

RAO

BULLETIN

14 February 2017

PDF Edition



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1. The page number on which an article can be found is provided to the left of each article's title
2. Numbers contained within brackets [] indicate the number of articles written on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to raoemo@sbcglobal.net.

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Commissary Prices Update 08 ► Savings Less Than Previously Thought

Shoppers save 23.7 percent by using commissaries instead of civilian grocery stores -- lower than the 30 percent savings claimed for years, according to a new analysis by the Defense Commissary Agency. The drop isn't a result of price increases, at least not directly -- it's a change in how DeCA tracks the savings, moving from a solely national model to one that includes a regional comparison of commissary prices with those at nearby stores. "This enhanced way of calculating savings doesn't change the actual dollars that patrons save, but it will give patrons a better understanding of price comparisons in their local area," said Joseph H. Jeu, DeCA director and CEO. Officials now calculate savings in each of eight regions and factor it into the overall savings measurement. The new formula led to a lower percentage of overall savings, according to DeCA spokesman Kevin Robinson.

Some advocates question the nearly 7 percentage-point difference in the savings benefit. "I was struck by the regional savings, versus the 30 percent savings. In some regions it was significant and surprising," said Eileen Huck, government relations deputy director for the National Military Family Association. "And across the board, even the global average was more than 6 percentage points less. "What I'm concerned about is whether the value of the benefit is really less than what we've been told all along? What's more reliable -- the old methodology or this new method?"

THE NEW MATH -- Commissary prices are the same regardless of region; regional savings may rise or fall depending on an area's cost of living or other factors that could affect pricing. Savings calculations include applicable sales taxes on commercial grocery store purchases and the 5 percent surcharge on commissary purchases. Without these taxes and surcharge calculations, the overall savings in commissaries would be 25.7 percent. The highest percent of savings is overseas, where customers at 61 stores save an average of 44.2 percent over stores outside the gate. Next is the Alaska/Hawaii region, where the nine stores save customers an average of 32.6 percent. The U.S. average savings at 20.2 percent for 177 stores, with a global average of 23.7 percent (238 stores). In the U.S. the lowest percentage of savings is in the Mountain region, at 17.6 percent. The other regions:

- New England (36 stores): 21.4 percent
- South Atlantic (30 stores): 19.9 percent
- South Central (33 stores): 18.1 percent
- Pacific (31 stores): 20.9 percent
- Mountain (20 stores): 17.6 percent
- North Central (18 stores) 20.2 percent

PRICE CHANGES COMING -- The savings calculations set an important benchmark. As defense officials move into new pricing systems sometime this year that allow them to raise prices on some items to help fund commissary operations, the baseline will allow DeCA and Congress to monitor the savings to ensure that the benefit isn't adversely affected by lower overall savings. "Military families have been told for years that when they shop at the commissary regularly, they can expect to see a 30 percent savings. This report says that's not what they're going to see moving forward," Huck said.. "It may reflect what it is, but it certainly sets the benchmark going forward lower than what military families have been told."

Defense officials over the last several years have pressured commissary officials to reduce the amount of taxpayer dollars required to operate the 238 commissaries worldwide – currently about \$1.4 billion. Congress, at the request of defense officials, allowed the commissary officials to test a system of variable pricing at some point this year, raising the prices of some items and lowering the prices of others. Commissary officials have also contracted with a company to start offering some private label brand items, sometimes known as generics, and officials expect to make profits on these items. These pricing changes will mark a fundamental shift in the way commissaries price their groceries, moving from a system where commissaries sell groceries at cost plus a 5 percent surcharge that is used for construction and renovation of stores. An additional 1 percent is added to the cost of items to cover loss and spoilage. By using the taxpayer funds to pay for operational costs like employee salaries, officials haven't had to mark up the cost of groceries.

Congress, at the request of Defense Department officials, mandated that the commissary agency update the methodology it uses to calculate customer savings. The savings percentage was previously calculated by comparing commissary prices on about 38,000 brand name items to the prices of those items in civilian grocery stores, using pricing data from Nielsen. The prices were averaged across the year and across the board on every item. Now, in addition to that comparison, DeCA is doing market basket comparisons between commissaries and local stores. They've contracted with a company to manually compare local prices on about 1,000 products, which are representative of a shopper's typical market basket. Not every commissary will be included in the market basket comparison every quarter; it will be a rolling process where commissaries are included at some point during the year. Their prices are compared with two to three local civilian grocers, including "super centers" such as some Wal-Mart's, in close proximity to the commissary.

Advocates have asked for transparency in the process of changing the savings baseline calculations, and how DeCA officials will move forward; this is a step in that direction, Huck said, but questions remained about which products were chosen for the comparison. "We've been concerned about the value of the benefit for the people who need it the most -- junior families," Huck said. It's not clear whether diapers and baby food, for example, are among the items that are compared across the spectrum. This local comparison adds an element to the comparison that's based on a snapshot in time, said Tom Gordy, president of the Armed Forces Marketing Council, an association of members of industry who supply products to commissaries and exchanges. For example, a civilian grocery store may put bananas on sale at a deep discount for a week to bring more customers into the store. In addition, a number of civilian grocery stores located near military installations price their items to compete with commissaries, but many commissary customers don't live directly outside the gates of military installations.

Until now, commissary prices were required to be uniform at all commissary stores. But the new tests will allow commissary officials to increase prices on some items, and lower prices on some items, in order to make money overall. "In theory, nothing changes for the patron in terms of prices," Gordy said. With the new variable pricing system, he said, "the devil will be in the details. DeCA may decide to take a loss on bananas, but something else will go up in price." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | January 31, 2017 ++]

Commissary Private Label Products Update 01 ► Brand Names Unveiled

The Defense Commissary Agency has chosen the names "Freedom's Choice™" and "HomeBase™" for its private label product assortment. That announcement came from DeCA Director and CEO Joseph H. Jeu. Private label, also known as store brands, will be appearing on commissary shelves in May. "Commissary patrons have been telling DeCA for quite some time that they want to take advantage of the value offered by store brands, but commissaries have not had their own brand until now," Jeu said. "We are proud of our new brands, and I believe our customers are going to be very pleased with the quality and low prices that Freedom's Choice and HomeBase bring to our shelves."



Freedom's Choice will be the commissary brand name for food items and HomeBase for nonfood items such as paper products and other household items. With the initial rollout targeted for May, patrons in commissaries worldwide can expect to see a number of DeCA's Freedom's Choice and HomeBase products. It takes time to develop and allow for a store brand to reach maturity, so the number of Freedom's Choice and HomeBase products will continue to grow much larger over the next four to five years. "Freedom's Choice and HomeBase will give our patrons another chance to save money without sacrificing quality on brands priced significantly lower than national brands," Jeu said. "Our private label products will also be equal or lower in price to commercial grocery store brands. These products will give our patrons the quality they expect and the savings they deserve."

Private label products are offered by retailers under their own, in-house brand or under a brand developed by their suppliers. DeCA conducted extensive research into developing the commissary brands, surveying hundreds of military members and their families to obtain their input for names and logos. "We talked to our customers about a number of package titles and showed them potential artwork for our commissary brands," said Chris Burns, DeCA's executive director for business transformation. "The Freedom's Choice and HomeBase names and logos proved to be overwhelmingly popular." Plans to start promoting Freedom's Choice and HomeBase have already begun and commissary customers will be noticing these names and logos very soon. In December, DeCA announced its partnership with SpartanNash to begin developing the commissary brands. SpartanNash, through its military division MDV, is the leading distributor of grocery products to military commissaries in the United States. [Source: <https://commissaries.com> | Kevin L. Robinson | February 1, 2017++]

BRAC Update 54 ► Too Many Bases | Opinion

Members of Congress have a hard time agreeing on virtually anything, and they're already butting heads with the new president. But one issue should unite them: a new initiative to shrink the Pentagon's massive overhead. President Trump and Secretary of Defense James Mattis have pledged to cut waste. And key leaders in Congress have renewed their calls for rationalizing the Pentagon's base structure. Now is the time for Congress to come together, put the national interest over parochial interests and finally support a new round of base closings. As Senate Armed Services Committee chair Sen. John McCain recently said to reporters, "Right now we do have excess properties and facilities, and I think we need to look at it." On the House side, Rep. Adam Smith, the ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, is pushing legislation that would initiate a new round of base closings in 2019, because, as he notes, "We should not be wasting hard-earned taxpayer money to maintain excess infrastructure that DoD has determined it does not need."

If properly structured, any new set of base closings could result in billions in savings. This item is high on the military's agenda. The brass have been asking Congress for permission to eliminate unneeded facilities for years, and for good reason. The last round of closures occurred eleven years ago, at a time when the military was busy fighting two wars. The Defense Department now estimates that **nearly one-quarter of its current bases serve no military need**. This is true even if the Army and Marine Corps remain at their current size. The billions of dollars wasted on overhead could be put to far better use, especially at a time when the services claim that they lack the resources to pay for essential functions such as training and equipment maintenance.

So why isn't there an overwhelming push to close unneeded bases? The resistance is grounded in pork-barrel politics, not a careful assessment of the nation's defense needs. Too many members of Congress believe that they were elected to put the interests of their state or district over that of the country. They believe that they are doing their duty by blocking any base closures. In fact, these representatives are actually doing harm to the nation and their constituents. Their stubborn refusal to allow the military to use its resources efficiently also prevents defense communities from taking advantage of land and property currently trapped behind chain-link fences and razor wire.

In that sense, the closure of military bases actually opens them up. Just ask the people of Philadelphia, who can now follow South Broad Street all the way to the Delaware River, through the gates of what used to be the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Austin, Texas, welcomes millions of people every year through the gleaming Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, formerly Bergstrom Air Force Base. The former naval air station in Brunswick, Maine, is now Brunswick Landing, a thriving business campus. Cal State Monterey Bay was carved out of the sprawling Army training base at Fort Ord. Thousands of acres have been set aside in the Fort Ord National Monument, which includes eighty-six miles of mountain bike and hiking trails. A 2005 study by the Pentagon's Office of Economic Adjustment looked at seventy-three communities impacted by a base closure, and determined that nearly all civilian defense jobs lost were replaced within fifteen years. In addition, the new jobs are in a variety of industries and fields, allowing communities to diversify their economies away from their excessive reliance on the federal government.

To be sure, base closures are initially disruptive to local economies and patterns of life, but most places do recover. In some cases, recovery has been quite rapid. The best way to ensure a successful transition is by encouraging local elected officials and civic leaders to plan for the future. Congressional leaders wishing to facilitate a new round of base closures should familiarize themselves with successful defense conversion cases, and be willing to help apply lessons learned. Before Congress signs off on sharp increases in Pentagon spending, it should make sure the department is using its current resources as efficiently as possible. Closing unneeded bases is a good place to start. [Source: The National Interest | Christopher A. Preble & William D. Hartung | February 6, 2017++]

Christopher Preble is the vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. William D. Hartung is the director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy.

BRAC Update 55 ► **USA/USAF Vice Chiefs Support Another Round**

The vice chiefs of the Army and Air Force on 7 FEB threw their support behind another round of base closures as a way to save substantial amounts of money that can be put to use for the military's other needs. "It's real money that we really need to reinvest into deferred maintenance and infrastructure backlog," Gen. Daniel Allyn, the Army's vice chief of staff, told the House Armed Services Committee on Tuesday. Gen. Stephen Wilson, vice chief of staff for the Air Force, agreed: "In today's budget environment, it makes sense to invest wisely, so BRAC would help us make smart investments to prepare for the future."

Wilson and Allyn were testifying alongside their Marines and Navy counterparts on the state of the military. They painted a bleak picture, lamenting that budget cuts have slashed the readiness of the force to fight in a war against a high-end adversary such as Russia. But the closure process, known as Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), has been a politically unpopular solution to the issue. Lawmakers in both parties oppose BRAC because of the potential for negative economic impact on the communities around bases. The last round of BRAC was in 2005, and under current law, another round is banned. But supporters of BRAC were bolstered recently by Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who said he and committee ranking member Jack Reed (D-RI) were looking into BRAC to address budget issues.

After McCain’s comment, Rep. Adam Smith (D-Wash.), a longtime BRAC supporter and ranking member of the House committee, reintroduced a bill to allow for BRAC. At Tuesday’s hearing, Allyn said the Army has saved \$1 billion annually from the 2005 round and has about \$11 billion in backlog maintenance. Wilson estimated the Air Force’s backlog totals \$25 billion. Right now, the Air Force has 25 percent excess capacity, Wilson added. Meanwhile, the Army will have a 21 percent excess capacity if it increases to 490,000 soldiers, Allyn said. While Allyn and Wilson supported BRAC, Gen. Glenn Walters, assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, said his service has the right amount of infrastructure for its needs. “We think we’re about right,” he said. “But we’ll participate in BRAC to see if there’s any savings with our partners.” [Source: The Hill | Rebecca Kheel | February 7, 2017 ++]

Secret Overseas Prison Plan ► Bush Era Interrogation Program

As the Central Intelligence Agency was setting up its secret prisons overseas 15 years ago to interrogate terrorism suspects, a Defense Department unit was considering a proposal to establish a secret military prison abroad, according to previously undisclosed government documents. The proposal was presented in a 2002 memo written in part by Bruce Jessen, one of two psychologists who eventually helped create the C.I.A.’s “enhanced interrogation” program. The memo, obtained by The New York Times, recommended opening at least one secret overseas site where prisoners would be subjected to “constant sensory deprivation” and develop “a profound sense of despair.” The military, though, did not act on the proposal for an “undisclosed non-U.S., unsuspected, secure location” to “hold, manage and exploit detainees.” The Department of Defense, through a spokeswoman, declined to comment on the extent to which the plan, which originated in the military’s Joint Personnel Recovery Agency, was considered.

Aside from sensory deprivation, the memo suggested that additional pressure tactics be permitted against prisoners, including those that “maximize cultural undesirability,” but it did not mention the brutal physical coercion techniques, such as waterboarding, later approved for use in the C.I.A. prisons. The memo is included among several government documents provided during the discovery process in a lawsuit brought in federal court in Spokane, Wash., against Dr. Jessen and the other psychologist, James E. Mitchell, by two former C.I.A. prisoners and the representative of a third man, who died in custody.

The documents, along with others previously released, are helping to fill in gaps in the historical record about the interrogation program of the George W. Bush era. Their disclosure comes soon after the Trump administration drafted an executive order calling for reviving the C.I.A. “black site” prisons, though the White House has since appeared to back off from the idea after lawmakers and cabinet officials objected. Also disclosed in the lawsuit were a series of PowerPoint training slides for American personnel apparently headed to the military detention center at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, discussing how they could defeat efforts by terrorism suspects to resist questioning. Those slides — or a similar set — were used in a training course by Dr. Jessen and a colleague in March 2002, and excerpted in a 2008 Senate Armed Services Committee report. Among the potential methods listed are “psychological torture” through “isolation, threats against self or family” and “the use of drugs.”

When Dr. Jessen’s memo was written in April 2002, he was the chief psychologist at the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency, a Defense Department unit overseeing training programs in which military personnel are subjected to simulated torture tactics and mock interrogation to prepare them for possible capture by regimes violating the laws of war. Dr. Jessen and most of his colleagues had no experience in conducting actual interrogations, but the Department of Defense legal counsel sought information from the agency on detainee “exploitation” beginning in late 2001. Dr. Jessen soon left his military position to help set up the C.I.A. interrogation program, along with Dr. Mitchell. The two men eventually created their own company, Mitchell, Jessen and Associates, which received \$81 million from the C.I.A. to manage the program.

The existence of the 2002 memo was mentioned in the Senate report on detainee abuse published in 2008, but the document itself had not previously been made public. The memo recommended practices similar to those later used at C.I.A. sites, such as holding only one or two “subjects” at a time and having an “operational team” that included a psychologist, interrogators, interpreters, guards, a physician, an intelligence officer and other support personnel, including video technicians. The plan called for “video/sound feed between interrogation rooms, confinement cells and control room.” It also described ethically conflicting roles for the physician — both advising interrogators and treating the subject. The memo was written at a time when Pentagon officials were deeply divided over the military’s role in detention and interrogation in the new war on terrorists. Many officials were already uneasy about interrogation procedures being used at the military detention center in Guantánamo Bay. The memo’s solution to the mounting internal criticism was to have a small team led by the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency run a smaller, more efficient prison.

The memo also insisted that secrecy be paramount and that the International Committee of the Red Cross, which monitors prisoners of war to ensure they are treated humanely, be kept out of the proposed prison. “No press, IRC, US or foreign observers,” the memo states. “These documents reveal some of the earliest planning for the systematic torture and abuse that Jessen and others would inflict on U.S. prisoners,” said Dror Ladin, a lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union, which is representing the former detainees. The emphasis on keeping the prisons hidden showed, Mr. Ladin said, that those involved in the plans “knew that what they were doing was wrong.” Asked about the documents, a lawyer for Dr. Jessen distanced him from them. “While Dr. Jessen was the original author of the JPRA report, the document that the government produced in discovery is the final version that was modified by other government officials for specific purposes,” said the lawyer, James Smith, who also represents Dr. Mitchell. “Dr. Jessen had no role in creating that final version,” he wrote.

Mr. Smith also asserted that “every action taken by Drs. Mitchell and Jessen was approved and directed by the C.I.A. after the Department of Justice and the Office of the President advised that the contemplated action was legal.” He said the two men had no involvement in activities alleged in the plaintiffs’ complaint, which claimed the psychologists had designed and administered the C.I.A.’s brutal interrogation program. According to the Senate report, Dr. Jessen drafted his memo and sent it to the senior civilian leadership and commander of the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency, Col. John R. Moulton, who is known as Randy. He requested that Dr. Jessen prepare a briefing to “take up for approval.” When interviewed by the Senate committee, Colonel Moulton testified that he did not recall any subsequent briefings for United States Joint Forces Command on the proposal.

Lawyers for Dr. Mitchell and Dr. Jessen have sought to depose several former C.I.A. officials in an effort to buttress the defense’s argument that the psychologists’ actions were approved by the C.I.A. Lawyers for the A.C.L.U., working with the Gibbons law firm of Newark, have said that they were trying to avoid asking the government to release classified information in the case, and instead were relying heavily on public records. Their strategy is to avoid demanding any information that might lead to the imposition of the state secrets privilege, which allows the government to prevent information from being made public in court cases by claiming it could damage national security. That could shut down the case. If it goes forward, a trial is expected to take place in June.

In a filing in the case in early FEB, Chad A. Readler, the acting United States assistant attorney general, and other government lawyers indicated that the government would seek to invoke the privilege to block testimony by James Cotsana, a former C.I.A. operations officer who Dr. Mitchell and Dr. Jessen have said supervised them at one time. The Justice Department requested additional time to invoke the state secrets privilege, it said, because the new C.I.A. director will need to assess whether to do so, and the attorney general will have to approve the plan. The multiple levels of review, the government added, “present unique challenges in this case given the recent change of administration.” Subpoenas to depose John A. Rizzo, a former acting general counsel of the C.I.A., and Jose A. Rodriguez, a former deputy director of operations, were recently canceled by the defendants, who received statements from the two men instead. The A.C.L.U. is now seeking to depose them. [Source: The New York Times | James Risen & Sheri Fink | February 8, 2017 ++]

DARPA Update 03 ► SHARE Program

DARPA has launched a program to develop secure handheld networks. The Secure Handhelds on Assured Resilient networks at the tactical Edge (SHARE) program will tackle the problem of sharing classified data over congested tactical networks. “The usual process for sharing such information requires an end-to-end connection to secure servers via a dedicated digital ‘pipe’ approved for the specific security level of data being transmitted,” according to a DARPA announcement. “If that tactical network is overloaded or if a glitch causes a break in the digital chain, the message or data is typically lost and the process must be repeated until a connection is completed, potentially hindering the mission in fast-moving tactical situations. Additionally, the current computers and infrastructure needed to manage multiple levels of U.S. classified and coalition information are too bulky for tactical use in the field and can take months or longer to deploy.”



“SHARE aims to create a system where information at multiple levels of security classification could be processed on a single handheld device using a resilient secure network that links devices without needing to route traffic through secure data centers,” DARPA said. “This capability would be able to operate over existing commercial and military networks while maintaining the security of sensitive information and safety of operations.” SHARE will focus on three areas: technologies and policy tools for distributed tactical security management on handheld devices; networking technologies based on resilient and secure architectures that work in challenging environments; and software that rapidly configures security across the network. The goal is to allow a mix of devices and security classification levels to transmit secure information over unsecure networks. [Source: Fifth Domain Cyber | Michael Peck | February 8, 2017 ++]

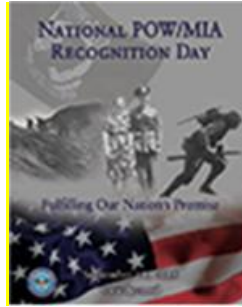
POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 01 thru 14 Feb 2017 | Ten

"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 3 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

- **Army Cpl. Melvin R. Hill**, 19, of Pomona, California, will be buried Feb. 4 in Alex, Oklahoma. In late November 1950, Hill's 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. After several days of intense fighting, approximately 1,300 members of the RCT were killed or captured in enemy territory. Hill was among those declared missing on Dec. 6, 1950. [Click to read more about Army Cpl. Hill.](#)

-- **Army Master Sgt. Ira V. Miss, Jr.**, 23, of Frederick, Maryland, will be buried Feb. 8 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Miss was a member of Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, operating in the area known as the Central Corridor in South Korea. Miss was reported missing in action on Feb. 13, 1951, after Chinese forces overran the roadblock he was manning. Click to [read more about Army Master Sgt. Miss.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Donald D. Noehren** was a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Service Company, 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. While conducting a delaying action against Chinese forces south from the Ch'ongch'on River to Kunu-ri, North Korea, his unit encountered heavy fire and continuous enemy mortars. Noehren was captured during the withdrawal and was declared missing in action as of Nov. 30, 1950. Interment services are pending. Click to [read more about Army Sgt. Noehren.](#)

World War II

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 7 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Storekeeper 2nd Class Glenn G. Cyriack** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Cyriack was one of 429 crewmen to be killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Click to read more about Navy Storekeeper Cyriack.](#)

-- **Fireman 1st Class Michael Galajdik** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Galajdik was one of 429 crewmen to be killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Click to read more about Fireman Galajdik.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class George T. George** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. George was one of 429 crewmen to be killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Click to read more about Navy Seaman George.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class William H. Kennedy** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Kennedy was one of 429 crewmen to be killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Click to read more about Navy Firemen Kennedy.](#)

-- **Navy Musician 1st Class Elliot D. Larsen** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Larsen was one of 429 crewmen to be killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Click to read more about Navy Musician Larsen.](#)

-- **Navy Gunner's Mate 1st Class Arthur C. Neuenschwander** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Neuenschwander was one of 429 crewmen to be killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Click to read more about Navy Gunners Mate Neuenschwander.](#)

-- **Fireman 3rd Class Robert N. Walkowiak** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Walkowiak was one of 429 crewmen to be killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Click to read more about Firemen Walkowiak.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | February 14, 2017 ++]

* VA *



VA Secretary Update 56 ► Dr. Shulkin First non-Vet to Fill Position

For the last 94 years, every permanent or acting head of the U.S. veterans benefits bureaucracy has served in the military. But that is expected change in coming days. President Donald Trump's pick for the next Veterans Affairs Secretary, Dr. David Shulkin, is poised to become the first non-veteran to assume that post, a tradition-breaking move that has produced surprisingly little controversy within the military community. The 57-year-old physician's father was an Army psychiatrist and his mother an Army psychotherapist. He grew up on a military base in Illinois. He has served as VA Under Secretary for Health since June 2015, and still sees veteran patients in an effort to stay in contact with the front lines of department services. He's earned praise from veterans groups as a reformer who knows the system

As was expected, he faced little opposition at his Senate confirmation hearing on 1 FEB. At the hearing he pledged to resist any plans to "privatize" veterans' services but also outlined a vision of a more robust, community-integrated system for the future. "If confirmed as secretary, I will seek major reform and a transformation of VA," he told senators at his confirmation hearing "There will be far greater accountability,

dramatically improved access, responsiveness and expanded care options, but the Department of Veterans Affairs will not be privatized under my watch.” Senators made it clear that the department still faces a difficult road ahead to regain public trust in the wake of the 2014 patient wait-times scandal, and that Shulkin will have to negotiate even more difficult choices on veterans’ care than in his current post. Republicans said those challenges include reforming a problematic culture ingrained in sections of the massive 365,000-employee bureaucracy. Democrats said those challenges include the White House.

Unlike his 26 predecessors, Shulkin never spent time in the ranks, a fact that leaves him with significant challenges as he prepares to oversee the 365,000-employee, \$177-billion department. “Every previous secretary, whether they were actually qualified or not, started the job from a position of trust because they were veterans,” said Bill Rausch, an Army veteran and executive director of Got Your 6. “The thought is that since they were vets, they’d understand veterans needs.” A membership poll released by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America showed some concern among members about his lack of military experience, with 40 percent of respondents saying they’d prefer a veteran for the post. More than half of those surveyed said having health care management experience was a critical resume line for the next secretary. “(The issue is) especially important for many, given the secretary’s role is also to serve as the nation’s leading advocate for veterans,” said Paul Rieckhoff, founder and CEO of IAVA. “He also serves as a role model to many veterans nationwide striving to succeed. It’s up to Dr. Shulkin to explain to folks not yet convinced why he is qualified to be the first non-veteran secretary in history.”

Former VA Secretary Bob McDonald, an Army vet who also served as CEO of Procter & Gamble, said in an interview with Military Times in December that his military experience was invaluable in leading a bureaucracy that currently serves nearly 9 million veterans. “Almost all veterans, whether in combat or not, have been in extreme situations,” he said. “What that does, it creates a camaraderie and bonding that you can’t duplicate. I tried for years to duplicate that camaraderie in business that you get automatically in the military.” Most of the biggest veterans groups didn’t note his lack of military experience in their endorsements of his nomination, though many did publicly encourage Trump to continue the tradition before Shulkin’s name was announced.

Officials at Association of the United States Navy (AUSN) were one of the few to publicly endorse a non-veteran for the post when they threw support in early December behind former House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-FL) for secretary. “To treat a veteran, you don’t have to be a veteran,” said retired Rear Adm. Garry Hall, executive director of the association. “It comes down to the compassion you have. “Being a veteran, that’s a great criteria. But it’s not the only selling point. We liked Miller because he knew the system and showed he wanted to make positive change, and we feel the same way about Shulkin.” Rausch said his group also backed Shulkin because they see him as an extraordinary candidate despite the lack of a military background. “His experience, his business acumen justifies this exception.”

For his part, Trump has not made any mention of the tradition-breaking nature of Shulkin’s nomination. He has praised the pick as “an incredibly gifted doctor who is using his elite talents for medicine to care for our heroes, and Americans can have faith he will get the job done right.” In his confirmation for the top VA health job in May 2015, Shulkin acknowledged his lack of military service but said his upbringing and family connections have given him a strong connection to the veterans’ community. He said the 2014 wait times scandal “was difficult for me to have watched from the sidelines” given his knowledge of the systems and the individuals being hurt. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | January 31, 2017 | ++]

The Independent Budget FY 2017 ► VSO Policy Priorities

The VFW, along with coauthors Disabled American Veterans and Paralyzed Veterans of America, released their 30th edition of the Independent Budget, which is a recommended budget guideline prepared by veterans for the Department of Veterans Affairs. The collaborative report was released 7 FEB with the support of 27 other veteran,

military, family and professional health organizations. The guideline addresses the following 5 critical issues for the new 115th Congress to address:

- Strengthen, Reform, and Sustain the VA Health Care System
- Resolve Budget Constraints that Negatively Impact Veterans Programs
- Realign and Modernize Capital Infrastructure
- Improvements Needed in the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) of Severely Injured Veterans
- Ensure that VA Provides High-Quality, Effective Programs and Services to Meet the Unique Needs of Women Veterans

Topping this list is the need to strengthen, reform and sustain the VA health care system. Said VFW National Commander Brian Duffy, “Choice Act funding expires this year, so it is imperative that Congress and the administration incorporate what works into the VA’s standard operating procedures as we move forward. Through contracted care, the Choice Act enabled the VA to serve more veterans in more areas than ever before, but it also highlighted weaknesses, such as chronic employee shortages, especially in clerical staffing, which forces doctors and nurses to file paperwork instead of seeing more patients. The Choice Act also proved that contracted care can complement but never replace the continuity and continuum of care that the VA provides to America’s veterans.”



Go to http://www.independentbudget.org/2018/FY18_ci.pdf to read or download this year’s 37 page Independent Budget. [Source: <http://www.independentbudget.org> | February 10, 2017 ++]

VA Whistleblowers Update 50 ► Poplar Bluff VAMC Doctor

A Wisconsin senator has accused the Department of Veterans of Affairs of firing a doctor for speaking out about alleged shortcomings at a Missouri VA hospital and then thwarting his efforts to get hired at another VA site. Republican Sen. Ron Johnson, who heads the Senate’s Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, wrote in a recent letter to the VA’s acting secretary that the department should “cease all retaliatory actions” against Dr. Dale Klein.

Klein was hired in 2015 to be a pain-management doctor at the John J. Pershing VA Medical Center in Poplar Bluff. Nearly four months into the job, he reported to the VA’s watchdog his worries that patients were selling their medications and that the VA wasn’t doing enough to halt it, according to the Office of Special Counsel. That independent, prosecutorial agency protects federal whistleblowers. Klein also voiced concerns to the VA’s Office of Inspector General that he was not being provided with a sterile area to perform injections and other interventional procedures, according to the OSC’s filings with the Merit Systems Protection Board. That panel arbitrates disputes between civil servants and federal supervisors. Klein, still during his job’s probationary period, later was reprimanded by a supervisor and in April 2016 was fired as recommended by a professional standards board that handles employment and promotion reviews, according to the OSC.

In its decision, the OSC claims, the board wrote that its decision wasn't based on Klein's patient care but instead "on the poor interactions (he) had with multiple employees and departments throughout the facility, his consistent acceleration of trivial matters through his chain of command, and an unwillingness to take direction" from superiors. At the OSC's urging, Klein's ouster has been repeatedly delayed, though he has been assigned to administrative duties unrelated to a physician's tasks. In his letter, Johnson wrote that last September, the Merit Systems Protection Board ordered the VA to assign Klein to a physician job "to the extent one becomes available within the local commuting area." But the VA hasn't allowed "to take the necessary steps to apply for clinical privileges at another VA facility," he wrote. "Medical professionals who treat our veterans deserve the VA's respect and support, not retaliation," Johnson wrote.

Johnson's staff provided his letter to The Associated Press but directed questions to Klein. Klein deferred to his Florida attorney, Natalie Khawam, who supplied the AP with filings in the case. A spokeswoman for the Poplar Bluff VA, which serves veterans in 29 counties in southeastern Missouri and northeastern Arkansas, referred questions to the department's headquarters. The national VA said in a statement that it will work with Johnson's office and the inspector general "to determine the facts of the situation and take appropriate action should any wrongdoing be uncovered."

The "VA is fully committed to correcting deficiencies in its processes and programs, and to ensuring fair treatment for whistleblowers who bring those deficiencies to light," the department wrote, noting that it strives for an inclusive, open culture among VA administrators and subordinates. "We need a work environment in which all participants - from front-line staff through lower-level supervisors to senior managers and top VA officials - feel safe sharing what they know, whether good news or bad, for the benefit of veterans and as good stewards of the taxpayers' money," the statement added. [Source: Associated Press | Jim Suhr | February 8, 2017 ++]

VA Information Technology ► Aging Systems Problem

The 115th Congress hauled in leadership from the Veterans Affairs Department to discuss what's become a very old problem for the agency tasked with taking care of those who served: information technology (IT). VA, with its history of failed large-scale IT projects that cost taxpayers billions of dollars, is again grappling with IT issues. This time, it isn't a single program bleeding taxpayer dollars that is troubling Congress. Rather, it's the agency's aging IT systems, two of which are more than 50 years old, according to testimony from Dave Powner, director of IT management issues for the Government Accountability Office. The age of some of VA's oldest systems and its disproportionate spending on legacy technology clearly bothered several members of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs.

"It appears 86 percent of the money in IT is used for maintaining systems," said Chairman Phil Roe, R-Tenn., who pressed VA Chief Information Officer Rob Thomas about what industry best practices for legacy spending were. Earlier, Powner had revealed that only about \$400 million of the over \$4 billion VA spends annually on IT is used to research and develop new systems. "Our numbers are out of kilter from industry; we'd like to see 60 percent on maintenance and 40 percent on development," Thomas said. "Right now, we're turning at 85 to 90 percent sustainment, and we have to shrink that." Thomas told the committee VA stood up a modernization effort last year aiming to decommission old systems, close data centers and attempt to make a dent in the agency's legacy spending. Thomas said that effort could help lead VA toward a buy-over-build approach to IT, which he himself supports.

Roe said the push for commercial-off-the-shelf solutions is encouraging, but tempered his enthusiasm. Congress has increased VA's appropriations for IT an average of 7 percent over the past five years with little to show for it. While the Defense Department opted to go commercial for its electronic health records system two years ago, VA still grapples with whether to build its own system or follow DOD. "My fear is that I've been sitting here eight years, listening to how it will get better, and I realize we have a lot of good, smart people working on this, and it's

obviously not easy,” Roe said. “But there are a lot of COTS products that can do scheduling and billing.” Roe also voiced disgust at VA’s failed \$5.3 million cloud migration contract. “That money could have paid for so many other things,” Roe said. “Like 70 entry-level nurses in Johnson, Tennessee.”

VA’s consolidation of data centers is generally behind the rest of government. Despite being the fourth largest IT spender among all agencies, VA has closed only 20 of its 356 data centers, ranking 19th out of the 24 agencies GAO studied. Powner said VA’s reported data center savings of \$15 million since fiscal 2011 are pennies compared to the \$2.8 billion other agencies saved collectively over the same period. VA also has yet to meet any metrics established by the Office of Management and Budget. To better keep tabs on progress at VA, Powner recommended the committee call VA personnel to Capitol Hill for quarterly updates. The committee agreed. “We need to have clear transparency on what progress is being made, and when the goal posts change,” said Powner, referring to schedule slippages that are apt to occur in large software projects.

Thomas said VA has many large IT decisions to make in the near future, beginning as soon as President Donald Trump’s nominee for VA secretary, David Shulkin, is confirmed. Chief will be determining whether VA will transition to a commercial electronic health records system, though when pressed, Thomas said he had no idea how long it might take. DOD is beginning pilots of its new EHR system, but its \$9 billion contract was awarded almost two years ago. Acquisitions of that scale take time, and VA would be reluctant to cut corners given the scrutiny it is under.

Ranking member Tim Walz (D-MN) said he wouldn’t suffer another decade of health records issues between VA and the Defense Department, and was disappointed to learn—from Powner—there still isn’t a seamless transition of health data for troops who transition to veterans. He called on Congress to demand interoperability between VA and DOD. “I have to tell you, I cannot talk to a veteran and justify why we’re going to spend countless dollars for two systems that do not communicate and do not improve veterans’ experience,” Walz said. “We need to demand interoperability for one system and be responsible. Ten more years of it, I can’t stand it.” If VA were to transition to a commercial EHR system, Thomas said the department would not necessarily have to use the same Leidos- and Cerner-developed system the Pentagon uses. Other commercial platforms should be interoperable, he said. [Source: Nextgov | Frank Konkel | February 7, 2017 ++]

Trump VA Listening Session ► Vet Organizations Not Invited

President Trump met with veterans advocates 7 FEB about ways his administration could reform the embattled Department of Veterans Affairs. Officials from the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans and the Veterans of Foreign Wars said they were not invited to the morning event and did not know about it until it was announced late the night before, as part of the White House’s routine schedule outline. Other prominent veterans groups were surprised Tuesday morning by news of the event, and unsure who was invited to take part in the discussion.

White House officials did not release any other details of the event, other than the meeting followed a similar listening session with President Trump and county sheriffs discussing local law enforcement issues. A press pool event to take pictures of the meeting was cancelled shortly before the veterans meeting began. But Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS) said White House officials told him the meeting was with health care executives, and that veterans groups would be invited for a similar session later.

In early January, at the same news conference where he announced Dr. David Shulkin as his pick to take over as the new VA secretary, Trump said he would set up an advisory panel to discuss department reforms, particularly in health care offerings. “We have some of the great hospitals of the world going to align themselves with us on the Veterans Administration, like the Cleveland Clinic, like the Mayo Clinic,” he said. “We’re gonna set up a group.

These are hospitals that have been the top of the line, the absolute top of the line. And they're going to get together with their great doctors ... and we're gonna straighten out the VA for our veterans.”

Several individuals who have advised Trump on military and veterans issues traveled with him to Florida on 6 FEB during a visit to U.S. Central Command headquarters, but it's unclear if they traveled back to the White House with him. Trump's actions so far on veterans issues have caused concerns among some advocates, particularly his comments that he would consider privatizing some VA services if it could mean a more efficient bureaucracy. But Shulkin, in his confirmation hearing last week, promised that he did not support wholesale privatization of department operations, but instead would favor community partnerships and streamlining of programs that reimburse veterans for outside care.

Trump officials met with veterans groups for a listening session early in the presidential transition process, but the president-elect did not meet with any of the major veterans group representatives. He did speak at both the American Legion's and VFW's annual conventions during the presidential campaign, and has repeatedly promised to fix the “broken” VA system. Moran said he hopes that Shulkin's confirmation -- expected in the next few weeks, since few senators have offered any objections -- will help bring the voices of veterans advocates into the conversation in the weeks to come. "The sooner he can visit with the veterans service organization, the better," he said. "Their input will be valuable, and they have influence with members of Congress. "We need to all work together." White House officials did not respond to requests for additional information on the event. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | February 7, 2017 ++]

VA Heart Care ► What You Should Take to Heart

Although VA does extremely well when it comes to prescribing evidence-based medications for patients hospitalized for heart attacks or heart failure, their cardiologists know that a large number of patients are not able to take these medications as prescribed. This is not a problem specific to the VA health care system; it is prevalent throughout the United States. Studies show that 20 to 30 percent of medication prescriptions are never filled by patients, and roughly 50 percent of medications prescribed for chronic disease are not taken by patients the way they are prescribed.

It is intuitive that a prescribed medication will work only when a patient is able to take it the way it was administered in large clinical studies leading to its FDA approval. The dynamics of these large clinical trials, and the patients enrolled in them, differ from what we see in everyday clinical practice. Therefore, both patients and health care providers need to constantly ask what they can do to ensure that maximum benefit is obtained from these medications. With February being American Heart Month, now is a good time to look at what patients can do to improve their chances of taking medications as prescribed. The tips below will apply to other types of medications, as well.

First. It is extremely important to know why you are taking a medication. Understanding the potential benefits of a prescribed medication will increase the chances that you will take it as prescribed. Most of our patients with heart disease are on many medications, which makes it even more important to understand what each medication does with regard to the body in general, and heart health in particular.

Second. It is equally important to know about the risks and possible side effects of any medication you are prescribed. Be proactive and ask your health care provider about this. And if you encounter any side effects from a medication, or you believe some of your symptoms are related to a prescribed medication, bring the issue to your provider's attention. These days, health care providers have several alternatives that could be used if a patient has a side effect from a particular medication, or a particular class of medications.

Third. Let your health care providers know if you are having difficulty refilling your prescriptions. This can be a real problem if you are on multiple medications, with each medication refill falling at a different time of the month. This can be synchronized by your health care team, including pharmacists. Other strategies, like pill boxes and reminders, can also be offered to help you take medications as prescribed.

Last but not least. You will likely need to take most heart medications on a lifelong basis. Therefore, the discussion about these medications (to include their benefits, risks, and side effects) should not be a one-time event. Periodic discussion with your health care provider about why you are taking a medication will not only increase your chances of being able to take a medication as prescribed, but also make you an equal partner in your health care!

[Source: Vantage Point | February 3, 2017 ++]

Agent Orange Guam Update 04 ► Guam AO Sprayer Fed Up With Lies

A motorized wheelchair helps retired U.S. Air Force Master Sgt LeRoy Foster get around his Lakeland home. Forty-five years ago he rode a much different machine around the island of Guam, spraying the dangerous herbicide known as Agent Orange. Since the end of the Vietnam War, the U.S. military has maintained that it did not use Agent Orange on the island of Guam. Because of this, veterans, who were stationed on Guam and never set foot on Vietnam, said they have been denied benefits for medical conditions linked to Agent Orange. “I’ve had it right up to here with the lies. I don’t want any more lies. You don’t want to pay me, don’t. I’ve been homeless. I’ve lived in the back of my car. Just don’t lie to me,” said Foster.



U.S. Air Force Master Sgt LeRoy Foster

Foster spent 21 years in the U.S. Air Force. When he arrived on Guam, he said he was selected to take care of the spraying, with the men in his unit joking with him that “he never wanted to have kids.” Foster would later find out, this was because the airman he was replacing had been diagnosed with testicular cancer. That airman would later die. “Here I am with this wand, and I’m spraying Agent Orange. I know I was soaked in it,” said Foster reflecting on his work. Part of Foster’s job was to spray up and down on the outside of fuel pipelines. He said after a while he noticed the herbicide had begun to eat into the metal of the line, that’s when he started to grasp just how toxic the chemicals were. Foster started spraying Agent Orange in September 1968. In October, his outbreaks of chloracne began. Marked by eruptions of blackheads, cysts, and pustules, chloracne has been linked to dioxins, including those connected with Agent Orange. Nobody told him much about Agent Orange. Nobody told him there was anything to worry about.

Eighteen years ago, he and his third wife had a daughter, Alicia Jean Foster. She was born with asthma and has suffered weight problems and emotional difficulties all of her life. Early in 2010, his daughter gave birth to her own daughter, Amelia Ann. The baby suffers from multiple birth defects. He firmly believes all the illnesses — his, his daughter’s, and his granddaughter’s — are linked to Agent Orange. “If they look at all the illnesses I had when I was

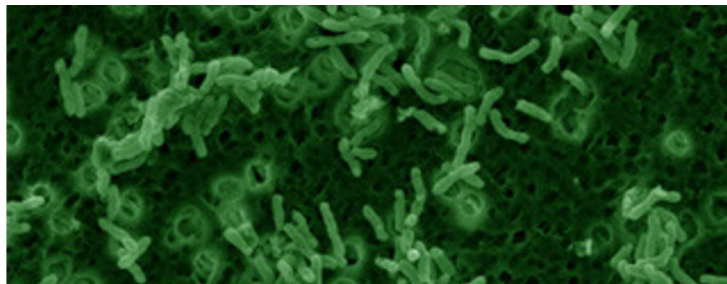
on active duty, if they look at those records and the VA records, they have a road map of a man, a veteran, who was exposed to Agent Orange, and it's progressed through my life. It's a road map! They can see it. I'd like to have somebody come up to my face and tell me I'm lying. I really would."

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. military sprayed more than 20 million gallons of Agent Orange to clear the jungle. The powerful herbicide kills plants but has since also been linked to birth defects, heart problems and cancer. Foster has 33 diseases, including cancer and heart problems. For the most part, the VA has denied claims from service members who did not set foot on Vietnam during the war for medical issues attributed to Agent Orange. In 2016, lawmakers from both parties in the U.S. House and Senate signed onto a bill that would have expanded the diseases associated with Agent Orange exposure and also include many that were not on Vietnam. The bill died when lawmakers balked at the cost. It is estimated it would cost at least \$1 billion over the next decade to expand Agent Orange care.

Earlier this year, U.S. Rep. Dennis Ross (R - FL) sent letters to the House Veteran Affairs Committee Chairman, and House Armed Services Committee Chairman asking for an investigation into the use of Agent Orange and the denial of benefits. There is also a push this year to pass the bill expanding care. However, it is unclear under current rules how members would fund the care (i.e. see video at <http://www.wftv.com/news/local/9-investigates-care-for-veterans-exposed-to-agent-orange/488219455>). [Source: WFTV 9 (ABC) | Christopher Heath | January 26, 2016 ++]

PTSD & TBI Update 03 ► Mice Study Inspires VA Treatment Study

Veterans Affairs researchers want to know if an over-the-counter probiotic given to colicky babies could help patients with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. VA staff in Denver have just begun to recruit 40 VA-eligible patients who have "mild TBI," or concussion, along with PTSD. Levels of inflammation, composition of gut bacteria, and quality of stress responses will be tracked, said Lisa Brenner, a psychologist and director of the VA Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research and Education Clinical Center in Denver. A recent study of mice inspired the VA's project. Scientists at the University of Colorado Boulder consistently recorded favorable outcomes in inflammation and anxiety after injecting mice with *Mycobacterium vaccae* bacteria, said Christopher Lowry of the university's Department of Integrative Physiology. His past work has linked inflammation with psychiatric disorders.



***Mycobacterium vaccae* showed promising results in mice.**

M. vaccae, discovered in Uganda in the 1970s, isn't ready for human trials. But inflammation-reducing properties have also been observed in the over-the-counter probiotic *Lactobacillus reuteri*, Lowry said. *L. reuteri* is sold for infants suspected of having a tummy ache and will be employed in the VA's experiment. Both lead researchers readily associate their ideas with the "hygiene hypothesis" — the notion that antibiotics and the urbanization of modern life have shifted our bodies' bacterial balance, and not all for the better. The mouse study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, was named one of the Brain & Behavior Research Foundation's

top 10 breakthroughs of 2016. It “showed we can prevent a PTSD-like syndrome in mice,” Lowry said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Amanda Miller | January 31, 2017 ++]

emPower Ankle ► VA Trial Results

Last October Hines VA Medical Center was selected to be the first VA hospital in the country to fit the new emPOWER ankle on Veterans with amputations. Seven Veterans were invited to trial the new ankle based on activity level and experience with prior ankle designs. EmPOWER is the next generation design of the BIOM ankle designed by Dr. Hugh Herr, Director and Principal Investigator of the Biomechatronics Group of MIT media laboratory. The normalized walking gait provided by the powered ankle has shown to reduce joint forces on the contralateral side that lead to pain and osteoarthritis. The ankle also provides real time control of full ankle movement for improved safety and stability across any surface.

The response from the Veterans was overwhelming and positive. *“This make it so much easier for me getting around...this bionic ankle really feels great. I am thankful for the VA giving me this opportunity.* Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital is pushing the boundaries of technology for our Veterans. You can learn more in the three-minute video at <https://www.facebook.com/HinesVAHospital/videos/1213631878676211> where Veterans talk about their experience with the ankle and how it is making life easier for them. As one of the technicians explains, “Hine is making this available to multiple patients at the highest level of technology. [Source: VAntage Point | Rick Fox | February 3, 2017 ++]

VA Cemeteries Update 16 ► NCA Ranked 1st in Customer Satisfaction

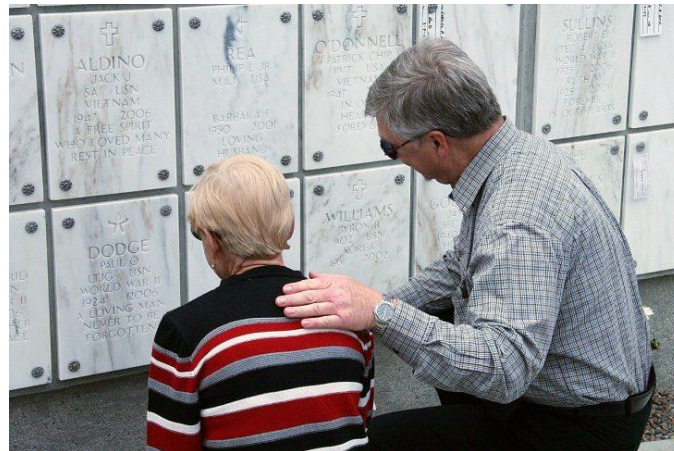
For the sixth consecutive time, the Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration (NCA) was ranked first in customer satisfaction among the nation’s top corporations and federal agencies in an independent survey conducted by the CFI Group utilizing the science of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI). “NCA continues to embody our MyVA principles focusing on a culture of continuous performance improvement so that families trust us during important times of need,” said Interim Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Snyder. “We are simplifying operations and providing Veterans quality care and services. We want them to view VA as MyVA; a world-class, customer-focused, Veteran-centered service organization.”

The ACSI is the only national, cross-industry measure of satisfaction with the quality of goods and services available in the United States. Beginning in 1999, the federal government began using the ACSI methodology to measure citizen satisfaction with its agencies. For 2016, NCA achieved a customer satisfaction index of 96, currently the highest ACSI score in either the private or public sector. The score is nearly 32 points above the 64 point average for federal agencies. NCA participates in the ACSI every three years, previously in 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010 and 2013. This is the sixth time NCA participated and the sixth consecutive time NCA received the top rating among participating organizations. The ACSI survey polled the next-of-kin or other people who arranged for the interment of a loved one in a VA national cemetery, six months to one year prior to the survey’s commencement.

NCA received ratings in the categories of: customer service, respectfulness of the service and interment and maintenance of the national cemetery, achieving an aggregate score of 96 out of a possible 100 points, indicating respondents are extremely pleased with their experience at VA national cemeteries and with its employees. The score for customer service was the highest received for this measure since the survey’s inception. Respondents also reported particularly high levels of satisfaction around the respectfulness of the service and interment and the

maintenance of the national cemetery. In addition, respondents were willing to recommend NCA's services to others.

According to Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Ronald E. Walters, NCA is continually seeking to improve customer services to Veterans. "NCA has a proud tradition as an industry leader in both the public and private sectors," Walters said. "These results demonstrate NCA's continued commitment to providing dignified burials and lasting memorialization for Veterans and their family members." For a complete listing of ACSI's results, visit: <http://www.theacsi.org/acsi-benchmarks-for-u-s-federal-government-2016> .



About NCA

Burial in a VA national cemetery is open to all members of the armed forces and Veterans who have met minimum active duty service requirements, as applicable, and were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. Members of the reserve components of the armed forces who die while on active duty or who die while on training duty under certain circumstances are also eligible for burial, as are servicemembers and former servicemembers who were eligible for retired pay at the time of their death. A Veteran's spouse, widow or widower, minor children, and, under certain conditions, unmarried adult children with disabilities, may also be eligible for burial. Eligible spouses and children may be buried even if they predecease the Veteran. VA provides the gravesite, grave liner, opening and closing of the grave, government headstone or marker, U.S. burial flag, Presidential Memorial Certificate and perpetual care of the gravesite at no cost to the family.

VA operates 135 national cemeteries and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites in 40 states and Puerto Rico. More than 4 million Americans, including Veterans of every war and conflict, are buried in VA's national cemeteries. VA also provides funding to establish, expand, improve, and maintain 105 Veterans cemeteries in 47 states and territories including tribal trust lands, Guam, and Saipan. For Veterans not buried in a VA national cemetery, VA provides headstones, markers or medallions to commemorate their service. In 2016, VA honored more than 345,000 Veterans and their loved ones with memorial benefits in national, state, tribal and private cemeteries.

Information on VA burial benefits is available from local VA national cemetery offices, from the Internet at www.cem.va.gov, or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 800-827-1000. To make burial arrangements at any open VA national cemetery at the time of need, call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117.

[Source: VA News Release | February 3, 2017 ++]

VA Pharmacy Update 07 ► Copay Reduction

Effective February 27, 2017, the Department of Veterans Affairs will amend its regulations concerning copayments for outpatient medications used to treat non-service connected conditions. This change aligns with VA's goals to reduce out-of-pocket costs, encourage greater adherence to prescribed outpatient medications and reduce the risk of fragmented care that results when Veterans use multiple pharmacies fill prescription.

Under the current regulations, medication copay amounts are based on priority groups and established using a formula based on the medication components of the Medical Consumer Price Index formula. VA estimates that copayment amounts would increase three times over the next six years if the current regulations are left unchanged. The revised rulemaking will eliminate future rate increases and the current formula used to calculate medication copays. In addition, Veterans will see a decrease in the current copayment cap of \$960 to \$700 per year.

Effective February 27th, 2017 the copayment regulations and associated cost for Veterans filling outpatient medications prescribed to treat non-service connected conditions will change, establishing three classes of outpatient medications tiers. Each tier will have a fixed copayment amounts and will only vary depending upon the class of outpatient medication in the tier.

- Tier 1- Preferred Generics will cost \$5 for a 30-day or less supply.
- Tier 2 Non-Preferred Generics will cost \$8 for a 30-day or less supply.
- Tier 3- Brand Name -\$11 for a 30-day or less supply.

Pay by check, money order, or credit card payable to "VA." Include Account Number. Please do not send in requests for prescription refills with your payment. If you do, your prescription refill will be delayed. You may provide payment via the following methods:

- Online: <https://pay.gov>
- By mail: PO Box 530269 Atlanta, GA 30353-0263
- In person: A VA Medical Center By Phone: 1-888-827-4817.

Go to <http://www.centraliowa.va.gov/docs/MedicationCopaymentBrochure.pdf> for a full brochure and more information or call 1-877-222-VETS (8387). [Source: VA Central Iowa Health Care System | February 6, 2017 ++]

Department of Veterans Affairs

Medication Copayments

VA charges a copayment for each 30 day or less supply of medication provided on an outpatient basis for the treatment of a non-service connected condition.



Effective early 2017, copay amounts are:

Priority Group	Outpatient Medication Tier	Copayment amount		
		1-30 day supply	31-60 day supply	61-90 day supply
2-8	Tier 1 (Preferred Generics)	\$5	\$10	\$15
	Tier 2 (Non-Preferred Generics and some DTCs)	\$8	\$16	\$24
	Tier 3 (Brand Name)	\$11	\$22	\$33
\$700 Medication Copayment Cap				

Copayments stop each calendar year for Priority Groups 2-8 once a \$700 cap is reached.

These changes apply to:

- Veterans without a service-connected condition, or
- Veterans with a disability rated less than 50%
 - » who are receiving outpatient treatment for a non-service connected condition, and
 - » whose annual income exceeds the limit set by law.

Note: Medication copayments do not apply to former Prisoners of War, catastrophically disabled Veterans, or those covered by other exceptions as set by law.

For more information call us at: 1-877-222-VETS (8387), or visit our website at: <http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits>



VA Appointments Update 17 ► VAR APP

Veterans Administration's new Veterans Appointment Request app helps veterans to schedule appointments with the VA care team from the convenience of their mobile phone, computer, tablet or any device with an internet connection. Veterans can use VAR to:

- Schedule primary care appointments
- Request dates and times for primary care and mental health appointments
- See details for all pending, confirmed and upcoming appointments (both those requested through the app or through a VA scheduler), including date, time, clinic, care team and reason for visit
- Send up to two messages to a VA scheduler about requested and booked appointments
- Get email notifications about appointment updates
- Cancel an appointment if you are unable to make it to that appointment

To use VAR, you must be a VA patient and have a DS Logon account. There is no cost to register. Visit <https://mobile.va.gov/dslogon> to learn more about registering. If you are having trouble you can call the help desk at (877) 470-5947 weekdays from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. The Veteran Appointment Request (VAR) App is available to Veterans at select locations. To see if it is available at your VA facility refer to <https://mobile.va.gov/app/veteran-appointment-request>. [Source: <https://mobile.va.gov/appstore> | February 9, 2017 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 01 thru 14 FEB 2017



Little Rock, AR — Three VA employees at the John L. McClellan Memorial Veterans Hospital in Little Rock have been indicted for conspiring to steal prescription medications, including opioids, from the VA and conspiring to distribute those drugs. Satishkumar Patel, 44, Alisha Pagan, 3, and Nikita Neal, 42, are charged with eight counts stemming from a scheme to order oxycodone, hydrocodone, Viagra, Cialis, and promethazine syrup with codeine and divert them from the VA for street distribution. This investigation began in June 2016, when VAOIG received a report that large amounts of unaccounted for prescription medications were charged to VA accounts. The VAOIG's investigation revealed that Patel, a pharmacy technician, used his VA access to a medical supplier's web portal to order and divert 4,000 oxycodone pills, 3,300 hydrocodone pills, 308 ounces of promethazine with codeine syrup, and more than 14,000 Viagra and Cialis pills, at a cost to the VA of approximately \$77,700 dollars, with a street value of more than \$160,000. It is alleged that Patel falsified payment invoices to avoid detection.

During the course of the investigation, which included controlled deliveries of oxycodone at the direction of law enforcement, VAOIG and DEA determined that Patel was distributing the medications to pharmacy technician Pagan, who in turn distributed a portion of the drugs to Neal, a pharmacy technician student trainee. All three defendants are charged in a conspiracy to steal the medication, as well as conspiracies to distribute oxycodone and hydrocodone. Patel is also charged in four counts of possession with intent to deliver oxycodone, and Pagan is charged with one count of possession with intent to deliver oxycodone. Conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute oxycodone and hydrocodone, and possession with intent to distribute oxycodone and hydrocodone is punishable by not more than 20 years' incarceration in the Bureau of Prisons, with a possible fine of up to

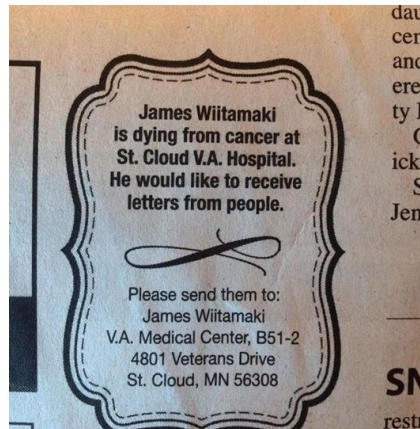
\$1,000,000, and not less than 3 years supervised release. Conspiracy to steal government property is punishable by not more than five years' incarceration in the Bureau of Prisons, with a possible fine of up to \$250,000, and not more than three years supervised release. An indictment contains only allegations. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. [Source: DoJ U.S. Attorney's Office | Eastern District of Arkansas | February 8, 2017 ++]

VAMC St. Cloud MN Update 02 ► Dying Vet Requests Letters

A patient at the VA Medical Center in St. Cloud, Minnesota took out a newspaper ad asking people to send him letters during his last days. The ad read: "James Wiitamaki is dying from cancer at the St. Cloud VA Hospital. He would like to receive letters from people." His great-niece found the posting and shared it on Facebook, saying that if anyone has a few minutes to send a card, she thinks he would be more than ecstatic to receive it. The VA Medical Center confirmed James Wiitamaki is a patient in their community living center. If you would like to send James a letter, here is the correct address:

James Wiitamaki
VA Medical Center, B51-2
4801 Veterans Drive
St. Cloud, MN 56303 vice 56308

[Source: KMSP (FOX-9) | February 7, 2017 ++]



* Vets *



NDA 2017 Update 27 ► **Impact on Retiree Community**

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDA) of 2017 (signed by President Obama on Dec. 23) has a number of provisions that impact the military's retired community. The following are brief summaries of the provisions; however, more details will follow as DOD agencies translate the law into policies and procedures:

- TRICARE Standard and TRICARE Extra plans will be terminated on Jan. 1, 2018. Retired members under these two plans and who intend to continue with TRICARE will need to choose between TRICARE Select or TRICARE Prime. By Jan. 1, 2018, the Secretary of Defense will establish a cost sharing, self-managed and preferred-provider network option called TRICARE Select. Eligible beneficiaries will not have restrictions on their choice of health care providers. Monitor TRICARE's website for coming details at www.tricare.mil/Plans.
- Hearing aids may be sold at cost to dependents of retired service members.
- TRICARE-eligible individuals are eligible to be covered under the Federal Employees Dental Program.
- TRICARE-eligible individuals are eligible to be covered under the Federal Employees Vision Insurance Program.
- The Defense Secretary shall authorize veterans or civilians to be evaluated and treated at a military treatment facility.
- The Defense Secretary shall establish an advisory committee for each military treatment facility. The members cannot be on active duty or a federal employee; they will be considered volunteers. The committee will advise the facility commander or director on administration and beneficiary care at the facility.
- Retired members placed on the temporary disability retired list (TDRL) on or after Jan. 1, 2017, will remain on the list for a maximum of three years instead of the current five years. Soldiers already on the TDRL will not be affected.
- After a divorce, dissolution, annulment, or legal separation and subsequent division of retired pay prior to retirement, retired pay will be calculated based on the service at the time of the court order rather than at retirement.
- The same survivor benefit will now be paid to survivors of Service members who die in the line of duty on active duty and inactive duty for training (IADT). Survivors of members who previously died on IADT will have their annuity recalculated under the same formula used for active duty death SBP. No annuity under this law will be payable prior to Dec. 23, 2016.
- When VA disability compensation offsets a member's retired pay to the point that the member's Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) premiums cannot be paid from retired pay, the SBP premiums can now be paid from the member's Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC). Many members who receive CRSC will no longer have to pay premiums directly to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) or coordinate for the VA to pay DFAS a portion of the member's disability compensation.
- The Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance, which reduces the offset of SBP by VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, has been extended at the current monthly payment amount until May 31, 2018, and will end June 1, 2018, if not extended by Congress.
- The Defense Secretary must make an independent assessment of military SBP and provide Congress a report by Dec. 23, 2017. The report must: cover the interaction of SBP with other federal programs; compare SBP benefits to those available to government and private employees; review the effectiveness of the program to include benefits for deaths on active duty and IADT; and examine the feasibility of replacing SBP with a government subsidy for an alternate insurance product.

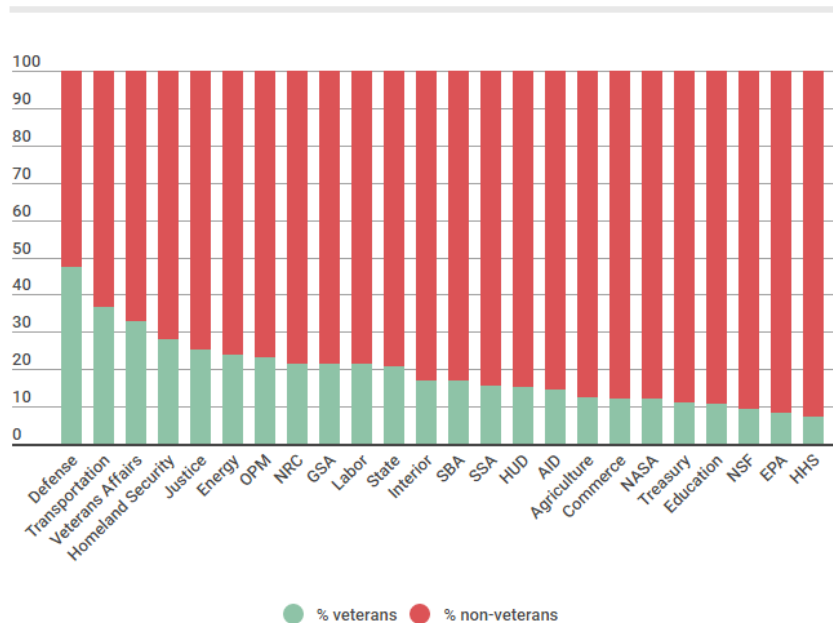
- The Defense Secretary must develop and implement a comprehensive plan to reduce reliance on appropriated funding for the Defense Commissary Agency without reducing benefits to patrons or revenue provided by the Services' exchange operations to the morale, welfare and recreation fund.
- The Military Star Card provided by the Army and Air Force Exchange Service will be accepted by Defense Commissary Agency stores.
- Debt to the government through no fault of the member (includes retired members) due to overpayment of pay or allowances and settlement of member's account will not be collected unless the recovery started within 10 years of when the debt was incurred.
- After Dec. 23, 2016, retired military members may only be appointed to federal civil service positions in the Department of Defense during the 180 days immediately after retirement if the minimum rate of basic pay for the position has been increased under 5 U.S.C. 5305 or a waiver has been approved. The clause that permitted appointments during "a state of national emergency" has been eliminated from the law.

Go to <http://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20161128/CRPT-114HRPT-S2943.pdf> to review the entire NDAA for 2017. [Source: Army Echoes | Feb-May 2017 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 212 ► Federal Employee Vet Population

Overall, 30.9 percent of all federal employees in fiscal 2015 were veterans, according to the Office of Personnel Management, potentially making veterans one of the largest groups affected by the federal employee hiring freeze. As indicated below the proportion of veterans who make up the workforce at each department and federal agency varies widely:

Percent of federal agency workforce who are veterans



[Source: MilitaryTimes | Ken Chamberlain | January 31, 2017 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 213 ► Heavy Duty Trucking

The Veterans Administration has granted accreditation to U.S. Xpress as part of the Post 9/11 GI Bill Apprenticeship Program that allows eligible veterans to receive educational benefits from the VA while training as a driver or technician for the company. Veterans who enter the program can receive their tax-free educational benefits as an income supplement on top of their U.S. Xpress salary. These benefits can be upwards of \$25,700, depending on years of service. Typically a truck driver coming to U.S. Xpress can earn between \$50,000 and \$70,000 depending on which driving opportunity he or she qualifies for, according to the company. U.S. Xpress said that with the VA benefits, veterans in the training program can now earn up to \$82,000 in their first year with the company.

“At U.S. Xpress, we value the strong work ethic and leadership experience veterans can bring to our company,” said Eric Fuller, president and chief operating officer of U.S. Xpress. “Beyond that, veterans have a sense of productivity, accountability and a ‘can-do’ attitude that will serve them well in the trucking industry, which is why we actively look to hire veterans in every aspect of our company.” Upon enrolling in the Post 9/11 GI Bill Apprenticeship Program, veterans are allowed to draw their GI Bill benefits for up to 24 months, giving them additional compensation and financial stability as they transition from military to civilian life. The amount each veteran is entitled to receive depends upon the length of service and service type (Active Duty, National Guard or Reserve). After completing the Apprenticeship Program, veterans will become a certified Heavy Duty Truck Driver or Diesel Technician for U.S. Xpress.

U.S. Xpress launched its Military Recruitment Initiative in July 2016 as part of the company’s commitment to providing veterans with opportunities to join the trucking industry. “Our veterans have always played an essential role in keeping our country strong, and now, we want veterans to put their skills to work as a U.S. Xpress truck driver and serve our country in a new way – one that will help keep the transportation industry moving forward and our economy strong,” said Fuller. “I truly believe our new apprenticeship program will help make this possible by giving veterans added financial stability as they transition out of the military and into a new career path as a professional truck driver or diesel technician at U.S. Xpress.”

[Source: <http://www.truckinginfo.com/news/story/2017/02/u-s-xpress-expands-military-recruitment-initiative.aspx> | February 2017 ++]

Vet Charity Watch Update 63 ► BBB Clears Wounded Warrior Project

After months of investigation, the Better Business Bureau has cleared the Wounded Warrior Project, one of the nation’s largest veterans charities, of “lavish spending,” and gave the nonprofit organization its seal of approval. The bureau’s Wise Giving Alliance report found that Warrior Project spending has been “consistent with its programs and missions.” Last March, the Wounded Warrior Project fired its top administrators amid news reports that the charity was spending millions in donations intended for veterans on a swanky convention in a five-star hotel along with other parties and employee perks and high salaries. At the time, two of the organization’s leaders, who were let go, were making \$473,015 and \$369,030, respectively, in 2013, the last year for which tax documents are readily available.

The Better Business Bureau’s Wise Giving Alliance suspended the charity’s seal designation, and donations fell off with donors uncertain about how their money would be spent. About 85 employees were laid off in September from the organization, which now has 500 employees. One source of contention was over media reports that said the organization had spent \$3 million on that “all-hands” Colorado conference, but Wounded Warrior said last March that the expense was less than \$1 million. Likewise, the Better Business Bureau said its review found that the cost

was less than \$1 million. The investigations found that based on the 415 staff members, the cost was about \$440 per day per employee for the five-day conference, including hotel rooms, food, travel and conference space, according to Stars and Stripes, which first reported the news.

Retired Army Lt. Gen. Michael S. Linnington, who took over the Wounded Warrior Project in July, said in an emailed statement that he is “pleased to see the Better Business Bureau’s report validating our impact and commitment.” In a previous interview, he said he understood how the Colorado conference appeared from the outside. The Wounded Warrior Project no longer holds such events and already has increased the scrutiny on spending for travel and all expenses, he said, adding that he would be paid less than those before him, with his salary at \$280,000. “This year the non-profit WWP will hit a milestone by providing meaningful resources to our 100,000th wounded warrior,” he wrote. “And we are humbled and honored to provide continued support to these warriors and their families for many years to come.” [Source: The Washington Post | Emily Wax-Thibodeaux | February 8, 2017 ++]

Honor Flight Update 12 ► 1 MAY Trip Will Include 650 Vets

Nebraska Vietnam veterans will make up the largest group flying to Washington D.C. to see their memorial on May 1st. Patriotic Productions are putting together a final flight called “The Final Mission” which encompasses 650 Vietnam combat veterans, 4 planes, 15 busses among other items. “My three tours were not exactly the better days of my life,” said Vietnam veteran Ken Walde. Walde served three tours in Vietnam in the Navy and earned three bronze stars. He worked on an aircraft carrier but doesn’t like to talk about that experience. “Don’t ask me what I had to do to get those bronze star medals. When I was in it was kill or be killed-I’m still here,” said Walde. Walde’s been wanting to go on an honor flight to see the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall for a while now but on 1 FEB he was surprised found out he’s going to be one of 650 veterans flying to DC. “They are treated like a King, I’ve never been treated like a King,” said Walde.



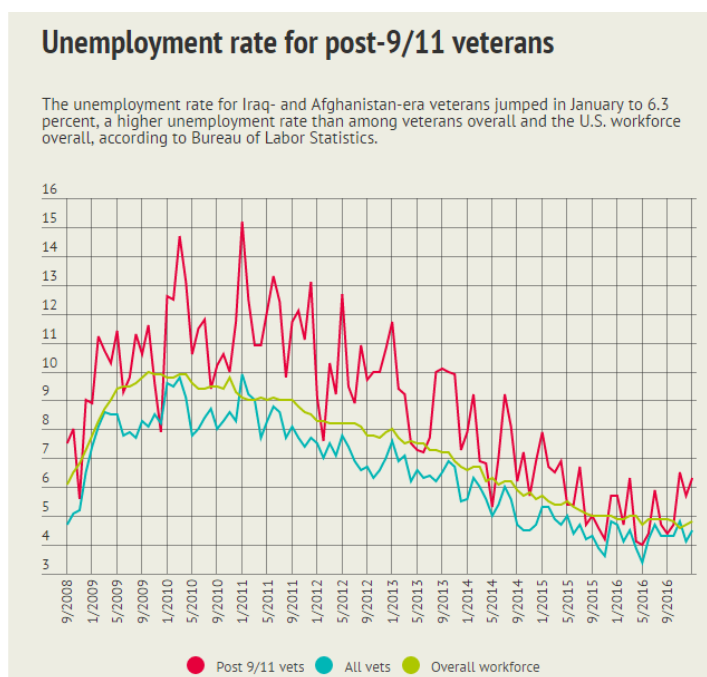
Vietnam Vet Ken Walde

This is the last honor flight from Patriotic Productions who have organized 11 flights from Nebraska to DC over the years and they are going out with a statement. “It’s the largest group of Vietnam veterans from one state to ever visit the wall in DC,” said Bill Williams, owner of Patriotic Productions. When veterans land in DC, they tour the memorials and when they arrive back in Nebraska they are welcomed with thousands of cheering “Most of them receive no homecoming or if they did it was negative so this is such a positive experience with 5-6 thousand people

cheering for them,” said Williams. It’s this experience Walde said he hopes will erase the bad memories of Vietnam. “Just to say I’m excited isn’t enough, I’m ready to go,” said Williams. This entire endeavor costs more than \$600,000 and so far two planes are paid for. Organizers are continuing to raise money for the other two. [Source: KMTV 3 Omaha | Nick Starling | February 1, 2017++]

Vet Unemployment Update 11 ► Jump to 6.3% in JAN

The unemployment rate for the youngest generation of veterans jumped to 6.3 percent in January, the fourth time in the last seven months that group’s figure has been substantially higher than the overall veteran rate. The figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which reflect the last month of President Barack Obama’s time in office, represent about 211,000 Iraq and Afghanistan era veterans looking for work. That’s almost 46 percent of the total of all U.S. veterans filing for unemployment benefits in January. But employment experts have cautioned that employment estimates for the subset of younger veterans can be prone to more fluctuation than other calculations by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) analysts, because of smaller sample sizes.



In December, the Iraq and Afghanistan era veterans rate was 5.7 percent. In September, it was even lower, at 4.4 percent. Still, the higher number of unemployed younger veterans does raise concerns of new struggles for that group, because most monthly estimates for the last two years have been at or below the national unemployment rate. For all veterans, the January unemployment rate was 4.5 percent, up slightly from the month before but under 5 percent for the 20th consecutive month. The national unemployment rate was 4.8 percent, up from 4.7 percent in December. BLS officials estimate that nearly 9.8 million veterans are in the U.S. workforce today, with roughly 32 percent of them having served in the military after 2001 [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | February 3, 2017++]

Military UCX Update 01 ► Unemployment Compensation Entitlement

If you are a servicemember separating from active duty you may qualify for unemployment compensation if you are unable to find a new job. In Fiscal Year 2016, the Army paid just over \$170 million into this program which is the lowest it's paid in 13 years. The Unemployment Compensation for Ex-service members (UCX) program provides benefits for eligible ex-military personnel. The program is administered by the States as agents of the Federal government. You are eligible if:

- You were on active duty with a branch of the U.S. military, you may be entitled to benefits based on that service.
- You must have been separated under honorable conditions.
- There is no payroll deduction from your wages for unemployment insurance protection. Benefits are paid for by the various branches of the military.

Receiving separation pay may also influence your receipt of unemployment compensation. (Retirees will almost certainly receive a lesser amount [or no amount] since the weekly amount of retirement pay is usually "offset" against the amount of unemployment compensation.) Your state employment office handles unemployment compensation. Benefits vary from state to state. Because of this, only the office where you apply will be able to tell you the amount and duration of your entitlement. The nearest state employment office is listed in your local telephone directory.

To receive unemployment compensation, you must apply. The best time to do that is when you visit the Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) at the state employment services office for assistance in finding a new job. To apply for unemployment compensation, you must bring your Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD Form 214), your Social Security Card and your civilian and military job history or resume. For more information about unemployment compensation, visit:

- www.ows.doleta.gov.
- http://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Home/Benefit_Library/Federal_Benefits_Page/Unemployment_Compensation.html?serv=148

[Source: Military.com | February 2013 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure | Laurel Bay ► Possible Contamination Concerns

New Navy guidance to medical providers treating those who've lived in the Laurel Bay housing area in South Carolina expands the concern over potential exposure to cancer-causing agents, now addressing adult cancer risks as well as pediatric ones. This military housing complex in Beaufort County primarily houses military personnel with families that are stationed at the nearby military bases: MCAS Beaufort, MCRD Parris Island, and USNH Beaufort. Melany Stawncyj, a Marine wife who once lived in the area near Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort and whose child has undergone cancer treatments, said the guidance doesn't go far enough to allay families' concerns. She strongly disagreed with a portion of the guidance that discourages testing solely to allay patient (or parent) concerns, calling such a recommendation "unethical and wrong."

A YouTube video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEoghEIE5_A&t=942s) posted by former Laurel Bay resident Marine wife Amanda Whatley, whose daughter was diagnosed with cancer, has been viewed more than 49,000 times. She urged other families who have lived there to be aware of early symptoms of leukemia, and to seek medical attention quickly. Since the video was posted 7 JAN, Whatley and fellow Marine wife Stawncyj have been contacted by other previous Laurel Bay families with cancer diagnoses, and are now aware of 13 children, 14 teachers and 20 other adults, Stawncyj sai. After the video was posted, NMCPHC officials sent guidance for

medical providers worldwide to help them address the concerns of parents who live at – or previously lived at – Laurel Bay. A few days later, they sent guidance related to adult patients, noting that “concern has now spread to include adult cancers as potentially being caused by alleged environment exposures” at Laurel Bay. “Medical providers are being asked for advice by concerned patients and their families.”

An investigation into potential environmental exposures has been underway with the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center since June 2015, months after the Whatley and Stawnyczyj families first contacted officials at Beaufort MCAS regarding the possible contamination related to aging underground oil storage tanks, and the possible link to childhood cancer. Base officials have said no reliable information to date establishes that any conditions at Laurel Bay cause health problems, and note that the NMCPHC study is expected to be finished this spring. They've held town hall meetings and established a website to provide information. It can be accessed at <http://www.beaufort.marines.mil/Resources/Laurel-Bay-Health-Study>.

The center “routinely” develops and distributes guidance to providers who may encounter patients that have specific environmental-exposure-related health concerns,” according to Navy Capt. Alan Philippi, head of the occupational and environmental medicine department at NMCPHC. Physicians in that department at the NMCPHC are key liaison between the local [medical] providers and public health scientists who are conducting the health risk assessments at those sites of concern. “Patients with suspected low-dose exposures to chemicals of concern should be evaluated as any other patient,” states the guidance for both adult and child patients, from the NMCPHC. The guidance doesn’t recommend blood, urine, imaging or invasive testing for patients who are otherwise healthy and have normal comprehensive examinations, stating that any testing performed “solely to allay patient (or parent) concerns is generally unhelpful and therefore not typically recommended.”

Stawnyczyj disagrees with that line of thought. “If we are being taken seriously, then military officials would not stand in the way of getting medical screenings and blood work done for families possibly affected,” she said. “It has been our mission from the start to reach out to military families worldwide and inform them of the past and current oil tank investigations, as well as spread vigilant awareness on symptoms or varied warning signs of cancer. ... It is unethical and wrong to thwart a family’s efforts in seeking reassurance through medical testing. These medical screening and tests can potentially save lives because it can detect the slightest imbalance. “Too often, parents don’t recognize the symptoms and it can be mistaken for common illnesses and discomfort,” she said, adding that the later the child is diagnosed, the less the chances are of survival. “I believe most parents would rather find out their child is completely healthy than to find out later that they had the resource to detect cancer sooner,” she added.

As the NMCPHC guidance states, “There is no test that can definitively determine if a patient will develop cancer. ... In addition, testing without evidence of disease is likely to result in false positives, leading to further unnecessary and potentially harmful tests and procedures.” Medical providers are advised that the physical examination of patients concerned about possible exposure should focus on establishing a baseline health assessment for, at minimum, the thyroid, lymph nodes, heart, lung and abdomen. If the findings indicate that further testing is needed, the medical provider should consult with a toxicologist, hematologist-oncologist or other expert for specific guidance for further evaluation, the guidance states. Medical providers should get an accurate patient history, including current symptoms and review of symptoms, according to the guidance. A thorough occupational, social and medical history “should carefully explore possible sources of exposure.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | February 2, 2017 ++]

Vet Ad Targets Trump ► VoteVets Personal Message

In the months since the election, the ad rates for MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” have more than doubled. The reason: President Donald Trump is a fan. If you want his attention, you have to pay for it. Which means VoteVets, a veterans political action committee, must’ve dished out a lot of dough to let the new president know that they do not

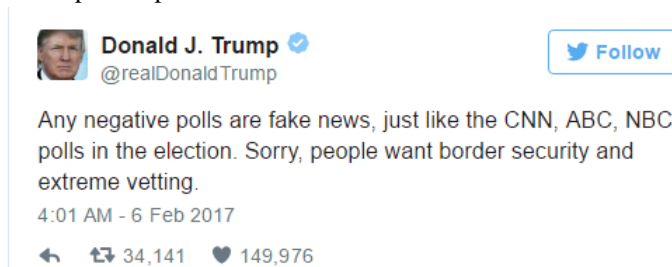
approve of him. On the morning of 6 FEB, they debuted a personal message for President Donald Trump on the show. The 30-second spot (https://youtu.be/e3qG5u1A_98) featured an Afghanistan war veteran who lost his leg in combat doing weighted squats in his garage. The ad starts with the narrator saying, “President Trump, I hear you watch the morning shows.”

But the ad is intended to do more than simply accuse the president of being a sissy. On its website (<http://www.votevets.org/about>) VoteVets describes itself as the “largest progressive group of veterans in America.” The PAC’s stated mission is “to elect veterans to public office; hold public officials accountable for their words and actions that impact America’s 21st century service members, Veterans, and their families; and fully support our men and women in uniform.” Of all the politicians VoteVets is currently endorsing, zero are Republicans (although, the group claims to endorse politicians on both sides of the aisle). So it’s not all that surprising what comes next in the ad. As the veteran works out, he speaks in a voiceover:

“Here’s what I do every morning. Look, you lost the popular vote. You’re having trouble drawing a crowd, and your approval rating keeps sinking. But kicking thousands of my fellow veterans off their health insurance by killing the Affordable Care Act and banning Muslims won’t help. That’s not the America I sacrificed for. You want to be a legitimate president, sir? Then act like one,” said the unnamed veteran.

The final seconds of the video reveal exactly what the narrator means by “sacrificed.” He’s an amputee. According to a statement released by VoteVets following the ad’s debut, he lost his leg in combat while serving Afghanistan. If that is indeed the case, the narrator would likely not be impacted by the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, because he’d be receiving care for his service-connected injury from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Same goes for anyone else enrolled in the VA. The “thousands” of veterans he is referring to are those who either don’t qualify for VA benefits (because of, say, a dishonorable discharge or not enough time in service) or simply choose not to seek treatment from the VA. The video concludes with one more zinger, the proverbial mic drop. “You want to be a legitimate president, sir?” asks the narrator. “Then act like one.”

VoteVets has already chalked up the ad as a success. In the statement, the group draws a direct connection between the ad and the below tweet, which Trump wrote “just three minutes after it aired,” and which the PAC points to as evidence that the ad put the president on the defensive.



[Source: Task & Purpose | Adam Linehan | February 7, 2017 ++]

Vet Car Donation ► Benefits of Giving to a Vet Organization

Veterans buying a new car have many choices when it comes to deciding what to do with the old one. Is it better to trade it in, sell it privately or donate it? It turns out that donating an old car to a worthy Veterans’ service organization can reap many benefits. In fact, with the help of websites like www.CharityWatch.org and www.CharityNavigator.org, you can identify which Veterans’ groups will make the best use of your donation. It’s

also surprisingly simple, effective and rewarding. Consider helping a fellow Veteran with your car donation for the following reasons:

It helps a fellow Veteran in need

As one of more than 20 million Veterans in this country, you know that it's a group made of many people who may need a little extra assistance. With the typical vehicle donation, the car is sold at an auction, and the proceeds go toward helping Veterans in need. For example, the vehicle-donation program for the group Homes for our Troops — top rated by both charity watchdog websites — goes to providing severely injured Veterans with mortgage-free homes that have been specially adapted for their unique needs. In some cases, a donated vehicle also may be used by the charity itself or given to an individual Veteran.

It helps Veterans' families

As all Veterans know, a Veteran's family makes its own significant sacrifices. Oftentimes, it's not only a fellow Veteran, but also their loved ones that will benefit from your vehicle donation. Family issues are a particular concern for recent Veterans, too: In a recent Blue Star Families survey, 40 percent of post-9/11 Veterans said that "family reintegration" was either "difficult" or "very difficult," and a key recommendation from the study was to continue boosting resources to support all members of Veterans' families. Imagine the burden that is lifted for the family receiving a donated vehicle.

It will make you feel good

Yes, it's better to give than to receive. That said, donating your car to a fellow Veteran also has its benefits for you, the donor. A roundup of studies from the Cleveland Clinic, for instance, revealed that supporting charities can have a noticeably positive effect on your physical and mental health. That includes lowering your blood pressure, increasing your self-esteem, and reducing depression and stress levels, leading to greater happiness and a longer life.

You can benefit from tax advantages

A more concrete advantage to donating a vehicle can be found at tax time. Now, this is something you should discuss with your own tax professional, as the IRS naturally has something to say on the matter. But many folks who donate their used vehicles to a qualifying charity will be able to deduct a fairly significant sum—the full proceeds that the Veteran's group receives when a vehicle is sold. If the vehicle will be used by the charity, you could be eligible to deduct its full fair-market value.

It's virtually hassle-free

Donating a used vehicle also eliminates the negotiation process when you go to buy your new car, which is one of the biggest sticking points to a dealership trade-in or a private sale. When donating to a charity organization, most of the donated cars are flipped anyway. You can be confident that Veterans' organizations aren't going to bicker with you over condition, mileage and the like. Some groups even have a policy to take any used vehicle at all, regardless of whether it's running or not, and some will come out to your location to pick up the vehicle. A word of advice about the latter situation, though: Dropping off is the way to maximize your donation's value, because that way, the organization doesn't have to use any of its resources to come get the vehicle.

You can inspire your children

Inspire the next generation to grow up caring for veterans and others by demonstrating charitable behavior. Among the best things you can do for them — according to Parents.com — is lead by example. Research shows that children share more often when they see others share, and by making charity part of your life, it will become a part of theirs as well. This creates a win-win outcome for all involved.

[Source: Vantage Point | February 8, 2017 ++]

AFRH Washington Update 06 ► Accepting Applications

The Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH), the premier beltway retirement community for eligible American veterans, is now accepting applications. AFRH offers residents an affordable lifestyle on a scenic, wooded campus just minutes from downtown Washington, DC – home to museums, monuments, and a host of entertainment, sports and other cultural options. Many veterans choose to live at AFRH for the superior medical, dental and vision care offered. The amenities include: private rooms with a shower, cable TV, three delicious daily meals prepared by licensed nutritionists in a modern dining facility, a wellness program and deluxe fitness center, movie theater, bowling center and hobby shops. Persons are eligible to become AFRH residents who:

- Served as members of the Armed Forces, at least one-half of whose service was not active commissioned service (other than as a warrant officer or limited-duty officer)
- Are 60 years of age or over; were discharged or released under honorable conditions with 20 or more years of active service
- Are determined to be incapable of earning a livelihood because of a service-connected disability incurred in the line of duty in the Armed Forces.
- Served in theater during a time of war declared by Congress or were eligible for hostile fire special pay; were released from service in the Armed Forces under honorable conditions; and are determined to be incapable of earning a livelihood because of injuries, disease or disability.
- Served in a women’s component of the Armed Forces before June 12, 1948; and are determined to be eligible for admission for compelling personal circumstances.

Married couples are welcome in the community, but both must be eligible in their own right. Veterans who have been convicted of a felony or are not free of drug, alcohol, or psychiatric problems are ineligible to become a resident. Veterans must be able to live independently upon admission to the AFRH. This means being able to care for personal needs, attend a dining facility for meals, and keep all medical appointments. Fees for independent living are about 40 percent of total current income (not to exceed \$1,425 / month). For further information or to request an application, visit: <https://www.afrh.gov/apply> or contact the Office of Public Affairs at: admissions@afrh.gov or (800) 422-9988. Refer to <https://www.afrh.gov/locations/afrh-w-directions> for directions to the home. [Source: Army Echoes | Feb-May 2017 ++]



Vet Housing Update 12 ► The Villages of Benning GA

Fort Benning is one of the many installations with housing properties that has opened its onpost housing to other eligible tenants, which now include Retired Soldiers and military veterans. The Villages of Benning, privately managed by Michaels Management Services in Ft. Benning, Ga., announced in early May 2015 that the community has open on-post housing to meet the growing demand of retired service members, widowed spouses and Department of Defense and Federal Agency civilians who work on the installation. With nearly 4,000 on-post

homes and the benefits of living on-post now rivaling that of neighborhoods in the surrounding areas, The Villages of Benning offers residents the luxuries often associated with living off-post while being conveniently located to the military lifestyle.

Retirees have shown interest in living on-post due to a variety of factors, from heritage and camaraderie to the convenience to on-post facilities, such as the Post Exchange, the commissary and the clinic at the new Benning Martin Army Community Hospital. While retirees are now eligible to live at The Villages of Benning and other installations, plans are in place to ensure that active duty residents remain the top priority for military housing. Occupancy caps are set for all neighborhoods to ensure availability for incoming active duty service members and their families. Rental rates for retirees and other eligible tenants may vary from installation to installation.

At Ft. Benning, the rental rate is determined by averaging the Basic Allowances for Housing (BAH) that Soldiers in the respective villages receive. Rental rates include rent, electricity, water, trash and landscaping services. Internet and cable are not included. For additional information on eligibility on your military installation, contact your local Housing Services Office or onpost living community directly. Visit www.villagesofbenning.com for more information about the Villages of Benning. [Source: Army Echoes | Feb-May 2017 ++]

Obit: William Tatel ► 3 FEB 2017

One hundred years of life will leave a person with plenty of stories to tell, and William “Bill” Tatel is no exception to that rule. But walking away from an hour-long conversation with the World War II veteran, devoted husband and father could leave one wondering which of those stories is the most remarkable. Tatel celebrated his 100th birthday on August 5, 2016.



With his wife, Phyllis, and daughter, Jane Karp, by his side that day Tatel recounted a few of his memories while seated in a small alcove off a hallway in Moultrie Creek Nursing & Rehab Center. While the years have made the storytelling a bit disjointed, he remembers all the details and was quick to mention the highlights. He served with Gen. George Patton, landing first in northern Africa. “We marched 50 miles the first day,” he said. Having been a member of the outspoken and sometimes controversial general’s staff, Tatel is able to recount scenes that sound familiar to any fan of World War II history. Throughout the stories, he mentioned Patton’s love for his dog that was almost always at his side. “Nobody touched that dog,” Tatel said. He also mentioned Patton’s dislike for British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery. “He couldn’t lead a Boy Scout troop,” Tatel said he could recall hearing his old boss say.

Getting Tatel to trace his military career from being drafted through his discharge in 1946 was difficult. Karp said the inability to track a story from start to finish started showing up in recent years. He has a hard time remembering things that happened a short time ago, but distant memories are still pretty solid, she said. What Tatel couldn't string together, Karp was able to supplement with a thick photo album full of pictures from the three years her father spent overseas. A large picture on the first page showed her dad shortly after he joined the service. "They made him a corporal the first day because he could type," she said. He went to officer candidate school and was eventually shipped to Africa and began his rise through the ranks. A timeline on the cover page of Karp's album listed the progression: 2nd Lieutenant, 1942; 1st Lieutenant, 1944; Captain, 1945. The last two promotions came from Patton himself, Karp said.

Tatel participated in the North African Campaign and the Sicily Campaign and later served in Italy, France and, eventually, Germany. Sicily also seems like it was a highlight for him, as he mentioned his time in Palermo more than once. Once the allied forces made it to Sicily's capital city, Tatel said, Patton sent him in to make sure shops were open and the streets were cleaned. "I opened the department stores," he said. "Then I opened the opera house." He credited his work there with earning him one of his promotions. "One good thing about him," Tatel said of Patton, "if you produced for him, he produced for you." Tatel's wife, Phyllis, looked on that day as her husband recounted his tales, nodding knowingly at the most familiar ones.

Her story, as it would, also figured into the brief biography on the first page of Karp's photo album. What wasn't mentioned there Karp and her mother filled in with conversation. Both from Massachusetts, Phyllis and Tatel lived across the street from each other from the time he was 8 and she was only 4. They became sweethearts as they grew older and were planning to marry after Tatel finished officer candidate school. "Instead they stuck him on a boat" and sent him to Africa, Karp said. They spent most of the war apart, but got married just after he got back from Europe. "They got married on [Victory in Europe] Day as a matter of fact," their daughter said.

Tatel had two jeeps while he was overseas. Pictures of one them in the album indicate thoughts of the girl he would later marry were never far from his mind. White stenciled letters across the bottom of the vehicle's windshield frame read one word: "Phyllis." At 95 and after 71 years of marriage, Phyllis was quick with her memories of the time her loved one was overseas, though some of them are still too close to the surface. In a hushed voice, Karp recounted the time one of her father's jeeps was destroyed by enemy fire, an incident that left his hand badly damaged. "It upsets my mother," Karp said. Asked about how she coped with the time her soon-to-be husband was gone, Phyllis said she worked with the American Red Cross and the United Service Organization. "I kept busy," she said. And they've kept close since. The three joked and teased and laughed as they reminisced that Friday.

In a wheelchair and breathing oxygen through a tube, Tatel still exuded an energy that his daughter and wife were quick to point out. Rocking his wheelchair back and forth as he told his stories, Tatel, more than once, bumped his daughter's leg or ran over her foot. She asked him repeatedly and politely to stop. In his thick northeastern accent, his younger days seemed to shine through as he jokingly told her that if she didn't want her foot run over she ought to take care to keep it out from under his wheels. She nodded and laughed as if she had heard the line many times before. That spirit and nonchalance seemed to wear well on a 100-year-old man, and served as a reminder of where he had been and why he could talk about serving under one of the most famous generals of the last century as if it were just another job. "He was an OK guy as far as I could tell," Tatel said of Patton, shrugging slightly. "He promoted me, so what the hell."

It was with a heavy heart that Michael Isam reported on the 3 FEB passing of WWII Veteran William "Bill" Tatel. He received the following from his daughter Jane Karp. "Dad's funeral service will be at Craig Funeral Home on Monday, February 6th at 2:30 pm. Military honors will be at the interment at Congregation Sons of Israel cemetery North Whitney & Evergreen." [Source: St. Augustine Record & Veterans Corner | Jared Keever | AUG 20, 2016 & FEB 7, 2017 ++]

Obit: Richard Lyon ► 3 FEB 2017

The first Navy SEAL to rise to the rank of admiral, Richard Lyon, has died. He was 93. Lyon died 3 FEB surrounded by family and friends at his beachfront home in Oceanside, north of San Diego, said lifelong friend Kelly Sarber, who met Lyon as a child because her father was also a SEAL. Sarber recalled photos of Lyon and the other SEALs during the elite military team's beginnings, showing them swimming with knives. "He reminded me of James Bond," she said. "I never saw him lose his cool. I never saw him be nothing but kind and treat people with manners. He was a real class act."

Lyon enlisted in the Navy in 1942 while studying at Yale University. He was among the first to endure the SEAL training known as "Hell Week" in which trainees spend seven days with almost no sleep, running, swimming and doing other drills. He served four decades in the Navy, including World War II and the Korean War, and was among the first U.S. troops to enter Japan after the atomic bomb was dropped. He went on to work as a Scout intelligence officer in northern China. He later served in Korea.



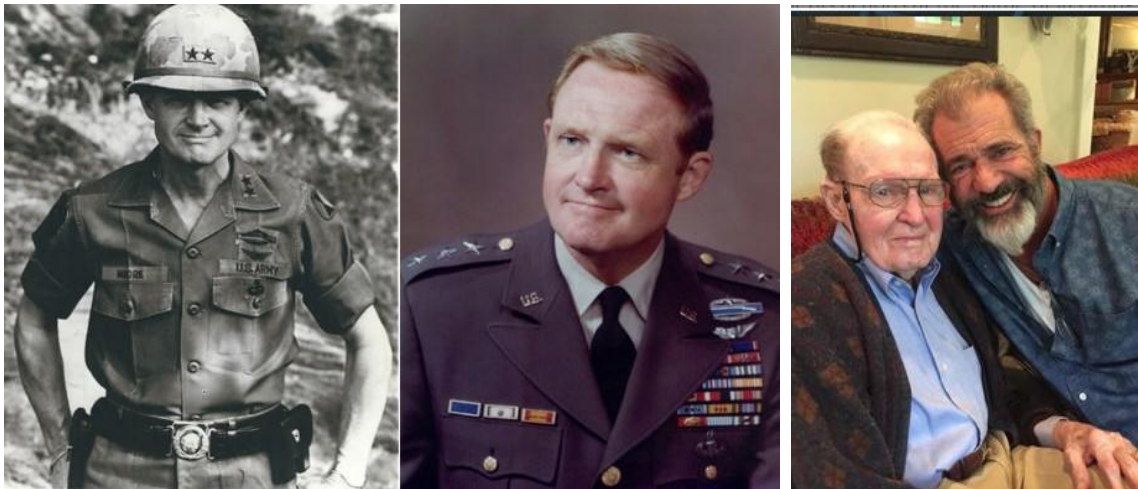
This circa 1975 portrait shows Adm. Richard "Dick" Lyon

An award-winning swimmer, he continued to body surf in competitions into his 70s, Sarber said. He stayed active in the SEAL community until his death and mentored young SEAL candidates until recently. Retired Rear Adm. Garry Bonelli, who became a SEAL in 1968, said he never knew SEALs had such high-ranking officers among them until being told as a young SEAL that he was going to be briefed by an admiral. "I thought there are no Navy SEAL admirals, and then I saw him in his white uniform, big gold bars and thought 'Wow, that's a Navy SEAL admiral!'" Bonelli said. "Dick Lyon personifies what it is to be a Navy frogman and Navy SEAL. He had the smarts, the athletic ability and the heart to do special maritime operations."

Bonelli said Lyon inspired sailors aspiring to be a SEAL and would give talks to the would-be candidates at the SEALs training school in Coronado until recently. Bonelli recalled that Lyon told them the most important tool to success is "the ability to listen to your troops and make decisions." Lyon retired from the Navy in 1983 and worked as a retail marketing and financial executive. He served two terms as mayor of Oceanside in 1992 and 1996, and served on various boards, including as president of the Oceanside Unified School District board of trustees. In 2013, Lyon was the recipient of the prestigious Yale University George H.W. Bush Lifetime of Leadership Award. He is survived by his wife of 41 years, Cynthia Gisslin Lyon; nine children; 14 grandchildren; and two great grandchildren. A service honoring his life was scheduled for 11 FEB at 11 a.m. at New Venture Christian Fellowship in Oceanside. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations in Lyon's name be made to the Navy

Obit: Hal Moore ► 10 FEB 2017

Retired Lt. Gen. Hal Moore, whose book about his experience in Vietnam was made into the movie "We Were Soldiers," died 10 FEB, just a few days short of his 95th birthday. Army officials from Fort Benning, Georgia, confirmed Moore's death in a statement Saturday evening. Moore, who the Army described as a "legendary combat leader," died at his home in Auburn, Alabama, according to the statement. He is survived by three sons, two daughters, 11 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Moore was preceded in death by his wife, Julie Compton, in 2004. His death came after having had a stroke a few days before, according to one of his children, WFSA reports.



Actor Mel Gibson (right) poses with retired Lt. Gen. Hal Moore during a July visit to Moore's home in Auburn Ala.

The general is best known for his actions during the Battle of Ia Drang, where he served as the commander of 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment. Within 20 minutes of the first shot of that deadly battle, Moore's battalion was vastly outnumbered and assaulted by hundreds of enemy furiously determined to overrun the Americans, according to the Army. After a three-day bloodbath, the enemy quit the field, leaving more than 600 of their dead on the battlefield. Moore was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second highest award for valor, for his actions during that battle.

Moore was commissioned as a second lieutenant of infantry after graduating from West Point in 1945, according to the Army. He served with the 187th Glider Infantry Regiment in Sapporo, Japan, then was reassigned to the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. There, he volunteered for the Army's Airborne Test Section, where he jump tested experimental parachutes, making more than 130 test jumps in two years. Moore then was assigned to the 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, where he commanded a heavy mortar company and an infantry company, according to the Army. He served as a regimental operations officer during the Korean War before serving at Fort Benning and undergoing air assault and mobility training and testing.

During the Vietnam War, Moore commanded 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment. It was the actions of that unit during the Battle of Ia Drang in 1965 that became the basis of his book "We Were Soldiers Once, and Young." The book became a movie in 2002, with Mel Gibson portraying Moore. Moore later assumed command of 3rd Brigade,

1st Cavalry Division, and led it through several major campaigns in 1966, earning a Bronze Star Medal with Valor - the third of his career - for carrying wounded soldiers to safety under "withering small and automatic weapons fire," according to the Army. As a two-star, Moore commanded the 7th Infantry Division in Korea. He was later promoted to lieutenant general in 1974 and assigned to the Pentagon as the deputy chief of staff for personnel. Moore, a native of Bardstown, Kentucky, retired from the Army in 1977.

Memorial donations may be made to the Ia Drang Scholarship Fund, which was established in 1994 using proceeds from his book and speaking engagements. The fund is used to help the children and grandchildren of the veterans of the Ia Drang battles. Contirbitoprs should send checks to the Ia Drang Scholarship Fund, c/o Executive Director, 1st Cavalry Division Association, 302 North Main, Copperas Cove, TX 76522. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Staff | February 11, 2017 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 14 Feb 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\veternans 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\veternans 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 | February 14, 2017 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► 15 Feb thru 14 Mar 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 *Note: Click on site for details*

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
Fort Bragg NC Job Fair	March 1, 2017
Greater Dallas TX Veterans Job Fair	March 2, 2017
San Diego CA Veterans Job Fair	March 2, 2017
Washington, DC Veterans Job Fair	March 2, 2017
Fort Bragg NC Job Fair	March 2, 2017
Houston Veterans TX Job Fair	March 9, 2017
New York NY Veterans Job Fair	March 9, 2017
San Jose CA Veterans Job Fair	March 9, 2017
Fort Lee VA Job Fair	March 9, 2017

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Listings

[Los Angeles Hiring Expo with the Los Angeles Clippers](#) February 15 - 9:30 am to 2:00

Los Angeles, CA pm [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Joint Base Lewis-McChord Military Spouse Career Event](#) February 15 - 7:00 pm to February 16 - 1:00 pm

Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA [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](#)

[AMPLIFY Military Spouse Career Intensive - Seattle](#) March 1 to March 2

Seattle, WA [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Fort Campbell Military Spouse Career Event](#) March 1 - 6:00 pm to March 2 - 1:00 pm

Fort Campbell, KY [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Fort Leonard Wood Transition Summit](#) March 7 - 8:00 am to March 8 - 4:00 pm

Fort Leonard Wood, MO [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Wright-Patterson Air Force Base Military Spouse Career Event](#) March 8 - 7:00 pm to March 9 - 1:00 pm

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, OH [Details](#) [Register](#)

[McLean Military Spouse Networking Event](#) March 14

McLean, VA [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

[Herndon, VA](#) March 8, 2017, 3pm - 7pm [More information](#)

Security University, 510 Spring Street, Herndon, VA 20170

[Washington, DC](#) March 15, 2017, 11am - 2pm [More information](#)

Verizon Center, 601 F Street NW, Washington, DC 20004

[Source: Recruit Military <https://events.recruitmilitary.com> & <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs> & <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs> | February 14, 2017 ++]

Vet State Benefits & Discounts ► Vermont 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 – VT**” 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 <http://veterans.vermont.gov> & <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/vermont.html>

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/vermont-state-veterans-benefits.html> FEB 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.

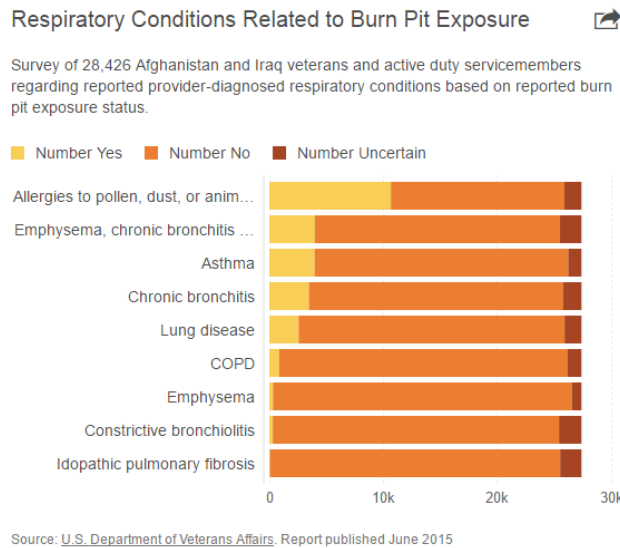
Flag Desecration Update 03 ► Amendment H.J. Res. 61

Rep. Steve Womack (Ark.) has introduced a proposed **constitutional amendment** (H. J. Res. 61) to allow Congress to pass a law to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States. Many brave men and women who serve and have served in the Armed Services feel deeply about the honor and dignity of “Old Glory,” and the physical desecration of this symbol of democracy and freedom is an affront to them and the memory of those who died in the defense of this Nation. The Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) is asking all veterans to contact their legislators and ask them to support this resolution. One convenient means to do this is to use the FRA Action line at [http://capwiz.com/fra/issues/alert/?alertid=75306626&queueid=\[capwiz:queue_id\]](http://capwiz.com/fra/issues/alert/?alertid=75306626&queueid=[capwiz:queue_id]) to send their preformatted editable message to your legislators via email or a printed letter. [Source: Northwest Florida Daily News (Fort Walton Beach) | Jennie Mckeon | January 17, 2017 ++]

Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 40 ► S.319 Introduced

A bipartisan bill has been introduced in the Senate that aims to finally help veterans who were exposed to toxic burn pits while serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. The “**Helping Veterans Exposed to Burn Pits Act**” (S.319) was introduced on 7 FEB by senators Thom Tillis (R-NC) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and aims to create what they say is a ‘center of excellence’ within the Department of Veterans Affairs. “Many of our brave men and women in uniform were exposed to harmful substances from toxic burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we have an obligation to care for them,” Tillis said in a statement. Klobuchar shared Tillis’ sentiment. “With an increasing number of our brave men and women returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan citing illnesses potentially caused by burn pits exposure, it’s clear that we can’t afford to wait,” she said.

The issue of burn pits and their use on military bases during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has been referred to as “the new Agent Orange,” as scores of soldiers returned home from the fight with a myriad of health issues—many of which proved lethal. Civilian workers and private contractors are also suffering from cancer, respiratory problems and blood disorders and, like military victims, they say they are being ignored. During the wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan, burn pits were used to get rid of waste and garbage generated on bases. Everything was incinerated in the pits, say soldiers, including plastics, batteries, appliances, medicine, dead animals and even human waste. The items were often set ablaze with jet fuel as the accelerant. The incineration of the waste generated numerous toxins. Thousands of U.S. military personnel who served on bases in Iraq and Afghanistan inhaled dense black smoke from burn pits which were often positioned right next to their barracks and base.



Nearly 64,000 active service members and retirees have put their names on a Burn Pit Registry, but documenting their plight doesn't guarantee coverage. “It’s a failed registry. It doesn’t work. It could take 20-30 years for someone to get assistance,” Joseph Hickman, author of the 2016 book “The Burn Pits: the Poisoning of America’s Soldiers,” told FoxNews.com in April. “It’s not fair. They need help now.” “The clouds of smoke would just hang throughout the base,” Army Sgt. Daniel Diaz, who was stationed at Joint Base Balad, in Iraq’s Sunni Triangle from 2004-2005, told FoxNews.com last year. “No one ever gave it any thought. You are just so focused on the mission at hand. In my mind, I was just getting ready for the fight.” Diaz returned from duty in 2008. A year later, he started developing health problems including cancer, chronic fatigue and weakness, neuropathy and hypothyroidism. Nearly every base he was stationed at during his four tours in Iraq and Afghanistan had burn pits nearby - and pungent smoke everywhere.

The new bill aims to help soldiers like Diaz by providing resources to the VA to give them the ability to better study the health effects caused by burn pit exposure and provide dedicated staff and resources to treat patients. Still, victims' advocates fear the relief may not come in time to save men and women now suffering from the effects of burn pit exposure. "We need a medical screening process in place now not in 20 years," said Rosie Torres, founder of Burn Pits 360, an advocacy group for service members who have fallen ill. "Our service men and women are dying now and many more will die by the time the center is implemented." [Source: Fox News | Perry Chiamonte | February 08, 2017 ++]

Arkansas National Guard ► Full College Tuition Senate Bill 278

Come ice storms, floods and tornadoes, National Guard members drop everything to respond. But helping people isn't their full-time job and doesn't give them a full-time paycheck. A bill, sponsored by State Sen. Jake Files (R-Fort Smith) hopes to recruit and retain more soldiers and airmen. "These people are a weekend a month, two weeks in the summer," said Sgt. First Class Christina Jones, a recruiter for the Arkansas National Guard. "Monday through Friday they're working jobs just like yourself." To get those jobs, Jones knows they typically have to have a degree, and that's where Arkansas is losing. "It's a big thing," said Lt. Col. Joel Lynch, a spokesperson for the Arkansas National Guard. "Education isn't cheap."

Unlike 35 others, the Natural State currently doesn't offer some form of full tuition to its National Guard members so many are moving to the places that do. "When somebody's thinking about getting in or when they've been in for almost six years and they're thinking, 'Do I re-enlist?,' these are things that keep people sticking around," said Lt. Col. Lynch. As soldiers and airmen leave Arkansas, recruiters can't fill their vacancies, which has cost the state nearly 700 jobs in the past two years. "We've been losing more people than any of the surrounding states," said Lynch. Sen. Files hopes to change that with a bill that would send them to college for free. "You offer a high school-age kid who is thinking about going to college and say, 'Hey, you can go for free. Just join the guard,'" Lynch said. "That's a pretty big incentive and a lot of people just jump at that." Years ago, he did in another state. "I'll tell you I wouldn't have graduated college if I hadn't," Lynch said.

More recent graduates feel the same way. "We've got to take care of them," Jones said. "Less than one percent of the total population is even eligible to even apply. At this rate, we don't want to lose any more people." Go to <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly/2017/2017R/Bills/SB278.pdf> to read the full text of the **Full College Tuition** bill. [Source: ArkansasMatters.com | Jessi Turnure | February 08, 2017 ++]

Less-Than-Honorable Discharge Update 03 ► H.R.918 Mental Health Care

A bill that would give veterans access to mental health care despite a less-than-honorable discharge is back in Congress. Reps. Mike Coffman, a Colorado Republican, and Derek Kilmer, a Washington Democrat, are leading the bipartisan reintroduction of the **Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Healthcare Act**, Coffman's office announced 9 FEB. The legislation, H.R. 918, would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide initial mental health assessments and "urgent mental health care services to veterans at risk of suicide or harming others, even if they have an other than honorable discharge," otherwise known as a "bad paper" discharge, the announcement said. "It's important that we give all of our combat veterans, irrespective of the discharges they receive, access to mental health care through the Veterans [Affairs Department]," Coffman told Military.com during a phone call 3 FEB.

Coffman, the only member of Congress to serve in both the first Iraq War and Operation Iraqi Freedom, said of the "bad-paper" separations, "I question the nature of the discharges in the first place, and I'm exploring that." Veterans who received a dishonorable or bad-conduct discharge would still be ineligible from accessing the services. The bill would also require an independent study of veteran suicide to review effects of combat service on suicide rates; the rate and method of suicide among veterans who have received health care from the VA; and the rate and method of suicide among veterans who have not received health care from the agency, the announcement said.

Coffman pursued a similar bill last year, but it didn't pass the House. The previous legislation included language that linked a dishonorable or bad-conduct discharge to a general court-martial, but those types of separations can also result from a special court-martial. The new bill excludes any reference to court-martial "to avoid confusion," spokesman Daniel Bucheli said. Coffman said this time around "there is a greater awareness of this issue," especially because David Phillip Roe, a physician representing Tennessee's 1st Congressional District, is now the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. In addition, the bill has 12 sponsors. "So I think it stands a good chance of getting passed this time around," Coffman said. "We seem to have fewer and fewer veterans in the Congress, so I think it's difficult sometimes for them to understand the culture of the military. I think [members in Congress] are very supportive of the notion of providing mental health care to veterans even if they don't understand the nature of these discharges."

High Ground Veterans Advocacy, a grassroots organization training veterans to become leaders and activists in their local communities, has advocated for a fairness for veterans coalition of more than 50 veterans service officers, mobile service officers and veterans legal services clinics surrounding the issue, said founder and chairman Kristofer Goldsmith. "We're calling on the Armed Services Committee and the Veterans Affairs Committee to hold hearings on the issue of 'bad paper,'" said Goldsmith, who also serves as the assistant director for policy and government affairs for the Vietnam Veterans of America. "We've seen a lot of positive action from the Congress and there is bipartisan recognition that the issue exists, which is wonderful, but until the VSOs and MSOs are invited to testify at a hearing alongside the boards of corrections of military records from each of the branches, we're not going to be able to get as much work done on this issue as we'd like to," he said, referring to veterans service organizations and military service organizations.

According to a National Public Radio study, roughly 22,000 Army veterans confirmed to have a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury (TBI) were issued "bad paper" between 2009 and 2015. The Army investigated the claim, but found nothing wrong with how commanders chose to remove soldiers coming back from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Coffman, who served in the Army before retiring from the Marine Corps as a major, said he believes the stigma surrounding personality disorders has become a way for the Defense Department to take disciplinary measures instead of offering proper health care. In some cases, he said, the action could be tied to how a specific service works through a drawdown in its ranks. "It seemed to always come down on military personnel returning from combat zones, and I just thought this was inappropriate. I think in the past what [DoD] has done is say, 'OK. We're going to do a reduction in force and ... deny people re-enlistment or give people early outs.' But to give these 'bad paper' discharges to combat veterans and then [say] no as a result ... they have no access to mental health care, and that's really problematic," Coffman said.

Goldsmith too said there needs to be more action from within the department. "It's disappointing that [DoD] thinks they can fix this problem just by changing the narrative in the press shop," he said. The dialogue pendulum continues to swing from DoD to the VA and vice versa, which too often turns into "the blame game" without firm action. "Congress needs to hold both of them to account in a coordinated effort," he said. "There's a long history of members of Congress trying to address this issue, and I think in this year, in 2017, we're going to kind of hit a -- I hope -- critical mass where members of Congress who don't focus on military and veterans issues will realize how important this is, and they'll join the fight as well," Goldsmith said. [Source: Military.com | Oriana Pawlyk | February 9, 2017 ++].

VA Claim Assistance ► H.R.506/S.150 | Penalize Illegal Vet Advisers

Questionable benefits advisers promise to help veterans file for elder care pensions or expedite their assistance requests. For a hefty price. They're charging big money for a service that government agencies and veterans groups offer free of charge. It keeps happening in South Florida, with its large number of aging veterans needing long-term care. And it's illegal. However, there are no criminal penalties attached to the law that could punish those caught. Three Florida congressmen have teamed up to change that.

The bipartisan **Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act** would authorize fines, prison time, or both, for unauthorized individuals charging vets for assisting with their federal Department of Veterans Affairs claims or applications. "Con artists go after veterans' hard-earned pensions with false claims to help them while charging outrageous fees ... This bill will discourage future exploitation," said U.S. Rep. Ted Deutch (D-Boca Raton), in a written statement. He is co-sponsoring H.R.506 with U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney,(R-Okeechobee). Republican Sen. Marco Rubio is handling the Senate companion bill, S.150. The three lawmakers co-sponsored the same legislation during the last Congressional session, and the bill passed in the House unanimously. However, it did not make it out of the Senate.

Criminal penalties are "something that would be welcomed," said Owen Walker, manager of Broward County's Veterans Services Division. "This is happening. But these people know they can't be financially punished for their actions." Those working with veterans say the number of these incidents began rapidly increasing more than a decade ago, as word got out about the then little-known Aid and Attendance pension. This federal benefit can give frail or disabled veterans and their spouses about \$21,000 to \$34,000 annually toward care or housing. The amount depends on multiple factors, such as the veteran's level of disability, medical expenses, marital status, income, age and assets. In 2013, there was a national backlog of more than 565,000 Aid and Attendance claims that had been pending at least 125 days, according to VA reports. In the St. Petersburg VA office, which is the headquarters for Florida veterans, it was taking about 335 days to process a claim that year. While Walker said the wait time now has dropped to between three and six months, the process remains complicated.

Seniors filing for veterans' benefits on their own can find it challenging. County and state veterans departments, or major veterans organizations like The American Legion, have VA-accredited advisers on-hand who will help for free. Some are stationed in VA clinics and hospitals. Legislators and advocates said questionable benefits advisers often look for clients in assisted-living centers or low-income senior housing complexes. "They'll say they have certain ins and outs with the VA, and have ways to expedite a claim for a percentage of what they get," said Marc Goodell, vice president of the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 25 in West Palm Beach. "Everyone is out to make a buck, and veterans are the flavor of the day." There is an exception: Attorneys can take fees to file VA claims, but only if the veteran already has been denied by the VA and is appealing. Attorneys and other professionals and advocates must be accredited through the VA, a process involving training and background checks, to assist with claims even if doing so for free.

Alene Tarter, director of benefits and assistance for the Florida Department Veterans' Affairs, said her office takes calls from elder veterans or their families who were illegally charged thousands of dollars by someone who promised to fast-track a claim but hadn't received any benefits. "It's terrible, especially when the agent has disappeared with their money and they realize their case won't be expedited," said Tarter, who began referring these callers to the Florida Attorney General's Office last year. Most of the callers weren't aware that VA claims can be given priority only in limited circumstances, such as when an applicant is terminally ill or homeless, she said. Officials with the Attorney General's Office said they are reviewing five complaints from the state Veterans' Affairs department for possible civil violations of deceptive and unfair trade laws. The office also has an active investigation regarding a veteran's consumer protection complaint that hopefully will be resolved shortly, officials

said. Criminal penalties for people illegally charging veterans for benefits assistance "is something I have been hoping for," Tarter said.

Some unscrupulous operators manage to siphon extra cash from veterans they are legally representing, Tarter said. Attorneys handling VA benefits appeals have been known to ask for 20 percent of the veteran's first benefits check if they win the case — which can net them an enormous payout, Tarter said, as all retroactive benefits due are rolled into that initial payment. Tarter, Walker and others also are concerned about financial planners and insurance agents, with company names sounding similar to nonprofit groups, hosting free Aid and Attendance seminars in assisted-living centers, care facilities and senior housing complexes. Instead of charging to file for the benefit, sometimes agents offer to lower veterans' incomes so they can qualify by shifting assets into the trusts and annuities they sell. While none of this is illegal, Tarter said, seniors can find themselves stuck in inappropriate financial products, where they can't withdraw their money for years or face high penalties if they do. "The veterans don't realize they are doing anything wrong. This was advice from someone they met in their nursing home, who gained their faith," Tarter said.

If you think someone unfairly charged you or deceived you regarding help with veterans' benefits, call the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs at 727-319-7440. County veterans officers file benefits applications or assist with claims at no charge. Call 954-357-6622 in Broward; 561-355-4761 in Palm Beach County; and 786-469-4600 in Miami-Dade. Only individuals and organizations accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs can file benefit claims for veterans. To check credentials, go to www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation. [Source: Sun Sentinel | Diane C. Lade | February 9, 2017 ++]

*** Military ***



Yeman 29 JAN Raid ► Golden Oldie al-Qaida Video Recovered

U.S. Central Command ate crow on 3 FEB after releasing al-Qaida video from a raid in Yemen, only to abruptly pull the video down after learning it was older than it expected. "We are aware that it is older video," Defense Department spokesman Eric Pahon told Military Times. "We can't verify what year it's from. It's been on the internet for a little while." Although the video has been online for years, it was part of a "big treasure trove of intel" that was recovered from the 29 JAN raid by special operations forces in Yemen, Pahon said. The video showed a masked militant lecture on how to create explosives. CENTCOM made the decisions to first publish and then take the video down, Pahon said. The 29 JAN raid has become a black mark for the special operations community. One Navy SEAL was killed: Chief Special Warfare Operator William "Ryan" Owens. Six other troops were injured. An MV-22B Osprey crashed and had to be destroyed. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Jeff Schogol | February 3, 2017 ++]

Yeman 29 JAN Raid Update 01 ► Spicer Blasts McCain's Disrespect

White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer blasted Navy veteran Sen. John McCain for being disrespectful to the family of a fallen Navy SEAL by questioning the success of the mission that took his life. On 7 FEB, McCain released a statement criticizing the White House's characterization of the controversial 29 JAN mission in Yemen, which resulted in the death of numerous civilians and Senior Chief Petty Officer William "Ryan" Owens. White House officials have publicly called the mission a success, but also a tragedy because of Owens' death.

- "Every military operation has objectives," said McCain, a former prisoner of war. "And while many of the objectives of the recent raid in Yemen were met, I would not describe any operation that results in the loss of American life as a success.
- "We must continue to take the fight to our enemies wherever they are while recognizing that risk is inherent in war. Going forward, I am confident that our military will act on lessons learned from this operation to strengthen our fight against our terrorist enemies."

Spicer took exception to the above comments. "I think anyone who would suggest that it is not does a disservice to the life of Chief Ryan Owens," Spicer said. "Anyone who would suggest otherwise doesn't fully appreciate how successful that mission was, what the information that they were able to retrieve was, and how that will help prevent future terrorist attacks." Spicer also said American lives "will be saved" because of information gathered in the raid, and that "future attacks will be prevented" because of the assault. White House officials have said that the mission on an al-Qaida facility had been planned since last fall, and suggested the mission would have been approved by President Barack Obama if the timing had worked out differently. Obama officials have pushed back on that assertion.

Pentagon officials have acknowledged problems with the mission, including the crash of a military aircraft involved in the assault and the loss of the element of surprise. News reports have also suggested U.S. forces may have missed the target of the attack, the head of al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. Spicer pushed back on reports that Yemen government officials were furious following the raid and are blocking future similar U.S. missions, saying that the two governments are speaking and both committed to rooting out terrorism. Owens family has repeatedly asked for privacy in the wake of his death. President Trump traveled to Delaware earlier this month to witness the return of his remains from overseas in a private ceremony. [Source: Military Times | Leo Shane III, February 8, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Dental Program Update 13 ► Premium Reduction

Monthly Tricare dental premiums for active-duty families as well as National Guard and Reserve members and their families will drop across all categories May 1 -- in some cases more than \$15 -- as the program is taken over by United Concordia as part of a new management contract. Monthly premiums for active-duty families will drop from \$11.68 a month to \$11.10 a month for a single dependent user and from \$34.68 to \$28.87 for two or more dependents. Active-duty troops do not use the Tricare dental plan, according to information posted to Tricare's website <http://www.tricare.mil/Costs/DentalCosts/TDP/Premiums>. Military retirees are not affected by the change. To review their premiums refer to <http://www.tricare.mil/Costs/DentalCosts/TRDP>

- For activated Guard and Reserve members, premiums will drop from \$11.68 to \$11.10 for coverage of the service member only; from \$29.19 to \$27.76 for a single dependent; from \$87.59 to \$72.18 for two or more dependents; and from \$99.27 to \$83.28 for the service member and family, the chart says.
- For inactive Guard and Reserve members, premiums will drop from \$29.19 to \$27.76 for the service member only or a single dependent only; from \$87.59 to \$72.18 for two or more dependents; and from \$116.78 to \$99.94 for service member and family, the chart says.

The changes push premiums below 2015 levels across all categories, while moving all the family and family-plus-sponsor rates to about \$9 below 2014 rates. Tricare's dental program will move from MetLife to United Concordia on 1 MAY, ushering in several benefit improvements and a renewed focus on education and prevention, Tricare's dental chief said Monday in an exclusive interview with Military.com. Among the expansions included in the new contract is an increase to the annual maximum benefit from \$1,300 to \$1,500 and a change that makes sealants free instead of carrying a 20 percent co-pay, Army Col. James Honey said in the interview.

Additionally, children in families who have purchased the dental program and who are enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) will automatically be added to their families' plans when they turn 1-year-old. Currently, children are automatically added at age four. "The Tricare Dental Program continues to offer uniformed service members and their families a robust dental option," said Kevin Dwyer, a Tricare spokesman. "Starting May 1, beneficiaries will receive an improved Tricare Dental Program at a lower cost." Enrollment in Tricare's dental coverage is not automatic. Instead, troops and families must sign up for coverage by enrolling online or calling the Tricare dental contractor. [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | February 01, 2017 ++]

Navy Readiness ► Lack of Funds Impact

The following bleak picture resulting from Congressional non-action is being presented by service leaders

- The U.S. Navy's F/A-18 Hornet and Super Hornet strike fighters are the tip of the spear, embodying most of the fierce striking power of the aircraft carrier strike group. But nearly two-thirds of the fleet's strike fighters can't fly — grounded because they're either undergoing maintenance or simply waiting for parts or their turn in line on the aviation depot backlog. Overall, more than half the Navy's aircraft are grounded, most because there isn't enough money to fix them.
- There isn't enough money to fix the fleet's ships, and the backlog of ships needing work continues to grow. Overhauls — "availabilities" in Navy parlance — are being canceled or deferred, and when ships do come in they need longer to refit. Every carrier overall for at least three years has run long, and some submarines are out of service for prolonged periods, as much as four years or more. One submarine, the Boise, has lost its diving certification and can't operate pending shipyard work. Leaders claim that if more money doesn't become available, five more submarines will be in the same state by the end of this year.
- The Navy can't get money to move around service members and their families to change assignments, and about \$440 million is needed to pay sailors. And the service claims 15 percent of its shore facilities are in failed condition — awaiting repair, replacement or demolition.

This is in stark contrast to the Trump administration's widely talked about plan to grow the Navy from today's goal of 308 ships to 350 — now topped by Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson's new Force Structure Assessment that aims at a 355-ship fleet. Richardson's staff is crafting further details on how the growth will be carried out — plans congressional leaders are eager to hear. It seems to many as though the Navy will be showered with money to attain such lofty goals. Yet, for now, money is tight, due to several years of declining budgets mandated first by the Obama administration, then Congress, and to the chronic inability of lawmakers to provide uninterrupted funds to the military services and the government at large. Budgets have been cut despite no slackening in the demand for the fleet's services; and the Navy, to preserve shipbuilding funds, made a conscious choice to slash maintenance and training budgets rather than eliminate ships, which take many years to build and can't be produced promptly even when funding becomes available.

Congress has failed for the ninth straight year to produce a budget before the 1 OCT start of fiscal 2017, reverting to continuing resolutions that keep money flowing at prior year levels. CRs have numerous caveats, however, and many new projects or plans can't be funded since they didn't exist in the prior year. There is widespread agreement that CR funding creates havoc throughout the Pentagon and the industrial base that supports it — often substantially

driving costs higher to recover from lengthy delays. Yet, like the proverbial weather that everyone talks about but no one can change, there seems to be little urgency in Congress to return to a more businesslike budget profile. The current continuing resolution through April 28 marks the longest stop-gap measure since fiscal 1977 — outstripping 2011 by only a couple weeks, noted Todd Harrison, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, in a post on Twitter. This also marks the first CR situation during a presidential transition year. And while the talk about building dozens of more ships grabs headlines, it is not at all clear when or even whether Congress will repeal the Budget Control Act — sequestration — which, if unabated, will continue its restrictions to 2021.

Meanwhile, some details are emerging of the new administration's efforts to move along the budget process. In a 31 JAN memorandum, Defense Secretary James Mattis described a three-phase plan that included submission by the Pentagon of a 2017 budget amendment request. The request would be sent to the White House's Office of Management and Budget by March 1. Under the plan, the full 2018 budget request is due to OMB no later than 1 MAY. The third phase of the plan involves a new National Defense Strategy and FY2019-2023 defense program, which "will include a new force sizing construct" to "inform our targets for force structure growth," Mattis said in the memo. The services this month will make their case to Congress when the vice chiefs of the Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine Corps testify in readiness hearings before the House Armed Services Committee on 7 FEB and the Senate Armed Services Committee the following day.

The vice chiefs are expected to make their pitches for money that can be spent right away, rather than funds for long-term projects that, with only five months left in the fiscal year even if Congress passes a 2017 budget, can't be quickly put to use. "If we get any money at all, the first thing we're going to do is throw it into the places we can execute it," a senior Navy source said 2 FEB. "All of those places are in ship maintenance, aviation depot throughput — parts and spares — and permanent changes of station so we can move our families around and fill the holes that are being generated by the lack of PCS money." The backlog is high. "There's about \$6-8 billion of stuff we can execute in April if we got the money," the senior Navy source said. "We can put it on contract, we can deliver on it right away."

Even if the budget top line is increased, Navy leaders say, the immediate need is for maintenance money, not new ship construction. A supplemental Navy list of unfunded requirements for 2017 that was sent to Congress in early January and is still being revised made it clear that maintenance needs are paramount. "Our priorities are unambiguously focused on readiness — those things required to get planes in the air, ships and subs at sea, sailors trained and ready," a Navy official declared. "No new starts."

The dire situation of naval aviation is sobering. According to the Navy, 53 percent of all Navy aircraft can't fly — about 1,700 combat aircraft, patrol, and transport planes and helicopters. Not all are due to budget problems — at any given time, about one-fourth to one-third of aircraft are out of service for regular maintenance. But the 53 percent figure represents about twice the historic norm. The strike fighter situation is even more acute and more remarkable since the aircraft are vitally important to projecting the fleet's combat power. Sixty-two percent of F/A-18s are out of service; 27 percent in major depot work; and 35 percent simply awaiting maintenance or parts, the Navy said. With training and flying hour funds cut, the Navy's aircrews are struggling to maintain even minimum flying requirements, the senior Navy source said. Retention is becoming a problem, too. In 2013, 17 percent of flying officers declined department head tours after being selected. The percentage grew to 29 percent in 2016. Funding shortfalls mean many service members are unable to relocate to take on new assignments. So far in 2017, the Navy said, there have been 15,250 fewer moves compared with 2016.

Under the continuing resolution, the senior Navy official said, another 14 ship availabilities will be deferred in 2018 — one submarine, one cruiser, six destroyers, two landing ship docks, one amphibious transport dock and three minesweepers. Programs seeking to buy items that were not included in the 2016 budget can't move forward, including CH-53K helicopters, Joint Air-to-Ground Missiles, Long-Range Anti-Ship Missiles and littoral combat ship module weapons. Many more programs that were to increase 2017 buys over 2016 levels can't do so. And with only five months left in fiscal 2017, even if a budget is passed in late April, there is some talk about a yearlong

continuing resolution — a prospect at which the senior Navy official shook his head. “The full CR is not a good situation at all,” he said. [Source: Defense News | Christopher P. Cavas | February 6, 2017 ++]

U.S. Philippine Bases Update 17 ► Okay Given to Build Barracks/Depots

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has given the go-ahead for the U.S. military to build barracks and fuel depots in designated local camps where American forces are allowed to temporarily station under a 2014 defense pact, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said 7 FEB. Duterte last month threatened to abrogate the agreement if the United States stores weapons in local camps, saying his country may get entangled if fighting erupts between China and the U.S. He identified 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.

He had said if the U.S. builds an arms depot, "I will consider a review and maybe ultimately abrogate" the pact all together. "I don't know where the president got his information but I corrected it," Lorenzana told reporters Tuesday. He said he also told Duterte that construction in the camps has not started and was scheduled later this year or next year. "I actually asked his decision if we will continue with the EDCA construction or not," Lorenzana added. "He said: 'OK, let's proceed, but make sure that there is no stockpiling of ammunition there.'" The defense chief said he explained to Duterte that the stockpiling of weapons is not allowed by the agreement. The pact allows the U.S. military to build big barracks that can be jointly used by American and Filipino troops, and to put up fuel tanks for their planes and vehicles.

Lorenzana said most of the equipment that the Americans will be bringing to the country will be for humanitarian assistance and disaster response, including rubber boats. When U.S. troops come to the Philippines for exercises, they will bring their rifles and their ammunition but will take the weapons back with them when they return to the United States, he added. Duterte took office in June and has moved to rebuild once-frosty relations with China while repeatedly threatening to scale back military exercises with American troops and stop agreements that allow U.S. forces to visit. [Source: : The Associated Press | February 7, 2017 ++]

Marine Corps Readiness ► Less than 50% of Aircraft Flyable

More than half of all Marine Corps fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft were unable to fly at the end of 2016, officials said on 8 FEB. The Marines are struggling to keep aging aircraft flying amid budget cuts, delayed spending bills and more than 15 years of wartime wear-and-tear. Out of 1,065 Marine Corps aircraft, 439 were flyable as of Dec. 31, said Lt. Gen. Jon Davis, deputy commandant for aviation. That represents roughly 41 percent of the service's fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft. “My target should be 589 [flyable aircraft]; so I am 150 airplanes shy of what I need to make my flight-hour goal,” Davis told reporters on Wednesday. “In order to meet my operational commitments, I need a little bit more than that.”

Since taking the job in June 2014, Davis has been working furiously to get enough Marine Corps planes and helicopters flyable until the service can receive new aircraft, such as the F-35. While the number of aircraft ready to fly on any given day fluctuates, overall the number of flyable aircraft has been improving, Davis said. But only 72 of the Marine Corps' 280 F/A-18 Hornets were flyable as of Dec. 31, officials said. This is just a quarter of the Corps' Hornets, and down from September, when 90 Hornets could fly. Davis explained that readiness declined at the end of 2016 due to holidays, including Thanksgiving, Christmas and the Marine Corps Birthday Ball. “November and December every year are low productivity months,” said Davis, who noted that 473 Marine aircraft were flyable at the beginning of October. Of the Marine Corps' 280 F/A-18 Hornets, 109 were either at or headed to

depot in December, Marine Corps spokeswoman Capt. Sarah Burns explained. "It should be noted that depot-level maintenance is deliberately planned and scheduled with few exceptions," Burns said in an email. "We expect and plan for a certain percentage of our aircraft to be in the depot at any given time. It is through depot-level maintenance that we ensure the Marine Corps maintains a ready and balanced fleet while we transition F-35."

In addition to the 72 Hornets that were flyable in December, another 26 needed repairs that were expected to be completed in less than 120 days, Burns said. The Marine Corps can only repair so many aircraft at any given time, Davis said. "I can't collapse that gap any faster than I am right now with the funding restrictions we've been under in the past," he said. "We are funded to the max. I can only reset a CH-53E so fast. I've got seven on the East Coast; eight on the West Coast and one in Hawaii — 16 airplanes in reset right now. I can only get so many of those into reset at any given time." [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Jeff Schogol | February 8, 2017++]

Hagfish Slime ► **Navy Researchers Believe Could Help Save Lives.**

It looks and feels a lot like snot, but Navy researchers believe slime produced by the primitive hagfish could help save lives. The bottom-dwelling hagfish is commonly referred to as a slime eel because it looks like an eel and produces a slimy substance that quickly expands in water to enable it to escape from predators by clogging up an attacker's gills. That unique capability is what has captured the Navy's imagination. Its researchers believe that, by reproducing the slime, they one day could replace synthetic products derived from petroleum, such as Kevlar that's used in bulletproof vests. It's not just science fiction, either. The Navy says one of its research teams in Panama City, Florida, has already re-created the material. Now it's beginning to work on how best to turn the synthetic slime into something useful.



Naval Surface Warfare Panama City Division (NSWC PCD) scientist and engineers demonstrate the elasticity of the hagfish slime secreted from the Pacific hagfish in a lab

"From a tactical standpoint, it would be interesting to have a material that can change the properties of the water at dilute concentrations in a matter of seconds," Ryan Kincer, a materials engineer at Naval Surface Warfare Center, Panama City Division, said in a statement. The Navy also envisions using the material in products to protect firefighters and divers, as an anti-shark spray, and as a coating for ships to protect against algae, barnacles and other aquatic life that typically attach to them. Eventually, some products derived from the slime could work their way into the private sector.

While there are several varieties of hagfish — frequently called one of the world's ugliest species — Navy researchers used the Pacific hagfish in their slime-duplication efforts. That's because the Pacific hagfish has already been genetically sequenced. Josh Kogot, a biochemist at Naval Surface Warfare Center, Panama City Division, said in a telephone interview that using the Pacific hagfish allowed researchers to work quickly by specifically looking into its DNA sequence and proteins. The slime they're interested in is a combination of two proteins and saltwater. Kogot said it took about six months to reproduce the slime into a filament. "What's fascinating to me is just how

simple in the grand scheme of things this system is. It's really a two-protein system with seawater, and it's able to be this strong and expansive," he said. "It can expand 10,000 times in volume in milliseconds."

To create the proteins, Kogot grew them in separate petri dishes filled with E. coli bacteria, isolated and purified them, and then combined them using a centrifuge. Researchers knew they had successfully duplicated the slime by examining their version with a scanning electron microscope. Kogot said no special equipment was necessary, either. It's all equipment most biotechnology researchers already have. The filament that's created is stored in a screwtop vial and kept in a refrigerator when it's not in use, although it maintains its properties at room temperature. Kogot said some practical-application testing on the material has already begun, but he did not elaborate for what uses.

Right now, his team is looking for ways to increase the duplicated slime's ability to attach to different surfaces, potential delivery systems, and enhancing its stability in different environments, according to the Navy. Kogot said it's too early to tell when a product using the synthetic slime could be integrated into the fleet, but testing on specific applications could begin within six months to a year. [Source: The Virginian-Pilot via AP | Brock Vergakis | February 12, 2017 ++]

*** Military History ***



Gen. Lucian Truscott ► One of the Most Competent WWII Officers

There is no doubt that many officers during the two World Wars rose through the ranks on the basis of their experience and previous service. However, the need to staff a rapidly expanding army often led to men gaining their positions of authority far more rapidly than many had in previous conflicts. It's worth noting that the Allied Commander, General Dwight Eisenhower, was in fact just a Colonel at the start of 1941. However, there was one American General who would come out of WWII in 1945 as perhaps one of the most competent officers among the Allied forces, having been honed by experience instead of quickly elevated beyond his abilities. General Lucian Truscott began the war as a Colonel, but he earned the rank of General after he proved his worth in the field.



General Lucian King Truscott, Jr. (January 9, 1895 – September 12, 1965)

Truscott was born in 1895, in Texas, and initially he didn't go looking for a career in the Army. However, when the United States entered into WWI, he felt duty-bound to enter the military and fight for his country. He was subsequently given the rank of second lieutenant of the cavalry. As the war ended, he missed out on any direct combat experience, a fact that he believed would hamper his military career in the future. However, even without much previous experience in action, Truscott would remain in the military, eventually becoming one of the last cavalrymen of that age.

As the United States entered WWII, Truscott now held the rank of Colonel. Although he was moving steadily forward in his career, he didn't see himself as a man destined for high rank of General. Not only did he lack combat experience, but he hadn't attended the elite West Point academy; time spent there often pushed a man up to a higher rank than their abilities warranted. Surprisingly, it was Truscott's love of polo, the sport, that brought him his first practical taste of combat. In early 1942, he was sent to Europe, with a group of officers, to gain combat experience. They were to work alongside British commando units under the command of British Admiral Mountbatten. Truscott was surprised at first that a cavalryman was selected to learn about amphibious landings, but it was later revealed that Admiral Mountbatten was himself a fan of polo, having even written a book on the subject.

Eisenhower hoped that Truscott could make an early connection and bridge the gap between the two commands. Because of this unlikely connection, Truscott was the senior American officer present to observe the disastrous Dieppe raid in 1942. While the raid was less than successful, Truscott was more interested in learning from what he observed and applying it to minimize casualties in the future. Now a General, in November 1942 Truscott would take what he learned from the failed Dieppe raid and apply it to the American landings in Morocco during Operation Torch. While the landings would succeed, Truscott still wasn't happy with the lack of coordination in command that took place during an amphibious landing.

Fortunately, the enemy's resistance was half-hearted at best, and these lessons could be learned at a much lower cost than they might have been under different circumstances. Due to his success, he earned his second star, after which Eisenhower would appoint him as a deputy commander with instructions to set up headquarters near the front. In 1943, he took command of the 3rd Infantry Division, preparing them for the Allied invasion of Sicily. Realizing from previous experience that many American soldiers were not as well trained or prepared as their enemies, he pushed his own men to the limit beforehand, ensuring that their chances of surviving in battle would be greatly increased. He adopted the philosophy that an ounce of sweat spilled today might save a gallon of blood tomorrow. American tanks disembarking at Anzio.

General Truscott thirsted for the knowledge gained by experience and he quickly became one of the most reliable Generals in the entire Army Command. When the campaign in Italy was faltering, they turned to General Truscott to take over VI Corps, after relieving the previous General of command. Commanding VI Corps with efficiency and speed – the latter famously nicknamed the “Truscott Trot” – he was appalled when General Mark Clark rerouted forces to take Rome. Clark arguably did this for his own glory rather than for the good of the overall campaign. Truscott wanted no part of such a mission, and would have preferred to focus on winning the war and keeping American troops alive.

General Truscott would then take 6th Corps through the invasion of Southern France. There, for once, he finally saw an amphibious landing operate with the speed and efficiency he had always hoped for, ever since he observed the action at Dieppe. When General Clark was moved to a higher command, the Army turned to Truscott to take over the 5th Army. Truscott would continue to lead in a manner informed by previous combat experience, rather than his own ego. On Memorial Day in 1945, General Truscott was asked to give a speech at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery in Italy, where many of the fallen from the Italian campaign were buried. When he took to the podium, he turned his back to the audience and fanfare and simply began to speak to the crosses of the fallen. Famed WWII cartoonist Bill Mauldin was present; he offered the following observations, summing up the character and abilities of General Lucian Truscott.



Sicily-Rome American Cemetery

Mauldin wrote: “He apologized to the dead men for their presence here. He said everybody tells leaders it is not their fault that men get killed in war, but that every leader knows in his heart this is not altogether true. “He said he hoped anybody here through any mistake of his would forgive him, but he realized that was asking a hell of a lot under the circumstances.... he would not speak about the glorious dead because he didn’t see much glory in getting killed if you were in your late teens or early twenties. “He promised that if in the future he ran into anybody, especially old men, who thought death in battle was glorious, he would straighten them out. He said he thought that was the least he could do.” [Source: www.warhistoryonline.com | Jeff Edwards| October 27, 2016 ++]

Battle of Chipyong-Ni ► Gettysburg of the Korean War

On June 25, 1950, the Korean War began when some 75,000 Soldiers from the North Korean People's Army (NPKA) poured across the 38th parallel and within days, captured Seoul, the South Korean capital. For two months, the outnumbered South Korean army and the small American force fought numerous battles with NPKA as they withdrew down the Korean peninsula to the Pusan area at the southeast tip of Korea. It was here that they set up a final defensive perimeter where they were able to impede the enemy's advancement. To take the pressure off the continuous attacks by the NKPA, a counteroffensive began on Sept. 15th, when United Nation forces made a daring landing at Inchon on the west coast. The unexpected attack crushed the meager NPKA defenses within a few day, cutting off North Korean supply lines to the south.

U.N. casualties during the Inchon landing and subsequent battles resulted in 566 killed and 2,713 wounded. In the fighting, the NKPA lost more than 35,000 killed and captured. As additional U.N. forces came ashore, they were organized into the US X Corps. Attacking inland, they advanced towards Seoul, which was taken on September 25th, after brutal house-to-house fighting. The daring landing at Inchon, coupled with 8th Army's breakout from the Pusan Perimeter, threw the NKPA into a headlong retreat. U.N. troops quickly assembled and surged into the north after them.

Movement was fast and by 19 OCT, the North Korean capital of Pyongyang was captured. By 2 NOV, NPKA were driven by the 8th Army, under Gen. Walton Walker, and the X Corp, under Gen. Edward Almond, almost to the Yalu River, which marked the border of Communist China. The successful advance north ended near the Yalu River, when China's People's Volunteer Army (CPVA) entered the conflict by deploying approximately 250,000 Chinese troops in support of North Korea. Within weeks the combined Communist armies pushed the United Nation forces back south below the 38th parallel into a full and complete retreat.

Just a few weeks after the disastrous defeat of United Nations forces in North Korea in late November 1950, Lt. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgeway, newly appointed 8th Army commander, issued orders to "seek, fix and kill," as initial

steps of Operation Thunderbolt, a forthcoming U.N. attack northward when troops of I and IX Corps advanced from the western sector of the front northward. On January 29, 1951, a motorized patrol from the 23rd Infantry under the command of Col. Paul L. Freeman, Jr., was ambushed, bloodied and finally rescued after uncovering major outpost lines of the Chinese 125th Division at the Twin Tunnels, just three mile southeast of strategic Chipyeong-Ni. Responding to Ridgway's order to find and destroy the Chinese, Freeman's 23rd Infantry, with the French Battalion de Coree attached, had moved in and, in a vicious two-day battle, brutalized three regiments of the Chinese division at Twin Tunnels. Defeated and in disarray, the Chinese survivors had fled up the hills toward Chipyeong-Ni and beyond, where other Chinese divisions were preparing their own attack in answer to Operation Thunderbolt.

Shortly after the victory at Twin Tunnels, Ridgway began his plan to reach the important crossroad village of Chipyeong-Ni, located near the east-west center of South Korea, and to defend it at all cost. It was of immense strategic value because it was a key road intersection for all vehicular movement in the area south east of Seoul. If overrun, a huge gap would open in the U.N. defenses that would severely threatened the flanks of an already shaken 8th Army. A strategic thinker, he realized his ability to launch effective counter-offensive operations would be badly curtailed without control of Chipyeong-Ni. Just forty miles north, the 38th parallel crossed the peninsula, generally marking the border separating Communist North Korea from free South Korea. Fifty miles west, twice-ravaged Seoul lay in Communist hands again, after the winter retreat of U.N. forces. Wonju, located 15 miles southeast of Chipyeong-Ni and in better times an important hub of communications and transportation, was now a wasted, deserted city. Chipyeong-Ni and Wonju were linked by a single-track railroad and a gravel road. Another town, Yoju, was situated about 20 miles south of Chipyeong-Ni and connected to it by a gravel road; these three, in military-geographical terms, formed the Chipyeong-Wonju-Yoju triangle.

Ridgway needed someone to make a stand against the advancing Communist force to show the rest of his army that the Chinese were not an invincible foe. He knew the Chinese couldn't sustain their attacks due to their dangerously overextended supply lines so he turned to the men of the 23rd RCT, along with the attached French Bataillon de Coree, to be the ones to make that stand. History has since validated his choice of defenders - the 23rd had performed superbly early in the war in the Pusan Perimeter and had come through the Battle of the Chongchon River and Kunu-Ri relatively unscathed (one of the few units to do so). This had fostered an esprit de corps within the unit not often seen in those desperate days. Moreover, the Soldiers of the 23rd had a strong fighting spirit and were not lacking in confidence in their leadership. The French had also shown well at Wonju and Twin Tunnels; they were under the command of the larger than life figure Lt. Col. Ralph Monclar.

This veteran Frenchman was already a national hero, a Three Star General at the time, but he voluntarily requested a demotion to Lieutenant Colonel to lead the battalion in Korea. Monclar fought in World War I where he was wounded seven times and received eleven awards for valor. At war's end he was almost entirely disabled. In 1924, a fully recovered Monclar was selected for the French Foreign Legion, leading Soldiers in Morrocco, the Middle East, and Vietnam. During World War II he fought with the French resistance from England. He was in his fifties by the time of Korea and was on the verge of retirement when he volunteered to lead his beloved battalion.

Late in the afternoon of 3 FEB, the American-French force, only 70 percent effective after its losses at the brutal, bloody battle of Twin Tunnels, began the weary trudge, now unopposed, to the village of Chipyeong-Ni. As they moved along under heavy packs of individual and combat gear, their infantry boots crunched through patches of icy snow, occasionally side stepping frozen bodies of Chinese Soldiers. As the column stretched along the snow covered road to Chipyeong-Ni, Freeman expected an ambush. He knew the Chinese leadership were bent on revenge because the hated 23rd Infantry had bloodied their noses previously at Kunu-ri during the winter retreat in North Korea and at Twin Tunnels a few days before. Freeman was a wiry, handsome, gray-haired Virginian who wore a full-colonel eagle on his helmet to distinguish him from the rank and file. He was known to be unpretentious, somewhat pessimistic, often expecting the worst in order to deal with it, and occasionally profane when orders from higher-ups seemed inane or ill-advised. He had been Gen. Joe Stilwell's supply officer during World War II, and a lot of Vinegar Joe had rubbed off on Paul Freeman. He himself would retire as a Four-Star General.

Following hours of marching, the advance guard of Lt. Col. George Russell's 1st Battalion entered Chipyeong-Ni. Patrols encountered a few Chinese Soldiers, who fled after a few cursory rifle shots. The other two battalions of the 23rd, with the French Battalion, closed on the village later in the afternoon. Freeman ordered a full alert. He realized that his 4,500-man force, including fewer than 2,500 front-line infantrymen, could not adequately man all the higher hills around Chipyeong-Ni. Instead, he decided to install a rectangular-shaped perimeter on the lower hills immediately surrounding the village. Over the next few days, they dug in and were reinforced by artillery, tank, and engineer elements. By 13 FEB, their strength consisted of three infantry battalions; the French Infantry Battalion and First Ranger Company, both attached to the regiment; the 37th Field Artillery Battalion; Battery B, 82nd Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion; Battery B, 503rd Field Artillery Battalion; Company B, 2nd Engineer Battalion (Combat); and a platoon from the 2nd Medical Battalion. In all, Freeman had 4,500 men under his command, including 2,500 front-line infantrymen.



Lt. Gen. Matthew Ridgway, Lt. Col. Ralph Montclar, & Col. Paul L. Freeman

Once all positions had been prepared and fortified, Freeman outlined the mission to his officers: hold the small garrison against an advancing enemy force of five Chinese Communist Force (CCF) Divisions. Don't count on reinforcements anytime soon, stand and fight it out, to the bitter end if need be. The men listened and accepted their lot. So be it. With quiet confidence Freeman's charges prepared for the inevitable onslaught. The exact size of enemy force that lined up against the 23rd during the battle is unclear. Some sources put the attacking numbers as high as 25,000 while the Chinese claim they only threw 8,000 men into the fight. But despite the heroics that Freeman's and men Monclar's performed, it could have been so much different had his request to withdraw been granted. Instead, they built up their defensive positions and rained down merry hell on the attacking units. The defensive line was then consolidated further as the commander began to undertake the work that would eventually repel the Chinese aggressors.

When you consider that the communist forces had the American and French troops surrounded, it makes their heroic and stoic defense of the village even more remarkable - and that's exactly what happened as light faded on February 13, 1951. Chinese were observed crawling, walking and trotting around the railroad tracks, creek bed, road and hills to the south. The supply road from Wonju was closing, as elements of the Chinese 40th and 66th armies shied away from Wonju and advanced on Chipyeong-Ni from the south and east. Parts of the 39th and 42nd armies were closing in from other directions. Aware of the growing Chinese movement around him, Freeman asked permission to withdraw. Eighth Army commander Gen. Ridgway said no. He planned to use Chipyeong-Ni as a baited trap, enticing the Chinese to turn and attack it out in the open with large forces that could be destroyed by the combined firepower of the 23rd infantrymen, tanks, mortars, artillery, and close-in Air Force sorties.

Shortly before midnight the deafening sound of whistles and bugles signaled the initial Chinese attack. This first attack was met and defeated by Monclar's French battalion in close hand-to-hand fighting. The heroic French confused the Chinese raiders by cranking their own sirens before charging with fixed bayonets howling all the way, rattling the attacking Chinese so much, they turned and fled. The Battaillon de Coree will always be remembered for

the legendary bayonet charge at Chipyeong-Ni. The spirited defense set the tone for the rest of the defenders of Chipyeong-Ni that night. Elsewhere, throughout that first night, the Chinese attacked the perimeter again and again. Tasked with the defense of Hill 397, E and G companies detonated fougasse drums filled with gasoline and oil. As attackers got close to the drums, the defenders detonated grenades underneath them, spraying the Chinese with a deadly mixture.



U.S. Army Illustration of The Battle of Chipyeong-Ni

As the battle continued into the early morning hours the fighting was fiercest against K Company. It was so bad that no ambulance could get to the front line in order to evacuate the wounded. Freeman had been wounded during the night and the defenders had suffered about 100 casualties. As dawn broke on 14 FEB, Valentine's Day, the Chinese forces, fearing the devastating effects of daylight artillery and air strikes, broke contact, withdrew and prepared to resume the fight again the next night. A dusting of snow covered the communist dead in front of American lines. Later that day, Ridgway appeared suddenly in Chipyeong-Ni. He toured the garrison and met with Freeman and his astounded troops, encouraging them to fight on. From most accounts the Soldiers appreciated his visit and gained confidence from his presence. This was not the last time Ridgway would risk his life by dropping in on a battle zone unexpectedly. He walked the walk.

As was expected, soon after dark on 14 FEB, sirens, whistles and howling echoed through the frigid night air and flares soared into the sky signaling the beginning of another desperate night of fighting. Throughout that awful night the Chinese launched repeated human wave attacks against the perimeter. Undaunted in the face of the savage and relentless raids the French and American defenders refused to yield. Even when ammunition supplies were desperate the men remained resolute. The fighting raged on fiercely until daylight finally broke on the morning of 15 FEB. The light of day revealed a snowy battlefield littered with enemy dead, many were literally piled on top of each other in front of some positions. This had been brutal, hard, fighting. Once again, the Chinese attackers faded away into the hills for the day.

That morning the skies suddenly cleared for the first time during the siege - this was a great stroke of luck because it allowed for deadly air strikes - napalm was dropped across the surrounding hills lay annihilating countless enemy troops. Cheers went up from the beleaguered ranks. The planes dropped loads of ammunition and food to the encircled fighters - things were looking up. In the meantime a relief convoy built around tanks from the 5th Cavalry Regiment had been fighting its way north through tough enemy fire taking significant casualties to reinforce their valiant brothers in Chipyeong-Ni. The arrival of the relief column, known to history as Task Force Crombez, coupled with the deadly strafing and napalm attacks sent the Chinese fleeing; they simply withdrew and disappeared from the area. With dogged determination the defenders had finally broken the enemy onslaught. Ridgway had his victory.

The battle marked a turning point in the war; the victory resulted in the defeat of a massive Chinese offensive and caused the CCF to suffer its first tactical defeat at U.N. hands. This time it was the Chinese who were turned back

and they never again regained the momentum. The battle of Chipyeong-Ni has since been referred to as the "Gettysburg of the Korean War." When it was said and done the UN forces had inflicted heavy losses on attacking CCF units but they too received many heartbreaking casualties -- the 23rd suffered approximately 51 KIA and hundreds more were wounded. Sadly, a number of men went missing in action at Chipyeong-Ni. Enemy casualties were estimated to be in the thousands. Although the CCF fought on for another two and a half years, the battle of Chipyeong-ni permanently altered the direction and outcome of the Korean War.

The 23rd and their French allies stood strong despite long odds, vicious fighting and traumatic casualties. While desperately fighting for their lives and for the lives of their brothers in the next foxhole they unknowingly stamped their signature on the future. Their story, written 66 years ago in a snow covered valley on the other side of the world, still resonates strongly all these years later. The victory at Chipyeong-ni allowed the Eighth Army to survive and fight another day, the events that transpired there supplied the troops with a new fighting spirit and will to win. From this battle forward the Eighth Army only faced north. There would be no more retreating in Korea -- just as Ridway had ordered. The future survival of South Korea was all but assured.

Standing before a joint session of Congress more than a year later, in May 1952, General Matthew Ridgway stated: "I shall speak briefly of the Twenty-third United States Infantry Regiment, Colonel Paul L. Freeman commanding, [and] with the French Battalion ... Isolated far in advance of the general battle line, completely surrounded in near-zero weather, they repelled repeated assaults by day and night by vastly superior numbers of Chinese. They were finally relieved ... I want to say that these American fighting men, with their French comrades-in-arms, measured up in every way to the battle conduct of the finest troops America and France have produced throughout their national existence."

The Battle of Chipyeong-ni was a decisive battle of the Korean War that resulted in a United Nations Command victory. Due to the ferocity of the Chinese attack and the heroism of the defenders, the battle has been called, "... one of the greatest regimental defense actions in military history." This was a turning point, a pivotal, singular moment of the Korean War. Rising from the wintry ashes of defeat and humiliation, Americans had won a victory, and the myth of Communist invincibility was finally shattered. [Source: Together We Served | January 2017 ++]

Manhattan Project ► RECA Act Applicability

The Manhattan Project was an effort during World War II in the United States to develop the first nuclear weapon. It was directed by American physicist Dr. Julius Robert Oppenheimer. The industrial problem was centered around the production of sufficient fissile material, of sufficient purity. This effort was two-fold, and is represented in the two bombs that were dropped.

- The Hiroshima bomb, Little Boy, was uranium-235, a minor isotope of uranium that has to be physically separated from more prevalent uranium-238, which is not suitable for use in an explosive device. The separation was effected mostly by gaseous diffusion of uranium hexafluoride (UF₆), but also by other techniques. The bulk of this separation work was done at Oak Ridge.
- The Nagasaki bomb, Fat Man, in contrast, consisted primarily of plutonium-239, a synthetic element which could be induced to supercriticality only by implosion. The design of an implosion device was at the center of the efforts by physicists at Los Alamos during the Project.

The U.S. raids completely destroyed many Japanese cities, including Tokyo, even before atomic weapons were deployed. The allies performed such attacks because Japanese industry was extremely dispersed among civilian targets, with many tiny family-owned factories operating in the midst of civilian housing. The choice of civilian instead of military targets has often been criticized. However, the U.S. already had a policy of massive incendiary

attacks against civilian targets in Japan. These dropped 20% explosives, to break up wooden structures and provide fuel, and then dropped 80% (by weight) small incendiary bombs to set the cities on fire.

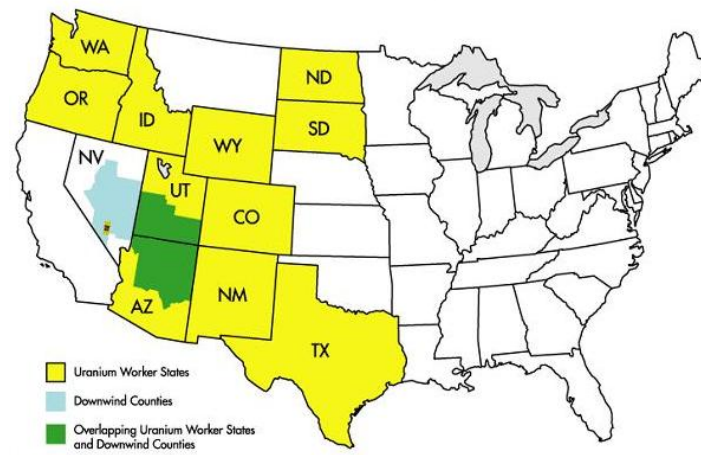
The United States subsequently conducted nearly 200 atmospheric nuclear weapons development tests from 1945 to 1962. Essential to the nation's nuclear weapons development was uranium mining and processing, which was carried out by tens of thousands of workers. Following the tests' cessation in 1962 many of these workers filed class action lawsuits alleging exposure to known radiation hazards. These suits were dismissed by the appellate courts. Congress responded by devising a program allowing partial restitution to individuals who developed serious illnesses after exposure to radiation released during the atmospheric nuclear tests or after employment in the uranium industry: the **Radiation Exposure Compensation Act** (RECA) was passed on October 5, 1990. The Act's scope of coverage was broadened in 2000.

The Act presents an apology and monetary compensation to individuals who contracted certain cancers and other serious diseases following their exposure to radiation released during the atmospheric nuclear weapons tests, or following their occupational exposure to radiation while employed in the uranium industry during the Cold War arsenal buildup. This unique statute was designed to serve as an expeditious, low-cost alternative to litigation. Significantly, RECA does not require claimants to establish causation. Rather, claimants qualify for compensation by establishing the diagnosis of a listed compensable disease after working or residing in a designated location for a specific period of time.

Residents of the New Mexico village of Tularosa have long said those living near the site of the world's first atomic bomb test in 1945 weren't told about the dangers or compensated for their resulting health problems. Since then, they say, descendants have been plagued with cancer and other illnesses while the federal government ignored their plight. More details will emerge on those concerns on 10 FEB, when a report is set to be released examining whether the blast damaged the genes of the people exposed to it. The Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium will unveil the health assessment involving residents of the historic Hispanic village and other New Mexico counties around the testing site.

Some residents allege that the federal government neglected to include New Mexico in a law that compensated residents near another atomic test site because many of those near the Trinity Test were Hispanic. The government has not commented on those claims. Officials with the U.S. Justice Department's Civil Division, which oversees the compensation program, said Congress would have to amend the act to expand payouts to New Mexico residents. The study and report were done after the consortium received a grant from the Santa Fe Community Foundation to hire an expert to evaluate health surveys of residents in Socorro, which is also close to the site, and four New Mexico counties. The Downwinders are lobbying for compensation and apologies from the U.S. government. The law currently only covers areas in Nevada, Arizona and Utah that are downwind from a different test site.

RECA COVERED AREAS



In 2015, U.S. Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM) pressed the Senate to include New Mexico residents in the law. "The rest of the world didn't know about the tragedies that happened in the Tularosa Basin," Udall said. "For a long time, the government denied that anything happened at all." [Source: The Associated Press | Russell Contreras | February 9, 2017 ++]

WWII Churchill White House Visit ► 22 DEC thru 14 JAN 1942

The very hour that the United States entered World War II, Winston Churchill decided to invite himself to Washington, D.C. On December 8, 1941, even as Franklin D. Roosevelt was delivering his "day of infamy" speech to Congress, the British prime minister resolved to sail across the Atlantic to fortify his nation's most important alliance. "We could review the whole war plan in light of reality and new facts," an eager Winston Churchill wrote to Roosevelt. After expressing concern about Churchill's safety in the U-boat-filled ocean—a concern the prime minister waved off—FDR assented. "Delighted to have you here at the White House," the president replied. Two weeks after Pearl Harbor, Churchill arrived in Washington for a three-week stay at the White House. He celebrated Christmas 1941 with FDR and Eleanor Roosevelt. As December became January—75 years ago—the president and prime minister bonded over late-night drinking sessions that annoyed the First Lady, taxed White House staff and cemented the partnership that won the world war.

On the morning of 22 DEC, the day of Churchill's arrival, the chief White House butler, Alonzo Fields, walked into an argument between Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. "You should have told me!" Eleanor said, according to Doris Kearns Goodwin's book 'No Ordinary Time'. FDR had just told her that Churchill was arriving that night to stay for "a few days." Churchill, whose warship had just docked in Norfolk, Virginia after ten storm-tossed days at sea, was anxious to travel the 140 miles to Washington to see Roosevelt. They had met four months earlier, in Newfoundland, to draft the Atlantic Charter, a joint declaration of postwar goals, including self-government for all peoples. Both men had hoped it would convince the American people to join the war and ally with Britain, but public opinion in the U.S. did not change until Pearl Harbor.

The prime minister flew to Washington from Norfolk on a U.S. Navy plane, and the president greeted him at Washington National Airport. Churchill arrived at the White House wearing a double-breasted peacoat and a naval cap, carrying a walking stick mounted with a flashlight for London's Blitz-driven blackouts, and chomping on a cigar. Accompanying Churchill that first day were British ambassador Lord Halifax, minister of supply Lord Beaverbrook, and Charles Wilson, Churchill's doctor. Upstairs, the First Lady, putting the best face on her sudden hostess duties, invited the prime minister and his aides to have tea. That night, after a dinner for 20 where Roosevelt and Churchill traded stories and quips, a smaller cohort retired to the Blue Room upstairs to talk about the war.



Roosevelt and Churchill 23 DEC press conference (left) and addressing Congress(right)

Churchill turned the second-floor Rose Suite into a mini-headquarters for the British government, with messengers carrying documents to and from the embassy in red leather cases. In the Monroe Room, where the First Lady held her press conferences, he hung up enormous maps that tracked the war effort. They told a gloomy tale: Germany and Italy in control of Europe from the English Channel to the Black Sea, Hitler's army besieging Leningrad, Japan sweeping through the Philippines and British Malaya and forcing Hong Kong's surrender on Christmas Day. That made Roosevelt and Churchill's summit doubly important: The Allies needed an immediate morale boost and a long-range plan to reverse the tide of fascism.

The 67-year-old prime minister proved an eccentric houseguest. "I must have a tumbler of sherry in my room before breakfast," Churchill told Fields, the butler, "a couple of glasses of scotch and soda before lunch and French champagne, and 90-year-old brandy before I go to sleep at night." For breakfast, he asked for fruit, orange juice, a pot of tea, "something hot" and "something cold," which the White House kitchen translated to eggs, toast, bacon or ham, and two cold meats with English mustard. White House staff often saw the prime minister in his nightclothes, a silk gown with a Chinese dragon on it and a one-piece romper suit. "We live here as a big family," Churchill wrote to British Labor Party leader Clement Attlee in a telegraph, "in the greatest intimacy and informality." One night, imagining himself as gallant as Sir Walter Raleigh spreading his cloak over dirty ground for Queen Elizabeth I, Churchill took hold of Roosevelt's wheelchair and wheeled him into the White House dining room.

Churchill and Roosevelt ate lunch together every day. In mid-afternoon, Churchill would often suddenly declare, "I'll be back," then retreat for a two-hour nap. Daytime was a prelude to his deepest work hours, from dinner long into the night. He kept Roosevelt up until 2 or 3 a.m. drinking brandy, smoking cigars and ignoring Eleanor's exasperated hints about sleep. "It was astonishing to me that anyone could smoke so much and drink so much and keep perfectly well," she later wrote. But FDR hit it off with Churchill. "The President did not share his wife's shock, nor her barely concealed disapproval," Nigel Hamilton wrote in *The Mantle of Command: FDR at War, 1941-1942*. "He liked eccentricity, which made people the more interesting." Though amused by Churchill—"Winston is not Mid-Victorian—he is completely Victorian," Roosevelt said—he also admired his courage. He brought Churchill along to his 23 DEC press conference with 100 American reporters, who cheered when the 5-foot-6 prime minister climbed onto his chair so they all could see him. He was "somewhat shorter than expected," the *New York Times* reported, "but with confidence and determination written on the countenance so familiar to the world."

On Christmas Eve, Churchill joined the president at the annual White House Christmas tree lighting, moved from Lafayette Park to the White House's South Portico out of wartime caution. "Let the children have their night of fun and laughter," Churchill told the 15,000 onlookers gathered beyond the fence. "Let us share to the full in their unstinted pleasure before we turn again to the stern tasks in the year that lies before us." After attending a Christmas Day service with Roosevelt at a nearby church, Churchill spent most of the holiday working nervously on the speech he would deliver the next day to a joint session of Congress (<https://youtu.be/EMZ-6a1m8Rs>). "The task which has been set is not above our strength," Churchill declared in his speech. "Its pangs and trials are not beyond our endurance."

Thrilled by his roaring reception by Congress, which he'd answered by flashing the V-for-victory sign, Churchill returned to the White House excited and relieved. Upstairs that night, Churchill watched *The Maltese Falcon* with Roosevelt and Canadian prime minister Mackenzie King, and declared that the ending, during which Humphrey Bogart's Sam Spade gives up the *femme fatale* he loves to the police, reminded him of a sad case he'd overseen as British home secretary. That night in his suite, Churchill was struck by a pain in his chest and arm—a minor heart attack. His doctor, not wanting to alarm him, simply told him he'd been overtaxing himself. Churchill, undaunted, took a train trip to Ottawa and addressed the Canadian parliament on December 30, then returned to Washington to continue the summit.

On New Year's Day 1942, Roosevelt and Churchill visited Mount Vernon to lay a wreath on George Washington's tomb. That night, they gathered in the president's study with diplomats from several Allied countries

to sign a joint declaration that they would fight the Axis powers together, and that none would negotiate a separate peace. The pact included a historic new phrase: At Roosevelt’s suggestion, it was called “A Declaration by the United Nations.” According to aide Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt hit upon the name that morning and wheeled himself to Churchill’s suite, unannounced, to run it by the prime minister. Ignoring a clerk’s warning that Churchill was in the bath, Roosevelt asked him to open the door. He did, revealing Churchill standing naked on the bath mat. “Don’t mind me,” Roosevelt quipped.

After a five-day vacation in Florida, Churchill returned to Washington on 10 JAN to conclude the summit. His three-week visit was fruitful for the war effort. Churchill and Roosevelt agreed on several strategies that would end up making a difference for the Allies. Churchill learned to his relief that despite Americans’ impatience for revenge against the Japanese, Roosevelt still intended to defeat Germany first, as the two leaders had agreed in Newfoundland. They also agreed to invade North Africa later in 1942, a move that proved an effective prelude to the Allied landings in Italy and France. At Roosevelt’s insistence, Churchill agreed that a single command center in Washington and supreme Allied commanders in Europe and Asia would coordinate the war effort. The agreement deeply upset British military leaders, but Churchill headed off criticism by telegraphing to Attlee, the acting prime minister in his absence, that it was a done deal.

Churchill left for England on January 14, 1942, flying home via Bermuda. “His visit to the United States has marked a turning-point of the war,” enthused a *Times* of London editorial upon his return. “No praise can be too high for the far-sightedness and promptness of the decision to make it.” All those late nights took a toll on Roosevelt and his exhausted staff. Hopkins, looking ashen, checked himself into the naval hospital to recover. But the bond between president and prime minister—the trust that would win the war—was forged. Roosevelt, in the now-quiet White House, found he missed Churchill’s company. He sent a message to him in London that foresaw how their friendship would resonate in history. “It is fun to be in same decade with you,” it read. [Source: Smithsonian.Com | Erick Trickey | January 13, 2017 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 15 thru 29 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 15 thru 29 FEB**”. [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | February 2017 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ► Eubanks, Ray E | WWII



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

to

RAY E. EUBANKS

Rank and organization: Commander, U.S. Navy

Place and date: Philippine Sea, Battle of Leyte Gulf off Samar 25 October 1944

Entered service: 1931.

Born: August 13, 1908, Pawnee Oklahoma

Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as commanding officer of the U.S.S. Johnston in action against major units of the enemy Japanese fleet during the battle off Samar on 25 October 1944. The first to lay a smokescreen and to open fire as an enemy task force, vastly superior in number, firepower and armor, rapidly approached. Comdr. Evans gallantly diverted the powerful blasts of hostile guns from the lightly armed and armored carriers under his protection, launching the first torpedo attack when the Johnston came under straddling Japanese shellfire. Undaunted by damage sustained under the terrific volume of fire, he unhesitatingly joined others of his group to provide fire support during subsequent torpedo attacks against the Japanese and, outshooting and outmaneuvering the enemy as he consistently interposed his vessel between the hostile fleet units and our carriers despite the crippling loss of engine power and communications with steering aft, shifted command to the fantail, shouted steering orders through an open hatch to men turning the rudder by hand and battled furiously until the Johnston, burning and shuddering from a mortal blow, lay dead in the water after 3 hours of fierce combat. Seriously wounded early in the engagement, Comdr. Evans, by his indomitable courage and brilliant professional skill, aided materially in turning back the enemy during a critical phase of the action. His valiant fighting spirit throughout this historic battle will venture as an inspiration to all who served with him.



LCdr. Ernest E. Evans, USN (1908-1944) at the commissioning ceremonies of USS Johnston (DD-557), Seattle, Washington, 27 October 1943.

Evans, of Native American ancestry (half Cherokee and one quarter Creek) graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1931. On 9 August 1941, he was assigned to the destroyer Alden, and was serving on her in the East Indies when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7 of that year. He became commanding officer of Alden on 14 March 1942, and held that position until 7 July 1943. While serving on Alden he participated in operations in and around Australia, New Guinea and the Dutch East Indies. In mid-1943 Evans was then ordered to duty in charge of fitting out the Fletcher-class destroyer Johnston at the Seattle-Tacoma Shipbuilding Corporation in Seattle, Washington. Commander Evans assumed command of Johnston at her commissioning on 27 October 1943. He was awarded the Bronze Star for meritorious achievement in action against a Japanese submarine on May 16, 1944.

In the Battle off Samar, a part of the Battle of Leyte Gulf, Evans fought his ship gallantly until it was sunk on October 25, 1944, by a Japanese force that was vastly superior in number, firepower, and armor. Johnston, together with the destroyers Hoel and Heermann, four destroyer escorts and six escort carriers (CVEs) formed the task unit 77.4.3, known as Taffy 3. This group, together with planes from Taffy 2 (TU 77.4.2), ultimately forced a Japanese battlegroup consisting of several battleships, heavy cruisers, light cruisers and destroyers to abort its original mission to attack the landing beaches at Leyte under the command of General Douglas MacArthur and retreat.

When the Japanese fleet during the Battle off Samar was first sighted, Evans did not hesitate. He ordered his helm sharp to port and he led his destroyer out of the task unit's circular anti-aircraft disposition in favor of charging the enemy alone to make a torpedo attack. Some claim that Evans told his crew over the ship's intercom: "A large Japanese fleet has been contacted. They are fifteen miles away and headed in our direction. They are believed to have four battleships, eight cruisers, and a number of destroyers. This will be a fight against overwhelming odds from which survival cannot be expected. We will do what damage we can." However, contemporaneous sources credit the latter part of this dramatic announcement to LCDR Robert W. Copeland of the Samuel B. Roberts, who charged in with Evans on a subsequent torpedo run.

At 0700, in response to incoming shell fire bracketing carriers of the group he was escorting, began laying down a protective smokescreen and zigzagging. At about 0710, Gunnery Officer Robert Hagen began firing at the closest attackers, then at a range of 18,000 yards (16,000 m) and registered several hits on the leading heavy cruisers. The Japanese targeted Johnston and soon shell splashes were bracketing the ship. In response and without consulting with his commanders, Evans ordered Johnston to "flank speed, full left rudder", beginning the action that earned him the Medal of Honor. Johnston, still making smoke and zigzagging, accelerated to flank speed towards the Japanese.

One gunnery advantage the Americans had was the radar-controlled Mark 37 Gun Fire Control System. The brains of the system was the Ford Mark I Fire Control Computer, which provided coordinated automatic firing solutions for her 5-inch guns merely by pointing the gun director at the target. Crude by comparison, the Japanese used optical range finders aided by splash color dye markers in each shell, color-coded to the firing ship. At this point, the Japanese were unable to find the range of their attacker.

At 0715, Hagen concentrated his fire on the leading cruiser squadron's flagship, the heavy cruiser Kumano. At the 5-inch gun's maximum range of 10 nmi (12 mi; 19 km), Johnston fired, scoring several hits on Kumano's superstructure, which erupted into flame and smoke.

At 0716, Sprague ordered Commander William Dow Thomas aboard Hoel, in charge of the small destroyer screen, to attack. Struggling to form an attack formation, the three small ships (Hoel, Heermann, Samuel B. Roberts) began their long sprint to get into firing position for their torpedoes.

Johnston pressed its attack, firing more than two hundred shells as it followed an evasive course through moderate swells, making it a difficult target. Johnston closed to within maximum torpedo range, and at 9,000 yards she fired a full salvo of ten torpedoes. At 0724, two or three struck, blowing the bow off Kumano. Minutes later, at 0733, Kongō was forced to turn away north to avoid four torpedoes. The heavy cruiser Suzuya, suffering damage from air attacks, was also taken out of the fight, as she stopped to assist Kumano. The effect of Johnston's attack was to generate confusion in the minds of the Japanese commanders, who thought they were being engaged by American cruisers. Evans then reversed course and, under cover of his smoke screen, opened the range between his ship and the enemy.

At 0730, three 14 inch shells from the battleship Kongō, at a range of 7 nautical miles passed through the deck of Johnston and into her portside engine room, cutting the destroyer's speed in half to 17 knots (20 mph) and disrupting electric power to her aft gun mounts. Moments later, three 6 inch shells — possibly from Yamato — struck Johnston's bridge, causing numerous casualties and severing the fingers of Commander Evans's left hand. The ship was mangled badly, with dead and dying sailors strewn across her bloody decks—but Johnston did not sink. Her stores of fuel had been seriously depleted before the battle, saving her from a catastrophic explosion. The ship

found sanctuary in rain squalls, where the crew had time to repair damage, restoring power to two of the three aft gun mounts. Johnston's search radar was destroyed, toppled to the deck in a tangled mess. The fire control radar was damaged, but was quickly returned to service. Only a few minutes were required to bring Johnston's main battery and radar online, and from its hidden position in the rain, Johnston fired several dozen rounds at a destroyer leader at 10,000 yards (beginning at approximately 0735). Fire was then shifted to the cruisers approaching from the east. Several dozen more rounds were fired at the closest target at 11,000 yards.

At 0737, Commodore Thomas ordered a torpedo attack via voice radio. Johnston and Heermann acknowledged. As Johnston continued its course away from the Japanese, it came upon the charging screening force, led by the damaged Hoel. Evans then had Johnston rejoin the attack to provide gun support to Commander Thomas' small squadron on their torpedo run. Attacking Tone, the leading heavy cruiser to the east of the formation, Johnston closed to 6,000 yards, now firing with reduced efficiency due to her lost SC radar, yet still registering many hits.

All available fighters and bombers from the Taffys converged on the Japanese fleet. At 0810, moving erratically through the smoke and rain, Johnston avoided Heermann by the narrowest of margins. Heermann was "within potato range" at one point (between 0808 and 0825) of a Japanese destroyer for several minutes, before being separated by the smoke.

During the battle, Evans engaged in several duels with much larger Japanese opponents. At 0820, emerging through smoke and rain squalls, Johnston was confronted by Kongō, a 36,600-ton battleship. Johnston fired at least 40 rounds, and more than 15 hits on the battleship's superstructure were observed. Johnston reversed course and disappeared in the smoke, avoiding Kongō's 14-inch return fire. At 0826 and again at 0834, Commander Thomas requested an attack on the heavy cruisers to the east of the carriers. Responding at 0830, Johnston bore down on a huge cruiser firing at the helpless Gambier Bay, then closed to 6,000 yards and fired for ten minutes at a heavier and better-armed opponent, possibly Haguro, scoring numerous hits.

At 0840, a much more pressing target appeared astern. A formation of seven Japanese destroyers in two columns was closing in to attack the carriers. Reversing course to intercept, Evans attempted to pass in front of the formation, crossing the "T", a classical naval maneuver which would have put the force being "crossed" at a great disadvantage. Evans ordered Johnston's guns to fire on this new threat. The Japanese destroyers returned fire, striking Johnston several times. Perhaps seeing his disadvantage, the commander of the lead destroyer turned away to the west. From as close as 7,000 yards, Hagen fired and scored a dozen hits on the destroyer leader before it veered off. He shifted fire to the next destroyer in line, scoring five hits before it too turned away. Amazingly, the entire squadron turned west to avoid Johnston's fire. At 0920, these destroyers finally managed to fire their torpedoes from extreme range, (10,500 yds). Several torpedoes were detonated by strafing aircraft or defensive fire from the carriers, and the rest failed to strike a target.

Now the Japanese and American ships were intertwined in a confused jumble. Gambier Bay and Hoel were sinking. Finding targets was not difficult. After 0900, with Hoel and Samuel B. Roberts out of the fight, the crippled Johnston was an easy target. Fighting with all she had, she exchanged fire with four cruisers and numerous destroyers.

Johnston continued to take hits from the Japanese, which knocked out the number one gun mount, killing many men. By 0920, forced from the bridge by exploding ammunition, Evans was commanding the ship from the stern by shouting orders down to men manually operating the rudder. Shell fire knocked out the remaining engine, leaving Johnston dead in the water at 0940. As her attackers gathered around the vulnerable ship, they concentrated fire on her rather than the fleeing carriers. Johnston was hit so many times that one survivor recalled "they couldn't patch holes fast enough to keep her afloat."

At 0945, Evans finally gave the order to abandon ship. Johnston sank 25 minutes later with 186 of her crew. Evans abandoned ship with his crew, but was never seen again. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. However, it was the Japanese themselves that first recognized Johnston's incredible actions that day: As a destroyer

from the opposing fleet cruised slowly by, Robert Billie and several other crewmen watched as the Japanese captain saluted the sinking Johnston, having considered her an honorable opponent.

The fate of the Johnston's captain was never conclusively established, and remains the subject of continuing conjecture among the ship's survivors. Some claim that he was hit by Japanese naval shellfire; others that he was able to jump into a damaged motor whaleboat. What is known is that he was seriously wounded during the battle; that he lived long enough to give the abandon ship order; and that he was not among those rescued. Evans was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his material contribution to the decisive victory won in Leyte Gulf and shared in the Presidential Unit Citation awarded his group for this action in which he gave his life.

In 1955, the destroyer escort USS Evans (DE-1023) was named in his honor. It was decommissioned in 1968, and no active ship carries the name of Evans or Johnston, although a number of active ships have been named for Samuel B. Roberts and her crew. On November 12, 2013, a petition was created to name a ship after Evans. On May 23, 2013, the Naval Station Newport, Newport, Rhode Island, Surface Warfare Officers School's virtual simulator for shiphandling training was dedicated as the Evans Full Mission-2 Simulator in Evans' honor. To hear what survivors of the battle had to say about their experiences go to <https://youtu.be/dXDnC07j63Y>

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

*** Health Care ***



Drug Cost Increases Update 03 ► Insulin Lawsuit

A lawsuit filed 30 JAN accused three makers of insulin of conspiring to drive up the prices of their lifesaving drugs, harming patients who were being asked to pay for a growing share of their drug bills. The price of insulin has skyrocketed in recent years, with the three manufacturers — Sanofi, Novo Nordisk and Eli Lilly — raising the list prices of their products in near lock step, prompting outcry from patient groups and doctors who have pointed out that the rising prices appear to have little to do with increased production costs.

The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Massachusetts, accuses the companies of exploiting the country's opaque drug-pricing system in a way that benefits themselves and the intermediaries known as pharmacy benefit managers. It cites several examples of patients with diabetes who, unable to afford their insulin treatments, which can cost up to \$900 a month, have resorted to injecting themselves with expired insulin or starving themselves to control their blood sugar. Some patients, the lawsuit said, intentionally allowed themselves to slip into diabetic ketoacidosis — a blood syndrome that can be fatal — to get insulin from hospital emergency rooms. A recent study in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* found that the price of insulin nearly tripled from 2002 to 2013. "People who have to pay out of pocket for insulin are paying enormous prices when they shouldn't be," said Steve Berman, a lawyer whose firm filed the suit on behalf of patients and is seeking to have it certified as a class action.

In a statement, Sanofi said, "We strongly believe these allegations have no merit, and will defend against these claims." Lilly said it had followed all laws, adding, "We adhere to the highest ethical standards." A spokesman for Novo Nordisk said the company disagreed with the allegations in the suit and would defend itself. "At Novo Nordisk," the company's statement said, "we have a longstanding commitment to supporting patients' access to our

medicines.” The rising costs of drugs has led to several hearings in Congress and has drawn the attention of President Trump, who this month pledged to address the issue and said the industry was “getting away with murder.”

In December, attorneys general in 20 states accused several generic drug makers, including two of the biggest — Teva Pharmaceuticals and Mylan — of engaging in a price-fixing scheme in which executives coordinated at informal gatherings and through phone calls and text messages. Federal investigators are also said to be looking at the issue of drug prices, and several companies, including Valeant Pharmaceuticals International, have said they have received subpoenas. Several companies have recently tried to head off criticism by taking actions to address rising prices. In December, Lilly said it would offer a 40 percent discount off the list price of its insulin product, Humalog, for patients who are forced to pay full price. And Novo Nordisk, which makes Novolog, has pledged to limit price increases in the American market to less than 10 percent in a year.

The lawsuit filed Monday claimed that the three companies intentionally raised the list prices on their drugs to gain favorable treatment from pharmacy benefit managers, who work with health insurers and drug makers and help decide how a drug will be covered on a list of approved drugs. Insurers do not pay the list prices that the drug makers set. Instead, the pharmacy benefit managers negotiate a rebate that is returned to them. The benefit managers, in turn, take a slice of that rebate for themselves, although the amount of the rebate, and the amount they keep, is not made public. As a result, the drug manufacturers end up setting two prices for their drugs — the higher list price and the lower, secret, “real” price that insurers pay. The lawsuit claims that rather than competing with one another to offer a lower, “real” price to the insurers, the drug makers are vying to offer the best payment to the pharmacy benefit manager, which is why they have been raising the list price.

When the list price goes up, many patients see their out-of-pocket costs rise, even if they have health insurance. That’s because plans increasingly carry high deductibles, which require patients to pay for their drug costs themselves until they hit a certain limit, as well as to pay a percentage of the list price even after their deductible is met. While Mr. Berman accused the benefit managers of being complicit, he said the lawsuit focused on the drug makers because “they are playing the game, and they are the ones who publish the list price.” Michael Carrier, an antitrust professor at Rutgers Law School, described the filing of the lawsuit as “big news” and said it was interesting because it turned its attention to the inner workings of the pharmacy benefit managers, which until now “have floated under the radar of sustained drug pricing scrutiny.” Brian Henry, a spokesman for Express Scripts, the nation’s largest pharmacy benefit manager, declined to comment on the lawsuit, but said, “Rebates don’t raise drug prices, drug makers raise drug prices.” [Source: The New York Times | Katie Thomasjan | January 30, 2017 ++]

PTSD Marijuana Treatment Update 01 ► Study Begins

The first participant in a clinical trial designed to evaluate the effectiveness of smoking marijuana to treat PTSD in veterans was given cannabis on 6 FEB, according to the organization conducting the study. The study is the first such trial to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of using marijuana to manage symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder in U.S. veterans, officials with the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies said in a release on Tuesday. MAPS is a California-based non-profit research organization focused on “the careful uses” of marijuana, according to its website. The study is funded by a \$2 million grant from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

The study will look at the safety and effectiveness of four separate levels of marijuana potency in 76 veterans. It will provide data on marijuana dosing, composition and side effects, and the potential benefits of using pot to treat PTSD. The data will be intended for clinicians and legislators considering marijuana as a potential treatment for PTSD. The first veteran to participate in the study received the marijuana at the Scottsdale Research Institute in

Phoenix, Arizona, the release stated. The study is taking place in two locations: in Phoenix, led by Dr. Sue Sisley, and at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, led by Ryan Vandrey.

The study is recruiting adult military veterans who have experienced trauma during military service. Screening for volunteers began in January. Volunteers will complete 17 outpatient visits to one of the study location clinics in a 12-week period, with a follow-up visit in six months. Veterans interested in volunteering for the clinical trial may email arizona@marijuanasites.org for the Phoenix location or call (410) 550-0050 to reach the Baltimore location. “As this is the first placebo-controlled trial of cannabis for PTSD, we are breaking important ground needed to identify improved treatment options for veterans with PTSD,” said Marcel Bonn-Miller of the University of Pennsylvania’s Perelman School of Medicine, in the release. Bonn-Miller is overseeing the project at the two study sites.

The research received approval in early 2014 from the federal Health and Human Services Department and was to get underway at the University of Arizona and other locations. The program was delayed after the school in Tucson terminated Sisley’s contract, Military Times reported in January 2015. Sisley and MAPS worked for more than four years to develop the study protocol and win federal approval. [Source: ArmyTimes | Kathleen Curthoys | February 7, 2017 ++]

Lung Cancer Update 01 ► Who should Really Get Screened

Back in 2013, the U.S. Preventive Task Forces recommended annual lung cancer screening in adults ages 55 to 80 who had a 30 pack-year smoking history and currently smoke, or have quit within the past 15 years. This was determined after a 2011 study called the National Lung Screening Trial (NLST) found that screening could prevent lung cancer deaths in high-risk people. Now, a new study just published in JAMA Internal Medicine finds that implementing such a lung cancer-screening program may be challenging and complex—and even unreliable in offering insights about whether someone actually has cancer or not. Undertaken by the Veterans Administration (VA), the study found that the rate of false positives was more than double that which was found in the NLST. Of the 2,106 patients screened, about 60 percent had nodules, but only about 2 percent required further evaluation—and just 1.5 percent actually had lung cancer.



“Lung cancer screening is particularly fraught with difficulty and always has been,” says Leena Gandhi, M.D., Ph.D., of NYU Langone’s Perlmutter Cancer Center. One reason? The test itself, which relies on CT scans, is less reliable at specifically picking up cancer than other tests are, she says. “When you use a CT scan, you pick up all kinds of things that aren’t cancer, especially on a smoker or former smoker,” she says. Those include benign nodules and inflammation. When doctors see them, it sparks false positives that could lead to more invasive procedures like biopsies—not to mention a whole lot of anxiety.

What’s more, CT scans also emit radiation, which in itself has been shown to be a cancer risk with cumulative exposure, Dr. Gandhi notes. Finally, another sticking point is that lung cancer screening requires a sophisticated

screening program that's backed by a lung cancer team—something not found in many areas, says Dr. Gandhi. The VA study was only done in certain parts of the country where those programs were in place, she adds.

So, should you get screened? It turns out that's a more difficult question than it seems. The best strategy is to talk with your doctor about risk factors. If you're a smoker and experiencing symptoms like chronic cough, and/or you have a history of lung cancer in your immediate family, it's likely that screenings will be used as a diagnostic tool. But for younger guys who either don't smoke or quit more than 15 years ago, and have no symptoms and no family history, a screening is usually not used as a preventive test. [Source: Mens Health | Elizabeth Millard | February 6, 2017 ++]

Health Tests ► Which do You Really Need?

There are health tests we need, and those we don't. Pelvic ultrasound? Sounds ultrasuspicious. Occult blood test? Only if it comes with an exorcism. Urinalysis? Great, now I'll be kicked off the tour . . . It's tough to know which of these are truly essential, especially when they're packaged with dozens of other tests and called an "executive health exam." And yet thousands of men sign up for these screenings—at an out-of-pocket cost of up to \$10,000 apiece—based on the sales pitch that a test may uncover a hidden health condition. Of course, 10 grand might be worth it if all that random screening actually did any good: But a seminal study by the Rand Corporation found that patients who had the most screenings over 5 years were no healthier than those given less medical attention. This isn't to say executive health exams are scams. They can be quite valuable—if you know which of the procedures are worthwhile. So we asked our experts to create an a la carte menu to bring to your General Practitioner. Think of these as the best tests for a recession.



Cardiac CT Angiography

These colorful 3-D images allow radiologists to calculate one of your most important heart numbers: your coronary artery calcium score, a measure of how much plaque is piling up in your arteries. A 2007 study of over 10,000 people published in the journal *Atherosclerosis* reported that calcium scores alone can predict heart attacks, while a 2003 study found that a high calcium score is associated with a tenfold increase in heart-disease risk. This is compared with a less-than-twofold increase in risk from traditional risk factors such as diabetes and smoking. The test has one significant downside: The radiation exposure from your average cardiac CT is equal to 600 chest x-rays, according to a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. This produces a 1-in-5,000 risk of cancer, another study reveals.

- Who needs it: Men with some of the risk factors for heart disease whose physicians may be on the fence about starting treatment. "In these medium-risk cases, cardiac CT scans and calcium scoring can provide the extra level of information that we feel we need," says Gerald Fletcher, M.D., a professor of cardiology

at the Mayo Clinic. The lower the calcium score, the lower the risk. If you reach 112, your physician might recommend aspirin or statins.

- Cost: \$350 to \$900. Most insurance companies will reimburse you if you've previously had an abnormal stress test or chest pain.

Bone Density Scan

Think osteoporosis affects only old ladies? Fact is, men begin losing bone mass at age 30. That's why it's important to assess the state of your skeleton now with a dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DEXA) scan, which uses low-radiation x-rays to gauge bone mineral density (it can also measure body fat percentage). "DEXA scans allow us to identify people at high risk for fracture so they can start treatment to strengthen their bones before a fracture occurs," says Murray J. Favus, M.D., director of the bone program at the University of Chicago medical center. Your doctor might suggest adding strengthening workouts to your exercise program and supplementing your daily diet with up to 1,000 milligrams of calcium and up to 400 IU of vitamin D.

- Who needs it: Anyone with any osteoporosis risk factors: inactivity, smoking, a family history of the disease.
- Cost: \$250 to \$300. To increase the odds of your insurance covering the scan, make sure your doctor notes any risk factors.

VO2 Max Test

With the VO 2 max test, you hop on a treadmill or stationary bike and give your maximum effort while wearing a mask that captures your every breath. By analyzing the amount of oxygen you consume, the test determines how efficiently your body extracts and uses oxygen from the air. This makes it the gold standard of fitness markers, as well as a strong indicator of your overall health. "Blood pressure, cholesterol—those are what we call 'remote markers.' The best predictor of your longevity is going to be your fitness," says Walter Bortz, M. D., a longevity researcher at Stanford University.

- Who needs it: Anyone who wants their blood to pump. If your score is under 18 ml/kg/min, talk to your doctor about increasing the intensity of your workouts.
- Cost: \$110 to \$160. The test is available at physical therapy, rehab, or cardiopulmonary centers. Insurance providers won't cover it.

Virtual Colonoscopy

By definition, something "virtual" usually can't compare to the real thing. But with a virtual colonoscopy, you avoid the two downsides of a traditional colonoscopy—sedation and the risk of a perforated colon—while still benefiting from the one big upside: test results you can stake your life on. "Virtual colonoscopies have the same sensitivity for detecting large polyps, which are the precursor lesions of colon cancer," says Judy Yee, M. D., a professor of radiology at the University of California at San Francisco. Though the CT scanning technology of a virtual colonoscopy can miss some smaller polyps, a University of Wisconsin study found that these are usually benign anyway. And don't sweat the radiation; you'll receive about 5 to 8 millisieverts, an amount that isn't considered dangerous, says Dr. Yee.

- Who needs it: People ages 50 and older, especially those on blood thinners, because an "oops" with a regular scope could cause dangerous internal bleeding. The exception: If your family has a history of colon cancer, you should be screened at least 10 years before the age your relative was when he or she was first diagnosed, Dr. Yee says. People who are overweight or inactive, drink or smoke heavily, or have an inflammatory bowel disease should also consider early screening.
- Cost: \$500 to \$1,000. Many health-care plans now recognize the effectiveness of virtual colonoscopies and increasingly cover them.

Nutritional Evaluation

While it's not a test per se, putting your diet under the microscope could result in a leaner body and a longer life. "The benefits of meeting with a dietitian are accountability, moral support, and troubleshooting if your progress stalls," says Alan Aragon, M. S., the Men's Health Weight-Loss Coach. In a 2008 Kaiser Permanente study, diabetic patients who received nutritional counseling were nearly twice as likely to lose weight as those who had no guidance. To find a registered dietitian who can see beyond the food pyramid, Aragon recommends going to the American Dietetic Association's Web site (eatright.org) and clicking on "Find a Nutrition Professional." Then call the R.D. and ask how he or she stays up on the latest research, which should include reading journals such as the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition or the Journal of Applied Physiology.

- Who needs it: Anyone who should lose weight or simply wants to know how they can eat to beat disease.
- Cost: \$40 to \$75 a session. Your insurance company may reimburse you if you have a condition that can be improved with diet changes. Ask your doctor for a referral.

[Source: Men's Health | Justin Park | April 21, 2015 ++]

Heart Attack Update 03 ► Can you Have a Silent One

Not all heart attacks cause chest pain and drenching sweats: Some heart attacks may strike “silently,” causing little or no symptoms, new research from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) suggests. The researchers recruited over 1,800 people 45 and older who were free of heart disease, and then scanned their hearts 10 years later. They discovered 8 percent of the participants showed evidence of scarring—damaged tissue—on their hearts. Of that scarring, the majority went unrecognized and uncared for, and nearly half of those looked typical of a heart attack. That means they may have experienced a heart attack and not even known it. These silent heart attacks could occur without any obvious signs or symptoms that something may be seriously wrong with your health.

“In some cases, patients have symptoms that they feel are not bad enough to go to a doctor,” says study author David Bluemke, M.D., Ph.D., the director of radiology and imaging sciences at the NIH Clinical Center. Those signs and symptoms of a silent heart attack may include mild chest pain, nausea, vomiting, unexplained fatigue, heartburn, shortness of breath, or discomfort in the neck or jaw, he says. That’s right: A silent heart attack may feel a lot like a bout of the stomach bug or the flu or indigestion. Unlike those illnesses and ailments, however, even a mild heart attack is a serious medical condition: It can leave scar tissue on your heart. And here’s why that’s a huge deal for your health: Scarring on your heart may mess with the electrical current in your heart, causing abnormal heart rhythms, or arrhythmia, says Dr. Bluemke. When that happens, your heart may beat too quickly, leaving it unable to pump blood efficiently. This can lead to sudden cardiac arrest—or when your heart suddenly stops working. So your best bet? Closely monitor your symptoms when you don’t feel 100 percent healthy.

For younger, healthier men, the chances of these signs and symptoms being a heart attack is very rare, says Dr. Bluemke. But if you're over 50, 40+ with a strong family history of heart disease, or have other risk factors like obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, or smoking, you should head to your doctor as soon as possible if your symptoms persist longer than 20 minutes or seem to worsen with activity. Don’t wait to see if the symptoms clear up. Even if you’re not having symptoms, it’s a good idea for your overall health to see a doctor for an annual physical, too. That’s because a silent heart attack isn’t the only thing that can scar the organ: Other causes of heart disease, like chronic high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, and smoking can also damage the heart.

In fact, 70 percent of people with unrecognized heart disease who died of sudden cardiac death actually showed previous scarring on their hearts, a previous study found. That’s why early detection of heart disease is important, so your doctor can control those factors before a heart attack hits. You should also ask your doctor for a CT calcium score or CT angiogram test, says Dr. Bluemke. These can detect plaque buildup at a very early stage. [Source: Men's Health | Christa Sgobba | November 10, 2015 ++]

Colds Update 04 ► Best Ways to Prevent One

Getting a cold sucks, but it's not inevitable. And while 33 million diagnoses each year—according to a CDC report—might suggest otherwise, there are four simple Strategies to Avoid Getting Sick This Winter. But you have to be diligent. And by diligent, it means you can't just read this and sort of follow the advice. You have to stick to it. Because the moment you let up is when colds take hold. (You'll probably have to get a little lucky, too.)

1. Stop Touching Your Face

This tip may seem obvious, but it'll be tough to follow through. That's because people touch their faces an average of 3.6 times every hour, a 2012 study in *Clinical Infectious Diseases* found. And that's a problem, because bringing your hands to your face can spike your cold risk. Workers who report sometimes touching their nose or eyes with their fingers were 41 percent more likely to come down with an upper respiratory infection than those who keep their hands off, according to researchers in Japan. While you can catch the common cold through germ droplets in the air, the most efficient form of transmission for that particular infection is actually hand contact with secretions that contain the virus, the researchers say.

So if your hands touch a surface with the virus on it, and then you touch your face, you can easily introduce the bug into your body. If you can't help touching your face, just make sure your digits are clean. That means scrubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds (sing "Happy Birthday" in your head), making sure to hit the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under the nails, the CDC says.

2. Get Plenty of Sleep

Skimping on shuteye can leave you susceptible—it's just one of the Crazy Things That Can Happen When You're Short On Sleep. People who sleep fewer than six hours a night are four times as likely to catch a cold as those who log seven hours or more, a study published in the journal *Sleep* found. This may be because sleep loss messes with certain types of immune cells called B and T cells, which are critical in protecting us from viruses, says study coauthor Aric Prather, Ph.D., an assistant professor of psychiatry at University of California San Francisco. "Additionally, sleep loss is related to an increase in inflammation, which is believed to play a role in cold symptom severity," he adds.

3. Hit The Gym

You should keep up your workout routine when the temperature drops. The reason: People who exercise five or more days a week take up to 46 percent fewer sick days than those who exercise one day or less a week, according to a study from Appalachian State University. When you exercise, your blood flow and body temperature increase, and your muscles contract. These factors signal your body to recruit important disease-fighting cells that are stored in your lymphoid tissues. These cells are then recirculated throughout your system, says lead researcher David Nieman, Dr.P.H. This allows your body to detect—and kill off—potential disease-causing intruders.

To jack up your immune system, Nieman says near-daily cardio of 30 to 60 minutes a session should do the trick. He notes that resistance training can work, too, but says it should be total-body training—say, like in THE 21-DAY METASHRED, an at-home body-shredding program from Men's Health—since it appears to be more effective in immune-cell recruitment than routines that target one or two body parts. You can review it at http://www.21daymetashred.com/21daymetashred/index?keycode=256350&utm_source=Menshealth.com&utm_medium=Textlink.

4. Hug It Out

Preventing a cold may truly be in your own hands. Stressed-out people who were more likely to have hugged within the past day are better able to fight off the virus than those who are more hands-off, a study in the journal *Psychological Science* found. "Hugging is a physical expression of social support, and when people feel they are

supported, they also feel they are better able to handle stress,” says study coauthor Denise Janicki-Deverts, Ph.D., a research psychologist at Carnegie Mellon University. And that’s important, because stress itself has been connected to increased cold risk, possibly because it may spark the release of certain hormones that can wreak havoc on your immunity, says Janicki-Deverts.

[Source: Men's Health | Alexa Tucker November 22, 2016 January 27, 2017 ++]

Exercise Mental Health Benefits ► Anxiety, Brain, & Sleep Impact

As a naval medical officer with nearly two decades of operational mental health experience, Navy Capt. Robert Koffman, M.D. is often asked: “What can I start doing today to help my mental situation get better?” In this time of what is referred to as “patient-centered care,” the answer to that question is unique for every individual: What works for you may not work for someone else. While medicines most certainly have their place, Koffman has one word of advice that, according to both his own experience and wide-ranging research in the field, has shown to provide positive benefit to almost everyone: Exercise.

Exercising with others is a great motivator. Semper Fi Fund (<https://semperfifund.org>) offers a recreational, team-based, sport program called Team Semper Fi for injured servicemen and women who use sport as a rehabilitative tool on their road to recovery. The motivation, inspiration and camaraderie that Team Semper Fi offers is truly extraordinary. Whether that physical activity takes place as part of a team or as an individual in a gym, out on the hiking trail (with the added therapeutic benefit of nature) or in your own backyard, exercise simply means increased physical activity. The benefits you’re likely to see from increasing your activity by as little as thirty minutes a day three days a week make the effort very worthwhile. These include:

- **Reduce stress and anxiety** - Exercise increases the presence of all sorts of good chemicals in the brain: norepinephrine, for example, which helps the brain respond to stress. And you’ve probably heard of endorphins: These chemicals trigger positive feelings (ever heard the term “runner’s high”?) even as they reduce perceptions of pain. It sounds like a big win-win, doesn’t it? Well, it is — and many studies have shown that even moderate walking (three orSimple graphic with the top 3 benefits listed four days a week for 30 minutes at a time) can deliver very positive benefits.
- **Increased brain health** - When you exercise, you increase the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) — a protein in the brain that’s important for long-term memory. Low levels of BDNF in the brain have been linked to Alzheimer’s, obesity and depression. Moreover, BDNF is also important for helping brain cells and neurons grow and form important connections with other neurons, Neuroplasticity is a term you’ll be hearing much more about as scientists tackle a significant concern for veterans — traumatic brain injury.
- **Improved sleep patterns** - The Centers for Disease Control recently reported that insufficient sleep has become an important public health issue. In fact, more than a third of Americans fail to get sufficient sleep on a regular basis. Why is this important? An insufficient quantity of sleep, chronically, is linked to seven of the 15 leading causes of death in the U.S. today!

You feel much better after a good night’s sleep than you do after a restless night’s sleep, right? That’s hardly a surprise: Sleep is the body’s way of recharging itself — not just physically, but also mentally. When you exercise, you’re increasing your body’s temperature; the drop in temperature after exercising is a signal to the body to get some sleep. A recent study by the National Sleep Foundation found that “people sleep significantly better and feel more alert during the day if they get at least 150 minutes of exercise a week.” The health benefits of exercise are particularly notable for Veterans who suffer from post-traumatic stress. Research has shown that focusing one’s

mind on the physical activity at hand, whether it's walking, hiking, swimming, seated cardio or whatever it may be, can help reduce the immobilization stress response familiar to anyone suffering from PTSD.

Of course, there are many more benefits to exercise that there insufficient space to comment on here, for example: Improved self-confidence. A sharper memory. Better control over addictive impulses. A force multiplier for therapeutic efforts. Increased energy and stamina. An improved overall mood. So, get out there and get moving — you have nothing to lose but those negative thoughts — and maybe a few less sleepless nights, too! To learn more visit Team Semper Fi at <https://semperfifund.org/how-we-help/team-semper-fi>. [Source: Vantage Point | Robert Koffman | February 8, 2017 ++]

Healthy Eating Update 01 ► American Heart Month | Smoothies

February is American Heart Month. A great way to take care of your heart is to live a healthy lifestyle which includes what you eat and drink. If you want a way to add more fruit, veggies, and fiber to your day try an option beyond what's on your plate. Sip and slurp your nutrients through a yummy and heart-healthy smoothie. Registered dietitian Anne L. Koth at the Rockford, Illinois VA Clinic encourages Veterans to eat and drink things that are heart healthy. A great way to get in a lot of produce is through a smoothie.

There are many ways to make a smoothie: most recipes use a milk or yogurt base, or a milk-substitute such as almond milk or soy yogurt. The next step is to add fruit and/or vegetables. If your smoothie is your breakfast meal or if you are trying to get more protein into your day, you can add peanut butter or other nuts, oats, seeds like chia or flax or even protein powder — the possibilities are endless. But beware – not all smoothies are truly a healthy choice. Some bottled and fast-food smoothies contain lots of hidden sugars and calories. No blender? No problem. Use soft fruit such as ripe banana, ripe mango or berries. You could steam vegetables and include those, too. Mash the fruit as much as you can in a bowl with a fork. Then add liquid gradually continuing to whisk it with the fork until it's all blended up.

It's important not to confuse smoothies with juice drinks or “juicing”. The juice of fruits and vegetables contains nutrients, but it lacks a very important item: fiber. Smoothies generally have the whole fruit or vegetable pureed into the product. This texture and fiber helps you stay full. For more information on this potential benefit, see the study in the medical journal Appetite at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27235823>. Many recipes for home-made smoothies exist, and your VA dietitian can share ideas as well. Check out <https://youtu.be/jtjZOe0dvwA>. Also take a look at http://www.nutrition.va.gov/docs/UpdatedPatientEd/Yummy_Benefits_Cookbook2.pdf for the Yummy Benefits Cookbook's (page 67) smoothie recipe and consider making an appointment with your PACT team dietitian, to customize your smoothies to meet your individual health goals. [Source: Vantage Point | Anne L. Koth | February 8, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 383 ► Kids Dental | Wear Red | Weight Loss

Children's Dental Health Month -- February is National Children's Dental Health Month. According to the American Dental Association, all toothpaste helps remove plaque, which is a film of bacteria that forms on teeth and gums every day and can lead to tooth decay. However, toothpaste with fluoride has the added benefit of making tooth enamel stronger. The U.S. Surgeon General agrees that drinking water with fluoride every day helps keep cavities away. Make sure your children brush their teeth at least twice a day; once in the morning and once at night. You should also schedule dental exams every six months. TRICARE offers two different plans to ensure your child

can get the dental care they need. Family members are eligible for care through either the TRICARE Dental Program or the TRICARE Retiree Dental Program. Both programs require enrollment for beneficiaries. Learn more at www.TRICARE.mil/Dental.

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National Wear Red Day -- Women are powerful, smart, strong – and about one-third of them are dying of heart disease and stroke each year, according to the American Heart Association. You can help save lives by raising awareness and encouraging change on National Wear Red Day®, which is annually on February 3rd. This observance raises awareness of heart disease and stroke in women, and encourages them to get educated about their health. Did you know that about 80 percent of heart disease and stroke in women is preventable? By eating healthy, staying active, not smoking, and making other healthy choices, you can lower your chances of heart disease.

Since 2003, National Wear Red Day® has reached millions of mothers, daughters, sisters and friends with some remarkable successes. Nearly 90 percent made at least one healthy behavior change, more than one-third lost weight, more than 50 percent exercised more, 60 percent changed their diets, more than 40 percent checked their cholesterol levels and one-third talked with their doctors about developing heart health plans. Over the past 10 years women’s deaths decreased by more than 30 percent. Make a plan to see your health care provider and talk about your overall health by TRICARE’s preventive care services. Learn more about preventive care at www.TRICARE.mil/preventive

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Weight Loss Supplements -- If you have ever thought about using weight-loss supplements to meet your weight loss and body composition goals, then you may want to reconsider. Did you know dietary supplements marketed for weight loss are categorized as “high risk” products? The Food and Drug Administration has found that many weight loss dietary supplements contain hidden drug ingredients and other ingredients that haven’t been studied enough in humans to prove them safe or effective. Not only are weight loss supplements unsafe, but those that advertise they will help you lose weight fast probably won’t work. There is not much scientific evidence that weight-loss supplements alone help people lose significant weight. Question claims on the label, and remember: If it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is. For more articles and information on living a healthier lifestyle check out 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> | February 3, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 384 ► Ear Care | Heart Health Webiner | SAD

Ear Infections in Children -- Did you know that ear infections are the most common reason parents take their children to the doctor? Ear infections are usually caused by bacteria that grow when fluid fills behind the eardrum. That usually happens when your child is already sick with another illness, like a sore throat or cold. According to the National Institutes of Health, more than 80 percent of children will have an ear infection by their third birthday. If your child is tugging or pulling his ear, has trouble hearing, difficulty sleeping or has fluid draining from the ear, then your child may have an ear infection and you should contact your child’s doctor. You can help prevent your children from developing ear infections by making sure they wash their hands frequently, keep them child home when they don’t feel well, and get your children vaccinated against the flu every year. If you’re unsure of whether your child may be showing signs of an ear infection, call TRICARE’s Nurse Advice Line before going to the emergency room. Go to www.TRICARE.mil/NAL or more information.

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Heart Health Webiner -- Need a little love on Valentine's Day? Join the Military Health System on February 14, 2017 at noon on Twitter to talk about how you can show your heart some love. Ask subject matter experts questions about how you can keep your heart healthy. They'll also talk about your heart healthy benefits under TRICARE.

To join the conversation, login to or sign up for a twitter account. Then go to the Military Health System's twitter page at twitter.com/MilitaryHealth and watch the live updates or search for #LOVEYOURHEART. If there's a question that you'd like to ask, use the hashtag LOVEYOURHEART to make sure we see your message. Remember that Twitter is a public forum. Don't share any personal health information or other information that you don't want the world knowing!

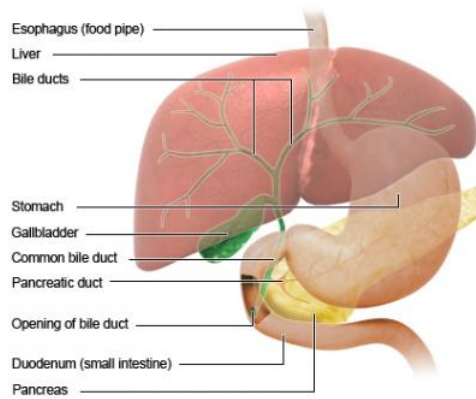
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Seasonal Affective Disorder -- During the winter months, the days are shorter. Lack of sunlight can affect your mood, which can lead to a form of depression called Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD. If you have this disorder then you may experience sadness, feelings of hopelessness, lack of energy or motivation and fatigue. Most research suggests that SAD is caused by a lack of sunlight exposure. Not getting enough natural light can throw off people's internal clocks, hormone production and serotonin levels. SAD usually goes away on its own with time as the weather improves and the days become longer again. But there are treatments that can help your symptoms. It's normal to feel down sometimes, but if this feeling lasts for days at a time and you don't have the motivation for activities you'd normally enjoy, contact your doctor. This is especially important if your sleep patterns and appetite have changed, or if you feel hopeless, think about suicide or turn to alcohol when you need comfort or relaxation. TRICARE offers mental health services. Learn more at www.TRICARE.mil/mentalhealth.

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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> | February 9, 2017 ++]

Gallstones Update 01 ► Often Harmless and Unnoticeable



Location of gallbladder

Gallstones are often harmless, and a lot of people don't even notice that they have them. If they do get problems, people may wonder whether to treat the symptoms or have surgery. It only makes sense to treat gallstones if they are causing problems. About two-thirds of people who have already had typical symptoms such as cramp-like upper abdominal pains (colic) get them again within two years. Then they are faced with the decision of whether to treat the symptoms only or to have the stones removed surgically. Gallbladder surgery is one of the most common operations in Germany. About 175,000 women and men have gallbladder surgery each year, mostly because they

have gallstones that are causing symptoms or complications. Gallstones form when a digestive fluid called bile thickens. The liver produces up to one liter of bile every day. It is used by the body to digest fats in the bowel. Most of the bile flows directly through the bile ducts into the small intestine after you eat. Between meals, the rest of the bile is stored and concentrated in the gallbladder. The gallbladder is a small, pear-shaped hollow organ, located in the right abdomen, just below the liver.

Symptoms

Many people don't notice their gallstones because they have hardly any symptoms or none at all. Research has shown that about 2 to 4 out of 100 people with gallstones have noticeable symptoms within one year. About 70 out of 100 people who have already had symptoms like colic will get them again within two years. Whether someone has symptoms and what kind of symptoms they have will depend on where the gallstones have formed, how large they are, and whether they are causing any complications. If you have symptoms of gallstones, it's important to get an accurate diagnosis in order to rule out any other possible causes.

The most typical sign of gallstones is very unpleasant, cramping pain in the upper abdomen (colic). This pain occurs if the gallbladder is contracting to squeeze bile into the bowel, but gallstones are blocking the exit at the same time. The pain comes in waves and usually gets a bit better after about an hour, eventually disappearing completely a few hours later. The pain may radiate into your right shoulder and back. Gallbladder stones can also cause other symptoms, including feeling too full, flatulence, nausea, vomiting and regurgitation. Cramping pain in the upper abdomen can also be caused by a different condition known as bile duct stones. These may lead to jaundice (sometimes called icterus) too – a condition where the skin and the whites of the eyes take on a yellowish color. Here the jaundice is caused by bile duct stones preventing proper bile drainage. This means that the liver is no longer able to break down the bile pigments, which raises the level of yellow bilirubin in the blood, causing the skin and whites of the eyes to turn yellow. This may also make urine darker, and stool may have a lighter color.

Causes

Bile is made up of water and several other substances, some of which are not water-soluble. If these substances clump together, gallstones form. It is believed that this happens when there is an imbalance in the substances that make up the bile. For instance, the bile often contains more cholesterol than usual. But it isn't exactly clear what causes the stones to develop. Most gallstones are made of cholesterol. Other, less common, types of gallstones are known as pigment stones. They consist of calcium and bilirubin, a yellowish pigment that is made during the breakdown of hemoglobin in red blood cells. Gallstones can form in the gallbladder itself, and, less frequently, directly in the bile ducts. Most bile duct stones first form in the gallbladder and then migrate into the common bile duct (ductus choledochus). The medical term for gallstones in the gallbladder is cholecystolithiasis, and the medical term for gallstones in the bile ducts is choledocholithiasis.

Risk factors - The following factors are known to increase the risk of gallstones:

- Age: The risk of developing gallstones increases with age, especially after you reach the age of 40.
- Genes: If someone in your family has had gallstones.
- Sex: Women are more likely to get gallstones than men. The female sex hormone estrogen is believed to increase the risk of gallstones.
- Pregnancy.
- Using the contraceptive pill or estrogen tablets during menopause (hormone therapy).
- Functional problems of the gallbladder: The organ cannot contract (squeeze bile out) properly.
- Short bowel syndrome: A disorder that can develop after surgical removal of a large segment of the small bowel.
- Diabetes.
- Cirrhosis: A severe liver disease caused by metabolic disorders or excessive consumption of alcohol.
- Being very overweight.

- Losing a lot of weight in a short time: This happens a lot in very obese people who have surgery to make their stomach smaller.
- Special high-calorie liquid food.
- Hemolysis: A disease that causes increased breakdown of red blood cells.

Prevalence, Effects, and Diagnosis

It is estimated that, from the age of 40, more than 20% of women and more than 10% of men have gallstones. Most of them will not have any symptoms. If the typical symptoms arise, there is a greater risk of complications, such as obstruction of the bowel or inflammation of the gallbladder or pancreas. About 1% of people with gallstones develop complications each year. Gallstones are sometimes found by chance, for example during an ultrasound scan of the abdomen done for other reasons. But the doctor will often specifically look for them because you have symptoms that could be signs of gallstones. Before any diagnostic tests are done, it is important to describe your symptoms to the doctor in detail.

Diagnosing gallstones is normally not very complicated. After you have talked to the doctor, you will have a physical examination and an ultrasound scan of your abdomen. This will usually be enough to make a diagnosis. More tests may be necessary to make sure the symptoms aren't being caused by other medical problems. Diagnosing gallstones located in the bile duct may be more complicated. If there is reason to believe you might have bile duct stones, an ultrasound scan will usually be done here too. But bile duct stones are more difficult to detect on an ultrasound image. Because of this, you might then have a special x-ray examination called endoscopic retrograde cholangiography (ERC). This involves inserting an endoscope through the mouth and gently pushing it along the food pipe, stomach and into the duodenum, where the bile duct opening is found. The doctor will then inject a contrast agent into the duct so that any stones become visible on the x-ray image. The endoscope can also be used to remove stones during the procedure. Other options include magnetic resonance cholangiography (MRC) and endoscopic ultrasound (EUS, or endosonography). MRC produces cross-sectional images of the bile duct system. Radiation isn't used in MRC or EUS. MRC doesn't require endoscopy. This means that, unlike with ERC, any stones that are discovered can't be removed during the examination. This would have to be done in a separate procedure.

Treatment

If gallstones don't cause any problems, then there's usually no need to treat them. A lot of people with gallstones don't have any symptoms for a long time. What's more, any treatment can have side effects, and surgery always carries certain risks. People who have very large gallstones or specific types of porcelain gallbladder (calcification of the gallbladder wall) are at greater risk of developing gallbladder cancer. Surgical removal of the gallbladder may then be considered even if they don't have any symptoms. Several painkillers and antispasmodic medications are available for the relief of painful colic. Symptoms like bloating or nausea can also be treated with medicine. But drugs that can dissolve the gallstones are used only rarely. Removing the gallbladder is the only way to permanently prevent painful colic. Whether and when this step is taken will depend on several factors, including the severity of symptoms and the risk of complications.

[Source: Informed Health Organization | February 8, 2017 ++]

* Finances *



FICO Credit Score Update 09 ► 12 Ways to Lower It

The next time you check your FICO score, you might discover it has taken a tumble because of a seemingly small mishap on your part. This happened to the author of this article a few years back because she misplaced a bill for a whopping \$12.70 that ended up being reported to the credit bureaus. Worst of all, the problem stemmed from a charge through automatic billing on a credit card she no longer used. The result was an 80-point decrease in her credit score and several months of regret. With this precautionary tale in mind, here are some other types of mishaps that can damage your FICO score:

1. Car rental reservations -- Planning to rent a car? If you use a debit card to make the reservation, the rental car company might require a credit screening. That can ding your credit score. Here's a better option: Confirm the reservation with your credit card to avoid the unnecessary credit inquiry and settle the final bill with your debit card upon returning the vehicle.

2. Past-due rent payments -- Fail to pay the rent on time, and the landlord might report your delinquency to each of the three credit bureaus. If you're having trouble with rent, meet with the landlord and propose an alternative payment plan until you're caught up. That way, you can salvage your good name and credit rating.

3. Library delinquency -- When you check out a stack of books or DVDs, it's easy to forget to return them by the appointed time. But the consequences for this oversight can be worse than you'd think. Libraries normally assess a per day fee for each outstanding item. Once the account reaches specific amount, an additional fine is usually tacked on, and the entire account is forwarded to a collection agency. Get your materials in on time. And if you lose them, fess up and pay the fees. Otherwise, your credit score could take a hit.

4. Outstanding medical bills -- If you're having trouble paying medical bills, there are some steps you can take to ease the financial burden. But whatever you decide, make sure you promptly tend to the matter. Muting the ringer on the phone or sending calls from collectors to voice mail will eventually result in a blemish — in the form of a collection account — on your credit report. Those marks stick around for at least seven years.

5. Delinquent tax obligations -- Did the IRS or the local tax collector send you a hefty bill for unpaid taxes? You can run, but you can't hide. They will eventually track you down and demand what they're owed. If you fail to respond and work something out, expect your credit score to take a dive.

6. Defaulting on recurring bills -- If you are slightly past due on a bill from cellphone, utility or other provider of recurring services, chances are you'll receive several notices before services are terminated. But once the provider has had enough, expect to be turned over to collections and subsequently reported to the three credit bureaus. Don't ignore correspondence or fail to settle outstanding obligations.

7. Breached gym membership contracts -- Even if you are tired of forking over hard-earned cash each month for a gym membership you aren't using, don't just walk away. Properly close the account, or it could cost you in the form of early termination penalties and a damaged credit score.

8. Unpaid traffic citations -- Most of us are aware of the consequences associated with ignoring tickets issued by law enforcement. But what about those random tickets issued by parking services at the local university or the downtown street patrol? Ignoring them and failing to pay could show up as a collection in your credit profile.

9. Closing credit cards -- Closing a credit card account sounds smart, but it can hurt your credit score. Losing a portion of your available credit increases your credit utilization ratio, which accounts for 30 percent of your credit score. An increase in this ratio has a negative effect on your score.

10. Too many credit card applications - Ten percent of your FICO score is determined by how you shop for credit. According to myFICO: If you have been managing credit for a short time, don't open a lot of new accounts too rapidly. New accounts will lower your average account age, which will have a larger effect on your FICO® scores if

you don't have a lot of other credit information. Even if you have used credit for a long time, opening a new account can still lower your FICO scores. So, remember that fact the next time you're offered a credit card at the checkout counter as part of a deal that could save you some significant cash on the purchase. The price of that one-time savings might be a lower credit score.

11. Inadequate credit mix -- If you're looking to establish or rebuild your credit, it might be necessary to apply for a credit card unless you plan to go another route. But opening a single credit card account is likely to have only a modest impact on your score. According to myFICO (<http://www.myfico.com/CreditEducation/Types-of-Credit.aspx>) : The credit mix usually won't be a key factor in determining your FICO scores — but it will be more important if your credit report does not have a lot of other information on which to base a score.

12. In-house zero-interest financing -- Strapped for cash but in desperate need of that new mattress or laptop? It might be tempting to take advantage of zero-interest financing if it's offered by the seller. But if the credit line is only equal to the total purchase amount, be prepared for a spike in your debt-to-available-credit ratio. Simply put, your credit score will take a tumble because 30 percent of your FICO score is calculated by the amount owed to creditors.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Allison Martin | February 1, 2017 ++]

Avoid 2016's Top Scams ► What to Look For in 2017

Last year, Fraud.org collected more than 7,000 consumer complaints about scams. Based on that on 1 FEB at http://www.consumerfraudreporting.org/current_top_10_scam_list.php they released their annual list of the Top Ten Scams in order to warn consumers what to watch out for. BBB also released their top 10 at <http://www.bbb.org/vancouver-island/news-centre/news-releases/2016/01/top-10-scams-2016>. To protect yourself it would be advisable to check out those websites. They differ slightly but both contain good dope.

Fraud.org for the fourth year in a row noted scams involving bogus Internet merchandise were the #1 complaint! Bogus sales of merchandise were the top reason that consumers complained to NCL. The way many consumers first come into contact with these scams is via a “too good to be true” ad on a website, social media platform, or Internet forum. Popular ways scammers catch consumers' eyes is with deep discounts on goods like iPhones, sneakers, luxury apparel, video game systems, and even pets. The key to avoiding these scams is to shop around. If the price you're being quoted is far below what reputable merchants are asking, that's a red flag of fraud. If you hand over your credit card or gift card number or send a wire transfer to the seller of these goods, chances are that all you'll get in return is a headache, not a sweet deal. Following are some things should you should be aware of:

#1: Internet merchandise -- These scams remained number one in 2016, however, there were some significant new trends, including scammers stealing money from consumers via gift cards, and individual victims losing twice as much cash as in 2015.

- **Trend: Gift cards as a payment form** -- Wire transfers and credit and debit cards remain the payment method of choice for scammers, but gift cards as a new form of payment are on the rise. In 2016, Fraud.org saw a 30.86 percent increase in complaints where the payment method included gift cards, including numerous complaints where scammers asked for payment via iTunes gift cards. In such instances, the victim is instructed to load funds onto a gift card and then give the code and PIN number off the back of the card to the scammer, who then quickly deducts funds from the card, leaving the consumer with worthless plastic and little recourse to obtain a refund.
- **Trend: Falling victim to a scam is getting more expensive** -- The cost of falling victim to a scam increased significantly in 2016. In complaints where a loss was reported, the median loss was \$600, double

the \$300 median loss reported in 2015. The most expensive type of scam for victims continued to be friendship and sweetheart swindles (also known as “romance scams”), with a median loss of \$2,000.

#2: Prizes/Sweepstakes/Free Gifts -- Scams in this category typically start when a consumer gets an email, phone call, or text message informing them that they’ve won a big prize. All that’s required in order to collect is to pay a fee (allegedly to cover things like “taxes,” “fees,” “insurance,” or any other reason the scammer can think up). Here’s the catch: the “fee” is all the money that will ever change hands. There are no prizes, lottery winnings, or other big pots of money waiting for the victims. The scammers counts on consumers’ willingness to keep paying in order to chase that elusive big payday. The tip for consumers to remember is that if you’re being asked to pay anything in order to collect your winnings, it’s almost certainly a scam.

#3: Fake Check Scams -- For several years, fake check scams topped our top ten scams lists. While they’re no longer our top complaint, we continue to receive thousands of complaints from consumers who fall victim. In these scams, consumers think they are receiving a check as payment for lottery winnings, as payment for a work-at-home job or other ruse. The catch is that they are instructed to deposit the funds into a personal bank account and send proceeds from the check to the scammer. By the time the bank catches on that it’s a fake check, the money is long gone and the victim is left owing their bank. The key to avoiding this scam is knowing that if someone asks you to deposit a check and send money somewhere else (via wire transfer or reloadable prepaid card, for example), it’s a scam.

#4: Recovery/Refund Companies -- There are what we call “double-dipper” scams. Consumers who have already been victimized once may be contacted by a scammer posing as a law enforcement agent or other official offering to help recover money lost to scams. The scammer promises that for a small fee, they can help set up a sting or otherwise get back money the consumer has already paid. In reality, the caller is a scammer himself and is just trying to get even more money out of someone who’s already showed a likelihood to fall victim.

#5: Computers: Equipment/Software -- This is the scam category where “tech support scams” reside. In one of these frauds, a consumer will receive an email or phone call from someone claiming to work with “tech support,” often for a well-known computer company (claiming to be with Microsoft is a popular ruse). Once the scammer has your attention, they’ll ask you to go to a website where they can “diagnose” the problem. If the victim follows these instructions, the scammer can remotely connect to your computer. The fraudster can then install malicious software like ransomware that prevents access to important files until the victims pays for bogus “tech support services.” The best tip to spot and avoid this scam is to know that a legitimate tech support company should never contact you and ask to remotely access your computer. If you’re concerned that your computer may be infected by a virus, hang up and get in touch with your computer manufacturer directly via their corporate support system.

[Source: Fraud.org | February 1, 2017 ++]

IRS VITA Program 2017 ► Free Tax filing Assistance

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program offers free tax help to people who generally make \$54,000 or less, persons with disabilities and limited English speaking taxpayers who need assistance in preparing their own tax returns. IRS-certified volunteers provide free basic income tax return preparation with electronic filing to qualified individuals. In addition to VITA, the Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) program offers free tax help for all taxpayers, particularly those who are 60 years of age and older, specializing in questions about pensions and retirement-related issues unique to seniors. The IRS-certified volunteers who provide tax counseling are often retired individuals associated with non-profit organizations that receive grants from the IRS. *Note: available services can vary at each site due to the availability of volunteers certified with the tax law expertise required for your return.

Before going to a VITA or TCE site, see Publication 3676-B (<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p3676bsp.pdf>)

for services provided and check out the 'What to Bring' page to ensure you have all the required documents and information our volunteers will need to help you. What to bring includes:

- Proof of identification (photo ID)
- Social Security cards for you, your spouse and dependents
- An Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) assignment letter may be substituted for you, your spouse and your dependents if you do not have a Social Security number
- Proof of foreign status, if applying for an ITIN
- Birth dates for you, your spouse and dependents on the tax return
- Wage and earning statements (Form W-2, W-2G, 1099-R, 1099-Misc) from all employers
- Interest and dividend statements from banks (Forms 1099)
- All Forms 1095, Health Insurance Statements
- Health Insurance Exemption Certificate, if received
- A copy of last year's federal and state returns, if available
- Proof of bank account routing and account numbers for direct deposit such as a blank check
- To file taxes electronically on a married-filing-joint tax return, both spouses must be present to sign the required forms
- Total paid for daycare provider and the daycare provider's tax identifying number such as their Social Security number or business Employer Identification Number
- Forms 1095-A, B or C, Affordable Health Care Statements
- Copies of income transcripts from IRS and state, if applicable

It is extremely important that each person use the correct Social Security Number. The most accurate information is usually located on your original Social Security card. If you do not have an SSN for you or a dependent, you should complete Form SS-5, Social Security Number Application. This form should be submitted to the nearest Social Security Administration Office. If you or your dependent is not eligible to get a Social Security Number, you may need an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). For procedure on how to obtain one refer to [http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Individual-Taxpayer-Identification-Number-\(ITIN\)](http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Individual-Taxpayer-Identification-Number-(ITIN)).

VITA and TCE sites are generally located at community and neighborhood centers, libraries, schools, shopping malls and other convenient locations across the country. To locate the nearest VITA or TCE site near you, use the VITA Locator Tool at <https://irs.treasury.gov/freetaxprep> or call 800-906-9887. When looking for a TCE site keep in mind that a majority of the TCE sites are operated by the AARP Foundation's Tax Aide program. To locate the nearest AARP TCE Tax-Aide site <https://secure.aarp.org/applications/VMISLocator/searchTaxAideLocations.action> between January and April use the AARP Site Locator Tool or call 888-227-7669.

At select tax sites, taxpayers also have an option to prepare their own basic federal and state tax return for free using Web-based tax preparation software with an IRS-certified volunteer to help guide you through the process. This option is only available at locations that list "Self-Prep" in the site listing.

[Source: <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/free-tax-return-preparation-for-you-by-volunteers> November 2016 ++]

Storage Limit Reached Scam ► How It works

This scam looks like just another email message from your company's IT department. It's so mundane, it's easy to click without thinking. But be sure to give this email a second look before you do.

How the Scam Works:

- You get an email that looks like a message from your company's IT department. The version that hit BBB inboxes has the subject line "[name]@[company.com] update required" and appears to come from [info]@[webmaster.com]. According to the message, your email has reached the storage limit, and "you will be blocked from sending and receiving messages." The message instructs you to click a link to validate your account and add storage. In a clever move, the scammers even made the link look like your email address. But in the version BBB received, the link really points to a website with an overseas domain name.
- Clicking the link takes you to a log in form that asks you to enter your email address and password. If you do so, you receive a message confirming that the extra storage was added and the problem is fixed. But don't believe it! The form is a fraud. It's really a way to steal your email password, which opens you up to identify theft.

How to Spot a Phishing Scam:

- Be wary of unexpected emails that contain links or attachments. Do not click on links or open files in unfamiliar emails.
- Don't believe what you see. Just because an email looks real, doesn't mean it is. Scammers can fake anything from a company logo to the "Sent" email address.
- Check your company's IT department or internet service provider. If something sounds suspicious, confirm it first. Contact them directly from a number you know is accurate. DON'T click on any links in the message you suspect is a scam.
- Be cautious of generic emails. Scammers try to cast a wide net by including little or no specific information in their fake emails. Always be wary of messages that don't contain your name, last digits of your account number, or other personalizing information. Pay attention to the ways in which your IT department normally addresses concerns and be cautious of any new method.
- Use unique passwords: Use different passwords for each account you create. This is the simple way to reduce your risk if one password falls into the hands of scammers.

Read more about phishing on the FTC website <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0003-phishing> and see examples of common phishing scams. Go to <https://www.bbb.org/scamtracker/us> to report a scam. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | February 10, 2017 ++]

Credit Monitoring ► 3 Reasons Not to Use A Service

Credit monitoring and ID theft prevention are two things many Americans pay for monthly. Even if you don't use one of these services, you've almost certainly seen the ads for them. Here's the question: Is it worth it? Most likely, the answer is no. They say sex sells but it is doubtful that it outsells fear. From burglar alarms to bomb shelters, Americans shell out billions annually to protect against all manner of evil: some real, much of it greatly exaggerated. But wherever fear can be churned up, you can bet there's someone not far behind making a buck. Such is the case with credit monitoring. Credit monitoring is a \$3 billion business, with millions of Americans paying for "protection" against ID theft, as well as greater access to their credit histories and scores. The biggest beneficiaries? The Big Three credit reporting agencies: Equifax, Experian and TransUnion. Here are three reasons you probably shouldn't pay for credit monitoring

1. You're not liable if someone opens credit in your name.

We've all read stories of how the cost of credit fraud, like shoplifting, is passed along to consumers in the form of higher prices. We've also read about the nightmare that ensues when your identity is stolen: Your credit is trashed, and you're forced to spend months, even years, restoring it. (Although there's now free help out there to do it. See "New Tools Help Identity Theft Victims Fight Back and Recover." at <http://www.moneytalksnews.com/new-tools-help-identity-theft-victims-fight-back-and-recover>). It's important to remember that, if someone forges your

signature on a credit application, check or anywhere else, you're generally not responsible. The law limits your liability on stolen credit cards to \$50, and virtually all card issuers waive even that. As with anyone stealing anything, the thief is liable. And if the thief isn't caught or can't make restitution, it's a problem for the institution that accepted the fraudulent charge, not you. So that's reason one not to pay for these services. But

2. Credit monitoring doesn't prevent ID theft.

This is an even more important reason not to pay for a service. Monitoring your credit is marketed as if it's a burglar alarm that keeps bad guys out. But what it more closely resembles is an alarm that's tripped as the bad guys are leaving with your stuff. By definition, credit monitoring can only monitor transactions that have occurred, which isn't the same thing as prevention. Also, according to Consumer Reports ... Affinion, Experian Consumer Direct, and LifeLock [have] been caught and punished for alleged deceptive marketing practices, such as not adequately disclosing automatic sign-up after "free" trials and promising to prevent ID theft, even though the services don't actually do that.

If you really want to prevent crooks from making off with your identity and going on a spending spree, it isn't hard to do, and it doesn't cost a dime. Just put a fraud alert on your account. According to Experian: "Fraud alert messages notify potential credit grantors to verify your identification before extending credit in your name in case someone is using your information without your consent." Doesn't that seem like a good idea? It costs nothing, and there aren't a lot of hoops to jump through. Take a look at the form and see for yourself. Fraud alerts aren't new. I recommended them years ago in stories like "Free ID Theft Protection." According to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, they're only supposed to be used if you "believe you are (or are about to become) a victim of fraud or identity theft." But with all the security breaches occurring practically daily these days, doesn't every American qualify?

So fraud alerts are one way to slow crooks down. An even more effective method is a security freeze. A freeze means nobody — including you — can open new credit under your name until your account is "thawed," a process that can take a few days. Unlike fraud alerts, depending on where you live, these aren't always free or even available, and some states also allow fees to temporarily lift the freeze. Read more about credit freezes at this page of the CFPB website and learn about the rules in your state at this page of the Consumers Union website.

3. It costs too much.

You can get a free credit report once each year from each major bureau at AnnualCreditReport.com. If you want more than that, however, or want a credit score, you could pay a bunch: up to \$11 for a credit report and \$20 for a FICO credit score. Against that backdrop, using a service that charges \$10 a month for unlimited looks at your credit report and score may seem like a bargain. But considering what wholesale clients pay for your credit report, it's outrageous. According to the New York Times, while credit reporting agencies are allowed to charge you up to \$11 to see your credit report, they routinely sell them to corporate clients for as little as 20 cents. There also are services that monitor your credit at no cost. Credit Sesame (<http://www.moneytalksnews.com/creditsesame>), for example, offers both free credit scores and free monitoring. You don't have to provide a credit card to enroll, but you should expect to get periodic sales pitches for products like mortgage and car loans. The same applies to Credit Karma (<https://www.creditkarma.com/signup>).

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacy Johnson | February 10, 2017 ++]

Tax Burden for Ohio Retired Vets ► As of FEB 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 **Ohio** in 2017.

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 5.75% (food, newspapers, magazine subscriptions, telephone service and prescription drugs exempt). Counties levy additional sales taxes which may add up to 2.25% in additional sales tax.

Gasoline Tax: 46.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 52.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$1.60 per pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low 0.495% to High 4.997%

Income Brackets: Nine - 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: Ohio's personal and dependent exemptions are \$2,200 for an AGI of \$40,000 or less, \$1,950 if AGI is between \$40,001 and \$79,999, and \$1,700 if AGI is \$80,000 or above

Standard Deduction: n/a

Medical/Dental Deduction: Unreimbursed medical/dental expenses, premiums for long-term care insurance, and unsubsidized health insurance premiums are deductible.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None.

Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security is exempt. Credit of up to \$200 if retirement income is at least \$8,000, plus a one-time credit on lump sums. Seniors 65 and over may claim a \$50 credit. Only one credit is allowed for each return. Out-of-state government pensions can be applied toward the retirement income credit. Taxpayers can deduct the following benefits only to the extent that they are included in the taxpayers federal adjusted gross income: Social Security, Tier 1 and TierII railroad benefits, and supplemental and other railroad benefits.

Retired Military pay: Military retired pay of taxpayers who retired from service in the active or reserve components of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or from the National Guard can deduct their military retirement income to the extent that income is not otherwise deducted or excluded in computing federal or Ohio adjusted gross income. Taxpayers who served in the military and receive a federal civil service retirement pension are also eligible for a limited deduction if any portion of their federal retirement pay is based on credit for their military service. These retirees can deduct only the amount of their federal retirement pay that is attributable to their military service. Military taxpayers refer to http://www.tax.ohio.gov/ohio_taxes.aspx and <http://www.tax.ohio.gov>.

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

The taxable base is the assessed value of land and buildings. Assessed value is 35% of market value, except for certain agricultural land. County auditors must reappraise all real estate every six years. A homestead exemption is available to the homesteads of qualified homeowners who are either at least 65 years old, permanently and totally disabled, or at least 59 years of age and the surviving spouse of a deceased taxpayer who had previously received the exemption. For more details refer to http://www.tax.ohio.gov/ohio_taxes.aspx.

There is a homestead exemption available. Homestead exemption property tax reductions are granted to homeowners who are at least 65 years of age; permanently and totally disabled; or to surviving spouses at least 59 years of age if the deceased had previously received the exemption. In tax year 2010, a total of 854,251 real property homestead exemptions were granted; the average reduction in taxes was \$441 per homestead; and the total reduction in real property taxes was \$378,743,424.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

Ohio does not have an estate tax or an inheritance tax.

For further information, visit the Ohio Department of Taxation site <http://www.tax.ohio.gov>.

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

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest ► 1 thru 14 Feb 2017

- **NASA.** The internet speed at NASA is 91GB per second making it 2000 times faster than the average household connection speed of 50 Mb.
- **South Korea.** US president Donald Trump reaffirmed Washington's commitment to defending South Korea in a telephone conversation with that country's acting president, Hwang Kyo-ahn, the White House said in a 29 January statement. The defense commitment includes the provision of "extended deterrence, using the full range of military capabilities", said the White House, adding that "the two leaders also agreed to take steps to strengthen joint defense capabilities to defend against the North Korean threat".
- **Vera Lynn Music.** To hear the first ever #1 single in the USA not performed by an American plus some of her other hits from the 40's and 50's go to <https://youtu.be/8WsuLH4sulA>. To celebrate her 100th birthday in March, she is debuting a new album '*Vera Lynn 100*'.
- **Japan.** US Defense Secretary James Mattis on 4 FEB reaffirmed Washington's commitment to defending Japan, including a group of disputed islands in the south china Sea which have been claimed by China.
- **USS Enterprise.** The latest chapter in the nearly 59-year saga of the now ex-aircraft carrier Enterprise played out on 3 FEB in a decommissioning ceremony held on the ship's hanger bay as the ship continues to be dismantled in Newport News, Va.
- **Background Checks.** The FBI's Rap Back program is quietly transforming the way employers conduct background checks. While routine background checks provide employers with a one-time "snapshot" of their employee's past criminal history, employers enrolled in federal and state Rap Back programs receive ongoing, real-time notifications and updates about their employees' run-ins with law enforcement, including arrests at protests and charges that do not end up in convictions.
- **RP Insurgency.** Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said 4 FEB his government is pulling out of peace talks with the country's communist movement, a day after he lifted the government's unilateral cease-fire with the insurgents.

- **Army Secretary.** Vincent Viola, President Trump's nominee to lead the Army, abruptly withdrew his name from consideration on 3 FEB citing his inability to get around strict Defense Department rules concerning his family businesses.
- **VA Lawsuit.** The DVA has agreed to pay DaVita Inc. \$538 million to settle a lawsuit that began in May 2011. DaVita alleged that the VA had underpaid for dialysis services the company provided from 2005 through 2011. Fresenius Medical Care Holdings Inc. announced that it also has reached an agreement with the VA, resolving reimbursement for services provided to veterans by the company's dialysis clinics from January 2009 through Feb. 15, 2011. The agreement resolves litigation that began in March 2014.
- **Trump & China.** US President Donald Trump has sent a letter to Xi Jinping, his first direct approach to the Chinese leader. The president thanked Mr Xi for congratulating him on his inauguration last month and said he looked forward to "constructive" relations. Mr Trump has not yet spoken to Mr Xi but did call other world leaders.
- **Trump Tower.** The Pentagon wants to rent space in Trump Tower. The military needs a place to put the communications team and other White House support personnel when President Trump is at his New York home. A DoD spokesman said the Pentagon was "working through appropriate channels and in accordance with all legal requirements
- **Terrorism.** A former FBI analyst dug into the figures on federal terrorism cases and found "nothing" to support the White House's claims on protecting the country from terrorist attacks—but she did find this: "Since January 2015, the FBI has also arrested more anti-immigrant American citizens plotting violent attacks on Muslims within the U.S. than it has refugees, or former refugees, from any banned country."
- **Taxes.** In California, taxpayers deducted \$96.6 billion from their federal returns in 2013 for state and local tax payments — nearly one-fifth of the national total, according to the Tax Policy Center. The Trump administration and some congressional Republicans have suggested eliminating this federal tax deduction. In New York, elimination of the state and local tax deduction would result in a \$14.8 billion federal tax increase, which would translate to a \$4,500 higher tax bill on average for New York families, according to a report prepared for Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo in 2013.
- **U.S.-China Conflict.** There would be no winner from conflict between China and the United States, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned on 7 FEB, seeking to dampen tension between the two nations that flared after the election of US President Donald Trump. Relations between China and United States have soured after Trump upset Beijing in December by taking a telephone call from Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen and threatened to impose tariffs on Chinese imports.
- **VA Secretary.** The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee unanimously approved David Shulkin to be Veterans Affairs secretary 7 FEB. Following a breezy hearing last week, the committee voted to send Shulkin to the full Senate for what's expected to be an easy confirmation vote, given that he's received praise from Republicans, Democrats and veterans alike.
- **Battle of Guadalcanal.** On 8 FEB 1943, Japanese troops evacuated Guadalcanal, leaving the island in Allied possession after a prolonged campaign. The American victory paved the way for other Allied wins in the Solomon Islands. Go to <http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/battle-of-guadalcanal> to view a video on the battle.
- **French Carrier.** The French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle is in drydock in the port of Toulon for an 18-month refit and upgrade. The carrier has been in service for 15 years and the French Navy said the midlife work will extend her operational life for at least 20 more years.
- **Red Baron.** At <https://shar.es/12Ag7e> is a 100 years old. piece of film. It shows Baron Von Richthofen, doing an external prior to a mission, as well as his putting on a flying suit prior to flight in cold weather. If you look close you will notice Hermann Goering. The Baron was shot down on 21 April 1918 by Roy Brown of the Royal Navy Air Services, a prelude of the R.A.F.. The Aussies also claim that one of their machine gunners on the ground shot the Baron down. UK & Aussie Doctors, after the autopsy stated that the fatal bullet was shot from above.

- **How to Fix VA.** President Trump invited a wounded veteran's wife into his oval office 7 FEB and asked her what she would recommend on how to fix the VA. To hear what she said transpired during their meeting go to <http://video.foxnews.com/v/5315503821001/?#news-clips>.
- **Navy.** Someone used the wrong oil in a trio E-2C Hawkeyes, and now the Navy is scrambling to replace all six turboprop engines before their air wing heads out on deployment. The estimated repair bill: upwards of \$1 million. The damage occurred over a period of time and it involved the use of a lubricant not approved or specified for these engines.
- **The Wall.** President Trump's executive order to complete the wall on the U.S.-Mexico border will cost \$21.6 billion and take approximately three and a half years to build, according to a Homeland Security Department report that surfaced 9 FEB.
- **Vietnam Rescue.** Go to <https://youtu.be/SuuDWd8SL7A> to listen to the 30 MAR 1969 recorded audio from a helicopter rescue mission during the Vietnam War battle in Plei Trap Valley. The group defied orders to stand down and successfully rescued all 125 infantrymen seconds before the hill was overrun.

China's Offensive Capability Update 02 ► Second Carrier Taking Shape

Beijing's second aircraft carrier was "taking shape" after two years and nine months of construction, mainland Chinese media reported – a move likely to further unnerve Taiwan and other neighbors about its growing military assertiveness. Construction of the Shandong, named after a province in China's east coast, began in 2014, the mobile app of Shandong television and radio said in a report seen on 31 JAN. The Shandong, mainland China's first indigenous aircraft carrier, was "taking shape", the report said. It did not give a date for completion or further details. It was being built in the northeastern port of Dalian, the Defence Ministry has said.



The country's first aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, was bought from Ukraine in 1998 and refitted on the mainland. In January 2017 a group of mainland Chinese warships, led by the Liaoning, tested weapons and equipment in the South China Sea in what Beijing's foreign ministry described as routine exercises that complied with international law. But Beijing is years away from perfecting carrier operations similar to those that the United States has practiced for decades. No date has been reported for the completion of the Shandong aircraft carrier. The eventual launch of the Shandong will further rattle self-ruled democratic Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own, as well as

Asian neighbors Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam with disputed claims in the South China Sea.

Mainland China and Taiwan have been diplomatic and military rivals since 1949 when the Nationalist, or Kuomintang, troops lost the Chinese civil war to the Communists and fled to the island. Bilateral trade, investment and tourism have grown significantly in the past three decades, but tensions have been simmering since the island elected President Tsai Ing-wen from the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party last year. Beijing has vowed to attack if the island declared de jure independence. [Source: South China Morning Post | January 31, 2017 ++]

RP Police Killings ► Crimes Against Humanity Alleged

Amnesty International claims the Philippine government has ordered the police to kill thousands of alleged drug offenders in a wave of executions that may amount to crimes against humanity. President Rodrigo Duterte in late JAN ordered all police anti-drug units to be disbanded in the wake of the killing of a South Korean man, allegedly by corrupt officers. The scale of Amnesty’s accusations is shocking. The group claims up to 7,000 people have been killed in the last seven months, since President Rodrigo Duterte took office. “The government, at the highest levels, has ordered the police – and the police working in concert with armed hit men – who are essentially acting as hit squads and executing people,” . Tirana Hassan, Amnesty’s Crisis Response director said.



Human rights activists light candles for the victims of extra-judicial killings around the country in the wake of "War on Drugs" campaign by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte in suburban Quezon city northeast of Manila, Philippines.

Amnesty says the police often act with no evidence – and target the poorest sections of Philippine society. “What we found is police are being paid for individual hits,” Hassan said. “They’re working in cahoots with the actual funeral homes, where they’re being paid for each body they deliver to the funeral home. We’ve seen police who have planted evidence to actually cover up extrajudicial executions.” Duterte has made the war on drugs a central tenet of his leadership – even claiming in December that he personally killed suspected criminals when he was mayor of Davao City. But this week the president ordered all police anti-drug units disbanded, following the killing of a South Korean businessman by corrupt officers allegedly involved in a kidnapping ring. But in a news conference 30 JAN, he said the war on drugs would go on. “The drug war? I will extend it to the last day of my term,” Duterte announced. The Philippine government has yet to respond directly to Amnesty’s report. President Duterte has repeatedly said he was elected on a mandate to eliminate illegal drugs. [Source: VOA | Henry Ridgwell | January 31, 2017 ++]

RP Police Killings Update 01 ► Duterte Corrupt Police Solution

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said on 7 FEB corrupt police will be sent to a violence-racked stronghold of Islamist militants or they should quit, in a fierce dressing down of men from a force he had relied on to fight his war on drugs. Duterte had been unwavering in his defense of the police in the face of international outrage over the death toll, but his faith in the force was shaken by the killing of a South Korean businessmen late last year by rogue officers. Duterte late last month denounced the police as "corrupt to the core" and suspended their anti-drug operations, though vowing to forge ahead with the drug campaign.



On Tuesday, he spoke to ranks of 400 policemen lined up in the grounds of the presidential palace, all of them under investigation for various infractions, and condemned them as "foolish, idiots and sons of bitches". He even challenged them to a shootout. "I will send you to Basilan, live there for 2 years. If you get out alive, you can return here. If you die there, I will tell the police not to spend anything to bring you back here but to bury you there," Duterte told them. Basilan is a southern island stronghold of the notorious Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf militant group, who have developed a reputation for beheading their captives. Those who did not want to go to Basilan could quit, Duterte said, but he warned any who did to stay out of trouble. "Find a clean livelihood," he said. "I will keep a battalion to keep track of your movements because it has been the sad experience of this country that the most vicious criminals, most are ex-police or ex-military men."

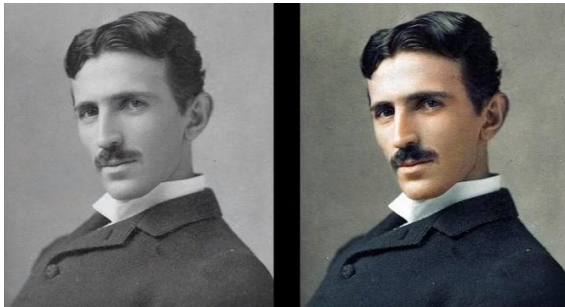
More than 7,700 people have been killed since Duterte unleashed his bloody crackdown on drugs seven months ago, about 2,500 in police operations. The rest of the killings are under investigation but rights groups suspect many of the victims were killed by vigilantes or hitmen supported by the police. The Philippine Drugs Enforcement Agency has been put in charge of anti-drug operations and Duterte has also raised the possibility of getting the military to help. The South Korean businessman, Jee Ick-joo, was killed at police headquarters after being arrested for drug offences that his wife and lawyers said was an official cover for kidnap for ransom. Several police officers are being investigated in connection with his death. [Source: Reuters | World News | February 7, 2017 ++]

Ask Marilyn ► How Much Oil Did One Dinosaur Make?

Contrary to popular belief, none. Oil was created from organisms that lived long before dinosaurs roamed the earth. Back then the planet was warmer, swamps and bogs covered the land, and the seas were filled with one cell

organisms. The matter was buried as the oceans and rivers dried up, and over eons, the material was cooked into oil and natural gas. The dinosaur connection became popular back in 1939 when an oil company adopted a dinosaur trademark and began to delight children everywhere with traveling exhibits featuring the awe-inspiring creatures. [Source: Parade Magazine | Marilyn vos Savant | February 5, 2017 ++]

Old Photos in Color ▶ **The Difference it Makes**



Nikola Tesla 1893



Audrey Hepburn - Giant (1956 Film)



Hindenburg Disaster May 6, 1937



Walt Whitman 1887



Walt Whitman in the Garden, circa 1900



Peatwy Tuck of the Meskwahki 1898

Have You Heard? ▶ **Trump AZ Impact || Alzheimer's Test**

TRUMP is destroying the local AZ economies. Illegal immigrants are boycotting Arizona by the thousands and moving elsewhere showing their outrage with Donald Trump's proposed law of sending illegal immigrants back to their native countries.

In the small town of Guadalupe, AZ, south of Phoenix, Manuel Renaldo is one of those who are vowing to punish Arizona by leaving. As he loaded his stolen car with his taxpayer-furnished belongings and family of ten, Renaldo told this reporter through an interpreter: "It's a matter of principle; I refuse to be supported by a state that treats me like a criminal!"

The effects of the exodus are already being felt by some Arizona retailers, who are reporting dwindling thefts & sales of beer, tequila, spray paint, and ammunition. Also hit hard are the state hospitals, which have reported a dramatic decline in births and emergency room visits of non-revenue patients!. State welfare agencies are preparing to lay off staffs that distribute food stamps and unemployment benefits. Tattoo parlors are in an absolute state of panic!

Renaldo told a reporter, through an interpreter, that he and his family are moving to Canada, with a new Liberal government under Justin Trudeau and new higher taxes and hardworking people who will better support him and his family with dignity!

-o-o-O-o-o-

The following was developed as a mental age assessment by The School of Psychiatry at Harvard University. Take your time and see if you can read each line aloud without a mistake. The average person over 50 years of age cannot do it!

1. This is this cat.
2. This is is cat.
3. This is how cat.
4. This is to cat.
5. This is keep cat.
6. This is an cat.
7. This is old cat.
8. This is fart cat.
9. This is busy cat.
10. This is for cat.
11. This is forty cat.
12. This is seconds cat.

Now go back and read the third word in each line from the top down.



Swedish Naval Base



Tabletop Mountains of Venezuela



WWII aircraft remain on Wales beach



A music school in China



Elephant rock in New Zealand



Paris view from Eiffel Tower

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-o-o-O-o-o-

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1. The Bulletin will be provided as a website accessed document vice direct access until further notice. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 20,441 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others are in the process of being deleted from the active mailing list.
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8. Articles within the Bulletin are editorialized information obtained from over 100 sources. Provided at the end of each article is the primary source from which it was obtained. The ++ indicates that that the information was reformatted from the original source and/or editorialized from more than one source. Because of the number of articles contained in each Bulletin there is no way that I can attest to their validity other than they have all been taken from previously reliable sources. My staff consist of only one person (myself) and it is a 7/10-12 endeavor to prepare and publish. Readers who question the validity of content are encouraged to go to the source provided to have their questions answered. I am always open to comments but, as a policy, shy away from anything political. Too controversial and time consuming.

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