

Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families (SMVF)

Newsletter: January 2026

Happy New Year! As we begin a new year, January invites us to reflect on service, resilience, and the lessons carried forward from history and lived experience. This month's newsletter highlights meaningful observances, upcoming events, and stories that explore leadership, perseverance, and creativity during times of challenge. From honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., to remembering the impacts of wartime experiences, to celebrating cultural innovation born out of necessity. These pieces set the tone for a year shaped by understanding, community, and continued support for Service Members, Veterans, and their families.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

The 53rd Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Celebration (2026)

Thursday, January 15, 5:30 - 8 p.m.

[More Info](#)

Virtual Military-Friendly Job Fair

Thursday, January 22, 11-2 p.m.

[Register Here](#)

Veterans Connect Career and Benefits Expo

Wednesday, January 28, 2 p.m.

[Register Here](#)

Conversations That Protect: Supporting Kids and Families Through Mental Health Challenges

Thursday, January 22, 8-9 p.m.

[Register Here](#)

OBSERVANCES:

National Mentoring Month

Poverty Awareness Month

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day- Monday, January 19

Thank Your Mentor Day- Wednesday, January 21

International Holocaust Remembrance Day- Tuesday, January 27



History and The Military

From "I have A Dream" to Making it a Reality: The Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

By: Nerina Cella

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. played a central role in dismantling legal segregation of African Americans within the South and other geographical areas of the United States. Dr. King was a prominent social activist as he believed that all human beings deserve equal rights regardless of color, gender or race. Dr. King had a firm stance in also ensuring all individuals possess the right to vote and the right to earn their own living, obtain their own housing, and ultimately, become a productive contributor to American society, again regardless of color or race.

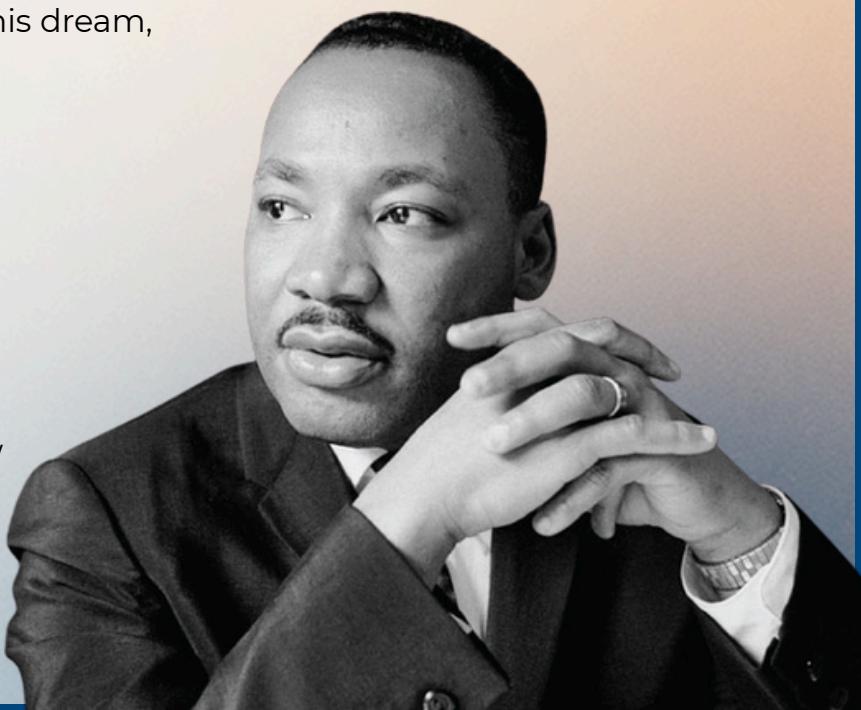
Mr. King was a Baptist minister with a strong Christian faith (he was born to parents who were preachers in their church), a father of 4 children (two daughters and two sons), and husband to Mrs. Coretta Scott King in his own respect. Dr. King was the youngest African American male to obtain a Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 at just 35 years old. It was under his leadership as President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference he gained most popularity nationwide, as he also encouraged various nonviolent tactics, including organizing the Washington, DC, March on Washington, that took place in 1963.

Dr. King's operational techniques were taken from one of his greatest inspirations, Mahatma Gandhi, where he operated the South Christian Leadership Conference based on his teachings. Dr. King lastly believed that segregation is extremely immoral, sinful and unjust. He argued that segregation and unjust laws made, treats people as if they are objects and not with proper dignity. Everyone should strive to adopt similar beliefs to Mr. King with respect to loving and being kind to one another.

We celebrate Dr. King, his legacy, and his dream, on Monday, January 19.

Sources Cited

Haberman, F. W., & From Nobel Lectures, Peace 1951-1970 (Eds.). (1972). Nobel peace prize 1964. NobelPrize.org. www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/biographical/



History and The Military

The Aftermath of the Blitz of November 14, 1940

by: Claire Wills

On November 14, 1940, the City of Coventry suffered a devastating 11 hour intense bombing raid—the single most concentrated attack on a British city in the second world war.



Over 554 people were killed, most of the city center was destroyed, and over 43,000 homes were destroyed by approximately 500 Luftwaffe dropped 500 tons of explosives, including 30,000 incendiary bombs and landmines, in a bombing raid codenamed “Moonlight Sonata.”



On the 85th anniversary of the Coventry Blitz, we remember and pay respects to the victims, survivors and heroes who found the strength and courage to rebuild Coventry from the ashes to the international City of Peace and Reconciliation it is today.



Both of my parents were little children who survived the Blitz of 1940 thanks to the heroic efforts of all four of my grandparents and so many others. I pray tribute to my native city, full of the very best and bravest souls.



Prime Minister Winston Churchill visiting the City of Coventry's Cathedral of St. Michael, which was destroyed during the Blitz of November 14th, 1940. It was rebuilt and is now a center for international peace and reconciliation.

Sources:
Coventry-Irish Society
International Churchill Society

Let's Get Cookin'

The Story of Banana Ketchup: A Lesson in Creativity During Hard Times by: Kimberly Ragin

During World War II, everyday life in the Philippines changed almost overnight. Supplies were limited, familiar foods became harder to find, and people had to get creative with whatever they had on hand. One of the most well-known examples of this is banana ketchup! It is a staple in Filipino households today that actually started as a wartime invention.

How it became a Filipino Innovation

Filipina food technologist Maria Ylagan Orosa played a huge role in this. She had studied food chemistry and pharmacy at the University of Washington before returning home to the Philippines, where she focused on helping communities stretch their food resources during the war.

When tomatoes became scarce, she created a ketchup alternative using what was widely available in the Philippines at the time. Bananas!

Her recipe mixed mashed bananas with vinegar, sugar, and everyday aromatics like garlic, onion, ginger, and a little heat from cayenne. It was simple, affordable, and familiar enough to bring comfort during an uncertain time.

From Golden Yellow to the Red We Recognize

Orosa's original banana ketchup was golden yellow. Although later, as it became commercialized, manufacturers added red food coloring to make it look more like tomato ketchup, which is something people were already used to.

Today, many brands have shifted back to more natural coloring or keep the sauce close to its original tone. Many modern versions of banana ketchup also add a bit of tomato paste for color and depth, depending on preference.

Why this story matters to the SMVF Community

Banana ketchup may seem like a small thing, but the story behind it speaks to the way people adapt, support one another, and find small comforts even when everything around them feels unstable. For many in the SMVF community, during deployment, transition, or times of uncertainty at home, families often find ways to stay grounded through routine, creativity, and cultural traditions. Banana ketchup is just one example of how resourcefulness can turn into something lasting.

Now here's a recipe on how to make homemade natural banana ketchup!

Ingredients:

- 3 large ripe bananas (saba if possible; Cavendish works fine)
- 1 small onion, minced
- 3–4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon grated ginger
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground turmeric
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground allspice
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup tomato paste
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup apple cider vinegar or cane vinegar
- 2 tablespoons honey (you can do half honey/half brown sugar if you want it sweeter)
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce, or soy sauce as a substitute
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon black pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water (add more if too thick)
- 1 tablespoon rum (optional, added at the end)
- 1 tablespoon avocado oil or peanut oil
- Optional: a pinch of paprika or annatto for natural color



Instructions

1. Sauté your aromatics: Heat the avocado or peanut oil in a small pot over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, and ginger. Cook until softened for about 3–4 minutes.
2. Add the bananas: Slice the bananas and toss them into the pot. Stir for a minute so they soften slightly.
3. Stir in seasonings and liquids. Everything should look like a loose, chunky sauce at this stage.
4. Simmer: Let the mix gently simmer for 10–12 minutes, stirring occasionally. The bananas should become fully soft and mashable.

Instructions continued

5. Blend until smooth: Turn off the heat and use an immersion blender (or transfer to a blender) to puree the mixture until smooth.
6. Add the rum: Return the pot to low heat and stir in 1 tablespoon of rum. Cook for another minute or two, just enough to mellow the flavor.
7. Final taste check: Adjust the ingredients as needed, such as more honey for sweetness, more vinegar for brightness, more fish/soy sauce for depth, or more turmeric or allspice for warmth.

Now here are some ideas on how to use it!

You can use natural banana ketchup the same way you'd use any barbecue sauce or dipping sauce. It works well with lumpia (egg rolls), plantain chips, grilled meats (chicken or hot dogs), fish, fries, or even breakfast eggs. For chicken skewers, it's especially versatile. You just toss the chicken in a little banana ketchup and a squeeze of calamansi before grilling, baking, or air-frying. Calamansi is a sweet citrus food that is sort of like a hybrid between a kumquat and a mandarin. Squeezing calamansi at the end is what really brings everything together. As the skewers cook, baste them with more banana ketchup the same way you would with regular BBQ sauce. When they're done, finish with another squeeze of calamansi to brighten the flavor.

Closing Reflections

Across history, moments of hardship have often revealed strength, ingenuity, and the power of collective action. The stories shared in this issue remind us that resilience takes many forms through advocacy, remembrance, creativity, and community care.

As we move forward into the year ahead, we encourage you to stay engaged, participate in upcoming events, and continue supporting and having empathy for one another. Thank you for being part of the SMVF community and for helping to build a future grounded in service, compassion, and connection.