

RAO

BULLETIN

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PDF Edition



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1. The page number on which an article can be found is provided to the left of each article's title
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Concurrent Receipt Status Update 03 ► White House Petition Signatures Needed



Career service members earn their retired pay by service alone and those unfortunate enough to suffer a service-caused disability in the process should have any VA disability compensation from the VA added to, not subtracted from, their service-earned military retired pay. The proposition made by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) to remove the Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP) provision would strip previously earned retirement benefits from hundreds of thousands of retired service members. Veterans are widely regarded as disadvantaged when looking for post-service employment opportunities, due largely to the military culture and combat related training. Wounded Warriors are further disadvantaged due to their injuries incurred in support of the nation's foreign policies.

Those who agree with the government continuing to pay concurrent receipt are requested to sign the 'We The People' petition titled, "**Recognize the Distinction Between Military Retirement and VA Disability Compensation**". It was initiated on 23 DEC 2016 to ask the president to propose a new administration policy on the issue. As of 14 JAN it had 13,691 signatures. However, it Needs 86,309 more signatures by January 22, 2017 to get a response from the White House To sign it go to <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/recognize-distinction-between-military-retirement-and-va-disability-compensation>. Keep in mind that if concurrent receipt is eliminated it will impact nearly 600,000 veterans and make it easier for the government to propose additional money cutting programs at vet's expense. [Source: We The People | December 23, 2016 ++]

Concurrent Receipt Status Update 04 ► Wrong Ways To Save Money

TAKING FROM DISABLED VETS -- Bean counters at the Congressional Budget Office have come up with a billion-dollar idea to reduce the deficit. Unfortunately, it's a billion-dollar bad idea, one that could harm nearly 600,000 service members in the process. The CBO, a nonpartisan budget analysis arm within the legislative branch, has pointed out that Congress could save a whopping \$139 billion from 2018 to 2026 by doing away with "concurrent receipt." This practice allows veterans to collect both retirement pay and disability pay at the same time.

Those vets who suffered career-ending combat injuries are eligible for combat-related special compensation, while those veterans who received a disability rating of 50 percent or more after at least 20 years of service are eligible for what is termed concurrent retirement and disability pay. Some people may consider concurrent receipt to be double-dipping. Those people must have been asleep during the last 15 years and last two wars. Prior to 2003, service members chose whether to earn full retirement pay from the Defense Department or their disability benefit from Veterans Affairs with a reduced retirement annuity. Congress allowed for concurrent receipt in the face of mounting and catastrophic injuries during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Since that time, the number of vets earning both retirement pay and disability has jumped from 33 percent in 2005 to more than 50 percent in 2015. This jump should not be all that startling. In that time-frame, soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines could hardly keep up with multiple deployments, increased demands, and a bloody and persistent fight on two fronts. To cut concurrent receipt now, as service members face new threats - and Marines prepare for a return to Afghanistan - is a slap in 600,000 faces. Eliminating concurrent receipt is a terrible idea, and one the new Congress and President Trump must not entertain.

RESERVISTS LOSE BIG -- Some fine print in Congress' 2012 Defense Authorization Act, a provision that took effect in 2014, has stiffed thousands of reservists and National Guardsmen who were expecting benefits granted to their active-duty counterparts - and nothing has been done about it. The problem arose from a law that granted the involuntary activation of up to 60,000 members of the reserves, for up to a year, to support pre-planned operations of a combatant command. There are a variety of federal laws that can call reservists and Guardsmen to active-duty. This particular one did not provide benefits to these deploying troops, to include the Post 9/11 GI Bill, pre- and post-mobilization Tricare access and federal civilian differential pay. It just recently caught a Marine unit by surprise when they deployed to Honduras. Some of these Marines notified Military Times after they discovered last-minute that they would not receive the benefits they were promised. Some insiders have called the move a cost-saving measure, but others believe it was just an oversight. The solution is clear: retroactively pay service members for the benefits they missed out on, and grant the benefits for future deploying reservists and National Guardsmen.

[Source: NavyTimes | Editorial | January 16, 2017 ++]

Fleet Expansion ► Biggest Since Cold War Planned

With President-elect Donald Trump demanding more ships, the Navy is proposing the biggest shipbuilding boom since the end of the Cold War to meet threats from a resurgent Russia and saber-rattling China. The Navy's 355-ship proposal released last month is even larger than what the Republican Trump had promoted on the campaign trail, providing a potential boost to shipyards that have struggled because budget caps that have limited money funding for ships. At Maine's Bath Iron Works, workers worried about the future want to build more ships but wonder where the billions of dollars will come from. "Whether Congress and the government can actually fund it, is a whole other ball game," said Rich Nolan, president of the shipyard's largest union.



Boosting shipbuilding to meet the Navy's 355-ship goal could require an additional \$5 billion to \$5.5 billion in annual spending in the Navy's 30-year projection, according to an estimate by naval analyst Ronald O'Rourke at the Congressional Research Service. The Navy's revised Force Structure Assessment calls for adding another 47 ships including an aircraft carrier built in Virginia, 16 large surface warships built in Maine and Mississippi, and 18 attack submarines built in Connecticut, Rhode Island and Virginia. It also calls for more amphibious assault ships, expeditionary transfer docks and support ships. In addition to being good for national security, a larger fleet would be better for both the sailors, who'd enjoy shorter deployments, and for the ships, which would have more down time for maintenance, said Matthew Paxton, president of the Shipbuilders Council of America, which represents most of the major Navy shipbuilders. "Russia and China are going to continue to build up their navies," he said. "The complexities aren't going to get any easier. The Navy, more than any of the services, is our forward presence. We're going to need this Navy."

Many defense analysts agree that military capabilities have been degraded in recent years, especially when it comes to warships, aircraft and tanks. The key is finding a way to increase Navy shipbuilding to achieve defense and economic gains "in a fiscally responsible way that does not pass the bill along to our children," said Sen. Angus King (I-ME), a member of the Armed Services Committee. Even when Trump takes office, no one envisions a return to the heady days during the Cold War when workers were wiring, welding, grinding, pounding and plumbing ships at a furious pace to meet President Ronald Reagan's audacious goal of a 600-ship Navy. The Navy currently has 274 deployable battle force ships, far short of its old goal of 308 ships. Lawrence J. Korb, a retired naval officer and former assistant defense secretary under Reagan, said the Navy's request isn't realistic unless the Trump administration is willing to take the budget "to levels we've never seen." "You never have enough money to buy a perfect defense. You have to make trade-offs," said Korb, senior fellow at the Center for American Progress.

But investors apparently are betting on more ships. General Dynamics, which owns Bath Iron Works, Connecticut-based Electric Boat and California-based NASSCO, and Huntington Ingalls, which owns major shipyards in Virginia and in Mississippi, have both seen stock prices creep upward since the election. "To the generic military shipbuilder, it's a bull market right now," said Ronald Epstein, an analyst at Bank of America's Merrill Lynch division. In Bath, the 6,000 shipbuilders aren't going to count their eggs before they hatch. "A lot of people are hopeful that it'll happen," Nolan said. "But they're taking a wait-and-see approach. They've heard it before and then seen it not come to fruition." [Source: Associated Press | David Sharp | January 09, 2017 ++]

Identity Theft Update 15 ► Pentagon Subcontractor Leaks 11GB of Data

A security researcher at the MacKeeper Security Research Center has revealed a Pentagon subcontractor exposed sensitive U.S. military health care personnel data thanks to an insecure server backup protocol. MacKeeper's Chris Vickery determined that at least 11 gigabytes of confidential data — including that of active top-secret security clearance holders — became accessible because of a server misconfiguration by Booz Allen Hamilton subcontractor Potomac Healthcare Solutions, according to a Dec. 31 post by Charlie Osborne on ZDNet's Zero Day blog. The leak — primarily of physical and mental health support staff — included names, contract types, Social Security numbers, duty start dates, billet numbers, unit assignments, places of work, pay scales, clearance levels and recruitment notes, among other items. Many of those with data leaked are part of the U.S. Special Operations Command's Preservation of the Force and Families program.

The data leaked could be used for identity theft, as well as targeting individuals to be blackmailed and coerced into espionage. Potomac says it has addressed the leak after being alerted by Vickery, and Booz Allen Hamilton has told ZDNet it is researching the incident. Potomac Healthcare acknowledged the report and said in a statement: "While our investigation remains ongoing, based on our initial examination, despite these earlier reports, we have no indication that any sensitive government information was compromised. The privacy and security of information remains a top priority, and we will continue to work diligently to address any issues or concerns." [Source: FederalTimes | Tony Ware | January 3, 2017 ++]

Sequestration Update 49 ► Impact on Trump Military Agenda

Donald Trump has promised to do away with the federal spending caps known as sequestration, rollbacks that have hit the Defense Department particularly hard. Now he has to figure out how to make that happen. This will be an important story to watch in the year ahead, whether the next administration can work with Congress to find a solution to the much-reviled 2011 law that established the 10-year budget caps. The outcome will determine how much funding flexibility military leaders will have in years to come. In recent years, Congress has passed a pair of short-term compromises to boost both defense and non-defense spending. But a long-term solution has remained elusive. Military planners have said the caps severely hamper their ability to buy new equipment and prepare for future threats, and the five years remaining will further complicate their work.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said shortly after the election that he views undoing sequestration as an area where Trump and his critics can work together. But President Barack Obama made similar attempts to work with Congress, only to become mired in the long-running political argument: Republicans want increases for defense programs only, and Democrats want the caps removed for both defense and non-defense programs. How Trump handles those negotiations will set the tone for his relationship with skeptics on Capitol Hill, and it will dictate just how much money he'll have to deliver his ambitious military agenda. [Source: Military Times |Leo Shane III | December 30, 2016 ++]

Sequestration Update 50 ► Repeal Needed for FY 2018

Unless Congress acts to replace sequestration with an alternative debt reduction plan, another, even more devastating round of defense cuts will be required in FY18. These cuts to our nation's defense budget put America's defense capabilities at an unacceptable level of risk. The Joint Chiefs have stated sequestration will devastate our

defense capabilities and "hollow out the force" that already has been made to bear 100% of the nation's burden of wartime sacrifice for over fifteen years. Avoiding the terrible effects of a sequester is fundamental to sustaining the nation's ability to defend itself. Our security at home and abroad cannot be allowed to take a back seat to political posturing.

Current law requires automatically triggers to make deep cuts to the FY18 Defense Department. The toll on our military and their families will be incalculable. The congressional session is just getting underway. Readers are urged to engage their members of Congress and encourage them to make it their priority to repeal sequestration. An easy way to do this is to utilize the MOAA Legislative Action Center's preformatted editable message available at <http://capwiz.com/moaa/issues/alert/?alertid=74607626>. [Source: www.moaa.org | January 11, 2017 ++]

Enlistment Bonus Payback Update 09 ► Most California Cases Dismissed

The Pentagon will repay millions of dollars in California Army National Guard bonuses that were improperly recouped from veterans and eliminate the debts of more than 17,000 troops who had been on the hook for repayment, according to the Defense Department's acting undersecretary for personnel and readiness. By July, the Defense Department will have reimbursed veterans who were sent to collections for their enlistment bonuses, cleared thousands more of their potential debts outright, and sent several hundred more to the Army Board for Correction of Military Records to make their cases, acting Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Peter Levine said in a Tuesday press conference.

Defense Secretary Ash Carter ordered a review in October after the Los Angeles Times broke news that thousands of current and former California guardsmen were being asked to repay their enlistment bonuses based on supposed ineligibility. Carter gave the Defense Department until 1 JAN to come up with a plan to make it right and until 1 JUL to settle the cases of 17,500 service members who received their bonuses between 2004 and 2010. "The basic bottom line of the update is we are on track to meet all of these objectives," Levin said. "We believe we can complete cases before the July deadline." The Pentagon expects to be able to clear more than 15,000 of those cases without further review, Levine said, adding that those soldiers will be notified over the next month that their cases have been dismissed.

Of the 1,400 soldiers who had already been referred to collection, the Army Audit Agency and the Army Review Boards Agency have already cleared half of the cases, Levine said. "What we're working is a two-step process," he said. "We screen the cases to determine whether we can essentially say, 'We don't need further information, we don't need to collect a debt in this case.'" More complicated cases will go to ABCMR, where soldiers will be able to make their case for why they were eligible for the bonus they received. The vast majority of the soldiers flagged for repayment completed their service and were either too junior to know whether they were eligible for the bonuses or were otherwise misled into believing that they qualified, Levine said. Of the estimated \$10 million that the California Guard had attempted to recoup, a few million that has already been paid will end up being reimbursed. "Most of the cases in which we'll be recouping will be cases in which the soldiers did not fulfill their commitment," Levine said.

Once the debts that have gone to collection are forgiven, Defense Finance and Accounting Services will notify credit agencies to rectify soldiers' credit scores and reports. As far as second-order effects, Levine said, DoD will look into any help they can provide to soldiers who, for example, lost their mortgages because of debt repayment. "But there may not be anything we can do at this point," he said. The California case raised suspicions that other states had incorrectly doled out bonuses and would soon be looking to recoup them. However, Levine said that both the loophole — a one-signature requirement to issue the bonuses — and the subsequent fraud it allowed — perpetrated by a master sergeant who pocketed thousands in incentives for her recruiting numbers — had been exposed and adjudicated. "We've determined that there was no other state in which there was the kind of massive

problems that there were in California," he said. "We don't see more than a few dozen cases in any other state where we've had recoupment from this kind of thing." [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | January 3, 2017 ++]

DoD Pharmacy Program ► Win-Win for Patients & Government

The Department of Defense pharmacy program is on to track to slice \$1.3 billion off projected drug costs from 2014 to 2019, thanks to higher beneficiary copayments, tighter point-of-service rules, and recent streamlining of prescription drug processes across the military, explained Dr. George E. Jones, chief of pharmacy operations for the Defense Health Agency (DHA). One of the more surprising aspects of savings being captured, said Jones, is that average annual out-of-pocket costs for beneficiaries have stayed flat or even fallen, despite recent increases in drug copayments. That's because changes to law and policy have forced or enticed beneficiaries to use more efficient points of service than retail outlets. Those who need maintenance drugs for chronic conditions must now use mail order, where refills are for three months for the same or smaller copayment than is charged for a month of pills at retail. Also, base pharmacies, where drugs are still dispensed free of charge, have expanded their formularies (drugs they must stock) to better support nearby beneficiaries.

Despite a couple of copayment increases the past five years to encourage beneficiaries to use generic medicines and more cost-efficient drug outlets, the average annual out-of-pocket cost per beneficiary has ranged from \$553 to \$603, with the lowest figure reported most recently, for fiscal year 2016. "That is a lot of prescriptions moving from 30-day supplies to 90-day supplies at [military treatment facilities] and mail order," Jones said. Prescriptions filled at retail are more expensive for the department. So it is seen as good news that, from 2012 through 2016, DoD drug spending at TRICARE retail outlets fell by \$956 million while it rose by \$1.47 billion for mail order and by \$94 million across base pharmacies. Jones called it a "win-win for the patient and the government." He credited Congress for creating "the framework for us to execute initiatives to ensure beneficiaries understand their options on keeping out-of-pocket costs low and [getting] best service."

The big move was requiring beneficiaries who want brand-name maintenance drugs to get them via home delivery or on base, ending their availability at retail pharmacies unless beneficiaries pay the full cost. "Our contract partner, Express Scripts Inc., has been vital to this part of the overall success of the program," Jones said. "They have facilitated a relatively smooth implementation of this guidance with a structure and communication outreach that has made it fairly straightforward, simple, and smooth for patients to utilize [base pharmacies] and mail order." In fiscal year 2016, military pharmacy costs totaled \$9.5 billion, the lowest since 2010. Jones cautioned that three quarters of the \$2.1 billion drop from 2015 reflected a successful crackdown on fraud and abuse directed at TRICARE by compound drug schemes. But ignoring the \$1.6 billion compound drug tab in 2015, drug costs still fell in 2016 by \$500 million.

Besides higher copayments to change behavior and restrictions on brand-name maintenance drugs at retail, base pharmacies expanded their drug formularies "to ensure they are taking care of their enrolled populations," Jones said. Both Express Scripts and DHA helped them do so, with drug usage data, to better serve beneficiaries and recapture business. These and more initiatives are part of a larger effort by the three-year-old DHA to integrate and optimize the pharmacy benefit using new authorities, Jones noted during an hour-long presentation this month at the annual conference of AMSUS, the Society of Federal Health Professionals. The recent copayments that Jones credited with helping to shape beneficiary behavior did not include far higher prescription copayments sought by DoD as part of the fiscal year 2017 defense authorization act. Earlier this year, the Senate had approved the plan to raise beneficiary out-of-pockets sharply. But House-Senate conferees rejected them, for now, as they ironed out final differences between separate versions of the defense policy bill.

So DHA's projection of \$1.3 billion in savings on drug costs through fiscal 2019 still stands. It's being achieved even as pharmacy usage per beneficiary rises, largely because beneficiaries are making better choices, Jones said.

The migration back to base pharmacies got a boost when they acquired the ability to fill prescriptions from physicians electronically, just as many retail outlets have done for years. E-prescriptions not only make dispensing prescriptions easier, Jones said, but also enhance patient safety. After e-prescribing became standard in civilian communities but still not on bases, civilian physicians serving TRICARE realized they could only send e-prescriptions to retail outlets and did so -- even when base pharmacies were nearer, had the drug in stock, and charged no copayment. "Now those prescriptions are coming back to military treatment facilities," Jones said. "As of January 2016, which was the one-year anniversary of starting this initiative, over 2 million prescriptions had come back to [base] via electronic prescribing."

DHA began to refer to the pharmacy program as an "enterprise" as it assumed greater oversight for controlling drug costs and improving the beneficiary experience across the entire military. But Jones emphasized that streamlining of the enterprise has relied on a Pharmacy Working Group comprised of Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and DHA representatives. They have implemented a unified set of business rules to guide and execute department-wide drug policies. They have aligned metrics to measure performance in delivering the benefit and aligned incentives to drive beneficiary behavior toward cost-effective decisions, Jones said.

Of 9.4 million beneficiaries eligible to use the pharmacy benefit, 82 percent did so in fiscal year 2016. That was up from 66 percent in 2002, before the TRICARE mail-order program began. A total of 7.7 million beneficiaries got at least one prescription filled in 2016, 2 million more than in 2002. Prescriptions filled across all three points of service totaled 127 million in 2016 versus 82 million in 2002, a 55-percent jump. Almost 60 percent of beneficiaries are retirees or their family members: 3.1 million (33.2 percent) are retirees 65 and older and their dependents; 2.2 million (23.7 percent) are younger retirees and their family members. About 1.5 million beneficiaries (16.4 percent) are active duty and 2 million (21.4 percent) are family members of active duty. The remaining half million "other" beneficiaries are mostly reservists, guardmembers, and their family members who qualify for the drug benefit. [Source: MOAA News Exchange | Tom Philpott | December 29, 2017 ++]

Traumatic Brain Injury Update 58 ► DoD Stops Blast Gauge Program

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is one of the signature wounds of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the Pentagon has quietly sidelined a program that placed blast gauges on thousands of combat troops in Afghanistan that would detect that injury. NPR reported last month that the monitoring was discontinued because the gauges failed to reliably show whether service members had been close enough to an explosion to have sustained a concussion, or mild TBI. But the small wearable devices produced "a trove of data on blast exposure that could eventually have helped researchers understand the links between bomb blasts, concussions and brain diseases. And they produced evidence that many service members are exposed to worrisome levels of blast pressure simply by being near a heavy weapon when it's fired."

Retired General Peter Chiarelli, who was the Army's vice chief of staff before retiring in 2012, called the decision to warehouse the blast gauges "a huge mistake." He is now the chief executive officer of One Mind, a nonprofit focused on brain illness and injury. Mild TBI was the signature wound of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, affecting more than 200,000 troops. Having data from blast sensors could play "a very, very important role in helping us understand why an individual has negative effects from a concussion," Chiarelli says, "or why an individual develops one of the neurodegenerative diseases that seem connected with concussion, everything from ALS, to Parkinson's to dementia and even Alzheimer's."

One of the reasons given for the discontinuation of the program by Secretary of the Army Eric Fanning, was that the gauges failed to show how much blast exposure is too much. The gauges contain sensors that measure overpressure, the sudden increase in air pressure caused by an explosion. Soldiers downrange noticed that the sensors registered significant overpressure exposure from firing weapons, such as shoulder-fired rockets, in confined

spaces - not when they were exposed to enemy explosions. As researchers began looking at the data from the gauges, it became clear that overpressure exposure from firing their own weapons was common for US soldiers.

David Borkholder, an engineering professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology and the founder of BlackBox Biometrics, which makes the blast gauges said, "The majority of exposures were not from improvised explosive devices, as you might expect," says Instead, the culprit was usually "blast-intensive weapons systems" like recoilless rifles, shoulder-fired rockets, artillery and mortars, he says. The Department of Defense's goal for the program was to identify troops with brain injuries caused by the blast wave from a bomb. From that metric, the program failed. [Source: TREA Washington Update | January 4, 2017 ++]

Exchange Online Shopping Update 08 ► Policy Change Announced

After two years of study and debate, the Department of Defense has made a policy change, effective next November, to allow 16 million honorably discharged veterans to shop online for discounted military exchange products. Peter K. Levine, acting undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, signed a memorandum 11 JAN announcing the benefit expansion, effective Veterans' Day 11 NOV, and giving Congress the required 30 days' notice before actions begin to implement the plan. Months of preparation are needed to make e-shopping portals more robust and to allow the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) time to create software for verifying veterans' status using Department of Veterans Affairs records.

Several million vets already are eligible to shop in exchanges — on base or online — because they are active or reserve component retirees, or 100-percent disabled from service-connected injuries or ailments, or Medal of Honor recipients. Thomas C. Shull, chief executive officer of the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, led a three-year quest to expand online exchange shopping to all honorably-discharged veterans with access to computers. It cited two reasons. One was to reward their service with exchange product savings that, on average, will be near to 20 percent versus commercial department store prices when military exemption from state and local sales tax are considered too. Shull's other purpose was to increase exchange revenues to help offset troubling declines due to the drawdown of active duty forces, base closures and the end of military tobacco discounts for the higher priority of healthier populations.

The Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard exchange services joined Shull and AAFES in pushing for the shopping benefit expansion. They worked with Levine's office and with resale board executives in refining the proposal. The online benefit does not extend to veterans' dependents, although spouses and family members theoretically could use the authorized customer's log-in credentials, given the nature of an online shopping benefit. Exchange officials project that expanding online shopping will result in \$1.8 million in added annual fixed costs to handle the larger customer base. However, they also project added sales and revenue, which will more than offset any added operating or order-fulfillment costs. Higher net earnings are seen boosting exchange dividends to support on-base morale, welfare and recreational activities. With DMDC verifying shopper identifies electronically, the department will not have to produce special identification cards. DMDC estimates that 13 percent of eligible veterans, primarily those who served before 1981 might not be in their data base when the shopping benefit becomes available. Presumably guidance will be issued for veterans who might have access problems initially.

Defense officials believe they have mitigated concerns previously raised on expanding the exchange benefit. These included worries it would dilute the benefit for currently authorized patrons, increase appropriated funding costs, reduce state and local tax revenues for civilian communities and harm commercial retailers. An audit of public comments to earlier news articles on the plan showed 90 percent support for veterans online shopping. Also, the online benefit should have no impact need for taxpayer support of certain exchange operations. Total sales are expected to climb annually by from \$185 million to \$525 million. But that range is viewed as insignificant against

\$300 billion in online sales reported across the retail industry, thus muting complaints retailers. The four exchange services are to maintain independent websites and separate online portals to the selection of goods they offer. But for verifying eligibility to shop, online shoppers might have a “common landing page.”

The business case for expanding the online benefit calls it “a low-risk, low-cost opportunity” to better fund morale, welfare and recreation programs and quality of life activities. It also notes that smaller percentages of recently discharged veterans are serving until retirement to qualify for base shopping, yet a higher proportion of them probably had multiple tours deployed, often to war. The Veterans Online Shopping Benefit will help to recognize the contributions of all who served, the business case argues, while strengthening the online benefit to better serve current patrons. The veterans are expected to at least double exchanges’ online presence, which will help attract better terms from vendors, more competitive merchandise assortments and improved efficiencies. Exchanges project \$18 million to \$72 million in new annual earnings when the online operation is fully matured. Half of the added earnings typically would be distributed as higher dividends to MWR programs, which have come under budget pressure as the services divert funds to more immediate readiness needs.

The Veterans Canteen Service, which sells products to veterans under authority of VA, is weighing the idea of establishing its own online retail presence. AAFES had reached out to the canteen service about a joint venture online, but the VCS opted to “go it alone,” according to AAFES documents. That is not seen as impacting the future success of the Veterans Online Shopping Benefit. The four exchange services reached agreement last year on how to divide revenue from the online purchases, in part by using zip codes of buyers to estimate their service affiliations. They have been eyeing a “soft launch” of the expanded online benefit to segments of vets by mid-2017 to gauge demand and test system capabilities including the process to verify veteran status before the full launch.

The more highly prized commissary benefit isn’t being opened to all veterans. Current exchange patrons won’t see more store traffic and discounts for exchange shopping on base are expected to remain higher than savings online. These factors helped to persuade major military associations to back the initiative. Proponents were anxious to see the initiative approved before the Obama administration ends Jan. 20 to avoid having to reargue its merits to new leaders. Military exchanges acknowledge that they are losing sales to popular online sites such as Amazon, particularly as military patrons grow increasingly comfortable with using smart phones and tablets to shop. [Source: The Military Advantage Blog | Tom Philpott | January 12, 2017 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 1 thru 15 JAN 2017

San Diego CA -- A Navy lieutenant involved in an overbilling scheme that cost the service tens of millions of dollars is going to prison. **Gentry Debord** was sentenced 12 JAN in San Diego to 30 months in federal prison. He pleaded guilty last year to a bribery conspiracy charge. Debord, a onetime Navy supply officer of the year, acknowledged that from 2007 to 2013 he supplied confidential information to a Malaysian defense contractor in return for cash, prostitutes and luxury hotels stays. Contractor Leonard Francis had a Singapore-based company that supplied services to Navy ships in the Pacific. Authorities say he overbilled the service by \$35 million. Debord is among 16 people charged in connection with the corruption. Ten current or ex-Navy officials and three company officials have pleaded guilty, including Francis. [Source: Associated Press | January 12, 2016 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 1 thru 15 JAN 2017 | Thirty

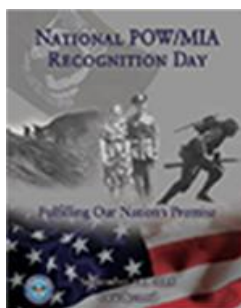
"Keeping the Promise", "Fulfill their Trust" and "No one left behind" are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II (73,515) Korean War (7,841),

Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,627), 1991 Gulf War (5), and Libya (1). Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home. For a listing of all personnel accounted for since 2007 refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/> and click on 'Our Missing'. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

== Mail: Public Affairs Office, 2300 Defense Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20301-2300, Attn: External Affairs

== Call: Phone: (703) 699-1420

== Message: Fill out form on <http://www.dpaa.mil/Contact/ContactUs.aspx>



Family members seeking more information about missing loved ones may also call the following Service Casualty Offices: U.S. Air Force (800) 531-5501, U.S. Army (800) 892-2490, U.S. Marine Corps (800) 847-1597, U.S. Navy (800) 443-9298, or U.S. Department of State (202) 647-5470. The remains of the following MIA/POW's have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:

Vietnam

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial updates of 1 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from Vietnam. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Marine Corps Reserve 1st Lt. William C. Ryan** was an F-4B radar intercept officer with the Marine Fighter Attack Force 115, Marine Aircraft Group 13, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Fleet Marine Force Pacific. While pulling out of a bombing pass over Savannakhet Province, Laos, Ryan's aircraft was hit by enemy fire. Ryan failed to eject and was declared deceased as of May 11, 1969. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1043272/marine-missing-from-vietnam-war-identified-ryan/>.



Korea

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial updates of 9 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Maj. Jack D. Griffiths**, 31, of San Diego, will be buried Jan. 11, 2017, in San Diego. On Nov. 30, 1950, Griffiths was a member of Headquarters, 38th Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, when he was reported missing in action in the vicinity of Somin-dong, North Korea. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1041265/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-griffiths/>



-- **Army Cpl. Luis P. Torres**, of Waushara, Wis., was stationed with Company C, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division along the east bank of the Naktong River, near Changyong, South Korea. On Sept. 1, 1950, his battalion's position was overrun by enemy forces. Torres was reported missing after the battle. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1034730/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-torres/>.



-- **Army Pfc. Thomas C. Stagg**, of Jefferson, Ala., was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment. On Nov. 29, 1950, Stagg was on a reconnaissance patrol near Hajoyang-ni, North Korea, when it was ambushed. Following the battle, Stagg could not be accounted for and he was declared killed in action. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1032312/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-stagg/>.

-- **Army Pfc. Charles C. Follese**, of Koochiching, Minn., was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment. On Nov. 30, 1950, Follese was part of a patrol sent to recover casualties near Hajoyang-ni, North Korea, when his patrol was ambushed. Follese could not be accounted for after the ambush and was declared killed in action. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1034151/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-follese/>.

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Eugene J. Colley**, of New Hanover, N.C., was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers into the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. Colley was among 1,300 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 2, 1950. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1041786/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-colley/>.

-- **Army Sgt. Thomas E. Zimmer**, of Milwaukee, Wis., was stationed with Battery A, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team, 7th Infantry Division, on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese Forces. After heavy fighting his unit was forced to withdraw to Hagaruri. Zimmer was unaccounted for after the battle and was reported missing as of Dec. 6, 1950. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1034358/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-zimmer/>.

-- **Army Sgt. Edward Saunders**, of Baltimore City, Md., was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. On the night of Feb. 11, 1951, Saunders' company was supporting a planned offensive with the Republic of Korea's 16th Regiment when they were attacked by Chinese forces. After heavy fighting, the unit was forced to withdraw to Hoensong, South Korea. Saunders could not be accounted for after the

battle. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1041784/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-saunders/>.

-- **Army Cpl. Joseph N. Pelletier**, of Coos County, N.H., was assigned to Headquarters Battery, 15th Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, near the Central Corridor in South Korea. While supporting Korean-led attacks on Chinese forces, they were caught in a massive Chinese counterattack on Feb. 11, 1951. Pelletier was declared missing on Feb. 13, 1951. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1036475/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-pelletier/>.

-- **Army Sgt. James W. Sharp** was a member of Battery B, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. Sharp was among 1,300 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 6, 1950. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1047133/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-sharp/>.

World War II

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update on 20 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Water Tender 1st Class Walter H. Sollie**, 37, of Myrtlewood, Ala., will be buried Jan. 6, 2017, in Pensacola, Fla. Sollie was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Sollie was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1039884/sailor-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-sollie/>.



-- **Mr. John D. Armstrong**, a former U.S. Navy Reservist, was training with the Flying Tigers at Kyedaw Airfield, a British Royal Air Force airfield outside of Toungoo, Burma, in 1941. Armstrong was killed in a midair collision during a training flight on Sept. 8, 1941. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1042317/american-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-armstrong/>.

-- **Mr. Maxx C. Hammer, Jr.**, was among a small group of American pilots training with the Flying Tigers to battle Japanese forces invading China in 1941. Hammer was killed during a training mission on Sep. 22, 1941, when his plane crashed near Toungoo, Burma, after a heavy rainstorm. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1042267/american-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-hammer/>.

-- **Mr. Peter Atkinson**, a former U.S. Army Air Corps Reservist, was among a small group of American pilots training with the Flying Tigers at Kyedaw Airfield, outside of Toungoo, Burma, in 1941. In preparation for battling Japanese forces invading China, the pilots engaged their Curtiss P-40 single-seat aircraft in aggressive training and mock battles. On Oct. 25, 1941, Atkinson's plane disintegrated while participating in one of these training flights. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1042263/american-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-atkinson/>.

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Cecil E. Barncord**, of Kansas, was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Barncord was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1034117/sailor-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-barncord/>.



-- **Navy Radioman 3rd Class Howard W. Bean**, of Massachusetts, was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Bean was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1034111/sailor-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-bean/>.

-- **Navy Mess Attendant 1st Class Ralph M. Boudreaux**, of Louisiana, was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Boudreaux was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1041290/sailor-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-boudreaux/>.

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Glaydon I.C. Iverson**, of Minnesota, was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Iverson was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1040481/sailor-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-iverson/>.



-- **Navy Coxswain Verne F. Knipp**, of Colorado, was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Knipp was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1040487/sailor-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-knipp/>.

-- **Navy Fire Controlman 2nd Class Donald R. McCloud**, of West Virginia, was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. McCloud was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1034103/sailor-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-mccloud/>.

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Camillus M. O'Grady**, of Kansas, was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. O'Grady was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1034122/sailor-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-ogrady/>.

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Francis J. Pitonyak**, of Pennsylvania, disappeared while leading a four-ship of fighter aircraft on an armed patrol mission. Enroute to Nadzab, Territory of Papua, the pilots encountered inclement

weather, causing one pilot to return to base, where he reported his fellow pilots, including Pitonyak, missing. After an unsuccessful aerial search the following day, Pitonyak was declared deceased on Oct. 28, 1943. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1035684/airman-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-pitonyak/>.

-- **Army Pvt. Gene J. Appleby**, of Ohio, was a member of Company A, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment. On Sep. 17, 1944, Appleby parachuted onto a drop zone north of Groesbeek, the Netherlands, as part of Operation Market-Garden. As the soldiers rallied, Appleby was reportedly struck by enemy fire and, following the attack, was listed as missing in action. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1040739/soldier-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-appleby/>

-- **Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Sidney A. Cook** was a member of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. Cook's unit was one of those tasked with securing the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll. Encountering fierce resistance by the Japanese, almost 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and another 1,000 were wounded in the battle. Cook was killed on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1043288/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-cook/>.



-- **Marine Corps Cpl. Walter G. Critchley** was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Critchley's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against fierce Japanese resistance. Critchley was killed on Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1043296/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-critchley/>.



-- **Marine Corps Reserve 2nd Lt. Ernest Matthews** was assigned to Headquarters Company, Headquarters Battalion, Division Special Troops, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Matthews' unit landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll. Matthews was among approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1043278/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-matthews/>.



-- **Marine Corps Pfc. James O. Whitehurst** was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Whitehurst's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Whitehurst was killed on the first day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1043282/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-whitehurst/>.



-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Larry R. Roberts** was assigned to Special Weapons Group, 2nd Defense Battalion, Fleet Marine Force. Roberts' unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll on Nov. 20, 1943. After five days of intense battle against the Japanese, Roberts was declared killed in action on Nov. 25, 1943. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1043285/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-roberts/>.



-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Charles E. Carlson** was a P-47 pilot with the 62nd Fighter Squadron, 56th Fighter Group, Eighth Air Force. Carlson was shot down south of Bonn, Germany, during an air battle between American and German pilots on Dec. 23, 1944. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1046038/airman-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-carlson/>.



-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. William J. Gray** was a member of the 391st Fighter Squadron, 366th Fighter Group. In April 1945, Gray flew his single seat P-47D aircraft on a dive-bombing mission in the vicinity of Lindau, Sachsen-Anhalt, Germany. After strafing a truck, Gray's aircraft clipped a tree and crashed. Gray was declared killed in action on April 16, 1945. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1043300/airman-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-gray/>.

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | January 14, 2016 ++]

*** VA ***



Trump VA Plan Update 04 ► Trump Picks for VA Post Drop Out

President-elect Donald Trump lost two candidates for the Department of Veterans Affairs secretary position at the beginning of the New Year. Luis Quinonez, a Florida businessman, said health concerns kept him from seeking the

job, and Toby Cosgrove, the chief-executive officer of Cleveland Clinic, also took his name out consideration. Trump has had trouble finding a candidate for a department he has described as broken and in need of an overhaul. He wants to increase the availability of private care for veterans and eliminate waste he says is rampant in the agency with a budget of \$180 billion.

Some groups that advocate for veterans want Trump to keep Secretary Robert McDonald, the current chief of the VA. He was brought in by President Barack Obama in 2014 in the wake of a scandal over wait times at VA clinics and hospitals. Trump's transition team has said McDonald is not a candidate. Two men still being considered, according to news reports, are former Sen. Scott Brown, a Republican who represented Massachusetts, and Pete Hegseth, who was president of Concerned Veterans for America and is now a Fox News host. Both have met with the president-elect several times.



Sen. Scott Brown



CVA Pete Hegseth

Trump's plan to provide more private care through the VA has its critics, including Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) who said privatizing the VA would be an insult to veterans and lower their quality of health care. Some veterans groups, too, oppose any effort to privatize the agency. A Trump official has spoken of a public-private option, according to news reports. "We think we have to have kind of a ... public-private option, because some vets love the VA. ... Some vets want to go to the VA," the official said. "So the idea is to come up with a solution that solves the problem. And it's not the easiest thing in the world because you've got all these little kingdoms out there, which is hard." [Source: NGAUS Washington Report | January 3, 2017 ++]

HVAC Update 21 ► New Chairman to Continue Accountability Push

The incoming chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN) says he plans to continue many of the initiatives directed toward accountability of agency management and line employees pushed by his predecessor, retiring Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL). "As chairman, I will conduct hearings, provide oversight and work to implement policies which will put veterans back in charge of how they receive healthcare from the VA. I will be a consistent advocate for improving the quality and timeliness of care that veterans receive both in and out of VA health care facilities, as well as ensure the benefits earned by our veterans are never delayed, dismantled or reneged upon," he said in a statement.

"Holding senior managers accountable is an important step toward addressing the corrosive culture which has existed within the VA bureaucracy for far too long. Unfortunately, to date, just three employees have been fired for their involvement in the nationwide waitlist scandal – which spanned over 110 VA facilities. This is unacceptable," he added. He listed as other priorities continued implementation of the 2014 Veterans Access, Choice and

Accountability Act, which allows veterans to get care outside the VA system but funded by the VA in certain circumstances; expanding treatment for traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder; and better coordination of medical records between DoD and VA.



Rep. Phil Roe

[Source: FEDweek | January 4, 2017 ++]

HVAC Update 22 ▶ **New Democrat Top Voice**

The highest-ranking enlisted soldier in Congress will serve as the Democrats' top voice on veterans issues in the House this session. Minnesota Rep. **Tim Walz**, a retired command sergeant major from the Army National Guard, was named ranking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee late 9 JAN after Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA) dropped his bid for the post. "We have work to do to ensure that every veteran has access to the benefits and care they have earned," he said in a statement. "I look forward to bringing a soldier's perspective to the 115th Congress and working with veterans, the VA and my colleagues to uphold our nation's promises to those who have served and sacrificed. Let's get to work."

Walz has served on the committee since 2007 and been a prominent voice for the party on veterans issues for his entire tenure in Congress. He has lobbied for the leadership role for years, arguing his perspective as a veteran gives him extra insight into reform efforts for the Department of Veterans Affairs. But party seniority and committee rules foiled his bid to get the role in 2014. Takano, who served as acting ranking member for the last half of 2016, said in a statement he was dropping his bid for the permanent leadership post because of his confidence in Walz. "The men and women who make incredible sacrifices to protect this nation do so with the promise that they will be cared for and supported when they come home," he said. "As a veteran and a passionate advocate for those who have served, I know that Congressman Walz will do everything in his power to make good on that promise."

Walz had the backing of numerous veterans groups, who have cited their close working relationship with him and his enlisted background as key advantages for his work. He also has close ties to committee Chairman Phil Roe (R-TN) who took over that role earlier this year. Both Walz and Roe are Army veterans and co-chair the House's Invisible Wounds Caucus. In a statement, Roe said he was "thrilled" with Walz's appointment. "Rep. Walz has been a tireless advocate for veterans, and I know he will continue that fight as ranking member," he said. "I look forward to working alongside Rep. Walz as we strive on both sides of the aisle to improve the lives of our nation's heroes."

Three of the top four congressional leadership posts on veterans issues have changed in the last month. On the Senate side, Montana Democrat Sen. Jon Tester took over as ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. Only that committee's chairman, Georgia Republican Sen. Johnny Isakson, remains from the so-called Big Four from last session. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 10, 2017 ++]

VA Nursing Homes Update 07 ► Florida Shortage

By its own analysis, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs calculates that Florida only has 20 percent of the VA-sponsored nursing home beds it needs to serve aging veterans. And it's put the state on a "critical" list when it comes to building VA nursing homes. "I need nursing homes," said retired Army Lt. Col. Glenn Sutphin, executive director of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs. "The VA says there are two states that have critical needs Texas and Florida. I'm supposed to have 4,049 beds. That's what they say I should have. I've got like 810. I've got two nursing homes I'm trying to build. We need to keep building them. But they changed the design. They went from \$38 million to \$58 million."

The cost of the nursing home planned for Port St. Lucie, jumped \$20 million because of design changes according to an online video, "We have taken a concept of creating a home environment for our residents, for our veterans who live with us. We create an environment where it's not as institutional as your traditional nursing home creating small neighborhoods where possible." That includes private rooms for veterans, a necessity for today's military according to VA Secretary Bob McDonald. "Now with a volunteer Army, everybody has their own room. We've got to have the same in the VA. If they're used to that in the Army, they'll expect that in the VA," McDonald said.



One of Florida's Six Existing State Veteran Nursing Homes

The VA nursing home design criteria changed five years ago. It's just that Florida didn't think the changes applied to its projects, but they did. And that miscalculation has delayed construction of the Ardie R. Copas State Veterans' Nursing Home at Port St. Lucie for more than a year. "We in Port St. Lucie alone with our indigent, homeless and etcetera veterans could fill a nursing home tomorrow," said Richard Feldman, commander of the 1500 member American Legion Post 318 in Port St. Lucie. Feldman, a World War II Marine veteran who served 1943-1953, said the more personalized design mandated by the VA is not worth the wait. "Because they were all set to break ground and doing the planning and then all of the sudden they come up with this," Feldman said. "Somebody's idea of what's better for veterans, what's better for veterans is to give them the care they need." And he said the Port St. Lucie region needs a VA-state run nursing home even though the VA will pay private nursing homes to care for a veteran. The Port St. Lucie plans have been reworked, but additional money is needed to build the 120-bed home.

The state will pay 35 percent and the federal VA 65 percent. Florida is waiting for the VA to release its nursing home grants' list. It usually comes out in November, but now is expected in early January. The delay doesn't worry Florida VA director Sutphin. "We of course have been assured verbally, 'Don't worry we've got everything fixed for Florida,'" Sutphin said. "I can't move forward until I actually know I've got the funding." That's federal funding. There's still the state contribution. Sutphin said he's talking with house and senate staff and hopes to start

construction in February at the Port St. Lucie site, even though the additional state money wouldn't theoretically be available until July 1, 2017.

And Sutphin is still negotiating with the VA over refurbishing a second VA nursing home at Lake Baldwin in Orlando – where again - the state is up against the new design mandates. “If I could just get one good one started and show them what we can do and how we can do, it I'm sure we can drive on and build more homes,” Sutphin said. “I'm committed to getting these homes that our veterans need.” Sutphin comes from a proven background where he rehabbed several of Florida's armories for the National Guard. And his father who was an engineer was part of the team that built the Pentagon during WWII in just 18 months. [Source: Off The Base | Bobbie O'Brien | January 5, 2017 ++]

VA Prosthetics Update 16 ► Military Amputees to Receive LUKE Arms

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency is making available to the first production versions of a groundbreaking upper-limb prosthesis, according to a DARPA press release. Dr. Justin Sanchez, director of DARPA's Biological Technologies Office, delivered the first two advanced “LUKE” arms from a new production line during a ceremony yesterday – evidence that the fast-track DARPA research effort has completed its transition into a commercial enterprise, DARPA officials said. The ceremony took place at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. “The commercial production and availability of these remarkable arms for patients marks a major milestone in the [DARPA] Revolutionizing Prosthetics program and most importantly an opportunity for our wounded warriors to enjoy a major enhancement in their quality of life,” Sanchez said, “and we are not stopping here.” The RP program is supporting initial production of the bionic arms and is making progress restoring upper-arm control, he added. “Ultimately we envision these limbs providing even greater dexterity and highly refined sensory experiences by connecting them directly to users' peripheral and central nervous systems,” Sanchez said.

As part of the production transition process, DARPA is collaborating with Walter Reed to make the bionic arms available to service members and veterans who are rehabilitating after suffering upper-limb loss, DARPA says. LUKE stands for “life under kinetic evolution” but is also a passing reference to the limb that Luke Skywalker wore in Star Wars: Episode V, The Empire Strikes Back. The limbs are being manufactured by Mobius Bionics LLC, of Manchester, New Hampshire, a company created to market the technology developed by DEKA Integrated Solutions Corp., also of Manchester, under DARPA's Revolutionizing Prosthetics program. The first production versions of “LUKE” arms, a groundbreaking upper-limb prostheses, were on display during a ceremony at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency is collaborating with Walter Reed to make the bionic arms available to service members and veterans who are rehabilitating after suffering upper-limb loss.



The prosthetic system allows very dexterous arm and hand movement with grip force feedback through a simple intuitive control system, DARPA says. The modular battery-powered limb is near-natural size and weight. Its hand has six user-chosen grips and an arm that allows for simultaneous control of multiple joints using inputs that include wireless signals generated by innovative sensors worn on a user's feet.

The technology that powers prosthetic legs has advanced steadily over the past two decades but prosthetic arms and hands are a tougher challenge, in part because of the need for greater degrees of dexterity, DARPA says. When the LUKE arm first went into development, people who had lost upper limbs had to use a relatively primitive split-hook device that hadn't changed much since it was introduced in 1912. DARPA launched the Revolutionizing Prosthetics program with a goal of getting U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval for an advanced electromechanical prosthetic upper limb with near-natural control that enhances independence and improves quality of life for amputees. LUKE received FDA approval less than eight years after the effort began, DARPA says. Under a recently finalized agreement between DARPA and Walter Reed, DARPA will transfer LUKE arms from an initial production run to the medical center for prescription to patients. Mobius Bionics will train the Walter Reed staff to fit, service and support the arms. [Source: Health.mil | Cheryl Pellerin | December 28, 2016 ++]

VA Health Care Access Update 47 ► Report Shows Improvement

A new report released on access to care at Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities shows the department has made improvements following several high-profile reports on patients facing long wait times. The VA has made "impressive progress" over the last year, according to a study released by the Harvard Business Review titled "Improving Access at VA." The findings, which were first reported by the Washington Post, look at the changes department leaders made following a 2014 scandal at a facility in Arizona in which patients faced unreasonable wait times - with some patients dying before they received care. The Harvard researchers found VA leaders who came in after that scandal had to rethink the department's capabilities and processes. That led to advancements in reaching new patients through improvements to information technology.

VA Secretary Robert McDonald, who was put in charge of the department after the fallout from the scandal in Arizona, also helped spur innovation across the department. He solicited best practices from successful employees from across the department that could be implemented at other facilities. McDonald also emphasized accountability at every level and implemented a Leaders Developing Leaders course that encouraged employees to get more involved in their patients' care. McDonald cited an example that could improve a patient's experience, according to the report. At the VA Medical Center in White River Junction, Vt., employees knew one of their regular patients so well that a single missed appointment gave them immediate concern about the patient's well-being. "On their own initiative, the employees contacted local police who then conducted a house call and discovered that the patient had fallen, was unable to move, and in a critical state," the report states. "By building strong relationships with their patients and incorporating that into their back stage work of scheduling, these VA employees saved the life of a veteran."

The VA is still facing significant challenges, though, the report notes. In some cases, wait times have increased despite adding new staff members and facilities. "In some ways, making service better was making service worse," the report states. Researchers cited the Veterans Crisis Line, which those considering suicide are urged to call, as one of the areas in need of improvement. When veterans called the original hotline, they were told to hang up and call a different number if they were experiencing a crisis. The new system allows veterans to be directly connected to crisis specialists, but the enhancement left the call center overwhelmed. The VA has since opened a second Veterans Crisis Line in Atlanta, which has nearly doubled its ability to help veterans in need.

During a speaking engagement in Washington, D.C., last month, McDonald touted several areas in which the VA has made strides in improving veterans' care. Since December 2015, he said that trust in the VA has improved and veterans are reporting more ease with accessing health care. The VA completed 4 million more medical appointments in FY 2016 versus last year, he added. And the department has added more doctors and nurses, he said, and extended clinic hours into the evenings. It's work McDonald said he hopes the next administration continues as President-elect Donald Trump considers candidates to replace the secretary. "Things are moving in the right direction," McDonald said. "My suggestion to the next president would be please keep it going, if not accelerate the progress." Trump has called for VA reform, pledging to improve accountability and create a White House hotline veterans can call to report complaints about their experiences with the department. [Source: MOAA | Gina Harkins | December 23, 2017 ++]

VA Burial Benefits Update 40 ► Spouse Rule Change

Veterans and their spouses qualify for burial in Department of Veterans Affairs cemeteries nationwide. But thanks to bureaucratic rules, making arrangements for yourself ahead of time has been absolutely impossible. Literally. That's because in the past, the VA required that applications for VA burial eligibility be sent in "at the time of need" — in other words, after you're already dead. Now can you say exactly how much paperwork were you planning to fill out after you die? That's what Military.com's Spouse Buzz thought. Which meant the whole thing has to be sorted out by family members. Now a new rule change means that your veteran can take care of the eligibility part of the VA burial benefits ahead of time. And since most of us want to be buried near our husbands or wives, it means we can take care of it for ourselves, too.

First note, this is for those who have left service only — not for active duty. Also, this system will not let you choose exactly which cemetery you are buried in. Instead, they let you state a preference. Actual location will depend on availability at "time of need" and still must be applied for by your family or through your funeral home. Here's what the VA burial benefits change does: The rule change allows veterans on their own behalf (or a designated agent) apply for burial benefits before they are actually needed, under a process known as pre-determination. You can read all about veteran burial pre-determination by going to <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2016/12/09/va-to-let-vets-preselect-cemetery-burials-before-death.html>.

But spouses aren't left behind on this one. Spouses qualify to be buried at a VA cemetery based off their veteran's eligibility. That means if your veteran can be buried there, so can you. VA officials said spouses can turn in an eligibility pre-determination form at the same time as their veteran — no need to wait for the veteran to be given the OK first. That means the spouse and their veteran can take care of all of your paperwork at the same time on the same day. Planning for the inevitable is a good idea. You can find the VA burial benefits form for pre-determination at <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA40-10007.pdf>. [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | December 27, 2016 ++]

VA Transgender Care Update 01 ► Patients Are Welcomed and Respected

Transgender people, according to Wikipedia, are people who have a gender identity or gender expression that differs from their assigned sex. There are currently about 5,000 transgender Veterans receiving their healthcare from VA. "That is certainly an undercount because not all transgender Veterans want to identify themselves to their provider," noted Dr. Michael Kauth, co-director of VA's National LGBT Program (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender).

Kauth is also a psychologist at the Houston VA and a professor in the Psychiatry Department at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

Kauth said VA provides gender transition counseling, evaluations for hormone therapy, and evaluations for gender transition surgeries. “VA doesn’t perform those surgeries, and doesn’t pay for them,” he said. “But we’ll be there to help the Veteran out if something happens to go wrong after transition surgery. If complications occur following surgery, VA will provide the Veteran with medically necessary care.” And for Veterans who are still in the process of transitioning, there’s counseling. “A VA counselor will talk to the Veteran about their transition goals, and how to achieve them safely,” Kauth said. “Our job is to help the Veteran successfully navigate their gender transition pathway, and to support them.”

Making sure transgender Vets get the support and understanding they deserve is the job of Dr. Jillian Shipherd, co-director of VA’s National LGBT Program and a clinical research psychologist at the Boston VA. She said a big part of her job is making sure providers throughout the VA system are properly trained in how to interact with this very special segment of the Veteran community. “We live in a largely gender binary world where we want things to be one way or another. But life is vastly more complex than that.” “As a transgender person you’re accustomed to dealing with all sorts of issues on a daily basis,” she explained. “But when you walk into a VA facility you shouldn’t have to worry about that. So here at VA we need to work extra hard to overcome any fear or anxiety you might be experiencing. We want to make sure that you, as a transgender Vet, are getting the healthcare you need and the respect you have earned.”

Shipherd said transgender Veterans, like other minorities, tend to have considerably more stress in their lives than the rest of us. “Veterans are at increased risk for suicide relative to the general population,” she observed, “and transgender Vets are 20 times more likely to attempt suicide than other Veterans. This statistic highlights the level of daily stress some of our transgender Vets are experiencing.”

So... Why so Much Stress? “As a transgender Vet one of your biggest battles is discrimination, which can take many forms—some subtle and some not so subtle,” Shipherd explained. “As a transgender Vet you might face discrimination where you work, or you might have trouble finding a job at all. You might face discrimination when you try to rent an apartment or purchase a home, or a car, or even a pair of shoes. You might face discrimination from your own family—your parents, your brothers and sisters, even your own children. That’s a lot of stress.” She continued: “Being transgender can affect every aspect of your life. When you go to the bank to get a loan, you might experience some problems due to a lack of credit history under your new name. When you go to a new dentist for the first time, you might be worried about explaining why you’re on certain medications or hormone therapy.”



Dr. Jillian Shipherd

And then there’s the dreadful event that tends to generate anxiety in all of us, but especially members of any minority group: getting pulled over by a police officer. “Any encounter you might have with law enforcement can be stressful, or downright scary,” Shipherd said. “Can you imagine being stopped by a police officer late one

evening? What are you feeling as the officer gets out of their cruiser and approaches your vehicle? Are you nervous? Are you afraid? What will the officer say when they look at your driver's license and it says John Doe, only you look like Jane Doe?" Shipherd said the unfortunate reality is that most transgender Veterans live with fear every day of their lives. "Just walking out of your house can provoke anxiety," she said. "Chances are people on the street may roll their eyes when they see you, or actually snicker or laugh. Some might verbally harass you. And of course, there is the risk of physical violence. It's not an easy life. This is why we work so hard at VA to make our transgender patients feel welcomed, and respected. We want them to know that when they come to VA they're coming to a safe place."

To make sure VA is a safe and welcoming place, the Department offers three levels of nation-wide training to help VA healthcare providers get up to speed on how to successfully interact with their transgender patients and how to address their sometimes unique healthcare concerns. (For more info on what kind of LGBT training VA is providing to its personnel, visit <http://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/index.asp>). Shipherd said this kind of sensitivity training is essential, since even well-meaning VA staff can experience anxiety when interacting with a transgender patient — thus causing the patient to feel anxious.

"Sometimes even a well-intentioned healthcare provider can mishandle their encounter with a transgender Vet," she said. "It's not that they're trying to be insensitive or callous; they're simply not educated in culturally appropriate care. So it's our job to provide that education, to make sure our healthcare staff and providers are trained in how to communicate and connect with transgender patients." She added: "We all need to understand that gender is more complicated than what we like to think. Male and female are not the only options. Gender identity exists on a continuum, with male and female being the extreme endpoints. Then you have everything in-between." Readers can go to [http://www.boston.va.gov/services/Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Veterans.asp](http://www.boston.va.gov/services/Lesbian_Gay_Bisexual_and_Transgender_Veterans.asp) to learn more about LGBT services offered at the Boston VA, visit To learn more about some of the services VA is providing to transgender Veterans nationwide, visit <http://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/index.asp>. [Source: VAntage Point | January 3, 2016 ++]

VA Secretary Update 53 ► Biggest Issues Replacement Will Face

The next person who leads the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will have one of the biggest jobs in America. He or she will inherit a bureaucracy with a \$182 billion budget and more than 340,000 employees at a time that promises to bring tumultuous change, including the question of whether VA medical services should be partly or wholly privatized. The agency also carries the baggage of a serious image problem after four years of scandals about delayed health care and backlogged disability claims. It's also responsible for leading the nation's efforts to combat the roughly 20 suicides per day among veterans. There's also the challenge of meeting the diverse needs of its 6 million patients. The agency is dealing with both the Vietnam War generation, now facing the expensive illnesses of aging, and the recent wave of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, who bring home battle-broken bodies and emotional wounds. And the Veterans Affairs department must address dissatisfaction within its own staff: It ranks second-to-last for best places to work in the federal government

President-elect Donald Trump is said to be days away from naming his nominee, after taking more time than with other Cabinet positions to analyze the best fit to carry out his vision. The contenders were reported to be retiring Florida Rep. Jeff Miller, outgoing chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs; former Massachusetts Sen. Scott Brown; and Pete Hegseth, former head of the conservative-leaning group Concerned Veterans for America. Former Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney was also said to be in the running, as are retired U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Thad Allen, who was in charge of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil-spill response, and Adm. Michelle Howard, the Navy's first female four-star admiral. On the experts' list of the four biggest issues the new VA secretary will face, there appears to be a tie for first.

Bureaucracy

Veterans advocates from various corners of the political landscape identify the VA's middle management as the biggest roadblock to change. VA employment boomed with the post-9/11 wars. The agency added 122,000 jobs, a 56 percent increase, between 2000 and 2013, according to a Cato Institute analysis. Sherman Gillums, head of the organization Paralyzed Veterans of America, sees regional management in the VA's health-care apparatus as problematic. Administrative staff at the agency's 21 regional health-care districts grew from 220 staffers to 1,340 by 2011, according to Gillums, who wrote a recent opinion piece on the subject titled "The One Problem That Will Make or Break Trump's Pick for VA Secretary."

These middle managers hold the purse strings for local VA hospitals and are supposed to provide oversight. Gillums argues that they're overpaid and underworked and have sidestepped accountability for the VA's recent health scandals, including the one in Phoenix, where VA officials hid long waits for medical appointments by using secret patient lists. "Middle management is the biggest issue that needs to be cleaned up immediately, if anything else is going to change," Gillums said in a phone interview last week. "To have that many people but not an increase in oversight, it doesn't make sense." Critics have said it's too hard to get rid of bad VA employees, and they've called out VA Secretary Bob McDonald for saying he fired 60 people linked to the wait-time scandal when it appears that didn't happen. Attempts by Congress to reduce this bureaucracy have had uneven results in recent years.

Dan Caldwell, policy director at Concerned Veterans for America, said the VA has more than the usual number of top-level people who are protected by Civil Service rules. In other words, other agencies have more appointed positions, which are filled at the pleasure of the secretary. "It's a very entrenched bureaucracy that has been impervious to change over the past few years, that is very invested in the current system," Caldwell said, adding that any new rules designed to change the setup would likely be challenged in court by individual employees and organized labor.

Privatization

The movement to change the way the nation provides medical services for its veterans gained momentum with the 2014 Veterans Choice Act. With veterans sometimes waiting months for appointments, Congress created a program that pays for patients to see outside doctors if the VA can't schedule an internal visit within 30 days or if the distance to be traveled is too far from the patients' home. Trump is weighing the idea of a system in which vets can pick a combination of public and private care or simply opt for a private doctor, his transition team has said. Supporters of this approach call it greater choice, while critics see it as privatizing public health care.

Some respected veterans groups are fighting this idea and have even called for Trump to keep the current VA secretary — McDonald. They argue that a large-scale move toward private care might erode what's now a full-service network attuned to treating veterans' distinct needs. "Some people pooh-pooh the idea that it's being privatized, but what is happening is the more you pull out of that center, the harder it is for that integrated care to take place," said Amy Fairweather, policy director for Swords to Plowshares, a veterans advocacy and service group based in San Francisco. Others said the jury is still out whether it can work. Gillums, of Paralyzed Veterans of America, said there now appears to be an inevitability to the discussion. "I think it's going to be a lot harder than people think, but I think the train has left the station with (Choice Act) care. When that passed, with all the support it got from Capitol Hill, it was the first step toward evaluating whether this is a viable alternative to VA care," he said. Gillums added that veterans groups will want the next VA secretary to provide detailed answers about how a new system would work. "I'm worried they are going to look at how many veterans were seen versus how many were made better off when they went to the private sector," he said.

There is some precedent. Medicare, another large government medical program, introduced an option called Medicare Advantage. Private health companies offer managed-care plans to people who want to opt out of traditional Medicare. It has become somewhat popular, especially in California, said John Romley, a University of Southern California economist who studies the hospital industry. The results of that experiment are mixed, Romley

said. “There’s a very robust debate about that,” he said. “In general, we think competition is a healthy thing. It gives people choices and makes providers of services accountable for their performance.” There are risks. The average person may not be sophisticated enough about medical issues to navigate the system and make the best choices, Romley said. Also, there have been accusations about “cream skimming,” in which private plans court the healthiest patients and leave the sicker — and thus more expensive — patients in the traditional Medicare program.

Claims backlog

Thanks in part to massive amounts of overtime work, the VA has succeeded in making a large dent in its backlog of disability claims. The total is now at just over 93,000 claims still waiting more than 125 days without a decision — down from a 2013 high of more than 600,000 in the so-called backlog. But let’s not call that victory, said Caldwell of Concerned Veterans for America. He and others also said there’s a big challenge ahead to continue modernizing how the labyrinthine claims process works. “Sending documents back and forth via courier or mail — it’s astounding, in the digital age, that they are still operating large parts of the claims process in way that is not that much that different than in 1980,” Caldwell said. However, there’s some concern in the veterans community that the age of automation brings dangers, as complicated cases require human judgment to be handled fairly and correctly.

More clinical resources

Despite its big staffing increases, the VA still faces challenges finding and keeping enough medical professionals. Paralyzed Veterans of America has called for 1,000 more bedside nurses for spinal-care units. Meanwhile, the turnover rate for registered nurses is high in some regions, including in San Diego County. Additionally, just as one in five young veterans struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder, the nation is in the middle of a shortage of psychiatrists. “One of the biggest things for the new VA secretary, and frankly I think for the new administration, is to really convey that they understand the seriousness of mental health injuries,” said Nathan Fletcher, a San Diego Iraq war veteran and former state assemblyman who started the Three Wise Men foundation to help returning vets. The VA recently launched programs to woo more psychiatrists. Those include better salaries and college loan repayment programs.

[Source: San Diego Union-Tribune | Jeanette Steele | January 2, 2017 ++]

VA Secretary Update 54 ► McDonalds's Exit Memo

On 6 JAN, Secretary McDonald and his fellow Cabinet members released their Exit Memos. The Department of Veterans Affairs memo, available online, covers the past 8 years of serving Veterans, the progress of the MyVA transformation, and a vision for the future. The full 14 page memo can be read at <http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/docs/VA-Exit-Memo.pdf>. It concludes with the following statement from the Secretary:

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Serving Veterans as Secretary of VA has been the greatest honor of my life. For more than 240 years, America’s Service Members have fought to establish and keep our great Nation free and safe from tyranny. They’ve provided for all of us the security and safety in which Americans of every race and religion have the opportunity to live and work, speak and worship, gather and speak as they see fit. From the American Revolution to today, from the “greatest generation” of World War II to the latest generations from Afghanistan and Iraq, Veterans have served with honor and distinction across our country and around the globe. And when they take off that uniform for the last time, we owe them the care and the benefits they have earned through their service. At VA, that is our only and most important mission—caring for those “who shall have borne the battle.” With the help of Congress, with our partners and allies in federal, state, and local government, and with the assistance of public and private institutions, Veterans

Service Organizations, and other stakeholders who care for Veterans, we can finish transforming VA to be the best customer service organization in government. It is not about the legacy of any one leader. Caring for Veterans is a bipartisan obligation—it has been in the past, and it should be in the future. It is about moving forward in the best interests of our Nation’s Veterans. That’s right for our Veterans, and our great country.

[Source: Cabinet Exit Memo | Secretary Robert McDonald | January 5, 2017 +]

VA Secretary Update 55 ► Trump Picks David Shulkin for Job

President-elect Donald Trump on 11 JAN named the Department of Veterans Affairs top health official his pick to run the entire veterans bureaucracy, a surprise move that puts a non-veteran in line for the post for the first time. **Dr. David Shulkin**, who has served as VA Under Secretary for Health since June 2015, is the first nominee held over from President Barack Obama’s administration. Trump made the announcement at his first press conference since the November election, and after a lengthy search which included dozens of potential candidates. “He’s fantastic,” Trump said. “He will do a truly great job. One of the commitments I made is that we’re going to straighten out the whole situation for veterans. Our veterans have been treated horribly ... I think you’ll be very impressed with David and the job he does.”



VA Undersecretary Dr. David Shulkin talks with attendees prior to testifying at a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee field hearing in Gilbert, Ariz., in 2015.

In a statement released by Trump’s transition team, Shulkin called the nomination an honor. “President-elect Trump’s commitment to caring for our veterans is unquestionable, and he is eager to support the best practices for care and provide our Veterans Affairs’ teams with the resources they need to improve health outcomes,” he said. “We are both eager to begin reforming the areas in our Veterans Affairs system that need critical attention, and do it in a swift, thoughtful and responsible way.” Shulkin currently oversees about 1,700 medical facilities and almost 300,000 federal workers in the department’s health system. Now he’ll be charged with looking after the entire \$177-billion agency, not only the health care aspects but also benefits delivery and a host of other support programs. Prior to his time at VA, Shulkin worked as president and CEO of Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City and spent many years as a top health care official at numerous Philadelphia research hospitals.

If confirmed by the Senate, the 57-year-old Shulkin will become the first non-veteran to oversee the department or any of its predecessor agencies. Over the last 94 years, each of the 26 other men to serve in the job boasted military experience. Shulkin comes from an Army family, and was born on an Army base in Illinois. His father served as an Army psychiatrist, and during his 2015 confirmation hearing he noted his military upbringing “has sensitized me to the psychological and medical needs of those who served our country.” The former internal

medicine physician would enter the job with the more medical experience than most past nominees, and with almost two years of first-hand experience with the challenges and failures of VA's medical care operations.

Trump has promised major changes within the department, including new rules on employee bonuses and a commission to "investigate all the fraud, cover-ups, and wrongdoing that has taken place in the VA" in recent years. He has also promised a private White House hotline active 24 hours a day devoted to fielding complaints about VA, to guide reform efforts. And he pledged as a candidate to increase the number of mental health care professionals within VA, a need that health officials have identified but been unable to fill due to nationwide shortages in specialists. On Wednesday, Trump said that Shulkin will work closely with executives from "some of the great hospitals of the world" to look at ways to reduce wait times, improve access and better veterans care. The president-elect has stated he wants to look at shifting more VA medical appointments to private physicians, a move that veterans advocates have strongly opposed.

Last fall, Shulkin testified before the Senate in favor of plans to extend the controversial VA Choice Card program past August 2017, but also argued that VA needs to remain "the care coordinator" for veterans' medical needs. He has also voiced support for expanding private-care partnerships with VA hospitals, a plan that Republicans in Congress have already endorsed. Shulkin enjoys a good relationship with veterans groups.

- In a statement, **Veterans of Foreign Wars** National Commander Brian Duffy said his group supports Shulkin's nomination and praised his "willingness to continue serving veterans and making the VA better."
- National Commander Charles E. Schmidt of **The American Legion** said, "My staff and I have worked closely with Dr. Shulkin and believe he has improved the Veterans Health Administration in the short time he has been at the helm. I met with him just last month and believe he is deeply committed to improving VA care and all of the services that VA provides to veterans. If confirmed by the Senate, Dr. Shulkin will continue to find The American Legion to be a resourceful and knowledgeable friend ... We believe that Dr. Shulkin shares our goals."
- Bill Rausch, executive director of **Got Your 6**, praised the pick as a chance to build on positive reforms in the department over the last few years. "Although Dr. Shulkin does not have military experience, we have worked with him closely in his current role and have seen first-hand his unwavering commitment to our nation's veterans," he said.
- **Vietnam Veterans of America** fully endorses President-elect Trump's intention to nominate David Shulkin as the next Secretary of Veterans Affairs," said John Rowan, VVA National President. "Dr. Shulkin has done terrific work over the past year-and-a-half years as Under Secretary for Health; he has assembled a gifted staff to integrate community care into VA health care, enabling the VA to live up to the challenge of providing the best care available."
- Sherman Gillums, executive director of **Paralyzed Veterans of America** remarked "As the incoming secretary, Dr. Shulkin will certainly have his own priorities, which Paralyzed Veterans of America will support, as long as they are in the best interest of our members and all veterans who served our country. His experience as under secretary for health should ensure continuity in improving health care for veterans as the scope of his responsibility broadens. Dr. Shulkin fully understands our priorities and what we expect of VA's senior leaders, so we're not starting from square one. We look forward to working with him and the new administration."
- Paul Rieckhoff, CEO at **Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America**, praised Shulkin's experience but noted that "his selection is unprecedented. Our membership overwhelmingly supported the selection of a veteran for this critical leadership position" Rieckhoff said his group will be watching Shulkin's confirmation hearing closely, to see if he supports plans to "expand privatization at VA, which veterans nationwide continue to overwhelmingly oppose."

- House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe (R-TN) lauded Trump's choice of a physician to lead the department, "especially one familiar with the integrating of private practitioners into the VA's network of health care providers."
- "Picking Shulkin shows both a focus on veterans health reform, and a desire to largely continue much of the good work done since (the 2014 wait times scandal), said Phil Carter, director of the Military, Veterans and Society Program at the Center for a New American Security. "Under Shulkin, VA has slowly and quietly shifted more of its patient load to the private sector, and that has helped VA handle much greater demand. That trend will likely continue, and work better than outright privatization of the VA."
- American Federation of Government Employees National President J. David Cox Sr. said, "Dr. Shulkin is a strong choice to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs. He has extensive knowledge of the VA and is committed to continuing its reputation as a world-class health care system. Dr. Shulkin recognizes that the VA must continue to improve, and that the answers to its most pressing issues can only be solved with the help of dedicated frontline VA workers."

No confirmation hearing schedule has been announced. But by picking an official in the current VA administration, Trump may be able to avoid a leadership gap in the department after current VA Secretary Bob McDonald's departure on 20 JAN. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 11, 2017 ++]

VA Privatization Update 09 ► Sen. Sanders Slams Trump's Plan

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) slammed a plan floated by President-elect Donald Trump to create a "public-private option" for veterans to seek healthcare. "Privatizing the VA would be an insult to the more than 22 million veterans who risked their lives to defend our country and it would significantly lower the quality of health care they receive," Sanders said in a statement Friday. "Our goal, shared by The American Legion and other major veterans' organizations, must be to improve the VA, not destroy it."

On 28 DEC, a senior Trump transition official told reporters that the incoming administration was considering a "public-private option" for the Department of Veterans Affairs, or VA, that would allow veterans to visit private-sector doctors rather than VA doctors. "We think we have to have kind of a ... public-private option, because some vets love the VA. ... Some vets want to go to the VA," the official said, according to a pool report. "So the idea is to come up with a solution that solves the problem. And it's not the easiest thing in the world because you've got all these little kingdoms out there, which is hard." The official did not elaborate on specific details of how that option would work.

Some veterans facing a long wait time or far distance to a VA facility can already seek private care through the Choice Card program approved by Congress in 2014. But some people want to expand the Choice program to all veterans, including reported candidates for Trump's VA secretary, Cleveland Clinic CEO Toby Cosgrove, and Pete Hegseth, a Fox News commentator and former head of the Koch brothers-linked Concerned Veterans for America. Critics, including many leading veterans organizations, say expanding Choice to all veterans would in effect be privatization, as it would undermine the VA by shifting resources away from it. Sanders, who is on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and was once its chairman, highlighted the veterans groups' opposition in his statement. "The veterans' organizations are right," Sanders said. "We must protect the VA, not destroy it."

For example, earlier this month, American Legion Executive Director Verna Jones said in a statement that Trump should know that "dollar-for-dollar, there is no better care or value available anywhere in the United States – period." Sanders also highlighted a quote from Paul Rieckhoff of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, who said veterans groups are worried the VA will get "burned down" by Trump, as well as a legislative call to action from earlier this year from the Veterans of Foreign Wars that blasts politicians who want to "dismantle and

privatize the VA health care system.” “When men and women put their lives on the line to defend us, the president must listen to them, not to the Koch brothers and their extreme right-wing, anti-government ideology,” Sanders said. “We will vigorously oppose any and all efforts to privatize the VA. [Source: The Hill | Rebecca Kheel | December 31, 2016 ++]

VA Bonuses Update 32 ► \$30M Paid in 2014 Was Unjustified

The Department of Veterans Affairs handed out more than \$30 million in employee incentives in one year without justification, and it will continue to overspend if changes aren’t made, according to a report released 5 JAN by the agency’s internal watchdog. The findings are the result of an investigation by the VA inspector general’s office into how the department was using funds to attract and retain employees. Inspectors initiated the investigation after allegations that the department was giving out too many incentives to VA executives without cause – a charge Republican lawmakers and VA leaders have quarreled about in recent years. “The VA has limited assurance that it is using [recruitment, relocation and retention] incentives effectively and strategically to acquire and retain talent,” the inspectors’ report stated.

Inspectors found \$30.7 million of \$66 million spent in fiscal 2014 to recruit, relocate or retain employees was not fully justified. At that rate, they estimated the VA could give out \$158.7 million in unsupported incentives through September 2019. Inspectors concluded VA officials did not always confirm the incentives were being used to help fix workforce gaps or were necessary to recruit and retain employees. The VA also failed to recoup about \$784,000 of incentives that were awarded on conditions that employees then did not meet. Inspectors estimated the VA could fail to collect another nearly \$4 million through fiscal 2019. Meghan Flanz, acting assistant secretary for VA human resources and administration, responded to the report by saying her office has started to take corrective measures and the department has already updated some of its procedures and internal controls to avoid giving out incentives haphazardly. The findings were issued about two weeks after Deputy VA Secretary Sloan Gibson sent a letter to Congress urging lawmakers lift spending restrictions on employee bonuses that were put in place last year.

Limits on how much the VA could spend on bonuses and other awards to employees were worked into the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2016, which addresses the nationwide opioid epidemic. Gibson called the restrictions “counter-productive,” “unwarranted” and a hindrance in hiring and retaining high-quality employees. Because of them, he said, employees would see a 30-percent cut in performance-based awards this fiscal year. “[It] defies logic that Congress should so severely limit employee awards and incentives, for VA alone, at such a pivotal time in our transformation,” Gibson wrote.

After the wait-time scandal in 2014, in which veterans were found to be waiting long periods for treatment, the VA started a concentrated effort to hire more medical staff. But the department has been giving out incentives without confirmation that they were helping to fill gaps in the workforce, the inspectors’ report stated. As an example, inspectors cited one \$51,316 relocation incentive awarded in October 2013 to fill the vacancy of director at the Hudson Valley Health Care System in Montrose, New York. Hiring officials said the incentive was necessary because of high turnover in the facility and a lack of qualified applicants. But inspectors found the position was not vacant for an extended period of time and the job was not well advertised. “We found this relocation incentive was based on inaccurate information and was not justified,” the report states. “We determined the position was not hard to fill or subject to leadership turnover.” In addition, the VA had not created workforce plans in many cases to ensure they could eventually get away from handing out incentives, inspectors found. “While there are no limits on the number of years an employee can receive retention incentive payments... retention incentives are not intended to be used long term,” the report reads.

As chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, former Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) was one of the VA’s main critics. He’s previously said the department gave out bonuses with “reckless abandon.” Most of Congress’

complaints have centered on incentives to VA executives. “Clearly, the judgment of VA leaders is clouded by their continual obsession with cash bonuses, awards and incentives for employees even in the face of ongoing scandals plaguing the agency,” Miller wrote in response to Gibson’s letter. Of the 1,546 recruitment incentives given out in fiscal 2014, two went to senior executives. They totaled \$97,000 and were not properly authorized, inspectors found. Nineteen of 727 relocation incentives were given to executives, and they totaled \$728,000 that was not justified. Of 1,719 total retention incentives given to VA employees, 11 went to executives. Ten of those incentives were given without a workforce plan, meaning \$227,000 in retention spending was not supported, according to the report.

Flanz wrote in the report that the VA was working to establish a talent management program for executives that would include workforce management plans, “reducing the risk of long-term reliance on retention incentives.” Many of the incentives went to hard-to-fill positions such as medical officers, nurses and psychologists. However, in some cases, they were not fully justified, the report states. Inspectors did credit the VA for decreasing the amount spent through the recruitment, relocation and retention fund. In fiscal 2012, the VA spent \$115 million on recruitment, relocation and retention. In fiscal 2015, the department spent \$67 million. Those amounts are only a portion of the total amount the VA gave out in performance awards those years. [Audit of Recruitment, Relocation, and Retention Incentives report www.stripes.com/polopoly_fs/1.447580.1483650318!/menu/standard/file/VAOIG-14-04578-371.pdf]. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | December 20, 2016 ++]

VA Opioid Therapy Update 03 ► Fewer Vets Receiving Prescriptions

Fewer veterans received prescriptions for risky dosages of opioid painkillers after a national initiative took aim at reducing high doses and potentially dangerous drug combinations, a new study finds. Over a two-year period, high-dose opioid prescribing declined by 16 percent, and very-high-dose opioid prescribing dropped by 24 percent. The number of patients receiving both opioids and sedatives, which can be lethal when combined, dropped by 21 percent. The study, published in the journal *Pain*, looks at the effect of the Opioid Safety Initiative rolled out by the Veterans Health Administration in late 2013 to promote safer opioid prescribing. The study examines implementation of the OSI across all of the nation's 141 VA hospitals.

Under the OSI, the VHA created a "dashboard" tool using its national computerized medical record system to allow local VA clinical leaders to systematically review opioid prescribing and give physicians feedback. The researchers hope their findings could help other large health systems use their own electronic medical systems as part of a larger initiative to address a key aspect of the nation's epidemic of painkiller overdoses and opioid addiction. The study was conducted by researchers from the University of Michigan Medical School and Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation, the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System, and Yale University

Deaths and cases of substance use disorders linked to opioid painkillers have risen to epidemic levels nationally, with more than 14,000 deaths from prescription opioids in 2014 according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Although there are many kinds of opioid painkillers, the potency of each one can be measured in morphine equivalents or MEQs. The study focused on patients with prescriptions above particularly high daily thresholds: 100 MEQ and 200 MEQ. The study finds that OSI was associated with 331 fewer patients a month receiving prescriptions with daily doses above 100 MEQ, and 164 fewer patients a month being prescribed a daily dose above 200 MEQ.

Accidental overdoses among people taking opioids that interact with other drugs have also been on the rise, so the OSI effort also focused on use of benzodiazepine sedatives. The study found that OSI resulted in 781 fewer patients each month receiving both an opioid and a benzodiazepine. However, the new data shows variation among VA hospitals in OSI's impact. In a minority of hospitals, high-dose opioid prescribing actually went up during the study period. [Source: Science Daily | University of Michigan Health System | January 10, 2016 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 1 thru 15 JAN 2017



District of Columbia — A pair of Department of Veterans Affairs officials who defrauded the VA for \$400,000 will not face any criminal charges, despite an inspector general's request that they both face a criminal investigation. In an inspector general report made public in September, **Diana Rubens** and **Kimberly Graves** were both accused of manipulating a VA program meant to ease the strain of moving agency employees between cities. The watchdog referred the matter to the Department of Justice for a criminal inquiry. But prosecutors in the U.S. attorney's office for the District of Columbia ruled against pursuing charges late last week, the Houston Chronicle reported 27 DEC, effectively eliminating any possibility that the two officials will face consequences for their actions. The VA declined to fire Rubens and Graves in November. Although the agency planned instead to demote the embattled officials, a paperwork mistake spared the two from even that minimal punishment. Members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee are keeping tabs on the situation, an aide said. However, the VA has not offered Congress any updates on the case other than a statement confirming the disciplinary process had restarted after the botched initial attempt to demote Rubens and Graves. [Source: Washington Examiner | Sarah Westwood | December 29, 2016 ++]

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Athens, ME — An Athens woman pleaded guilty 6 JAN to conspiring to defraud the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, authorities said. **Lisa-Marie Watson**, 25, now faces up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, according to a news release from U.S. Attorney Thomas E. Delahanty II. Watson, who entered the guilty plea in U.S. District Court, conspired with her father-in-law to obtain VA compensation benefits illegally, according to the release. They submitted documents to the VA claiming Watson suffered from mental disabilities stemming from her service in the Army, but Watson “falsely described her mental condition to VA doctors,” the release said. Her father-in-law, David Watson, pleaded guilty 18 NOV to engaging in a conspiracy to defraud the VA, and he is awaiting sentencing. The investigation into the Watsons was conducted by the criminal investigation division of the VA Office of the Inspector General. [Source: Kennebec Journal - Morning Sentinel | January 5, 2016 ++]

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Bangor, ME — United States Attorney Thomas E. Delahanty II announced that **David B. Watson**, Sr., 66, and **Lisa-Marie Watson**, 25, of Madison and Athens, Maine pled guilty today in U.S. District Court to conspiring to defraud the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. According to court records, the father and daughter-in-law conspired to illegally obtain VA compensation benefits. They submitted documents to the VA falsely claiming she had suffered from mental disabilities that were connected to her service in the U.S. Army. She also falsely described her mental condition to VA doctors. On November 18, 2016, the defendant’s father-in-law, David Watson, pled guilty to engaging in a conspiracy to defraud the VA and awaits sentencing. The daughter faces up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Both will be sentenced after completion of a presentence report by the U.S. Probation Office. [Source: DoJ | U.S. Attorney's Office | January 5, 2016 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Cincinnati, OH — Authorities say a man improperly received \$130,000 in medical and housing benefits through Veterans Affairs by claiming he had served in the Marine Corps during years when he actually had been imprisoned in Arizona. Forty-three-year-old **Shawn Olinger** is charged with theft of government money in federal court in Cincinnati. Court records indicate he was arrested last month. A message seeking comment was left 11 JAN for his public defender. In court documents, investigators say Olinger's purported military service was wrongly logged into a database because of a disability compensation claim he had filed. They say Olinger later admitted making up his claim about being a veteran. They allege he knew that was wrong but did it because he needed medical care that he received through the Cincinnati VA Medical Center. [Source: The Associated Press | January 11, 2017 ++]

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St. Louis, MO — Two more defendants have been added to a criminal case that claims that former employees and contractors ripped off the John Cochran VA Medical Center. The U.S. Attorney's office said that **David Graham**, 24, of DeSoto, was arrested Wednesday and **Tony Pedretti**, 43, of Whiting, Indiana, was arrested last week. Both were indicted 4 JAN on a felony charge of conspiracy to defraud the U.S. As the Post-Dispatch reported last month, a former employee and contractor, Scott Geary, 54, of DeSoto, pleaded guilty to a felony charge of conspiracy to steal government funds and admitted conspiring with a VA official to bill for unnecessary work.

The conspiracy cost the government more than \$270,000, Assistant U.S. Attorney Tom Albus said in court at the time. Albus said that Geary initially worked as an outside contractor and paid kickbacks to Pedretti for each job he was awarded. Geary was later hired, and recruited Graham to take his place, Albus said. All the contracts were intentionally billed at amounts under \$2,500, the level that would have required complex bidding, he said. The official apparently no longer works there. A VA spokesman told the Post-Dispatch last month that both Geary and Pedretti "have not been employed here for some time." Geary is scheduled to be sentenced 15 MAR and could face up to five years in prison. [Source: St. Louis Post-Dispatch | Robert Patrick | January 12, 2017 ++]

VA Golden Age Games 2017 ► To be Held May 7-11 in Biloxi MS

VA will accept applications from Veterans interested in competing in the 2017 National Veterans Golden Age Games beginning 1 FEB. Veterans ages 55 and older and enrolled in VA health care may complete applications online at www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov. Applications will be accepted through 1 MAR. "VA is committed to offer sports and fitness as an integral part of a successful healthcare program, and I encourage every eligible Veteran to take advantage of this opportunity," said Carla Carmichael, National Veterans Golden Age Games director. "There are significant health benefits to leading an active lifestyle, and in keeping with the games' motto, we want every Veteran to achieve 'Fitness For Life.'"



The 2017 National Veterans Golden Age Games will take place in Biloxi, Mississippi, May 7-11. Nearly 800 athletes are expected to compete in the national multi-sport competition for senior Veterans, embracing the “Fitness for Life” motto. The event encourages participants to make physical activity a central part of their lives, and supports VA’s comprehensive recreation and rehabilitation therapy programs. Competitive events include air rifle, badminton, boccia, bowling, cycling, golf, horseshoes, nine ball, powerwalk, shuffleboard, swimming, table tennis and track and field. Exhibition events include: air pistol, archery, basketball, blind disc golf and pickleball.

VA research and clinical experience verify that movement and exercise are important to maintaining good health, speeding recovery and improving overall quality of life. The games encourage participants to continue in local senior events in their home communities and every other year serve as a qualifying event for competition in the National Senior Games. VA Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System will host this year’s games. The Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System provides care for more than 50,000 Veterans throughout Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. For more information visit www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov and follow VA Adaptive Sports on Twitter at @VAAdaptiveSport or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/vaadaptivesports. [Source: VA Vantage Point | January 9, 2017 ++]

*** Vets ***



Homeless Vets Update 76 ► VA's 30 Day Housing Effort

Robert A. McDonald, Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) Secretary announced 5 JAN a concentrated 30-day effort by VA staff and partners to house as many homeless Veterans in their communities as possible. To accomplish this, Secretary McDonald charged VA’s network of federal, local and nongovernmental partners to target available housing and supportive services to the nation’s most vulnerable Veterans. He made the announcement from Los Angeles, the city with the most homeless Veterans last year, during a forum with community leaders. Since 2010, ongoing efforts to assist Veterans who lack stable housing have resulted in a 47-percent reduction in homelessness among Veterans. Between 2015 and 2016 alone, Veteran homelessness decreased by 17 percent – four times the previous year’s decline. While these statistics indicate that the efforts of VA and its partners are producing successful outcomes for many Veterans, more must be done to accelerate progress.

“We have made significant progress in dramatically reducing homelessness among Veterans in recent years, but we know there is more to be done,” Secretary McDonald said. “For the next 30-days – during a time of year when temperatures in many parts of the country can become dangerously cold – I challenge VA and all of our partners to strategically target available resources to help our nation’s homeless Veterans. Together, we can find where the needs are greatest among Veterans in each community and ensure that every Veteran has access to safe, permanent housing.”

The 30-day surge comes from a best practice Secretary McDonald observed in Tampa, Florida, where local housing officials hosted a one-day event to find homes for as many homeless Veterans as they could. Tampa

officials called this Operation Reveille, referencing the French term for a bugle call to action. VA officials have adopted the term. Operation Reveille builds on the all-in, surge concept VA uses during its homeless stand downs, which provide homeless Veterans with a one-stop shop for medical care, support services and needed clothing and toiletries. Go to <https://www.va.gov/homeless/events.asp> for a list of when VA medical centers are holding stand downs.

From prioritizing unsheltered Veterans for immediate placement into safe housing, to organizing homeless stand downs and rapid rehousing events in their communities, there are many actions VA staff and partners can take to help veterans quickly exit homelessness. Refer to the following sites for more information on these:

- https://www.va.gov/homeless/docs/EVH_Surge_One_Pager_Winter_2016_508_3.pdf overview of the 30-day surge page. Contact your local VA medical center to find out about specific needs of homeless Veterans in your community.
- www.va.gov/homeless provides more about VA programs and services that support homeless and at-risk Veterans.
- <https://www.va.gov/homeless/docs/HomelessGeneralFactSheet-1610.pdf> fact sheet on VA's work to end Veteran homelessness
- <http://www.losangeles.va.gov/documents/Fact-Sheet-Ending-Homelessness-in-Los-Angeles-20160727.pdf> fact sheet on VA's work to end Veteran homelessness in Los Angeles

[Source: VA News Release | January 5, 2017 ++]

Wounded Warrior Project Update 05 ► Can They Survive 2017

The nonprofit Wounded Warrior Project entered 2016 with a more than \$400 million budget and reason to believe its meteoric growth would continue. It ended the year with detrimental losses following a scandal that led to the ouster of its two top executives in March. And while the veterans charity has remained mum on projected 2017 revenue, there is little doubt that donations continue to fall. The question is, by how much. New CEO retired Lt. Gen. Mike Linnington took the helm in July promising transparency as he worked to right the ship. After the organization announced its first restructuring – laying off 15 percent of its 600-member staff – Linnington told news organizations that WWP lost \$90-\$100 million in revenue. He told Stars and Stripes at the time that he would release exact figures at the end of September, when the fiscal year came to a close.

Last week, Linnington declined to release the 2016 tallies or projections for the 2017 budget, which began 1 OCT. He said he was “still a rookie on nonprofit accounting,” when he spoke with the newspaper in August and said he would release the financials only after they were audited and filed with the IRS – likely next summer. But an examination of WWP's financials appears to indicate that the nonprofit could face big troubles in the coming year – losses so steep that it would be forced to choose between depleting its reserves or cutting critical programs for wounded veterans and their families. “They are contracting,” said Doug White, a nonprofits expert and professor who was director of Columbia University's Master of Science in Fundraising Management. He left his position in June to conduct an in-depth study of what happened at WWP. “There's no way they can't contract at this point.”

White was fascinated by the controversy surrounding WWP spending, which raised questions about how nonprofits raise and allocate money and how their success is judged. In a strongly worded report, he concluded that the vision of ousted CEO Steve Nardizzi and Chief Operating Officer Al Giordano – which involved aggressive and costly fundraising to exponentially grow the nonprofit – was sound, even good business for the organization. But he acknowledged Nardizzi's flamboyant style led to damaging perceptions. White is working on a book about the organization and the issues. Nardizzi and Giordano were fired after reports in the New York Times and on CBS in January portrayed lavish spending and a toxic organizational culture. The charity had been placed on the Charity

Navigator watch list for having too small of a percentage of donations going directly to programming. Charity Navigator calculated that as much as 40 percent of revenue was spent on fundraising and administration. A forensic accounting of WWP's financials found no wrongdoing, but distrust remained. As donors began pulling their support, the board removed the two leaders.

By mid-spring WWP donations were plummeting. The charity pulled its TV ads and went into a holding pattern until Linnington's arrival in July. The ads have only recently resurfaced, but other than Linnington's initial statements in August and September, WWP has divulged little about its financial situation. There has been a lot of speculation about WWP's numbers for 2017, and without transparency from the organization, there's no way to be certain. But there are ways to assess nonprofit financial performance. White said that pulling advertising has unseen repercussions for a nonprofit, stalling new donations and limiting the ability to recoup donors as monthly donations expire and aren't renewed. He said the losses quickly build on themselves, leaving the nonprofit further behind. With WWP out of the public eye, donor drop-off likely increased, he said. Without an aggressive campaign to restore fundraising, it's reasonable to assume things have gotten worse, he said. "My feeling is they are on a downward spiral at this point," White said.

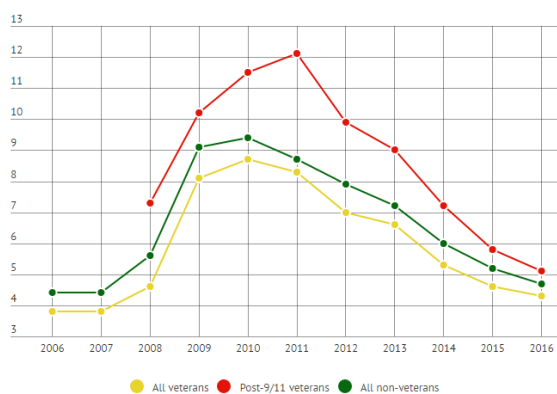
According to the latest financial documents available for Wounded Warrior Project -- the nonprofit tax form 990 for 2015 -- the organization made \$398.7 million. Nardizzi said the charity had projected a budget increase to \$414 million in 2016 (plus \$13 million from reserves to be used for the long-term care trust) and to \$475 million in 2017. By the time Linnington took the helm in July, Nardizzi said he believed the organization was on a trajectory to lose \$200 million in 2017. In August, the Chronicle of Philanthropy reported that Nardizzi had slammed the trustees of WWP for downplaying the financial crisis. Nardizzi told the Chronicle that during a conversation with Linnington in early July, the newly appointed CEO told him that the 2017 projections were even more dismal: revenue of just \$185 million.

Linnington confirmed to the Chronicle that he'd spoken with Nardizzi, but said the figure was inaccurate. He told the magazine that it was too soon to predict the organization's fundraising amount, and that 2017 revenue could be anywhere from \$185 million to \$355 million. Nardizzi confirmed to Stars and Stripes that when he left in March, WWP had \$250 million in reserves -- an amount they believed was "enough to weather any storms," he said. Their plan was to transfer some of that into the trust created for WWP's Independence Program, which provides lifetime home care for the most severely wounded. The organization was looking to grow programming and planned to add less to reserves. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Dianna Cahn | December 31, 2016 ++]

Vet Unemployment Update 10 ► Drops Again in 2016

Unemployment among the newest generation of veterans fell somewhat in December after a sharp spike upward in the month before, new government data indicate. The unemployment rate for Afghanistan- and Iraq-era veterans dropped to 5.7 percent in December, according to information released 6 JAN by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The rate was down from November's 6.5 percent, which was a jump from the 4.7 percent unemployment rate in October. The overall rate for post-9/11 veterans in 2016 was 5.1 percent, the lowest annual rate since the government started tracking unemployment among these veterans in 2008. Among all veterans, the annual rate in 2016 was 4.3 percent, the lowest since 2007. Between November and December, the numbers fell from 4.8 percent to 4.1 percent. The rate among non-veterans, meanwhile, ticked up a bit in December from November -- 4.3 percent to 4.4 percent -- with an annual rate of 4.7 percent.

Unemployment Rates



[Source: MilitaryTimes | K. Chamberlain | January 6, 2017 ++]

WWII VETS 127 ► George DeLong | USS Oklahoma Survivor

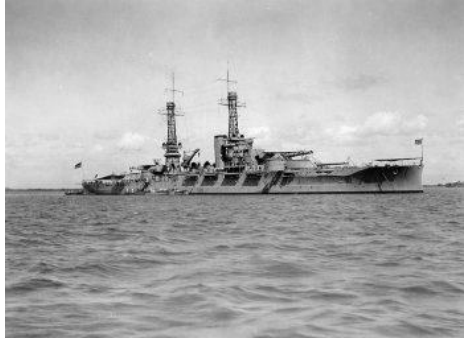
Up until George Albert DeLong decided to enlist in the United States Navy to “see the world” in January 1941, he had lived in Annville, Pennsylvania. He had graduated high school less than a year before that. He was born and raised in Annville, and he had a job in a local factory. When he started out in the Navy, he had no idea that, within the first year, he would survive one of the worst attacks the United States has ever faced.



George Albert DeLong

DeLong went to Quartermaster school in California after his recruit training and then was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, a battleship in the Pacific Fleet. The ship was stationed in Pearl Harbor and, when the Japanese attacked on December 7, 1941, he was trapped on board, along with seven other men. In describing his experience on that fateful day, DeLong remembered that “[t]here was a moment of panic when we first realized we were trapped...we looked at each other in stunned silence.” They did not know what had happened yet, but they all decided together to stay where they were rather than risk getting stuck trying to move. Luckily, none of them were seriously injured.

The group tried to shift to a higher position and “started fighting off the incoming water.” Then, everything tipped over and all of the enormous machinery – “TONS of machinery” – that they had thought was secure fell. Water came in through the air vents into the small area where they were waiting for help, and they used a rolled up mattress to stop it, after first trying to use clothes and blankets. DeLong recalled that they “didn’t dare go near the water.” Their flashlight wasn’t working properly, especially by the end, which left them in the dark. Then, someone made a joke, which really helped all of their morale, “set[ting] a tone that kept everybody on an even keel.”



USS Oklahoma under way and capsized and sinking at Pearl Harbor

As they waited to be rescued, DeLong remembered that “[t]here was just a little pin-point of light up there which was our first indication they were out there – just a little nail-hole or something. ... When we saw it, we KNEW they were out there; before this it had SOUNDED as if they were there a dozen times; but this was the first time that we actually knew.” The rescuers cut a small hole to get them out because “[t]hey were afraid they were going to burn the oil in the sides there.” When everything was ready, the rescuers “reached down under our armpits and pulled us up one at a time and handed us up to the guy on the next perch.”

The whole time that this group of eight men was trapped, they “had no idea of time.” Later, they discovered that they had been there for about 32 hours. As soon as they were rescued, they went to the USS Solace for medical attention, “and met the Captain on the quarterdeck. He came over and said, ‘Get the brandy!’” Everyone in the group was exhausted from their ordeal, but, before they went to sleep, they were fed and informed of the attack. When DeLong discussed this experience, he recalled that, while he was trapped, his first thoughts were about his mom. Rather than being angry or upset about the situation for his own sake, he was worried about how much pain it would cause for his mother. He tried to minimize the significance of this selflessness by attributing it to his young age and the fact that “at that time [he] was without ties and responsibilities,” but this just shows that he was modest in addition to being extremely empathetic. He also expressed gratitude to everyone who “participated in the rescue.”

DeLong’s time in the Armed Forces did not end with Pearl Harbor. He was reassigned to the USS Helena, which took part in several battles of World War II as part of the Pacific Fleet. One of the campaigns that he could most vividly recall was the Battle of Guadalcanal, on November 13, 1942. Unlike at Pearl Harbor, during this battle, he was able “to observe the action taking place outside.” He saw the USS Helena fire at a ship whose searchlight was trained directly on it and he saw “star shells in the sky.” As the battle continued, he “thought [he] felt little pieces of debris bounce off [his] life jacket.” It wasn’t until later that he realized that those “little pieces of debris” were the result of a shell base hitting the engine order telegraph that was right next to him.

Once the battle had ended, the USS Helena and four other ships “head[ed] back to Espiritu Santo.” DeLong was at the ship’s helm when “Lt. Cdr. Carpenter, the ship’s navigator,” began issuing urgent orders. He dutifully followed his orders and, soon, “an immense explosion took place.” Since he had to stay at his post, he did not know what had happened. He later learned that a torpedo had hit the USS Juneau. Several years after this event, DeLong saw “Lt. Cdr. Carpenter (by that time Admiral Carpenter) at a Helena reunion,” and he learned that “in the early part of his career, [Admiral Carpenter] had taken special training on spotting and tracing torpedo wakes... As a result of his early training, he was the first one to see the wakes of the two torpedoes coming from the port side.” Unfortunately, they “were not able to warn the Juneau in time to save her.”

Although DeLong was given orders to go back to the United States so that he could attend the U.S. Naval Academy, his ability to transfer was hampered by wartime delays, and he turned 21 before he could make it to the Naval Academy. Since the Naval Academy requires its entering students to be under the age of 21, he could not attend. Instead, he worked as a teacher at the San Diego Naval Base before being assigned to a cargo ship and working in the Pacific until the end of the war.

On January 6, 1947, DeLong was discharged from the Navy. He returned to Annville, Pennsylvania, and used the GI Bill to study English and Political Science at Lebanon Valley College (LVC). He married fellow LVC student Jeanne Stine on August 5, 1950, before the beginning of their senior year of college. DeLong was active in his community, even running for a state senate seat in 1966. He lost the race and worked in the private sector until 1971, when he became Pennsylvania's Deputy Secretary of Labor and Industry. After the political winds changed in Pennsylvania, he got a position with the U.S. Department of Defense, which he kept until his retirement in 1987.

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON

February 14, 1947

My dear Mr. De Long:

I have addressed this letter to reach you after all the formalities of your separation from active service are completed. I have done so because, without formality but as clearly as I know how to say it, I want the Navy's pride in you, which it is my privilege to express, to reach into your civil life and to remain with you always.

You have served in the greatest Navy in the world.

It crushed two enemy fleets at once, receiving their surrenders only four months apart.

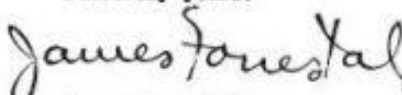
It brought our land-based airpower within bombing range of the enemy, and set our ground armies on the beachheads of final victory.

It performed the multitude of tasks necessary to support these military operations.

No other Navy at any time has done so much. For your part in these achievements you deserve to be proud as long as you live. The Nation which you served at a time of crisis will remember you with gratitude.

The best wishes of the Navy go with you into your future life. Good luck!

Sincerely yours,


James Forrestal

Letter to Mr. DeLong from the Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal.

As a retiree, DeLong went to Navy reunions and booked speaking engagements in which he discussed his recollections of the events of Pearl Harbor. His story has been published in books and in National Geographic magazine. In 1991 and 1992, DeLong travelled to Hawaii, the Philippines, Australia, and Guadalcanal to attend ceremonies honoring the 50th anniversary of World War II events that occurred in those places. George Albert DeLong died on March 22, 2002, and was laid to rest in Indiantown Gap National Cemetery, in Annville, Pennsylvania. He left behind his wife of over fifty years, two daughters, a son, and four grandchildren. We honor his service. [Source: VAntage Point | Veterans Legacy Program | December 11, 2016 ++]

WWII VETS 128 ► Richard Overton | Oldest Living Vet

America's oldest living World War II veteran spends most days sitting on the porch of the East Austin house that he built, and his family hopes he can continue to do so. Richard Overton, who turned 110 on 11 MAY 2016, may have to move into a nursing home because his current caretaker can no longer provide for him. Benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs don't cover around-the-clock at-home care, the station reported. His cousin, Volma Overton Jr, started a GoFundMe (<https://www.gofundme.com/help-richard-overton>) account to raise funds for the 24/7 care. By 3 JAN, it had reached close to \$80,871 of the \$100,000 goal. It has now been decided to have Senior Helpers to be Richard's 24/7 home care provider. Thanks to all of the sharing, caring and loving support that everyone has given Richard he now has 24/7 home care coverage for a little more than 6 months.



Overton in 2013

"He's an American treasure," Volma Overton told the Austin American-Statesman. "He's been there since 1945, and changing that environment — like sending him to a nursing home — would be horrible. The GoFundMe is about getting him quality care at that address." The VA covers at-home care for up to three hours a day every day of the week. Veterans can also apply for compensation to help pay for in-home care, KXAN reported. "When you're at the point where 24/7 care is needed ... what's best for the veteran might not be the home," said Patrick Hutchison, a spokesman for the Central Texas Veterans Affairs Health Care System. "The caregiver is taxed at that point, too."

Overton was born in 1906 in Bastrop County. He was part of the all-black 1887th Engineer Aviation Battalion and served in the Pacific Theater from 1942 to 1945, according to a profile by the Statesman for his birthday in May. When he returned to Austin after the war, Overton built and moved into the house he still lives in. Overton worked at local furniture stores before taking a position with the Texas Department of the Treasury (now part of the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts) in Austin. He was married twice and never had children. When he was 82 years old, his wife, Wilma, died in 1988. Overton was invited to the White House in 2009 where he met with President Obama, and to the Veterans' Day ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, where he was singled out by name for praise by the President. Overton gained some attention on the Internet during the Memorial Day weekend in 2013 when he told Fox News he would spend his Memorial Day "smoking cigars and drinking whiskey-stiffened coffee."

He considers cigars and whiskey the secrets to his long life, though he's stopped drinking since a bout of pneumonia in 2015. But he still passes the time on his porch chatting with his neighbors and waving to passers-by. One neighbor, Helen Elliott, told the Statesman earlier this year that Overton considers himself the neighborhood watchdog. "He knows everything that's going on," she said. "I don't think the neighborhood would be what it is without him. He's our legend, our icon." [Source: Dallas News | Claire Z. Cardona | December 31, 2016 ++]

Texas Veteran Tuition Update 05 ► Supreme Court Upholds Hazelwood Act

The U.S. Supreme Court has let stand an appeals court ruling that upholds a much-watched Texas program that promises free college educations to military veterans if they lived in the state when they enlisted. The Hazelwood Act dates to the 1920s. State lawmakers expanded the program in 2009 to include the veterans' children. Veterans also qualified if they entered military service at a Texas installation. A veteran who enlisted in Georgia but moved to Texas after his discharge challenged the law's Texas enlistment requirements. He won a trial court ruling state officials worried would send the program's costs skyrocketing. Texas appealed to the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, however, which ruled that Texas residency rules were constitutional and the state has the right to regulate its own education system. [Source: Associated Press | January 9, 2017 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure | Lejeune Update 66 ► VA SC Rule Published

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has published regulations to establish presumptions for the service connection of eight diseases associated with exposure to contaminants in the water supply at Camp Lejeune, N.C. The presumption of service connection (SC) applies to active duty, reserve and National Guard members who served at Camp Lejeune for a minimum of 30 days (cumulative) between August 1, 1953 and December 31, 1987, and are diagnosed with any of the following conditions:

- Adult leukemia
- Aplastic anemia and other myelodysplastic syndromes
- Bladder, kidney & liver cancer
- Multiple myeloma
- Non-hodgkin's lymphoma
- Parkinson's disease

“We have a responsibility to take care of those who have served our Nation and have been exposed to harm as a result of that service,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald. “Establishing a presumption for service at Camp Lejeune will make it easier for those Veterans to receive the care and benefits they earned.” Environmental health experts in VA’s Technical Workgroup conducted comprehensive reviews of scientific evidence, which included analysis and research done by the Department of Health and Human Service’s Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), the Environmental Protection Agency, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the National Toxicology Program, and the National Academies of Science.

Veterans with 30 or more cumulative days of active duty service, at Camp Lejeune during the contamination period are already eligible for certain medical benefits, following passage of the Honoring America’s Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012. In the early 1980s, volatile organic compounds, trichloroethylene (TCE), a metal degreaser, and perchloroethylene (PCE), a dry cleaning agent, as well as benzene and vinyl chloride, were discovered in two on-base water supply systems at Camp Lejeune. The contaminated wells supplying the water systems were shut down in February 1985. The area included in this presumption is all of Camp Lejeune and MCAS New River, including satellite camps and housing areas. The rule will be effective either 60 days after publication in the Federal Register, or following conclusion of the 60-day Congressional Review, whichever is later. [Source: VA News Release | January 13, 2017 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure | Lejeune Update 67 ► VA Cash Payouts

After years of waiting, veterans who were exposed to contaminated drinking water while assigned to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina may now be able to receive a portion of government disability benefits totaling more than \$2 billion. The Department of Veterans Affairs described the new benefit 6 JAN as "historic." It is one of few instances in which former military personnel who weren't deployed for war could become eligible for cash payouts. Outgoing VA Secretary Bob McDonald determined there is sufficient scientific and medical evidence to establish a "strong association" between exposure to the contaminated water at Camp Lejeune and eight medical conditions. "We have a responsibility to take care of those who have served our nation and have been exposed to harm as a result of that service," McDonald said, adding that the VA's decision will make it easier for veterans "to receive the care and benefits they earned."

Beginning in March, the disability benefits may supplement VA health care already being provided to eligible veterans who were stationed at the Marine base for at least 30 cumulative days between Aug. 1, 1953, and Dec. 31, 1987. Veterans will have to submit evidence of their diagnoses and service information. The estimated taxpayer cost is \$2.2 billion over a five-year period. As many as 900,000 service members were potentially exposed to the tainted water, although the VA estimates that roughly 23,000 veterans will apply and qualify for the benefit. "This is good news," said retired Marine Master Sgt. Jerry Ensminger, whose daughter Janey was born in 1976 while he was stationed at Lejeune. Janey died from leukemia at age 9. Ensminger now heads a veterans group, The Few, The Proud, The Forgotten, which advocates for those seeking disability compensation. "This has been a hard, long slog," said Ensminger, who argues the government must go further in covering additional diseases. "This is not the end of the issue."

The new rule covers active duty, Reserve and National Guard members who developed one of eight diseases: adult leukemia, aplastic anemia, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, liver cancer, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and Parkinson's disease. It allows veterans to qualify for government disability aid based on toxic harm sustained while at a garrison, as opposed to a battlefield. In 2015, McDonald also agreed to award disability benefits for another category of veterans who weren't on the ground, those who had developed medical conditions after exposure to Agent Orange residue on planes used in the Vietnam War. "It's a major first," said Dr. Ralph Erickson, a chief health consultant at the VA and former commander of the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research. Most disability awards, he said, involve "exposures that occurred during deployment."

Documents uncovered by veterans groups over the years suggest Marine leaders were slow to respond when tests first found evidence of contaminated groundwater at Camp Lejeune in the early 1980s. Some drinking water wells were closed in 1984 and 1985, after further testing confirmed contamination from leaking fuel tanks and an off-base dry cleaner. The Marine Corps has said the contamination was unintentional, occurring when federal law didn't limit toxins in drinking water. Spurred by Ensminger's case, Congress in 2012 passed a bill signed into law by President Barack Obama extending free VA medical care to affected veterans and their families. But veterans were not automatically provided disability aid or survivor benefits. The issue has prompted lawsuits by veterans organizations, which note that military personnel in Camp Lejeune housing "drank, cooked and bathed" in contaminated water for years.

Ensminger credited North Carolina Republican Sens. Richard Burr and Thom Tillis for their efforts. Burr introduced the 2012 legislation to provide free VA medical care. "It's about time," Burr said, welcoming the VA 6 JAN news. "These veterans put their lives on the line for our nation and they were negligently poisoned by the government." Affected veterans who were stationed at Camp Lejeune may now submit applications for benefits. Roughly 1,400 disability claims related to Lejeune are already pending, and will be reviewed immediately, according to the VA. [Source: Associated Press | Hope Yen January 13, 2017 ++]

Obit: Austin Lindsey ► DEC 2016

Austin Monroe Lindsey was in the words of his minister “a true American hero.” Lindsey, though, despite serving in the Navy for 23 years, was just as apt to describe himself as a servant of God, said the Rev. Jane Stanley of The Nourishing Place in Gulfport. He served the church, and through it, the low-income community surrounding it on Tennessee Street in Gulfport. “He cooked for us for a number of years,” she said. “We serve a hot breakfast every morning before and after church and he was our chef for probably six or seven years and then he became a helper of the chef. “He would show up early on Sunday mornings and help get everything prepared. Picked up the parking lot if necessary, swept the kitchen if necessary. He did what it took to be a good steward of the facility.”

And he a was great advertisement. “He was a real evangelist,” she said. “He told people about how loving our church is and invited people to come and be with us.” The church has a back porch where people in need can come for free food, clothing and household items. “He’d take his pickup truck and go help unload garages and houses and bring the things back to the church,” she said. “He was busy everyday serving his God by serving the community.” But before he became a servant of The Nourishing Place, he served his country as a Navy aviator, narrowly avoiding death three times. His daughter Gwen Lindsey shared his first-hand accounts of those harrowing flights. “In his Navy career as a fighter pilot, Austin holds a rare record of having had three potentially deadly aircraft accidents, the first while flying an F4-A and performing a night landing on an airstrip in Florida,” she wrote on the Reimann Family Funeral Homes Page.



His description:

“My nose wheel simply collapsed and I slid 3,000-4,000 feet down the runway trailing flames,” Austin Lindsey wrote. “The centerline tank ruptured during the slide and a small amount of residual fuel sparked off. After the aircraft came to a stop, my naval flight officer (back seater) and I simply climbed down and waited for a ride. The fire had gone out on its own.” The next two flights were in Vietnam. As a member of Fighter Squadron VF-1, the “Black Aces,” he was trying to land on the USS Independence, when a hydraulic pump failed and his landing gear wouldn’t lower. “The ship diverted me to Da Nang for a night landing,” he wrote. “I activated my emergency air system to lower the landing gear, but only the left main and the nose wheel came down. So now I was faced with a one wheel up landing. I flew out over the water and dumped my ordinance, returned to Da Nang and asked for landing. It so happened that they had an emergency arresting gear rigged 300 feet from the overrun and wire. I burned my fuel to a low state, made the approach, caught the wire and slid out on two landing gear and an empty bomb rack. My NFO and I opened our canopies as if we did this stuff every day. Everything was cool and there was no fire.”

On his last combat mission, his aircraft was hit by enemy fire over Laos on Oct. 25, 1965. This was how he described it in 2012, when he was 82. “We dropped our WWII 250 pound, fragmentation bombs over the Ho Chi Minh trail and as we were climbing out my aircraft was hit and decided not to cooperate any longer,” he wrote. “The cockpits began filling with smoke so my NFO jettisoned his canopy. With it gone, suction pulled flames out from under his seat, so he ejected. “Now it gets heavy. The flames came around me and burned my face and hands. I pulled my seat’s face curtain to eject but nothing happened. I then pulled the seat’s secondary firing handle without results. I next pulled the canopy jettison handle but it wouldn’t move. “I was not too functional at this time and I

thought about the end. But, the canopy left and the seat operated normally, my chute opened and I could see the trees getting closer — and down I went into the foliage.

My chute caught up in the top of a tree and my feet landed on a limb next to the main trunk. I disconnected from my chute and sat down on the limb. “I was 80 feet up. I clearly remember the thought, as I looked down, ‘this is no time to screw up.’ I disconnected and dropped my seat survival pack to the ground, put my gloves on over my burns and skinned down the tree. The limb I had sat on was the lowest limb on the tree. An hour or so later the Air Force sent two helos. The helicopter pilots called the area we were in, ‘the land of the 100 foot trees.’ We were plucked out of the jungle and taken to a refurbished WWII Japanese hospital. We returned to flight duty the next January.”

He received several commendations including two Distinguished Flying Crosses, the second as a Gold Star to the first and an Air Medal for six strikes in July-October 1965, and a Navy Commendation Medal with a Gold Star and a Combat V, and a Joint Service Commendation, Gwen Lindsey wrote. After he retired from the Navy, he returned to Gulfport, where he had graduated from high school. After that graduation, he served in the Merchant Marines for two years, then earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Tulane. He married Shirley Thompson Lowe in New Orleans and raised two daughters, Gwen Christin Lindsey and Diane Robin Lindsey Keith. He took up photography and post card collecting. Some of his photos can be found at Triplett-Day Drug Co. and the Port City Cafe in downtown Gulfport. He was to be buried with military honors 9 JAN at the Biloxi National Cemetery. [Source: The Sun Herald | Paul Hampton | January 5, 2017++]

Presidential Pardon ► Petition Cites Clinton Email Scandal Treatment

A former sailor serving time behind bars for mishandling classified information is seeking a presidential pardon from Donald Trump, citing comparatively lenient treatment of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for her private email. Former Machinist's Mate 1 st Class Kristian Saucier pleaded guilty this summer to charges relating to six pictures of classified spaces he took on his cell phone on the attack submarine Alexandria. Saucier claims that despite two other sailors on his ship being punished administratively for the same crime in 2011, his case was treated differently in 2015 and 2016. Saucier claims federal prosecutors and investigators came after him aggressively because of an atmosphere of hypersensitivity surrounding classified information in the wake of the Hillary Clinton email scandal, according to documents provided by his attorney. And while he admits he did wrong by taking photos of his workstation — he claims it was as a memento of his time on the boat — he thinks his sentence of a year in lockup is too severe.

“While my conduct in taking the six photos was admittedly wrong and without excuse, the Department of Justice's heavy-handed response to my misconduct was certainly a product of the scrutiny brought about by a fervent political climate and not by the gravity of my misconduct,” Saucier wrote in the petition to the White House filed 9 JAN. “Indeed, if not for the high level of the Clinton misconduct and the lengthy presidential campaign process, there can be no doubt that my far less egregious acts of taking six photos of my work station would have otherwise been received with a significantly lower form of punishment.” Clinton, during her time as Secretary of State, used a private email server set up in her house to transmit secret and top secret classified information. The FBI recommended that no charges be filed but called her actions “extremely careless.”

Saucier landed himself in even more trouble during the investigation because he destroyed a laptop and an SD card after being interviewed by the FBI, which the feds said was obstruction of justice. After pleading guilty and being sentenced in August, Saucier was booted from the service with an “other-than-honorable” discharge. Saucier’s attorney, Jeffrey Addicott, said he is was not hopeful that President Obama would pardon Saucier in the waning days of his administration because of the time it takes for officials to review the case but he is holding out hope that the incoming Trump administration will be sympathetic. “The reason this case cries out for clemency and pardon is just the gross injustice,” he said. “This is a matter of justice and justice isn’t just about whether you are

guilty or not — he's admitted that. It's about the punishment as well." Addicott, a retired Army lawyer who now teaches at St. Mary's University School of Law in Texas, is representing the former sailor free of charge. Addicott is simultaneously seeking clemency for Saucier.

Saucier's case became something of a cause célèbre during the presidential campaign among conservatives who noted that the sailor's treatment at the hands of federal prosecutors relating to confidential information was significantly harsher than Clinton's treatment. During the sentencing phase, prosecutors called the comparison with Clinton "highly imaginative." "The defendant is grasping at highly imaginative and speculative straws in trying to...draw a comparison to the matter of Sec. Hilary Clinton based upon virtually no understanding and knowledge of the facts involved, the information at issue, not to mention any issues [of] intent and knowledge," the prosecution wrote in court filing.

In his letter to the White House, Saucier cited two other cases of sailors on the same attack submarine who were busted taking pictures on their cell phones. Both sailors were tried at captain's mast under the military justice system, forfeited some pay and were reduced in rank. That stands in sharp contrast with how federal investigators treated his case, Saucier said. "In my case, not only did the Department of Justice take the unusual step to seize the case from the military for federal investigation (which dragged on for almost four years) and prosecution, I received an Other Than Honorable discharge from the Navy ... This is not justice," he wrote. In concluding the letter, Saucier argued that he never intended to disclose the information to anyone, despite the federal indictment that dripped with insinuation that he was a spy and that the images he took were classified at the lowest level — confidential. "The irony of this climate of hypersensitivity that caused me severe punishment is that Secretary Hillary Clinton, whose actions resulted in a demand for accountability by a considerable portion of the U.S. population, was never punished for her actions at all, despite jeopardizing far more sensitive information and on a much grander scale," he wrote.

In an interview with Navy Times, Saucier's mother Kathleen Saucier said she thinks her son was caught up in a dual storm of the Navy cracking down on the use of digital devices on subs and the feds aggressively prosecuting mishandling classified information. Saucier said she was outraged at what she sees as the overzealous prosecution of her son as it compared to Clinton. "So my son accepts responsibility for his behavior, admits he took the six photos," Kathleen Saucier said. "There's no evidence he transmitted the photos and he's sitting in federal prison and has lost all his benefits — his family has lost all their benefits. The judge told him it was for having classified information on an insecure device. How does that compare with Hillary Clinton, who used an insecure device to transmit classified information and there are no criminal charges?" Addicott has filed paperwork to hustle the clemency and pardon requests through the system but it's uncertain how long it will be until a decision is reached. [Source: NavyTimes | David B. Larter | January 10, 2017 ++]

Vet Assisted Living Facility ► Rents Double - Pay Up or Move Out

Veterans at an assisted living facility in Kerrville are struggling to figure out where to live next. Their rent just doubled and they now have less than four weeks to either pay up or move out. KENS 5 went to find out what's behind the price hike. "Most of us came here to die. I'm sorry, it sounds horrible, but this is where we were gonna live. This is my home," said Michael Dorion, a disabled veteran living at Alpine Terrace Assisted Living and Nursing Facility in Kerrville. Alpine Terrace has been Dorion's home for the past two months. He enjoys the quality care he gets for the affordable price. "The deal that [Alpine Terrace] made with the VA was that they would take care of veterans for \$48.90 a day," Dorion noted.

Late last month, Dorion and other veterans paying the lower rate were told rent would double from \$48.90 a day to \$100 a day. That change, he says, would force 15 to 20 veterans to leave. "The same problem everybody is facing is, 'where do I go?'" he said. In a letter sent by Alpine Terrace administrators on 20 DEC, the new rent increase and

the rate structure will take effect on 1 FEB. The cheapest option for rooms will be \$100 a day, if you live with a roommate in what the facility calls "assisted living rooms." Long-term care rooms offer the same accommodations, but the cost jumps to \$143 a day. If residents want a private room, that will now cost \$175. Alpine Terrace administrators say that the rate increase is necessary to fund programs for patient services and retain staff members. The letter claims that the rate hike is also needed to cover the cost of personal care supplies like toothpaste, combs, and hairbrushes.



"I'm in the hole \$1,219!" said Dorion, who receives VA funding for his disability to help pay for assisted living facilities. While some veterans receive similar funding support from the VA, many do not. "I don't have any family, so it's not a big deal where I'm gonna live," Dorion said. "But all the other vets who live here who are affected by this have family in this area." Even with the help he gets, Dorion says he simply cannot afford \$3,000 a month. "Veterans Administration is taking very good care of us," he said. "It's the rest of the world that is kicking us in the butt and saying, 'We don't care what you sacrificed.'"

In a statement to KENS 5, Alpine Terrace Spokesperson, Annaliese Impink, said: "Alpine Terrace staff does their best to try to accommodate the needs of our residents as well as the need of the Kerrville community. When we have space at the facility we may offer private rooms at the semiprivate rate; however, when our admissions increase, we can only offer private rooms at the private rate. Otherwise, we are unable to meet the needs of other community members. We appreciate all of our residents and we look forward to the opportunity to continue to serve them at Alpine Terrace. We also thank the Kerrville community for their support and look forward to serving community members well into the future." Meanwhile, veterans are pleading with managers in a letter asking for a 90-day extension to find alternate housing.

Dorion says that the VA is working to get some of the veterans aid and attendance, while Alpine Terrace administrators say they're willing to wait and prorate that debt. VA public affairs officials say that the majority of the veterans at Alpine Terrace are assigned to a social worker who can help relocate them. For other veteran residents who are not yet assigned to a social worker and need assistance, they can call 210-699-2152. [Source: KENS-5 San Antonio | Eyewitness News | January 6, 2016 ++]

Arkansas State Income Tax ► Military Retiree Tax Cut Proposal

Governor Asa Hutchinson and supporters of his plan in the legislature say their proposed tax cuts aim to get more veterans living and working in Arkansas. It would eliminate state income taxes on the pensions of military retirees. There are currently about 25,000 military retirees living in Arkansas. Exempting them from state income taxes is expected to cost the state about \$13 million per year in revenues. But the bill to provide tax relief to military retirees is caught up in a fight over how to pay for it. The governor wants to end exemptions that would increase taxes on manufactured housing, candy and soda and unemployment benefits. It's a plan that's drawn criticism from some lawmakers. On 11 JAN, veterans were at the capitol to show their support for the plan as lawmakers who are behind

it talked about the benefits. It would only apply to veterans who serve at least 20 years. [Source: ArkansasMatters.com | Drew Petrimoulx | January 11, 2017 ++]

Vet Fraud & Abuse ► Reported 01 thru 15 JAN 2017

Laramie, WY -- A former U.S. Marine who accepted gifts and honors, including a letter from Gov. Matt Mead, after falsely claiming to have been wounded in combat has pleaded no contest to a charge of obtaining property by false pretense. The Laramie Boomerang reports that **Adam P. Snow**, of Laramie, entered the plea to the misdemeanor charge recently in state Circuit Court. Last year, Snow accepted a rifle and plaque from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation after he said he had been wounded multiple times during combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. He also received a personal letter from Mead. Albany County Undersheriff Josh DeBree says some area residents questioned Snow's accounts. An investigation, aided by U.S. Navy officials, determined Snow was a weather observer who was never injured. [Source: The Associated Press | January 12, 2017 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 15 JAN 2017

Retiree Appreciation Days (RADs) are designed with all veterans in mind. They're a great source of the latest information for retirees and Family members in your area. RADs vary from installation to installation, but, in general, they provide an opportunity to renew acquaintances, listen to guest speakers, renew ID Cards, get medical checkups, and various other services. Some RADs include special events such as dinners or golf tournaments. Due to budget constraints, some RADs may be cancelled or rescheduled. Also, scheduled appearances of DFAS representatives may not be possible. If you plan to travel long distances to attend a RAD, before traveling, you should call the sponsoring RSO to ensure the RAD will held as scheduled and, if applicable, whether or not DFAS reps will be available. The current updated schedule for 2017 is available at:

== HTML: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html

== PDF: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf

== Word: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc

This schedule has been expanded to include dates for retiree\vetterans activity related events such as Seminars, Veterans Town Hall Meetings, Stand Downs, Resource\Career Fairs and Other Military Retiree & Veterans Related Events for all military services. To get more info about a particular event, mouseover or click on the event under Event Location. Please report comments, changes, corrections, new RADs and other military retiree\vetterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager at milton.bell126@gmail.com.

(NOTE: Attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214. "@" indicates event requires registration\RSVP.)For more information call the phone numbers indicated on the schedule of the Retirement Services Officer (RSO) sponsoring the RAD.

To quickly locate events in your geographic area just click on the appropriate State\Territory\Counry listed at the top of the schedule. They will look like this:

AK AL AR AS AZ CA CO CT DC DE FL GA GU HI IA ID IL IN KS KY LA MA MD ME MI MN MO MS MT NC ND NE NH NJ NM NV NY OH OK OR PA PR RI SC SD TN TX UT VA VI VT WA WI WV WY Belgium Germany Italy Japan Korea Netherlands Thailand

[Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | January 15, 2016 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► 16 JAN thru 15 FEB 2016

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's (USCC) Hiring Our Heroes program employment workshops are available in conjunction with hundreds of their hiring fairs. These workshops are designed to help veterans and military spouses and include resume writing, interview skills, and one-on-one mentoring. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date in the below list. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown below for the next month. For more information about the USCC Hiring Our Heroes Program, Military Spouse Program, Transition Assistance, GE Employment Workshops, Resume Engine, etc. visit the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's website at <http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events> . Vet Job Fairs being conducted in the next 30 days in state order include:



Recruit Military Listings

Joint Base Lewis-McChord Job Fair	Wednesday, January 18
Sacramento Veterans Job Fair	Thursday, January 19
Oklahoma City Veterans Job Fair	Thursday, January 26
Raleigh Veterans Job Fair	Thursday, January 26
Atlanta Veterans Job Fair	February 2, 2017
Riverside Veterans Job Fair	February 2, 2017
Fort Stewart Job Fair	February 7, 2017
Hunter Army Airfield Job Fair	February 8, 2017
Baltimore Veterans Job Fair	February 9, 2017
Nashville Veterans Job Fair	February 9, 2017

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Listings

Cleveland Hiring Expo with the Cleveland Cavaliers
Cleveland, OH January 19 - 9:30 am to 2:00 pm Details Register

[Austin Hiring Fair](#)

Austin, TX January 25 - 10:00 am to 1:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Tampa/St. Petersburg Hiring Fair](#)

St. Petersburg, FL January 26 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Dallas Hiring Expo with the Dallas Stars](#)

Dallas, TX January 31 - 9:30 am to 2:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Fort Bragg Military Spouse Event](#)

Fort Bragg, NC February 1 - 6:00 pm to February 2 - 1:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Los Angeles Hiring Expo with the Los Angeles Clippers](#)

Los Angeles, CA February 15 - 9:30 am to 2:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Joint Base Lewis-McChord Military Spouse Career Event](#)

Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA February 15 - 7:00 pm to February 16 - 1:00 pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

Veteran Career/Job Fairs

Lexington Park, MD January 24, 2017, 3pm - 7pm [More information](#)

Patuxent River MD Bay District Vol Fire Dept Social Hall, 46900 S. Shangri-La Drive
Lexington Park, MD 20653

Joint Base Andrews, MD January 26, 2017, 10am - 2pm [More information](#)

The Club at Andrews, 1889 Arnold Avenue, Joint Base Andrews, MD 20762

Los Angeles, CA February 15, 2017, 9:30am - 2pm [More information](#)

Staples Center, 1111 S. Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, CA 90015

[Source: Recruit Military <https://events.recruitmilitary.com> & <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs>
& <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs> | January 15, 2017 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► **Texas 2017**

The state of Tennessee provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these plus discounts listed on the Military and Veterans Discount Center (MCVDC) website, refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Vet State Benefits & Discounts – TX**” for an overview of the below benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below benefits refer to <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us> & <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/texas-state-veterans-benefits.html>

- Veteran Housing Benefits
- Veteran Financial Assistance Benefits
- Veteran Education Benefits
- Veteran Employment Benefits
- Other State Sponsored Veteran Benefits
- Discounts

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/texas-state-veterans-benefits.html> JAN 2017 ++]

*** Vet Legislation ***



Note: To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 115th Congress. Bills are listed in reverse numerical order for House and then Senate.

VA Accountability Update 39 ► House Passes Pro-Vet H.R. 1038 & 1016

President-Elect Donald Trump made U.S. veterans a top priority during the election campaign, and the incoming Congress has taken the baton, passing a pair of bills 4 JAN aimed at bringing accountability to the Department of Veterans Affairs. The “**Ensuring VA Employee Accountability Act (H.R.1038)**”, the first bill to unanimously pass in the 115th Congress, requires the beleaguered agency to maintain current files of employee disciplinary actions throughout each employee’s tenure for review when under consideration for a bonus, promotion or other advancement. “The reason I introduced this legislation is simple—it allows the Department of Veterans Affairs to maintain accurate records of disciplinary actions against employees,” said Rep. Ryan Costello (R-PA) “The file can then be taken into consideration when an employee is up for a promotion.” Currently, the VA only keeps disciplinary action in an employee’s file for three years before they are deleted. Costello first introduced the legislation during the last Congress, when it passed in the House, but failed in the Senate.

House lawmakers moved along another bill concerning veterans in their first day in session, unanimously passing “**The Biological Implant Tracking and Veterans Safety Act of 2017 (H.R.1016)**.” Crafted by House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Phil Roe, a Tennessee Republican and medical doctor, the legislation would direct the VA Secretary to adopt the Food and Drug Administration’s system for labeling of all biological implants and would implement an automated inventory system to ensure veterans do not receive expired or otherwise contaminated tissue. Roe’s bill comes after a Government Accountability Office 2014 report found that the VA does not use a standardized process for tracking biological tissue from cadaver donors to living veteran recipients. In the same report, the GAO detailed the Veteran Health Administration’s failure to consistently ensure it was purchasing tissue from biological implant vendors that had been registered with the FDA.

“These commonsense reforms will help ensure veterans receive the quality health care they deserve while also holding VA employees who fail in their duty to care for veterans accountable,” Roe said. No vote on either bill has been scheduled in the Senate. “Our veterans should always come first, but for too long they’ve been let down by a failed system,” House Speaker Paul Ryan said in a statement. “I’m proud that our very first bills considered in the new Congress help the brave men and women who have served our country in uniform.” [Source: Fox News | Brooke Singman | January 4, 2017 ++]

VA Project ECHO ► S.2073/H.R.5395's Impact on Vet Care

As we leave 2016 behind and celebrate the New Year, we are seeing continued progress for telehealth and rural health initiatives. One of the biggest milestones is Congress’ passing of the bipartisan, bicameral bill S. 2873 (the counterpart to H.R. 5395), the **Expanding Capacity for Health Outcomes (ECHO) Act**, which extends Project

ECHO nationwide. Project ECHO provides professional development services to remote and rural health providers. The new legislation calls for pairing academic specialists with primary-care providers through the use of virtual clinics designed to mentor providers, while addressing behavioral and public health needs. In doing so, Project ECHO also aims to reduce providers' sense of isolation by architecting a network of support.

The bill, which became Public Law No: 114-270 on 14 DEC, was originally introduced by Senators Orrin Hatch and Brian Schatz, followed up with introductions in the House by Congressman Michael C. Brugess and Congresswoman Doris Matsui. "In Sacramento, we've seen how the Project ECHO model can harness the power of technology to bring specialty expertise to community health centers and other providers in underserved areas," Matsui stated, addressing the impact and expansion of the model for care beyond its origin. "By passing the ECHO Act, communities across the country will now be able to benefit from this successful model to better serve patients in areas such as pain management and addiction." By taking a closer look at the project's implementation, expansion, and focus, we can have a better understanding of how and why it works.

As Project ECHO expands its impact nationwide, it's mindboggling to consider that it was once such a small and contained project. Founded by Sanjeev Arora, MD, professor of Internal Medicine at the University of New Mexico, Project ECHO commenced as a clinic to treat thousands of underserved hepatitis C patients. The ECHO Model launched in 2003 as a collaboration between teams of specialists at academic medical centers with local clinicians to expand treatment knowledge and capability. The disease management program was so successful that it caught on quickly, and today, has been implemented by 103 partners with more than 6,000 patients enrolled. Twenty-four clinics in New Mexico now offer hepatitis C treatment through the program, up from just two before the initiative began. The reason behind the fast growth since its inception is due to the concept being simple, cost-effective, and outcomes-driven: to use technology to connect academic experts with clinicians throughout the country — especially in rural or underserved areas. By doing this, a greater number of high-needs patients can receive treatments based on the most up-to-date, and best, practices.

The program initially focused on hepatitis C treatment in New Mexico, but today focuses on multiple diseases and high-need aspects of care throughout the country and even internationally. In clinical pediatrics, for example, the ECHO Model has been used to train primary-care providers in best practices for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) patients with the use of biweekly clinics. ECHO Autism led to improved adherence to ASD screening guidelines and use of resources with higher participant satisfaction compared with traditional care models. In Washington, community practitioners with the goal of improving HIV care capacity took part in a distance mentorship and consultation program, based on Project ECHO, and experienced similarly positive results.

The telehealth tools derived from the ECHO-based program decreased provider isolation while significantly increasing provider confidence in HIV care. Providers also reported a stronger feeling of professional connectedness. Extending into veterans care, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) created the SCAN-ECHO "telementoring" program for pain management across seven healthcare networks. A separate ECHO Model program centered on women's health, Bone Health ECHO focused on the management of osteoporosis and metabolic bone disease by utilizing best practices derived from a knowledge network of tele-connected academic specialty-care experts and primary-care providers.

The ECHO Act's most recent progress was reported shortly after federal grants were announced for rural healthcare providers to address their specific needs. Benefiting 10 rural Montana, Nevada and North Dakota hospitals, CMS' Frontier Community Health Integration (FCHI) project demonstration is rolling out new integrated healthcare models in sparse or isolated rural areas. Under the program, participating providers are offered increased reimbursement to cover new services such as telemedicine and skilled nursing care, which hospitals will provide to make care access more convenient to patient populations. Rural healthcare aid doesn't end there. Recently, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) allocated more than \$16 million toward telehealth and quality improvement initiatives, benefitting 60 rural communities within 32 states.

As we move into 2017, we expect initiatives like Project ECHO to increase the adoption of telemedicine, and strengthen medical organizations in rural areas. Through today's rural health initiatives, healthcare providers across the country can overcome miles of physical isolation through the utilization of telehealth, mentorship and collaboration projects. And in doing so, they'll have better opportunities for financial reimbursement, improved population health treatment and a more educated pool of connected community-care providers. [Source: mHealth Intelligence | Sheri Stoltenberg | January 04, 2017 ++]

VA Blue Water Claims Update 36 ► H.R. 299 Introduced 5 JAN

After a stinging legislative defeat, about 90,000 sailors who served in Vietnam have another shot this year at getting coverage for Agent Orange-related health problems. A bill extending the health benefits to crewmembers aboard Navy aircraft carriers, destroyers, cruisers and other ships along Vietnam's coast was reintroduced this week as H.e.299 in the House with the 131 original co-sponsors. Veteran advocates are already lobbying lawmakers and plan to meet in Washington, D.C. at the end of the month for a new push to get the bill passed. "I will start crossing congressman and senators off [my list] as I go and we will get back at it," said Mike Little, legislative director for the Association of the United States Navy. But the odds might still be against them.

Last year, the same legislation drew massive support in the House with 335 co-sponsors spread almost evenly among Democrats and Republicans. It failed anyway, unable to pass a huge hurdle – cost. The new Agent Orange benefits require more than \$1 billion over a decade and despite the support, lawmakers and veterans have been unable to find a way to pay for it. Current law requires the new expenses to be covered by spending cuts elsewhere in the budget "Give me 30 minutes with the [Department of Veterans Affairs] budget and a red pen and I will find the money, but the problem is it has to come out of mandatory spending," said John Wells, an attorney and the executive director of the Louisiana-based group Military-Veterans Advocacy. That means pulling money from obligated expenses such as veteran disability payments. During the past two years, Wells and the Navy association proposed using a method called "round downs" that would round the monthly checks to the nearest dollar amount, costing any disabled veteran no more than a maximum of \$11.88 per year.

They also looked at an annual surcharge on visas for foreign students in the United States as a way to cover the new benefits for Navy veterans, Wells said. Both ideas were opposed by two Vermont senators, Independent Bernie Sanders and Democrat Patrick Leahy, Wells said. Without a funding plan, the legislation finally died in December without ever leaving congressional committees or making it to floor votes in the House and Senate. "That was extremely disappointing," Wells said, particularly about the rejection of the visa fees. "I mean, where is your priority here?"

Veteran sailors contend dioxin-tainted Agent Orange runoff from the Vietnamese mainland was sucked up through their ships' water filtration systems and piped to crew, sometimes at concentrated levels. The herbicide was used widely by U.S. forces in Vietnam to denude the jungle and rob the Viet Cong of a key advantage in its guerrilla war. But Agent Orange was linked later to a variety of serious illnesses. Veterans who served on land and in rivers are assumed to have had contact with the tainted herbicide but the VA has denied extending the benefits to the so-called "blue water" sailors, reaffirming that decision last year. Wells has sued the agency in federal court and opening oral arguments are expected in APR 2017. Advocates say the sailors have elevated risks for diseases such as cancer, diabetes and Parkinson's disease similar to ground troops in the war. An examination in 2011 by the Institute of Medicine found sailors could have been exposed to herbicide through potable water systems in warships that collected seawater polluted by land runoff and concentrated the dioxins in Agent Orange through distillation.

The idea of exposure has been an easy sell to many lawmakers and Little said he sees new opportunities in Congress this year, especially with a key committee that oversees veteran issues. The former chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) had questioned whether the Institute of Medicine findings

were sufficient and refused to hold a committee vote on the legislation, dooming it. Miller left Congress last month and will be replaced as chairman by Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN) a veteran and medical doctor who Little believes will be more receptive to expanding the Agent Orange benefits. The highest ranking Democrat on the committee had not yet been named but Rep. Tim Walz of Minnesota is a frontrunner. Walz is a sponsor of the new Agent Orange bill introduced 5 JAN.

On top of the new committee leadership, Little said about 90 percent of House members already support the benefits for veteran sailors. Also about half of senators appeared ready to support them as well. A Senate version of the bill introduced by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) attracted 46 cosponsors. Little, who lobbied hundreds or thousands of hours for the legislation during the last two years, said the Navy association is already drafting letters for every member of the House urging support and will begin following up in-person meetings. Little and Wells hope all their work on the benefits will pay off for veterans this year. Veterans are urged to use the Action Center (action.fra.org/action-center) to ask their Representative to support the “Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Travis J. Tritten | January 6, 2016 ++]

Concurrent Receipt Status Update 05 ► S.66, HR.303 & HR.333

Senators Dean Heller (R-NV) and Jon Tester (D-MT) have introduced comprehensive concurrent receipt legislation, the “Retired Pay Restoration Act” (S.66). This legislation would authorize the immediate payment of concurrent receipt of full military retired pay and veterans’ disability compensation for all disabled retirees.

Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) also introduced the “Retired Pay Restoration Act” (H.R. 303), which would expand the eligibility of retirees with less than 50 percent disability rating to receive service-connected disability from VA and their full retirement pay for retirees eligible for Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payments (CRDP). Currently, only CRDP disabled retirees with a rating of 50 percent or more are eligible for concurrent receipt. Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-GA) has also introduced comprehensive concurrent receipt reform (H.R.333) that includes disabled retirees with CRDP less than 50 percent and CRDP (Chapter 61) medically retired (less than 20 years of service). Rep. Bishop’s bill is similar to the Senate bill and would have the same impact. Readers are urged to use the FRA Action Center at www.capwiz.com/fra/home to contact their Senators and representative and ask their support for these proposals. For the above bills click on <http://www.capwiz.com/fra/issues/alert/?alertid=74663626> and enter your personal contact to send your representatives a preformatted editable message. [Source: FRA Making Waves | January 10, 2017 ++]

American Legion Update 03 ► 115th Congress Legislative Agenda

The American Legion is the voice of 2 million American veterans and servicemembers. As a resolutions-based organization, The American Legion’s positions represent the views of its members and are based on their four pillars: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth. This report highlights the top issues The American Legion will fight for in 2017.

- Fully fund a superior national defense as the global war on terror continues.
- Limit outsourcing, unify VA's programs.
- Develop alternative treatments, therapies for PTSD, TBI.
- Reclassify cannabis for medical research.
- Support those who care for wounded veterans.
- Provide mandatory end-of-service exams for reservists.

- Repeal unfair offsets that penalize disabled veterans and widows.
- Protect student veterans from predatory schools.
- Ensure those returning from active duty retain re-employment rights.
- Support veteran-owned small businesses.
- Continue funding programs to end veterans homelessness.
- Create an American Legion Commemorative Coin.

Refer to <https://www.legion.org/sites/legion.org/files/legion/publications/13LEG0117-Legislative-Agenda.pdf> to read amplifying information on each of the above agenda items. [Source: The American Legion Dispatch | January 10, 2017 ++]

TREA ► **What They Will be Looking For in 2017**

What will happen this year regarding military people? Now that Congress and the Administration are controlled by the same political party will it be good news or bad news to active duty personnel, retirees, veterans, spouses, widows, or members of the reserve components? We don't, of course, have a crystal ball, but here are just a few of the things we will be closely watching and working on in the coming year:

Commissaries -- The defense commissary agency is initiating a new program to see if they can provide the same benefit to shoppers as they have now, but at the same time lower the cost of doing business. Will it succeed? Will Congress once again push to privatize commissaries?

Implementation of a new military health care system -- Congress passed legislation to overhaul the military health care system. We will be watching to see how it works out be on guard for any further attempts to make military people pay more for their health care.

COLA -- We will be on guard to stop any attempts to change the current COLA formula that would further devalue military retirement pay.

VA Improvements -- A new VA Secretary (David Shulkin) has been nominated by President-elect Trump. We will be on guard to see what kinds of changes he or she will propose to improve VA health care.

Concurrent receipt -- We will once again support legislation to give concurrent receipt to military retirees with less than a 50 per cent VA rated disability. HR 303, The Retired Pay Restoration Act, and HR 333, Disabled Veterans Tax Termination Act have already been introduced in the House of Representatives. These are substantially the same bills that have been introduced for the last several years. However, with the change of Administrations and one-party control of Congress, we will be pushing this hard in the year to come. Also S. 66, A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to permit certain retired members of the uniformed services who have a service-connected disability to receive both disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs for their disability and either retired pay by reason of their years of military service or Combat-Related Special Compensation, and for other purposes. We are aware that the Congressional Budget Office has said that one way to reduce federal spending is to eliminate concurrent receipt for everyone now receiving it. *We will be watching to see if any member of Congress picks up that idea and proposes it in legislation.*

Privatization -- There seems to be great enthusiasm among many in Congress to privatize things like commissaries, DoD schools, VA health care and other health care programs currently run by the government. In addition, several Washington "think tanks" are advocating taking retirees out of the military health care system and making them get their health care in the private sector. We will be closely watching all of these and fight to stop any new proposals that would hurt military personnel.

*** Military ***



Military Retirement Pay Update 05 ► Troops Have 1-Year to Decide



The year ahead will prompt many of today's 1.3 million active-duty service members to make a big decision about their retirement benefits: whether to preserve their place in the traditional military pension system or opt into a new "blended" benefits package. Troops can start doing their research this year, but those who are eligible to make a choice have a full year before they can opt in to the new plan. That window will last from Jan. 1, 2018, through Dec. 31, 2018. Everyone who joins the military on or after Jan. 1, 2018, will be automatically enrolled in the new plan.

In the months to come, the Defense Department will roll out an expansive education program to ensure all troops understand the difference between the two benefits and are prepared to make such a critical personal financial decision. There will be classes, online educational tools and a calculator that will enable military personnel and their families to compare the two options based on their current career status and plans for the future. The law contains a grandfather clause giving all troops entering the service prior to 2018 the option to keep the legacy retirement benefit, which offers a monthly pension check equal to 50 percent of basic pay after 20 years of service. The new retirement benefit offers a smaller pension check, 40 percent of basic pay after 20 years, yet also includes monthly government contributions to an individual retirement account that service members own outright after completing just two years of service.

It will be similar to 401(k) contributions for private sector employees, and mark the first time the military offers some limited retirement benefit to troops who separate before reaching 20 years of service. Historically, noncareer service members — more than 80 percent of the force — have received no retirement benefit. The new system will make individual retirement account contributions equal to at least one percent of basic pay. Beyond that, the government will provide matching funds to troops who contribute their own cash. The maximum is 5 percent, meaning if troops agree to contribute 5 percent of their own pay to the individual retirement account, the government will also contribute 5 percent. Individual contributions are tax-deferred, meaning the tax is payable upon withdrawal. But money deposited into these retirement accounts, known as a Thrift Savings Plan, is generally not available for withdrawal before the owner reaches age 59½. Early withdrawal comes with significant tax penalties.

Personal finance experts say the most important factor in the decision will be whether an individual service member plans to stay for a 20-year military career. For those who expect to reach the 20-year mark, the traditional pension system is probably a better deal. Yet for young troops who are unsure about their career plans, the new system promises some retirement benefit for those who might leave after long before 20 years of service. **Note:** Refer to <http://snagfilms.s3.amazonaws.com/d0/c6/509392864d0b900f655b4b6de485/2017-military-pay-chart-21-percent.1ii.pdf> to review the current 2017 pay scales. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Andrew Tilghman | December 31, 2016 ++]

Reservist Deployment Benefits ► New Rules Block Some

Thousands of reservists who deployed over the past two years, thinking they were entitled to the benefits that mobilized and deployed reservists have typically received for years, have been bitterly disappointed upon their return. A little-known provision slipped into the 2012 Defense Authorization Act, which took effect in 2014, denies some members of the National Guard and Reserve the benefits to which they had become accustomed and on which they had relied. The authority contained in Title 10 of the U.S. Code, Section 12304b, Mobilization for Preplanned Mission Support, allows the Defense Department to deny them *Post 9/11 GI Bill credit, reduced age for retirement, Federal Civilian Differential Pay, Voluntary Separation Pay recoup protection, pre- and post-mobilization health care, and more.*

In many cases, no one told the reservists before their deployments of the changed situation. Moreover, use of the authority — one of several the services can use to call reservists to active duty — has been inconsistent, some would say inscrutable. And although the authority applies only to involuntary mobilizations, in many cases the majority of reservists on the deployments have, in fact, volunteered to go. Word of the changes has been slow to filter through the ranks. And higher-ups apparently haven't been eager to tell them. Hundreds of Marine reservists sent to Honduras in 2016 only discovered the change after their six-month deployment. "All of them were baffled. For some of them, it was their first deployment, so they were incentivized by education benefits," said -Gunnery Sgt. Doug Webb, who deployed with the command element of Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force-Southern Command. Then they're told — no s--t, last minute, right before -Thanksgiving — 'By the way, you don't rate.'"

Leaders like Webb are left holding the bag. With 12 years of active-duty service prior to the Reserve, the change doesn't affect him directly, but it affects his junior Marines, and that matters deeply. "We live by all those leadership principles, and the top principle is to keep your Marines informed. When you're not informing your senior staff NCOs on how to mentor and guide their Marines, you've failed, bottom line. That's exactly what happened," he said.

New deployment authority -- Section 12304b allows for the involuntary activation of up to 60,000 troops for up to a year to support preplanned operations of a combatant command. It was supposed to streamline the Pentagon's ability to augment active-duty forces and meet global commitments. To its credit, the Air Force Personnel Center warned airmen of the changes in a March 2016 news release. "The Air Force has not uniformly utilized this mobilization authority," said Lt. Col. Greg Bules, Reserve Policy and Integration Legislative Initiatives program manager, in the release. "It's important that all citizen airmen realize what benefits they are, and are not, entitled to with the changes. "As we move forward in a resource-constrained environment ... military planners expect to see growth in the use of 12304b," Bules warned. The Office of the Secretary of Defense declined to say how often the code has been invoked, but Stars and Stripes reported that 4,705 reservists have been mobilized under the authority since 2014. That includes 2,925 Army -National Guard soldiers, said Patricia Kirby, a -National Guard Bureau spokeswoman.

'Absolutely furious' -- The Marines and sailors' mission in Central America was planned years in advance. Over the six-month deployment, they mentored and trained military partners in the region, built new classrooms,

improved a hospital and renovated a water tower. Approximately 200 of the 294 members of the task force were reservists, according to Maj. Armando Daviu, spokesman for Marine Forces South. All expected to earn benefits for their stint on active duty. “For us, it was a pretty big surprise. A lot of people didn’t realize it was an issue,” said Marine Sgt. Will Hubbard, one of the reservists who deployed with Webb and was directly affected. Before 12304b came into effect, a reserve deployment was an opportunity for reservists to ramp up the percentage the Department of Veterans Affairs would provide for tuition assistance, housing and other costs of higher education. The longer deployment time, the higher the percentage. “A few of my guys had education plans for when they got back,” Webb said. “They were informed initially when we were first mobilized that this would aid in getting their percentages raised. They were absolutely furious about this.” This anger was exacerbated by the fact that so many of the Marines had volunteered for the deployment, only to realize later that their orders clearly stated “involuntary.” The involuntary aspect ensures that enough bodies are present and accounted for when and where they’re needed.

Moving forward -- As a civilian, Hubbard is vice president of government affairs for the Student Veterans of America, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that helps veterans navigate academia and lobbies on their behalf. He believes momentum is building on Capitol Hill to at least get benefits restored for service members on future deployments, perhaps retroactively. Sen. Al Franken (D-MN) introduced legislation last year to do just that, but it stalled in committee. “I’m confident we’re going to come up with some kind of language that will correct this moving forward,” -Hubbard said. “The fact that [so many service members] are being left behind is extremely concerning.”

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Matthew L. Schehl | January 7, 2017 ++]

Columbia SSBN Program ► Ohio Replacement Program Parameters

The Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) program, formerly known as the Ohio-class Replacement Program, is officially entering the next stage in the long and drawn out Department of Defense acquisition process by passing a so-called Milestone B review on 4 JAN, USNI News reports. That means U.S. shipbuilder General Dynamics Electric Boat can now commence detailed design and engineering work on what is slated to become the U.S. Navy’s priciest and at the same time deadliest ballistic missile submarine class in its history. The Milestone B review was originally scheduled for August 2016, but had to be pushed back due to price, design, and production readiness concerns by the Pentagon.

According to USNI News, Frank Kendall, the undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics (AT&L), signed an acquisition decision memorandum (ADM), outlining total cost and the production schedule of the program, “and approved the program for Milestone B, as well as designated it a major defense acquisition program,” earlier in the week. In December, U.S. lawmakers also appropriated funds for the next stage of the Columbia-class program in the 2017 defense budget. General Dynamics’ Electric Boat Division also built the U.S. Navy’s current sea leg of the United States nuclear triad, the Ohio-class SSBN, which entered service in 1981 with the last submarine of the class commissioned in 1997. The U.S. Navy is currently operating 14 Ohio-class SSBNs, armed with up to 24 Trident II D-5 submarine-launched ballistic missiles fitted with multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles.

In December 2016 the U.S. Navy announced that the lead boat of the U.S. Navy’s new SSBN class will be named USS Columbia (SSBN 826) in honor of the District of Columbia. The new Columbia-class will begin replacing the Ohio-class in 2031. The new subs will be designed for a 42-year service life all the way through 2085. According to the USNI, the new sub will displace 20,810 tons when submerged — the largest submarine the U.S. Navy has ever constructed — measure 561 feet (171 meters) in lengths, and have a beam of 43 feet (13 meters). This will make the new class only marginally larger than the Ohio-class with 18,750 tons submerged, 560 feet (170 meters) in lengths,

and a beam of 42 feet (13 meters). With a complement of 155, the crew size will also be roughly the same on both ships.

The lead ship of the class is expected to cost \$14.5 billion, which includes \$5.7 billion in detailed design and nonrecurring engineering costs, and \$8.8 billion in construction costs for the boat itself. The remaining 11 subs are estimated to cost around \$8 billion in 2017 dollars. Some analysts expect the total number of Columbia-class SSBNs to go down from 12 to ten due to the high price tag. [Source: The Diplomat | Franz-Stefan Gady | January 7, 2016 ++]

Army Grooming & Dress ► New Guidelines

The Army has issued a new regulation: Effective immediately, brigade-level commanders will be able to grant accommodations to servicemen and women who wear beards, turbans, or hijabs for religious reasons—the three most common requests for waivers to current guidelines on grooming and dress, according to a letter from the Secretary of the Army, Eric Fanning. The new guidelines also revise hairstyle standards for female soldiers: They can now wear dreadlocks in addition to cornrows and twists, which were allowed in a revision made in 2014. Like other hairstyles, locks must be relatively small, uniform, neat, and tied off inconspicuously, and women don't have to request an accommodation to wear them.

This might seem like an odd choice for a policy directive in the final days of the Obama administration. It came about largely in response to litigation and advocacy from Sikh servicemen who wear beards and turbans for religious reasons, and who wanted to be able to keep them while actively serving. While this ruling will make a big difference for those soldiers, there are very few of them. Eric Baxter, an attorney at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, one of the firms that has been advocating on behalf of the Sikh soldiers, attributed the timing to fear of continued litigation. “The pressure of the lawsuit was a significant factor in deciding this needs to be finished,” he said. “The time had just come when it was no longer possible to make excuses for why Sikhs need to be excluded.”

It's possible that the Army felt it had no options and wanted to put the issue to rest, but also possible the directive reflects some other unstated motive. Regardless of the intent, though, this regulation sends a signal: It makes the Army more inclusive of minority religions and cultures, right as Donald Trump prepares to take office. The new regulations are a response to a long-standing issue within the military. In the 1986, the Supreme Court heard a case brought by an Orthodox Jewish rabbi, Simcha Goldman, who had been forbidden by the Air Force to wear a yarmulke while on duty and in uniform. The Court deferred to the military. In response, Congress passed a rule stating that servicemen should be able to wear religious apparel. “When you look at the legislative history for that law, Congress spoke openly about the need to accommodate Sikhs and Jews,” said Baxter. “But the military has always construed it as only applying to the yarmulke.”

Over the years, military officers have regularly dealt with requests for religious exemptions to various rules. Douglas Carver, a Southern Baptist minister who is the former chief chaplain for the Army, said he faced his first religious exemption requests almost as soon as he became a chaplain. When he retired from service in 2011, the conversation about a possible dress-code revision had already been happening for years, he said. “The military is strong on tradition and order. When you're going to have someone who looks different in the ranks, it takes a lot of discussion and exploration and advisement.” Recently, Sikhs have taken up the cause. Within the last year, several servicemen have sued the Army to be able to keep their turbans and beards. Until now, the Army has responded with temporary fixes—exemptions granted on a limited, case-by-case basis. The military expressed safety concerns about the way beards or other headwear might undermine the effectiveness of gear, and began conducting studies about the feasibility of broader exemptions.

Over time, these exemptions provided evidence that soldiers could successfully serve while wearing non-standard dress, according to Fanning’s letter. Now, officers across the military will be able to address requests for religious exemptions with the guidance of the Chaplain Corps, which is responsible for training service units on the new rules. Once an accommodation has been granted, it can only be permanently revoked by the secretary of the Army or his designee. The military will also continue testing for safety hazards; for now, soldiers with religious accommodations are restricted from serving in positions involving toxic chemicals and other potentially dangerous substances. Carver sees the new regulation as an accomplishment for the Army. Faith is a major part of many service members’ lives; religious affiliation is even listed on soldiers’ dog tags, he pointed out. “You are prepared to go into harm’s way, even to die, and practice of your religious belief brings courage and calmness,” he said. “A soldier should not have to feel that he’s about to give his life for his country, but that he doesn’t want to compromise his individual faith or practices.”

The new policy seems to be in keeping with other military policies set during the Obama administration. In June, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced a new policy allowing transgender service members to serve openly. “We can’t allow barriers unrelated to a person’s qualifications prevent us from recruiting and retaining those who can best accomplish the mission,” he said. The new regulations on religious dress and hairstyles address a different issue, but they still accomplish the same basic goal: They make the largest branch of the military more inclusive, and allow more Americans to serve their country. [Source: The Atlantic | Emma Green | January 5, 2017 ++]

Military Tattoo Criteria Update 09 ► USAF Modifies Rules

Beginning 1 FEB the Air Force will no longer enforce its 25 percent tattoo rule, the service announced 10 JAN. Airmen were previously not allowed to have tattoos on the chest, back, arms and legs that were larger than 25 percent of the exposed body part. Now, they could have full tattoo sleeves on their arms or large back pieces if they so choose. Tattoos, body markings or brands on the head, neck, face, tongue, lips and/or scalp are still prohibited, according to an Air Force news release. Tattoos on the hands will be limited to one single-band ring tattoo, on one finger. Airmen who already have hand tattoos that were already authorized will be grandfathered in, according to the release.



The changes result from a tattoo policy review the Air Force began conducting earlier this year. “As part of our effort to attract and retain as many qualified airmen as possible, we periodically review our accessions policies,” Secretary Deborah Lee James said in the release. “In this instance, we identified specific changes we can make to allow more members of our nation to serve without compromising quality. As a next step in this evolution, we are opening the aperture on certain medical accession criteria and tattoos while taking into account our needs for worldwide deployability and our commitment to the profession of arms.”

The Air Force also reviewed medical accession standards, prompting policy changes to waivers concerning common conditions that have disqualified potential airmen. These include eczema, asthma and attention deficit

hyperactivity disorder. Waivers for these three conditions comprise the highest volume of requests from recruiters, the release said. Air Force candidates who are medically classified as having mild forms of eczema will be processed for a waiver. However, certain restrictions may be applied to secure personal and mission safety. For asthma, the service will use the methacholine challenge test to provide an objective measure of candidates with an uncertain history of asthma. Candidates who pass this test will receive a waiver. Recruits who do not meet the standard of never having taken more than a single daily dosage of medication for ADHD or not having been prescribed medication for their conditions for more than 24 cumulative months after age 14 will be processed for a waiver if they have demonstrated at least 15 months of performance stability, without use of medication.

These waiver changes are effective immediately. The Air Force also is updating its policy about marijuana use before joining the service. The change removes the numerical limitations on a potential recruit's prior use of marijuana. This means a potential recruit will not be disqualified for service based on how much marijuana he or she smoked in the past. The old policy was found to not reflect current legalization of marijuana in numerous states, according to the release. Airmen still won't be allowed to currently use it, but they won't be asked how many times they had used it in the past. "We are always looking at our policies and, when appropriate, adjusting them to ensure a broad scope of individuals are eligible to serve. These changes allow the Air Force to aggressively recruit talented and capable Americans who until now might not have been able to serve our country in uniform," Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force James A. Cody said in the release. [Source: AirForceTimes | Charlsy Panzino | January 10, 2017 ++]

Military Pay & Benefits Update 06 ► Unclear on What Lies Ahead

For the first time since 2013, military personnel in January will see a "full" pay raise equal to the expected increase in private sector wages. But it remains unclear whether this is a sign of better benefits and compensation in years to come. How Congress and the new president treat military pay and benefits will be an issue worth service members' attention in the year ahead, since the moves will directly affect their families' finances. President-elect Donald Trump has already promised to boost military spending, including more personnel and equipment. He has also promised that the country will "take care of the military" better than under President Barack Obama. Outside advocates hope this means protecting military compensation. In recent years, Pentagon leaders trimmed expected increases for housing stipends and basic pay to instead redirect hundreds of millions of dollars to modernization and training efforts. Military officials have said it's a distasteful but necessary tradeoff, given shortfalls in the defense budget. But troops' advocates and some lawmakers have said it needlessly burdens troops and their families. They successfully fought a lower pay raise proposal for 2017, and pushed back against plans for a complete overhaul of housing stipends which could have taken away thousands of dollars annually from some troops. With the new administration they'll push Trump's Pentagon to hold personnel costs separate from major weapons purchases, and hope to recoup some of the lost trims in the years to come. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | December 27, 2016 ++]

Less-Than-Honorable Discharges Update 02 ► Pentagon Review

The Defense Department announced 30 DEC that it is reviewing and potentially upgrading the discharge status of veterans who might have been improperly discharged for reasons related to post-traumatic stress disorder, sexual orientation, sexual assault and other circumstances. "With today's announcement, the department is reaffirming its intention to review and potentially upgrade the discharge status of all individuals that are eligible and that apply," a Pentagon news release said. The announcement comes a week after President Barack Obama signed the 2017

National Defense Authorization Act, which included a bipartisan provision to help veterans who may have been erroneously given a less-than-honorable discharge due to bad behavior arising from mental trauma, such as PTSD or traumatic brain injury.

Such discharges, also called "bad paper" discharges, often arise from minor misconduct -- such as being late -- and other behaviors that are linked to trauma-related conditions. Veterans with less-than-honorable discharges are ineligible for certain benefits. In a statement earlier this month, North Carolina's Republican Sen. Thom Tillis attributed these discharges to a lack of knowledge surrounding certain medical conditions in the military community. "So many of our servicemembers have developed PTSD and brain injuries while on active duty," he said. "Many...were undiagnosed until long after their service was completed." "Too many service members have lost access to their VA benefits because of mental health injuries that were not recognized when they left the military," said Democratic Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee Personnel Subcommittee, in the same statement.

The provision will let veterans with mental health injuries and those who experienced military sexual trauma more easily have their discharges upgraded "so that they can get the care they need and the benefits they earned," she said. The Pentagon said 30 DEC that it will reach out to those affected through engagement with military service organizations and other outside groups, as well as direct outreach to individual veterans. The Defense Department is encouraging all veterans who believe they experienced "error or injustice" in their discharge to contact their service's Board for Correction of Military or Naval Records, or the Discharge Review Board, the news release said.

The Defense Department said it was inviting feedback from veterans and other military organizations on their experiences with these two boards, including suggestions on how policies and processes could be improved. If the discharge was less than 15 years ago, the veteran should complete Defense Department Form 293. For older discharges, DD Form 149 should be completed. Veterans seeking to correct records other than discharges should complete and submit DD Form 149. The announcement outlined three keys to succeeding in having discharges upgraded or corrected.

- "First, it is very important to explain why the veteran's discharge or other record was unjust or erroneous -- for example, how it is connected to, or resulted from unjust policies, a physical or mental health condition related to military service, or some other explainable or justifiable circumstance," the Defense Department said.
- Second, veterans should also provide evidence to their claims, such as medical records.
- Third, it is helpful to submit copies of the veteran's service records. Further information, including links to forms, can be found at the Department of Defense website.

[Source: Stars and Stripes | Wyatt Olson | Dec 31, 2016 ++]

Hyper Velocity Projectile Program ► Platform Expansion

An Army Howitzer is now firing a super high-speed, high-tech, electromagnetic Hyper Velocity Projectile, initially developed as a Navy weapon, an effort to fast-track increasing lethal and effective weapons to warzones and key strategic locations, Pentagon officials said. Overall, the Pentagon is accelerating developmental testing of its high-tech, long-range Electro-Magnetic Rail Gun by expanding the platforms from which it might fire and potentially postponing an upcoming at-sea demonstration of the weapon, Pentagon and Navy officials told Scout Warrior. While initially conceived of and developed for the Navy's emerging Rail Gun Weapon, the Pentagon and Army are now firing the Hyper Velocity Projectile from an Army Howitzer in order to potential harness near-term weapons ability, increase the scope, lethality and range ability to accelerate combat deployment of the lethal, high-speed round.

The rail gun uses an electromagnetic current to fire a kinetic energy warhead up to 100 miles at speeds greater than 5,000 miles an hour, a speed at least three times as fast as existing weapons. Firing from an Army Howitzer, the rail gun hypervelocity projectile can fire the high-speed projectile at enemy targets to include buildings, force concentrations, weapons systems, drones, aircraft, vehicle bunkers and even incoming enemy missiles and artillery rounds. "We can defend against an incoming salvo with a bullet. That is very much a focus getting ready for the future," Dr. William Roper, Director of the Pentagon's once-secret Strategic Capabilities Office, told Scout Warrior among a small group of reporters.

Pentagon weapons developers with the Strategic Capabilities Office, or SCO, are working to further accelerate development of both the gun launcher and the hypervelocity projectile it fires. While plans for the weapon's development are still being deliberated, ongoing work is developing integration and firing of the projectile onto existing Navy's deck-mounted 5-inch guns or Army M109 Paladin self-propelled howitzer (a mobile platform which fires 155mm artillery rounds).



The Strategic Capabilities Office, a high-level Pentagon effort, is aimed at exploring emerging technologies with a mind to how they can be integrated quickly into existing weapons systems and platforms. Part of the rationale is to harness promising systems, weapons and technologies able to arrive in combat sooner that would be the case should they go through the normal bureaucratic acquisition process. In almost every instance, the SCO partners with one of the services to blend new weapons with current systems for the near term, Roper explained. Part of the calculus is grounded in the notion of integrating discovery and prototyping, being able to adjust and fix in process without committing to an official requirement, Roper said.

Roper further explained that firing the HVP out of a 155m Howitzer brings certain advantages, because the weapon's muzzle breach at the end of its cannon is able to catch some of the round's propellant - making the firing safer for Soldiers. "Its design traits were all based with dealing with extreme electromagnetic fields - that projectile could be fired out of an existing weapon system. Its whole role is to just keep the hot gas and propellant from rushing past. You don't want it eroded by the hot material," Roper explained. The goal of the effort is to fire a "sub-caliber" round that is aerodynamic and able to fly at hypersonic speeds. We can significantly increase the range and continually improve what powder guns can do, he added. "We've been looking at the data and are very pleased with the results we are getting back," Roper said.

One Senior Army official told Scout Warrior that firing a Hyper Velocity Projectile from a Howitzer builds upon rapid progress with targeting technology, fire-control systems and faster computer processing speeds for fire direction. Such an ability would give ground-based mobile artillery weapons an ability to protect Soldiers from greater distances by identifying and destroying attacks much more quickly than existing Howitzer rounds can, the Senior official said. "If you can destroy approaching enemy fire in a matter of seconds, it changes the calculus of fire support. You have really changed things," he told Scout Warrior.

Adjusting for the higher-speed round also involves managing blast overpressure released from the muzzle when the projectile leaves the cannon; the trajectory or guidance of the round also needs to be properly managed as it exits the cannon tube through the muzzle toward the intended. "This is not just making sure you are not damaging the tube, but retaining accuracy for the projectile based on projectile stability," he said. Accomplishing this high-tech integration also widens the target envelope a Howitzer is able to destroy, expanding its offensive attack, ground

defense and counter-air possibilities. The senior official described the Army Howitzer as an "advanced countermeasure," therefore underscoring the added combat value of firing a round with massively increased speed and lethality.

Meanwhile, the Navy intends to arm portions of its surface fleet with Rail Gun fire power; platforms include Joint High-Speed Vessels, Destroyers and Cruisers, among others. On the ocean, a HPV be fired against a floating target, in an effort to test the rail gun's ability to destroy targets that are beyond-the-horizon much faster than existing long-range weapons, Navy officials said. The rail gun uses an electromagnetic current to fire a kinetic energy warhead up to 100 miles at speeds greater than 5,000 miles an hour, a speed at least three times as fast as existing weapons.

High-Speed, Long-Distance Electromagnetic Weapons Technology -- The weapon's range, which can fire guided, high-speed projectiles more than 100 miles, makes it suitable for cruise missile defense, ballistic missile defense and various kinds of surface warfare applications. The railgun uses electrical energy to create a magnetic field and propel a kinetic energy projectile at Mach 7.5 toward a wide range of targets, such as enemy vehicles, or cruise and ballistic missiles. The weapon works when electrical power charges up a pulse-forming network. That pulse-forming network is made up of capacitors able to release very large amounts of energy in a very short period of time. The weapon releases a current on the order of 3 to 5 million amps --- that's 1,200 volts released in a ten millisecond timeframe, experts have said. That is enough to accelerate a mass of approximately 45 pounds from zero to five thousand miles per hour in one one-hundredth of a second, Navy officials added at a briefing last Spring.

Due to its ability to reach speeds of up to 5,600 miles per hour, the hypervelocity projectile is engineered as a kinetic energy warhead, meaning no explosives are necessary. The hyper velocity projectile can travel at speeds up to 2,000 meters per second, a speed which is about three times that of most existing weapons. The rate of fire is 10-rounds per minute, developers explained at last years' briefing. A kinetic energy hypervelocity warhead also lowers the cost and the logistics burden of the weapon, they explained. Although it has the ability to intercept cruise missiles, the hypervelocity projectile can be stored in large numbers on ships. Unlike other larger missile systems designed for similar missions, the hypervelocity projectile costs only \$25,000 per round. The railgun can draw its power from an onboard electrical system or large battery, Navy officials said. The system consists of five parts, including a launcher, energy storage system, a pulse-forming network, hypervelocity projectile and gun mount. While the weapon is currently configured to guide the projectile against fixed or static targets using GPS technology, it is possible that in the future the rail gun could be configured to destroy moving targets as well, Navy officials have explained over the years.

Possible Rail Gun Deployment on Navy Destroyers -- Also, the Navy is evaluating whether to mount its new Electromagnetic Rail Gun weapon from the high-tech DDG 1000 destroyer by the mid-2020s, service officials said. The DDG 1000's Integrated Power System provides a large amount of on board electricity sufficient to accommodate the weapon, Navy developers have explained. The first of three planned DDG 1000 destroyers was christened in April of last year. Navy leaders believe the DDG 1000 is the right ship to house the rail gun but that additional study was necessary to examine the risks. Also, with a displacement of 15,482 tons, the DDG 1000 is 65-percent larger than existing 9,500- ton Aegis cruisers and destroyers.

The DDG 1,000 integrated power system, which includes its electric propulsion, helps generate up to 78 megawatts of on-board electrical power, something seen as key to the future when it comes to the possibility of firing a rail gun. It is also possible that the weapon could someday be configured to fire from DDG 51 Arleigh Burke-class destroyers. Something of that size is necessary, given the technological requirements of the weapon. For example, the Electro-magnetic gun would most likely not work as a weapon for the Navy's Littoral Combat Ship. [Source: Scout Warrior | Kris Osborn| January 1, 2016 ++]

Military Working Dogs Update 02 ► Dogs for Defense Program ++

When World War II began, Fritzie got the call to do his bit to defeat the Axis powers and, like so many other patriotic Americans, jumped at the chance. The son of a full-blooded English setter, he was just right for the job — adventurous, fearless and a little hyperactive. Left with relatives after his owner, Bessie Goethel, joined her husband, Louis, at an Army camp in Abilene, the energetic Fritzie fought with his father, climbed the fence and sometimes returned with a neighbor's chicken. Then Uncle Sam called him to duty. Fritzie joined the Dogs for Defense program, a four-legged force that would grow to more than 10,000 dogs and form the basis of a K-9 corps that still exists — starting with basic training at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, where dogs and their handlers have received instruction since 1958.

The United States entered World War II with a small military and almost no dogs in service. The British, Germans and Belgians had used them to haul supplies and weapons in World War I, run messages to the front lines and aid the wounded, according to the website FidoUniverse.com (<http://fidouniverse.com/dogs-for-defense>). Putting man's best friend on the front lines is an even older practice, in use since before the invention of gunpowder, a Lackland history of military working dogs noted. Roman legions dressed them in armor and spiked collars.

The modern U.S. effort began when Harry Cesar, Leonard Brumby, Arthur Kilborn, Dorothy Long and Arlene Erlanger met in January 1942, according to FidoUniverse.com. "The dog must play a game in this thing," Erlanger, a poodle breeder who organized Dogs for Defense and served as a civilian consultant to the quartermaster general during the war, told Kilborn, a writer, for the New York Sun. "Just think what dogs can do guarding forts, munition plants and other such places." Folks in San Antonio quickly rallied around their dogs of war. The San Antonio Express-News covered the departure of Fritzie and other canines for training in San Carlos, California on March 9, 1943. A headline under the photo in the Local News section proclaimed, "Dogs Wanted For Service In South Seas."

Fritzie was pegged to be an "attack dog," and that seemed about right. He was an escape artist captured in a 1940 photo standing over the railing of a white wooden fence. As a 10-month-old puppy, he had picked a fight with his father. A little over a year later, Fritzie was hurt chasing a truck and patched up at a veterinary hospital in Abilene. After passing his physical and finishing training, Fritzie went to work as a sentry dog. Trouble, invariably, followed. The UTSA Libraries' Special Collections, which holds photos, certificates and news clips provided by Bessie Goethel, show Fritzie suffered an injury to his tail that ended in an amputation. He eventually returned home with an honorable discharge. Bessie Goethel signed a certificate saying her dog, "U25," arrived in San Antonio on March 31, 1944, but she was disturbed about the injury, writing the Army, "Good — but would appreciate information as to why his tail was amputated." That part of the story, and the cause of Fritzie's death 15 months later, is lost to history.



Army Sgt. 1st Class Russell Minta, senior non-commissioned officer for the Defense Department's Military Working Dog Breeding Program on Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, holds a puppy in his hand.

In all, more than 18,000 dogs were donated during World War II, with 10,206 serving in the Army, Coast Guard and Marines. Most were sentries like Fritzie, but some became scouts and messengers. A few were trained for mine-detection work, but that was characterized as an experiment never put into practice. Not all the dogs made it home. Some 1,058 went missing in action or died in service. Never again, though, would the armed forces do without dogs. A 1945 article from the Special Collections tells of how the Army planned to establish a permanent dog breeding program. The clip, from a publication called Reserve Officer, said “breeding dogs will be placed with civilian breeders and puppies best suited to military needs will be selected from the litters.” They were to be used “as sentries in occupation armies and for experiments in developing new uses for dogs in war.”

Today, more than 1,700 military working dogs are on duty with the four services, the Air Force said, and more than 300 new canines and their handlers go through Lackland’s 341st Training Squadron every year. The dog school also trains canines and handlers for the Secret Service, State Department, U.S. Customs and other federal law enforcement agencies. Former Air Force Staff Sgt. Kenneth Neal, a Vietnam dog handler, said canines are credited with saving more than 10,000 U.S. troops in the war. They did everything from smelling enemy soldiers and chasing them through tunnels to hearing the high-pitched sound of wires used to trigger explosives. More recently, they’ve found roadside bombs in Afghanistan, Iraq and other war zones.

They were honored three years ago at Lackland’s sprawling parade field, where the Air Force saluted more than 4,000 working dogs that were left behind, killed or euthanized during the Vietnam War. A modest memorial at the Air Force Security Forces Museum elsewhere on the base honors Nemo A534, a German shepherd that defended its badly injured handler, Airman 2nd Class Bob Throneburg, after a brutal 1966 battle at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. The tale is legendary in the working dog world. Shot in the right eye, and suffering injuries to one sinus cavity and most of his right jaw after killing an enemy soldier, Nemo crawled to his unconscious master and covered him, refusing to budge even when friendly troops arrived. “I was pretty much a goner,” Throneburg said, adding that he had no idea Nemo was with him. Airman 2nd Class Leonard Bryant, Nemo’s previous handler, convinced him to let medics care for Throneburg, an action that saved the dog’s life. Nemo would have been shot if he hadn’t gotten up.

A volunteer docent at the museum, Kenneth Neal said Nemo and Throneburg, 72, of Gaffney, South Carolina were briefly reunited in Saigon. Nemo came to his bedside and then headed to the United States, becoming the first of 286 working dogs to make it home from Vietnam. He helped recruit more than 5,000 working dogs for the government from 1968 to 1969 and retired at Lackland, living in his own kennel. [Source: San Antonio Express-News | Sig Christenson | January 3, 2017 ++]

B-52's Update 02 ► Engine Issues

The Air Force has confirmed following questions from Defense News that an engine dropped out of a B-52 bomber during a training flight on 4 JAN. Because the B-52 runs on eight Pratt & Whitney TF33-P-3/103 turbofan engines, pilots were able to land the aircraft safely without any injury to the five personnel on board. The Air Force has since dispatched a UH-1N Huey helicopter to recover engine debris, which was found located in an unpopulated area about 25 nautical miles northeast of Minot Air Force Base, an Air Force spokesman said in a statement. There were no weapons onboard the B-52, which belongs to Minot Air Force Base's 5th Bomb Wing and was conducting a training mission, he said. The service was not able to provide the root cause of the mishap, but the spokesman said an initial safety investigation has been initiated.

The incident could also ignite debate about whether and how to re-engine the service’s B-52 inventory. The Boeing-manufactured bomber has been flying since 1952 and is expected to remain operating until around 2040, depending on when it is fully replaced by the Northrop Grumman’s B-21. In 2015, Lt. Gen. Mike Holmes, deputy

chief of staff for Strategic Plans and Requirements, said the service was especially interested in a public-private partnership, which would keep it from having to funnel procurement dollars into a new engine program. "The idea is in a public-private partnership, somebody funds the engine and then we pay them back over time out of the fuel savings, which are generated out of the new engines," he said then. Pratt & Whitney has proposed an upgrade package for the TF33-P-3/103 engines that would make them less expensive to maintain. Analysts have also floated the Pratt PW2000, known as the F117 when installed on military aircraft, as a potential substitute for the TF33. Engine manufacturers General Electric and Rolls-Royce could also offer their own replacements. There are currently 76 B-52's in the Air Force's inventory. [Source: DefenseNews | Valerie Insinna & Aaron Mehta | January 4, 2017 ++]

Obama's Military Legacy ► How The Troops Rated Him | Part I

Between Dec. 16 and 21, Military Times and Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families conducted a voluntary, confidential online survey of U.S. service members. The questions focused on President Barack Obama's time in the White House and the nation's current political climate. The survey received 1,664 responses from active-duty troops. A standard methodology was used by IVMF analysts to estimate the weights for each individual observation of the survey sample. The margin of error for questions on Obama's popularity is 2%. Other questions have slightly higher margins of error. The survey audience was 87% male and 13% female, and had a mean age of 30 years old. The respondents identified themselves as 7% white, 12% Hispanic, 11% African American, 4% Asian and 9% other ethnicities. Respondents were able to select more than one race.

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President Barack Obama will step down after eight years as commander in chief with one of the most influential tenures leading the U.S. military, but not necessarily the political support of service members. His moves to slim down the armed forces, move away from traditional military might and overhaul social policies prohibiting the service of minority groups have proven divisive in the ranks. His critics have accused him of trading a strong security posture for political points, and for allowing the rise of terrorists like the Islamic State group whom the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were supposed to silence. But Obama's supporters define him as the Nobel Peace Prize winner who ordered the elimination of Osama bin Laden and refocused military strategy while wrestling with an uncooperative Congress and unprecedented budget restrictions. They insist the military is more nimble now, and more prepared to deal with unconventional warfare against non-traditional threats across the globe.

More than half of troops surveyed in the latest Military Times/Institute for Veterans and Military Families poll said they have an unfavorable opinion of Obama and his two-terms leading the military. About 36% said they approve of his job as commander in chief. Their complaints include the president's decision to decrease military personnel (71% think it should be higher), his moves to withdraw combat troops from Iraq (59% say it made America less safe) and his lack of focus on the biggest dangers facing America (64% say China represents a significant threat to the U.S.) But more than two-thirds support Obama's mantra that securing America means building strong alliances with foreign powers. And more than 60% think his use of drones and special forces teams for precision strikes — instead of large-scale military operations — has helped U.S. national security.

That's a conflicted response to a president who entered the White House vowing to end U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan but instead leaves as the first American president to oversee two full terms with combat troops deployed to hostile zones. In a departure memo released 5 JAN, Defense Secretary Ash Carter defended Obama's "record of progress" with the military by praising the White House moves as creating "a smaller yet more technologically advanced and capable military that is ready for the threats of today and the challenges of tomorrow." "America is today the world's foremost leader, partner, and underwriter of stability and security in every region across the globe, as we have been since the end of World War II," Carter wrote. "But even as we continue to fulfill

this enduring role, it's also evident that we're entering a new strategic era ... and it requires new ways of thinking and new ways of acting."

The White House did not respond to repeated requests for an interview with Obama to discuss his defense moves and the military legacy he'll leave behind. In a farewell speech during a military honor review on 4 JAN, Obama said he saw his top priority overseeing America's military as balancing the need to use force with the need to honor the armed forces. "You committed yourself to a life of service and of sacrifice," he said. "And I, in turn, made a promise to you ... that I would only send you into harm's way when it is absolutely necessary, with the strategy, the well-defined goals, with the equipment and the support that you needed to get the job done. Because that's what you rightfully expect and that is what you rightfully deserve." Still, many troops see Obama less as a wartime commander in chief and more as a politician managing Pentagon affairs. Through his presidency Obama has repeatedly promised to keep the military "the strongest fighting force the world has ever known" but many troops question his stewardship of the institution, particularly when it comes to the defense budget.

'IT'S THE PRESIDENT'S FAULT'

"There's no question this era will go down as the third 'hollow' army, and it's the president's fault," said James Jay Carafano, deputy director of international studies at the conservative Heritage Foundation. "For all his promises, the operations tempo hasn't gone down as much as he hoped, and he has invested little in the military." Troops responding to the Military Times/IVMF poll saw years of defense budget fights as the largest blemish on Obama's presidency. Two-thirds said spending caps enacted in 2011 have had a very negative effect on military morale, and another 28 percent said it was harmful to a lesser extent. Fewer than two percent saw the budget caps as a positive for the military. Conservatives have attacked Obama for the lower defense budgets for years, arguing that his insistence on pairing military spending with non-defense spending has crippled Pentagon efforts to modernize and recapitalize.

The caps — known as sequestration — have been blamed for shortfalls in parts and repairs, cuts in training time and a gradual drawdown in military manpower. They've also contributed to a host of compensation trims, as Pentagon leaders have held down pay increases and stipend raises in recent years to help offset funding reductions in other areas. Obama has shouldered much of the blame for sequestration, even with lawmakers approving the plan and failing to draft a repeal. In recent years, administration officials have tried to push back on the narrative that the president is responsible for that host of budget fights that have consumed Washington and, by extension, the military.

"The Defense Department has faced this new strategic era while dealing with significant impediments presented by Congress, including budget uncertainty, the first government shutdown in a generation, the repeated denial of reform proposals to make the defense enterprise more efficient, and efforts to micromanage the organization of the department," Carter said in his memo. "Despite this, the Department has been able to manage its strategic priorities during eight consecutive years that began with continuing resolutions, albeit at increasing levels of programmatic risk." Still, independent military advocates have said lower-than-anticipated defense budgets put enormous strain on military families in recent years. A November Military Times/IVMF poll, conducted in the immediate aftermath of Donald Trump's election victory, showed that more than 60% of active-duty service members felt improving troops' pay and benefits should be a top priority of the incoming administration.

Obama has pushed back on the idea that tighter budgets have ruined the services, one of Trump's favorite talking points. Last week, Obama said the military remains "the most capable fighting force on the face of the Earth" despite financial challenges. "Our Army, tested by years of combat, is the best-trained and best-equipped land force on the planet," he said. "Our Navy is the largest and most lethal in the world, on track to surpass 300 ships. Our Air Force, with its precision and reach, is unmatched. Our Marine Corps is the world's only truly expeditionary force. Our Coast Guard is the finest in the world." The White House in recent years has helped broker a pair of short-term deals to get around the budget caps, but failed to find a permanent solution with Republican leaders. Trump has promised to do just that, but will likely face the same political obstacles. Carafano said he is hopeful that a change

in administrations will produce different results. “We don’t have a just-in-time industrial base anymore, so any changes in defense spending will be gradual,” he said. “But these problems are reversible. We just have to have a president who is interested.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III & George R. Altman | January 8, 2017 ++]

Obama's Military Legacy ► How The Military Rated Him | Part II

Budget concerns were at the core of Trump’s attacks on Obama on the campaign trail, with accusations that the president was uninterested in “defending” America and too quick to prefer diplomacy over military might. In speech before troops in Florida in December, Obama said that he never shied away from military intervention, but instead took a responsible, cautious approach to those grave decisions. “I believe that we must never hesitate to act when necessary, including unilaterally when necessary, against any imminent threats to our people,” he said. “But I have also insisted that it is unwise and unsustainable to ask our military to build nations on the other side of the world, or resolve their internal conflicts.”

Obama will leave office with American military units still in the Middle East and Afghanistan, but overseeing training and assistance missions, not direct combat. He has received criticism both for failing to zero-out those deployments and moving too fast to pull down the numbers before those regions were fully secure. “He’s a reluctant warrior,” said Phil Carter, director of the Military, Veterans and Society Program at the progressive Center for a New American Security. “He has struggled to end the wars overseas and fulfill those promises, and he never managed to do so.” Troops polled appear divided on whether Obama ever achieved the proper balance on those deployed force levels. Nearly 60% of poll respondents said the drawdown of U.S. troops from Iraq made America less safe. A slightly smaller 55% said moves to pull U.S. forces out of Afghanistan has hurt this country’s national security. While half of troops surveyed see the reduced emphasis on large-scale overseas missions as harmful to military readiness, 45% see the shift to training and advising missions as a positive for the armed forces.

For his part, Obama appears to have no such qualms about the approach. “Instead of pushing all of the burden onto American ground troops, instead of trying to mount invasions wherever terrorists appear, we’ve built a network of partners,” Obama said in his speech, calling his decisions “a smart strategy that can be sustained.” But Trump and Republican lawmakers have ridiculed the president’s foreign policy as scattered, quick to find any option other than a possible fight. They point to what they see as an overly trusting agreement with Iranian hard-liners over nuclear weapons and indecisive, unfulfilled threats against Syrian President Bashar Assad for attacks on his own people. And a host of Obama’s own former defense officials have helped pile on that narrative.

- In his memoir, former Defense Secretary Robert Gates blasted Obama as a leader “who doesn’t believe in his own strategy” and said his plans in Iraq and Afghanistan were “all about getting out.” He also accused Obama of distrusting senior military leaders, and treating them as potential adversaries.
- Retired Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis, head of U.S. Central Command under Obama and Trump’s nominee to serve as defense secretary, last fall called Obama’s anti-ISIS strategy “unguided by a sustained policy or sound strategy, replete with half-measures.”
- While overseeing U.S. operations in Afghanistan in 2010, Army Gen. Stanley McChrystal was effectively fired by Obama after reports of their fights over military strategy were made public.
- In 2014, Army Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, today a top adviser to Trump, was dismissed as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency over his criticism of Obama’s soft approach to Islamic terrorism.

The president's conflict with military leaders came even as First Lady Michelle Obama launched the White House Joining Forces initiative, designed to better educate the public on the service and sacrifice of military personnel and their families.

'WE CAN NO LONGER AFFORD TO ALLOW BARRIERS'

The biggest impact of Obama's tenure may be felt by those serving in the ranks, and how dramatically that population has changed in recent years. Since 2009, White House-led changes have allowed gay troops to serve openly for the first time, women to serve in combat posts, same-sex couples to receive military benefits, and transgender service members to announce their presence in the ranks. "Inertia is the most powerful force in the Defense Department," said Phil Carter, the analyst, who served as an Army adviser in Iraq in 2005-2006. "Some of these changes may have happened without [Obama], but he gets credit for forcing them quicker than they wanted." It's unclear if the departing president will get credit or blame.

- About 30% of troops surveyed in the latest poll said the Pentagon's move to open all combat jobs to women has hurt military readiness, versus 15% who see it as a positive and the new open-service policy for transgender troops is less popular, with 41% of those surveyed calling it harmful and only 12% calling it helpful.
- Both moves leave the majority of troops in the middle, saying the changes have had no real effect on unit effectiveness.
- The repeal of the "don't ask, don't tell" law was seen by many in the military community as a significant problem when it was finalized in 2010, but now is seen as no big deal to most troops. Only 17% of troops surveyed by Military Times and IVMF saw openly gay troops as a negative for military readiness, versus 24% who believe it has improved the force and 58% who say little changed after the repeal was finalized.

Obama and a host of defense officials have defended the changes as a way to "strengthen the military" without compromising military readiness. "As an all-volunteer force, the Defense Department must be able to draw from 100 percent of America's population, focusing purely on a person's willingness and ability to serve our country," Ash Carter wrote in his exit memo. "We can no longer afford to allow barriers unrelated to a person's qualifications to prevent us from recruiting and retaining those who can best accomplish the mission." Phil Carter said that, long-term, those policies could be among the most significant military moves of Obama's presidency. Advocates have called them life-altering for their members.

Following the "don't ask, don't tell" repeal, officials from the Human Rights Campaign lauded the moves as long-overdue permission for "brave men and women currently serving to have the freedom to come out and be honest with their comrades about who they are and who they love." Officials from the Service Women's Action Network called the combat roles expansion "a new era for American women to serve the nation with valor and courage on the battlefield."

STRONG SUPPORT AMONG WOMEN, MINORITIES

Among troops in the poll, Obama was more popular with officers (44% favorable rating) than enlisted troops (35% favorable) and more popular among Navy personnel (43 percent favorable) than those in any other service. In each of those groups, the percentage of troops who held a negative view of his presidency still outweighed his supporters. That has been a recurring theme for Obama among the military. Past reader polls by Military Times (which unlike the IVMF-partnered polls were not conducted in a scientific manner) have consistently shown him with higher unfavorable numbers than positive marks. Right after taking office in 2009, 40% of readers said they had an unfavorable view of him, with 35% having a favorable opinion. His favorable marks dropped down in similar reader polls in following years, and his unfavorables grew.

Still, the outgoing president does appear to be admired by some segments of the military. More than 60% of women have a favorable view of him, in contrast with 36% who disliked his presidency. Roughly 57% of minorities in the military approve of the work done by the country's first black president. And almost 90% of troops who voted for Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton (about 29% of service members in the poll say they did) have a favorable opinion of the last eight years of White House policies. Now, all of those them will answer to a new commander in chief. Nearly 49% of troops who voted in the last election said they cast a ballot for Trump, and he

enters this Oval Office with 46% of active-duty service members saying they have a favorable view of him and 37% saying they have an unfavorable view.

In his exit memo, Ash Carter warned that the incoming administration will face many of the same challenges that Obama faced, albeit with a better plan of attack from the outgoing president. “While the next administration will continue to be challenged by an evolving security environment, I am confident that our military is up to the task of protecting our nation in the years ahead,” he wrote.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III & George R. Altman | January 8, 2017 ++]

*** Military History ***



USS Constitution ► History of the Legendary Survivor

Of the numerous ships that have added to the laurels of the United States Navy since its official inception more than two centuries ago, a handful stand out, both for their individual deeds and for their ability to epitomize the era in which they earned their fame. Of those, arguably the most famous is the frigate Constitution. Besides achieving renown in several actions during the War of 1812, USS Constitution managed to endure to the present day, despite some close brushes with destruction—the last of which was at the hands of her own navy. To learn about the history of this ship refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**USS Constitution: The Legendary Survivor**". [Source: <http://www.historynet.com/uss-constitution-the-legendary-survivor.htm> | December 2016 ++]

Last Six Seconds ► Gen. John Kelly USMC 2010 Speech

If you'd like to know more about Trump's pick for Homeland Security, USMC Gen. John Kelly, read the following speech that he gave just 4 days after he lost his son in combat. One can hardly conceive of the enormous grief held quietly within General Kelly as he spoke.



-o-o-O-o-o-

On Nov 13, 2010, Lt General John Kelly, USMC, gave a speech to the Semper Fi Society of St. Louis, MO. This was four days after his son, Lt Robert Kelly, USMC, was killed by an IED while on his 3rd Combat tour. During his speech, General Kelly spoke about the dedication and valor of our young men and women who step forward each and every day to protect us. During the speech, he never mentioned the loss of his own son. He closed the speech with the moving account of the last six seconds in the lives of two young Marines who died with rifles blazing to protect their brother Marines.

"I will leave you with a story about the kind of people they are, about the quality of the steel in their backs, about the kind of dedication they bring to our country while they serve in uniform and forever after as veterans. Two years ago when I was the Commander of all U.S. and Iraqi forces, in fact, the 22 ND of April 2008, two Marine infantry battalions, 1/9 "The Walking Dead," and 2/8 were switching out in Ramadi. One battalion in the closing days of their deployment going home very soon, the other just starting its seven-month combat tour. Two Marines, Corporal Jonathan Yale and Lance Corporal Jordan Haerter, 22 and 20 years old respectively, one from each battalion, were assuming the watch together at the entrance gate of an outpost that contained a makeshift barracks housing 50 Marines. The same broken down ramshackle building was also home to 100 Iraqi police, also my men and our allies in the fight against the terrorists in Ramadi, a city until recently the most dangerous city on earth and owned by Al Qaeda. Yale was a dirt poor mixed-race kid from Virginia with a wife and daughter, and a mother and sister who lived with him and whom he supported as well. He did this on a yearly salary of less than \$23,000.

Haerter, on the other hand, was a middle class white kid from Long Island. They were from two completely different worlds. Had they not joined the Marines they would never have met each other, or understood that multiple Americas exist simultaneously depending on one's race, education level, economic status, and where you might have been born. But they were Marines, combat Marines, forged in the same crucible of Marine training, and because of this bond they were brothers as close, or closer, than if they were born of the same woman.

The mission orders they received from the sergeant squad leader I am sure went something like, "Okay you two clowns, stand this post and let no unauthorized personnel or vehicles pass. You clear?"

I am also sure Yale and Haerter then rolled their eyes and said in unison something like, "Yes Sergeant," with just enough attitude that made the point without saying the words, "No kidding, we know what we're doing." They then relieved two other Marines on watch and took up their post at the entry control point of Joint Security Station Nasser, in the Sophia section of Ramadi, Al Anbar, Iraq.

A few minutes later a large blue truck turned down the alley way - perhaps 60-70 yards in length, and sped its way through the serpentine of concrete jersey walls. The truck stopped just short of where the two were posted and detonated, killing them both catastrophically. Twenty-four brick masonry houses were damaged or destroyed. A mosque 100 yards away collapsed. The truck's engine came to rest two hundred yards away knocking most of a house down before it stopped. Our explosive experts reckoned the blast was made of 2,000 pounds of explosives. Two died, and because these two young infantrymen didn't have it in their DNA to run from danger, they saved 150 of their Iraqi and American brothers-in-arms.

When I read the situation report about the incident a few hours after it happened I called the regimental commander for details as something about this struck me as different. Marines dying or being seriously wounded is commonplace in combat. We expect Marines regardless of rank or MOS to stand their ground and do their duty, and even die in the process, if that is what the mission takes. But this just seemed different. The regimental commander had just returned from the site and he agreed, but reported that there were no American witnesses to the event - just Iraqi police. I figured if there was any chance of finding out what actually happened and then to decorate the two Marines to acknowledge their bravery, I'd have to do it as a combat award that requires two eye-witnesses and we figured the bureaucrats back in Washington would never buy Iraqi statements. If it had any chance at all, it had to come under the signature of a general officer.

I traveled to Ramadi the next day and spoke individually to a half-dozen Iraqi police all of whom told the same story. The blue truck turned down into the alley and immediately sped up as it made its way through the serpentine. They all said, "We knew immediately what was going on as soon as the two Marines began firing." The Iraqi police then related that some of them also fired, and then to a man, ran for safety just prior to the explosion. All survived. Many were injured, some seriously. One of the Iraqis elaborated and with tears welling up said, "They'd run like any normal man would to save his life." "What he didn't know until then," he said, "And what he learned that very instant, was that Marines are not normal."

Choking past the emotion he said, "Sir, in the name of God, no sane man would have stood there and done what they did. No sane man. They saved us all."

What we didn't know at the time, and only learned a couple of days later after I wrote a summary and submitted both Yale and Haerter for posthumous Navy Crosses, was that one of our security cameras, damaged initially in the blast, recorded some of the suicide attack. It happened exactly as the Iraqis had described it. It took exactly six seconds from when the truck entered the alley until it detonated.

You can watch the last six seconds of their young lives. Putting myself in their heads I supposed it took about a second for the two Marines to separately come to the same conclusion about what was going on once the truck came into their view at the far end of the alley. Exactly no time to talk it over, or call the sergeant to ask what they should do. Only enough time to take half an instant and think about what the sergeant told them to do only a few minutes before, "Let no unauthorized personnel or vehicles pass." The two Marines had about five seconds left to live.

It took maybe another two seconds for them to present their weapons, take aim, and open up. By this time the truck was half-way through the barriers and gaining speed the whole time. Here, the recording shows a number of Iraqi police, some of whom had fired their AKs, now scattering like the normal and rational men they were - some running right past the Marines. They had three seconds left to live.

For about two seconds more, the recording shows the Marines' weapons firing non-stop the truck's windshield exploding into shards of glass as their rounds take it apart and tore in to the body of the (I deleted) who is trying to get past them to kill their brothers - American and Iraqi-bedded down in the barracks totally unaware of the fact that their lives at that moment depended entirely on two Marines standing their ground.

If they had been aware, they would have known they were safe because two Marines stood between them and a crazed suicide bomber. The recording shows the truck careening to a stop immediately in front of the two Marines. In all of the instantaneous violence Yale and Haerter never hesitated. By all reports and by the recording, they never stepped back. They never even started to step aside. They never even shifted their weight. With their feet spread shoulder width apart, they leaned into the danger, firing as fast as they could work their weapons. They had only one second left to live.

The truck explodes. The camera goes blank. Two young men go to their God. Six seconds. Not enough time to think about their families, their country, their flag, or about their lives or their deaths, but more than enough time for two very brave young men to do their duty into eternity. That is the kind of people who are on watch all over the world tonight - for you.

We Marines believe that God gave America the greatest gift he could bestow to man while he lived on this earth - freedom. We also believe he gave us another gift nearly as precious - our soldiers, sailors, airmen, U S Customs and Border Patrol, Coast Guardsmen, and Marines - to safeguard that gift and guarantee no force on this earth can ever steal it away.

It has been my distinct honor to have been with you here today. Rest assured our America, this experiment in democracy started over two centuries ago, will forever remain the "land of the free and home of the brave" so long as we never run out of tough young Americans who are willing to look beyond their own self-interest and

comfortable lives, and go into the darkest and most dangerous places on earth to hunt down, and kill, those who would do us harm.

God Bless America , and SEMPER FIDELIS !"

[Source: Military Service Coalition | Brian Colfack | January 4, 2017 ++]

Operation Meetinghouse ► When Fire Rained From the Sky

On the night of March 9-10, 1945, U.S. Twentieth Air Force B-29s burned down 7% of Tokyo and killed some 85,000 people. Probably no one on Major General Curtis LeMay's staff in the Mariana Islands expected the Japanese to capitulate in the aftermath, but the unprecedented fire blitz on the enemy capital would set the standard for five months of operations to come.

By the summer of 1944, four B-29 groups were operating from India, staging through China within maximum range of southern Japan. LeMay, Army Air Forces chief Henry "Hap" Arnold's troubleshooter, turned the hard-pressed XX Bomber Command around, improving efficiency and results. But the Asian mainland proved too demanding logistically, and late that year Superfortresses began flying from the Marianas, 1,500 miles south of Honshu. The emperor's war machine was caught in a geographic vise that permitted no escape. Now commanding XXI Bomber Command on Guam, LeMay concluded that conventional high-level bombing was not producing the desired results. Therefore, in early March 1945 he opted for a dramatic reversal of airpower doctrine. He sent hundreds of Superfortresses against Tokyo armed with incendiary bombs, at low level—at night.

The 9 MAR mission was code-named "Operation Meetinghouse." Of 325 B-29s airborne that evening, 279 unloaded 1,665 tons on the Tokyo urban area while 20 bombers diverted to alternates. The fuel saved by stripping guns from most B-29s and cruising at lower altitudes had doubled the February ordnance average to nearly 6 tons per bomber. Approaching the Japanese coast beneath a quarter moon, B-29 crews tugged on flak vests—heavy, cumbersome garments with steel plates that could stop a shell splinter. Some also donned helmets that interfered with earphones, but the airmen were flying into the enemy's most cherished airspace at a frighteningly low altitude. The primary target was a section of downtown Tokyo measuring three by four miles, recalled by historian John Toland as "once the gayest, liveliest area in the Orient." Though wartime shortages had closed most businesses, the area teemed with life: an estimated 750,000 workers crammed into 12 square miles of low-income housing and family-operated factories. It was probably the most densely populated place on earth.

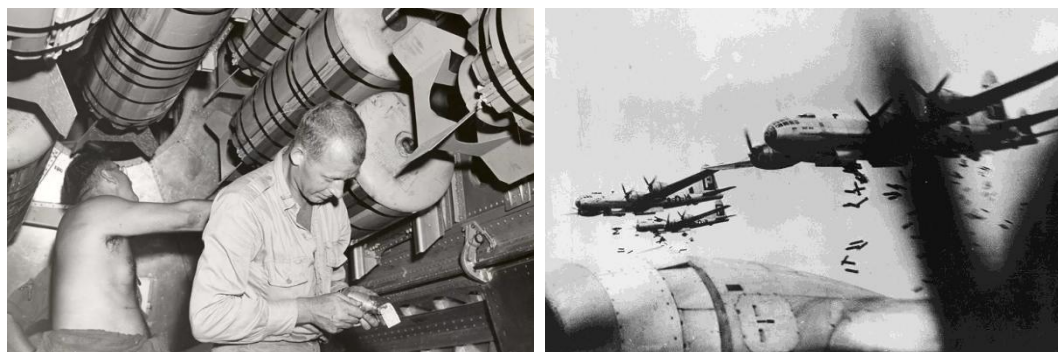
The sirens blared at midnight, but evidently few Japanese were concerned. They were accustomed to repeated alerts, mostly annoying false alarms. Furthermore, radio reports only mentioned American aircraft orbiting at Choshi, a port city 50 miles northeast—seemingly no immediate threat to the capital. Choshi was one of the coast-in points for XXI Bomber Command B-29s. The first bombers were pathfinders, sweeping in low and fast over Tokyo, doing nearly 300 mph at 5,000 feet. Their navigators had worked to perfection with an identical time over target of 12:15 a.m. Approaching at right angles to each other, the B-29s opened their bomb bay doors and the bombardiers toggled their loads. Bundles of incendiaries spewed into the slipstream, cascading onto the urban congestion. As the napalm sticks ignited, they formed a fiery cross on the ground.

The pathfinders did their work well, marking targets for the following bombardiers. Among the best work was the load that marked the Tokyo Electric Power Company. The firebombs seared the buildings, which were engulfed in flames, providing an almost unmissable aim point. For the trailing bombers, X literally marked the spot. Each group and wing had designated target areas, as mission planners had divided the sprawling city into fire zones to avoid excessive concentration in one locale. Attacking between 4,900 and 9,200 feet, 93 percent of the B-29s struck the briefed urban-industrial area. As LeMay had predicted, the defenses were wholly saturated. Searchlights swept their pale white arcs skyward, occasionally illuminating a passing bomber, but seldom long enough for flak gunners

to draw a bead. It was Major Arthur R. Brashear's tenth mission. The 499th Bomb Group's target was the First Fire Zone between the Ara and Sumida rivers. His navigator's notes summed up most fliers' reactions to the defenses: "Night incendiary at 5,000 ft. Caught in lights for a short time. All kinds of flak, mostly inaccurate. No hits but this one had us scared!"

Almost half a million M-69 firebombs cascaded down from the night sky, and wherever they hit they spurted their napalm-filled cheesecloth bags. In a matter of minutes thousands of small fires from the little "fiery pancakes" were swallowing everything they touched, coalescing and swelling into a roaring conflagration unlike anything man had previously inflicted upon man. A Vichy French journalist reported on the scene: "Bright flashes illuminate the sky's shadows, Christmas trees blossoming with flame in the depths of the night, then hurtling downward in zigzagging bouquets of flame, whistling as they fall. Barely 15 minutes after the beginning of the attack, the fire whipped up by the wind starts to rake through the depths of the wooden city." As the sky over the city became superheated, huge amounts of air were sucked upward through multistory buildings in the "stack effect," draining the cool air from ground level to feed the insatiable stack. As more and more ground air was drawn into the conflagration from farther afield, the firestorm spread of its own accord.

A fully developed firestorm is a horrifically mesmerizing sight. It seems like a living, malicious creature that feeds upon itself, generating ever higher winds that whirl cyclonically, breeding updrafts that suck the oxygen out of the atmosphere even while the flames consume the fuel—buildings—that feed the monster's ravenous appetite. Most firestorm victims do not burn to death. Rather, as carbon monoxide quickly reaches lethal levels, people suffocate from lack of oxygen and excessive smoke inhalation. In Tokyo that night some citizens felt that hell had slipped its nether bounds and raised itself through the earth's crust to feed on the surface. People fled panic-stricken from searing heat amid the demonic roar of flames, the crash of collapsing buildings and the milling congestion of terrified human beings. Some survivors found themselves suddenly naked, the clothes burned off their bodies, leaving their skin largely intact.



Armorers fuse 500lb incendiary bombs (left) that have been loaded into a 500th Bomb Group B-29 Superfortress. Incendiary bombs tumble from 20th Air Force B-29s over Yokohama in May 1945.

In those frightful hours humans watched things happen on a scale that probably had never before been witnessed. The superheated ambient air boiled the water out of ponds and canals while rains of liquid glass flew, propelled by cyclonic winds. Temperatures reached 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit, melting the frames of emergency vehicles and causing some people to ignite in spontaneous combustion. Decades of Japanese unpreparedness and complacency took a terrible toll, with barely 8,000 firemen to cover an area of 213 square miles. There were insufficient shelters and, perhaps worse, too few fire lanes to prevent one conflagration from spreading into another. Even adequate firebreaks might not have helped that night. The bombers possessed an invincible ally in the form of stiff southeasterly winds that whipped and whirled burning embers from one neighborhood to another. Wherever the fiery brands landed, they spread the flames uncontrollably.

Tokyo's fire department fought a losing battle from the first few minutes. The fire chief spent a horrible night dashing from one area to another, trying to coordinate his insufficient resources. His sedan caught fire twice. The

firemen were gallantly ineffective with their towed water carts and hand pumps—poor substitutes for firetrucks, many of which stalled in the chaos and, immobilized, melted into the street. Nearly 100 fire engines were incinerated with hundreds of personnel. Those numbers, pitifully small within the context of the greater catastrophe, further emphasize Tokyo's woeful unpreparedness. It was no better in residential areas, where the burden fell upon thousands of pitifully prepared neighborhood associations. Small groups of families tried to comply with government dictates to swat at fires with dampened cloths or sandbags, or vainly attempted to douse blazing napalm with buckets of water.

Everywhere people were forced to rely on their own meager resources. Factory worker Hidezo Tsuchikura saved his family and himself by climbing into a water tank on a school roof. Tsuchikura later made a Dantesque comparison: "The whole spectacle with its blinding lights and thundering noise reminded me of the paintings of purgatory—a real inferno out of the depths of hell itself." Not even the imperial bunker was immune. When the firestorm's high winds dropped burning embers onto the emperor's Obunko, shrubs and camouflage material ignited. Palace guards and staff were reduced to subduing the flames using water pails and even tree branches. Safely underground, Emperor Hirohito and Empress Kojun sat out the attack in their bunker. The empress had observed her 42nd birthday three days previously, and now they had planned on celebrating their grandson's first. Instead they tasted the acrid outside air that slipped through the filters and vents.



Tokyo residential section virtually destroyed.(left), the charred body of a woman who was carrying a child on her back (center), and charred remains of Japanese civilians.

Brigadier General Thomas Power's B-29 had fuel to spare and circled the spreading inferno for 90 minutes, radioing a play-by-play of the growing catastrophe. Because post-strike photos would not be available for a day or more, the wing commander had cartographers on board to plot the extent of the fires for immediate assessment back at Guam. He noted that it took just 30 minutes for the first bombs to spread into a fully developed conflagration. Actually, it was half that time. On the ground, some witnesses reported that from the moment the first firebombs struck, only 14 minutes passed before "the hellfire began." A firestorm also could threaten the airmen who created it. Bomber crews over urban areas had to contend with wind shear as well as powerful thermals. The firestorms created violent cyclones and vertical winds that could toss 50-ton bombers onto their backs.

Captain Gordon B. Robertson and his 29th Group crew, who flew their first mission that night, received a terrifying initiation to combat. Caught by searchlights at 5,600 feet and nearly blinded by the glare, Robertson and his copilot fought to keep the wings level until "bombs away." By then the attack was well developed, with incredible updrafts that lifted some B-29s 5,000 feet. The Superfortress felt, the pilot said, "like a cork on water in a hurricane." Abruptly Robertson's bomber rolled, its wings tilted at an angle alarmingly past the vertical. Pilots and crew were conscious of a rain of debris inside the B-29: everything from sand and cigarette butts to oxygen masks falling from the floor. The fliers realized they were upside down. It was a chilling sensation to see the fiery world "below" suddenly appear through the top of the cockpit. Robertson, an experienced flight instructor, oriented himself to the ground. In a maneuver more suited to a fighter, he allowed the huge bomber to fall nose-first through the bottom half of a loop, completing a split-S maneuver that compressed the crew into their seats under the onerous foot of gravity's elephant. The B-29 accelerated rapidly, clocking 400 mph at the bottom—about as fast as a

Superfort ever went. Fighting the heavy aerodynamic loads on the controls, Robertson expended much of his momentum to regain precious altitude.

About 90 American fliers died that night and at least six more later perished in captivity. Aircraft losses among the 299 effective sorties totaled 14 planes downed, ditched or demolished by enemy action or accident, including two crews lost in bad weather, three bombers ditched in the sea and one plane crash-landed on Iwo Jima. That equaled 4.6%, right in line with LeMay's eerily accurate prediction of 5 percent. The surviving B-29s turned southward with ashes streaked on their glass noses and appalling odors sucked inside the fuselages. Though they were flying well below the standard 10,000 feet for oxygen bottles, some men strapped on their masks to escape the stench of burning flesh.

In the aftermath, Tokyo's survivors struggled to deal with the massive calamity and found no standard of comparison. Medical services were reduced to insignificance: The only military rescue unit in the capital numbered nine doctors and 11 nurses. Not even the capital's combined civil and military emergency services could ease human suffering on such an unprecedented scale. "Stacked up corpses were being hauled away on lorries," Fusako Sasaki recalled. "Everywhere there was the stench of the dead and of smoke. I saw the places on the pavement where people had been roasted to death. At last I comprehended first-hand what an air raid meant." American intelligence monitored a Japanese radio report that said: "Red fire clouds kept creeping high and the tower of the Parliament Building stuck out black against the background of the red sky. During the night we thought the whole of Tokyo had been reduced to ashes."

Spread by panic-driven rumor, exaggerated Japanese accounts of the disaster claimed as much as 40% of the city had been destroyed. In truth, 7% of metropolitan Tokyo—16 square miles—had been razed that night. But with that level of destruction inflicted in less than three hours, the capital could well be completely leveled in two weeks of continuous operations. The grimmest measure of Meetinghouse's effectiveness was found in a single astonishing number. During 10 previous attacks since November, Tokyo had sustained fewer than 1,300 deaths. Then, literally overnight, at least 84,000 were killed and 40,000 injured. (Reports of 100,000 dead probably included displaced persons unaccounted for.) More than a quarter-million buildings were destroyed, leaving 1.1 million people homeless. Damage to Japan's industry was considerable. The 16 facilities destroyed or badly damaged included steel production, petroleum storage and public services. And no one could calculate the number of small feeder factories and family shops that had been incinerated in the residential areas.

One of the most illuminating comments on Meetinghouse came from Maj. Gen. Haruo Onuma of the Japanese army general staff: "The effect of incendiary bombing on the capital's organization and the disposition of factories of Japan was very great, and, accompanying this, the main productive power was stopped. It [also] decreased the will of the people to continue the war." Tokuji Takeuchi of the Ministry of Interior echoed that from a civilian perspective: "It was the great incendiary attacks on 10 March 1945 on Tokyo which definitely made me realize the defeat."

LeMay's fire blitz continued two nights later, with 310 bombers over Nagoya. The atmospheric conditions were far less favorable than at Tokyo, however, and the many initial fires never merged into a mass conflagration. About two square miles were burned. The next night, March 13, was Osaka's turn. A cloud deck forced most planes to drop by radar, but the incendiaries did their job, charring eight square miles of the industrial and port areas. Subsequent missions scalded Kobe on March 16-17 and Nagoya again on the 19th, each time with 300 or more B-29s. The five incendiary missions constituted some 1,400 bombing sorties that razed or burned 30 square miles of urban-industrial area. The cost was 21 Superforts. Meanwhile, XXI Bomber Command stood down for a few days while the Navy delivered more bombs to replenish nearly empty bunkers.

The postwar Strategic Bombing Survey tentatively concluded that some 330,000 Japanese died in B-29 attacks within 14 months—the huge majority in six months. The actual numbers are unknowable, but for context the Anglo-American bombing offensive in Europe killed between 500,000 and 600,000 Germans in four years. Pundits have claimed that the Meetinghouse raid killed more people than the atomic bombings of Hiroshima or Nagasaki, the

death tolls from which remain controversial even today. But one thing is indisputable: The fire raids against Japan's urban-industrial areas inflicted massive damage on a scale and efficiency seldom seen before or since. Airpower had won its terrible, decisive victory. [Source: History.net | Barrett Tillman | June 29, 2016 ++]

Operation Linebacker II ▶ **Vietnam Maximum Effort Bombing Campaign**

Operation Linebacker II was a US Seventh Air Force and US Navy Task Force 77 aerial bombing campaign, conducted against targets in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) during the final period of US involvement in the Vietnam War. The operation was conducted from 18 to 29 December 1972, leading to several informal names such as "The December Raids" and "The Christmas Bombings". Unlike the Operation Rolling Thunder and Operation Linebacker interdiction operations, Linebacker II was to be a "maximum effort" bombing campaign to "destroy major target complexes in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas, which could only be accomplished by B-52s". It saw the largest heavy bomber strikes launched by the US Air Force since the end of World War II. Linebacker II was a modified extension of the Operation Linebacker bombings conducted from May to October, when the emphasis of the new campaign shifted to attacks by B-52s rather than smaller. Although the operation was eventually successful mistakes were made at high levels that resulted in the unnecessary loss of aircraft and their crews. The overall operation and these mistakes are discussed by participants of the operation in the 38 min video **Sully, A General's Decision** at <https://vimeo.com/195186849>. Worth watching . [Source: Military Service Coalition Austin TX | Brian Colfack | January 6, 2016 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ▶ **16 thru 31 JAN**

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 JAN**". [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | December 2016 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ▶ **Epperson, Harold Glenn | WWII**



*The President of the United States in the name of The Congress
takes pleasure in presenting the
Medal of Honor posthumously
to*

HAROLD GLENN EPPERSON

Rank and organization: Private First Class, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, 2d Marine Division

Place and date: Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands 25 June 1944

Entered service: December 12, 1942.

Born: July 14, 1923, Akron, Ohio

Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving with the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, 2d Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces on the Island of Saipan in the Marianas, on 25 June 1944. With his machinegun emplacement bearing the full brunt of a fanatic assault initiated by the Japanese under cover of predawn darkness, Pfc. Epperson manned his weapon with determined aggressiveness, fighting furiously in the defense of his battalion's position and maintaining a steady stream of devastating fire against rapidly infiltrating hostile troops to aid materially in annihilating several of the enemy and in breaking the abortive attack. Suddenly a Japanese soldier, assumed to be dead, sprang up and hurled a powerful hand grenade into the emplacement. Determined to save his comrades, Pfc. Epperson unhesitatingly chose to sacrifice himself and, diving upon the deadly missile, absorbed the shattering violence of the exploding charge in his own body. Stouthearted and indomitable in the face of certain death, Pfc. Epperson fearlessly yielded his own life that his able comrades might carry on the relentless battle against a ruthless enemy. His superb valor and unfaltering devotion to duty throughout reflect the highest credit upon himself and upon the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.



Epperson's Medal of Honor was presented to his mother in a ceremony on Wednesday, July 4, 1945 in Tiger Stadium, Massillon, Ohio, with the Massillon High School Band and 8,500 of the people of the town where Epperson grew up. The medal was presented by Col. Norman E. True, district Marine officer of the 9th Naval District and commanding officer of the Marine Barracks at Great Lakes, Illinois. Epperson's parents, who moved to Mt. Sterling, Kentucky following their son's death, returned to Massillon for the ceremonies because they felt their son "would have liked it that way." The citation signed by President Harry S. Truman, and a letter from Gen. Alexander A. Vandegrift, Commandant of the Marine Corps, were read by Col. True during the ceremony.

The USS Epperson (DD-719), a destroyer named in honor of Harold Epperson, was launched on December 23, 1945, in Port Newark, New Jersey.

Initially buried in the 2d Marine Division Cemetery on Saipan, Marianas Islands, PFC Epperson's remains were re-interred in Winchester Cemetery, Winchester, Kentucky, in 1948.

[Source: <http://www.history.army.mil/moh> | January 2016 ++]



Drug Price Gouging ► SAC Report Released

U.S. Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Claire McCaskill (D-MO), the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Aging Committee, have released a report on drug pricing titled, "Sudden Price Spikes in Off-Patent Prescription Drugs: The Monopoly Business Model that Harms Patients, Taxpayers, and the U.S. Health Care System." The 131-page report which can be accessed at <http://www.pharmwatch.org/reports/pricing.pdf> details findings from the Committee's investigation into abrupt price increases for prescription drugs whose patents expired long ago. The report examines how companies acquired and raised the prices of decades-old, off-patent, and previously affordable drugs to the detriment of patients, insurance companies, providers, hospitals, and the government. The report also discusses policy responses:

- The Increasing Competition in Pharmaceuticals Act (S. 2615), introduced by Collins and McCaskill, would address regulatory factors that serve as limitations to generic entry.
- Permitting highly targeted, temporary prescription drug importation could provide prompt price relief for major price increases in off-patent drugs. This would require giving the FDA the power to permit temporary importation.
- The Federal Trade Commission can take greater enforcement action on drug company mergers and operations that are anti-competitive.
- Greater transparency in the health care system would call public and legislative attention to drug price manipulation that is now hidden.

The Prescription Justice Action Group, which advocates for legislative and regulatory reforms to help Americans who are struggling to afford prescription medication, has launched a free weekly e-mail report on relevant news. To subscribe go to <http://www.pjag.org>. [Source: Consumer Health Digest #17-01 | January 1, 2017 ++]

Mindfulness Exercises ► Improve Your Health With 4

Mindfulness benefits both the mind and body. It can help you maintain control and balance and achieve your goals. Mindfulness can also help improve breathing, posture and other components of mind-body wellness through simple exercises. In addition to supporting psychological health, mindfulness can help improve overall wellness, said Mark Bates, associate director of psychological health promotion for the Deployment Health Clinical Center. "Psychological health is not just absence of illness, but a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being," Bates said, referencing the World Health Organization definition. "You can easily work mindfulness exercises into day-to-day life without disrupting regular routines. In addition, linking new behaviors to existing routines (PDF) is a powerful way to create new habits," Bates said.



Col. Joel Aoki, command inspector general for Special Operations Command Central, practices breathing techniques

“These very simple activities, when used every day, can make a big difference,” Bates said. “In fact, the power of these exercises — also called microhabits — lies in their simplicity and their benefits grow the more regularly you use them.” To start, choose an exercise that seems like a good fit with your goals and interests, Bates said. As you grow comfortable with that exercise, you can add more. Involving friends and family, and rewarding yourself, can help with motivation. Here are four exercises you can try today:

- **Grounding.** Increase stability in body and mind by coming to rest in a symmetrical and balanced position. For example, use a seated position that allows the floor and chair to fully support the weight of your body. Notice what it feels like to let your body fully relax.
- **Controlled breathing.** Take slow, deep breaths and focus on how your body moves while breathing. This can activate the body’s relaxation system and you can do it in almost any setting. Apps like Breathe2Relax can help you learn healthy breathing.
- **Stretching.** Stretching the neck and shoulders helps you increase awareness of the tension in your body and its release. The Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center offers a guided video of neck stretches that are great for anyone to do anywhere, including the workplace.
- **Self-monitoring.** Simply tracking your experiences during the day can help you increase awareness and reach behavioral goals. Keeping a record or a visual reminder can help. The T2 Mood Tracker mobile app can also help you monitor your mood from your smartphone.

Practice mindfulness in daily activities by making it a part of your daily routine. Minimize distractions, keep good posture, focus on one thing at a time and stay aware of the senses. Each of these steps will benefit overall wellness. Finally, be sure to focus on how each exercise will improve wellness. Don’t simply go through the motions, you’ll see more benefits when you use these tips with intention, Bates said. To learn more about mindfulness, visit the DCoE mindfulness blog page <http://www.dcoe.mil/blog.aspx?BlogTagID=e434b036-9c02-436d-9f47-3be7a4820911?BlogTagID=e434b036-9c02-436d-9f47-3be7a4820911>. [Source: DCoE Public Affairs | Sidney R. Hinds III | January 5, 2017++]

End of Life Update 03 ► Physician Survey on Medical Aid In Dying

The vote before the Massachusetts Medical Society was whether to approve a survey — just a survey — of members’ attitudes toward “medical aid in dying.” But the discussion last month launched dozens of doctors into a broader emotional debate over end-of-life decisions for their patients. One doctor invoked the “death with dignity”

message of South African Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu, while another cited the “do no harm” mantra of the Greek physician Hippocrates. In the end, the policy-making body decisively endorsed the survey and approved \$25,000 to fund it — a sign that the Massachusetts Medical Society may be reconsidering its historic rejection of what it has called “physician-assisted suicide.” It comes as this movement to give terminally ill patients an option to end their life at a time of their choosing is gaining traction, propelled in part by some physicians’ groups dropping their longstanding opposition.

The debate — in a hearing room packed with 200 delegates — revealed deep divisions and perhaps hints of change. The doctors even disagreed about what words to use to describe the movement. Supporters preferred to call it “medical aid in dying” and emphasized the protracted suffering of terminally ill patients. But critics prefer the term “physician-assisted suicide,” and they emphasized that doctors are entering a slippery slope if they are allowed to prescribe fatal drugs to hasten a patient’s death. Speaking in favor of the survey, one physician warned that many in this profession, particularly older doctors, may be out of step with an end-of-life movement that is attracting widespread public support in many parts of the country.^v “A lot of us — whether we want to admit it or not — are afraid of death,” a Wareham doctor said at the hearing.

The Massachusetts Medical Society has never before surveyed its 25,000 physicians and medical students about end-of-life options, which are now legally available in six states — Oregon, Washington, Vermont, Montana, California, and Colorado — and appear on the brink of final city enactment in Washington, D.C. And the medical society also approved funding for the poll at a level that was more than double what was originally requested. The society’s renewed involvement also comes at a time when one of its own members — a retired Falmouth physician who has metastatic prostate cancer — is waging a public legal battle over “medical aid in dying.”

Dr. Roger Kligler, who spoke at the medical society’s hearing last month, filed a state lawsuit in October, arguing he has a constitutional right to obtain a lethal dose of medicine, if he is deemed by a doctor to have less than six months to live, and choose when he dies to avoid needless suffering. The suit is expected to be heard in court this year. “I want to maintain my dignity and quality of life until the end,” Kligler said as he addressed the delegates. “Now on the receiving end of modern medicine, I understand even more acutely how we physicians must share decision-making with our patients . . . I also understand the value of control.” Kligler — and other physicians who share his view — face a lengthy history of opposition inside the state’s medical establishment.

Since 1996, the Massachusetts Medical Society’s top delegates have voted to oppose what it called “physician-assisted suicide,” and in 2012 it joined the Catholic Church and some disability groups in lobbying against a “death with dignity” ballot initiative in Massachusetts. Voters narrowly defeated the initiative, despite early polls indicating that the public favored it. Medical society officials in Massachusetts have also lobbied against proposed state legislation on the issue. But in recent years some physicians’ organizations in other states have begun to drop their opposition, in a prelude to legalization of the option in their states, said Sean Crowley, spokesman for Compassion & Choices, a nonprofit dedicated to passage of such measures nationwide.

In May 2015, the California Medical Association became the first state medical organization to change its historic opposition, voting to become “neutral” to its state’s end-of-life bill. That legislation passed and went into effect last year. The Colorado Medical Society also took a neutral position on the issue last year, which played a major role in the passage of a ballot initiative in November, Crowley said. A national survey on ethics last fall by Medscape, a major online medical news outlet, also shows rising support among physicians. Among 7,500 physicians who responded, 57 percent believed an end-of-life option should be available to terminally ill patients, up from 54 percent in 2014 and 46 percent in 2010. Meanwhile, some state doctors’ groups are awaiting a report this year on the topic due from the American Medical Association, the largest national physicians’ group.

Given the soon-to-be-released national report, Dr. Barbara Rockett, who has twice served as president of the Massachusetts Medical Society and long opposed the end-of-life option, urged her colleagues last month to table the survey until the national group’s report is completed. She said she saw the vote over the survey as the “well-orchestrated” political work of a small group of doctors trying to reignite this issue in Massachusetts. “Suddenly it

comes up now as a survey,” Rockett said after the vote. “To me, it’s wasted money.” She also said she disapproves of the term “medical aid in dying,” which she thinks attempts to neutralize the profound ethical issues for doctors. “Let’s call it what it is — physician-assisted suicide,” she said. But supporters of this option say “suicide” is an emotionally loaded — and inaccurate — term because terminally ill patients who seek this alternative are not suicidal, but want to live. In states with such laws, they say, many safeguards are in place. Doctors in these states are authorized to prescribe a lethal dose of medications to patients who are deemed by clinicians to have less than six months to live and are mentally sound, according to Crowley. The drugs must be self-administered by the patient.

Dr. Eric Ruby, a pediatrician from Taunton and coauthor of the resolution to approve the survey, said many physicians — in their professional and personal life — have experience with medical care that “prolongs death, rather than enhances the quality of life.” He said he watched his father die painfully of prostate cancer. In his final month of life, he said, his father, as he withered away, was either sedated or awake in severe pain. He told his family, “It’s taking me too long to die.” Ruby said his mother, now 93, told him, “Don’t let this happen to me.” Some physicians acknowledged, after the meeting, that current medical practice has an ethical gray zone, one in which doctors administer high doses of painkillers to lessen a patient’s acute pain, which they know will likely hasten death due to the medications’ effect on the lungs and other organs. Ruby said that scenario, however, is not the same as giving terminally ill patients control over when and how they die.

Meanwhile, Dr. Mary Louise Ashur, an internal medicine doctor in Needham who spoke largely against the resolution, said advances in palliative care must be front and center in this debate, and this reflects the medical community’s ongoing compassion toward the dying. She said most terminally ill patients are not writhing in pain as they die. “For most people, death comes peacefully,” she said. The specific questions in the poll — and who will oversee it and how it will be unrolled — have yet to be finalized, said society spokesman Rick Gulla. Meanwhile, both sides are staying in close touch with the medical society to hear details of the survey. Said Rockett: “How they word this will be important.” [Source: The Boston Globe | Patricia Wen | January 03, 2017 ++]

Energy Drinks Update 01 ► Reasons to Avoid Overuse

We’ve all seen them before. The cans, small shots and uniquely packaged drinks that promise to give you an energy boost during the most important parts of your day. At first glance, it seems like a great idea: chug it down and get reinvigorated for the day. But, if you go beyond wanting to simply stay alert and begin to overindulge, you could wind up doing some serious harm to your body. Energy drinks became the beverage of choice for many service members during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Walter Reed Army Institute of Research analyzed data collected during Operation Enduring Freedom in 2010 and found nearly 45 percent of deployed service members consumed at least one energy drink daily. Nearly 14 percent reported drinking three or more per day. But, there are real reasons to avoid overusing energy drinks:



Energy drinks can cause drastic side effects -- Energy drinks are loaded with caffeine, and too much of it isn’t good for you. Dr. Patricia Deuster, professor and director of the Consortium for Health and Military Performance at

the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, warns service members to avoid consuming more than 200 mg of caffeine every four hours. “If it’s got more than 200 mg of caffeine, don’t use it,” cautions Deuster. Deuster also warns female service members to be cautious about using energy drinks, noting the amount of caffeine you ingest relative to body weight is an issue for women. “Women get a higher concentration [of caffeine] since they tend to be smaller,” she said. “Doctors don’t know what the effects of [energy drink] ingredients are in larger doses,” Deuster noted. “I don’t think anybody has an answer to the long term effects question.” High amounts of caffeine can lead to increased blood pressure, panic attacks, heart palpitations, anxiety, dehydration, insomnia, and even bowel irritability when energy drinks are mixed with alcohol.

Energy drinks can activate your sweet tooth -- Energy drinks are loaded with sugar. Some cans pack a punch of 27 grams of sugar — two thirds of the recommended daily maximum for men, and 2 grams more than the maximum doctors recommend for women. Some service members can double or even triple that if they drink more than one energy drink per day.

They can make you pack on the pounds -- All of that extra sugar can cause your blood sugar to increase. Even the sugar-free versions of energy drinks can lead to weight gain, as research suggests artificial sweeteners may raise blood sugar, too. Your body can also begin storing fat, especially if you’re unable to increase physical activity.

Energy drinks + alcohol = a dangerous cocktail -- “A lot of the young people mix energy drinks with alcoholic beverages, then you’ve got a wide awake drunk,” says Deuster. The CDC warns that when alcoholic beverages are mixed with energy drinks, the caffeine stimulant can mask the effects of the alcohol, which is a depressant. Often, the person drinking doesn’t even realize that they’re actually drunk. According to the CDC, that means people who mix alcohol with energy drinks are three times more likely to binge drink than those who don’t mix alcohol with energy drinks. Some companies sell pre-mixed alcoholic energy drinks which have the same sweet or tart flavors as standard energy drinks. As the Army notes, the alcohol content in these beverages can be significantly higher than what’s found in beer. These energy drinks with alcohol may appeal to underage drinkers because they’re cheaper than hard liquor and they’re marketed with a message that the drinker can last all day or all night long. The sugary nature of the beverages also makes drinkers feel they can imbibe longer than if they were having harder alcohol.

Energy drinks can ruin your good night’s sleep -- Deuster raises concerns about a problem in the military with energy drinks and sleep. And, the data back up those concerns. While service members may initially use energy drinks to make up for a lack of sleep, overuse can lead to a harmful cycle. Dr. Nancy J. Wesensten, from the Center for Military Psychiatry and Neurosciences Research, tells Army Medicine that research on caffeine shows that it can be effective if used properly. However, Wesensten notes “because caffeine impairs sleep, individuals should stop all caffeine consumption at least 6 hours prior to scheduled sleep. Otherwise, sleep could be impaired without the person even being aware of it.” As caffeine is the major ingredient in energy drinks, the CDC reports service members who drink three or more energy drinks per day were significantly more likely to report sleeping fewer than four hours per night. They were also more likely to report disrupted sleep and other illnesses. Research indicates service members who drank three or more energy drinks each day also had difficulty staying awake during briefings or on guard duty.

You really don’t know what’s in them -- Energy drinks are not regulated as dietary supplements. While the cans have nutrition labels, many do not list supplement information. One area that’s concerning to Deuster is the ingredient taurine. The chemical compound is an amino acid found in animal tissue. Many energy drink makers purport the ingredient will enhance mental and physical performance. Researchers with the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center report little is actually known about taurine’s neuroendocrine effects.

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So, what should service members use instead of energy drinks? Deuster keeps it simple: “Good old water.” Appealing to service members’ frugality, she adds, “If you want to save money, drink water.” [Source: Health.mil | Yolanda R. Arrington | January 3, 2017 ++]

NDAA 2017 Update 26 ► **Avalanche of TRICARE Changes**

The National Defense Authorization Act (S.2943) signed into law 23 DEC orders an avalanche of changes to the Tricare health care benefit used by servicemembers, retirees and their families. It also makes sweeping reforms to how the military direct-care system is organized and operates. The sheer number of changes and additional studies being mandated, filling 40 sections and 150 pages of the Act, is more impressive than any short list of highlights we might be able to review here. “There’s a lot of good stuff in there. There’s a lot of stuff we’re still puzzling over,” said Dr. Karen S. Guice, acting assistant secretary of defense for health affairs. She will serve in that post only two more weeks, until the Trump administration assumes responsibility for the \$50-billion-a-year military health care system and a beneficiary population of 9.6 million.

The authorization act for fiscal 2017 “is full of ideas, concepts and new things for us to tackle,” said Guice in phone interview. She added that it contains “a remarkable series of provisions that set forth some challenges [and] provides us with new authorities that we’re greatly looking forward to.” But Guice emphasized many new provisions to modernize Tricare and improve access will only accelerate reforms that the department already has been piloting or planning to adopt, though perhaps not at the speed Congress desired. The department’s guide has been recommendations of the 2014 Military Healthcare System Review, which then-Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel ordered to take a hard look at performance and outcomes at military facilities and through civilian purchased-care networks, Guice said.

Beneficiaries have started to see the fruits of that effort in greater access to care and a nurse advice line. They will see more when the new generation of Tricare purchased-care contracts takes effect this year, and also with gradual rollout of MHS Genesis, the new electronic health records system. All this before many of the new defense bill initiatives kick in in 2018 and years beyond. Associations advocating for beneficiaries wonder how many changes the health system can implement before chaos rules. Guice doesn’t sound worried for the staff she’s leaving behind. “We have a lot of very experienced, motivated people who just like to tackle challenges,” she said. “Also, we are looking at this across the enterprise so it’s the Army, Navy, Air Force all coming together about how we actually do this.”

The Senate version of the defense bill had called for dismantling the medical headquarters of the Army, Navy and Air Force surgeons general. The enacted law is a compromise that directs a shift of key management functions done by the services to the Defense Health Agency, leaving the surgeons general to recruit, educate and train their military and civilian health care providers and to advise DHA on medical readiness issues. “That’s an interesting construct,” said Guice. “And we’re kind of figuring out how best to optimize what Congress is intending to achieve.” Congress staggered deadlines in the law across a span of years. “They knew there was a lot of work here and allowed flexibility by pushing out some timelines or saying do this work and then the timeline kicks in,” Guice said. “I think they want us to take our time and get it right.”

There are gems in the law for families seeking more timely care. One provision ends a requirement that Tricare Prime users get referrals from primary care providers before using a neighborhood urgent care facility. Another provision mandates that military treatment facilities with urgent care clinics keep them open daily until at least 11 p.m. Those “are both wins for families,” said Brooke Goldberg, deputy director of government relations for family issues at Military Officers Association of America. Other law highlights she noted require:

- Adoption of a standardized appointment scheduling system across all of military health care and also first-call resolution of appointments.
- New Tricare contracts incentives to improve beneficiary access, care outcomes and enhanced beneficiary experiences.

- Adoption of new productivity standards for care providers in military treatment facilities, which should mean more on-base appointments.
- Military providers' performance reports to include measures of accountability for patient access, quality of care, outcomes and safety.

Military families will be eligible by 2018 to buy vision coverage through federal employee health programs, explained Karen Ruediseuli, government relations deputy director for National Military Family Association. Retirees and dependents will be eligible for both dental and vision programs.

Some changes touted by Congress are not quite what they seem. For example, the planned narrowing of three insurance options — Tricare Prime, Standard and Extra — down to two, with Prime still providing managed care and Tricare “Select” offering a preferred provider network, is largely a name change push by DOD. Goldberg said it could even be “transparent to families who really don’t know the nuances of Standard vs. Extra.” Many beneficiaries, she added, “just know they have to pay more if they see one [civilian] provider over another. Many have been using Extra, calling it Standard and not realizing it.”

Still to be determined “is what the preferred-provider network will look like and will families be able to easily discern which services will result in higher costs? And will they have access to providers who are low-cost?” For example, current Tricare provider networks include those who participate in Prime and agree to take a discount from the normal Medicare-based payment. But many providers willing to see Standard patients for its allowable fee will not see Prime patients with its lower fee. “Will those providers be considered preferred providers under Tricare Select, or will the Select network only include those who participate as part of the Prime network? If the former is true, then the transition likely will be smooth. If the latter is true, many more people could be hit with out-of-network charges, to the extent they aren’t grandfathered,” said Goldberg.

Adding some confusion is language that grandfathers current generations of military families and retirees from a new schedule of higher fees to hit those who enter service on or after Jan. 1, 2018. But the law will require current beneficiaries to enroll in Select, as they do with Prime, and enrollment will carry a fee for retirees under age 65, beginning in 2020, if a government audit confirms improvements in quality care and patient access.

Guice took exception to one senator’s characterization of the new law as a “first step in the evolution” of military health care from “an under-performing, disjointed health system into a high-performing, integrated” one. She noted a recent National Academy of Medicine study on military trauma care that found that over a decade of war the U.S. military had made unprecedented gains in survivability rates from battlefield wounds. “I don’t think that’s reflective of an underperforming system at all,” Guice said. “The people who created that learning system of care are the same people who provide the in-garrison care. That is evidence we really do value constant performance improvement.” [Source: Special To Stars And Stripes | Tom Philpott | January 5, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Pub Updates 01 ► As of JAN 2017

The TRICARE Beneficiary Publications Office has recently updated the following publications to reflect 2017 premium rates:

- [file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Costs_Sheet%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Costs_Sheet%20(3).pdf) Costs and Fees Sheet JAN 2017
- [file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/TYA_FS%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/TYA_FS%20(1).pdf) TRICARE Young Adult Fact Sheet JAN 2017

You can download the documents at the above sites or from the TRICARE website www.tricare.mil/publications.

[Source: Tricare communications | January 6, 2016 ++]

Deep Vein Thrombosis ► Know the Symptoms

Lots of things can cause pain and swelling in your leg. But if your symptoms stem from a blood clot deep in your leg, it can be dangerous. Blood clots can happen to anyone, anytime. But some people are at increased risk. Taking steps to reduce your chances of a blood clot forming in your veins can help you avoid potentially serious problems. Blood clots can arise anywhere in your body. They develop when blood thickens and clumps together. When a clot forms in a vein deep in the body, it's called deep vein thrombosis (DVT). Deep vein blood clots typically occur in the lower leg or thigh.



“Deep vein thrombosis has classic symptoms—for example swelling, pain, warmth, and redness on the leg,” says Dr. Andrei Kindzelski, an NIH blood disease expert. “But about 30–40% of cases go unnoticed, since they don’t have typical symptoms.” In fact, some people don’t realize they have a deep vein clot until it causes a more serious condition. Deep vein clots—especially those in the thigh—can break off and travel through the bloodstream. If a clot lodges in an artery in the lungs, it can block blood flow and lead to a sometimes-deadly condition called pulmonary embolism. This disorder can damage the lungs and reduce blood oxygen levels, which can harm other organs as well.

The precise number of people affected by DVT/PE is unknown, although as many as 900,000 people could be affected (1 to 2 per 1,000) each year in the United States. Estimates suggest that 60,000-100,000 Americans die of DVT/PE (also called venous thromboembolism). Of these 10 to 30% will die within one month of diagnosis and sudden death is the first symptom in about one-quarter of people who have a Pulmonary Embolism (PE). Among people who have had a DVT, one-half will have long-term complications (post-thrombotic syndrome) such as swelling, pain, discoloration, and scaling in the affected limb. One-third (about 33%) of people with DVT/PE will have a recurrence within 10 years. Approximately 5 to 8% of the U.S. population has one of several genetic risk factors, also known as inherited thrombophilias in which a genetic defect can be identified that increases the risk for thrombosis.

Some people are more at risk for deep vein thrombosis than others. “Usually people who develop deep vein thrombosis have some level of thrombophilia, which means their blood clots more rapidly or easily,” Kindzelski says. Getting a blood clot is usually the first sign of this condition because it’s hard to notice otherwise. In these cases, lifestyle can contribute to a blood clot forming—if you don’t move enough, for example. Your risk is higher if you’ve recently had surgery or broken a bone, if you’re ill and in bed for a long time, or if you’re traveling for a long time (such as during long car or airplane rides). Having other diseases or conditions can also raise your chances of a blood clot. These include a stroke, paralysis (an inability to move), chronic heart disease, high blood pressure, surgical procedure, or having been recently treated for cancer. Women who take hormone therapy pills or birth control pills, are pregnant, or within the first 6 weeks after giving birth are also at higher risk. So are those who smoke or who are older than 60. But deep vein thrombosis can happen at any age.

You can take simple steps to lower your chances for a blood clot. Exercise your lower leg muscles if you’re sitting for a long time while traveling. Get out of bed and move around as soon as you’re able after having surgery or being ill. The more active you are, the better your chance of avoiding a blood clot. Take any medicines your doctor prescribes to prevent clots after some types of surgery. A prompt diagnosis and proper treatment can help prevent the complications of blood clots. See your doctor immediately if you have any signs or symptoms of deep

vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolism (see the Wise Choices box). A physical exam and other tests can help doctors determine whether you've got a blood clot. Symptoms include:

- Swelling of the leg or along a vein in the leg
- Pain or tenderness in the leg, which you may feel only when standing or walking
- Increased warmth in the area of the leg that's swollen or painful
- Red or discolored skin on the leg
- Unexplained shortness of breath
- Pain with deep breathing
- Coughing up blood

There are many ways to treat deep vein thrombosis. Therapies aim to stop the blood clot from getting bigger, prevent the clot from breaking off and moving to your lungs, or reduce your chance of having another blood clot. NIH scientists continue to research new medicines and better treatment options. If you think you may be at risk for deep vein thrombosis, talk with your doctor. [Source: NIH News in Health | January 2017 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 379 ► Referrals | Network Provider | Go Green

Specialty Care Referrals -- Did you know that if you are a Prime beneficiary who needs specialty care services that you must receive a referral from their primary care manager? Getting a referral means your regional or overseas contractor authorizes the care before you make the appointment. TRICARE's rules require that you will be referred to an available military hospital clinic near you first, if they offer the care you need. Military hospitals and clinics have ninety minutes to accept urgent care referrals and two business days to accept referrals for routine care. If your local military hospital or clinic doesn't accept the referral within that time, you will be referred to a network provider near you. Your regional contractor will send a letter with the name and location of your specialty provider. The letter will also tell you what care is authorized, how long you are authorized to get that care, and the type and number of visits you can have before you'll need another referral. You'll want to call your regional contractor and check the status of your referral about three to five days after your Primary Care Manager enters the referral. Remember to get your referral before you make an appointment with a specialty care provider. If you're overseas and are referred to a host-nation provider you should coordinate care through your overseas call center. To learn more about referrals go to www.TRICARE.mil/referrals.

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Network Providers -- Network providers accept TRICARE's payment as the full payment for any covered health care services you get. Network providers also file claims for you and limit your costs to your copayment. Sometimes you may lose your TRICARE network provider if he or she retires, no longer accepts TRICARE or for another reason. If you lose your TRICARE network provider, then go to www.tricare.mil/finddoctor and look for network providers in your region. If you have to change your primary care manager, then you will have to let TRICARE know by using the Beneficiary Web Enrollment website, calling your regional contractor, or by submitting a TRICARE Prime Enrollment, Disenrollment, and Primary Care Manager Change form to your regional contractor. Learn more about changing your primary care manager at www.tricare.mil/changepcm.

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Fitness Goals -- Every year you make the same resolution to get in shape and end the year dissatisfied. Fitness is a long-term goal that's hard to keep in focus. Your poor fitness may make it hard to believe that you can get off the couch, let alone ever get in shape. But it is possible for you to get fit. One of the best ways to get into better shape is to keep yourself focused on incremental goals or "prizes" along the way. This could be anything from completing a race, running farther than you did the day before, or rewarding yourself for getting off the couch with a healthy treat.

Remember to keep self-talk positive and try to visualize yourself achieving your goals. Make sure that your goals are SMART, or: specific, measurable, action-oriented, relevant and time-sensitive. This will help you keep your motivation high. If you take these steps to help you focus on your end goal and ignore distractions around you, then your goals will seem closer and you'll perform better. Check out www.tricare.mil/livewell for more information on healthy living and fitness.

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | January 6, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 380 ► Preventive Services | Students | Go Green

Preventive Services -- TRICARE has added new services and screenings to ensure their preventive services align with United States Preventive Services Task Force recommendations and Health Resources and Services Administration guidelines. Effective 1 JAN, TRICARE now covers annual preventive office visits for all Prime beneficiaries age six and older. Children under age six are already covered by the well-child benefit. The new coverage ensures children receive on-going observations, physical examinations, screenings, immunizations, and various counseling services. TRICARE Standard beneficiaries also receive expanded preventive services with no cost-share or co-pay. Annual well-woman exams continue to be covered for all Prime and Standard beneficiaries under age sixty-five with no cost-share or copayment. However, new covered services include free genetic counseling before BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene testing. Counseling must be done by a TRICARE-authorized provider for women identified as high risk for breast cancer by their primary care providers. TRICARE will also cover BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene testing for women who meet specific coverage guidelines. TRICARE also covers stool DNA testing once every three years starting at age fifty for those with an average risk of colon cancer. This service is covered retroactively to 21 JUN 2016. Make sure to save copies of your receipts and file a claim if you have recently received these services. Learn more about filing medical claims at TRICARE.mil/claims. And for more information about TRICARE's preventive services visit www.TRICARE.mil/preventiveservices.

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Students -- College students across the country are wrapping up their winter breaks. If you're heading back to school, make sure you know your health care options. If you have TRICARE Prime, then your primary care manager provides most of your care. If you live outside of your home's prime service area, then you should call the Nurse Advice Line before going to a school clinic or other provider for care. Remember that you need a referral from your primary care manager to see another provider, or you will have to pay point-of-service charges, which may be costly, if you're a college student on a budget. If you are transferring to a new school this semester, then you may want to revisit your health care options, change your primary care manager, or ask your primary care manager if they would be willing to give you referrals when you need care. If you use TRICARE Standard or Extra, then you can visit any TRICARE-authorized provider, but you will have to pay cost shares. Remember that if you have a health plan through your college or university that TRICARE pays second after other health insurance. Learn more about taking TRICARE to college at www.TRICARE.mil/college.

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Go Green -- Tired of all that paper cluttering up your mailbox? Did you make a new year's resolution to be more environmentally conscious? Go Green with TRICARE and avoid the hassle of mailing, faxing, and storing, bulky letters, publications and forms. Free up space and time by being able to manage your benefit anytime and anywhere you have access to a computer. Here are some of the things you can do to go paperless with TRICARE: you can pay your bill online, get proof of coverage, download a contact wallet card, update your personal information or enroll in a health or dental plan. You can also sign up for email alerts about your benefit, for e-correspondence for status

changes or explanation of benefits statements. It's even possible to view your personal health information, manage your prescriptions and file claims online. Go GREEN today! Visit www.TRICARE.mil/gopaperless for specifics on how to use less paper while using TRICARE.

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | January 13, 2017 ++]

*** Finances ***



College Tuition & Fees 2016-17 ► Average Cost by State

Earning a college degree doesn't have to leave you broke. Depending on where you live, you might be able to obtain a top-notch education on the cheap. Many states offer inexpensive annual tuition to in-state students at their public universities. For example, based on data from The College Board a resident of Wyoming can expect to pony up an average of \$5,060 — which includes both tuition and fees — to attend a public college in that state. Wyoming leads this list of the 10 states that offer the least expensive in-state tuition rates for students:

- Wyoming: Average in-state tuition and fees: \$5,060
- Florida: \$6,360
- Montana: \$6,410
- Utah: \$6,580
- New Mexico: \$6,620
- Nevada: \$6,910
- Idaho: \$7,010
- Alaska: \$7,130
- North Carolina: \$7,200
- Mississippi: \$7,410

New York, which is considering a program to offer middle-and low-income students free tuition at its state colleges, already offers the 12th-cheapest tuition in the nation to in-state students. You can check the College Board website <https://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/2016-17-state-tuition-and-fees-public-four-year-institutions-state-and-five-year-percentage> to find out how your state's public college tuition rates compare with other states. So, before you dismiss college as too expensive, check out your state's public universities. There's a good chance your education dollar will go a lot further there than at private schools. Many states also have programs that enable residents to attend college in another state without having to fork over big bucks for out-of-state tuition. The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators has more information on this at http://www.nasfaa.org/State_Regional_Tuition_Exchanges. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | January 5, 2017 ++]

Car Ownership ► 10 Year Longevity Rankings

Japanese makes dominate a recent iSeeCars.com ranking of cars that owners are most likely to keep for 10 years. Phong Ly, CEO of <http://www.iseecars.com>, describes this finding as “unsurprising,” noting Japanese automakers’ “reputation for reliability.” For its study, the website analyzed more than 2.5 million cars from the 1981-2006 model years that were sold in 2016. The analysis showed that, on average, 12.9% of original owners hold onto cars for at least a decade. By contrast, for the top 10 ranked cars in the study, 24 to 32.1% of original owners hold onto them for that long. The top 10 cars are:

- Toyota Highlander Hybrid: 32.1 percent of original owners keep the car for at least 10 years
- Toyota Prius (hybrid): 32 percent
- Toyota Highlander: 29 percent
- Toyota Sienna: 28.7 percent
- Honda Pilot: 27.2 percent
- Honda CR-V: 25.2 percent
- Toyota RAV4: 24.9 percent
- Subaru Forester: 24.2 percent
- Lexus RX (hybrid): 24.1 percent
- Honda Odyssey: 24 percent

Ly was surprised that every vehicle in the top 10 besides the Toyota Prius was a minivan or SUV. He explains: “... the makeup of the cars is unexpected. These kinds of cars tend to be used as family cars, so they might be expected to be kept for many years if they’re bought just as their owners start their new families.” Trucks, on the other hand, tend to be used as heavy-work vehicles that are driven more than typical passenger cars, Ly notes. So they may not last as long. The highest-ranked truck in iSeeCars.com’s analysis was the Honda Ridgeline, whose original owners were 22.2% more likely than average to hold onto for at least 10 years. Ly was also surprised that three hybrid vehicles made the top 10. Fuel-cost savings accumulate after several years of ownership, though, he notes. So hybrid owners might hold onto their cars longer to offset costs. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsler | January 6, 2017 ++]

Tax Burden for North Carolina Retired Vets ► As of JAN 2017

Many people planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales and property taxes can more than offset the lack of a state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn’t necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. States raise revenue in many ways including sales taxes, excise taxes, license taxes, income taxes, intangible taxes, property taxes, estate taxes and inheritance taxes. Depending on where you live, you may end up paying all of them or just a few. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you retired in **North Carolina** in 2016. Note - This state has a statutory provision for automatic adjustment of tax brackets, personal exemptions or standard deductions to the rate of inflation.

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 4.75% - Prescription drugs, medical equipment exempt, food subject to 2% county tax. Counties may add an additional 2% to 3% tax.

Gasoline Tax: 56.5 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 62.15 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: 45 cents/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate: Flat 5.75%

Income Brackets: N/A

Tax Rate Range: N/A

Income Brackets: N/A

Number of Brackets: N/A

Personal Exemptions: None

Standard Deduction: Single – \$8,750; Married filing jointly – \$16,500.

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount. Income tax credit for premiums paid on long-term care insurance that covers the individual, a spouse or dependent. Credit is equal to 15% of premium cost but may not exceed \$350.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security is exempt. At least \$4,000 in exclusions for federal, state and local pensions (depending on dates and length of service); up to \$2,000 also qualify for the \$4,000 exemption. State retirees with at least 5 years of creditable service as of August 12, 1989, will be permanently exempt from state income tax on their retired exemption for qualified private pensions, including IRAs. Out-of-state government pensions /retainer pay. Be sure to investigate the Bailey Decision www.dornc.com/taxes/individual/benefits.html. Taxable income also includes income derived from gaming in North Carolina. For more details on retirement income deductions, refer to <http://www.dor.state.nc.us/cgi-bin/search/search.cgi>.

Retired Military Pay: If an individual had five years of creditable service as of August 12, 1989, all military retired pay is exempt from taxes. Otherwise, a deduction of up to \$4,000 is allowed for military pay or survivor's benefits.

Military Disability Retired Pay: Retirees who entered the military before Sept. 24, 1975, and members receiving disability retirements based on combat injuries or who could receive disability payments from the VA are covered by laws giving disability broad exemption from federal income tax. Most military retired pay based on service-related disabilities also is free from federal income tax, but there is no guarantee of total protection.

VA Disability Dependency and Indemnity Compensation: VA benefits are not taxable because they generally are for disabilities and are not subject to federal or state taxes.

Military SBP/SSBP/RCSBP/RSFPP: Generally subject to state taxes for those states with income tax. Check with state department of revenue office.

Property Taxes

All property, real and personal, is subject to taxation and is assessed based on 100% of appraised value. Taxes are collected by cities and counties. For tax rates refer to http://www.dornc.com/publications/effective_rates.html.

There is an elderly or disabled exclusion which excludes the greater of the first \$25,000 or 50% of the appraised value of the permanent residence of the qualifying owner. A qualifying owner must be at least 65 years old or be totally and permanently disabled. The owner cannot have an income amount from the previous year that exceeds the income eligibility limit for the urgent year. Refer to <http://www.dor.state.nc.us/taxes/individual> for information about what's new for 2016

The state also has a circuit breaker property tax deferral program. Under this program, taxes for each year are limited to a percentage of the qualifying owner's income. The qualifying owner must either be at least 65 years of age or be totally and permanently disabled. For an owner whose income amount for the previous years does not exceed the income eligibility limit for the current year, which for tax year 2012 is \$27,100, the owner's taxes will be limited to 4% of the owner's income. For an owner whose income exceeds the income eligibility limit, which for tax year 2010 is \$40,650, the owner's taxes will be limited to 5% of the owner's income.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

On June 27, 2011, a bill was signed into law by North Carolina governor Beverly Perdue. This law clarifies that the North Carolina estate tax does not apply to the estates of decedents who died in 2010 but will apply to the estates of

decedents dying on or after January 1, 2011 with a \$5,000,000 exemption, which is indexed for inflation in 2012 so that the 2012 exemption is \$5,120,000.

For further information, visit the North Carolina Department of Revenue site <http://www.dor.state.nc.us> [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#NORTHCAROLINA> JAN 2017 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest ► 1 thru 15 JAN 2016

- **NATO.** Turkey's defense minister says a lack of support from Turkey's NATO allies in its operation to clear the Islamic State group from a town in northern Syria is leading many to question the country's permission for the U.S.-led coalition to use its air base. In the past few weeks, Turkey has complained that the coalition forces aren't providing air cover to Turkish troops trying to capture the key ISIS-held town of al-Bab which is leading to serious disappointment in the Turkish public opinion."
- **GTMO.** President-elect Donald Trump called 1 JAN for the end of all detainee releases from the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, saying in a tweet that those who remain are "extremely dangerous people" who "should not be allowed back onto the battlefield."
- **China.** China confirmed that its aircraft carrier has for the first time conducted drills in the South China Sea with a formation of other warships and fighter jets, a move that could raise concerns among its neighbors. The Defense Ministry said several J-15 fighter jets took off and landed from the flight deck of the aircraft carrier Liaoning on 1 JAN. The Liaoning, China's first and only aircraft carrier, It is classified as a training ship, intended to allow the Navy to practice with carrier usage. China is currently building its second aircraft carrier.
- **USMC.** The Marine Corps may retire one of its most iconic recruiting slogans next year: "The Few. The Proud. The Marines." When the service's new recruiting campaign begins in 2017, it may have an entirely new slogan that better describes what the Marine Corps does, said Marine Corps Recruiting Command spokesman Lt. Col. John Caldwell.
- **USMC.** The first female infantry Marines will graduate boot camp this month. To date, 31 female Marines have signed enlistment contracts for previously closed combat arms military occupational specialties.
- **VA Accountability.** The House has approved a bill that would require all reprimands and admonishments given to Department of Veterans Affairs employees to remain in their personnel files as long as they are employed there. Under current law they are removed after 2 (admonishment) or 3 (reprimand) years.
- **Trump's Wall.** A Massachusetts Bristol County sheriff has made a personal offer to Trump to make the inmates in his jails available to help build Trump's border wall with Mexico.
- **Parking.** An unlucky U.K. driver who lost his car in a crowded parking garage for SIX MONTHS has finally been reunited with the vehicle. Not only was the car not his – a friend had loaned him the BMW for

the evening, he said – but he was also charged for the entirety of his time in the lot. Police estimate it'll run him about \$6,000.

- **Inflation.** The Federal Reserve projects an inflation rate of 1.9 percent for 2017, just below the Fed's stated inflation target of 2 percent annually. The Fed predicts a core inflation rate of 1.8 percent. The core rate excludes food and energy. For comparison, inflation was about 1.5 percent between October 2015 and October 2016.
- **Opioids.** New data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that the number of deaths from opioid overdoses continues to rise, reaching more than 33,000 in 2015, the highest number ever recorded. Opioids, which include prescription drugs and illicitly manufactured heroin and fentanyl, accounted for more than 63% of all drug-related overdoses that year.
- **Wire Fraud.** In 2009 Kenneth Lagonia pleaded guilty to a charge of conspiracy to commit wire fraud in connection to a real estate investment scheme and was required to pay \$19M in restitutions. In Feb 2016 he agreed to pay \$260 a month to the Federal District Court in Charlotte NJ. It will take him 6,120 years to make restitution.
- **Venezuela.** President Nicolas Maduro, the successor to the late socialist President Hugo Chavez announced 5 JAN that former minister Tareck El Aissami would become vice president of the country. That means that, in a country of complete and utter chaos — where people are starving, healthcare is nonexistent, electricity is scarce, and vigilante justice is becoming a norm, — a suspected terrorist is one heartbeat away from the highest office in the land. He is allegedly a part of Venezuela's state drug-trafficking network and has ties to Iran, Syria, and Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah.
- **National Anthem.** At http://www.topbuzzapp.com/article/i6260659452401566212?app_id=1106 see what a coach did in response to his player's disrespect during the playing of The Star Spangled Banner.
- **Mein Kampf.** The first reprint of Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" in Germany since World War II has proved a surprise bestseller, heading for its sixth print run, its publisher said 3 JAN. The Institute of Contemporary History of Munich (IfZ) said around 85,000 copies of the new annotated version of the Nazi leader's anti-Semitic manifesto had flown off the shelves since its release last January.
- **Children.** It is now against the law to spank kids in France. Got a baby in the house? NIH says feed the little rascal some peanuts to help prevent peanut allergy.
- **Chicago.** The city is off to a good start. 54 people shot so far this year as of 6 JAN. Seven were fatal. Good thing Chicago has strict gun control.
- **Smog.** Officials in Beijing have announced a new environmental police squad to root out illegal burning in the city, the latest government response to the widespread public anger over China's persistent problems with smog.
- **Retiree Longevity.** Americans are living longer than ever before. But U.S. retirees are seeing their golden years cut short compared with peers in other developed nations, according to an analysis recently presented at the Living to 100 _symposium. Refer to <https://livingto100.soa.org/default.aspx>.
- **New Teachers.** Go to <https://biggeekdad.com/2017/01/meeting-gorgeous-new-teacher> and see the reactions recorded by Candid Camera of young boys and girl after they met their alleged new handsome and beautiful teachers.
- **Trump Hiring Freeze.** Maine's U.S. senators are calling for President-elect Donald Trump to exempt the Department of Veterans Affairs from a potential hiring freeze on civilian federal employees. They say Trump should not include critical VA personnel who provide care and support for veterans. They said 10 JAN that a hiring freeze could leave important positions unfilled at veterans' centers in Maine and elsewhere.
- **VA Workforce Incentives.** Could cost VA millions. Improper use of workforce bonuses and inadequate oversight of these bonuses -- resulted in millions of dollars in unsupported spending and could lead to even larger amounts in the future, according to a recent inspector general report. VA estimates that 31% of its

employees, including 58% of the Senior Executive Service workforce, will be eligible for retirement by 2020.

- **Vet Misconception.** The public jumps to inaccurate conclusions about combat veterans when vets are involved in mass shootings. Statistics show veterans are less likely to be involved in crime than civilians. The Department of Veterans Affairs says PTSD can be linked to violence in a minority of cases. That's usually domestic violence.
- **National Debt.** The United States is carrying about \$19.96 trillion in debt as of this week. You can volunteer to help wind back the hands of the national debt clock. The government's TreasuryDirect website https://www.treasurydirect.gov/govt/resources/faq/faq_publicdebt.htm#DebtFinance contains information about how you can make your donation.

Sam Johnson (R-TX) ► Vietnam/Korea Vet Won't Seek Reelection

Longtime Texas Rep. Sam Johnson announced 6 JAN that he will retire at the end of his term. Johnson, 86, was an Air Force fighter pilot in Vietnam and Korea before his election to Congress in 1990. He spent seven years as a prisoner of war in the notorious Hanoi Hilton but returned to his hometown of Plano to a hero's welcome. On Capitol Hill, the Republican has been a stalwart conservative as a fierce defender of gun rights, an opponent of tax increases, and a hawk on military matters. He attracted attention recently when he introduced legislation to curb Social Security benefits. He says he has been a "commonsense, conservative voice in Congress."



Johnson has generally been a loyal vote for GOP leaders over the years, even as the ranks of House conservatives have become more combative. He backed the hard-won 2011 debt and budget deal negotiated by former Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, but voted against the 2013 tax increases obtained by President Barack Obama after he won a second term. Johnson has easily cruised to re-election in his strongly Republican district outside of Dallas, and his seat is likely to remain in GOP hands after the 2018 midterm elections. Johnson has slowed in recent years and told supporters in a statement that "the Lord has made clear that the season of my life in Congress is coming to an end." House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI), who served for years on the powerful tax-writing Ways and Means Committee with Johnson, issued a statement calling him "the greatest living man I know." Added Ryan: "This is a man who, after serving in two wars and enduring seven years in the Hanoi Hilton, went right back to flying and ran for public office." [Source: The Associated Press | Andrew Taylor | January 6, 2017 ++]

Terrorist's Treatment ► Torture Unnecessary/Counterproductive

A group of retired military officers is telling President-elect Donald Trump not to bring back torture for terrorism suspects, The New York Times reported. They reported that 176 retired officers, including 33 four-star generals and

admirals, sent a letter to Trump him against bringing back waterboarding and other torture methods. In the letter, the officers cited their "six thousand years of combined experience." They said waterboarding and "other enhanced interrogation techniques" are illegal, adding that the torture is both "unnecessary" and "counterproductive." The officers noted it violates our core values as a nation. "Out greatest strength is our commitment to the rule of law and to the principles embedded in our Constitution," the letter said. "Our servicemen and women need to know that our leaders do not condone torture or detainee abuse of any kind."

During the presidential campaign, the president-elect expressed support for authorizing any means necessary for interrogating terror suspects, including the use of waterboarding. Last year, he said "waterboarding would be fine." Last year, Trump indicated after a meeting with retired Marine Gen. James Mattis he may have taken a new stance on the issue. "General Mattis is a strong, highly dignified man. I met with him at length and I asked him that question. I said, 'What do you think of waterboarding?'" Trump told the Times. "He said — I was surprised — he said, 'I've never found it to be useful.' He said, 'I've always found, give me a pack of cigarettes and a couple of beers and I do better with that than I do with torture.'" [Source: The Hill | Rebecca Savransky | January 10, 2017 ++]

Holman Rule ► **Enables Individual Federal Worker Pay Cuts to \$1**

House Republicans this week reinstated an arcane procedural rule that enables lawmakers to reach deep into the budget and slash the pay of an individual federal worker — down to a \$1 — a move that threatens to upend the 130-year-old civil service. The Holman Rule, named after an Indiana congressman who devised it in 1876, empowers any member of Congress to offer an amendment to an appropriations bill that targets a specific government employee or program. A majority of the House and the Senate would still have to approve any such amendment, but opponents and supporters agree that it puts agencies and the public on notice that their work is now vulnerable to the whims of elected officials.

Democrats and federal employee unions say the provision, which one called the “Armageddon Rule,” could prove disastrous to the federal workforce, when combined with president-elect Donald Trump’s criticism of the Washington bureaucracy, his call for a freeze on government hiring and his nomination of Cabinet secretaries who seem to be at odds with the mission of the agencies they would lead. “This is part of a very chilling theme that federal workers are seeing right now,” said Maureen Gilman, legislative director for the National Treasury Employees Union, which represents 150,000 federal employees. The rule is particularly troubling to Virginia and Maryland lawmakers and the District’s nonvoting delegate, who represent large numbers of federal workers in the national capital region. The Holman provision was approved 3 JAN as part of a larger rules package but received little attention amid the chaos of Republicans’ failed effort to decimate the House ethics office on the first day of the new Congress.

Republican leaders say the rule increases accountability in government and played down concerns — some within their own party — that it will usher in broad changes to the appropriations process. As a concession to Republicans who oppose the rule, leaders designed it to expire in one year unless lawmakers vote to keep it in place. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) said that insofar as voters elected Trump with the hope of fundamentally changing the way government works, the Holman Rule gives Congress a chance to do just that. “This is a big rule change inside there that allows people to get at places they hadn’t before,” he told reporters this week. Asked which agencies would be targeted, he said that “all agencies should be held accountable and tested in a manner and this is an avenue to allow them to do it.”

The rule was the first thing House Minority Whip Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.) railed against Tuesday in a floor speech objecting to an overarching rules package, which includes the Holman provision. “Republicans have consistently made our hard-working federal employees scapegoats, in my opinion, for lack of performance of the federal government itself,” he said. “And this rule change will allow them to make shortsighted and ideologically

driven changes to our civil service.” The rule changes the process of passing spending bills by allowing any rank-and-file House member to propose an amendment that would cut a specific federal program or the jobs of specific federal employees, by slashing their salaries or eliminating their positions altogether. Before this rule change, an agency’s budget could be cut broadly, but a specific program, employee or groups of employees could not be targeted because of civil service protections.

Republicans and Trump advisers have been quietly drawing up plans since the election to erode some of the job protections and benefits that federal workers have received for a generation, starting with a hiring freeze Trump has pledged to put in place in his first 100 days in office. An end to automatic raises, a green light to fire poor performers, less generous pensions and a ban on union business on the government’s dime — these changes are all on the table now under unified Republican rule in Washington. Conservatives were thwarted from making these changes under President Obama, but with Trump pledging to shrink big government and shake up a system he told voters on the campaign trail was awash in “waste, fraud and abuse,” they are more emboldened than ever.

Federal unions and their advocates in Congress — and even the Republican behind the rule himself — scrambled Wednesday to understand how the rule would work. “Now any backbencher can make an amendment to hear his voice heard on a particular program or group of employees,” said Max Stier, president and chief executive of the nonprofit Partnership for Public Service. “We’ll see how it’s used, if it’s used.” In light of recent inquiries by the Trump transition team for a list of Energy Department scientists who have worked on climate change, advocates for federal workers say they worry that bureaucrats could be targeted for political reasons.

Jeffrey Neal, former personnel chief at the Department of Homeland Security and now a senior vice president for ICF International, said the rule “creates a lot of opportunity for mischief” because lawmakers could act to reduce the salary or eliminate the job of government officials they don’t like. For example, the House could have voted to significantly reduce the salary of Lois Lerner, the senior executive at the center of the IRS scandal that gave extra scrutiny to conservative groups seeking tax-exempt status. Lawmakers could, in theory, even vote to roll back the 2.1 percent pay raise Obama gave federal employees starting Jan. 1, he said.

Early in its history, the rule was used to eliminate patronage jobs, particularly customs agents, in the late 19th century before the federal workforce shifted to a nonpolitical civil service. The rule was dropped in 1983, when then-Speaker Tip O’Neill (D-MA) objected to spending cuts devised by Republicans and conservative Democrats. The revival of the Holman Rule was the brainchild of Rep. H. Morgan Griffith (R-VA), who is intent on increasing the powers of individual members of Congress to reassign workers as policy demands. Known as the unofficial parliamentarian in the hard-line conservative Freedom Caucus, the four-term congressman sought the rule change out of frustration with an \$80 million federal program that pays for the care of wild horses on federal land in the West, which he considers wasteful.

He favors a strategic application of the law, likening it to a bullet from a sniper rifle rather than a shotgun. It’s unlikely — but not impossible — that members will “go crazy” and cut huge swaths of the workforce, he said. “I can’t tell you it won’t happen,” he said in an interview in his office. “The power is there. But isn’t that appropriate? Who runs this country, the people of the United States or the people on the people’s payroll?” Although Griffith has few federal workers in his poor and rural southwest district, Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA) noted that many of Griffith’s constituents rely on federal programs. “It’s a backdoor way of furthering your desire to dismantle that part of the federal operation,” he said. Connolly and Rep. Don Beyer (D-VaA), who each represent thousands of government employees in their Northern Virginia districts, said the rule heralds a new era of granular governing, giving the party in power the ability to mess with federal agencies at a microscopic level.

Several House Republicans did try to block revival of the Holman Rule in a closed-door meeting Monday evening. Rep. Barbara Comstock, the only Republican member of Congress in Northern Virginia, voted for an amendment sponsored by Reps. Tom Cole (R-OK) and Rob Bishop (R-UT) to strip the rule from the package. The rule “diminishes the roles of the authorizing committees in the House, and will make it more difficult to pass appropriations bills in the new Congress,” Comstock’s spokesman, Jeff Marschner, said in a statement. However,

when the rules package, including the Holman measure, came to the floor Tuesday, she voted for it, as did every member of her party. All the Democrats voted no. [Source: The Washington Post | Jenna Portnoy & Lisa Rein | January 5, 2017 ++]

Pushups ► How the USMC Does Them

Every Marine has an opinion about the right way to do pushups, but now the Marine Corps has officially resolved the matter for all time. The Marines' Training and Education Command on 4 JAN released an instructional video showing the dos and don'ts when doing a pushup. After a brief introduction about how the Corps' new rules allow Marines to do push-ups in lieu of pullups for their Physical Fitness Test, the brief video gets into the nitty-gritty of how to do the perfect pushup. In Warren Commission-like detail, the 3-minute-and-23-second video shows Marines how parallel their arms must be; how far apart their feet can be; how straight their bodies must be and other fine aspects of doing the perfect pushup. "The body must remain rigid in a generally straight line and move as a unit while performing each repetition," the narrator says. "When viewed from the side, the body should form a generally straight line from the shoulders to the ankles."

The video at <http://www.militarytimes.com/video/the-marine-corps-perfect-push-up-pull-up> also shows the proper way Marines can rest during pushups by flexing their back or sagging in the middle, as long as they don't bend their knees to the point where Marines are supporting most of their body weight with their legs. A red circle with a line through it appears each time the Marine demonstrating the pushup breaks form. "If the Marine rests on the ground or raises either hand or foot from the ground, the performance will be terminated," the narrator warns, as the Marine demonstrator waves an arm and leg in the air to show what not to do. While the video should answer all of Marines' questions on how to do pushups correctly, Marines will still be able to argue about how to do the perfect pullup. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Jeff Schogol | January 4, 2017 ++]

USA Deaths & Mortality ► Data for 2014

National Vital Statistics https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr65/nvsr65_04.pdf dtd Jun 2016:

- Number of deaths: 2,626,418
- Death rate: 823.7 deaths per 100,000 population
- Life expectancy: 78.8 years
- Infant Mortality rate: 5.82 deaths per 1,000 live births

Number of deaths for leading causes of death IAW <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/hus15.pdf#019>

- Heart disease: 614,348
- Cancer: 591,699
- Chronic lower respiratory diseases: 147,101
- Accidents (unintentional injuries): 136,053
- Stroke (cerebrovascular diseases): 133,103
- Alzheimer's disease: 93,541
- Diabetes: 76,488
- Influenza and Pneumonia: 55,227
- Nephritis, nephrotic syndrome and nephrosis: 48,146
- Intentional self-harm (suicide): 42,773

More data: reports and tables

- <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db229.htm> Mortality in the United States, 2014
- https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr65/nvsr65_05.pdf Deaths: Leading Causes for 2014[PDF - 3.5 MB]
- <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hus/index.htm> Health, United States
- https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr64/nvsr64_11.pdf United States Life Tables, 2011[PDF - 1.5 MB]
- <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db88.htm#x2013;2010%3C/a%3E> 75 Years of Mortality in the United States, 1935–2010
- <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr076.pdf> Deaths Attributed to Heat, Cold, and Other Weather Events in the United States, 2006–2010[PDF - 330 KB]
- <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr084.pdf> Hospitalization, Readmission, and Death Experience of Noninstitutionalized Medicare Fee-for-service Beneficiaries Aged 65 and Over.

[Source: “VFW Post 10132 Hobe Sound FL | Rich McMeekin | January 1, 2016 ++]

Presidential Inauguration ► Tips for Attending



Inauguration Day takes place Friday, Jan. 20, 2017. If you plan to attend the swearing in of the 45th president of the U.S. Jan. 20, here are a few tips to help navigate your way through this and future Inauguration Days in the nation's capital.

Attending the main events

- The swearing in ceremony takes place on the West Front of the Capitol. Tickets for the viewing from the platform are free but also are in high demand and might be difficult to obtain. Contact your state [representative](#) or [senator](#)'s office to request tickets. Free and non-ticketed viewing with live screens and audio also is available along the [National Mall](#).
- The inauguration parade celebrates the new president's journey from taking the oath of office to the move into the White House. The parade starts at the Capitol and continues along Constitution Avenue before switching over to Pennsylvania Avenue and finally completing its route at the White House. This event is free to the public, and space is available on a first-come first-served basis. Arrive early for the best view. In the past, tickets for bleacher seating along the parade route were available for purchase through the [Presidential Inauguration Committee](#).

Inaugural balls

The celebrations culminate in the evening as individuals dance and toast to the new president at one of the many official or unofficial inaugural balls. You will be most likely to catch a glimpse of the new president and vice president at an official inaugural ball. These events are planned and promoted by the Presidential Inauguration Committee and generally require an invitation or ticket to attend. If you simply are looking to celebrate the day, you can [search through a number of other unofficial inaugural balls and galas](#) that will take place throughout the Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia area. Expect heightened security leading up to and throughout the duration of Inauguration Day. If you are attending any particular event that requires a ticket, you should check on the security requirements that might be associated with the ticket. Be sure to keep a valid ID on you for reference.

Bundle up

January in Washington, D.C., is considerably cold. Temperatures average a high of 43 degrees F and a low of 28 F. Be sure to wear comfortable footwear that can keep your feet warm and provide support for long periods of standing and walking.

Transportation

- This might be a good time to leave the car at home. Expect to find mass road closures (to offset the crowds and the parade route) and limited parking. Major road and bridge closure information is available [here](#), and you can view a map of Washington, D.C., street closures [here](#). A better option might be to drive to a Metro station. The use of alternative means of transportation - such as the [Metrobus](#), walking, or biking - also is a viable option for getting around the region.
- According to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), Metro's Safe Track surges will be suspended during the month of January, and Metrorail will open Jan. 20 at 4 a.m. with “near rush-hour service levels” on all lines until 9 p.m. Be prepared to pay the weekday peak-fare prices and for some of the more central stations to be closed for security purposes. Metro lines, fares, and scheduled times can be viewed on the [WMATA website](#).
- If you plan on using a taxi or ride-sharing service, be aware of surcharges during high-volume hours. Water taxi services from Alexandria, Va., also will be available. Tickets are about \$90 per individual for a round trip and are available for purchase through the [Potomac Riverboat Company](#).

Hotels and lodging

If you have not already booked a room for your Inauguration Day stay, be prepared to look through a few options before finding your optimal price point. You might find cheaper options through residential rental platforms, such as [Air BnB](#) or [HomeAway](#). Private rooms with homestay networks are averaging \$255 a night, and full residences are renting out for an average of \$1,250 a night during the inauguration weekend (these prices were available as of the second week of December 2016). Some hotels offer packages that include an inaugural event to go along with your stay. Check out a curated list of inauguration-friendly hotels [here](#). Are you a member of the Army and Navy Club? You can inquire about room rates by contacting their front desk at (202) 628-8400 or by email at frontdesk@armynavyclub.org. You do not have to limit yourself to accommodations in Washington, D.C. If you are comfortable with commuting, keep your options open to available bookings within Metro-accessible regions of Maryland and Virginia. [Here's a good list of options that pairs with location and individuals' interests](#).

History and legacy

Whether you are taking in the moment from your home or braving the cold for the live events, Inauguration Day is a significant part of American history and culture. It demonstrates the resilience of our democracy and its ability to peacefully transition power from one individual to another. Learn about the nation's history involving our past presidents and the steps they took for their inaugurations on [the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies' website](#).

[Source: MOAA News Exchange | Christine Reborn | January 4, 2017 ++]

The Century That Ended ► What 1916 Was Like

The year is 1916 "One hundred years ago." What a difference a century makes! Here are some statistics for the Year 1916:

- The average life expectancy for men was 47 years.
- Fuel for cars was sold in drug stores only.
- Only 14 percent of the homes had a bathtub and only 8 percent of the homes had a telephone.
- The maximum speed limit in most cities was 10 mph.
- The tallest structure in the world was the Eiffel Tower.
- The average US wage in 1910 was 22 cents per hour and the average US worker made between \$200 and \$400 per year.
- A competent accountant could expect to earn \$2000 per year, a dentist \$2,500 per year, a veterinarian between \$1,500 and \$4,000 per year, and a mechanical engineer about \$5,000 per year.
- More than 95 percent of all births took place at home.
- Ninety percent of all Doctors had NO COLLEGE EDUCATION! Instead, they attended so-called medical schools, many of which were condemned in the press AND the government as "substandard.
- Sugar cost four cents a pound, Eggs were fourteen cents a dozen, and Coffee was fifteen cents a pound.
- Most women only washed their hair once a month, and, used Borax or egg yolks for shampoo.
- Canada passed a law that prohibited poor people from entering into their country for any reason.
- The Five leading causes of death were: 1. Pneumonia and influenza; 2. Tuberculosis; 3. Diarrhea; 4. Heart disease; 5. Stroke
- The American flag had 45 stars ...
- The population of Las Vegas, Nevada was only 30.
- Crossword puzzles, canned beer, and iced tea hadn't been invented yet.
- There was neither a Mother's Day nor a Father's Day.
- Two out of every 10 adults couldn't read or write, and only 6 percent of all Americans had graduated from high school.
- Marijuana, heroin, and morphine were all available over the counter at local corner drugstores. Back then pharmacists said, "Heroin clears the complexion, gives buoyancy to the mind, regulates the stomach, bowels, and is, in fact, a perfect guardian of health!" (Shocking?)
- Eighteen percent of households had at least one full-time servant or domestic help...
- There were about 230 reported™ murders in the ENTIRE U.S.A.

[Source: VFW Post 10132 | Rich McMeekin | January 3, 2017 ++]

RP~Russia Relations ► Naval Exercises Under Consideration

Russia is eyeing naval exercises with the Philippines and deployed two navy ships for a goodwill visit to Manila on 2 JAN as Moscow moves to expand defense ties with a Filipino president known for being hostile to the U.S. Rear Adm. Eduard Mikhailov, deputy commander of Russia's Pacific Fleet, led the five-day visit of vessels including an anti-submarine ship and showcased what his country can offer to a Southeast Asian nation that's long been a staunch American treaty ally. "You can choose ... to cooperate with United States of America or to cooperate with Russia," Mikhailov told reporters through an interpreter at the Manila harbor after a welcoming ceremony. "But from our side

we can help you in every way that you need." "We are sure that in the future we'll have exercises with you. Maybe, just maneuvering or maybe use of combat systems and so on," he said.

The anti-submarine ship Admiral Tributs and sea tanker Boris Butoma have a wide range of combat features. Filipinos will be allowed to tour the huge ships and Russian marines will demonstrate their combat capability during the high-profile visit, according to the Philippine navy. With an underfunded and underequipped military, the Philippines has struggled to deal with attacks by ransom-seeking Abu Sayyaf militants and allied gunmen, who have kidnapped crewmen of tugboats and ships from neighboring Malaysia and Indonesia in the Sulu Sea and outlying waters. Russia can help through future combat drills, Mikhailov said. "We have an experience in fighting these (threats)," he said. "We will share to you our knowledge on these problems, how to solve piracy and terrorism."



A Philippine Navy Band plays as the Russian Navy vessel Admiral Tributs, a large anti-submarine ship, docks at Manila's pier, Philippines on Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2017. Two Russian Navy Vessels are in the country for a goodwill visit till Jan. 7.

After Russian and Philippine officials met in Manila in August, the two countries began drafting a proposed defense cooperation accord that could be signed during a planned visit by President Rodrigo Duterte to Russia in April. The visit by the Russian navy ships is the third to the Philippines and the first under Duterte, who took office in June. Duterte has lashed out at outgoing President Barack Obama and his administration for criticizing Duterte's deadly crackdown on illegal drugs which is feared to have left more than 6,000 suspected drug users and dealers. Contrastingly, Duterte has reached out to China and Russia — whose leaders he has met recently — in a dramatic shift in Philippine foreign policy that has put Washington in a dilemma.

The Philippines has depended heavily on the U.S., its treaty ally, for weapons, ships and aircraft for years, although it has turned to other countries for defense equipment. After visiting Moscow last month, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said the Philippine military was considering purchasing sniper rifles from Russia. Duterte has repeatedly threatened to scale back U.S. troop presence and joint exercises with the Americans in the Philippines. [Source: The Associated Press | January 3, 2017 ++]

RP~Russia Relations Update 01 ► Philippines Finalizing Security Deal

The Philippines is finalizing a security deal with Russia allowing the two countries' leaders to exchange visits and observe military drills, a minister said on 9 JAN, at the same time assuring the United States that ties with Moscow will not affect its alliance with its traditional ally. Two Russian warships made port calls in Manila last week with President Rodrigo Duterte touring an anti-submarine vessel, saying he hoped Moscow would become his country's ally and protector. Duterte has thrown the future of Philippine-U.S. relations into question with angry outbursts against the United States, a former colonial power, and some scaling back of military ties while taking steps to improve relationships with China and Russia. In October, Duterte told U.S. President Barack Obama to "go to hell"

and said the United States had refused to sell some weapons to his country but he did not care because Russia and China were willing suppliers.



Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte (4th L) gestures with Russian Ambassador to the Philippines Igor Khovaev (3rd L), Russia's Rear Admiral Eduard Mikhailov (5th L), and other Philippine and Russian officials in front of a Russian Ka-26 anti-submarine helicopter

He is due to go to Moscow in April. The visit by the Russian warships was the first official navy-to-navy contact between the two countries. "We will observe their exercises," Philippine Defence Minister Delfin Lorenzana told reporters during the military's traditional New Year's call at the main army base in Manila. "If we need their expertise, then we will join the exercises. That's the framework of the memorandum of understanding that is going to be signed. It could be a joint exercises but, initially, its going to be exchange of visits." Lorenzana assured Washington the military agreement with Moscow would not allow rotational deployment of Russian troops, planes and ships in Manila for mutual defense. "It's not similar to the U.S. which is a treaty, Mutual Defence Treaty, which mandates them to help us in case we're attacked," he said. "We wont have that with Russia. The MOU is about exchange of military personnel, visits and observation of exercises."

He said the Philippines also expected a team of Russian security experts to visit to discuss the sale of new weapons systems. Last month, Duterte sent his foreign and defense ministers to Moscow to discuss arms deals after a U.S. senator said he would block the sale of 26,000 assault rifles to the Philippines due to concern about a rising death toll in a war on drugs launched by Duterte. [Source: Reuters | Manuel Mogat | January 9, 2017 ++]

North Korea Nuclear Weapons Update 02 ► Can They Reach USA?

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump took to Twitter to vow that North Korea won't develop a nuclear weapon capable of reaching parts of the United States. But it might already have done so. Views vary, sometimes wildly, on the exact state of North Korea's closely guarded nuclear and missile programs, but after five atomic test explosions and a rising number of ballistic missile test launches, some experts believe North Korea can arm short- and mid-range missiles with atomic warheads. That would allow Pyongyang to threaten U.S. forces stationed in Asia and add teeth to its threat last year to use nuclear weapons to "sweep Guam, the base of provocations, from the surface of the earth." Guam is a strategically important U.S. territory in the Pacific. Some experts see the U.S. mainland as potentially within reach in as little as five years if North Korea's nuclear progress isn't stopped.

Trump's tweet on 2 JAN was in response to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who said the dy before in his annual New Year's address that preparations for launching an intercontinental ballistic missile have "reached the final stage." He did not explicitly say a test was imminent. Trump tweeted, "North Korea just stated that it is in the final stages of developing a nuclear weapon capable of reaching parts of the U.S. It won't happen!" The morning after the tweet, top aide Kellyanne Conway said that while Trump was putting North Korea "on notice," he was "not

making policy at the moment." Conway, who will serve as Trump's White House counselor, said that as president, Trump "will stand between (North Korea) and missile capabilities." North Korea, poor, suspicious of outsiders and governed by a third-generation dictator, is used to being underestimated and mocked. Few believed it could build a nuclear program that would keep U.S. presidents since the early 1990s up at night.

Armed to the teeth, acutely bellicose and not afraid to push tensions on the Korean Peninsula to the brink, Pyongyang could be among Trump's top foreign policy challenges. Here's a look at how close North Korea may already be to proving Trump's tweet wrong:

THE NUKES

- There's a general consensus that Pyongyang has made significant nuclear and missile progress under Kim, who took over after his father, Kim Jong Il, died in late 2011.
- Kim has conducted three of the country's five total nuclear tests, including two last year. Propaganda out of Pyongyang makes clear that North Korea views nuclear weapons as essential to keeping at bay U.S. and South Korean forces it says are intent on its destruction.
- Some U.S. experts believe North Korea may have enough fuel for about 20 bombs and can add a possible half dozen more each year.
- Fuel is one thing; it's much more difficult to develop the technology needed to build bombs small enough to fit on missile tips.
- Each new nuclear test, however, pushes the North another big step toward its goal of an arsenal of nuclear missiles capable of hitting the U.S. mainland.

THE MISSILES

- Outsiders don't know for sure whether North Korea can arm any of its ballistic missiles, regardless of range, with nuclear warheads yet. But Siegfried Hecker, a leading North Korea nuclear expert, wrote after last year's September nuclear test that outsiders should now assume that Pyongyang has "designed and demonstrated" atomic warheads that can be placed on short- and possibly medium-range missiles.
- North Korea may deploy a "working, nuclear-tipped ballistic missile" by 2020, according to another expert, Euan Graham, director of the International Security Program at the Lowy Institute.
- North Korea has an arsenal of short-range Scuds and mid-range Rodong missiles, and some South Korean experts believe those can already be armed with nukes. That would put in danger the roughly 28,000 U.S. forces in South Korea and another 50,000 in Japan.
- While there's not a consensus, some South Korean experts also believe the North can place a nuclear warhead on the more powerful mid-range Musudan missile, which could target Guam, about 3,000 kilometers (1,900 miles) away. Last year, after a string of failures, North Korea launched a Musudan missile that some experts considered a success.
- Kim Jong Un has already conducted more ballistic missile tests, including from submarines, in his short time in power than his father did during his entire 18-year reign, Graham wrote last year. This has allowed "refinements" in solid propellants, road mobility and experiments with vertical launches to high altitudes that could complicate U.S. and Japanese missile defense systems' efforts to intercept, Graham wrote.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Even if North Korea can fit a nuclear weapon on a missile, it has yet to meet the even greater challenge of building a nuclear-tipped ICBM capable of hitting the U.S. mainland. Since 2012, North Korea has conducted three satellite launches using long-range rockets, in what outsiders consider covers for banned tests of ICBM technology. As with the nuclear detonations, each new rocket test puts the North closer to having a nuclear missile that can target the U.S. mainland. Hecker estimates that it may take North Korea five to 10 years to succeed.

CHINA'S ROLE

Another tweet from Trump criticized China, North Korea's most important ally, for not doing more to discourage its nuclear weapons program: "China has been taking out massive amounts of money & wealth from the U.S. in

totally one-sided trade, but won't help with North Korea. Nice!" While Beijing has publicly reprimanded Pyongyang after nuclear tests and has agreed to rounds of U.N. sanctions against the North, critics say China hasn't done enough to tighten economic pressure. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said China's efforts and commitment to the dismantling of North Korea's nuclear program are "consistent and clear." "The effort China has made to this end is obvious to all," Geng said in a regular briefing. "We hope all sides can refrain from speaking or doing anything that can aggravate the situation and work in concert to pull the issue back to dialogue and negotiation."

WHAT'S NEXT

Pyongyang has a habit of taking a swing at new U.S. presidents, so Trump may not have long to wait before getting a fresh look at North Korean nuclear or missile technology. Or both: In 2009, a newly inaugurated Barack Obama was greeted with a nuclear test and a long-range rocket launch.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Foster Klug | January 3, 2017 ++]

Pioneer Cabin Tree ► Giant Sequoia With 'Tunnel,' Falls In Storm

Pioneer Cabin Tree, an iconic giant sequoia in California's Calaveras Big Trees State Park, was toppled during a massive storm (the largest in a decade) that swept through the state on 7 JAN. "The storm was just too much for it," the Calaveras Big Trees Association wrote on Facebook along with images of the fallen giant taken by park volunteer Jim Allday: His wife, park volunteer Joan Allday, told SFGate that the tree was in bad shape before the storm hit. "It was barely alive, there was one branch alive at the top," she was quoted as saying. "But it was very brittle and starting to lift." It's not clear how old the tree was, but other giant sequoias in the park are more than 1,200 years old. The great tree with its 32-foot diameter was already a popular photo stop even before the tunnel was carved into it, as 19th-century images show:



A [stereoscope](#) image (left) of the Pioneer Cabin with people and horse passing through (c. 1867–1899) and (right) in 2006

The Pioneer Cabin Tree got its name from its distinctively hollow trunk, partially burnt by lightning strikes and forest fire. It had small compartments as in a log cabin, the tree's burnt core as a chimney, and a small opening as a backdoor. In 1857 it was noted that the "top half" of the tree was broken off at about 150 feet, and that the tree was hollow. The tree was hollowed out in the 1880s to compete with Yosemite's Wawona Tree, which had become a popular tourist destination. At the time, the Pioneer Cabin Tree was part of a privately owned resort, Redwood Hikes stated. That tunnel won the tree attention, and for a time cars could even drive through it. However, the destruction of the trunk damaged the tree forever. "Because of the huge cut, this tree could no longer support the growth of a top, which you could see lying on the ground if you walked through the tunnel," a park brochure notes. "The opening also had reduced the ability of the tree to resist fire." The giant sequoias, cousins to the coastal redwoods, are the largest trees in the world by volume and can live up to 3,000 years old.



The fallen Pioneer Cabin Tree covered with snow

[Source: The Huffington Post | January 9, 2016 ++]

Kids Say the Dardnest Things ► **Art Linkletter Would Have Agreed**

NUDITY: I was driving with my three young children one warm summer evening when a woman in the convertible ahead of us stood up and waved. She was stark naked! As I was reeling from the shock, I heard my 5-year-old shout from the back seat, 'Mom, that lady isn't wearing a seat belt!'

OPINIONS: On the first day of school, a first-grader handed his teacher a note from his mother. It read, 'The opinions expressed by this child are not necessarily those of his parents ..'

KETCHUP: A woman was trying hard to get the ketchup out of the jar. During her struggle the phone rang so she asked her 4-year-old daughter to answer the phone. 'Mommy can't come to the phone to talk to you right now, she's hitting the bottle.'

MORE NUDITY: A little boy got lost at the YMCA and found himself in the women's locker room. When he was spotted, the room burst into shrieks, with ladies grabbing towels and running for cover. The little boy watched in amazement and then asked, 'What's the matter, haven't you ever seen a little boy before?'

POLICE # 1: While taking a routine vandalism report at an elementary school, I was interrupted by a little girl about 6 years old. Looking up and down at my uniform, she asked, 'Are you a cop?' 'Yes,' I answered and continued writing the report. My mother said if I ever needed help I should ask the police. Is that right?' 'Yes, that's right,' I told her. 'Well, then,' she said as she extended her foot toward me, 'would you please tie my shoe?'

POLICE #2: It was the end of the day when I parked my police van in front of the station. As I gathered my equipment, my K-9 partner, Jake, was barking, and I saw a little boy staring in at me. 'Is that a dog you got back there?' he asked. 'It sure is,' I replied. Puzzled, the boy looked at me and then towards the back of the van. Finally he said, 'What'd he do?'

ELDERLY: While working for an organization that delivers lunches to elderly shut-ins, I used to take my 4-year-old daughter on my afternoon rounds. She was unfailingly intrigued by the various appliances of old age,

particularly the canes, walkers and wheelchairs. One day I found her staring at a pair of false teeth soaking in a glass. As I braced myself for the inevitable barrage of questions, she merely turned and whispered, 'The tooth fairy will never believe this!'

DRESS-UP: A little girl was watching her parents dress for a party. When she saw her dad donning his tuxedo, she warned, 'Daddy, you shouldn't wear that suit.' And why not, darling?' 'You know that it always gives you a headache the next morning.'

DEATH: While walking along the sidewalk in front of his church, our minister heard the intoning of a prayer that nearly made his collar wilt. Apparently, his 5-year-old son and his playmates had found a dead robin. Feeling that proper burial should be performed, they had secured a small box and cotton batting, then dug a hole and made ready for the disposal of the deceased. The minister's son was chosen to say the appropriate prayers and with sonorous dignity intoned his version of what he thought his father always said: 'Glory be unto the Father, and unto the Son, and into the hole he goes..'

SCHOOL: A little girl had just finished her first week of school. 'I'm just wasting my time,' she said to her mother. 'I can't read, I can't write, and they won't let me talk!'

BIBLE: A little boy opened the big family Bible. He was fascinated as he fingered through the old pages. Suddenly, something fell out of the Bible. He picked up the object and looked at it. What he saw was an old leaf that had been pressed in between the pages. 'Mama, look what I found,' the boy called out.' What have you got there, dear?' With astonishment in the young boy's voice, he answered, 'I think it's Adam's underwear!'

Have You Heard? ► Last Kiss | Jungle Rumble

Back on November 9th, a group of HELLS ANGELS, South Carolina bikers were riding east on 378 when they saw a girl about to jump off the Pee Dee River Bridge. So they stopped.

Jason, their leader, a big man, got off his Harley, walked through a group of gawkers, past the State Trooper who was trying to talk her down off the railing, and said, "Hey Baby . . . whatcha doin' up there on that railin'?"

She said tearfully, "I'm going to commit suicide!"

While he didn't want to appear "sensitive," Jason also didn't want to miss this "be-a-legend" opportunity either so he asked, "Well, before you jump, Honey-Babe . . . why don't you give ol' Jason your best last kiss?"

So, with no hesitation at all, she leaned back over the railing and did just that . . .and it was a long, deep, lingering kiss followed immediately by another even better one.

After they breathlessly finished, Jason got a big thumbs-up approval from his biker-buddies, the onlookers, and even the State Trooper! Then Jason said, "Wow! that was the best kiss I have ever had! That's a real talent you're wasting there, Sugar Shorts. You could be famous if you rode with me. Why are you committing suicide?"

"My parents don't like me dressing up like a girl."

The body has not been recovered. It's still unclear whether she jumped or was thrown from the bridge!

-o-o-O-o-o-

A German Shepherd starts chasing rabbits and before long, discovers that he's lost. Wandering about, he notices a panther heading rapidly in his direction with the intention of having lunch. The old German Shepherd thinks, "Oh, oh! I'm in deep trouble now!"

Noticing some bones on the ground close by, he immediately settles down to chew on the bones with his back to the approaching cat. Just as the panther is about to leap, the old German Shepherd exclaims loudly,

"Boy, that was one delicious panther! I wonder if there are any more around here?" Hearing this, the young panther halts his attack in mid-strike, a look of terror comes over him and he slinks away into the trees. "Whew!" says the panther, "That was close! That old German Shepherd nearly had me!"

Meanwhile, a squirrel who had been watching the whole scene from a nearby tree figures he can put this knowledge to good use and trade it for protection from the panther. So, off he goes. The squirrel soon catches up with the panther, spills the beans and strikes a deal for himself with the panther.

The young panther is furious at being made a fool of and says, "Here, squirrel, hop on my back and see what's going to happen to that conniving canine!" Now, the old German Shepherd sees the panther coming with the squirrel on his back and thinks, "What am I going to do now?" But instead of running, the dog sits down with his back to his attackers, pretending he hasn't seen them yet, and just when they get close enough to hear, the old German Shepherd says...

"Where's that squirrel? I sent him off an hour ago to bring me another panther!"

Moral of this story...Don't mess with the old dogs . Age and skill will always overcome youth and treachery! Brilliance only comes with age and experience. Of course, I am in no way insinuating that you are old, just 'youthfully challenged'. You did notice the size of the print, didn't you?



Honor



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Notes:

1. The Bulletin will be provided as a website accessed document vice direct access until further notice. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 20,406 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others are in the process of being deleted from the active mailing list.
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