

RAO BULLETIN

1 February 2017

PDF Edition



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*** DoD ***



Trump 350 Ship Fleet ► Where Will the Money Come From

President Donald Trump wants to expand the Navy's fleet to 350 ships, the largest build-up since the end of the Cold War. But where that money will come from is unclear and defense contractors aren't counting their ships yet. Experts say that going from the current fleet of 274 ships to Trump's 350 goal will cost about \$165 billion over 30 years. And it will be impossible to achieve unless there's a dramatic increase in the defense budget, currently at \$619 billion. Navy budget expert Ronald O'Rourke said the \$165 billion price tag does not include broader costs such as staffing the ships, maintenance and operations. "The cost to build the ships is just a fraction of this larger number," O'Rourke, a Congressional Research Service analyst, told The Hill. "It's some much more substantial amount of money that would be needed."

There are expectations on Capitol Hill and within the Pentagon that Trump will substantially increase the defense budget. Sen. John McCain (AZ) and Rep. Mac Thornberry (TX), the chairmen of the Armed Services Committees, are preparing a 2018 defense budget plan of about \$640 billion, according to a source close to the House panel. And the Navy added more ships to its 30-year shipbuilding plan after Trump's election. On the campaign trail, he called for a plan to grow the military that experts say would raise the current Pentagon budget by 20 percent. Retired Marine Gen. James Mattis, Trump's nominee for Defense Secretary, has also voiced support for increasing the size of the military and number of ships. However, there are key obstacles to raising defense spending.

The first is the 2011 Budget Control Act, which imposed budget ceilings on defense spending after Congress failed to agree on tax and spending reform. The ceilings are referred to as sequestration, or sequester, and go through

2021. Overturning the bill would require the new GOP-led Congress to pass a new law, which would be a daunting task, if members can't agree on how to otherwise reduce the deficit. The only other option for Republican leaders in Congress is comprising with Democrats to lift the defense budget ceilings for several years at a time -- which Congress has done since the ceilings began in 2013. But Democrats have only been willing to raise the ceilings on defense if non-defense spending is raised as well. Senate Democrats can also still filibuster any GOP plan to raise defense spending, as in previous years.

And there is pressure on Trump from other quarters to keep federal spending low, including the conservative House Freedom Caucus. Last year, they successfully pushed to extend a short-term government spending measure, known as a continuing resolution, through April 2017, giving the Trump administration to chance to weigh in. Trump's appointee for the Office of Management and Budget, Rep. Mick Mulvaney (R-SC), is also a fiscal hawk hostile to increased defense spending. If the ceilings can't be overturned or raised, then money for the new shipbuilding plan and associated costs will have to come from elsewhere in the defense budget, at the expense of other programs. That could spark significant pushback from within the Pentagon.

Trump had said repeatedly on the campaign trail that he would seek to overturn the budget ceilings and raise defense spending. "We will also repeal the Obama-Clinton defense sequester, and rebuild our badly depleted military," he said at a 7 NOV rally in Scranton, Pa. Defense hawks plan to hold Trump to this promise. "He says he wants to spend a lot more money on defense -- I take him at his word," said McCain. How Trump will reconcile these competing expectations is anyone's guess, experts say. "That's the \$100 billion dollar question," said Center for Strategic and International Studies director of defense budget analysis Todd Harrison. "You've got an inherent contradiction." Harrison said Trump will also be using his political capital on a number of other priorities including repealing ObamaCare and tax reform. "How much will be left over when it comes to the defense budget?" he said. "I don't think we're going to see a dramatic increase in defense spending."

Some in the defense industry are worried that lawmakers will pass another year-long continuing resolution to fund the government. That would mean carrying over spending levels from the previous year, which could lead to the delay of new defense programs. One industry official urged lawmakers not to wait until current government spending expires at the end of April, worried they would just extend current spending levels through the end of fiscal year in September. While there is optimism the ceilings on defense spending can be raised, there is also skepticism that Trump can overturn them permanently. "[Trump] campaigned for the end of sequester," the industry official said, but added that he is seemingly walking back other promises, such as having Mexico pay for a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. "The same may be true for sequester," the official said. [Source: The Hill | Kristina Wong | January 16, 2017 ++]

DoD 2018 Budget Update 01 ► McCain's Plan for Military Buildup

President-elect Donald Trump says he wants a military buildup, and Senate Armed Services Chairman John McCain has a plan to do it — one that would cost \$430 billion more than current plans over five years. While the Trump plan looks to rebuild the military through more hardware and manpower, the hawkish Arizona Republican argues the US military, weakened by the Obama administration and budget caps, also ought to be reshaped. It's an ambitious proposition that would have to navigate a Congress marked for years with budget dysfunction: GOP fiscal hawks with an aversion to deficit spending on one hand and Democrats who want parity for defense and non-defense spending on the other.

In a 33-page white paper "[Restoring American Power](#)," McCain says the US military cannot do what he says it must: Wage and win conventional warfare in three priority theaters — Asia, Europe, and the Middle East — with plans to counter the new threats of battlefield nuclear weapons, cyber attacks and irregular warfare. "The joint force must be bigger, but more importantly, it must be more capable. Our adversaries are modernizing their militaries to

exploit our vulnerabilities,” McCain argues. “If all we do is buy more of the same, it is not only a bad investment; it is dangerous. We must rethink how our military projects power and invest in new capabilities.” For the defense industry, there is plenty to notice. McCain proposes ending the off-schedule, over-budget littoral combat ship program in 2017 at 28 ships and begin procuring the next small surface combatant in 2022. For Lockheed Martin’s embattled joint strike fighter, the Air Force’s goal of 1,763 F-35As by 2040 is “is unrealistic and requires re-evaluation, and likely a reduction,” but the Air Force should buy as many as possible for now, McCain says.

For next year’s defense budget, McCain has proposed \$640 billion base national defense budget (including Department of Energy nuclear activities). That’s \$54 billion above President Obama’s planned budget. For any military buildup to prevail, it would likely require Washington to untangle the problem of mandatory spending caps enacted by Congress, under the 2011 Bipartisan Budget Act (BCA), with hopes of reigning in the federal budget. The Pentagon has managed to ease some shortfalls by tucking enduring requirements in the overseas contingency operations account, meant for emergency wartime expenses. By McCain’s reckoning, OCO masked \$41 billion in enduring requirements in the 2017 budget, and overall, “broken future spending caps, rosy cost growth assumptions, and the abuse of OCO ... adds up to more than \$300 billion in existing defense costs.”

“We have been deceiving ourselves and the American people for too long,” McCain argues. “We have allowed arbitrary caps on our national defense spending to remain in place for five years, despite clear evidence that the world is growing more dangerous, the state of military readiness and modernization is growing more perilous, and none of this is having any impact on the national debt, which keeps growing.”

The president-elect’s plan has thus far included broad brushstrokes: Trump wants an active-duty Army with another 60,000 soldiers in the ranks, an unspecified number of additional sailors to man the 78 ships and submarines he intends to see built in coming years. He wants up to 12,000 more Marines to serve in infantry and tank battalions, and at least another 100 combat aircraft for the Air Force. Trump’s plan to lift spending caps would add roughly \$450 billion to the federal deficit over the next decade, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. To offset that cost, Trump has pledged to find savings in other areas; That includes cutting spending that has not been formally authorized by a legislative committee, which would save about \$150 billion, according to CRFB estimates. To figure out how it will all add up, Trump has selected the fiscally hawkish Rep. Mick Mulvaney (R-SC) as his director of the Office of Management and Budget. It’s been read as a signal of his intent to slash spending and address the deficit as president.

“Reversing this budget-driven damage to our military must be a top priority for national leaders,” McCain argues. “President-elect Donald Trump has pledged to ‘fully eliminate the defense sequester’ and ‘submit a new budget to rebuild our military.’ This cannot happen soon enough. The damage that has been done to our military over the past eight years will not be reversed in one year. McCain and Trump, who have been at odds politically, do not completely align here. While Trump has suggested he’s less inclined toward military interventions and global operations, McCain advises the opposite: That the next defense secretary and Congress assess where and how many number of permanently forward-stationed forces are needed, without considering any fewer of them. “When reconsidering global force posture, one option should clearly be off the table: a large-scale reduction in forward-stationed or forward-deployed forces that the United States relies upon around the world,” McCain said. “We have run this experiment over the past eight years: The United States withdrew forces in Europe and the Middle East, and the resulting vacuum was filled with chaos, the malign influence of our adversaries, and threats to our nation.”

The McCain white paper offers detailed recommendations for the armed services to improve capabilities incrementally, but significantly. Overall, it argues for a joint force “equipped with what is often called ‘a high/low mix of capabilities.’ Finally, we need to rethink our global military posture to make it more forward, flexible, resilient, and formidable.” Here are some highlights from the five-year plan, beyond those mentioned above:

- Growing from 274 ships to the Navy of 355 ships is unrealistic in five years, but with funding, it should do 59 ships and invest in autonomous and unmanned capabilities.

- The Navy should boost procurement of manned submarines from two per year to three per year in 2020 and four per year starting in 2021; procure an added 58 F/A-18 E/F Super Hornets, and 16 additional EA-18G Growlers, in light of F-35C delays.
- The Marine Corps, at 182,000 Marines, is too small to meet deployment-dwell target ratios and should grow by 3,000 per year to 200,000 by 2022. To fix readiness problems, the Marines should speed procurement of replacement aircraft like the F-35B, CH-53K helicopter and KC-130J tanker; F-35B procurement should be increased by 20 aircraft over the next five years.
- The Air Force, in light of China and Russia's planned advancements, may need 1,500 fighter aircraft and an end-strength boost of 20,000. It should rethink number of F-35A buys, given ongoing capacity shortfalls, but may need more B-21 bombers. While sustaining the A-10 close air support fighter fleet, procure 300 low cost, light attack fighters —the first 200 by 2022.
- The Army should field emerging technologies, such as electronic warfare and unmanned ground vehicles and modernize air defenses and munitions. Upgrade five brigades with the latest variants of the Abrams tank, Bradley fighting vehicle and Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle — outfitted with the Active Protection System.
- The Army could realistically add 8,000 soldiers a year through 2022 to retain heavier force structure that was due to be eliminated. It could also help the Army experiment with new force mixtures and concepts, such as Train/Advise/Assist Brigades to build partner-military capacity and Multi-Domain Combat Brigades to project power in contested environments through long-range fires, cyber, and other capabilities.
- Nuclear modernization should move ahead as planned while throttling up on missile defense programs: The ground-based midcourse defense system; Aegis ashore sites in Romania and Poland; the Redesignated Kill Vehicle and Multiple Object Kill Vehicle, and next-generation capabilities.
- Investment in new technologies should include more funding for Rapid Capabilities Offices in each of the military services, with greater emphasis on prototyping, experimentation, and common sense principles such as “fly before you buy.”

[Source: Defense News | Joe Gould | January 16, 2017++]

Army Wish List ► 2017-2018 Lists Sent to Congress

Diverting from normal practice, the US Army has outlined in wish lists sent to Congress what it would need in the next two years in order to catch up on lagging modernization efforts and accommodate troop increases mandated in the recently passed defense policy bill. Congress passed its National Defense Authorization Act in December that requires the Army to increase its end-strength by 16,000 more soldiers than originally planned. And President Donald Trump has pledged a troop plus-up to 540,000. What hasn't been determined is how much funding the Army will get in the fiscal year 2017 budget and beyond to cope with a large troop increase at a time it was drastically shrinking the force under the previous administration.

The first wish list is designed to meet the needs of a 476,000-strong active force in 2017 and the second list addresses 2018 plans for an active Army of 490,000. If Congress included all of the Army's "unfunded requirements" in its budget, the service has calculated it would need an additional \$8.2 billion not included in 2017 and an additional \$18.3 billion on top of its yet-to-be-released 2018 budget request. Typically, these unfunded requirements lists are sent to Congress to help guide it in considering what additional funding it might give to the services as it hashes out appropriations. The lists usually come shortly after the release of a budget request in the late winter or early spring. So the pair of lists the Army sent over to Congress in December -- and obtained by Defense

News -- are out of the ordinary and an indication the service is trying to make it clear early on what it would need if Trump follows through on his stated goal to grow the force and spend more on defense.

2017

The 2017 wish list appears to amend the Army's previous list submitted to Congress last March. Congress has yet to pass a 2017 appropriations bill, choosing instead to pass a continuing resolution keeping the Defense Department operating under 2016 funding levels until the end of April. And, in a unique move, the fiscal 2018 wish list comes ahead of the Defense Department's budget request, offering an early glimpse into what will not make it into the 2018 budget taking shape in the Pentagon now. The Army's previous wish list for fiscal 2017 amounted to over \$7.5 billion and included nearly \$800 million for modernization efforts particularly in aviation. The list indicated the Army was taking recommendations made in a February 2016 report from the congressionally mandated National Commission on the Future of the Army (NCFA) to heart, particularly to deal with a dispute between the active Army and the Army National Guard over Apache helicopters.

The new list is less focused on fulfilling NCFA recommendations to emphasizing what the Army would need to equip a larger force. It also addresses other capability gaps that have come to the forefront as the service increases its concentration on the European theater to deter an aggressive Russia's possible unwelcome military advancement into Eastern Europe. The Army would spend \$1.8 billion beyond the 2017 budget to upgrade its armor formations, a direct answer to capability demands in Europe. According to the list, the Army wants to:

- Accelerate Abrams tank production by two Battalion sets -- recapitalizing older tanks into a new version.
- Speed up Bradley Fighting Vehicle production to build one cavalry squadron set.
- Ramp-up the pace to modernization of 140 Stryker armored fighting vehicles to the Double V-Hull (DVH) variant as well as the production of 18 M88A2 Hercules armored recovery vehicles, which would accelerate the pure-fleet of M88A2 for all Armored Brigade Combat Teams and ABCT support units.
- Procure battalion mortar capability for three ABCTs and fund research and development to increase fire power of the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle with a 30mm gun.
- Reduce capability gap at US Army Europe in short-range air defense (SHORAD). It needs \$1.3 billion to pay for modifications to the Patriot Air and Missile Defense System, procures Patriot Advanced Capability-3 missiles, accelerates Stinger air defense system modifications and a service life extension program and also to fund modifications of the Army's Avenger short-range air defense systems.
- Speed up the procurement of ground and air electronic warfare capabilities, an area where Russia is considered to be more advanced.
- Spend \$2.5 billion for 10 new-build AH-64E Apache attack helicopters and advanced procurement for an additional 10 aircraft, 14 new-build CH-47F Chinook cargo helicopters, 17 LUH-72A Lakota light utility helicopters, and 12 additional Gray Eagle unmanned aircraft.

2018

In order to bring the Army's end-strength up to 490,000 troops, which is 36,000 above what was originally programmed in 2018, the service needs \$7 billion -- apparently not included in the 2018 budget request -- to build the force. The funding would allow the Army to:

- Add three Armor Brigades, one through conversion and two new.
- Add an Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), one Corps Headquarters and one Division Headquarters.
- Create a "readiness enhancement account" that would provide funding for the increased number of soldiers in institutional training and generating the force, according to the list.
- Grow the Army National Guard to 343,000 -- 8,000 above the 2018 program -- and the Army Reserve to 199,000 -- 4,000 above the 2018 plan.

- Accelerate aviation procurement programs, which have taken hits in recent years due to sequestration and tight budgets. At a cost of \$2.5 billion the Army would buy 33 new-build Apaches and modernize 48 within five years. The modernization of UH-60 helicopters and Gray Eagles would be accelerated.
- Invest \$2.5 billion in armor formation upgrades in 2018 to include modernization efforts for Abrams, Bradley, the Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicle (AMPV) as well as active protective systems.
- Address shortfalls in the quantity of missiles and artillery available. The Army would spend \$1.5 billion to procure enough fire capacity in five years for US Central Command, US European Command and Korea and would extend the life of the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) while accelerating its long-range missile replacement. Funds would also extend the Guided Multiple-Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) range and upgrade its seeker among other investments in ammunition and missiles.
- Spend \$1 billion to boost Air Defense would in terms of upgrades to SHORAD and Patriot missiles and radars. The money would also go toward Stinger man-portable air defense system upgrades and procurement.
- Spend \$800 million to procure one additional Stryker BCT lethality package per year and accelerate the Mobile Protected Fire Power (MPF) vehicle program.
- Advance command and control modernization though efforts to develop assured Position Navigation and Timing (PNT) in a GPS-denied environment, modernize the existing Warfighter Information Network - Tactical system and bring on a rapid solution for advanced radio encryption and survivability capability in an electronic warfare battlefield are among the items on the Army's wish list.
- Increase funding training and sustainment efforts in both 2017 and 2018.

[Source: DefenseNews | Jen Judson | January 23, 2017++]

DoD Mariana Islands Lawsuit ► Dismissal Sought

The U.S. military is seeking to have a federal lawsuit challenging its plans to expand operations on the Mariana Islands dismissed. The Department of Defense claims the court does not have the authority to question the \$8 billion international agreement that will move as many as 5,000 U.S. Marines from Japan to the Marianas in Dededo, Guam, The Pacific Daily News reported Monday. The military also plans to use some islands in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands for training. Earthjustice filed its lawsuit in July 2016 on behalf of several groups opposed to the military training.

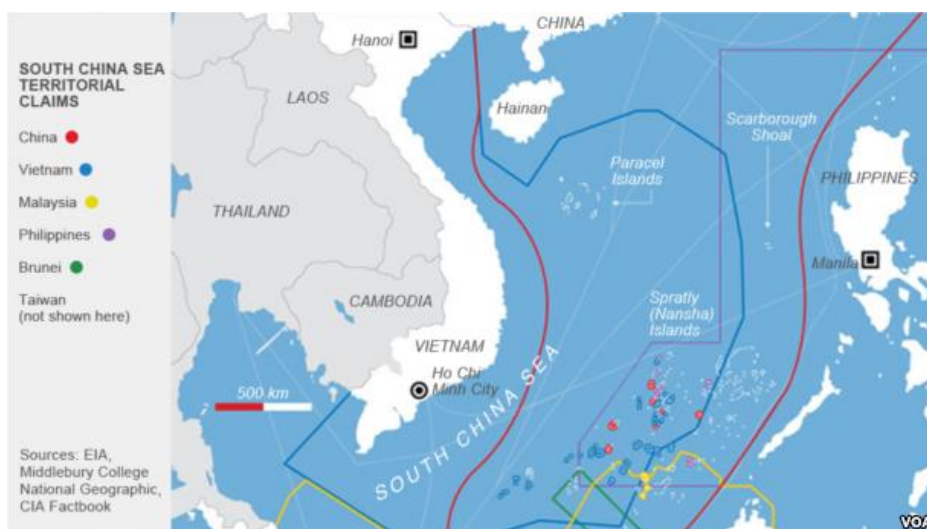
The lawsuit says the U.S. Navy failed to evaluate the environmental impacts of training on Tinian and Pagan islands and did not consider alternate locations outside the Mariana Islands "where the Marines could accomplish their mission with fewer adverse impacts." Earthjustice claims communities on Tinian would be subjected to high-decibel noise and have restricted access to fishing grounds, cultural sites and recreational beaches as a result of the military training. Pagan would be the target of ship-to-shore naval bombardment, which would destroy native forests and coral reefs, according to the lawsuit. The other groups involved in the lawsuit include the Tinian Women's Association, PaganWatch, the Center for Biological Diversity and Guardians of Gani, a nonprofit established to protect "Gani," which refers to the Mariana Islands north of Saipan.

The military issued a response to the complaint 20 JAN saying the court should dismiss the case for lack of jurisdiction. "The decision to relocate the Marines from Okinawa to Guam is a 'political decision already made' by the United States Secretaries of State and Defense through a 2006 commitment to the Government of Japan, and a binding international agreement signed by the United States Secretary of State and Japan's Foreign Minister in 2009," the military's response states. "Plaintiffs point to no case in which a court has exercised jurisdiction to direct an Executive Branch agency to reconsider a course of Executive action that is the subject of a binding international agreement." The military added that it is premature to challenge the proposed training activity in the Northern

Mariana Islands because related environmental impact studies are ongoing and the training "may never be approved at all." [Source: The Associated Press | January 24, 2017 ++]

China Territorial Claims Update 04 ► Indisputable Sovereignty Claimed

China has warned the United States it would not retreat from claims that it controls the South China Sea. "China has indisputable sovereignty over the South China Sea islands and their adjacent waters," foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told reporters at a 24 JAN news briefing in Beijing. "The United States is not a party to the South China Sea issue," Chunying added. Her remarks came in response to White House spokesman Sean Spicer's comments Monday that the U.S. would "defend international territories," including the South China Sea. Spicer also said the U.S. will prevent China from "taking over" the islands and reefs in the sea. President Donald Trump's nominee for secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, said last week that China's access to the islands might be blocked, raising the possibility of a military confrontation.



China's development of artificial islands in the South China Sea has fueled tensions in the area. Regional countries fear that China, which has built airfields and placed weapons systems on man-made islands, will extend its military reach and potentially try to restrict navigation. China claims most of the South China Sea, while Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei claim areas with strategic sea lanes and rich fishing grounds along with oil and gas deposits.

[Source; VOA | January 17, 2017 ++]

Arlington National Cemetery Update 67 ► Eligibility Restriction Proposal

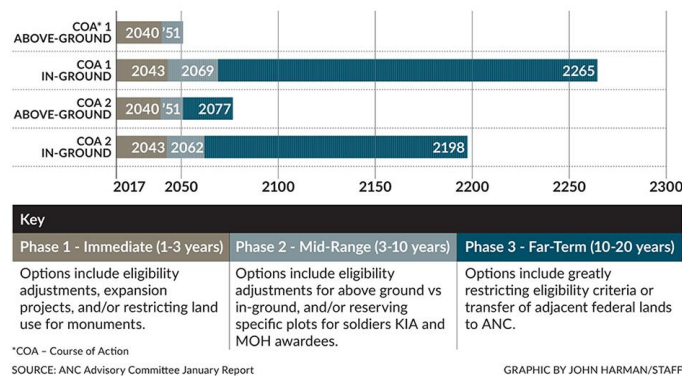
An advisory committee suggests eligibility restrictions as a solution to the cemetery's capacity problems. Retiree eligibility, active duty requirements, and spatial and fiscal constraints are all topics of discussion for delaying maxing capacity at Arlington National Cemetery, Va. If nothing changes, there won't be space for anyone – let alone those meeting exceptional eligibility standards – within the next few decades. Potential courses of action going forward are taking more solid form. The Arlington National Cemetery Advisory Committee held a public meeting this week to provide an update on burial eligibility recommendations and cemetery capacity forecasts, among other business. The latest report further solidified the likely recommendations the committee will provide to the secretary of the Army.

The advisory committee is tasked with finding solutions to the rapidly shrinking available space at the cemetery and suggesting ways to prolong the maximum capacity point as far into the future as possible. The committee has now developed two potential courses of action, which largely fall in line with suggestions from previous reports. Current rules permit anyone with an honorable discharge and with at least one day of active duty service to be interred or inurned at ANC. That's a looser eligibility standard than used for other veteran cemeteries, which can require at least 24 months' service. Both suggested courses of action include a provision to adopt the 24 months' active duty requirement. Further, both potential courses of actions could include changing of eligibility criteria to include only those service members killed in action and/or recipients of the Medal of Honor. However, if approved, those restrictions would not be implemented for another 10 to 20 years.

The cemetery is undergoing two expansion projects to add 27 acres, which will be completed next year. Plans underway (but not finalized) are expected to add another 40 acres, to be completed in 2022. Both courses of action presume completion of this program, but one plan suggests a possible transfer of adjacent federal lands for further expansion. Maximum capacity projections, in accordance with the three-phase courses of action, were included in this week's release. The committee still intends to do a thorough analysis of both possible courses of action, after which a final decision is to be provided to the secretary of the Army. The details of that analysis will come in a future report.

Arlington National Cemetery Capacity Timeline

Two potential courses of action could extend the life of Arlington for centuries.



The final recommendation from the advisory committee will inform the secretary of the Army's decision in his report submission to the House and Senate Armed Services and Veterans' Affairs Committees. That submission deadline passed in November of 2016, as committee deliberation was delayed by due discourse. The report specifically will include the official:

- Estimated date the cemetery will reach maximum capacity
- Recommended actions to ensure maximum capacity is not reached until well into the future

MOAA Government Relations VP Col. Dan Merry, USAF (Ret) said MOAA appreciates the full commitment to exploring all potential courses of action on this issue, and eagerly awaits the advisory committee and secretary of the Army's final report to Congress. They would like to see ANC remain open and active well into the future. They don't have a problem reserving a set number of plots for future Medal of Honor recipients and combat deaths, but we don't think an 80-year old retiree who's made plans for Arlington burial should lose eligibility to reserve space for an active duty member who dies in a car accident 150 or 200 years from now.

"A lot can change over 50 or 75 years. The Pentagon hadn't been built 75 years ago, and lots of military installations have been BRACed over the last 35. MOAA and other military and veterans' associations have told the committee they think all options for further expansion should be pursued before we start turning away older vets

who planned for ANC interment. We know procuring land can take a long time, so that process should start sooner rather than later.” [Source: MOAA Leg Up | January 27, 2017 ++]

U.S. Philippine Bases Update 16 ► Duterte | Weapon Depots Not Allowed

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte asked the United States on 29 JAN not to store weapons in local camps under a defense pact, saying his country may get entangled if fighting erupts between China and the U.S. Duterte said in a news conference that he would consider abrogating a 2014 defense pact that allows U.S. forces to temporarily station in designated Philippine camps if the Americans build weapon depots in those encampments. "They're unloading arms in the Philippines now," Duterte said, identifying three areas where U.S. forces were supposedly bringing in their armaments, including the western Philippine province of Palawan, which faces the disputed South China Sea.

"I'm serving notice to the armed forces of the United States, do not do it, I will not allow it," Duterte said in the televised news conference after meeting top military and police officials. U.S. officials did not immediately comment on Duterte's remarks. The brash-talking Philippine leader, who took office in June, has been antagonistic to the administration of former President Barack Obama for raising concerns over Duterte's bloody crackdown on illegal drugs which has left thousands of mostly suspected drug users and small-time dealers dead. Duterte, who has moved to rebuild once-frosty relations with China, has repeatedly threatened to scale back military exercises with American troops and stop agreements that allow U.S. forces to visit. The agreements include the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, which was signed by the treaty allies in 2014. But he has walked back many of those threats.

Duterte said Washington was putting regional stability at risk and its actions could put the Philippines in "extreme danger" because of the posturing between the United States and China. "You are egging us ... egging us (on) to force the issue of arbitral judgment," he said, referring to the United States. "The missiles of China are pointed at the American expeditions," he said, referring to its naval patrols. "A depot would serve as a supply line." Duterte said he had an "urgent" message to China, asking it to help provide precision-guided missiles so Philippine troops could fight Islamic State-linked militants in the south. He said the court ruling on the South China Sea would be discussed with China when the time was right. "I made a commitment to President Xi Jinping, I made a solemn commitment that we will talk about this arbitral award during my term. When, I really do not know, but we will talk hard," he said.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said 25 JAN that the Pentagon plans to start constructing facilities inside designated Philippine military camps as early as this year. Lorenzana mentioned at least three Philippine camps where the Americans plan to start constructions of buildings for their troops and equipment, including an air base in Palawan province. The U.S. military construction plans were delayed due to petitions to the Supreme Court that questioned EDCA's legality. The court declared that the defense pact conforms with the Philippine Constitution last year. [Source: The Associated Press | January 29, 2017 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 JAN 2017

Jacksonville, FL – United States Attorney A. Lee Bentley, III announces that a federal jury has found **Crystel Lee Riedling** (44, Lake City) guilty of theft of government property and making a false statement. She faces a maximum penalty of 15 years in federal prison. Her sentencing hearing is scheduled for April 11, 2017. Riedling was indicted on February 18, 2016. According to evidence presented at trial, Riedling, a U.S. Army veteran, received almost

\$300,000 in disability benefits over the past five to six years. She began receiving the benefits after claiming that she was completely unable to use her right arm. In reality, Riedling had use of her right arm and was seen using it. Two doctors testified that Riedling was malingering and exaggerating her injuries. Statements presented at trial also included Riedling's admission that she knew that receiving these benefits was "completely wrong." The jury also found Riedling guilty of making false statements to the United States after she told an investigator that she was totally and permanently disabled. This case was investigated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs – Office of Inspector General, the Social Security Administration - Office of the Inspector General, and the U.S. Department Health and Human DoJ U.S. Attorney's Office | Middle District of Florida | January 12, 2017 ++]

POW/MIA Update 80 ► U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POWs/MIAs

When the Russian Imperial frigate Svetlana steamed into Norfolk in 1877, it carried Russian royalty and was considered a grand affair. Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich, Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich and Prince Shcherbakov were visiting Hampton Roads as part of a diplomatic mission that involved entertaining hundreds of Americans aboard the Svetlana and dining at the posh Hygeia Hotel at Old Point Comfort in Hampton. An opera singer from New York was even brought down to perform for the royals at the Church Street Opera House. But while the Svetlana eventually left, not all of its crew did. Six sailors died of typhus while they were in Norfolk and were buried next to the naval hospital in Portsmouth.

Three of them were identified for the first time DEC 2016. And on 27 JAN, about 140 years after they were interred, a formal funeral service was held for all six. The rector of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Washington performed a brief ceremony, attended by officials from the Russian embassy and U.S. Navy. About a dozen passersby stopped to watch and take pictures as the Russian navy's ensign, St. Andrew's flag, was planted at each headstone. It was a rare sight of respect and cooperation for two countries that have been at odds over a number of issues in recent years. Tensions have included Russian aircraft buzzing a U.S. destroyer in the Baltic Sea in April and actions by Russian ships the U.S. Navy has deemed unsafe and unprofessional.



Reverend Victor Potapov, of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in D.C., waves an incense burner while reciting prayers during a memorial ceremony held for six Russian Sailors

The funeral service was the result of the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POWs/MIAs that was created in 1992 by former President George H.W. Bush and former Russian President Boris Yeltsin. U.S. Army Col. Chris Forbes, who oversees Europe for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, said this is one area in which the United States and Russia have worked well together. "Three are unknown, which brings the human side to this. They were known by someone. All they probably know is their families sent them off to the navy, did Russia's business and didn't return home," Forbes said during the service. "It's fitting we honor them, as their families have not been able to do for so many years."

While Russian historians have long known Russian sailors were buried near Portsmouth Naval Medical Center, it wasn't until 2013 that they were identified online by volunteers of a Russian memorials project, according to the Russian Embassy. Four of the graves say "Unknown Russian Sailor" while the other two are marked "Unknown Sailor." The Russians are buried along with American sailors and those from Brazil, Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Germany, as well as those who fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War. The graves were first visited by the chief of the Russian office of the prisoner-of-war joint commission in April. In December, the Russian Military Historical Society was able to identify three of the six: 25-year-old Seaman 2nd Class Gavriil Vyakhirev, Seaman 2nd Class Arseniy Bragin and Seaman 1st Class Zakhar Lebedev. Lebedev and Bragin's ages are unknown.

Russia's embassy says it is hopeful that the other three sailors will be identified later this year. "We're grateful to the American side for preserving the graves. I'm sure it will be a great tradition gathering here at the end of January every year," said Nikolay Lakhonin, the Russian embassy's press secretary. "We hope of course the other three seaman will not so long remain unknown. We will together discover our past in Norfolk that consisted not only of tragic and sad events, but also legendary and great examples of friendship and cooperation." Shortly after Lakhonin spoke, Americans and Russians together placed multiple red carnations on the headstones of the sailors who never made it home. [Source: The Virginian-Pilot | Brock Vergakis | January 28, 2017 ++]

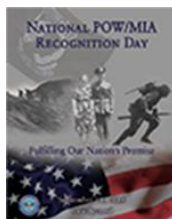
POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 16 thru 31 JAN 2017 | Two

"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

None

Korea

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

-- **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 of one 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:

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. John D. Mumford** was a P-51C “Mustang” pilot assigned to the 318th Fighter Squadron, 325th Fighter Group, 15th Air Force. On June 6, 1944, Mumford flew escort for B-17 “Flying Fortress” bombers on their mission to bomb and destroy a German occupied airfield at Galati, Romania. Following the bombing, the formation was attacked by German fighters. Mumford pursued two German fighters before crashing near present day Novi Troyany, Ukraine. Interment services are pending. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1052053/airman-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-mumford/>.

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | January 31, 2017 ++]

* VA *



VA Progress ► By the Numbers

If Veterans Affairs Under Secretary for Health Dr. David Shulkin is confirmed as the next VA Secretary, he'll take on a broader profile than just the medical aspects of the department. Here's a look at some key facts and figures on where the department stands today, based on current officials' own statistics and assessments of operations since current VA Secretary Bob McDonald took office in August 2014.

⊕ The VA budget totals \$176.9 billion for fiscal 2017, almost twice the budget total when Obama took office in fiscal 2009 (\$93.7 billion) and almost four times the total when the war in Afghanistan began in fiscal 2001 (\$48.7 billion). Of the 2017 total, roughly \$77.4 billion is set aside for discretionary programs, and the rest for disability, medical and education benefits, along with other mandatory spending.

⊕ VA employed about 365,000 workers in fiscal 2016, up about 88,000 people from when President Barack Obama took office in 2009. Employee bonuses and discipline has been a constant fight for department leaders in

recent years, with critics saying they do too little to root out lazy or incompetent bureaucrats. In fiscal 2015, about one-third of all VA employees were veterans.

⊗ Roughly 9 million veterans were enrolled in VA health care at the end of fiscal 2016, about 42 percent of the nation's veterans population. That number was 7.8 million in fiscal 2009, roughly 33 percent of the total U.S. veterans population at the time. Part of the increase is due to troops returning from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the department has also seen increases in the usage rate from older generations.

⊗ About 58 million medical appointments were scheduled by VA in fiscal 2016, an increase of almost six percent in two years. Almost a third of those appointments were scheduled with doctors working outside the VA system, in private clinics.

⊗ More than 542,000 veterans were rated as 100 percent disabled at the end of fiscal 2016, giving them access to a wide range of payouts and benefits. In fiscal 2009, that number was 265,000. Again, part of that increase is attributable to the current wars, but a large part also reflects an aging veterans populations with worsening service-injuries from decades ago.

⊗ About 93 percent of veterans medical appointments are being scheduled within 30 days, according to department data from December 2016. That's down about 1 percent from fall 2014, when department officials began tracking patient wait times in the wake of nationwide scandals about delayed appointments and cover ups. The average wait time for mental health care appointments is 4.5 days, roughly the same as the wait over the previous two years. The wait for primary care is 5.7 days (down from 6.7 in fall 2014) and the wait for specialty care is 10.2 days (up from 7.5 days in fall 2014).

⊗ And 8,481 patients on VA lists have been waiting more than four months for appointment requests, a number that swelled to more than 10,000 in early 2016.

⊗ More than 960,000 veterans received some type of education benefits through VA in fiscal 2016, up from around 265,000 in fiscal 2009. The biggest contributor to that jump was passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2010, which offered a full four years tuition at state universities and a housing stipend to troops who served at least three years after 2001.

⊗ An average of 20 veterans a day committed suicide in fiscal 2014, the latest information available. Past research had pegged that number at 22, but those estimates were drawn from fewer states and contained problematic guesses. It's unclear whether recent mental health efforts by VA have driven down the suicide rate.

⊗ About 96,000 first-time benefits claims were "backlogged" as of Dec. 31, 2016. A claim is considered overdue if it isn't completed within 125 days. Obama promised to bring that number down to zero by the start of 2016. The backlog peaked at about 611,000 cases in March 2013 and was down as low as 70,000 cases in fall 2015, when VA officials announced that zeroing out the backlog completely was likely impossible and could unnecessarily rush some cases.

⊗ Another 303,673 benefit cases that are pending in the department's appeals system, as of Dec. 31, 2016. That's up from about 181,000 cases at the end of 2009. The cases typically take three or more years to fully complete.

⊗ More than 2.6 million VA home loans were awarded in fiscal 2016, up about 500,000 eight years earlier.

⊗ Federal researchers estimate that 39,472 veterans were homeless as of January 2016. That's down from about 75,600 veterans on the streets in 2009, when Obama announced plans to house every veteran in America by the end of 2015. So far, 33 communities and three states have been certified as "effectively" ending veterans homelessness, meaning they have the resources to rapidly house all veterans in in their community facing financial distress.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 16, 2017 | ++]

VA Home Loan Update 46 ► 707,000+ loans in FY 2016

Veterans in Oregon and across the country are turning to their hard-earned home loan benefits like never before. The historic Veterans Administration home loan program had its biggest year ever in 2016, fueled by a surge of millennial veterans and service members. The VA backed more than 707,000 loans last fiscal year, nearly double the program's volume from five years ago. Created as part of the original GI Bill, these flexible, \$0 down mortgages are helping a new generation of veterans and military families put down roots. VA loan volume in the Portland area and across Oregon has jumped about 75 percent from just a couple years ago.

This is a deserving demographic that believes in homeownership. Earlier this year, the national homeownership rate dropped just below 63 percent, marking a 50-year low. VA estimates the veteran homeownership rate is closer to 82 percent. For many veterans and military families, the challenge has been securing financing in an era of tight lending and lagging wage growth. Military buyers can face unique credit and financial challenges that put conventional financing out of reach. VA loans allow qualified buyers to purchase with no down payment, no mortgage insurance and less-than-perfect credit. The average VA buyer in 2016 had a FICO credit score nearly 50 points lower than their conventional counterpart, according to mortgage software firm Ellie Mae. It can take veterans and military families years to save the 5 percent down payment most conventional loans require.

This benefit program is also proving to be an economic springboard for those elusive millennial homebuyers. The VA estimates millennial-age veterans and military members accounted for a third of all loans last year, spurred by the \$0 down advantage and more forgiving credit guidelines. In many ways, VA loans continue to fulfill their original mission to help level the playing field for those who've served our country. But they've also become a surprising model of stability in the mortgage industry. One of the most under-the-radar stories of the housing recovery is that a no-down payment loan has led the way in foreclosure avoidance. VA loans have had a lower foreclosure rate than both FHA and prime conventional loans for 25 of the last 35 quarters, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association.

Part of that success stems from the VA's common sense requirements for discretionary income, an underwriting feature absent from other loan types. But loan program leadership is also committed to helping veterans keep their homes. The VA keeps tabs on its more than 2 million active mortgages. Loan program staff members can intercede on behalf of troubled homeowners and encourage lenders and servicers to consider foreclosure alternatives. Since 2008, those efforts have helped more than 500,000 veterans avoid foreclosure.

Over the last decade, millions of veterans and military families have found a foothold in the housing market using the VA loan program. But millions more are still missing out. VA surveys have found about 1 in 3 homebuying veterans didn't know they had a home loan benefit. These government-backed loans aren't the right answer for every would-be homebuyer. But understanding all of your mortgage options is key to making the savviest financial decision possible. For so many veterans and military members, this hard-earned benefit winds up being the most powerful lending option on the market. [Source: The Oregonian | Gordon Oliver | January 30, 2017 ++]

VA Electronic Health Record Update 05 ► New Digital Health Platform

The Department of Veterans Affairs Digital Health Platform (DHP), a cloud-based technology, will equip providers with real-time access to patient health data from VA, military, and commercial electronic health records (EHRs), applications, devices and wearable's. The program will employ open health IT standards — specifically, HL7 — in combination with cloud-based technologies in order to present a holistic view of veteran digital health records. DHP

will rely on application programming interfaces (APIs) to merge military and commercial health data, unify VA data stores, connect patients and providers instantly, and improve patient care. Currently, VA operates across a variety of disparate systems each housing different records, making it challenging for veterans to exchange information between providers. DHP will connect this health data in a closed-loop system programmed to continuously collect and analyze data.

The primary goal of DHP is to ensure that all available health data on a veteran — from personal devices and wearables to provider-generated data at annual physicals — is available in one easily-accessible digital location that can follow that individual anywhere. Because DHP is a cloud-based service focused on connecting a network of existing systems, it will not be dependent on any singular system to function. Were VA to replace its existing VistA EHR technology with a replacement EHR, the process would not have an adverse effect on DHP. "The digital health platform will be a system of systems," David Shulkin told the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs in a June 2016 hearing. "It is not dependent on any particular [electronic health record], and VA can integrate new or existing resources into the system without sacrificing data interoperability. One of the digital health platform's defining features will be system-wide cloud integration, a marked improvement over the more than 130 instances of VistA that we have today."

Officials with VA stated instead of focusing on building VistA 4, the latest iteration of its EHR evolution scheduled for delivery next year, they are more concerned with modernizing its current EHR system and improving health information exchange. Critics questioned a new platform replacing VistA after more than \$510 million in IT development funds have already gone toward developing the platform since 2014, but Shulkin assured skeptics the resources poured into VistA will not go to waste. Shulkin stated that "regardless of whether our path forward is to continue with VistA, a shift to a commercial EHR platform as DoD is doing, or some combination of both."

DHP will prove particularly helpful for a variety of special cases, including veterans with chronic diseases (e.g., congestive heart failure) who require care pathways and monitoring to prevent the worsening of existing medical conditions. In his written testimony below, Shulkin stressed the need to consider special cases in the future:

Due to the expansion of care in the community, a rapidly growing number of women Veterans, and increased specialty care needs, the need for more agility in our EHR has never been greater. We are looking beyond what is delivered with VistA 4 in FY 2018, and we are evaluating options for the creation of a Digital Health Platform to ensure that we have the best strategic approach to modernizing our EHR for the next 25 years. To prepare for this new era in connected health, VA is looking beyond the EHR to a digital health platform that can better support Veterans throughout the health continuum. These factors drive the need for continuous innovation and press us to plan further into the future.

On top of EHR interoperability, DHP will facilitate care coordination, claims processing, and medical records management. [Source: HealthIT Interoperability | January 17, 2017 ++]

VA Telehealth Update 09 ► Impact on HIV Care

Dr. Michael Ohl of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Iowa City VA Health Care System is creating a model titled Telehealth Collaborative Care to improve the quality of care for Veterans who live far from specialty clinics. Telehealth Collaborative Care uses videoconferencing to connect rural Veterans with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) with VA specialists. HIV is a chronic condition that can result in serious outcomes for patients lacking access to quality treatment. The illness attacks the body's immune system and can cause acquired immune deficiency syndrome or AIDS, a potentially life-threatening disease. Approximately 18 percent of the 26,000 Veterans under VA care for HIV live in rural areas. These Veterans have limited access to high-quality, HIV specialty clinics. "Veterans should have easy access to HIV testing and state-of-the-art HIV care regardless of

where they live,” said Ohl, an infectious disease specialist. “We know that compared to their urban counterparts, rural Veterans with HIV enter care with more advanced illness, are less likely to receive the latest advances in HIV treatment, and have lower survival rates. We want to change that.”

Ohl’s study explores rural Veterans’ interest in using video telehealth at close-by, VA community-based outpatient clinics, (CBOCs) to maintain their ongoing care. CBOCs serve as satellite clinics for large VA medical centers. Veterans can telecommunicate, via video at CBOCs, with an HIV specialist at the larger facility. HIV pharmacists, psychologists, and nurse-care managers may also be included in videoconferences. A nurse onsite with the Veteran at the outpatient clinic can administer treatment if prescribed by the specialist. Veterans can also meet with their primary care physician onsite. The primary care clinic and specialty care clinic can then communicate to determine how best to co-manage the Veteran’s care. The coordinated process lifts a major travel burden off rural Veterans. In 2010, rural Veterans with HIV were an average of 86 minutes by car from the closest infectious disease clinic versus 23 minutes on average for urban Veterans. Rural Veterans were also less likely than their urban counterparts to use specialty care.

The Telehealth Collaborative Care study, which involves approximately 800 Veterans, is focusing on rural areas near San Antonio, Houston, Dallas and Atlanta, each of which has a VA hospital with an HIV specialty clinic. Veterans with HIV who live closer to a primary care clinic or CBOC than to a specialty clinic and who have at least a 90-minute drive to one of these cities are being offered the telehealth option. Through interviews with the Veterans, Ohl and his team are finding that most of those offered telehealth are choosing to take advantage of the option. VA offers close to 50 telehealth specialties. During fiscal year 2016, more than 700,000 Veterans completed approximately 2 million telehealth appointments. For more information about VA’s work in HIV and AIDS, visit <http://www.hiv.va.gov/patient/index.asp>. Information about Ohl’s study may be found at www.hsrd.research.va.gov/research/abstracts.cfm?Project_ID=2141702405. [Source: VA Congressional Notifications | January 24, 2017 ++]

VA Fertility Services Update 03 ► IVF Regulation Amendment

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced 19 JAN that it is amending its regulation regarding fertility counseling and treatment available to eligible Veterans and spouses. VA currently provides certain infertility services other than in vitro fertilization (IVF) services to Veterans as part of the medical benefits package. This interim final rule authorizes IVF for a Veteran with a service-connected disability that results in the inability of the Veteran to procreate without the use of fertility treatment. It also states that VA may provide fertility counseling and treatment using assisted reproductive technologies (ART), including IVF, to a spouse of a Veteran with a service-connected disability that results in the inability of the Veteran to procreate without the use of fertility treatment.

“I have always believed that one of the main responsibilities of a grateful nation is to make whole the men and women who have made sacrifices on our behalf,” said VA Secretary Bob McDonald. “It is important that we fully understand the needs of our Veteran population, and incorporate the major scientific advances available today that can allow them to live a full life. Providing fertility counseling and treatment, including in vitro fertilization, is consistent with VA’s goal of restoring reproductive capabilities of Veterans and improving the quality of their lives.”

As part of the medical benefits package, VA provides many different types of fertility treatments and procedures to Veterans. These include infertility counseling, laboratory blood testing, surgical correction of structural pathology, reversal of a vasectomy or tubal ligation, medication, and various other diagnostic studies or treatments and procedures. Full implementation of this regulation requires that VA utilize and optimize existing capabilities for care in the community and develop internal processes that will provide Veterans with a seamless path to receiving

ART services. Veterans can immediately schedule appointments with their local health care system for eligibility determinations, clinical evaluation and consultation, and initial treatment as we work to build this structure.

The interim final rule was published in the Federal Register on January 19, 2017 and can be accessed by going to <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/01/19/2017-00280/fertility-counseling-and-treatment-for-certain-veterans-and-spouses>. Although the interim rule references September 30, 2017 as the date the funding expires, the funds are authorized through September 30, 2018. [Source: Vantage Point | January 19, 2017 ++]

VA Hiring Update 08 ► What Freeze Means for VA Healthcare

President Donald Trump on 23 JAN imposed a federal hiring freeze affecting the short-staffed Department of Veterans Affairs. According to Becker's Hospital Review here are six things to know about the hiring freeze and how it affects the VA.

1. The White House said President Trump imposed the hiring freeze "to counter the dramatic expansion of the federal workforce in recent years and the costs attendant to that expansion."
2. The hiring freeze does not affect the military and other positions regarded as necessary for national security and public safety, reports USA Today. However, White House press secretary Sean Spicer confirmed Tuesday that it does affect thousands of open jobs at the VA.
3. Commenting on the hiring freeze, Mr. Spicer said federal officials wanted to ensure President Trump's pick to lead the VA, current undersecretary for health at the agency David Shulkin, is confirmed, according to the report. "When you have a system that's not working, and then going out and hiring additional people doesn't seem to be the most efficient way of solving the problem," Mr. Spicer said. "What we need to do, whether it's the VA or any other agency, is make sure that we're hiring smartly and effectively and efficiently."
4. The hiring freeze does not affect hires already in the works before Monday, the report notes. Still, the hiring freeze comes as the VA has posted more than 2,000 job openings on the federal hiring website, including for hundreds of nurses and physicians, reports USA Today.
5. In response to the hiring freeze and Mr. Spicer's remarks, the VA said it planned to take advantage of the hiring freeze's allowances for public safety needs, according to the report. "The Department of Veterans Affairs intends to exempt anyone it deems necessary for public safety, including frontline caregivers," Acting VA Secretary Robert Snyder said in a statement.
6. Mr. Spicer has noted the hiring freeze is only meant to "pause" hiring until further analysis takes place, according to the report.

[Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Kelly Gooch | January 25, 2017 ++]

VA Hiring Update 09 ► Democrats Ask for Freeze Exemption

Fifty-five House and Senate Democrats are calling on President Trump to exempt the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from his freeze on federal hiring, as well as protecting veterans seeking federal jobs. "While there can be no debate that the federal government, including VA, should be more efficient in its delivery of services to all Americans, a hiring freeze at VA will delay veterans' access to health care and resolution of their disability claims, which for many of our nation's heroes provides a sole source of income to them and their families," the Democrats

wrote in a letter to Trump on Wednesday. “Our nation’s veterans should not be made to sacrifice any more than they already have while you review federal hiring.” The letter was organized by Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) and Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN) the ranking members of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees. It was co-signed by every Democrat in the Senate and six Democrats in the House.

Trump signed an executive order 23 JAN that freezes all federal government hiring except for the in military. There are also exceptions for public safety and public health jobs. In line with the order, acting VA head Robert Snyder said the department would continue to hire frontline caregivers and other people necessary for public safety. But the Democrats say those exceptions are not enough. For example, under the freeze, the VA won’t be able to hire administrative support teams to help with appointment scheduling or staff to process appeals for disability compensation, according to the letter. More than 450,000 appeals are pending. “Our nation’s veterans cannot afford an unnecessary wait to receive the benefits they have earned serving our country,” they wrote. “We urge you to re-evaluate this hiring freeze and take into account the effect it will have on veterans who will have to wait longer for earned benefits -- whether it’s disability, survivor or education benefits, or whether it’s vocational rehabilitation or job training services.”

In 2014, the VA was rocked by a wait-time scandal that prompted the eventual resignation of Secretary Eric Shinseki. Veterans care has been in the spotlight since then. Veterans, who make up 31 percent of the federal workforce, will be further hurt by not being able to seek federal jobs, the Democrats warned 25 JAN. “The negative impacts of this freeze will be felt across the country and disproportionately affect those men and women who have honorably served in our military,” they wrote. Trump’s own nominee for VA secretary, David Shulkin, has talked in the past about the need to hire more staff for the VA’s health administration. Shulkin has served as under secretary of health since 2015. “We have 45,000 job openings. That’s too many,” Shulkin said in an interview with NPR this past fall. “I need to fill every one of those openings in order to make sure that we’re doing the very best for our veterans.”

Two Democratic Massachusetts Congressman Seth Moulton and Oregon Congressman Kurt Schrader have filed legislation aimed at blocking Republican President Trump from imposing the hiring freeze at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Moulton said the freeze will have a lasting impact on the VA’s ability to care for veterans. He said progress made on reducing wait times “will come to a screeching halt.” Schrader said one in 12 Oregon residents is a veteran. He called the freeze an unacceptable way to treat those who have risked their lives to serve the country. Trump spokesman Sean Spicer has said the freeze ensures taxpayers get efficient government. He said at the VA in particular, hiring more people isn’t the answer. [Source: The Hill | Rebecca Kheel | January 25, 2017 ++]

VA Hiring Update 10 ► Freeze Exemption List Released

The Veterans Affairs Department on 27 JAN released a list of wide-ranging jobs it intends to exempt from President Donald Trump’s governmentwide hiring freeze, from medical and law enforcement personnel to cemetery caretakers. The VA has carved out approximately 100 or so positions as exempt from the freeze because they are necessary to maintain the massive department’s “public safety responsibilities,” wrote Acting VA Secretary Robert Snyder in a Jan. 27 memorandum to VA’s top leadership. Snyder noted that the memo was “interim guidance” and would be updated once the department receives additional guidance from the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Personnel Management. “The authorities outlined in the president’s memo provide VA the ability to continue filling essential positions that provide public safety services to our veterans,” the department said in a statement. “We strongly believe that these exemptions are in line with the president’s intent.”

Trump’s 23 JAN presidential memorandum authorizing the freeze said that agency heads “may exempt from the hiring freeze any positions that it deems necessary to meet national security or public safety responsibilities.” The freeze “applies to all executive departments and agencies regardless of the sources of their operational and

programmatic funding, excepting military personnel,” the order stated. Acting OMB Director Mark Sandy sent preliminary guidance 25 JAN to agencies with some clarifications on the broadly-worded freeze, noting that more detailed guidance was “forthcoming.” Many agencies, federal employees and job candidates, however remain confused over how the freeze applies to them. Federal employees have flooded the inboxes of lawmakers’ offices and even Government Executive with questions. Applicants are concerned about the current status of conditional offers or whether they should bother starting the process to enter federal service at all. Current employees have asked what jobs would be exempted and whether potential promotions are now defunct.

VA appeared to be the first major department to release detailed guidance on how it plans to apply the hiring freeze. Snyder said in his memo to department leadership that in addition to exempting front-line patient caregiver jobs (doctors, nurses, therapists, etc.) from the freeze, he also was exempting positions at major construction projects the VA is in the midst of across the country at several facilities. “To ensure veterans are able to continue accessing state-of-the-art facilities and the quality care they deserve, I am granting exemptions to ensure the minimum staffing required to become or remain operational, and to ensure that the safety and health standards required by law are met. Those positions include: project manager, professional engineer, contracting specialist, and realty specialist.

Snyder also left open the possibility that other positions not listed could be exempted. “Any support positions required to bring those facilities up to operating capabilities will also be exempted to avoid any delays, but VHA [Veterans Health Administration] and the Office of Acquisitions, Logistics, and Construction must request and obtain secretarial approval on a facility-by-facility basis for those exemptions,” he wrote. Law enforcement positions, including categories for police and security guards also were exempt, as was the position of chaplain. Snyder also tagged several positions within the VA’s National Cemetery Administration as exempt from the freeze, including laborer, cemetery caretaker/foreman, operations supervisor, and maintenance mechanic, and other jobs “directly involved in the burial of veterans and their eligible family members.”

American Federation of Government Employees President J. David Cox Sr. praised Snyder “for stepping up and attempting to limit the hiring freeze’s impact on veterans,” pointing out the more 45,000 job openings for medical health care providers at VA facilities across the country. “By exempting certain positions within the VA, Acting Secretary Snyder has taken a positive step in veterans’ health care, but it’s simply not enough,” Cox said in a statement. “Veterans can’t afford a delay in their patient scheduling or benefits. The VA is an integrated system of care, and while medical professionals are the positions most in need, all vacancies must be filled.” Cox said the freeze also hurts vets who aren’t seeking care at the VA because the federal government “is the leading employer of veterans.” AFGF represents more than 200,000 VA employees.

White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer in his 24 JAN briefing said the hiring freeze applied to the VA, and in response to a question about the freeze and critical vacancies at the VA said this: “What we need to do, whether it’s the VA or any other agency, is make sure that we’re hiring smartly and effectively and efficiently. And I think the VA in particular, if you look at the problems that have plagued people, hiring more people isn’t the answer, it’s hiring the right people, putting the procedures in place that ensure that our veterans -- whether it’s health care, mortgages or the other services the VA provides to those who have served our nation -- get the services that they’ve earned. And right now, the system’s broken.” The comments left some confused over whether the VA could claim some exemptions from the hiring freeze. VA did not immediately respond to a question about whether the department consulted first with the White House over the positions listed as exempt in Snyder’s memo. [Source: GovExec.com | Kellie Lunney | January 27, 2017 ++]

FHCC Chicago Update 01 ► Joint DoD/VA Experiment Not Working Out

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2010 authorized the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Defense (DOD) to establish a 5-year demonstration project to integrate VA and DOD medical care

into a first of its kind Federal Health Care Center (FHCC) in North Chicago, Illinois. Expectations for the FHCC were outlined in an Executive Agreement signed by VA and DOD in April 2010. Five years into their experiment in jointly operating a health care facility in Chicago, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments have learned they still have some bugs to work out.

In a report to Congress, they said the cost of running the facility to serve both veterans and military personnel are running “very high.” Originally, projections had the facility saving the government about \$20 million per year. But there’s no going back now. The Navy hospital that used to serve military patients in the area has since been demolished, and disentangling the pay and personnel systems at the integrated facility would be enormously complicated. The two departments recommended against pursuing any other integration of DoD and VA health care facilities until officials “get it right” in Chicago. The GAO said much more data is needed to determine how effective the pilot program has been. [Source: Federal News Radio | Terry Wing | January 25, 2017 ++]

VA Claim Denials ► Jarman Jenkins, Vietnam

Jenkins joined the Navy in 1964 after he finished at Wake Forest. He laughs when he says that he and a buddy got drunk when considering their options and decided to take an exam for officer’s candidate school. Next thing he knew, Jenkins was a junior officer and on his way to Vietnam, where he served in the military sea transport service, which means he was all over the place moving ships. Agent Orange, a powerful herbicide since shown to cause cancer, was everywhere. “We saw barrels of it all the time on those ships,” he said. “They had no idea in the world what it would do to you, but they used it.” The VA’s own literature says that if a veteran served anywhere in the Republic of Vietnam from January 1962 to May 1975, exposure to Agent Orange is presumed.

Jarman Jenkins’ running battle with the Department of Veterans Affairs started in 2005 in a Home Depot. A Navy man and a Vietnam vet, Jenkins was about to pay for his purchases when a cashier casually informed him about a veterans’ discount. He carries a laminated copy of his discharge in his wallet but “they told me I needed a card from the VA. I didn’t know a thing about the VA.” He does now. Jenkins says the first VA representative he reached told him he wasn’t eligible for a VA card or services because his income was too high, which ticked him off. “They didn’t ask me how much I made when they sent me over there,” he said. But he let that one slide and didn’t think much about the VA until after he was treated in 2011 for non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.



Jenkins Looking over some of the paperwork from the VA relating to his exposure to and illness from Agent Orange in Vietnam

Jenkins left the Navy in March 1968. He got busy raising a family and with a career in finance that brought him back to Winston-Salem. He was diagnosed in early 2011 with stage 3 non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma and endured a long, painful treatment that included months of chemotherapy. He developed neuropathy in his feet and heart trouble as side effects. It was only after he’d regained some portion of his health in 2012 that he learned about his eligibility for VA disability pension benefits and decided to apply. He didn’t do it for the money, though. It was the principle;

he'd volunteered for the service, gone to war and gotten exposed to a carcinogen known to cause the cancer he developed.

He learned in 2012 that as a Vietnam veteran and presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange, he was eligible for VA disability benefits. So he applied. When he did, Jenkins unwittingly wandered into a minefield of paperwork and inertia that might have caused a less determined man to give up. "What they're really looking for is for me to die," he said. "And I'm determined not to do that." That first application is where the absurdities began.

- In the VA's first denial, officials told him he was turned down because he didn't complain of cancer before he left Vietnam and furthermore, in their eyes, he had never been in Vietnam because he was in the Navy aboard ships. "But they didn't even know about Agent Orange until 1972," he said.
- Jenkins reapplied in 2014. This time, the response came back that he should have applied for benefits in 2011 and that he was being denied because his cancer was in remission. "It (VA literature) doesn't say anything about remission or being cured," he said. "There's no cap or time limit on a benefit."
- There were some signs of movement amid the dysfunction, however. Jenkins was seen by a physician's assistant for a physical and an assessment in 2015; he believes it was due to a tsunami of bad press in which the VA was swimming.
- Even that had its moments. After what he says was a cursory exam, Jenkins was granted a small disability benefit for the neuropathy in his feet — a result of the cancer and treatment — but not for the cancer itself or the heart trouble. He uses a cane to help get around sometimes. "I have difficulty breathing sometimes, and I sound like a freight train if I walk for long," he said.
- Because he is who he is, Jenkins persisted. He started writing to his representatives in Congress, Rep. Virginia Foxx and Sen. Thom Tillis. And he appealed once again.
- An appeals board in Washington finally acknowledged in a letter dated Feb. 29, 2016, that his non-Hodgkin's lymphoma was service connected and that it was presumed to have been caused by exposure to Agent Orange. And a separate claim that Jenkins said he didn't seek for melanoma was added to his file.
- There was one problem, though. The appeals board remanded his case back to the regional office here for a rating determination about the cancer. A month later, in a letter dated March 31, 2016, he had his answer: a 0% disability rating for the cancer and no bump in his benefit.

His disability rating — a VA score used to determine the level of benefits afforded to a veteran — for neuropathy would remain at 40 percent, just over \$600 a month. Its basic position seems to be that he's not disabled enough to merit the higher rating. And that ticks Jenkins off, too. "I'm tired of being made out to be a liar and a malingeringer," he said. Kori Mabe, an assistant public affairs specialist in the Winston-Salem regional VA office, said 27 JAN she couldn't comment specifically on Jenkins' case without his signed authorization, which is now in the pipeline. But she did call Jenkins Saturday morning to assure him that his file would be reviewed by a retired Air Force officer who works at the VA regional office straight away. Nevertheless, Jenkins said that he will continue to press his case. "My whole thing is, I have to fight this because there are boys now (younger veterans of recent wars) who don't have the wherewithal to fight these decisions. I do." [Source: Winston-Salem Journal | Scott Sexton | Jan 29, 2017 ++]

Agent Orange Guam Update 03 ► VA Continues to Deny Related Claims

Former Navy Captain Walter Miner served his country and is paying the ultimate price. But before he asks the Veterans Administration for help, he asks that his crew be taken care of first. Capt. Miner is one of thousands of veterans facing death at the hands of Agent Orange. Their stories cultivate both commiseration and condemnation. Following a series of reports by Tampa's NBC WFLA News Channel 8 senior investigator, Florida Congressman Dennis Ross requested a meeting with the Air Force to inquire about the use of Agent Orange on Guam. The

military told Ross it did not use the cancer-causing defoliant outside of Vietnam or Thailand, but evidence that it did keeps mounting, veteran by veteran.

Walter Miner spent 28 years in the Navy as a doctor. He was stationed in Guam, then later in Vietnam. While Marine and Army units with which he worked fought the enemy, Miner put their health first, fighting diseases to which they were exposed and contracted. “Malaria was a huge one, but we had a big problem with dengue and potentially big problem with plague,” he remembered. His time in Vietnam exposed him the toxic herbicide Agent Orange. The now 85-year-old Walter Miner is paying dearly for his service to America. “I have stage four metastatic prostate cancer, incurable,” he said. “I have stage one bladder cancer.” He also suffers from heart disease. All of those conditions are presumed to be caused by Agent Orange exposure. “It is almost an unique toxin and it’s a very, very bad one. There is no safe dose,” Miner explained. Several weeks ago, when Air Force veteran Leroy Foster told Target 8 that he personally sprayed thousands of gallons of Agent Orange on Guam, Miner learned he’d been exposed there also.

The V.A. routinely denies Agent Orange benefits to veterans who served there. WFLA's reports prompted Congressman Dennis Ross to demand answers from the Air Force. “It’s turned into an adversarial process where the V.A. is saying that you’re guilty until proven innocent. That’s the wrong standard there, which is why we need these presumptions, presumptions that we have in the Blue Water Navy bill presumptions that we’ll have in the Guam bill. Presumptions in favor of these people who raised their right hand in order to give their life in the defense of this country,” Ross said. His service in Vietnam alone makes Miner eligible for Agent Orange benefits. But, as he did while in the Navy, he is putting the welfare of his troops before his own.

“Almost everyone that I know that’s applied for them has been turned down,” Miner said. “And as I said before, I would much rather have my enlisted crew get them than me.” Ross wants more documentation from the Department of Defense. He wants to know what chemicals were used during the Vietnam era. He vows if there is a cover up he will get to the bottom of it. A 2004 report to Dow Chemical investors warns “soldiers stationed on Guam who handled Agent Orange are becoming ill and symptoms of dioxin poisoning are evident in the general population.” The military has not offered an explanation about that report. To read the report go to https://mgtvwfla.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/3458_001.pdf. [Source: WFLA News Channel 8 | Steve Andrews | January 26, 2017 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 JAN 2017



Kansas City, MO — Tammy Dickinson, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that the former owner of a local construction company and a Kansas City, Mo., veteran were indicted by a federal grand jury today for their roles in a “rent-a-vet” scheme to fraudulently obtain more than \$13.8 million in federal contracts. **Jeffrey K. Wilson**, 51, of the Village of Loch Lloyd in Belton, Mo., **Paul R. Salavitch**, 56, of Kansas City, Mo., and Patriot Company, Inc., a business located in Kansas City, Mo., were charged in an eight-count indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Kansas City, Mo. Today’s indictment alleges that Wilson, Salavitch and the Patriot Company participated in a conspiracy to defraud the government by falsely representing Patriot Company as a veteran-owned or service-disabled veteran-owned small business in order to fraudulently obtain approximately \$13.8 million in federal government construction contracts for work in nine states.

According to the indictment, Patriot Company was a pass-through or front company for a Greenwood, Mo., construction company owned by Wilson during the scheme. Conspirators allegedly used Salavitch's veteran and service-disabled veteran status in a "rent-a-vet" scheme to bid on at least 20 government contracts and receive approximately \$13.8 million to which Patriot Company would not have otherwise been entitled to receive because those contracts were set-aside exclusively for legitimate veteran-owned or service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses. As a result of the fraud scheme, legitimate veteran owned and run businesses were not awarded these contracts. The indictments cites 20 contracts with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Army, totaling \$13,819,522, which allegedly were fraudulently obtained by Wilson, Salavitch and Patriot Company. The contracts, which ranged as high as \$4.3 million, included construction projects in Missouri, South Dakota, Texas, Nebraska Oklahoma, Michigan, Indiana, Tennessee, Iowa, Illinois and North Dakota.

According to the indictment, Salavitch, a service-disabled veteran, worked full-time as a federal employee with the Department of Defense in Leavenworth, Kan., and did not work full time for Patriot Company. Salavitch nominally served as president of Patriot Company from July 14, 2005, to April 1, 2014. Salavitch did not actively control the day-to-day management, daily operation or long-term decision making of Patriot Company. Salavitch never managed a construction company prior to his involvement with Patriot Company, the indictment says, and he had limited government contracting experience. For example, the indictment cites an e-mail exchange in which Wilson discusses leasing an office for Patriot Company and writes, "I would like for you to get a thing or two from Paul (Salavitch) to put in that office that is personal. Anything from his military. Any plaques, or US ARMY stuff or anything that if one stepped into it, it would look and feel like Patriot ..." The indictment also refers to a series of e-mails in which Salavitch was still contemplating the start date of his work with Patriot Company after the firm had already obtained 10 of the government contracts.

During the fraud scheme, the indictment says, Wilson wired \$449,321 as down payment for his Village of Loch Lloyd home purchase, of which \$250,000 originated from Patriot Company's bank account. Wilson financed the balance of the purchase price with funds from the sale of his previous home and a \$240,000 mortgage. Wilson used \$225,000 in Patriot Company funds, the indictment says, to pay off the mortgage. Wilson used \$175,000 in Patriot Company funds for the purchase of a residence in Mesa, Ariz., the indictment says. Wilson allegedly also used \$400,000 of Patriot Company funds to pay two annual premiums for life insurance policies. In addition to the conspiracy, Wilson, Salavitch and Patriot Company are charged with four counts of major government program fraud. Wilson is also charged with one count of wire fraud and two counts of money laundering. The indictment also contains forfeiture allegations, which would require Wilson and Salavitch to forfeit to the government any property derived from the proceeds of the fraud scheme, including \$2,152,189 that has been seized by law enforcement from various financial accounts, Wilson's residences in Village of Loch Lloyd and Mesa as part of the money judgment of \$13,819,522. Dickinson cautioned that the charges contained in this indictment are simply accusations, and not evidence of guilt. Evidence supporting the charges must be presented to a federal trial jury, whose duty is to determine guilt or innocence.[Source: DoJ U.S. Attorney's Office | Western District of Missouri | January 13, 2017 ++]

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Tomah VAMC — A former Tomah Veterans Administration Medical Center doctor accused of overprescribing opioids has agreed to surrender his medical license, documents released Wednesday show. **David Houlihan** signed an agreement with the state Department of Safety and Professional Services on 10 JAN, the documents show. The state Medical Examining Board accepted the agreement on Wednesday, finalizing it. Houlihan must surrender his license permanently and never reapply for one in Wisconsin. In exchange, DSPS agreed to drop its investigation into three complaints against him and not seek reimbursement for its investigative and attorney costs. The deal means Houlihan will have to close the psychiatry practice he opened in La Crosse after he was fired from the Tomah VA in November 2015. His attorney, Frank Doherty, didn't immediately return a voicemail.

The agreement brings to a close one of the last lingering threads from a 2014 investigation into the Tomah VA which found doctors were overprescribing opioids, earning the facility the nickname "Candy Land." Some patients called Houlihan "Candy Man" because he so freely prescribed painkillers. Months after the investigation closed, 35-year-old Marine veteran Jason Simcakoski died from "mixed drug toxicity" at the facility days after Houlihan added another opiate to the 14 drugs Simcakoski was already prescribed. The Medical Examining Board in July found probable cause that Houlihan engaged in unprofessional conduct in his overall practices. The board had already determined there was probable cause that Houlihan was unprofessional and negligent in his care for Simcakoski. The board suspended Houlihan's license in March after it learned he'd opened the psychiatry clinic but an administrative law judge reinstated it a month later, concluding the board didn't prove the suspension was necessary.

A VA report from 2015 concluded that patients at the Tomah facility were more likely than patients at other VA hospitals to receive high doses of painkillers. The report also said there was an atmosphere of fear among staff members that affected patient care. [Source: Associated Press | Todd Richmond | January 18, 2017 ++]

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Bonifay, FL — Following day two of her trial, **Veronica Dale Hahn**, 60, of Bonifay, Florida, pled guilty to theft of government funds. During the first two days of trial, the government presented evidence that, between November 2001 and February 2016, Hahn received \$394,800.85 from the Department of Veterans Affairs in disability payments for 100% service-connected blindness in both eyes. Over the course of a decade and a half, Hahn told various doctors within the Veterans Health Administration and in private practice that she was almost completely blind. However, within a year of receiving her disability benefits for loss of vision, she obtained a driver's license in New Mexico, Alabama, and Florida with no vision restrictions, after passing vision exams in each state with at least 20/40 vision. During this time, Hahn was also observed driving her personal automobile on numerous occasions. Further, she worked full time as a case manager and transition counselor at several state correctional facilities. All of which required normal eyesight to perform her duties. Hahn faces a maximum of 10 years in prison. The sentencing hearing is scheduled for April 13, 2017, at 10:00 a.m. at the United States Courthouse, in Panama City, Florida. [Source: DoJ, NE Dist of Florida | U.S. Attorney's Office | January 20, 2017 ++]

* Vets *



Vet Job Hunting Update 01 ► Some Strategies to Help Your Job Search

In 21-year Air Force Veteran Sonya Harris-Ladjevich's two years as an employment specialist for the VA, she has helped hundreds of Veterans and transitioning Servicemembers find jobs in the federal government as well as the private and nonprofit sectors. From mentor to career counselor to employment-resource provider, she has worn many hats in her role helping Veterans navigate their professional crises. Recently, she was the Veteran in need of employment support. Due to an organizational restructure, she found herself in the same space as many of those she has helped. So what did she do? She took her own advice and exercised some of the strategies and tactics that she

encourages Veterans to use when conducting a job search. From updating her résumé, to tapping her personal and professional networks for job leads, she used a multi-pronged approach to quickly find a new position, so she wouldn't become an unemployment statistic.

More than five years ago, the overall rate for Veteran unemployment was over 8 percent. To address those concerning statistics, the White House launched an initiative to improve employment opportunities for transitioning and disabled Veterans within the federal government. Current numbers prove the effort worked. According to December statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor, the Veteran unemployment rate was 4.1 percent, down from 4.8 percent a year ago, and the lowest since May 2016. But if you're a Veteran facing unemployment, those favorable numbers mean little if you can't pay the bills. So, here are some strategies to help your job search:



- Update your resume. Tailor your résumé to include some of the language from the job to which you are applying. Don't do a word-for-word cut and paste from the job description to your résumé. It will turn off most hiring managers, and may even hurt your chances of being hired. Instead, tweak your résumé to include some of the key words from the job description.
- Network, network, network. Reach out to everyone you know personally and professionally and let them know you are in the market for a new job. I contacted recruiters, employment specialists, friends, and even family members to ask for job leads.
- Apply for the job. This may sound simple, but you have to go beyond reviewing the job, talking about the job to others and actually apply for the job. Sonyo dedicated herself to applying for at least five jobs per week. Some weeks she missed this mark; others, she exceeded the goal. She spent many late nights tailoring her résumé for each job to which she applied. She even applied for jobs she was not 100 percent sure she wanted, but her goal was to create as many options as possible for herself.
- Clean up your social media accounts. We leave a digital footprint each time we post content to a social media site, so present your best online image to a prospective employer. Remove inappropriate content that could negatively impact your hiring prospects, and share subjects that show your professional expertise. Many companies use social networking sites to research job candidates as well as to query your mutual online connections about your background.
- Take care of yourself. A job loss is a professional crisis, but it can affect your overall wellbeing, so look for ways to maintain your health — physically, emotionally and mentally. In Sonyo's case, she exercised a little more, ate healthier meals and reached out to friends and family to provide comfort and encouragement.
- Tap all of your resources. A multitude of online resources offer career advice, lists of job fairs and tips to find employment. Here are a few that she used in her job search: www.usajobs.gov; <http://vaforvets.va.gov>; <https://www.fedshirevets.gov/job/index.aspx> ; <https://www.dol.gov/vets> ; <https://recruitmilitary.com> ; <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs> ; and <https://www.dol.gov/vets> .

[Source: VAntage Point| January 17, 2016 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 209 ► Truck Driving

USA Truck (No. 57 on the CCJ Top 250) is launching a new apprenticeship program aimed at helping military veterans transition into truck driving jobs. The company's Military Transition Apprenticeship Training Program is for military veterans eligible for GI Bill and post-9/11 employment training benefits. USA Truck President of Trucking Martin Tewari says the program allows veterans to receive Class A CDL training with no up-front costs. "Plus, they can start employment at USA Truck while receiving earned benefits from the Veterans Administration of \$1,200 per month or more for up to 15 months," Tewari adds. The program is in cooperation with the VA and the Department of Labor. USA Truck says military veterans already account for more than 21 percent of its employees. Recent Vets are eligible for their \$1,000 Hiring Heroes Bonus! For more info on obtaining training or a job refer to <http://driveusatruck.com/veterans>. [Source: Overdrive | January 23, 2017 ++]



Vet Jobs Update 210 ► Trump Hiring Freeze Impact

President Donald Trump's new federal hiring freeze could cause major problems for not only managers at the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense but also thousands of former servicemembers hoping to land government posts. On 3 JAN, in one of his first executive actions in the White House, Trump ordered "a freeze on the hiring of federal civilian employees to be applied across the board in the executive branch." It applies to "all executive departments and agencies regardless of the sources of their operational and programmatic funding, excepting military personnel."

White House spokesman Sean Spicer said the move was a reaction to what the president sees as a frustration with the growth of federal bureaucracy. "There's been, frankly, a lack of respect for taxpayer dollars in this town for a long time," he said at a news conference Monday. "I think what the president is showing through the hiring freeze, first and foremost, is that we've got to respect the American taxpayer. "Some people are working two, three jobs just to get by. And to see money get wasted in Washington on a job that is duplicative is insulting to the hard work that they do to pay their taxes." The order does not revoke any job offers already made by managers, and does contain exceptions for "any positions that it deems necessary to meet national security or public safety responsibilities." That could give the White House and Pentagon plenty of leeway to still hire key positions as they evaluate departures from the last administration. In addition, the Office of Personnel Management can grant exemptions from the freeze upon request, but details on how that process would work have not been released.

Nearly 3,000 civilian Defense Department positions are currently listed in federal employment sites, along with almost 2,300 more Department of Veterans Affairs posts. Administration officials could not say how many of those positions may be exempt, or how many other open jobs had not yet been listed formally before the announcement. Veterans looking for work could be among the largest groups affected by the change, since they currently make up about one-third of the federal workforce, according to agency reports. More than 623,000 veterans are currently working in civilian federal posts, of the 2 million-person federal work force. Veterans-hiring preferences and

familiarity with VA and military issues make many of the posts attractive to former servicemembers. And the federal government is among the biggest employers of disabled veterans, as well. About 15 percent of veterans working at VA and nearly 18 percent of veterans at the Defense Department are disabled.

Spicer said officials do not anticipate the freeze will hurt customer service or agency operations. He said agency landing teams are “talking about ways that we can create greater efficiencies, eliminate duplicity and maximize the tax dollar” without cutting programs. But outside analysts have questioned whether those promises are realistic. At a defense panel discussion 23 JAN, Mark Cancian, senior adviser for at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Trump’s frequent insistence that cutting waste will create more than enough savings for program expansions is either naive or foolish. “There really is no such thing as a management efficiency,” he said. “You can’t cut where you reduce the inputs and increase the outputs. Really when people talk about management efficiencies, they’re talking about cutting what they believe are lower priority programs.”

Trump’s order does allow agencies to move around some funding “to meet the highest priority needs and to ensure that essential services are not interrupted,” but also prohibits “contracting outside the government to circumvent the intent of this memorandum.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 24, 2017 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 211 ► Parent - Job Description

TITLE: Mom, Mommy, Mama, Ma Dad, Daddy, Dada, Pa, Pop, Granpa

JOB DESCRIPTION :

Long term, team players needed, for challenging permanent work in an often, chaotic environment. Candidates must possess excellent communication and organizational skills and be willing to work variable hours, which will include evenings and weekends and frequent 24 hour shifts on call. Some overnight travel required, including trips to primitive camping sites on rainy weekends and endless sports tournaments in far away cities! Travel expenses not reimbursed. Extensive courier duties also required.

RESPONSIBILITIES :

The rest of your life. Must be willing to be hated, at least temporarily, until someone needs \$5. Must be willing to bite tongue repeatedly. Also, must possess the physical stamina of a pack mule and be able to go from zero to 60 mph in three seconds flat in case, this time, the screams from the backyard are not someone just crying wolf. Must be willing to face stimulating technical challenges, such as small gadget repair, mysteriously sluggish toilets and stuck zippers. Must screen phone calls, maintain calendars and coordinate production of multiple homework projects. Must have ability to plan and organize social gatherings for clients of all ages and mental outlooks. Must be willing to be indispensable one minute, an embarrassment the next. Must handle assembly and product safety testing of a half million cheap, plastic toys, and battery operated devices. Must always hope for the best but be prepared for the worst. Must assume final, complete accountability for the quality of the end product. Responsibilities also include floor maintenance and janitorial work throughout the facility.

POSSIBILITY FOR ADVANCEMENT & PROMOTION :

None. Your job is to remain in the same position for years, without complaining, constantly retraining and updating your skills, so that those in your charge can ultimately surpass you

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE :

None required unfortunately. On-the-job training offered on a continually exhausting basis.

WAGES AND COMPENSATION :

Get this! You pay them! Offering frequent raises and bonuses. A balloon payment is due when they turn 18 because of the assumption that college will help them become financially independent. When you die, you give them

whatever is left. The oddest thing about this reverse-salary scheme is that you actually enjoy it and wish you could only do more.

BENEFITS :

While no health or dental insurance, no pension, no tuition reimbursement, no paid holidays and no stock options are offered; this job supplies limitless opportunities for personal growth and free hugs and kisses for life if you play your cards right.

Wyoming Veterans Cemetery Update 02 ► Land Purchased

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced 30 JAN that it purchased about five acres near Cheyenne for a VA National Cemetery. The agency paid the city of Cheyenne about \$64,000 for the land. Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Ronald E. Walters says the Cheyenne cemetery will help reach veterans in rural parts of Wyoming without reasonable access to a national or state veterans cemetery. The new cemetery will serve nearly 22,000 veterans, their spouses and eligible family members. The cemetery will include burial sites, above-ground columbarium niches, a memorial wall, flagpoles, a memorial walkway, roads and other infrastructure. The Oregon Trail Veterans Cemetery at Evansville is run by the state. Wyoming's congressional delegation welcomed the announcement. [Source: Associated Press | January 30, 2017 ++]

Pacific War Memorial ► Rear Adm. Lloyd R. "Joe" Vasey's Vision

There is not much that retired Rear Adm. Lloyd R. "Joe" Vasey hasn't accomplished in his first 100 years. Vasey, who became a centenarian on 31 JAN, now has his sights set on the creation of a Pacific War Memorial at Pearl Harbor. "There is no recognition of well over 150,000 brave Americans who were lost in the Pacific War," Vasey said. "They are resting on the bottom of the Pacific Ocean somewhere, or their remains are scattered across the South Pacific islands. We need to honor them, and their families need a place to mourn." The late U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye had planned to introduce legislation authorizing the National Park Service to design and build the Pacific War Memorial, Vasey said. On 25 JAN, U.S. Rep. Colleen Hanabusa agreed to pick up the mantle. "I'm hoping that it can be accomplished in honor of Admiral Vasey's 100th birthday," Hanabusa said in a phone interview. "I will try to push it through on the House side, and I'm hoping Sen. John McCain will move it forward on the Senate side. I first became aware of this effort from Sen. Inouye and I want to see it done."



In a 2012 file photo, retired Rear Adm. Lloyd "Joe" Vasey arrives at the Navy Hale Keiki School, where he was presented the first annual "Heart of a Hero" award by the Young Patriot's Club.

Vasey envisions the memorial would occupy about a 30-square-yard circular site on the Pearl Harbor waterfront between the visitor center and Bowfin Park. The memorial would become part of the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument, which is home to the USS Arizona Memorial. The Pacific War Memorial, which would be surrounded by a lava rock wall, features a center tile mosaic map of the Western Pacific that notes locations of the major battles and campaigns. The mosaic would be surrounded by about 20 podiums that provide visual and electronic informational displays of these key historical moments. On the outside, there would be a 12-foot-wide walkway with six podiums, noting the contributions of the U.S.'s wartime allied nations. "The memorial meshes beautifully with the ongoing WWII Valor in the Pacific National Monument and fills an important niche that is not getting the priority attention that it deserves," Vasey said.

Hanabusa said the Pacific War Memorial would be an important monument addition. "The plans are very well thought out. The admiral has put his whole heart and soul into them," she said. Vasey, who served on a submarine during World War II, said he gets "very emotional" about the memorial because he's doing it for "my old buddies." The casualties were high among U.S. submarine forces, which sank 30 percent of the Japanese Imperial Navy, including eight aircraft carriers, and destroyed 60 percent of all Japan's merchant ships. Vasey made it home to marry a school principal named Lilian and have three daughters, Kristine, Karla and Kari. He went on to reach career highlights such as chief of strategic plans and policies at U.S. Pacific Command headquarters, secretary to the Joint Chiefs of Staff; deputy director of the U.S. National Military Command Center in the Pentagon; and chief of staff for the commander, 7th Fleet.

Vasey learned about the value of doing your homework and accepting responsibility for your actions under his boss President Harry Truman, who had to make the agonizing decision to use the atomic bomb. But it was his experiences aboard the USS Gunnel submarine, which was commanded by U.S. Sen. John McCain's father, Jack, that inspired him to promote peace in later life. "They were dropping bombs (depth charges) for 36 hours. That's why I can't hear on one side. As we were waiting to come up, some of our sailors were gagging for air. I thought to myself there must be a better way to solve these international problems," Vasey said. "If I survived, I thought I would try to do something about it."

Vasey comes from a long line of patriotic Americans with similar can-do attitudes. His grandmother, Kansas America Carson, was the niece of American frontiersman Kit Carson. Vasey recalls she and her husband, H.P. Vasey, who later became the first sheriff of Canadian County, Okla., were part of the great land rush. "He rode ahead on a pony and she road in a buckboard followed by two horses," he said. "Three thousand people came from back East to stake a land claim. The settlers were pretty tough people." His mother's father, Charles Anderson of Sweden, mined for gold in Alaska. His father, Robert Vasey, was a U.S. naval officer, whose career took the family around the world. Vasey, who graduated from Los Angeles' Belmont High School, said he went to 12 different schools, including one in the Philippines. Vasey said he most enjoyed his time in California, where his Uncle Lloyd Vernon Hamilton, a popular comedian of the silent-film era, once made him part of his act. "Here I was a little kid trying to imitate him. There were 3,000 people in the audience and they just roared," he said.

Despite his acting stint, Vasey was drawn to military service. He became a 1939 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, where he was a champion swimmer. Fellow students dubbed him "Cuddlesome" because he was a hit with the ladies; however, he proved his mettle as a fierce fighter during WWII. "We sank a lot of ships. I was attacked 21 times by Japanese forces," Vasey said. Vasey was sent to Yokosuka, Japan, after the war. "When we landed it was like a ghost town," Vasey said. On the second night, he encountered a Japanese captain who invited him back to his submarine to complete the exchange of power. "He tried to give me his sword. I gave it back to him because I didn't feel right taking his honor," Vasey recalled.

Now Vasey sits among stacks of news clips that line his dining table and the computer desk, where he stays up late writing op-eds on military strategy. His work has appeared in the Wall Street Journal and the Christian Science Monitor among others. Vasey hopes his latest messages reach President Donald Trump, who he said needs seasoned advice on handling issues like terrorism and the nuclear weapons buildup in North Korea. "I think business and the

Cossa said. “If you sit down with him, it’s like getting a three-hour credit in American history. But he’s a visionary, too.” Cossa said Vasey advanced Hawaii’s relations with China when he brought the first Chinese leadership delegation here in the 1980s. “He was told, ‘Why are you wasting your time? China is a third world country,’” Cossa said. “The mayor of Shanghai visited at the time. His name was Zhu Rongji and he later became premier of China.” Georgette Almeida, who was Vasey’s executive assistant at the Pacific Forum before he retired, said he is still dearly loved there both for his continued accomplishments and his humble disposition. “Every time he won some kind of award or got praise for something good,” Almeida said, “he would say, ‘I’m just an old sailor.’” [Source: The Honolulu Star-Advertiser | Allison Schaefer | January 29, 2017 ++]

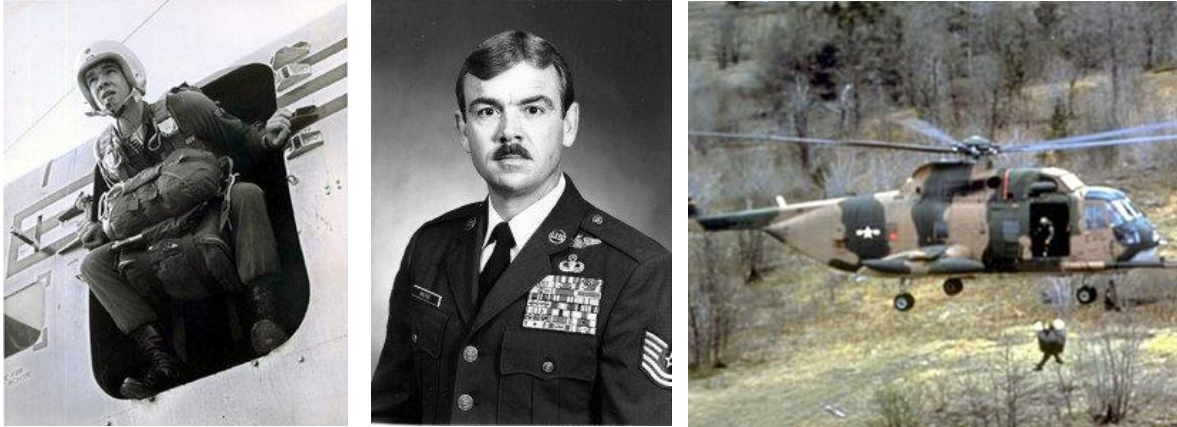
USFSPA & Divorce Update 28 ► State Rule Listing

State courts have issued different rules on the division of military retired pay subjected to VA disability offsets.



Vietnam Vets [19] ► Duane Hackney | Recipient of 70+ Awards

Duane Hackney was a native of Flint Michigan who joined the Air Force in 1965 to become a Pararescueman. As the Vietnam War was picking up steam, the United States began to use air superiority in an ever-increasing fashion to hold back a relentless enemy. And while the United States enjoyed technological superiority in the air, North Vietnamese ground fire and surface to air missiles were regularly enough to take its toll on the American planes. When one of these pilots would go down over the jungles of Vietnam, this typically meant death or capture that led to a less than courteous stay at the infamous Hanoi Hilton.



Duane Hackney (center) preparing to jump (left) from HH-3E jolly green right)

But America had made a promise to his pilots, that whenever possible and in cases when it seemed completely improbable that they would come looking for them thanks to men like Duane Hackney. This man would fly over 200 combat missions over 3 ½ years of volunteer duty in Vietnam. Just days after reporting for his first assignment, he took a .30 caliber slug to the leg and had it removed himself to avoid medical evacuation. In the months ahead, he would see the helicopter on which he served shot down up to five times as they braved the most hostile of enemy territory in search for downed pilots.

By his own account, he couldn't recall the number of times he descended into the thick canopy of the Vietnamese jungle to search for downed pilots or exactly how many he was able to extract. But as the missions accumulated and the enemy fire came raining down, it became clear that each mission brought with it a necessity to display unprecedented valor and an opportunity for near certain death. After a year plus of demonstrating such valor, one particular mission in February 1967 would set him apart and earn him the Air Force's second-highest military honor. On February 3, 1967, Hackney was riding in one of two HH-3E jolly green giant long-range search and rescue helicopters over Vietnam. On his second rescue mission of the day near Mu Gia Pass North Vietnam, Hackney descended into the jungle as he had many times to search for the downed pilot.

Despite the presence of heavy enemy forces, he was able to locate the pilot and assist him in being hoisted up into the helicopter. Once the crew departed, they became subject to heavy 37 mm flak that tore into the craft creating an intense fire on board. During the chaos, Hackney was able to take off his own parachute and place it upon the downed airmen with little regard for his own life. Just as Hackney made his way to the smoke-filled cabin and slipped another parachute around his own arms, a second burst of 37 mm flak tore into the craft sending it into an uncontrollable spin. Unsecured Hackney was flung from the helicopter out the open door. Despite being dazed and confused, he was able to employ the parachute that was still unbuckled and made a successful landing over enemy territory. The rest on board this particular HH-3E, died in the crash, and Duane Hackney found himself on the opposite side of a rescue that he himself had conducted time and time again.

Eventually, another jolly green giant was able to locate Hackney and bring him to safety. It was for his actions on this particular mission that Duane Hackney was awarded the Air Force Cross. One might think such a close call would be plenty of cause to call it quits as surely one could only cheat death so many times, but Duane Hackney took his calling seriously and was earning distinguished flying crosses as late as 1970. Before his career was over, Hackney would receive more than 70 individual awards making him the most decorated enlisted man in Air Force history. After 26 years of unprecedented service where he served at great risk to his own life in order to save others, Chief Master Sgt. Duane Hackney retired from the Air Force in 1991.

Tragically the man, the entire North Vietnamese Army couldn't seem to kill, died of a heart attack in 1993 at age 46. And while Hackney would claim he was just doing his job, his record of unprecedented gallantry is without rival in the Air Force. In 2006, a training facility at Lackland Air Force Base near San Antonio was named in his honor. In 2009, he was inducted into the Michigan aviation Hall of Fame. While his life was cut short, the untold ripple effect of the pilots he pulled from the hostile jungles of Vietnam is immeasurable. Men lived because Duane Hackney saw to it that it was so. He honored the commitment of a nation to its pilots enabling them to enter harm's way with the confidence that men like Duane Hackney would be coming for them. Although the United States Air Force is only 68 years old, it appears this man will hold the title of most decorated for quite some time. [Source: War History On Line | Jeff Edwards | December 13, 2016 ++]

Vietnam Vets [20] ► Larry Thorne | Fought Under 3 Flags

Larry Thorne enlisted in the U.S. Army as a private in 1954, but he was already a war hero. That's because his real name was Lauri Törni, and he had been fighting the Soviets for much of his adult life. Born in Finland in 1919, Törni enlisted at age 19 in his country's army and fought against the Soviet Union in the Winter War of 1939-40, according to Helsingin Sanomat. He quickly rose to the rank of captain and took command of a group of ski troops, who quite literally, skied into battle against enemy forces. In 1942, he was severely wounded after he skied into a mine, but that didn't slow him down. In 1944 during what the Finns called The Continuation War, he received Finland's version of the Medal of Honor — the Mannerheim Cross — for his bravery while leading a light infantry battalion.



Captain Lauri Törni (Finland)



SS Trooper (Germany)



U.S. Green Beret

Unfortunately for Törni, Finland signed a ceasefire and ceded some territory to the Soviets in 1944 to end hostilities. But instead of surrendering, he joined up with the German SS so he could continue fighting. He received additional training in Nazi Germany and then looked forward to kicking some Commie butt once more. But then

Germany fell too, and the Finn-turned-Waffen SS officer was arrested by the British, according to War History Online. Not that being put into a prison camp would stop him either. “In the last stages of the war he surrendered to the British and eventually returned to Finland after escaping a British POW camp,” reads the account at War History Online. “When he returned, he was then arrested by the Finns, even though he had received their Medal of Honor, and was sentenced to 6 years in prison for treason.” He ended up serving only half his sentence before he was pardoned by the President of Finland in 1948.

Törni’s path to the U.S. Army was paved by crucial legislation from Congress along with the creation of a new military unit: Special Forces. In June 1950, the Lodge-Philbin Act passed, which allowed foreigners to join the U.S. military and allowed them citizenship if they served honorably for at least five years. Just two years later, the Army would stand up its new Special Forces unit at Fort Bragg, N.C. More than 200 eastern Europeans joined Army Special Forces before the Act expired in 1959, according to Max Boot. One of those enlistees was Törni, who enlisted in 1954 under the name Larry Thorne. “The Soviets wanted to get their hands on Thorne and forced the Finnish government to arrest him as a wartime German collaborator. They planned to take him to Moscow to be tried for war crimes,” reads the account at ArlingtonCemetery.net. “Thorne had other plans. He escaped, made his way to the United States, and with the help of Wild Bill Donovan became a citizen. The wartime head of the OSS knew of Thorne’s commando exploits.”

Thorne quickly distinguished himself among his peers of Green Berets. Though he enlisted as a private, his wartime skill-set led him to become an instructor at the Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg teaching everything from survival to guerrilla tactics. In 1957, he was commissioned a second lieutenant and would rise to the rank of captain just as war was on the horizon in Vietnam. But first, he would take part in a daring rescue mission inside of Iran. In 1962, then-Capt. Thorne led an important mission to recover classified materials from a U.S. Air Force plane that crashed on a mountaintop on the Iran-Turkish-Soviet border, according to Helsingin Sanomat. Though three earlier attempts to secure the materials had failed, Thorne’s team was successful.

According to the U.S. Army Thorne quickly made it into the U.S. Special Forces and in 1962, as a Captain, he led his detachment onto the highest mountain in Iran to recover the bodies and classified material from an American C-130 airplane that had crashed. It was a mission in which others had failed, but Thorne’s unrelenting spirit led to its accomplishment. This mission initially formed his status as a U.S. Special Forces legend, but it was his deep strategic reconnaissance and interdiction exploits with Military Assistance Command, Vietnam Studies and Observation Group, also known as MACV-SOG, that solidified his legendary status.

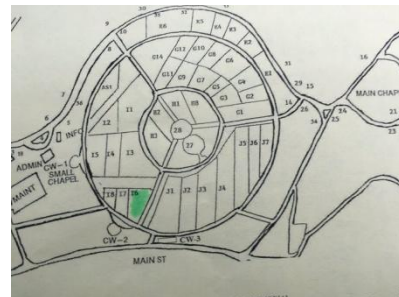
In Vietnam, he earned the Bronze Star medal for heroism, along with five Purple Hearts for combat wounds, War History Online writes. According to Helsingin Sanomat, his wounds allowed him to return to the rear away from combat, but he refused and instead requested command of a special operations base instead. On Oct. 18, 1965, Thorne led the first MACV-SOG cross-border mission into Laos to interdict North Vietnamese movement down the Ho Chi Minh trail. Using South Vietnamese Air Force helicopters, his team was successfully inserted into a clearing inside Laos while Thorne remained in a chase helicopter to direct support as needed. Once the team gave word they had made it in, he responded that he was heading back to base. Roughly five minutes later while flying in poor visibility and bad weather, the helicopter crashed. The Army first listed him as missing in action, then later declared he was killed in action — in South Vietnam. The wreckage of the aircraft was found prior to the end of the war and the remains of the South Vietnamese air crew were recovered, but Thorne was never found.

Thorne’s exploits in combat made him seem invincible among his Special Forces brothers, and with his body never recovered, many believed he had survived the crash and continued to live in hiding or had been taken prisoner by the North Vietnamese, according to POW Network. “Many believed he was exactly the sort of near-indestructible soldier who would have simply walked back out of the jungle, and they found it hard to believe he had been killed,” writes Helsingin Sanomat. In 1999, the mystery was finally put to rest. The remains of the legendary Special Forces soldier were recovered from the crash site. DNA confirmed the identities of the air crew, while dental records proved Törni had died on that fateful night in 1965, reported Helsingin Sanomat. “He was a complex yet

driven man who valorously fought oppression under three flags and didn't acknowledge the meaning of quit," U.S. Army Special Forces Col. Sean Swindell said during a ceremony in 2010. [Source: We Are the Mighty | Paul Szoldra | July 2, 2015 ++]

Vet Cemetery Rhode Island Update 02 ► Grave Mix-Up

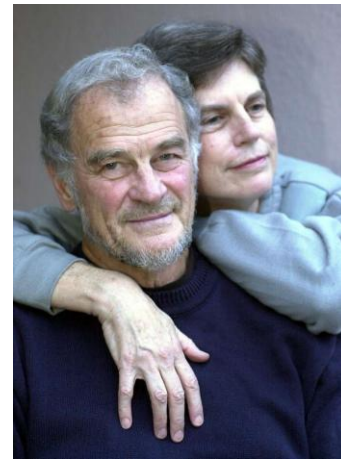
Seven people were buried in the wrong graves at a veterans' cemetery because grave markers in one row were off by a burial plot. Veterans Affairs Director Kasim Yarn apologized on 23 JAN for the grave mix-up. "We recognize our cemetery is hallowed ground, and we did not meet our obligation to our veterans, their loved ones who are buried here or the families and the veterans who continue to come to our cemetery to pay their respects," he said at his office in Warwick. Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery workers left two spaces instead of one to transfer the remains of a veteran's father in November 2010. The extra space wasn't accounted for when permanent grave markers were added that spring. Consequently, 21 grave markers were off. Seven interments occurred in that row since 2010, resulting in those cemetery vaults being buried in the adjacent plots.



The dead people and the markers were moved this past weekend. Families are being contacted. Yarn said he was alerted to the issue on 19 JAN, after the grounds crew at the Exeter cemetery discovered the issue as it prepared for a burial in the row that day. Yarn said there wasn't a formalized process to prevent mistakes like this and he's addressing that. Among the changes, when someone buries a vault, a second cemetery worker will verify that it's correctly placed. Yarn said he believes the mistake was an isolated incident, and he said no staff members are being disciplined. The cemetery's administrator took over in November. More than 34,000 people are buried at the cemetery, with about 1,200 interments occurring annually. [Source: Associated Press | January 23, 2017 ++]

Obit: Charlie Liteky ► 20 JAN 2017

Charlie Liteky, an Army chaplain in Vietnam who was awarded the Medal of Honor for rescuing more than 20 wounded men but later gave it back in protest and became a peace activist, has died. Longtime friend Richard Olive said Liteky died Friday night at the Veterans Administration Hospital in San Francisco. He was 85. The Army awarded Liteky the highest military decoration for his actions on Dec. 6, 1967, when his company came under intense fire from an enemy battalion in Bien Hoa province. Despite painful wounds in the neck and foot, Liteky carried more than 20 men to the landing zone to be evacuated during the fierce firefight. "Noticing another trapped and seriously wounded man, Chaplain Liteky crawled to his aid," the Army's official citation reads. "Realizing that the wounded man was too heavy to carry, he rolled on his back, placed the man on his chest and through sheer determination and fortitude crawled back to the landing zone using his elbows and heels to push himself along."



He left the priesthood and in 1983, married former Catholic nun and peace activist Judy Balch in San Francisco. His wife introduced him to refugees from El Salvador, “teenagers, whose fathers had been killed and tortured. I didn’t believe it, but I kept going to more and more of these meetings and it became clear these people weren’t blowing in the wind,” Liteky told the San Francisco Chronicle in a March, 2000 interview. Twenty years after his heroic actions in Vietnam, Liteky left the Medal of Honor - awarded under the name of Angelo J. Liteky - and a letter to President Ronald Reagan at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington in protest of the country’s foreign policy in Central America, where U.S.-backed dictators were fighting bloody wars against left-leaning rebels. With that, he renounced the award’s benefits, which included a tax-free pension of \$600 a month. The medal was retrieved by the National Park Service and later put on display at the National Museum of American History.

After that, Liteky spent years protesting against the U.S. Army School of the Americas, an academy at Fort Benning, Georgia, where the U.S. Army trained soldiers from Central and South America and the Caribbean. He was sentenced to one year in federal prison in 2000 for entering the school without permission and splashing its rotunda with their own blood. In 2003, he traveled to Baghdad with other peace protesters to bear witness to the war and work with children in an orphanage and at hospitals. Over the past 10 years, Liteky had been working on a book, “Renunciation,” that chronicled his life from war hero to peace activist. Friends said they expect the book will be published in the next few months. Liteky’s health worsened in recent years, and in late 2016 he was admitted to the hospice unit at the Veterans Administration Hospital. Olive said he remembers Liteky for his humility. “It was three years after I met Charlie and bonded a fast friendship that I learned he was a Medal of Honor recipient” when Liteky told him about his plans to renounce the medal, Olive said. There are no plans for a funeral, Olive said. Liteky’s wife, Judy, died in August. The couple did not have children. [Source: Associated Press | January 21, 2017++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 31 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\veterans 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\veterans 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\Country 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 | January31, 2016 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► 01 thru 28 FEB 2017

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

Atlanta GA Veterans Job Fair	February 2, 2017
Riverside CA Veterans Job Fair	February 2, 2017
Fort Stewart GA Job Fair	February 7, 2017
Hunter Army Airfield GA Job Fair	February 8, 2017
Baltimore MD Veterans Job Fair	February 9, 2017
Nashville TN Veterans Job Fair	February 9, 2017
Sacramento CA Veterans Job Fair	February 16, 2017
Greater Phoenix AZ Veterans Job Fair	February 16, 2017
Richmond VA Veterans Job Fair	February 16, 2017
Jacksonville FL Veterans Job Fair	February 16, 2017

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Listings

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
Washington DC Hiring Fair and Networking Reception with the American Legion	February 24 - 8:00 am to 4:00 pm	
Washington , DC	Details	Register
Minneapolis-St. Paul Hiring Expo with the Minnesota Wild	February 27 - 9:30 am to 2:00 pm	
St. Paul, MN	Details	Register
Montgomery Hiring Fair and Networking Reception	February 27 - 6:00 pm to February 28 - 1:30 pm	
Montgomery, AL	Details	Register

Veteran Career/Job Fairs

Los Angeles, CA	February 15, 2017, 9:30am - 2pm	More information
Staples Center, 1111 S. Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, CA 90015		
Springfield, VA	February 16, 2017, 10am - 2pm	More information
American Legion Post 176-Springfield, 6520 Amherst Ave, Springfield, VA 22151		
Washington, DC	February 24, 2017, 8am - 4pm	More information
Washington Hilton, 1919 Connecticut Ave NW, Washington, DC 20009		
St. Paul, MN	February 27, 2017, 9:30am - 2pm	More information
Xcel Energy Center, 199 W. Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55102		

[Montgomery, AL](#) February 28, 2017, 10:30am - 1:30pm [More information](#)

Teague Arena – Garrett Coliseum Complex, 1555 Federal Drive, Montgomery, AL 36104

[Source: Recruit Military <https://events.recruitmilitary.com> & <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs>
& <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs> | January 31, 2017 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► Utah 2017

The state of Utah 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 – UT**” 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 refer to <https://veterans.utah.gov> & <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/utah.html>.

- Veteran Housing Benefits
- Employment Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits
- Discounts

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/utah-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.

Purple Heart Update 04 ► Additional Protection Bill

The Purple Heart is more than just a medal -- especially to the recipients who have sacrificed while fighting for their country. "It gives me a distinguished feeling," said Sam Houston, who was awarded a Purple Heart in 1970 after his service in the Vietnam War. "No matter where I go, if I'm wearing a Purple Heart hat, people always stop me. There's that saying, 'all gave some and some gave all.' " This year, a piece of legislation is expected to come up in Congress that could help protect the Purple Heart and preserve that distinguished feeling.

Rep. Paul Cook (R-CA) plans to introduce the **Private Corrado Piccoli Purple Heart Preservation Act** this session. The bill would penalize the sale of any Purple Heart awarded to a member of the Armed Forces by imprisonment up to six months or a fine, which would be determined by the Department of Justice based off the federal fine schedule. "The purpose of the bill is to see the Purple Heart protected and to ensure medals find their

way back to families or homes of honor," Cook, himself a veteran, said in an emailed statement to the News Herald in Panama City. "It's wrong to turn profits on the sacrifices of our service members. These medals are powerful symbols of selflessness in defense of our nation. They deserve to be cherished by families instead of being traded like a pack of baseball cards and auctioned to the highest bidder



Piccoli's medal was purchased in an antique mall for \$100. The woman who purchased the medal gave it to her son, Capt. Zachariah Fike, who served in the Vermont Army National Guard. Fike then founded Purple Hearts Reunited, a nonprofit that returns lost or stolen military medals of valor to veterans or their family. Cook introduced the bill last year, but it was at the end of the congressional session, and no action was taken. He is optimistic it will pass this time and expects it to get referred to the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security and Investigations as it was last session. In 2013, President Barack Obama signed the Stolen Valor Act, which makes it a federal crime to fraudulently claim to be a recipient of certain military decorations or medals to obtain tangible benefit.

Houston, who is chapter commander of the Sgt. Timothy Padgett 811 Military Order of the Purple Heart, said that it "happens quite often" that a military medal may end up in a pawn shop or antique store. Those who find one should turn it in to a local chapter of Purple Hearts Reunited, advised Houston. Awarded since 1917 to those wounded or killed while serving in the U.S. military, the Purple Heart is an important badge of honor in military service and should be regarded as such, Houston said. "It's the oldest continually used medal in our history," he added. "It's the only medal given out strictly for combat wounds, that's what makes it prestigious. As a recipient, I'm glad they're trying to get a handle on this. People should not be able to buy any military award for heroism or wounds. It takes away from what it truly means." [Source: Northwest Florida Daily News (Fort Walton Beach) | Jennie Mckeen | January 17, 2017 ++]

VA Blue Water Claims Update 37 ► H.R. 299 Gains 100 Cosponsors

The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2017 is a bill to restore the presumption of exposure to Agent Orange by veterans who served in the harbors, bays and territorial seas of Vietnam. The bill was introduced on 5 JAN by Rep. David Valadao (R-CA) and co-sponsored by Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN) Joseph Courtney (D-CT) Elise Stefanik (R-NY), Dennis Ross (R-FL) and Joe Lobiondo (R-NJ). The bill picked up an additional 100 co-sponsors in less than a week. HR 299 would correct a policy by the Veteran's Affairs implemented in 2002 that striped veterans of the presumption of exposure as stipulated in the Agent Orange Act of 1991. The action was based on the interpretation of the phrase that service in the Republic of Vietnam applies only to those who served in the landmass of Vietnam. The opinion ignored that national sovereignty extended to the territorial seas.

Despite studies done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showed a higher rate of incidence of Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma among Navy Veterans who did not serve in-country, **the VA bureaucracy had refused to reconsider its position.** The Australian VA also found that there is a higher percentage of cancer incidence in their Royal Australian Navy veterans roughly 22 to 26 percent as compared to 11 to 16 percent

incidence rate for those who fought onshore. An Institute Of Medicine special committee confirmed that dioxin infiltration into the bays, territorial seas and harbors of Vietnam led to possible exposure of the veterans. It was found that a ship's evaporation and distillation system that converts sea water into drinking water enriches dioxin instead of removing it from the water. This resulted in increased level of dioxin being released into the ship's water tanks. The dioxin enriched water was used in showering, laundry, cleaning, cooking, food preparation and drinking.

In 2015, the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims ruled that the policy by the VA which excludes bays and harbors in the definition of inland waters and presumption of exposure was irrational, capricious and arbitrary. A reevaluation of the definition was ordered by the court. The policy is currently under review by the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. Veterans argue that as a result of river discharge plumes, dioxin was confirmed in major harbors. By studying coral deterioration 20 years after the war, it was confirmed that toxic levels of dioxin was found in the Kay River which discharges into Nha Trang Harbor where American ships anchored as reported in an article by The Hill.

VA's Agent Orange policy on blue water veterans, those Vietnam War veterans who served on open sea ships and did not set foot on Vietnam or served on ships that operated near inland waterways and who served anytime between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975 must show factual evidence that they were exposed to herbicides during the military service to receive disability compensation for diseases related to Agent Orange exposure. The cases are decided on a case to case basis. An evolving list of U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships associated with military service in Vietnam is being maintained by the VA. A full and latest list of ships that operated in the Vietnam War can be found on their web page. VA had asked the Health and Medicine division of the National Academy of Science, Engineering and Medicine to review scientific and medical evidence regarding possible exposure of Blue Water Veterans to Agent Orange and other herbicides. In 2011, the report stated that the committee was unable to conclude with certainty that Blue Navy personnel were not exposed to Agent Orange as reported by U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. [Source: NCOA Newsletter | Allan Alforte | January 23, 2017 ++]

Military Spouse Job Continuity Act ► S.143 Introduced 12 JAN

NGAUS strongly supports S.143, the Military Spouse Job Continuity Act, introduced on January 12th by Senator Robert Casey of Pennsylvania. This legislation would offer a tax credit up to \$500 to any military spouse who requires a renewal or transfer of a professional license due to a government-ordered move across state lines (PCS order). The tax credit would only apply to administrative fees paid to licensing boards or certificate-granting institutions. Additionally, eligible spouses are those who are married to a member of the Armed Forces at the time the member moves to another State under a PCS order and the spouse moves with the member.

This legislation will help over 50% of respondents to the 2013 Military Spouse Employment Survey who indicated their chosen career field requires licensing or certification of which 73% indicated renewal/reissuing would be required after a PCS move. (The survey found 90% of female spouses of active duty servicemembers reported being underemployed). Studies have shown that if military spouses are underemployed or unemployed, it annually costs the economy between \$700 million and \$1 billion. Passage of this vitally important bill will ease the burden on spouses who have to renew or transfer a professional license or certification due to a relocation related to military orders. Readers are urged to write or email their Senators and request their support of this bill. At <http://www.ngaus.org/advocating-national-guard/write-congress?vvsrc=%2fcampaigns%2f49321%2frespond> is a preformatted/editable letter which can be automatically forwarded to your Senators via email. [Source: NGAUS | Gus Harget | January 23, 2016 ++]

VA Accountability Update 40 ► H.R.5620. Reintroduced as H.R.611/S.152

Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) on 16 JAN brought back his proposal to reform the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Last week, Rubio reintroduced his “VA Accountability First and Appeals Modernization Act.” The Senate read it and referred it to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs on 17 JAN. Its most dramatic change is a 77-day cap on the length of time it can take to finally demote or remove a VA official. Sens. John McCain (R-AZ) and Pat Toomey (R-PA) are cosponsors of his new bill. Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-CO) introduced a House version of the bill H.R.611 on 23 JAN.

Back in July, Rubio teamed up with then U.S. Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) who was serving as the chairman of the U.S. House Veterans Affairs Committee, to bring out the bill last summer. The bill adds more “protections for whistleblowers,” would “increase flexibility to remove VA employees for poor performance or misconduct” and “reform the department’s disability benefits appeals process.” The proposal also closes loopholes from the “VA Accountability Act” from Miller and Rubio which passed the House in 2015 but stalled in the Senate.

Rubio explained why the bill was needed when he brought it out back in July. “For far too long, veterans have been victims of a broken and incompetent VA system,” said Rubio. “To make real progress in fixing the VA, we need to tackle the first problem plaguing the VA, which is the lack of accountability among employees. It is simply unacceptable that it can take years to fire one employee for poor management or misconduct. “The VA Accountability First and Appeals Modernization Act ... goes further to address the excessive backlog of appeals found at the department that have spiraled out of control,” Rubio added. “To give our veterans the care they deserve, it is crucial this legislation is passed and signed into law.”

Rubio brought back this proposal as well as more than a dozen other bills that never crossed the finish line, focusing on everything from former President Barack Obama’s health-care law to Second Amendment issues. “In this new Congress, I will continue pursuing solutions that will make a positive difference in the lives of Floridians and all Americans,” said Rubio when he reintroduced his bills. “By reintroducing this legislation today, we’re moving forward with our work to stop a taxpayer-funded bailout of health insurance companies under Obamacare, keep guns out of terrorists’ hands while protecting the constitutional rights of law-abiding gun owners, improve hurricane forecasting, modernize the VA, and reform the disastrous HUD inspections process that has jeopardized countless lives in Florida and across the country.”

Rubio sounded an optimistic note since President Donald Trump was now in the White House and Republicans controlled both chambers on Capitol Hill. “Now that Republicans control the Senate, House and White House, it is my hope that we can pass these – and many other – meaningful, commonsense solutions to the problems facing our country,” Rubio said. The VA reform bill has the support of a number of groups including the American Legion, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Concerned Veterans for America (CVA) and Student Veterans of America. Diego Echeverri, CVA’s Florida spokesman, praised the bill on 18 JAN. “If passed, Rubio’s VA Accountability First and Appeals Modernization Act would help put an end to the horror stories we hear daily about VA negligence, incompetence, and corruption,” Echeverri insisted. “CVA urges Congress to pass this bill immediately. Veterans’ lives are on the line.” [Source: Sunshine State News | Kevin Derby | January 23, 2017 ++].

BRAC Update 53 ► McCain Labels Congress's Handling Cowardice

The head of the Senate Armed Services Committee said he will consider starting another military base closing round in the near future, calling Congress’ handling of the issue “cowardice” and a threat to military readiness. “We need to talk about it, I think it has to be considered as all things should be on the table,” Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) said during a 24 JAN committee hearing on the defense budget. He said that committee ranking member Sen. Jack Reed, (D-RI) is “seriously considering the issue of BRAC, and obviously we want to talk to now-Secretary of Defense

(James Mattis) about it.” Even discussing a possible base closing round would be a significant shift on Capitol Hill, where lawmakers have been fiercely against the idea of shuttering bases in their districts.

Pentagon officials have repeatedly asked for a reexamination of the military’s domestic footprint with an eye toward closing underused or outdated facilities. They estimate the five previous base closing rounds since 1990 have saved taxpayers at least \$12 billion annually. But lawmakers have responded by not only rejecting the idea but prohibiting defense officials from planning future base closing plans, largely in response to the controversial 2005 reorganization which many saw as overly complicated and minimally fiscally justified. McCain suggested that future rounds may be handled differently, instead of relying on an independent commission as has been practice in the past. “We can’t make the decisions ourselves, so we leave it up [to] a commission, and frankly the last commission made some very bad decisions,” he said. “Like sequestration, it’s a cowardly act, because it shows we can’t make the decision ourselves.”

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX) in the past has said he would be open to allowing the Defense Department to update research on how many DoD facilities may be underused or obsolete. Pentagon officials have said in recent years they are paying to maintain 22 percent more infrastructure than they need, but lawmakers have argued those figures are based on outdated studies. As it has been in recent years, the base closing issue is expected to be a major talking point in the fiscal 2018 defense budget debate later this spring. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 24, 2017 ++]

Military Family Tax Burden ► H.R.282 | Spouse State Residency

Military spouses would be able to simplify their state residency status -- and their tax bills -- under new legislation introduced by a pair of Republican lawmakers this week. The Military Residency Choice Act H.R.282 is designed to untangle the sometimes complicated residency rules surrounding military families, whose frequent duty assignment changes and cross-country moves can leave a confusing trail of paperwork. Bill sponsors Rob Wittman, (R-VA) and Darrell Issa (R-CA) said simplifying those rules could lead to fewer financial problems for those families and even help military spouses continue their careers as they jump from state to state. “The last thing our military families need is additional stress during tax season,” Wittman said in a statement. “Allowing military families to establish a consistent state of residency will give spouses the confidence to rejoin the workforce when they move and help them better provide for their families.”

Under current law, servicemembers are allowed to stay residents of the state where they enlisted for tax and voting purposes for the duration of their military careers. Troops who sign up at a recruiting station in Florida, for example, are considered Florida residents even if their military assignments take them to other states or countries. Military spouses are granted that steady residency too, but only if their state of residency matches their servicemembers’ at the time of marriage. Otherwise, they’re required to refile based on their new home states’ rules with every move. For military couples who meet and get married mid-career, that can lead to a complicated mess of state tax bills and residency regulations every few years. “Each transition requires difficult adjustments as they adapt to new schools, new jobs, new churches and new communities,” Issa said in a statement. “They shouldn’t be burdened yet again when tax season comes around.”

The new measure allows military spouses to adopt their servicemembers’ state of residency as their own, even if they never lived there before. For all future moves, the couple will have the same state for tax and voting purposes. The proposal was introduced in Congress last year (H.R.5428) but stalled in the House. The Congressional Budget Office has already said the move would not cost the government any money, and would have minimal effect on state and local government budgets because the population of individuals electing to make the change would be spread out all over the country. But Wittman said the move would be a major help for a number of military families. “Our nation’s military is only as strong as the men and women serving and the families who support them,” he said.

“Passing this simple residency fix will send a strong signal to our military families that we have their best interests at heart.” No timetable has been set for hearings or a vote on the measure. [<https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/282/text>] [Source: TREA Washington Update | January 10, 2017 ++]

* Military *



USS Gerald A. Ford Update 05 ► CVN 78 Will Head to Sea in Spring

The Navy anticipates its new aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) will be headed to sea this spring for the first time, with builder's sea trials scheduled for March before acceptance trials and delivery in April. Navy acquisition executive Sean Stackley said 12 JAN that the test program is back on track after engineers fixed “a fairly significant issue” with the power distribution system, which caused a delay. The ship has now completed about 93 percent of its test profile, with a further 5 percent to be done once the ship goes out to sea for trials. “From last summer, frankly, to the end of the year in 2016, there was a very intense effort to solve the technical [problems], to test out the technical fixes, implement the technical fixes and then get back on track with completing that portion of the test program,” he said at the Surface Navy Association conference. “That work was done in, nominally, the December time frame.”

“We’re really nicking down to the final higher stage testing across the board,” he continued. The sea trials in March and April will predominantly focus on the hull and mechanical engineering, but some combat system, air traffic control, navigation, and command, control, communications, computers and intelligence testing will also be conducted at that time. After acceptance trials, Stackley anticipates the Navy will have to make corrections to the Ford — a normal practice for any new ship. Then, once it has delivered, the service will certify the Ford’s crew on the remaining shipboard systems still operated by Newport News employees. “The crew is onboard. They’re manning, training and operating the systems that have been turned over to them,” he said. “We owe them access to the remaining systems that have completed the shipboard testing so they can likewise do the training that they need aboard those.”

The Ford won’t begin to launch and recover aircraft until its second underway period this summer, after it has been delivered to the service. “None of the carriers go through launch and recovery of the aircraft during this phase of the program,” Stackley said. But work is being done to complete shipboard tests of the next-generation launch and recovery systems — the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS) and Advanced Arresting Gear (AAG) developed by General Atomics. The Ford will be the first carrier with the systems onboard. EMALS testing is about 99.5 percent complete, Stackley said. The AAG system has been more challenging, with only about 70 percent of its testing wrapped up.

At the same time, the Navy is making progress on finishing the aircraft recovery bulletins, or ARBs, a series of land-based tests at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey where live aircraft are launched and recovered with EMALS and AAG. “We’re on track to have these ARBs done and the shipboard testing done to support launch

and recovery testing at sea [during the] second underway post delivery for the Ford,” he said. [Source: Dfense News | Valerie Insinna | January 13, 2017 ++]

Hack The Army ► Bug Bounty Program a Success

Statistics are in from the Army’s first bug bounty program, and the program appears to have been a success. Bug bounty programs award cash prizes to hackers who reveal security holes in the organization's products and infrastructure. During a three-week program that ended 21 DEC, the Army received 118 valid vulnerabilities to patch. Though payouts are currently still being assessed, hackers earned "around \$100,000" for their troubles, according to a press release from the company that administered the program. Like the “Hack the Pentagon” program that ran April 18, 2016 until May 12, 2016, the hackers that participated in the “Hack the Army” program were vetted in advance. Unlike Hack the Pentagon, Hack the Army focused on more valuable systems — online databases and recruitment sites rather than websites not designed to manage data.

The Hack the Pentagon program was administered by HackerOne, a company that facilitates bug bounty programs. It was the first known bug bounty program in the history of the federal government. Of the 1,410 hackers who registered, 250 successfully found vulnerabilities. Out of all the submissions, 138 were found to be "legitimate, unique and eligible for a bounty," according to Defense Secretary Ash Carter. Those vulnerabilities earned \$75,000, paid promptly by HackerOne in June, 2016. Each validated report was rapidly turned over to Defense Media Activity (DMA) for remediation. The entire cost of the Hack the Pentagon pilot was \$150,000, of which half went to the hackers. The program, according to Carter, is a cost-effective way to supplement and support the people who defend the government's computer networks. In October, the Department of Defense announced a contract with HackerOne and the firm Synack to expand the bounty programs in the months ahead. [Source: The Hill & <https://hackerone.com> | Joe Uchill | January 20, 2017 ++]

Army Handgun ► M9 Beretta Replacement

Half a decade into its search for a new handgun, the Army has chosen Sig Sauer's version of the Modular Handgun System, according to a 19 JAN announcement from the Army. The new sidearm will replace the M9 Beretta, the Army's pistol of choice for more than 30 years. I am tremendously proud of the Modular Handgun System (MHS) team," said Army acquisition executive Steffanie Easter in the release. "By maximizing full and open competition across our industry partners, we have optimized private sector advancements in handguns, ammunition and magazines and the end result will ensure a decidedly superior weapon system for our warfighters." The Army first announced the competition for the MHS back in 2011, but multiple delays left the most recent solicitation deadline at February of 2016.



Bib Sauer 320

Sig Sauer beat out Smith & Wesson, Beretta and Glock for the contract worth up to \$580 million, which includes firearms, accessories and ammunition. The Army did not immediately provide any additional information Thursday evening, including specifics on the weapon or the caliber of the round. "As MHS moves forward into operational testing, the due diligence taken by all of the stakeholders will ensure a program that remains on-budget and on-schedule," Easter said. After operational testing, the new pistol should be fielded this year, according to the release. Here's what we know so far:

- The P320, released by Sig Sauer in 2014, is a polymer striker-fired pistol, according to a statement from the gunmaker.
- The P320 is the first modular pistol with interchangeable grip modules that can also be adjusted in frame size and caliber by the user.
- It can be adapted to shoot 9mm, .357 SIG and .40 S&W ammunition, according to Sig Sauer.
- Although neither the Army nor Sig Sauer announced which caliber the Army chose, media reports say the Army chose the 9mm version.
- Sig Sauer confirmed that the Army had selected both the full size and compact P320.
- Soldiers should start getting the new handguns this year, with all of the contract's weapons delivered over a period of 10 years.
- All pistols will be configurable to receive silencers.
- The pistols will have standard and extended capacity magazines.
- The pistols will be produced at Sig Sauer facilities in New Hampshire, the company said.

The gun boasts a stainless steel frame that allows users to "change caliber, size and fit at will," according to promotional material from Sig Sauer. It also has a "cleaner, crisper trigger reset, safe takedown and unprecedented modularity," the company said. While the Beretta M9 has been the Army's pistol since 1985, the military uses other handguns, including Sig Sauers, particularly in special operations. Green Berets regularly use Glock 9mm pistols, and last year Marine Special Operations allowed use of the 9mm Glock 19. Navy SEALs generally use the Sig Sauer P226 and, on occasion, Heckler & Koch's .45-caliber HK45C. [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers & Michelle Tan | January 19 & 20, 2017 ++]

Navy Fleet Size Update 02 ► Deferred Maintenance Impact

The Navy is in bad shape and its leaders are starting to make noise about it. The carrier George H.W. Bush is headed out for deployment 21 JAN — about a month late — which meant an extended gap in carrier presence in the Middle East in the middle of a war on the Islamic State group. And the culprit was a longer-than-anticipated trip to the shipyards. It's a sign of the times. President Donald Trump has vowed to provide more money and an end to budget cuts that have wreaked havoc on the Navy's training and maintenance cycles — the period between deployments overseas. The constant demands on the force have caused an ever-growing list of equipment and weapons' systems that need to be fixed but lack funding and adequate time to perform the repairs.

"We are under stress right now," said Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson at a Defense One forum discussion 17 JAN. "There is persistent demand for naval forces from the [combatant commanders]. If you just take the raw numbers, we're meeting about half of those demands. So we're stretched pretty thin." The strain on the fleet is made all the more real by the lack of funding for fixing its ships. The Navy's number two officer made the Navy's maintenance woes the centerpiece of his speech at the Surface Navy Association's (SNA) annual symposium in early January, and called the deferred maintenance problem in the Navy insidious. "This long war we're in and emerging or re-emerging threats have raised the stakes and kept us on the field longer than our bullpen is able to stay healthy," Adm. Bill Moran, vice chief of Naval operations said. "Deferred maintenance is insidiously taking its toll

on the long-term readiness of our fleet.” During a presentation at the Surface Navy Association, Capt. Dave Bauer of the Surface Maintenance Engineering Planning Program said in 2016 he had 11 ships that had unfunded maintenance periods, which is when the Navy ties a ship up to the pier or sends it to the shipyards for extensive repair and renovation.

This new willingness to openly press the case for more maintenance dollars comes at a time when the incoming Trump administration has promised more money to the services and has set the Navy’s ship-count goal at 355 ships up from today’s 274. But before any money goes into building new ships to boost its numbers, the Navy is demanding an end to its starvation diet for maintenance, Moran said. “When the transition team asked me what I would do with more money today, this year and next my answer was not, more ships,” Moran said. “It was making sure that the 274 ships we had were maintained and modernized to provide 274 ships worth of combat power ... When we make decisions that either directly or indirectly underfund our readiness accounts, we do not get the full value from our Navy.” Within moments of Trump inauguration Friday, the administration had posted a commitment to reversing the strain on the Navy on the White House website. “Our Navy has shrunk from more than 500 ships in 1991 to 275 in 2016. Our Air Force is roughly one third smaller than in 1991,” the statement reads. “President Trump is committed to reversing this trend, because he knows that our military dominance must be unquestioned.”

One of the underlying themes of the SNA symposium was a barely-constrained giddiness at the prospect of a Trump-sponsored cash infusion into the military industrial complex. But experts and analysts say it may not be time to spike the football just yet — the challenges ahead for such a windfall are significant. First off, the new White House budget director Mick Mulvaney is a South Carolina Tea Party Republican who during his time in Congress crusaded against both domestic and military spending. Second, the cash can’t flow until Congress repeals the Budget Control Act which locked in defense spending cuts for years to come.

That fight won’t be easy, experts say, especially with the aggressive domestic agenda Trump laid out in the campaign, said Dan Palazzolo, a professor of political science at University of Richmond, in a recent interview. “There are going to have to be a lot of trade-offs,” he said. “Donald Trump wants a lot of things: Big tax cuts, big infrastructure spending, doesn’t want to touch entitlements, defense spending. There are tensions here that are going to have to get unwound. “Really, this is going to be the challenge of Trump’s presidency: How do you translate these broad policy proposals into policies, and defense is in that mix. It’s going to be on Congress to help him figure that out,” Palazzolo said. [Source: NavyTimes | David B. Larter | January 21, 2017 ++]

Air Force Readiness ► Trump Pledges to Reverse Trend

Newly sworn into office, President Donald J. Trump on 20 JAN pledged to grow the size of the Air Force and "rebuild the American military." The official White House website was updated with information about some of the new administration's priorities. One issue paper, titled "America First Foreign Policy," lamented "our Air Force is roughly one-third smaller than in 1991." Trump, it says, "is committed to reversing this trend, because he knows that our military dominance must be unquestioned." In the document, Trump also pledged to develop a "state-of-the-art missile defense system" to protect against nations like Iran and North Korea, and to improve overall military readiness. The Air Force has shrunk from more than 510,000 active duty airmen in fiscal 1991 to about 317,000 at the end of 2016 — a drop of nearly 38 percent over those 25 years. After Trump's election in November, Air Force officials said they hoped to get the service up to 350,000 airmen by the year 2024, and focus most of their growth on the maintenance, nuclear, cyber and space career fields. The Air Force also wants to grow its ranks of drone pilots, who are in great demand as combatant commanders rely more and more on the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance unmanned aircraft provide. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Dave Goldfein and other top brass have been speaking with Trump's transition team about the need for more airmen. [Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | January 20, 2017 ++]

Military Manpower Challenge ► Rebuilding the U.S. Military

Manpower, not money, may prove a bigger challenge to President Trump's hopes to rebuild what he calls a "hollowed-out" U.S. military. While much of the debate over how the administration will pay for its ambitious defense buildup, an equally large question mark looms over whether Mr. Trump and Defense Secretary James Mattis can find enough willing and able recruits to meet the demands for soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. On the campaign trail, Mr. Trump called for a restoration of force levels across the services to numbers before a series of "sequestration" cuts to defense spending, including a 540,000-member Army, backed by a 350-ship Navy and an Air Force of 1,200 fighter aircraft.

The increases to the Navy and Air Force would likely result in a small uptick of 100,000 sailors and airmen combined, compared with the force levels sought in the Army and Marine Corps, Mark Cancian, senior international security adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told The Washington Times. Between the proposed expansions of the Army and Marine Corps, Mr. Trump's plan would fall hardest on the Marines, Mr. Cancian said. Mr. Trump's plan for the Army would put the service's total force on par with troop levels at the height of the U.S.-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But the White House's plan to boost the Marine Corps to 36 infantry battalions — more than 200,000 Marines — would put the service at force levels "not seen since Vietnam." "That would be quite a struggle," he said.

One small sign of the challenge ahead came with the announcement this month that the Army was offering soldiers who have the option of leaving before October incentive bonuses of \$10,000 or more to stay on for another 12 months. Those in high-demand fields also could be offered choice assignments or educational training if they stay. The Army Times noted that the service is scrambling to meet the mandate of the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, which says the active Army must have 476,000 soldiers in the next eight months — 16,000 more than the generals originally planned for. "Is it dire? No. But we need more soldiers," Army Sgt. Maj., Dan Dailey told the newspaper this month. "We need to do this pretty rapidly." Another challenge facing Mr. Trump's plan is the lukewarm response from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to an expedited surge in the ranks. Publicly and privately, the service chiefs have expressed wariness over the massive troop increases proposed in the Trump plan, Mr. Cancian said.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley and Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Robert Neller have publicly stated that they would be willing to have a smaller troop increase and use the additional funds to repair aging weapon systems and procure newer ones for their arsenals, he said. Gen. Milley has expressed a desire for a 490,000- to 500,000-member force, and Gen. Neller said a total force of 184,000 Marines would be adequate. If the Trump administration seeks to push troop increases on the services too quickly, it risks a politically dangerous fight with the military brass, said Mr. Cancian. But retired Lt. Gen. Thomas Spoehr, director of the conservative Heritage Foundation's Center for National Defense, said Mr. Trump has an opportunity to address a readiness issue that has not received sufficient attention in recent years. Attracting and retaining capable recruits is among the "top one, two or three national security risks we are not talking about," he said. While hardware and high-tech weapons are critical, "quantity has a quality all its own" in ensuring U.S. forces have the capability to address national security threats around the globe, Gen. Spoehr said.

Dwindling pool? Only 1.4 million Americans, or less than one-half of 1 percent of the country's total population, are serving as active-duty members of the U.S. military, according to Defense Department statistics. Only 17 percent of all military-age Americans would be deemed physically "qualified military available" for service, according to the most recent assessment of possible military manpower by the nonprofit Center for Naval Analyses. The pool of military recruits may be dwindling as the job market improves in the private tech and service sectors. Meshing those factors with the manpower goals required by the Trump administration's defense buildup plan "is going to be a

challenge,” said Mr. Spoehr. Money also will be an issue for the Pentagon. “You can’t do this on the cheap. You are going to have to grow into this thing,” he said. The Army in particular, he noted, can typically boost its force levels by an average of 10,000 troops per year. Go faster than that, Mr. Spoehr said, and “you are going to make some bad decisions” regarding the quality of soldiers who are brought into the service.

These bad decisions came to the forefront during the troop surges in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mr. Cancian noted. “We just saw one of them be pardoned by the president,” he said, referring to Chelsea Manning, the transgender Army intelligence analyst convicted of leaking military secrets in 2010. President Obama commuted her sentence as one of his final official acts last week. Manning was part of the wave of recruits brought into the armed forces as part of the Pentagon’s effort to maintain troop “surge” levels in Iraq and Afghanistan in the mid-2000s. To avoid those mistakes, the Trump team at the Pentagon must focus on bringing in “capable manpower,” not just swelling the ranks of the armed forces with fresh recruits, said David Johnson, a senior national security fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments in Washington. “The issue will be how fast the [military] expansion will be” under Mr. Trump and Mr. Mattis, Mr. Johnson said. “The biggest challenge is we are not just looking for efficiency in the military, we are also looking for effectiveness in the military and the two are not necessary mutually exclusive.”

One option to ensure that balance is struck is to slow down the schedule for retirements of more experienced service members, Mr. Johnson said, noting that retaining those officers and senior enlisted members would ease the pressure on fresh recruits. Mr. Spoehr agreed that slowing down the retirements of seasoned officers and senior enlisted service members could ease the manpower challenges: “That is a spigot you can turn on quite quickly,” he said. The Pentagon could look to its reserve and guard units to take a larger role, Mr. Mattis, a retired Marine general, has said. “It’s not just a strategic reserve anymore. It’s also an operational reserve,” he told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee during his confirmation hearing this month.

The Obama administration sought to offset reductions in American military might by leaning on global defense alliances and proxy forces to battle extremist groups in places such as Syria, Iraq and Libya. But that status quo of the Obama national security doctrine is in danger of buckling, as Washington faces renewed military threats from near-peer rivals such as Russia, China and Iran, Mr. Mattis told Congress. “That’s just a reality when we’ve shrunk our military to the point we have yet not reduced our strategic obligations,” he told the Senate defense panel. [Source: The Washington Times | Carlo Muñoz | January 22, 2017 ++]

Credentialing Assistance ► Giving Credit for Experience

For decades the Army has offered tuition assistance to soldiers who want to earn degrees, and now leadership is looking into how to translate that program to cover civilian credential and certification training for soldiers to study skills both in and out of their specialties. A survey went out to 100,000 soldiers back in November, asking whether they would be interested in earning civilian credentials and whether they might consider that option over tuition assistance (TA) if they could, officials told Army Times in a 11 JAN interview. “What we’re finding is, overwhelmingly, of course yes,” Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey said. More than 3,000 soldiers responded within the first three weeks the survey went out, according to Joe Parson, the Army’s credentialing officer. Participants had until Jan. 23 to give their feedback.

The survey is the first step the Army is taking to create a sort of credentialing assistance program that would allow the Army to invest in soldiers while potentially saving money on college tuition while they’re in the service. The program also could save money down the road, because soldiers with professional civilian credentials hopefully will be more marketable to employers and won’t be drawing unemployment checks from the Army once they separate. The move will undo an oversight, officials said, that had the Army training soldiers in myriad job skills without giving them the piece of paper that would let them translate that experience into a civilian job.

"The value proposition wasn't very high for them to enter the marketplace because we didn't do a very good job translating the training, education and experience they got in the service," Parson said. "We had a culture of, everything was disposable -- that you had to leave the service and it was strictly on you to translate that." That has been particularly true for combat arms soldiers, who historically have had a harder time transitioning their service to a civilian job. Eventually, Dailey said, the hope is that soldiers will be able to earn credentials no matter what their military occupational specialty, the way they can study anything they want through tuition assistance.

The 2017 National Defense Authorization Act opened the door for the Army to be able to pay for soldiers to get professional credentials that directly correlate to their jobs. That can mean information technology certifications for information technology specialists, commercial driver's licenses for motor transport operators or personal training licenses for every noncommissioned officer leading your morning PT. An IT certification costs less than \$4,000, Parson said, with starting salaries pegged between \$40,000 and \$100,000 per year depending on the credential. But officials want to expand that beyond MOS constraints, so that even your average 11B can get certified as an electrician and get a job as soon as he's out of the Army, or possibly use it while he's still in.

Dailey told the story of a reserve component infantryman he led during an Iraq deployment who helped set up an electrical grid because that was his day job. "Another time, I had to get a water treatment facility going in Sadr City. Because when people don't have water, they get very angry, and when they get very angry they're shooting at you," he said. "It just so happens I had a reserve soldier who worked at a water treatment facility." It might also keep that enlisted infantryman in longer, if reenlistment bonuses weren't enough of a motivator. "The misperception is that if you give people credentials, they'll leave. That's absolutely not true," Dailey said. "Monetary incentive is not the primary reason people stay with organizations. It's obviously not the one in the Army. We don't give a whole lot of monetary incentive." Just investing in soldiers and allowing them to cultivate their own skills and knowledge could keep them loyal to the Army, he added, which is the same philosophy behind TA.

There are two ways to flesh out this plan: One is an internally funded program through the Army to do MOS-related credentials, and then there is a broad-reaching option that will require approval from the office of the secretary of defense and Congress. Dailey and his partners are working both angles right now, to see whether they have to start with MOS-only training or if they can get it all done with one program. Once the survey closes, there will be a cost-benefit analysis, to see how much money it would cost to credential soldiers, and how much might be saved if they decide to go for a certificate over a degree. Like TA, there would have to be limits on dollars and number of hours spent on training. "We're authorized to pay for all the training, materials, fees, certifications and recertifications," Parson said, but they will have to set parameters.

For instance, it's unlikely that the Army will pay for the same certification through multiple outlets, or that they'll cover yearly or periodic recertification fees indefinitely. With tuition assistance, for example, the cap is 16 credit hours or \$4,500 a year. In the meantime, Dailey encourages soldiers to look into credentialing programs through their local community colleges, which are eligible for TA money. The only hitch is that the Army won't pay for certification tests just yet. Realistically, he said, they're looking at a year before they could have a credentialing program up and running. [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | January 19, 2017 ++]

Army Combat Systems ► Ground | Becoming Cold War Relics

The core of the Army's ground combat systems is under threat of being seriously outmoded by foreign adversaries like Russia, China, and North Korea, according to the Congressional Research Service (CRS). Developed primarily in the 1970s, the Army's fleet of main battle tanks, tracked infantry fighting vehicles, tracked self-propelled artillery and multiple launch rocket systems were designed to battle a larger Cold War adversary, a report produced by CRS explains. "U.S. Army leadership notes for the first time since World War I that the Army does not have a new

ground combat vehicle under development and, at current funding levels, the Bradley [Fighting Vehicle] and Abrams [tank] will remain in the inventory for 50 to 70 more years,” the report reads.

Efforts to modernize the Army’s artillery and armor systems have been a Sisyphean task, costing roughly \$1 billion dollars a year since 1996 — representing nearly 42 percent of the Army’s research, development, testing and evaluation budget in failed and cancelled projects, according to the CRS. Failed projects include the \$11 billion Crusader SP artillery system, \$160 billion Future Combat System program, the M-2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle, and the M-109A6 Paladin SP, congressional researchers wrote. In comparison, near-peer competitors such as China and Russia are close to fielding or have already fielded modern main battle tanks and infantry fighting vehicles. Russia’s new T-14 Armata tank — which boasts 48 tons and a 125mm smooth bore autoloader as its main armaments, is currently under development. China fielded the MBT-3000 in 2012 — coming in at 57 tons, the tank is capable of firing laser-guided rounds, the CRS reported, citing data supplied from IHS Jane’s 360.

Although interstate war between Russia and China is unlikely, congressional researchers note that the possibility of combating their weapon systems is high — pointing to conflicts in Syria, Iraq and the Israeli- Lebanon conflict of 2006 as hybrid wars in which irregular armed groups conducted warfare with modernized equipment, including tanks and ant-aircraft rocket systems. The potential for adversaries to surpass the U.S. in its technological edge with military weapons systems is a real likelihood. And with the Defense Department’s slow acquisition process and budgetary issues, new projects to modernize the Army’s ground combat systems could take decades, the CRS warns. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Shawn Snow | January 23, 2017 ++]

USMC Field Exercises ► Mixed Gender Policies

The first female infantry Marines will share fighting holes and tents with male Marines during field exercises. “We’re not changing any of our tactical posture or breaking unit cohesion or adjusting anything to accommodate mixed genders while we’re operating in a field environment replicating tactical conditions,” said Maj. Charles Anklam III, executive officer for 1st Battalion, 8th Marines at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. On 5 JAN the battalion received three female infantry Marines: a rifleman, machine gunner and mortar Marine. Whenever the Marines are in the field, they will live, train and fight with their unit, Anklam told Marine Corps Times. “Our female Marines will find themselves side-by-side their male counterparts in a fighting hole or in their living conditions for the execution of field or deployed duties,” he said in a 20 JAN interview.

When in their barracks, all of the female Marines have their own rooms, which include their own shower and bathroom, Anklam said. The battalion has had to make some adjustments in buildings where both women and men now work, he said. “Typically you’ll find within an infantry battalion like in this building, we’ve got a downstairs and an upstairs head facility,” he said. “We’ve been able to allocate one of those for the use of female members and then the other for male members.” So far, the battalion has not experienced any unexpected challenges to integrating the women into the unit, said Lt. Col. Reginald McClam, battalion commander. Before the women arrived, the battalion had several discussions with officers and noncommissioned officers about how the female infantry Marines would become part of the unit, McClam said. “We placed a continued emphasis on the corporal through first lieutenant because that’s the small unit leadership, the middle management, that really is critical in carrying out my commander’s intent and the policy and guidelines of Headquarters Marine Corps,” he said.

Capt. Katharine Gibbons-Neff is the battalion’s logistics officer, who is also serving as part of the unit’s female leadership cadre. While the cadre’s mission is to be a sounding board for battalion and company leaders on personnel issues, their interactions with the three women will be limited, she said. “The existing female leadership is not in the immediate chain of command for the female infantry Marines,” Gibbons-Neff said. “We don’t expect or outright condone that the female Marines go outside of their chain command to seek counsel solely on the basis of gender – unless they’ve been specifically directed to do so by their chain of command.” Gibbons-Neff and the other

female leaders have been invaluable in providing a female perspective of what it's like to arrive at a unit that has never had women before, McClam said.

McClam stressed that the battalion's mission has not changed and neither have the standards that all Marines have to meet, both men and women. "This is what I told the staff," McClam said, "I joined the Marine Corps to lead Marines and sailors. I didn't take an oath of office that said I was going to lead male Marines or female Marines or male sailors or female sailors. I said I would lead Marines." [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Jeff Schogol | January 25, 2017 ++]

Navy Uniform Changes Update 03 ► TYPE III Phase-in on Track

The Navy's ramp up to putting every sailor in the green Navy Working Uniform Type III is on track, officials announced 26 SEP. This means that boot camp issue is still slated to begin on 1OCT and soon after, the uniform parts and pieces should all be on shelves in Navy Exchanges. They are already officially authorized for wear — if you have them. "The NWU Type III is on schedule for introduction at Recruit Training Command Great Lakes beginning 1 October 2017," Rear Adm. Robert Burke, the Navy's chief of personnel said in a uniform update NAVADMIN released Jan. 26. No firm dates for the exchange roll-out have been set, officials say, but updated schedules will be announced once they're available.



It's the first update to a roll-out plan that was introduced in August 2016, when the Navy announced that they'd shift away from the "aquaflage" NWU Type I's and put everyone in green digital instead. At the time, Navy officials told Navy Times that it would take the better part of a year to ramp up production of the uniform, previously only worn by about 50,000 sailors at officially authorized commands. As of 1 OCT the uniform became the Navy's official working uniform and the phase-out of Type I's began. Sailors who already have them through command organizational clothing issue can wear them even if they transfer away from that command, as long as those uniforms are serviceable. But issue Type III's must be turned in to the Navy once they are damaged or worn out, officials told Navy Times in August.

Once the uniforms show up on exchange shelves, there will be a two-year lead time until the stated mandatory wear date of Oct. 1, 2019. After that date, Type I's are no longer authorized and sailors will be required to have a minimum of three sets in their seabag. Officials could change that required number in the future, but that all depends on whether the service develops a two-piece fire retardant "at-sea" uniform in the next couple years and whether the service adopts that into the seabag. Fleet officials announced earlier this month that such a two-piece variant of the new fire resistant coveralls will be developed and tested in the fleet. With the fleet in green, the Navy has said the traditional blue command ball caps will remain authorized, but the message now authorizes the coyote brown ball caps to work fleet-wide with the NWU Type III. The cap also remains authorized for those wearing the desert NWU Type II's. The Navy initially authorized the brown caps last March and this approval expands that wear fleet-wide, should commands choose to.

The Navy continues to wrestle with the issue of boots and research and development continues to try and make boots more comfortable for sailors, while still meeting shipboard safety requirement. The message reiterated that the boots used with the Type I's are also the primary boots for sailors to use as they shift to the Type III's. The seabag nine-inch black safety boots will remain the shipboard boot for now. Ashore, there are both the nine-inch black smooth leather Navy Working Uniform boot as well as the 9-inch black rough-side-out leather NWU boot. These rules apply to both the outgoing Type I's as well as the Type III's. But as the Type III's become available, there will now be more boot options, the message said. Brown safety boots issued for flying duty and Seabee duty can be worn. In addition, the Navy certified desert tan or coyote brown rough-side-out leather non-safety boots are an option if your CO authorizes them when for when safety boot aren't required. Normally, sailors are issued these boots by commands, but they can also be procured by sailors out of their own pocket. [Source: San Antonio Express-News | Sig Christenson | January 3, 2017 ++]

* Military History *



Versailles Treaty ► Marked the End of WWI

On 18 JAN 1919 in Paris, France, some of the most powerful people in the world met to begin the long, complicated negotiations that would officially mark the end of the First World War. Leaders of the victorious Allied powers—France, Great Britain, the United States and Italy—would make most of the crucial decisions in Paris over the next six months. For most of the conference, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson struggled to support his idea of a “peace without victory” and make sure that Germany, the leader of the Central Powers and the major loser of the war, was not treated too harshly. On the other hand, Prime Ministers Georges Clemenceau of France and David Lloyd George of Britain argued that punishing Germany adequately and ensuring its weakness was the only way to justify the immense costs of the war. In the end, Wilson compromised on the treatment of Germany in order to push through the creation of his pet project, an international peacekeeping organization called the League of Nations.



Of the many provisions in the treaty, one of the most important and controversial required "Germany [to] accept the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage" during the war (the other members of the Central Powers signed treaties containing similar articles). This article, Article 231, later became known as the War Guilt clause. The treaty forced Germany to disarm, make substantial territorial concessions, and pay reparations to certain countries that had formed the Entente powers. In 1921 the total cost of these reparations was assessed at 132 billion marks (then \$31.4 billion or £6.6 billion, roughly equivalent to US \$442 billion or UK £284 billion in 2017). At the time economists, notably John Maynard Keynes, predicted that the treaty was too harsh—a "Carthaginian peace"—and said the reparations figure was excessive and counter-productive, views that, since then, have been the subject of ongoing debate by historians and economists from several countries. On the other hand, prominent figures on the Allied side such as French Marshal Ferdinand Foch criticized the treaty for treating Germany too leniently.

Representatives from Germany were excluded from the peace conference until May, when they arrived in Paris and were presented with a draft of the Versailles Treaty. Having put great faith in Wilson's promises, the Germans were deeply frustrated and disillusioned by the treaty, which required them to forfeit a great deal of territory and pay reparations. Even worse, the infamous Article 231 forced Germany to accept sole blame for the war. This was a bitter pill many Germans could not swallow.

The Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919, five years to the day after a Serbian nationalist's bullet ended the life of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and sparked the beginning of World War I. In the decades to come, anger and resentment of the treaty and its authors festered in Germany. Extremists like Adolf Hitler's National Socialist (Nazi) Party capitalized on these emotions to gain power, a process that led almost directly to the exact thing Wilson and the other negotiators in Paris in 1919 had wanted to prevent—a second, equally devastating global war. The problems that arose from the treaty would lead to the Locarno Treaties, which improved relations between Germany and the other European Powers, and the re-negotiation of the reparation system resulting in the Dawes Plan, the Young Plan, and the indefinite postponement of reparations at the Lausanne Conference of 1932. [Source: <http://www.history.com> & <https://en.wikipedia.org> | January 18, 2017 ++]

Inventions That Led to Big Victories ► Seven Small Ones

Sometimes small inventions bring about big change, either in our everyday lives, or in times of war. Wartime brings about innovation, born out of necessity. That innovation doesn't just take the form of large weapons of war, but also of smaller inventions and efforts to assist the war effort. In some cases, these small changes led to the significant victories, ranging from single battles to the Allied victory in World War II.

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Bayonet

In the early 17th century, French hunters hunting boar began attaching knives, called bayonets, to their muskets. The French army first adopted the bayonet in 1671, and by the end of the 17th century, bayonets were a standard part of military issue equipment. The bayonet eliminated the need for pikemen in the military. Previously, pikemen had served as a guard for the musketeers as they reloaded; however, the guard was no longer needed once the muskets included a bayonet. The introduction of the bayonet changed the role of the musketeer and led, overall, to a period of reduced specification of tasks. Since pikemen were no longer needed, musketeers took on an increasingly important role in the armies of the 18th century. As gun technology advanced, the bayonet became less important. By the Civil War, only one percent of fatalities could be attributed to the bayonet.

Bayonets could fit in, on or over the muzzle of the musket. The knife served a range of roles in warfare, from all-purpose cutting implement to close combat. The earliest bayonets fit into the muzzle of the musket, but adaptations

soon offered alternatives. These allowed the bayonet to remain in place while the musket was shot. Bayonets ranged from saw-bladed tools to short swords. The bayonet played a key military role for quite some time, even as guns took less time to reload; however, by the beginning of the 20th century, the impact of the bayonet was largely psychological, causing the enemy to retreat. In World War I, specially crafted bayonets served as digging tools and bayonets became shorter. Many modern assault rifles retain the ability to attach a bayonet.



US-Military-M9-Bayonet

Pikemen had, throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period, been an essential part of the fighting force. After the introduction of the bayonet, pikemen were gradually removed from the armed forces, although still occasionally played a ceremonial role.

Canned Food

In 1795, the French Directory or government of the period offered a substantial prize for an advance in food preservation. Improved food preservation was essential for long combat—troops could not fight effectively if they were not fed. Several years later, during the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte, a young French chef, Nicholas Appert, set out to solve this problem. Appert first relied upon the longest-lasting and best-sealing container of the time, the champagne bottle. These bottles were sealed with a mixture of cheese and lime. By 1803, Appert progressed to wide-mouth jars, and began canning a variety of foods, including fruits and vegetables, meat, dairy and fish. These early, glass-container, canned foods were sent out with the French Navy beginning in 1804.



In 1804, Appert also began experimenting with the first tins, rather than glass jars. The tin for canned food was patented not long after by Peter Durand. Durand replaced the glass jars with more durable and lighter tins, soldered closed. By the time Appert died in 1841, canned foods were becoming commonplace, both on the battlefield and in shops throughout Europe and the United States. Canned foods fed the enormous armies of the 19th century in the Crimean War, the U.S. Civil War, and the Franco-Prussian War. Canned foods could be shipped long distances to feed troops and provided quick access to essential foods. Local food supplies, with questionable availability, were no longer necessary to feed the troops. This improved the nutrition of armies, and allowed for longer battles without restocking of supplies. Eventually, the U.S. Civil War led to the development of another essential technology to accompany canned foods—the can opener.

Barbed Wire

Barbed wire, or heavy wire with sharp wire barbs, is commonly used for fencing. While there were a number of earlier unpatented versions of barbed wire, barbed wire as we know it today developed out of an idea by Henry Rose, presented at an 1873 county fair. Rose suggested adding barbs to a wooden fence rail for livestock containment. Several of those who saw Rose's idea worked to develop their own barbed wire. By November 1874, two men had joined together to form the Barb Fence Company. While barbed wire was marketed as containment

fencing for livestock, it soon found other uses on the battlefield. In the Second Anglo-Boer War in what is now South Africa, the British used barbed wire to confine people to concentration camps and to help fortify buildings.

By World War I, barbed wire played a key strategic role. Barbed wire was a cheap and practical way to limit the movement of oncoming offensive troops, providing a first line of defense. Barbed wire fences were effective, quick to put up, and did not limit visibility, yet they were difficult to pass through or to destroy. Barbed wire didn't only serve to protect troops in the trenches. It could also be used to create traps for the enemy, by funneling enemy forces into an effective kill zone that could be easily defended, and made it simple to eliminate the enemy with little risk. Barbed wire remains an important strategy to keep people in or out of areas even today, and is found surrounding prisons, military installations and other facilities. In addition, it continues to be used for its original purpose—containing livestock.

Chlorine

Chlorine was a chemical used by the German dye industry. Today, we still use chlorine bleach for industrial uses, to clean in our homes and to whiten our laundry; however, on the battlefield, this chemical had a significantly greater impact. Chlorine was, in fact, the first major chemical weapon, deployed on the battlefields of World War I on April 22, 1915. The Germans had experimented with chemical weapons previously, but had been less successful. Chemist Fritz Haber had used chlorine in an industrial setting, and recognized several key attributes that made it an ideal chemical weapon. Chlorine remains gaseous at cold temperatures and is heavier than air, so sank into enemy trenches. When inhaled, chlorine causes the lungs to fill with fluid, killing by drowning.

Even the Germans were surprised by their own success in April 1915. The gas attack decimated entire divisions of French and Algerian troops at the Second Battle of Ypres. The use of chemical weapons by the Germans continued throughout the war. While poison gas was defended as an effective strategy, defensive strategies, like gas masks kept pace with the development of new gases. Chlorine was a significant ingredient in most of the chemical weaponry of the period, used by both sides in the conflict. Phosgene, for instance, was a chlorine-based, nearly odorless gas. This gas was responsible for 80 percent of gas deaths in World War I. In total, some 100,000 pounds of poison gases were used in World War I, causing almost 30,000 deaths. The 1925 Geneva Protocol banned the use of chemical weapons, but not their production or stockpiling. While chemical weapons were not in use in combat in World War II, they were, of course, used in the death camps of the Holocaust.

Sulfanilamide

Before the introduction of antibacterial compounds or modern antibiotics, infection was a more likely cause of death than a wound. In World War I, medics had only saltwater and alcohol to wash wounds, and, while they understood infection, lacked the ability to treat it. That changed in World War II, with the introduction of sulfanilamide. Sulfanilamide or sulfa was an antibacterial powder, issued to American soldiers.



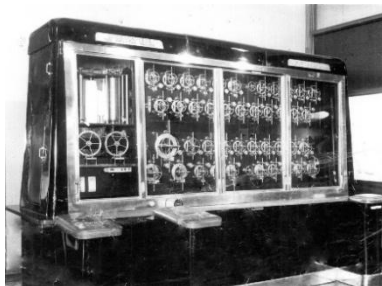
Sulfanilamide was part of a compound called Prontosil, an industrial dye used for wool and leather. In 1930s Germany, a number of scientists were working to find an antibacterial compound, testing available industrial chemicals. During the course of their tests, they discovered that sulfanilamide was effective against the streptococcus bacteria. By 1935, it became clear that the drug was effective; sulfanilamide was isolated from

Prontosil. The U.S. government issued sulfa powder, a white powder, to American troops to apply to wounds, as well as sulfa tablets to prevent dysentery. Sulfa powder could reduce the risk of death from serious injuries, like gunshot wounds, but could also be used to prevent infection in less severe cuts and scrapes.

Dysentery was common in the South Pacific, and without access to sulfa tablets, Japanese troops were significantly weakened by the intestinal condition. American troops, with access to sulfa tablets, were more able to effectively resist dysentery and remain more capable of fighting effectively. Sulfanilamide played an essential role in the health of American troops in World War II, helping to support an eventual Allied victory. Sulfa has been long-since replaced by an array of more effective drugs, but this innovation saved American lives in the war, and reduced the rate of death from infection on the home front.

Tide-predicting Machine

The tide-predicting machine was a little bigger than many of these other inventions, but in terms of the size to impact ratio, it fits in well with little inventions. Tide-predicting machines were essentially complex analog calculators. These had been in use for some time, having been first developed in the 1870s, and were treated as classified technology by the time of the second World War.



The US No.2 Tide Predicting Machine, called “Old Brass Brains” was essential to Allied operations in World War II. “Old Brass Brains” relied on a system of gears, pulleys and chains to complete the complex equations necessary to predict the tides at specific locations. This machine predicted the tides for all island landings in the Pacific, as well as for the essential landing in Normandy on D-Day. The landings in Normandy provide the best example of the importance of the tide-predicting machine; however, US No. 2 Tide Predicting Machine remained in use until it was replaced by a computer in 1965.

German Field Marshall Erwin Rommel expected Allied forces to storm Normandy at high tide. In preparation for the attack, he installed barriers of wood, cement and steel, designed to stop ships and landing parties from reaching the shores of Normandy. The Allies would have to plan to land at low tide, destroy the barriers to open channels inland, and get ships off the beach before becoming stranded. This made the timing of the landing essential. In addition, the ships had to be able to cross the English Channel at night, have enough daylight for a naval assault prior to the landing, and needed a late-rising moon to allow paratroopers to drop into Normandy overnight the previous night. Only three dates in June met all of these requirements, according to the tide-predicting machine; June 5, 6 and 7. The carefully planned assault helped to turn the tide of war, forcing the Germans to fight on two fronts. By the end of June 1944, more than a million troops had landed in Normandy and Victory Europe Day or VE Day was less than a year away.

DDT

In wartime, often one of the biggest sources of casualties and deaths is not the enemy, but nature. Illness, particularly the types of illness carried by insects and pests, can decimate armies. The military was concerned about typhus, which had caused some 2.5 million military and civilian deaths in World War I, as well as mosquito-borne illnesses, like malaria and yellow fever. By the late 1930s, scientists were actively looking for an insecticide that could be used on clothing and blankets to prevent insect activity from lice and mosquitos. In 1939, Swiss chemist Paul Muller realized that a chemical compound discovered in the 19th century, dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, or

DDT was an effective way to mothproof wool fabrics. Researchers in the U.S. soon realized that DDT worked well as an insecticide at low doses.



U.S. soldiers were issued DDT powder, and entire towns and islands were sprayed with DDT. The use of DDT dramatically reduced soldier's deaths from pest-related illnesses, and World War II may be the first conflict in which more individuals died from combat injuries than illness. Questions about the safety of DDT appeared early on in its history, but it was not banned in the United States until 1972. As early as 1946, scientists recognized that the chemical could concentrate in fatty tissues, and serious criticisms were published in the 1962 book, *Silent Spring*. While DDT led to ongoing health and environmental issues, it also inaugurated an era of chemical solutions in the world of agriculture. The market success of DDT led to the development of a wide range of other pesticides, used extensively for a number of decades.

[Source: <http://historycollection.co/category/war> | Michelle Powell-Smith | January 14, 201 ++]

Zimmerman Telegram ► WWI German Attempt to Ally w/Mexico

Between 1914 and the spring of 1917, the European nations engaged in a conflict that became known as World War I. While armies moved across the face of Europe, the United States remained neutral. In 1916 Woodrow Wilson was elected President for a second term, largely because of the slogan "He kept us out of war." Events in early 1917 would change that hope. In frustration over the effective British naval blockade, in February Germany broke its pledge to limit submarine warfare. In response to the breaking of the Sussex pledge, the United States severed diplomatic relations with Germany.

In January of 1917, British cryptographers deciphered a telegram from German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann to the German Minister to Mexico, von Eckhardt, offering United States territory to Mexico in return for joining the German cause. Zimmermann himself dispelled initial suspicions regarding the telegram's authenticity by giving a speech in which he confirmed its existence. This message helped draw the United States into the war and thus changed the course of history. The telegram had such an impact on American opinion that, according to David Kahn, author of *The Codebreakers*, "No other single cryptanalysis has had such enormous consequences." It is his opinion that "never before or since has so much turned upon the solution of a secret message." In an effort to protect their intelligence from detection and to capitalize on growing anti-German sentiment in the United States, the British waited until 24 FEB to present the telegram to Woodrow Wilson.

The American press published news of the telegram on 1 MAR. On April 6, 1917, the United States Congress formally declared war on Germany and its allies. Decoded the telegram read as follows:

To the German Minister to Mexico

Berlin, January 19, 1917

On the first of February we intend to begin submarine warfare unrestricted. In spite of this, it is our intention to endeavour to keep neutral the United States of America.

If this attempt is not successful, we propose an alliance on the following basis with Mexico: That we shall make war together and together make peace. We shall give general financial support, and it is understood that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona. The details are left to you for settlement...

You are instructed to inform the President of Mexico of the above in the greatest confidence as soon as it is certain that there will be an outbreak of war with the United States and suggest that the President of Mexico, on his own initiative, should communicate with Japan suggesting adherence at once to this plan; at the same time, offer to mediate between Germany and Japan.

Please call to the attention of the President of Mexico that the employment of ruthless submarine warfare now promises to compel England to make peace in a few months.

Zimmermann
(Secretary of State)

[Source: www.firstworldwar.com | January 30, 2017 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 01 thru 14 FEB

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, **“Military History Anniversaries 1 thru 14 FEB”**. [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | January 2017 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ► Erwin, Henry E | WWII



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

Henry E. Erwin

Rank and organization: Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army Air Corps, 52d Bombardment Squadron, 29th Bombardment Group, 20th Air Force

Place and date: Koriyama, Japan, 12 April 1945

Entered service: Bessemer, Ala. July 27, 1942.

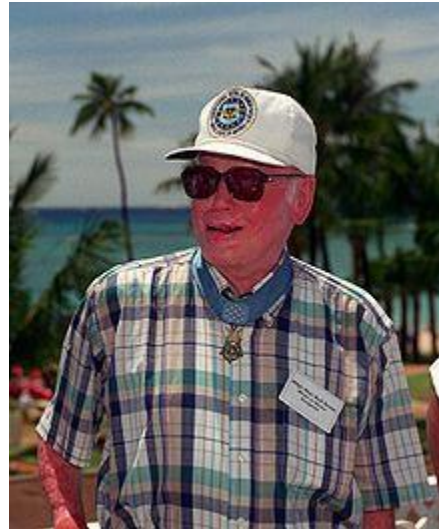
Born: May 8, 1921, Adamsville, Alabama

Citation

He was the radio operator of a B-29 airplane leading a group formation to attack Koriyama, Japan. He was charged with the additional duty of dropping phosphoresce smoke bombs to aid in assembling the group when the launching point was reached. Upon entering the assembly area, aircraft fire and enemy fighter opposition was encountered. Among the phosphoresce bombs launched by S/Sgt. Erwin, one proved faulty, exploding in the launching chute, and shot back into the interior of the aircraft, striking him in the face. The burning phosphoresce obliterated his nose and completely blinded him. Smoke filled the plane, obscuring the vision of the pilot. S/Sgt. Erwin realized that the aircraft and crew would be lost if the burning bomb remained in the plane. Without regard for his own safety, he picked it up and feeling his way, instinctively, crawled around the gun turret and headed for the copilot's window. He found the navigator's table obstructing his passage. Grasping the burning bomb between his forearm and body, he unleashed the spring lock and raised the table. Struggling through the narrow passage he stumbled forward into the smoke-filled pilot's compartment. Groping with his burning hands, he located the window and threw the bomb out. Completely aflame, he fell back upon the floor. The smoke cleared, the pilot, at 300 feet, pulled the plane out of its dive. S/Sgt. Erwin's gallantry and heroism above and beyond the call of duty saved the lives of his comrades.



Courtesy of the Air Force Heritage Research Institute



Erwin in 1995

Like many of his generation Erwin grew up in poverty and lost his father at an early age. However he had very strong religious faith which he discussed on a History Channel documentary on Medal of Honor winners in 1999. Erwin said "I called on the Lord to help me and he has never let me down". Erwin joined the Army Reserve from nearby Bessemer on July 27, 1942. Called to active duty as an aviation cadet in the Army Air Forces on 3 FEB, 1943, he trained as a pilot in Ocala, Florida, but washed out due to "flying deficiency". He was instead transferred to technical school at Keesler Air Force Base, Mississippi, as a private first class in July of that year. He completed further radio operator and radio mechanic training in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and Madison, Wisconsin, until his graduation in 1944.

Assigned to the 52nd Bombardment Squadron, 29th Bombardment Group, 20th Air Force, in Dalhart, Texas, Erwin and his unit left for the Asia-Pacific theater in early 1945. From 25 FEB to 1 APR of that year, they participated in a series of un-escorted bombing strikes against cities in the heart of Japan. For these missions, Erwin, by then a staff sergeant, received two Air Medals.

On April 12, 1945, Erwin, called "Red" by his crewmates, was serving as the radio operator aboard a B-29 Superfortress named City of Los Angeles, piloted by Captain George Simeral. The plane was in formation for a low-level attack on a chemical plant at Koriyama, 120 miles (190 km) north of Tokyo, on their 11th combat mission. Along with their primary jobs, the twelve B-29 crew members had additional duties to perform. Erwin's was to drop

phosphorus smoke bombs through a chute in the aircraft's floor when the lead plane reached a designated assembly area. He was given the signal to drop the bombs when the aircraft was just off the south coast of Japan and under attack by anti-aircraft fire and Japanese fighters.

Erwin pulled the pin and released a bomb into the chute, but the fuse malfunctioned and ignited the phosphorus prematurely, burning at 1,100 degrees. The canister flew back up the chute and into Erwin's face, blinding him, searing off one ear and obliterating his nose. Smoke immediately filled the aircraft, making it impossible for the pilot to see his instrument panel. Erwin was afraid the bomb would burn through the metal floor into the bomb bay. Completely blind, he picked it up and feeling his way, crawled around the gun turret and headed for the copilot's window. His face and arms were covered with ignited phosphorus and his path was blocked by the navigator's folding table, hinged to the wall but down and locked. The navigator had left his table to make a sighting. Erwin couldn't release the table's latches with one hand, so he grabbed the white-hot bomb between his bare right arm and his ribcage. In the few seconds it took to raise the table, the phosphorus burned through his flesh to the bone. His body on fire, he stumbled into the cockpit, threw the bomb out the window and collapsed between the pilot's seats.

The smoke cleared enough for Simeral to pull the B-29 out of a dive at 300 feet (91 m) above the water and turn toward Iwo Jima, where Erwin could be given emergency treatment. His crew members extinguished his burning clothes and administered first aid, but whenever Erwin's burns were uncovered, phosphorus embedded in his skin would begin to smolder; white phosphorus is known to cause extremely terrible wounds, as the burning chemical cannot be extinguished if oxygen is present, and will continue to burn through flesh until it consumes itself or is extracted. It is also toxic. Although in excruciating pain, he remained conscious throughout the flight and spoke only to inquire about the safety of the crew. Once at Iwo Jima, medical personnel didn't believe he would survive.

Army Air Force officials, led by Major General Curtis LeMay and Brigadier General Lauris Norstad, approved Erwin's award of the Medal of Honor in a matter of hours, so a presentation could be made while he still lived. A medal was flown from Hawaii to Guam and presented to him in the hospital there. However, Erwin survived his burns. He was flown back to the United States, and after 30 months and 41 surgeries, his eyesight was restored and he regained use of one arm. He was given a disability discharge as a master sergeant in October 1947. In addition to the Medal of Honor and two Air Medals received earlier in 1945, he was also awarded the Purple Heart, the World War II Victory Medal, the American Campaign Medal, three Good Conduct Medals, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with two bronze campaign stars (for participation in the Air Offensive Japan and Western Pacific campaigns), and the Distinguished Unit Citation Emblem.

For 37 years, Erwin served as a benefits counselor at the veterans' hospital in Birmingham, Alabama. In 1951, his story was included in the movie *The Wild Blue Yonder*; Erwin was portrayed by Dave Sharpe. In 1997, the Air Force created the Henry E. Erwin Outstanding Enlisted Aircrew Member of the Year Award. It is presented annually to an airman, noncommissioned officer and senior noncommissioned officer in the flight engineering, loadmaster, air surveillance and related career fields. It is only the second Air Force award named for an enlisted person. Erwin died at his home on January 16, 2002, and was buried at Elmwood Cemetery in Birmingham, Alabama. His son, Hank Erwin, became an Alabama state senator.

[Source: <http://www.history.army.mil/moh> | January 2017 ++]

Great Patriotic War ► Forgotten Battles

The Soviet-German war was the fiercest, most brutal and most costly chapter in World War II. Since this conflict ended with the destruction of both Germany's Wehrmacht and Adolf Hitler's Third Reich, it was also the war's most decisive theater. It is unfortunate, therefore, that until very recently— for largely political, ideological and military reasons— the historical record of this struggle has remained woefully incomplete. Newly released Russian and

German archival sources now indicate that Soviet histories of the war overlooked or obscured as much as 40 percent of the Red Army's wartime military operations, primarily its failed offensives, in a deliberate attempt to conceal those defeats or to protect the reputations of defeated wartime commanders. Resurrecting many of these "forgotten battles" enables us to recognize the contributions of the thousands of Red Army soldiers who fought, perished or simply endured for the sake of their Motherland, only to see history forget their sacrifices. To learn more about their struggle and sacrifice refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Forgotten Battles of the Great Patriotic War**". [Source: History.net | David M. Glantz | November 22, 2016 ++]

* Health Care *



PTSD Update 226 ► Marriage | 5 Things Spouses Should Know

You never invited combat stress or post-traumatic stress disorder to be a part of your marriage. But there it is anyway, making everything harder. Sometimes you want to give up. Why does everything have to be so, so hard? Other times, you wish someone would just give you a manual for dealing with the whole thing. Surely there's a way to know how to handle this disease? Like the rest of marriage, loving someone who suffers from PTSD or who is trying to work through the ghosts of combat doesn't come with a guidebook. And although the whole thing can feel very isolating (everyone else seems fine! Is my marriage the only one in trouble?) that doesn't mean you're alone. Therapists who specialize in PTSD know that while some couples may put on a good show for the outside world, dealing with trauma is hard work and, no, everything is not perfect.



If you're dealing with PTSD at home, you are not alone. Husband and wife team Marc and Sonja Raciti are working to help military couples work through how PTSD can impact their marriages. Marc, a veteran, has written a book on the subject, "I Just Want To See Trees: A Journey Through PTSD." Sonja is a licensed professional counselor. The Racitis said there are five things that a spouse dealing with PTSD in marriage should know.

1. It's normal for PTSD to impact the whole family -- If you feel like your life has changed since PTSD came to your home, you're probably right. The habits that might help your spouse get through the day, like avoiding crowded spaces, may become your habits too. "PTSD is a disease of avoidance -- so you avoid those triggers that the person with PTSD has -- but as the partner you begin to do the same thing," Sonja Raciti said. Remember that marriage is a team sport, and it's OK to tackle together the things that impact it.

2. **Get professional help** -- The avoidance that comes with PTSD doesn't just mean avoiding certain activities -- it can also mean avoiding dealing with the trauma head on. But trying to handle PTSD alone is a mistake, the Racitis said. "We both are really big into seeking treatment, getting a professional to really help you and see what treatment you're going to benefit from," Sonja said. "Finding a clinician who you meet with, and click with and really specializes in PTSD is so, so important."

3. **No, you're not the one with PTSD. But you may have symptoms anyway** -- The Racitis said it is very common for the spouses of those dealing with PTSD to have trouble sleeping or battle depression, just like their service member. That's why it's important for everyone in the family to be on the same page tackling the disease -- because it impacts them too.

4. **Be there** -- As with so many issues in marriage, communication is key, the Racitis said. But also important is being supportive and adapting to whatever life built around living with PTSD looks like for you. "You have to adapt -- the original man you married has changed. The experience has changed him and that's part of life," Sonja says. "He has gone through something that has been horrific, and life altering and life changing, and together you're going to adapt to that and you're going to help support each other in that."

5. **Don't give up** -- It can seem very tempting to just give up and walk away, they said. After all, the person you married may have changed dramatically. And while splitting may ultimately be the right answer for you, it doesn't have to be only solution on the table. "Don't give up," Marc said. "It's so easy to do. It's the path of least resistance. But people who engage, people who actively engage -- these are the marriages that survive."

[Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | January 17, 2017 ++]

Traumatic Brain Injury Update 59 ► ONR Spearheads BLAST Monitoring

Contrary to the 4 JAN TREA report on the discontinuance of BLAST device monitoring, Military Times is now reporting that the Office of Naval Research (ONR) is spearheading the development of the technology to better analyze and diagnose the effects of traumatic brain injury. The Blast Load Assessment Sense and Test (BLAST) — is designed to be a portable system that can measure shock pressure and analyze injury thresholds for the brain. "A system like BLAST is vitally important because it can help recognize the signs of TBI early and tell warfighters they might need medical attention," said Dr. Timothy Bentley, a program manager overseeing the research for ONR's Warfighter Performance Department. "This reduces the likelihood of someone enduring multiple blasts and suffering more serious brain injury. BLAST also is unique for its unique suite of technology."



Brain injuries have become a primary concern of Congress and defense experts over the past several years. As a result of an increase in TBI related cases from military veterans in Iraq and Afghanistan, Congress passed the Traumatic Brain Injury Act of 2008, which requires the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health to best determine information dissemination practices and procedures to help facilitate TBI diagnosis and treatment. That collaborative exercise produced a report to Congress in summer of 2013 that found

roughly 33,149 U.S. military veterans were diagnosed with TBI in 2011, and 59, 218 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans were potentially treated for TBI from 2001 to 2011. It is believed that more than 327,000 vets have been diagnosed with a TBI since 2000, with the VA spending roughly \$32 million a year on TBI research.

BLAST operates by utilizing tiny sensors that can be fitted onto helmets and body armor. The sensors can survive blast environments and collect necessary data for medical personnel or even a corpsman operating in the field, retrieved potentially by some form of barcode scanner. The retrieved data can provide a corpsman with necessary information including an assessment vibration test on an injured service member that can determine whether or not the injured warfighter needs to stand down or can remain in the fight. “BLAST sensors can provide valuable blast pressure data that can be used to assess the possibility of TBI,” said Dr. Amit Bagchi, a scientist at the Naval Research Laboratory. “The more data we have, the better we can predict the presence of TBI.” The technology is designed to be deliverable to Navy and Marines within a three to five year timeline. The sensors are currently being tested in laboratories, but over the next year and a half the sensors should graduate to field testing with Marines undergoing breacher training. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Shawn Snow | January 13, 2017 ++]

Alzheimer's Update 12 ► Concussion Link

Suffering just one concussion could increase the risk of developing Alzheimer's for those who already have a genetic predisposition, according to a new finding from Boston University researchers that could help prevent the onset of symptoms later in life. “A lot of times when you get that Alzheimer's diagnosis, the brain is far gone at that point, and medication can only do so much,” said Jasmeet Hayes, research psychologist for the VA Boston Healthcare System and a BU professor. “But if we try to intervene at an earlier point in people's lives, that's where the important part of this research is going to come in.”

Other BU researchers have linked repeated head trauma from contact sports to the progressive degenerative disease chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE. But very little research has been done on the long-term effects of one-time hits and how they manifest when combined with genetic factors, said Hayes, who is the study's first author. “Most of the research that's come out with concussions looks at repetitive concussions in contact sports,” Hayes said. “But for the most part, single concussions or concussions that have been spread out over one's lifetime have largely been ignored or thought to be negligible.” Hayes and her team studied a group of 160 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans, some who had suffered concussions and some who had not. Their genomes were also analyzed to determine the level of genetic risk for each vet.

MRI imaging was used to examine the thickness of each participant's cerebral cortex — an area of the brain that is first to degrade during the onset of Alzheimer's, according to the study, published this week in the journal Brain. The group's average age was 32. Those with a high genetic risk who had suffered at least one concussion showed a decline in cortex thickness, and scored lower on some memory tasks. But Hayes was careful to note that people who suffer concussions, for the most part, do not carry this risk. “Most people go back to baseline functions within three to six months, but there's a segment who don't go back to normal functioning and will later in life develop something like Alzheimer's,” Hayes said, “and we're trying to figure out who those people might be.” She said the researchers will expand their participant pool and follow their performance over time.

More than five million Americans suffer from Alzheimer's disease, and there are no medications approved by the FDA that target the illness' underlying mechanisms. This makes it especially important to pinpoint potential risks, according to Jim Wessler, president and CEO of the Alzheimer's Association Massachusetts/New Hampshire chapter. The message in this type of research, he said, is: “You only have one brain. You need to protect it.” [Source: Boston Herald | Lindsay Kalter | January 13, 2017 ++]

Hospice Care Update 05 ► Children's Eligibility Rule Change Needed

Military children needing end-of-life care (hospice), have to forego curative care in order to return home to receive hospice care. Currently, TRICARE policies align with Medicare; built for adults over 65. Medicare recipients must give up curative treatments to receive hospice care. This is not appropriate for pediatric patients for a variety of reasons, and the military service of a parent provides more compelling reasons for enhanced access to the palliative benefits of hospice care, which provide a holistic approach to a family facing such loss. MOAA and the Tricare for Kids Coalition are engaged with those in the civilian medical community frequently caring for military children in these situations, as well as the Defense Health Agency (DHA) that oversees TRICARE policy.

In mid-JAN, MOAA received news that DHA is taking action to identify solutions for these families. The first step, however, is to identify families who could choose hospice care but have not because of the legal requirement to give up curative care or who have given up curative care to receive hospice care at home. If you or someone you know is facing this life and death decision send a message to moaaspouse@moaa.org requesting additional information on how you can assist DHA. Laws take time to change, and DHA requires engagement with military families to better shape support offerings and what procedural, policy, or legislative steps are best suited to remedy this unacceptable circumstance. This is not an easy topic, and MOAA knows it is not just about policy and laws. This is a deeply personal decision. Ultimately, with the right information, DHA can begin facilitating a change that will bring this rule to an end. [Source: Health.mil | Yolanda R. Arrington | January 3, 2017 ++]

Cervical Cancer ► What Women Need to Know

Regular Pap smear exams have become a lifesaving intervention for some women. The routine practice of Pap smears has reduced cervical cancer from the number one killer of women in the first half of the 20th century to a mild, treatable condition which rarely progresses. A Pap smear exam determines if there are any changes in the cells of your cervix. The Pap smear can tell if you have an infection, abnormal (unhealthy) cervical cells, or cervical cancer. A Pap smear can detect the earliest signs of cervical cancer. The chance of curing cervical cancer is very high, when caught early. Regular Pap smears have led to a major decline in the number of cervical cancer cases and deaths.

All women should have a Pap smear, along with pelvic exams, as part of their routine health care starting at age 21. Each woman has her own risks and her health care provider should oversee her screening plan. Generally, between 21 and 65 years old, a woman should get a Pap smear every three years if the results are normal. This increased interval of screening acknowledges the role of HPV vaccination in decreasing the most common cause of cervical cancer, HPV. When to stop having Pap smears is a topic to discuss with your health care provider. Women, who have never had a positive Pap smear, are over age 65, have had a hysterectomy with cervical removal for non-cancer related reasons, are at lower risk to develop cervical cancer. Even when Pap smears are not done, pelvic exams should be performed to screen for ovarian and other pelvic or vaginal cancer.

HPV is a major cause of cervical cancer and one of the most common sexually transmitted infections. Approximately 40 types of HPV are spread during sex. Approximately 75 percent of sexually active people will get HPV sometime in their life. A few types cause cervical cancer if not treated, but most women with untreated HPV will not get cervical cancer. Genital warts are caused by HPV; however these types rarely cause cervical cancer. Most people with HPV have no symptoms and will not know they are infected. Actions which reduce HPV exposure and decrease the risk of developing cervical cancer include:

- Refrain from sexual activity before age 18

- Limit the number of sexual partners
- Get vaccinated against HPV, if you are between the ages of nine to 26. The HPV vaccine, Gardasil, is a two or three dose series vaccine which protects against the most common cancer causing HPV strains.
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[Source: Health.mil | January 27, 2017 ++]

VA COPD Treatment ► Guideline Compliance Quirk

A just-published study at the Northport Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Long Island, New York, offers a glimpse at what happens when doctors' clinical intuition collides with the guidelines they are supposed to follow. The study analyzed data on nearly 900 patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), a lung condition that affects breathing. Dr. Hussein Foda, the pulmonologist who co-led the study, notes that the disease affects nearly 1 in 6 patients Northport VA patients, and he says that rate is probably typical across VA. The agency on the whole spends some \$3 billion yearly on medications to treat the condition. One unexpected finding by histeam was that 44 percent of the patients in the study were under-treated, according to the clinical guidelines in place during the years looked at in the study, 2005 through 2010.

That is, the veterans were given a medication regimen that was recommended for those with less severe disease. In contrast, only 19 percent of the patients were treated appropriately per the guidelines, which are put out by a group called the Global Initiative for Obstructive Lung Disease, or GOLD. At that time, the GOLD guidelines grouped patients into four categories based strictly on the amount of airway blockage they had on lung function tests in the pulmonary lab—such as how long it took them to blow out all the air in their lungs. Another twist in the study's results, perhaps even more striking: Those patients who were under-treated had far fewer exacerbations, on average, than those whose treatment accorded with the guidelines. Exacerbations are the serious flare-ups that bring people with COPD into the hospital, or have them laid up at home for two weeks. That means these patients did better than those whose treatment was prescribed by the book.

The results surprised Dr. Foda and his colleagues. "When we started the work on this paper, it was 2010," he recounts. "Our expectation was that this was going to show that when physicians didn't follow the guidelines, patients would do worse. And when they did follow the guidelines, patients would do better." Interestingly, one year after the 2010 data cutoff for the study, the GOLD group revised its guidelines. The new guidelines took into account patients' exacerbation rates. This factor would now help determine how they should be treated, in addition to the results of their pulmonary lab tests. Dr. Foda's group's study was far from being released and published at that time. But the study was an omen of things to come.

According to Dr. Foda, the research showed that many doctors were bending or ignoring the GOLD guidelines of that time and going with their gut instead. They sensed that fewer exacerbations should lead to less aggressive therapy—regardless of what the spirometry or other tests showed. "What happened was that the physicians in the VA were adjusting their treatments depending on what happened with the patients. If the patients did not get exacerbations, their doctors reduced their medication, even though it was recommended in the guidelines to increase," he explained. Dr. Foda says there's a larger lesson to be gleaned from the study.

While he affirms that clinical guidelines are generally a good thing—in fact, "in a system like VA, they are very useful," he says—he stresses that "you'd better make sure that guidelines make sense. They have to be studied and they cannot be static. In this case, the GOLD folks realized there was a need to adjust the guidelines." The data from the study also reflect well on the preventive and comprehensive care given in VA, Foda says. Besides pointing to high rates of under-treatment in the era of the older GOLD guidelines, the study also showed lower exacerbation rates, compared with what has typically been found outside VA. Dr. Foda noted reasons for this include

- The higher rates of flu and pneumonia vaccination in VA, relative to non-VA settings. Those measures can help reduce COPD flare-ups. VA vaccination rates are much higher than in the private sector. At the Northport VAMC it is around 90 percent."
- VA patients tend to get more thorough care than they might elsewhere, said Foda. "A lot of people who get exacerbations of COPD have other issues, like congestive heart failure. VA treats patients comprehensively. In other systems, they are more likely to just attack the COPD exacerbations and not think about the whole patient."
- VA pays the entire cost of medication for eligible patients. "That means adherence is going to be better."
- VA tends to do a better job of identifying and diagnosing COPD, even in veterans whose disease is only in the early stages and who have only mild symptoms. Part of that is thanks to the electronic health record and better follow-up overall.
- In VA there's more proactive screening for COPD. Anyone who has a "20 pack-year history"—in other words, they have smoked at least a pack a day for 20 years, or the equivalent, such as two packs a day for 10 years—is referred to a pulmonary lab for testing. Smoking is the biggest risk factor for COPD. In the private sector, unless you go to the doctor complaining of shortness of breath, you're not going to get a test and will thus not be identified as having COPD."

The aggressive COPD screening in VA means two things in terms of Dr. Foda's study and his finding that VA patients, at least in Northport, get fewer exacerbations than are commonly seen in COPD studies. First, patients who get an earlier diagnosis can get preventive care that can help ward off exacerbations. Second, there are simply more COPD patients with milder stages of the disease in the equation, meaning the proportion of those suffering exacerbations will be lower.

Foda says that while the new COPD guidelines aren't perfect—few guidelines are—most pulmonologists have welcomed the new classifications that are based on whether or not patients get flare-ups, in addition to their lab results. "It appears there's a phenotype of patients who get exacerbations," he says. "They seem to have almost a different disease than the COPD patients who don't get exacerbations. For those who don't get exacerbations, you have to treat them mainly on the basis of their everyday shortness of breath, their inability to do their daily activities—whereas those with exacerbations get these episodes where their lung function really worsens, and they often show up at the ER. We need to treat these two types of patients differently," and the new guidelines help with that, he says. It would appear that thanks to the updated guidelines, COPD patients—and their doctors—can now breathe easier. [Source: Medical Press | Mitch Mirkin | January 23, 2017 ++]

Premature Death Rates ► Decreases & Increases in Last 15 Years

Premature death rates have declined in the United States among Hispanics, blacks, and Asian/Pacific Islanders (APIs) — in line with trends in Canada and the United Kingdom — but increased among whites and American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/ANs), according to a comprehensive study of premature death rates for the entire U.S. population from 1999 to 2014. This divergence was reported by researchers at the National Cancer Institute (NCI), and colleagues at the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), both part of the National Institutes of Health, and the University of New Mexico College of Nursing. The findings appeared Jan. 25, 2017, in *The Lancet* available at [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(17\)30187-3/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(17)30187-3/fulltext).

Declining rates of premature death (i.e., deaths among 25- to 64-year-olds) among Hispanics, blacks, and APIs were due mainly to fewer deaths from cancer, heart disease, and HIV over the time period of the study. The decline reflects successes in public health efforts to reduce tobacco use and medical advances to improve diagnosis and treatment. Whites also experienced fewer premature deaths from cancer and, for most ages, fewer deaths from heart

disease over the study period. Despite these substantial improvements, overall premature death rates still remained higher for black men and women than for whites.



In contrast, overall premature death rates for whites and AI/ANs were driven up by dramatic increases in deaths from accidents (primarily drug overdoses), as well as suicide and liver disease. Among 25- to 30-year-old whites and AI/ANs, the investigators observed increases in death rates as high as 2 percent to 5 percent per year, comparable to those increases observed at the height of the U.S. AIDS epidemic. “The results of our study suggest that, in addition to continued efforts against cancer, heart disease, and HIV, there is an urgent need for aggressive actions targeting emerging causes of death, namely drug overdoses, suicide, and liver disease,” said Meredith Shiels, Ph.D., M.H.S., Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics (DCEG), NCI, lead author of the study.

“Death at any age is devastating for those left behind, but premature death is especially so, in particular for children and parents,” emphasized Amy Berrington, D.Phil., also of DCEG and senior author of the study. “We focused on premature deaths because, as Sir Richard Doll, the eminent epidemiologist and my mentor, observed: ‘Death in old age is inevitable, but death before old age is not.’ Our study can be used to target prevention and surveillance efforts to help those groups in greatest need.” The study findings were based on death certificate data collected by the National Center for Health Statistics, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Source: National Institutes of Health (NIH) | January 26, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 381 ► Prescription Refills | Energy Drinks

Prescription Refills -- Did you know you THAT beneficiaries don’t have copays for prescription drugs at military pharmacies? Military pharmacies can fill prescriptions written by military or a civilian provider for up to a 90-day supply of most drugs. Military pharmacies stock most drugs on the basic core formulary and many brand name maintenance drugs on the uniform formulary. Be sure to check with the pharmacy first to make sure they carry your drug. You just need to bring your prescription to a military pharmacy to have it filled. Or your civilian provider can send the prescription electronically, saving time and cutting down on potential errors from using paper prescriptions. If you’re picking up a prescription for a family member, then you may need to bring their ID card or a photocopy of the front and back of the card, and a written consent of release if your family member is under 18 years old. Ask your specific military pharmacy what you’ll need to bring with you to fill a family member’s prescription. You can find the military pharmacy closest to you at www.TRICARE.mil/MTF.

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Energy Drinks -- Caffeinated drinks promising an energy boost when you’re feeling sleepy may seem like a great idea, but too much can be harmful. Consuming high amounts of caffeine can lead to increased blood pressure, panic attacks, heart palpitations, anxiety, dehydration and insomnia. You shouldn’t consume more than 200 milligrams of caffeine every four hours. These drinks are also loaded with sugar, which can increase blood sugar levels and lead you to gain weight. And never mix energy drinks with alcohol. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, if you mix caffeine with alcohol, you may not realize you’re drunk and may be more likely to binge drink. Though you might start using energy drinks to make up for a lack of sleep, the CDC reports that those who

drank three or more energy drinks per day were more likely to say they slept less than four hours per night. Their sleep was also disrupted. You should stop all caffeine consumption at least six hours before bedtime. Learn more about healthy living, including tips on getting a better night's sleep, at www.TRICARE.mil/healthyliving.

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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 20, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 382 ► High BP | E-cigarettes | Hydration

High Blood Pressure -- When you have high blood pressure, the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries is too high. When you're active, it is normal for your blood pressure to increase. Once the activity stops, your blood pressure should return to your normal range. When it doesn't, you may have high blood pressure. According to the American Heart Association, some common high blood pressure complications are: heart attack, stroke, kidney disease, vision loss and heart failure. The best way to know if you have high blood pressure is to get your numbers checked. A blood pressure check is quick and easy and it can be done in your health care provider's office or clinic. TRICARE covers blood pressure screening as part of its clinical preventive benefit. Children are screened every year between the ages of three and six, and every two years after. Adults may get a blood pressure screening every two years, but usually your health care provider checks it each time you visit.

If you are diagnosed with high blood pressure, your health care provider will work with you to come up with a way to treat your condition. You may have to make lifestyle changes, like weight loss and exercise. You may benefit from prescription medications. Whatever you do, be sure to follow your provider's plan for your care. This may be the best way to lower your blood pressure and maintain normal blood pressure readings. For more information, including tips on a heart healthy lifestyle visit www.heart.org.

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E-cigarettes -- Electronic cigarettes are the most commonly used tobacco product among youth in the United States. In The U.S. Surgeon General recently released the first report by a Federal agency to review the public health issue of them. E-cigarettes are tobacco products that deliver nicotine and other chemicals to the user. These products come in a variety of forms, including e-cigs, e-hookahs, vape pens and tank systems. Nicotine is highly addictive. Exposure to nicotine can harm adolescent brain development and pregnant women and their fetuses, according to the report. Although e-cigarette aerosol generally contains fewer toxins than traditional tobacco products, it's not harmless. It can contain nicotine and other harmful chemicals. Even e-cigarette flavorings can be harmful! If you're trying to quit using tobacco products, TRICARE covers tobacco cessation services and products. These include nicotine replacement therapies, prescription drugs, counseling and quit lines that are safe and proven effective. Learn more about TRICARE's tobacco cessation benefits at www.TRICARE.mil/HealthWellness/Tobacco.

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Hydration -- Winter isn't over yet, so here's a reminder: You can get dehydrated in cold weather. And it isn't always easy to hydrate, especially when it's cold outside. If you're active outside for less than two hours, it isn't likely to be a problem. But if you're out in the cold for hours, the combination of heavy clothing and high-intensity exercise can lead to sweating, which contributes to dehydration. You might not even feel as thirsty in cold weather as in the heat, because your cold-weather body chemistry could affect your brain's ability to tell you when you need liquid. Cold weather also tends to move body fluids from your extremities to your core, increasing your urine output and adding to dehydration. So when you're in a cold climate, don't rely on thirst to tell you when you need to drink. Drink often and before you're thirsty. Water and sports drinks are the best fluids to maintain hydration, even in cold weather conditions. Carbonated and caffeinated beverages, including energy drinks, have a dehydrating effect. Also

avoid consuming alcohol in cold weather. It might make you feel warm initially, but it can reduce your body's ability to retain heat. Enjoy exercising in the cold weather, but be sure to keep your water bottle in tow. Visit www.ready.gov for winter weather tips, resources and safety ideas.

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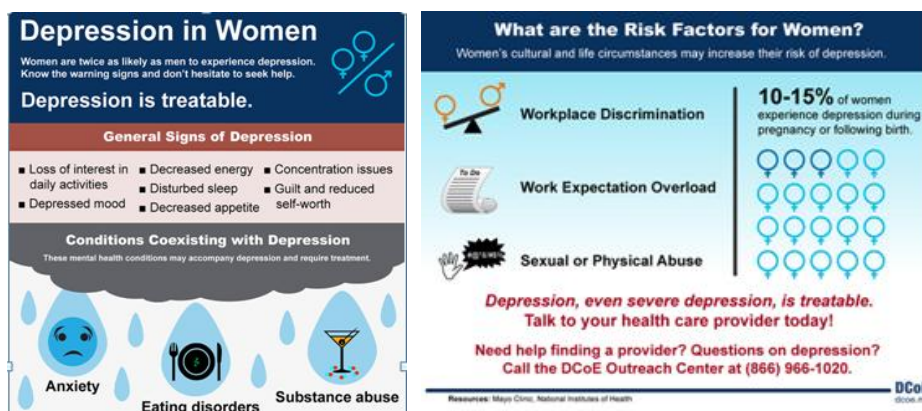
The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | January 27, 2017 ++]

Depression Update 05 ► Things Women Need to Know About It

Although people use the words depressed or depression to refer to a sad mood, it is much more than just a bad day. Depression is a complicated condition with many aspects. According to the National Institute for Mental Health, depression is a common but serious mood disorder. It causes severe symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities, such as sleeping, eating or working. Misunderstandings about depression can hinder proper identification and treatment. Additionally, the signs and effects of depression can differ from person to person. The Deployment Health Clinical Center outlines six key aspects of depression:

- Depression is one of the most common mental health conditions. Symptoms of depression and depressive disorders are often underdiagnosed because many people never seek treatment.
- Depression is more than a mood. Although a depressed mood is one indicator of the condition, others include loss of interest or pleasure in regular activities, decreased energy, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, and poor concentration.
- Depression is a major cause of disability. In fact, it's the leading cause of disability in the United States for individuals 15-44 years of age.
- People with chronic illnesses are at a higher risk for depression.
- Depression impacts all services, ranks and ages. Service members returning from combat deployments have an increased risk of developing depression.
- Depression is treatable, even severe depression.

While these aspects are universal, depression may manifest in different ways for different people. How depression shows up can vary depending on several of factors, including gender. The following infographic outlines symptoms of depression and risk factors specific to women.



[Source: DCoE Public Affairs | Myron J. Goodman & Sidney R. Hinds | January 24, 2017]

Drug Cost Increases Update 02 ► Trump on High Prices

President Trump told Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD) at an inaugural luncheon 20 JAN that the two needed to meet about the high cost of prescription drugs, according to a Cummings aide. Cummings is one of the most outspoken lawmakers in favor of government action to fight high drug prices. Trump's apparent willingness to work with him on the issue is a further sign that the new president is upending the usual GOP position against government action on drug prices. The conversation between Trump and Cummings was first reported by April Ryan of American Urban Radio Networks.

Cummings has repeatedly teamed up with Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) to introduce legislation to fight high drug prices. In 2015, the two lawmakers introduced a bill to allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices and encourage the importation of lower-cost drugs from Canada. Trump has echoed some of those calls himself. At a press conference earlier this month, Trump attacked pharmaceutical companies and repeated his call for Medicare to negotiate prices, a position most Republican lawmakers oppose. "The other thing we have to do is create new bidding procedures for the drug industry, because they're getting away with murder," Trump said then. "PhRMA, PhRMA has a lot of lobbyists and a lot of power and there's very little bidding on drugs," he added, calling out the drug companies. It is unclear, though, what legislation on drug prices could actually get through Congress, given Republican control. [Source: The Hill | Peter Sullivan | January 21, 2017 ++]

Prescription Drug Advertising Update 01 ► Reaction to Trump Comments

Just two weeks after President Trump said the pharmaceutical industry is "getting away with murder" on drug prices, the industry's major lobbying group launched its largest-ever ad campaign aimed at rebranding drug companies' image — without even mentioning the topic. Instead of drug prices — which have been the subject of multiple congressional hearings, an issue debated in the presidential campaign and a top concern of consumers — the first television ad focuses on science, patients and the heroism of researchers. The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, known as PhRMA, said its new campaign will cost in the high tens of millions of dollars each year. It will highlight areas of true scientific excitement such as immunotherapies for cancer and the power of personalized medicine and genomics to target medicines to patients.



PhRMA President Steve Uhl said at a press event 23 JAN that the industry hasn't told its scientific story well enough. The print, online and TV campaign would fill in that gap, explaining to consumers that we're in a "new era of medicine," he said. But the emphasis on innovation instead of pricing is a familiar strategy, according to historians of medicine. Today's "new era of medicine" is yesterday's antibiotics, antituberculosis drugs, psychotropic drugs or antidiabetic medicines. That strategy has worked many times in the past, but it may be a risky time to rehash this message. The campaign launches as the affordability of health care has become a pressing issue for millions of Americans, as it remains uncertain what will replace the Affordable Care Act. "What does it matter to the average American that there are new and exciting treatments for cancer if there's no confidence they'll be able to

afford them or access them?” said Jeremy Greene, a historian of medicine at Johns Hopkins University (JHU) who also practices medicine in a community health center in Baltimore. “When people don’t have insurance, you begin to realize just how much drugs cost at the pharmacy with no insurance.”

Ubl said that it was the right time for the industry to go on the offense. He argued that the negative image of drug companies stems from a handful of outlier companies that raised prices on old drugs. Specifically, he noted Martin Shkreli, the hoodie-wearing former chief executive of Turing Pharmaceuticals who hiked the price of an old drug to \$750 a pill overnight. “We want to replace the image of the industry that some have,” Ubl said. “In short, less hoodie and more lab coats,” he added, referring to Shkreli. In response, Shkreli put up his own website, arguing that other companies had hiked drug prices. Industry observers said that a campaign focused on science and future therapeutic revolutions don’t address a core issue that has emerged over the past year and a half: the public perception that the industry is not holding up its part of the social contract to not only develop drugs but also make them accessible. “Just because you have a new breakthrough medicine doesn’t mean I’m going to get access to it,” said Kenneth Kaitin, director of the Tufts Center for the Study of Drug Development. “I think this is the exact wrong time to play around with that issue, because more and more people are going to get concerned — or already are concerned — about the state of their health-care coverage.”

Ubl said the campaign will also focus on demonstrating the value of drugs. That, too, isn’t new, said Dominique Tobbell, a historian of medicine at the University of Minnesota (UM). Tobbell said in an email that since the late 1950s the pharmaceutical industry has made arguments about its drugs’ values, from the reductions in mortality to saving health-care costs through reduced hospitalizations or getting workers back on the job faster. “Consistently, the industry has cast pharmaceuticals as the major reasons for these health-care gains — the role of public-health measures, preventive medicine, and lifestyle changes have been routinely missing or downplayed in its campaigns,” Tobbell said.

JHU’s Greene argues that there are essentially two conversations Americans have about drugs. One is about the frontiers of science and the need for medicines to treat rare and overlooked diseases. Another is about access to medicine and health. These two discussions rarely overlap, he says. For example, in a rare wave of bipartisan support late last year, Congress passed the 21st Century Cures Act aimed at speeding up the development of new drugs. What wasn’t part of that legislation was an acknowledgment that patients were frustrated with the price and access to older drugs, an issue that came up at multiple congressional hearings over the past year.

UM’s Historian Tobbell said that although the strategy of focusing on innovation has been successfully used for decades, consumers have more information about how pricing works that may keep them skeptical about the industry. But if history is a guide, the strategy may simply put off the issue until the next time a pricing controversy flares. “Each time, it seems like prescription drug prices have reached some new high that’s just impossible to bear. The level of prices that we’re talking about when we talk about the unaffordability of prescription drugs — if you were to show them to people having arguments over prescription drug prices in the ‘80s, it would be incredible,” Greene said. “How many cycles of normalization of high drug prices and re-inflation of drug prices can we stand as a society?” [Source: The Washington Post | Carolyn Y. Johnson | January 23, 2017 ++]

* Finances *



Personal Budgets ► Overlooked Expenses That Can Ruin Them

Drafting a picture-perfect budget is only half the battle if you want to keep your spending in check. Following rules is the other half — and that can be challenging if you underestimate expenses or forget to incorporate a few important pieces of the puzzle into your spending plan. Here are some commonly overlooked expenses that can cause you to throw in the towel on your budget each month:

1. **Auto maintenance and repairs** - At some point, if you don't take care of your car, it won't take care of you. So be proactive in order to avoid costly repairs down the road. If a mechanic brings a major problem to your attention, don't ignore it. Instead, get a second and perhaps third opinion. Then, take care of it. You may be able to money by checking out www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine/2014/11/get-your-car-fixed-for-almost-free/index.htm.
2. **Children's extracurricular activities** -- Use a calendar to plan out your children's extracurricular activities. That way, you can set aside the funds needed to pay up when the amounts are due. The same rules apply to family fun. Plan ahead and always remain on the lookout for cheap or free fun.
3. **Pet care** -- Furry friends have needs, too. And, sometimes, those needs aren't as cheap as you think. So don't forget to factor in the costs of routine care as well as doctor visits. Check out <http://www.moneytalksnews.com/28-ways-save-big-bucks-pet-supplies>.
4. **Regular monthly fees** -- Are you responsible for obligations payable quarterly, semiannually or annually? If so, it's best to divide the total by 12 to get the monthly amount. Then, store the funds away so you won't be caught off-guard. Examples of such expenses include homeowner association fees, alarm fees and subscription dues. If your HOA fee is \$300 quarterly, \$100 should automatically be set aside each month to take care of the expense when it arises.
5. **Special events** -- Your lifelong friend has decided to tie the knot next month, or your child's friend from school is having a birthday bash. Do you have the funds on hand to cover the travel costs or go out and purchase a gift? If not, you may have to borrow to make it happen. Or, you can respectfully decline to attend.
6. **Health insurance** -- Monthly premiums for health insurance can be expensive, and that's before co-pays and deductibles. To cover these costs, you can either go into debt and pay interest, or plan ahead and have money set aside.
7. **Road trips** -- Do you have money set aside to cover an extra tank of gas if you need it? Make sure you do — you never know when you'll need to make a quick trip to tend to important business or to check on a loved one.
8. **Service calls** -- The water heater can suddenly die, or your furnace may go on the fritz. So make sure you tuck away money for these unpredictable failures.
9. **Utility consumption** - When temperatures reach extreme lows, you might crank up the thermostat to stay comfy and wind up overextending your budget.
10. **Food** -- Perhaps you stop by the bagel shop to grab a bite to eat because you're running behind schedule. Or, you take a co-worker up on an offer to go out to lunch. If you don't have the funds available for extras, another category of your budget will take a hit.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Allison Martin | January 16, 2017 ++]

Military Retirement Pay Update 06 ► BRS Option

Personal finance expert Suze Orman knows military leaders, pay officials and retirement service offices are getting ready to educate servicemembers on the new Blended Retirement System (BRS). But none of them, she said, can

advise individuals whether to opt in, or avoid, the BRS when it becomes available in 2018. “But I certainly can,” said Orman with the spunk that made her so popular over decades with TV audiences and book buyers hoping to become better investors and wiser consumers of loans, insurance and other financial products. Part of her familiar mantra is to avoid debt, pay off credit cards, run from payday lenders, buy (don’t lease) vehicles, and buy used not new. For military folks, she like to add, protect your money as aggressively as you do the nation. Orman has visited the Pentagon and agreed to help the Army educate soldiers on the new retirement, by starring in a new instructional video.



In February, the primary tool to introduce BRS to active and reserve component servicemembers will be a two-hour online course that explains features and compares potential lifetime values with the legacy “High-3” retirement plan. They also will have access to a new online calculator to compare BRS with High-3 using age, years expected to serve, planned contributions to Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) with government matching (a key feature of BRS), historic rates of return on TSP investment options, personal tolerance for investment risk and more. Roughly 1.8 million current members will be offered the choice to change plans. As many as half are expected to do so. The choice will be available to any active-duty member with fewer than 12 years’ service as of Dec. 31, 2017, and to any Reserve or Guard member with fewer than 4,320 drill points on that date. Those given the choice, about 70 percent of the total force, will have all of 2018 to decide. But to switch they must complete the course, said Col. Steve Hanson, a branch chief in the Army’s compensation directorate and officer in charge of implementing BRS for soldiers. After the course, members with more questions can get individual help, by phone or in person, with financial counselors and others trained on the new plan.

BRS’s key features are portability, enhanced TSP, a lump-sum continuation payment at mid-career and an immediate but reduced annuity — 20 percent less than the High-3 plan — payable after 20 or more years of service. With characteristic candor, Orman said the military is moving to BRS for the same reason most companies have trimmed or replaced their defined pension plans with employer contributions to portable 401(k) plans: It saves them money. Under High-3, retirees after 20 years’ service gets 50 percent of average basic pay over their three highest earning years, plus 2.5 percent more for each year served beyond 20. Under BRS, retirees will get only 40 percent of average basic pay after 20 years and 2 percent more for each additional year.

The big flaw of High-3 is cliff vesting; no one gets a retirement benefit if they don’t serve at least 20. That affects more than 80 percent of enlisted members and half of all officers. About 45 percent of the current force, however, have opened TSP accounts but with no government matching of their contributions. With BRS, if you serve two years, you can walk with a TSP enriched by government matching. To make the plan more attractive for careers, it offers a one-time continuation payment by at least the 12-year mark to members who agree to serve four more. Congress recently voted to allow the payment as early as the eighth year. The services are still deciding how that new flexibility will be used. Members who joined the military before 2006 will remain under High-3.

Those who join this year will only be under the BRS. So choice of plan falls only on those who entered between those years. “If you’re smart and you let me teach you, I can show you how you can have more money [with BRS] than if you stayed with the simple legacy system,” Orman said she will advise younger and career-minded

servicemembers. The keys to matching or surpassing the value of the High-3 plan, she said, is to be both young and committed. They also must:

- Contribute a full 5 percent of basic pay to TSP to maximize government matching.
- Use only the Roth IRA option inside TSP so contributions are taxed in the year made but will be withdrawn tax free after age 59 ½.
- Invest only in stock index funds that provide the highest return over time.
- Don't get spooked when markets correct and decide to move into more conservative funds. Investors in their 20s and 30s should "hope the market goes down, down, down," Orman said. "Because the more it goes down, the more shares you buy" each month. "I want to educate them not to look at how much they have in dollar value; look at how many shares," Orman said. As number of shares climb, investors over time will be "happy no matter what happens."

Choice of plan will be easy for members who don't want or expect to serve 20 years. Only BRS provides TSP with government matching. Deciding to stay under High-3 should be almost as easy for members halfway through military careers, Orman said. One reason is they don't have time to make up for a 20 percent annuity cut using TSP and a continuation payment that at a minimum will equal two and half months' basic pay for active duty, and a half month's active-duty basic pay for Guard and Reserve. Also, Orman said, by mid-career members know service life. Having served eight to 10 years, if they were to shift to BRS and take continuation pay at 12 years, it would obligate them for four more years. At that point they would have just four additional years to reach 20. So they should consider whether at 20 they will regret having passed on the bigger lifetime annuities under High-3. If they can envision at 12 years being willing "to spend another four years in after that — and probably with ease another four because they've been doing it for so long — then I would say stick with your legacy plan."

Orman and Hanson agreed one positive side effect of a blended retirement plan will be to make military folks more aware of the world of finance and investments, and perhaps more knowledgeable of scams and schemes that routinely target their busy lives and steady paychecks. Her impression of military audiences, Orman said, "is they are so sweet, the men and the women both, that it breaks my heart that they don't have a clue about anything when it comes to money." It's no surprise that an investment expert believes service people need more than an online course on choice of retirement. Orman says the next generation, given only the BRS retirement plan, will have to be more disciplined and stay more engaged in their finances. "In the long run this will be far better than the legacy when you look at their entire financial life," she said. "But [you] have got to be smarter and financially ready. ... If you know the right moves, you will leave service without any battle scars at all, when it comes to your money." [Source: Stars And Stripes | Tom Philpott | January 26, 2017 ++]

FHA Mortgages ► Trump Stops Loan Insurance Premium Cut

President Donald J. Trump has rolled back a planned Federal Housing Administration policy to reduce the insurance premiums people pay monthly on FHA-backed mortgages. The Los Angeles Times reports that the initiative could have saved homeowners hundreds of dollars annually on mortgage insurance, which is required with FHA-backed loans. But the new Trump administration killed the planned fee cut on 20 JAN, just a week after the Obama administration first announced the initiative, which was supposed to take effect on 27 JAN. According to the Times, the Trump administration indefinitely suspended the pending FHA insurance rate cut just an hour after Trump was sworn in as president. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development oversees the FHA. FHA-backed loans are popular with first-time homebuyers and people with fair to poor credit. The Obama administration had estimated that homebuyers with FHA-backed mortgages would save an average of \$500 a year with the rate cut, the Times reports.

It was an effort to offset recent rises in mortgage rates and make buying a home more affordable. However, Republicans had concerns about the rate cut. According to the Times --Some Republicans expressed concern that the rate cut could cost taxpayers if the loans started to go sour and the Federal Housing Administration was unable to cover the losses. If you're a potential homebuyer considering an FHA-backed loan, you might have to dig deeper into your pockets to pay for mortgage insurance. According to the Times -- For most borrowers getting an FHA-backed loan that means that after paying an upfront insurance fee, you will pay 0.85 percent of your loan amount for premiums each year. The Obama administration action would have lowered the rate from 0.85 percent to 0.60 percent. Bankrate said, "For most borrowers buying homes with down payments of less than 5 percent, the monthly mortgage insurance payments will remain \$141.67 for a \$200,000 loan" instead of falling to \$100 monthly." [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | January 23, 2017 ++]

IRS 2017 Filing Season ► Tips & Filing Help Options

The Internal Revenue Service and partners from the states and tax industry remind taxpayers that the nation's 2017 individual income tax filing season opens 23 JAN. The IRS expects more than 153 million tax returns to be filed this year and taxpayers have until 18 APR to file their 2016 tax returns and pay any tax due. The deadline is extended because the Emancipation Day, a holiday in Washington, D.C., will be observed on 1 APR, pushing the nation's filing deadline to April 18. Choosing e-file and direct deposit for refunds remains the fastest and safest way to file an accurate income tax return and receive a refund. The IRS anticipates issuing more than nine out of 10 refunds in less than 21 days from the time returns are received.

Each year, millions of tax returns are prepared for free by taxpayers using IRS Free File or by volunteers at community organization sites nationwide. IRS trained and certified volunteers at thousands of Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (VITA and TCE) sites nationwide offer free tax preparation and e-filing. VITA offers free tax return preparation to taxpayers who earn \$54,000 or less. The TCE program is mainly for people age 60 or older and focuses on tax issues unique to seniors. AARP participates in the TCE program and helps taxpayers with low to moderate incomes.

- To find the closest VITA site, visit www.irs.gov and search the word "VITA." The IRS2Go Mobile App <https://www.irs.gov/uac/irs2goapp> can help find free tax preparation assistance, check your refund status and more! Site information is also available by calling the IRS at 800-906-9887.
- To locate the nearest AARP Tax-Aide site, visit www.AARP.org, or call 888-227-7669. There are also VITA and TCE sites that provide bilingual help for taxpayers who have limited English skills.

IRS Free File <https://www.irs.gov/uac/free-file-do-your-federal-taxes-for-free> lets taxpayers who earned less than \$64,000 prepare and e-file a return for free. Go to www.irs.gov and click on the 'Filing' tab for options on using commercial tax software. Commercial partners of the IRS offer free brand-name software to about 100 million individuals and families with incomes of \$64,000 or less. Seventy percent of the nation's taxpayers are eligible for IRS Free File. Those who earned more than \$64,000 are still eligible for Free File Fillable Forms (<https://www.irs.gov/uac/before-starting-free-file-fillable-forms>), the electronic version of IRS paper forms. This more basic Free File option is best for people who are comfortable preparing their own tax returns.



The IRS urges taxpayers to avoid fly-by-night preparers who may not be available after this year's April 18 due date or who base their fees on a percentage of the refund. The IRS also reminds taxpayers that a new law requires all refunds on returns that claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) or Additional Child Tax Credit (ACTC) be held until 15 FEB. This change helps the IRS detect and prevent fraud. [Source: Vantage Point | January 17, 2017 ++]

Tax Burden for North Dakota 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 Dakota** in 2017.

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 5% (food and prescription drugs exempt); 6% on lodging, 7% on alcoholic beverages. Cities or counties which have adopted home rule charters may levy additional sales and use taxes up to 3.0%.

Gasoline Tax: 41.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 47.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: 44 cents/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low 1.9% to High 2.9%

Income Brackets: Five - Bracket levels adjusted for inflation each year. Release dates for tax bracket inflation adjustments vary by state and may fall after the end of the applicable tax year.

Personal Exemptions: Single \$4,050 - Married \$8,100 - Dependents \$4,050

Standard Deduction: Single \$6,300; Married filing jointly – \$12,600. Deduction or exemption tied to federal tax system. Federal deductions and exemptions are indexed for inflation. Federal Taxable income is the starting point for North Dakota, so the federal standard deduction and exemptions are built in.

Medical/Dental Deduction: Full

Federal Income Tax Deduction: Rates for single person - None.

Retirement Income Taxes: A total of \$5,000 can be excluded from military, civil service, some state/local government, and qualified pensions, minus amount of Social Security received. Out-of-state government pensions are fully taxed. Call 701-328-3275 for more information.

Retired Military pay: North Dakota's individual income tax law provides only one special deduction for active members of the military. It does not include combat pay that is exempt from federal income tax. The current income tax law does not provide for any special deductions for retired military members.

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 real property in the state is subject to tax by the state, counties, townships, and municipalities. Residential property is taxed as 9% of assessed value. For the most part, personal property is exempt from property tax.

Personal property of utilities companies that are assessed by the State board of Equalization is subject to property tax. Household personal property, inventories, and machinery and equipment used in trade or manufacture are exempt from property taxes. Machinery and equipment used in refining products from oil or gas extracted from the earth is deemed to be real property and therefore subject to property taxes. A mobile home used as a residence or place of business is also subject to a property tax.

There is also a Homestead Tax Credit available to senior citizens (65+) or disabled persons who own or rent their home. Your income, plus the income of your spouse and any dependents, may not exceed \$26,000 for the calendar year preceding the assessment date. Your assets may not exceed \$75,000. The maximum homestead credit is \$4,500 (income \$0 to \$18,000). Go to <http://www.nd.gov/tax/404> for details. For a brochure on the Homestead Tax Credit go to <http://www.nd.gov/tax/404> or call 701-328-3127 for details.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

North Dakota does not have an inheritance tax. There is an estate tax based on a decedent's total gross estate and limited to the credit for state death taxes allowed on the Federal 706 estate tax return. North Dakota's definition of a deceased person's taxable estate is identical to the federal definition and North Dakota recognizes all federal exemptions and deductions.

For further information, visit the North Carolina Department of Revenue site <http://www.nd.gov/tax> or call 701-328-3657. To review the North Dakota tax guide at <http://www.nd.gov/tax/e-services>.

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#NORTHDakota> JAN 2017 ++]

College Tuition & Fees Update 01 ► Free for 8 with Steep Commitments

With an average sticker price of \$20,090 a year, a college education in the United States is far from cheap. But students at eight U.S. universities are earning their degrees without having to shell out a dime for tuition. There's a catch — getting accepted is crazy difficult. CNBC explains: "Each school is geared to determined young scholars eager to challenge themselves throughout their college career. In return for a degree at no cost – and with no debt burden – the commitment they require, even after graduation, is steep." These eight universities offer their students a tuition-free education:

- **Berea College** — Berea, Kentucky. This private Christian college requires students to take a full course schedule while working 10 to 15 hours each week in a job that aligns with their major in an effort to "repay the college for extending them the cost of tuition and room and board," says BestColleges.com. Classroom attendance is also mandatory for students, CNBC says.
- **College of the Ozarks** — Point Lookout, Missouri. "Dubbed Hard Work U, this is one of the hardest Midwestern schools to get into, with an 8 percent acceptance rate," CNBC reports.
- **Deep Springs College** — Big Pine, California. This small two-year all-male college admits just 22 to 25 students a year.
- **U.S. Air Force Academy** — near Colorado Springs, Colorado. Air Force Academy grads must commit to five years of active duty service with the military
- **U.S. Coast Guard Academy** — New London, Connecticut. After completing schooling at the academy, students must commit to spending at least five years of service — most often that service involves going to sea.
- **U.S. Merchant Marine Academy** — Kings Point, New York. "It's known for having the hardest academic standards but the widest variety of career options of all the service academies," says CNBC.
- **U.S. Military Academy** — West Point, New York. Graduates of this academy, which has just a 9 percent acceptance rate, must serve five years of active duty and three years in the reserve.

- **U.S. Naval Academy** — Annapolis, Maryland. This academy requires grads to serve five years as an officer, plus time in the reserves.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | January 20, 2017 ++]

College Grad Income ► 10 Top Colleges & Majors in 2016-2017

Look to the East Coast — and the military — if you want the best chance of earning a decent paycheck after graduating from college, according to PayScale's new College Salary Report for 2016-2017. The report at <http://www.payscale.com/college-salary-report> is based on salary data for alumni of nearly 1,400 U.S. colleges at least 10 years after the students graduated. The data are broken down by school, degree level and college major.

According to the report, these are the top 10 colleges for salary potential:

- SUNY Maritime College: \$144,000 midcareer pay
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology: \$134,000
- Harvey Mudd College: \$131,000
- Princeton University: \$131,000
- Stanford University: \$127,000
- U.S. Military Academy at West Point: \$126,000
- U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis: \$125,000
- U.S. Air Force Academy: \$124,000
- University of Pennsylvania: \$124,000
- Harvard University: \$123,000

According to PayScale, these are the top 10 highest-paying bachelor degrees and their graduates' midcareer pay:

- Petroleum engineering: \$172,000
- Systems engineering: \$121,000
- Actuarial science: \$119,000
- Chemical engineering: \$119,000
- Computer science and engineering: \$116,000
- Nuclear engineering: \$116,000
- Electronics and communications engineering: \$115,000
- Electrical and computer engineering: \$114,000
- Aeronautical engineering: \$113,000
- Computer engineering: \$113,000

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | September 20, 2016 ++]

Postal Rates Update 04 ► 22 JAN Increases

Some postal rates increases went into effect on 22 JAN. You might have heard about these increases in October, when the U.S. Postal Service announced it had requested them. The retail rates for domestic first-class mail after the increase include:

- Stamped letters, up to 1 ounce: 49 cents (up from 47 cents)

- Large envelopes (aka “flats”), up to 1 ounce: 98 cents (up from 94 cents)
- Parcels, up to 3 ounces: \$2.67 (up from \$2.62)

Other shipping services that were affected include:

- Priority Mail (one to three business days): Starts at \$6.65 (up from \$6.45)
- Priority Mail Express (overnight): Starts at \$23.75 (up from \$22.95)

This is the first time in three years that the USPS has raised rates, the agency noted in October. Not all rates increased. Unaffected services include:

- Postcards (still 34 cents)
- Additional ounces for letters (still 21 cents per ounce)
- Letters mailed to international destinations (still \$1.15)

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsheer | January 19, 2017 ++]

Toothpaste ► Alternate Uses That Will Save Money

You already know that toothpaste helps keeps your choppers healthy — not to mention, pearly white. But there is more magic in that long, thin tube than you ever imagined. From cleaning piano keys to zapping pimples, toothpaste has many great — and cost-effective — applications. Hint: remember to avoid gel-based toothpastes and instead use a plain white paste when employing these ideas. Following are nine surprising uses for toothpaste that have nothing to do with teeth, but will make you smile nonetheless.

☺ **Get rid of pimples** -- Pimples always seem to pop up at the absolute worst times. Your skin stays clear until your wedding weekend, or right before a big job interview, and then the eruption ensues. Zap that pesky pimple with a little dab of toothpaste, and it should disappear within 24 hours. According to reader’s digest: The toothpaste dehydrates the pimple and absorbs the oil. This remedy works best on pimples that have come to a head.
Shine up jewelry

☺ **Shine Jewelry** -- Is your diamond grimy? If your bling has lost its gleam, take a little toothpaste and a brush and go to work on it. It’s cheaper than jewelry cleaner and equally effective, if not more so!

☺ **Clean piano keys** -- Piano keys traditionally were made of ivory from the tusks and teeth of animals. So it makes perfect sense that toothpaste would bring a new gleam to them. Today, most piano keys are made of plastic. But toothpaste still does a great job of shining them up. According to coupon sherpa: Rub each key gently with a damp, cotton swab and a touch of paste. Wipe dry and buff with a clean cloth. It takes time, but you’ll be stunned by how nice your keyboard looks at the end of the project.

☺ **Banish car interior smells** -- If your car smells a little funky, try a trick recommended by the folks at carefree dental. It’s quick and dirt cheap: Take a couple of smears of toothpaste on a paper towel. Fold the paper up and place it underneath your car seats, but only when the vehicle is parked in sunlight. Once it heats up, the toothpaste will begin to melt and soften, and the car will fill up with a minty smell.

☺ **Whiten your sneakers** -- This next tip may have you sprinting to the medicine cabinet! If your favorite pair of sneakers is looking a little dingy, whiten them up with toothpaste and a rag. They’ll look brand, spanking new in no time.

☺ **Scrub stains off your nails** -- Dark polishes can leave your fingernails discolored. So grab a tube of whitening toothpaste and start scrubbing. According to today.com: Use a nailbrush or unused toothbrush to scrub the stains away — really get in there, especially under the nails. Follow up with a nice lemon juice soak.

☸ **Deodorize containers or your hands** -- Does your baby's bottle smell of sour milk? Are you having trouble ridding your hands of that fish or garlic smell? In both cases, toothpaste acts as a great deodorizer. Just scrub the bottle or your hands with that paste.

☸ **Defog your goggles** -- If you love to scuba dive, you know that your goggles can become pretty foggy. And a new pair of goggles often has a manufacturer film that you'll want to remove. Toothpaste to the rescue! According to wise bread: Simply squirt a dab in each lens and rub in thoroughly with your fingers. Rinse well.

☸ **Remove table rings** -- Coasters should be used , but old habits are hard to break. If your glass leaves a ring on your coffee table, use a little toothpaste and a soft cloth to rub out the stain. Coupon sherpa suggests the rest: Apply a finishing shine with a touch of furniture polish or oil (olive oil works, too). Then break out the coasters and make sure they get used.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Melissa Neiman | January 26, 2017]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 31 JAN 2017

- **Bob Hope.** Check out https://youtu.be/SR9TSxp_okc to see some special moments Bob spent with the troops during his many Christmas performances.
- **Tribute to Veterans.** To see and hear videographer John Langskov's youtube work which has been set to music go to <http://worriersanonymous.org/Share/Mansions.htm>.
- **GTMO.** Oman said 16 JAN it has accepted 10 prisoners from the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Fewer than 50 prisoners remain. Annual cost per prisoner was \$8 million in 2016.
- **DoD Expenditures.** Operation and maintenance (O&M) costs ate up roughly \$251 billion, or 50 percent of the U.S. defense budget, when overseas contingency operations (OCO) were accounted for in 2015, according to a [report](#) prepared by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO).
- **Vietnam POWs.** Go to <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/mccain-and-the-pow-cover-up> to read what Pulitzer Prize Journalist Sydney Schanberg had to say about a Vietnam POW Cover-up in 2010.
- **Edward Snowden.** Russia says that Edward Snowden, the former U.S. intelligence contractor who leaked secret documents from the National Security Agency (NSA), has been granted permission to remain in Russia for at least two more years. Snowden had leaked 1.5 million documents he acquired while working as a contractor for the NSA, prompting a furious public debate about the legality of some of the agency's programs, about privacy concerns, and about U.S. snooping on its allies.
- **Chelsea Manning.** Military Times readers overwhelmingly disapprove of President Barack Obama's controversial decision to commute the prison term of Army Pvt. Chelsea Manning, who was serving 35 years for providing national secrets to the website Wikileaks.

- **Chelsea Manning.** The Army says former private Manning will lose her military healthcare benefits following President Obama's commutation of her prison sentence if she is discharged with a dishonorable discharge. She will lose her entitlement to benefits, including gender-transition care at [military] medical treatment facilities.
- **IRS.** Steven Mnuchin, the investor tapped by Trump for the top job in US economic policy, told lawmakers at his confirmation hearing Jan. 19 that he would like to expand the workforce at the IRS and modernize technology there in order to collect more taxes.
- **National Cemetery.** The Department of Veterans Affairs is looking to buy at least 200 acres of land near Albuquerque, NM to develop a new National Cemetery to replace Santa Fe National Cemetery, which is expected to run out of space in the mid 2020's.
- **COLA.** The December CPI is 235.390, 0.1 percent above the FY 2016 COLA baseline. See more at: <http://www.moaa.org/takeaction/#COLA-Watch>
- **Philippine President.** Rodrigo Duterte has stood by his police chief Ronald Dela Rosa after calls for him to resign over the alleged killing of a South Korean businessman by police officers at the national police headquarters. The Chief, a top figure in Duterte's deadly war on drugs, has the president's full support, the president's top aide told Reuters on 22 JAN. Police figures show more than 7,000 people have been killed during the President's campaign.
- **TPP & NAFTA.** Trump administration announced the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade pact championed by former President Barack Obama and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. It also declared a renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA.
- **VA Goes Red.** Feb. 3, VA will Go Red for Women by asking Veterans and VA staff to wear RED in support of heart health. Nearly 1 in 3 women are impacted by heart disease or stroke! Each year, VA partners with the American Heart Association (AHA) to bring more awareness to the risk of heart disease for women Veterans. Join them as they raise awareness for heart health! Contact your local VA Women's Health Department to participate in local events planned in support of **VA Goes Red!**
- **Army.** The Army will deactivate its three 100 man long-range surveillance companies in the active-duty force in the remaining days of January, along with four National Guard companies in 2018. Defense analysts have said Army commanders have an aversion to risk and a growing preference to use technology such as satellites and drones for reconnaissance rather than insert small teams of soldiers.
- **Nostalgia.** A young woman invites her dad over to meet her boyfriend who has been bitten by a monkey in this funny skit from The Carol Burnett Show at <https://youtu.be/ZYLzoLrALVg>.
- **GA Tattoos.** Tattoo parlors would have to tell customers that if they get tattoos in certain parts of their body - including on their face - that it could bar them from the military, under a new House Bill 123 filed in the Georgia House. A similar measure passed the House last year but died in the Georgia Senate.
- **Camp Lejeune Claims.** President Donald Trump's order blocking new federal regulations apparently won't affect one that former President Barack Obama's administration pushed forward during his last days in office: a Veterans Affairs rule that will provide more than \$2 billion over the next five years to cover disability claims for Camp Lejeune veterans exposed to toxic water at the North Carolina base.
- **Military Parades.** President Trump says he would like to see the armed forces assume a more public ceremonial presence. He told the Washington Post recently that he favored more military parades on the streets of cities like New York and Washington, D.C. The Association of the U.S. Army reported that Trump sees his role as commander-in-chief as that of "being a great cheerleader for the country. As we build up our military, we're going to display our military."
- **Army Dogs.** Retired army dogs meant for veterans given to company that tried to sell them to foreign countries. Refer to <http://govnews.us/id/17147909006> to read the full story on this gross lack of Army oversight
- **Marijuana.** A new American industry could soon blossom on the deck of Tara Bass's small marijuana store in the tiny community of Skagway, Alaska, nestled between the Coast Mountains and the deepest

saltwater fiord in North America. If all goes according to plan, by the time tourists start arriving via cruise ships this spring, the Remedy Shoppe will offer recreational marijuana that can be bought and consumed in the same place: one of the first legal cannabis cafes in the United States.

- **Lead.** Do you hunt or fish on federal land? Not with lead bullets or lead fishing tackle weights you don't. Unless Trump overturns that Obama rule.
- **Kazoo Music.** Check out this very talented kazoo player at http://www.bitoffun.com/video_vault/sexy-talent-amy-g.htm
- **Champva/TRICARE.** Southern Arizona VA Health Care system is no longer accepting patients that use one of two health care benefit programs for civilians associated with the military. The programs no longer accepted at the VA Hospital in Tucson are called the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (Champva) and Tricare. VA facilities across the country have made similar moves.
- **North Korea.** Analysis of commercial satellite imagery from 22 JAN indicates that operations at the 5 MWe plutonium-producing reactor at North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear research facility is likely to have resumed.
- **Iran.** The Iranian government carried out a medium-range ballistic missile test 29 JAN that may be a violation of a United Nations Security Council resolution, U.S. officials said. Iran has repeatedly maintained that missile development is within its rights to self-defense against attack from Israel, its longtime regional adversary.
- **White Sands Open House.** Two days a year, the site of a once-secret weapon project is open to visitors at the Army's White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. On 1 APR and sometime in OCT visitors can see ground zero, where the bomb was placed for explosion, and the McDonald ranch house where the plutonium core of the bomb was assembled. The McDonald house has been restored to the way it looked during the war.

Personal Security ► FamilyTreeNow

Loose lips sink ships. So the idea that a series of public websites have your home address, including any on-base residence, and a pretty darn accurate list of family members just sitting there, waiting anyone to search and find is pretty shocking. But it's true. All of this is completely legal. The site <http://www.familytreenow.com> and a series of other, similar sites pulls from public government records to compile a whole parade of information about you (including long ago addresses, a list of associated names), a list of family members and a much less accurate list of "possible associates."

For the writer of this article this meant her current home address, eight former addresses stretching back to 2004 (many of which she had totally forgotten), including one on a military base, a list of all of her family members from her husband's side, including her deceased brother-in-law (but none of the direct family who had her maiden name), and a list of 15 "possible associates" that only included two people who she actually knew. Her husband's listing was just as accurate and almost completely mirrored hers, but included addresses from before they were married dating back to 2006.

When she searched her father's record, his entry included former business addresses dating back to 2001, former home addresses, a list of all of her brothers and sisters (but not herself) and mom and grandparents, one of which is deceased. Her husband's "possible associates" were more accurate than her's. FamilyTreeNow isn't the only site that has your home address just sitting out there, waiting for people to look up. But it appears, it's the easiest to use because it is free to search. <https://www.ussearch.com> for example, shows you that results are available, but makes you pay to see them. Another site, <http://www.spokeo.com>, also requires a payment. The good news is: you can opt out of FamilyTreeNow and remove your information. And you should. Right now. Here's how.

1. Visit <http://www.familytreenow.com/optout>
2. At the bottom, click “I’m not a robot,” and then “Begin opt out procedure.”
3. Search for whatever name you want to remove.
4. Click the big red “Opt Out This Record” button. This button won’t show up if you search for the record with the normal search tool on the site. You have to go through the opt out page.

The screenshot shows the FamilyTreeNow.com website interface. At the top, there are navigation links: HOME, SEARCH, MY TREE, and a button to Start Family Tree. Below these are several action buttons: Back, Add To Tree, Save Record, Related Records, and a Facebook Share Record button. A search bar contains a URL. A prominent red button labeled 'Opt Out This Record' is visible. To the left of this button is a 'Public Records Online' warning box with text about not using the information for stalking or spreading gossip. Below the warning box is an 'Enter' button. To the right of the 'Opt Out This Record' button, a form displays the record details: Full Name: Amy J Bushatz, Age: 32. Below this, there are sections for 'Associated Names' (listing Amy J Doolittle) and 'Possible Relatives'.

5. Done.

[Source: NCOAdvocate Newsletter | Amy Bushatz | January 11, 2017 ++]

PLAN ► China's AGI Program

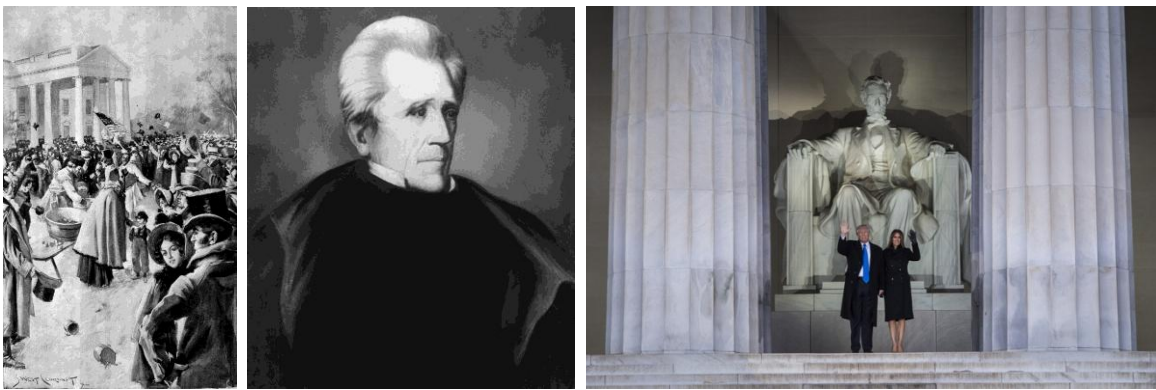
On 10 JAN, the Chinese People’s Liberation Army-Navy (PLAN) commissioned its fifth improved Dongdiao class (Type 815A) electronic reconnaissance, or auxiliary general intelligence (AGI), ship. The ship will join China’s North Sea Fleet. The PLAN Kaiyangxing was commissioned at a ceremony at the northern Chinese port of Qingdao. The vessel was built at Shanghai’s Zhonghua Shipyard, according to IHS Jane’s 360. The PLAN to date has commissioned six Dongdiao-class vessels, five of the improved Type 815A variety and an older Type 815 vessel, the PLAN Beijixing, which was commissioned in 1999. Between the one Type 815 and the four Type 815A, China’s AGI fleet currently stands at 5 commissioned vessels.

The PLAN Tianwangxing was commissioned in December 2010 and entered service with the PLAN’s East Sea Fleet. Three more vessels were commissioned in 2015, with two entering service with the South Sea Fleet and one with the North Sea Fleet. With the commissioning of the Kaiyangxing, the PLAN’s North Sea Fleet will possess two AGIs. The vessels provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support to other PLAN vessels. The Type 815A variant is reported to be capable of tracking ballistic missiles as well.

Chinese AGI ships drew attention in 2012 and 2014 for surveilling the Rim of the Pacific exercises in waters off Hawaii. The 2014 iteration of the exercise was the first ever to include the PLAN as a participant. RIMPAC is the world’s largest naval exercise and takes place biennially. A Type 815 vessel was also at the center of the East China Sea dispute with Japan earlier this year when it became the first PLAN vessel since 2004 to enter the territorial sea around the dispute Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The Dongdiao-class vessels displace 6,000 tons and have a top speed of around 20 knots. The ship is armed with two sets of primary guns — one 37 mm cannon and two 25 mm cannons. The Type 815A is expected to play an important role in enabling future expeditionary carrier operations for the PLAN. An unnamed Chinese expert who works in shipbuilding told state-run media this week that “[China’s] future carrier battle groups also need such vessels that can provide various kinds of theater intelligence.” [Source: The Diplomat | Ankit Panda | January 13, 2017 ++]

Trump-Jackson Analogy ► In the Mold of Andrew Jackson

When Andrew Jackson became president, he called it “The People’s Inauguration” and opened up the White House to anyone who wanted to come celebrate. The place was mobbed. Many got drunk on the free whiskey punch. The uncouth crowd broke fine china and busted fancy furniture. The decorated war hero had run as an outsider, fighting against “the aristocracy of the few” on behalf of the little guy. The rollicking party that trashed the executive mansion horrified already-aghast eastern elites. Donald Trump’s team actually considered opening the White House up for a public party that would pay homage to the fabled Jackson slosh-fest. “Unfortunately, security concerns are different than they were in 1829,” Tom Barrack, a longtime Trump friend and business partner who chaired the inaugural committee, said at an event last month. That this was even considered reflects the degree to which Trump has come to identify with the seventh president.



This artist's rendition (left) shows the crush of people after Andrew Jackson's (Center) inaugural ceremony on 4 March 1829

During a pre-inaugural dinner speech, the president-elect likened his “movement” to the one that elected Jackson. “There hasn’t been anything like this since Andrew Jackson,” Trump told 500 donors on 18 JAN. “Andrew Jackson! What year was Andrew Jackson? That was a long time ago!” Jackson, who served two terms, is considered the father of the Democratic Party. After winning a plurality of the popular vote and the most electoral votes in a four-way race, he felt robbed of the presidency in 1824 by what he considered a “corrupt bargain” between John Quincy Adams and Speaker Henry Clay. He avenged his loss with a campaign four years later that was animated by grievance and which made the nastiness of 2016 look like child’s play.

-- People in Trump’s orbit say Trump’s newfound fascination with Old Hickory reflects the influence of Stephen Bannon and conversations he’s had with Newt Gingrich. It’s not clear how much Trump himself has explicitly engaged with what it means to be Jacksonian, but he clearly likes the general idea. “Like Jackson’s populism, we’re going to build an entirely new political movement,” Bannon, who will be chief strategist in the new White House, declared in November. “The conservatives are going to go crazy. I’m the guy pushing a trillion-dollar infrastructure plan,” he explained to the Hollywood Reporter. “Shipyards, ironworks, get them all jacked up. We’re just going to throw it up against the wall and see if it sticks. It will be as exciting as the 1930s (and) greater than the Reagan revolution — conservatives, plus populists, in an economic nationalist movement.”

-- Newt Gingrich has repeatedly compared Trump to Jackson in public for nearly a year. The former Speaker of the House reportedly did so again during a inaugural party his law firm put on at The Source. “The only president remotely like Trump is Andrew Jackson,” Newt told Breitbart.com last March when Bannon was still running the conservative site day-to-day. When asked if Trump has the mental fitness to be commander-in-chief last summer,

the onetime history professor told a New York Times reporter: “Sure. I mean, he is at least as reliable as Andrew Jackson, who was one of the most decisive presidents in American history.” Other Trump intimates subsequently glommed onto the analogy. “This is like Andrew Jackson's victory,” New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani said on MSNBC after the election. “This is the people beating the establishment!”

Every new president inevitably draws comparisons to some of his predecessors when he takes office. Often, as with the stories eight years ago about how Barack Obama was like Abraham Lincoln, these pieces are way overwrought. Like snowflakes, no two presidents are exactly alike. They are products of their time. But most presidents typify a strain of thought that can be traced back to the founding, and they tap into elemental forces that have presented themselves before.

-- Jon Meacham, who wrote a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Jackson called “American Lion,” believes the aura of populism and power around Jackson is what appeals to Trump. “I totally understand why Trump would want to link himself to Jackson,” Meacham told me last night by phone. “An outsider. The first president of his type. The first president who wasn’t either a Virginia planter or an Adams from Massachusetts.” Jackson radically expanded the power of the presidency, ignoring orders of the Supreme Court and perennially working to usurp congressional sovereignty. Only a handful of presidents have an epoch of American history named for them, and none is as long as The Age of Jackson. A general known for his ruthlessness, he entered the national consciousness because of his success in the Battle of New Orleans. “Jackson’s opponents successfully portrayed him as King Andrew I,” Meacham said. “Trump, I think, would be delighted to be portrayed as King Donald I.”

He had many flaws, but Jackson proved somewhat adept at the art of governing. He knew when to bluff and when to fold. “Jackson could leverage his vices into political virtues,” said Meacham. “I don’t think we’ve seen a great deal of evidence yet that Trump can do the same. ... Can he use his bombast the way Jackson did as a negotiating tactic? ... Jackson faked a lot of temper tantrums. I can’t tell how much of Trump’s are real or manufactured.” Meacham said he’s “totally open minded” that Trump just might be able to replicate some of Jackson’s political talents. “Having been wrong about everything since June of 2015, I am not ruling that out,” he said.

-- Scholars and journalists from across the ideological spectrum have also seen resonance in the Trump-Jackson analogy: “Old Hickory might be mystified that a celebrity New York billionaire is holding up his banner (but Trump is nonetheless a powerful voice for Jacksonian attitudes,” National Review Editor Rich Lowry wrote back in 2015. “Historian Walter Russell Mead once wrote a memorable essay on the Jacksonianism that, so many years later, serves as a very rough guide to the anti-PC and fiercely nationalistic populism of the 2016 Trump campaign. ... ‘The Jacksonian hero dares to say what the people feel and defies the entrenched elites,’ Mead writes. ‘The hero may make mistakes, but he will command the unswerving loyalty of Jacksonian America so long as his heart is perceived to be in the right place.’ ... Trump doesn’t believe in limited government. ‘Jacksonians believe that the government should do everything in its power to promote the well-being — political, moral, economic — of the folk community,’ Mead writes. ... Trump isn’t ideologically consistent. The Jacksonian philosophy, Mead notes, ‘is an instinct rather than an ideology — a culturally shaped set of beliefs and emotions rather than a set of ideas.’”

-- Steve Inskeep, the co-host of NPR’s “Morning Edition” who wrote a book called “Jacksonland” about the Trail of Tears, sketches out two other parallels: “Jackson, like Trump, made innovative use of the media,” he wrote in a November essay for The Atlantic. “He offered nothing like Trump’s running commentary on Twitter ... But he did use newspapers, which were growing in number and importance. A subscriber to as many as 17 papers, he understood the changing media landscape better than his critics did. He personally involved himself in news coverage, once writing a letter urging that a friendly, but alcoholic, newspaperman must be kept sober long enough to ‘scorch’ one of Jackson’s rivals. He ... made sure they established a pro-Jackson newspaper in Washington when he took office. (His famous ‘kitchen cabinet’ included these newsmen.) Trump, of course, has made analogous moves by managing his own media relations, asking Sean Hannity for advice and inviting Bannon to serve as his strategist...

“There is (also) something Jacksonian both in Trump’s promise to ‘drain the swamp’ of Washington and his early moves to refill the swamp with wealthy friends, loyal supporters, and family members. ... Though not born to wealth as Trump was, Jackson made his fortune on the early American frontier. He did not clear out Washington elites so much as bring a new coalition of elites to power: New York politicians and Pennsylvania businessmen allied with Southern slaveholders. Jackson tended to their special interests. He also used political patronage to stuff the government with Jackson loyalists. [Source: The Daily 202 | Breanne Deppisch | January 20, 2017 ++]

Marriage ► U.S. Never Married Percentages

The percentage of adults in Philadelphia who have never been married is the highest among the nation’s 10 largest cities—and has been rising steadily during the past decade. In 2015, the last year for which census data were available, nearly 52 percent of adults in Philadelphia reported having never been married, up from 43 percent in 2005. Some of the other largest cities were not even close. For instance, in San Jose, California, 35 percent of adults had never married, and in San Antonio it was 38 percent; the national figure is even lower, at just below 34 percent.

In each of these cities, and throughout the nation, the never-married percentages have been higher for men than for women in recent years. In Philadelphia, 54 percent of men and 49 percent of women had never married. That 5 percentage-point gap was lower than the gap in some of the other cities; nationally, it was only about 3 points. All of the largest cities saw the percentage of never-married adults grow during the 10-year period, which also happened in the nation as a whole—although the national numbers have stabilized in the last few years. Although Philadelphia’s percentage of adults who never married stands out among the most populous cities, it is very much in keeping with those of other high-poverty cities. Among the 10 cities with the highest poverty rates and populations of at least 350,000, Philadelphia’s share of never-married adults was fourth highest, behind Detroit, Baltimore, and Milwaukee. Social scientists have long noted that marriage rates vary according to income, with lower-income adults less likely to be married than those with higher incomes.

Experts say the growth in the number of never married individuals stems from a variety of factors, including the rising share of young adults across the nation—particularly in a number of cities, including Philadelphia—and the tendency of those young adults to marry later in life than their age group once did. According to the Census Bureau, the median age of individuals in first marriages nationally increased from 26.2 in 2005 to 28.7 in 2015, following a decades-long trend. In addition, census data show that more adults are living together and/or having children without getting married. There is little evidence to suggest these trends are about to change. Projections by the Pew Research Center indicate that a quarter of today’s young adults will still fall in the never-married column when they reach ages 45 to 54. That would be a record. [Source: Route Fifty | The Pew Charitable Trusts | January 19, 2017 ++]

GTMO Prison Update 08 ► Trump Era Strands Five Prisoners'

Donald Trump’s inauguration on 20 JAN elated and enraged Americans, as both supporters and detractors looked ahead to the changes the Republican leader’s presidency will bring. For a small group of foreign detainees locked in the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the start of the Trump era has a different sort of meaning: a narrowly missed chance for freedom. The five men — an Algerian, a Moroccan, a Tunisian, a Yemeni, and an apparently stateless detainee — were all certified by Obama administration officials as eligible for resettlement overseas. But they did not form part of a final flurry of transfer deals sealed by the departing Obama administration. Now, as Trump declares that no additional prisoners should leave Guantánamo, it appears their long detentions may continue for at least another four years.



he entrance to Camp 5 and Camp 6 at the U.S. military's Guantanamo Bay detention center, at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba.

Trump assumed responsibility for a much more sparsely populated Guantánamo than former president Barack Obama did eight years ago. Following Obama's resettlement of 196 prisoners overseas, only 41 inmates remain today, far fewer than the prison's peak of over 700 under President George W. Bush. But Obama failed to accomplish his primary goal of shuttering the facility, unable to overcome political opposition to congressionally sanctioned steps, and unwilling to resort to executive action to make such a controversial move. Trump, in contrast, has suggested he might put new prisoners in Guantánamo, and possibly use the facility to try Americans. In line with his administration's day-one promise to defeat "radical Islamic terror groups," Trump, like Republicans in Congress, believes prisoner resettlement undermines American security.

Like nearly all remaining prisoners, none of the five men now expected to be marooned at Guantánamo has been convicted of a crime. Two of the men, an Algerian named **Sufyan Barhoumi** and Moroccan **Abdul Latif Nasir**, now face indefinite detention after the defeat of an 11th-hour court action aimed at securing their release. Attorneys for the men, who were not included in a final set of notifications officials submitted to Congress regarding upcoming transfers, say their repatriation did not come together for reasons unrelated to their backgrounds or security profiles. The legal teams requested that judges waive steps required before transfers can take place, including a 30-day congressional notice period, to allow the men to be moved before Trump took office. Last week, judges denied those requests.

- According to prisoner profiles made public by WikiLeaks, Barhoumi, the Algerian, is believed to have lived in Europe before being arrested in Pakistan in 2002. The 43-year-old has been held at Guantánamo since June of that year.
- Nasir, 51, was captured in Afghanistan in late 2001 and held at an American detention center there before being brought to Guantánamo in May 2002. Thomas A. Durkin, who represented Nasir, said that Morocco had complied with U.S. requirements regarding security guarantees for transferred prisoners. It had just been done so too late. For the court to deny the transfer was to leave his client in a "legal black hole," Durkin argued in a filing this week. "His whole life hangs in the balance due to a mere technicality that the courts and more importantly the Obama Justice Department didn't have the courage to act on," he said on 20 JAN. He called the fact that Nasir and others would remain at Guantánamo despite having been deemed eligible for resettlement "disgraceful."
- Another of the five is Rida bin **Saleh al Yazidi**, a 51-year-old Tunisian who military officials believed lived in Italy and was later captured in Pakistan. He was taken to Guantánamo in Jan. 2002. Officials said they had identified a country that was willing to accept him, but Yazidi rejected a proposal to be resettled there.

- Military officials alleged that **Tawfiq Nisar al-Bihani**, a 44-year-old Yemeni citizen, smuggled himself into Iran from Afghanistan in 2001, and was later captured by Iranian authorities. He was held by Afghan officials before being turned over the United States in 2002, and arrived at Guantánamo in February 2003. Former Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter, who stepped down this week, did not support Bihari's transfer due to security concerns, the officials said.
- The final prisoner is a man of undetermined nationality named **Muieen al-Din Jamal al-Din al-Sattar**. According to U.S. officials, Sattar is a member of the Rohingya, a Bengali-speaking Muslim minority that lives in large numbers in Burma. While Sattar was born in the United Arab Emirates in 1974, he is considered stateless. Officials were unable to find a home for him, partly for that reason and partly because of foreign officials' concerns about the threat Sattar might pose. He has been at Guantánamo since February 2002.
- Many of the other detainees remaining at Guantánamo are expected to be held indefinitely without charges due to a lack of admissible evidence against them.

Wells Dixon, a senior staff attorney at the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), which represented the Algerian prisoner, said the Obama administration's instinct to fight off legal challenges like the one about Barhoumi and Nasir was partly to blame for the fact the prison remains open. He said the government's rejection of the legal petition to free the two prisoners, just days before Trump took office and shut down future transfer options, meant the men "may remain stranded at Guantánamo forever." [Source: The Washington Post | Missy Ryan & Julie Tate | January 22, 2017 ++]

North Korea Humanitarian Aid ► U.S. Gave \$1M on 19 JAN

The United States has provided \$1 million in humanitarian aid to impoverished North Korea, the U.S. State Department said 25 JAN. Despite growing tensions between North Korea and Washington, the U.S. sent the assistance last week on the day before President Donald Trump was sworn in and took over the U.S. government. It marks the first time that the U.S. provided humanitarian assistance to the North since 2011, when it provided relief items including medical supplies to North Korean flood victims. That aid, worth \$900,000, was made through Samaritan's Purse, a U.S. based humanitarian aid organization.



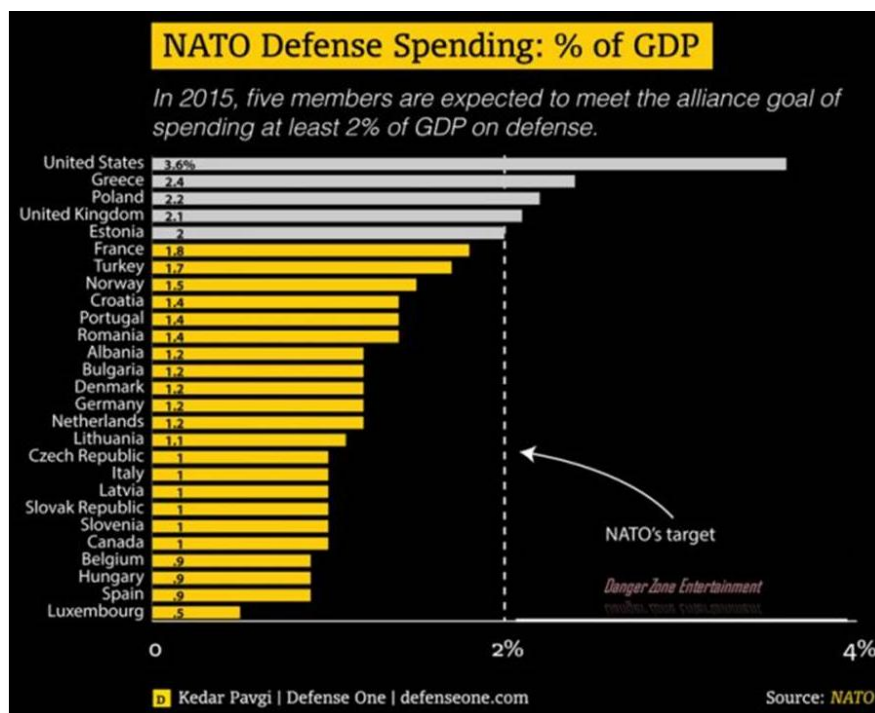
Workers recover cement blocks from flood-damaged areas in Onsong, North Korea, Sept. 16, 2016.

The current assistance comes in the aftermath of Typhoon Lionrock, which hit North Korea in August with heavy rain that resulted in flooding. At the time, the government reported hundreds were dead and missing, and said thousands had lost their homes. International aid organizations responded immediately. Outgoing Secretary of State John Kerry awarded \$1 million for North Korea to UNICEF, a U.N. agency, the day before President Donald Trump took office last week. The State Department confirmed the assistance in an email to VOA and said the funding was

destined only for humanitarian assistance. However, a spokesman added that U.S. officials are “currently reviewing last-minute spending approved by the previous administration.” News of U.S. assistance to North Korea came as a surprise to some officials in Washington and Seoul, since both countries have been increasing pressure on Pyongyang since the communist country conducted multiple nuclear tests last year.

According to a report by Congressional Research Service, the United States provided the North over \$1.3 billion in assistance, mostly food aid and energy assistance, between 1995 and 2008. Since early 2009, the U.S. has withheld all types of humanitarian aid to North Korea, while denying any connection between its political relations with the regime and humanitarian assistance. In February 2012, Washington struck a deal with Pyongyang, known as the "Leap Day" agreement, in which the U.S. agreed to resume large-scale food assistance on the condition that the North promise to refrain from further testing nuclear weapons. The agreement was scrapped less than three weeks later, after the North announced a plan to launch a long-range rocket. [Source: VOA | Baik Sung-won | January 25, 2017 ++]

NATO Defense Spending ► Who Pays What



Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton both used the Democratic presidential debates to call on other NATO members to spend more on defense. Donald Trump has gone even further, saying the U.S. should rethink its involvement in the military alliance because it costs too much money. Many European members -- including big economies like France and Germany -- spend less than the amount called for by NATO guidelines. The U.S. shells out far more money on defense than any other nation on the planet. According to NATO statistics, the U.S. spent an estimated \$650 billion on defense in 2015. That's more than double the amount all the other 27 NATO countries spent between them, even though their combined GDP tops that of the U.S. [Source: CNN Money | Ivana Kottasova | April 15, 2016++]

The Wall ► Democrats Said 'Build That Fence' in 2006

As a senator, Barack Obama once offered measured praise for the border control legislation that would become the basis for one of Donald Trump's first acts as president. "The bill before us will certainly do some good," Obama said on the Senate floor in October 2006. He praised the legislation, saying it would provide "better fences and better security along our borders" and would "help stem some of the tide of illegal immigration in this country." Obama was talking about the Secure Fence Act of 2006, legislation authorizing a barrier along the southern border passed into law with the support of 26 Democratic senators including party leaders like Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden, and Chuck Schumer.



An agent of the border patrol, observed near the Mexico-US border fence, on the Mexican side, separating the towns of Anapra, Mexico and Sunland Park, New Mexico, this week.

Now it's become the legal mechanism for Trump to order construction of a wall between the United States and Mexico, attempting to make good on a key promise from the campaign trail. Trump specifically cited the law in the first sentence of his 25 JAN executive order authorizing the wall. The episode shows how concerns over border security occupied Washington well before Trump made it the centerpiece of his candidacy, and that Democrats were more than willing to offer big sums of taxpayer money to keep Mexicans and other Latino immigrants out of the United States. The border fence called for in the 2006 law was far less ambitious than the wall Trump envisions, and, as he is apt to do, he has made the issue bigger, more explosive, and far more disruptive to US diplomacy. Trump has also added his own controversial twist that was never a part of the 2006 legislation, a promise that the Mexican people would pay for the wall. Time will tell how or if they will do that. [Source: Boston Globe | Annie Linskey | January 27, 2017 ++]

China's Offensive Capability Update 01 ► Stepping Up Preparedness

According to China's state media and military observers China is stepping up preparedness for a possible military conflict with the US as the Donald Trump presidency has increased the risk of hostilities breaking out. Beijing is bracing itself for a possible deterioration in Sino-US ties, with a particular emphasis on maritime security. The People's Liberation Army said in a commentary on its official website 20 JAN, the day of Trump's inauguration, that the chances of war have become "more real" amid a more complex security situation in Asia Pacific. The commentary written by an official at the national defense mobilization department in the Central Military Commission said the call for a US rebalancing of its strategy in Asia, military deployments in the East and South China Seas and the instillation of a missile defense system in South Korea were hot spots getting closer to ignition.

‘A war within the president’s term’ or ‘war breaking out tonight’ are not just slogans, they are becoming a practical reality,” it said.

The official People’s Daily said in another commentary on 22 JAN that China’s military would conduct exercises on the high seas regardless of foreign provocations. China’s sole aircraft carrier Liaoning passed through the narrow Taiwan Strait last month. The commentary referred to remarks by the US secretary of state Rex Tillerson that the US should stop China’s access to artificial islands it has built in disputed areas of the South China Sea. New White House spokesman Sean Spicer told a press conference on 23 JAN that the US would prevent China from taking over territory in international waters in the South China Sea. With their threats to China, Trump and Tillerson are making rookie blunders that will only hurt US credibility

Spicer told the press “the US is going to make sure that we protect our interests there,” when asked about US President Donald Trump’s position on the South China Sea. “It’s a question of if those islands are in fact in international waters and not part of China proper, then yeah, we’re going to make sure that we defend international territories from being taken over by one country,” he said. Foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying responded by telling the US “to be cautious in what it says and does, so as to avoid harming the peace and stability in the region.” The Chinese military is constantly prepared for possible military conflict whoever serves as US president, but Donald Trump’s possible “extreme approach” against China was dangerous, according to analysts. Ian Storey, a senior fellow at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, said some of the comments from Trump’s key advisors and appointees suggest that the US may pursue a more hardline policy against Beijing in the South China Sea over the next four years “As it’s highly unlikely that China will compromise its sovereignty claims in the face of US pressure, we can be sure that the dispute will increasingly become a risky point of contention between Beijing and Washington,” he said.

The comments come as President Xi Jinping is overseeing massive reforms within China’s military to improve its fighting capabilities. A huge reshuffle is also underway in the military’s top brass. Vice-Admiral Shen Jinlong, commander of the South Sea Fleet, is to replace retiring Admiral Wu Shengli as chief of the PLA Navy. Meanwhile, Vice-Admiral Yuan Yubai, the former North Sea Fleet commander, has been promoted to head the Southern Theatre Command, which focuses on the South China Sea. “Promoting naval officers to command theatres is aimed at utilizing them to the maximum and getting ready to win wars,” Song Zhongping, a military affairs commentator at Phoenix TV, said. The navy has been the focus of recent developments within the PLA, with massive investment and the construction of large numbers of ships, Song said.

China is involved in other disputes beyond the South China Sea, particularly with Taiwan. Sovereignty disputes with Japan in the East China Sea and concerns over the deployment of the missile shield in South Korea are other potential flashpoints. [Source: South China Morning Post | Liu Zhen | January 27, 2017 ++]

Have You Heard? ► Rainy Day Fishing | Officer vs. NCO Difference

The rain was pouring and there was a big puddle in front of the bar near an American Legion Post. A ragged old sea going sailor was standing near the edge with a fishing line in the puddle.

A curious young USAF fighter pilot came over to him and asked what he was doing.

"Fishing," the old salt simply said.

"Poor old fool," the officer thought to himself, and he invited the old sailor into the bar for a drink.

As he felt he should start some conversation while they were sipping their whiskey, the haughty fighter pilot asked, "And how many have you caught today?"

"You're number ten" the old chief answered. 3 Army, 2 Air Force, 3 Navy, and 2 Marines.

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A young Naval officer was severely wounded in the head by a flight deck accident, but the only visible, permanent injury was that both of his ears were amputated.

Since his remaining hearing was sufficient, he remained in the Navy

Many years later he eventually rose to the rank of Rear Admiral.

He was, however, very sensitive about his appearance.

One day the Admiral was interviewing three servicemen who were candidates for his headquarters staff.

The first was a Marine Major, a helicopter pilot, and it was a great interview.

At the end of the interview the Admiral asked him, 'Do you notice anything different about me?'

The young officer answered, 'Why, yes, Sir, I couldn't help but notice that you have no ears.'

The Admiral was displeased with his lack of tact and threw him out. The second was with a Navy Lieutenant, and he was even better.

The Admiral then asked him the same question to which he replied sheepishly, 'Well, sir, you have no ears.' The Admiral also threw him out.

The third interview was with an old Master Chief, an Airdale and staff-trained NCO.

He was smart, articulate, fit, looked sharp, and seemed to know more than the two officers combined.

The Admiral liked this guy, and went ahead with the same question,

To his surprise the Master Chief said, 'Yes, sir, you wear contact lenses.'

The Admiral was very impressed and thought, 'What an incredibly observant NCO, and he didn't mention my ears.'

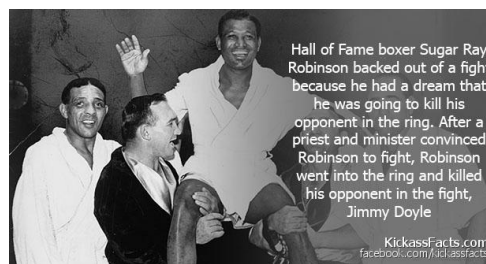
'He asked, Master Chief, how do you know I wear contacts?'

"Well, sir,' the salty old Master Chief replied, "it's pretty hard to wear glasses with no fuckin' ears!"





We Will Miss you Mary



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