

# RAO

# BULLETIN

## 1 April 2017

**PDF Edition**



**THIS RETIREE ACTIVITIES OFFICE BULLETIN CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES**

<b>Pg</b>	<b>Article</b>	<b>Subject</b>
<b>* DOD *</b>		
04	== Navy LCS Program [ 01] -----	(Cost Overruns)
06	== DoD/VA Collaboration [02] -----	(PTSD Symptom Trajectory Study)
07	== Nuclear Weapons [01] -----	(U.S. General Recommends Upgrade)
08	== USFSPA & Divorce [29] -----	Dividing Retired Pay SCOTUS Case)
09	== BRAC [56] ---	(Trump Presidency Improves Base Closure Prospects)
09	== DoD Fraud Waste & Abuse -----	(Reported 16 thru 31 MAR 2017)
12	== POW/MIA [82] -----	(Battle of Tarawa Unknown's Remains)
12	== POW/MIA Recoveries -----	(Reported 16 thru 31 MAR 2017   Ten)
<b>* VA *</b>		
16	== VA Mental Health Care [32] --	(Senators Ask for More OTH Details)
17	== GI Bill [220] -----	(Processing Delays Impact 11,000 Students)
18	== VA VIC [02] -----	(Issued w/VA Benefits Enrollment)

- 18 == VA Crises Hotline [34] ----- (Over 25% of Calls Redirected)
- 20 == VA Appeals [25] ---- (VA/GAO Agree - Appeals Reform Needed)
- 20 == VA Appeals Backlog [06] ----- (Hiring Surge Needed)
- 21 == VA Burial Schedules ----- (Now Available Online)
- 22 == VA Hiring & Retention ----- (Federal Hiring Freeze Impact)
- 22 == VA Data Analytics ----- (A Means to Improve Services)
- 23 == VA Image [01] ----- (Vets Like Despite Problems)
- 24 == VA Suicide Prevention [37] ----- (Higher Risk With Opioid Use)
- 25 == Traumatic Brain Injury [60] - (DVBIC Adds 5 TBI Network Sites)
- 26 == VA Spinal Cord Program [02] ----- (Robotic Brace)
- 26 == Brain Gate 2 ----- (Paralysis Pilot Study Shows Promise)
- 27 == Indebtedness to VA ----- (Be Prepared - It Could Happen to You)
- 28 == VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ----- (Reported 16 thru 31 MAR 2017)
- 29 == VAMC Mountain Home TN [01] ----- (Opiate Safety Complaints)
- 29 == VA HCS Connecticut ----- (Top Diagnosis is Female PTSD | 45%)

**\* Vets \***

- 31 == Trump Vet Listening Session ----- (10 Vet Groups Included)
- 32 == Vet Health Care [05] ----- (Proposed ACA Bill Impact)
- 32 == Homeless Vets [77] ----- (Minnesota Milestone Reached)
- 33 == Fisher House Expansion [17] ----- (Dayton VAMC)
- 33 == Purple Hearts Reunited [01] ----- (1st Lt. Rodney D. Beckel)
- 34 == Vet Toxic Exposure | Operation Tomodachi - (Nuclear Meltdown)
- 36 == MOH Day ----- (Trump Hosts Recipients)
- 37 == Bataan Death March [06] ----- (19 MAR 26.2 Mile Annual Event)
- 38 == GWOT Memorial Wall ----- (Beginning Efforts to Get it Built)
- 39 == Stolen Valor [103] ----- (Reported 170315 thru 170331)
- 40 == Retiree Appreciation Days ----- (As of Mar 31, 2017)
- 41 == Vet Hiring Fairs ----- (01 thru 30 APR 2017)
- 43 == Vet State Benefits & Discounts ----- (Wisconsin MAR 2017)

**\* Vet Legislation \***

- 43 == Vietnam Veterans Day [01] ----- (Signed Into Law)
- 44 == Vet Gun Control [13] -- (H.R.1181 to End Federal Checks on Vets)
- 46 == VA Appeals [24] --- (Appeals Process Overhaul Bill Reintroduced)
- 47 == VA Employee Accountability [05] ----- (H.R.1259 Passes House)
- 47 == VA Women Vet Programs [26] ----- (S.681 | Deborah Sampson Act)
- 48 == VA Designated Smoking Areas ----- (Bill to Eliminate Introduced)
- 49 == Burn Pit Toxic Exposure [42] ----- (H.R.2237 Reintroduced)
- 49 == VA Adult Day Care [02] ----- (S.324/H.R.1005 | Increase Access)
- 50 == Vet Toxic Exposure Legislation [08] -- (Classified Record VA Access)

**\* MILITARY \***

- 50 == USMC Photo Scandal [01] --- (Tillis | Strip Participant's Benefits)
- 52 == USMC Photo Scandal [02] ----- (NCIS Investigating 1200 Marines)
- 53 == Air Force Readiness [01] ----- (Sequestration and Funding Impact)
- 53 == SBP Under Blended Retirement System ----- (Impact)

- 53 == USAF KC-46 Program ----- (At Risk of Further Schedule Delays)
- 54 == Freeze Dried Plasma ----- (USAF to Test on the Battlefield)
- 55 == Military Laser Program ----- (Army HEL MD | 60 KW System)
- 56 == Military Research [01] - (Navy Environment Sensor Development)
- 57 == Military Research [02] ----- (Army Third Arm)
- 58 == USCG Budget [02] ----- (Proposed Billion-Dollar Budget Cut)
- 59 == Army Readiness ----- (Continuing Resolution Impact)
- 60 == Army Bedtime Snack Bar ----- (New for Recruits)
- 61 == Carl Gustaf Recoilless Rifle [01] ----- (Precision “Guided” Rounds)
- 62 == Expert Action Badge ----- (Army Non-Infantry Soldier Award)
- 63 == Locust ----- (Race to Field Gun Launched Swarmbots)
- 64 == China’s Offensive Capability [03] ----- (PLAMC to Grow to 100k)
- 65 == Battlefield Acupuncture ----- (Close to 60% of USAF Bases Trained )
- 66 == Navy Birthday ----- (October 13, 1775)

**\* MILITARY HISTORY \***

- 68 == K-9 Corps ----- (War Dog Program)
- 69 == Roman Legion ----- (Ten Little-Known Facts)
- 74 == Battle for Schloss Itter ----- (One of the Last WWII Offenses)
- 77 == HNLMS Abraham Crijnsen -- (A True Story of Naval Deception)
- 78 == Liberty Bell ----- (WWI Contribution)
- 79 == Liberty Bell [01] ----- (Utilization)
- 80 == Military History Anniversaries ----- (01 thru 15 APR)
- 80 == Vietnam Vets [22] ----- (Hank Beck | Delayed DSC)
- 82 == WWII Vets 133 ---- (Oscar Davis Jr. | 70 Year Wait for Purple Heart)
- 83 == Medal Of Honor Story ----- (Roberts~Gordon | Vietnam)
- 83 == Medal of Honor Citations ----- (Fardy~John P | WWII)

**\* HEALTH CARE \***

- 85 == Rehydration ----- (Rice-Based Drink Powder Solution)
- 85 == Colorectal Screening ----- (Is It time for One?)
- 86 == AHCA ----- (Plan to Repeal and Replace ACA)
- 88 == Parasites ----- (What's Eating You (1)
- 90 == TRICARE Podcast 389 ---- (Care Type | Winter Storms | Eye Injuries)
- 91 == TRICARE Podcast 390 ----- (Allergies | Webinars | Cervical Cancer)

**\* FINANCES \***

- 92 == Credit Card Fraud Protection [01] ----- (Available Methods)
- 93 == Common Money Mistakes ----- (Beware These 12)
- 95 == SSA Retirement Application [01] ----- (15 Minutes Online)
- 96 == VA Loan Multiple Use [01] ----- (3 Ways)
- 97 == IRS Scam [07] ----- (How It works)
- 98 == Political Fundraising Scams ----- (How It works)
- 99 == Government Grant Scam [03] ----- (Its Back on Facebook)
- 100 == SSA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ----- (\$500M Scheme to Defraud)
- 100 == Tax Burden for New Jersey Retired Vets ----- (As of Mar 2017)

**\* GENERAL INTEREST \***

- 103 == Notes of Interest ----- (16 thru 31 MAR 2017)
- 104 == RP~China Dispute [18] ----- (Benham Rise Concerns)
- 105 == RP~China Dispute [19] ----- (Scarborough Shoal Radar Station)
- 105 == RP~China Dispute [20] ----- (3 Man Made Islands Nearly Complete)
- 106 == Trump Budget Plan -- (2018 Winners & Losers if Congress Approves)
- 107 == Trump Budget Plan [ 01] ----- (Meals On Wheels Impact)
- 108 == Airline Bomb Precautions - (Electronic Device Explosive Potential)
- 110 == PRK Nuclear Weapons [03] ----- (Trump Halts Diplomatic Efforts)
- 111 == PRK Nuclear Weapons [04] - (Preemptive Military Action Option)
- 112 == PRK Nuclear Weapons [05] ----- (All Options Are Bad)
- 114 == Vintage U.S. Nuclear Test Films ----- (Declassified and Released)
- 115 == PRK Propaganda ----- (TV | Burning U.S. Carrier & B-1B Bomber)
- 115 == Taiwan-China Dispute ----- (New Missile Capability)
- 116 == Taiwan-China Dispute [01] ----- (Plan To Build Own Subs)
- 116 == Climate Change [01] ---- (White House Doubts it, Pentagon Does Not)
- 118 == Dog Greeting Protocol ----- (How Not to Be Bitten)
- 120 == Have You Heard? ----- (Blonde Stories || Lesson On UP)

**Note:**

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](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net).

**\* ATTACHMENTS \***

- Attachment - RAO Bulletin April 01, 2017
- Attachment - Wisconsin Vet State Benefits & Discounts MAR 2017
- Attachment - Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 APR

**\* DoD \***



**Navy LCS Program Update 01 ► Cost Overruns**

As the Trump administration proposes to ramp up defense spending and expand the U.S. Navy's armada, the long-term future of a combat shipbuilding program in Marinette ultimately may hinge on a combination of those ships' cost-efficiency and performance. But in a new report that examines Navy shipbuilding, the Government Accountability Office has deleted cost overrun data on the Marinette-built USS Milwaukee, launched in 2014, as well as the USS Jackson, also launched that year but built in Mobile, Ala. The GAO said:

- It withheld the data from the public at the request of the Defense Department, which deemed it “sensitive but unclassified information.”
- “We always ask the Department of Defense to go through our information and ask if there is anything that should not be publicly released. They did that in this case,” said Michele Mackin, a GAO official familiar with the report.
- “We did not argue or push back. It’s not our call,” she said. “We only asked for their rationale. We wouldn’t take something out (of a report) because it was embarrassing or they didn’t want it to be seen by the public. But in this case, we understood their point.”

The USS Milwaukee and Jackson were the fifth and sixth vessels produced in the Navy’s littoral combat ship program, which so far has been dogged by high costs, mechanical breakdowns and lackluster performance. Littoral ships are designed to perform in shallow, near-shore waters. Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), a critic of the program, said in a December hearing that taxpayers have paid for, and are still paying for, 26 ships that have demonstrated next to no combat capability. “The littoral combat ship, or LCS, is an unfortunate yet all too common example of defense acquisition gone awry,” said McCain, chairman of the Senate Committee on Armed Services. “Taxpayers have paid a heavy price for these mistakes. **The LCS was initially expected to cost \$220 million per ship. But the cost of each ship has more than doubled to \$478 million.**”

The GAO report declined to make public the cost overrun information for USS Milwaukee, although it said increases for other Navy ships ranged up to nearly 45%. The agency said it wouldn’t release the information on the littoral vessels because it could harm price negotiations for some of the next ships in the program. The “percent difference” for the Milwaukee and Jackson was “above target cost” for each ship, the GAO said, while not providing numbers. Congress and the GAO have access to the data for official purposes, but the public does not, said Navy Capt. Thurraya Kent, a public affairs officer who works with the Pentagon. “We are in an ongoing competition for fiscal-year 2017 ships. So that information is not releasable,” Kent said.

Objecting to the secrecy about LCS overruns is the Project on Government Oversight, a Washington, D.C., group that for decades has exposed wasteful military spending on items such as a \$7,600 coffee maker and a \$435 hammer. Taxpayers are footing the bill for the littoral ships, and they have a right to know, said Mandy Smithberger, a director for the project’s military reform initiative. Also in question is how well the Navy has managed billions of dollars in the shipbuilding program, for years racking up costs and paying for repairs when the ships were delivered with defects. “Unfortunately, we see this as a textbook example of ineffective congressional oversight,” she said.

- In December 2015, the USS Milwaukee broke down at sea and had to be towed more than 40 miles to a Navy base near Norfolk, Va.
- Then, in January 2016, the USS Fort Worth had a major mechanical failure in Singapore, with repairs estimated in the millions of dollars.
- The USS Freedom, the first LCS built in Marinette, has suffered multiple setbacks since its 2008 commissioning, including a 6-inch crack in the hull, a failed gas turbine, propulsion system problems, and a leak that caused flooding in the vessel.

The GAO wrote in December that the LCS “raises a basic oversight question. Does a program that costs twice as much but delivers less capability than planned still warrant an additional investment of nearly \$14 billion?” Still, the Navy says it believes in the small, fast vessels powered by jet propulsion. “What is getting lost in the discourse is the real capability that LCS provides to the fleet,” Navy Lt. Kaitlin Smith wrote in a January article for the Center for Maritime International Security. “LCS was ... envisioned as a platform for ‘mobility’ related missions like support for Special Operations Forces, maritime interception operations, force protection, humanitarian assistance, logistics, medical support and non-combatant evacuation operations. Assigning these missions to LCS frees up multi-mission destroyers and cruisers for high-end combat operations,” Smith wrote.

Wisconsin’s congressional delegation has supported the shipbuilding program, which has brought 2,200 jobs to the Fincantieri shipyard in Marinette and supports a total of about 12,500 jobs at the shipyard and suppliers in 37

states. Members of the delegation — including U.S. Reps. Paul Ryan, Mike Gallagher, Sean Duffy and Sens. Tammy Baldwin and Ron Johnson — did not respond to Milwaukee Journal Sentinel requests for comment about the GAO’s refusal to disclose the cost overruns. Currently, nine of the ships are in various stages of production at Marinette. The work is expected to last through at least 2021. Altogether, the Navy wants 52 of the ships, including 12 described as “frigates” that are expected to be bigger and better armed than the current designs. Lockheed Martin Corp., the defense contractor for the LCS program in Marinette, says it’s confident in the progress made to improve the ships and bring costs down. Last spring, Lockheed was awarded U.S. Navy funding of up to \$564 million to build an LCS that's to be delivered in 2020. “We are executing the program within the Navy’s budget,” Lockheed Martin spokesman John Torrisi said in a statement to the Journal Sentinel.

President Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis haven’t made public their views on the littoral combat ships, but Trump has said he supports a bigger, stronger Navy. “The Trump plan is to expand the Navy to 350 ships (from about 270). That frankly isn’t affordable unless a significant number of ships are small vessels like LCS,” said Loren Thompson, chief operating officer of the Lexington Institute, an Arlington, Va., policy research group that studies military matters. “It costs less than any other warship in the fleet,” Thompson said. The Navy is expected to select the design for the 12 frigates in the next couple of years. Marinette or Mobile could be eliminated from the program if they don’t win a bid for the new ships. Thompson said he thinks the current Marinette design, which is very different than the tri-hull ship built in Mobile, is well-positioned for the change. [Source: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel | Rick Barrett | March 16, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **DoD/VA Collaboration Update 02 | PTSD Symptom Trajectory Study**

Researchers from VA and the Department of Defense (DOD) recently released findings of a new study called Prospective Post-Traumatic Stress disorder Symptom Trajectories in Active Duty and Separated Military Personnel, which examines Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms in Veterans, compared with active-duty populations. This is the first known study comparing PTSD symptom trajectories of current service members with those of Veterans, and is the product of a collaborative effort from VA and DOD researchers analyzing data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), the largest prospective health study of military service members.

According to VA’s National Center for PTSD, the PTSD rate among Vietnam Veterans was 30.9 percent for men and 26.9 percent for women. For Gulf War Veterans, the PTSD rate was 12.1 percent. Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans had a PTSD rate of 13.8 percent. “Knowing there are similarities in how PTSD affects service members and Veterans makes it easier to pinpoint which treatments are the best to control the condition,” said Dr. Edward Boyko, an epidemiologist and internist at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Washington state, and VA’s lead researcher on the Millennium Cohort Study.

Officials involved with the project said they are hoping the collaboration will improve the understanding of Veterans’ health needs, relative to their experiences in service. “The data that MCS researchers have been collecting since 2001 is incredibly valuable for both the DOD and VA,” said Dr. Dennis Faix, director of the Millennium Cohort Study and preventive medicine physician. “Going forward, working with VA will allow both agencies to make sure we are getting the best information to develop a comprehensive understanding of the continuum of health in current and former service members.” The results of the joint VA DOD study will appear in the Journal of Psychiatric Research’s June 2017 issue. It is the first of many joint future publications expected to result from the collaboration between VA and MCS. You can learn more about the study here: <http://millenniumcohort.org>. [Source: VA News Release | March 24, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*



## Nuclear Weapons Update 01 ► U.S. General Recommends Upgrade

The general who oversees the United States' atomic weapons arsenal has expressed concern over what he described as "much more aggressive" behavior by Russia in recent years, saying it justifies the need for a strengthened and modernized nuclear deterrent force in this country. Lt. Gen. Jack Weinstein of the Air Force made the remarks against the backdrop of a reassessment by the Trump administration of American nuclear policy, including whether nuclear disarmament, as advocated in 2010 under President Barack Obama, is a realistic goal. General Weinstein, the deputy chief of staff for strategic deterrence and nuclear integration, said in an interview on 21 MAR with editors at The New York Times that he believed that history had shown that nuclear deterrence had basically kept the peace between the major powers since the end of World War II.

The general expressed confidence that the United States' nuclear arsenal remained effective, saying, "I sleep very well at night." But like an aging vehicle, the general said, the arsenal is overdue for an overhaul. "When you look at our deterrent, it was really built in the 1960s," he said, and was last updated in the 1980s. "It should have happened in 2000 and 2001," the general said, but "obviously our country was a little bit busy in 2001 based on another horrific act." Although the Obama administration spoke of its aspiration to eliminate nuclear weapons around the world, it did designate tens of billions of dollars to upgrade nuclear laboratories and prolong the lives of aging warheads. In 2014, the Pentagon acknowledged it would have to spend additional billions through 2019 to make emergency repairs on missile silos, bombers, submarines and other infrastructure that had been permitted to languish since the Cold War.

General Weinstein, whose career spans four decades, attributed the increased tensions with Russia in large part to its actions under President Vladimir V. Putin, punctuated by Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian territory of Crimea in 2014. "If you look at the Russian behavior since 2010 to the way they are now, it's much more aggressive — much more, I'll say, bellicose," he said. "I woke up one day, and the Russians had invaded a sovereign nation, which was not something that was on my scope." When he looks back at the actions of Russia over time and its dealings with the United States, the general said, "For me the most important thing we can really do is maintain a strong nuclear deterrent." The American approach toward Russia, he said, "has got to be some behavior that gets them to the table."

General Weinstein is among those who have accused the Russians of violating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, signed by the United States and the Soviet Union in 1987. That pact was the first time the superpowers agreed to reduce their arsenals. Russia has denied it is in violation of the accord, but the dispute constituted an additional irritant in the deteriorating relations with the Kremlin under Mr. Obama. President Trump has sent mixed signals about his stance toward Russia and nuclear weapons. While he has expressed admiration for Mr. Putin — and has been fighting accusations by critics that Russia meddled in the American election to help him win — Mr. Trump has asserted that he wants to increase America's nuclear might. In December, Mr. Trump said in a Twitter post that the United States must "greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes."

On 21 MAR in Washington, Christopher Ford, the National Security Council's senior director for weapons of mass destruction and counterproliferation, offered some further insight into the views of the administration, saying it would re-examine the policy of nuclear disarmament. "We're reviewing policy across the board — we're no exception in that respect — and that necessarily includes whether or not, among many other things, the goal of a world without nuclear weapons is in fact a realistic objective," Mr. Ford said at the Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference. "I do not know where we're going to come out on that." He also said "unrealistic expectations" of denuclearization had increased the appeal of a global treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons and eventually eliminate them. A United Nations conference on such a treaty is to be held next week in New York. Mr. Ford said he believed that the conference was a "fundamentally misguided ban-treaty-talk process." Mr. Ford also said Mr. Trump "has

made it very clear that he would not accept a second-place position in the nuclear weapons arena” and that the military personnel managing American nuclear forces must “have the best available tools.” [Source: New York Times | Rick Gladstone | March 22, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **USFSPA & Divorce Update 29 ► Dividing Retired Pay SCOTUS Case**

A case involving the Uniformed Services Former Spouse Protection Act (USFSPA), a controversial 1982 law, is being heard before the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS). The case will determine the extent of a state court's legal authority to divide military retired pay in a divorce where the former servicemember waives a portion of military retired pay in favor of VA disability compensation. Lt. Col. Aniela Szymanski, USMCR, MOAA director of government relations for veterans benefits, attended the Supreme Court oral argument March 20 in the case of Howell v. Howell and reported on the proceedings.

In the current case, a family court granted the former spouse 50 percent of the servicemember's retirement pay. Years later, the retiree received a VA disability rating and waived a portion of military retired pay to receive the tax-free VA disability compensation instead. As a result, the servicemember's military retirement pay was reduced; the former spouse took the retiree to court to get her portion of that - in this case, \$152 a month - back. USFSPA is a controversial law in the military community because it allows courts to treat military retired pay as property in the case of a divorce. Adam Unikowsky, the attorney for the veteran, says the letter and spirit of USFSPA were followed in this case. Disability pay, he argued, is paid to the veteran for injuries suffered in service and to compensate for lost earning potential.

Previously, a lower-level court in Arizona held that, even though the reduction in retired pay was the result of a VA disability, the retiree still had to pay the \$152 per month to the former spouse. The court reasoned that the former spouse had a “vested interest” in the retired pay and had come to rely on the full amount. During the 20 MAR proceedings, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said, “Alimony is something that one spouse pays to the other based on economic need. The division of property gives a spouse the property outright. It's hers. It's not something that she is getting from somebody else. It is hers, because there's an enormous difference between equitable division of property and alimony.”

The justices asked questions aimed at the implications of how varying legal interpretations of USFSPA will affect those who have come to rely on the income provided by a portion of their former spouse's military retirement. “How consequential is the issue before us?” Justice Ginsburg asked. “Because if you're right, then in all future divorce settlements, they won't say half of the military retirement pay. They'll give a dollar amount which is equal to what the military retirement pay is before any disability payment kicks in.” Chief Justice John Roberts was more direct in his skepticism. “You have a law that says you can't divide disability pay, and yet, you say it's okay to say, ‘Well, I'm not going to divide it, but I'm just going to award you an amount equal to what it would be if I divided it.’ ... That's the sort of thing that gives law a bad name. It makes a charade out of the statute.”

It is never a good idea to try and guess the outcome of a case that reaches the Supreme Court by listening to oral arguments, but there is a good possibility that the decision in this case will affect the divorce settlements of military retirees in the near future. The court is expected to rule on the case later this year. When a decision is issued, MOAA will provide an update. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | March 24, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **BRAC Update 56 ► Trump Presidency Improves Base Closure Prospects**



Lawmakers have repeatedly refused to authorize another round of U.S. military base realignment and closure, known as BRAC, despite pleas from Pentagon leaders. But that could change now that President Donald Trump is in office, according to defense analysts. Pentagon officials estimate that another round of BRAC — which last occurred in 2005 — would save \$2 billion annually. That money could be reinvested to address military readiness shortfalls, noted Kurt Couchman, vice president of public policy at Defense Priorities, a national-security focused advocacy group. “The new president I think is the main reason for optimism,” he said at a conference on Capitol Hill. “There was a lot of distrust for President Obama [among Republican lawmakers]. There was a lot of concern about his ... commitment to a strong national defense — whether or not that was justified, there was a lot of concern there. “There isn’t that level of concern with President Trump,” he continued.

GOP members of Congress are now more likely to have confidence that any savings from BRAC would be reinvested in other military priorities, Couchman suggested. “With [Secretary of Defense James] Mattis in the driver seat of this whole process, I think people could be assured that he is going to put the readiness and capabilities of the armed forces above everything else.” Christopher Preble, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, envisioned Trump using the presidential bully pulpit to pressure lawmakers to cut unnecessary overhead. “To my knowledge he has not addressed the subject [of BRAC] specifically, but he has talked about the amount of waste at the Pentagon and using ... efficiencies to pay for some of his increased force structure,” Preble said.

Mattis has promised to find efficiencies and improve the way the Pentagon does business as part of the fiscal years 2019-2023 defense program that is being developed. Preble expects a push for base realignment and closures, and a reduction in civilian overhead, to be part of that. “I find it hard to believe that the president can implement major efficiency reforms that don’t address the overhead problem,” he said. Nevertheless, there’s no guarantee that lawmakers would green-light another round of BRAC, even if Trump and Mattis push for it. “I’ve worked for two members of Congress, and nobody wants a facility in their district to go away” and have a negative impact on the local economy, Couchman said. [Source: NDIA | Jon Harper | April 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **DoD Fraud Waste & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 MAR 2017**

**Trump** -- If you have suggestions on how to save money on building the F-35 fleet, or on how to reorganize Veterans Affairs hospitals to be more efficient, President Trump wants to hear from you. An executive order signed by Trump 13 MAR calls for a “comprehensive plan for reorganizing the executive branch” to include a plan from every federal department by early September to “improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of that agency.” In addition, the order calls for the director of the Office of Management and Budget to invite the public to suggest improvements to how federal agencies operate. That includes, the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs (but not Congress, which is part of the legislative branch of government).

In a statement to reporters before his Cabinet officials, Trump said the move is designed to make the federal government more efficient and effective. “Today there is duplication and redundancy everywhere,” he said, without offering further specifics on areas where he has seen those problems. “Billions and billions of dollars are being wasted. “This order requires a thorough examination of every executive department and agency to see where money is being wasted, how services can be improved and whether programs are truly serving American citizens.” Trump made cutting government waste a frequent promise on the campaign trail, although outside analysts have argued that potential savings won’t be enough to offset spending on the president’s proposed new programs. And the idea mirrors similar actions by previous presidents, including President Barack Obama. In December 2009, he launched a new “openness in government” initiative that included input from the public on ways to make operations of federal agencies more transparent and less costly.

Details how the public can submit ideas will be published in the Federal Register in coming days. The final report from OMB is expected to include whether some federal agency functions “would be better left to state or local governments, or to the private sector” and “the costs of shutting down or merging agencies.” In January 2015, the Pentagon's Defense Business Board suggested the Defense Department could cut \$125 billion in spending over five years by reducing services from contractors, implementing early retirements, reworking contracts and reducing administrative costs. VA officials have also faced charges of wasteful spending in recent years, including expensive overruns on hospital constructions. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 14, 2017++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Fat Leonard Investigation** -- Retired US Navy Rear Adm. Bruce Loveless, four retired Navy captains, a Marine colonel and three other individuals were arrested and charged 14 MAR in the latest indictments related to the Glenn Defense Marine Asia (GDMA) bribery scandal. The investigation is also known as the "Fat Leonard" case, after a nickname for GDMA's former chief executive officer, Leonard Francis. The latest federal indictment charges the individuals with accepting luxury travel, elaborate dinners and the services of prostitutes from Singapore-based GDMA, according to the US Department of Justice, all in exchange for classified and internal US Navy information. Glenn Defense Marine Asia was one of the biggest husbanding firms in the western Pacific, handling a large variety of services for ships visiting ports throughout the region.



**Rear Adm. Bruce Loveless & Rear Adm. Robert Gilbeau**

With Tuesday's arrests, a total of 25 individuals have been charged in connection with the corruption and fraud investigation into GDMA, the Justice Department said in a press release. Of those charged, Justice said, 20 are current or former U.S. Navy officials and five are GDMA executives. Thirteen of those charged already have pleaded guilty. The defendants were arrested early Tuesday morning in California, Texas, Pennsylvania, Florida, Colorado and Virginia, Justice said in the press release, adding that federal officials will seek to move all defendants to San Diego, where the GDMA case is being tried in federal court. According to the press release, the nine defendants were arrested on various charges including bribery, conspiracy to commit bribery, honest services fraud, obstruction of justice and making false statements to federal investigators when confronted about their actions.

- Loveless, 48, of San Diego, was arrested at his home in Colorado.
- Four of the defendants, Justice said, are retired captains: David Newland, 60, of San Antonio, Texas; James Dolan, 58, of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; David Lausman, 62, of The Villages, Florida; and Donald Hornbeck, 56, a resident of the United Kingdom.
- The other defendants arrested Tuesday included Marine Col. Enrico Deguzman, 48, of Honolulu, Hawaii; retired Chief Warrant Officer Robert Gorsuch, 48, of Virginia Beach, Virginia; active-duty Lt. Cmdr. Stephen Shedd, 48, of Colorado Springs, Colorado; and active-duty Commander Mario Herrera, 48, of Helotes, Texas.

According to the indictment, Justice said in the press release, the Navy officers allegedly participated in a bribery scheme with Leonard Francis, in which the officers accepted travel and entertainment expenses, the services of prostitutes and lavish gifts in exchange for helping to steep lucrative contracts to Francis and GDMA and to sabotage competing defense contractors. The defendants allegedly violated many of their sworn official naval duties, including duties related to the handling of classified information and duties related to the identification and reporting of foreign intelligence threats. According to the indictment, the defendants allegedly worked in concert to recruit new members for the conspiracy, and to keep the conspiracy secret by using fake names and foreign email service providers. According to the indictment, the Justice press release said, the bribery scheme allegedly cost the Navy “tens of millions of dollars.”

Acting U.S. Attorney Alana Robinson of the Southern District of California, quoted in the press release, declared the scandal represented “a fleecing and betrayal of the United States Navy in epic proportions, and it was allegedly carried out by the Navy’s highest-ranking officers. The alleged conduct amounts to a staggering degree of corruption by the most prominent leaders of the Seventh Fleet -- the largest fleet in the U.S. Navy -- actively worked together as a team to trade secrets for sex, serving the interests of a greedy foreign defense contractor, and not those of their own country.” Dermot O’Reilly, director of the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), said in the press release that, “the allegations contained in today’s indictment expose flagrant corruption among several senior officers previously assigned to the U.S. Navy’s Seventh Fleet. The charges and subsequent arrests are yet another unfortunate example of those who place their own greed above their responsibility to serve this nation with honor. This investigation should serve as a warning sign to those who attempt to compromise the integrity of the Department of Defense that DCIS and our law enforcement partners will continue to pursue these matters relentlessly.”

Asked for comment, a spokesman at the Navy’s office of the chief of information deferred to the Department of Justice. Loveless becomes the second flag officer charged in the GDMA scandal. Rear Adm. Robert Gilbeau, a supply officer, has pleaded guilty and is awaiting sentencing. According to the federal indictment, Loveless was charged for actions when, as a captain in 2007 and 2008, he was serving as assistant chief of staff for intelligence for the Seventh Fleet. Before that, starting in 2005 he served as an intelligence officer aboard the Japan-based carrier Kitty Hawk. In the federal grand jury indictment, Loveless accepted bribes, expensive hotel rooms, and the services of prostitutes, mostly from 2006 to 2008. He is charged with making false statements to investigators and obstructing justice in November 2013. Loveless underwent a publicly embarrassing, nearly 900-day period serving first as the Navy’s director of intelligence operations – but with his security clearance revoked pending the results of the Justice investigation.

He, along with his boss, director of intelligence Vice Adm. Ted “Twig” Branch, were not allowed to attend classified briefings or even enter their officers, which were considered classified areas. To date, Branch has not been publicly charged in the investigation. Loveless was transferred in late 2014 to become the Navy’s corporate director for information dominance, dealing mostly with non-classified issues. He retired in October 2016. The federal investigation continues under a partnership of three primary agencies, the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) and the Defense Contract Audit Agency. In San Diego, Assistant Chief Brian Young of the Criminal Division’s Fraud Section and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Mark Pletcher and Patrick Hovakimian of the Southern District of California are prosecuting the case. The Navy is conducting its own investigations of individuals cleared of criminal wrongdoing, and a number of active duty officers remain under investigation. [Source: DefenseNews | Christopher P. Cavas | March 14, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **POW/MIA Update 82 ► Battle of Tarawa Unknown's Remains**

Military and Veterans Affairs officials are digging up the remains of 94 unidentified Marines and sailors killed on a remote atoll in the Pacific during one of World War II's bloodiest battles. The servicemen were killed in the Battle of Tarawa in 1943 and buried as unknowns at a national cemetery in Honolulu after the war. Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency spokeswoman Maj. Natasha Waggoner said 28 MAR advances in DNA technology have increased the probability of identifying the unknowns. More than 990 U.S. Marines and 30 U.S. sailors were killed in the three-day battle. About 550 are still unidentified, including some still in Tarawa, Waggoner said.

National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific spokesman Gene Maestas said the disinterments began in October. The cemetery, which is also known as Punchbowl, expects to transfer the last eight servicemen to the military next on 3 APR. The exhumations come two years after the Pentagon announced new criteria for exhuming remains from military cemeteries for identification. Shortly after, it dug up from Punchbowl cemetery the remains of nearly 400 unknowns from the USS Oklahoma who were killed in the 1941 Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. The work to identify them is expected to take about five years.

Waggoner said her agency doesn't have an estimate for how long it will take to identify the Tarawa remains. That's because some of the skeletons from Punchbowl are incomplete and parts of some bodies are still in Tarawa. The agency recently received Pentagon approval to exhume some 35 Punchbowl graves believed to hold the unidentified remains of servicemen from the USS West Virginia, which was also hit in the Pearl Harbor attack. The agency will schedule these disinterments after it gets a permit from the state of Hawaii, she said.

Tarawa, which is some 2,300 miles (3,700 kilometers) southwest of Honolulu, is today part of the Republic of Kiribati. During the U.S. amphibious assault on Tarawa 74 years ago, Japanese machine gun fire killed scores of Marines when their boats got stuck on the reef at low tide. Americans who made it to the beach faced brutal hand-to-hand combat. Only 17 of the 3,500 Japanese troops survived. Of 1,200 Korean slave laborers on the island, just 129 lived. The U.S. quickly buried the thousands of dead. But these graves were soon disturbed as the Navy had to quickly build an airstrip to continue their push west toward Japan. [Source: The Associated Press | Audrey McAvoy | March 28, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

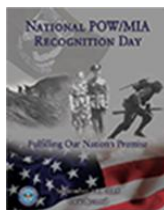
## **POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 16 thru 31 MAR 2017 | Ten**

"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**

*The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 0 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from Vietnam. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:*

### **Korea**

*The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 4 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:*

-- **Army Cpl. Billie J. Jimerson** was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit engaged with enemy forces near Anju, North Korea. Jimerson could not be accounted for after the battle and was declared missing in action as of Nov. 28, 1950. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1109724/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-jimerson> to read about Jimerson.

-- **Army Pfc. Robert E. Mitchell** was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. On Sept 6, 1950, North Korean forces penetrated the Naktong Bulg portion of the Pusan Perimeter near Am-sin, South Korea, and engaged with Mitchell's unit. Mitchell could not be accounted for after the battle and was declared missing in action. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1113963/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-mitchell> to read more about Mitchell.

-- **Army Cpl. Norman Joseph Pelletier**, a New Hampshire serviceman who died in a prison camp during the Korean War, remains have been identified and are being returned to his family for burial at Arlington National Cemetery. Twenty-year-old Pelletier, of Berlin, will be buried 28 MAR with full military honors, according to the Pentagon's Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. Pelletier was reported missing in action by the Army on Feb. 13, 1951, soon after his Headquarters Battery, 15th Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division came under attack from the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces in an area known as the Central Corridor in North Korea. Pelletier, who received a Bronze Star, never reported in. Returning American prisoners later reported that Pelletier had died from malnutrition and dysentery and was buried in a prison camp in what is now North Korea. But his family didn't have definitive proof that he had died, an answer that wouldn't come for another 66 years.

The first break came in 1994, when North Korea returned 208 boxes containing the remains of 400 U.S. servicemen who fought during the war. Among them were 15 boxes of remains found in the North Hwanghae Province, where Pelletier was believed to have died. Still, it would be another two decades before Pelletier's remains were identified by military scientists using DNA samples from three of his brothers. Pelletier's dog tags and a pair of broken glasses were returned to his family on Monday. "I was stunned, absolutely stunned," said Raymond Pelletier, a brother, who spearheaded the effort to identify the remains from his home in Hampden, Maine. Raymond Pelletier



said he remembers little about his brother, who left for the war when he was 8 and gave him a camera he still has. He later would find a box of Western novels in the family's attic that his older brother loved to read and remembers how his brother's death took a toll on his parents, who had prevented him from enlisting until he graduated from high school.

"I knew there was a big issue with my parents. He wanted to sign up and go into the military before he was of age. They wouldn't allow him," he said. "That sort of led to a lot of heartbreak in the family. My parents sort of went back to the issue of wondering if they had signed right away, maybe he would have come back." Raymond Pelletier admits he often doubted his brother would ever be identified. But now that he has been, he plans to do everything he can to honor his service including trying to get a memorial at New Hampshire State Veterans Cemetery in Boscawen. He also wants to have his brother recognized at the Berlin Historical Society. "He is finally, after 60 years, getting some of the recognition he deserves," Raymond Pelletier said. The Accounting Agency said 7,757 Americans remain unaccounted for from the Korean War. [Source: The Associated Press | Michael Casey | March 21, 2017 ++]

-- **Army Cpl. Jules Hauterman Jr.**, an Army medic from Hampden, Massachusetts who was reported missing in action during the Korean War on 20 Dec 1950, remains are returning home for burial, military officials said 20 MAR. Cpl. Hauterman is scheduled to be buried in Holyoke on 31 MAR with full military honors, according to the Pentagon's Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. Hauterman will be buried in the family plot with his parents and sister, said David Stuntz, whose 94-year-old mother is Hauterman's cousin. "This means a great deal to my mother because the family is complete again," Stuntz said. "My mother is his closest living relative." Stuntz, who was a child when Hauterman went missing, has no memories of him but remembers vague family stories. "He was a nice young man, I heard, and when he died, his mother withdrew, went into her own cave," he said. Hauterman was 19 years old when he was reported missing in action during the fighting withdrawal of the 31st Regimental Combat Team from the Chosin Reservoir, military officials said.

More than 1,300 Americans, pursued by the Chinese army, were captured or killed. Neither the Chinese nor the North Korean armies listed Hauterman as a prisoner, and no returning American POWs reported any information about him, so he was declared dead. Remains recovered from the reservoir area in 1954 were declared unidentifiable and buried the next year in Hawaii. Those remains were disinterred last June and were sent to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency's lab for analysis. Dental and anthropological analysis and circumstantial evidence matched Hauterman's records. [Source: The Associated Press | Mark Pratt | March 21, 2017 ++]

## World War II

**The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 6 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:**

-- **Mr. Maax C. Hammer, Jr.**, 25, of Cairo, Ill., will be buried 21 MAR in Carbondale, Ill. Hammer, formerly in the U.S. Army Air Corps Reserve, was among a small group of American pilots training with the Flying Tigers to battle Japanese forces invading China in 1941. Hammer was killed during a training mission on Sep. 22, 1941, when his plane crashed near Toungoo, Burma, after a heavy rainstorm. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1120349/civilian-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-hammer> to read more about Hammer.





-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. John D. Mumford**, 22, of St. Petersburg, Fl., will be buried March 23, in his hometown. Mumford was a P-51C "Mustang" pilot assigned to the 318th Fighter Squadron, 325th Fighter Group, 15th Air Force. On June 6, 1944, Mumford flew escort for B-17 "Flying Fortress" bombers on their mission to bomb and destroy a German occupied airfield at Galati, Romania. Following the bombing, the formation was attacked by German fighters. Mumford pursued two German fighters before crashing near present day Novi Troyany, Ukraine. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1120363/soldier-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-mumford> to read more about Mumford.



-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Charles R. Casto** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Casto was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1120345/remains-of-uss-oklahoma-sailor-identified-from-world-war-ii-casto> to read more about Casto.

-- **Marine Pvt. Harry K. Tye**, 21, of Orinoco, Kentucky, will be buried March 28 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Tye was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Tye's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against fierce Japanese resistance. Tye was killed on Nov. 20, 1943. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1124838/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-tye> to read more on Tye.



-- **Army Air Forces Capt. Albert L. Schlegel**, 25, of Cleveland, Ohio, will be buried March 30 in Beaufort, South Carolina. Schlegel disappeared Aug. 28, 1944, while piloting his P-51D Mustang on a ground strafing mission near Strasbourg, France. In his final communication, the fighter "ace" radioed he'd been hit by heavy anti-aircraft fire and would need to bail out. Historical records indicated that locals in Valmy, France reported that an unknown American aviator was captured in their village that same evening. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1124860/soldier-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-schlegel> to read more about Schlegel.



-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pvt. Donald S. Spayd** was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Spayd's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against fierce Japanese resistance. Spayd was killed on Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending. Read more on Spayed at <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1122268/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-spayd>.

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

\* VA \*



## **VA Mental Health Care Update 32 ► Senators Ask for More OTH Details**

Eight Democrats in the Senate are seeking more details from the Department of Veterans Affairs about an announcement last week that the VA would provide urgent mental health care to veterans with other-than-honorable discharges. In a letter to VA Secretary David Shulkin, the senators wrote the announcement had sparked interest from some veterans with other-than-honorable (OTH) discharges who are now scrambling to find more information about what services the VA will provide. Other-than-honorable discharges, also known as “bad paper,” prevent veterans from receiving federal benefits, such as health care, disability payments, education and housing assistance. “Many of the veterans who could be eligible under this expansion are now seeking information and treatment after hearing your statements,” the senators’ letter reads. “These are veterans with elevated risks for substance use issues, homelessness, criminal court involvement and suicide, and time is always crucial in connecting them to treatment options.”

Kristofer Goldsmith, who works with Vietnam Veterans of America and has been a longtime advocate for veterans with bad paper, said “tons of veterans” have reached out to him and the veterans group with questions since Shulkin’s announcement. “These are folks who have been in desperate need of help some, some of them for decades,” Goldsmith said. “Some of them were in Vietnam, discharged in the late ‘60s and have been needing help ever since.” The letter was sent 10 MAR, and Tester’s office said they had not received a response as of 14 MAR. A VA spokesman said 15 MAR he wasn’t certain whether the department’s legislative office had seen the letter yet. It was signed by Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT), Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT), Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO), Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV), and Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA).

Shulkin made the announcement about offering mental health care to veterans with bad paper during testimony before the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs on 7 MAR, and it received praise and applause. Lawmakers and veterans advocates have long argued servicemembers with bad paper were, in many cases, unjustly released from the military because of mental health issues. Some advocates have urged the VA for years to provide benefits to veterans with other-than-honorable discharges. But now, the senators want details – and soon. “What they’re asking is what we need to know,” Goldsmith said. He said the most important question being asked is whether any

preventative mental health services would be offered or if veterans with bad paper would be allowed to receive services only when they're in an urgent crisis.

Speaking to the House committee last week, Shulkin said mental health care would be provided to veterans with bad paper who urgently needed it. The VA specified in a news release the following day that veterans would be allowed to receive treatment starting in "early summer" at VA emergency rooms, vet centers or through the Veterans Crisis Line. The VA offers counseling at approximately 300 vet centers nationwide. "Will they stop at urgent mental health care for veterans about to commit suicide or provide care to actually overcome things like post-traumatic stress disorder, [traumatic brain injury] and [military sexual trauma]?" Goldsmith asked. "You can't wait until they're suicidal, help them for a week, and then push them back out with no resources."

The senators also inquired about whether the Veterans Crisis Line and in- and out-patient mental health care facilities had the capacity to handle a larger group of veterans. In its release, the VA estimated there were 500,000 veterans with other-than-honorable discharges. The senators also want to know whether the VA needs more authority or resources from Congress to allow veterans with other-than-honorable discharges to get care. "These questions must be addressed quickly, and the answers must be communicated proactively to all veterans immediately," the letter states. The letter urged Shulkin to consult with veterans organizations when creating a plan.

Goldsmith is also calling on lawmakers on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee to hold hearings before the VA presents a plan, in order to gather input from veterans and military organizations and others who have received other-than-honorable discharges. "What we're telling [veterans] is that they need to make their voices heard," Goldsmith said. "Vets with bad paper have been closeted for decades, and now is the time that [President Donald] Trump's administration, the VA and members of Congress need to hear them." To read the senators' letter go to [https://www.testersenate.gov/files/Letters/2017\\_03\\_10\\_Testers\\_Skulkin\\_Other\\_Than\\_Honorable\\_Discharges.pdf](https://www.testersenate.gov/files/Letters/2017_03_10_Testers_Skulkin_Other_Than_Honorable_Discharges.pdf).

[Source: Stars And Stripes | Nikki Wentling | March 15, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **GI Bill Update 220 ► Processing Delays Impact 11,000 Students**

Sommona Ada is a graduate student at the University of North Texas who's been paying for school with the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits she earned after 11 years in the U.S. Air Force and reserves. But Ada hasn't been able to re-enroll in classes for the next eight-week term at the UNT Health Science Center because the Department of Veterans Affairs hasn't paid her bill. Nor has she received her housing stipend since January, she said. Ada is one of approximately 11,000 beneficiaries who have been impacted by processing delays at the VA. Department officials said the delays stem from an internal quality audit that required a review of approximately 14,000 already-processed claims that started in late December.

"These reviews require a significant increase in the number of inquiries VA has had to make with DoD service departments for information about individual training dates and service times," according to an emailed statement from the department. "This is a significant workload that will take time to work through," the statement said, adding that the department does not have an estimated completion time. "VA is working with DoD and is making every effort to minimize the effect of this review to our GI Bill beneficiaries." It took an average of 24.5 days for the department to process original claims and 10.3 days for supplemental claims in February – slightly higher than the VA's current fiscal year average of 20.2 days for original claims and 8.1 days for supplemental claims. A department spokesperson said the VA is still meeting or exceeding its timeliness goals for the fiscal year.

As of 2015, more than 790,500 students were using Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to pay for school tuition, fees and housing. Processing delays at the VA are nothing new, said Will Hubbard, vice president of government affairs for the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit advocacy group Student Veterans of America. In the past, he said, the VA has been proactive about addressing such issues, and he's glad to see that the department posted a notice of the delays

on Facebook 17 MAR. The delays aren't affecting a large percentage of the total number of users, Hubbard said. "The scope of it is not widespread panic or anything like that, which is good," he said, noting that the organization has not heard complaints from its student veteran members. "Obviously, we're concerned," he added. "We're keeping our ear to the ground. The hundreds of thousands of veterans in our chapters always know that they can reach out to us if there's any issues."

As for Ada, she said she waited on hold twice for 45 minutes when she tried calling the VA about her unpaid school bill. After sending proof of her military service, including her deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, at employees' request, she was told they couldn't help her and that she may have better luck by calling her Congressman, she said. "It's been about three months since my school hasn't gotten paid. It's ridiculous that we're going through this," she said. "This is serious. This is people's lives." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | March 20, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA VIC Update 02 ▶ Issued w/VA Benefits Enrollment**

Many veterans do not realize that to become eligible for the VA's comprehensive medical benefits package, they must first enroll. After they enroll, they are pleasantly surprised by the VA's swift check-in process. Once enrolled, they receive their VIC (Veteran Identification Card), which can be used at any VA health facility. This card is proof of identity for lab work, diagnostic tests, prescriptions and other services. Their sensitive information such as their Social Security number and date of birth are not on the face of this card. That information is coded into the magnetic stripe and barcode. Thus, when they enter any VA health facility, they put their VIC into a kiosk that automatically checks them into the facility. The kiosk will display, upon its touchscreen, their check-in time for their appointment, update personal information such as address, phone number, email, next-of-kin and health insurance information. Once checked in, they simply wait to be seen by their health provider. Can it be any simpler? For more information, please refer to the VA's homepage at [www.va.gov/healthbenefits](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits) or call 877-222-8387 (VETS) Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 7, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Crises Hotline Update 34 ▶ Over 25% of Calls Redirected**

More than one-fourth of calls to the Veterans Crisis Line end up being redirected to other emergency response services because of ongoing problems with the services' operations, according to a new report released 20 MAR. Those problems persist despite leadership changes and promised reforms at the crisis hotline in the last year, and a years-long emphasis on suicide prevention efforts from Department of Veterans Affairs officials. "Staff did not respond adequately to a veteran's urgent needs during multiple calls to the (crisis line) and its backup call centers," officials from the VA Inspector General's office said in the report. "Supervisory staff did not identify the deficiencies in their internal review of the matter."

Last spring, a similar report by the office found at least 23 callers to the crisis line were transferred to voicemail systems instead of reaching emergency help. That revelation prompted harsh criticism from lawmakers, who said the mistakes literally could kill unstable veterans trying to get help. The new analysis of crisis line operations for the last six months of 2016 found that more than 28 percent of calls to the hotline were redirected to backup centers that might not have the same training and resources to help veterans in crisis. VA has set a goal of no more than 10 percent for "rollover" calls to the crisis line. The report also found "deficiencies in governance and oversight" of the program's operations, including poor record keeping to detect and correct problems with missed calls. In a

statement, VA's acting Under Secretary for Health Poonam Alaigh said the crisis line "is the strongest it's ever been since its inception in 2007" but acknowledged that further improvements are needed in the system.



The department opened a new Atlanta satellite office for the New York-based crisis line in October — midway through the inspector general's review — and "has implemented a comprehensive workforce management system and optimized staffing patterns" to "provide callers with immediate service" in the future. But officials critiquing the system say that's not enough. The Inspector General's office has recommended better staff education, technology support, performance reviews and call monitoring to better the system. Calls which go unanswered by the line are mandated to be directed to backup crisis centers, so veterans seeking help aren't left without help. But the inspector general notes that those backups may not have the same training in military-specific issues and services, limiting some of the assistance they can provide.

In a statement, House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe (R-TN) called the ongoing problems "unacceptable" and asked for immediate fixes. "The Veterans Crisis Line is intended to be the first line of defense against veteran suicide, and we must ensure calls are being answered by a trained professional in a timely manner," he said. "I am extremely frustrated by the findings and will continue to conduct oversight so the men and women who answered the call to serve have their calls answered when they need help the most." The Veterans Crisis Line, launched in 2007, has fielded 2.5 million calls in the last decade and dispatched emergency services more than 66,000 times to callers in need of emergency help. In fiscal 2016 alone, staffers answered more than 510,000 calls, 53,000 chat requests and 15,000 texts. VA statistics show roughly 20 veterans a day nationwide commit suicide. Of those, only six are active users of VA services.

To contact the Veteran Crisis Line, callers can dial 1-800-273-8255 and select option 1 for a VA staffer. Veterans, troops or their families members can also text 838255 or visit VeteransCrisisLine.net for assistance. The full report is available on the inspector general's web site <https://www.va.gov/oig/pubs/VAOIG-16-03985-181.pdf>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 20, 2017 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Note: The following was received on March 21, 2017 regarding the VCL**

In response to the recently released VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) report that reviewed processes from June 6 through Dec. 15, 2016, of the Veterans Crisis Line(VCL), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released the following statement: "The Department of Veterans Affairs is proud to announce that the challenges with the Veterans Crisis Line have been resolved. Prior to the opening of our new Atlanta call center, our call rollover rate often exceeded 30 percent. Our current call rollover rate is less than 1 percent, with over 99 percent of all calls being answered by the VCL." "Suicide prevention is one of our highest priorities," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs David J. Shulkin. "Fixing the Veterans Crisis Line was a critical step in keeping our commitment to Veterans." To reach a VA professional, who is specially trained to attend to emotional crises for Veterans and service members:

- Dial the National Suicide Prevention Hotline number, 800-273-TALK (8255). Veterans should choose option 1 to reach a VCL responder;
- Text 838255 — A VCL responder will text back.
- Chat online at <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net>

[Source: VA News Release || March 21, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Appeals Update 25 ► VA/GAO Agree - Appeals Reform Needed

In response to a report released by the Government Accountability Office's (GAO), "VA Disability Benefits: Additional Planning Would Enhance Efforts to Improve the Timeliness of Appeals Decisions," the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released the following statement:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) appreciates the work of the Government Accountability Office (GAO). This report confirms that the current law and process for adjudicating appeals is not consistent with the commitment we have made to our nation's Veterans

"Veterans are waiting far too long for decisions in our current appeals process," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David J. Shulkin. "We have made bold changes to remove the bureaucratic red tape that has caused Veterans to wait an average of three years before they get a decision. VA has developed sound and aggressive plans regarding hiring, training and mitigation strategies that are already being aggressively implemented. In addition, VA recognizes the importance of effective management practices for the development of information systems to help integrate and streamline the appeals process. Our new Caseflow system will help us anticipate new information requirements, allowing us to quickly address challenges and provide our employees the support they need.

There is broad consensus that the current VA appeals system is broken and in urgent need of reform. Our proposal for a new appeals process was designed in conjunction with Veterans Service Organizations and other key stakeholders. VA strongly disagrees with GAO about the need for any type of piloting, which would only unnecessarily delay the implementation of the bold changes Veterans expect us to make.

"We have a number of reports and studies, including this one from GAO, which have helped us clearly identify the problems in the current system," said Acting Under Secretary for Benefits Tom Murphy.

VA is working to make as many changes to the system allowed by current law.

"We need our partners in Congress to act swiftly, so we can implement the changes we all agree need to be made," Secretary Shulkin said. "I am personally committed to work with Congress over the coming months to get this done."

[Source: VA News Release | March 23, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Appeals Backlog Update 06 ► Hiring Surge Needed

The Department of Veterans Affairs is warning of a rapidly growing backlog for veterans who seek to appeal decisions involving disability benefits, saying it will need much more staff even as money remains in question due to a tightening Trump administration budget. The red flag is included in a Government Accountability Office report released 23 MAR. The VA says the **wait time of as much as five years** for veterans seeking resolution of their claims would continue to grow without a "hiring surge" in the next budget year beginning in October. Without the staff, the VA said, the backlog could exceed 1 million within a decade, and "veterans may have to wait an average of



8.5 years" to have their appeals resolved. The department provides \$63.7 billion in disability compensation payments each year to about 4.1 million veterans with disabling conditions incurred during their military service.

Setting a goal to decide most appeals within one year by 2021, the VA set aside additional money in 2017 to boost full-time staff by 36 percent, or 242. It also estimated that a hiring surge of up to 1,458 more staff would be necessary in 2018. But in comments to GAO, the VA acknowledged Thursday that its workforce plan was "highly dependent on VA's annual budget appropriation," and that it could not necessarily commit fully to the hiring. Trump's budget blueprint calls for a 6 percent increase in VA funding, mostly to pay for rising health costs to treat veterans. The VA is one of three agencies slated for more money amid big-time cuts to other domestic programs. But the White House plan has yet to spell out specific funding for hiring of more VA staff to handle both disability claims and appeals, only saying it planned to continue "critical investments" to transform VA claims processing. In testimony to Congress this week, VA inspector general Michael Missal said the Trump administration was proposing to carry over 2017 funding levels to 2018 for most VA discretionary programs.

Asked for additional detail, a spokesman for the White House Office of Management and Budget said, "stay tuned." VA Secretary David Shulkin has pointed to reform of the VA's disability appeals process as one of his top 10 priorities, calling the current system "broken." He has backed legislation introduced last year aimed at streamlining the appeals process, but has been less clear about available money for hiring. Last week, after being prodded by members of Congress, Shulkin released a memorandum detailing a few hundred more exemptions to the federal hiring freeze, in part to allow for the hiring of claims processors authorized in 2017. "These workforce shortages are deeply troubling," said Sen. Jon Tester, the top Democrat on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. "It's time we get these folks hired." He was among a group of senators, including Democrat Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, on Thursday who re-introduced legislation to overhaul the disability appeals system.

In a phone interview, VA officials said they had been devoting additional staff in recent years to address the appeals backlog but that broader reform from Congress, including added staffing, was urgently needed. "We plan to continue to hire to the extent we can," said Dave McLenachen, director of the Veterans Benefits Administration's appeals management office. In the GAO report, auditors as a whole found the VA's staffing estimates sound but cautioned the government's second largest agency needed a better plan to make sure additional staff are properly trained and have adequate office space. [Source: The Associated Press | Hope Yen | March 23, 2017++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Burial Schedules ► Now Available Online**

VA announced 24 MAR a new online schedule for all VA national cemeteries that will allow families, friends and community members to find time and location information for those being interred. "We pride ourselves on continuously improving customer satisfaction and meeting the wishes of Veterans and their loved ones," said interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Ronald E. Walters. "We want manageable information for anyone wishing to pay their respects." The new online feature is available to anyone with a smartphone, tablet or computer. Schedules of interments are updated hourly at [www.cem.va.gov/dailyburialschedule](http://www.cem.va.gov/dailyburialschedule), though some scheduled services may not be included as families may opt out of posting the information publicly.

Searches can be conducted by location or last name. The daily burial schedule provides date and time of the committal service, the location of the cemetery, as well as the funeral home providing services. The schedule also provides a direct link to the national cemetery's web page, directions, location of committal shelters and additional information. 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. [Source: VAntage Point | Megan Moloney | March 24, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Hiring & Retention ► Federal Hiring Freeze Impact**

On 22 MAR, the health subcommittee of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee held a hearing to address how best to attract, recruit, and retain a highly qualified clinical workforce to meet the complex health needs of veterans. At a time when the VA is struggling to increase access to care in the community, the department also faces challenges in its ability to attract and keep health care providers within its own system. As the nation's largest health system in the nation, the VA employs about 317,000 people at almost 1,200 medical facilities across the country. While surveys indicate the quality of care is some of the best in the country, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) continues to deliver that care inconsistently across facilities.

VHA staffing shortages are prominent across the system, particularly in five critical clinical occupational areas: physicians, registered nurses, physician assistants, psychologists, and physical therapists. According to a December 2016 study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), an independent auditing agency, VHA employee attrition grew to about 7,700 in FY 2015, from 5,900 employees in FY 2011, in these five fields. The growth accounted for about half of VHA's total attrition among all clinical occupations across the system during that period. One GAO official told lawmakers, "Challenges in recruiting and retaining clinical and human resources [HR] employees along with weak HR-related internal control practices are undermining VHA's ability to meet the health care needs of veterans." The GAO had serious questions about how veterans would be affected by the administration's federal hiring freeze. Of the 108 VHA clinical and administrative positions exempted from the freeze, HR personnel were not included. Should the freeze be further extended, the GAO seriously questioned the VHA's ability to recruit and hire medical staff.

MOAA has gone on record recognizing the significant changes the VA has made in recent years, including implementing a number of hiring initiatives through the secretary's MyVA efforts. "Historically, VHA has followed hiring practices that have proven to be unduly burdensome," said Steve Young, the deputy under secretary for health for operations and management at VHA. "Over the last year, VHA's business process improvement efforts, under the MyVA Critical Staffing Breakthrough Initiative, have resulted in a more efficient hiring process." Young also spoke to the hurdles facing the department: statutory performance and award caps; competition for medical talent with the commercial sector, particularly in areas of compensation; a "well-intended" press for greater accountability; the hiring freeze; and decreases in available funding all result in significant impediments to recruitment and retention of employees for the VHA.

MOAA is grateful to the subcommittee for holding this important and timely hearing. "The HR challenges facing VA are too big for the department to tackle on its own," said Cmdr. Rene' Campos, USN (Ret), MOAA's director of government relations for veterans health care. "The good news is Congress, GAO, the VA, and veteran service organizations like MOAA are willing to take on these pressing issues," Campos said. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | Take Action | March 24, 2017 | ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Data Analytics ► A Means to Improve Services**

Answers. Every transaction, every opportunity, every business plan seeks to provide answers to questions about how a problem can be solved or a goal can be achieved. Although data analytics has been around for a long time,

dramatic changes in technology, capabilities, quantitative methods, and the nature of data have increased the importance of analytics for all organizations. Using statistical and mathematical calculations, computer software, programming languages, big data and data analysis, data analytics provides advanced tools to deliver powerful results in a user-friendly way. VA's Financial Services Center (FSC) has taken on understanding the mountains of data being processed every day by wielding data analytics through its Data Analytics Division (DAD). DAD explores the information that floods an organization like FSC, and then provides answers to improve efficiencies and services for America's Veterans.

"Data analytics is new in organizational settings," said Chris Pate, Ph.D., Financial Support Services Data Analytics Division chief, "It originated in academia. It is often not being used by companies that could really benefit from its services because it is often quite challenging to implement." But the rewards are there: improved efficiency, effectiveness, compliance and performance. Everything that is characterized by numbers can be tracked, understood and improved. Pate has always placed himself on the cutting-edge. He is a full adjunct professor at the Webster University San Antonio campus where he teaches economics and statistics to graduate students. With more than 15 years of graduate teaching experience in organizational and quantitative methods and over 30 years of professional experience in federal healthcare administration and resource management, he has seen the increasing relevance of data analytics across a wide range of organizational settings as well as changes in academic curricula that reflect industry dynamics.

Today he heads the FSC Data Analytics Division team as the group works to improve efficiencies in VA services for Veterans and improve cost-savings through this cutting edge technology. "I love everything in data analytics," Pate said. "I am a statistician at heart. But I love all of the parts of analytics. From the gathering of statistics to the deployment of solutions – I find it amazing." Advanced computer programs and high-end mathematics simulations were not always at the forefront of how to examine data. Once, people understood market trends and sales using nothing more than an adding machine and daybook. Now, advanced simulations can provide more advanced, easier-to-understand results on bigger sets of data. Experts at FSC work with business owners and organizations to ensure that the vast quantities of information are shared effectively.

Data analytics requires giving the team access to as much data as possible to properly inform the results of testing. The team can examine everything as it happens and turn that into those ever-so-important answers that organizations can use to improve efficiency. Sometimes organizational inertia can slow down efforts to improve efficiencies through data calculations. Integrating these new ideas can be a challenge, especially for a system or organization that has spent decades using older computerization methods. Transitioning from paper ledgers or Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to modern business intelligence and analytics solutions, such as TIBCO Spotfire, can take a while, but it turns data into something teams across VA can use to improve how they do business.

And, analytics results manifest through more than graphs. Data analytics involves sending powerful information to the people who can use it – people already involved in making VA services work well, who use information like this in their daily jobs. "It translates to how we do work efficiently," Pate said. "By doing our work more efficiently, it results in dollars saved. If you can do things more efficiently, more money can be dedicated to Veterans services." Like all of us here, using analytics to improve services to our primary audience – Veterans – means that our goals are being met. [Source: VAntage Point | March 29, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Image Update 01 ► Vets Like Despite Problems**

The campaign manager for Sen. Bernie Sanders' (I- VT) presidential bid said 24 MAR on MSNBC that veterans "like" the scandal-plagued Department of Veterans Affairs "despite some of its problems." Discussing some ways he felt Republicans could work to fix Obamacare's problems rather than fully repeal it with the American Health Care Act, Jeff Weaver was asked by MSNBC host Katy Tur whether a true single-payer system could ever be a

possibility. "Could single-payer ever work in this country?" Tur asked. "Absolutely," Weaver said. "We have a number of examples. Medicare, for instance, is a single-payer program for people 65 and over ... The VA is a single-payer program for people who've served in the military. Ask military veterans. They like the VA, despite some of its problems which could be fixed with additional funding." Tur chuckled. "The VA has had quite a few problems, Jeff," she said.

The agency came under fire in 2014 when reporting revealed mass negligence, cancelled appointments, and cover-ups that led to long waiting times and even deaths for American veterans. President Obama called the revelations "disgraceful." The nonpartisan Government Accountability Office wrote a letter to Congress in January laying out the "systemic" human capital issues the department faces. "VA faces serious and long-standing problems with veterans' access to care and management failures, including ongoing appointment scheduling problems, unreliable appointment wait time data, and inadequate coordination of veteran care between VA and non-VA medical providers," the GAO wrote. Vermont tried a single-payer health care system that collapsed in 2014 due to exorbitant costs. [Source: Washington Free Beacon | David Rutz | March 24, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Suicide Prevention Update 37 ► Higher Risk With Opioid Use**

While drug and alcohol problems are associated with a higher risk of suicide among veterans, the increased danger is particularly high with opioid abuse, a U.S. study suggests. Overall, male veterans with drug or alcohol problems are more than twice as likely to die by suicide as other ex-service members, researchers report in the journal *Addiction*. For female veterans with substance use disorders, the odds of death from suicide are almost six times higher. The suicide risk is particularly high when veterans misuse prescription sedatives, with more than quadrupled odds of suicide for men and more than 11 times the risk for women, the study also found. Among female veterans, opioids were also tied to a nearly eight-times-higher risk of suicide, while amphetamines and stimulants were tied to almost six times the risk.

"Previous studies have linked substance use disorders with an increased risk of suicide in both general population and Veteran samples; however, because suicide is a relatively rare outcome, prior studies have tended to group substance use disorders into broad categories," said lead study author Kipling Bohnert of the VA Center for Clinical Management Research and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. "Our investigation is one of the first to provide estimates of the suicide risk associated with cannabis, cocaine, amphetamine and sedative use disorders in the same large population, and compare risks associated with these specific substance use disorders between men and women," Bohnert said by email. For the study, researchers examined medical data and death records for more than 4.4 million veterans who received care through the Veterans Health Administration in 2004 and 2005. They followed veterans for six years.

At the start of the study, 8.3 percent of men and 3.4 percent of women had a substance use disorder. During the study, 9,087 veterans died by suicide, for a suicide rate of 34.7 cases per 100,000 person-years. For veterans with a substance use problem, the overall suicide rate was 75.6 cases per 100,000 person years. Men had a slightly higher rate of 76.1 cases, while women had a lower rate overall of 63.4 cases per 100,000 person-years. Two-thirds of the suicides involved firearms, and another one-quarter were by intentional poisoning, the study found. After researchers accounted for veterans' age and the severity of any medical conditions, the increased risk of suicide associated with substance abuse diminished somewhat but remained meaningful in most cases. Once researchers also factored in mental health diagnoses, however, the findings changed. Differences between men and women diminished, and only alcohol and opioid misuse remained associated with an elevated suicide risk for female veterans.

One limitation of the study is that it only included VA patients, who tend to have poorer physical and mental health than other veterans, the authors note. Because the cause of death for suicides is often classified as an accidental overdose, it's also possible that the study might have underestimated the odds of suicide for certain substance use disorders, the researchers point out. "We knew that a diagnosis of a substance use disorder increased risk for suicide, but this paper illustrates that not all substance use disorders are the same," said Rajeev Ramchand, a researcher in military mental health and suicide prevention at Rand Corporation who wasn't involved in the study. "There is an opiate crisis in America, including among our veterans, and this paper provides evidence that opiate addiction and suicide are strongly linked," Ramchand said by email.

For veterans in particular, the transition from military to civilian life and problems with finances, housing, or spouses can be stressful circumstances that may make substance use or suicide attempts more likely, said Yu-Chu Shen, a researcher at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, who wasn't involved in the study. "In addition, clinicians should be aware that deployments may increase suicide risk independently of underlying mental disorders, and so asking patients about deployment history is advisable," Shen said by email. "Substance use disorder is not the only psychiatric condition associated with elevated risk of suicide - other psychiatric disorders and any previous attempts of suicide are major markers." [Source: Reuters | Lisa Rapaport | March 24, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Traumatic Brain Injury Update 60 ► DVBIC Adds 5 TBI Network Sites**

The Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC) recently added traumatic brain injury (TBI) network sites at Fort Gordon, Georgia; Fort Drum, New York; and at the South Texas Veterans Health Care System in San Antonio. These sites help DVBIC spread the word among the military community about the latest in TBI research and treatment according to DVBIC Deputy Director Katherine Helmick. "If we want to impact and improve health care for our service members, we need to be where they are," Helmick said. "This puts us at all five of the VA's Polytrauma Rehabilitation Centers and at high volume military treatment facilities."

DVBIC will bring its knowledge of up-to-the-minute findings on the causes, symptoms and treatment of TBI, so that providers won't have to hunt down new information on their own. Each location also provides added benefits to DVBIC, which in turn will enable DVBIC to help patients more effectively. For example, the new site at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Audie L. Murphy Medical Center in San Antonio, offers DVBIC staff access to VA polytrauma system of care services. These services include rehabilitation centers, support clinic teams, points of contact and transitional rehabilitation programs. DVBIC will be able to learn from patients in San Antonio about what treatments are most effective. The Fort Drum site in the Guthrie Ambulatory Healthcare Clinic in Watertown, New York, makes it easier for TBI providers in the northeast to learn about new treatments. Before this site opened, these service members traveled all over New England to meet with providers from DVBIC and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

Reducing patient wait times is an important goal for DVBIC. The Dwight D. Eisenhower Medical Center at Fort Gordon operates a TBI outpatient program for a significant number of patients with persistent brain injury concerns. DVBIC will now be on hand to figure out how this population and others like it can receive more efficiently targeted care. "By looking at referral patterns and researching the range of treatment options throughout the military health care system, we are working with our service TBI partners to find solutions to match patients with the care they need," Helmick said. Providers appreciate the benefits of the growing DVBIC network. According to John Rigg, site director for TBI at Fort Gordon, the new DVBIC staff will help support and prepare providers who care for TBI patients. "We've been kind of isolated," said Rigg. "By working together with DVBIC as a network site, we can participate in ongoing research, better collaborate with other experts in the field, and tap into some of the great work being done." [Source: Defense Centers of Excellence | March 27, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Spinal Cord Program Update 02 ► Robotic Brace

In a series of thumps, whirrs and clattering noises, Brandon Myers was able to achieve what his body would no longer let him do on his own. Augmented by brace support, motion sensors and a computer control system and further aided by his caregiver and crutches, he slowly walked forward in an upright posture. His steps were small and unbalanced at first but became more fluid as he got used to the machine saddled to his torso, hips and legs. “This exoskeleton is not quite as fluid or fast as a robot you would see in a science fiction movie but its light years apart from what I can do in a wheelchair,” Myers said as his face lights up with a smile. “Now I can walk.”

The Navy Veteran participated in a trial demo at VA San Diego Healthcare System on 14 MAR with the intention of moving one step closer to the goal of owning his own exoskeleton. For many with spinal cord injuries (SCI) causing paralysis to the lower extremities, being able to walk again is the promise of a better quality of life. Since losing the use of his legs during active military service, Myers has dreamed of being able to do the little things again that often require a standing position, like making dinner on a countertop. With the exoskeleton, many abilities lost by having a spinal cord injury are possible again.

According to John Colaneri, VA physical therapist trained on the system, the **ReWalk Exoskeleton** equipment has motors at the hip and knee region that give the user the ability to stand from a seated position. With the assistance of a caregiver and the use of forearm crutches, wearers bear weight through their bones in their legs, allowing them to take steps without needing to contract muscles. In addition, the structural support of the exoskeleton at the hips and knees helps with moving the patient forward. “Because it requires assistance from a caregiver and crutches, the exoskeleton doesn’t give a patient the ability to walk completely independently and won’t fully replace the need for a wheelchair,” said Colaneri. “Instead, it allows users to walk within their communities and perform some functional tasks while standing.” “I faced harder goals in the military.”

Health-wise, using the exoskeleton also improves gastrointestinal function and circulation and may improve bone density as dormant bone structures in the legs become active once more. While it’s currently being offered to patients paralyzed by spinal cord injuries, they must meet medical requirements that include the Veteran retaining use and strength of the upper body and a dedicated caregiver to assist when using the exoskeleton. An interdisciplinary care team evaluates the patient for other criteria including height and weight requirements and a battery of screening tests that require medical, social work, occupational health and physical therapy approval. Once approved, the patient can begin trials.

Trials feature a 45-day period of learning how to use the exoskeleton in the SCI gym, followed by another 45-day training period for home use. At the conclusion, if the Veteran is still interested and has met all of the goals of the training program, the medical center will put in a request to have the equipment ordered for personal use at no additional cost. “It’s a long road to get one of these things,” said Myers of the exoskeleton. “But I faced harder goals in the military and harder challenges since my injury. Compared to either, the testing and screening really is a small price to pay for being able to stand on your own two feet.” In addition to San Diego, this technology is also being offered at the following VA Medical Center locations: Bronx, West Roxbury, Syracuse, Richmond, Tampa, Houston, Dallas, Long Beach, Palo Alto, Seattle and Cleveland. [Source: VA HCS San Diego | Christopher Menzie | March 28, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Brain Gate 2 ► Paralysis Pilot Study Shows Promise

When a person has a spinal cord injury, their spinal cord no longer transmits messages from their brain to their muscles for movement. The messages are still drafted and they hit the “send” button, but the spinal cord injury



prevents the messages from reaching the intended target. This was the case for U.S. Navy Veteran, Bill Kochevar after his bicycle accident in 2006. He was left completely paralyzed with only the ability to partially shrug his right shoulder. Now, thanks to Kochevar's participation in BrainGate2, he can use his right arm to make meaningful movements like scratching his nose, drinking coffee and even feeding himself mashed potatoes. BrainGate2 is a pilot clinical trial being conducted by a consortium of academic, clinical and VA institutions using a brain-computer interface (BCI) and functional electrical stimulation (FES) system to reconnect his brain to paralyzed muscles.

Released March 28, 2017, in The Lancet, this research study is believed to be the first instance in the world of a person with severe and chronic paralysis directly using their own brain activity to move their own arm and hand to perform functional movements. "For somebody who's been injured eight years and couldn't move, being able to move just that little bit is awesome to me," said Kochevar. "It's better than I thought it would be." Eight years of muscle atrophy required exercising the muscles to increase strength, range of motion and endurance to get the full effect of the combined systems. Kochevar travels just a short distance down the hall from the Cleveland VA's Long-Term Spinal Cord Injury Unit to participate in the study. He and the researchers benefit from the close proximity between his VA care facility and the FES Center's VA research lab.

Other studies have shown persons with paralysis moving wheelchairs, cursors on a computer screen and robotic arms. Some studies have even had persons with significantly less paralysis regain hand grasp assistance, but none have involved such a severely paralyzed person regaining the ability to use his own arm. The study results suggest that one day, this technology could make its way to becoming the standard of clinical care for persons with chronic and complete paralysis. The technology could also be applied to other neurological injuries in the future. BrainGate2 is the combination of the recording and translating capabilities of the brain computer interface (records the pattern of electrical activity and uses mathematical algorithms to decipher the activity into movement commands) and the functional electrical stimulation (FES) system that turns the movement commands into electrical signals that then stimulate the right group of muscles to produce the intended movement. [Source: Vantage Point | March 30, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Indebtedness to VA ► Be Prepared - It Could Happen to You**

**The VA overpaid tens of thousands of veterans, and now it says they have to give the money back**

Every month since June 2009, Tad Steckler has received a disability benefits check from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Steckler retired from the Army at age 40 as a master sergeant with a Soldier's Medal for heroism, and he'd built a new life on the foundation of his checks. The money covered rent on a three-bedroom home in Nebraska that he shared with his wife and her two daughters and the lease on the family's Nissan Leaf electric car. It was all part of the agreement he'd made with the government when he enlisted out of high school: In exchange for his service, he'd be taken care of. Last June, Steckler's wife, Robyn Loveland, opened what she thought was just another envelope from the VA. Except this one wasn't a check — it was a bill for more than \$10,000. A letter stated that Steckler had received thousands of dollars in disability compensation in error, and the VA was going to withhold future payment until the debt was paid.

Under the current system the burden of proof is on the veteran to prove that he has not been overpaid. This could easily be you if you're a veteran receiving VA compensation. To read this rather lengthy article on how the VA has treated Steckler and others like him go to <https://news.vice.com/story/va-veterans-overpayment>. [Source: VICE News | Sara Jerving | Mar 27, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

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



**Alexandria, LA** — Acting U.S. Attorney Alexander C. Van Hook announced that a Ball man was sentenced 16 MAR to 21 months in prison for stealing more than \$100,000 in Veterans Affairs benefits from a deceased woman's bank account. **Tracy Marler**, 51, of Ball, La., was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Dee D. Drell for one count of theft of government property. He was also sentenced to two years of supervised release and ordered to pay \$101,250.10 restitution. The defendant was found guilty on December 13, 2016 after a two-day trial. Evidence admitted at trial revealed that from February 25, 2008 until April 30, 2014, Marler withdrew \$101,250.10 from a deceased woman's account. The woman was receiving the benefits on behalf of her deceased husband who had served in the U.S. armed forces. Marler had a joint bank account with the woman. After she died in February of 2008, he continued to receive her Veterans Affairs benefit payments to which he was not entitled. The Veterans Affairs-Office of Inspector General conducted the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Brandon B. Brown prosecuted the case. [Source: U.S. Attorneys » Western District of Louisiana » News | March 17, 2017 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Colden, NY** — **Richard L. Klaffka** posed as a severely disabled veteran and postal worker. He also pretended to be in a wheelchair, unable to walk, drive or care for himself. Klaffka and his wife, Cathleen, both residents of Colden, admitted 22 MAR it was all a hoax. They also admitted netting \$1.2 million in fraudulent benefits as part of their 10-year scheme. "The defendant knew he wasn't 100 percent disabled and, in fact, knew he was mobile, able to care for himself without assistance," Assistant U.S. Attorney Paul E. Bonanno told the federal court Wednesday. As part of his guilty plea to wire fraud, Klaffka agreed to pay \$1.2 million in restitution and on Wednesday made an initial payment of \$325,000. He also agreed to forfeit property he and his wife own in Port St. Lucie, Fla.

With Klaffka, who walks with a cane, standing just a few feet away, Bonanno read from a laundry list of evidence against him, including surveillance of his comings and goings at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Buffalo. Federal agents claim they saw Klaffka drive to the VA, get out of the car and then lift and open his wheelchair without help. They said his wife would then push him into the offices at the medical center. Bonanno said the government also had witnesses, including neighbors who were prepared to testify that they saw Klaffka hunting, riding a bicycle, chopping wood and playing horseshoes. Klaffka's defense lawyer said his client's case stems from a decision to exaggerate his health problems - he has legitimate hip, spine and knee problems - in order to increase his disability and workers compensation benefits. "He's a Marine Corps veteran, honorably discharged, who worked for the post office for 20 years and was determined in 2002 to have a disability," said defense attorney Rodney O. Personius.

Personius said the couple attempted to exploit Klaffka's legitimate health problems, and the effort snowballed into a scheme to defraud the VA and the U.S. Department of Labor, the federal agency that hands out workers compensation benefits. Defense lawyer Cheryl Meyers Buth said Cathleen Klaffka, 62, was forced to plead guilty because the law says she had an obligation to turn in her husband. She also wonders why it took so long for their crimes to be discovered. "This case raises questions about how to fix a VA system where someone who is not disabled is paid over a million dollars in benefits despite undergoing regular physical examinations," she said. Richard Klaffka faces a recommended sentence of up to 33 months in prison when he is sentenced by U.S. District Judge Richard J. Arcara. His wife faces a recommended sentence of up to 12 months in prison. [Source: The Buffalo News | Phil Fairbanks | March 22, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VAMC Mountain Home TN Update 01 ► Opiate Safety Complaints

In the months since Mountain Home VA started weaning veterans off opioids, many of those patients filed formal complaints, according to federal records. A breakdown of complaints, obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request, identified nearly 300 complaints since October linked to opioids. “They have every right to be upset in the sense that they have their own personal feelings, at the end of the day though we’re here to help take care of them in a safe way,” Mountain Home VA Chief of Staff Dr. David Hecht said. “We will look closer to make sure we’re not making any mistakes, but at the end of the day, if there is a disagreement we have to do what’s safe.” Despite the number of complaints and intensity of some of them, Dr. Hecht said there are some veterans who have come around to the change. “I think there’s a lot of buy in, I think a lot of new understanding of why we’re trying to do this. For the safety of our veterans is really the main reason,” he said. “Some veterans have been very happy, have said that they’ve never felt better and didn’t realize how much the medications were affecting their daily function.”

The roughly 60 complaints a month came after VA administration sent a letter to patients in September clarifying the reasons for the change, which include research and federal guidelines that warn opioids on their own and mixed with anti-anxiety medications are not only dangerous, they’re also not as effective as once thought. Dr. Hecht says the VA’s priority is providing veterans with pain management alternatives that are not only safer, but work better. For those with non-cancer pain, the VA is recommending acupuncture, yoga, therapy and mental health support as alternatives to opioids. Army veteran Tony Hughes, Sr. is among those who are unhappy. Hughes says he relies on an opioid to treat a lower back injury. “They’ve started cutting me back,” he said. “It bothers me, because as many years as I’ve put in, they need to take care of me.”

In the months since the, Dr. Hecht says he’s met personally with veterans and in group sessions to address their concerns. He says patient advocates are also there to help veterans through the appeals process. “We try to take this on an individual basis,” Dr. Hecht said. “We’re always open for better ways of doing things, suggestions and improvements.” In a statement, Congressman Phil Roe (R-01-TN) said while he supports the VA’s recent decision, “there’s no question more needs to be done.” [Source: WHJL Channel 11 | Nate Morabito | March 23, 2017, ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA HCS Connecticut ► Top Diagnosis is Female PTSD | 45%

The top diagnosis of female veterans treated in the VA Connecticut Healthcare System is post-traumatic stress disorder and it is usually accompanied by other mental health illnesses, according to VA officials. Most female veterans suffer from a mental illness, studies show, and the VA is taking steps to focus more on female-specific mental health care. A national study commissioned by the VA, Barriers to Care for Women Veterans, found that 52 percent of female veterans said they needed mental health care, but only 24 percent sought treatment. A survey by the nonprofit Service Women’s Action Network, or SWAN, showed that female veterans consider mental health to be their biggest challenge.

At Connecticut VA facilities, 1,404 women had at least one mental health visit last year, representing 45 percent of women who use the VA. This is an increase from 1,023 in 2012. Lynette Adams, a psychologist and program manager for female veterans, attributed the increase in part to added mental health services. Hypertension is the second most frequent diagnosis for women at the Connecticut VA. Unspecified PTSD is the third, which the VA defines as having symptoms that don’t meet the “full criteria for PTSD” but cause significant distress or impairment in functioning. The VA is seeking to ensure that at least one expert in women’s mental health is in each VA system

nationally to consult other providers who treat women. The Women’s Clinic at the West Haven VA hospital added a staff psychiatrist in 2015 after a patient survey showed a need for it, Adams said. The psychiatrist, Dr. Margaret Altemus, is one of three experts designated as a women’s mental health champion at the Connecticut VA.

Adams explained that the champions are resources for VA providers on issues that affect a woman’s mental health, such as military sexual trauma, domestic violence, eating disorders and reproductive health. Altemus holds monthly “tele-psychiatry” video conferences with providers at outpatient clinics throughout New England. One video conference, for instance, addressed the symptoms of menopause and how menopause can affect the course of mental health treatments. Altemus, a specialist in reproductive psychiatry, said she is working with a VA psychiatrist in Chicago on a template for VA providers that will include questions they should ask female patients about reproductive issues, such as pregnancy, birth control and menopause, that could help provide clues about an underlying mental illness. “If you don’t see women a lot, you might not ask” these questions, she said.

In the national Barriers to Care study, female veterans who didn’t receive mental health care expressed fear that the stigma of mental illness would hurt their jobs and relationships. They also cited lack of transportation and child care, discomfort in the male-dominated VA culture, and concerns about taking psychiatric medications. Some said they lacked knowledge about VA services. The Connecticut VA does not have child care, but does provide some transportation. Statewide, 186 mental health care providers offer services at VA hospitals, clinics and veterans’ centers. Altemus said she is “on the phone regularly” at the Connecticut VA urging women to keep their mental health appointments.

Melissa Piercy, an East Windsor veteran, takes her 3-year-old daughter with her when she goes to at least three medical appointments weekly at the VA hospitals in Newington and West Haven. Piercy has PTSD, anxiety and depression triggered by a botched bunion operation performed by an Air Force surgeon in 2003. Her foot has required continuous care. She has had five repair and reconstructive surgeries and a sixth is scheduled for April. She was forced to leave the Air Force after one year. Piercy, 31, said that because of her mental illnesses, “I go through days I don’t want to talk to anyone.” Among her symptoms are panic attacks and a recurring nightmare that she is missing a toe. Anxious about her upcoming surgery, she increased visits to her VA psychiatrist from once a month to twice. She recently joined a VA therapy group to learn coping skills.

The VA has a variety of support groups for women with behavioral health issues. The West Haven hospital has two co-ed PTSD groups and two female-only groups for victims of military sexual trauma, and the VA’s Errera Community Care Center in West Haven has a group for women with serious psychiatric illnesses. At the Hartford Vet Center in Rocky Hill, a women’s support group focuses on combat experiences, MST and PTSD. One group at the Errera Center has turned isolated mentally ill women, who have faced homelessness, into friends who meet weekly, celebrate birthdays, check up on each other and go on outings. Friendships help “reduce the stress” from mental illness, said Dr. Stephanie Lynman, a clinical supervisor. “The fact that they keep coming back,” she said, “shows the impact on their lives.” For information about VA women’s health care, call Adams at 203-932-5711, ext. 5402. The national Women Veterans Hotline is 1-855-VA-WOMEN (855-829-6636). The website is [www.va.gov/WOMENVET](http://www.va.gov/WOMENVET). [Source: New Haven Register | Peggy McCarthy | March 23, 2017 ++]

**\* Vets \***



## Trump Vet Listening Session ► 10 Vet Groups Included

President Trump held his first face-to-face meeting with representatives from prominent veterans groups on 17 MAR. A step that community advocates called a productive and critical step in advancing the White House's promises to veterans. The hour-long meeting with Trump, Vice President Mike Pence, Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin and senior White House staff covered issues including medical care access for veterans, accountability for VA employees, veterans caregiver programs and the president's campaign pledges to make veterans services more efficient. It included top officials from 10 veterans groups and was billed as a listening session for the president, with no policy or legislative proposals presented to the community leaders. But individuals at the event said Trump was involved in the conversation throughout the meeting, questioning the groups on their priorities and ways the White House can help.

"We've been asking for this meeting for a long time, and I think it was a great way to start a working relationship with this White House," said Joe Chenelly, national executive director of AMVETS. "Both the president and vice president were very engaged on the issues and wanted to hear from us." Since his election last fall and inauguration in January, Trump has held several meetings with health care officials to talk about ways to solve problems with VA health care offerings. Earlier this month, veterans groups were invited to talk to senior staff about their priorities, but Trump did not attend. That worried veterans advocates and Capitol Hill lawmakers, who warned that the White House needed to include the groups in any reform conversations. After Friday's meeting, those concerns largely disappeared. "Coming out of the meeting, we believe that the president and his administration are committed to improving the VA system of care and expanding choices for veterans seeking healthcare outside of the VA system," Sherman Gillums Jr., executive director of Paralyzed Veterans of America, said after the meeting. "What's more, we are optimistic that with further collaboration between his administration and Secretary Shulkin, there is a new day dawning for the future of all healthcare for veterans that includes convenience, quality and adequate protections."

Trump spoke briefly to press at the start of the meeting, saying that "as commander in chief, I will not accept substandard service for our great veterans," and repeating his assertion that veterans have been treated poorly by VA in recent years. "I outlined a detailed plan to reforming veterans' care throughout the country, and we're working to put that plan into effect," he said. "And it's moving, I think I can say, honestly, ahead of schedule." Officials in Friday's meeting said Trump made no new promises to the groups, but did direct Pence to discuss the idea of a White House office for veteran empowerment after a suggestion from Got Your 6. Bill Rausch, executive director of the group, said he pushed for administration officials to look beyond Veterans Affairs programs and challenges to larger societal issues for ways to help veterans, noting that not every veterans issue is one tied to health care and benefits.

Along with Got Your 6, the meeting included Student Veterans of America, the Military Order of the Purple Heart and the "big six" veterans groups — American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, PVA, Vietnam Veterans of America and AMVETS. It was also the second White House veterans meeting for Concerned Veterans for America, a conservative-backed group that was shut out of similar meetings during President Barack Obama. In a statement, CVA Executive Director Mark Lucas praised Trump for "a bold vision of VA reform that includes choice and accountability" and said his group is grateful that he "has given us a seat at the table in these important discussions."

Accountability was a highlighted topic at the meeting, as it was for Trump on the campaign trail. At one point, he promised to quickly fire any VA employee found committing criminal acts or workplace negligence, and if it violates federal employment policies, "they can sue me, I don't care." Officials from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America said they were disappointed to be left off the event. Group officials are scheduled to meet with



congressional and VA leadership next week in Washington D.C. Trump said before Friday's meeting that he'll also again be discussing VA reform with health care executives this weekend, at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 17, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Health Care Update 05 ► Proposed ACA Bill Impact**

In the struggle to overhaul Obamacare, House Republicans appear to have made a costly overcorrection. Due to a technical change in the current draft of the bill, millions of veterans may be ineligible to receive tax credits. On 20 MAR leadership staff released a 22-page technical amendment to the bill in order to make it compliant with Senate reconciliation rules. In their haste, they introduced language that could keep as many as 7 million veterans from participating in the GOP healthcare plan. Under the original bill, service members could receive tax credits from the government so long as they were not enrolled already in the Veterans Affairs program. "In the case of other specified coverage," a special rule with respect to veterans' health programs read, "an individual shall not be treated as eligible for such coverage unless such individual is enrolled in such coverage." Translated from legislative parlance, veterans couldn't double dip. Under the original leadership plan, they had access to both the credits and VA benefits. But they could choose only one.

By design or by accident, leadership staffers struck that language. Now retired service members qualify only if they "are not eligible" for other types of government healthcare. According to Chris Jacobs, a senior healthcare analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation and CEO of the Juniper Research Group, that means "individuals eligible for, but not enrolled in, VA coverage cannot qualify for the new insurance subsidies." With just the stroke of a pen, some legislative staffer would force millions of veterans to rely on the VA for their healthcare whether they want it or not. This legislative mess up will likely be corrected in the House Rules Committee or on the floor. Already President Trump has decried the VA system as "absolutely unacceptable" and it'd be political suicide to slouch on that promise now. But the gaffe points to a much larger problem.

Rushing to get the bill to the finish line, Republicans are legislating like Democrats. No doubt running on the fumes of alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine, sleep-deprived staffers are making costly errors. They're leaving behind those our country promised never to forget. And as Jacobs notes, this episode has happened before. When Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law, service members and veterans were susceptible to the penalties for violating the individual mandate. That wasn't fixed until Republicans forced a vote on exempting them. Legislating by the seat of their pants, it looks like the GOP is repeating that history again. But they don't have to. Rather than passing the bill to find out what's in it, Republicans should take a deep breath and go through it with a fine toothed comb. Chances are that if this veterans blunder found its way into the bill, there are plenty of other errors waiting to be discovered. [Source: Washington Examiner | Philip Wegmann | March 22, 201 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Homeless Vets Update 77 ► Minnesota Milestone Reached**

Eighteen southwest Minnesota counties have found housing for every known homeless veteran, according to the state's Department of Veterans Affairs. The milestone is part of a statewide push to end veteran homelessness established in 2014 using a voluntary registry for homeless veterans. The VA and its partners have housed 856 people since December of that year, and are looking to find homes for about 200 more. The registry helps staff members personalize housing plans in order to make them more likely to last. Once registered, veterans are typically housed within four months. The 18 counties make up the country's 40th region to clear its housing waiting list for homeless veterans. It is also the first area in Minnesota to do so. "These 18 counties in Southwestern Minnesota are committed to honoring the men and women who have served our state and our country by establishing a strategic



plan that prevents Veterans homelessness from occurring whenever possible,” said Cathy ten Broeke, State Director to Prevent and End Homelessness. “The plan also ensures that when homelessness does occur, it is rare, brief, and nonrecurring.” [Source: Star Tribune | Jackie Renzetti | March 22, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Fisher House Expansion Update 17 ► Dayton VAMC**

Fundraisers have the money they need to build a new house at the Dayton VA where veterans and their families can stay while they receive care. The Fisher House, a two-story 13,500 -square-foot building planned on the campus of the Dayton VA Medical Center, will have 16 bedrooms for veterans who are receiving care at the medical center. The project is ready to move ahead with \$6.5 million raised for its construction, as well as another \$634,000 for its operation, said Chris Stanley, executive director Fisher/Nightingale Houses Inc. They have been fundraising locally since the project got a green light in 2015. "We are ready to support the guests in every way they need to be supported," he said. "We're continuing to do the last fundraising; we still have some bedrooms that have not been named yet."

The VA is a historic landmark, so the groups have secured permission from national and state historic preservation offices, as well as the National Park Service, to demolish two buildings to make way for the house, Stanley said. The VA will award contracts for site preparation by April, and it's expected the project will break ground in early July and take 12 to 15 months to complete. The project got a head start with a \$1.08 million donation from local developer Randy Gunlock and his wife Vicki. Fisher House Foundation put up its own \$5.5 million for construction and furnishing for the house, and local fundraising efforts brought in the \$634,000 for the house's operating budget, so veterans don't have to pay to stay there. Additional fundraising has been in the works — with groups donating \$25,000 to \$50,000 to fund individual rooms. This weekend, the Cornell/Nicholson Team at UBS Financial Services is hosting a private client-appreciation event aiming to raise another \$25,000 for the house. They were connected to the Fisher House by the Gunlocks, Stanley said. The house will fill a niche that has not previously existed at the VA, Stanley said. As is, veterans receiving care there often stay at the hotels near downtown Dayton. [Source: Dayton Business journal | Tristan Navera | March 14, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Purple Hearts Reunited Update 01 ► 1st Lt. Rodney D. Beckel**

Several years ago, a student in Macungie, Pa., brought his social studies teacher a box of military medals, which included a Purple Heart, that he uncovered in his backyard while using a metal detector. The teacher passed the box on to Keegan Nytz of Allentown, the son of Army veteran and Legionnaire Michael Nytz, who took it upon himself to research who the Purple Heart belonged to in an effort to reunite the medal with a living relative. “I knew how much it would mean to the family,” said 16-year-old Keegan. With the name Rodney D. Beckel engraved on the Purple Heart, Keegan found information online about his military career. At 25 years old, U.S. Army 1st Lt. Beckel served in World War II and was wounded in the Philippines. He went on to serve as a flight commander of his squadron until his plane was hit by enemy fire and crashed on the Japanese airbase Clark Field; he was listed as missing in action. Besides the Purple Heart, Beckel also was awarded the Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, American Campaign Medal and the World War II Victory Medal.

Beckel left behind a wife, Gloria, and a son, Rodney Jr., who Keegan discovered had both passed away in 2002 and 2000, respectively. However, through Gloria's obituary, Keegan discovered she had two daughters from a second marriage and called the one who lived near him, Wanda Pitosky. When Keegan called Pitosky to share his findings, which were uncovered at the home her family once resided in, he said her initial reaction was “absolute shock and disbelief” and she cried. The two met within a week of their phone conversation and Michael was there to watch his son reveal the lost treasure. “I watched him meet her, shake her hand, discuss what he did, heard him ask

her questions and connect the dots of the mystery of the journey the awards had taken. I was very proud of him,” said Michael, a member of Legion Post 945. “The medals that 1st Lt. Rodney Beckel earned took an interesting 72-year journey from the time they were issued to the time they made their way home to one of his relatives. (Learn more here and here). Knowing my son played an important part in that journey was very special.”



**Wanda Pitosky talks to Keegan Nytz as she is reunited with a Purple Heart medal that had been awarded to a family member.**

For Keegan, reuniting the medals, especially the Purple Heart, to a living relative of Beckel’s was “amazing,” he said. “American history is important because it not only shapes us as Americans, but also the rest of the world. I like to focus on more than just us here in America, but the impact left on the rest of the world.” As a father and a veteran, Michael said he is “very proud of Keegan’s efforts to research and find a living relative of a veteran who earned many of these military awards over 72 years ago. I hope Keegan’s actions inspire other people to do what he did which basically was to honor the sacrifices and service of a U.S. military veteran.” [Source: Theamerican Legion | Online Update | March 16, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Toxic Exposure | Operation Tomodachi ► Nuclear Meltdown**

William Zeller, a 33-year-old active-duty Navy servicemember living in San Diego said, "Right now, I know I have problems, but I'm afraid of actually finding out how bad they really are." He's one of the 4,500 sailors who were aboard the USS Ronald Reagan during Operation Tomodachi, a humanitarian aid mission sent to Japan the day after a tsunami triggered the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear meltdown. "I know there's something wrong," Zeller said. "I've got many other people around me telling me I don't look good, and I need to get checked out. While I am a workaholic, it's a distraction." Zeller is only one of 318 sailors (and counting) who have joined a billion-dollar class action lawsuit filed in 2012 against the nuclear generators' operating company, Tokyo Electric Power Company, or TEPCO, for injuries allegedly caused by radiation exposure.

The lawsuit argues TEPCO is financially responsible for the sailors' medical care because the operating company, admittedly, did not inform the Japanese government of the meltdown. In turn, the Japanese government unknowingly misinformed the U.S. Navy of potential dangers of anchoring off the coast of Japan where the ship was engulfed in a plume of radiation for several hours. "Everywhere we went we had to carry [gas masks] on our hips," Zeller said. "We were turning on news networks, and we could see how we were right in the plume. You could taste the metallic air."

In the six years since Fukushima, Zeller has only sought medical attention from the Navy since the care is financially covered. "The military health system is a process, putting it politely," he said, explaining how it took four years to learn he had abnormal bone growth, nerve damage and what he believes is irritable bowel syndrome,

all of which began a year after Operation Tomodachi. His weight fluctuates 20 to 30 pounds within a month, and he's unendingly fatigued. "Before I went [on the USS Ronald Reagan], I used to be a martial arts instructor," he said. "I used to go on regular bike rides. I hiked. I was in very good shape. Now, I wear a breathing machine when I go to sleep because I have respiratory problems. I literally just go to work and go home now. I don't have the energy or the pain threshold to deal with anything else."

Considering the Veterans Health Administration's troubles with treating members in a timely or efficient manner, Zeller's lawyer, Paul Garner, said VA care is not an option. Instead, they're hopeful that a fund set up by former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi will come to fruition. Koizumi announced the creation of the fund while visiting 10 affected sailors, including Zeller, in San Diego in May. Koizumi said he expects to raise \$2 million by a 31 MAR cutoff date. The plan is to then transfer the money to the U.S. to supplement the sailor's medical bills at, according to Garner, some of the best care centers across the country. However, Garner knows \$2 million won't be enough to cover every need, especially since some sailors have reported symptoms appearing in their children who were born after Operation Tomodachi.

"I have no idea if it's caused by the radiation that I was exposed to on the Reagan, but I don't know that it's not," said Jason F., who was also on board the USS Ronald Reagan but didn't want to share his last name while he's still active duty. His breathing is audible over the phone, as if climbing several sets of stairs, but he's tucking his three-year-old daughter into bed at their San Diego home. "That's standard breathing for me," he said. "I don't know what to do about it. She has difficulty breathing too," he said of his daughter, who was born in 2013. "She snores like a grown man." Jason is 36 years old, in shape, never smoked a day in his life and didn't have trouble breathing until after his time on the USS Ronald Reagan.

His respiratory difficulties have aggrandized since 2011, peaking during a 2016 deployment where the doctors told him the contrasting temperatures were to blame and gave him an inhaler to puff on. It took a formal request to fly him off the ship to receive medical treatment in Bahrain, where he was told he had a 60 percent chance of tuberculosis and a 40 percent chance of lung cancer. He has since been diagnosed with asthma by an outside specialist, although the treatments aren't working. "It's difficult for them to figure out," Jason said. "I mean, how many patients have they had that are exposed to radiation? And are they trained for that?"

When Zeller mentioned radiation exposure to doctors at the Navy, he said he was told it was interesting, if acknowledged at all. Lung cancer is one of several cancers associated with high radiation exposure, according to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission website, as well as leukemia, which several sailors have been diagnosed with. Bloody noses, rectal and gynecological bleeding, weakness and ulcers, are also symptoms reported by the sailors and are signs of radiation poisoning, according to the Scripps Health website. In 2014, the Department of Defense published a report acknowledging that radiation exposure can cause such medical issues, but that the exposure levels were too low and the symptoms appeared too soon to make a connection. While Zeller and Jason hope for financial support either from Koizumi's fund or by winning the lawsuit, they want support for the others affected.

"I'm experiencing symptoms, but it's not just for me," Zeller said. "It's for the individuals who are way worse than me and to bring attention to them... They have tumors, cancers, birth defects in their children, some individuals have mass muscle fatigue where their entire half of their body isn't functional anymore, and they are stuck in wheelchairs. I am currently on the better end." The sailors are waiting for a decision from the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals determining whether the lawsuit will continue in the United States or in Japan, if at all. In January, TEPCO urged the court to dismiss the case, citing that it is a political matter that could impact international relations. Jason said the lawsuit is about more than money, specifically when it comes to his daughter's future. "I just want accountability," he said. "I want her taken care of. Whatever that takes." [Source: San Diego City Beat | Torrey Bailey | February 17, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## MOH Day ► Trump Hosts Recipients

National Medal of Honor Day on March 25 is dedicated to all Medal of Honor recipients. It was on March 25, 1863, when the first Medals of Honor were presented. Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton presented Medals of Honor (Army) to six members of “Andrews Raiders” for their volunteering and participation during an American Civil War raid in April of 1862. Created in 1861, the Medal of Honor is the United States of America’s highest military honor. It is awarded only to US military personnel, by the President of the United States in the name of Congress, for personal acts of valor above and beyond the call of duty. There are three versions of the Medal of Honor; one for the Army, one for the Navy and one for the Air Force, with personnel of the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard receiving the Navy version. Since its creation, there have been 3,468 Medals of Honor awarded to the country’s soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and coast guardsmen. In 1990, the United States Congress designated March 25th of each year as National Medal of Honor Day.

This year a third of the nation’s living Medal of Honor recipients gathered at the White House on 24 MAR to commemorate Medal of Honor Day with President Donald J. Trump. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis also attended the ceremony, conducted in the Oval Office, which the president called a great tribute to everyone and a great tribute to the nation. “Each of you has risen above and beyond the call of duty in defense of our country, our people, and our flag,” Trump told them. “You have poured out your hearts, your sweat and your tears like few others, and your blood -- most importantly your blood -- for the United States of America. We thank you, very much thank you.”  
Soul of the Nation



Trump said the Medal of Honor recipients are “the soul of our nation, and a grateful republic salutes you. Constantly we're saluting you. We have great admiration and respect, believe me, I know what you've been through.” America writes the recipients’ names and deeds in its national memory, and will forever remember those who did not come home, but who died for the cause of freedom, he said. “In this room hangs the portrait of our 26th president, Theodore Roosevelt. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for his courage alongside his band of Rough Riders at the Battle of San Juan Hill. ... His medal, which is also displayed here, is a reminder of how blessed we truly are to live in the land of heroes. And you are our greatest heroes,” Trump told the Medal of Honor recipients. “To all of those gathered here today, and to all of those warriors who could not be with us, we thank you. Your acts of valor inspire us -- and they show us that there is always someone on the night watch to ensure a bright sun rises on America each and every morning,” he said.

**Note:** There are over 1,200 national days which are identified at <http://www.nationaldaycalendar.com/calendar-at-a-glance>.

[Source: DoD News & <http://www.nationaldaycalendar.com> | Terri Moon Cronk | March 25, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Bataan Death March Update 06 ► 19 MAR 26.2 Mile Annual Event

The 2017 Bataan Memorial Death March reached record registration at record speed this year. In 28 years, this is the first year registration had to close early due to the event reaching capacity of 7,000 participants. In 2016 there were over 6,500 participants, the record at the time. Hotel reservations and RV reservations were also booked with a long waiting list. The 19 MAR event broken a record of participation, meaning not only an increase of participants but also an increase of spectators. The 26.2 mile-Bataan Memorial Death March course ran through the hilly desert terrain of the state's White Sands Missile Range. The 28th such event, it honored the 10,000 American and 58,000 Filipino service members who defended the Philippines and were forced by the Japanese military to walk more than 65 miles through the hot jungle of the Bataan Peninsula without food or water. Marchers also had the option to walk a 14.2 mile course.



“We all wanted to march for the simple purpose of being part of something larger than ourselves and to honor those who survived and gave their lives on our behalf,” said Carolina Johnson, the captain of the five-member women’s Army team representing Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. Johnson, a first-time participant, and her teammates were part of the women’s “heavy” division, which means they marched the course carrying at least 35 pounds on their backs. The military and civilian men and women who entered the heavy division used non-perishable items, including cans of beans, bags of rice or other items to make the weight, all of which was then donated to the Roadrunner Food Bank in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In 2016, 21,000 pounds was given to the food bank, according to race organizers. We remembered their heroism and drew strength from them in taking each step forward,” she adds. “We all pulled together as one when one was falling down.”

The march carries as much meaning to longtime attendees. “As a veteran who served 26 years in the U.S. Army and deployed three times to combat and experienced the horrors of war, I feel pain for the men and women who suffered intensely under the deadly Japanese Imperial Forces, as they were marched through the Philippine jungle. This is what drives me to run in their honor,” said Ed Broadnax of El Paso, Texas. Broadnax, who hosts runners at his home every year,old Fox News the decision to run in full Army gear is an easy one. “Uniform, Boots and 45-pound backpack. That is the only way I know how to do the Bataan Memorial Death March. Every year I’m blessed to be alive, so every year I will run/walk 26.2 miles for the Forgotten Soldiers of Bataan” he adds.

The course, including a nearly-one mile stretch in ankle-deep sand known as “the sand pit,” was humbling for military and civilian, veteran marathoners and first-timers alike. But, nothing was more humbling than being in the presence of the eight Bataan survivors. Prisoner of war survivor Ben Skardon was attending his 10th march and was the only survivor to walk any distance on Sunday. Joined by friends and supporters, known as “Ben’s Brigade,” the retired colonel, who turns 100 in July, walked 8.5 miles of the course. While unable to walk, Bataan survivor Richard Trask was no less determined to be on hand, as he has for decades. Trask, who lives in a veterans' home in



Amarillo, Texas, told Fox News that despite the fact it is challenging to physically participate in the event, he would not miss it. “Being here is just fabulous. Being surrounded by the mountains and seeing everyone here is beautiful and means so much,” says the 97-year old.

His son, Richard Trask III, says his father did not begin opening up about his experience in the Philippines until he started attending the march. After surviving the death march, Trask was transported to the infamous Japanese “Hell ships,” where he was forced into slave labor cutting steel. Despite the torture he endured, Trask harbors no hatred for his captors, which his son says may be what has kept him going well into his 90s. Trask is one of less than 50 survivors still alive – a somber note that was struck during the ceremony when the names of the 26 Bataan survivors who died since the last march were read. For many, it made the opportunity to shake the hands of the eight survivors in attendance at the start and finishing lines even more emotional. U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce (R-NM) was among a crowd of attendees at the ceremony, which began in the chilly shadows of the Organ Mountains with the singing of the American anthem and, for the first time in the memorial march’s history, the Philippine National Anthem, “Lupang Hinirang.”

The march is the nation’s largest gathering to commemorate a Philippine historical event, according to Jim Diego, who sang the Filipino national anthem. More than 1,200 volunteers handed out approximately 120 cases of oranges, 12,000 cups and 15 cases of bananas and served more than 750 pounds of pasta and 150 gallons of marinara sauce. For Bill Moeller, a 61-year old Army veteran, he will come back in future years to ensure the Bataan families and the families of those who serve are paid the appropriate honor. “It is the least I can do to pay respect for the service members who went before me,” said the West Point graduate and longtime participant. As challenging as the experience was to the body, the spirit of the race makes the question of whether to come back next year easy for some. Without hesitation, Carolina Johnson and her teammates replied, “Yes.” [Source: FOX News U.S. | Jennifer G. Hickey | March 21, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **GWOT Memorial Wall ► Beginning Efforts to Get it Built**

Jan C. Scruggs founded the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund and served as the group’s president from 1979 to 2015. He’s been on the board of advisers for the Global War on Terrorism Memorial since 2015. A native Washingtonian, he’s now retired and living in Annapolis, Maryland. Following is his commentary.

On 26 MAR, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial hosted a ceremony to commemorate the 35th anniversary of its historic groundbreaking. The idea for a memorial engraved with names of the fallen flowed from my academic research and from testimony before the Senate on what is now called post-traumatic stress, a common reaction to witnessing violence. The memorial was planned as a societal acknowledgement of those who served, funded by the American people. I started the Vietnam Veterans Memorial effort in 1979 while a GS-7 at the Labor Department, thanks to the permission of my wife. This was nonstop work, day after day. In 1982, the money was in hand, as was a permit to begin construction. The effort barely succeeded. I hope the lessons learned can ease the path to success for a Global War on Terrorism Memorial that will honor a new generation of service members.

For months, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund had been in the middle of a national controversy over the memorial’s design. National media outlets, ranging from The Wall Street Journal to “60 Minutes,” were heavily involved. The affair even ended up at the National Security Council. A staffer at the time was Army Maj. Bob Kimmitt, a supporter of the VVMF. The White House became the key player in keeping an unfriendly interior secretary in check. Politically skilled opponents of the cause held influence in the inner circles of the White House and Interior Department. Some opponents were determined to stop the groundbreaking despite our agreement to add a statue to the design. I was getting daily advice from some brilliant people, including former Attorney General



Elliot Richardson, who told me to “keep the pressure on the White House by using the media to cover their indifference to an effort of such historic significance,” and “embarrass the interior secretary with the media”.

His advice was sage. I was able to influence the White House with urgent memos to Ed Meese, then-counselor to President Reagan, from the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I met with Time Magazine’s Hugh Sidey, whose piece showing the struggle behind the memorial’s creation described me as “indefatigable.” It also angered the interior secretary, precisely as planned, setting the stage for victory. The White House caved. Opponents threatened court action, yet a temporary restraining order was nearly impossible as a legal matter. On a cold and windy March day, veterans from each of the 50 states broke ground with shovels to show wide support. In the end, it was graduates of West Point whose planning and vision helped me get the job done, especially Kimmitt, John P. Wheeler III and Gen. William Westmoreland. Kimmitt later became ambassador to Germany.

The opposition was led by Naval Academy grads James Webb, retired Vice Adm. James Stockdale and Ross Perot. They viewed the memorial as too modernistic. They had a fair point: A traditional statue was added in 1984, and President Reagan spoke at its dedication ceremony. (Reagan did not attend either the groundbreaking or the November 1982 dedication. The 1982 controversy raged far beyond the comfort level of his White House advisers.) Since its construction, the Wall has hosted more than 100 million visitors and is an important symbol to both the nation and the veterans. Could we have built it today? I really doubt it – with social media, “fake news,” Facebook, and so on, a few clever tweets would have brought the plans to an end.

### THE NEW STRUGGLE

Plans for a new national memorial – one that will honor those who have served since the Sept. 11 attacks – are making progress. These service members deserve the memorial they are seeking. Warfare continues in places like Syria and Iraq, and likely will continue for many decades. Civilians have been honored at the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, the Pentagon, and a memorial in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The veterans have been left out, even as they are under fire today in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Those veterans are taking action. Leaders of the effort again include service academy grads, such as Andrew Brennan, a former helicopter pilot in Afghanistan and the founder of the Global War on Terror Memorial Foundation. This team will meet the challenges ahead, which are substantial.

Legislation to authorize construction is moving through Congress this year. It made progress last year thanks to then-Rep. Ryan Zinke (R-MT) – a former Navy SEAL who is now the interior secretary. That is a stroke of luck; perhaps the Trump administration can get behind this effort. After legislation is complete – some skirmishing in Congress is expected; contact your lawmakers to push for swift passage – work will be done on a site and design. Funding and other tasks should take five years or less. The goal is to create a place of honor for the veterans of our most recent (and ongoing) wars to gather. It worked 35 years ago with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Let’s welcome these veterans home with a memorial and a parade down Constitution Avenue. The time is now.

Go to <https://www.gwotmemorialfoundation.org/take-action> to send a preformatted/editable email to your legislators regarding your support of this effort. We need to pass H.R. 873 so Congress will allow us to begin the important work of building a memorial. To learn more go to [www.gwotmemorialfoundation.org](http://www.gwotmemorialfoundation.org). [Source: MilitaryTimes | Jan C. Scruggs | March 24, 2017++]

\*\*\*\*\*

### Stolen Valor Update 103 ► Reported 170315 thru 170331

**Menomonee Falls, WI** -- Police say a man conned his way into a new car, a block of apartments, and a bunch of furniture. Officials say he was able to carry out the scam by posing as a Marine. 32-year-old **Brandon Blankenship** is charged with the following:

- False statement regarding military service with intent to commit a crime (two counts)
- Unauthorized use of an entity's identifying information or documents (two counts)

In early March, Menomonee Falls police paid a visit to The Junction apartment complex, looking for Blankenship, who was accused of stealing a car from a dealership in Virginia. They ended up finding someone who works at Heiser Toyota on 107th and Good Hope. He told them Blankenship bought a new Toyota SUV from the dealership and also had work done on the car police were looking for. "One part of the investigation led to another," said Captain Jeff Knop, Menomonee Falls Police Department. The worker said Blankenship paid for both the car and repairs with bad checks. The same day, police saw Blankenship at the complex in the stolen Virginia car and arrested him.

According to the complaint, in a separate incident, Blankenship is accused of leasing 20 apartments under the premise that "he was a platoon leader for the United States Marine Corps and needed the apartments to rent for numerous Marines. Purportedly the United States Department of Defense would be paying...for the rent on all 20 units." The complaint indicates Blankenship "did not show any documentation of his status as a member of the Marine Corps, but did verbalize that he is a representative of the United States Department of Defense as a platoon leader for the Marine Corps Security Services Division." The complaint says, "It was not believed that Blankenship is in the military and that the rental scheme was some sort of fraudulent activity."

When investigators went to Blankenship's apartment, they found "a computer, software discs for printers and computers on how to print checks from a personal computer, several pieces of paper that appear to purportedly be check paper with a Navy Federal Credit Union information affixed on them, paperwork on what appeared to be basic pay for military service members and/or their families based on service time and rank, a T-shirt that was black in color and short-sleeved that had a screen printed emblem of the badge stating US Marine Corps Military Police with MSGT." "Was able to accomplish all of this through letterhead and checks and other documents that had insignias indicating the U.S. Government or the Department of Defense," said Knop. When authorities spoke with Blankenship about the accusations, he indicated "he was taught how to write fraudulent checks by purchasing a computer, a printer and check writing software by a person he met in prison." He said "he did not have any money when he got out of prison, so he had to write bad checks to get back on his feet."

As it relates to the alleged rental scheme, Blankenship "also stated that he rented furniture from Brook Furniture Rental to make his facade look more realistic" to the owners of the apartments. When authorities spoke with a manager at the furniture store, she said Blankenship "was very believable, but very forceful in his request while dealing with the Brook Furniture." The manager stated Blankenship "presented Military ID during the rental agreement process." Police believe Blankenship came to Menomonee Falls to meet up with a woman he's known since they began chatting online 15 years ago. Authorities say the two had been together in the past and believe Blankenship planned on rekindling that relationship. Police confirm they interviewed the woman but would not comment further, stating they believe she has no connection to the alleged crimes and was unaware of the scam Blankenship was perpetrating.

Police say it's possible Blankenship has scammed others. They're asking other possible victims to come forward. Blankenship was also wanted for a parole violation in Pennsylvania. He is due in court for his preliminary hearing on Friday, March 24th and has an extradition hearing set for the 31st with regard to the stolen car in Virginia. [Source: FOX 6 News | A.J. Bayatpour | March 21, 2017

\*\*\*\*\*

## Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 31 MAR 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](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html)

== PDF: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs and Other Retiree-Veterans Events.pdf](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf)

== Word: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs and Other Retiree-Veterans Events.doc](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc)

This schedule has been expanded to include dates for retiree\vetterans activity related events such as Seminars, Veterans Town Hall Meetings, Stand Downs, Resource\Career Fairs and Other Military Retiree & Veterans Related Events for all military services. To get more info about a particular event, mouseover or click on the event under Event Location. Please report comments, changes, corrections, new RADs and other military retiree\vetterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager at [milton.bell126@gmail.com](mailto: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 | March 31, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Hiring Fairs ► 01 thru 30 APR 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*

<a href="#">Austin TX Veterans Job Fair</a>	April 6, 2017
<a href="#">Greater Boston MA Veterans Job Fair</a>	April 6, 2017
<a href="#">Denver CO Veterans Job Fair</a>	April 13, 2017
<a href="#">Tulsa OK Veterans Job Fair</a>	April 13, 2017
<a href="#">Chicago IL Veterans Job Fair</a>	April 20, 2017
<a href="#">Orlando FL Veterans Job Fair</a>	April 20, 2017
<a href="#">Fort Bliss TX Job Fair</a>	April 25, 2017
<a href="#">Central Region Virtual Career Fair</a>	April 25, 2017
<a href="#">Minneapolis MN Veterans Job Fair</a>	April 27, 2017
<a href="#">Orange County (Anaheim) CA Veterans Job Fair</a>	April 27, 2017

**U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Listings**

- [Chicago Hiring Expo with the Chicago Bulls](#) April 12  
Chicago, IL [Details](#) [Register](#)
- [Farmingdale Hiring Fair](#) April 13 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm  
Farmingdale, NY [Details](#) [Register](#)
- [Patrick Air Force Base Military Spouse Career Event](#) April 13 - 9:00 am to 1:00 pm  
Patrick Air Force Base, FL [Details](#) [Register](#)
- [Fort Bragg Transition Summit](#) April 25 to April 27  
Fort Bragg, NC [Details](#) [Register](#)
- [Fort Irwin Military Spouse Career Event](#) April 26 - 6:00 pm to April 27 - 1:00 pm  
Fort Irwin, CA [Details](#) [Register](#)

**Veteran Career/Job Fairs**

- [Chicago, IL](#) April 12, 2017, 11am - 2pm [More information](#)  
United Center, 1901 W Madison Street, Chicago, IL 60612
- [Farmingdale, NY](#) April 13, 2017, 10:30am - 1:30pm [More information](#)  
Farmingdale Armed Forces Reserve Center, 25 Baiting Place Road, Farmingdale, NY 11735
- [Patrick Air Force Base, FL](#) April 13, 2017, 10am - 1pm [More information](#)  
The Tides Club, 1001 North Highway, A1A S Atlantic Ave, Patrick Air Force Base, FL 32925
- [Lexington Park, MD](#) April 25, 2017, 3pm - 7pm [More information](#)  
Patuxent River MD Bay District Vol Fire Dept Social Hall, 46900 S. Shangri-La Drive, Lexington Park, MD 20653
- [Joint Base Andrews, MD](#) April 27, 2017, 10am - 2pm [More information](#)

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

**Fort Irwin, CA** April 27, 2017, 10am - 1pm **More information**  
Sam Adams Building, 37 Goldstone Road, Fort Irwin, CA 92310

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

\*\*\*\*\*

## State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► Wisconsin 2017

The state of Wisconsin 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 – WI**” 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://dva.state.wi.us> & <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/wisconsin.html>

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

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

## Vietnam Veterans Day Update 01 ► Signed Into Law

On March 29, 1973, the last American combat troops left Vietnam and returned home. Unlike troops of more recent wars, the vast majority of those brave service members did not receive a warm welcome. In fact many were spat upon, called names and treated with disdain. Vietnam Veterans bore the horrors of battle in Vietnam only to come

home to shoulder the burden of an unpopular war that was no fault of their own. The way they were treated has often been called a national disgrace and rightly so. They did their duty because their country asked them to. That's what patriots do, they serve when their nation calls. Today, 44 years later, they are getting some of the recognition they earned so long ago. On 28 MAR, the president signed the "Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act of 2017" into law designating March 29 as National Vietnam War Veterans Day.

The law amends title 4 of the U.S. Code "to encourage the display of the flag of the United States on National Vietnam War Veterans Day" – the simple language creates both the day and encourages the flag to be flown in their honor each year. Finally. The bipartisan legislation, co-authored by Indiana Sen. Joe Donnelly and Pennsylvania Sen. Pat Toomey, is the first federal statute to both recognize Vietnam Veterans and create an annual recognition. The legislation passed in the House 21 MAR and in the Senate 3 FEB. To read the full text of the bill go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/305/text>. VA recognized March 29 with wreath-laying ceremonies at national cemeteries and other facilities across the country. [Source: Vantage Point | arch 29, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Gun Control Update 13 ► H.R.1181 to End Federal Checks on Vets**

A House bill seeking to end federal checks that prevent more than 167,000 veterans deemed "mentally incompetent" from keeping or purchasing firearms is receiving criticism from some Democrats and former generals. "This would be irresponsible, dangerous, and life threatening to those who need access to care, not weapons," a group of 14 former military officials wrote to lawmakers in a letter opposing the bill. The Department of Veterans Affairs considers veterans who cannot manage their VA benefits and need another person to help with their finances as "mentally incompetent." The department reports the names of those veterans to the FBI, which adds them to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System – the national database that gun merchants are required to check before selling a firearm.

But last week, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs advanced legislation that would do away with that practice, and instead require the court system to determine whether veterans pose a threat to themselves or others before they're added to the database. "It's disgraceful because the VA doesn't determine the veteran is actually dangerous before sending the name to the FBI. They only look at if the veteran needs help looking at his or her financial affairs," said Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. "Unfortunately, the VA's decision has serious consequences for the veteran, including losing his or her Second Amendment rights." Roe sponsored H.R. 1181, the "Veterans Second Amendment Protection Act," and faced backlash from some Democrats on the committee who said there should've been a hearing on the issue before the bill was rushed to a vote.

The most vocal critic of the legislation is Rep. Elizabeth Esty (D-CT), who represents Newtown, where 26 people were gunned down at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. After the shooting, former President Barack Obama sought to boost reporting to the national background check system. Esty, a member of the veterans' affairs committee, criticized Roe's measure for allowing "veterans in crisis" to have access to a firearm. "This hastily crafted, overbroad bill does not and will not help our veterans or our communities," Esty said in a prepared statement. On 14 MAR, members of the Veterans Coalition for Common Sense also expressed their disapproval of the legislation. Fourteen members of the coalition sent a letter to Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI), and Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) contending the bill could increase risk for veteran suicide. "When vulnerable veterans have access to firearms, they can do harm not only to themselves but also to family members and loved ones," the letter reads. "The impact of these tragedies is felt in communities across our nation."



The letter writers include Gen. Stanley McChrystal, Gen. James Hill, Gen. David Petraeus and Admiral Thad Allen, who President Donald Trump considered for VA secretary. According to a report from the Congressional Research Service in February, federal agencies had added 171,083 names to the FBI database as of Dec. 31, 2016. Of those people, the VA added 167,815. The department began contributing names to the database in 1998. Citing VA data, Roe said the VA reported approximately 32,000 names last year. Esty, also citing VA data, said tens of thousands of veterans reported to the FBI database had mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, dementia and serious depression. The VA's method for contributing names to the database has been long-criticized from veterans groups, such as the American Legion, which previously stated concerns that the law discourages veterans from seeking VA treatment.

The legislation has appeared in Congress multiple times in recent years, but failed to be passed into law. However, this time it's under consideration following the success of a resolution that revoked an Obama-era rule banning Social Security beneficiaries from owning guns if they were mentally ill or deemed incapable of handling their finances. Obama initiated the rule in 2013 following the Sandy Hook shooting, but it hadn't fully gone into effect. On Feb. 28, President Donald Trump signed a resolution that revoked it. "H.R.1181 is in congruence with what this Congress just passed dealing with the Social Security Administration," said Rep. John Rutherford (R-FL), a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. "We have to protect the constitutional rights of individuals, and the key here is due process. I think this is exactly where this Congress is going." You can read the full VCCS letter at <http://americansforresponsiblesolutions.org/files/2017/03/ARS-VCC-Letter-Opposing-Veterans-2nd-Amendment-Protection-Act.pdf>.

On 16 MAR the House, largely along party lines, passed H.R.1181 by a vote of 240-175. The bill now goes to the Senate where it faces an uncertain future because of Democratic opposition which could stall its progress indefinitely. No timetable has been set for when Senate leaders will take up the bill. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | March 14, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Jobs Update 217 ► Senate Passes H.R.244 | Hire Vets Act 2017**

Rep. Paul Cook, announced 27 MAR that the U.S. Senate has passed his bill, H.R.244, the Hire Vets Act of 2017. The bill already passed the House of Representatives in February. Cook had reintroduced this bipartisan bill earlier this year. It was introduced last Congress and passed the House with unanimous support, but was unable to pass the Senate before the end of the year. The bill now heads back to the House for final passage as the Senate made minor technical changes to it. This legislation would promote private sector recruiting, hiring and retaining of men and women who served honorably in the U.S. military through a voluntary and effective program, according to Cook's office. Specifically, it would create an awards program recognizing the meaningful and verifiable efforts undertaken by employers to hire and retain veterans. The program is designed to be self-funded.

"The HIRE Vets Act is an opportunity for Americans to see which companies truly live up to the employment promises they make to veterans," Cook said. "Veterans who serve this country honorably shouldn't struggle to find employment, and this bill creates an innovative system to encourage and recognize employers who make veterans a priority in their hiring practices. "I'm grateful this bipartisan bill has passed so resoundingly in both the House and the Senate. I expect it to quickly receive final approval from the House and look forward to it being signed into law soon." Through the U.S. Department of Labor, the HIRE Vets Act would allow businesses to display "HIRE Vets Medallions" on products and marketing materials. These medallions would be awarded as part of a two-tiered system — Gold and Platinum — associated with specific hiring and retention goals each year.

The program also establishes similar tiered awards for small and mid-sized businesses with less than 500 employees. To ensure proper oversight, the Secretary of Labor would be required to provide Congress with annual reports on the success of the program with regard to veteran employment and retention results. A member of the

House Natural Resources, Armed Services, and Foreign Affairs Committees, Cook served as an infantry officer and retired after 26 years as a Colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps. During his time in combat, he was awarded the Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts. He represents the 8th District, which includes all of the High Desert, in the House of Representatives. [Source: The Daily Press Tribune | March 27, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Appeals Update 24 ► Appeals Process Overhaul Bill Reintroduced

On 24 MAR, U.S. Senators Mark R. Warner and Tim Kaine joined a group of fourteen Senators in introducing legislation to overhaul the Department of Veterans Affairs' broken appeals process. The process has not been updated since 1933, and more than 450,000 appeals are currently pending. Because of redundancies and inefficiencies in the current process, most veterans wait years for a decision on their appeals. By replacing the current process, the Department of Veterans Affairs Appeals Modernization Act would expedite appeals before the Board of Veterans Appeals and give veterans clear options after receiving an initial decision.

The Government Accountability Office on 23 MAR released a report warning that, if no action is taken, veterans may have to wait an average of 8.5 years by fiscal year 2026 to have their appeals resolved. The report highlights inefficiencies in the current process and recommends the process is significantly reformed—as the legislation would do. “The VA has more than 450,000 veterans waiting to hear about an appeal, and the average appeal takes up to 5 years to resolve,” said Senator Warner. “There is wide acknowledgement that the current process for VA appeals is insufficient to adequately support our nations’ veterans, including the more than 780,000 veterans who call Virginia home. Our legislation will modernize the appeals process while maintaining a veteran’s right to full consideration.”

"I hear from veterans across Virginia whose appeals get caught in a long, complex process that is incredibly difficult to navigate," said Senator Kaine. "Our bill would simplify and improve the appeals process, which will help the VA address its drastic backlog and decrease wait times for veterans. These reforms are long overdue, and they'll allow the VA to better serve veterans across the country, including nearly 800,000 veterans who call Virginia home." The legislation introduced today would give veterans clear options after receiving an initial decision by consolidating the current appeals process into three distinct tracks:

- **Local Higher Level Review:** This lane would provide the opportunity for a quick resolution of the claim by a higher-level adjudicator at the VA Regional Office. This lane would be a good option for veterans who are confident they have all the evidence necessary to win their claim.
- **New Evidence:** This lane would be for submitting new evidence at the VA Regional Office. This lane would serve as a good option for veterans who believe that they can succeed on their claim by providing additional evidence.
- **Board Review:** In this last lane, intermediate steps currently required by statute to receive Board review would be eliminated. Furthermore, hearing and non-hearing options at the Board would be handled on separate dockets so these distinctly different types of work can be better managed.

Joining Warner and Kaine as original cosponsors of the legislation are U.S. Senators Jon Tester, Richard Blumenthal, Angus King, Maggie Hassan, Bob Casey, Tammy Baldwin, Chris Van Hollen, Patty Murray, Dick Durbin, Dianne Feinstein, Bernie Sanders, Tom Udall, Mazie Hirono, and Jeanne Shaheen. The Department of Veterans Affairs Appeals Modernization Act is a reintroduction of S. 3328 from last Congress, which was supported by the Disabled American Veterans, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, AMVETS, the Military Officers Association of America, the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers, and the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs. [Source: NCOA Advocate | March 27, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Employee Accountability Update 05 ► H.R.1259 Passes House**

U.S. Representative Mike Coffman (R-CO) along with his colleagues on the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs introduced H.R. 1259, the 'Veteran's Affairs (VA) Accountability First Act of 2017' on 1 MAR. This bill aims to provide the VA Secretary increased discretion to remove, demote, or suspend any VA employee, including Senior Executive Service employees due to performance or misconduct. "Time and time again, I have called to reform the VA—an organization that has been mired in a culture of corruption and bureaucratic incompetence. The VA has consistently failed to meet our nation's obligations to the men and women who have made tremendous sacrifices in defense of our freedoms." H.R.1259 also provides improved protections for whistle blowers, would allow the Secretary to reduce an employee's federal pension if convicted of a felony, recoup bonuses provided to any employee who has engaged in misconduct or exhibits poor performance, and would provide for the means to recuperate relocation expenses obtained by VA employees illegitimately.

The bill would allow the VA secretary to fire or suspend any employee for poor performance or misconduct, regardless of their position. Those employees would receive advance notice of discipline of not more than 10 days, and the secretary would have five days after the action to respond to any objections. If those employees appeal the punishment, judges with the Merit Systems Protection Board would have 45 days to issue a ruling. Those provisions go to lawmaker complaints that disciplining problem employees within current federal rules is too time consuming, sometimes taking months of hearings and reassignments. It also allows VA officials to recoup bonuses and specialty pay in certain instances where fraud or abuse is later discovered. It has received support from a host of veterans groups but fierce opposition from union supporters like American Federation of Government Employees, who called it "politicizing the workforce and gutting frontline employees' basic worker rights."

House Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Tim Walz (D-MN) said he supported the idea behind the bill, but not the specifics of it. He said he worries it erodes workers' appeals rights, and unsuccessfully tried to amend the measure to better match Senate-backed accountability proposals from last year. The measure has drawn criticism from Democrats in recent days, who questioned why the bill was rushed ahead of widely supported proposals like a plan to reform the appeals process for veterans disability benefits. But Republicans insisted the legislation was needed to protect the health and welfare of veterans. House lawmakers approved this contentious veterans policy measure on 16 MAR— which passed 237-178 —largely along party lines

The bill sponsored by House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe (R-TN) received the backing of the White House and Department of Veterans Affairs. Roe said "real reform" at the department won't occur at VA unless lawmakers "provide the secretary with the tools he needs to swiftly discipline employees who don't meet standards our veterans deserve, or fail in their sacred mission to provide world-class health care and benefits to the men and women who have served." However, it faces an uncertain future in the Senate, where Democratic opposition could stall its progress indefinitely. No timetable has been set for when Senate leaders will take up the bill. [Source: Rep. Mike Coffman PR & Leo Shane III | March 1 & 16, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Women Vet Programs Update 26 ► S.681 | Deborah Sampson Act**

On 21 MAR, the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, Senator Jon Tester, introduced S. 681, the Deborah Sampson Act. This comprehensive measure addresses gender disparities and would improve and expand programs and services for women veterans provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The bill would establish a pilot program for peer-to-peer counseling and authorizes group retreat counseling for women veterans recently separated from military service. It would expand the capabilities within the VA Women Veterans

Call Center and extend the number of days, from seven to 14, VA can cover the cost of care for newborns of women veterans and authorize medically-necessary transportation for newborns.

The legislation aims to eliminate barriers to care by ensuring every VA medical facility has at least one full-time or part-time women's health provider, as well as a Women Veterans Program Manager and a Women Veteran Program Ombudsman. Additional resources are authorized for mini-residency training in women's health for clinicians, and retrofitting VA facilities to enhance privacy, safety and improve the overall environment of care for women veterans. S. 681 would provide support services for women veterans seeking legal assistance and authorizes additional grants for organizations supporting women veterans and their families. Finally, The Deborah Sampson Act would require data collection and reporting on all VA programs serving veterans, by gender and minority status, including a report on the availability of prosthetics for women veterans and would better coordinate outreach by centralizing all information for women veterans in one easily accessible place on VA's website.

Disabled American Veteran's 2014 report, Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home identified many of these gaps in VA programs for women and has long advocated for a more comprehensive provision of VA women's health services that appropriately recognizes and honors their service and sacrifice. Readers are encouraged to click on <https://www.voterveice.net/BroadcastLinks/6xyNAXNVrF2221-HU5Xkug> to contact their elected representatives to urge co-sponsorship and passage of S. 681. There a letter has been prepared for this purpose or you may write your own to express your personal views. Also a similar way to contact your legislator on the subject is provided by the NCOA organization at <https://www.voterveice.net/BroadcastLinks/LMoRYbf9nVMpduAIOT7Xhg> [Source: DAVA National Commander | David W. Riley | March 22, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Designated Smoking Areas ► Bill to Eliminate Introduced**

House Republicans introduced a bill 22 MAR to immediately shut down the remaining indoor designated smoking areas at Veterans Health Administration facilities and also to eliminate outdoor designated smoking areas within five years. "Exposure to secondhand smoke puts veteran patients at unnecessary risk," said Rep. Brad Wenstrup, an Ohio Republican and chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health. "This common-sense reform mitigates that risk by requiring VHA facilities to become 100 percent smoke-free within five years," said Wenstrup, an Army veteran and a medical doctor. Currently, the VHA maintains 15 indoor smoking areas at its facilities, and 971 outdoor designated smoking areas, according to the sponsors of the proposed legislation. Some 20 percent of veterans enrolled at VHA are smokers and "many non-smoking veteran patients are at an increased risk for cardiovascular events associated with exposure to secondhand smoke," the sponsors said.

The Veterans Health Care Act of 1992 required the VA to offer smoking areas, though designated smoking areas at most other federal facilities were closed in 2009. Supporters of the 1992 law said that any restrictions on smoking would violate veterans' right to have access to a legal product. In co-sponsoring the bill, Rep. Phil Roe, a Tennessee Republican and chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said, "The health and well-being of our nation's heroes should always come first. This commonsense legislation would bring VA's smoking policies into the 21st century, ensuring veteran patients receive the same considerations as patients in the private-sector." The VA currently offers programs to help veterans quit smoking and any veteran receiving health care through VA is eligible to use the "Quit VET quitline" at 1-855-QUIT-VET (1-855-784-8838) to speak with a tobacco cessation counselor. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | March 22, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 42 ► H.R.2237 Reintroduced**

Three members of Congress introduced legislation 22 MAR that would provide aid to veterans exposed to toxic burn pits on military bases. Reps. Elizabeth Esty, Ryan Costello and Betty McCollum introduced the **Helping Veterans Exposed to Burn Pits Act**, which seeks to create a VA center focused on the “diagnosis, mitigation, treatment, and rehabilitation of health conditions related to exposure to burn pits,” according to an Esty press release. Burn pits on military bases are used to incinerate toxic items such as human waste, batteries, metal containers, tires, aerosol cans, plastics and other garbage. The items are often set fire after being doused with accelerants such as jet fuel, sending toxic smoke and fumes into the air around the base. Smoke from these burn pits can end up in living areas on the base, the release says.

“I’ve heard from veterans throughout Connecticut who are suffering – or know other service members suffering – from serious health complications that were likely caused by burn pits,” said Esty, a Democrat from Connecticut. “We cannot repeat our shameful inaction after the Vietnam War, when the government failed to acknowledge the terrible toll of Agent Orange. By passing this bill, we can significantly improve the quality of the care for veterans who have been exposed to burn pits, and help them to live longer, healthier lives,” she added. The legislation has bipartisan support with Costello (R-PA) also sponsoring the bill, and Rep. Peter King (R-NY) as a cosponsor. “The men and women who dedicate their lives to protecting our country must be able to access care for their health needs when they return home,” Costello said. “By establishing a center of excellence within the Department of Veterans Affairs, this bill is an important step forward in providing critical services for veterans facing health issues from burn pits,” he added.

The VA currently maintains a list of service members exposed to burn pits, according to McCollum, a Minnesota Democrat. “We need to provide the VA with the resources necessary to examine and research the health effects caused by burn pits,” she said. “Our veterans exposed to these airborne toxins cannot wait any longer for the care and treatment they deserve.” Health effects associated with the burn pit exposure can include cancer, neurological and reproductive effects, respiratory toxicity and cardiovascular toxicity, according to the release. The bill was previously introduced into the 114th Congress as H.R.2237. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Christopher Diamond | March 23, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Adult Day Care Update 02 ► S.324/H.R.1005 | Increase Access**

Senator Orrin Hatch (UT) and Representative Lee Zeldin [NY-1] introduced legislation (S.324 and H.R.1005) designed to increase the availability of adult day health care services for severely disabled veterans. If enacted, the legislation would increase the current reimbursement to state veterans homes for the provision of adult day health care services to severely disabled veterans who are eligible for, but do not receive, full-time skilled nursing home care paid for by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), with no cost to the veteran.

Under current law, veterans who require nursing home care due to a service-connected disability or who have a VA disability rating of 70% or more can receive full-time nursing home care inside a state veterans home at no cost; however, the law does not allow those same severely disabled veterans to benefit from adult day health care, which is a less costly non-institutional alternative many prefer. S.324 and H.R.1005 would amend existing law to authorize VA to pay state veterans homes a per diem rate that is 65% of the per diem otherwise payable for full-time skilled nursing home care for these same severely disabled veterans.

Adult day health care, which is currently offered by only three state homes, provides comprehensive medical, nursing and personal care services combined with social activities for physically or cognitively impaired adults. Under this program, veterans are brought to the state home for 6-8 hours where they can receive any necessary

medical care -- including physical, occupational or speech therapy -- as well as nutritional and social services. Adult day health care allows severely disabled veterans who might otherwise need skilled nursing services to receive these services several times a week while continuing to live at home.

If enacted, these bills would enable more state veterans homes across the country to offer adult day health care programs for these deserving veterans. The legislation would also provide important relief and support for their family caregivers. DAV Resolution 127 calls for legislation to provide state homes with greater flexibility in providing eligible veterans medically necessary long-term supports and services. Readers are requested to contact their elected officials and urge them to support passage of the State Veterans Home Adult Day Health Care Improvement Act of 2017 (S.324 and H.R.1005) during the 115th Congress. To facilitate this DAV has provided a preformatted editable message at <https://www.votervoices.net/BroadcastLinks/uhBgyzERoxnKVVbYCtPeYA> to send to your legislators. [Source: DAV | David W. Riley| March 28, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Vet Toxic Exposure Legislation Update 08 ► Classified Record VA Access

Two U.S. Senators introduced a bipartisan legislation in late MAR to allow veterans who have been exposed to toxic substances in classified incident to access their military records as they apply for disability benefits and VA health care. Sen. Jerry Moran and Sen. Jon Tester are working to pass **The Gary Deloney and John Olsen Toxic Exposure Declassification Act**. Veterans who have health conditions that are linked to exposure to toxic substances during their military services are eligible to apply for disability benefits from health care from the VA. However, some missions and projects that resulted in their exposure to the toxic substances remain classified by the Department of Defense, despite having taken place decades ago. The policy prevents veterans from accessing and using their service records to establish their service-connected conditions and securing a disability rating that grants them eligible for care and benefits. The Gary Deloney and John Olsen Toxic Exposure Declassification Act would call on the Secretary of Defense to declassify the records of experiments or incidents that resulted in troops' exposure to toxic substances that could be used in a veteran's claim for benefits. Gary Deloney, who served in the Navy from 1962 to 1965, was awarded the Vietnam Service Medal and was unable to prove his exposure to Agent Orange, despite evidence. He passed away while waiting to receive a service connection designation from the Department of Veteran Affairs because records of his missions are classified. Gary Delony, from Fort Scott, passed away while working with Sen. Jerry Moran's staff to access the classified military records that would have proven his exposure to Agent Orange and service-connected illness. [Source: Topeka KS 13WIBW-TV | Natalie Dattilio | Mar 28, 2017 ++]

**\* Military \***



## USMC Photo Scandal Update 01 ► Sen. Tillis | Strip Participant's Benefits

Furious over a nude-photo scandal involving male Marines who made sexually violent comments online about female Marines, U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC) said 14 MAR that he wanted to explore how to punish non-active duty and retired personnel who participated. One idea: stripping any guilty veterans of benefits.



*IF THERE'S SOMETHING WE CAN DO TO DISALLOW THEIR BENEFITS FOR BAD BEHAVIOR AFTER THEY'RE DISCHARGED, THOSE ARE THE SORTS OF THINGS WE HAVE TO DO.* Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC)

There should be “dire consequence for people stupid enough to do these kinds of things moving forward,” said Tillis, who sits on the Senate’s Veterans’ Affairs and Armed Services committees. He asked for information about how lawmakers could stop post-service benefits for veterans who had participated. “If there’s something we can do to disallow their benefits for bad behavior after they’re discharged, those are the sorts of things we have to do,” he said. Marine Corps officials have said they will investigate and prosecute active-duty personnel involved in the scandal under the Uniform Code of Military Justice but punishment for veterans falls outside those parameters. Later, Tillis called the photo incident a scandal and “absolute disgrace” that is not reflective of the vast majority of Marines.

The panel’s seven women were also outraged. Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA), an Iraq War Army veteran, saw a troubling pattern. “This seems to be service-wide,” she said. “This is a cultural problem not just in our military but society at large. . . . Hearing that there may not be a way to hold many of the people involved in this accountable – that angers me.” Senators were also angry at a report from Sen. Angus King, a Maine independent, that a veteran who may have been involved posted his discharge papers and taunted investigators. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), a retired Air Force colonel, called for an immediate disclosure of the veteran’s name. “Who is that person? Do we know their name? Well, let’s make them famous right here. What is their name?” Graham pressed 14 MAR, seemingly addressing his question to no one in particular on the witness panel. He didn’t get an answer but the committee planned to meet afterward in a private, closed-door session. “We’ll get it later,” Graham said. “We’ll publicly let the world know who this person is.”

Marine Corps Commandant General Robert Neller said during Tuesday’s hearing that he would go to Camp Lejeune on Wednesday to speak with Marines about the issue. Camp Lejeune is the largest Marine Corps base on the East Coast. At least one Marine suspected of being involved at Camp Lejeune is no longer on active duty. Marine Corps officials told McClatchy he was due to be honorably discharged under normal circumstances. They didn’t give the name of the Marine but confirmed that he had begun the process of being discharged before the Facebook page was discovered. Investigators think the page was both a platform and conduit to other websites where male Marines posted nude photos of women, including their co-workers, without permission. Some of the photos of female Marines living and working on military bases were taken without their knowledge. Comments on the photos, written by both active-duty and retired Marines, included some that encouraged sexual assault against the women pictured, harassment of the female Marines and other denigrating activity.

The page was exposed earlier this month by Thomas Brennan, a retired and combat-injured Marine and journalist now working for the War Horse, an investigative news site focused on the U.S. military, war and veterans issues. His report on “Marines United” was published by the Center for Investigative Reporting and prompted swift responses across the military and federal government.



*I'VE HEARD IT DESCRIBED AS THE DARK HUMOR OF VETERANS – THAT'S A COPOUT.*

Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Robert Neller

Neller and other high-ranking Marine Corps leaders have strongly condemned the online harassment, sexually explicit images and violent comments. Neller has promised full support for female Marines who were targeted and tough penalties for those who took photos, left comments or acted as “bystanders” and didn’t report the activity. Neller said he thought the Marine Corps had to address the cultural issues to find a solution. He called the mocking, hazing, harassment and assault of women on display in the “Marines United” scandal one of the corps’ darker moments in history. “I’ve heard it described as the dark humor of veterans – that’s a copout,” Neller said. He had a stern demeanor during Tuesday’s hearing and often shared the Senate panel’s visible disgust over the website.

Acting Secretary of the Navy Sean Stackley said he supported all that could be done to hold guilty veterans accountable but that the military’s authority was limited after a service member was discharged. Veterans, however, are subject to military court-martial if it’s later found they committed crimes or violated military codes while on active duty. Stackley said the Department of Defense was reviewing similar websites used by members of other branches of the military. He liked Tillis’ idea of giving the government more authority to handle cases involving veterans. [Source: McClatchy DC Bureau | Robert B. Neller | March 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **USMC Photo Scandal Update 02 ► NCIS Investigating 1200 Marines**

The Naval Criminal Investigative Service has identified hundreds of Marines who are members of the Marines United Facebook group, where some members allegedly shared nude photos of female troops, veterans and civilians, a Democratic House lawmaker said on 16 MAR. NCIS is investigating whether Marines shared the nude photos without the women’s consent and harassed them online. So far, investigators have 1,200 members of Marines United, including 700 active-duty Marines and 150 Marines in the Reserve, Rep. Jackie Speier, of California, said at a news conference. About 500 of Marines United’s roughly 30,000 members are believed to have viewed the nude photographs, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Robert Neller told senators on 14 MAR.

Neller said he did not know what motivated Marines to cyberbully the women whose pictures were shared. “I’ve heard it described as the dark humor of veterans, but that’s a cop-out,” Neller said. “But we also know that there are Marines that are participating in this, who have never been shot at in their lives. So they’re just trying to get credibility — I don’t know.” There is one major legal issue prosecutors may face: If the pictures shared online were originally taken consensually, the strictest penalties under the Uniform Code of Military Justice may not apply to Marines who shared them without permission. That’s why Speier has proposed a bill that would allow service members to be prosecuted for sharing revealing pictures that “a reasonable person would know or understand” are intended to remain private without permission of the people depicted in the pictures.

“Clearly the antiquated language of the UCMJ must be fixed to address this national scandal and to restore the reputations of not only our brave service members, but the Marine Corps itself,” Speier said at Thursday’s news conference. Gloria Allred, an attorney who represents two women whose pictures were shared on Marines United praised Speier’s proposed bill and said Congress needs to take further action. “The House Armed Services community needs to conduct a hearing as soon as possible to hear from the female victims of Marine United and other web pages,” Allred said at the news conference. “Both the Senate and the House have asked General Neller to testify, but we need Congress to hear from the victims of this scandal. Their voices need to be heard. I represent a number of those victims but none have been invited to testify.” [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Jeff Schogol | March 16, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Air Force Readiness Update 01 ► Sequestration and Funding Impact**

Senior officials from the Air Force testified to the House Armed Service Committee 22 MAR on the impact sequestration and unpredictable funding have on readiness and modernization. Testimony focused on the critical shortage of nearly 3,400 maintainers and 2,900 pilots across the Total Force, including 723 fighter pilots in the active force; the increased demand for Air Force assets over the last 15 years, including a 1,200 percent increase in the demand for Remote Piloted Aircraft; and the desire for another round of Base Realignment and Closure in order to reduce unnecessary infrastructure costs. Additionally, a 38 percent decrease in end strength since 1991 has increased reliance on civilian personnel - increasing their numbers to 26 percent of the Total Force. With the hiring freeze, however, the Air Force now has more than 8,000 civilian vacancies. To watch the hearing in which testimony was heard from Lieutenant General Maryanne Miller, Lieutenant General L. Scott Rice, and ANG Major General Scott D. West go to <https://armedservices.house.gov/legislation/hearings/current-state-us-air-force>. [Source: VFW Action corps Weekly | March 24, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **SBP Under Blended Retirement System ► Impact**

The majority of retiring service members elect a benefit that provides a payment of 55 percent of their retirement pay to qualified survivors. And as the Blended Retirement System reduces retirement pay in favor of Thrift Savings Plan matching funds, it also reduces this benefit in the event of a service member's death. Retiring service members can choose Survivor Benefit Plan coverage on any base amount of their retired pay between \$300 and their full retirement pay. In 2013, 80% of service members who retired enrolled in SBP, compared with 52% in 1993, according to information provided by the Defense Department Actuary to the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission. In return, the service member's retired pay is reduced by 6.5 percent of the base amount selected.

The current system calculates retired pay by multiplying 2.5 percent of the final base pay by the number of years served, for those who serve at least 20 years. So after 20 years, retired pay would be 50 percent of base pay. Under the BRS, after 20 years, retired pay would be 40 percent of base pay, with a lesser multiplier of 2 percent — a reduction of 20 percent. Here's how the math might break out: A retired E-8 with 20 years in uniform will make a bit less than \$30,000 for his first year out of service if he retires in 2017 under the existing system, according to a Defense Department calculator. If he has the full amount covered by SBP and dies unexpectedly, his spouse would get about \$16,500 for the year. All things equal, a retired E-8 with 20 years under the new system would make about \$24,000 in retirement pay – a reduction of 20 percent. His spouse would get 55 percent of that, or about \$13,200 for the year, in the event of his death.

The calculations don't factor in cost-of-living adjustments, which could more than double a service member's retirement pay over the course of a lifetime. The 20 percent difference will remain steady, but the dollar-figure difference between plans will rise along with the amounts. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | March 20, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **USAF KC-46 Program ► At Risk of Further Schedule Delays**

The \$44 billion KC-46 program is at risk of further schedule delays, the Government Accountability Office stated in a new report. KC-46A manufacturer Boeing has struggled to meet key milestones throughout the duration of the program and is already at least one year behind by most measures. The company faces an uphill battle to keep the

program on time, even as it continues to meet cost and performance goals, the GAO said. The most important deadline on the horizon is the October 2018 target date for “required assets available,” which contractually binds Boeing to deliver the first 18 tankers and nine aerial refueling pods. The company has already slipped too far behind to meet its initial August 2017 benchmark. Because of delays, Boeing will have to compress its original delivery timeline for those 18 aircraft from 14 months to 6 months. “This delivery period assumes Boeing will deliver 3 aircraft per month, a greater pace than planned during full rate production,” the report stated. Twelve of those aircraft are already over 70 percent complete, GAO adds, but the company is far from being in the clear.

Two major challenges stand in the way. First, Boeing may not be able to conduct an electromagnetic effects test scheduled for May 2017. The test, which is held at a specialized facility, will evaluate whether the KC-46 creates any electromagnetic interference. However, because the Federal Aviation Administration has yet to approve the aircraft’s aerial refueling pod design, the Air Force will have to decide whether to test the aircraft and pods separately or risk pushing the test to a later date. GAO also has questions about whether Boeing can finish developmental flight tests as quick as it plans, noting that the company “is projecting that it can complete test points ... at a rate higher than it has been able to demonstrate consistently.” Boeing must finish an average 1,713 test points per month to enable the first aircraft deliveries in September 2017, but it has exceeded that number only once, when it completed 2,240 test points in October 2016, the report said. When looking at data from March 2016 to January 2017, the agency found Boeing’s average completion rate was about 800 test points per month.

By other benchmarks, the program is performing admirably. For instance, the aircraft is meeting its performance goals, and costs are lower than expected — a feature virtually unheard of in major defense programs. The GAO notes that the KC-46 program’s total estimated acquisition cost has dropped by about \$7.3 billion since the initial estimate, a 14 percent decrease. Much of that success can be attributed to the fact that there have been no alterations to the tanker’s requirements and few engineering changes, the agency stated. But another key factor is the Air Force’s fixed-price contract with Boeing, which holds the company responsible for cost growth. Boeing has already paid more than \$2 billion for overruns. But during an earnings call earlier this year, Boeing CEO Dennis Muilenburg struck an optimistic tone on the program. “While we still have flight testing to go, it’s very clear now that we’re not discovering new testing risks,” he said. “It’s now about getting the first 18 aircraft delivered.” The KC-46 program was approved for low-rate, initial production in August, about a year later than expected. Boeing plans to deliver the first tanker this year. [Source: DefenseNews | Valerie Insinna | March 24, 2017 +]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Freeze Dried Plasma ► USAF to Test on the Battlefield**

Plasma makes up more than half of a person’s blood, and its clotting properties help stop bleeding — which is why medics carry the precious liquid, in frozen form, on the battlefield. Frozen plasma needs to be kept cold, however, and lugging a freezer in combat isn’t exactly practical. That’s why the Defense Department is working on bringing freeze-dried plasma to the U.S. This type of plasma doesn’t need to be kept cold and is also more stable than frozen plasma. Since the Food and Drug Administration hasn’t approved a U.S.-sourced product yet, the military is using French-manufactured freeze-dried plasma in a joint effort to bring the technique to the States. And Air Force Special Operations Command is part of this effort. Lt. Col. Rebecca Carter, chief of AFSOC’s medical modernization, said the command will receive 25 units of the product from France under the FDA’s Investigational New Drug protocol. This allows the Air Force to receive the product before it receives FDA approval.

The use of freeze-dried plasma, however, is not new. “The U.S. used it in World War II,” Carter said. “At the time, we did not have as reliable and accurate methods of donor screening for the blood supply,” which increased the possibility of infection. France received approval for freeze-dried plasma from its FDA equivalent in 1994, and now the United States is working on its own approval. Once the AFSOC medical team receives its supply of French freeze-dried plasma this month, it will be ready to deploy when needed and used to treat special operations airmen

on the battlefield, Carter said. The two main branches of the command's medical team are the operational medic support team and the special operations surgical team. They also support pararescuemen, Carter said. Carter said each shipment of freeze-dried plasma is meant to support a single deployment cycle.

Frozen plasma must be thawed and warmed before it can be injected into a patient, she said. Frozen plasma can remain frozen for an extended period of time, but it cannot be thawed and then refrozen. Once thawed, the product starts to degrade rapidly. With freeze-dried plasma, the water is removed and the product becomes a powder. This powder is reconstituted with sterile water and injected into the patient intravenously or via intraosseous infusion — directly into the bone. The French product is contained in glass bottles, but Carter said the U.S. plans to hold its freeze-dried plasma in IV bags to make transporting them easier and safer. “The French product is really a bridge product for special operations forces to get to the U.S.-sourced product,” she said. “The larger [Defense Department] community has a team of research and development professionals that are supporting projects to ensure we do have U.S.-sourced [freeze-dried plasma].”

Carter said it will probably take up to five years before the U.S. has its own freeze-dried plasma product. “Our job is to facilitate the fielding of the product throughout the Air Force,” she said. Army Special Operations Command was the first to use the French product in the United States, and now the Army Blood Program is seeking volunteers to donate plasma in the effort for U.S.-sourced freeze-dried plasma. [Source: AirForceTimes | Charlsy Panzino | March 26, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military Laser Program ► Army HEL MD | 60 KW System**

The U.S. Army is taking delivery of a 60 kilowatt-class laser from Lockheed Martin as the company wraps up demonstrations of the capability. “In testing earlier this month, the Lockheed Martin laser produced a single beam of 58kW, representing a world record for a laser of this type,” the company said in a statement 16 MAR. Now that the laser is in Army hands, Radiance Technologies, which has been working on Boeing's High Energy Laser Mobile Demonstrator (HEL MD) program since 2012 will conduct laboratory testing of the new laser. Once the laser is integrated onto the Army's Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck, or HEMTT, that becomes the High Energy Laser Mobile Test Truck. Radiance will coordinate all testing of the laser against targets. The HEMTT is the largest vehicle in the Army inventory and previously a 10-kW laser was tested on the platform.



The new laser is based on a design developed under the Department of Defense's Robust Electric Laser Initiative Program, as well as through investments into the 60 kW-class system by the company and the Army. The Pentagon has made directed energy an important priority because military officials believe ultimately employing lasers will dramatically decrease the cost of firing shots. Missiles, rockets, artillery and mortars would ultimately cost far more than shooting with a laser, and with the proper power source, laser weapons would never run out of ammunition.



The delivery of the more powerful laser to the Army marks another important milestone in developing directed energy to be used as laser weapons on a variety of platforms.

The 10-kW specialized commercial-off-the-shelf welding laser on a HEMTT was tested between 2010 and 2014 in the High Energy Laser Mobile Demonstrator program and shot down targets in flight, to include class 2 unmanned aircraft systems and 60mm mortars at White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico. The less powerful laser was also tested at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, during a maneuver fires integration experiment last spring where the primary targets were class 1 quadcopter UAS as well as ground targets like simulated ground stations and ammunition points. In 2015, the company used a 30-kW fiber laser weapon, known as ATHENA, to disable a truck from a mile away. Lockheed is preparing to ship the 60-kW laser to the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command and Army Forces Strategic Command in Huntsville, Ala.

The more powerful laser brings together individual lasers “generated through fiber optics, to generate a single, intense laser beam,” Lockheed explained, which allows for it to be scaled up in power by adding more fiber laser subunits. “We have shown that a powerful directed energy laser is now sufficiently light-weight, low volume and reliable enough to be deployed on tactical vehicles for defensive applications on land, at sea and in the air,” Robert Afzal, a senior fellow for Lockheed’s Laser and Sensor Systems business, said. The laser system has “proved to be highly efficient in testing,” the company stated, “capable of translating more than 43 percent of the electricity that powered it directly into the actual laser beam it emitted.” Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdunGOYmzro> to see a video of the system in operation. [Source: DefenseNews | Jen Judson | March 16, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military Research Update 01** ► **Navy Environment Sensor Development**

The U.S. Navy is enlisting the help of seals — but not the kind of highly trained special operatives with whom it usually associates. Real seals, specifically their whiskers, may be the key to a new way for ships and underwater vehicles to sense their environment, scientists think. When a fish swims by, a hungry seal senses the wake with its whiskers. It can tell characteristics of the fish, such as shape and size, and track the location even when it's murky or dark. Despite the adorable possibilities, scientists aren't looking to outfit ships and vehicles with whiskers. They're studying how the whiskers function to learn how to reverse-engineer the system. The science could be applied to the development of a future sensor. "If we want to design the best systems, it makes sense to take advantage of millions of years of work that nature has done for us," said Christin Murphy, a marine mammal biologist.



**Engineer David Wade (left) attaches a seal whisker to a clamp in a laboratory at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center and Marine mammal biologist (right) displays close-up images of seal whiskers generated by an electron microscope in a laboratory at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, in Newport, R.I. Scientists think real seals, specifically their whiskers, may be the key to a new way for ships and underwater vehicles to sense their environment.**

The research is taking place at the Newport division of the Naval Undersea Warfare Center. Murphy and colleague Joy Lapsertitis looked to seal whiskers because they're a highly sensitive system of underwater touch that



employ bumps to reduce their own self-induced vibrations, something that may help increase their sensitivity to water disturbances. That, Lapsertis said, could lead to a novel, passive sensor. "You don't need to put sound into the water, like sonar," she said. "This is literally feeling the landscape." Murphy discussed their work with Ash Carter, then the secretary of defense, when he visited Newport in May. The warfare center receives funding from the Office of Naval Research for in-house laboratory independent research, including the whisker project. The budget is about \$2.4 million annually, with each project typically receiving \$100,000 to \$150,000 a year, according to the center.

The Navy, which is also funding bio-inspired work at universities, has taken a greater interest in the field in the past decade. Animals do things well that the Navy wants its underwater vehicles to do well, like the way they propel themselves through water and can stay put in the face of currents. Scientists and engineers at the warfare center are studying a variety of creatures to borrow their best features for potential military applications, from the maneuverability of a bat in flight to cicadas' ability to transmit sound. One researcher is even trying to figure out how a sensor could float like a jellyfish. The seal whiskers project shows "remarkable promise" for the Navy because a seal's sensory capabilities are so specific and sensitive, said Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution researcher Andrea Bogomolni, who leads the Northwest Atlantic Seal Research Consortium.

This month in the lab in Newport, Lapsertis and Murphy measured the motion of a harbor seal whisker in a tunnel of water as the speed of the flow changed. A cylinder in the tunnel disturbed the water flow like a swimming fish would. They work with groups that respond to reports of distressed or deceased seals to collect whiskers from seals that die. They have run hundreds of trials with different whiskers and species, and have created a whisker with a 3-D printer. They haven't set a timeline for finishing the project. [Source: Associated Press | Jennifer McDermott | March 15, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military Research Update 02 ► Army Third Arm**

Soldiers in the field are asked to carry so much. Wouldn't it be nice to have a third arm to help carry some of it? Brains at the Army Research Laboratory have created just that – a device designed to hold your weapon, and displace the weight from a soldier's arms to his torso. Third Arm, an ultralight exoskeleton for soldier weapons is intended to "increase soldier lethality, while reducing soldier burden," explained Zac Wingard, a mechanical engineer with the Army Research Lab's Weapons and Materials Research Directorate.



**The Third Arm transfers the weight of a weapon from a soldier's arms to his torso.**

Wingard modeled the 4-pound, carbon-fiber exoskeleton during a presentation at the Association of the U.S. Army Global Force Symposium. It attaches to a soldier's back, via the tactical vest, and connects to the gun's Picatinny rail. It is ambidextrous and can mount on either side of the body. While the demo included an M4 carbine, the arm is capable of supporting bigger firepower, up to around 20 pounds, said Dan Baechle, the mechanical engineer leading the project. He specifically mentioned the squad automatic weapon as another option. It could also be used to carry a breaching saw or a shield, Baechle said. Important: The arm is not going to fire the weapon for you, you need your own arms to stabilize and aim, but it's going to reduce the weight you carry.

The prototype is brand new, and took about a year to develop, Baechle said. Researchers have already launched a pilot test with six active-duty soldiers assigned to the lab. Testing includes live-fire exercises to measure marksmanship and muscle activity. Future tests of the device will address: moving targets, shooting on the move, unconventional firing positions and recoil mitigation, Baechle said. The Army has many hurdles to clear before the device could see real action. Even so, the engineer team is moving fast. They expect to test a ruggedized Third Arm within a year. Soldiers are going to be diving into the dirt, Baechle said, and this device must do the same. [Source: DefenseNews | Tony Lombardo | March 15, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **USCG Budget Update 02 ► Proposed Billion-Dollar Budget Cut**

The U.S. Coast Guard has apparently sailed around a proposed billion-dollar budget cut after an outcry from advocates and lawmakers. The Homeland Security Department, of which the service is a part, recently released additional details into the White House's budget amendment for fiscal 2017 and budget blueprint for fiscal 2018, also known as the "skinny budget." While the latter — a 62-page document released Thursday — doesn't mention the Coast Guard, the department's release from the same day states the proposed spending plan "sustains current funding levels for the U.S. Coast Guard, which allows for the continuation of day-to-day operations and investments in the acquisition, construction and improvements account." A spokeswoman for the Coast Guard referred questions about the matter to the White House Office of Management and Budget, which first proposed the reduction.

The news was nevertheless welcomed by Coastie enthusiasts, from Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Paul Zukunft to Rep. Duncan Hunter, a Republican from California and a member of the House Armed Services Committee and the House Transportation and Infrastructure's Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee. "Everything that was released was pre-decisional," Zukunft told reporters, according to an article by Christopher Cavas of Defense News. "Normally that [debate] doesn't hit the public domain, but it did. When it did there was an avalanche of support for the Coast Guard. Bipartisan support." In a letter Friday to President Donald Trump, Hunter recommended moving management of the Coast Guard from the Homeland Security Department to the Defense Department to better shield the service from potential spending reductions. (Notably, both departments are currently headed by retired Marines — John Kelly at Homeland and Jim Mattis at the Pentagon.) Hunter wrote, "Over time, the Coast Guard's mission importance has not been properly recognized or advocated for — as demonstrated by years of underfunded budget requests, and perhaps most clearly, by this year's grossly inadequate proposed Office of Management and Budget (OMB) funding guidance."

The office had proposed a \$1.3 billion cut to the Coast Guard in fiscal 2018, which begins 1 OCT. The service's total budget authority for fiscal 2017 is \$10.3 billion, according to service budget documents. The reduction, if approved by Congress, may have forced the Coast Guard to cancel a contract for a new national security cutter. "First and foremost, the Coast Guard is a military force," Hunter continued. "It deserves to be housed in a department that recognizes the importance of its mission, and has the capabilities to properly advocate for greatly needed resources. And the Coast Guard's mission set, acquisition needs and national security role provide a strong case that our country would be best served by housing the Coast Guard at DoD."



The Coast Guard Cutter Woesche, a 418-foot Legend-class national security cutter, is shown at the pier at Base Alameda in Alameda, California, June 6, 2016.

The commandant may agree. During his annual State of the Coast Guard address last week at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., Zukunft reminded folks that the service is a branch of the military. “The Coast Guard is an armed service,” he said, according to a copy of his remarks. “Yet we are not postured to benefit from vital national security investments because our funding is classified incorrectly. Our men and women are military members who operate on the front lines to secure our nation and our borders. Our service must be categorized and funded accordingly.” [Source: DoD Buzz | Brendan McGarry | March 20, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Army Readiness** ► **Continuing Resolution Impact**

The U.S. Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Dan Allyn said the service’s budget for force readiness in 2017 will run out by mid-summer should a continuing resolution extend farther out. “We are going to run out of money in mid-July on the current spending and when that happens all the readiness gains that we’ve been building for two-and-a-half years are going to start that tip down,” Allyn said at the McAleese and Associates and Credit Suisse defense conference in Washington on 22 MAR. “That is a significant near-term problem,” he said. The Army had a \$4 billion budget in 2017 for “direct readiness deliverables” that it won’t get as long as the continuing resolution continues, Allyn added. The current CR is scheduled to expire on April 28, but there is buzz on Capitol Hill that the mechanism to fund the government at 2016 levels could extend beyond that date, potentially to the end of the fiscal year.

Allyn said a longer-term problem is also the inability to start hundreds of new programs. This would mean delays to modernization, and after the service has taken a long appetite suppressant on modernizing the force in order to keep up with readiness, what is budgeted in 2017 in the modernization category is already “very prioritized,” he said. “We have prioritized that money so when it doesn’t come, it’s like a double hit,” Allyn said. “It’s like a punch to the belly and a roundhouse to the face.” At the Association of the U.S. Army’s Global Force Symposium in Huntsville, Ala., last week, Karl Schneider, the senior official performing duties of the under secretary of the Army, said the CR has caused the service so far to have to delay 120 programs that would enhance modernization and provide additional weapons and platforms, and it has prevented the service from starting 50 “critical” new programs. Allyn said modernization is critical for going up against near-peer adversaries.

The force, after 15 years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, is not designed to go up against such adversaries in large-scale land warfare, officials claim, and the Army is having to urgently refocus efforts to go up against emerging threats without the freedom of movement to which it's grown accustomed. Of the 14 armored brigade combat teams across the total force -- which will be vital when fighting near-peer adversaries in contested environments -- Allyn said there are five that still have Desert Storm-era tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles. Allyn said the Army has to move as quickly as it can to modernize the ABCTs with the most capable and up-to-date variants. "We must have the best we can on the battlefield." The vice chief added that without timely appropriations and predictable funding the Army will not be able to deliver mobility, lethality and protection across the current combat platforms in the BCTs, including current efforts such as Stryker lethality upgrades.

In the interim the window is closing rapidly for soldiers to extend their contracts by a year and score a \$10,000 bonus. The Army has been offering the incentive since January as part of a range of initiatives to bring its active component end strength up to 476,000 by 1 OCT. But, per a recent Military Personnel message, that bonus will drop down to \$5,000 on 24 MAR. "We need soldiers to re-enlist, but we do have a finite budget," Sgt. Maj. Mark Thompson, a senior career counselor, told Army Times on 22 MAR. "If they want to take advantage of it, they can." Soldiers willing to extend for two years or more can take home \$7,500, according to the MILPER message. The past two months have seen a healthy amount of extensions, Thompson said, prompting the Army to shift its focus to re-enlistments. To do that, the Army created a new selective retention bonus tier especially for soldiers with an ETS date through September of this year. [Source: DefenseNews | Jen Judson | March 22, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Army Bedtime Snack Bar ► New for Recruits

The Military Nutrition Division at the U.S. Army's Research Institute of Environmental Medicine has unveiled a new nutritional snack bar for recruits to consume before bedtime while at basic combat training. Military health experts have found that recruits often arrive to basic with poor vitamin D status, making their bones more vulnerable to fracture and injury, according to the Military Health System. This subsequently leads to delays in training and increased dropout rates.



Stress fractures can easily occur during basic due to strenuous tasks that the body is unaccustomed to. Wearing boots for long marches, running frequently and carrying heavy loads are just some of the activities that can increase the likelihood of stress fractures, according to James McClung, Ph.D., deputy chief of the Military Nutrition Division at the U.S. Army's Research Institute of Environmental Medicine in Natick, Massachusetts. "Up to 18 percent of recruits suffer from these stress fractures," said McClung. "Women beginning training with poor vitamin D status are particularly vulnerable," he added. Roughly 60 percent of those who suffer from stress fractures end up



dropping out of the military, while long term injuries can occur later in life for those that push through, according to McClung.

The new nutritional snack bar developed at the Natick facility boosts calcium and vitamin D levels, helping to prevent bone injuries. “Our test soldiers eat these bars each evening,” McClung said, “and we are seeing marked improvements in their nutritional status and their bone health.” Basic combat training recruits in the Army physically train on most mornings before eating any breakfast. Eating the nutritional bars the night before workouts can potentially allow for better performance during morning exercises, said McClung. The bar is also intended to help with general nutritional compliance among recruits. “Research showed compliance was better when calcium and vitamin D were provided in a fortified bar,” said Army Maj. Kayla Ramotar, dietitian with the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command. “Trainees don’t get a lot of treats during basic training, and since this bar is made of chocolate, we know compliance won’t be an issue. It’s a lot more enticing than having to swallow a bunch of pills.”

The Army will begin rolling out the new nutritional snack bar program this year, implementing the bars at all four basic training locations in 2018. It will also share outcomes with other branches of the armed forces, according to Ramotar. The Air Force currently provides commercially available nutrition bars to recruits after dinner during basic military training. Results in the Air Force’s extra nutrition efforts in the form of snack bars have shown better physical training performance, as well as better morale. “We recruited them in because we wanted them in; we need to maintain and keep them,” said Ramotar. “If that means giving them something to help them succeed, then why not?” [Source: ArmyTimes | Christopher Diamond | March 23, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Carl Gustaf Recoilless Rifle Update 01 ► Precision “Guided” Rounds**

Army and industry weapons developers are working with the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency to explore the feasibility of precision-guided rounds for a man-portable, anti-personnel and ant-armor weapon known as the Carl Gustaf, officials said. Current innovations involve a cutting-edge technology program, called Massive Overmatch Assault Round or MOAR, aimed exploring the prospect of precision guided rounds for the weapon.

While the shoulder-fired infantry and Special Operations weapon currently uses multiple rounds and advanced targeting technologies, using a precision “guided” round would enable the weapon to better destroy enemy targets on the move by having the technology to re-direct with advanced seeker technology. “We are exploring different kinds of seekers to pursue precision engagement capabilities,” Malcolm Arvidsson, Product Director, Carl-Gustaf M4, Saab, told Scout Warrior in an interview.



The weapon, called the Multi-Role Anti-Armor, Anti-Personnel Weapons System, known as the Carl-Gustaf, was initially used by Special Operations Forces. Several years ago, it was ordered by the Army in response to an Operational Needs Statement from Afghanistan. These innovations are still in early conceptual, research and testing phases. However, they are being pursued alongside a current Army effort to acquire an upgraded 84mm recoilless shoulder-fired Carl Gustaf weapon able to travel with dismounted infantry and destroy tanks, armored vehicles, groups of enemy fighters and even targets behind walls, Army and industry officials said. Acquisition efforts for the weapon began when the Army was seeking to procure a direct fire, man-portable, anti-personnel and light structure weapon able, among other things, to respond to insurgent rocket-propelled grenade, or RPG, fire, service officials said.

Designed to be lighter weight and more infantry-portable than a Javelin anti-tank missile, the Carl Gustaf is built to help maneuvering ground units attack a wide range of targets out to as far as 1,300 meters; its target set includes buildings, armored vehicles and enemy fighters in defilade hiding behind rocks or trees. Following the weapon's performance in Afghanistan with soldiers, Army weapons developers moved the weapon into a formal "program of record" and began to pursue an upgrade to the Carl Gustaf to include lighter weight materials such as titanium, Arvidsson said. The upgraded M4 Carl-Gustaf, introduced in 2014, shortens the length and lowers the weight of the weapon to 15 pounds from the 22-pound previous M3 variant, he said. The first M3 variant of the weapon was introduced in the early 1990s. "We use a steel that is half the weight and half the density. For the barrel, we have improved the lining pattern and added a more efficient carbon fiber wrapping," Arvidsson added.

The lighter weight weapon is, in many ways, ideal for counterinsurgency forces on the move on foot or in light vehicles in search of small groups of enemy fighters – one possible reason it was urgently requested for the mountainous Afghanistan where dismounted soldiers often traverse high-altitude, rigorous terrain. At the same time, the anti-armor function of the weapon would enable infantry brigade combat teams to attack enemy vehicles in a mechanized, force-on-force kind of engagement. The Carl-Gustaf is engineered with multipurpose rounds that can be used against armored vehicles and soft targets behind the walls. There are also pure anti-structure rounds to go through thick walls to defeat the targets behind a wall, Army and Saab developers explained.

The weapon fires High-Explosive air burst rounds, close combat rounds, and then the general support rounds, like the smoke and battlefield elimination, developers said. Airburst rounds use programmable fuse to explode in the air at a precise location, thereby maximizing the weapon's effect against enemy targets hiding, for example, behind a rock, tree or building. Air burst rounds can detonate in the air or in general proximity to a target. For instance, an airburst round could explode just above an enemy fighter seeking cover behind a rock or wall. "I want to penetrate the target. I want to kill a light armored vehicle. I want to kill a structure. I want to kill somebody behind the structure. With the gun, soldiers can decide how to affect the targets. Really, that's what the Carl-Gustaf brings to the battlefield is the ability to decide how they want to affect the battlefield -- not call in air support and mark targets," Wes Walters, Executive Vice President of Business Development, Land Domain, Saab North America, told Scout Warrior in an interview.

The Army is evaluating a wide range of new technologies for its newer M4 variant to include electro-optical sights with a thermal imager, magnification sights of durable-optical sights, Saab officials explained. Sensors and sights on the weapon can use advanced computer algorithms to account for a variety of environmental conditions known to impact the trajectory or flight of a round. These factors include the propellant temperature, atmospheric conditions, biometric pressure and terrain inclination, "There are a number of parameters that the sight can actually calculate to give you a much harder first round probability of hit," Walters said. Some weapons use a laser rangefinder which calculates the distance of an enemy object by computer algorithms combining the speed of light with the length of travel – to determine distance. [Source: Warrior | Kris Osborn | arch 23, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*



## Expert Action Badge ► Army Non-Infantry Soldier Award

Army Training and Doctrine Command is hoping to roll out a new badge for soldiers outside of the infantry and medic military occupational specialties, according to the command's top enlisted soldier. Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport said the Expert Action Badge will be very similar to the Expert Infantryman Badge and the Expert Field Medical Badge. If approved, soldiers could see the badge by October 2019. "This is for the remainder of MOSs that don't have a formal way of certifying competencies associated with their MOSs," Davenport said 24 MAR during a conference call with reporters. Similar to the other badges, soldiers will have to meet requirements for foot marches, the Army Physical Fitness Test, tactical skills and cognitive skills, but the difference will be the hands-on training, he said. For every soldier who's not an infantryman or medic, they will be tested on warrior tasks and battle drills in a training event similar to what soldiers must complete for the infantry and medic badges.

As for the badge itself, Davenport said the early-stage concept for the Expert Action Badge will still have the bayonet and fragmentation grenade found on a Combat Action Badge, but there won't be a wreath. The Combat Action Badge, right, is seen next to an early concept of the proposed Expert Action Badge.



To test soldiers for the badge, the plan is to have a week for setup, a few days to train, and then a few days to actually conduct the test, which can be administered at the brigade level. "It will be a tool for commanders at O-6 level to validate their soldiers' skill in warrior tests and battle drills," he said. Davenport said he will discuss the next badge further during a virtual town hall scheduled to be recorded on 30 MAR and available for viewing at <http://www.tradoc.army.mil/watch>. In April, the Army is scheduled to run a pilot at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington to test the feasibility of the Expert Action Badge. Any feedback or lessons learned will then be evaluated. The badge and testing, if they move forward, must receive final approval from the chief of staff of the Army and Army secretary.

Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey told Army Times that offering testing and a badge is a good way to incentivize soldiers to train and remain proficient. "I want to build individual skills," he said. "The reason why we have an EIB and EFMB is so those two fields can maintain their skills during peacetime." The test could include rifle marksmanship and land navigation. And the idea is to allow brigade commanders to choose to include specific tasks based on the unit's mission, Dailey said. "It's not exactly like the EIB, as that'll be focused for the infantry, but the EAB is focused on the basic soldier skills," he said. "It's all tied to readiness." [Source: ArmyTimes | Charly Panzino | March 24, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Locust ► Race To Field Gun Launched Swarmbots

Russian arms makers have announced efforts to shoot multiple small drones in rapid succession from small arms and cannons, hastening a day when Russian and U.S. drone swarms may meet each other over the skies of distant battlefield. On 23 MAR, Russian news site Tass revealed a reconnaissance drone that a soldier would shoot from "a

hand-held grenade launcher.” “The drone is prepared for launch within a period of 5 seconds to 3 minutes, depending on the time of preparing a flight program in cases when other similar drones require much more time for accomplishing the mission,” Tass reported. The unveil was part of a military robotics show that brought together more than 30 Russian defense companies and 500 participants. Other robots on display included an armed ground tank robot called the Vikhr, or “Whirlwind,” which has been recently updated with a 30 mm gun and optional rockets. The Whirlwind works with a small quadcopter and a couple of toaster-sized bots that perform resupply and maintenance. A crew can control it remotely from a kilometer away or it can run semi-autonomously according to Tass.



The conference announcement follows a February announcement that Russian arms manufacturers had worked up a way to launch drones from a much larger Smerch multiple launch rocket system. “The idea to create an unmanned air vehicle enclosed in a Smerch missile warhead is not new. We have carried out technological research and produced it at our own expense, we are not hiding it. We hope customers will start streaming in soon,” Nikolai Makarovets, chief designer of the Splyav research and manufacturing association, told Tass. Russian-backed forces in Ukraine have made liberal use of reconnaissance drones to target enemy positions, allowing artillery fire to arrive within minutes. The ability to deploy drone swarms would aid in that effort.

The Pentagon is pursuing similar technology through a program called Low-Cost UAV Swarming Technology, or LOCUST, announced in 2015. Its goal is to fire 30 synchronized, foldable drones out of a tube launcher — basically, a cannon. “How do you get a lot of birds up in the air quickly? That drives you to a canister launch configuration,” Mastroianni, who runs the LOCUST program at the Office of Naval Research, said a few years ago. “I’m platform-agnostic. If you’re looking at a swarm of 20 or 30, there’s no reason why you couldn’t swarm Predators,” he said. “But when you get into something like the Predator, they want them back. They’re not going to be one-way missions.” LOCUST passed an important developmental milestone in September, when program officials successfully launched a quick succession of 30 Raytheon Coyote demonstration drones, which organized themselves into formation and conducted some group maneuvers, the program officer said. That may be the last we hear about LOCUST for a while; the program has since been classified, an Office of Naval Research spokesman said. For a short video on LOCUST and its operation go to [https://youtu.be/nc\\_ijxZRDB0](https://youtu.be/nc_ijxZRDB0). [Source: Defense One | Patrick Tucker | March 27, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## China’s Offensive Capability Update 03 ► PLAMC to Grow to 100k

The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is set to increase the size of its Marine Corps from about 20,000 to 100,000, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post (SCMP) reported on 13 MAR. According to unnamed PLA insiders and experts interviewed by SCMP, elements of the expanded Marine Corps would be stationed abroad, including Djibouti in the Horn of Africa and Gwadar in southwest Pakistan. The PLA Marine Corps (PLAMC), part of the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), has gradually been expanding its size over the last couple of years as its mission is slowly expanding from conducting operations in China’s coastal areas — including defending

Chinese holdings in the East and South China Seas, next to preparing for a possible amphibious assault on Taiwan — to more global roles.



“The PLA marines will be increased to 100,000, consisting of six brigades in the coming future to fulfill new missions of our country,” a source told SCMP. The source also noted that two combat brigades were already transferred to the PLAMC, increasing the size from roughly 12,000 (two understrength brigades) to around 20,000. Each PLAMC brigade is divided up into one armored regiment and two marine battalions. The brigades are equipped with ZBD05 Tracked Amphibious Infantry Fighting Vehicles and ZLT05 Tracked Amphibious Assault Guns. The ZBD05 is reportedly one of the fastest amphibious assault vehicles, capable of top speeds of 45 km/h in the water. According to IHS Jane’s, China’s Ministry of Defense may also be considering equipping its PLAMC brigades with the Norinco ZTL-11 8×8 amphibious assault vehicle.

As reported in January 2015, China purportedly is expanding its amphibious mechanized infantry divisions (AMID) from two to four or from about 30,000 to 60,000 men. Each division is equipped with up to 300 armored and amphibious transport vehicles, including ZBD05s and ZLT05s, but also heavier main battle tanks and associated equipment. Interestingly, the PLAMC and the AMIDs still lack a joint command system. While China may be building up the size of the PLAMC and AMID, the PLA’s major weak spot remains amphibious transport capacity. According to an estimate by the RAND Corporation, the PLA may be able to field 89 amphibious landing ships in 2017, including five Type 071 Yuzhao-class amphibious warfare ships and up to two bigger Type 081 Xisha-class amphibious assault ship.

Whereas Type 071 ships can carry up to 600 troops and 15-20 armored vehicles, the larger Type 081s allegedly are capable of accommodating up to 900-1,100 marines and 30-40 armored vehicles (along with eight helicopters). RAND estimates that the PLAN’s one-way total transport capacity will be 2.7 divisions or around 40,000 men by the end of 2017. However, this estimate is based on a Taiwan invasion scenario and does not apply to the PLAN’s capacity to deploy larger PLAMC units globally. Nevertheless, China at this stage certainly has the capacity to conduct successful amphibious assault operations against medium-sized islands in the South China Sea or beyond. [Source: The Diplomat | Franz-Stefan Gady | March 24, 2017++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Battlefield Acupuncture ► Close to 60% of USAF Bases Trained**

About 50 flight surgeons from 21 countries wrapped up a day of training at an international medical conference in Germany this week with matching gold-plated studs set in their ears. Their ears sparkled in the name of medicine:

This was a hands-on workshop on battlefield acupuncture, an alternative therapy that's vying to become a standard practice of care at Defense Department and Veteran Affairs medical centers for acute and chronic pain. Battlefield acupuncture, a form of auricular or ear acupuncture so named because the tiny needles can be administered quickly in combat without removing so much as a helmet, has been around for more than 15 years. But use of the technique, once practiced by fewer than a 100 military doctors across the services, is rapidly expanding through a vigorous training program supported by DOD and the VA.

In 2013, the agencies received \$5.4 million for a three-year project to develop and implement an education and training program in battlefield acupuncture to address concerns about overmedication of servicemembers. Funding came from the Joint Incentive Fund, a pot of money designated for DOD/VA medical-sharing initiatives to improve quality and cost savings at their facilities. Training under the pilot program was expanded to physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, medics, corpsmen, and physical and occupational therapists. About 2,800 providers have been trained as part of the initiative, said Thomas Piazza, the director of the Air Force Acupuncture Program at Joint Base Andrews, Md.

In the Air Force, where the therapy was pioneered by physician and retired Air Force Col. Richard Niemtzow in 2001, close to 60 percent of its bases "are trained up" in battlefield acupuncture, Piazza said. "We're looking to get battlefield acupuncture as part of standard of care versus a separate thing where we say 'you can have an alternative medicine.'" He added: "Sometimes people just want a Motrin and that's fine, great, we've got that, too. But some people just don't want to take medicines; they just want something else for a change." Piazza was at Ramstein last week to teach battlefield acupuncture to U.S. and NATO flight surgeons attending an annual international medical conference. One of the appeals of battlefield acupuncture is simplicity. The training is boiled down into a few hours of academic and clinical instruction. In one afternoon, the flight surgeons at Piazza's workshop could find the five points on each ear — with names like cingulate gyrus and shen men — corresponding to where the needles go, in a particular order. The training is standardized to ensure it's done right, Piazza said. "Most of the people we're teaching to aren't acupuncturists," he said. "We say follow this recipe, follow these steps."

NATO personnel were unsure whether they'd be able use battlefield acupuncture on their patients. "The problem in Germany, if you want to do acupuncture, you have to do more than one of these courses. You have to get a license," said Lt. Col. Katrin Thinner, an anesthesiologist and intensive care unit specialist with the German air force. But she's interested in the concept and practicality. "In case of emergency and being deployed, it's a good way to have another tool," she said. Thinner and others in the workshop practiced poking needles in their partner's ears at specific points and getting pricked in turn. Lt. Col. Stefanie Watkins-Nance, a resident in the Air Force's aerospace medicine program at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, grimaced when the first stud popped into her ear. "It just feels like a pinch. When it discharges, you're not used to that pressure," she said as she steadied for the next pop.

The needles resemble tiny gold barbs about the size of a ballpoint pen tip. A long plastic inserter with a plunger releases the needle. They fall out after three to five days. Someone in the class suggested practicing at home with an uncooked broccoli stalk "to give you the same sensation as putting a needle in the ear." Though side effects and risk of infection are minimal, Piazza told the flight surgeons that one of the hurdles they might face is convincing patients to try a treatment involving needles. "Who likes needles? Most of your patients don't like needles. "You're going to learn this is much less painful than getting your ears pierced," he said. "It's a little uncomfortable but it's not like being shot," said Col. Anthony Mitchell, an aerospace medicine resident at Wright-Patterson who was using the training as a refresher.

While deployed to Afghanistan in 2013, Mitchell used battlefield acupuncture on wounded patients during air evacuation. "This was just an adjunct, to see if they didn't need as much medicine" during transport, he said. "It seemed like a reasonable thing to do. You can get to the ear, you're not taking any body armor or equipment off and it might help." Acupuncture in general, including battlefield acupuncture, has been assailed by some in Western medical circles as quackery with no real benefits. Tricare, DOD's own health care system, doesn't cover the

procedure for its beneficiaries on the economy. Harriet Hall, a retired family physician and U.S. Air Force flight surgeon, was quoted last year in a Scientific American article debunking the practice as saying, “We have no evidence that [acupuncture] is anything more than theatrical placebo.”

Piazza said the therapy is backed by more than half a dozen randomized control trials and a number of case reports. In one study, conducted by Air Force doctors at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., and published in 2015, battlefield acupuncture was compared to standard pain treatment in 54 DOD patients with an acute sore throat. Acupuncture was associated with reduced sore throat pain for 24 hours and decreased use of pain medication for up to 48 hours. There was no apparent effect on hours missed from work. Piazza said a group of doctors reported a 64 percent decrease in the rate of medical groundings for deployed pilots who received battlefield acupuncture instead of pain killers for lower back pain. “We’re not looking to replace medicine,” Piazza said, but the procedure has been shown to reduce the use of narcotics. The effects initially last only a few days, but subsequent treatments can last longer, he said.

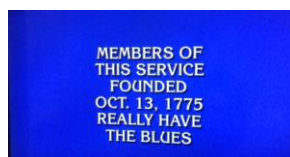
Air Force Lt. Col. Patricia Macsparran, the aerospace medicine consultant to the Air Force Surgeon General, incorporates acupuncture into her practice daily. She’s a licensed acupuncturist with more than 300 hours of training. She explains the science behind it with a reference to Dr. Seuss. When the body perceives pain, it sends a lot of fluid with anti-inflammatory products to fix it, she said. Under a microscope, those products “look a lot like Dr. Seuss monsters,” she said, and the body has a hard time clearing them out. “Acupuncture is sort of like a traffic cop,” she said. “If you know where to place those needles to push ionic flow to get things moving, you basically release that traffic jam so the body can heal itself.” Battlefield acupuncture “is just scratching the surface,” she said. “Every organ in the body, including the brain, is represented on the ear. It’s a microsystem.”

Results at the workshop were mixed. Maj. Thomas Weme, a doctor in the Royal Norwegian Air Force, didn’t notice his back pain ease after getting the procedure. “I just feel warmth on the ears,” he said. But Sylvain Hourlier, a physician from France who was one of the workshop volunteers to receive battlefield acupuncture, said his chronic back pain, lingering from a motorcycle accident 20 years ago, had “vanished.” “I feel the pressure where I have the pain, but the pain is gone,” he said. “It’s crazy.” Mitchell said a small crick in his neck was feeling better. “I may be giddy,” he said, after all five needles were in, in each ear. “You feel a surge. It’s interesting. It’s very interesting.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Jennifer H. Svan | March 24, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Navy Birthday ► October 13, 1775**

The Navy has long viewed itself as the brains behind the sea services, but karma struck on Monday when a naval officer missed a question on “Jeopardy!” that not even the most inebriated seaman should get wrong. The clue was, “Members of this service founded Oct. 13, 1775 really have the blues.” Lt. Cmdr. Eli Rosenberger, assigned to Electronic Attack Squadron 137 at Whidbey Island in Washington, was quick on the buzzer. As he proudly wore his dress blues, he answered, “What is the Marine Corps?” Within seconds, the enormity of the moment struck. Rosenberger’s head dropped. Another contestant incorrectly guessed, “What is the Coast Guard?” And finally, the third contestant correctly answered, “What’s the Navy?” Pouring sea salt into the open wound, host Alex Trebek said, “Eli is not happy right now.” Rosenberger maintained his composure as he shook his head and replied, “No, I’m not.” Meanwhile, in the briny depths of the afterlife, Chesty Puller turned to John Paul Jones and said, “Pay up!” [Source: Defense News | Tony Lombardo | March 13, 2017 ++]







## **K-9 Corps** ► **War Dog Program**

Dogs have been associated with the United States Army since its inception, but their role has been primarily that of a mascot or in some other unofficial capacity. Not until World War II did the Army make the connection official. In January 1942, members of the American Kennel Club and other dog lovers formed a civilian organization called Dogs for Defense. They intended to train dogs to perform sentry duty for the army along the coast of the United States. Aware of this effort, Lieutenant Colonel Clifford C. Smith, chief of the Plant Protection Branch, Inspection Division, Quartermaster Corps, met with his commander, Major General Edmund B. Gregory, and suggested that the Army use the sentry dogs at supply depots. Gregory gave his approval to an experimental program, and on March 13, 1942, Under Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson approved Gregory's application and created the K-9 Corps.

On 13 MAR 1942, the Quartermaster Corps (QMC) of the United States Army began training dogs for the newly established War Dog Program, or "K-9 Corps." Well over a million dogs served on both sides during World War I, carrying messages along the complex network of trenches and providing some measure of psychological comfort to the soldiers. The most famous dog to emerge from the war was Rin Tin Tin, an abandoned puppy of German war dogs found in France in 1918 and taken to the United States, where he made his film debut in the 1922 silent film *The Man from Hell's River*. As the first bona fide animal movie star, Rin Tin Tin made the little-known German Shepherd breed famous across the country.

In the United States, the practice of training dogs for military purposes was largely abandoned after World War I. When the country entered World War II in December 1941, the American Kennel Association and a group called Dogs for Defense began a movement to mobilize dog owners to donate healthy and capable animals to the Quartermaster Corps of the U.S. Army. Training began in March 1942, and that fall the QMC was given the task of training dogs for the U.S. Navy, Marines and Coast Guard as well.





The K-9 Corps initially accepted over 30 breeds of dogs, but the list was soon narrowed to seven: German Shepherds, Belgian sheep dogs, Doberman Pinschers, collies, Siberian Huskies, Malamutes and Eskimo dogs. Approximately 18,000 dogs reached training centers after examinations by Dogs for Defense. Almost 8,000 of those animals failed exams given at the centers. Reasons for dismissal included excitability when exposed to noise or gunfire, disease, poor sense of smell, and unsuitable temperament. Members of the K-9 Corps were trained for a total of 8 to 12 weeks. After basic obedience training, they were sent through one of four specialized programs to prepare them for work as sentry dogs, scout or patrol dogs, messenger dogs or mine-detection dogs. In active combat duty, scout dogs proved especially essential by alerting patrols to the approach of the enemy and preventing surprise attacks.

The Quartermaster Corps trained dog handlers as well as the dogs themselves. Technical Manual 10-396 (1 July 1943) outlined the doctrine to be followed in the training. Normal training time for a dog was eight to twelve weeks. First the animals went through what might be called "basic training" to become accustomed to life in the military. Then the dogs received assignment to a specialized training program--sentry dogs, scout or patrol dogs, messenger dogs, or mine dogs. The Quartermaster Corps established war dog platoons in March 1944 to assist American military forces conducting offensive operations in Europe and the Pacific. Of the fifteen such platoons organized, seven served in Europe and eight in the Pacific. It has been said that, in the latter theater, the Japanese never ambushed or made a surprise attack on a patrol led by one of the war dogs. The Quartermaster Corps also experimented with training dogs to locate casualties on the battlefield. Dogs were first tested for this at Carlisle Barracks on May 4, 1944. Ultimately, the Army abandoned this program because the dogs did not or could not make a distinction between men not wounded, men who had received wounds, or men who had died.

The top canine hero of World War II was Chips, a German Shepherd who served with the Army's 3rd Infantry Division. Trained as a sentry dog, Chips broke away from his handlers and attacked an enemy machine gun nest in Italy, forcing the entire crew to surrender. The wounded Chips was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star and the Purple Heart—all of which were later revoked due to an Army policy preventing official commendation of animals. After World War II, the Military Police Corps took over responsibility for training military dogs. They have continued to serve with distinction in other conflicts. It is estimated that the Army employed 1,500 dogs during the Korean War and 4,000 in the Vietnam War. Currently, the Army has 578 dog teams which have seen service in Iraq and Afghanistan. The courage and loyalty of these dogs have continued to save lives and prevent injuries since creation of the K-9 Corps. [Source: U. S. Army Military History Institute | Arthur W. Bergeron, Jr., February 14, 2008 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Roman Legion** ► **Ten Little-Known Facts**

The Roman Legion was one of the most feared armies of the ancient world. Through the might of the Roman Legion, the Roman empire's influence spread from Scotland to Northern Iraq and to the borders of Ethiopia. For centuries they were considered to be almost invincible on the battlefield, defeating fierce enemies such as the Celts and the Persians. If the Roman Legion was ever defeated they would quickly retaliate and their revenge would be brutal.

One of the reasons why the Roman Legion was so feared was that it was always changing. The Legion was never stuck in past traditions. If they were defeated by an enemy they would quickly reorganize and learn from the defeat in order to come back tenfold. The strategies of the Roman Legion changed to match changing technology and the needs to each battle. They were successful in a wide range of battlefields no matter the terrain or climate. Even today many military commanders and historians look to the Roman Legion as one of the most superior fighting forces in history with much that can still be learned from them. Some of the greatest military minds have given

credit to studying the tactics of the Roman Legion as part of their successes. Here are ten little-known facts about the Roman Legions.



### The Roman Legion was Not Just for Romans

In the beginning, the Roman legion was something that only Roman citizens who owned property were able to join. There were two groups, the wealthy who joined the Cavalry and the poor who served in the infantry. It was a conscription force that served short terms. That changed in 218 B.C. with the 2nd Punic War. Since the Romans now had an overseas empire to defend, the restrictions on the legion were relaxed. Conscripts continued to serve 6 year-terms but they were supported by volunteers. The amount of property that was required was reduced so that more conscripts could be pulled from the populace. In 107 BC the property requirement was eliminated completely. Volunteers did not have to own property and were often members of the poorest social class. They did not have land at home to care for and they saw the modest pay and prospect of war booty worth signing up for a 16-year volunteer term. At this time the Roman Legion was often accompanied by non-Roman mercenaries.

During the period of the Imperial Roman Army (30 B.C. – 284 AD) conscription was done away with almost completely and replaced with a force that was entirely volunteers. Now the volunteers served a mandatory 20 years but many would stay in the army for 30 to 40 years. The number of volunteers meant that conscription was only needed in times of emergency. During this period the legion was flanked by an auxilia, troops that were drawn from imperial subjects who did not have Roman citizenship. They volunteered for a 25 year term. This continued until 212 when all imperial subjects were granted citizenship. By 284 AD things changed yet again and regular conscription was once again enforced to populate the legion. Barbarian volunteers were accepted once again and now soldiers became 25 year professionals which kept the army well supplied. Now there were not even separate units for citizens and non-citizens all the units were intermixed.

### Training for the Legion was Very Demanding

Even though the Legion was a conscript and volunteer force they demanded the same level of performance from everyone in the Legion and would continue to train recruits until they met those standards. Training was considered to be so important that instructors were given double rations and large training halls were built so that the men could continue training even through the winter. The first thing a recruit was taught was how to march at pace in any weather. The historian Vegetius remarked that the most important thing for the Roman army was that it could march

at speed. An army with stragglers or in a spread out formation would be more vulnerable to attack. Beyond marching, soldiers were required to be fit, they not only had to march 20 miles in 5 hours, they had to run, long and high jump and even swim. Most of it had to be done while carrying heavy packs.

Once the army learned how to march they would then be taught to fight. They trained with training weapons which were created to be twice as heavy as the weapons the soldiers would use in battle. If a soldier could effectively fight with the heavy weapons then it was reasoned they would be twice as good with the regular weapons. Weapons training was so important that soldiers who did not meet the standards were given inferior rations until they could meet the standards. Once a soldier mastered the sword they would then be trained on the spear. Like the sword training the training spear was twice the weight of a normal spear.

### **They Used Tunneling to Surprise Their Enemies**

During the time of the Roman Legion siege warfare happened often and there were few armies better at it than the Romans. One of their most successful strategies, for a time, was tunneling. Instead of just waiting out the siege and hoping the city or building eventually surrendered, they would just tunnel underground. By tunneling they could easily get under the defensive walls that were keeping them out. For awhile this was a very effective tactic and led to a number of successes for the Romans. But eventually Rome's enemies learned of this strategy and began defending against it.

One such defense by the people of the city of Themiscyra in the early first century BC was to find the tunnel and drive wild animals into it. They filled the tunnel with bears and bees which made quick work of the Romans who were stuck together in cramped quarters. Rome's enemies even began using tunnels themselves and in the 3rd century AD it was the Romans who had to defend against tunneling Sassanian Persians. The Romans built their own tunnels to get to the attackers and stop them. Evidence has been found of this massive underground battle and the amount of fighting done in the tunnels is astonishing. But the underground aspect of the battle is not the most intriguing part. This battle was the first known use of chemical warfare. The Persians burned bitumen and sulfur crystals in order to create a gas cloud which suffocated the Romans

### **Men Joined the Roman Legion for Booty**

Part of the reason why the poor were so eager to sign up for the legion was the chance of collecting booty. The Romans were known for being particularly brutal when they invaded a city. They would start by killing every living thing they came across, killing all the people and animals of the town. Some suggest that this might have been a form of intimidation for anyone that saw the village afterward would see nothing but corpses and dismembered animals. Once the order was given to stop the massacre, the looting would begin.

Half the force would be allowed to loot the town freely while the other half stood guard or carried out other duties. The men would be allowed to loot the corpses, the buildings and even the art, anything of value was free to take. Once all the booty was collected it would be gathered together and then divided between the different legions that had been on the attack. Then the loot divided among the legions is divided among the individuals within each legion. It was divided among everyone, even those who were not part of the orders to loot the city. This meant that everyone had a chance to get some of the spoils of war. This effective method of insuring that everyone got their share was how the Roman legion kept down dissension in the ranks. When every man knew that they would get their share they would not have a reason to disobey orders or feel like they were not treated as important as other men in the legion.

### **The Donativum**

The Roman Legion and particularly the Generals of the Roman Legion became very popular in Rome and they were in close consort with the Emperor. The Praetorian Guard, the bodyguards of the Emperor were also rising in power during the 2nd and 3rd centuries. They even became part of the process for appointing new emperors. Therefore it became imperative for any Emperor to get on the good side of the Generals and the Praetorian Guard. To do this it was decided that a sum of money or lavish gifts would be given to these prominent men whenever a new emperor came into power. It would be a bribe of sorts to ensure the loyalty of the army.

However it also placed substantial incentive for the Praetorian Guard and the Roman Legion to see to it that a new Emperor was put in place. The existence of the donativum led to the Praetorian Guard becoming corrupt. As the personal guards of the emperor they were in an easy position to murder him if they decided they wanted another donativum. The Praetorian Guard and some of the generals of the Roman Legion became very corrupt and even plotted the murders of several emperors in order to get the donativum. The Guard even helped to decide who would replace a slain emperor by picking the candidate that offered the largest donativum. After the death of Caligula in 41 the Guard supported Claudius and the Senate eventually learned that the Guard had installed Claudius on the throne. His promised donativum was one of the largest in recorded history. By the late history of the Western Roman empire the succession of the emperor had become very chaotic and the Emperor would often be more in fear of his guard than feel protected by them.

### **The Roman Legion Had a Large Entourage**

When it comes to the Roman Legion they were not on their own on the battlefield. Even once the requirements had been loosened and all members of the legion (citizen and non-citizen) were merged together in the same units, there were still auxiliary troops that accompanied the Romans to ensure that the army did not want for anything. In the beginning when conscription and volunteer requirements were strict, the auxiliary troops would be pulled from tribes and put into troops that would fight beside the legion. Men pulled from mounted tribes would become part of an auxiliary that would fight beside the Cavalry. Other tribe members would be put into auxiliaries that would fight beside the infantry. Eventually both these groups were merged into singular legions but there were still others that traveled with the Legion to ensure that the army could continue on in battle.

There were surveyors that would travel ahead of the main army in order to find a main site for the army to find the best place to camp that night. The surveyors were part of a group of men that traveled with the Roman Legion that were known as immunes. These men included those who were excused from fighting because they were pivotal to the war effort in other ways. The immunes included medics, carpenters, veterinarians, armorers, priests and soothsayers and even hunters. These men were necessary for keeping the army fed, well supplied, in good health and they helped build the weapons that were needed in siege warfare, like catapults.

### **The Aquila Was Believed Necessary to the Success of a Legion**

From 104 BC onward, each legion used an aquila (eagle) as the symbol of the unit. A gold eagle would be the standard of each unit and would be carried by an officer known as the Aquilifer. The symbol was the embodiment of the honor of the legion. If the aquila was lost in battle it was devastating to the legion that lost it. It was so devastating to the legion that quite often the legion would be disbanded afterward and would never fight together again. This was based on the belief that if the legion lost its eagle then it would never recover its old fighting spirit. The eagle was used to motivate the men.

Caesar describes an incident during the first invasion of Britain in 55 BC. The soldiers became very afraid when they came in sight of Britain. This was largely because it was an unknown territory and they did not know what to expect. Caesar saw the problem and he had a great idea. He ordered the aquilifer with the eagle onto the beach. His comrades, fearing disgrace, 'with one accord, leapt down from the ship' and the invasion force was soon assembled on the beach, ready to take on the Britons. The Romans would also go to great lengths to recover aquila that were lost in battle. In the Battle of Teutoburg, three legions were completely defeated and their aquila taken. Emperor Augustus waged war in retaliation against the Germanic tribes and to recover lost territory. Numerous raids of tribes, even against the coming of winter, ended with the recovery of two of the missing aquila. The battle continued for the territory and the remaining aquila but it was never recovered and the Romans never recovered their Germanic territories.

### **The Roman Strategy**

What made the Roman Legion one of the most feared forces in the world was their ability to employ different types of fighting in a single battle and maintain a tight formation when necessary. During the height of the Roman Legion each Legion contained 4,800 men. These men were then divided into 10 cohorts of 480 men each. Each cohort

contained 6 Centuries of 80 men each and each Century was commanded by a Centurion. This highly structured military was far more advanced than the loose configuration of troops used by many of Rome's enemies.

The Roman Legion would begin their attack with long range catapults. This would bombard the enemy with boulders and iron bolts. The Legion would throw their spears or Pilum. These were specially designed to bend on impact so that the enemy would not be able to throw them back at the Romans. Then the worst part of the Roman attack would begin. They would march in formation with their swords drawn and their large shields covering from the bottom of their chin to their knees or lower. The moving wall was unstoppable to disorganized tribes and the Roman Legion became known for their destruction and their ability to completely eliminate their enemies.

The Romans even had defensive positions that were nearly impossible to overcome. If they were under projectile fire the Roman Legion would assume the Tortoise Formation. The front line of soldiers would lock their shields outward and connect with the soldiers on the sides. The soldiers in the middle would raise their shields over their heads in order to limit any death or injuries from the flying volleys. They could also employ a wedge formation by forming a triangle which would then allow them to divide up large armies.

### **Decimation as Discipline**

The discipline of the Roman Legionaries was legendary. Men who infringed even the most minor rule could face severe punishments. The ordinary soldier was often beaten for not doing their duty. Punishments and beatings were severe enough that men would obey orders even in fear of battle or harsh conditions. However, the severe form of discipline often resulted in mutinies and they were a common occurrence especially after the 3rd-century crisis. The most extreme form of punishment was the decimation and this was a collective punishment. It was often used by senior commanders to punish troops that had attempted or threatened mutiny.

The word decimation is derived from Latin for tenth and it can be loosely translated as 'taking a tenth'. If a unit was found guilty of mutiny then they were sentenced to decimation. The legion was lined up without arms and their standards. Some reports say that they also had to remove their armor. Then one out of every ten men would be stoned to death. Some reports say that commanders would choose the men and others say their colleagues would choose. Some say the men were chosen individually and others state it was by lot. Whatever the method it made soldiers think twice about mutiny and was so brutal that even those who administered it saw its faults. They knew that often innocent men were punished by decimation but the fear that was generated by the punishment was considered worth this necessary evil. The punishment was very rare. The remaining soldiers were often punished by giving a poor diet and by being obliged to reside outside of the camp for a given period.

### ***Rituals For War***

When it came to declaring war there were a number of rituals that were traditionally performed. A specialized body of priests known as fetials had a number of different rituals that they needed to perform in order for war to be declared by the Senate. The final part of the ritual was to throw a spear into enemy territory. This worked well enough for a time but eventually the territory of Rome grew to be far too big for this to be practical. Rome often did not even share borders with their enemy or the enemy was much too far away from the fetials for them to throw the spear.

Most were ready to do away with this part of the tradition but the fetials were too superstitious to let it go. They found a rather ingenious way to keep up the tradition without actually having to travel long distances or through enemy territory. They found a spot of land near the temple of Bellona (the goddess of war) and declared that spot of land to be non-Roman. When the Romans decided they wanted to go to war against King Pyrrhus of Epirus in 280 BC they needed to throw a spear into his territory. So the Roman Legion captured one of King Pyrrhus' soldiers and forced him to buy the piece of land near the Bellona temple. Then the fetials were able to throw the spear onto this land that now belonged to the enemy they wished to fight.

[Source: <http://historycollection.co/ten-things-not-know-roman-legions> | Stephanie Schoppert | January 15, 2017  
++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Battle for Schloss Itter ► One of the Last WWII Offenses**

The Battle for Schloss Itter was one of the very last offensives of World War II. It was May 5, 1945. Hitler had already committed suicide. There was no longer any hope for the Germans and it was clear that the war for Europe was over. But for Captain John C. “Jack” Lee Jr. and his tank battalion, there was one last mission. It was dangerous and the stakes were high, but 14 high-profile French prisoners were still being held at the medieval castle known as Schloss Itter. When Lee received news of the prisoners he did not hesitate to act. The battle for Schloss Itter would become one of the most unbelievable and remarkable battles of World War II. Following are six amazing facts about the Battle:

### **The Germans Fought Side By Side with the Americans**

The Battle for Schloss Itter was the only time during the war that Americans and Germans fought side by side. The prisoners at the castle sent out messages for help, one reached the Austrian resistance and in turn Major Josef Gangl. Gangl was a highly-decorated member of the Wehrmacht, but when the order came to retreat from Austria, Gangl and some of his men stayed behind. They no longer supported the Nazi cause and they stayed behind to join the Austrian resistance and protect the people of Worgl, Austria. The town’s residents were often under attack by roving SS members, and so Gangl and the 20 men that remained loyal to him stayed to protect the town.

When he got word of the prisoners and their predicament, he knew that his small group of 20 men would not be enough to free and protect the prisoners. He decided that he would do whatever it took to get help and free the prisoners. He had hoped to wait in town until American forces reached them and to surrender, but the predicament of the prisoners meant he could not wait. Raising a white flag, he made his way toward the closest American forces he could find. Gangl found Lee, who was leading a reconnaissance unit of 4 Sherman Tanks that were part of the 12th Armored Division. Captain Lee was waiting to be relieved by the 36th infantry division when he was approached by Gangl. Upon learning of the prisoners, Lee immediately volunteered and got approval from headquarters to help with the rescue. The two commanders then set out with 14 soldiers, one tank, a truck and driver, and 10 German artillery men. It was a small force to liberate a medieval castle prison, but the two men were willing to try.

### **The Prison Was Unguarded When the Allies Arrived**

With the end of the war on the horizon, the guards at Schloss Itter saw little reason to remain at their post and wait for the Allies to show up. Sebastian Wimmer was the head guard of the prison, and he knew that it was highly dependent on who reached the prison first whether or not he would live. He abandoned his post and most of the other German guards in the castle followed suit. The prisoners were then able to take over the castle and arm themselves, but they had nowhere to go. They were outnumbered by the SS that were wandering the forest and they did not know which way was safe for them to travel.

With the guards gone it seemed like a rescue would be an easy enough operation but even with the German forces completely disorganized, they had a substantial force mobilized around the castle. Getting to the castle was no easy feat, and escaping from the castle would be even less so. The prisoners had very little in terms of weapons that would offer up much defense against an SS battalion. The SS soldiers were also setting up road blocks to prevent the Allies from getting to the castle and to prevent the prisoners from escaping. It would be found out that later that an SS troop had been dispatched to the castle with the purpose of executing all the prisoners that were held there. Time was of the essence for the Allies to come to the rescue. When Lee and Gangl finally arrived with their small group of men, the prisoners were relieved and yet saddened by the size of the force. Instead of hiding in the castle as was commanded by Lee and Gangl (they were not soldiers after all but women and dignitaries), the prisoners refused and instead fought side by side with their rescuers.



### **Three Women Were Prisoners Because They Refused to Leave Their Men**

There were three women that were held prisoner at Schloss Itter. Christiane Mabire was the mistress of Paul Reynaud and was allowed to be imprisoned with him because she was his office assistant. They allowed her to bring a typewriter which she used to help Reynaud write his memoirs while imprisoned. She also helped him set up his quarters like a true library in order to make his time at the prison more enjoyable. Augusta Bruchlen was the secretary and partner of Leon Jouhaux. Jouhaux was a labor leader and he had been imprisoned in different places from 1940 onward. But in May of 1943 he was transferred to Schloss Itter. Once there he requested permission for Augusta Bruchlen to join him. The permission was granted and she came to the prison to be by his side.

Bruchlen spoke fluent German and therefore worked as an intermediary between the commander of Itter and his wife. She also kept a diary that detailed her life at the castle and it coincides with the stories of many other prisoners held there. Madame Weygand made a similar sacrifice in order to be with her husband, General Maxime Weygand. Undoubtedly Madame Weygand made the choice to stand by her husband because he was already quite old and surviving a prison camp was unlikely for a man over 70. But the older couple proved to be stronger together than they could ever be apart, and they both survived their time at Schloss Itter. Madame Weygand died in 1961 at the age of 85, and her husband followed her in 1965 at the age of 98.

### **The Prisoners Refused to Hide and Fought Alongside Their Rescuers**

The political prisoners at Schloss Itter included Reynaud and Weygand, who were staunch enemies. Reynaud considered Weygand a traitor for being willing to work with the Germans and the Vichy government in France. The feud between rival political factions held at the prison was enough to cause plenty of tension and assigned seating at mealtimes. But no rivalry would stop the men from hoisting their guns and being willing to fight when it came time to save themselves, their rescuers and the women they loved. When the Nazi troops advanced on the castle, both Lee and Gangl told the prisoners to take cover and hide from enemy fire. The men refused to do so and took up the weapons that had been left by the fleeing guards and fought alongside the German and American troops to stop the advance on the castle. There were outnumbered and their ammunition was limited. Some of the prisoners were in their 70s and some had no experience on the battlefield, but they all joined the fight. They fought throughout the long night as the reconnaissance troops that had been sent to judge their strength kept trying to advance on the castle.

The following morning, May 5, 1945, the Waffen-SS countered with a force of 100 to 150 men. It more than triple the size of the force defending the prison, and the Waffen-SS was much better supplied. The only saving grace was the fact that Lee had managed to bring one tank with him to the castle and he had it positioned at the front gate. The tank was able to provide some cover until it was destroyed by the Germans. Gangl was able to get a call into the Austrian resistance for help, but they were only able to spare three men. It was not enough. Desperate for help, Lee contacted the 142nd, but he was unable to give exact information before the connection was severed. One of the prisoners, Jean Borata, volunteered to jump the wall and run the gauntlet through the SS troops to deliver the necessary information to the 142nd. He was successful and when he reached the 142nd, he asked for a uniform and went with the troops as part of the relief force to liberate Schloss Itter once and for all.

### **The Prisoners Refused to Hide and Fought Alongside Their Rescuers**

The political prisoners at Schloss Itter included Reynaud and Weygand, who were staunch enemies. Reynaud considered Weygand a traitor for being willing to work with the Germans and the Vichy government in France. The feud between rival political factions held at the prison was enough to cause plenty of tension and assigned seating at mealtimes. But no rivalry would stop the men from hoisting their guns and being willing to fight when it came time to save themselves, their rescuers and the women they loved. When the Nazi troops advanced on the castle, both Lee and Gangl told the prisoners to take cover and hide from enemy fire. The men refused to do so and took up the weapons that had been left by the fleeing guards and fought alongside the German and American troops to stop the advance on the castle. There were outnumbered and their ammunition was limited. Some of the prisoners were in their 70s and some had no experience on the battlefield, but they all joined the fight. They fought throughout the

long night as the reconnaissance troops that had been sent to judge their strength kept trying to advance on the castle.

The following morning, May 5, 1945, the Waffen-SS countered with a force of 100 to 150 men. It more than triple the size of the force defending the prison, and the Waffen-SS was much better supplied. The only saving grace was the fact that Lee had managed to bring one tank with him to the castle and he had it positioned at the front gate. The tank was able to provide some cover until it was destroyed by the Germans. Gangl was able to get a call into the Austrian resistance for help, but they were only able to spare three men. It was not enough. Desperate for help, Lee contacted the 142nd, but he was unable to give exact information before the connection was severed. One of the prisoners, Jean Borata, volunteered to jump the wall and run the gauntlet through the SS troops to deliver the necessary information to the 142nd. He was successful and when he reached the 142nd, he asked for a uniform and went with the troops as part of the relief force to liberate Schloss Itter once and for all.

### **Josef Gangl Was Honored As An Austrian Hero**

Josef Gangl may have started the war on the wrong side, but he was a hero to the Allies for his efforts against the Nazis during the war. It was his bravery and dedication that protected the people of Worgl, and there is now a street in the town that is named after him. At the time, the SS were going into homes and executing the men inside if they proved to be loyal to Austria or the resistance. It was this outright violence and brutality that caused Gangl to stay in the town with whatever men were willing in order to save the lives of as many Austrians as he could. Josef Gangl was a good man who was first and foremost a leader to his men. His initial reluctance to go to Schloss Itter alone was because he had promised the men under his command that they would return home. The bravery of Josef Gangl was unmatched as he stayed at Schloss Itter despite an oncoming force of more than 100 fellow Germans.

He risked his life to save Allied French prisoners, his own men, and the American soldiers who answered his plea for help. Unfortunately, Gangl's courage and honor would not be rewarded. He became one of the very last casualties of the war against the Nazis. It was during the castle defense that Gangl was making sure that former French prime minister Paul Reynaud was out of the line of fire. It was during the process of getting Reynaud to safety that he was struck by a sniper's bullet. The bullet injured him in such a way that he was not able to recover, and he was the only one of the defenders of the castle to lose his life. His sacrifice was not in vain as he did fulfill his promise to his men, they all returned home and he saved the life of Paul Reynaud.

### **The Castle Held Some of the Most Valuable Political Prisoners of the War**

Schloss Itter was seized by SS Lieutenant General Oswald Pohl on February 7, 1943 under the orders of none other than Heinrich Himmler. On April 25, 1943, it was officially transformed into a prison to hold prominent French prisoners that were of particular importance to the Reich. Officially the castle was considered to be a sub camp of the Dachau concentration camp. Men from the concentration camp were used as staff at the castle. Many of them were referred to only by numbers and their names have been lost. The Dachau concentration camp mainly held Eastern European prisoners and it meant that some of the staff at the castle were willing to deliver messages for the prisoners.

Former French Prime Ministers Edouard Daladier and Paul Reynaud were held at the prison. There was also General Maurice Gamelin, and the famous commander-in-chief Maxime Weygand who was a very polarizing figure during the war. Tennis champion Jean Borata was also held at the prison and was instrumental in the defense of the castle. Right-wing leader Francois de La Rocque and labor leader Leon Jouhaux were also among the prisoners that were held at the formidable castle. Other politicians included Andre Francois-Poncet and Michel Clemenceau. For a short time, republic president Albert Lebrun and Marie-Agnes de Gaulle were also held at the prison.

Due to the high-profile nature of the prisoners they were held in much better conditions than most wartime prisoners. Near the end of the war, oil was running low, so there was little light in the castle and food was running low as well. But the relationship between the SS guarding the prison and the prisoners was an amicable one.

Wimmer even promised the French prisoners that they would not be killed, even as executions were taking place at the nearby concentration camp. In the end, Wimmer fled and did little to live up to his promise. In the end it was up to the prisoners themselves and their rescuers to ensure they would survive the war.

[Source: Frontlines of Freedom Newsletter | Stephanie Schopper | March 17, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **HNLMS Abraham Crijnsen ► A True Story of Naval Deception**

Sometimes in life, the guy with the so-crazy-it-just-might-work ideas hits one out of the park and saves the day. This is what happened in 1942 aboard the HNLMS Abraham Crijnsen, the last Dutch warship standing after the Battle of the Java Sea. Originally planning to escape to Australia with three other warships, the then-stranded minesweeper had to make the voyage alone and unprotected. The slow-moving vessel could only get up to about 15 knots and had very few guns, boasting only a single 3-inch gun and two Oerlikon 20 mm canons making it a sitting duck for the Japanese bombers that circled above. Knowing their only chance of survival was to make it to the Allies Down Under, the Crijnsen's 45 crew members frantically brainstormed ways to make the retreat undetected. The winning idea? Turn the ship into an island.

You can almost hear crazy-idea guy anticipating his shipmates' reluctance: Now guys, just hear me out. But lucky for him, the Abraham Crijnsen was strapped for time, resources and alternative means of escape, automatically making the island idea the best idea. Now it was time to put the plan into action. The crew went ashore to nearby islands and cut down as many trees as they could lug back onto the deck. Then the timber was arranged to look like a jungle canopy, covering as much square footage as possible. Any leftover parts of the ship were painted to look like rocks and cliff faces these guys weren't messing around.



Now, a camouflaged ship in deep trouble is better than a completely exposed ship. But there was still the problem of the Japanese noticing a mysterious moving island and wondering what would happen if they shot at it. Because of this, the crew figured the best means of convincing the Axis powers that they were an island was to truly be an island: by not moving at all during daylight hours. While the sun was up they would anchor the ship near other islands, then cover as much ocean as they could once night fell praying the Japanese wouldn't notice a disappearing and reappearing island amongst the nearly 18,000 existing islands in Indonesia. And, as luck would have it, they didn't. The Crijnsen managed to go undetected by Japanese planes and avoid the destroyer that sank the other Dutch warships, surviving the eight-day journey to Australia and reuniting with Allied forces.

She arrived on 20 March 1942; Abraham Crijnsen was the last vessel to successfully escape Java, and the only ship of her class in the region to survive. After arriving in Australian waters, the minesweeper underwent a refit, which included the installation of new ASDIC equipment. On 28 September, the minesweeper was commissioned

into the RAN as HMAS Abraham Crijnsen. She was reclassified as an anti-submarine convoy escort, and was also used as a submarine tender for the Dutch submarines that relocated to Australia following the Japanese conquest. The ship's Dutch sailors were supplemented with survivors from the British destroyer HMS Jupiter and Australian personnel, all under the command of an Australian lieutenant. The wardroom tradition of hanging a portrait of the commissioned ship's reigning monarch led to some tension before it was decided to leave Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands on the bulkhead instead of replacing her with King George VI of the United Kingdom, which was installed in the lieutenant's cabin. [Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HNLMS\\_Abraham\\_Crijnsen\\_\(1936\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HNLMS_Abraham_Crijnsen_(1936)) | March 21, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Liberty Bell ► WWI Contribution

Just weeks after joining World War I in April 1917, the United States was in deep trouble—financial trouble. To raise the money needed to help save the world from itself, the Treasury Department had undertaken the largest war-bond drive in history, seeking to raise \$2 billion—more than \$40 billion today—in only six weeks. The campaign's sheer scope all but reinvented the concept of publicity, but it was still coming up short. Despite endless appearances by movie stars (who had previously considered explicit politicking taboo), 11,000 billboards, streetcar ads in 3,200 cities and towns, and fliers dropped from planes, bond sales lagged. Treasury Secretary William McAdoo, who also happened to be the son-in-law of President Woodrow Wilson, needed some kind of national loyalty miracle. So he and his propaganda advisers, the Committee on Public Information, who had produced a series of clever posters (the Statue of Liberty using a phone, Uncle Sam carrying a rifle), decided to take one of their most arresting images and bring it to life, no matter how risky.

They would actually ring the Liberty Bell. They would ring it even if it meant that the most emblematic crack in political history would split the rest of the way and leave a 2,080-pound pile of metal shards. And the moment after they rang the Liberty Bell, every other bell in the nation would be sounded, to signal a national flash mob to head to the bank and buy war bonds. On the campaign's final day—June 14, 1917, which was also Flag Day—Philadelphia Mayor Thomas Smith and his entourage approached Independence Hall just before noon. Thousands were already camped outside. Smith walked ceremoniously past the spots where Washington became commander in chief of the Continental Army and the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, and he approached the rear staircase, where the bell was kept, below where it had once hung.



The bell was normally enshrined in a ten-foot-high display case of carved mahogany and glass, but today it was fully exposed and rigged with microphones underneath, as well as a three-foot-long metal trumpet at its side to capture the sound for a Victrola recording. As Smith stepped up to the bell with a small golden hammer, telegraphers in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. awaited their cue to alert the thousands of their fellow Americans standing by in churches, fire stations and schoolyards, any place with an active bell tower. They were all clutching their ropes, anxious to join what the New York Times called a “patriotic clangor from sea to sea.” Smith looked a bit tentative in his three-piece suit and wire-rim glasses as he raised his arm to strike. But as he brought his hammer down for the first of 13 times, to commemorate each of the original colonies, the Liberty Bell was about to assume its rightful place in history—and maybe help save the world. [Source: Smithsonian Magazine | Stephen Fried | April 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Liberty Bell Update 01 ► Utilization

Every year, more than 2.2 million people come to see the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia and do their best to resist touching it. There’s no question that the bell is the most enduring, powerful, yet approachable symbol of our country. What is less appreciated is how this bell became The Bell. It was, after all, abandoned and sold for scrap in the early 1800s, after the national capital moved from Philadelphia to Washington and the state capital to Harrisburg, and the old Pennsylvania State House, where it hung, was scheduled for demolition. It was saved only by inertia; nobody got around to knocking the building down for years, and in 1816 a local newspaper editor went on a crusade to save the structure where the Declaration of Independence had been signed—which he rebranded as “Independence Hall.” Its clock tower was restored in the 1820s with a new bell, and the original was rehung inside from the ceiling and sounded only for historic events.

It was rung in 1826, for the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration, and a few times in years afterward in memory of some founders. But it wasn’t called the “Liberty Bell” until 1835, and that was in a snide headline in an antislavery pamphlet, above an article noting all the slaves for whom the bell had never tolled. And its ascension as a national relic still had decades to go. The Bell reportedly cracked after being rung for Washington’s birthday in 1844. (What seems to be the first mention of its being cracked appeared that year in the Philadelphia North American.) In an attempt to fix it, the city had the hairline crack drilled out to half an inch and rivets inserted on either end of the new, more visible crack, thinking to make the bell more stable and even occasionally ringable. Soon after, it was brought to lie in state on the first floor of Independence Hall. At the 1876 world’s fair in Philadelphia, more visitors saw replicas than the real thing because the fairgrounds were so far from the Hall.

The actual Bell was taken on a half-dozen field trips between 1885 and 1904, to the two world’s fairs in Chicago and St. Louis and to New Orleans, Atlanta, Charleston and Boston, but it was retired from travel on the grounds of fragility without ever appearing west of the banks of the Mississippi. While popular, the Bell didn’t truly come of age as a national symbol until World War I. Its rise to glory began with a hastily organized train trip across the country in the summer of 1915, as President Wilson, former President Theodore Roosevelt and other leaders felt the need to whip the nation into a patriotic frenzy to prepare for the war to end all wars, and culminated in the war-bond drives of 1917 and 1918. In three short years, the Liberty Bell changed America and empowered America to change the world. During its excursion in 1915, nearly a quarter of the nation’s population turned out to see it; in each of the 275 cities and towns where it stopped, the largest crowds ever assembled to that point greeted it. Many more Americans gathered along the train tracks to see it pass by on its specially constructed open car. At night a unique generator system kept a light on it, so it glowed as it traversed the countryside, a beacon across the land.

Over four months on the road, the Bell became a unifying symbol in a nation that had been increasingly divided. It went west across the northern United States, through Eastern and Midwestern cities wrestling with racism and anti-Semitism fueled by a backlash against immigrants from our wartime enemy, Germany, and then it continued



through the Pacific Northwest, where Native Americans and Asian-Americans struggled for their rights. It returned through Southern California and the Southwest, where Native Americans from other tribes and Hispanics fought for inclusion, and then into the Deep South not long after the premiere of *The Birth of a Nation*, the lynching in Georgia of a Jewish factory manager named Leo Frank and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. Among the passengers on the Liberty Bell Special, as the train was called, was Philadelphia City Councilman Joe Gaffney, who kept a diary he later turned into a slide presentation. "It seemed to have been the psychological moment," Gaffney wrote, "...when some such enterprise was needed to arouse the latent patriotic impulses of the people and give them opportunity to show their love of flag and country."

After the trip, it was no surprise that the Treasury Department saw the Bell as its last best hope to persuade Americans to support the world's first democratically financed war. Historian Frank Morton Todd, writing in 1921, claimed that during the "fiery test" of the Great War, nothing short of a Liberty Bell tour could have "stimulate[d] patriotism and brought the public mind to dwell on the traditions of independence and democracy that form the best inheritance of the Americans." Following are some facts about the bell:

- Location: Liberty Bell Center, Market St. & 6th, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Ownership: City of Philadelphia After WWII and following considerable controversy, the City of Philadelphia agreed, while retaining ownership, that it would transfer custody of the bell and Independence Hall to the federal government.
- Bell originally cast by Whitechapel Foundry 1752. It was recast by Pass & Stow Philadelphia 1753
- The Strike note: E-flat
- Composition: 70% copper, 25% tin, and old and silver.
- Circumference around base 12ft. Thickness at lip: 3 in.
- Weight (originally): 2080 lbs.
- Length & weight of clapper: 3 ft. 2 in. & 44-1/2 lbs. Weight of yoke: 200 lbs.
- The "crack" is approximately 1/2 inch wide and 24.5 inches long.

[Source: Smithsonian Magazine | Stephen Fried | April 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military History Anniversaries ► 01 thru 15 APR**

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 APR**". [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | February 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vietnam Vets [22] ► Hank Beck | Delayed DSC**

His chain of command said they'd put him in for the Army's second-highest valor award back in 1967, but retired Master Sgt. Hank Beck didn't give it another thought until a unit reunion more than 40 years later. His buddies asked him about his elusive Distinguished Service Cross, and it was a conversation that spurred a seven-year, grassroots effort to get Beck the recognition he deserved. Beck, now 69, is credited with risking his life to single-handedly take out a sniper team and a machine gun position during a firefight in Vietnam, saving his own six-man reconnaissance team and another team nearby. "I felt honored. I was moved," Beck said of the Feb. 27 ceremony at the Pentagon. "I was humbled, and I felt watched over and guided by a lot of people."

The retired NCO, who transferred from infantry to Special Forces in 1980, received his award from Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley, one of his former team leaders, who hosted the ceremony in front of Beck's family and friends. "In the process of that 60 minutes or so, Hank eliminated an estimated 10 enemy personnel and an unknown number through airstrikes and other forms of indirect fire," Milley said. "Hank Beck's heroism, valor and leadership under fire clearly mark him as an American hero." Milley was surprised to learn about the forgotten award, Beck said. "He asked me, he says, 'Damn Henry, you never brought that up to me, why?'" Beck told Army Times in a 27 MAR phone interview. "I said, 'What good would it do?'"

When Beck joined the Army in 1965, he was on a mission. "When I walked into the recruiter's office, he said, 'My God, you want to go airborne infantry? Have a seat,'" Beck said. On Feb. 25, 1967, the then-specialist four was 19 years old and 10 months into his first Vietnam deployment, part of a recon team with B Company, 2nd Battalion, 327th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. Beck and his team were dropped by helicopter over a blind landing zone near a supposed secret Viet-Cong base, he said. "The salami really hit the fan," Beck said. Seconds after the helicopter took off, he recalled, the men in the front of the patrol line started dropping — shot by sniper fire. "To protect his team, Specialist Four Beck exposed himself to enemy fire to throw a smoke grenade and call for suppressive fire while he ran across the open terrain to the spider hole," according to his award narrative.

Beck charged the position with his M60 machine gun. "I threw a hand grenade in, and I hosed them down with my machine gun," he said. "I killed them both." After killing two more North Vietnamese soldiers who spotted him near the sniper position, Beck said, he heard over the radio that a fellow recon team was pinned down by machine-gun fire. "Again without regard to his personal safety and at extreme personal risk, Specialist Four Beck turned and charged the gun position alone and succeeded in killing the surprised five-man gun crew," according to the award narrative.

A couple months later, Beck was back in the U.S., transferred to the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He did two more tours in Vietnam, eventually serving with the 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment as part of the 8th Infantry Division in Europe and the 101st Airborne Division a second time, Milley said at the ceremony. In 1980, Beck completed the Special Forces qualification course and headed to 5th Special Forces Group at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. After working on the Special Forces scuba team and training local forces in Mogadishu, Somalia, he said, he retired in 1985, just a few months after graduating from the Sergeants Major Academy. Over his career, Beck earned two Purple Hearts, the Army Commendation Medal with "V" device and the Silver Star, Milley said.

Beck spent the next 20 years as a sheriff's deputy with Volusia County and Orange County in Florida, and it wasn't until a 2010 reunion of his 101st Airborne battle buddies that talk of his Distinguished Service Cross resurfaced. Former Sgt. William Bowen and former Spc. Robert Karpuszka encouraged Beck to fill out a DA Form 638 to make his case. "It's a long and devious task, if you really want to do it," Beck said. In 2011, the awards office came back with an award of a Silver Star, citing a lack of evidence to bestow the higher award. "I was going to just let it rest, but they're going, 'Henry, this is bullshit. That's what we put you in for, that's what you're going to get,'" Beck said of Bowen and Karpuszka.

The men reached out to fellow unit veterans and managed to get a statement from both their battalion commander, retired Lt. Gen. Donald Rosenblum, and their battalion operations officer, Beck said, then filed an appeal of the award. "He provided new and compelling eye witness statements from individuals who witnessed his actions, which very clearly made the case for the Army to upgrade his award to the Distinguished Service Cross," Hank Minitrez, an Army spokesman, told Army Times. Fifty years later, almost to the day, Beck said he was moved to receive the award from Milley alongside his brothers. "That day of the action, I'll tell you, a great being was watching over me, protecting me," he said. "We all should have died that day." [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | March 28, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## WWII Vets 133 ► Oscar Davis Jr. | 70 Year Wait for Purple Heart

A 92-year-old North Carolina man has finally received the Purple Heart he earned more than 70 years ago while fighting in Belgium during World War II. Oscar Davis Jr. was a private assigned as a radio telephone operator when he was knocked down by a large piece of shrapnel during the Battle of the Bulge, according to a Fayetteville Observer report. The radio on Davis' back protected him, but the German artillery barrage knocked down a tree that fell on Davis, injuring his spine. He was paralyzed from the waist down for three weeks and ultimately rejoined his unit in Germany.

Davis was told long ago that he would receive the honor, but the award paperwork was never signed. Decades later, he smiled from ear to ear as Lt. Col. Marcus Wright leaned down to pin the Purple Heart to his jacket on 25 MAR. "This has been some day," Davis said. "I couldn't believe all this was going to happen. I just want to thank the Lord." Friends, family and more than two dozen soldiers with the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, attended the ceremony. Wright, commander of the 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, presided over the event. Davis belonged to the same regiment.



The ceremony was the culmination of nearly two years of work by the Veterans Legacy Foundation, a Harnett County-based volunteer organization that has helped more than 100 veterans receive military awards owed to them. John Elskamp, executive director of the foundation, said volunteers scoured an archive of war reports to find proof of Davis' injuries. The Purple Heart was the latest medal the group recovered for Davis. In late 2015, the group helped the World War II veteran to receive the Bronze Star and other medals that were awarded to him in a ceremony at the U.S. Army Airborne & Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville. Capt. Andrew Hammack, commander of A Company, 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, said Davis is "still one of us." "He's just not currently reporting for duty," Hammack said. [Source: The Associated Press | March 27, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Medal Of Honor Story ► Roberts~Gordon | Vietnam



Go to <https://www.legion.org/legiontv/PLHMR9MmnivfPEHKG6CSDJEBn3yF6jm5HM/5krledluQM> to listen to MOH awardee Gordon R. Roberts talk about his time his time in Vietnam, assaulting bunkers to save his platoon.  
[Source: The American Legion | March 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Medal of Honor Citations ► Fardy, John P | WWII



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

**John Peter Fardy**

**Rank and organization:** Corporal, U.S Marine Corps, Company C, 1st Bn, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Div

**Place and date:** Okinawa Shima in the Ryukyu Islands, 7 May 1945

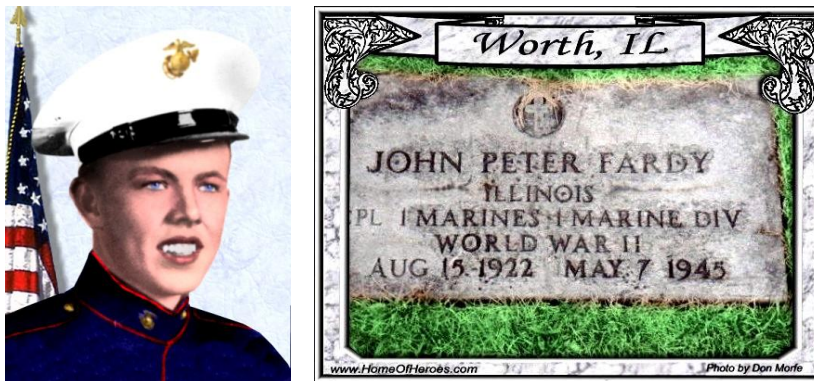
**Entered service:** Chicago IL, May 8 1943

**Born:** August 15, 1922, Chicago IL

### *Citation*

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as a squad leader, serving with Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Okinawa Shima in the Ryukyu Islands, 7 May 1945. When his squad was suddenly assailed by extremely heavy small arms fire from the front during a determined advance against strongly fortified, fiercely defended Japanese positions, Cpl. Fardy temporarily deployed his men along a nearby drainage ditch. Shortly thereafter, an enemy

grenade fell among the marines in the ditch. Instantly throwing himself upon the deadly missile, Cpl. Fardy absorbed the exploding blast in his own body, thereby protecting his comrades from certain and perhaps fatal injuries. Taken to a field hospital, Cpl Fardy died the next day. Concerned solely for the welfare of his men, he willingly relinquished his own hope of survival that his fellow marines might live to carry on the fight against a fanatic enemy. A stouthearted leader and indomitable fighter, Cpl. Fardy, by his prompt decision and resolute spirit of self-sacrifice in the face of certain death, had rendered valiant service, and his conduct throughout reflects the highest credit upon himself and the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.



John Peter Fardy was born in Chicago Illinois, on August 15, 1922. Educated in the schools of Chicago, he graduated from high school in 1940. He took a course in typing at the Fox Secretarial College the same year and entered the Illinois Institute of Technology the following year. He majored in mechanical engineering but left after the first year. He had been doing time study work previously, so he went to work at the Cornell Forge Company as a time study man and draftsman.

Inducted into the Marine Corps on May 8, 1943, he went through recruit training at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, California, upon completion of which he was assigned to the Japanese Language School at his own request. He was promoted to private first class in July, about two weeks before the start of school. After one month of attendance at the language school at Camp Elliott, San Diego, PFC Fardy was transferred to the Infantry Battalion where he was trained as an automatic rifleman.

Private First Class Fardy joined the 29th Replacement Battalion shortly before the unit left the United States on October 28, 1943. He journeyed to Nouméa, New Caledonia, and was reassigned to the 27th Replacement Battalion, which was leaving to join the 1st Marine Division.

Attached to Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines upon his arrival at Goodenough Island, D'Entrecasteaux Islands, early in December 1943, PFC Fardy left with that unit about a week later for Nascing, Alatu, New Guinea. The stay there was a short one also, for the 1st Marines left Finschaffon on Christmas Day 1943, for their December 26 landing on enemy-held Cape Gloucester, New Britain. Within two months of the time he left his home shores, the former draftsman was involved in a battle for an enemy airdrome on an island rarely heard of before.

Following the Cape Gloucester operation, and the return of the 1st Marine Division to the Russell Islands for over three months training, the division left for Peleliu. After practice landings at Guadalcanal, the division landed on the coral-studded, shadeless Peleliu. PFC Fardy participated in the capture of the airport and the attack on the coral hills overlooking it before returning to the Russell Islands with his regiment in early October.

Promoted to Corporal on December 21, 1944, the veteran of two campaigns became a squad leader as the reorganized division started training for the next operation. The training ashore ended in February and the Marines embarked aboard the ships that took them for practice landings at Baniki (Russell Islands), Guadalcanal, and Ulithi Atoll in the Caroline Islands. The landing on Okinawa occurred on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945 and the division's



sweep across the island up to the northern tip was accomplished with comparative ease. Later, Marines were moved south to help hard-pressed Army troops. Subsequently he was killed as noted in the above citation.

The Medal of Honor was presented to Corporal Fardy's parents at ceremonies conducted by the Marine Corps League in Chicago, September 15, 1946. Reinterment services for Cpl Fardy, with military honors by the Chicago Detachment of the Marine Corps League, were held on April 7, 1949, at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

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

## \* Health Care \*



### Rehydration ► Rice-Based Drink Powder Solution

When you're sweating yourself into oblivion on a ruck march, there are a number of ways to quickly rehydrate -- water, sports drink or in the worst case, intravenous fluids. But not all hydration sources -- including sports drinks -- are created equal, according to the creators of Cerasport, a rice-based drink powder you can drop in a canteen and gulp down in a hurry. "You get the benefit of a carbohydrate, but then you get all the electrolytes pulled into your bloodstream quicker and for a longer period of time," Cera Products president Jennifer Gurrola told Army Times on 15 MAR at the Association of the U.S. Army's Global Force Symposium. "Water doesn't work well enough because your body sweats sodium and potassium," she added.



Gurrola's product was developed by her mother in the 1990s, with public health workers from Johns Hopkins University, trying to efficiently re-hydrate cholera victims in Bangladesh. Today, convenient pour-packet versions in several fruity flavors are used in several corners of the Army, including medical commands and some basic training units as well as Airborne, Air Assault and Ranger schools. The Air Force was the first service to field it, after it was approved in 2005, putting the packets in flight jackets and combat lifesaver bags. Cerasport is available for commands to buy through the supply chain, so the company is trying to get the word out about its benefits and eventually, Gurrola hopes to see it alongside chocolate drink mix in meals ready-to-eat.

Each half-ounce packet, which is designed for a 16.9-ounce water bottle, has 40 calories, 10 carbohydrates, 2 grams of sugar, 400 mg of sodium and 200 mg of potassium. The gluten-free packets have a five-year shelf life and

can be stored at 120 degrees, she said, which more than meets the requirements for the MRE. If the Army is looking for something in the pack to increase performance or replenish at the end of the day, Gurrola said, Cerasport would fit right in. The product, she added, is easier, safer and more efficient than re-hydrating with water or even an IV. "Sugar has a tendency of dehydrating you," she said. "Your body doesn't know what to do with all that sugar and your gut can't absorb the electrolytes if there's too much sugar." There's also a biological benefit to a rice-based product, because it's a mixed-chain carbohydrate that your body can absorb quickly and for longer periods of time, rather than short-chain sugars that can only be absorbed in the stomach. "If you can take it into your mouth, it's absorbed into your gut and reabsorbed at the beginning, middle and end of your gut, next to your colon," she said. "So you're pulling electrolytes through your intestines."

This approach is more efficient than an IV, she said, not only because it can be tough to carry around equipment and keep an area clean for needles, but because of biological responses to dehydration. "With an IV, what starts to happen is, your veins start to collapse because they're so dehydrated, so you have to sort of stagger the IV," Gurrola said. "So things go very slowly." And it works better than something like Gatorade, which is only absorbed through the stomach, according to a study by the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences published in January. There are also the health benefits of staying away from added sugars, said Gurrola, who has a bachelor's degree in health sciences. [Source: DefenseNews | Meghann Myers | March 15, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Colorectal Screening ► Is It time for One?

With the proper screening, you could avoid colorectal cancer. Unfortunately, many people avoid or delay screenings because they are unsure about what to expect or are afraid that the screening might be harsh or painful. The American Cancer Society reports that regular screening is one of the most powerful weapons for preventing colon cancer. Screening can identify colon cancer or rectal cancer early when it is easier to treat, or even prevent it altogether. If polyps are found during routine screenings, they can usually be removed before turning into cancer. If they are cancerous they can be treated at the early stages. Possible symptoms of colorectal cancer include:

- A change in bowel habits, such as diarrhea, constipation, or narrowing of the stool that lasts for more than a few days
- A feeling that you need to have a bowel movement that is not relieved by doing so
- Rectal bleeding, dark stools, or blood in the stool
- Persistent cramping or stomach pain

If you experience any of these symptoms you should talk with your primary care provider right away. The average risk is for those between 50 and 85. TRICARE covers colorectal cancer exams based on certain criteria. Visit the Colorectal Cancer Exams page at <https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/IsItCovered/ColorectalCancerExams> to learn about the type of care available to you and your family. [Source: TRICARE Communications | March 29, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## AHCA ► Plan to Repeal and Replace ACA

Will Fischer, an Iraq war veteran, isn't too fond of the current House Republican plan to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. "When we see rollbacks like this, I don't see how anyone can think that's a positive thing," says Fischer, the head of government relations at VoteVets, a progressive veterans organization. "We want to ensure that people don't have to make a choice between buying their child lunch and buying their child medicine." The rollback Fischer is referring to is the possible repeal of the Affordable Care Act, and a nod to President Donald

Trump's promise to "get our veterans the care they need wherever and whenever they need it." Trump has vowed to cut wait times at the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) and increase the number of mental health professionals available.

But the GOP's recently released **American Health Care Act**—which the president supports—would put many vets at risk of losing access to the care they need. The draft bill is a combination of legislative recommendations that were passed by the House Energy and Commerce Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee on 9 MAR. It was scheduled to be considered by the Budget Committee on 16 MAR before reaching the House floor.

Hundreds of thousands of veterans and their family members have gained coverage under Obamacare, or the ACA, according to research from the Urban Institute, a socioeconomic think tank. In fact, a study published by the Urban Institute last fall reported that the rate of uninsured veterans dropped by 42% between 2013 and 2015. That increased coverage has translated into fewer vets reporting that they can't afford their hospital bills or have an unmet medical need, says Jennifer Haley, a research associate at the Urban Institute and one of the authors of the report. All of those coverage gains are now on the chopping block under the AHCA.

"A lot of people were surprised that any veterans were uninsured," says Haley. "But if the ACA's coverage options are no longer available to veterans, I would think we would go back to increases in [those uninsured]." Millions of veterans can access health care services via the VA, but not every former military member qualifies for care there or chooses to use the organization's services—long wait times and backlogs have plagued the agency for years. In the newly released report from the Congressional Budget Office, an estimated 24 million fewer Americans overall would be insured by 2026 under the AHCA, compared to the ACA, mostly because of the rollback of the Medicaid expansion and the individual mandate that requires everyone to purchase health care or pay a tax penalty. The veteran population would not be exempt from these changes. And that would send many vets back to the overburdened VA—which cannot hire additional workers to help process or care for potential new patients because of a federal hiring freeze implemented by the Trump administration.

This would likely leave the thousands who do not qualify for VA care without coverage at all, as insurance becomes unaffordable without the ACA's subsidies. Hundreds of thousands of spouses and children could also lose coverage. But it's not just insurance coverage that's at risk—it's the type of care that's covered by that insurance. The House plan removes the requirement that Medicaid plans cover essential services, including mental health, substance use, and behavioral health services. A 2015 survey from the nonprofit Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America found that 58% of respondents reported having a mental health injury due to their service. Decreasing mental health coverage for Medicaid enrollees could be detrimental for vets, who suffer from mental health issues like PTSD and are at higher risks of suicide than the general population.

For some, the AHCA's changes are a reflection of a bigger, cultural shift, where veterans and their needs have become less visible. "I've been in this field for about 40 years and this is the worst it's ever been in terms of the lack of human and moral support for people who are disabled," says Ron Manderscheid, executive director of the National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors, a mental health advocacy group. "Something has changed in our culture where there's a lot less sympathy than in any time I've been in the field."

Finally, the AHCA's combination of lower subsidies, no individual mandate, and continuous coverage provision—which allows insurers to charge people 30% higher premiums if they go without coverage for 63 days or more—creates the conditions for higher insurance prices for low-income or working-class vets down the road, much as it does for the general population. All of these factors have led veterans, medical groups, and mental health organizations to come out against the AHCA. "If the ACA is repealed and replaced with Trumpcare, we are going to see thousands of veterans lose their health care," Fischer of VoteVets says. "We need politicians to stand with them and their families."

Differences and similarities between the ACA and AHCA		
	ACA	AHCA
<a href="#">Insurance mandates</a>	Individual mandate Employer mandate on larger companies	No individual or employer mandate Insurers can impose a one year 30% surcharge on consumers with a lapse in coverage
<b>Aid for insurance consumers</b>	Income-based subsidies for premiums that limit after-subsidy cost to a percent of income Tax credits for out-of-pocket expenses	Age-based refundable tax credits for premiums, phased out for higher incomes No tax credits for out-of-pocket expenses
<a href="#">Medicaid</a>	Matching federal funds to states for anyone who qualifies Expanded eligibility to 138% of poverty level income	Federal funds granted to states based on a capped, per-capita basis starting in 2020 States can choose to expand Medicaid eligibility, but would receive less federal support for those additional persons
<b>Premium age differences</b>	Insurers can charge older customers up to three times as much as younger customers	Insurers can charge older customers up to five times as much as younger customers
<a href="#">Health Savings Accounts</a>	Individuals can put \$3,400 and families can put \$6,750 into a tax-free health savings account	Individuals can put \$6,550 and families can put \$13,100 into a tax-free health savings account
<b>"Cadillac" tax</b>	Cadillac tax on high-cost employer plans implemented in 2020	Cadillac tax on high-cost employer plans implemented in 2025
<b>Other taxes</b>	3.8% tax on investment income 0.9% tax on individuals with an income higher than \$200,000 or families with an income higher than \$250,000	Repeal of both taxes
<a href="#">Essential health benefits</a> <sup>(44)</sup>	Insurers are required to offer ten essential health benefits	Private plans are required to offer the ten essential health benefits. Some Medicaid plans are not required to offer mental health and substance abuse benefits
<a href="#">Pre-existing conditions</a>	Insurers are banned from denying coverage for pre-existing conditions	
<b>Dependents staying on plan</b>	Dependents can stay on health insurance plan until age 26	
<b>Annual and lifetime limits</b>	Insurers are prohibited from setting annual and lifetime limits on individual coverage	

[Source: Money | Alicia Adamczyk | March 15, 2017++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Parasites ► What's Eating You (1)



*Bedbug*



*Lice*



*Scabies*



*Pork Tapeworm*

**Bedbugs** -- Furniture, wallpaper, mattresses, and clutter provide nesting spots for these small, flat insects. They like to live near people or pets, and they come out while you're asleep to feed on your blood. Bedbugs don't cause disease, but you might have an allergic reaction to their bite. If you scratch too much, the bitten area could get infected. Use antiseptic creams or lotions, or take an antihistamine, to ease the itch.

**Lice** -- These insects live on your blood. There are three types: head, body, and pubic. Only body lice spread diseases. Since they crawl, you can get lice through close contact with someone. They lay eggs on you, and the itching starts when they hatch. You can treat them with over-the-counter and prescription medications and shampoos.

**Scabies** -- A mite that digs into your body and lays eggs causes this condition. You get it from skin-to-skin contact with an infected person. Symptoms include itching at night, a pimply rash, sores, and crusty patches. You can treat it with a prescription medicine that kills the mites called scabicide.

**Pork Tapeworms** -- You can't get these bugs from eating pork, unless it's raw or undercooked. Both people and pigs carry them, but they're spread when you swallow the eggs from tainted food and water. You can also get them if you come in contact with the feces of someone who has them. They infect the intestines and brain, which can lead to a disease that causes headaches and seizures, called cysticercosis. Some people get better without treatment. Others need medication or surgery.



**Brain-Eating Amoeba**

**Roundworms**

**Giardia**

**T. Cruzi**

**Brain-Eating Amoeba** -- People in the U.S. don't have to worry as much about this parasite as people in Southeast Asia do. The bug, also known as *N. fowleri*, lives in warm freshwater, and it enters the body through the nose. It causes a condition that destroys brain tissue called primary amebic meningoencephalitis. Symptoms include headache, fever, vomiting, confusion, stiff neck, seizures, and loss of balance. Only experimental treatments are available now, so the survival rate is low.

**Roundworms** -- Most of these bugs infect your intestines. But the one that causes trichinosis also affects your muscles. Common roundworm diseases and their symptoms include:

- Ascariasis -- belly pain
- Hookworm -- blood loss
- Pinworm -- anal itching
- Trichinosis -- pain, fever, face swelling, pink eye, rash
- Whipworm -- mucus, water and blood in stool, rectal prolapse (when part or all of the rectum slides out of place)

**Giardia** -- If you've ever been camping and you came down with diarrhea, gas, stomach cramps, bloating, and nausea, you've likely caught this bug. You get it through food or drinking water, or from contact with the feces of an infected person or animal. The illness can be treated with prescription drugs.

**T. Cruzi** -- This parasite causes Chagas disease, which can be life-threatening. People get infected from contact with the bug's feces. Symptoms show up quickly as fever, fatigue, aches, headache, rash, loss of appetite, diarrhea, vomiting, and swollen eyelids. Later, it can lead to heart and intestine problems. Doctors treat the disease and kill the parasite with medication.

[Source: WebMD | Alison Kodjak | February 28, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*



## TRICARE Podcast 389 ► Care Type | Winter Storms | Eye Injuries

**Understanding emergency versus urgent care** -- When we're in pain or sick, we're anxious and it can be hard to think straight. We want relief as soon as possible. In those moments, it is can be hard to determine if you need to go to the emergency room, an emergency center or if an urgent care center will do. Generally, if a condition is threatening to life, limb or eyesight, or causes the beneficiary to require relief from pain, it's considered an emergency and calls for a trip to the emergency room. Emergency departments affiliated with a hospital are most likely TRICARE-authorized providers. Over the past few years, urgent care centers have emerged across the country and this may lead to more urgent care facilities in an area than emergency rooms. However, beneficiaries who seek care at emergency centers need to ask if it is affiliated with a hospital-based emergency department. If it isn't, the beneficiary will need to make a decision about getting care elsewhere or being responsible for those facility charges. If you aren't sure if you need to see a doctor, you can call TRICARE's Nurse Advice Line. Call 1-800-874-2273 and choose option 1. The nurse advice line lets you speak with registered nurses who can answer your urgent care questions and help you determine the level of care you need. This service is free and available 24/7. Visit [www.TRICARE.mil/nal](http://www.TRICARE.mil/nal) for more information.

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Winter Storms** -- Springtime is right around the corner, but end of season winter storms can still be dangerous. Snow, sleet and high winds can knock out heat, power and communication services to your home or office. When you know a storm is coming, prepare for weather-related emergencies and follow these steps from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention to prepare:

- Have a safe alternate heating source and alternate fuels available.
- Check both carbon monoxide and smoke detectors batteries and change them if necessary, and
- Stock food that doesn't need cooking or refrigeration and water stored in clean containers.

It's also important to check on family and neighbors who are at risk from cold weather hazards including young children, older adults and the chronically ill. If you have pets, bring them inside. If you can't bring them inside, provide adequate, warm shelter and unfrozen water to drink. Winter storms and cold temperatures can be hazardous for all, but if you plan ahead, you can stay safe and healthy! You can also visit [www.Ready.gov](http://www.Ready.gov) for more tips, resources and winter safety ideas. After the storm, visit [www.TRICARE.mil/afterdisaster](http://www.TRICARE.mil/afterdisaster) for a checklist to consider after severe weather to make sure your health care needs are met.

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Workplace eye injuries prevention** -- Nearly 300,000 Americans visit the emergency room each year due to workplace eye injury. This month, the American Academy of Ophthalmology wants to remind you of the importance of protecting your eyes at work. Whether you're in the motor pool, the dining facility or your office, you should know the potential dangers to your eye health and safety. The most important thing you can do to protect your vision at work is to always wear appropriate protective eyewear. Eyes can also be damaged by sun exposure, not just chemicals, dust or objects. When an eye injury occurs, an ophthalmologist or other medical doctor should examine the eye as soon as possible, even if the injury seems minor. A serious eye injury isn't always immediately obvious. Delaying medical attention can cause more damage and could result in permanent vision loss or blindness. If you're injured in the line of duty, active-duty service members should seek care at the nearest military hospital or clinic. National Guard and Reserve members injured while in drilling status can receive line of duty care at a military hospital or clinic. This includes when traveling directly to or from your place of duty. To get line of duty care, your unit must issue a Line of Duty determination or a Notice of Eligibility if you're in the U.S. Coast Guard. Civilians who experience eye injuries should seek emergency care. Remember, TRICARE considers an emergency a medical condition that is threatening to life, limb or eyesight and requires immediate attention. Visit [www.geteyesmart.com](http://www.geteyesmart.com) for more eye safety tips and resources.

-o-o-O-o-o-

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> | March 17, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **TRICARE Podcast 390** ► Allergies | Webinars | Cervical Cancer

**Relief for allergy sufferers** -- Whether it's seasonal or a reaction to a specific food, allergies can be bothersome or even dangerous. The key to getting relief is finding out exactly what you're allergic to as soon as possible. Allergies occur when the immune system reacts to substances that do not bother the general population. Allergic reactions are sensitivities to substances, known as allergens, which come into contact with the skin, nose, eyes, respiratory tract, and gastrointestinal tract. Allergens can be breathed into the lungs, swallowed, or injected. Allergic reactions can affect people in different ways. First-time exposure may produce only a mild reaction. Mild allergic reactions include itching, rashes, watery or red eyes and nasal congestion. Certain reactions can occur after several hours after exposure, particularly if the allergen causes a reaction after it's been eaten. In very rare cases, reactions develop after 24 hours. However, one of the most severe allergic reactions, anaphylaxis, is a sudden and severe allergic reaction that occurs within minutes of exposure. Anaphylaxis requires immediate medical attention. Doctors use skin and blood tests to diagnose allergies and determine treatment options. TRICARE covers services and supplies required in the diagnosis and treatment of allergies. Treatments include medicines, allergy shots, and avoiding the substances that cause reactions. Visit [www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices](http://www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices) if you suffer from allergies or need more information.

-o-o-O-o-o-

**March Webinar** -- TRICARE and Military OneSource are co-hosting a webinar to bring you the answers to your questions. Join us on Wednesday, March 29th from 1 to 2 pm Eastern Standard Time to ask your questions about TRICARE. We'll have a panel of subject matter experts on hand to take your questions. To register, visit [www.militaryonesource.mil/social](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/social) and click on "Webinars". Registration is on a first-come, first-served basis and is limited due to system capacity. Participants must avoid sharing personal health information when asking a question. You can ask questions to subject matter experts from TRICARE For Life, National Guard & Reserve Programs, TRICARE Dental Programs, members of TRICARE's Customer Service Team and more! A list of archived webinars is available for recall and viewing on the website.

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Cervical cancer prevention and detection** -- Every year, about 12,000 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and 4,000 women die from it, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. You can prevent cervical cancer or detect it early when it is most treatable by getting screened. A regular Pap test can detect abnormal or unhealthy cells before they turn into cervical cancer. The Pap test can tell if you have an infection, abnormal cervical cells or cervical cancer. Under TRICARE, routine Pap tests are covered yearly for women starting at age 21. The frequency is at patient and provider discretion, though not less than every three years. HPV DNA testing is covered as a cervical cancer screening when performed with a Pap test for women age 30 and older. Some cervical cancer is caused by HPV, but there are vaccines to protect you from the most dangerous strains of HPV. TRICARE covers HPV vaccines for beneficiaries who haven't already been vaccinated or completed the HPV vaccine series. The HPV vaccine is covered for females ages 11–26. The series of injections must be completed before reaching age 27 for coverage under TRICARE. The HPV vaccine is also covered for all males ages 11–21 and is covered for males ages 22–26 who meet certain criteria. Visit [www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices](http://www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices) for more information.

-o-o-O-o-o-

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> | March 24, 2017 ++]

## \* Finances \*



### Credit Card Fraud Protection Update 01 ► Available Methods

Identity theft is one of those back-of-your-mind kind of fears. The idea of someone using your credit card is always lurking there when you enter your card number online or fill out a form that asks for personal information. It is a justifiable concern. A record 15.4 million Americans were victims of identity theft in 2016 — a 16 percent increase from the prior year, according to a report from Javelin Strategy & Research. So if you haven't experienced your card being fraudulently used, you probably know someone who has. But what can you do? There are three main methods used to detect, deter or prevent identity theft. And then there is the nuclear option: a credit freeze.

**Do-it-yourself monitoring** -- The most basic approach is do-it-yourself credit monitoring, which is free and relatively easy. The basics entail balancing your checkbook to make sure no one's running up debit charges without you knowing, and checking your credit card bills line by line to make sure those charges are legitimate. Some thieves are in it for the long term, and they will make a series of small charges in the hope that they fly under your radar. So go over every line. If something looks unfamiliar, check with your card issuer. The DIY method also entails pulling your credit report at least once per year to make sure no one has opened any accounts in your name. The major credit reporting agencies — Equifax, Experian and TransUnion — are required by law to provide you with one free credit report each year. You can obtain them at [www.AnnualCreditReport.com](http://www.AnnualCreditReport.com) but note that they are only credit reports. If you want free credit score information and credit reporting analysis, use a website like [www.creditsesame.com](http://www.creditsesame.com). The downside to the DIY approach is that it doesn't prevent fraud, it only catches it after the fact. Still, it will help you spot fraud in a timely fashion and do damage control.

**Credit monitoring** -- Credit monitoring is outsourcing the DIY method, at least parts of it. You pay a company to check in on your credit reports from the three major credit reporting agencies. Typically, you pay a flat monthly fee, and the company sends you reports about any suspicious activity that showed up in the previous month. So if someone opens something in your name, you'll know within a few weeks and can act accordingly. The biggest drawback is that credit monitoring companies, like DIY credit monitoring, don't prevent fraud from happening. They simply notify you after the fact. Additionally, you're paying for something you could do yourself.

**Fraud alerts** -- Another way to guard against identity theft is to place a fraud alert with one of the three major credit reporting agencies. Fraud alerts — which are free — effectively put a notice on your credit report that a potential creditor should verify your identity before opening a new account in your name. If you place a fraud alert with one of the three major credit reporting agencies, it is required to notify the other two. In general, an alert remains in place for at least 90 days but can be renewed. One exception is for victims of identity theft who have a police report to prove it. They can place an extended alert that lasts for seven years. Alerts are good for people who have reason to believe that someone else might have their information, such as people affected by a credit-card data breach. Fraud alerts won't help you if someone already has your information and is using an existing card number. But they

should prevent someone from opening a new account in your name. For more information about placing a fraud alert, visit the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's website which can be found at <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/askcfpb/1375/i-may-have-been-victim-fraud-or-identity-theft-how-can-i-put-fraud-alert-my-credit-report.html>.



**Credit freeze** -- A credit freeze is kind of like the nuclear option in the sense that it is a more powerful weapon against identity thieves — but could entail fallout for you. When you put a credit freeze or security freeze in place on your file at the three major credit reporting agencies, no one will be permitted access to your credit reports, even if they have your Social Security number. This will stop prospective thieves from opening an account in your name. The big drawback is that it will also stop you from opening an account in your own name. For some people, that may not be a problem, though. For example, if you've already got your home, with the attendant utility accounts, and all the credit cards you need, you might not have reason to open any new accounts. If that's the case, a freeze could offer an extra layer of protection. You can also lift a freeze — say if you need financing for a new car — and then restore it after you've secured a loan. Another drawback: Placing a credit freeze is generally not free. Costs vary by state. Equifax has a handy chart at [https://help.equifax.com/app/answers/detail/a\\_id/75/search/1](https://help.equifax.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/75/search/1) with state-by-state details. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's website has links to each of the three reporting agencies' information about putting a freeze into effect. The Federal Trade Commission's site has general information about freezes at <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0497-credit-freeze-faqs>.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Ari Cetron | March 16, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Common Money Mistakes ► Beware These 12

Everybody messes up with money now and then. Ask anyone. If they're honest, they'll tell you their regrets. Maybe they moved their 401(k) savings into cash accounts after the stock market crashed in 2008, missing the market gains since then. Or they bought a house they couldn't afford. Or waited until age 40 to start saving. Here are some of the most common mistakes, how to fix them and keep learning:

**Mistake 1: Keeping up with friends** -- One of the fastest ways to get into money trouble is trying to match the lifestyle and possessions of people around you. Status matters to most of us. That's the culture we live in. But playing when you can't pay? That's financial suicide. Genuinely successful people are more independent.

**Better idea:** Creating the life that fits you and you alone takes guts. Get your financial life under control by tracking your spending. Fortunately, doing so is easier than it ever has been with free online tools. You could try using Money Talks News partner PowerWallet at <http://www.moneytalksnews.com/rates/powerwallet> or other good budgeting products on the market.

**Mistake 2: Letting indulgences become habits** -- You can rationalize a small luxury because it's cheap. Spending \$5 on haute coffee isn't a bad splurge once in a while. But do it every day and that \$5 treat is a \$150-a-month expense — that's \$1,800 a year — just for your daily cup of joe.

**Better idea:** Track your spending, daily or weekly if possible. It's the hands-down best way to control it. A simple budget is easy to make and gratifying to use. By all means, treat yourself once in a while to a goodie you can afford, and then stop.

**Mistake 3: Putting subscriptions on autopilot** -- I gave someone a six-month subscription to Netflix a while back. Many months after the six months had passed, I realized I'd forgotten to cancel the gift. Many merchants enjoy streams of income from customers who sign up for ongoing monthly charges and then forget to monitor the charge. Remember to cancel that extra tier of cable or phone service you no longer need, or the free credit monitoring trial or premium channel preview period that starts charging your credit card after 30 days. These small charges really mount up.

**Better idea:** Read bills carefully to spot services you no longer use. Call the customer service folks at your phone and cable companies twice yearly to review your accounts for better deals or features you can drop.

**Mistake 4: Buying a new car** -- As soon as you leave the dealer's lot with a new car, your new car or truck depreciates 10 percent, and then another 10 percent by the end of the first year, according to Carfax. Translation: A new car costing \$30,000 is worth \$27,000 after driving it off the lot, and about \$24,300 after a year. Registration and insurance are also more costly for new cars.

**Better idea:** Buy used. "These days, 100,000 miles is merely the halfway point for a lot of vehicles," says Bankrate. Save the money you'd have spent and put it to work. Hang on to your car, and drive it for free after it's paid off.

**Mistake 5: Buying almost anything else new** -- Why pay a premium for new books, toys, clothes, cars, tools and sports gear when you can get them for a discount used?

**Better idea:** Before shopping retail for a new purchase, see what kinds of deals are available on used goods. You can often find furniture, jewelry, clothes, appliances and electronics that look and work as well as new for a sliver of the new price. Of course there are some things — mattresses, shoes, digital cameras and stuffed toys, to name a few — you should never buy used.

**Mistake 6: Paying interest on credit cards** -- If you are paying, for example, 20 percent interest on credit card balances while your savings are earning just 0.2 percent, you've got things upside down.

**Better idea:** Rates on credit card balances are insane. Why pay up to hundreds of dollars monthly to borrow money to buy something when your savings are earning far less? If your job's safe and you have some money in savings to spare, use it to pay off high-interest debt. Next, rebuild your savings and pay off the entire card balance every month. Never borrow money at those rates again. Before signing up for a credit card, comparison shop. Check competing savings account rates, too.

**Mistake 7: Ignoring your employer's 401(k) match** -- You're throwing away free money if you aren't claiming every dollar your employer is willing to contribute to your retirement plan or 401(k).

**Better idea:** Never, ever turn down free money, not to mention that nice tax deduction you get by contributing to a traditional 401(k) plan. You're allowed to pay as much as \$18,000 a year into a tax-deferred retirement plan such as a 401(k). Over 50? You can make an additional \$6,000 in catch-up contributions. (See details from the IRS.) Think you can't afford to put enough in to get the company's matching funds? Think again. You can't afford not to.

**Mistake 8: Borrowing to buy stuff that loses value** -- A new car may be your biggest depreciating purchase, but there are plenty more. When you take out a loan or use a credit card to buy toys — big-screen TVs, audio equipment, video and still cameras, or high-end sports equipment like new skis and boots — you are undermining your financial health.

**Better idea:** Pledge to pay only cash for toys and bling, whether a snowboard or a dress for a special party. Consider dropping expensive mindsets, too: "If you are an 'early adopter' of electronics like the new 3-D televisions, you are also paying too much for little more than bragging rights to your friends," blogs Matt Breed at Money Crashers.



**Mistake 9: Chasing credit card rewards** -- This is a tough one. Capturing rewards points is like a game. It's fun, especially if you are working toward a goal like a free trip. But you may be overspending.

**Better idea:** Beware of driving yourself into a financial ditch in pursuit of "savings." The way out? Revisit your financial goals to reinforce how much more important they are than chasing points. The bottom line: If you're carrying a credit card balance, it's time to cut up that card and pay it off.

**Mistake 10: Living with no emergency fund** -- You're walking a tightrope without a safety net when you have no emergency fund. Scary, huh? But only 41 percent of Americans have the savings to cover an emergency expense, according to a 2017 Bankrate survey.

**Better idea:** Build an emergency cushion to cover your net take-home pay for seven or eight months. For example, if you take home \$4,000 a month after taxes, your emergency fund should be \$32,000.

- Treat this fund like any other bill; contribute to it every month.
- Put your fund where it's harder to get at — maybe in a savings account (not checking) at a bank you don't use otherwise.
- Keep saving. After you've fully funded your emergency account, use your extra cash to pay down debt or build up retirement or college savings.

**Mistake 11: Letting bank fees drain your accounts** -- You've worked hard for your money. You don't want it going to bank fees for overdrafts, out-of-network ATMs and checking account maintenance.

**Better idea:** Keep a cash cushion in accounts to avoid overdrafts, switch to a bank that offers free checking if possible, sign up for electronic alerts to stay on top of account balances, and get cash back when you use your debit card at the grocery store to avoid out-of-network ATMs. For more ways to keep your cash in your hands, read "14 Ways to Avoid Paying Irritating Bank Fees" at <http://www.moneytalksnews.com/banking-fees-are-killing-you-here-are-14-ways-dodge-them>.

**Mistake 12: Raiding your retirement savings** -- What a tempting pot of money your 401(k) can be, especially when an emergency strikes or you're short of cash.

**Better idea:** Do all you can to avoid raiding your retirement savings. You've worked hard to get this far. Besides, it'll cost you. Yes, you can borrow from your 401(k), but that means that money won't be growing in your account. And the amount you borrowed will become due in full if you lose your job. When you change jobs, don't cash out the account. You'll pay a penalty and taxes. Ask your HR department for help rolling your savings into another tax-deferred account.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Marilyn Lewis | March 6, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## SSA Retirement Application Update 01 ► 15 Minutes Online

On 2 MAR in 1940, a 65-year-old legal secretary named Ida May Fuller became the first monthly Social Security beneficiary. A few months earlier, she had stopped by her local Social Security office in Vermont to learn how the program works. She knew she had paid into Social Security but wasn't sure if she would get anything back out. A clerk at the office helped her apply for retirement benefits. Today, you can skip the trip to a Social Security office and apply for retirement benefits from the comfort of home. The SSA Retirement Benefits web page at <https://www.ssa.gov/retire> makes it easy. Just select "Apply for Retirement Benefits" and follow the simple prompts. It takes as little as 15 minutes!

First, sign in to or sign up (<https://secure.ssa.gov/RIL/SiView.do>) for your free my Social Security account. **[CAUTION: You will be asked 5 questions to establish your online access. Make sure you answer them correctly. If**

*only one is answered incorrectly you will be locked out of future access]* Once signed in, you can view and print out your Social Security Statement to verify your lifetime earnings record and get an estimate of your potential benefit amount. Then, visit the Retirement Planner for answers to your questions and help with deciding when to start receiving benefits. Use the Retirement Estimator for benefit estimates based on the earnings information we have for you in our records. You'll also find helpful links to guide you as you complete the online application. If you need to step away, you can save your entries and continue later where you left off. When you're done, you'll get a receipt that you can print and keep for your records. And by signing into your my Social Security account, you can check the status of your application online. Of course, you're welcome to apply for retirement benefits on the phone or in person if you prefer. Call 1-800-772-1213 from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Monday through Friday to set up an appointment to visit your local Social Security office. Deaf and hard-of-hearing people can use our text telephone service at 1-800-325-0778.

Whether you apply online, over the phone, or in person, SSA's knowledgeable staff will review your application carefully. They will contact you if we need more information or discover that you may be able to receive a higher benefit on another person's work record, such as your spouse. They will also tell you if other family members may be able to receive benefits on your record. In Ida May Fuller's day, you could still ride in a rumble seat to get to your Social Security office. Now, SSA's convenient Internet services are allowing many of their customers to ride the web to take care of their Social Security business. Aunt Ida, as her friends called her, continued to receive Social Security benefits until her death in 1975. She was 100 years old.

Social Security is with you through life's journey, just as they were back in 1940. Giving their customers more choices is one way Social Security is securing today and tomorrow for millions — during Ida May Fuller's time, now, and for future generations. [Source: SS Matters | Jim Borland | January 31, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Loan Multiple Use Update 01 ► 3 Ways

The VA mortgage is so attractive that it's no wonder some borrowers want to take advantage of the Department of Veterans Affairs program more than once. There are three ways a service member, veteran or other qualified borrower can get another helping:

- Buy a home with a VA loan, sell it and then buy another home with a new VA loan.
- Refinance from one VA loan into another.
- Have two or more VA loans for different homes at the same time.

The VA home loan "isn't a single-use proposition," says Michael Dill, vice president of mortgage lending at Guaranteed Rate in Tampa, Florida. Ready to shop for your next VA loan? Hold on -- a lot depends on something called your "entitlement."

**How entitlement works** -- The VA guarantees to reimburse up to 25 percent of the lender's loss if a borrower defaults. This protection encourages lenders to offer VA loans with lower rates, no down payment and easier guidelines to qualify. Typically, if you use a VA loan to buy a home for \$200,000, the VA will guarantee a quarter of that, or \$50,000. Your entitlement is the total dollar amount that the VA is willing to guarantee and pay out on your behalf. In most parts of the country, entitlements top out at \$106,025, but the limit can be higher in expensive areas. Rather than set its own guaranty limits, the VA uses the Freddie Mac loan limits, which are updated annually. In 2016, these limits went up in 39 U.S. counties. Years ago, VA loans were rare in high-priced housing markets because the guaranty limit was only \$144,000 nationwide. Adopting the Freddie Mac limits opened up these areas, including parts of California, to veteran homebuyers. Still there are places where the current limits are "insufficient" to buy a home. Examples include areas in Manhattan, Boston, San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego.

The \$200,000 home in this example would reduce your \$106,025 entitlement by \$50,000. So, you'd still have plenty left for another VA loan to buy another home. "A lot of military guys are stationed somewhere, they buy a property with a VA loan, then they get relocated and need to buy another one," Dill says. "They can still buy and have multiple VA loans at the same time."

**2 homes, 2 VA loans, and renting 1 out** -- The VA loan is intended to be used to buy your primary residence, not a rental property. However, if you occupy a home and then move into a second home purchased with a second VA loan, the first one often can be rented out. But here's the fine print: Borrowers can't convert their primary residence into a rental and buy a similar-sized home in the same location. The second home would have to be a larger residence for a growing family, or would have to be in a different area. Chris Pollard, a Certified Financial Planner professional at Great Path Planning in Monroe, New York, says turning a primary home into a rental property can be an "OK deal," with a rate of return that's about what you'd get with a conservative bond portfolio. "You might as well have bought the bond portfolio and not had the headaches of tenants calling you at three o'clock in the morning if the pipes burst," Pollard says.

**Getting entitlement back** -- Whenever you sell a home and pay off a VA loan, you get that part of your entitlement back and can use it again. However, if the loan is merely paid off or refinanced and you still own the home, the entitlement amount remains tied up in the home, Dill says. There is one exception. Borrowers can request a one-time restoration of entitlement, even if the VA's must-sell rule has not been met. "That would help you if you were truly stuck in a situation where you had two properties already," Guaranteed Rate's Dill says. "Instead of having to sell one, you could request that one-time restoration." In this case, "one-time" truly means once in a lifetime.

**Losing VA loan entitlement for good** -- VA loan entitlement can be permanently lost if you default on a VA loan, the lender forecloses and sells the home for less than what's owed, and the VA has to reimburse the lender. When that happens, the VA's payment to the lender is deducted from your entitlement, and you can't get it back. The same is true in the case of a short sale, in which the home is sold at a loss and lender isn't made whole. The one-time restoration can't be used in the case of a foreclosure or short sale, unless the money is paid back to the VA. "A lot of veterans assume that if they had a foreclosure back in the 1980s, they can do a one-time restoration," Dill says. "The VA doesn't grant it for situations where you defaulted on a VA loan. If they took a loss, they're not going to hand that (guaranty) back."

**Loan guidelines** -- VA borrowers must qualify for the loan they want based on their income, employment, credit and other guidelines. Despite such requirements, the VA loan still gives veterans more flexibility in terms of down payment. That's really where the benefit is. There's one other incredibly powerful reason a veteran or service member should want to get a VA loan. VA loans don't require mortgage insurance. Borrowers pay monthly for mortgage insurance when they obtain a conventional loan or a loan insured by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and make a down payment of less than 20% of the purchase price.

**Funding Fee** -- All VA loans include a funding fee. With no down payment, the fee is 2.15% of the base loan amount for a regular military veteran's first use of the program and 3.3% for subsequent uses. With a down payment of at least 5%, the fee drops to 1.5%. In effect, the minimum 25% down payment for the portion of a loan that exceeds the VA guaranty limit could lower the borrower's funding fee. That could mean significant savings. Veterans who have a service-connected disability are generally exempt from funding fees.

[Source: Bankrate | Marcie Geffner | March 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## IRS Scam Update 07 ► How It works

There's nothing quite like getting a call from the IRS to make your heart skip a beat. Then imagine what it would feel like if they told you that you owe back taxes and a warrant has been issued for your arrest? Unfortunately, these

threatening calls are a reality for many Americans. Only it's not what you think. They aren't IRS agents, and their claims are phony. Relax, it's not the IRS. The rash of IRS calls sweeping the nation is part of a massive scam. In fact, it's No. 1 on the list of "dirty dozen" tax scams.

#### **How the Scam Works:**

- The caller needs to verify your tax return and asks for your Social Security number and other personal data, or you're entitled to a refund, but you need to provide your Social Security number first, or a warrant has been issued for your arrest, but you can avoid it by buying a prepaid card to make payment today.
- It may seem legitimate. According to the IRS: *These con artists can sound convincing when they call. They use fake names and bogus IRS identification badge numbers. They may know a lot about their targets, and they usually alter the caller ID to make it look like the IRS is calling.*
- Don't be fooled. The IRS will never, ever call you out of the blue. You can be practically guaranteed that any random call you get from an "IRS agent" is fake.
- The criminals are after one of two things: your money or your identity. In the first two scenarios above, they want you to provide your personal information for identity theft reasons. In the last scenario they're trying to steal from you. Prepaid cards and wire transfers seem to be their preferred method of payment because these make it easy for them to take your money and run.

#### **What to do if you get a call**

- Do the same as you would with any other unwanted caller: hang up. Personally, I wouldn't engage them because that may encourage them to keep calling back.
- If you're not content to simply ignore the calls, ask for the person's name, badge number and a number where they can be reached. Then, call the IRS at 1-800-366-4484 to see if this person is in fact an agent. You can also report the incident on the website for the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration.
- In the event you're concerned you may actually owe taxes or your return wasn't processed right, you can call the main IRS hotline (be prepared to hold) at 1-800-829-1040 to check on the status of your account.

Of course, phone calls are only one way criminals are trying to take advantage of you. They may also be sending you emails, letters and texts. Fortunately, the IRS has put together a chart to help you figure out to respond to alleged IRS contact. Refer to <https://www.irs.gov/uac/report-phishing>.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Maryalene Laponsie | March 15, 2017++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Political Fundraising Scams ► How It works**

A new scam uses clips of politicians' voices to ask for money. The calls pretend to be raising funds for a political cause, but the donations are really going into scammers' pockets. No matter your political leanings, be sure to hang up on these calls.

#### **How the Scam Works:**

- You answer the phone, and it's a recording of former President Barack Obama or former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. In the message, which is likely lifted from a speech, the politician asks for a donation.
- Then, another voice prompts you to push a button and speak with an agent, who will collect your credit card information.
- Don't do it! Just hand up. Speaking to the "donation agent" can give scammers information they may use in later cons. Providing your credit card number and personal information to these scammers opens you up to the risk of fraudulent charges and even future identity theft.

- While this current con impersonates Clinton and Obama, the technique can easily be applied to other politicians.

#### **How to avoid political fundraising scams:**

- Hang up . Don't press any buttons. We all like to have the last word, but engaging with the caller may just give the con artist information he can use.
- Watch for spoofed calls . Your Caller ID may say that someone from Washington DC is contacting you, but scammers can fake this using phone number spoofing technology.
- Never give out any financial information. If you did not initiate the call, do not provide bank account, credit card, or Social Security numbers over the phone.
- Research fundraising organizations before donating. Be especially cautious of links that come to you through email or social media. Don't click through. Instead, go directly to an organization's website by typing the URL in your browser or using a search engine.

Go to <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/feature-0025-robocalls> to learn more about robcall scams on the Federal Trade Commission website. And check out Poltico's previous alert on political polling scams available at <http://www.bbb.org/council/news-events/bbb-scam-alerts/2016/08/watch-out-for-campaign-donation-fraud>. To find out more about other scams, check out BBB Scam Tracker at [www.bbb.org/scamtracker](http://www.bbb.org/scamtracker). [Source: MoneyTalksNews | March 24, 2017++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Government Grant Scam Update 03 ► Its Back on Facebook**

Watch out for phony social media posts and messages from fake "friends." Scammers are using Facebook to entice victims with "free" government grant money, according to recent BBB Scam Tracker reports.

#### **How the Scam Works:**

- You get a message from a Facebook friend or spot a post on someone's wall. According to the post/message, the government is awarding "free grants" to eligible citizens. If you meet the broad criteria, your application is guaranteed to be accepted, and you'll never have to repay the money.
- If you reply to the "friend," he or she will point you to someone posing as an official government agent on Facebook. This scammer will congratulate you on your eligibility and good fortune.
- Sound too good to be true? That's because it is. The scammer may ask you to wire money to cover a one-time grant "processing fee." In other versions, the con artist claims to need your checking account information to deposit your grant directly into your account. Whatever the story, you will never see the grant money, and you've opened yourself up to a scam.

#### **How to Spot this Scam:**

- The government communicates through the mail, not Facebook. Government agencies normally communicate through the mail, so be very cautious of any unsolicited social media posts, calls, text messages or emails you receive.
- Don't pay any money for a "free" government grant . If you have to pay money to claim a "free" government grant, it isn't really free. A real government agency won't ask you to pay a processing fee for a grant that you have already been awarded.
- Be wary of look-a-like government agencies . Just because the caller says he's from the "Federal Grants Administration" doesn't mean that he is... or that such an agency exists. When in doubt, do a quick online search.



- Pick up the phone. If you receive a suspicious call or email, call the local government agency to check its legitimacy. Look for the phone number on previous correspondence or the official government website. Don't call the number in the email.

To read details about one scam in which an Ohio woman experienced being defrauded out \$70,000 go to <http://fox8.com/2017/03/10/middlefield-woman-out-70000-in-facebook-government-grant-scam>. Read more about government grant scams on the Federal Trade Commission website <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0113-government-grant-scams>. To find out more about other scams, check out [www.bbb.org/scamtracker/us](http://www.bbb.org/scamtracker/us). [Source: Council of Better Business Bureaus | [www.bbb.org/council](http://www.bbb.org/council) | March 17, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## SSA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► \$500M Scheme to Defraud

In a break for the governmentwide effort to thwart improper payments, the Justice Department on 24 MAR announced a guilty plea by a Kentucky disability attorney involved in a scheme to defraud the Social Security Administration of as much as \$550 million. **Eric Christopher Conn**, 56, of Pikeville, Ky., pleaded guilty in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Kentucky to one count of theft of government money and one count of payment of gratuities. From October 2004 to April 2016, according to the plea, “Conn participated in a scheme with former SSA administrative law judge David Daugherty and multiple doctors that involved the submission of thousands of falsified medical documents to the SSA. Conn and his co-conspirators obligated the SSA to pay more than \$550 million in lifetime benefits to claimants for these fraudulent submissions.”

Conn’s Floyd County firm spent two decades representing claimants, and he admitted in his plea that he paid Daugherty about \$10,000 a month to award disability benefits to 1,700 claimants for whom Conn submitted falsified medical documents from December 2004 through April 2011, Justice reported. Daugherty and a clinical psychologist named Alfred Bradley Adkins, who is alleged to have signed inaccurate evaluation reports for disability claimants before the patents were examined, were indicted separately. They were charged with conspiracy, fraud, false statements, money laundering and related offenses. Conn admitted that he received more than \$5.7 million in representative fees from SSA based upon the fraudulent claims. Sentencing for Conn is set for 14 JUL. [Source: GovExec Newsletter | Charles S. Clark| March 27, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Tax Burden for New Jersey Retired Vets ► As of Mar 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 retire in New Jersey.

### Sales Taxes

**State Sales Tax:** 6.87% (food, prescription drugs and non-prescription drugs, clothing, footwear exempt). Local sales taxes are imposed on sales of certain items sold in Atlantic City and Cape May County.

**Gasoline Tax:** 55.50 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 57.80 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Cigarette Tax:** \$2.70/pack of 20

## **Personal Income Taxes**

**Tax Rate Range:** Low – 1.4%; High – 8.97%.

**Income Brackets:** Six. Lowest – \$20,000; Highest – \$500,000 (The tax brackets reported are for a single individual. A separate schedule is provided for married households filing jointly which ranges from 1.4% under \$20,000 to 8.97 for income over \$500,000.)

**Personal Exemptions:** Single – \$1,000; Married – \$2,000; Dependents – \$1,500

**Additional Exemptions:** Taxpayer or spouse 65 or older – \$1,000

**Standard Deduction:** None

**Medical/Dental Deduction:** Limited to excess of 2% of gross income

**Federal Income Tax Deduction:** None

**Retirement Income Taxes:** Pensions, annuities, and certain IRA withdrawals are taxable and must be reported on your New Jersey resident income tax return. However, the taxable amount you show on your state return may differ from the amount that is taxable for Federal income tax purposes. This is because you may have to calculate the taxable amount for your New Jersey return differently than you do for your Federal return. Social Security and Railroad Retirement benefits, and benefits received as a result of permanent and total disability before age 65, are not taxable and should not be reported as pension income. However, if you retired before age 65 on a total and permanent disability pension, and you continue to receive pension payments after age 65, your disability pension is treated as ordinary pension income beginning the year you reach age 65.

For residents receiving a United States military pension or survivor's benefit payments, the military pension or survivor's benefit is not taxable for New Jersey gross income tax purposes, regardless of your age or disability status. Military pensions are those resulting from service in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard. This exemption does not apply to civil service pensions or annuities, even if the pension or annuity is based on credit for military service. Most military pensions and survivor's benefit payments are received from the US Defense Finance and Accounting Service while a civil service annuity is received through the US Office of Personnel Management.

The state provides several income exclusions to enable residents to reduce their taxable income. These exclusions can be used every year you qualify. Persons 62 or older may use the [Pension Exclusion](#) to exclude all or part of their taxable pensions, annuities, and IRA withdrawals provided their gross income for the entire year before subtracting any pension does not exceed \$100,000. The maximum amount excluded depends on your filing status. If married and filing a joint return, you may exclude up to \$20,000. If you file as single, head of household, or qualifying widow or widower, you may exclude up to \$15,000. If you are married, filing a separate return, you may exclude up to \$10,000. If you file a joint return, and both you and your spouse qualify for the Pension Exclusion, you may apply the exclusion to the total taxable pension amount on your return. However, if only one spouse is age 62 or older or disabled, then only the income of the spouse who is age 62 or older or disabled may be excluded.

Go to the tax form at <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/emailfaqs.shtml#home> for more information on taxes due, exclusions, deductions, and exemptions.. Also check out <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/njit13.shtml> for all of the income deductions. Go to <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/military/taxinformation.shtml> for Military Personnel Income Tax Information

**Retired Military Pay:** Military pensions are exempt from taxes.

### **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**

Property taxation is local. Go to <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/lpt/localtax.shtml> for a property tax list of forms and information. Go to <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/lpt/ptbrochures.shtml> to review property tax brochures.

### **Property Tax Relief Programs**

Go to <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/relief.shtml> to review the various programs. New Jersey residents who owned and occupied a home in New Jersey that was their principal residence on October 1, 2011, may be eligible for a homestead benefit provided the 2011 property taxes were paid and they meet certain income limits. The homestead benefit application for homeowners is not included in the NJ-1040 booklet. Information about the 2011 homestead benefit will be posted on the state site as it becomes available.

### **Tax Treatment of New Jersey Property Tax Benefit Payments**

Go to <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/treatment03.shtml> for additional guidance. To calculate the correct amount of property taxes paid on their New Jersey principal residence homeowners must know whether they received a homestead benefit during 2011, the amount of the benefit, and whether the benefit was paid as a credit on their 2011 property tax bill or in the form of a check. For tenants, 18% of the rent paid during the year is considered property taxes paid. Qualified residents should review the instructions in the NJ 1040 booklet for determining the amount of property taxes due and paid for 2011.

### **Homestead Rebate Program**

This program establishes a system of homestead credits for homeowners and residential tenants. This program previously included residential tenants. The credit program provides taxpayers with benefits calculated as a percentage of the property tax (up to a maximum of \$10,000 tax) that they paid during the previous year. The percentages used to calculate this benefit are based on income levels, with higher percentage benefits allowed for the lower income levels, and with no benefit allowed for those whose income exceeds \$250,000. The act also imposes a 4% property tax levy cap on school districts and county and local governments, subject to limited exceptions and adjustments. The tax levy cap provisions will apply to budget years beginning on or after July 1, 2007, but not to years beginning after June 30, 2012. The homestead credit provisions will begin to apply to claims for rebates and credits for property tax paid for the year 2006. Go to <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/emailfaqs.shtml#home> for more information.

### **Property Tax Deduction/Credit**

This is available to eligible homeowners and tenants who pay property taxes, either directly or through rent, on their principal residence in New Jersey. They are eligible for either a deduction or a refundable credit on their New Jersey resident income tax return. Homeowners and tenants may be eligible for a deduction or credit even if they are not eligible for a homestead rebate. Qualified residents may deduct 100% of their property taxes due and paid or \$10,000, whichever is less. For tenants, 18% of rent paid during the year is considered property taxes paid. The minimum benefit is a refundable credit of \$50. Those eligible must be 65 years of age or older or blind or disabled and are not required to file a return because their income is below the minimum filing threshold. For more information go to <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/njit35.shtml>

For senior citizens and disabled persons there is a \$250 tax deduction from real property taxes provided for a dwelling of a qualified senior citizen. You must be age 65 or older, or a permanently and totally disabled individual, or the unmarried surviving spouse, age 55 or more, of such person. This benefit is administered by the local municipality.

## **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

New Jersey imposes a transfer inheritance tax, at graduated rates ranging from 11% to 16%, on the transfer of real and personal property having a total value of \$500 or more which passes from a decedent to a beneficiary. If a decedent's death occurs on or after July 1, 1988, property passing to a decedent's surviving spouse, surviving parents, grandparents, children, stepchildren or grandchildren is entirely exempt from the tax.

In addition to the inheritance tax, New Jersey imposes a separate estate tax. An estate may be subject to the New Jersey Estate Tax even though there is no New Jersey Inheritance Tax payable. For decedents with a date of death prior to January 1, 2002 the New Jersey Estate Tax was designed to absorb the maximum credit for state inheritance, estate, succession or legacy taxes allowable in the Federal estate tax proceeding. It did not increase the estate's total estate tax obligation. For decedents with a date of death on or after January 1, 2002 the New Jersey Estate Tax was decoupled from the Federal estate tax proceeding.

The New Jersey Estate tax is based upon the Federal Estate tax credit for state death taxes which was allowable under the provisions of the Internal Revenue Code in effect on December 31, 2001. The Federal Estate Tax does not have a provision providing a deduction for property passing to a domestic partner.

Information pertaining to the estate and inheritance tax may be obtained by calling 609-292-5033 or 609-292-5035.

Visit the New Jersey Department of Taxation website <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/index.shtml> for further information. [Source: <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#NEWJERSEY> | March 2017 ++]

### \* General Interest \*



## Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 31 MAR 2017

- **Drone Defense.** A US ally reportedly used a Patriot missile to shoot down a drone aircraft worth just a few hundred dollars, according to a US Army general. Radar-guided Patriots are intended to intercept other missiles, which would theoretically make them suitable for small, nimble targets like drones. But a single missile can cost between \$2.5 million and \$3.4 million.
- **Visas.** Afghans who aided U.S. forces fighting the Taliban can no longer receive special visas for their service, at least until year's end, said U.S. senators and advocates who are trying to pass legislation to restart the flow of newcomers.
- **COLA.** The February CPI is 237.477, 1.03 percent above the FY 2016 COLA baseline. The CPI for March 2017 is scheduled to be released on April 14, 2017.
- **TRICARE.** The Defense Health Agency announced that they will delay the transition of the TRICARE contract from Oct. 1, 2017, to Jan. 1, 2018. The new contract reduces TRICARE from three regions — North, South and West — down to East and West, with Humana managing TRICARE Region East and Health Net managing TRICARE Region West.
- **Military Protocol .** Former Petty Officer 2nd Class Janaye Ervin who refused to stand for what she considered a racist national anthem while on reserve duty at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii has received an honorable discharge. According to Navy rules, enlisted soldiers must stand and face the flag whenever the national anthem is played. Moreover, if in uniform, they must salute the flag. And if in casual gear, as she was on the morning of Aug. 31, they must stand in attention and place their right hand over their heart.
- **Presidential Cost.** Air Force One costs \$206,337 an hour to operate plus the cost of 4 military support planes and 4 to 5 helicopters. Additional security at the Presidents' New York home costs the city \$308,000 a day when he is there and \$145,000 a day when he is not. Secret Service protection costs \$38,000 a day. This costs rises drastically when his family and not with him and also have to be protected.

- **Drugs.** In 2016, Air and Marine Operations P-3 aircrews based in Jacksonville and Corpus Christi, Texas, contributed to 145 drug seizures and disruptions in which about 34,000 pounds of marijuana and 193,000 pounds of cocaine were seized, the agency said. On 22 MAR they discovered two ships carrying nearly 3,000 pounds of cocaine in the Eastern Pacific Ocean.
- **Flag Code.** The House of Representatives passed a bill which would amend the flag code to include National Vietnam War Veterans Day on the list of days that Americans should fly the U.S. flag. March 29 of each year is the designated day. The bill, which cleared the Senate in February, now goes to the President’s desk for signature.
- **Illinois.** Voters voted down proposal to make Obama’s birthday a state holiday. They did the same thing to Ronald Reagan. Also in Illinois a 4 years old pre-school student was suspended for 7 days because he brought a spent .22 shell to school.
- **TV Live.** Both MSNBC and CNN aired what they claimed was a "live" interview, at the exact same time doing different interviews. How could someone talk to two different people at the same time? Media analyst Mark Dice has the story at <https://youtu.be/UoF2Ov8QdYE>.
- **Sales Tax.** Amazon will start charging sales tax on online purchases from customers residing in all states except those 5 which do not charge sales tax to their citizens. They are The five states that do not levy statewide sales taxes — and thus remain exempt from taxes on Amazon — are: Alaska, Delaware, Oregon, Montana, and New Hampshire
- **Battles Won.** The Marine Corps is well-known for its epic recruiting videos, but its latest may be one of the most memorable yet. Check out the new Marine Corps commercial at <https://youtu.be/16fvvPaliVQ>.
- **Stolen Valor.** Check out the video at <https://youtu.be/Pf8vTmw1w-k>.

\*\*\*\*\*

## RP~China Dispute Update 18 ► Benham Rise Concerns

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has ordered his navy to put up “structures” to assert sovereignty over a stretch of water east of the country where Manila reported a Chinese survey ship casing the area last year. The Philippines has lodged a diplomatic protest with Beijing after the vessel was tracked moving back and forth over Benham Rise, a vast area east of the country declared by the UN in 2012 as part of the Philippines’ continental shelf. According to the Philippines, Benham Rise is rich in biodiversity and fish stocks. China’s foreign ministry on 10 MAR said the ship was engaged in “normal freedom of navigation and right of innocent passage” and nothing more.

Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said Duterte’s instruction was to increase naval patrols in that area and put up structures “that says this is ours”. He did not specify what structures would be erected. “We are concerned, they have no business going there,” Lorenzana told reporters on Sunday. Although he accepts China’s explanation, Lorenzana said it was clear its vessel was not passing through the area because it stopped multiple times for sustained periods. Lorenzana last week said he was suspicious of China’s activities near Benham Rise and suggested they might be part of surveys to test water depths for submarine routes to the Pacific. The issue was due to be discussed further at a national security council meeting on Monday evening, he said.

The issue risks disturbing ties with China at a time of rare cordiality between the two countries under Duterte, who has chosen to tap Beijing for business rather than confront it over its maritime activities and intentions in disputed waters. Rows with China have usually been about the South China Sea, west of the Philippines, a conduit for about US\$5 trillion of shipped goods annually. China lays claim to almost the entire South China Sea. While Duterte has been sanguine about ties with China, Lorenzana is more wary and has noted that Beijing’s fortification of man-made islands inside the Philippines’ 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone has not abated. [Source: South china Morning Post | March 13, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*



## **RP~China Dispute Update 19 ► Scarborough Shoal Radar Station**

The Philippines plans to file a strong protest against China after it announced preparatory work for an environmental monitoring station on a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, a Cabinet minister said on 21 MAR. China five years ago started blockading the Scarborough Shoal, a rocky outcrop within the Philippines' 200 mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and the United States has warned Beijing against carrying out the land reclamation work there. Justice Minister Vitaliano Aguirre told reporters Manila would file a complaint against Beijing's plan to install a radar station on Scarborough Shoal. "The case which will be filed is fairly strong I think," he said.

The Philippines would take necessary action to defend and protect the country's sovereignty and entitlements in the disputed maritime borders, presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella said in a statement. "President Rodrigo Duterte has repeatedly asserted that the Philippines is not giving up its claims and our entitlements over the area," he said. The mayor in charge of administration of disputed South China Sea islands and reefs China controls last week said preparatory work was being planned this year to build monitoring stations on a number of islands. President Duterte was asked on Sunday for his response to the report of a radar station to be built at the Scarborough Shoal and said: "We cannot stop China." He also said it was pointless going to war with China.

China until late last year had two or three coastguard ships guarding the shoal and stopping Filipinos from tapping its vast fish stocks. An international tribunal ruled last year that Beijing violated Manila's entitlements and no country has sole rights to fish there. However, just days after Duterte visited China and heralded a new era of ties, Filipinos returned to fish at the periphery of the shoal, unimpeded by Chinese vessels. Aguirre said the Philippines would renew its strong ties with Washington in the face of China's aggressive action in the shoal, which is 124 nautical miles from the nearest coast of the main island of Luzon. "We're strengthening the relationship with the United States," he told reporters. Last month, former Foreign Minister Perfecto Yasay said the US had dissuaded China from reclaiming Scarborough Shoal, which security analysts consider a red line that could escalate tension in the region. China has put missiles and radar on some of its seven man-made islands in another part of the South China Sea, a strategic water claimed by several countries in the region. [Source: South China Morning Post | March 21, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **RP~China Dispute Update 20 ► 3 Man Made Islands Nearly Complete**

A report from a U.S. think tank says China has nearly completed construction work on three man-made islands in the South China Sea, giving it the ability to deploy combat aircraft and other military assets to the disputed region. The Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies analyzed recent satellite photos and concluded that runways, aircraft hangers, radar sites and hardened surface-to-air missile shelters have either been finished or are nearing completion. The report, released 27 MAR, appears to be the most conclusive indication yet that China is using its island-building project to give teeth to its claim over almost the entire South China Sea and its islands and reefs. The islands in the study — Subi, Mischief and Fiery Cross reefs — are part of the Spratly chain, which is claimed in whole or in part by China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei.

On each of the islands, China has constructed enough concrete hangers for 24 fighter jets and four or five larger planes such as bombers or early warning aircraft, CSIS reported. China already uses an existing airfield on Woody Island in the similarly disputed Paracel chain, located to the north, where it has maintained mobile HQ-9 surface-to-air missiles for more than a year and deployed anti-ship cruise missiles on at least one occasion, CSIS said. The airfields and advanced surveillance and early warning radars will allow China's military to operate over virtually the entire South China Sea. "Beijing can now deploy military assets, including combat aircraft and mobile missile launchers, to the Spratly Islands at any time," the report said.

China's creation of seven man-made islands in the South China Sea has drawn strong criticism from the U.S. and others, who accuse Beijing of further militarizing the region and altering geography to bolster its claims. China says its island construction is mainly for civilian purposes, particularly to increase safety for ships that carry an estimated \$5 trillion worth of goods through the waterway each year. It has also provided reassurances that it will not interfere with freedom of navigation or overflight, although questions remain as to whether that includes military ships and aircraft. Commenting on the report, a senior Philippine defense official said the construction China has carried out on the islands "belies a clearly military purpose contrary to Chinese public pronouncements that it is civilian in nature."

That raises the likelihood of further militarization and restrictions on air and sea traffic, posing a "clear and present danger to the present regional security balance," said the official, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to reporters on the matter. China has refused to confirm speculation over whether it plans to declare an air defense identification zone over the South China Sea as it has done already over international airspace in the East China Sea. The U.S. has refused to recognize the East China Sea zone, which requires aircraft to declare their flight plans, identify themselves to Chinese traffic monitors and follow their instructions. [Source: The Associated Press | Christopher Bodeen | March 28, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Trump Budget Plan ► 2018 Winners & Losers if Congress Approves**

Military spending would get the biggest boost in President Donald Trump's proposed budget. Environmental programs, medical research, Amtrak and an array of international and cultural programs — from Africa to Appalachia — would take big hits, among the many parts of the government he'd put on a crash diet. The budget proposal out 16 MAR is a White House wish list; it'll be up to Congress to decide where money goes. If Trump gets his way, there will be more losers than winners among government departments and programs. Some programs would tread water: WIC grants — money to states for health care and nutrition for low-income women, infants and children — are one example. Money for states grants for water infrastructure projects would be held level as well. Some others would lose everything: Trump proposes to eliminate money for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the national endowments for the arts and the humanities and more than a dozen other independent agencies financed by the government. A sampling:

### **WINNERS**

— ***The Pentagon***. Trump proposes a 10 percent increase in the massive defense budget, adding \$52 billion in military spending in one year to expand personnel, equipment and capability. Another \$2 billion would go to nuclear weapons.

— ***Veterans Affairs***. Up 5.9 percent. That's an additional \$4.4 billion, driven by ever-growing health care costs.

— ***Homeland Security***. Up 6.8 percent. That's \$2.8 billion more. Most of the increase, \$2.6 billion, would be to help kick-start Trump's promised border wall. The president has repeatedly said Mexico would pay for the wall; Mexican officials are adamant that they won't. Trump also wants an extra \$1.5 billion for more immigration jails and deportations, and \$314 million to hire 1,500 immigration enforcement and border patrol agents.

— ***The National Nuclear Security Administration***, which oversees the maintenance and safety of the nuclear arsenal and its research labs. The agency would grow by 11.3 percent, or \$1.4 billion, so that it takes up more than half the Energy Department's budget, which would shrink overall.

— ***Opioid prevention and treatment***: A proposed \$500 million increase in the Health and Human Services Department to counter the epidemic and more money for the Justice Department to combat the problem.

— **School choice:** \$1.4 billion more to expand school choice programs, bringing spending in that area to \$20 billion, even as the Education Department's overall budget would be cut by \$9 billion, or 13 percent.

#### LOSERS:

— **EPA,** facing a 31.4 percent cut, or \$2.6 billion. The plan would cut 3,200 jobs at the agency, eliminate a new plan for tighter regulations on power plants, and "zero out" programs to clean up the Great Lakes and the Chesapeake Bay.

— **Health and Human Services,** facing the largest cut in dollar terms: \$12.6 billion, or 16.2 percent. The plan would cut \$5.8 billion from the nearly \$32 billion National Institutes of Health, the nation's premier medical research agency, bringing its total to \$25.9 billion. It's not clear what research on diseases or disorders would lose the most money, although the budget plan specifically calls for elimination of a division that focuses on global health. Already, the NIH's budget hasn't kept pace with inflation over the last decade, making it dramatically harder for scientists around the country to win money for research projects into potential new treatments or better understanding of disease.

— **State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development.** Down 28 percent, or \$10 billion. Foreign aid would be reduced, as would money to the U.N. and to multilateral development banks including the World Bank. Some foreign military grants would be shifted to loans.

— **Labor Department.** A more than 20 percent cut, or \$2.5 billion. To be eliminated: a \$434 million program that has helped more than 1 million people 55 and older find jobs, according to the department. The blueprint says the Senior Community Service Employment Program is inefficient and unproven.

— **Agriculture Department.** A nearly 21 percent cut, or \$4.7 billion, achieved in part by cutting land acquisition in the National Forest System, rural water infrastructure and statistical capabilities at the department. Trump also proposes reduced staff in county USDA offices, an idea that fell flat in Congress when President Barack Obama proposed a similar reduction.

— **Transportation Department.** Trump proposes a cut of nearly 13 percent, or \$2.4 billion. Amtrak, local transit agencies, and rural communities that depend on federal subsidies to obtain scheduled airline service would take the brunt. Trump would eliminate subsidies for Amtrak long-distance train routes, which would most likely mean the end of those routes since they are generally not profitable. Money for the Federal Transit Administration grant program for new light rail and subway construction would be eliminated except for multi-year projects the government has already committed to help fund.

— **Internal Revenue Service:** After years of cuts, the IRS budget would be cut again — by \$239 million from this year's spending levels. The IRS budget is down about \$1 billion from its height in 2010. Since then, the agency has lost more than 17,000 employees. As a result, the chances of getting audited have rarely been so low.

— **Commerce Department.** A 16 percent or \$1.5 billion cut. The plan would eliminate more than \$250 million in National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration grants, including a program that helps coastal communities adapt to climate change, deal with invasive species and maintain healthy water and fisheries. Also on the chopping block: the Economic Development Administration, which provides federal dollars to foster job creation and attract private investment; and the Minority Business Development Agency, which is dedicated to helping minority-owned business get off the ground and grow. The Trump administration says the two agencies duplicate work done elsewhere.

— **School programs:** The plan would eliminate a \$1.2 billion initiative that supports before- and after-school programs as well as summer programs.

— **Independent agencies supported by tax dollars.** If Trump prevails, a hefty contingent of entities would lose all federal money and be shut. Among them, the public broadcasting corporation, the Appalachian Regional

Commission, the Chemical Safety Board, the United States Institute of Peace, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Corporation for National Community Service and the African Development Foundation. That foundation was established by Congress and provides seed money and other support to enterprises in some 20 countries on that continent.

[Source: Associated Press Washington | Calvin Woodward | March 16, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Trump Budget Plan Update 01 ► Meals On Wheels Impact**

Sweeping cuts being proposed by the Trump administration could impact Meals on Wheels, a program that helps feed the poor and elderly, including many veterans. “Meals on Wheels serves 500,000 veterans each year. Any cuts to Meals on Wheels funding could cause programs to start waiting lists and cut back on the number of meals served,” said Jenny Bertolette, a spokesperson for Meals on Wheels. “This would no doubt effect veteran recipients in states that use those block grants to support Meals on Wheels.” The proposed cuts include roughly \$3 million from the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Community Development Block Grant program, which funds Meals on Wheels and other programs, according to the New York Times. Meals on Wheels serves roughly 2.4 million seniors, and costs nearly \$1.4 billion, a year. But only 35 percent of the costs is covered by the Older Americans Act, the “primary federal funding source,” Bertolette told Military Times. “The rest is made up of contributions from state, local, private donations and other resources.” “We know for certain that there are Meals on Wheels programs that would lose vital funding if this proposal went through,” which will hurt vital services that assist veterans all across the country, she added. [Source: MilitaryTimes| Shawn Snow | March 16, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Airline Bomb Precautions ► Electronic Device Explosive Potential**

New restrictions on flights from the Middle East reflect how just about anything with power can be turned into an explosive. Last February, a Somali man boarded a Daallo Airlines flight in Mogadishu, Somalia’s capital. Twenty minutes after the flight took off, the unassuming laptop in his carry-on bag detonated, blowing a hole in the side of the plane. The bomber was killed, and two others were injured. But if the aircraft had reached cruising altitude, an expert told CNN, the bomb would have ignited the plane’s fuel tank and caused a second, potentially catastrophic blast. The Daallo explosion was one of a handful of terrorist attacks that the Department of Homeland Security cited to help explain why it introduced new rules for some passengers flying to the U.S. with electronics. Starting this week, travelers on U.S.-bound flights from 10 airports in the Middle East and North Africa will be required to check **all electronic items larger than a smartphone**.

A senior administration official told reporters 20 MAR that the indefinite electronics ban was a response to continuing threats against civil aviation, but wouldn’t elaborate on the specific nature or the timing of the threat. Adam Schiff, the ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee, said in a statement that the ban was “necessary and proportional to the threat,” and that terrorists continue to come up with “creative ways to try and outsmart detection methods.” The specificity of the new rules could hint at the nature of the intelligence it’s based on, says Justin Kelley, the vice president for operations at MSA Security, a large private firm that offers explosive-screening services. The ban could be focused on simply separating items like laptop-bombs from passengers who would need to access them in order to set them off, Kelley says. A transcript of their conversation, lightly edited for concision and clarity, follows.

**Kaveh Waddell:** How much has bomb-smuggling technology changed since Richard Reid tried to hide explosives in a shoe in 2001?

**Justin Kelley:** It's pretty common, and it was common even before Reid. But now, everything we have on our person has some sort of power source to it, and that's what they're looking for. Everything from a laptop to a phone to an iPad—most of those restricted items they want now in checked baggage—they all have a power source, which is what bombers are generally looking for: something to kick off their device.

**Waddell:** What's most difficult about designing a bomb that's hard to detect, and small enough to fit into something like a shoe or underwear?

**Kelley:** The bombs in underwear were pretty rudimentary—they needed a human element. But if we're looking at an electronic device, they can be done a whole host of different ways. They don't necessarily need an actor to set off the device. The electronic version has been around since we've had cellphones. Even before cellphones, you could use a greeting card that sings a holiday tune or a birthday wish—those use power as well. There's a whole host of things that can be used to initiate a device. But now, we travel with all these electronics on our person, we need to look even harder.

**Waddell:** DHS said the new ban was created in response to a threat. How do authorities monitor the state of adversaries' bomb-making skills to have a sense of what to watch for in airports?

**Kelley:** That intelligence could have been gathered through social media, or people they're monitoring. Terrorist groups are always changing and adapting to what we put forth as security principles, so this is just another step. When liquids were banned from planes, that was also a product of intelligence, and I'm not surprised they don't want to disclose the source.

**Waddell:** What kind of extra screening might luggage be subject to in checked bags that they might not be if they were carried on?

**Kelley:** Anything on those planes is going to be screened, whether it's passenger-carried or cargo. This may have been driven by intelligence that someone would use power sources during a flight, that there would need to be some human interaction. If they were interested in banning electronics entirely, there would be a stronger restriction.

**Waddell:** So you're saying that it's not necessarily that it's easier to detect a bomb in checked baggage—it could be that separating a person from their electronics breaks a necessary link for using it as a bomb?

**Kelley:** Yeah, it tells me they want to separate the human element from the device. That's what jumped out at me. That could be part of the reason.

**Waddell:** Would it be that difficult to check a laptop that would be set to detonate at a certain time or altitude?

**Kelley:** No, in fact, we have seen that in the past. That's why I think this specific ban was driven by specific intelligence that they've gathered. The Reid-type device was human driven. If their concern was about a device in the belly of the plane, I think they'd have imposed other restrictions, but this just says, "You can fly with it; you just can't fly with it on your person."

**Waddell:** The scope of the ban is pretty limited right now: It only covers direct flights to the U.S. from 10 airports in the Middle East and North Africa. Could this be broadened at some point? Might this be a pilot program that'll end up being implemented elsewhere?

**Kelley:** I think that comes down to how comfortable DHS is with security at these host countries. Our hope is that other countries that other countries follow TSA-like guidelines for screening—but some don't. Those that are at or near our standard wouldn't be part of the ban.

**Waddell:** Earlier today, the U.K. introduced a similar ban. If enough other countries jump on board, could this become standard practice?

**Kelley:** No doubt. And once someone steps up with a concern, with real-time information sharing, I think you might see quite a few more countries jump on as well.

[Source : Defense One | Kaveh Waddell | March 22, 2017 ++



\*\*\*\*\*

## **PRK Nuclear Weapons Update 03 ► Trump Halts Diplomatic Efforts**

The Trump administration made a clear break 16 MAR with diplomatic efforts to talk North Korea out of a nuclear confrontation, bringing the United States and its Asian allies closer to a military response than at any point in more than a decade. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that 20 years of trying to persuade North Korea to abandon its nuclear program had failed and that he was visiting Asia “to exchange views on a new approach.” Soon after Tillerson’s remarks, in a sign of mounting tensions, the North Korean Embassy held an extraordinary news conference in Beijing to blame the potential for nuclear war on the United States while vowing that its homegrown nuclear testing program will continue in self-defense.

North Korea has amassed a sizable nuclear stockpile and appears at the brink of being able to strike the U.S. mainland and American allies in Asia. The rising threat from the isolated military dictatorship has prompted the Trump administration to begin assessing its options for how to respond and serves as an early test for how the president will confront an increasingly volatile international situation. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said there's been "20 years of a failed approach" in the denuclearization of North Korea. Tillerson discussed the matter at a joint news conference in Tokyo, his first major trip abroad since taking office. One potential immediate response would be to strengthen existing South Korean missile capabilities or to provide Japan with new offensive missile ability. Japan’s defense chief told parliament this month that he would not rule out “first strike” capability, which would be a major departure from Japan’s postwar pacifist traditions.

The United States could also field the same THAAD missile defense system in Japan that it is now installing in South Korea or take the potentially provocative step of reinstalling American nuclear weapons at U.S. bases in South Korea. The North Korean threat could also rekindle the largely dormant idea of a domestic U.S. missile defense system. North Korea has boasted of an intercontinental ballistic missile, and experts on Asia security generally agree that such a capability is within Pyongyang’s reach. Preventing it outright would probably require a military strike on North Korean facilities, something the United States has considered an option of last resort because it would almost certainly result in an attack on South Korea and U.S. forces stationed there, perhaps with chemical or biological weapons. “I think it’s important to recognize that the political and diplomatic efforts of the past 20 years to bring North Korea to the point of denuclearization have failed,” Tillerson said.

Sen. Bob Corker (R-TN) said during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing last month that the United States has three choices: what he called “proactive regime change,” to topple Kim; sanctions and other coercive measures; or military cooperation with Japan and South Korea that could include a preemptive strike on missile facilities. “Otherwise, we’re staring down the barrel of an ICBM,” Corker said Tillerson made a version of Trump’s argument that the United States will demand clear benefits for its diplomacy and foreign aid and will walk away when necessary. Tillerson scoffed at the U.S. expense for trying to entice North Korea to drop its nuclear program — \$1.35 billion by his count. “That encouragement has been met with further development of nuclear capabilities, more missile launches,” including this month and last, Tillerson said. “In the face of this ever-escalating threat, it is clear that a different approach is required.”

Last week, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned that the United States and North Korea were like “two accelerating trains” on a collision course, while Premier Li Keqiang cautioned Wednesday that “tension may lead to conflict.” There are sharply different views in the region about how to lower the North Korean threat, with China in particular unwilling to do anything that might destabilize the desperately poor agrarian nation on its border. Under discussion in addition to potential military moves are tighter U.S. sanctions on the regime and secondary sanctions against its commercial allies. Those steps are considered largely symbolic unless China uses its economic leverage to slow or end North Korean import of critical missile parts. The Trump administration has signaled that it could increase financial penalties against Chinese companies and banks that do business with North Korea. China has

imposed a ban on coal imports from North Korea, a move that — if fully implemented — would deprive the regime of a crucial revenue stream. But many analysts doubt Beijing will uphold the ban, given the instability it could create on China's borders.

Tillerson's remarks seemed to shut the door on any rekindling of international talks that had involved Japan, South Korea and China to persuade the dynastic regime to stop firing missiles and pursuing nuclear weapons. The failed diplomatic outreach had coincided with U.S. efforts to reassure North Korea that it did not plan an unprovoked attack — something the North has long claimed is a Washington plot. In his opening remarks in Tokyo, Tillerson appeared to give a nod to those reassurances, however. "North Korea and its people need not fear the United States or their neighbors in the region who seek only to live in peace with North Korea," he said.

Tillerson is the former chairman and chief executive of ExxonMobil and has no previous diplomatic experience. He has kept a low profile since assuming his new job and has not attended some meetings with foreign leaders in the Oval Office, leading to speculation that he has little influence within the Trump administration. Tillerson did not go to the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo to meet staff Thursday morning, as is often customary. He instead stayed in his hotel, where he read and received briefings from embassy officials, a spokesman said. [Source: The Washington Post | Anna Fifield & Anne Gearan | March 16, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **PRK Nuclear Weapons Update 04 ► Pre-Emptive Military Action Option**

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Friday it may be necessary to take pre-emptive military action against North Korea if the threat from their weapons program reaches a level "that we believe requires action." Tillerson outlined a tougher strategy to confront North Korea's nuclear threat after visiting the world's most heavily armed border near the tense buffer zone between the rivals Koreans. He also closed the door on talks with Pyongyang unless it denuclearizes and gives up its weapons of mass destruction. Asked about the possibility of using military force, Tillerson told a news conference in the South Korean capital, "all of the options are on the table." Trump weighed in on the matter 17 MAR on Twitter: "North Korea is behaving very badly. They have been 'playing' the United States for years. China has done little to help!"

Tillerson said the U.S. does not want a military conflict, "but obviously if North Korea takes actions that threaten South Korean forces or our own forces that would be met with (an) appropriate response. If they elevate the threat of their weapons program to a level that we believe requires action that option is on the table." But he said that by taking other steps, including sanctions, the U.S. is hopeful that North Korea could be persuaded to take a different course before it reaches that point. Past U.S. administrations have considered military force because of North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to deliver them, but rarely has that option been expressed so explicitly. North Korea has accelerated its weapons development, violating multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions and appearing undeterred by tough international sanctions. The North conducted two nuclear test explosions and 24 ballistic missile tests last year. Experts say it could have a nuclear-tipped missile capable of reaching the U.S. within a few years.

Tillerson met Friday with his South Korean counterpart Yun Byung-se and its acting president, Hwang Kyo-ahn on the second leg of a three-nation trip which began in Japan and will end in China. State Department officials have described it as a "listening tour" as the administration seeks a coherent North Korea policy, well-coordinated with its Asian partners. Earlier Friday, Tillerson touched down by helicopter Friday at Camp Bonifas, U.S.-led U.N. base about 400 meters from the Demilitarized Zone, a Cold War vestige created after the Korean War ended in 1953. He then moved to the truce village of Panmunjom inside the DMZ, a cluster of blue huts where the Korean War armistice was signed.



Tillerson is the latest in a parade of senior U.S. officials to have their photos taken at the border. But it's the first trip by the new Trump administration's senior diplomat. The DMZ, which is both a tourist trap and a potential flashpoint, is guarded on both sides with land mines, razor wire fence, tank traps and hundreds of thousands of combat-ready troops. More than a million mines are believed to be buried inside the DMZ. Land mine explosions in 2015 that Seoul blamed on Pyongyang maimed two South Korean soldiers and led the rivals to threaten each other with attacks." Hordes of tourists visit both sides, despite the lingering animosity. The Korean War ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty, which means the Korean Peninsula remains in a technical state of war. President Donald Trump is seen as seeking to examine all options — including military ones — for halting the North's weapons programs before Pyongyang becomes capable of threatening the U.S. mainland.

Tillerson declared an end to the policy "strategic patience" of the Obama administration, which held off negotiating with Pyongyang while tightening of sanctions but failed to prevent North Korea's weapons development. Tillerson said U.S was exploring "a new range of diplomatic, security and economic measures." Central to the U.S. review is China and its role in any bid to persuade Pyongyang to change course. China remains the North's most powerful ally. Tillerson will meet with top Chinese officials including President Xi Jinping in Beijing this weekend. While the U.S. and its allies in Seoul and Tokyo implore Beijing to press its economic leverage over North Korea, the Chinese have emphasized their desire to relaunch diplomatic talks. Tillerson, however, said that "20 years of talks with North Korea have brought us to where we are today." "It's important that the leadership of North Korea realize that their current pathway of nuclear weapons and escalating threats will not lead to their objective of security and economic development. That pathway can only be achieved by denuclearizing, giving up their weapons of mass destruction, and only then will we be prepared to engage with them in talks," he said.

Six-nation aid-for-disarmament talks with North Korea, which were hosted by China, have in fact been stalled since 2009. The Obama administration refused to resume them unless the North re-committed to the goal of denuclearization, something that North Korea has shown little interest in doing. Tillerson urged China and other countries to fully implement U.N. sanctions on North Korea. He also accused China of economic retaliation against South Korea over the U.S. deployment of a missile defense system. He called that reaction "inappropriate and troubling" and said China should focus on the North Korean threat that makes the deployment necessary. China sees the system as a threat to its own security. In early March, North Korea launched four missiles into seas off Japan, in an apparent reaction to major annual military drills the U.S. is currently conducting with South Korea. Pyongyang claims the drills are a rehearsal for invasion. [Source: The Associated Press | Matthew Pennington & Lee Jin-Man | March 17, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **PRK Nuclear Weapons Update 05 ► All Options Are Bad**

As U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson warned Washington's "strategic patience" with North Korea has ended and "all options are on the table" to slow its nuclear ambitions, U.S. and South Korean forces were preparing for a range

of military scenarios. As many as 300,000 mainly South Korean and U.S. personnel are involved in military drills that will run until the end of April. These exercises have been a feature of life on the peninsula since the Korean War ended in a 1953. In recent years, they have become larger and more realistic. Every U.S. president since at least Bill Clinton has confronted North Korea's weapons program and been offered a range of potential military action to tackle them.

So far, none has been willing to strike – primarily because all the options are bad, particularly given the risk of North Korean retaliation that could turn the peninsula, and perhaps the wider region, into a bloodbath. At worst, violence on the peninsula could even drag the United States into war with China, just as it did in the original Korean War. As Pyongyang moves forward with warhead and missile testing, however, many experts believe the likelihood of Washington finally taking such steps is gradually increasing. President Donald Trump says he will not allow Pyongyang to develop the ability to strike the United States with nuclear force. If he orders a limited strike on its facilities, however, North Korea's nuclear progress may only slow temporarily – and such an operation could spark brutal North Korean retaliation. A broader effort to bring down the entire regime would be an enormous undertaking.

Small wonder, then, that the United States has preferred to stick with alternative techniques such as economic sanctions and cyber attacks to interfere with missile tests. The recent deployment of THAAD antiballistic missile batteries to South Korea and Japan should offer some protection, although no one knows how effective they would be against North Korean missiles. If Washington did choose to go further, the most likely action would be sudden, hopefully overwhelming bombing raids on suspected North Korean missile and weapons facilities. While such action would be unlikely to destroy the program out right, it would slow development. At best, it would prevent Pyongyang from perfecting some of its more ambitious weapons programs, such as mounting ballistic missiles in diesel electric submarines.

The largest acknowledged conventional bomb in the U.S. Air Force arsenal – the 30,000 pound GBU-57 “Massive Ordnance Penetrator” – was designed with just this sort of target in mind. Built by the George W. Bush administration primarily to destroy Iranian nuclear facilities, it could be dropped from B2 stealth bombers flying from either regional bases or the continental United States. Unlike more conventional jets, the B2s should be able to penetrate North Korean airspace largely undetected, perhaps joined by some of the more modern F-22 Raptors and perhaps even the newly operational F-35 Joint Strike Fighters now deployed in the region. The reason such strikes have not been launched so far is the same reason they were never launched against Iran's nuclear program. Many experts believe they would leave many facilities intact – and the potential retaliation might be devastating. With Iran, Washington feared that Tehran would retaliate against Gulf oil and gas facilities and shipping, with potentially disastrous consequences for an already fragile global economy. With North Korea, the worry is that Pyongyang might launch missile strikes against Japan and regional U.S. bases such as Guam and a devastating artillery barrage into South Korea.

Analysts disagree over just how effective that barrage would be – some suggest North Korean artillery could land up to 500,000 shells in the South Korean capital within the first hour, others are more skeptical. There is also the fear that if the North believed its rockets and warheads were under threat, it might fire them – with Japan the most likely target. Either action would probably spell the end for the North Korean regime, prompting Washington and Seoul to put into action already existing plans to overrun the North. Over the last few years, U.S. and South Korean forces have shifted their focus from training to stop a North Korean offensive to having plans in place for a comprehensive invasion across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). That would be a major undertaking, one that would dwarf any war America – or any other country – has fought in recent history. Attacking troops would face mountainous terrain, concerted opposition and potential chemical, nuclear and radiological threats.

There are some signs the United States might try to halt escalation by simply decapitating the regime. According to South Korean news agency Yonhap, this month's exercises included U.S. Navy SEAL Team Six, the unit that conducted the 2011 raid that killed Osama bin Laden. They were working with South Korean counterparts to

simulate a strike on the North Korean leadership, according to a South Korean military official quoted by the news agency. Such an option would be extremely hard to put into practice. North Korea's air defenses make sending troops by helicopter difficult, while Kim is believed to be heavily guarded. For now, Kim appears to think he can keep ramping up his nuclear program unchallenged. Washington, though, may not be willing to watch from the sidelines. It's an unenviable choice. Action could provoke disaster. But failure to do anything might be blamed for a future conflict that could be even worse. [Source: Reuters | Peter Apps | March 24, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vintage U.S. Nuclear Test Films ► Declassified and Released**

From the deserts of southern New Mexico and Nevada to islands in the Pacific Ocean, the U.S. government conducted dozens of nuclear weapons tests from the 1940s until the early 1960s. Vintage rolls of film collected from high-security vaults across the country show some of the blasts sending incredible mushroom clouds into the sky and massive fireballs across the landscape. Others start with blinding flashes of light followed by rising columns of smoke in the distance. A team from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory this week published more than five dozen films salvaged from government installations where they had sat idle for years.

Lab physicist Greg Spriggs said the decades-old films were in danger of decomposing and being lost to history. He called them a big part of the nation's history and an important tool for providing better data to modern scientists who now use computer codes to help certify that the U.S. nuclear stockpile remains safe and effective. "We don't have any experimental data for modern weapons in the atmosphere. The only data that we have are the old tests," he said, noting that the manual methods used in the 1950s to analyze the blasts weren't that accurate. By scanning the film and reviewing it along with data sheets from the original tests, the team discovered that much of the data initially published were wrong. Some of the answers were off by 20 percent. "One of the payoffs of this project is that we're now getting very consistent answers," he said. "We've also discovered new things about these detonations that have never been seen before."

Of the 10,000 or so films that are thought to have been made over the testing period, Spriggs and his team have located about 6,500 of them. Only a fraction of the films have been reanalyzed and declassified. Some of the film cans had not been opened for decades. Some smelled of vinegar, indicating the decomposition process was underway and any more time would have left the material useless. Some of the test films were located in a vault at Los Alamos National Laboratory, the northern New Mexico installation that played a large role in the Manhattan Project to develop the first atomic bomb. Archivists and software developers worked together to determine the frame rates of the cameras used during the tests. That ensured an accurate measure of the growth of the fireball, the size of the shockwave and the overall yield. "It's just unbelievable how much energy's released," Spriggs said.

"We hope that we would never have to use a nuclear weapon ever again. I think that if we capture the history of this and show what the force of these weapons are and how much devastation they can wreak, then maybe people will be reluctant to use them." It could take another two years to scan the rest of the films and even longer to complete the analysis and declassification, Spriggs said. The U.S. conducted 210 atmospheric nuclear tests between 1945 and 1962, with multiple cameras capturing each event at around 2,400 frames per second. Go to [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvGO\\_dWo8VfcmG166wKRy5z-GIJ\\_OQND5](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvGO_dWo8VfcmG166wKRy5z-GIJ_OQND5) to view 64 of the declassified films of tests conducted by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. [Source: The Associated Press | Susan Montoya Bryan | March 19, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## PRK Propaganda ► TV | Burning U.S. Supercarrier & B-1B Bomber

North Korea's main propaganda outlet on 19 MAR showed images of a U.S. supercarrier and strategic bomber engulfed in flames to showcase Pyongyang's resolve to counter the ongoing joint Seoul-Washington military drills. Uriminzokkiri TV showed in a 170 second video clip a superimposed image of what looks to be the USS Carl Vinson on fire after the ship is placed in the crosshairs. The Internet-based mouthpiece of the reclusive regime then showed an image of the B-1B bomber similarly in flames. It said a knife will be stabbed into the throat of the carrier, while the bomber will fall from the sky after getting hit by a hail of fire. Uriminzokkiri then said that ongoing military drills between South Korea and the United States have now completely given up all pretenses of being a defensive operation and instead have openly stated the intent to assassinate the North's leadership. This, it said, can only be viewed as a declaration of war.

The North has viewed all military drills between Seoul and Washington as a rehearsal for an invasion of the North. It then warned that such provocations by the allies will only lead to the annihilation of the United States and it showed off images of the latest missiles such as the Pukguksong-2 missile and its vast artillery units in training. The video was released within two weeks of North Korea's ballistic missile tests into the Sea of Japan, a test which Pyongyang labeled as training for strikes on U.S. military installations in Japan. Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni in Yamaguchi Prefecture is one of the suspected targets.

The United States deployed a controversial missile defense system to South Korea a day after the ballistic missile tests. Neighboring China was quick to condemn the deployment of the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense system, or THAAD, as they view the systems high-power radar as a security threat. The joint U.S.-South Korean exercises, which occur annually, will run through April. Pyongyang views the exercises as a mock-invasion of North Korea, while the U.S. and South Korea view them as defensive exercises. The Carl Vinson, as well as B1-B strategic bombers, are involved in the joint exercises. [Source: Yonhap News Agency Seoul & MilitaryTimes| March 19 & 20, 2017 ++]



\*\*\*\*\*

## Taiwan-China Dispute ► New Missile Capability

Taiwan has publicly claimed it's capable of launching missiles that will hit mainland China, confirmed Minister of National Defense Feng Shih-kuan when asked by a lawmaker. "It is the first time the ministry has confirmed this,"



lawmaker Wang Ting-yu told AFP, adding that Taiwanese missiles may be able to travel more than 1,500 kilometers. In the four-yearly report to parliament Shih-kuan delivered, there was also a pledge to create an enhanced military to protect Taiwan. Currently, China sees Taiwan as a renegade province, and Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense says China has more than 1,500 missiles aimed at the island nation. "Should the enemy insist on invading, we will weaken their capabilities by striking enemy troops at their home bases, fighting them at sea, crushing them as they approach the coastlines and wiping them out on the beaches," the report says. Ties have worsened since Beijing-skeptic Tsai Ing-wen became president, bringing an end to an eight-year rapprochement, AFP reported. [Source: DefenseNews | Ashley Bunch | March 17, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Taiwan-China Dispute Update 01 ► Plan To Build Own Subs**

Taiwan will build its own submarines to get around Beijing's efforts to prevent it from purchasing such craft from overseas and ensure an adequate defense against Chinese threats, President Tsai Ing-wen said 21 MAR. During a visit to the Navy's main base in Tsoying, also spelled Zuoying, Tsai oversaw the signing of a memorandum of understanding on the construction of submarines. "Under the strategic concept of effective and multilayered deterrence, subsurface combat ability is what Taiwan's defense is most in need of strengthening," Tsai said. "This is a problem that everyone is aware of but which in the past we were never able to resolve." Defense News' correspondent in the region, Mike Yeo, says Taiwan's submarine program is still in its infancy, as there is very little firm detail. Taiwan's Navy presently has just two combat-ready subs, versions of the Zwaardvis-class subs purchased from the Netherlands in the 1980s in a deal that led to a major diplomatic rift between Beijing and The Hague.

Although George W. Bush's administration had pledged to help Taiwan procure more submarines, the U.S. no longer makes the diesel-electric craft that Taiwan needs and has apparently been unable to enlist foreign makers in providing their expertise. Earlier reports have said Taiwan was seeking eight new submarines, although Tsai gave no details other than to say that sub production would be the "most challenging" aspect of Taiwan's development of an upgraded indigenous defense industry. The craft will be built through a joint venture between the government's National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology and the formerly state-owned ship maker CSBC Corp. The announcement comes weeks after Tsai announced a \$2.1 billion investment in the production of Air Force jet trainers to be designed and manufactured on the island.

China has successfully used its diplomatic and economic clout to prevent many overseas military purchases by Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own territory. Most of Taiwan's military hardware is either produced domestically or bought from the United States, which is legally bound to ensure Taiwan can defend itself, despite having only unofficial ties with the island. [Source: The Associated Press | March 21, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Climate Change Update 01 ► White House Doubts it, Pentagon Does Not**

The contentious debate over climate change is entering a new phase, with skeptics in the Trump administration poised to roll back regulations governing everything from clean-water standards to fracking — convinced that doing so will boost the U.S. economy. But the Pentagon views the issue differently. For Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, climate change represents a significant national security threat, one that's "impacting stability in areas of the world where our troops are operating today," according his written testimony to Congress provided in January ahead of his confirmation. The news site ProPublica was first to publish Mattis' remarks, pitting the retired Marine general's views against those held by the commander in chief and others in his administration.

The topic has renewed relevance as the White House aims to grow defense spending substantially — hoping to add personnel, and buy more ships, aircraft and weapons — while making major reductions to other parts of the federal budget, including at the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which researches climate change and provides weather forecasting data to the military. It's a tricky predicament for the Pentagon, which has conducted substantial climate-related research, too, dating back at least to the 1990s. Officials continue to factor this data into core military doctrine. In fact, the most recent Quadrennial Defense Review, a 90-page document that outlines the Defense Department's strategic trajectory, includes the phrases "climate change" or "severe weather" at least 10 times. On the one hand, the Defense Department stands to benefit from funding rollbacks at other agencies. But on the other, senior officials see immediate, practical reasons to be worried.

Here are three:

**Economic competition.** Thawing in the Arctic has opened new maritime routes and revealed new energy sources, creating new competition between the U.S. and Russia. The Pentagon's 2013 Arctic Strategy statement details its plans for safeguarding American interests there and ensuring freedom of navigation. It calls the region a "strategic inflection point," noting that as the ice caps continue to melt, there will be rush to claim the oil, natural gas and other resources there. The Pentagon views the Arctic as vital for establishing ballistic missile defenses to safeguard the homeland. But Russia's buildup there has greatly exceeded that of the United States. Its military has established a new Arctic command, added four brigades, 14 airfields, 16 ports, and has 40 operational icebreakers and 11 in production. The U.S. has only one working icebreaker, and it was commissioned in the 1970s.

In the South China Sea, warming waters have forced fish stocks to migrate north, increasing the potential for conflict between China and U.S. allies whose economies depend on that trade, says Frank Femia, who heads the Center for Climate and Security. The non-partisan think tank includes several senior retired military officers concerned about climate change and its impact on national security. Tensions are particularly high between Vietnam and China, which have competing territorial claims to the Spratly and Parcel islands. The Chinese have harassed several Vietnamese fishing boats, even sinking some of them. One such incident, in 2014, was caught on video. The Chinese maintain the Vietnamese boat ventured too close to one of its oil rigs, an incident documented by The Diplomat. Another confrontation happened in 2015 near the Parcel islands, when armed men boarded the Vietnamese boat and removed navigation equipment, according to Voice of America. The U.S. Navy has stepped up its presence in response. Tension in the region will only increase as China aggressively defends its claims there.

**Military infrastructure.** Rising sea levels threaten several major U.S. installations while prolonged droughts, which can lead to forest fires, put bases and other military infrastructure at risk. Last summer, the Union of Concerned Scientists published a report indicating a three-foot sea level rise would threaten 128 bases. Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia and 17 other facilities that reside on waterfront property could experience hundreds of floods a year and, in some cases, become mostly submerged by the year 2100. Cleanup or relocation costs could stretch into the tens of billions of dollars. Drought-fueled wildfires are an equally troublesome threat. In the spring of 2014, a major fire started on Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach in southern California, a facility adjacent to Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton. It forced the evacuation of nearly a thousand people and destroyed roughly 6,000 acres, according to NBC San Diego.

**Mass migration and instability.** The world's most fragile and unstable regions tend to be hit hardest by climate change, Femia says. In Bangladesh, for instance, a former military leader has warned that rising sea levels could force mass migrations and potentially lead to the radicalization of marginalized people in a region already challenged by violent militant groups. Pakistan, a nuclear power also contending with a resurgence in terrorist activity, depends on glacial melt for drinking water. Abrupt changes in the water supply can result in major security shifts there. Pakistan and India have fought several wars over the contested regions of Jammu and Kashmir, where both countries derive most of their fresh water. A deadly terror attack on an Indian base in September set off a major diplomatic row, with India's foreign minister suggesting the two scrap a 56-year-old accord ensuring access to fresh

water. "The consequences might well be humanitarian devastation in what is already one of the world's most water-starved countries — an outcome far more harmful and far-reaching than the effects of limited war," analyst Michael Kugelman wrote in Foreign Policy.

In parts of North Africa and the Middle East where there is weak governance, climate change is "acting as an accelerant of instability or as a threat multiplier," Femia told Military Times. Lake Chad, which borders the African countries of Chad, Niger, Nigeria, and Cameroon, has been drastically affected by drought. This harms people's livelihoods, making the region fertile ground for groups like Boko-Haram, an Islamist terror group, to recruit. Prior to the revolution in Syria, which has led to a six-year civil war, the region was experiencing one of its worst droughts ever recorded. And although it was not a factor in starting the conflict, which has left an estimated 500,000 dead and caused more than 11 million to flee their homes, climate did create the conditions for mass displacement, Femia said. And researchers have predicated that will only get worse, with large swaths of the Middle East and North Africa becoming increasingly uninhabitable.

-o-o-O-o-o-

So Mattis' recent comments on climate change represent a "practical view of what the military needs to do," he added. It's an issue that has crossed previous administrations, both Republican and Democratic, and demonstrates the Pentagon has "thought about this in an apolitical way." On 28 MAR President Trump signed an executive order overturning a requirement that federal agencies consider climate change in their operations, saying it would reduce regulation and create jobs. Trump's action repealed an executive order signed by President Obama in 2013 that aimed to "enhance climate preparedness and resilience" at federal agencies. Obama instructed agencies to issue plans spelling out risks climate change poses to agency missions and the specific actions agencies will take to mitigate those risks.

The president also rolled back Obama-era memoranda requiring federal agencies to protect and minimize harmful effects on land, water, wildlife and other natural resources, as well as an initiative to incorporate climate change considerations into national security policy. He is also looking to change the formula agencies use when issuing regulations to determine the economic and social costs of greenhouse gas emission. Trump left in place a 2015 Obama order calling on agencies to reduce their direct greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent by 2025. It required agencies to receive 30 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by the same period and to award \$4 billion in contracts to improve energy and water efficiency by 2017. As of September 2016, agencies had already awarded \$3.4 billion toward those contracts with an additional \$2.8 billion in the pipeline. Agencies were on track toward their efficiency goals -- according to [todata](#) on Performance.gov -- cutting greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 18 percent and receiving 8 percent of their energy from renewable sources. [Source: MilitaryTimes & Gov.Exec | Shawn Snow & Eric Katz | March 19 & 28, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Dog Greeting Protocol** ► **How Not to Be Bitten**

You're seated on a restaurant patio enjoying the spring weather and can't help but reach out to pet a nearby dog. STOP! Not only do pets become fearful of strangers — no matter how nice you really are — they will sometimes bite when they feel threatened. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports there are 4.5 million dog bites in the United States annually. Most victims are children, followed by men. You never know a dog's history or behavioral issues they may have, so always make sure to ask a dog's owner before you go to pet a dog," said Ashley Jacobs, CEO and founder of Sitting for a Cause. "This way you can ensure your safety and the dog's comfort." And you can make sure you and your loved ones don't turn a seemingly innocent encounter into a nasty one for you and the pet. Dogs are not naturally inclined to attack humans unless they are threatened or allowed to do so by irresponsible owners, according to Cesar's Way. Still, it's best to understand how to escape such attacks or

avoid serious injury. Consider these seven points from pet experts to ensure your pet encounters stay friendly for everyone.

**1. Remain still as the dog sniffs your closed hand** -- Keep your hand in a fist – it’s less threatening – and slowly offer it to the dog to sniff it as long as it wants, recommends Valerie Trumps, writing for the pet parenting site Pet 360. When the dog relaxes or wags its tail, you can move ahead to pet it (again, with the owner’s permission).

**2. Stand up straight or squat** -- A dog has its own way of interpreting your posture when you meet. Standing straight or squatting is fine, but whatever you do, don’t crouch over the dog, recommends Trumps. That posture can be interpreted as threatening.

**3. Don’t stare into a dog’s eyes** -- If you squat down to its eye level, don’t hold the dog’s gaze. You may think doing so shows love or friendliness, but Jacobs says many dogs see it as a sign of aggression. It makes them uncomfortable and even fearful.

**4. Pet the body of a dog, not its head or face** -- “Many dogs, especially dogs that aren’t familiar with you, aren’t comfortable having their head or face touched,” says Jacobs. “Touching their heads or faces is an invasion of their space and can leave them feeling threatened. Instead, opt to pet their backs, chest or shoulders.”

**5. Avoid hugging** -- Even if the dog belongs to a friend or relative, don’t assume it’s completely comfortable with you. Dogs don’t like anyone hugging them, says Jacobs. “Most dogs are not fans of being hugged because it makes them feel trapped or dominated, increasing their stress levels,” she says.

**6. Do let the dog control the interaction** -- If the dog wags its tail and relaxes, it enjoys the encounter. If the dog backs away, stop what you’re doing and allow the dog solitude, recommends the pet travel site GoPetFriendly at <http://blog.gopetfriendly.com/11-tips-for-greeting-a-strange-dog>.

**7. Do play nice** -- You may think it’s a gentle sign of love to gently pull a dog’s tail or pull a toy away, but it is frustrating to a dog. Play nice and be respectful, says Jacobs.

If you’re running, walking or just sitting, and a dog threatens to attack, heed these next four tips from dog behavior expert Cesar Millan’s website, Cesar’s Way <https://www.cesarway.com/dog-behavior/biting/when-dogs-attack>.



**1. Remain calm** -- Don’t yell, kick or strike out at a dog that attacks you. Remaining calm shows the dog you are in charge. It also surprises it. Dogs sense fear so try not to exhibit that reaction.

**2. Control your space** -- If you are carrying a handbag, sweater or umbrella, place it in front of you. That will show the dog you are trying to maintain your space, not intrude into its area. Holding an umbrella or other object out also makes you appear larger.

**3. Allow the dog to attack clothing** -- If you sense an attack is imminent, pull your arm out of the sleeve of a sweater or jacket, and let the dog attack the garment. The dog will think it’s attacking you, and that distraction will likely give you a chance to reach safety.

**4. Protect your neck, face and chest** -- If a dog attacks, the least harmful place it can bite you is on your forearm or shin. A bite on the neck, face, chest or thigh can be serious and even fatal. Also, try to keep your hands clenched in fists to protect your fingers.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Nancy Dunham | March 23, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Have You Heard? ► Blonde Stories || Lesson On UP**

### **DISNEYLAND**

Two blondes were going to Disneyland. They were driving on the Interstate when they saw the sign that said Disneyland LEFT.

They started crying and turned around and went home.

-o-o-O-o-o-

### **FARTHER AWAY**

Two blondes living in Oklahoma were sitting on a bench talking, and one blonde says to the other, 'Which do you think is farther away, Florida or the moon?'

The other blonde turns and says 'Hellooooooooooooo, can you see Florida?'

-o-o-O-o-o-

### **CAR TROUBLE**

A blonde pushes her BMW into a gas station. She tells the mechanic it died. After he works on it for a few minutes, it is idling smoothly.

She says, 'What's the story?'

He replies, 'Just crap in the carburetor'

She asks, 'How often do I have to do that?'

-o-o-O-o-o-

### **SPEEDING TICKET**

A police officer stops a blonde for speeding and asks her very nicely if he could see her license.

She replied in a huff, 'I wish you guys would get your act together. Just yesterday you take away my license and then today you expect me to show it to you!'

-o-o-O-o-o-

### **RIVER WALK**

There's this blonde out for a walk. She comes to a river and sees another blonde on the opposite bank 'Yoo-hoo!' she shouts, 'How can I get to the other side?'

The second blonde looks up the river then down the river and shouts back, 'You ARE on the other side.'

-o-o-O-o-o-

### **AT THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE**

A gorgeous young redhead goes into the doctor's office and said that her body hurt wherever she touched it.

'Impossible!' says the doctor. "Show me."

The redhead took her finger, pushed on her left shoulder and screamed, then she pushed her elbow and screamed even more. She pushed her knee and screamed; likewise she pushed her ankle and screamed. Everywhere she touched made her scream.

The doctor said, 'You're not really a redhead, are you?'

'Well, no' she said, 'I'm actually a blonde.'

'I thought so,' the doctor said, 'Your finger is broken.'

-o-o-O-o-o-

### **KNITTING**

A highway patrolman pulled alongside a speeding car on the freeway. Glancing at the car, he was astounded to see that the blonde behind the wheel was knitting! Realizing that she was oblivious to his flashing lights and siren, the trooper cranked down his window, turned on his bullhorn and yelled, 'PULL OVER!'

'NO!' the blonde yelled back, 'IT'S A SCARF!'

-o-o-O-o-o-

### **FIRST ON THE SUN**

A Russian, an American, and a Blonde were talking one day.

The Russian said, 'We were the first in space!'

The American said, 'We were the first on the moon!'

The Blonde said, 'So what? We're going to be the first on the sun!'

The Russian and the American looked at each other and shook their heads.

'You can't land on the sun, you idiot! You'll burn up!' said the Russian.

To which the Blonde replied, 'We're not stupid, you know. We're going at night!'

-o-o-O-o-o-

### **IN A VACUUM**

A blonde was playing Trivial Pursuit one night. It was her turn. She rolled the dice and she landed on Science & Nature. Her question was, 'If you are in a vacuum and someone calls your name, can you hear it?'

She thought for a time and then asked, 'Is it on or off?'

-o-o-O-o-o-

### **NEW DOG**

A girl was visiting her blonde friend, who had acquired two new dogs, and asked her what their names were.

The blonde responded by saying that one was named Rolex and one was named Timex.

Her friend said, 'Whoever heard of someone naming dogs like that?'

'HELLLOOOOOOO,' answered the blonde. 'They're watch dogs!'

\*\*\*\*\*

### **A Lesson on UP**

This two-letter word in English has more meanings than any other two-letter word, and that word is **UP**. It is listed in the dictionary as an [adv.], [prep], [adj.], [n] or [v].

It's easy to understand **UP**, meaning toward the sky or at the top of the list, but when we awaken in the morning, why do we wake **UP**?

At a meeting, why does a topic come **UP**? Why do we speak **UP**, and why are the officers **UP** for election (if there is a tie, it is a toss **UP**) and why is it **UP** to the secretary to write **UP** a report?

We call **UP** our friends, brighten **UP** a room, polish **UP** the silver, warm **UP** the leftovers and clean **UP** the kitchen. We lock **UP** the house and fix **UP** the old car.

At other times, this little word has real special meaning. People stir **UP** trouble, line **UP** for tickets, work **UP** an appetite, and think **UP** excuses.

To be dressed is one thing but to be dressed **UP** is special.



And this UP is confusing: A drain must be opened UP because it is blocked UP

We open UP a store in the morning but we close it UP at night. We seem to be pretty mixed UP about UP!

To be knowledgeable about the proper uses of UP, look UP the word UP in the dictionary. In a desk-sized dictionary, it takes UP almost 1/4 of the page and can add UP to about thirty definitions.

If you are UP to it, you might try building UP a list of the many ways UP is used. It will take UP a lot of your time, but if you don't give UP, you may wind UP with (UP to) a hundred or more.

When it threatens to rain, we say it is clouding UP. When the sun comes out, we say it is clearing UP. When it rains, it soaks UP the earth. When it does not rain for a while, things dry UP. One could go on and on, but I'll wrap it UP, for now . . . My time is UP!

Oh . . . One more thing: What is the first thing you do in the morning and the last thing you do at night?

U P!

Did that one crack you UP? Don't screw UP. Send this on to the people you look UP in your address book . . . Or not . . . it's UP to you. Now I'll shut UP!

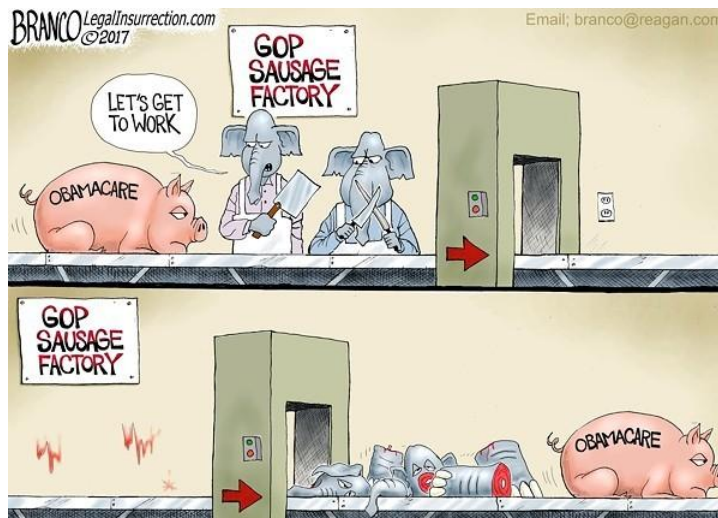
\*\*\*\*\*



**BBQ & Beer Cooler.** When done push the handle to put out fire



**Matador Antonio Romero fights a bull in Mexico City and receive an 11 inch gore in his rectum**



**FAIR USE NOTICE:** This newsletter may contain copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. The Editor/Publisher of the Bulletin at times includes such material in an effort to advance reader's understanding of veterans' issues. We believe this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, the material in this newsletter is distributed without profit to those who have expressed an interest in receiving the included information for educating themselves on veteran issues so they can better communicate with their legislators on issues affecting them. To obtain more information on Fair Use refer to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>. If you wish to use copyrighted material from this newsletter for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.

**-o-o-O-o-o-**

**TO READ and/or DOWNLOAD THE ABOVE ARTICLES, ATTACHMENTS, OR PAST BULLETINS**

**Online GO TO:**

- <http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html> (PDF Edition w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://www.veteransresources.org> (PDF & HTML Editions w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions in Word format)
- <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> (PDF & HTML Editions w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://www.veteransresources.org/rao-bulletin> (past Bulletins)

**Notes:**

1. The Bulletin will be provided as a website accessed document vice direct access until further notice. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 20,496 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.
2. Anyone who no longer wants to receive the Bulletin can use the automatic "UNSUBSCRIBE" tab at the bottom of this message or send a message to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) with the word "DELETE" in the subject line.
3. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines, whether or not they live there, can request to be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of notices on Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, and TRICARE in the RP.
4. New subscribers and those who submit a change of address should receive a message that verifies their addition or address change being entered in the mailing list. If you do not receive a message within 7 days it indicates that either I never received your request, I made an error in processing your request, or your server will not allow me to send to the email addree you provided. Anyone who cannot reach me by email can call (858) 432-1214 to ask questions or confirm info needed to add them to the directory.
5. If you have another email addree at work or home and would like to also receive Bulletin notices there also, just provide the appropriate addree to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net).
6. Past Bulletin articles as well as an index of all previously published article titles are available on request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net). Bear in mind that the articles listed on this index were valid at the time they were written and may have since been updated or become outdated.

