

RAO

BULLETIN

15 April 2017

PDF Edition



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

*** ATTACHMENTS ***

Attachment - RAO Bulletin April 15, 2017
Attachment - West Virginia Vet State Benefits & Discounts APR 2017
Attachment - Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 30 APR
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*** DoD ***



SECNAV Retiree Council Update 06 ► Response to 2015 Report

The Secretary of the Navy's (SECNAV) Retiree Council (SNRC) met at the Washington Navy Yard in August 2015. The council meets annually in accordance with SECNAV Instruction 5420.1691, and is made up of both Navy and Marine Corps retired volunteers. The council debates areas of retiree concerns and makes recommendations to the Secretary of the Navy. After the council issues its recommendations, they are reviewed by the Secretary, who then issues a response. Among the highlights are:

- In a repeat issue from 2014, the council made recommendations to address the shortage of mental healthcare providers, to include increased funding, recruiting providers and providing educational, administrative and financial support to decrease barriers to Tricare participation.
- The Secretary's response concurred with the Navy that during FY-15, Tricare added 14,022 behavioral health providers to its network, including six overseas. Currently, military retirees with a combined Veterans Affairs (VA) disability rating of at least 50 percent and with at least 20 years service receive both a full military retired pension and full VA disability compensation benefits.
- The council recommended Navy support of initiatives referred to Congress to pass legislation amending Title 10 of the U.S. Code to expand the Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payment entitlement to all military retirees, regardless of VA disability rating. The Secretary, while not opposed, pointed out such an expansion would cost approximately \$35 billion over 10 years, and such a proposal could not be made without an equivalent budgetary offset.
- In dealing with survivor's benefits, the council recommended that the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) should not be offset by the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). Survivors eligible for both SBP and DIC must forfeit one dollar of SBP annuity for every dollar of DIC received from the VA. The Secretary responded that elimination of the offset would create inequity compared to beneficiaries who are not eligible for both by creating a group of survivors receiving two government subsidized survivor annuities.
- The council revisited extending presumption of Agent Orange exposure by "blue-water" Sailors. The council recommended the Secretary endorse the presumed exposure and support legislative change. If pending legislation (H.R. 969 and S.B. 681) fails or is delayed, the council intends to resubmit the issue. The response stated both bills remain in subcommittee, and that the Secretary will continue to monitor this legislation and update the council.
- The council also made recommendations for expansion of Tricare overseas, urging SECNAV to take action to encourage Tricare efforts to increase the number of providers overseas, especially in areas around former U.S. military concentration areas. The Secretary's response was that Tricare representatives indicated regional contractors use proprietary models to determine numbers of required providers. The representatives disagreed with a Navy assessment that the models do not take retirees into account. The Secretary indicated he will continue working with Tricare to determine if this issue needs further resolution.

Other issue recommendations receiving responses covered issues such as the medical evaluation process for those on the Temporary Disabled Retired List, transitional housing for single parent veterans with children, Space Available transportation, VA claims for radiation exposure, and TRICARE eye coverage and program enrollment fees. GO to <http://www.public.navy.mil/bupersnpc/reference/publications/shiftcolors/Documents/Response.pdf> to read the full report. [Source: Shift Colors | Spring-Summer 2017 ++]

Navy Retiree Seminar/Appreciation Days ► 2017 Schedule

- Retiree Appreciation Day Naval Base Kitsap/ Naval Station Bremerton Saturday, July 8, 9 a.m.-noon Jackson Park Community Center, 90 Olding Road Bremerton, Wash. POC: (360) 396-1768 Email: britt.feldman@navy.mil
- Retiree Appreciation Day Naval Support Activity Mid-South Millington, Tenn. Saturday, Sept. 9, 8 a.m.-2 p.m. NSA Mid-South Conference Center Email: julia.powell@navy.mil
- Retired Appreciation Day Naval Air Station, Lemoore, Calif. Saturday, Sept. 23, 9 a.m. Station Theater, 824 Hancock Circle Email: james.bloxsom.ctr@navy.mil

- Retiree Appreciation Day Air National Guard Base Selfridge, Mich. Saturday, Sept. 23, 8 a.m. Dining Facility, Bldg. 164, 43156 Wagner Street Email: selfrao@yahoo.com
- Joint Retiree Appreciation Day Navy Operational Center Minneapolis, Minn. Saturday, Sept. 30, 7:30 a.m. Mystic Lake Main Ballroom Email: metrojrad@gmail.com
- Retiree Appreciation Day Sub Base New London, Conn. Saturday, Oct. 14, 9 a.m. Dealy Center (Base Auditorium) Email: navret2@aol.com
- Retiree Seminar Naval Air Station Pensacola, Fla. Saturday, Oct. 21, 7:30 a.m. Mustin Beach Club POC: (850) 452-5618 Retiree Seminar Naval Base San Diego, Calif. Saturday, Oct. 29, 8 a.m. Anchors Catering Conference Center RSVP: (858) 277-4259
- Retiree Appreciation Day Navy Operations Support Center Phoenix, Ariz. Saturday, Oct. 29, 8 a.m. Luke Air Force Base (NOSC) POC: Bill Best, (623) 856-3923/6827 Email: bjb9930@aol.com
- Retiree Appreciation Day Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam Saturday, Nov. 4 7:30 a.m.-noon Hickam Officers' Club POC: Phone: (808) 474-0032 Email: jack9562@gmail.com

[Source: Shift Colors | Spring-Summer 2017 ++]

DoD Appropriations Act Update 02 ► Congress' Professional Malpractice

For eight straight years, Congress has failed to pass a defense appropriations bill on time, forcing the armed services in wartime to operate for months at the start of every fiscal year under restrained spending authority called a continuing resolution (CR). CRs freeze defense spending at prior-year levels, block the start of new programs, delay expiration of old programs, and drive up procurement costs by billions of dollars by dismantling the efficiency of multiyear weapon contracts. For the current fiscal year, budget handcuffs on the military are tighter than at any time since the government shutdown of 2013. More than six months into FY 2017, the military continues to operate under a CR, in this case the second desperate budget patch lawmakers have applied since October.

As usual, Republicans and Democrats are paralyzed by partisanship. Republicans want only defense budgets to get relief from spending controls imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA). Democrats want relief from the BCA for domestic programs, too. So far, claims of deteriorating readiness across the military aren't enough to stir an old-fashioned compromise from this generation of lawmakers. At a hearing 5 APR before the House Armed Services Committee, service chiefs of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps predicted readiness disasters if Congress fails to pass a \$578 billion defense money bill, or even a \$30 billion defense supplemental budget the White House requested in early March. With the current CR set to expire April 28 and Congress taking a two-week break for Easter and Passover, military leaders fear lawmakers will take the easy path again and vote for a third CR to cover the last five months of fiscal 2017.

If that occurs, service chiefs warned, then by early summer training will stop across much of the military. New recruits won't be sent to boot camp. Most aircraft at stateside bases will be grounded. Ship repairs will stop. Only next-to-deploy ground units will see critical training continue. Most training center rotations and large-scale exercises will be suspended. Routine maintenance of equipment will be halted, and thousands of military families will see transfer orders put on hold.

Rep. Susan Davis (D-CA) got a sense of the depth of frustration felt by the chiefs when she suggested CRs might be the “new normal” and asked if military leaders shouldn't find more effective ways to deal with that reality. “I don't accept it as a new normal, Congresswoman,” snapped Gen. Mark A. Milley, Army chief of staff. “Candidly, failure to pass a budget, in my view both as an American citizen and chief of staff of the United States Army,

constitutes professional malpractice. I don't think we should accept it as the new normal. I think we should pass it and pass the supplemental with it. And get on with it.” “The world is a dangerous place,” Milley continued. “And it's becoming more dangerous - by the day!” he said, emphasizing each word for effect. **“Pass the budget.”**

Other chiefs softened their tone but agreed with Milley it can't become normal to saddle the military with months of budget uncertainty every year.

- Adm. John M. Richardson, chief of naval operations, said accepting CRs as normal would mean accepting the idea of giving potential adversaries a head start every year in the race to gain or sustain military dominance.
- Gen. David L. Goldfein, Air Force chief of staff, said every service chief visits frontline fighting forces and can “give that speech” on why they are there, separated from family and putting their lives at risk. The hardest question to field, he said, is why Americans back home don't seem to be paying attention. “Are we serious about this or not? Is the risk, going forward, worth it or not? And I'm not sure, if we don't even pass a budget, that we can look them in the eye and tell them that what they're doing ... is on the minds of this Congress,” Goldfein said.

By early March, the House alone had passed a defense appropriations bill to cover the current year. The Senate defense appropriations subcommittee was still discussing with leadership how it should proceed. “No one is advocating for a full-year CR for the Department of Defense,” said a committee staff member. “It has never operated under one, and we do not intend to start doing that now. We want that to be very clear.” Details of the House-passed appropriations had been worked out with senators with bipartisan support. The \$30 billion defense supplemental, however, might not enjoy the same level of bipartisan support. Additional legislator comments made at the hearing included:

- Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA) noted at the House hearing that the supplemental includes \$5.1 billion to fund President Trump's new strategy for defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the terrorist organization still holding territory in Iraq and Syria. Garamendi pressed Milley for details. The Army chief declined to share publicly. “I guess you would expect us to approve a plan that's not been submitted,” Garamendi complained. So far Congress doesn't know, he said, “where the money would be spent [or] how it would be spent.”
- Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX), committee chairman, said frequent deployments have done more damage to readiness “than most of us realize, requiring more time and more money to repair than is generally expected.” Responsibility for “the current state of affairs” can be shared with “both Congress and the Obama administration, with both Republicans and Democrats, with both military and civilian leadership.” Defense budgets, he said, “got caught up in the partisan back-and-forth on other issues and has even been held hostage for other priorities. We need to get back to evaluating our defense needs on their own, without regard to any agreement or disagreement we may have on other issues.”
- Rep. Adam Smith (D- WA), the committee's ranking Democrat, said the services deserve timely funding bills. CRs, he said, are “a colossal waste of your time and also very expensive.” But Smith told the chiefs he can't agree “that we can somehow pull defense out of the entire rest of the federal government ... as if all the other money we spend on government doesn't matter.”

Adopting a full-year CR would mean canceled training, costly maintenance delays, and supply shortages across the military. But deploying forces would still be well-trained and equipped and other units would still deploy if called, Goldfein said. The Air Force chief advised adversaries listening to testimony on budget challenges to still know, if they were to challenge the U.S. military, they will lose. “I'll give you just one example: If [Russian President Vladimir] Putin makes a bad choice, he will face the combined economic and military might of 28 nations, and the most powerful alliance we've ever been part of. And that spells his loss.” [Source: MOAA Leg Up | Tom Philpott | April 7, 2017 ++]

Commissary Elimination Update 05 ► Are They in Jeopardy

In late March, the GAO released an overdue report required as part of commissary reform measures included in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016. GAO briefed the Armed Services committees more than a year ago on their preliminary observations, but just released the report on its analysis and review of certain aspects of commissary operations. In the meantime, the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) has been moving full steam ahead on pilot programs in variable pricing and private-label products, directly impacting the experience of commissary patrons.

The GAO report concludes that certain DeCA business processes “are not consistent with those generally employed by commercial grocery stores.” This isn't surprising, as DeCA is constrained by law regarding how much they can charge, to whom they can sell, where they can operate, etcetera. But the report identifies certain areas where the standards used by DeCA are inefficient. This leaves the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) concerned, because during GAO's evaluation of the processes, DeCA already was implementing new ways of doing business. Achieving data fidelity is difficult when the evaluation instrument is out of touch and out of sync with the subject. The GAO concludes that:

- DeCA's methodology for calculating the patron savings rate has limitations and “DeCA lacks reasonable assurance that it is maintaining its desired savings rate for patrons.” Not included in this report are DeCA's recent changes to its savings calculation. The report goes on to say, “at the time of this review, DeCA officials could not provide evidence to support how the revised savings methodology would address all the limitations we identified, including those related to seasonal bias, sampling methodology for overseas commissaries and geographic differentiation.” Additionally, DeCA's new calculation compares the prices of private-label items to commissary private-label items, which are not yet available at commissaries. Such a comparison is highly speculative in an area where GAO already is questioning DeCA's methodologies.
- The way DeCA manages products sold at commissaries limits its ability to operate efficiently. GAO recommends DeCA find efficiencies based on store sales or customer demand. While DeCA has seen decreasing sales numbers since 2012, it is in the process of rolling out its own private label. To make room for private-label stock, commissaries will have to remove some items. Will those items be ones patrons feel strongly about losing? The report says, “DeCA has not focused on improving the management of products based on consumer demand and consequently may be missing potential opportunities to improve sales, leverage efficiencies, and achieve savings in commissary operations.” Introducing the private label as a cost-savings maneuver seems risky when other efficiencies may not have been thoroughly explored.
- DeCA has not conducted a cost-benefit analysis for its service contracts for stocking and custodial services and for distributing products to commissaries. More than 70 percent of the appropriations dollars (the subsidy) go to labor costs, which include staff pay and benefits, shelf stocking, transportation of goods, janitorial contracts and purchased services. There is an argument to be made that DeCA should have explored some savings opportunities from the largest part of the government's subsidy prior to introducing variable pricing, a private label, and changing the way patrons shop.

MOAA's main concern is that GAO's report indicates there are many more avenues of savings that have not yet been explored. If sales are decreasing, and DeCA loses additional patrons based on its new reforms, what does that mean for foot traffic at the exchanges - and the resulting dividends to local Morale, Welfare and Recreation funds? Commissary reform laws allow DeCA to become a non-appropriated fund (NAF) entity if existing pilots for variable pricing and private label are successful. DoD is required to brief the Armed Services committees before those extra steps can be taken. Some questions remain:

- Will those briefings be made public?

- How have the three requirements of patron savings, satisfaction, and product quality been maintained?
- Has the change in savings benchmark calculations lowered the bar for savings if it doesn't include exact comparisons?
- What items will patrons see go away to make room for private label, and what assurance is there patrons will not be less satisfied as a result?

The Armed Services committees have reserved oversight authority over all of these reforms. They need to hear from the military community on the subject and hold hearings on the issue. MOAA has prepared an editable message at <http://capwiz.com/moaa/issues/alert/?alertid=76546626> and suggests readers use it to ask their legislators to ensure their oversight includes assessment of these gaps noted by the GAO. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | March 31, 2017 ++]

Commissary Funding Update 29 ► Sales Continue to Fall

TREA has been warning about the threat to military commissaries for the past few years. Some over-zealous members of Congress decided four or five years ago that commissaries cost too much and were a good place to cut the budget in their attempts to reduce federal spending. Unfortunately, Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) was one of those, and since he's been both Ranking Member and now Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, he has tremendous influence over the DoD budget. TREA has been fighting for years to save the commissary benefit and so far, They've been successful. However, some recent developments continue to place the benefit at risk. One is the new effort by the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) to try and run commissaries more like a for-profit business.

DeCA had announced last fall that it will roll out its own private label, or "generic," brand. The plan is to put about 400 private-label items on shelves in early May under "Freedom's Choice" and "HomeBase" labels. Adding those items to commissary shelves, however, means making space by eliminating some of the national brands currently stocked by the agency. It also has announced that it will institute "variable pricing," which means prices will vary in different parts of the country, depending on the cost of groceries in different areas. Instead of selling groceries priced "at cost" from the supplier, variable pricing allows DeCA to mark up the prices on some items in order to make money to pay for some of the commissary system's operations. The variable pricing system allows officials to raise and lower prices at will, so long as shoppers continue to see a specific savings of between 17.6 percent and 44.2 percent, depending on region, over off-base grocery stores.

Initially, variable pricing will be tested at 10 different commissaries throughout the nation but we believe it will eventually become part of the way commissaries are operated. Now, however, comes news that sales at commissaries between FY 2012 and FY2016 fell by 14 percent, and they continue to fall. There appear to be numerous reasons for this.

- There is more competition from "super stores" that sell lower priced groceries.
- Half of all commissary shoppers are now retirees because there are fewer personnel in military and only 26 percent of those live on a base or post, meaning they are more likely to grocery shop off-base/post.
- In addition to fewer overall personnel in the military and fewer living on base or post, the number of those who are married is even smaller and single personnel are on meal plans at dining facilities and tend not to cook at home but rather they go out to eat.
- The end of discounts on tobacco products
- Customer reluctance to make small purchases because of having to use and to tip grocery baggers
- Customer inconvenience of tightened security to access on-base stores
- The questioning of what the real savings at commissaries are in the wake of actions to transform the benefit and reduce taxpayer support.

TREA is working with their partners in the Coalition to Save Our Military Shopping Benefits and the office of Congressman Walter Jones (R- NC) on legislation to put in place needed protections to safeguard the commissary and our other valuable earned benefits. They will keep us posted on this as additional information becomes available. [Source: TREA Washington Update | April 5, 2017 ++]

Coast Guard Move to Pentagon ► Opposed by Commandant

The U.S. Coast Guard is happy to be part of the Homeland Security Department and doesn't see a need to reorganize under the Defense Department, an official said. Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Paul F. Zukunft has said "the best place for us is the Department of Homeland Security and I agree with him," Vice Commandant Adm. Charles Michel said on Friday at the annual Military Reporters and Editors conference in Arlington, Va., outside Washington, D.C. The service is the smallest branch of the U.S. armed forces and the only one that falls under the Homeland Security Department rather than the Pentagon -- an organizational structure recently questioned by a lawmaker.

Rep. Duncan Hunter, chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure's Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee, recently supported such a change to better shield the service from potential spending reductions. A Republican from California, Hunter is also a member of the House Armed Services Committee. "First and foremost, the Coast Guard is a military force," he wrote in a 17 MAR letter to President Donald Trump. "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." Hunter also wrote that 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 lawmaker, who is under investigation by the Justice Department for using campaign funds on personal expenses, was referring to the OMB proposal to cut \$1.3 billion from the Coast Guard's roughly \$10 billion annual budget as part of the fiscal 2018 federal budget request. The decision was reversed after an outcry from naval and maritime advocates. "There was only one skinny budget that was delivered to [Capitol] Hill and when you look at that, that's a sustainment budget for the Coast Guard," Michel said. "That's something we can work with and that's what we're marching forward on."

As for the organizational change, the vice commandant said the issue is a perennial one that has been debated for decades -- going back to when the Coast Guard was part of the Treasury Department from 1790 to 1967. "The Department of Homeland Security is a Tier 1 department," he said. "Most of the Coast Guard missions fit very comfortably within the Department of Homeland Security and our secretary has, as evidenced by this skinny budget that was ultimately delivered to the Hill, is a great advocate for us and we're very happy." Michel said the Coast Guard works "extremely well" with other parts of the department, including U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), he said. He added, "I think it's the right fit, the commandant said it's the right fit and I'm pretty sure that's the way we're going to respond to Mr. Hunter, too."

Yet even the commandant has issued reminders that the service is a branch of the military. "The Coast Guard is an armed service," Zukunft said during his 16 MAR "State of the Coast Guard" address at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. "Yet we are not postured to benefit from vital national security investments because our funding is classified incorrectly," he said. "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: Military.com | Brendan McGarry | April 1, 2017 ++]

Ohio-Class Subs ► Will be Useless in One Decade

Navy officials may have as little as a decade before their Ohio-class submarine fleet won't dive beneath the waves anymore, the head of U.S. Strategic Command warned lawmakers on 4 APR. "Each submarine is built to go down, under pressure, a certain number of times. Once you reach the end of life, you can't go down any more," said Air Force Gen. John Hyten, STRATCOM commander, in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee. "And a submarine on the top of the water is not an effective deterrent."

The comments came as Hyten detailed the need for stable and sufficient funding for nuclear modernization efforts, including the military's submarines. Navy officials have already begun a \$100 billion-plus plan to replace the aging Ohio-class submarines with the Columbia-class in coming years, but the STRATCOM commander warned that recent budget fights could jeopardize that progress. "Every year [of] that program, if it slips one year then the future commander of STRATCOM is down one nuclear submarine," he said. "Two years, two nuclear submarines. "We know that because there's a certain time in the future where Ohio-class submarine just will not go under the water anymore, just the pressure on the vessel itself will not allow it to go down. (The Columbia-class program) has to stay on time."

Hyten would not detail exactly when military officials predict the older subs will become obsolete, but said the problem will start "towards the end of the next decade." Lawmakers at the hearing called that alarming. Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS) called it "a very precipitous risk" for the country if a replacement isn't prioritized. Hyten's comments were the most recent of a series of dire predictions from military officials about looming defense budget issues, as lawmakers try and find a solution for federal spending for the remainder of the fiscal year. Most federal agencies, including the Department of Defense, have been operating off fiscal 2016 spending levels since last fall as Congress tries to work out a long-term spending plan for the government. If a solution is not found before the end of April, the country will face another partial government shutdown. In recent days, lawmakers have discussed the possibility of another continuing resolution to push the funding fight to October, but military leaders have warned that plan will leave them short on a number of multiyear procurement and planning priorities, including the Columbia-class subs

Last week, Marine Lt. Gen. Jon Davis, deputy commandant for aviation, said he would be forced cut all flying hours for several F/A-18 Super Hornet and Harrier squadrons under a continuing resolution. Service officials are expected to outline other possible training and personnel cuts at a House Armed Services Committee hearing Wednesday. Hyten said the continued budget confusion is taking a toll on his service members. "They are dealing with very old equipment," he said. "We have a commitment to them, as a nation, that we need to give them the tools they need in order to do their job. Their enthusiasm can only last a certain amount of time, and if we don't follow through on that commitment, that morale will be brought into question." Lawmakers have been unable to reach a long-term funding deal balancing military and non-defense funding since 2011, when they passed 10 years of budget caps designed to reign in the federal budget. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 4, 2017 ++]

POW/MIA Update 83 ► All-American Meal Event

Dan McKinney would have been happy with any number of wedding presents. Being captured and sent to a Chinese Prisoner of War camp wasn't one of them. On the day McKinney had planned to marry his wife Joyce Anne, he was

instead beginning a two-month, 600-mile march to a prison camp in the Korean War's "Iron Triangle." Once there, he spent 28 months disobeying his captors, who were trying to brainwash him and other POWs to reject capitalism in favor of communism. "I got thrown in jail for arguing with them so much and creating a storm all the time," McKinney said. "They had to put me away where I couldn't cause any more trouble."

McKinney, 90, eventually escaped and married Joyce Anne, a tale he recounted on 7 APR at the local Veterans Affairs Health Care System's biannual luncheon for former POWs. The couple recently celebrated their 63th anniversary. But at the time of his capture, he was only thinking about how to survive. "I didn't have time to think about a wedding right then," McKinney said. "Just trying to stay alive was the most important thing." Eight of the 30 POWs living in the panhandle region showed up for the luncheon, Amarillo VA Public Affairs Officer Barbara Moore said. Less than 30,000 former POWs and 620,000 World War II veterans remain across American today, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

APR 9 marked National Former POW Day, with a second POW/MIA day observed on 15 SEP. By coincidence, Friday would have been the 67th birthday of Palo Duro High School graduate and Medal of Honor for Heroism recipient Marine Corps Lance Corporal Thomas E. Creek. Already seriously wounded by ambush gunfire when the Vietcong attacked his convoy near Cam Lo on Feb. 13, 1969, the Amarillo marine died when he intentionally rolled atop a live grenade during a fierce firefight to save the lives of his patrol companions. The Amarillo VA Hospital is dedicated to Creek. To honor the former POWs, the VA served brisket, sausage, beans, potato salad and cobbler, staples for a July 4th dinner, to remind veterans of the culture for which they fought. Each veteran also went home with a plate of leftovers as well as a Belmar Bakery pie.



C.J. Solomon

For men who used to pinch sawdust together to form "bread" around whatever food they were given in captivity, Moore said, a hearty all-American meal has an extra meaning. "This is a country that can provide, and is free and independent," Moore said. "We're saying, 'the sacrifice that you made is for this kind of thing, and we want to make sure that you have it.'" Another attendee at Friday's luncheon, 93-year-old Lubbock resident C.J. Solomon, found his German heritage didn't help when captured by Nazis during World War II. They heard his biblical last name and asked his religion. "I said I wasn't a Jew, but I wouldn't mind being a Jew," Solomon said. "I told one of the other (POWs) that later, and he said I was lucky not be killed right there on the spot."

After a couple of days of hospitable treatment from a local couple, Solomon began marching for more than four months until he was 40 miles from the Austrian border, dropping 51 pounds from his 181-pound frame and emerging with a chest full of lice. He and 21 other POWs were then liberated from a pillbox bunker by U.S. Army General George S. Patton's men. A colonel offered to promote Solomon from buck sergeant to a staff sergeant if he remained in service, but Solomon had other plans. "People don't know what freedom is until it's taken away," he said. "I just thank God that I'm here today." [Source: Amillaro Globe-News | Ben Egel | April 9, 2017 ++]

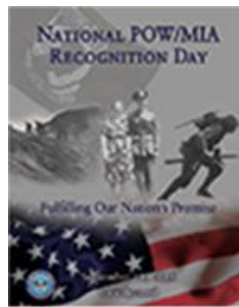
POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 01 thru 15 APR 2017 | 27

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

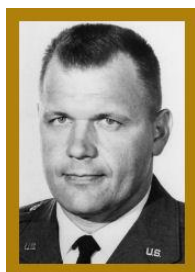
-- **Marine Corps Capt. John A. House, II**, was assigned to HHM-265 Marine Aircraft Group 16. On June 30, 1967, House's CH-46A Sea Knight helicopter crashed after being hit by enemy fire while attempting to insert a Marine reconnaissance team into hostile territory in Thua Thien-Hue Province, Vietnam. While most of the reconnaissance team survived, House and four others were killed. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1146037/marines-missing-from-vietnam-war-identified-house-killen-runnels> to read more about House.

-- **Lance Cpl. John D. Killen, III**, was assigned to Company A, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 3rd Marine Division. On June 30, 1967, Killen was onboard a CH-46A Sea Knight helicopter attempting to insert his Marine reconnaissance team into hostile territory in Thua Thien-Hue Province, Vietnam, when it was struck by enemy fire and crashed. While most of the reconnaissance team survived, Killen and four others were killed. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1146037/marines-missing-from-vietnam-war-identified-house-killen-runnels> to read more about Killen.



-- **Cpl. Glyn L. Runnels, Jr.** was assigned to Company A, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 3rd Marine Division. On June 30, 1967, Runnels was onboard a CH-46A Sea Knight helicopter attempting to insert his Marine reconnaissance team into hostile territory in Thua Thien-Hue Province, Vietnam, when it was struck by enemy fire and crashed. While most of the reconnaissance team survived, Runnels and four others were killed. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1146037/marines-missing-from-vietnam-war-identified-house-killen-runnels> to read more about Runnels.

-- **Air Force Capt. Robert R. Barnett**, 32, of Gladewater, Texas, will be buried April 7 in Austin, Texas. Barnett was a B-57B pilot with the 8th Bomb Squadron. While on a strike mission over Laos, Barnett's aircraft reportedly crashed with no parachutes seen. The hostile threat in the area prevented a search and rescue mission and Barnett was declared killed in action on April 7, 1966. For more information go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1135341/airman-missing-from-vietnam-war-accounted-for-barnett>.



Korea

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 the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Sgt. Homer R. Abney**, 24, of Dallas, will be buried April 7 in his hometown. Abney was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, when his unit was engaged in heavy fighting with Chinese forces on the road from Kunu-ri to Sunch'on, North Korea — later named "The Gauntlet." After several days of fighting, his regiment declared Abney missing on Nov. 30, 1950. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1135387/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-abney> for more information.



-- **Army Cpl. James T. Mainhart**, 19, of Butler, Pennsylvania, will be buried April 8 in his hometown. Mainhart served with Company I, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, part of the 31st Regimental Combat Team deployed east of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea. The RCT was attacked by an overwhelming number of

Chinese forces in late November 1950. Mainhart was among 1,300 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory. He was reported missing as of Nov. 30, 1950. Go to for more information <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1135321/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-mainhart>.



-- **Army Sgt. Donald D. Noehren**, 23, of Harlan, Iowa, will be buried April 3 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Noehren was a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Service Company, 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. While conducting a delaying action against Chinese forces south from the Ch'ongch'on River to Kunu-ri, North Korea, his unit encountered heavy fire and continuous enemy mortars. Noehren was captured during the withdrawal and was declared missing in action as of Nov. 30, 1950. or more information go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1130589/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-noehren>.



-- **Army Master Sgt. Joseph Durakovich**, 30, of Gary, Ind., will be buried in April in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C. Durakovich was a member of Company G, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. His unit was attacked by Chinese forces while establishing a defensive position in Pongmyong-ni east of Kuni-ri, North Korea, on Nov. 28, 1950. After the battle, Durakovich could not be accounted for and was reported missing in action. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1138334/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-durakovic> to read more about Durakovich.



-- **Army Cpl. Daniel F. Kelly** was assigned to C Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. In late November 1950 his unit was ordered to advance as part of an offensive push to drive the North Koreans to the Yalu River. They were attacked by Chinese forces and Kelly was declared missing on Nov. 26, 1950. Interment services are pending. Read more about Kelly at <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1143390/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-kelly>

-- **Army Cpl. Freddie L. Henson** served with Battery A, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division, part of the 31st Regimental Combat Team deployed east of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea. The RCT was attacked by an overwhelming number of Chinese forces in late November 1950. Henson was among 1,300 members of the

RCT killed or captured in enemy territory. He was reported missing as of Dec. 6, 1950. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1139888/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-henson> to read more about Henson.

World War II

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 18 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Monroe Temple** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Temple was one of 429 crewmen to be killed in the attack. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1130503/remains-of-uss-oklahoma-sailor-identified-from-world-war-ii-temple> for more information.

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Capt. James W. Boyden** was a member of the Marine Torpedo Bombing Squadron 233, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Fleet Marine Force. On Feb. 14, 1944, Boyden piloted his Grumann torpedo bomber on an experimental mission to destroy enemy shipping in Simpson Harbor, New Britain. As part of the last wave of bombers, Boyden's aircraft encountered intense anti-aircraft fire and was one of six bombers to fail to return from the mission. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1133836/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-boyden> for more information

-- **Army Cpl. William R. Sadewasser** served with Headquarters Battery, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division, as part of the 31st Regimental Combat Team deployed east of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea. The RCT was attacked by an overwhelming number of Chinese forces in late November 1950. Sadewasser was among the more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory. He was reported missing as of Nov. 28, 1950. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1135473/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-sadewasser> for more information.

-- **Mr. Peter Atkinson**, 25, of Berkley Springs, West Virginia, will be buried April 8 in Martinsburg, West Virginia. Atkinson, a former U.S. Army Air Corps Reservist, was among a small group of American pilots training with the Flying Tigers at Kyedaw Airfield, outside of Toungoo, Burma, in 1941. In preparation for battling Japanese forces invading China, the pilots engaged their Curtiss P-40 single-seat aircraft in aggressive training and mock battles. On Oct. 25, 1941, Atkinson's plane disintegrated while participating in one of these training flights. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1135220/civilian-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-atkinson> for more information.

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Murry R. Cargile**, 21, of Robersonville, North Carolina, will be buried April 7 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. Cargile was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Cargile was one of 429 crewmen to be killed in the attack. For more information go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1135214/uss-oklahoma-sailor-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-cargile>.

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Vernon N. Grow**, 25, of Redding, California, will be buried April 7 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. Grow was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Grow was one of 429 crewmen to be killed in the attack. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1135207/uss-oklahoma-sailor-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-grow> for more information.

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Robert E. Moessner**, 24, of Scranton, Pennsylvania, will be buried April 5 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. On April 18, 1944, Moessner was serving as a bombardier on a B-24 departed Kwelin, China, on a sea sweep. After making two passes over a Japanese merchant ship and escorting

destroyer, Moessner's plane came under heavy fire and was then shot down over Hong Kong harbor by Japanese fighters. Survivors reported that Moessner went down with the aircraft. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1133702/soldier-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-moessner> for more information..



-- **Marine Corps Pfc. James O. Whitehurst**, 20, of Ashford, Ala., will be buried April 12, in Cowarts, Ala. Whitehurst was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Whitehurst's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Whitehurst was killed on the first day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1143481/sailor-killed-in-world-war-ii-identified-coke> to read more about Whitehurst.



-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class George A. Coke** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Coke 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/1143481/sailor-killed-in-world-war-ii-identified-coke> to read more about Coke.

-- **Machinist's Mate 1st Class Fred M. Jones** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Jones 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/1143486/sailor-killed-in-world-war-ii-identified-jones> to read more about Jones.

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Ewart T. Sconiers** served as a bombardier on the B-17F Flying Fortress with the 414th Bombardment Squadron, 97th Bombardment Group. On Oct. 21, 1942, his plane was severely damaged during a mission to bomb the German U-boat pens at Lorient, France. The crew parachuted safely and were rescued from the water, only to be turned over to German forces as prisoners of war. Sconiers was transferred to Stalag Luft II in present-day Zagan, Poland, where he remained until 1944. He was reported deceased on Jan. 24, 1944. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1143489/soldier-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-sconiers> to read more about Sconiers.

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Jack J. Fox** was assigned to Company L, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Fox's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Fox was killed on Nov. 22, 1943, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. Interment services are pending. Interment services are pending. Read more about Fox at <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1139851/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-fox>

-- **Army Pfc. Reece Gass** served with Company E, 33rd Armored Regiment, 3rd Armored Division. On Jan. 14, 1945, tanks from Gass' unit began a three-pronged advance against enemy forces moving toward Cherain, Belgium. Gass was declared deceased after his tank was hit by enemy fire. Interment services are pending. Read more about Gass at <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1139856/soldier-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-gass>.

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Marvin B. Rothman**, 21, of Cleveland Heights, Ohio, will be buried April 19 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Rothman, a P-47D Thunderbolt pilot, was assigned to the 311th Fighter Squadron, 58th Fighter Group. On April 11, 1944, Rothman flew on a bombing escort mission with 15 other Thunderbolts to Wewak, Territory of New Guinea. Rothman was attacked by enemy fighter aircraft and failed to return from the mission. He was officially declared deceased as of Feb. 6, 1946. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1148707/airman-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-rothman> to read more about Rothman.



-- **Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Don O. Neher** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Neher 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/1146019/sailor-killed-in-world-war-ii-identified-neher> to read more about Neher.

-- **Navy Reserve Ensign William M. Thompson** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Thompson 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/1146024/sailor-killed-in-world-war-ii-identified-thompson-wm> to read more about Thompson.

-- **Army Technician 4th Grade John Kovach, Jr.** was assigned to Company C, 192nd Tank Battalion. He died Nov. 19, 1942, while stationed in the Philippines. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1146046/soldier-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-kovach> to read more about Kovach.

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | April 15, 2017 ++]

* VA *



VA Survey 2017 ► **VFW Results | Establish Private Care or Fix VA**

An overwhelming number of Veterans of Foreign Wars members prefer fixing Veterans Affairs medical services to establishing a new private-care based health system for them, according to a new survey released this week by the group. The poll, which collected responses from nearly 11,000 veterans last fall, also found significant improvements in VA care in recent years. More than two-third of respondents said they were satisfied with their experience at VA facilities. Nearly 60 percent of the veterans said they have seen better service and access, or described their local facility as already being “high performing.”

VFW officials said the results show that “VA is on the right track,” but also warned that VA is still far from a perfect system. “Respondents indicated that VA still has a lot of work ahead in order to fully restore the trust of those it was created to serve,” the report stated. “Nearly 40 percent of veterans reported that that their local VA medical facilities need improvements. “When asked what needs to improve, access was the principal concern with veterans indicating VA needs to hire more doctors, decrease wait times and travel for appointments, and streamline procedures and system. Veterans also indicated that VA needs to improve its phone systems to make them more user-friendly.”

The report comes as President Trump looks for ways to overhaul VA services, to fulfill campaign promises of reforming the system to make it more welcoming and accessible to veterans. On numerous occasions he has described VA as broken and deeply flawed, and suggested that the long-term solution for the department may be privatization of some services. Lawmakers are debating whether to renew and expand the department’s controversial Choice Card program later this year, a move which would allow veterans to continue to seek health care services outside the VA system but at the government’s expense. But VFW officials say plans to shift a majority of funding and resources outside the VA would be unpopular among their members. In the survey, 92 percent said they want to see VA “fix deficiencies” in the health care system rather than look to other private-sector alternatives. “Very few respondents believe veterans should be given a universal health care card or believe the VA health care system should be dismantled by creating a subsidy-based private health insurance for veterans, shutdown completely and outsourced to the private sector, or limited to only serving service-connected conditions,” the report stated.

Members of both parties in Congress have repeatedly promised in recent months not to fully privatize VA health services, but have advocated for more partnerships with local hospitals and research centers to expand access to veterans. VFW officials said they see they clear message from their survey as “the preferred method to achieve (the best care for veterans) is to hire more VA doctors, hold wrongdoers accountable, improve customer service, and make VA’s programs and systems more user-friendly.” The survey results are available on the VFW’s web site <https://www.vfw.org/-/media/vfwsite/files/advocacy/vfw-our-care-2017--executive-summary.pdf?la=en>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 31, 2017++]

VA Burial Benefits Update 42 ► Pre-Enrollment

Since first announced last December, more than 10,000 eligible veterans have taken advantage of a new VA benefit that allows them to pre-enroll for interment in a VA national cemetery, which means less paperwork that survivors will have to complete following their loved one’s death. Interested veterans can submit [VA Form 40-10007, Application for Pre-Need Determination of Eligibility for Burial in a VA National Cemetery](https://www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA40-10007.pdf) (<https://www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA40-10007.pdf>), and supporting documentation, such as a DD Form 214, if readily available, to the VA National Cemetery Scheduling Office by toll-free fax at 1-855-840-8299; email to Eligibility.PreNeed@va.gov; or by regular mail to the National Cemetery Scheduling Office, PO Box 510543, St. Louis, MO 63151.

VA will review applications and provide written notice of its determination of eligibility. VA will save determinations and supporting documentation in an electronic information system to expedite burial arrangements at the time of need. Because laws and personal circumstances change, upon receipt of a burial request, VA will

validate all pre-need determinations in accordance with the laws in effect at that time. VA operates 135 national cemeteries and 33 soldiers' lots 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 and maintain 105 Veterans cemeteries in 47 states and territories including tribal trust lands, Guam, and Saipan. For Veterans buried in private or other cemeteries, 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.

Eligible individuals are entitled to burial in any open VA national cemetery, opening/closing of the grave, a grave liner, perpetual care of the gravesite, and a government-furnished headstone or marker or niche cover, all at no cost to the family. Veterans are also eligible for a burial flag and may be eligible for a Presidential Memorial Certificate. Information on VA burial benefits is available from local VA national cemetery offices, from the Internet at www.cem.va.gov, or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 800-827-1000. To make burial arrangements at any open VA national cemetery at the time of need, call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117. [Source: VFW Action Corps | April 13, 2017 ++]

VA Accountability Update 42 ► Democratic Opposition

Firing Offense: Democrats are constantly bleating about the need to better serve the nation's veterans. Yet when it comes down to it, they would rather bow to their union masters than allow the VA to fire workers who aren't doing their jobs. The proof is the Democrats' fervent opposition to a simple reform being pushed by Republicans — the VA Accountability First Act. This bill would let the Veterans Affairs secretary fire someone and not have to wait a month for the person to actually be fired. It would also let the VA cut the pensions for those convicted of a felony, and reclaim bonuses from those fired.

The bills (H.R.611/S.152) got some needed momentum after a VA worker was caught watching porn while with a patient. VA Secretary David Shulkin wanted him fired immediately, only to learn that the worker is entitled to spend a month — at taxpayer expense — on desk duty before being shown the door. "I need the authority as secretary to remove these people immediately," Shulkin said. Even so, the bill is just a tiny step toward improving this dangerously dysfunctional agency, which three years ago was embroiled in a scandal over excessively long wait times for veterans seeking health care and efforts by executives to cook the books to hide them. The VA has been impervious to reform largely because its workers know that it is almost impossible to fire anyone.

But when the accountability measure reached the House floor, just 10 Democrats voted for it. And now, Democrats are threatening to block a similar bill in the Senate. Why? The reason is simple. More than three quarters of the VA workforce is unionized, and public employee unions don't want this bill to pass. The American Federation of Government Employees, which represents nearly a quarter million VA workers, called it "a union-busting bill, plain and simple." Well, guess what: In the last election cycle, the AFGE contributed \$6.9 million to political campaigns and PACs, with all but a tiny fraction of it going to Democrats, according to Open Secrets. Kowtowing to unions also explains why, despite promises by President Obama in the wake of the VA's wait-time scandal that he was "moving ahead with urgent reforms, including ... instituting a critical culture of accountability," nothing got done. At best, one person involved in that scandal was fired, and that was for a separate offense. Two others were "punished" with "paid administrative leave," and both landed new jobs at the VA.

This accountability problem isn't limited to the VA. Unionized federal workers across the board rarely get fired. Managers don't even dare give a worker a bad review — 99.5% of federal workers get top performance ratings — out of fear that it will cause untold pain and anguish justifying it to the Merit Systems Protection Board. As a result, even those who commit egregious offenses are often put on paid administrative leave. A Government Accountability Office report found that agencies spent \$3.1 billion from 2011 through 2013 on paid leave. At other agencies,

incompetent or lazy workers mostly just mean paperwork doesn't get shuffled fast enough. But at the VA, which is charged with providing health care for veterans, this lack of accountability can literally mean the difference between life and death. The fact that Democrats would put union interests ahead of veterans' health is intolerable, and shows just how much their constant claims of compassion really mean. [Source: Investor's Business Daily | Editorial | April 12, 2017 ++]

VA Health Care Access Update 49 ► Transparency With New Tool

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is taking unprecedented steps to increase transparency. Today, VA launched a new Access and Quality Tool that provides Veterans with an easy-to-use, easy-to-understand way of accessing patient wait time and quality of care data. This tool not only provides Veterans with more information about VA services, it increases accountability and ensures VA is held to a higher standard. “Veterans must have access to information that is clear and understandable to make informed decisions about their health care,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David J. Shulkin. “No other health-care system in the country releases this type of information on wait times. This allows Veterans to see how VA is performing.”

The tool allows Veterans to access the average times patients are waiting to be seen in their local area; how Veterans describe their experiences scheduling primary- and specialty-care appointments at specific VA facilities; timeliness of appointments for care needed right away; and the quality of health care delivered at VA medical centers compared with local private-sector hospitals. The Access and Quality Tool is the most transparent and easy to understand wait time and quality data website in the health-care industry.

“This tool is another example of VA leading the way,” said Acting Under Secretary for Health Dr. Poonam Alaigh. “No one in the private sector publishes data this way. This tool will instill a spirit of competition and encourage our medical facilities to proactively address access and quality issues while empowering Veterans to make choices according to what works best for them and their families.” VA will continue to make improvements to this tool based on the feedback it receives from Veterans. The Access and Quality Tool can be found at www.accesstocare.va.gov . Watch the [video](http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/37002/vas-new-online-tool-helps-veterans-make-informed-health-care-decisions) at <http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/37002/vas-new-online-tool-helps-veterans-make-informed-health-care-decisions> to learn how the tool can be used. [Source: VA News Release | April 12, 2017 ++]

VA Crises Hotline Update 35 ► VA Defends Work to Fix It

Grilled by lawmakers, the Department of Veterans Affairs insisted 4 APR it was well on its way to fixing problems with its suicide hotline and largely brushed aside the worst criticisms in an internal watchdog report released two weeks ago. A 20 MAR audit by the VA inspector general had found that nearly a third of calls to the Veterans Crisis Line as recently as November were bounced to backup centers run by an outside contractor, as well as other problems including weak leadership and inadequate data to measure the quality of calls. The rollover calls happen when phone lines are busy, leading to possible waits of 30 minutes or more. It was an early test for new VA Secretary David Shulkin, who has made suicide prevention a signature issue at the troubled agency, riven with scandal in recent years since reports of delays in treatment at veterans' hospitals.

Approximately 20 veterans take their lives each day. Testifying before a House panel, Steve Young, VA's deputy undersecretary for health for operations and management, pointed to a dramatic turnaround in calls answered by the hotline since November. He said it was now a "rare instance" that calls are bumped to a backup center and that calls are answered by live counselors within 8 seconds, on average. The crisis hotline "is the strongest it has been since its

inception in 2007," Young told the House Veterans Affairs Committee. But pressed by lawmakers, the VA acknowledged it was still working to make other improvements it had promised to do by last September. It pledged to beef up quality control and hire a new permanent director as soon as possible. "Fulfilling the IG's recommendations is a key step in raising the bar," Young said.

Shulkin, who previously served as VA's top health official, has previously described the issue as resolved. "Fixing the Veterans Crisis Line was a critical step in keeping our commitment to veterans," he said in a 21 MAR statement. Lawmakers were unconvinced. Minnesota Rep. Tim Walz, the top Democrat on the House panel, pointed to "re-occurring issues we see time and time again at VA." For more than a year, the crisis hotline has operated without a permanent director and has yet to issue a policy handbook. "I would be very careful in saying you fixed the problems," Walz warned. Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), a physician who chairs the House committee, questioned whether the VA intended to fully implement reforms after repeated promises. "There is very clearly a need for more to be done — and soon — so that we can be assured that every veteran or family member who contacts the VCL gets the urgent help he or she needs every single time."

According to internal VA data, calls to the Veterans Crisis Line that rolled over to backup centers steadily declined from 31 percent in early November, to just 0.1 percent as of March 25. That came despite growing workloads in which weekly calls to the hotline jumped from 10,558 in November to 13,966 last month, the VA said. As recently as mid-December, when the IG was finalizing its audit, the share of rollover calls had declined close to the VA's goal of 10 percent. That figure dropped to less than 1 percent by early January, according to the VA. VA inspector general Michael Missal said he cannot confirm the most recent VA data, and stressed that it was vital that the Veterans Health Administration follow through on proposed reforms dating back to February 2016. "Until VHA implements fully these recommendations, they will continue to have challenges," Missal said.

Launched in 2007, the crisis hotline has answered nearly 2.8 million calls and dispatched emergency services more than 74,000 times. Featured in a documentary that won an Oscar in 2015, it later received negative attention after its former director reported frequent rollovers due to poor work habits. Last year, Congress passed a law requiring that all calls and messages to the hotline be answered in a timely manner. The most recent problems appear to stem from the VA's opening of a second call center last October. Spurred by veterans' complaints, the IG said the department launched a follow-up review to its February 2016 audit. Instead, it found many rollover calls, due in part to the VA's decision to divert some staff from its upstate New York call center to help train new workers in Atlanta.

The IG suggested the Atlanta center was slow in becoming operational, but the VA says that rollover calls in fact began to fall significantly as workers became trained. The Veterans of Foreign Wars organization said it worried the VA sometimes focuses too much on metrics — the number of calls received and handled. "The VFW believes that while the number of calls going to backup centers decreasing at such a rapid rate is a positive, it is not a sign of the quality of work being provided," said Kayda Keleher, VFW's legislative associate. [Source: Associated Press | Hope Yen | April 4, 2017 ++]

VA Caregiver Program Update 37 ► Dropped Caregivers

By the time they cut her from the program, Alishia Graham was angry, but not surprised. Her postman delivered the news in February 2017. "The letter was sitting at the top — and my stomach dropped because I knew what it was," she says. The letter from the Department of Veterans Affairs informed Graham that her husband Jim, who sustained a brain injury on his third deployment to Iraq, no longer qualified for a caregiver to help with his daily life. "It's not even like ... 'We think he doesn't need as much help.' No — 'We think he's totally fine and he doesn't need any help,'" says Graham. "I'm insulted for him. Because I know what he struggles with."



Alishia and Jim Graham

At its outset in 2011, families of veterans overwhelmed the VA with applications to become official caregivers. A program designed for 4- to 5,000 has now grown to nearly 23,000 approved caregivers. Alishia Graham had been on the program for six years, but she'd been hearing rumors from around the country of **veterans getting dropped without experiencing improvements in their disability**. "I was watching as all these caregivers were going up to their re-assessment. And one by one ... they were dropped," says Graham. The VA denies any cuts to the size or funding of the caregiver program. "The program is not cutting back in any way," says Meg Kabat, director of the VA Caregiver Support Program. "We've been able to expand the number of caregiver support coordinators and really continue to monitor that. We also train our staff on a regular basis."

But the VA is infamous for lacking consistency from station to station. And while the program has added 6,300 caregivers since 2014, according to VA data, NPR discovered that 32 out of 140 VA medical centers were cutting their programs during the same period — some drastically. That included the VA in Fayetteville, N.C., which used to send Alishia Graham a monthly stipend of about \$2,000 and offer her health insurance, respite and support. Fayetteville cut more than half of its caregivers, dropping 314 families from the rolls between May 2014 and February 2017. And while data from the VA in Washington showed seven staff at Fayetteville were coordinating caregivers (a ratio of 37/1), the Fayetteville VA shows only two staff are doing that job, meaning that each coordinator is actually overseeing more than 125 veterans.

Graham's husband, Jim, was a Navy corpsman — a combat medic — for 13 years. In December 2006, on his third tour in Iraq, a mortar blast killed his best friend. Jim Graham was standing nearby and suffered a brain injury, as well as debilitating post-traumatic stress disorder. The brain injury left him forgetful and in persistent pain for nearly 11 years. "I've had a headache ever since I got hurt," says Jim, who wears dark Terminator-like sunglasses indoors, even with the blinds drawn, to prevent triggering an even worse pain. "I get migraines on top of it. When I get one it lasts for days, months. If I'm somehow able to get rid of the migraine, I'm lucky to get a week off before another one hits me," he says.

It's hard to separate which condition causes what symptom, but Jim's PTSD is probably what gives him anxiety about breaking his daily routine, about leaving the house, or about getting personal care from anyone outside his family. Alishia was studying to become a nurse when Jim got hit. She hasn't been able to work outside the house since then, because Jim needs help with everything from cooking to bathing — mostly just reminders not to let things burn on the stove, or help to get in or out of the shower. That made the caregiver program a great fit for them, and VA rated Jim at the highest tier of need, which meant VA paid Alishia a stipend of nearly \$2,000 per month. The stipend is based on 75 percent of what a professional caregiver would make for 40 hours a week in their town of Jacksonville, N.C. Jim says it's much better care than a stranger would give him. Alishia says 40 hours a week isn't the half of it.

The Portland, Ore., VA cut 66 percent of its caregivers in three years. Seattle cut 49 percent; the South Texas VA cut 48 percent; and Charleston, S.C., went from 197 caregivers in 2014 to just 11 in February of 2017 — a 94 percent reduction. The Charleston VA told NPR some of those vets improved and didn't need the program, and said that others probably never should have qualified at the start. Congress and veterans organizations are aware of the

problem, says Adrian Atizado of DAV, an advocacy nonprofit for veterans. "We don't have a good idea about how many caregivers are in the same situation we're talking about. ... We know some have appealed, but we don't have enough reliable information, which we need," says Atizado. He says the VA is promising to get better data and to look into the way clinical decisions about these veterans are made. Atizado adds that the program is a great first step toward recognizing the millions of family members, doing billions of dollars' worth of work the VA might otherwise have to pay for, taking care of America's veterans. For the moment, however, caregivers like Alishia Graham are not feeling that recognition and support.

Alishia says their financial situation is not exactly dire, though. She says she made sure to never live paycheck to paycheck, and that Jim still has a pretty high disability check from VA. Plus, Jim hates leaving the house, she says, so it's not like they were saving up for a big vacation. But Jim says the problem is more about Alishia's hard work no longer being recognized. "It's insulting. Cause I know how much she does do. And how much help I do need with everything. I gave everything I have to what I was doing. Always did. To not get back the same or equivalent to I gave up is a slap to the face, basically," he says. The Fayetteville VA told NPR that Jim is no longer clinically eligible for the program, and that the Grahams are welcome to appeal. The VA also says it "can't thank Caregivers enough for the vital role they play in helping Veterans recover from injury and illness." [Source: NPR | Quil Lawrence | April 5, 2017 ++]

VA Caregiver Program Update 38 ► Stations With Greatest Shifts

Shifts in the VA's caregiver program vary greatly by station: 107 saw a net gain in the number of caregivers supported, while 32 saw a net loss. (One station, Cincinnati VAMC, remained unchanged.)

Highest Net Losses

STATION	CAREGIVERS (2017)	CHANGE SINCE 2014
Fayetteville(NC) VAMC	256	↓ 314(-55%)
Northern Arizona VA HCS (Prescott, Ariz.)	38	↓ 186(-83%)
Ralph H. Johnson VAMC (Charleston, S.C.)	11	↓ 186(-94%)
South Texas Veterans HCS (Kerrville and San Antonio)	177	↓ 165(-48%)
VA Puget Sound HCS (Seattle)	168	↓ 163(-49%)

Highest Net Losses

STATION	CAREGIVERS (2017)	CHANGE SINCE 2014
Portland VAMC (Portland, Ore.)	58	↓ 114(-66%)
Charlie Norwood VAMC (Augusta, Ga.)	18	↓ 88(-83%)
Harry S.Truman Memorial (Columbia, Mo.)	133	↓ 46(-35%)

Greatest Net Gains

STATION	CAREGIVERS (2017)	CHANGE SINCE 2014
Phoenix VA HCS	868	↑ 586(+208%)
VA San Diego HCS	701	↑ 430(+159%)
Hampton (Va.) VAMC	631	↑ 411(+187%)
VA Greater Los Angeles HCS	491	↑ 336(+217%)
VA Northern California HCS (Mather & Martinez)	621	↑ 330(+113%)
VA Loma Linda (Ca) HCS	640	↑ 265(+71%)
VA Palo Alto (Ca) HCS	455	↑ 259(+132%)
C.W. Bill Young VAMC (Bay Pines, Fla.)	335	↑ 208(+164%)

Source: NPR analysis of Government Accountability Office and Department of Veterans Affairs data
Credit: Stephan Bisaha and Alyson Hurt/NPR

VA Reform Update 06 ► What Vets Are About to Get from Trump's VA

A competition between ideas to reform the Department of Veterans Affairs that's patterned after the TV reality game show "Shark Tank." A searchable, Yelp-style website that rates and ranks VA medical centers against nearby private facilities. A beer-brewing magnate who's new to veterans' advocacy, but is already talking openly about closing some VA hospitals. These are a few of the Trump administration's new priorities for the beleaguered VA — and they leave veteran advocates cautiously optimistic, if a little weirded out. In interviews with nearly a dozen officials at the nation's leading veterans service organizations and in the government, Task & Purpose has learned that the VA is preparing to roll out some new "accountability" features as early as this week, with input from advisers in the nonprofit and private sectors. The changes, which are consistent with VA Secretary David Shulkin's longtime reform agenda and President Donald Trump's government-as-a-business mindset, have earned initial praise from veterans advocates in Washington.

But although government officials have privately reassured the VSOs that the VA won't turn over its services willy-nilly to the private sector, some advocates say they're watching the new moves closely. "Reform is happening," one senior veterans advocate told Task & Purpose, but "we want to make sure it happens in as responsible a way as possible." Some of the planned reforms proposed by VA are not new, so much as supercharged versions of old ideas. That's the case with the department's "Shark Tank" competition. "That's actually what they're calling it," said Joe Chenelly, executive director of AMVETS, one group that's helping judge the competition. "Within the last few weeks, [VA officials] said, 'Hey, we'd like to get a group from each veterans organization to give their feedback,'" Chenelly told Task & Purpose.

It may sound tailor-made for a president with a background in reality TV game shows, but the idea's bounced around VA for a while — it was pioneered in the late Obama years by Shulkin when he ran the Veterans Health Administration, as a way for VA employees to spot and correct inefficiencies they saw at work. Now "Shark Tank" Shulkin is apparently expanding the competition and asking veterans advocates for their help. The program solicits "innovations" — ideas big and small to reform VA's practices — from internal employees or outside experts, and lets judges review them through a secure online dashboard in "a competitive elimination process," according to Sherman Gillums Jr., executive director of Paralyzed Veterans of America, one of the groups involved in the judging. "I've already been assigned a set of innovations to review," Gillums said. "That hasn't happened before."

Even veterans groups that aren't judging in the current "Shark Tank" round have been briefed on the project and spoke about it enthusiastically. "The innovation idea is something that goes back quite a ways," said Garry Augustine, executive director of Disabled American Veterans. In 2009, Augustine was part of a panel that judged VA employee innovation ideas with Craigslist founder Craig Newmark. The number-one idea that both men voted for was a disability benefits questionnaire to standardize vets' claims paperwork — a form that's still in use today. "I think it's a great idea to reach down into the workforce" for reform ideas, Augustine said, adding that, besides generating suggestions from people who know the system's shortfalls intimately, the competition could bolster "employee pride" — no small thing in a department that's used to bad press.

The VA is expected to roll out a more novel change in the next few weeks, according to multiple sources: a public-facing, searchable database that rates and ranks every VA medical center and outpatient facility, along with nearby private care facilities. "It's a real effort to have VA compete with private sector providers," Gillums said. "I love this," Chenelly of AMVETS said. "It's like Yelp for VA facilities." The site will provide data about safety, wait times, and appointment availability at each center. The grading system is expected to work hand-in-glove with an automated, online appointment process that could make it easier for vets to access their care — and harder for VA workers to doctor their appointment books. Augustine of DAV says the ratings site is part of Shulkin's push for efficiency through transparency at VA: "He thinks that this will not only help veterans get their care, but it also helps employees understand where they're falling short."

The VA has graded its facilities on a five-star scale for years, primarily as an internal troubleshooting tool. Those ratings came up for public scrutiny last December when a USA Today investigation revealed them; pressure following the paper's report led the VA to publish those rankings just before last Christmas. But adding private facilities into the scoring mix is a new move for the department — one that some watchdogs worry could portend a greater reliance on private-sector care for VA patients down the line, or the outsourcing of key jobs in the department to contractors. “Veterans advocates are all for accountability,” said Paul Sullivan, director of veteran outreach for the Bergmann & Moore law firm, but it has to be done in a way that protects patients and workers. Gillums of PVA says that tough ratings are part of how the VA has to bring accountability to the system, though. “The VA secretary expects there to be bad news, and he embraces it — which is commendable,” he said. “You can't be allergic to bad news if you want positive change.”

Even if government facilities' ratings end up outperforming expectations, such a system needs to be continually tweaked and updated, said Joe Plenzler, director of media relations for the American Legion's National Headquarters. For example, “What consequence comes from being at the ‘bottom’ of a list in a case where [nearly] all of the facilities score 100 percent, and the bottom hospital scores a 99.9 percent?” he said. “We will always support increased transparency [with] ranking VA facilities, but we would just need to be cautious when it comes to how they are scored.” The ratings site is “up and running,” almost ready for public consumption, Chenelly said. “They're testing and focus-grouping.”

Leaders at key VSOs have also been getting used to new administration faces at VA. After the Washington Post reported that Trump appointees have been planted in every agency to keep tabs on career staff for the White House, some veterans advocates expressed concerns about one new face in particular: VA Senior White House Advisor Thomas “Jake” Leinenkugel, who came out of retirement to take the job after a quarter century running his family's beer-brewing business in Wisconsin. Despite the fact that he's a Marine veteran, Leinenkugel — who did not respond to Task & Purpose's requests for an interview — has no apparent direct experience in government or veterans affairs. Leinenkugel has been a fixture in the White House meetings with veterans groups since the new administration took office, including a breakfast session with Shulkin on 22 MAR and the veterans' only major meeting so far with President Trump, a listening session in the Roosevelt Room on 17 MAR.

“We were a little surprised” to see Leinenkugel working the room with other VA and White House staff, one vet advocate, who was at Shulkin's 22 MAR breakfast meeting, said. “I worked on veterans affairs in Wisconsin,” the advocate said. “In 20 years, I've never once heard mentions of ‘Jake Leinenkugel’ and ‘veterans’ in the same sentence.” That's led to concerns that the businessman — and several other Trump appointees from right-leaning groups — could be part of a quiet union-busting, privatizing push at VA by the White House. “Has this guy set foot in a VA hospital? Does he know how to file a disability claim?” one vets advocate told Task & Purpose. “Why is this guy in his position? Who's he know, who's he beholden to?” VSO leaders who have spoken to Leinenkugel, however, say he's affable, a good listener, and upfront about his blind spots. “He's a successful businessman in the private sector, and we look forward to ideas. He's coming in not really knowing much more than what's in the newspapers, so he's got a learning curve,” one advocate said, adding that educating new political appointees was nothing new for veterans groups: “We see this every few years.”

Still, Leinenkugel — who's been trekking out to VA centers across the country on a listening tour — may have gotten ahead of the administration in some of his conversations with advocates. At Shulkin's breakfast session, one advocate said, Leinenkugel “talked about VA hospitals closing and consolidating, which of course makes sense, but it's not something the administration has talked about,” because it's such a politically fraught topic. “You have to assume Jake has the president's ear and Secretary Shulkin's ear,” the advocate said. “That's why I was sort of surprised at this conversation.”

In some ways, veterans advocates' jittery discussions of new faces and programs at VA reflect broader concerns about a new, unpredictable, and radically unconventional presidential administration. VSO representatives, for example, have a lot of questions about the White House's new Office of American Innovation, which is run by

President Trump’s businessman son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and is expected to play a major role in reforming the VA. “The government should be run like a great American company,” Kushner told the Washington Post last week. “Our hope is that we can achieve successes and efficiencies for our customers, who are the citizens.” If Kushner’s office is going to work with vets, that’s news to some. “I read about it in the Post,” one veterans advocate told T&P, laughing. “Nobody called us up and said they were going to do it. That was a little surprising.” But that may just be par for the course for an administration still learning its way with stakeholders and interest groups that have been longtime fixtures in the Beltway. “We’re hoping someone from the VSO community is going to be a part of [Kushner’s efforts],” the advocate said.

VA’s work with the Office of American Innovation is beginning in earnest. Shulkin told Task & Purpose in a statement that the office is “providing technical capabilities from the best talent in Government and private sector as we work to modernize and improve the quality of services for Veterans.” Advocates tell Task & Purpose they’re bullish on those efforts, and on private-sector help — as long as it doesn’t disrupt VA’s fundamental obligations to vets. “Our guiding principles are outlined in resolutions that support making sure that veterans lose no benefits, and that the government ‘do no harm’ when it comes to veterans,” the American Legion’s Plenzler said. “We’re very guarded about maintaining a very strong VA system,” DAV’s Augustine said, recounting the ways that system helped him after being injured in Vietnam and discharged from the service. “They take care of the whole veteran. We feel very strongly about it.” “We’ve been assured by just about everybody we’ve spoken to that wholesale privatization is off the table — everyone pretty much agrees on that,” Gillums of Paralyzed Veterans of America said. “My sense is this is a results-based administration.” He added, “I think it’s important to separate all the other issues in this administration from veterans’ issues.” [Source: Task & Purpose | Adam Weinstein | April 3, 2017 ++]

PTSD Marijuana Treatment Update 02 ► JHU Withdraws from Study

Eighteen months after joining a study on using marijuana to treat post-traumatic stress disorder, Johns Hopkins University has pulled out without enrolling any veterans, the latest setback for the long-awaited research. The university said its goals were no longer aligned with those of the administrator of the study, the Santa Cruz, Calif.-based Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS). MAPS said the dispute was over federal drug policy and whether to openly challenge federal rules that say medical cannabis research must rely on marijuana grown by the federal National Institute on Drug Abuse. One of the lead researchers from MAPS recently did just that, in a PBS report that said the government-grown marijuana provided for the study was of poor quality and contaminated with mold. Hopkins quit the study two days later.



Although MAPS will continue the research at a private lab in Arizona, the departure of the well-known university in Baltimore is a blow, analysts said, in part because the campus was considered a prime test site that could draw on Maryland’s large population of veterans. The decision to withdraw coincides with uncertainty within the industry about whether President Trump will continue the Obama administration’s support for institutions that conduct research using marijuana, as well as its hands-off approach to states that legalize pot for recreational or medical use. “The future of scientific research under the Trump administration generally is quite shaky,” said John Hudak, a

governance-studies fellow at the Brookings Institution who tracks marijuana research. The MAPS study is meant to capture the first clinical evidence of whether marijuana can effectively treat PTSD. Favorable findings would aid endeavors to add the condition to those that are authorized for treatment in state medical cannabis programs, as well as efforts to lift a prohibition on Department of Veterans Affairs doctors from recommending or even discussing the drug as a way to alleviate anxiety and other symptoms.

“We’re trying to study what cannabis does for veterans with treatment-resistant PTSD,” said Sean Kiernan, president of the Weed for Warriors Project. “These are vets who have not been helped by the traditional regimen and in many cases have been severely hurt.” MAPS Director Rick Doblin started planning the study in 2009 with co-administrator Suzanne Sisley, an Arizona psychiatrist and marijuana advocate. At the time, Sisley was a faculty member at the University of Arizona. In 2012, their research proposal was approved by that university’s scientific review board. But in 2014, the university fired Sisley and said her position as a physician educator for medical marijuana would no longer be funded. She says she was ousted because of controversy surrounding her marijuana PTSD study, an accusation the university denies. MAPS got funding from Colorado, winning a nearly \$2.2 million research grant paid for with license fees from the state’s legalized-marijuana industry.

Hopkins joined the study that year. Its scientific review board cleared the project in September 2015, but it took until January of this year for Hopkins to determine that the marijuana provided by the federal government was safe enough to give to veterans. The university received its first delivery of cannabis 13 JAN. Although Hopkins set up a phone line for veterans to register for clinical trials, it did not enroll anyone. Advocates say they first learned the school had withdrawn when veterans who called the phone number heard a recorded message saying the university was no longer participating. This has been ongoing for years — roadblock after roadblock after roadblock,” said Scott Murphy, co-founder and president of the Massachusetts-based Veterans for Safe Access and Compassionate Care.

Sisley, backed by others at MAPS, had been trying to persuade Hopkins to speak out about the mold issue as a way of questioning the government-provided marijuana and other federal requirements for marijuana research. In March, she told PBS that the samples were moldy and had insufficient levels of THC, the active ingredient in cannabis. The next week, MAPS said some of the samples also tested positive for trace amounts of lead. “It’s crucial that the public is aware that their taxpayer dollars are going to support a single government-enforced monopoly, the sole federally legal supply of cannabis for any and all cannabis controlled trials,” Sisley said last week. Before the televised report, those involved in the study agreed they could use the government-provided marijuana despite its deficiencies, after at least five rounds of testing determined that mold and lead levels were low enough for the product to be safely consumed.

Hopkins did not respond to questions about whether the PBS report affected its decision to withdraw. But MAPS spokesman Brad Burge said the adverse publicity was the direct cause of the university’s abrupt departure. The publicity also prompted the Food and Drug Administration to contact MAPS requesting new information about the study and marijuana test results. Advocates have pushed for years for the government to allow more providers to supply marijuana for medical research. The Obama administration took initial steps to allow private suppliers, but it did not complete the process. The Trump administration has not clarified its position.

The test center in Scottsdale, Ariz., where MAPS will continue with Sisley and other researchers, has close to a dozen veterans enrolled out of a planned 76, Burge said. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Colorado who had been signed up to help with the study are continuing their participation. Sisley said MAPS gave the University of Arizona and Hopkins “every opportunity to partner with us on these studies, and neither were willing to embrace it.” “Ultimately, I think we will prove that we can conduct this research efficiently by working through the private system,” she said. [Source: The Washington Post | Aaron Gregg | April 2, 2017 ++]

VA Home Loan Appraisal ► System Under Pressure

Many appraisers are reluctant to work with Veterans Affairs as pressure mounts due to regulatory burdens, according to the National Association of Realtors' 2016 Veterans and Active Military Home Buyers and Sellers Profile. Michelle Bradley, a state-certified general real property appraiser and immediate past chair of NAR's Real Property Valuation Committee, testified before the House Veterans Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. Bradley explained to members of the committee that while good appraisals are key to maintaining a strong VA Home Loan Guarantee Program, regulatory burdens are getting in the way. "America's veterans have been well-served for years by VA's appraisal system, and professionals in the business should be proud of their good work," Bradley said. "Unfortunately, that system is under tremendous pressure today."

Currently, 18% of recent homebuyers are veterans, and over half of them used a VA loan in the home mortgage, according to NAR's report. However, appraiser willingness to service VA loans is getting in the way of allowing these loans to reach their full market potential. "What we've found is that, among appraisers, there's a real reluctance to work with the VA," Bradley said. "Generally, appraisers are dissatisfied with the level of compensation they're receiving for their work." "It's also harder than ever for trainees to enter the field, not just within the VA system but across the industry, which only adds to the perception of an appraiser shortage," she said. "This overall regulatory burden is a significant issue, and we have to turn things around." In fact, NAR created several charts (<http://www.housingwire.com/articles/39601-charts-nar-survey-breaks-down-problems-plaguing-the-appraisal-industry>) showing the problems affecting the entire appraisal industry.

But there is an added complication when it comes to VA loans. Bradley explained in to the committee that the VA holds one program, reconsideration of value, that allows an appraiser to stop work and notify the lender's point of contact if a property's value is lower than the sale price. Also known as the Tidewater Initiative, Bradley said it is unique to VA transactions and designed to protect the buyer. However, the process often isn't transparent to the buyer or their agent, Bradley said. To improve the program, she reminded the committee that a clear understanding between appraisers, real estate agents and the agents' clients is not only allowable, but should in fact should be encouraged. "What we have today isn't perfect, but it's an important part of ensuring veterans and active-service members are protected when using a VA home loan," Bradley said. "NAR looks forward to working with the VA and members of Congress to improve this system in the years to come." [Source: Housingwire | Kelsey Ramirez | April 5, 2017 ++]

VA Suicide Prevention Update 38 ► REACH VET Launched

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has launched the Recovery Engagement And Coordination for Health Veterans Enhanced Treatment Program, also known as REACH VET, to pinpoint veterans with suicidal thoughts and intervene immediately. Describing REACH VET as a cutting-edge predictive model, VA Secretary David Shulkin, MD, said in a statement that the program is already saving lives. When REACH VET finds an at-risk veteran, a clinician then reaches out to review the patient's condition, any ongoing treatments and ultimately determine if care is needed to prevent suicide. "Early intervention can lead to better recovery outcomes, lessen the likelihood of challenges becoming crises and reduce the stress that Veterans and their loved ones face," said Caitlin Thompson, National Director of VA's Office for Suicide Prevention. VA began a pilot program of REACH VET in October of 2016 and rolled it out nationwide this week to address the problem of veteran suicide, which the agency estimated to be as many as 20 every day. "One Veteran suicide is one too many," Shulkin said. [Source: Health IT News | Tom Sullivan | April 05, 2017 ++]

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



Houston VAMC — After a through internal review of an employee of the Michael DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Houston caught watching pornography while with a patient, the designated proposing official recommended removal from federal service. VA immediately removed the employee in question from patient care and placed the employee on administrative duties. Due to current law, the deciding official cannot affect a final determination for 30 days from the date the proposal for removal was made. VA is committed to ensuring every employee retains their right to due process while at the same time reducing the time it takes to remove employees who have engaged in misconduct. “This is an example of why we need accountability legislation as soon as possible,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs David J. Shulkin. “It’s unacceptable that VA has to wait 30 days to act on a proposed removal.”

Under current law, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) must continue to pay employees who are in the process of being removed. During this advance notice period, at least 30 days from the date that the employee’s removal has been proposed, assuming there is no evidence that the employee has committed a crime, an employee must be paid. If the employee has been assessed as a potential danger to Veterans, the employee should be placed on administrative leave with pay. If the employee does not pose an immediate threat to Veterans, they are typically placed on administrative duties, which limits their contact with Veterans and their families while ensuring that they aren’t sitting at home collecting a pay check without providing any services to the government.

VA is grateful that Congress has made employee accountability a priority. VA has been working with Congress to ensure legislation would provide VA the ability to expedite removals while still preserving an employee’s right to due process. Without these legislative changes, VA will continue to be forced to delay immediate actions to remove employees from federal service. “Current legislation in Congress reduces the amount of time we have to wait before taking action,” continued Secretary Shulkin. “I look forward to working with both the Senate and the House to ensure final legislation gives us the flexibility we need.” [Source: VA News Release | March 31, 2017 ++]

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Fayetteville, NC — A state board has suspended a Fayetteville doctor's medical license after a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs investigation found that he diverted prescription pain medication for his own use. In the 9 MAR order suspending **Chet Crawford**'s license, the Arkansas State Medical Board said it had been notified that the VA had terminated Crawford's medical privileges and medical staff membership at agency medical facilities amid an investigation into prescription drug diversion. The Medical Board's website lists the suspension as having taken effect 3 APR. He is set for a board hearing 8 JUN on whether he violated the state Medical Practices Act. According to the Medical Board order, the VA reported to the board that it received information from patients and a VA office of inspector general review about Crawford's drug diversion.

The VA reported that, on one occasion, Crawford prescribed 90 oxycodone tablets for a patient whom he described in a medical record as having denied having any pain, according to the Medical Board order. The VA also reported that Crawford told the office of inspector general that he had twice written oxycodone prescriptions for patients with the intention of later retrieving the drugs, either by intercepting a UPS package or visiting the patient at home, according to the order. The order also quoted the veterans agency as reporting that Crawford initially

described the unneeded prescriptions as errors. Crawford later said he was trying to taper off his hydrocodone use and wanted access to another pain medication as a "safety blanket" in case he needed it, the Medical Board order further quoted the VA report. [Source: ArkansasOnline | Andy Davis| April 3, 2017 ++]

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DVA — Swiftwater-based **Sanofi Pasteur**, the vaccines unit of French pharmaceutical company Sanofi SA will pay a \$19.9 million fine for overcharging the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for two products between 2002 and 2011. The company said the settlement was a result of its own voluntary disclosure of a calculation and reporting error in 2012. By law, drug manufacturers cannot charge the VA more than a maximum level called the Federal Ceiling Price for drugs. The Justice Department said 3 APR that Sanofi Pasteur notified the VA that it had incorrectly calculated the price for some medicines from 2007 to 2011, and thereby overcharged the VA. An investigation by the VA's Office of Inspector General then determined the overcharges dated back to 2002.

Sanofi Pasteur also agreed not to seek reimbursement for sales where it undercharged the VA. Sanofi confirmed the settlement of a what it called a contract dispute for products purchased by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs related to a voluntary disclosure of a calculation and reporting error made from 2002-2011. The company said the final civil settlement with the U.S. DOJ and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs resolves potential civil claims. "As part of the settlement, Sanofi Pasteur agreed to pay \$19.9 million to resolve the government's contract claims and to withdraw its own contract claim for undercharges," according to a statement by the company. "At all times, Sanofi Pasteur has cooperated fully and negotiated in good faith with the government since its voluntary disclosure in 2012 of the calculation and reporting error, and the company is committed to honoring its obligations under the Federal Supply Schedule contract. The parties agreed to the settlement to avoid delay, inconvenience and expenses of protracted litigation of the claims."

Neither the government nor the company identified the products involved. [Source: Associated Press | Howard Frank | April 3, 2017 ++]

VA Benefits Assistance Update 01 ► Do Not Pay

It can be difficult navigating the government bureaucracy to obtain veterans disability and other benefits, but all it should cost you is time, not money. The state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs recently advised veterans, active service members and their families not to pay for assistance to file paperwork that they can submit themselves or get free help with. "Through the years we have seen businesses and individuals who offer 'free' help applying for veterans benefits, but in the end they issue a bill under the guise of financial planning or some other service rendered," Brig. Gen. Tony Carrelli, Pennsylvania's adjutant general, said in a consumer advisory last month. "Understanding and learning about benefits can be challenging at times, and the last thing our veterans and their families need to worry about is an unexpected charge for something that should be provided for free," Carrelli said.

You can obtain free help or guidance from your county veterans affairs office, the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and service organizations such as the American Legion, VFW and Disabled American Veterans. Disability benefits are among the most well-known benefits offered by the federal government. But there are other benefits as well, some of which can be obtained at the state and local level, such as real estate tax exemption for disabled veterans. A list of the benefits that are available is on the state department's website, www.dmva.pa.gov/veteransaffairs. A good starting point if you are seeking benefits is your county veterans affairs office. You can find a list of them here <http://bit.ly/2o09hYZ>. [Source: The Morning Call | Paul Muschick | April 12, 2017 ++]

DVA Oklahoma ► Lawmakers Call for ODVA Investigation

Lawmakers are calling for an investigation and audit of the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, citing a list of complaints about the agency's policies and purchasing decisions. Rep. Brian Renegar of McAlester leads the group of Democrat representatives, including Vinita's Chuck Hoskin, Owasso's Dale Derby and Broken Arrow's Mike Ritze, The Oklahoman (<http://bit.ly/2op4nGN>) reported. At a press conference 11 APR, Renegar criticized a directive by the department to "lock up" heart monitoring machines and take out lab machines from the department's centers. "There is a move to decrease the level of care for our veterans and move our veteran centers to the level of care of nursing homes," Renegar said.

The ODVA argued that the centers aren't staffed with personnel qualified to analyze results from an electrocardiogram machine. It said a resident experiencing chest pains should be sent to an emergency room. "Should ODVA's budget be restored with the \$10 million that it has lost in the last seven years, it could easily restore all the services that were once present, hire additional doctors, operate 24-hour lab services and many other luxuries that are currently not feasible," the unsigned response noted.

The department has been under scrutiny for the health of veterans after the two high-profile deaths Owen Reese Peterson, 73, and Leonard Smith, 70, at the Talihina Veteran Center. Peterson died of sepsis and was found with maggots in his body. Smith, who had advanced dementia, choked to death. Legislation failed in a House committee that would allow for the relocation of the Talihina Veterans Center. Oklahoma Auditor and Inspector Gary Jones said an audit can't be initiated based solely on a legislator's request. [Source: Associated Press | April 12, 2017 ++]

VAMC Radcliff KY ► Public-Private Partnership Proposed

A public-private partnership is being hailed as a means to expedite construction of a new regional VA Medical Center that has been on the drawing board for more than a decade. Radcliff Mayor Mike Weaver, who offered a free 50-acre site in Millpond Business Center to the Veterans Administration, is working with Dr. Bob Robbins, a retired surgeon and investor, on equity partners interested in the concept. A VA facility under construction in Omaha, Nebraska, is using the private investment model authorized six months ago by Congress. While the federal law is new, Robbins said the concept is not. Private money built public properties as recognizable as the Transcontinental Railroad and Golden Gate Bridge, he said. "Almost from the beginning of our country, we've been involved in building done by private equity money," Robbins said.

Based on his research, Robbins said construction would be completed 80 percent cheaper under the public-private approach and in less time. Without the motivation of profit or fear of penalties, construction of public buildings also tend to take longer to complete. In a document prepared for the 11 APR news conference, Robbins writes a "complete, comprehensive funding plan is currently being developed and will be presented to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in approximately four to eight weeks." Robbins' vision extends beyond helping Radcliff convince VA officials to abandon construction plans for a new hospital off Watterson Expressway and Brownsboro Road in Jefferson County. By partnering with Hardin Memorial Health and Kentucky universities, he believes a "high-quality, integrated health care network" could be created in Hardin County.

Using the best of what's offered in medical care from the University of Kentucky and University of Louisville hospitals combined with the 400-member medical staff at HMH, Robbins said the VA could benefit while establishing a premiere health care center in the region. His idea includes using training available through Elizabethtown Community and Technical College and resources of Western Kentucky University. Robbins, who

worked at the VA Medical Center in Louisville while training as a surgeon more than 50 years ago, was on hand for the 11 APR announcement at Colvin Community Center along with five of his six-member group which recently met with leadership at the VA hospital in Louisville.

Weaver sees the medical center idea as a cure for VA claims that the new hospital must stay near teaching facilities associated with University Hospital in Louisville. “What this idea of Dr. Robbins does, it dispels the notation that the VA hospital has that, wherever they locate, it must be close to University Hospital,” Weaver said. “This dispels all that. I think it shoots their argument straight into the ground.” To continue to build community support for the VA in Radcliff idea, Weaver invited the public to hear about the public-private partnership and the [Source: The News-Enterprise | Ben Sheroan | April 11, 2017, ++]

VAMC Hampton VA Update 05 ► It Shouldn't be This Hard

“It shouldn't be this hard.” That's how Senator Mark Warner (D-VA) summarizes the patient experience at Hampton VA Medical Center. Warner met with hospital management 10 APR and found several problems including a lack of space, outdated systems and 200 unfilled positions. It's the fourth time Warner has visited the hospital since 2014, when its wait times were among the worst in the nation. Wait times for primary care are nearly nine days at Hampton, compared with about five days for the national average. The facility has seen other issues, including some veterans waiting months to get custom wheelchairs.

Then-director of Hampton VAMC Michael Dunfee told 10WAVY.com On Your Side in December that wait times improved drastically during his tenure. “We are still not where we need to be but we are much closer to the national average,” Warner said. A new scheduling system will be in place by this fall, replacing outdated software that's nearly 30-years-old. He said morale has been a problem in recent years at Hampton, but he's confident in the current leadership team at Hampton. The VA also needs to simplify the choice program. It was designed to provide better access to private providers, but Warner says it is too complicated and too similar to other programs.

Warner's top priority is paving the way for a new hospital on the southside to relieve some of the workload in Hampton. It's growing three times faster than other VA medical centers. He's pushing bipartisan legislation to make it happen. “A newer facility that can handle a large population of veterans where they can get quality care, across a series of specialties, we just got to get that done,” Warner said. [Source: 10WAVY.com | Chris Horne and Kevin Green | April 10, 2017 ++]

VAMC Washington DC Update 02 ► Director Temporarily Relieved

On March 21, 2017, a confidential complainant forwarded to the Office of Inspector General (OIG) documents describing equipment and supply issues at the Washington D.C. VA Medical Center sufficient to potentially compromise patient safety. OIG promptly reviewed the documentation. On 29 MAR OIG deployed a Rapid Response Team to assess the allegations. OIG's team conducted interviews, collected documents, and conducted a physical inspection of the Medical Center's satellite storage areas 29-30 MAR. The team returned for an additional site visit on 4-6 APR, and is on-site for a third inspection at the time of this report's publication.

OIG has preliminarily identified a number of serious and troubling deficiencies at the Medical Center that place patients at unnecessary risk. Although they have not identified at this time any adverse patient outcomes, OIG found that:

- There was no effective inventory system for managing the availability of medical equipment and supplies used for patient care;
- There was no effective system to ensure that supplies and equipment that were subject to patient safety recalls were not used on patients;
- 18 of the 25 sterile satellite storage areas for supplies were dirty;
- Over \$150 million in equipment or supplies had not been inventoried in the past year and therefore had not been accounted for;
- A large warehouse stocked full of non-inventoried equipment, materials and supplies has a lease expiring on April 30, 2017, with no effective plan to move the contents of the warehouse by that date; and
- There are numerous and critical open senior staff positions that will make prompt remediation of these issues very challenging.

At least some of these issues have been known to the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) senior management for some time without effective remediation. Although OIG's work is continuing, they believed it appropriate to publish this Interim Summary Report given the exigent nature of the issues we have preliminarily identified and the lack of confidence in VHA adequately and timely fixing the root causes of these issues. They are also including recommendations for immediate implementation. The OIG 12 April Interim Summary Report can be accessed at <https://www.va.gov/oig/pubs/VAOIG-17-02644-202.pdf>.

The Department of Veterans Affairs thanks the OIG for its quick work reviewing the D.C. VAMC. The department considers this an urgent patient-safety issue. Effective immediately, the medical center director has been relieved from his position and temporarily assigned to administrative duties. Dr. Charles Faselis has been named the acting Medical Center Director. VA is conducting a swift and comprehensive review into these findings. VA's top priority is to ensure that no patient has been harmed. If appropriate, additional disciplinary actions will be taken in accordance with the law. [Source: VA News Release | April 12, 2017 ++]

VA HCS Phoenix Update 30 ► What Still Needs Improvement

Phoenix's VA hospital on 11 APR marked the third anniversary of a nationwide scandal over veterans health care by hosting the head of a congressional committee that played a key role in exposing patient deaths in a system of delayed care. Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, toured the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center and afterward stressed continuing efforts to provide more timely appointments and enhanced accountability at America's roughly 150 veterans hospitals. Roe, a physician who served in the military, said the addition of about 800 new staff positions at the Phoenix VA is evidence of improvement. Subsequent investigations verified the original allegations and revealed that phony appointment data, mismanagement, whistleblower reprisal and other problems were systemic throughout the VA. Amid probes by Congress and the VA Office of Inspector General, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki was replaced, the \$15 billion Veterans Choice Act was passed and major reforms were undertaken.

Rep. Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), who accompanied Roe, said the department still faces major challenges, but added, "I am glad to see there has been tremendous work ... to make a change." Sinema said she bumped into a veteran during Tuesday's Phoenix VA tour and asked him about the care. "He told me, 'Three years ago it was crap, and today it was better,'" she said. Roe and Sinema said the Choice Act, which enables long-waiting patients to get VA-subsidized care from private providers, suffered from an imperfect rollout but has improved. They predicted President Donald Trump soon will sign a measure that continues the federal funding. Meanwhile, they said, legislation known as the VA Accountability Act already has passed the House and appears likely to win Senate approval. They said that measure would give new VA Secretary David Shulkin authority to expeditiously fire employees for malfeasance, and to hire workers quickly.

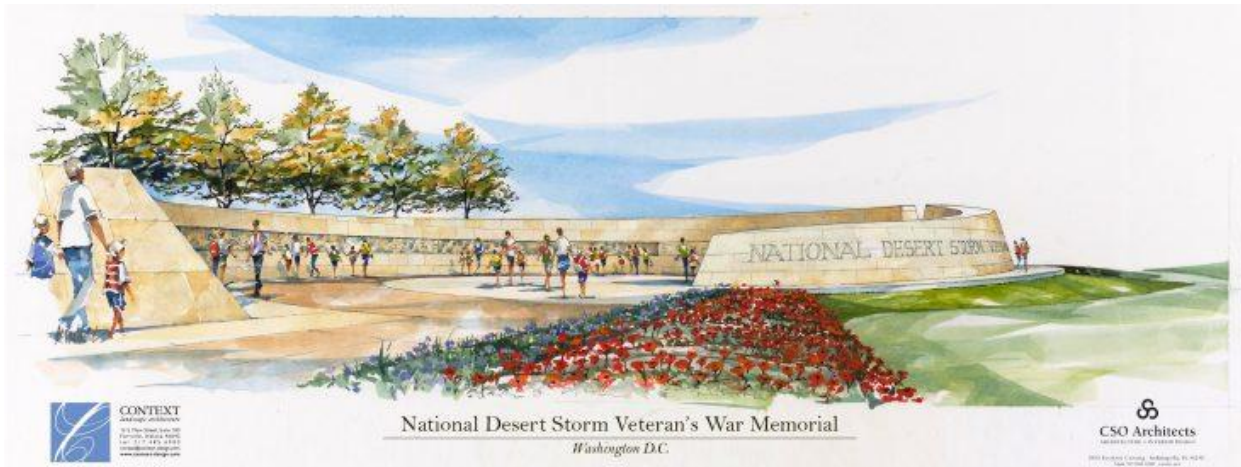
In October, The Arizona Republic, which first reported on the scandal, published a detailed analysis of improvements and setbacks. The Phoenix medical center's progress also has been spotty. It remains among the lowest-rated VA hospitals and continues to struggle with wait times, but it has increased staffing, capitalized on the Choice Program and become more transparent. During three years of negative publicity, the hospital also experienced significant workload increases. The number of enrolled patients rose to 89,207 from 84,727, according to VA records, and outpatient visits jumped nearly 15 percent, to 1 million. [Source: The Republic | Dennis Wagner | April 11, 2017 ++]

*** Vets ***



Desert Storm Memorial Update 06 ► Approval Legislation Signed

Veterans of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm will soon have their own memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., thanks to legislation signed 31 MAR by the president. President Trump signed Senate Joint Resolution 1, “A joint resolution approving the location of a memorial to commemorate and honor the members of the Armed Forces who served on active duty in support of Operation Desert Storm or Operation Desert Shield.” The resolution was sponsored by Indiana Sen. Joe Donnelly and Arkansas Sen. John Boozman and designates the location of the memorial on the National Mall.



A Phase 1 rendering of the National Desert Storm War Memorial.

The legislation was introduced and passed by Congress this month and signed in the White House by the president. “I appreciate the commitment of my colleagues in the House of Representatives to swiftly approve this resolution so our Gulf War Veterans are appropriately honored for their service and sacrifice in our nation’s capital,”

Sen. Boozman said. “This resolution is the final step in Congress to create a memorial in our nation’s capital that loved ones and future generations can visit to honor the men and women who fought and died for our country in the First Gulf War,” Sen. Donnelly added. The National Desert Storm War Memorial will honor those Veterans who served in the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991. Now that legislation to create the memorial has been approved, the memorial’s sponsors will begin the process of fundraising and working with the National Capital Planning Commission to select a location on the National Mall and a final design. Funds for the construction of the memorial will be raised privately by the National Desert Storm War Memorial Association. [Source: VAnTage Point | March 31, 2017 ++]

Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 43 ► Registry Link Not Good Enough

A new federal report says the data from an existing registry of troops’ downrange exposure to burn pits cannot be used to establish a link with health problems they are now experiencing, making it difficult to prove they are entitled to special benefits. Currently, veterans who have been exposed to burn pits in Afghanistan and Iraq have to go through difficult and time-consuming processes to prove that their conditions are service-related. At stake are health care benefits, support for spouses and education benefits for children. Congress in 2013 mandated the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, which was launched in 2014. It allows veterans to enter information about how much they were exposed to burn pits during their deployments and any subsequent health problems.

Congress hoped the VA’s burn pit registry would enable scientists to gain insights into the connection between burn pits and veterans’ illnesses, but a new report said the data aren’t scientific enough to draw good conclusions. It was intended to assist veterans in tracking their health issues and to help the Department of Veterans Affairs get information out to affected troops. Congress also hoped scientists would be able to use the registry data to gain insights into how exposure to burn pits might have resulted in cancers and respiratory, cardiovascular and gastrointestinal problems. But four years later, a congressionally mandated report, produced by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, says the way data are collected in registries isn’t scientific, making it “fundamentally unsuitable” for drawing authoritative conclusions.

“A more rigorous and appropriate study design is needed,” said the report, which found that registries relying on voluntary participation and self-reported information are subject to data biases. The absence of scientifically proven associations makes it difficult for veterans to claim benefits related to illnesses they believe stem from the burn pits, especially if those problems appear long after a deployment. “The veteran will not see those things if he can’t link his disease process to those exposures,” said Kerry Baker, a former VA legislative and policy director who now serves as a veteran advocate at Chisholm, Chisholm, and Kilpatrick, a Rhode Island law firm focused on veteran benefits.

The burn pits were used at bases in Afghanistan and Iraq to dispose of everything from general trash to paints and chemicals, automotive parts, rubber, plastics and human waste. Accelerants like jet fuel and kerosene were often used to start the fires, which sent thick black clouds across installations. According to the report, at least 250 such pits were set up in Iraq and Afghanistan. Veterans began complaining of health problems in the mid-2000s. In 2009, the military restricted the use of burn pits. As veterans fell ill or died, advocacy groups started demanding action. In 2011, Rep. Todd Akin (R-MO) and Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM) introduced bills that would become the registry law, which allows anyone who deployed after 9/11 to participate. The VA says more than 105,000 people have enrolled.

Both the new report and the 2011 Institute of Medicine assessment recommended the government should conduct a public-health-style epidemiological study to identify the effects of burn pits. “There would be a methodological approach to selecting who’s going to be participating in the study and a more rigorous approach for assessing exposure to the burn pits and health outcomes than the registry is capable of providing,” said Dr. David Savitz, a

ends. Troops have been stationed in Afghanistan for more than 16 years now, and U.S. forces that left Iraq in 2011 have re-entered that country in recent years. “My grandfather served in WWII, but he never got a chance to visit the memorial (completed in 2004),” said Rep. Seth Moulton (D-MA) who served four combat tours in Iraq as a Marine Corps infantry officer. “I want to make sure that’s not the case for so many of our War on Terror veterans today.” Supporters are looking for a waiver to the 10-year rule so they can start working now to honor the nearly 7,000 U.S. troops killed in those countries.

The legislation is sponsored by Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-WI) who served as a Marine during two tours in Iraq. He called the measure a fitting tribute to those fallen troops. “My hope is that this memorial will not only remind people on that sacrifice and the sacrifice of so many families in the global war on terrorism, but will also serve as a call to action for those of us who are here, who are alive,” he said. “Those who died don’t just want us to sit back in awe of their patriotism, but want our participation, want us to get engaged in government.” If the legislation becomes law, fundraising and construction responsibilities will fall to the foundation, not taxpayers. Veterans groups supporting the bill said they’re anxious to advance that work. “This memorial will stand as a powerful tool to help bridge the civilian-military divide,” said Bill Rausch, executive director at Got Your 6 and an Army veteran who served in Iraq. “It will provide opportunities for the public to connect and learn about the service of veterans and their families. And it will provide a shared space for all generations of veterans to strengthen their communities across the country.”

No timetable has been set for when lawmakers may take up debate on the bill, but Moulton and Gallagher said they are confident there will be bipartisan support for the idea. Similar work on the National Desert Storm War Memorial is already underway. . [Source: MilitaryTimes |Leo Shane | March 28, 2017 ++]

Tomb of the Unknowns Update 11 ► Evolution of the Tomb

For years, sentinels guarding the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery voluntarily had their lives defined by four constant and silent witnesses: the Unknown of World War I, the Unknown of World War II, the Unknown of the Korean War, and the Unknown of the Vietnam War. Until 1998. That’s when the Unknown of the Vietnam War was identified as First Lieutenant Michael Joseph Blassie. The tombs—the first of which was erected in 1921—represent the American soldiers who died in conflict and were never identified. Blassie was originally tallied as one more unidentified service member lost to the war, either missing or killed in action. In the longer course of history, however, he came to occupy a place at the nexus of old and new in how the United States cares for its dead.



Major James Connally spotted Blassie’s plane as it went down outside An Lộc on the morning of May 11, 1972—28 days into the battle for which the city gave its name. “The aircraft flew a short distance on its own and then slowly rolled over, exploding on impact in enemy-held territory,” Connally later recalled in a letter to the

Blassie family. Though Connally knew the site of the crash, recovery took nearly six months from when anti-aircraft fire clawed the A-37 Dragonfly from the sky to when a South Vietnamese Army patrol eventually found some remains, an ID card, a beacon radio, and other small fragments of an identity. Though the materials found were enough to initially mark the remains as Blassie's, a flawed bone fragment-based forensics process later overruled this verdict by miscalculating the supposed height of the individual to which the fragments belonged. It would take another 26 years before Blassie completed his odyssey from An Lộc, to the Tomb of the Unknown of the Vietnam War, to the Jefferson Barracks Memorial Cemetery near his childhood home of St. Louis, Missouri.

A rise in both care and capability borne out over centuries of warfare has caused the number of unidentified to gradually dwindle. Only three individuals who took part in Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2003 to 2010 have yet to be accounted for, according to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, which is responsible for the recovery of missing personnel. It's a considerable drop from the thousands of American service personnel unaccounted for from past wars. The reasons for the decline are varied, but include both the changing character of war as well as advances in technology like DNA testing, which have made unknowns largely a phenomenon of the past. "The generation that the tomb was built for, and the unknown soldier honored and buried here ... that generation of people has come and gone," said Sergeant of the Guard Paul K. Basso.

The nation needed something universal that could represent that final missing part of the process—a body. After World War I, calls for the repatriation of bodies, which lay on the fields of Europe, flooded politicians' offices in Washington, D.C. To many who had lost loved ones on hotly contested grounds or through the ubiquitous flash of an artillery explosion, even the full brunt of the government's efforts to send home their loved ones often wasn't enough. For these families, whose mourning was rendered incomplete, the nation needed something universal that could represent that final missing part of the process—a body. Though the U.S. had previously established tombs of the unknown for some 2,000 Civil War dead gathered from the fields of Bull Run and near Rappahannock, this new creation would represent those who could never be brought back, much less identified. The U.S. turned to its allies, whose own losses dwarfed America's in the war, to seek inspiration for this memorial.

According to Bill Niven, a professor of contemporary German history at Nottingham Trent University, England, the effect of World War I on how countries memorialize conflict was a cultural turning point—one most neatly embodied in the sharp contrast between France's modest Tomb of the Unknown and the imposing Arc de Triomphe. Constructed in the early 1800s, the arch memorializes the "glory of [Napoleon's] Grand Armée," while the tomb that rests in its shadow, and built more than a century later, has a subdued visage. The arch reflects the aggrandizement of war through extravagant uniforms, neat battle lines, and the ever-present murmur of honor and fidelity, but World War I had trod such formal conceptions through the muddy trenches of France and the Eastern Front. And it was that more desolate aspect of war that the tomb personifies. Here were average citizens—rather than professional soldiers—charging, fighting, and dying seemingly at random and on an industrialized scale few at home could fathom, much less fully comprehend. War itself had been radically altered, and so too had the mourning of those lost to it.

"These guys will all tell you, every single one of them, they will tell you they don't do it for the badge," Captain Jean J. Gwon said of the Honor Guard Badge, one of the rarest awarded in the U.S. Army. "It's always for the unknown." As she spoke, Gwon, the commander of the Tomb Guards, motioned to an 18-year-old soldier walking through the door to the subterranean guard quarters before his shift. The quarters, where three "reliefs" of seven sentinels spend 24 hours on duty before two days' rest, lie beneath the risers where visitors to Arlington gather from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Visitors watch the soldier on duty take 21 measured steps past the tomb and back again, over and over during a shift; it's a tacit nod to the military's highest honor: the 21-gun salute.

Near the hour mark, the crowds swell, standing on tiptoes to catch the intricate changing-of-the-guard ceremony, a moment when the unit's strict standards are performed as each new guard takes the post. "If there was no guard, people would not come here," Basso lamented. "People would not know what the tomb is. There would not be Facebook posts; there would not be memes; there would not be YouTube videos." James Mayo, a professor of urban

planning at the University of Kansas, explained the attraction in a 1988 article on war memorials: “Rituals transform a landscape and the memory associated with it ... Through rituals, people can focus on war memory, and their performances temporarily renew the importance of these memorials in the landscape.”

“Today, the tomb and the unknown soldiers continue to serve their original purpose, and that’s important.” And so, in January 1998, when CBS Evening News reported that Blassie was indeed the Vietnam Unknown, Americans had to collectively reconsider the role of memorials and rituals dedicated to the unknown. In an interview, Blassie’s sister, Patricia, called for a DNA test of her brother’s remains to confirm the CBS report. The military obliged. On May 14 of that year, the fourth unknown was exhumed from his resting place at the tomb for testing, and just 47 days later, Assistant Secretary of Defense Kenneth Bacon notified the Pentagon press corps that the link between the Vietnam Unknown and Blassie was absolute. It was that combination of shoddy forensic science and the lack of other suitable candidates that likely marked Blassie unidentified in the first place.

Where the airman once rested now lies a cenotaph in Arlington. The empty tomb’s cover, initially designed for the Unknown of the Vietnam War, instead reads: “Honoring and Keeping Faith with America’s Missing Servicemen, 1958-1975.” Because science virtually assures that any unidentified body could one day become identified—and thus known—then-Defense Secretary William Cohen decided that Blassie’s former tomb should remain vacant. No remains would be interred in the tomb, said Undersecretary of Defense Rudy de Leon, unless “it can be assured in perpetuity that the remains of the American serviceman would be forever unidentifiable.” And so, the tomb was sealed from gaining another member. But that hasn’t stopped its continued evolution in the minds of millions of Americans who visit it annually.

“Today, the tomb and the unknown soldiers continue to serve their original purpose, and that’s important,” said Basso, “but they also serve a whole new purpose for many Americans and the world.” War losses may now be identifiable, but they are no less poignant or profoundly grieved. After all, when visitors make the trek up to the tomb, take in the landscape, align their various screens to best capture the grandeur of the space, and hit send on their social-media accounts, those crypts—including the fourth—lie in full view. And maybe that’s enough. [Source: The Atlantic | Adin Dobkin | April 2, 2017 ++]

Homeless Vets Update 78 ► Potter's Lane | Changing Lives

Last fall, right around the time Dean Harrell rolled a sleeping bag on the hard ground of the newly opened Courtyard homeless shelter in Santa Ana, a crane was dropping shipping containers into place on a dirt lot in Midway City. There’s no way Harrell could have known it then, but he was destined to live in those steel boxes. If you had told him that at the time he wouldn’t have believed it. And he still didn’t, right until the morning last month, when he actually moved in to his own studio apartment created from three containers. By then, that dirt lot in Midway City had been transformed into a landscaped village for formerly homeless military veterans like Harrell. Nobody can say, yet, how Harrell might be transformed.

Potter’s Lane, the name of the 16-unit micro housing project on Jackson Street, bore no resemblance to what Harrell imagined a few months ago, when he first heard about the idea from people at the Veterans Affairs Community Resource and Referral Center in Santa Ana. Then, the words “iron coffin” popped into his mind. He later saw that Potter’s Lane is far from that. When 64-year-old Harrell moved in a little over two weeks ago, the containers had been reborn as bright and comfortable living quarters – insulated, air-conditioned and fully furnished, and with floor-to-ceiling windows to let in the sunshine. Constructed and managed by the nonprofit American Family Housing, whose headquarters is right next door, Potter’s Lane has attracted wide attention as an innovative approach to a stubborn problem: quick and affordable housing for people who are chronically homeless. It’s the first permanent housing complex for the homeless in California created from modified shipping containers, and possibly the only one nationwide.



“I am willing to give anything a shot,” Harrell said. “And I’m definitely willing to give this a shot.” In the eyes of many, Potter’s Lane has come to symbolize the power of transformation. The company that turns the containers into building blocks for homes, GrowthPoint Structures, typically uses its factory near Dodger Stadium to modify one-use shipping containers into custom homes and schools. Potter’s Lane is the firm’s first foray into multi-unit housing. “Our goal is to do this everywhere on a bigger scale,” said Lisa Sharpe, GrowthPoint’s senior vice president.

Proponents of using containers to build affordable housing expect costs to come down as more companies like GrowthPoint compete in that market. The price tag for Potter’s Lane has yet to be revealed. The original estimate in December 2015 was \$1.9 million. American Family Housing has declined to release a final figure until it finishes an analysis, and would not confirm a \$6.3 million figure cited by one news outlet. “There were a lot of lessons learned,” said Steve Harding, communications director for American Family Housing, noting that Potter’s Lane is a first-of-its kind. “I guess you could say we kind of over-designed it.” But those who champion shipping container housing note that the building process is much cheaper and faster – about half the time – than traditional home or apartment construction. Last summer, the 54 Potter’s Lane containers spent about a day each being processed at GrowthPoint’s factory, each emerging shrink-wrapped and ready for delivery.

On four dates in September and October, they arrived at their final destination in Midway City, in a neighborhood that includes both light industrial businesses and older stucco homes. A 180-ton crane topped with a fluttering American flag lowered each box onto a foundation where construction workers then welded them in place. In early March, the first veterans moved in. It remains to be seen if the residents will be transformed so dramatically. Early signs indicate that having a safe, calm place to sleep works wonders. Emil “Kurt” Carson said that during his first night in his second-story unit, 3 MAR, he slept nine hours straight. That compares with the two-hour catnaps he’d take during the six years he spent living under a bridge that crosses the Santa Ana River in Anaheim. The 54-year-old Marine Corps veteran of Desert Storm and missions in Somalia and Eritrea, who was homeless for 11 years, said he didn’t sleep much under the bridge because he was wary of thieves.

Now, in Potter’s Lane and its 480-square-foot studio apartments, Carson is more trusting. “I’m not uncomfortable with these guys, like I was with those people under the bridge.” Harrell, too, had grown wary for similar reasons: He lost three cellphones in three months while sleeping at the Courtyard shelter. A few weeks ago, while still at the Santa Ana shelter, he packed in haste for his move to Potter’s Lane, stuffing cookies and other snacks into a suitcase. “Are you leaving now?” a woman asked him that day. “Well, God bless you. I’m trying to find a way out of here. I’m glad for you.” A bit later, after he wheeled his belongings and his walker a few blocks over to the veterans center, he said he was tired of living at the shelter, a former bus terminal. “I gotta get the hell out of here.” He was talking as much about how he lived as where.

The people connected to Potter’s Lane – promoters and residents alike – know that rebuilding lives is more complicated than merely providing shelter. Income is part of the problem. About half the veterans have housing vouchers issued by the VA, and rents are subsidized on a sliding scale, depending on income. The Orange County

Housing Authority paid for security deposits. But all of the veterans at Potter's Lane have led post-military lives fraught with other trouble – some of their own making and some they never asked for. At Potter's Lane, case managers from the Veterans Administration and the Illumination Foundation, another Orange County nonprofit that works with the homeless, are around to help the men remain stable with whatever assistance they might need. Still, limited housing options add to their dilemma, and solving that is a huge step forward.

On move-in day for Harrell, Jean Willis, services coordinator at the veterans center that guided Harrell to his new home, called out to the man she'd helped. "Dean," she said, "I can't believe the day has finally arrived." He could. After spending most of the past three years scraping up money for motel rooms and, more recently, sleeping amid the miseries of nearly 400 people at The Courtyard, he was eager for better surroundings. "To get stable," Harrell said, "you need your own residence."

Potter's Lane is small and lean, but not without niceties. There's an open courtyard where neighbors can mingle if they choose. There's a community room stocked with donated food; a coin-operated laundry. There's a stainless steel barbecue and wooden planters to grow vegetables. Lettuce already sprouts in a hydroponic garden fertilized by fish one of the vets feeds regularly. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash and in-kind donations, along with dozens of volunteers – including other veterans – helped make Potter's Lane possible. Kristi Russell, a three-year resident of the Midway City neighborhood, watched the last of the containers arriving in October from her front yard a couple of houses down, on Jackson Street. She was pleased. "I don't know why they don't do (this) in more places," Russell said of the idea of housing the homeless. "It's really ridiculous that they don't." Orange County has about 450 homeless veterans, based on a survey done in 2015. Over the past year, a few other projects have launched to house them. Harrell sees Potter's Lane as a beginning, not an end. Even at his age, Harrell hopes to regain some of the pride and independence he once had when he owned a home and worked with his hands.

Lean and lanky Harrell is a gruff man with a voice like a crunch of gravel who claims affiliation with a motorcycle gang and tough Sicilian heritage by way of saying "Don't mess with me." His bushy mustache, with the tell-tale yellow stain of a smoker, is a darker gray than the hair that flairs out from under an assortment of baseball caps he wears to cover his otherwise bald scalp. T-shirts, jeans and sweatshirts make up his wardrobe. He calls himself "another bitter veteran" of the war in Vietnam, where he says he served in 1970 and '71. He still sometimes uses an offensive, four-letter word to describe the Vietnamese people he fought in the war – well aware that his new neighborhood is within jogging distance of the biggest Vietnamese enclave outside that country. But his greatest tragedy, he says, didn't involve the war at all. It happened in this country, in 1998, when he says a drunk driver killed his wife and two children. Other misfortunes add to his attitude: A work accident that damaged his back; the death of a younger brother in a house fire; a 2014 assault by two men wielding a bat in which he lost some teeth and many personal possessions, including his family photos.

Harrell said he made a living swinging a hammer, and that he once ran his own roofing company. These days he looks for the odd construction job and, if needed, he'll panhandle. The last three years have been particularly rough, Harrell confesses. "It's been harder and harder to find the motivation to keep going." Ramon Irving, a mountain of a man who helped Harrell move his belongings to Potter's Lane, works as a peer specialist with the VA. He knew Harrell from 20 years ago. Back then, he worked under Harrell as a laborer on a construction project. More recently, he's been helping his old boss find a new start. "Dean gets sober, then unsober, then sober," Irving said. "He disappears, and then I've got to go find him." Harrell's had his struggles, but over the past year or so, he's been better. "It's a big change," Irving said. "It's a big difference."

Harrell will resort to panhandling if needed, as he did in the weeks leading up to his move to Potter's Lane. One day in February, with an appointment to meet his VA case manager looming about an hour away, Harrell plucked a folded cardboard sign from among belongings he stored at the Santa Ana veterans center. He hung the sign from his neck and let it unfurl: "Disabled Homeless Vietnam Veteran. Please Help." After 30 minutes at his favorite spot, on a median at Fourth Street at the Santa Ana/Tustin border, he left with \$7, a ham sandwich and a bag of almonds. He gave away the nuts, pointing at his missing teeth: "Can't eat them." When moving day arrived on 16 AR, Harrell

was short on cash to pay his first month's rent, \$297. After a mad scramble, an American Legion post in Newport Beach came through with a check for \$210. In the future, a monthly \$790 disability check will more than cover his rent, which includes utilities and internet.

On moving day, Harrell's friend Irving and another VA peer specialist, Nate Berkley, made several trips to unload his suitcases and boxes. They were filled with clothes, bedding, books and junk food. Both men marveled at Harrell's new home. "Oh, my God, man, this is nice," said Irving, a veteran who also spent about a year homeless. "You know, in an earthquake, this isn't going to fall apart." Harrell seemed ready to settle in. He listened as he heard the house rules (guests are limited to a few overnight stays at a time), and expressed excitement when he signed his lease. "It's going to take wild horses to get me out of here now." At his doorstep, he thanked Irving and Berkley, offering each a brotherly hug. Then, as they left, he danced a jig. For a slide show on the buildig of Poer's Lane and its occupants go to <http://www.ocregister.com/articles/harrell-748165-lane-potter.html#fancy-1>. [Source: Orange county Registrar | Online Update | Theresa Walker | April 2, 2017 ++]

AFRH Update 07 ► Gulfport/Washington Homes Facing Budget Woes

Most service members' connection to the finances of the Armed Forces Retirement Home begins and ends with a 50-cent-a-month deduction from their paycheck. But that revenue stream, and other funding sources, are running short, and defense officials are considering drastic changes to the management of the home, which cares for about 1,000 former enlisted members in two locations. Among the suggestions: Convert the home's leadership into a "military garrison model" with a senior officer at the helm, or privatize it completely. Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work ordered defense officials to evaluate those and other options and propose a new management structure in a 14 FEB memorandum. Work also directed officials to take actions to save money in a variety of areas at AFRH, such as reducing spending on veterans' activities, revising the fee structure and eliminating a golf-course subsidy.

The home has campuses in Washington, D.C., and Gulfport, Mississippi. It's open to former enlisted members and warrant officers, with certain exceptions and eligibility requirements. Some residents are retirees. Others are eligible because service-connected disabilities make them unable to earn a living or, if they served in a war theater, because they suffered from qualifying injuries, diseases or disabilities. Enlisted members and warrant officers contributed \$6.8 million to the AFRH in 2015 through paycheck deductions. A move to increase that amount to \$1 several years ago was blocked by the services. Funding to pay for other operations costs come from the residents themselves and from fines and forfeitures paid by active-duty service members as punishment for misconduct during military service. That revenue has dropped by more than 40 percent since 2009.

The retirement home's trust fund balance has declined from \$186 million in 2010 to \$46 million in 2015, according to AFRH budget justification documents for fiscal year 2017. In fiscal 2015, the AFRH had \$63 million in expenses against \$48 million in revenue. DoD has estimated it will need an infusion of \$22 million a year to bail out the home. Todd Weiler, who served as the assistant deputy secretary of manpower and reserve affairs in the last year of the Obama administration, ordered a complete review of AFRH operations in 2016, he told Military Times, when he realized the home wasn't getting the managerial oversight it needed and was in dire financial straits. "It should never have gotten into this situation," Weiler said. "There was a series of not-smart business decisions being made, so consequently the trust fund was depleted."

Weiler said he asked the services' senior enlisted advisers about raising the mandatory deductions from enlisted members' paychecks from 50 cents a month to \$1, and "they all pushed back," he said. The population of the facilities is small, he noted, and a small percentage of enlisted members will ever live there. "We're asking the most junior service members to pay up. Until we make sure we have our house in order and have found ways to do business better, we shouldn't be asking more of them." He proposed putting an active-duty officer at the O-6 level with experience in installation management in charge of the home. "That colonel is not going to sit there and let that

stuff happen like it's happening now," he said. "And the residents will respect the military leadership." Such a senior leader would be in charge under the "military garrison model" outlined in Work's memo. As chief operating officer, he'd be supported by experts in the management of retirement homes and in providing long-term medical care for older people. Such a move would require legislation, according to the memo.

Rules now in place allow an active-duty member below general or flag officer rank to administer each AFRH facility, but while some administrators have been retired members, it's been a number of decades since an active-duty member served at the helm. The eligibility system also has been subject to suggested reforms. Weiler said he was also concerned about some admission requirements that apparently exclude veterans if they have issues like post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, and was in the process of addressing that when he left in January. Work's memo calls for an evaluation of admissions requirements that are excessively restrictive and that "may preclude serving veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, addictions and other psychological conditions."

It also pushes for the home to increase occupancy rates (it's about 84 percent of capacity) and to revise the fee structure, which is based on a percentage of resident income and type of care received. After a 2016 increase, the basic independent living fees are 40 percent of total current income, up to a maximum of \$1,429 a month; and the long-term care fees are 80 percent of total current income, not to exceed \$4,664 a month. Those fees include many expenses, such as meals. Officials should evaluate the fee structure "to balance the appropriate level of service, resident cost-sharing, need-based aid, and demand for space across campuses," the memo states. Other actions Work has approved to address the financial problems include:

- Stop using trust funds to pay for operating the golf course at the Washington site. The nine-hole course would be allowed to continue to operate if the costs to operate it are recovered by golfers or other sources of revenue.
- Reduce spending on resident activities by at least 20 percent in the first year and by half over the next four years. "AFRH spending in this area far exceeds the industry average," Work's memo states.
- Establish nurse-to-resident staffing targets for each level of care provided at the homes. The ratio of staff to residents is higher than industry averages as staffing is based on full occupancy, despite the 84 percent occupancy level.
- Explore receiving Veterans Affairs Department payments, such as per diem payments for qualified residents. The law allows VA to provide per diem payments to state veterans' homes for certain kinds of care of veterans.
- Explore agreements with DoD and VA for reimbursement for medical care to veterans normally provided for veterans by those departments.
- Improve contract management and surveillance, to ensure AFRH is getting full value for its money. One example: Weiler said he was concerned when he discovered that AFRH has a contract to raise the flag in the morning at the golf course.
- Sell excess property and lease non-excess property, which could include the golf course if it doesn't prove self-sufficient.
- Explore options for charitable funding.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | April 5, 2017++]

Alabama Veterans Homes Update 02: DVA Rejects Hartsville Proposal

Reverend James Henderson said he's sure it will happen, and he said his vision is clear. For the past six months, Henderson worked to garner support for his idea to turn the now-closed Hartselle Hospital facility into a state-run veterans home. "I can tell you, as a preacher and as an old soldier this is a fight for our veterans," said Henderson.

It's no secret that Alabama's four state veteran homes have wait lists. Reverend Henderson said the old 120-bed Hartselle facility can help alleviate the wait. He said it would help address the more than 800 people on state waiting lists. "We have 800 elderly veterans on the waiting lists at the four homes," Henderson began. "582 of them, or 70%, of those veterans on those four lists on the four homes are on the list for Birmingham or Huntsville."

He goes on to say Hartselle is ideally positioned, within approximately an hour long drive of the two, and can help do some of the lifting. He says the hospital could be perfect for dementia and Alzheimer's patients. The Hartselle facility is currently owned by Huntsville Hospital, and Rev. Henderson said he has worked with Huntsville Hospital administrators to discuss the possible cost of renovation, and how the transition to a possible state veteran home would work. The problem, he said, is that the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs rejects the idea. They did not come to see the facility, but say they know the hospital setup will not work for their model. "The VA adopted a concept of making veterans homes as much like their own personal homes as possible," Rev. Henderson explained. But that, he said, is not reason enough to give up on the concept. He believes that with the right renovations, it can be a great staffed facility for servicemen and servicewomen with debilitating conditions.

WHNT News 19 spoke with Mayor Randy Garrison, who said the hospital played a major role in the city for so long, in fact, he was born there and his mother worked there for decades. "I think it's a great idea if it could come to fruition," he said. "It would create jobs, more taxes for the city. Hartselle Hospital was one of Hartselle Utilities' biggest customers so it would be taxes from the utilities." Also, a recent meeting, Priceville town council passed a resolution in support of the old hospital becoming a veterans home. Rev. Henderson said the state government is good about responding to the will of the people, and getting support from municipalities and Alabama residents will help make it happen. He's already met with a number of Alabama lawmakers, as well as representatives with Huntsville Hospital, who owns the facility. and he has plans to meet with Governor Bentley to push it forward.

Henderson described the Alabama VA's response as 'lukewarm at best,' and Commissioner Clyde Marsh released the following statement to WHNT News 19. Caring for our veterans is one of the most sacred duties one can perform on a daily basis and it is of special significance for all Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) employees. We work hand in glove with the federal government to care for elderly and disabled veterans regarding all benefits or services but especially in our State Veterans Homes (SVH).

Alabama currently has four SVHs for aged and infirm veterans. Sen. Bill Holtzclaw requested that the ADVA provide our assessment of the suitability of using the vacant Hartselle Medical Center in light of a constituent's interest. The assessment indicated that the hospital is not suitable as a state veterans home. "The problem with many legacy or older (senior) living facilities is they're very institutional, they look, feel and function like hospitals or infirmaries," W. Clyde Marsh, ADVA Commissioner, said. The Hartselle hospital and new patient wing were built in 1953 and operated as a medical facility until 2012. In 2012, that hospital was deemed no longer useful or beneficial in meeting the purpose for which it was built. The hospital closed in January 2012 and has remained shuttered.

The US Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) committed to a cultural transformation of resident-centered homes for skilled care in 2005. This transformation changed the homes to the small house design, with 10-14 resident rooms per house for all future SVH construction projects. New homes must have a front door entrance to each house including a foyer, all private rooms and bathrooms, and include a living room, dining room and a kitchen which duplicates the home environment for each resident veteran. Retrofitting and repurposing of old existing structures must follow the same guidelines and incorporate the same design specifications.

The USDVA has attempted to repurpose and convert old existing facilities in the past. Those attempts often required a complete gutting and rebuild or a tear down and new construction on site. "This new design provides a sense of community and the veteran's own home rather an institutional feel," Commissioner Marsh said. "It creates a home away from home environment for the veterans which facilitates better access to daily living care, interaction with small house staff which improves the veteran's experience and reinforces the standards of care."

The ADVA conducted a feasibility study in 2007. Kim Justice, Executive Director of the State Veterans Home program, said, “Now at the 10-year mark, we are near completing the recommendations of that study which entailed the opening of a new 254-bed home in the Birmingham area and upgrading/improving our current state veterans homes. We are seeking to conduct a new feasibility study that will project needs and guide our path of decision-making for the next 10–15 years.” The results of this new study will determine if and where a new veterans home will be built. If a new home is built, construction falls under the USDVA guidelines.

“The old hospital is not useful for the ADVA for consideration as a State Veterans Homes to achieve a purpose for which it was not designed or constructed. The VA has specific designs, and strict requirements in order to meet the operational requirements of a SVH and provide the necessary standards of skilled care.” Commissioner Marsh said. “We appreciate the owners thinking about our agency and veterans; however, this facility is not suitable to be a state veterans home.” [Source: WHNT 19 News | Shevaun Bryan] April 9, 2017 ++]

Obit: John Glenn ► 8 DEC 2016 | Astronaut

Marine aviator John Glenn, whose 1962 flight as the first U.S. astronaut to orbit the Earth made him an all-American hero and propelled him to a long career in the U.S. Senate, died Thursday. The last survivor of the original Mercury 7 astronauts was 95. Glenn died at the James Cancer Hospital in Columbus, where he was hospitalized for more than a week, said Hank Wilson, communications director for the John Glenn School of Public Affairs.



Navy Secretary Ray Mabus praised Glenn as “an American hero” and a pioneer of space flight who dedicated his life to his country. “But to those of us in the Navy and Marine Corps family, he will remain a shipmate – a Marine Aviator who flew nearly 150 combat missions in World War II and the Korean War,” Mabus said in a statement on Thursday. “His orbit around the Earth inspired a generation, and gave us the confidence needed to meet President John F. Kennedy's challenge to put a man on the moon. “John Glenn's legacy will live on in all the men and women who dedicate their lives to public service and exploring the unknown. The Navy and Marine Corps mourn the passing of a legend, with gratitude for his sacrifices.”

As a Marine aviator, Glenn was equaled by few and surpassed by none. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross six times for his bravery in World War II, the Korean War, making the first supersonic flight across the US and then for his famous Friendship Seven mission. “We are saddened by the news that one of Marine Corps Aviation's legendary trailblazers and an American hero has passed away,” the Marine Corps said in a statement. “Col. John Glenn Jr. led a monumental life from his time serving as a fighter pilot in WWII and the Korean War to becoming the first American to orbit the Earth and fifth person in space. He is an inspiration to us and our fellow Marines. Our deepest condolences go out to the family and friends of Col. Glenn. He will be missed. Semper Fi.”

John Herschel Glenn Jr. had two major career paths that often intersected: flying and politics, and he soared in both of them. Before he gained fame orbiting the world, he was a fighter pilot in two wars, and as a test pilot, he set

a transcontinental speed record. He later served 24 years in the Senate from Ohio. A rare setback was a failed 1984 run for the Democratic presidential nomination. His long political career enabled him to return to space in the shuttle Discovery at age 77 in 1998, a cosmic victory lap that he relished and turned into a teachable moment about growing old. He holds the record for the oldest person in space. More than anything, John Glenn was the ultimate and uniquely American space hero: a combat veteran with an easy smile, a strong marriage of 70 years and nerves of steel. Schools, a space center and the Columbus, Ohio, airport were named after him. So were children.

The Soviet Union leaped ahead in space exploration by putting the Sputnik 1 satellite in orbit in 1957, and then launched the first man in space, cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, in a 108-minute orbital flight on April 12, 1961. After a two suborbital flights by Alan Shepard Jr. and Gus Grissom, it was up to Glenn to be the first American to orbit the Earth. "Godspeed, John Glenn," fellow astronaut Scott Carpenter radioed just before Glenn thundered off a Cape Canaveral launch pad, now a National Historic Landmark, to a place America had never been. At the time of that Feb. 20, 1962, flight, Glenn was 40 years old. With the all-business phrase, "Roger, the clock is operating, we're underway," Glenn radioed to Earth as he started his 4 hours, 55 minutes and 23 seconds in space. Years later, he explained he said that because he didn't feel like he had lifted off and it was the only way he knew he had launched. During the flight, Glenn uttered a phrase that he would repeat frequently throughout life: "Zero G, and I feel fine."

"It still seems so vivid to me," Glenn said in a 2012 interview with The Associated Press on the 50th anniversary of the flight. "I still can sort of pseudo feel some of those same sensations I had back in those days during launch and all." Glenn said he was often asked if he was afraid, and he replied, "If you are talking about fear that overcomes what you are supposed to do, no. You've trained very hard for those flights." Glenn's ride in the cramped Friendship 7 capsule had its scary moments, however. Sensors showed his heat shield was loose after three orbits, and Mission Control worried he might burn up during re-entry when temperatures reached 3,000 degrees. But the heat shield held.

Even before then, Glenn flew in dangerous skies. He was a fighter pilot in World War II and Korea who flew low, got his plane riddled with bullets, flew with baseball great Ted Williams and earned macho nicknames during 149 combat missions. And as a test pilot he broke aviation records. The green-eyed, telegenic Marine even won \$25,000 on the game show "Name That Tune" with a 10-year-old partner. And that was before April 6, 1959, when his life changed by being selected as one of the Mercury 7 astronauts and instantly started attracting more than his share of the spotlight. Glenn in later years regaled crowds with stories of NASA's testing of would-be astronauts, from psychological tests — come with 20 answers to the open ended question "I am" — to surviving spinning that pushed 16 times normal gravity against his body, popping blood vessels. But it wasn't nearly as bad as coming to Cape Canaveral to see the first unmanned rocket test. "We're watching this thing go up and up and up ... and all at once it blew up right over us, and that was our introduction to the Atlas," Glenn said in 2011. "We looked at each other and wanted to have a meeting with the engineers in the morning."

In 1959, Glenn wrote in Life magazine: "Space travel is at the frontier of my profession. It is going to be accomplished, and I want to be in on it. There is also an element of simple duty involved. I am convinced that I have something to give this project." That sense of duty was instilled at an early age. Glenn was born July 18, 1921, in Cambridge, Ohio, and grew up in New Concord, Ohio, with the nickname "Bud." He joined the town band as a trumpeter at age 10 and accompanied his father one Memorial Day in an echoing version of "Taps." In his 1999 memoir, Glenn wrote "that feeling sums up my childhood. It formed my beliefs and my sense of responsibility. Everything that came after that just came naturally." His love of flight was lifelong; John Glenn Sr. spoke of the many summer evenings he arrived home to find his son running around the yard with outstretched arms, pretending he was piloting a plane. Last June, at a ceremony renaming the Columbus airport for him, Glenn recalled imploring his parents to take him to that airport to look at planes whenever they passed through the city: "It was something I was fascinated with." He piloted his own private plane until age 90.

Glenn's goal of becoming a commercial pilot was changed by World War II. He left Muskingum College to join the Naval Air Corps and soon after, the Marines. He became a successful fighter pilot who ran 59 hazardous

missions, often as a volunteer or as the requested backup of assigned pilots. A war later, in Korea, he earned the nickname "MiG-Mad Marine" (or "Old Magnet A —," which he sometimes paraphrased as "Old Magnet Tail.") "I was the one who went in low and got them," Glenn said, explaining that he often landed with huge holes in the side of his aircraft because he didn't like to shoot from high altitudes. Glenn's public life began when he broke the transcontinental airspeed record, bursting from Los Angeles to New York City in 3 hours, 23 minutes and 8 seconds. With his Crusader averaging 725 mph, the 1957 flight proved the jet could endure stress when pushed to maximum speeds over long distances. In New York, he got a hero's welcome — his first tickertape parade. He got another after his flight on Friendship 7.

That mission also introduced Glenn to politics. He addressed a joint session of Congress, and dined at the White House. He became friends with President Kennedy and ally and friend of his brother, Robert. The Kennedys urged him to enter politics, and after a difficult few starts he did. Glenn spent 24 years in the U.S. Senate, representing Ohio longer than any other senator in the state's history. He announced his impending retirement in 1997, 35 years to the day after he became the first American in orbit, saying "there is still no cure for the common birthday." Glenn's returned to space in a long-awaited second flight in 1998 aboard the space shuttle Discovery. He got to move around aboard the shuttle for far longer — nine days compared with just under five hours in 1962 — as well as sleep and experiment with bubbles in weightlessness. In a news conference from space, Glenn said "to look out at this kind of creation out here and not believe in God is to me impossible."

NASA tailored a series of geriatric-reaction experiments to create a scientific purpose for Glenn's mission, but there was more to it than that: a revival of the excitement of the earliest days of the space race, a public relations bonanza and the gift of a lifetime. "America owed John Glenn a second flight," NASA Administrator Dan Goldin said. Glenn would later write that when he mentioned the idea of going back into space to his wife, Annie, she responded: "Over my dead body." Glenn and his crewmates flew 3.6 million miles, compared with 75,000 miles aboard Friendship 7.

Shortly before he ran for the 1984 Democratic presidential nomination, a new generation was introduced to astronaut Glenn with the film adaptation of Tom Wolfe's book "The Right Stuff." He was portrayed as the ultimate straight arrow amid a group of hard-partying astronauts. Glenn said in 2011: "I don't think any of us cared for the movie 'The Right Stuff'; I know I didn't." Glenn was unable to capitalize on the publicity, though, and his poorly organized campaign was short-lived. He dropped out of the race with his campaign \$2.5 million in the red — a debt that lingered even after he retired from the Senate in 1999. He later joked that except for going into debt, humiliating his family and gaining 16 pounds, running for president was a good experience. Glenn generally steered clear of campaigns after that, saying he didn't want to mix politics with his second space flight. He sat out the Senate race to succeed him — he was hundreds of miles above Earth on Election Day — and largely was quiet in the 2000 presidential race.

He first ran for the Senate in 1964 but left the race when he suffered a concussion after slipping in the bathroom and hit his head on the tub. He tried again in 1970 but was defeated in the primary by Howard Metzenbaum, who later lost the general election to Robert Taft Jr. It was the start of a complex relationship with Metzenbaum, whom he later joined in the Senate. For the next four years, Glenn devoted his attention to business and investments that made him a multimillionaire. He had joined the board of Royal Crown Cola after the aborted 1964 campaign, and was president of Royal Crown International from 1967 to 1969. In the early 1970s, he remained with Royal Crown and invested in a chain of Holiday Inns. In 1974, Glenn ran against Metzenbaum in what turned into a bitter primary and won the election. He eventually made peace with Metzenbaum, who won election to the Senate in 1976. Glenn set a record in 1980 by winning re-election with a 1.6-million vote margin.

He became an expert on nuclear weaponry and was the Senate's most dogged advocate of non-proliferation. He was the leading supporter of the B-1 bomber when many in Congress doubted the need for it. As chairman of the Governmental Affairs Committee, he turned a microscope on waste and fraud in the federal bureaucracy. Glenn said the lowest point of his life was 1990, when he and four other senators came under scrutiny for their connections to

Charles Keating, the notorious financier who eventually served prison time for his role in the costly savings and loan failure of the 1980s. The Senate Ethics Committee cleared Glenn of serious wrongdoing but said he "exercised poor judgment." The episode was the only brush with scandal in his long public career and didn't diminish his popularity in Ohio. Glenn joked that the only astronaut he was envious of was his fellow Ohioan: Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon. "I've been very fortunate to have a lot of great experiences in my life and I'm thankful for them," he said in 2012.

In 1943, Glenn married his childhood sweetheart, Anna Margaret Castor. They met when they were toddlers, and when she had mumps as a teenager he came to her house, cut a hole in her bedroom window screen, and passed her a radio to keep her company, a friend recounted. "I don't remember the first time I told Annie I loved her, or the first time she told me," Glenn would write in his memoir. "It was just something we both knew." He bought her a diamond engagement ring in 1942 for \$125. It's never been replaced. They had two children, Carolyn and John David. He and his wife, Annie, split their later years between Washington and Columbus. Both served as trustees at their alma mater, Muskingum College. Glenn spent time promoting the John Glenn School of Public Affairs at Ohio State University, which also houses an archive of his private papers and photographs.

Final funeral rites for astronaut John Glenn took place 6 APR at Arlington National Cemetery. His family and invited guests, including astronauts and dignitaries, said goodbye to the first American to orbit Earth at a small private service at the Old Post Chapel. The U.S. Marine Corps ran a live stream that included a processional to the graveside by caisson, a flyover, a graveside service and taps. Streaming video was also available on NASA TV. In Glenn's honor, President Donald Trump ordered flags at federal entities and institutions flown at half-staff [Source: The Associated Press | Seth Borenstein | December 8, 2016 ++]

Retiree Checklist ► What Survivors Should Know

This checklist is designed to provide retirees and their loved ones with some help in preparing for the future. The checklist is not all-inclusive and should be used with other estate planning tools.

1. Create a military file.

- Retirement orders
- DD 214
- Separation papers
- Medical records

2. Create a military retired pay file.

- Claim number of any pending VA claims
- Address of the VA office being used
- List of current deductions from benefits
- Name, relationship and address of beneficiary of unpaid retired pay at the time of death
- Address and phone number for DFAS:

Defense Finance and Accounting Service, U S Military Retirement Pay, Post Office Box 7130, London, KY 40742
7130 (800) 321-1080 option #3 (for deceased members)

3. Create an annuities file, to include:

- Information about the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP).
- Reserve Component Survivor Benefit Plan (RCSBP)
- Retired Serviceman's Family Protection Plan (RSFPP)
- Civil Service annuity

Note: (Additional information regarding SBP annuity claims can be obtained from the DFAS-Cleveland Center office at 1-800-321-1080.)

4. Create a personal document file.

- Marriage Records
- Divorce decree
- Adoptions and naturalization papers

5. Create an income tax file.

- Copies of state and federal income tax returns

6. Create a property tax file.

- Copies of tax bills
- Deeds and any other related information.

7. Create an insurance policy file.

- Life Insurance
- Property, accident, liability insurance
- Hospitalization/Medical Insurance

8. Maintain a listing of banking and credit information, in a secure location.

- Bank account numbers
- Location of all deposit boxes
- Savings bond information
- Stocks, bonds and any securities owned
- Credit card account numbers and mailing addresses
- 401K Accounts

9. Maintain a membership listing of all associations and organizations.

- Organization names and phone numbers
- Membership fee information

10. Maintain a list of all friends and business associates.

- Include names, addresses and phone numbers

11. Hold discussions with your next of kin about your wishes for burial and funeral services.

At a minimum the discussion should include cemetery location and type of burial (ground, cremation or burial at sea). This knowledge may assist your next of kin to carry out all of your desires.

12. You could also pre-arrange your funeral services via your local funeral home. Many states will allow you to prepay for services.

13. Investigate the decisions that you and your family have agreed upon. Many states have specific laws and guidelines regulating cremation and burials at sea. Some states require a letter of authority signed by the deceased in order to authorize a cremation. Know the laws in your specific area and how they may affect your decisions.

Information regarding Burials at Sea can be obtained by phoning Navy Mortuary Affairs at (866) 787-0081.

14. Once your decisions have been made and you are comfortable with them, have a will drawn up outlining specifics.

15. Ensure that your will and all other sensitive documents are maintained in a secure location known by your loved ones. Organizations to be notified in the event of a retiree death:

1. Defense Finance and Accounting Service, London, KY (800) 321-1080
2. Social Security Administration (for death benefits) (800) 772-1213

3. Department of Veterans Affairs (if applicable) (800) 827-1000
4. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) (724) 794-8690
5. Any fraternal group that you have membership with (e.g., MOAA, FRA, NCOA, VFW, AL, TREAA)
6. Any previous employers that provide pension or benefits.

[Source: Shift Colors | Fall/Winter 2016 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 15 APR 2017

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

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

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

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

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

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

To quickly locate events in your geographic area just click on the appropriate State\Territory\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 | April 15, 2017 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► 16 APR thru 15 MAY 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*

Chicago IL Veterans Job Fair	April 20, 2017
Orlando FL Veterans Job Fair	April 20, 2017
Fort Bliss TX Job Fair	April 25, 2017
Central Region Virtual Career Fair	April 25, 2017
Minneapolis MN Veterans Job Fair	April 27, 2017
Orange County (Anaheim) CA Veterans Job Fair	April 27, 2017
Charlotte NC Veterans Job Fair	May 4, 2017
Oakland CA Veterans Job Fair	May 4, 2017
Columbus GA Veterans Job Fair	May 10, 2017
Norfolk VA Veterans Job Fair	May 11, 2017
Greater Omaha (Council Bluffs) IA Veterans Job Fair	May 11, 2017
Greater Dallas TX Veterans Job Fair	May 11, 2017

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Listings

[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](#)

[Fort Campbell Transition Summit](#) May 2 to May 4

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

[Marine Corps Base Quantico Military Spouse Career Event](#) May 2 - 5:30 pm to May 3 - 1:00 pm

Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA [Details](#) [Register](#)

[AMPLIFY Military Spouse Career Intensive - Hampton Roads](#) May 4 to May 5

Virginia Beach, VA [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Fort Bliss Military Spouse Career Event](#) May 9 - 7:00 pm to May 10 - 1:00 pm

El Paso, TX [Details](#) [Register](#)

Veteran Career/Job Fairs

Fort Bragg, NC April 25, 2017, 9am - 4pm [More information](#)

Iron Mike Conference Center, 2658 Reilly Road, Fort Bragg, NC 28310

* TRANSITION SUMMIT (Day 1 of 3) 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Afterburner Military Transition Seminar; requires separate pre-registration.

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

Fort Bragg, NC April 26, 2017, 9am - 7pm [More information](#)

Iron Mike Conference Center, 2658 Reilly Road, Fort Bragg, NC 28310

* TRANSITION SUMMIT (Day 2 of 3)

9 a.m.-4 p.m. Industry briefs for job seekers

5 p.m.-7 p.m. Networking reception

Fort Riley, KS April 26, 2017, 10am - 3pm [More information](#)

Riley Conference Center, Building 446 Huebner and Seitz Drive, Fort Riley, KS 66442

Fort Irwin, CA April 26, 2017, 6pm - 8pm [More information](#)

Sam Adams Building, 37 Goldstone Road, Fort Irwin, CA 92310

* MILITARY SPOUSE CAREER EVENT (Day 1 of 2) 6 p.m.-8 p.m. networking reception

Joint Base Andrews, MD April 27, 2017, 10am - 2pm [More information](#)

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

Note: You must have Active CAC Card or Military ID for base access. If not, then to obtain access to the base, send FULL NAME, BIRTHDAY, DRIVERS LICENSE NUMBER, EXPIRATION DATE, AND STATE REGISTERED via e-mail (Janet.Giles@JobZoneOnline.com) or call 434-263-5102 or 540-226-1473 with info no later than 1 week prior to the event. Deadline depends on the number of requests received for base access; therefore the date may change. ADVANCED NOTICE FOR SECURITY APPROVAL IS REQUIRED (NO EXCEPTIONS). Please note that registering online and posting/linking your resume for this event DOES NOT VALIDATE SECURITY APPROVAL FOR ACCESS TO THE BASE.

Fort Irwin, CA April 27, 2017, 10am - 1pm [More information](#)

Sam Adams Building, 37 Goldstone Road, Fort Irwin, CA 92310

* MILITARY SPOUSE CAREER EVENT (Day 2 of 2) 10 a.m.-1 p.m. hiring fair

Fort Bragg, NC April 27, 2017, 9am - 4pm [More information](#)

Iron Mike Conference Center, 2658 Reilly Road, Fort Bragg, NC 28310

* TRANSITION SUMMIT (Day 3 of 3) 9 a.m.-noon Employment workshops 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Hiring fair

Fort Campbell, KY May 2, 2017, 9am - 6pm [More information](#)

Personnel Processing Center Building, Hedge Row Road and 4th Street, Fort Campbell, KY 42223

* TRANSITION SUMMIT (Day 1 of 3)
9 a.m.-4 p.m. Industry sector briefings for job seekers
4 p.m.-6 p.m. Networking reception

Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA May 2, 2017, 5:30pm - 8:30pm **More information**
The Clubs at Quantico and Crossroads Events Center: Quantico Station, 3017 Russell Rd., Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA 22134

* MILITARY SPOUSE CAREER EVENT (Day 1 of 2) 5:30-8:30 p.m. networking reception and Arts in the Armed Forces performance.

Fort Campbell, KY May 3, 2017, 9am - 4pm **More information**
Personnel Processing Center Building, Hedge Row Road and 4th Street, Fort Campbell, KY 42223

* TRANSITION SUMMIT (Day 2 of 3)
9 a.m.-noon Job seeker workshops and opening ceremony at Personnel Processing Center.
1 p.m.-4 p.m. Hiring fair at Cole Park Commons.

Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA May 3, 2017, 10am - 1pm **More information**
The Clubs at Quantico and Crossroads Events Center: Quantico Station, 3017 Russell Rd. Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA 22134

* MILITARY SPOUSE CAREER EVENT (Day 2 of 2) 10 a.m.-1 p.m. hiring fair

Fort Campbell, KY May 4, 2017, 9am - 12pm **More information**
Cole Park Commons, Fort Campbell, KY 42223

* TRANSITION SUMMIT (Day 3 of 3) 9 a.m. Hiring fair

El Paso, TX May 9, 2017, 7pm - 9pm **More information**
Centennial Banquet & Conference Center, Bldg. 11199, East Bliss El Paso, TX 79916
* MILITARY SPOUSE CAREER EVENT (Day 1 of 2) 7-9 p.m. networking reception

El Paso, TX May 10, 2017, 10am - 1pm **More information**
Centennial Banquet & Conference Center, Bldg. 11199, East Bliss El Paso, TX 79916
* MILITARY SPOUSE CAREER EVENT (Day 2 of 2) 10 a.m.-1 p.m. hiring fair

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

State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► West Virginia 2017

The state of Wyoming 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 – WV**” 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://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/west-virginia.html> & <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/west-virginia-state-veterans-benefits.html>

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/west-virginia-state-veterans-benefits.html> Apr 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.

Cola 2017 Update 05 ► H.R.1329 | Disabled Vet Compensation & DIC

On March 2, 2017, the Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Disability and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee, Congressman Mike Bost (IL) and Ranking Member Elizabeth Esty (CT) introduced H.R.1329, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2017. This bill, if enacted, would provide an increase, effective December 1, 2017, in the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) for the survivors of certain disabled veterans. Disabled veterans' disability compensation has not kept pace with the rest of the economy; even in years when there were COLA payments, disability benefits lagged. Many disabled veterans and their survivors are on fixed incomes and rely on COLAs to keep pace with their current living expenses. In accordance with DAV Resolution No. 013, DAV strongly supports H.R.1329. To enhance passage of this legislation readers are encouraged to go to https://www.votervoices.net/BroadcastLinks/BBkcExMa0ULYQw_8z3YwYA which contains an editable preformatted message to send to their legislators encouraging them to support this bill. [Source: DAV | David W. Riley | March 30, 2017 ++]

Vet ID ► Maine Governor Vetos Passport Bill

Republican Gov. Paul LePage has vetoed a bill to help veterans access health care by issuing passport cards. A 2007 law bars Maine from complying with federal ID standards, like using facial recognition technology. The federal government last year denied a waiver to give Maine more time to comply. Now, Maine veterans can only access clinics on the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard with Maine-issued driver's licenses and the latest veteran's health card. But bill sponsor Democratic Rep. Jared Golden, a veteran, said he hasn't been issued the latest health ID. LePage said groups shouldn't get carve-outs and urged legislators to pass a bill requiring compliance with federal ID standards. Golden said veterans shouldn't have to wait for new driver's licenses, which could take months. Lawmakers can override LePage's veto. [Source: The Associated Press | March 31, 2017 ++]

VA Vet Choice Program Update 51 ► S.554 | Program Termination Date

The Senate on 3 APR approved legislation that would extend a troubled program aimed at widening veterans' access to private-sector health care, the first step in an overhaul of programs at the Department of Veterans Affairs. The bill passed by voice vote. It would allow the VA to continue operating its Choice program until its money runs out, expected to occur early in 2018. Without legislation, the program will expire on 7 AUG with nearly \$1 billion left over in its account. The VA says that money can provide stopgap care until a broader revamp is designed. The Choice program was put in place after a 2014 wait-time scandal at the Phoenix VA medical center in which some veterans died. Intended to provide veterans more timely care, the Choice program allows veterans to go outside the VA network in cases where they had to wait more than 30 days for an appointment or drive more than 40 miles to a facility. Yet it often encountered long wait times of its own due to bureaucratic glitches and other problems.

The Senate bill calls for fixes in the program to address some of those concerns, by helping speed up VA payments and promote greater sharing of medical records. It was sent to the House 5 APR who easily passed the measure. "This bipartisan legislation cuts some of the red tape that slows down veterans' access to care in their communities," said Montana Sen. Jon Tester, the top Democrat on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. "I'm proud that Republicans and Democrats in Congress worked together to provide these solutions for veterans." Tester sponsored the bill along with Republican Sens. John McCain of Arizona and Johnny Isakson of Georgia.

Major veterans' organizations and Democrats were not opposed to continuing the Choice program as a stopgap. But they are closely watching the VA's subsequent overhaul, after President Donald Trump's transition team signaled last year that it would consider a "public-private" option in which veterans could get all their medical care in the private sector, with the government paying the bill. Veterans groups generally oppose that as a threat to the viability of VA medical centers. While VA Secretary David Shulkin has promised not to privatize the department, he says he wants to build stronger partnerships with the private sector to improve VA care. A newly formed White House Office of American Innovation led by Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, is also now examining ways to improve the VA. [Source: Associated Press | Hope Yen | April 3, 2017 ++]

VA Blue Water Claims Update 39 ► H.R.299 | Opposed by VA

The Department of Veterans Affairs opposes a bill that would extend disability benefits to 90,000 Navy veterans from the Vietnam War who served at sea and claim they were exposed to Agent Orange because the evidence of exposure is uncertain and the cost could reach nearly \$1 billion, a top VA official said 5 APR. The measure, H.R. 299, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act*, proposed by Rep. David Valadao, (R-CA) would "extend the presumption of Agent Orange exposure to all veterans who served on ships in the 'territorial seas' of the Republic of Vietnam." Veterans advocacy groups say that deployment on ships during the Vietnam War is enough to warrant a lower threshold to qualify for service-related disability benefits. "There is continued scientific uncertainty surrounding the issue of blue water Navy veterans' exposure to Agent Orange," Beth Murphy, VA director of compensation service at the VA, told the House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. Blue water Navy refers to sailors who serve on traditional sea-going vessels, while brown water Navy is often used to refer to Navy units that conduct riverine patrols away from the sea.

Murphy said the National Institute of Medicine (since renamed the National Academy of Medicine) had "reviewed all available scientific evidence" and concluded in part that they were "unable to state with certainty that blue water Navy personnel were or were not exposed to Agent Orange." Murphy also told the House subcommittee that the VA would not support the bill in its current form because it doesn't clearly define what constituted "the territorial seas of the Republic of Vietnam." Without that, Murphy said, the agency "could not determine which veterans are eligible to receive benefits under the expanded presumption based on their military service." Murphy's

testimony noted that “a new study of Vietnam veterans, which includes the collection of data on blue water Navy veterans, is currently ongoing, with early results expected to be available by December.” She added that the agency was also concerned that the retroactive award date for benefits went as back as 1985 and that those settlements would amount to at least \$967 million by next year.

But John Wells, executive director of Military Veterans Advocacy, accused the VA of “cherry picking” scientific evidence to defeat the bill. “They only provide what they want to provide. The very next sentence after the one they quote (from NIM) basically says there is no more or less evidence to support the exclusion of the blue water Navy than there is for the Army or the brown water Navy,” Wells said. “That is why we need the presumption.” Wells said the VA could have settled the matter by conducting required medical tests on affected Navy personnel, which would have put the issue to rest as far back as 1991.

Many veterans at the hearing criticized the VA for what they said is a strategy of “delay, deny, until they die.” Rick Weidman, Vietnam Veterans of America executive director for policy and government affairs, agreed with Wells that the VA was using information from the NIM study selectively while ignoring findings that contradicted its position. “If you ask for a panel from the only recognized national body that is independent of the government and then you disregard it, then that makes it absurd. Why the hell did you go through this charade?” he asked. The refusal to grant the benefits is creating a sharp wedge between the advocacy groups and the VA at a time when the Trump administration is seeking to fulfill its campaign promises of reforming the VA’s bureaucracy to speed delivery of services. The “VA decided to do what they thought was the most economical thing to do and not necessarily the most problematic. Its more about money than it is about anything else,” said Chris Slawinski, a former president of the Fleet Reserve Association, which advocates for enlisted sailors. [Source: Medill News Service | Duke Omara | April 5, 2017 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 218 ► Accelerated Computer Course Legislation

House Republican Majority Leader Rep. Kevin McCarthy says veterans need more educational opportunities that meet the demands of the fast-paced technology industry. The California lawmaker is introducing legislation 6 APR giving the Department of Veterans Affairs \$75 million to start a pilot program to provide accelerated computer courses in everything from robotics and basic programming to artificial intelligence and virtual reality. McCarthy, who is second-in-command to the House speaker, said the GI bill doesn’t cover many such courses and the VA approval process for changing curriculums or course offerings creates bureaucratic delays that are not conducive to the quickly changing technology fields.

Under his proposal, veterans, instead of going to a traditional college — or in addition to a traditional degree — could get a shorter-term nano degree or micro credential. “And they could be in the work force right away and be a major asset,” McCarthy told USA TODAY. “So I want to provide greater flexibility there.” Some 450,000 veterans in the United States are unemployed and 40% of them are between 18 and 44 years old, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The tech industry, meanwhile, is expected to add a half million jobs by 2024. McCarthy’s legislation would not expand the GI bill, which provides veterans with money for school. Instead, it would expand a separate program started in 2015 under the Obama administration. That program provided free technology courses known as accelerated learning programs to veterans.

Under McCarthy’s bill, the VA would contract with companies to provide the training and pay them in installments: 25% when a veteran starts a course, 25% when the veteran finishes, and the rest when the veteran then lands a job. In addition, participating veterans would receive a housing allowance while they are in training. McCarthy told USA TODAY that he first learned about such programs when his son, a graduate of Georgetown University, was taking a course with a company called Udacity, which provides “Nanodegrees” in web and software development, robotics, and artificial intelligence, among other fields. McCarthy went to meet last year with the

company's founder, Sebastian Thrun, a computer science professor at Stanford University who led the development at Google of self-driving cars. Thrun founded Udacity in 2012 after offering a free online class on artificial intelligence and 160,000 students in more than 190 countries signed up.

McCarthy said he was struck by the employment opportunities that such non-traditional courses could provide to veterans. "Think about when you're in the military, the type of weaponry and other stuff that you use. Technology, right? They can't go to Udacity; the GI bill doesn't work," he said. "And it's not about the accreditation, it's because if you want to get (VA) approval, you've got to freeze your curriculum. Well, the companies that you go to work for after Udacity, the Googles and the others, they're changing and adapting all the time." He said companies like to hire graduates from the programs because they're up-to-speed on cutting-edge technology. McCarthy said the cost of the program is not offset in his legislation with any so-called "pay-fors" — or cuts or revenue-raisers in other areas of the federal budget. "To me the pay-for is people are going to start getting jobs and be in the workforce," he said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Christopher Diamond | March 23, 2017 ++]

GI Bill Update 221 ► S.765/H.R.1793 | Veterans Priority Enrollment Act

The new Veterans Priority Enrollment Act is sponsored by Brown, a Democrat, and Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina. It would extend priority enrollment for college courses to veterans and eligible dependents. Brown says the goal is to allow people to plan their semesters so that they can finish their degrees before their benefits expire. "At many colleges, general education requirements and pre-requisite courses fill up quickly. It takes several semesters to secure a place in the most in-demand classes. But waiting for a spot in the required course is a luxury that many veterans don't have."

All public colleges in Ohio offer priority registration for veterans. The bill would expand the program nationwide and would include private schools with existing priority registration programs. The bill has also been introduced in the House, co-sponsored by Northeast Ohio Congressman Tim Ryan. Brown and Tillis are also co-sponsoring The Yellow Ribbon Improvement Act, along with Republican Bill Cassidy of Louisiana. The bill would expand eligibility for the program to spouses and children of service members who died in combat. "They often don't go back to school right away. And by the time they are positioned to be able to do that, their G.I. Benefits may have run out. The Yellow Ribbon Program helps students avoid out-of-pocket tuition and fees for education programs that cost more than the G.I. Bill's allowance." [Source: WKSU 89.7 | Kabir Bhatia | April 6, 2017 ++]

GI Bill Update 222 ► GI Bill Fairness Act

Oregon Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden has joined forces with his Republican colleague John Boozman of Arkansas and fellow Democrat Edward J. Markey of Massachusetts to try once again to remove a restriction on education benefits for wounded members of the National Guard and Reserve under the post-9/11 GI Bill. For the love of God, Congress, what does it take to get this passed? Members of Congress appear to have embraced their inner bureaucrat in not approving this extension of benefits to Guard and Reserve members the first time it was introduced: They couldn't agree on how to pay for it.

The problem Wyden is trying to fix exists because of a quirk in the existing law: It doesn't consider time spent by wounded members of the National Guard and Reserve in commonly prescribed treatment as counting toward eligibility for education benefits under the GI Bill. In other words, they are penalized for being wounded. This exception does not apply to active members of the military. It's hard to fathom why there is this disparity, but it affects potentially hundreds of Oregonians who have served in recent years. In 2003, the Oregon Army National

Guard announced its largest mobilization since World War II, with more than 700 troops heading for the Middle East; thousands more Guard members followed in the ensuing years. Many were wounded, often seriously. War makes no distinctions between members of the active duty military and National Guard or Reserve members. Wounded is wounded.

To cut or deny educational benefits on their return, because their wounds required time in treatment and rehabilitation, is unconscionable. As Markey put it: "Guardsmen give no less to their country in the line of duty than their active duty counterparts, and we cannot give them less in return. This legislation will ensure that we keep our promises to those who have kept their promises to us... ." The GI Bill Fairness Act was included in a broader bill that passed the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs in May 2016. It's time for Congress as a whole to act on the bill, and keep the country's promise to all those who served. [Source: The Register-Guard | Editorial | April 6, 2017 ++]

GI Bill Update 223 ► Provide Purple Heart Recipients Full Benefits

A new bill could grant Purple Heart recipients full Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. U.S. Senator Tim Kaine, along with Senators Mike Rounds (R-SD), Joe Manchin (D-WV) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) introduced the bill. Under the bill, Purple Heart recipients would be eligible to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program, which is an optional program for universities to provide additional funding to veterans if their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits do not fully cover education costs. The Department of Veterans Affairs is required to match the universities' contributions. "Investing in veterans is not only the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do," Kaine said. "Veterans are graduating at higher rates with higher GPAs and competitive degrees. We need to continue improving veterans' educational experience to prepare them for success in the civilian workforce and ensure that especially all those who have been wounded in action have access to the GI Bill. This legislation would make commonsense improvements, and I'm proud to support it."

Veterans who served on active duty for 36 months or were medically discharged after at least 30 continuous days on active duty are eligible for full Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. A service member may be wounded in combat, earning a Purple Heart but not be medically retired or having completed 36 months or moths of active duty, excluding them from full Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits. A similar bill H.R.1379 was originally introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Rep. Scott Peters (CA-52) and passed out of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs in March. [Source: ABC 13 News Now | WVEC Lena Wallace | April 12, 2017 ++]

VA Women Vet Programs Update 27 ► H.R. 93 | Improve Care Access

Congresswoman Julia Brownley, the ranking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Health Subcommittee, introduced H.R. 93, a bill to make gender-specific care and services continuously available at all VA medical centers and community outpatient clinics. The Disabled American Vets organization DAV is pleased to support this measure in accordance with thier Resolution 129, which calls for enhanced services and benefits for women veterans. In 2014, DAV published a special report, Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home. This report which is available at <https://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/women-veterans-study.pdf> identified the sea change occurring in many VA medical centers to adequately respond to the influx of young women veterans who require gender-specific care and the need for reproductive health services related to childbirth in addition to preventive screenings and basic gynecological services.

Although the report found that VA had made progress with its training program for VA health care providers in women's health, it also revealed that 1/3 of VA medical centers still lacked staff gynecologists and routinely referred such care to other VA medical centers or community providers. VA's comprehensive services and coordinated care are hallmarks of the veterans' health care system and should be available for all veteran patients. H.R. 93 would require that VA make gender-specific care available within all VA facilities either through the use of VA staff or contract providers depending upon women's demand for such services at that facility.

Veterans are encouraged to write their representatives and request they support this bill. To facilitate doing this at <https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/RITrT3IrFvJEZDs06y10KA> DAV has provided a preformatted editable message which can be sent to your legislators. Write your elected official today to urge his or her co-sponsorship and support for the passage of this important legislation. [Source: DAV Action Alert | David W. Riley | April 11, 2017 ++]

*** Military ***



BAH Update 03 ► Should It Be An Entitlement or Allowance

A prominent conservative think tank has proposed drastic changes to the military's Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH), which they say too many troops view as an entitlement. The Heritage Foundation, based in Washington, D.C., is calling on Congress to make radical changes to servicemembers' BAH. Their proposal would put an end to dual-military couples who live together collecting two housing allowances. It also would mean servicemembers who find housing that costs less than their BAH rates would no longer be able to pocket the difference. "Congress should restore BAH's place as an allowance, versus an entitlement, by requiring married military couples to share a single BAH, and all service members to document their housing expenditures in order to receive BAH," the authors wrote in a new 21-page report titled "Preventing a Defense Crisis: The 2018 National Defense Authorization Act Must Begin to Restore U.S. Military Strength."

DoD needs more troops and updated equipment to deal with ongoing global threats, the authors argue. That requires more money, so curbing BAH costs and making changes to other programs like health care and commissary subsidies will be necessary to help the military rebuild after years of budget cuts, they wrote. "Over time, the BAH has come to be perceived as an entitlement, an element of compensation, versus the purpose for which it was intended, to defray the costs of housing for service members living off base," the document states.

MOAA leaders, however, disagree. "Basic Allowance for Housing is part of Regular Military Compensation-it is not an entitlement," says Col. Mike Barron, USA (Ret), MOAA's director of Policy and Advocacy for Currently Serving and Retired Affairs. "We support maintaining the calculation currently in federal law for Basic Allowance for Housing as part of Regular Military Compensation." This isn't the first time BAH has landed in budget hawks' crosshairs. Last year, members of the Senate Armed Services Committee called the housing allowance system

“bloated and ripe for abuse.” They, too, proposed limiting troops' BAH payments to their actual housing costs. They also planned to end multiple BAH payments for dual-military couples.

The overhaul, which was introduced in the fiscal 2017 Defense Authorization Bill, was ultimately rejected. “When this unfair and discriminatory provision was brought to the House/Senate conference on the 2017 [National Defense Authorization Act] in the fall, it was killed,” Barron said. Congress is expected to debate the annual authorization bill - and potential changes to the housing stipend - in May, Military Times reported. For now, Barron said tangible support for changing the entire military pay system is a long way off. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | March 31, 2017 ++]

MOAB (GBU-32) ► Mother of All Bombs Used on ISIS

The U.S. military said it conducted a strike on an ISIS-K tunnel complex in the Achin district of Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, on 13 APR. A U.S. aircraft dropped a GBU-43 Massive Ordnance Air Blast, also known as a MOAB, as part of ongoing efforts to defeat ISIS-Khorasan in Afghanistan, according to a statement from U.S. Central Command. The strike aimed to minimize the risk to Afghan and U.S. forces conducting clearing operations in the area, the release said. "As ISIS-K's losses have mounted, they are using IEDs, bunkers and tunnels to thicken their defense," Gen. John W. Nicholson, the top commander in Afghanistan, said in the release. "This is the right munition to reduce these obstacles and maintain the momentum of our offensive against ISIS-K." Here's what we know about the bomb and the bombing:

Size and Power

- The GBU-43 has the force of 11 kilotons of TNT, an explosive output just short of the 15-kiloton nuclear bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. The bomb dropped days later on Nagasaki was the equivalent of 20 kilotons.
- Officials were unsure if the 21,000-pound-MOAB is more powerful than the larger and heavier MOP ([Massive Ordnance Penetrator](#)), which weighs in at 30,000 pounds. The MOP has yet to be used.
- When the MOAB was first tested in March 2003, a mushroom cloud could be seen from a distance of 20 miles, according to the [Air Force Print News service](#).
- The bomb, carried by a large transport plane, is more than 30 feet long, [Politico reports](#).

History

- The MOAB was originally built in 2003, during the Iraq war ,to intimidate Saddam Hussein, according to the AFPN, though it was never deployed in Iraq. “The goal is to have the pressure be so great that Saddam Hussein cooperates,” then-defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld said in March 2003. “Short of that...the goal is to have the capabilities of the coalition so clear and so obvious that there is an enormous disincentive for the Iraqi military to fight against the coalition.”
- It was designed in such a hurry that they had no choice of what color to paint it, munitions design chief Robert Hammack told AFPN in 2008. “Since we were in such a rush to get the weapon into our inventory to send over to aid the war effort, resources were limited. The weekend the MOAB arrived, the only color available in the amount we needed was John Deere green.”
- Each unit costs \$16 million and the army has spent a total \$314 million on them, according to [military website Deagel](#).

Use and the results

- Officials could not immediately assess the level of damage but said its deployment was aimed at minimizing impact on US and Afghan soldiers. It is guided by a GPS system that allows it to move accurately to within 8 meters of its intended impact point, an air force official said.

- It is particularly adept at penetrating caves and canyons, and clearing minefields, the official said. This means it was well-placed to hit the bunkers and tunnels that ISIL have been using in Afghanistan—it was dropped at just such a tunnel complex in Achin district, Nangarhar province.



The GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb prototype moments before it makes contact March 11, 2003. The detonation created a mushroom cloud that could be seen from up to 20 miles away.

After the initial phase of the Iraqi war passed without it being used, it became a museum piece and was added to the Air Armament Museum at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida in 2004. That MOAB on display was an empty shell, but the Air Force said at the time that it could be refilled with explosives and put back into service. To view a video on the MOAB go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9H50tHiHjs>. [Source: AirForceTimes & GovExec.com | Charlsy Panzino/Jeff Schogol & Max de Haldevang | April 13, 2017 ++]

Navy Readiness ► **Loose Lips Might Sink Ships**

In their desperation to convince Congress that budget gridlock hurts military readiness, Navy officials made public some information that they shouldn't have, Acting Secretary Sean Stackley told reporters 6 APR. It's this oversharing of readiness data, along with too much detailed talk about future capabilities that prompted the Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. John Richardson, to issue a 1 MAR memorandum urging all naval personnel "to ensure we are not giving away our competitive edge by sharing too much information publicly."

Many reporters at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space conference said they'd felt a chilling effect from the CNO's memo. Three admirals cited the need to say less in public. And, unlike in past years, the CNO himself didn't address the conference in any public forum. The new policy came up when Stackley sat down with reporters on 6 APR. His response is worth quoting at length.

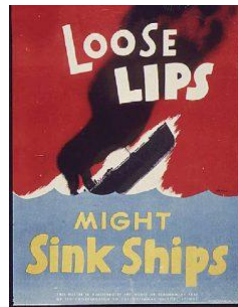
"We're having a dialogue with Congress, trying to get Congress to understand the impacts associated with Continuing Resolutions, the shape that our budget is in, and the impacts that has on things like fleet readiness," Stackley said. "And in doing that... what had been happening is, people were leaning further and further into talking about details associated with readiness — hey, that's classified. We don't promulgate that information."

"We can share that information with the Congress behind closed doors, but we don't want to share that information with our competitors," Stackley continued, "so there has been a pullback in terms of how much detail we put out regarding materiel readiness."

Stackley's staff clarified afterwards that he was not accusing anyone of improperly disclosing classified information. But a central point of the CNO's memo, and of Stackley's comment, was that even unclassified data can be damaging if disclosed.

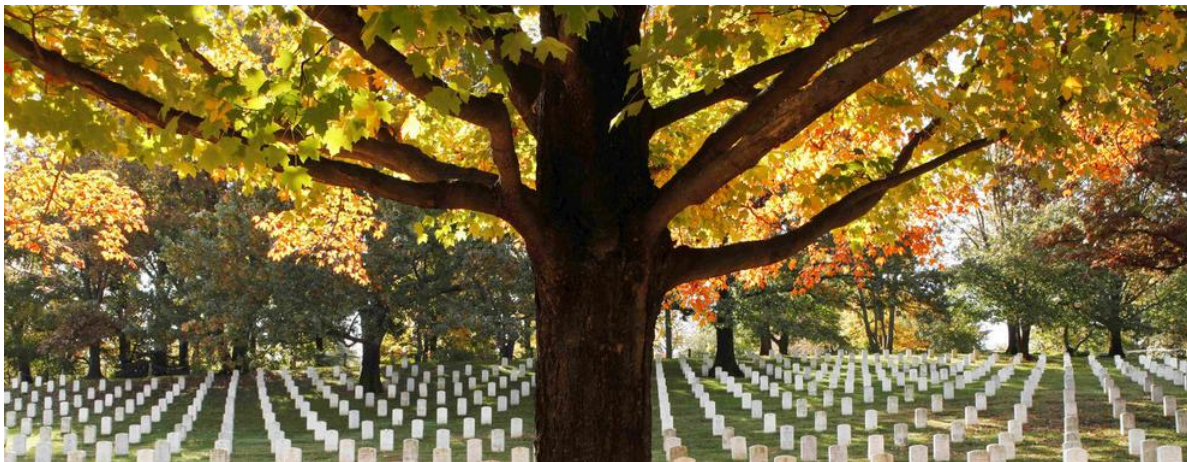
- “China’s watching everything that we do, and we want to be very measured about what we put out in open, public forums,” Stackley said. “Are we in fact sharing information that creates vulnerabilities, crosses the line in terms of security?”
- “I’ve read pieces myself, I’ve seen things in the literature (that made me think), ‘what the heck is this doing in the press?’” Stackley said. “These are our secrets, and we don’t need them to know exactly what we’re doing, how we’re doing it.”
- “We do have a responsibility to share information with the public, (but) we need to be more measured about the information we’re pushing out in the public domain,” Stackley said. “There’s some recalibration going on, rightfully so. We have a very aggressive competitor out there.”

[Source: Breaking Defense | Sydney J. Freedberg Jr. | April 06, 2017 ++]



Arlington National Cemetery Update 69 ► Will Be Full by 2042

When Arlington National Cemetery was established in 1864, it served as an overflow for other Washington, D.C.-based burial grounds overburdened by the rising tide of Civil War casualties. More than 150 years later, the site has become a national shrine to the sacrifices of American military members, and faces the opposite problem: Diminishing space at the northern Virginia site could force veterans’ families to choose other locations for their loved one’s final resting place, if changes aren’t made in coming years. On 29 MAR, the Senate Appropriations Committee held a field hearing at the well-known Army cemetery to discuss the current operations as well as future plans to honor the nation’s fallen veterans.



At the top of the list of looming challenges is the issue of space. Presently, Arlington National Cemetery is nearing total capacity. The cemetery staff maintains a high burial pace, conducting 27 to 30 ceremonies each

weekday and 10 more on Saturdays. In 2016 alone, Arlington buried or inurned 7,140 veterans and eligible family members. The Millennium Project, a southern expansion of the cemetery that will add 27 acres of land and 28,000 new grave sites, is set to open in fall of 2017. But Karen Durham-Aguilera, executive director of Army National Military Cemeteries, said despite that work, by the year 2041, “Arlington National Cemetery will not be a burial option for those service members who served in the Gulf War and any conflict afterwards” without changes to the current footprint or eligibility policies.

That’s a looming challenge for a cemetery already racked by scandal in recent years. In 2010, Army investigators found more than 100 unmarked graves, numerous mistakes on cemetery maps and at least four burial urns dumped into storage areas for excess grave dirt. The following year, Army auditors discovered that \$12 million appropriated between 2004 and 2010 could not be accounted for, leading to the resignation of the cemetery’s superintendent and deputy superintendent. Officials have also struggled to shift site records from paper to digital records. But the site remains one of the most revered spaces in American military history. Founded more than 150 years ago to lay to rest Union soldiers killed in the Civil War, the cemetery has become the final resting place for revered men and women such as George C. Marshall, Anita Newcomb, John F. Kennedy and Thurgood Marshall.

Arlington, while an active cemetery, has become a national tourist site. It is a place for Americans to come and honor those who have served. Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kansas, chairman of the panel’s military construction subcommittee, spoke of Arlington’s importance in honoring veterans and providing a link between “American history, traditions and customs.” He said whatever issues face the cemetery, lawmakers are committed to “working with you closely to ensure the perpetual success of this hallowed ground.” That will likely include discussions of who will be eligible to be buried at the site in years to come. That debate is still ongoing. Durham-Aguilera said a change in those rules could extend the life of the cemetery, but will require conversation with the public, members of Congress, veterans and military service organizations. Recommendations for eligibility have been put forth in a report by Arlington staff, but have not yet been released to the public.

Budget restrictions have also capped the cemetery’s funding at the same levels for the last five fiscal years, and officials said they are now straining their ability to keep up with civilian pay increases, annual contract inflation and new security requirements. At the hearing, Durham-Aguilera also acknowledged the “huge problems with accountability in the past” but said staff have made great strides in repairing those problems. Technological improvements have ensured every grave is now geo-mapped, with digital records to substantiate each grave site. Officials have stressed the importance of the chain of custody to “make sure we know where every single person is buried here.”

But those fixes don’t change the looming space problems facing the cemetery. After the hearing, senators toured the grounds to see first-hand the new southern expansion plans, including land in the shadow of the Air Force Memorial, built 10 years ago to honor a service that was still decades away from being born when Arlington Cemetery was established. It serves as a reminder of the changes the cemetery has already weathered, and the changes ahead. Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, said that Congress’ job now is “to ensure that it remains an active cemetery for generations to come.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Claire Barrett | March 31, 2017 ++]

Beards In Uniform Update 01 ► It Can Be done

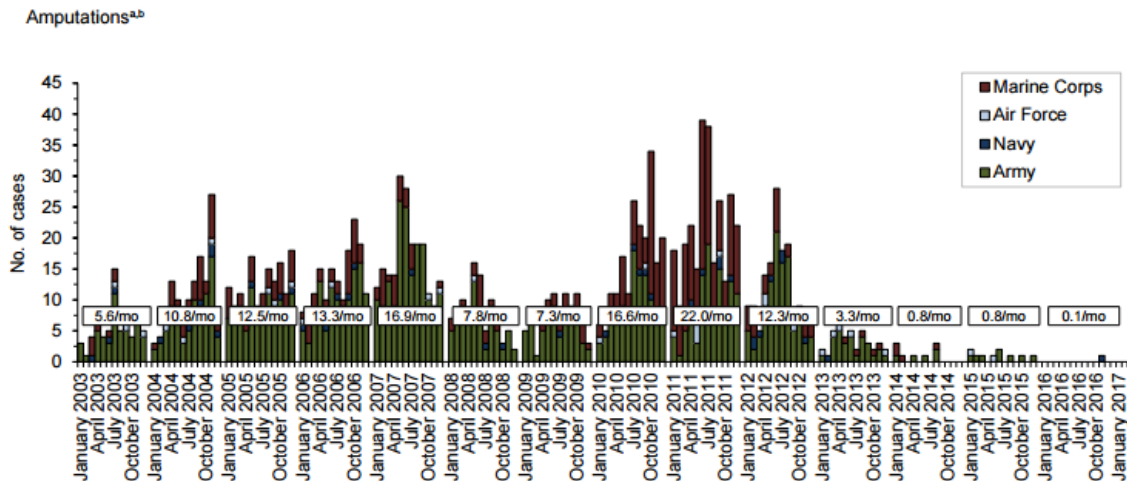
Tattoos. Sleeve tattoos. Rolled sleeves. Black socks. Earbuds. Bless Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley and Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey for granting these small changes to Army regulation that have led to huge cheers from the rank and file. But the good times do not have to stop here. Thanks largely to the religious accommodations sought by Sikh service members, the Army is taking a very close look at allowing the widespread wear of beards. Sikh soldiers are already allowed to keep their beards. Research is also underway for an improved gas mask that would work effectively, even with a full face of facial hair.

It's very clear that soldiers support beards. A poll of more than 13,500 Army Times readers found a whopping 87 percent supported allowing soldiers to grow beards. Further, 86 percent said they'd grow a beard in uniform if they could. OK, this wasn't a scientific poll, but Army Times readers are not composed of a bunch of chin-curtain-loving hipsters. These are active-duty soldiers and veterans, chiming in with a clear message — grant us beards! Of course, the Army needs to establish grooming standards. We don't want to see Gandalfs or Kentucky moonshiners in uniform. We also don't want to risk lives in war zones if beards degrade a soldier's safety or ability to wear protective gear. Other countries have proven it can be done: Israel, Great Britain, Norway, Denmark, India — beards are A-OK in uniform for all these militaries. It was also OK in the U.S. Army, at least until the threat of gas during World War I required a force of clean-shaven Doughboys.

Today, beards would be good for the troops but also Big Army. Allowing them would be a real retention tool, and an attractive recruiting tool for the service. A few critics out there have dismissed beards as a fad. The Wall Street Journal, Vice, Mashable and Business Insider have all declared the end of beards. Poppyclock. Google Trends, which tracks search terms around the world, shows that searches for "beard styles" has trended upwards every year since 2004, according to the Huffington Post. The beard bubble has yet to burst. To Army leaders, let's just approve beards already. While you're at it, throw in nail polish and earrings for the women. Finally, to those men who can't grow a beard to save their lives: The health experts say to wash your face, rub some eucalyptus in your pores and pray for growth. [Source: Army Times | Editorial | April 1, 2017 +]

Combat Amputations ► Zero in 2016

Last year marked the first year without a combat amputation for a U.S. service member since the Afghanistan and Iraq wars began, according to the U.S. Military Health System. Recent numbers from the Medical Surveillance Monthly Report, a report from the Defense Health Agency's Armed Forces Health Surveillance, show that 2016 was the first year with no combat related amputations since they began reporting the numbers in January 2003.



Army Medical Surveillance Activity - Amputations Jan. 2003 - Jan. 2017

Since the wars broke out, well over a thousand armed service members have had to have an upper and/or lower extremity amputated as a result of combat injuries during deployments. To accurately track amputations, AFHSB records the number of incidents by each service of the armed forces to track distribution, impact and trends. The AFHSB chief, Army Col. Douglas Badzik said such analyses help provide “a force that is healthy and ready to carry out its mission.” June and July of 2011 saw more combat-caused amputations than any other months since Jan.

2003. Both months saw more than 35 amputations each. Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), commonly referred to as roadside bombs, were one of the primary causes of amputations among combat forces over the past 13 years. Improvements in protective equipment, including safer vehicles, as well as innovations in battlefield medical care have helped to decrease these numbers. [Source: MilitaryTimes : Christopher Diamond | April 2, 2017 ++]

Army Helmets ► ACH Gen II | Lighter w/Same Protection

Army equipment officials said 30 MAR that the service's newest combat helmet will feel significantly lighter to soldiers while providing the same protection. The Advanced Combat Helmet Gen II will replace the legacy Advanced Combat Helmet, which was fielded about 15 years ago. The service earlier this month awarded Revision Military, based in Essex Junction in Vermont, a contract worth about \$98 million to make 293,870 of the new helmets. Made of high-density polyethylene instead of the current helmet's Kevlar, the ACH Gen II weighs about 2.5 pounds in size large -- about a 24-percent weight reduction, officials from Program Executive Office Soldier said at Fort Belvoir in Virginia. For small and medium sizes, the Gen II is about 21-percent lighter than the standard ACH, making the new helmet an average of 22-percent lighter, Maj. Brandon Motte, assistant product manager for Soldier Protective Equipment, told reporters Thursday.



Despite being lighter, the ACH Gen II provides the same protection against fragmentation and 9mm projectiles as the current helmet, equipment officials maintain. The Army has come a long way in head protection since the steel pot, which was replaced in the early 1980s by the Kevlar Personnel Armor System for Ground Troops, or PASGT, helmet. The weight reduction from the ACH to the ACH Gen II is "double and triple" what was achieved when the ACH replaced the PASGT, said Jacob Hopping, chief system engineer for the program. "This is the largest weight reduction we have ever had on a head protection item," he said. "We have never had this big of a jump and maintained the same protection level. This is a truly revolutionary move."

Soldiers wear a helmet 12 to 18 hours a day in training and combat situations. Over an extended period of time, it causes a lot of fatigue and stress on the body that can reduce a soldier's overall effectiveness, Motte said. The ACH Gen II is an example of how the service is working to reduce the soldier's combat load. "What we have been able to demonstrate to the Army and to our fellow soldiers is that the Army can and will continue to get after weight reduction and to give them a solution that they can ... definitely feel the difference," said Lt. Col. Kathy Brown, product manager for Soldier Protective Equipment. "And you can tell with these helmets. You can truly feel the difference in the weight."

But the ACH Gen II isn't the first helmet to use high-density polyethylene fibers. The Army also fields the Enhanced Combat Helmet to soldiers for high-threat combat situations such as Iraq and Afghanistan. The ECH is about the same weight as the standard ACH but provides increased protection and is capable of stopping rifle rounds, Brown said. "You do have some more high-intensity conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan than where as we were going out to the Horn of Africa or other contingencies that are not as high threat," Brown said, explaining that the ECH is currently on the Rapid Fielding Initiative list for deployments. The ECH will also form the bridge in technology to the Integrated Head Protection System, which the Army hopes to begin fielding by 2020. It features a

base helmet with add-ons such as a visor, a "mandible" portion that protects the lower jaw, and a "ballistic applique" that is much like a protective layer that attaches over the base helmet.

Eventually, all deploying soldiers will get the IHPS with the base helmet, which is the standard configuration. Other soldiers, vehicle gunners in particular, will also get the mandible portion and the ballistic applique, known as the turret configuration. The goal is to refine the polyethylene helmet to maximize both weight reduction and increased protection. "This really was a focused effort to see how far we could push the weight reduction and maintain the same level of protection" Hopping said. "We pushed the technology as far as we could." [Source: Military.com | Matthew Cox | March 30, 2017 ++]


Award Devices C, D, & V ► New Guidelines

The Pentagon has quietly implemented a series of changes to its awards policy for troops involved in combat, establishing new criteria for recognizing contributions both on and off the battlefield. Commanders may now recommend their troops for 12 types of awards affixed with new "C" or "R" devices, products of an internal review focused on honoring drone operators, cyber warfare specialists and others who use emerging technology to influence the battlefield in unconventional ways. The former, which stands for "combat," signifies meritorious performance "under combat conditions" while the latter, which stands for "remote," is reserved for those "not directly exposed to hostile action or significant risk."

Equally noteworthy, the Pentagon's guidance establishes new eligibility rules for awarding medals with the coveted "V" device intended to recognize valorous combat actions taken at great risk and under duress. Service specific Achievement Medals are no longer eligible for a "V," only a "C" or "R," a decision some may call controversial. That's true now, too, for the Legion of Merit, heretofore awarded with a "V" only by the Navy and Marine Corps. However, each of the services is clear to award the Distinguished Flying Cross with "V," as the Air Force has since for heroism dating to the Korean War. "Overall, I find these changes surprisingly good and well thought out," said Doug Sterner, an expert on military awards who operates Military Times' Hall of Valor database. "It does bring the awards into conformity across the branches."

NEW RULES FOR COMBAT AWARDS

U.S. troops may now receive "C" and "R" devices for certain uniform decorations to designate their participation in combat operations, even if they were not directly exposed to front-line battle. Eligibility for the "V" device also has changed.

 Defense Distinguished Service Medal C	 Meritorious Service Medal R
 Distinguished Service Medal C	 Air Medal VC
 Defense Superior Service Medal CR	 Joint Service Commendation Medal VCR
 Legion of Merit CR	 Service-specific Commendation Medal VCR
 Distinguished Flying Cross VC	 Joint Service Achievement Medal CR
 Bronze Star Medal V	 Service-specific Achievement Medal CR
 Defense Meritorious Service Medal R	

This chart includes the awards now eligible for "C," "R" and "V" devices:

Both new devices are retroactive to January 2016, according to an Army news release announcing its plans to implement the new rules. Awards approved prior to that date are not eligible, it says. A Pentagon spokesman told Military Times that each of the services will roll out the new policy by the end of this year. Both new devices are the same color, size and font as the "V" device. The new awards come with specific criteria. Here's how the new policy defines them:

“C” device. Recognizes meritorious service or achievement under combat conditions, and authorized only if the service or achievement was performed while personnel were exposed to hostile action or significant risk:

- While engaged in action against an enemy of the U.S.
- While engaged in military operations involving conflict with a foreign force.
- While serving with friendly forces engaged in armed conflict in which the U.S. is not a principal party.

The “R” device. Recognizes hands-on employment of a weapon system or other war-fighting activities with direct and immediate impact on an operation. The device appears intended for drone operators, cyber warfare specialists and others who contribute to battlefield initiatives while not directly exposed to hostile action or significant risk:

- While engaged in action against an enemy of the U.S.
- While engaged in military operations involving conflict with a foreign force.
- While serving with friendly forces engaged in armed conflict in which the U.S. is not a principal party.

The concept was introduced in early 2016, after the Pentagon's review recommended several policy changes aimed at modernizing the military's awards system to recognize contributions made by those who have unique roles supporting combat operations. That effort began after the controversial attempt by then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta to establish a "Distinguished Warfare Medal" — dismissed by some as "the Nintendo medal" — for drone pilots and cyber techs. The policy changes also seek to tighten the criteria for awarding the Bronze Star specifically, a combat award that can be presented without a "V," and often was throughout the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, for "meritorious" performance. Now, a service member could receive a Meritorious Service Medal instead if his or her commander determines that, while the job performance was admirable, the assignment came with few inherent risks. Neither a "C" nor an "R" can be awarded with a Bronze Star medal, according to the new policy.

"Recognizing valor," a defense official told Military Times last year when the review was complete, "should be the preeminent thing we do in the Department of Defense." To that end, some service members and military veterans may question the shift away from allowing Achievement Medals to be presented with "V" devices. Since the war on terrorism began in 2001, thousands of troops received them to recognize bravery and heroism in active war zones and other hostile locations. James Goff received a Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal with "V" for his actions as a Marine sergeant during an ugly gunbattle in southern Iraq just days after the U.S. invasion in March 2003. Goff's commander nominated him and another Marine, John Jamison, for Bronze Stars with "V."

A higher command knocked them down, a fate that's befallen many combat awards throughout the war on terrorism. To be eligible for a "V," Goff told Military Times, one had to "receive direct fire and return direct fire. A very simple and understood meaning of the Marines' application of the device. So why remove it from any award if said award is downgraded? Does that mean the event never took place?" Goff characterized this particular policy change as "petty," but said the award remains just as relevant. "Does it change my perception of the award? Hell no," he added. "Doesn't change a thing." Jamison suggested the Pentagon should evaluate whether rank unfairly factors into the decision-making process. "In my view, it seems DoD is making these decisions to allow for specific actions to be awarded more specifically. I'm fine with that," he said. "Let's also take a good hard look at the actions versus the rank when awarding them too."

Sterner, the medals expert, noted a harrowing 2006 incident in Sudan, where 16 U.S. Air Force personnel were detained at gunpoint for several hours aboard their HC-130 search and rescue plane. The standoff was eventually diffused and, three years later, eight crew members were recognized with Air Force Achievement Medals bearing the "V" device — awards unilaterally downgraded from a mix of Bronze Stars, for which the officers had been nominated, and Air Force Commendation Medals, recommended for the enlisted airmen. "My first reaction upon

hearing that story was 'What in the hell is this?' " Sterner said. "The answer is, the Air Force wanted to the incident under wraps." And while Sterner said he supports the Pentagon's decision to make Achievement Medals ineligible for "V" devices, saying conformity is important and these medals "are by definition 'achievement' awards," he believes too that the Pentagon should automatically boost all Achievement Medals with "V" to Commendation Medals with "V." "There is precedence," Sterner added, "for such universal upgrades." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Andrew deGrandpre & Charlsy Panzino | March 30, 2017 ++]

USMC Sexual Harassment ► Boot Camp Preparation

As a Marine recruit at Parris Island, Erika Butner learned from her drill instructors that her supposed brothers in arms would treat her as one of three stereotypes: "A bitch; you're a whore or you're a lesbian," she told lawmakers on 5 APR. "I'm not blaming the drill instructors," she said at a Democratic Women's Working Group hearing. "They were preparing us to have thick skin because it is so ingrained in this culture that they don't know how to change it, so they go with the grain." Wednesday's hearing focused on allegations that male service members and veterans have posted nude pictures of female troops, veterans and civilians on the "Marines United" Facebook page and other websites. Moreover, some members have allegedly threatened to kill and rape women who are clearly identified in those pictures, lawmakers said.

Butner testified along with Lance Cpl. Marisa Woytek, both of whom have been harassed online. During Butner's time in the Corps, pictures of her fully clothed were stolen from her social media accounts and shared on websites with captions such as, "Smash or pass?" which meant "would you have sex with this woman or not?" she said. Later, her pictures and contact information were shared on the Marines United page along with lurid descriptions of "all the unspeakable things they'd do to me," she said. The culture of misogyny (i.e. a hatred of women) toward women that begets this type of behavior traces back to boot camp, where women learn to put up with sexual harassment from male Marines, Butner said on Wednesday. "We're taught to go with the flow and accept the culture as is, or else we face repercussions," she said.



Marines eye changes to recruit training amid renewed calls for coed boot camp

When asked about Butner's testimony, a Marine Corps spokesman said that any such conduct by drill instructors would not be acceptable. "Bottom line: Any Marine that would express the type of attitude expressed in that statement is dead wrong," said Maj. Clark Carpenter. "Every Marine is critical to our mission and any behavior meant to demean or degrade a fellow Marine is not tolerated." But Butner's comments are not the first time this issue has arisen. In 2012, a Marine veteran told Stars and Stripes that she had a similar experience at boot camp, where she and other female recruits were told to decide whether they were a "slut, a dyke or a bitch." "You are told that pretty much any contact with male Marines makes you a slut," Katie Appeldorn told the newspaper. "It is automatically assumed she is sleeping around. Dyke isn't necessarily a lesbian, but she is thought to be. Bitch is what you are told to be. It basically means you don't give the men around you an inch."

No Marine Corps leaders attended Wednesday's hearing. Marine Commandant Gen. Robert Neller testified at a separate hearing Wednesday morning about how another temporary spending measure could hurt readiness. Assistant Commandant Glenn Walters initially told Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) that he would attend, but he was later advised against it because it was technically a caucus meeting and not a formal committee hearing, Marine Corps Times has learned. Rep. Lois Frankel (D-FL) contended that Wednesday's event was indeed a hearing and she regretted that Marine Corps leaders did not attend. "We would have loved them to be here with us and I'm sorry they declined," said Frankel. "Hopefully, we'll have some follow-up with them." All of the lawmakers at Wednesday's hearing were Democrats except one: Rep. Walter Jones Jr., a Republican whose North Carolina congressional district includes Camp Lejeune.

"What would be the best thing I could do to help your pain?" Jones asked Butner and Woytek. "I think it would be to start holding people accountable," Butner replied. "I think they need to start making examples out of people who are condoning this behavior. I think that would help the victims to come forward."

USCG Missions ► The Little Agency That Could.

The U.S. Coast Guard has always been the little agency that could. It's the only U.S. military branch that isn't a permanent member of the Department of Defense, it's constantly the last in line for the budget (it is one of the agencies with lots of money on the chopping block in President Donald Trump's first budget proposal), and it's constantly getting made fun of by the other services. But the Coast Guard steps up and performs when called upon. While many of its finest moments happened when you would most expect — like when it received praise for its actions after Hurricane Katrina or when it rescued sailors trapped on the tankers Pendleton and Fort Mercer — it should also be known for its role in frontline operations against terrorism at home and all enemies deployed. Yeah, the Coast Guard fights terrorists and deploys, especially when it's tied up in missions like these:

1. Evacuating and securing key ports during emergencies — Believe it or not, it's the Coast Guard that is most likely to save American citizens in a sudden attack. After the attacks on 9/11, the Coast Guard led a boatlift in New York that, in numerical terms, was larger than the evacuation at Dunkirk. The U.S. Coast Guard also fields the Maritime Security Response Team, which responds to terrorist attacks that are imminent or in progress in an American port or waterway. In 2014, they practiced securing ferries with dirty bombs onboard in New York, one of the world's busiest ports.

2. Respond to chemical, biological, nuclear, and other threats — Of course, the Coast Guard doesn't just field the emergency calls for terror attacks. When law enforcement and intelligence agencies get word of possible threats, they can call the Maritime Safety and Security Teams (MSSTs). These guys specialize in securing American and friendly ports that are at heightened risk of attack. The MSSTs work to prevent the successful completion of an attack, but they can also respond to attacks in progress like they did in Boston in 2013 after the marathon bombings.

3. Capturing and occupying captured oil rigs at sea — MSST and FBI joint training-hook-ladder-FBI-coast-guard-piracy-narcotics. One of the largest special operations in history took place on March 21, 2003, when Navy SEALs and Polish special operators seized Iraq's oil platforms at the same time that other forces took land-based sections of Iraq's oil infrastructure. The often unsung heroes of that operation are the soldiers and Coast Guardsmen who gave the SEALs the ride and provided the gun platforms that supported the operation from the water. The Coast Guard sent eight 25-foot boats to the platforms and provided the defensive positions that allowed the U.S. to hold the platforms after the SEALs captured them. The 60 Coast Guardsmen held the platforms and 41 prisoners of war for months despite severe storms that damaged boats and tore equipment— including food and fresh water — from where it was stored. At one point, they had to fire flares to deter an attack by circling Iranian speedboats.



4. Landing U.S. soldiers and Marines at D-Day, Guadalcanal, and hundreds of other places — Did anyone think it odd that the Coast Guard would be in charge of landing and supporting operators hitting oil rigs in a carefully synchronized operation? It's a little unusual, but only because they're used to hitting beaches and rivers. During World War II, Coast Guardsmen piloted many of the landing craft at key fights like the invasions of Normandy and the Philippines. The only member of the Coast Guard to receive the Medal of Honor conducted his heroic action while rescuing Marines under fire at Guadalcanal. The U.S. Coast Guard also took part in riverine and coastal warfare in Vietnam. All of this was, of course, before they took part in the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

[Source: We Are The Mighty | Logan Nye | April 5, 2017 ++]

USCG Budget Update 03 ► Operations & Maintenance Worries

The White House has dropped plans for a 14 percent cut to the Coast Guard, instead promising a budget that “sustains current funding levels.” The bad news is that “current funding levels” are already too low. The Coast Guard has to give almost 600 drug shipments a pass each year because they don't have the ships or planes to catch them — and that's their top-priority mission. Elsewhere, the Coast Guard has cut corners on everything from patrolling the Pacific, to maintaining its bases and to working with the Navy, the Coast Guard Commandant told reporters today. “Where we've seen the most pain is we've deferred a lot of our shore (facilities) maintenance,” Adm. Paul Zukunft told the Defense Writers' Group. “We have a lot of our crew who are out there, if they're not out doing operations, then they're fixing utilities, they're patching roofs.” It took Hurricane Sandy battering the Coast Guard Academy to free up necessary funding for repairs there, he said: “That's no way to run a railroad.”

Another asset wearing thin is the nation's only heavy icebreaker, the Polar Star. The 40-year-old ship is “on life support” until a replacement arrives in 2023, Zukunft said, but it still has to break “chunks of ice the size of a Metro bus,” so after each deployment it needs a lot of time in the shipyard. Between deployments and overhauls, he said, “that crew is going to be away from home over 200 days this year.” There appears to be an end in sight. The 2017 budget includes \$1 billion in Navy funding to start the new icebreaker. The Coast Guard's own modernization account rose to \$2 billion last year with the addition of a ninth National Security Cutter. (The 14 percent cut would have cancelled it). Construction continues on the smaller Offshore Patrol Cutters and Fast Response Cutters. All told, Zukunft said, “on the acquisition front I'm extremely optimistic.” It is operations and maintenance that have him worried — especially if Congress keeps passing long-term Continuing Resolutions instead of regular spending bills. “My greatest concern right now is a CR,” he said. “If we don't have an appropriation in 2017, I will have to shut down operations.... Your only variable expense is fuel, (so) you stop flying, you stop sailing.”

A big part of the problem is the Coast Guard's unique status as an armed service that's not part of the Defense Department, Zukunft argues. That problem became particularly acute with the Budget Control Act of 2011, which set strict caps on federal discretionary expenditures (but not entitlements), one cap for defense spending and one for everything else, with the Coast Guard being part of the everything else. “Most of our budget — 96 percent — is

non-defense discretionary (funding),” Zukunft said. “The irony is on any given day, I’ll have upwards of 20 ships serving in support of the (military’s) Combatant Commanders. Ships that are bought by, maintained by, and crewed and by non-defense discretionary funding. Yet we are an armed service. So we find ourselves in this no-man’s land.”

On the upside, however, the Coast Guard’s unique status lets it do things no other federal agency can, combining the Title 10 authorities of an armed service with the Title 14 authorities of law enforcement. In particular, the Coast Guard has international agreements with 60 countries that permit the US to board their ships on the grounds of “reasonable suspicion” and even to enter their territorial waters to do so. That’s why there’s an elite Coast Guard Advanced Interdiction Team assigned to Central Command (CENTCOM) in the Mideast. It’s trained and equipped to military Special Operations standards but possesses much greater legal authority to board and search suspicious vessels in times of peace. Around the world, naval vessels conducting boarding operations often carry Law Enforcement Detachments (LEDETs) of Coast Guard personnel.

Coast Guard counter-terrorism teams also protect the President’s frequent retreats to Mar-a-Lago, such as his recent summit with Chinese president Xi Jinping. Boat teams protect both the Atlantic and Intracoastal Waterway sides of the property, while helicopters keep drones and other low-fliers out of the airspace above. That all comes out of the existing Coast Guard budget. “Is there a supplemental to support this?” he asked. “The answer is no.” So there are some missions the Coast Guard just can’t afford to do. “Probably our biggest missed opportunity right now is in enforcing fisheries out to 200 miles (i.e. the Exclusive Economic Zone) and beyond,” Zukunft said. In the Pacific, for example, there are small island nations that rely on the US to protect their fishing grounds, often their only economic asset, Zukunft said: “They are ripe for plunder because they don’t have a coast guard, they don’t have a navy.” The Coast Guard has also declined European requests for assistance with mass migration of Syrian war refugees across the Mediterranean.

The Coast Guard has been able to increase its efforts in the Arctic, to include building a relationship with its Russian counterparts relatively untroubled by rising tensions between the two countries. In fact, the recently created Arctic Coast Guard forum will hold an international search and research exercise in September. “We’re going to use search and rescue (exercises) to nurture this relationship rather than a Freedom of Navigation exercise,” Zukunft said, which could raise tensions. Zukunft has also proposed a permanent Coast Guard presence in the contested waters of the Western Pacific, where the Chinese Coast Guard, not its navy, plays the leading role in asserting Beijing’s territorial claims. All these global efforts, however, take second place to stopping illegal drugs in the Americas. In the past, the Coast Guard tried to spread resources more evenly among missions, like “peanut butter,” Zukunft said. Today it’s accepting risk elsewhere to cover the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific as densely as it can. Meanwhile Navy ships have largely pulled out, though the larger service provides some support in form of coastal patrol boats (PCs) and P-3 Orion scout planes.



The crew of a single Coast Guard cutter, the Stratton, seized 34 tons of cocaine.

On the Coast Guard's part, Zukunft said, "we have more than doubled the number of ships, the number of resources we have devoted to this part of the world." Seizures of cocaine have more than doubled since 2014, from under 100 tons to more than 200 tons. Yet at the same time, year after year, the Coast Guard still ends up getting intelligence on far more shipments than it has forces to intercept. "We have an awareness of over 80 percent of the maritime flow of the drugs in the Eastern Pacific," Zukunft said. "Last year, with all that awareness, there were 580 events that we had at least one level of information on that we just did not have enough ships or enough planes to track those down." [Source: Breaking Defense | Sydney J. Freedberg Jr. | April 12, 2017 ++]

SGLI/VGLI Update 16 ► Navy Members Can Now Manage SGLI Online

Navy members now have the opportunity to enroll or change their Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) online. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) began enrollment for Navy members in the SGLI Online Enrollment System (SOES) on 5 APR. SOES allows active-duty and eligible reserve and Guard members to manage their SGLI and Family SGLI coverage electronically at any time, from anywhere in the world. "Now, the Navy, and soon all of our nation's service members, will be able to manage their coverage and beneficiaries online — just like their private-sector counterparts" said Thomas Murphy, acting under secretary for Benefits at VA. "Moving to an online, self-service system brings the SGLI program in line with current insurance industry best practices."

VA is collaborating with the Department of Defense (DoD), Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) and the Uniformed Services to develop this system. It will be available through DMDC's milConnect web application, which allows service members to review personal, health care and personnel information from one reliable source, the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). The SOES rollout to the remaining uniformed services will be completed in phases through the end of the year, ensuring a smooth transition for all service members. To ensure support for service members using the new system, VA is working with DOD and the individual uniformed services to train key service personnel as SOES becomes available to each branch. More information on SOES is available at <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect>. [Source: VA News Release | April 6, 2017 ++]

Missile Defense ► U.S. Needs Better Sensors, and Soon

No missile defense is better than the sensors that tell the interceptors where to go and what to kill. The Ground-based Midcourse Defense system, or GMD, draws upon considerably more sensors for homeland defense than when operations began in 2004, but shortfalls remain. The North Korean and other missile threats are not diminishing, and it's time to get this right. In a forthcoming report, the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) recommends that the Defense Department and Missile Defense Agency take several steps to improve the sensor backbone of America's homeland missile defenses, including fielding a space layer, filling radar gaps, adding omnidirectional focus, and improving command and control. Unfortunately, the budget for missile defense sensors has fallen considerably over the past decade, exactly the wrong trend for our changing security environment.

The sensors supporting homeland missile defense include both some of the newest and oldest ones currently operating. An enemy missile launch would be detected first by satellites tuned to spot the heat of a firing rocket motor. Yet their infrared sensors cannot track a missile much after its engine burns out, and do not in any case provide enough data to conduct an intercept. For the demanding tasks of missile tracking and discrimination, the global Ballistic Missile Defense System largely relies on large ground-based radars: five upgraded Cold War-era

Early Warning Radars; the Cobra Dane surveillance radar on Shemya, Alaska; and five newer forward-deployed TPY-2 X-band radars. When they are deployed to the right place, the Navy's SPY-1 radars on Aegis ships and floating Sea-Based X-band radar, or SBX, also provide important help.

These radars help track incoming missiles in different ways, depending on their location and capabilities. Lower-frequency radars like the early warning radars are better for tracking over great distances, while the higher-frequency X-band radars are best at discriminating the warhead from accompanying debris. All these terrestrial sensors, however, are limited by the curvature of the earth. To be sure, ground- and sea-based radars will continue to play critical roles, but the first and possibly most important step to improving global missile defense capabilities is to create and field a space sensor layer for persistent, birth-to-death missile tracking and discrimination. "Given where the threat is going," MDA director Vice Adm. James Syring said last year, "persistent tracking and discrimination capability from space is a must."

Each of the last five presidential administrations has had space-based infrared sensors as a key component of their planned missile defense architectures—at least on paper—but none has yet deployed one. Two demonstrator satellites called STSS are currently on orbit, but they do not operationally contribute, and a larger constellation would be needed to do so. Last year, a campaign memo for president-elect Donald Trump pledged to create just that, endorsing "a comprehensive ballistic missile defense system with a heavy emphasis on space-based early warning and missile tracking technologies." This is exactly what is needed, but there's still no concrete plan to deploy it. One obstacle is cost, which is why MDA's Space-based Kill Assessment experiment aims to put a sensor payload on a commercial satellite, to help determine whether interceptor missiles had destroyed their target, or whether another salvo is needed. If successful, this model of commercial hosting could help defray launch costs and lead to a larger, more distributed constellation of smaller and less-expensive satellites.

First -- Until a space layer is fielded, U.S. missile defenses will have too few sensors to definitively discriminate warheads from debris or decoys, which means that more interceptors will need to be fired to ensure a kill, which in turn reduces the effective magazine. The 37 Ground-based Interceptors currently deployed in Alaska and California could be challenged by a larger missile salvo. The emergence of hypersonic boost glide vehicles maneuvering in the high endo-atmosphere and other new threats will further tax terrestrial radars.

Second -- The United States should continue to improve the global quality and redundancy of ground-based radar sensors, both in the Pacific and elsewhere. To narrow some of the coverage gap in the Pacific for tracking North Korean missiles, MDA is building the Long-Range Discrimination Radar, or LRDR, at Clear Air Force Station, Alaska. Scheduled for initial operations around 2020, its S-band radar will discriminate less well than an X-band radar but provide a greater field of view. The LRDR is being built at Clear rather than the more remote Shemya island, some 1,500 miles southeast at the end of the Aleutian chain. This new location will reduce operating costs, but may also leave a coverage gap after a North Korean missile overflies the TPY-2 radars in Japan, and will reduce coverage for missiles that might threaten Hawaii.

To compensate, MDA is studying a proposal to build a single-faced Medium Range Discrimination Radar in Hawaii to help Alaska-based interceptors protect America's southernmost state. Other options include alternate high-frequency radars on Hawaii that might provide a cheaper and nearer-term solution if the Aegis Ashore test range at Kauai were to be operationalized and equipped with the Standard Missile IIA, which is scheduled to become available next year. In general, a more distributed sensor architecture would improve effectiveness and resilience. Today's regional and homeland missile defenses have too many single points of sensor failure. Most of NATO missile defense is supported, for instance, by a single TPY-2 in Turkey, and the only-sometimes deployed SBX remains all too critical for discriminating North Korean threats to the homeland. MDA should therefore continue to add redundancy and expand coverage.

Third -- The United States should explore options for adding a radar on or near its Atlantic coast. Today's sensor upgrade efforts are largely aimed at the North Korean problem, but there remains a near-total lack of late-midcourse

discrimination for any missile coming from the Middle East. When the radar at Clear is ready, SBX could be moved to the Atlantic seaboard, but that would end its usefulness in testing GMD and gathering information on North Korean missile tests. Other options might bring the SBX radar ashore or build another ground-based radar. X-band radars could be installed near the Upgraded Early Warning Radars at Fylingdales or Thule, or at some other location, perhaps either with a new East Coast interceptor site or even in Canada. In the longer term, more high-frequency radars will likely be needed. As the SBX dilemma suggests, there are currently just not enough high-frequency radars to go around.

Fourth -- A closely related area concerns the command-and-control systems that make missile defense possible. The world's best sensor data is useless unless it can be fused, integrated, and effectively employed, a challenging task for an effort that is global in scope. The GMD Fire Control system takes data from the Command and Control Battle Management and Communications network, integrates it with other sensor data, and crafts an engagement plan and firing solution. Fire control information is continuously fed, via Inflight Data Terminals, to interceptors in flight. Critical evolution and regular updates to these and other ground systems must not be overlooked.

The Path Forward -- Fast-moving interceptors tend to get more attention, but sensors are the real spine of the missile defense mission. Indeed, sensors are critical to each part of the kill chain: launch detection, tracking, classification, discrimination, fire control, divert, intercept, and kill assessment. The sensor architecture to protect the United States has drastically improved since 2004, but still falls short of the persistent, birth-to-death tracking and discrimination. The utility of a space sensor layer, closing terrestrial radar gaps, and the need to defeat more complex threats are well understood in principle. Now it is time to make these capabilities a reality. [Source: DefenseNews | Thomas Karako & Ian William | April 5, 2017 +]

Syrian Strike ► **Pentagon's Play-By-Play**

President Trump's decision to launch Tomahawk missiles at a Syrian air base was the culmination of 48 hours of activity, one that began with what the U.S. believes was a chemical warfare attack on civilians perpetrated by the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Two senior defense officials briefed reporters 7 APR at the Pentagon about details of the strikes, in the process laying out their best understanding of the timeline from the April 4 th chemical weapons attack at to the decision last night to launch high-end weapons at Shyrat airfield.

April 4

6:50 a.m. local time — A Syrian fixed-wing aircraft, most likely a Su-22 launched from Shyrat airfield, drops a munition that strikes in the middle of a street at Kahn Sheikoum. “We know the routes that these aircraft took. We know that these aircraft were overhead at the time of the attack,” the first Pentagon official said. Subsequent analysis of the crater caused by the missile would show “staining” around the explosion site, in line with the signs of a chemical warhead. Despite early claims from Russia and Syria that the chemical attack were caused by an explosion at a chemical weapons factory being maintained by anti-Assad rebel groups, the Pentagon official said the crater evidence shoots that option down.

7:00 a.m. local time — Intelligence shows the first “reflections” of the potential use of a nerve agent, which include causalities arriving at a local hospital. Shortly afterwards, a small unmanned system -- “either regime or Russian” - - flies over the hospital, gathering intelligence at the scene before departing. “About five hours” after it was first spotted, the UAV returns, and shortly thereafter the hospital is struck by a fixed-wing aircraft. “We don't have positive accountability yet, but [why] somebody would strike the hospital, potentially to hide the evidence of a chemical attack about 5 hours after it was clearly seen that was a hospital with ambulances and civilian traffic, is a question that we're very interested in,” the first official said.

April 5

President Trump directs Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis to come up with military options to respond to the chemical attacks. According to the second defense official, “those options were basically put together into recommendations. It went forward to the National Security Council, multiple meetings with not only the presidential senior advisers but also the Chairman [of the Joint Chiefs], the Vice Chairman and the Secretary of Defense.”

April 6

Final proposals for action are presented to the president, with the final selection made sometime in the afternoon.

4:30 p.m. EST — The Pentagon receives orders from Trump to execute the plan.

7:40 p.m. EST — The USS Porter and USS Ross combine to launch 60 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Shyrat airbase. One of those weapons fails to launch, requiring the Navy to launch a replacement; while heading to the target, one of the missiles fails and ditches into the water.

8:40 p.m. EST — 59 Tomahawk weapons reach their targets. Each missile was assigned to a single target, and all detonated successfully.

What was targeted

- Syrian military assets: Fuel, hardened bunkers, munitions and a Russian-made surface-to-air missile system were targeted by the strikes.
- Syrian planes: The Pentagon believes around 20 Syrian aircraft were destroyed, though it is hard to say exactly how many were taken out, as some planes were inside bunkers that were destroyed.

Asked to assess how losing those planes would degrade Assad’s military, the official declined to offer a figure but noted that “20 aircraft out of their inventory is going to make an impact.”

What wasn’t targeted

- Chemical warfare bunkers: The Pentagon was careful to avoid hitting anything they believed to be storage for chemical warfare materials, in order to not unleash those weapons.
- The runway: Shyrat has a 10,000 foot runway, but that wasn’t targeted in the strike. Asked why, the officials said that didn’t fit into the “proportionality” they were going for, and noted that, as they were using Tomahawks, “it would have been a waste off a munition on the airfield.”
- Russia: The Pentagon believes there are up to 100 Russian personnel on the base, and the mission plan was created specifically so the strikes would not target Russian citizens or assets. Ahead of the strikes, Russia was warned the Tomahawks were incoming, so they would not “read the attack” wrong, the second official said.

During the briefing, the officials were careful not to formally link Russia to the chemical weapons attack. But in both tone and their statements, the officials acknowledged that if there was an active chemical weapons storage unit at the airbase, the Russians would likely have known about it. They also would not rule out that the Russians played a part in the hospital bombing. “We know the Russians have chemical expertise in country. We cannot talk openly about any complicity between the Russian and the Syrian regime in this case, but we’re carefully assessing any information that would implicate the Russians knew or assisted in this Syrian capability,” the first official said. “We have no knowledge of Russian involvement in this attack. But we will investigate any information that might lead us in that direction. We’re not done.”

Go to http://video.foxnews.com/v/5389264644001/?playlist_id=2114913880001#sp=show-clips to view a Fox News clip on the launch, impact, and aftermath of the strike.

[Source: DefenseNews | Aaron Mehta | April 7, 2017 ++]

Tomahawk Missile ► What It is

The Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles used in U.S. military strikes against Syria on 6 APR have been a key tool in the Defense Department’s arsenal for the last 25 years, seen as powerful statement of military force with minimal danger to U.S. personnel. Nearly 60 of the high-tech munitions were fired at a Syrian air base in response to chemical attacks in that country that U.S. intelligence officials said were carried out by forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar Assad. The missiles were launched from the U.S. Navy destroyers Ross and Porter, stationed hundreds of miles away in the Mediterranean Sea.

According to Navy files, the Tomahawk cruise missiles are designed to fly at low altitudes and speeds up to 550 miles per hour, giving them a strong defense against many anti-aircraft measures. The 3,500-pound explosives also contain guidance systems that can be tailored to provide further evasive capabilities. The missiles were first used by American forces in 1991’s Operation Desert Storm, and have become part of the expected opening salvo for most major U.S. military operations. At least 50 were fired into Afghanistan in the opening hours of the American intervention there in 2001, and several hundred launched into Iraq in the opening moves into that country in 2003.



Today’s Tomahawk Block IV cruise missiles can fly for hours and shift course instantly on command.

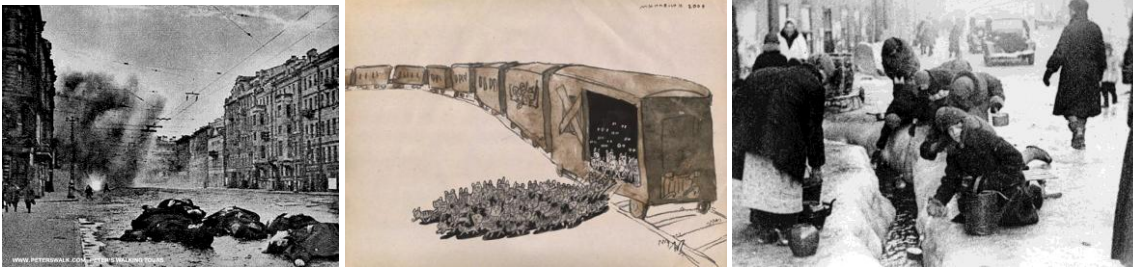
But the weapons have also been used for more limited strikes, including targets in Somalia, Bosnia and Yemen. Navy officials said it has been used more than 2,000 times in combat since 1991. The high-tech munitions also come with a sizable price tag. Todd Harrison, director of defense budget analysis at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, estimated the replacement cost of the Tomahawks used against Syria will total about \$89 million. Defense contractor Raytheon is the sole supplier of the missiles, but Navy officials have announced plans to stop production of the Tomahawk this year, to be eventually replaced by more modern munitions. But in recent years, lawmakers have pushed against those Navy plans and added funding to the annual defense budget for the missiles.

On Thursday night, Rep. Martha McSally (R-AZ). — whose district includes Raytheon’s headquarters — said she was proud those efforts ensured “that this weapon was ready and available when our armed forces needed it.” In testimony earlier this week before the House Armed Services Committee, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson said that if Congress approves a White House request for \$30 billion of supplemental funds in the fiscal 2017 defense budget, a portion of that money will go to purchasing more Tomahawks. Without the extra money, officials will stick with the current inventory. Harrison said that totals about 4,000 now, an arsenal that Navy officials expect to last for another 11 years. But he notes that in the event of another major conflict, that likely won’t be enough for mission demands. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 7, 2017 ++]



Siege of Leningrad ► Eight Horrific Facts

When Germans encircled Leningrad (St. Petersburg) on September 8th, 1941 they planned to quickly freeze and starve the city. They had no idea the devastation and horror that the people of Leningrad would be willing to endure without ever giving in. The siege is one of the longest in history and one of the deadliest as well. Here are just a few things you might not know about the siege that devastated Soviet Union.



Leningrad Death Toll Over 1,000,000

The death toll from the siege of Leningrad varies anywhere from 600,000 to 2,000,000 but most put it closer to 1,500,000. That makes the siege ten times deadlier than either of the death tolls (on the first day) from the atomic bombs dropped on Japan. Many of the deaths occurred from starvation and freezing as many tried to survive in the surrounded city. But that was not the only thing that citizen of Leningrad had to fear. Many were also killed by the bombs that the Germans were frequently dropping on the besieged city.

There were attempts to evacuate Leningrad with as many as 1.4 million people being evacuated during three phases. The first wave was evacuated from June to August of 1941. Another evacuation was attempted of more than 650,000 civilians from September 1941 to April 1942 over lake Ladoga, on foot when frozen, on water craft when it wasn't. A third was went from May to October of 1942 and was also utilizing lake Ladoga. The evacuations consisted of mostly women and children, but also included anyone that was considered to be essential to the war effort. However, the evacuations were not a guarantee of survival as many of those evacuated still lost their lives either due to bombings from the Germans or from succumbing to illness or starvation by the time they made it out of the city.

By the time the siege had ended only 700,000 of the 3 million citizens of Leningrad remained alive and in the city. All others had died or been evacuated. For the credit of the people of Leningrad, they never gave up and even as they were starving they did everything they could to help the army defeat the Germans.

Mass Starvation Led to Cannibalism

Many of the deaths that occurred during the siege were due to starvation. The city had not been prepared for a lengthy siege or even any siege at all. The city only had supplies for 1 to 2 months and therefore rationing of food started even before the siege did. The siege officially began on September 8th, but the city had been under heavy bombing since August with the Red Army fighting to save the city and evacuate civilians.

During the bombs that fell from August to October 1941 all food storage facilities were destroyed. The food literally burned in front of the eyes of starving people. After one bomb sugar melted into the ground and desperate citizens dug up the earth and tried to separate the sugar and earth to be able to eat the sugar. Others just mixed the sweetened dirt with flour and cooked with it. Food rations continued to drop through 1941 and by November 1941, the rations were for 250 grams daily for manual workers and 150 grams for all other civilians. The bread that was given was made with what little food could be found and then mixed with sawdust or other fillers to make the bread seem filling, even if it was not nutritious. All animals in the city were killed for meat and people went as far as to eat dirt or wallpaper paste. By 1942 the citizens were so desperate for food that they turned to the unthinkable and were willing to do anything to get food to survive. The 125 grams was not enough to survive the freezing temperatures, especially when there was so little heat to be found. There were numerous reports of people eating the bodies of those who had starved to death or worse, killing people to eat them.

The Penalty for Stealing Food was Death

When the food started to run low and starvation became rampant, stealing food was common. Bands of thieves would wander the streets to steal ration cards or food. Police struggled to keep up with the thefts and those who were caught faced stiff penalties. There were accounts of murder in order to get ration cards and even people who would pretend family members who had died of starvation still lived so that they could continue to collect their rations. The Red Army did what they could to supply the city by sending trucks of food across the frozen lake Ladoga.

These trucks faced air bombings by the Germans and many were blown to pieces before they could make it across the lake or delivered into the city. Soldiers would then quickly try and gather the food for placement on another truck or to bring to the city center. Sometimes people of the city would steal the food that was blown across the ground knowing that if caught they would face a firing squad. But it was the truck drivers that were the most common culprits of food theft. Once the city had run out of food the truck drivers were their only salvation. This meant that a truck driver who took food and sold it in the city could make a substantial sum. One truck driver who was caught stealing was told to kneel in the snow and then ten executioners fired upon him. By contrast a truck driver who was caught accepting a bribe for driving someone out of the city faced only 10 days in solitary confinement.

There were also punishments for those who engaged in cannibalism. During the siege a special police force was created to combat cannibalism but they still struggled to maintain order and prevent the people from eating the dead or killing the living for their flesh. However, after the siege was lifted all those who were believed to have engaged in cannibalism faced criminal charges and some were sentenced to death.

Valuable Books and Art Were Burned For Warmth

There was no heat and very little electricity in the city during the siege and the winter of 1941 was the hardest winter of the siege. Temperatures dropped below -40 degrees Fahrenheit. There was no way to keep warm except by burning things in the stove. People would burn everything in their home from the shelves to the furniture. They would burn whatever clothes they were not wearing to keep warm. Then the people turned to the books in their libraries and the art on their walls. Some of the wealthy citizens of Leningrad recalled burning first editions or rare copies of books as a last resort to keep warm against the bitter cold.

Paintings on the wall were also burned, along with the floorboards. The shelling destroyed museums and set them on fire. Nazis looted and vandalized what they could even as museum workers tried to hide the precious art. Some of the art was hidden in the basement of the Hermitage in order to protect it from looters, whoever they might be. It is

unknown just what was destroyed in order to keep the people of Leningrad warm. The Nazis were also known to loot the city so books and artworks might have been taken and not actually burned. The worst of the siege was the height of the winter in 1941/42 when temperatures dropped to their lowest and food stores were the scarcest they would be throughout the entire siege.

Hitler Wanted The Entire City to Starve

Hitler had a plan for Leningrad and one that he even had experts analyze. He believed that Leningrad would be too difficult to take in a normal battle. He did not want to start a fight with the large city because he did not want to divert the manpower and artillery needed to take the city by force. So he came up with the plan to encircle the city and starve it to death. Food stores were targeted by the bombings and any attempt to get food into the city was also targeted by the bombings. Hitler's experts calculated how long the food in the city would last and assured Hitler that Leningrad would be eating itself in a matter of weeks.

This seemed like a much better option for Hitler than trying to take over the city. It was also better for Hitler's ultimate plan for Leningrad. He was more concerned with trying to feed his army than trying to feed millions of urban citizens in Leningrad. He wanted to use the USSR to feed his army and not bother with feeding Russian citizens, so even if the city were to surrender, he would only use it as a chance to destroy the city. Diaries from his generals and others reveal that the plan was to let the population starve and to raze the historic city afterward.

Hitler and his experts were correct in that the city would start eating itself within weeks. The first winter of the siege was the worst for freezing and starvation as rations dropped to nearly nothing and supply trucks failed to get through. But ultimately it was the resolve of the people of Leningrad and perhaps the belief that they would fare no better if they surrendered that led to the Red Army eventually defeating the German blockade and freeing the city.

City Leaders Were Arrested and Executed After the Siege

City leaders struggled throughout the siege to not only keep people alive but to keep the munitions factories going and to maintain some semblance of law and order. That was not enough to satisfy the KGB and the Red Army. They made excuses that some leaders did not contact Moscow often enough or that they betrayed the people of Leningrad. Some of these arrests and executions were hidden from the public, others occurred years later during the Leningrad affair.

The Leningrad Affair was an attempt by Stalin to consolidate power. The people of Leningrad were hailed as heroes after their ordeal during the war. They held off against impossible odds and spent nearly three years completely cut off from Moscow. Leningrad officials and communist party members were believed to be moving away from absolute loyalty to Stalin and the Soviet Union. Those closest to Stalin perpetuated those fears and therefore any sign that the Leningrad officials or communist party leaders were not in line with Stalin was viewed as a threat.

In 1949 a number of these officials were arrested on trumped up charges (Soviet leaders would later admit outright the charges were false) and after secret trials were sentenced to death. Some 2,000 other Leningrad party members were jailed or exiled. The museum that had been built to commemorate the siege was closed in the fear that it would bring about a party uprising against Stalin. It would not reopen until 40 years later. Some of the people that Stalin had killed or imprisoned were among the last of the high-ranking figures to be killed during Stalin's reign when the aging dictator still feared any threat to his power.

Four Train Cars of Cats Were Brought to Save the Food Supplies

It might seem like they were meant as food but when cats were shipped by train to be sent to Leningrad it was not as a means for food. The cats were meant to save the little food that the city had. The besieged city had one substantial problem (of many) in 1942 that was making survival hard and that was rats. With the number of dead bodies in the streets (the ground was frozen during the winter and they could not be buried or people were too weak to dig graves) rats were flourishing. There were several attempts to catch and kill the rats, but reports credit the roving gangs of rats as "organized, intelligent and brutal." Nothing worked and the rats often found their way to the mill to eat the small bit of food that was found there.

By this time starvation through the winter meant that most citizens had eaten their cats (families would trade cats so as not to have to eat their own pet) so there were no cats to control the rats. Once the blockade was broken in 1944 the gangs of rats had to be dealt with before they ate all the food that was now being delivered to the starved city. Four train cars of cats were sent to Leningrad. Some of the cats were just released onto the streets, others were given to residents. The beloved creatures were in such high demand after the suffering of the siege that some were willing to pay 50 rubles for one or give up some of their precious bread for a kitten.

The cats were a success and quickly dispatched of the rodent problem. Today there are even statues in Saint Petersburg (formally Leningrad) that honor the cats that helped to bring the city back from the brink of death and destruction.

The Spark Ended the Siege

After more than 800 days under siege and two separate attempts to end it, the Red Army finally felt that they had a way to break through the German blockade and save the city. In 1944 the plan to end the blockade was called the “Spark.” It was carefully planned and it took what the Soviets had learned from their Lyubavinskaya and Sinyavinskaya operations and applied it to the latest operation. The operation planned two fronts at Volkhov and Leningrad and then a move forward to the Mga train station to try and restore communication with Leningrad. Intelligence operations had pieced together a very accurate idea of the Nazi army at Leningrad and the plan was to strike at a narrow stretch of land between Mga and Lake Ladoga.

This was the Nazi bottleneck and there were 5 Wehrmacht divisions of more than 10,000 men each, 50 tanks and over 700 guns. All this was supported from the air with 250 combat planes. When the Red Army marched on the bottleneck, they outnumbered the Nazis. They had 20 divisions, 5,000 guns, 540 tanks and more than 800 planes, this time they were determined to free Leningrad. On January 12th the Red Army hit the Germans on all sides. Planes dropped bombs and protected the infantry from the air, tanks crossed the neck with a goal of pushing the Germans back 2 to 4 km a day. It was slow progress but the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts continued moving toward each other. Then on January 18th, the two fronts met and by the end of the day the south coast of Lake Ladoga was free of enemy troops. The Red Army continued to push back the Germans and even put down a 30 km long railroad in just 17 days. On February 7th, the first train filled with food arrived in Leningrad.

[Source: <http://historycollection.co/eight-horrific-facts-siege-leningrad-1941-1944> | JAN 2017 ++]

Bataan Death March Update 01 ► 75th Anniversary

On April 9, 1942, U.S. forces in the Philippines surrendered to the Japanese, and so began what we call the Bataan Death March today. After the surrender, 75,000 American and Filipino soldiers were taken captive by Japanese soldiers and forced to march throughout the Philippines to confinement camps. To commemorate the 75th anniversary of the start of the Bataan Death March and the devastation survivors and the fallen endured during, here are a few facts you need to know.

1. 140 miles to Camp O'Donnell -- U.S. and Filipino soldiers surrendered to the Japanese were more than just POWs, they were captives of the Japanese. Forced to march six excruciatingly long days in the hot sun with no shade, clean water and a scarce amount of food, many became victims of mistreatment, starvation and illness. Soldiers reportedly marched anywhere from 65 to 140 miles to confinement at Camp O'Donnell, where they were forced to work under harsh conditions with a lack of medical treatment and nourishment. During the march, soldiers were placed into box cars in San Fernando. After a few hours, they stopped, but not at their destination. The soldiers were forced to walk several more miles to camp. However, not all captured men were ‘privileged’ to stand cramped shoulder-to-shoulder in the hot cars, but instead forced to finish the trek on foot because there wasn’t enough room.

2. Fort Drum (Philippines): Two days of mistreatment -- Soldiers surrendered over to the Japanese were all mistreated. They were shot, beaten, beheaded, buried alive and given “sun treatments.” Fort Drum soldiers in particular were given two days of mistreatment following the U.S. surrender because it was reported that Americans defending Fort Drum were responsible for killing a large number of Japanese soldiers when they dropped a 14-inch shell, killing a high-ranking Japanese soldier according to the Office of the Provost Marshal General Report in November 1945. For two long days, Fort Drum soldiers were not authorized to lay down, sleep, eat or drink any water.

3. Buried alive -- Through the march, several soldiers became weak from lack of food and clean water. Many soldiers fell out of line and were shot or bayoneted by the Japanese soldiers. Some were reported to have been run over. Some soldiers who fell out or became too slow due to sickness were buried alive. Japanese soldiers made those captured bury their fellow comrades. It has been reported that the only decent thing the Japanese did was take the dog tags from the dead and throw them on the side of the road before burial, even if it was to keep the U.S. from identifying the dead.

4. The march was not one long line -- While 75,000 soldiers were surrendered over to the Japanese, not all started the march at the same time. “We weren't one close-knit group by any means. When the Japanese got a bunch together, say one hundred or so, that group would start walking. You might get the impression it was one long line, but it wasn't. One group would start and then a couple of days later, another one came along. When we got to our destination, Camp O'Donnell, soldiers kept coming in. For how long or how many had passed before and after us, I don't know. On the sixth day, we got to Balanga and were fed a second rice ball. From Balanga, we walked to San Fernando,” www.bataansurvivor.com recorded a survivor saying.

5. Soldiers were not the only victims -- Often, local Filipinos along the route would try and offer food to the malnourished soldiers marching by. They would try to give them food or water, but the Japanese soldiers would shoot them as soon as they noticed. One Filipino man was reportedly beheaded and women were raped and mutilated. Filipino women who worked as nurses in the local field hospitals were imprisoned, as well.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Ashley Bunch | April 10, 2017 ++]

WWI U.S. Entry ► Dependence on Foreign Weapon Technology

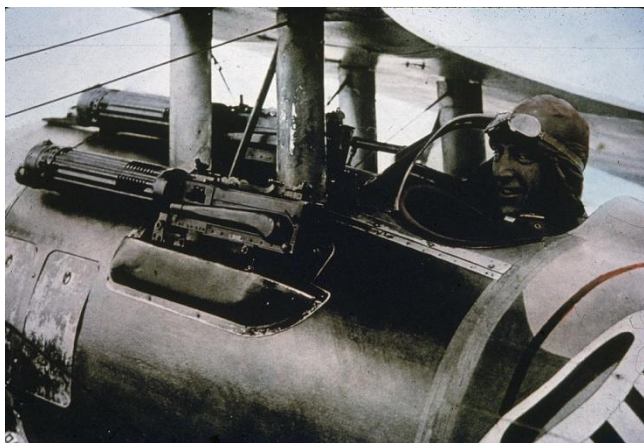
On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war against Germany and entered World War I. Since August 1914, the war between the Central and Entente Powers had devolved into a bloody stalemate, particularly on the Western Front. That was where the U.S. would enter the engagement. How prepared was the country's military to enter a modern conflict? The war was dominated by industrially made lethal technology, like no war had been before. That meant more death on European battlefields, making U.S. soldiers badly needed in the trenches. But America's longstanding tradition of isolationism meant that in 1917 U.S. forces needed a lot of support from overseas allies to fight effectively. In Europe, American combat troops would encounter new weapons systems, including sophisticated machine guns and the newly invented tank, both used widely during World War I. American forces had to learn to fight with these new technologies, even as they brought millions of men to bolster the decimated British and French armies.

In certain areas of military technology, the United States was well-prepared. The basic infantrymen of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps were equipped with the Model 1903 Springfield rifle. Developed after American experience against German-made Mausers in the Spanish American War, it was an excellent firearm, equal or superior to any rifle in the world at the time. The Springfield offered greater range and killing power than the U.S. Army's older 30-40 Krag. It was also produced in such numbers that it was one of the few weapons the U.S. military could deploy with to Europe. Machine guns were another matter. In 1912, American inventor Isaac Lewis

had offered to give the U.S. Army his air-cooled machine gun design for free. When he was rejected, Lewis sold the design to Britain and Belgium, where it was mass-produced throughout the war. With far more soldiers than supplies of modern machine guns, the U.S. Army had to adopt several systems of foreign design, including the less-than-desirable French Chauchat, which tended to jam in combat and proved difficult to maintain in the trenches.

American soldiers fared better with the Great War's truly new innovation, the tank. Developed from the need to successfully cross "No Man's Land" and clear enemy-held trenches, the tank had been used with limited success in 1917 by the British and the French. Both nations had combat-ready machines available for American troops. After the U.S. entered the war, American industry began tooling up to produce the French-designed Renault FT light tank. But the American-built tanks, sometimes called the "six-ton tank," never made it to the battlefields of Europe before the Armistice in November 1918. Instead, U.S. ground forces used 239 of the French-built versions of the tank, as well as 47 British Mark V tanks. Though American soldiers had never used tanks before entering the war, they learned quickly. One of the first American tankers in World War I was then-Captain George S. Patton, who later gained international fame as a commander of Allied tanks during World War II.

Also new to Americans was poison gas, an early form of chemical warfare. By 1917 artillery batteries on both sides of the Western Front commonly fired gas shells, either on their own or in combination with other explosives. Before soldiers were routinely equipped with gas masks, thousands died in horrific ways, adding to the already significant British and French casualty totals. Scientists on both sides of the war effort worked to make gas weapons as effective as possible, including by devising new chemical combinations to make mustard gas, chlorine gas, phosgene gas and tear gas. The American effort was substantial: According to historians Joel Vilensky and Pandy Sinish, "Eventually, more than 10 percent of all the chemists in the United States became directly involved with chemical warfare research during World War I."



American flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker (1890 - 1973) sits in his Nieuport 28 fighter plane and smiles at the camera, 1910s. Dubbed America's 'Ace of Aces,' Rickenbacker had 26 victories in battle and was part of the first all-American air unit to see combat duty in World War I, the 94th Aero Pursuit Squadron.

All the manpower coming from the U.S. would not have meant much without safe transportation to Europe. That meant having a strong navy. The U.S. Navy was the best-prepared and best-equipped of all the country's armed forces. For many years, it had been focusing much of its energy on preparing for a surface naval confrontation with Germany. But a new threat had arisen: Germany had made significant progress in developing long-range submarines and devising attack tactics that could have posed severe threats to American shipping. German Navy U-boats had, in fact, devastated British merchant fleets so badly by 1917 that British defeat was imminent. In May 1917, the British Royal Navy pioneered the convoy system, in which merchant ships carrying men and materiel across the Atlantic didn't travel alone but in large groups. Collectively protected by America's plentiful armed escort ships, convoys were the key to saving Britain from defeat and allowing American ground forces to arrive in

Europe nearly unscathed. In fact, as military historian V.E. Tarrant wrote, “From March 1918 until the end of the war, two million U.S. troops were transported to France, for the loss of only 56 lives.”

Some of those Americans who made it to Europe climbed above the rest – right up into the air. The U.S. had pioneered military aviation. And in 1917, air power was coming into its own, showing its potential well beyond just intelligence gathering. Planes were becoming offensive weapons that could actively engage ground targets with sufficient force to make a difference on the battlefield below. But with fewer than 250 planes, the U.S. was poorly prepared for an air war in Europe. As a result, American pilots had to learn to fly British and French planes those countries could not man. Despite often lacking the weapons and technology required for success, it was ultimately the vast number of Americans – afloat, on the ground and in the air – and their ability to adapt and use foreign weapons on foreign soil that helped turn the tide of the war in favor of the Allies. [Source: The Conversation | David Longenbach | April 4, 2017 ++]

WWI Navy ► U-Boat Threat Led to Innovations

“We are ready now, sir” said Lt. Cmdr. Joseph Taussig, division commander for the first six U.S. destroyers to arrive in Europe (in Queenstown, now Cobh, Ireland) 100 years ago on May 4, 1917, in response to a question from the local British commander on when the U.S. destroyers could commence operations against German U-boats. It's not exactly what Taussig said, although the gist was correct, but it's what the British press reported. The “quote” became the most famous U.S. Navy rallying cry of the war. It was also a huge boost to British morale at a time when U-boats were sinking British merchant ships at a rate that gravely threatened the entire Allied war effort and Britain's very survival.

In many respects, however, the U.S. Navy (and the U.S. Army, too) were far from being ready to go to war. The U.S. had tried very hard to stay out of the First World War and the horrific carnage of millions of futile deaths that characterized the war. The British naval blockade of Germany, which disrupted U.S. trade to Europe, angered the U.S. almost as much as German actions. Even the sinking of the liner SS Lusitania by a German U-boat in 1915, and the loss of 128 of the 139 American civilians on board, was not enough to overcome intense opposition in the U.S. to going to war. Only belatedly did President Woodrow Wilson and Congress authorize serious preparations and a massive naval buildup (the Naval Act of 1916), but none of those new ships would be ready by the time the U.S. declared war on April 6, 1917, resulting from the German's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare that February.

World War I would profoundly change the U.S. Navy, and naval warfare, ever after. The rapid building program created the second-largest navy in the world. Two U.S. technological innovations early in the war, underway refueling and reliable radio-telephones, were significant in defeating the U-boat threat and revolutionized naval warfare. Social change in the Navy also was profound. Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels, a strong proponent of rapid technological development, also implemented programs aimed at improving the training, safety and living standards (and morals) of the Navy's enlisted ranks. In March 1917, Loretta Perfectus Walsh would enlist as the first “Yeoman (F),” and 13,000 more women would follow. Conversely, Daniels implemented racial segregation in the Navy, ending the full integration of blacks that had been the case in the enlisted ranks since at least the War of 1812.

In the end, the key contribution of the U.S. Navy was to prevent U-boats from sinking the transport ships that safely delivered 2 million U.S. troops to the Western Front in France — where they were then killed in large numbers, but which decisively changed the course of the war, resulting in Germany's rapid defeat after years of bloody stalemate. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Rear Adm. Samuel J. Cox (ret.) | April 5, 2017 ++]

WWII MRE ► Field Ration Connoisseurship

Here's something that may sound odd or disgusting to anyone who's ever served in the military: Field ration connoisseurship is a real thing. In fact, there's a whole subculture around collecting meals ready to eat. Like, really — people pay good money for old MREs and then they eat them...because they want to. The man in the video at https://youtu.be/hm8f5Kj_CrY, who goes by the YouTube handle Steve1989, is something of a celebrity in the MRE world. Steve is like Anthony Bourdain, except that, instead of traveling the world sampling exotic cuisines and meeting interesting people, he hangs out in his bedroom and eats dehydrated food. He has fans, lots of them. Many of his videos go viral.



Steve doesn't smoke stale government-issued cigarettes and stuff his face with decades-old crackers and sardines to shock people. He genuinely enjoys MREs. The older and more obscure, the better. In this episode — which is one of 105 videos he's posted to YouTube — Steve treats himself to a World War II U.S. Army Field Ration C B Unit, and gives us, the viewer, a little history lesson along the way. “The C-ration's original objective was to provide the soldier with a readily carried ration, which he could use in combat, independent of outside sources of supply and central preparation facilities,” Steve explains.

The real fun begins when Steve finally cracks open the ration. “Wow, check that out,” he says as we get our first glimpse at what's inside the tin can. “What a time capsule. It smells kind of fruity and wholesome.” Then, unable to restrain himself any longer, Steve digs in, beginning with a piece of a 75-year-old biscuit. “Mm, that is so crisp,” he says. Adding, “This oldie is making me shake already.”

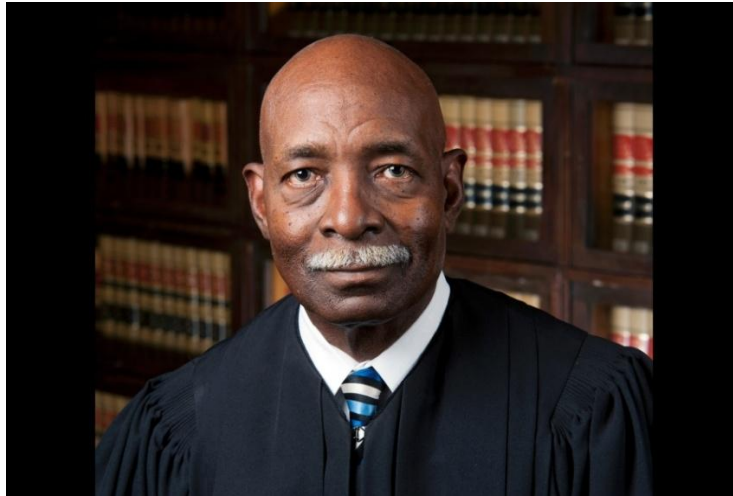
Steve discovers what appears to be mold as he prepares his meal, but that doesn't stop him. He eats the entire ration, and savors every morsel. His final assessment: “Absolutely amazing.” If Steve has somehow managed to make MREs seem appetizing to you, check out his website, MREinfo.com. There you can get all of the information you need to find and purchase MREs, which apparently average \$45-\$60 a case. Worth it? That depends on how much you enjoy being really, really constipated. [Source: Task & Purpose | Adam Linehan | April 4, 2017 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 16 thru 30 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 16 thru 30 APR**”. [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | February 2017 ++]

Vietnam Vets [23] ► Robert Rucker | Scrutinized by African-Americans

History has recorded the struggles many Vietnam veterans faced when they returned home from the war more than four decades ago. As the country was dealing with political divisions drawn between the establishment and anti-war movement and played out on the streets, the soldiers came home without parades or fanfare. Some were ostracized for answering the country's call. But Indiana Supreme Court Justice Robert Rucker, who earned a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star for his service in Vietnam, said he received an additional layer of scrutiny from African-Americans. "For (African-Americans) the rejection was more devastating," he said "We received a double dose from our community," adding that African-Americans questioned how he could fight abroad when they were fighting for civil rights in the United States.



Indiana Supreme Court Justice Robert Rucker, a Vietnam veteran who received a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star for his service in Vietnam, said he was scrutinized by African-Americans, who questioned how he could fight abroad when they were fighting for civil rights in the United States.

Rucker, a Gary native, was years away from college and law school. He said he was simply fulfilling the duty he was called to do. "I had no political agenda, no ax to grind," he said 4 APR. "My country called and I went just as some 3 million of my countrymen, served proudly and came home." As the featured speaker at a Vietnam Veterans Day luncheon at Purdue University Northwest opened up about his time spent in Vietnam and some of the struggles he dealt with integrating into civilian society when he returned home. "In Vietnam I was a grunt; an infantry soldier," Rucker said. "I'd go on patrol, carry ammo, water and food in that order." Akili Shakur, the Assistant Director of veteran Services at the university, said she feels like Rucker was able to connect with the veterans in the room. "I think that meant a lot to the individuals in the room who never received rank. It makes them feel like he's one of them. He's homegrown," she said.

The event gave many veterans an opportunity to reflect on their experiences in combat decades ago. "We have a bond because we know what all of us had to go through," said Jerome Grigsby, who served in the Marines in Vietnam. "We don't need to really reflect because you never forget what that place was like." In 1967, Grigsby was a 19-year-old Marine corporal. He said he remembers being trapped on a hill for 77 days. His memories are sharp. At age 69, he carries a history book where the battles he fought in are highlighted and his discharge papers that list the several medals he was awarded. "We lived in the trenches," he said. "That's what we had to endure. There was no calling mommy and daddy."

For decades, Rucker, like many Vietnam veterans, tried to move forward with his life and move forward from his service. "All I ever really wanted, without realizing it, was for somebody, anybody to simply say 'thank you, we're proud of you.'" After returning home Rucker went on to graduate from Indiana University Northwest and Valparaiso

Law School. After graduating law school, Rucker worked for almost 15 years as a deputy prosecutor and a city attorney for Gary before becoming the first African-American judge appointed to the Indiana Court of Appeals. In May, Rucker's distinguished career as a Supreme Court Justice will come to an end, when he steps down after serving 26 years on the bench.

The event was the fourth event the university has hosted to honor Vietnam veterans. "We do it because the first people to attend Purdue Calumet were 26 military students in 1946," Shakur said referring to students who enrolled at then Purdue Extension after World War II. But Shakur said honoring Vietnam veterans is a bit more personal for her. "I was in school when they started coming home and I remember how bad it was for them," she said. "I can't forget that." The Purdue event came shortly after Sen. Joe Donnelly (D-IN) co-authored a bill that will make March 29 National Vietnam War Veterans Day. Rucker said he doesn't want the efforts and sacrifices of veterans to go unnoticed.

"As a judicial officer of the court, I am confronted routinely with issues of civil and human and constitutional rights, but we know these rights do not defend themselves," he said. "Indeed they come with a price. And we acknowledge, as we must, that the direct link between the price Vietnam vets paid and the liberties and freedom that we all Americans enjoy. Indeed, justice is secure because we honored our promise to protect America." In his closing remarks Rucker emphasized one last point. "Don't blame the soldiers," he said. "Don't confuse opposition to the war with opposition to the warrior." [Source: Post-Tribune, Merrillville, Ind. | Javonte Anderson | March 31, 2017 ++]

WWII Vets 134 ► Wayne Carringer | Bataan Death Marcher

Sunday, 9 APR, was the 75th anniversary of the Bataan Death March, which claimed the lives of thousands of American and Filipino soldiers in World War II. On Sunday Army Veteran Wayne Carringer, one of the survivors, was honored at a ceremony this Sunday at the Charles George VA Medical Center in Asheville, N.C., where he is a resident of the Community Living Center. Carringer was only 17 when he enlisted in 1939, although he told the Army he was 19. He was sent to the Philippines and after Pearl Harbor was bombed, he was sent to Bataan. On April 9, 1942, Bataan was taken over by the Japanese. American and Filipino soldiers fought bravely with equipment and weapons left over from World War I. Bataan had no anti-aircraft batteries. Carringer became a prisoner of (POW) , surviving the brutal 60-mile Bataan Death March



“Thank God for giving me the courage and strength.”

He spent an entire year at Camp O'Donnell, which he recalls as a death factory. A number of Japanese officers involved in the march and POW camp were later tried for war crimes and executed or imprisoned. At the end of the year, Carringer was loaded onto a ship and taken to work in the Mitsubishi coal mines, working up to ten hours a day and receiving only a bowl of rice and cabbage leaf soup twice a day. "The POWs worked in groups of 10", he remembers. "The guards told us that if one tried to escape, the other nine would die." He was a Prisoner of War for more than three years.

Carringer, a staff sergeant, separated from service in 1946. When he finally made it home, back to North Carolina, Carringer started a family, a business and continued his service to the community, a longtime active member of the American Legion and the Masons, and a volunteer counselor at the VA. He says, "I thank God for giving me the courage and strength to endure the torture, the beatings and the humiliation to come home to the greatest country in the world." In the photo above, Carringer is awarded the "Order of the Long Leaf Pine," one of the most prestigious awards conferred by the Governor of North Carolina. The award is given to individuals who have served others in a manner that their actions have positively impacted the community around them and the State of North Carolina. At the 75th Anniversary event, participants gathered in the medical center atrium to commemorate the sacrifice of thousands of American and allied Servicemembers who lost their lives in the Bataan Death March or endured years of brutal treatment as Prisoners of War.

Cynthia Breyfogle, Medical Center Director: "While we may not be able to fully comprehend the extreme hardships, sacrifices and uncertainties that our allied soldiers endured during this difficult time, we can honor both the survivors and deceased by showing out appreciation for all Veterans – past, present and future – and by keeping our commitment in serving them just as they have served our country." [Source: Vantage Point | April 6 & 9, 2017 ++]

WWII Vets 114 ► Richard Overton | Oldest Living Vet



When the nation's oldest living veteran showed up to an event honoring him, he had four cigars sticking out of his jacket pocket. If you knew Richard Overton, 110, then you would know that's his style. On 7 APR, the healing garden at the VA Austin Outpatient Clinic in southeast Austin was officially named in Overton's honor. The World

War II veteran, who will soon turn 111 years old, served in the US Army Air Force. Overton says the event is a proud moment for himself as well as the community. “It makes me feel proud of myself, not only me, but makes y’all proud. I’m glad you all take your time out to take up this much time with me,” said Overton. The love for the veteran doesn’t stop at a garden. On Thursday, the Austin City Council approved a resolution to give the street where Overton lives in east Austin, Hamilton Avenue, the honorary name of “Richard Overton Avenue.” Overton built his home on Hamilton in 1945. Late last year his family, to raise money to pay for his at-home care, started a GoFundMe page at <https://www.gofundme.com/help-richard-overton>. Since then, thousands of people have donated more than \$168,000. [Source: KXAN-TV News | Calily Bien | April 7, 2017 ++]

Medal Of Honor Story ▶ **Miyanura-Hiroshi | WWII/ROK**



Go to https://www.legion.org/legiontv/PLHMR9MmnivfPEHKG6CSDJEBn3yF6jm5HM/_Q0bTwhVWvg to listen to MOH awardee Hiroshi H. Miyanura, World War II & Korean War Army veteran, reflects on actions that led to his earning the medal, surviving being a POW. [Source: The American Legion | April 2017 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ▶ **Femoyer, Robert E. | WWII**



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

Robert E. Femoyer

Rank and organization: Second Lieutenant, 711th Bombing Squadron, 447th Bomber Group, U.S. Army Air Corps

Place and date: Over Merseburg, Germany, 2 November 1944

Entered service: Jacksonville FL, November 11, 1942

Born: October 31, 1921, Huntington West Virginia

Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty near Merseburg, Germany, on 2 November 1944. While on a mission, the bomber, of which 2d Lt. Femoyer was the navigator, was struck by 3 enemy antiaircraft shells. The plane suffered serious damage and 2d Lt. Femoyer was severely wounded in the side and back by shell fragments which penetrated his body. In spite of extreme pain and great loss of blood he refused an offered injection of morphine. He was determined to keep his mental faculties clear in order that he might direct his plane out of danger and so save his comrades. Not being able to arise from the floor, he asked to be propped up in order to enable him to see his charts and instruments. He successfully directed the navigation of his lone bomber for 2 1/2 hours so well it avoided enemy flak and returned to the field without further damage. Only when the plane had arrived in the safe area over the English Channel did he feel that he had accomplished his objective; then, and only then, he permitted an injection of a sedative. He died shortly after being removed from the plane. The heroism and self-sacrifice of 2d Lt. Femoyer are in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Army.



Robert Edward Femoyer joined the Enlisted Reserve Corps on November 11, 1942 and was called to active duty in February 1943. He took basic training at Miami Beach, Florida, aircrew training at the University of Pittsburgh, and became an aviation cadet at the Mississippi Institute of Aeronautics in Jackson but failed his pilot training. In 1944, he graduated from the Army Air Force (AAF) Flexible Gunnery School at Fort Myers, Florida, and the AAF Navigation School at Selman Field, Louisiana. From his training assignments, he went to the European Theater in September 1944, as a second lieutenant and was assigned to the 447th Bomb Group's 711th Bombardment Squadron. Six weeks later, on November 2, 1944, he was the navigator of a B-17 Flying Fortress on a bombing mission over Merseburg, Germany which resulted in the loss of his life.

Femoyer is one of only nine known Eagle Scouts to receive the Medal of Honor; the others are Aquilla J. Dyess, Eugene B. Fluckey, Thomas R. Norris, Arlo L. Olson, Mitchell Paige, Ben L. Salomon, Leo K. Thorsness, and Jay Zeamer, Jr. He is the only navigator awarded the Medal of Honor. He attended Virginia Tech, from 1940 to 1943. Virginia Tech's Femoyer Hall is named for Second Lieutenant Femoyer, a member of the Class of 1944. Femoyer Hall was originally built as a residence hall in 1949, and is currently an academic building serving as the home to the Naval ROTC unit at Virginia Tech as well as houses the Student Success Center.

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

*** Health Care ***



Wheelchair Enhancement ► Waterproof PneuChair Runs on Air



A mobile wheelchair with no electronic components debuted at Morgan's Wonderland in San Antonio, a feature that will allow wheelchair-bound people to go places they never could before. The revolutionary wheelchair was unveiled at the Wonderland on 7 APR. It doesn't use any batteries and runs on air. The "PneuChair" also is waterproof. It glides with the simplicity of a joystick and weighs 80 pounds, a third of the weight of a normal wheelchair. Director of Human Engineering Research Laboratories Rory Cooper developed the chair, along with the University of Pittsburgh and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The chair does not have a single electronic component, which makes it 100 percent submersible. "You can get in a chair and literally drive into a pool," Cooper said. "You can go through the splash features or even the sprinklers in the front yard." The chair made its debut along with several other water-friendly wheelchairs. Gordon Hartman helped fund the innovative wheelchair. "Without this chair, we couldn't call Morgan's Wonderland ultra-accessible," he said. "This is making our dream come true." Although the prototype will begin at the amusement park, Cooper said it could be mass produced very soon. [Source: KENS 5 San Antonio | Natassia Paloma | April 08, 2017 ++]

Drug Cost Increases Update 06 ► Dirty Dozen

With the crisis over prescription drug prices intensifying in the United States, Prescription Justice on 12 APR released a new analysis of the top 12 drugs with the highest dollar price increases over the past five years. Using data compiled from public sources, all 12 of the "dirty dozen" on Prescription Justice's Rx Rip-offs list have risen

more than \$600 per monthly prescription over the past five years, and the top five medications on the list have all risen more than \$1,600 in that timeframe.

Rx Rip-offs: Top 12 Highest Dollar Prescription Drug Price Hikes

Ranking	Medication	Medical Condition	2012 Price*	New Price**	Price Difference	Percent age Change
1	Subsys-200MCG Spray	Pain Management	\$4,221.71*	\$7,388.00	\$3,166.29	75%
2	Aplenzin ER 522MG Tablet	Anti-Depressant	\$679.59	\$3,663.00	\$2,983.41	439%
3	Enbrel-50 MG-ML Sureclick SYR	Arthritis/psoriasis	\$2,147.69	\$4,188.00	\$2,040.31	95%
4	Duexis-800/26.6 MG Tablet	Arthritis/Stomach upset (Combo)	\$166.48	\$2,116.00	\$1,949.52	1171%
5	Simponi-50 MG-0.5 ML Syr	Rheumatoid arthritis	\$2,267.44	\$3,900.00	\$1,632.56	72%
6	Noritate- 1 % Cream	Rosacea	\$211.44	\$1,700.00	\$1,488.56	704%
7	Forteo-600 MCG-2.4 ML Pen INJ	Osteoporosis	\$1,284.91	\$2,724.00	\$1,439.09	112%
8	Fanapt 10 MG Tablet	Mental/Mood Disorders	\$651.04	\$1,875.00	\$1,223.96	188%
9	Banzel-400 MG Tablet	Epilepsy	\$1,057.35	\$2,231.00	\$1,173.65	111%
10	Zyflo CR- 600 MG Tablet	Asthma	\$817.33	\$1,839.00	\$1,021.67	125%
11	Adcirca	Hypertension	\$786.73	\$1,660.00	\$873.27	111%
12	Sensipar 60 MG Tablet	Chronic Kidney Disease	\$893.60	\$1,537.00	\$643.40	72%

*Prices reflect monthly prescription cost, and all prices are from 2012 except Subsys, which reflects the price as of 2013, when it first appeared on the NADAC.

** All new prices are as of September 2016

The No. 1 medication on the list is Subsys, an expensive pain management drug used primarily for unmanageable pain caused by end-of-life illnesses. From 2013 to the end of 2016, Subsys went from about \$4,200 a month to about \$7,300 — a price change of more than \$3,000. The No. 4 drug — Duexis — shows just how far pharmaceutical companies will go to hike prices for drugs that are otherwise affordable. Duexis is a combination of the relatively inexpensive, over-the-counter drugs ibuprofen and famotidine — the active ingredients in Advil and Pepcid, respectively. Used to treat arthritis pain and prevent stomach ulcers caused by high doses of ibuprofen, Duexis’ cost has risen 1171% — from \$166 per month in 2012 to \$2,116 today. If consumers were to buy the components of Duexis separately and over-the-counter, the monthly price would be closer to a mere \$34, Prescription Justice discovered.

“Drug companies are shamelessly price gouging consumers for prescriptions that cost far less in other Western countries,” said Jodi Dart, executive director of Prescription Justice. “Our new analysis shows the real impact these price increases are having on Americans’ wallets and proves once again how urgent this crisis is. We would urge President Trump and Congress to move swiftly on prescription drug pricing reforms to give consumers the relief they so desperately need.” The Rx Rip-offs list shows that prescription price hikes are not limited to medications that treat rare disorders. The drug costs that have risen the most treat common conditions from osteoporosis and depression to asthma and arthritis, the analysis shows.

The Prescription Justice Rx Rip-offs analysis of the top 12 highest dollar price increases was compiled using data from the National Average Drug Acquisition Cost database, a February investigative report from KUSA & KTVD-TV, GoodRx, and Drugs.com. Prescription Justice is a non-profit organization that brings together doctors, lawyers, public health advocates, and companies dedicated to helping people afford medication. Prescription Justice advocates for legislative and policy reforms to allow personal prescription importation, permitting Medicare to

negotiate drug prices, and ending “pay to delay” activities by pharmaceutical companies that prevent lower cost generics from coming to market. [Source: Prescription Justice | Jodi Dart 12 Apr 2017 ++]

TRICARE Dental Program Update 14 ► Improvements

Beginning on May 1, 2017, United Concordia Companies, Inc. (United Concordia) will manage the TRICARE Dental Program (TDP). Beneficiaries don’t need to take any actions to continue their coverage. The TDP is a voluntary dental benefit for eligible active duty family members, National Guard and Reserve members and their families. Several improvements to the TDP include:

- The annual maximum TDP will pay will increase from \$1,300 to \$1,500
- The TDP will consider sealants a free and preventive treatment, and no longer include a 20 percent cost share
- The auto-enrollment age for family members will lower from age four to one
- For most beneficiaries, the monthly premium rate will decrease
- The Active Duty Dental Program and TRICARE Retiree Dental Program will not change.

The TDP will continue to provide access to a network of civilian dentists around the world. Your access to quality care will not change. However, some dentists currently in the TDP network may leave, while new ones will join. So, those currently enrolled may need to find a new dental provider. To find participating dentists please visit: <https://www.uccitdp.com/find-a-dentist> . You may nominate dentists to participate by clicking on “Nominate Your Dentist” on the page linked above and completing a simple form. For more information regarding the TDP, please visit the TRICARE website or www.uccitdp.com . [Source: Tricare News Release | April 5, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Dental Program Update 15 ► Rate Changes Will Hurt Access

Military.com reported last week that dentists in several states are warning reimbursement rate decreases in the new Tricare dental contract will force providers to stop participating TRICARE. Dentists will then pass on higher out-of-pocket costs to active duty, Guard and Reserve dependents. Active duty military and activated Guard & Reservists will still get their dental work done by military dentists. The \$2.9 billion Tricare Dental Plan (TDP) contract for the families of active-duty, Guard and reserve troops is set to move from MetLife to United Concordia on 1 MAY. There are roughly 1.8 million dependent beneficiaries enrolled in the program. Military retirees will not be impacted by the new contract.

Although the change comes with several expansions to care for users, including an increased yearly cost cap and lower premiums, it also includes a decrease to the in-network rates paid to dentists for their services. That decrease, dentists told Military.com, in many cases will leave providers paying more to administer services than they will be reimbursed. The change, they said, will force many of them out of network and, in turn, increase the amount each Tricare user must pay out of pocket if they want to remain with their current provider. United Concordia reimbursement rates are based on region. Company officials declined to provide rate examples to Military.com, saying they are proprietary information. For more information, go to: <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2017/03/30/dentists-warn-new-tricare-rates-will-cause-drop-in-providers.htm>. [Source: TREA Washington Update | April 5, 2017 ++]

Children's Health ► Quiz | True or False

Things like mumps, measles and chickenpox are typical childhood diseases that everyone has heard of. But parents and their offspring have to deal with far more illnesses and ailments. Find out how familiar you are with the most common of them.

1. You can have scarlet fever several times, but you can only get chickenpox once.
 - True -- Unlike scarlet fever, you can in fact only get chickenpox once. If you have already had chickenpox once, you are immune to the virus for life. Both diseases are most common in preschool and school-age children. The typical signs of scarlet fever are a skin rash and a dark red tongue ("strawberry tongue"). Because scarlet fever is caused by bacteria, it can easily be treated with antibiotics. Chickenpox is highly contagious. Typical symptoms include a very itchy rash and a mild fever.
2. If children swallow too much fluoride toothpaste it can damage the enamel on their permanent teeth.
 - True -- Fluoride toothpaste has been proven to prevent tooth decay in children. But if they swallow too much of it, fluoride that gets into the bloodstream can damage the enamel of permanent teeth. This can happen when children swallow toothpaste or tooth gel that is supposed to be spat out. Typical signs of too much fluoride include white, yellowish, or brown stains and surface damage (fluorosis) in the enamel of the permanent teeth.
3. Fever in children is harmless 99% of the time and not a sign of a serious illness.
 - True -- Children are prone to fever. Even things like horseplay, excitement or warm layers of clothing can make children's body temperature rise, even when they are not ill. But fever is usually caused by an infection. Most fevers in children are caused by a harmless viral infection. They can be taken care of easily at home and will be fit and healthy again after two or three days. Only about 1 out of 100 children with fever has a serious illness.
4. Head lice are a result of poor hygiene.
 - False -- It is a common misconception that head lice are caused by poor hygiene. Head lice are simply very common and have nothing to do with dirt. They can spread very quickly from child to child.
5. Babies spit up milk because they have been overfed.
 - False -- Babies do not spit up just because they have been overfed. When babies regurgitate milk, it is simply because during their first year they put on weight very fast and need so much food that their digestive system sometimes can't cope with it properly. One half to two thirds of all babies spit up at least once a day until they are six months old, and they sometimes even need a little longer to grow out of it. Food that babies spit up is not considered to be vomit.
6. Children with eczema have most likely been infected by their siblings.
 - False -- Eczema is a non-contagious skin condition. It is relatively common. About 20% of all children in Germany are affected by it. By the age of 15, the condition will usually have improved or disappeared on its own in 70% of people. The causes of eczema are not fully understood, but genes are likely to play an important role. It is also thought that environmental pollution plays a role too. Science has shown that probiotic foods may be able to help prevent eczema.
7. Acute middle ear infections are one of the most common illnesses in infants.
 - True -- Acute middle ear infections are one of the most common illnesses in babies and infants. Most children will have had at least one acute middle ear infection by the age of three. In babies and young children, acute middle ear infections usually go hand in hand with a cold, a sore throat or sinusitis. In young children, the Eustachian tube is still very narrow and short, so it is easy for germs to spread from the nose and throat to the middle ear. Acute middle ear infections become less common over the age of seven.

8. If you have migraines as a child you will have to deal with them all your life.
 - False -- Children who have migraines will not necessarily continue to have them for the rest of their life. There is a very good chance that the migraines will even go away completely as you get older. But if migraines run in a child's family, there is a greater chance that they will continue to have them in later life.
9. Children who exercise shortly before going to bed will sleep better.
 - False -- The opposite is true. Intensive exercise right before bedtime can interfere with sleep. Rest and relaxation before bedtime are more beneficial.
10. The bladder has a sphincter too. After eventually learning to control it, a child won't wet the bed anymore.
 - True -- Bladder control mechanisms develop more slowly in children who wet their bed. To be able to control their bladder, the child's brain has to be able to detect and process nerve signals from the bladder, and they have to learn which signals mean that it is time to wake up. It also takes some time to develop control over the bladder muscles, and this developmental process varies from child to child. Parents can't speed things up.

[Source: Informedhealth.org | Newsletter | April 6, 2017 ++]

Back Pain Update 02 ► Not Many Benefit from Spinal Manipulation

Spinal manipulation might make a small difference in your lower-back pain, but it's unlikely to have you doing backflips right away, according to an analysis published 11 APR in the Journal of the American Medical Association. The research, which pooled 26 prior studies, found that spinal manipulation was linked to "modest improvements" in pain and function among people with short-term lower-back pain. Their pain improved an average of one point on a 10-point scale. "For acute back pain, this is usually not considered a clinically meaningful improvement," said Dr. Wolf Mehling, who practices at the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. Mehling was not involved in the JAMA study. The analysis did not include people with chronic low back pain, which lasts much longer. A 2011 Cochrane review failed to find good evidence that spinal manipulation was any better or worse than other treatments for chronic low back pain.

Mehling is one of two doctors he knows at UCSF who practice spinal manipulation and other chiropractic therapies. He said the new study lumps together many people who may have differing causes for their back pain. For this reason, a lackluster average drop in pain may actually hide people who do see a noticeable benefit. "It's not like everybody gets exactly a one-point benefit," said Dr. Paul Shekelle, one of the authors of the study and a physician at the VA Medical Center in West Los Angeles. "Some people get zero, but some people get a lot more." Previous research has suggested that some people are more likely to benefit from spinal manipulation than others: for example, those whose symptoms last fewer than 16 days, who have no pain below the knee and who are willing to remain active.

Mehling, who trained in both Germany and the United States, said that most American doctors do not receive training in spinal manipulation, nor do they know how to test whether a patient might be a good candidate. Often, those who practice the technique may be chiropractors or physical therapists. "Physicians in the US are not trained to put their hands on patients," he said. "In Germany, spinal manipulation ... is part of normal care."

"We're trying to take joints in your spine that have become too stiff and give them back their normal motion again," said William Lauretti, a spokesman for the American Chiropractic Association and an associate professor at New York Chiropractic College. Lauretti, who did not participate in the study, said spinal manipulation can take different forms, but the most common involves someone lying on their side on a low bench while a chiropractor twists and moves each spinal joint through its normal range of motion. "There are people who respond very, very

well to this," he said. But some experts say that a sample of patients with acute low back pain is inherently skewed. "We know that the vast majority of these patients will spontaneously get better whether or not we do anything," said Dr. Raj Rao, a spine specialist who has served on the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons' board of directors. Rao was not involved in the new analysis.

Two of the studies in the analysis compared spinal manipulation to a fake, placebo version of the therapy, while additional studies compared it to other treatments. But Rao said that, because spinal manipulation is practiced in different ways by many types of practitioners -- physical therapists, chiropractors and doctors included -- it can be hard to standardize how the research is conducted. Experts say there is a need for well-designed studies that can prove or disprove the benefits of spinal manipulation and whom it is most likely to help. In their analysis, Shekelle and his co-authors rated the quality of each study they included; over half were classified as "low quality."

"It makes me a little cautious about my interpretation of any results of the study," Rao said.

"There's no magic bullet out there, on average," said Shekelle, the study author. About four out of five people will have lower-back pain at some point, according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, making it a leading cause of missed work and disability. "Spinal manipulation is one of those therapies that on average has a small effect, and it's in your doctor's bag of things you can pull out and try," Shekelle said. By coincidence, Shekelle found that **the effect of spinal manipulation was about the same as anti-inflammatory drugs, such as Tylenol and Advil**, according to a 2008 Cochrane review. "All of this manipulation didn't change things that much but certainly adds to the cost of care," Rao said.

A first visit with a chiropractor, which typically includes an evaluation, may run between \$75 and \$200 depending on location and other factors, the ACA's Lauretti estimated. Followup visits may cost between \$30 and \$70. He said many insurance plans cover some sort of chiropractic treatment, but policies and co-payments can vary. Over-the-counter pills, on the other hand, are cheaper and widely available, but come with potential side effects like stomach ulcers, Lauretti said. But side effects are more likely at high doses and over long periods, according to experts. On the other hand, no "serious" harms were reported in the low back pain studies that were analyzed, but minor aches and pains were plenty. About half to two-thirds of patients treated with spinal manipulation had temporarily increased pain, muscle stiffness and headache. Lauretti said, "This is similar to what you might get if you did a workout for the first time."

So what to do about short-term back pain? Shekelle said that if something is safe and has worked for patients in the past, he doesn't mess with a good thing. He may ask his patients to start by applying heat and trying over-the-counter meds and said he generally follows the advice of the American College of Physicians. In February, that group published its own recommendations for treating low back pain, suggesting starting with noninvasive remedies like superficial heat, massage, acupuncture or spinal manipulation. They also listed NSAIDs and muscle relaxants, if people prefer to take medicines. "Physicians should avoid prescribing unnecessary tests and costly and potentially harmful drugs, especially narcotics, for these patients," Dr. Nitin Damle, the organization's president, said in a statement.

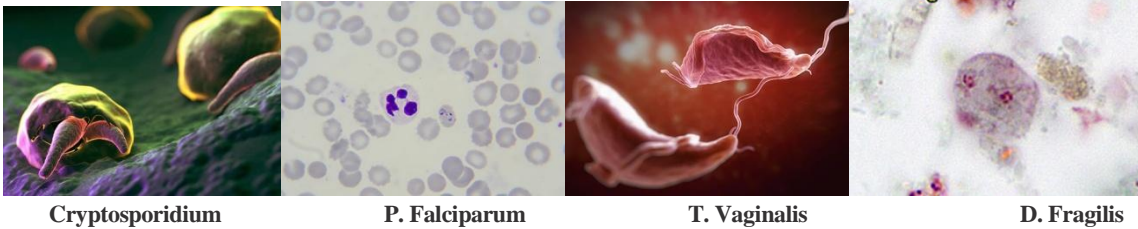
The group's review said that spinal manipulation was backed by "low-quality evidence," as well. Although the technique appeared to slightly improve function for short periods, there wasn't enough evidence to say that it had any impact on the back pain itself. No matter which path people take, Shekelle said several things are key:

- Reassurance that "the sky is not falling."
- Most patients get better no matter what
- It is important to remain active.

"When I first started out 30 years ago, we put everybody to bed for a week and told them to rest their back. It turns out we were probably causing more harm than good," Shekelle said, adding that the Department of Veterans Affairs, which requested the study, has integrated chiropractic care for years. Rao said that anecdotally, some patients do well with chiropractic therapies, which may be appropriate for short-term pain. "If you go to a

chiropractor (one or two times) and it makes a difference, I'm all for it," he said. "What I think I'm a little bit more cautious about ... is prolonged chiropractic care. "When any of us is in pain," he added, "we're willing to do almost anything to get relief." [Source: CNN | Michael Nedelman | April 11, 2017++]

Parasites Update 02 ► What's Eating You (3)



Cryptosporidium -- This bug's also called "crypto," and it affects your intestines. It's spread by contact with the stool of an infected person or animal. People tend to catch it from pool water, especially kids. The diarrhea it causes can last a long time, but it usually goes away on its own without treatment. **P. Falciparum** -- Some mosquitoes carry this parasite, which causes malaria. The disease kills more people than any other of its kind. It feels like the flu, and it causes body chills, fever, and sometimes nausea or vomiting. A doctor has to look at someone's blood under a microscope to tell if they have it. Early treatment is best. Certain prescription drugs can cure most types.

P. Falciparum

Some mosquitoes carry this parasite, which causes malaria. The disease kills more people than any other of its kind. It feels like the flu, and it causes body chills, fever, and sometimes nausea or vomiting. A doctor has to look at someone's blood under a microscope to tell if they have it. Early treatment is best. Certain prescription drugs can cure most types.

T. Vaginalis -- This parasite causes a sexually transmitted disease called trichomoniasis, the most common curable STD. Most infected people don't have any symptoms, but some may notice itching, burning, or irritation of their penis or vagina. It's treated with antibiotics.

D. Fragilis -- Doctors aren't sure how you get this parasite, which infects your large intestine. Some people have stomach pain and diarrhea, but others have no symptoms. It's common in all parts of the world. Your doctor can prescribe medicine to help you get rid of it.

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

TRICARE Podcast 391 ► TBI | Cervical Cancer | Travel

TBI & Substance Abuse -- Traumatic brain injury, or TBI, and substance use disorder share many symptoms, and one condition may often complicate the other. Research shows that substance misuse is responsible for 37 to 50 percent of all traumatic brain injuries. Substance misuse, particularly alcohol use, can complicate TBI in several ways including:

- Delayed or halted brain recovery. Alcohol can cause inflammation of the brain, which inhibits its ability to heal.

- Increased TBI symptom severity. Issues with memory, cognition and concentration can all increase when drinking alcohol.
- Worsening depression. Depression is eight times more prevalent among those with TBI. Alcohol also reduces the effectiveness of anti-depression medication.
- And dangerous interactions with TBI medications. Medicine for TBI can have adverse effects when paired with alcohol or other substances.

It's important to tell your provider all incidents of TBI and substance abuse. Lack of communication may lead your provider to wrongly attribute symptoms to a TBI when they are due to substance misuse, and vice versa. Go to <http://afterdeployment.dcoe.mil/blogs/expert/managing-co-occurring-substance-use-and-mental-health-disorders> to learn more about TBI and substance misuse.

-o-o-O-o-o-

Colorectal Cancer -- With the proper screening, you could avoid colorectal cancer. Unfortunately, many people avoid or delay screenings because they're 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. And if they're 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;
- Rectal bleeding, dark stools, or blood in the stool; or
- Persistent cramping or stomach pain.

If you experience any of these symptoms you should talk with your primary care provider right away. TRICARE covers colorectal cancer exams based on certain criteria. Visit the Colorectal Cancer Exams page at www.TRICARE.mil/ColorectalCancerExams to learn about the type of care available to you and your family.

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Getting Care While Travelling -- Are you on Spring Break or preparing for vacation? Either way, you should know how to get medical or dental care when you need it. Your rules for getting care depend on your TRICARE plan and travel destination. If you're using Prime, get your routine care from your primary care manager before you go. If you have an emergency, go to the nearest emergency room. However, if you decide you need urgent care, you need to get a referral from your doctor. Standard and Extra beneficiaries can visit any TRICARE-authorized provider for care, whether stateside or overseas. Keep in mind, if you're overseas, you may need to pay up front and file a claim with the overseas claims processor for reimbursement. If you need dental care and are enrolled in the TRICARE Dental Program, you can visit any licensed dentist for treatment. You can search for participating dentists at www.metlife.com/tricare . TRICARE Retiree Dental Program enrollees can search for a stateside dentist at <http://www.trdp.org> call Delta Dental's international dentist referral service collect at 1-312-356-5971. Don't forget about your prescriptions! TRICARE beneficiaries have several options for filling prescriptions; military hospitals or clinics, network pharmacies, non-network pharmacies and home delivery. Visit www.express-scripts.com/tricare for more information.

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | March 31, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 392 ► TRDP | Exercise | Childhood Obesity

TRICARE Dental Program. -- Effective May 1, 2017, United Concordia will assume responsibility for administering the TRICARE Dental Program, replacing the outgoing dental contractor, MetLife. Beneficiaries don't need to take any actions to continue their coverage. The TRICARE Dental Program is a voluntary dental benefit for eligible active duty family members, National Guard and Reserve members and their families. There are several improvements including:

- An increased annual maximum amount from \$1,300 to \$1,500;
- Sealants will be a free and preventive treatment, and no won't include a 20 percent cost share;
- The auto-enrollment age for family members will lower from age four to one;
- And for most beneficiaries, the monthly premium rate will decrease.

The Active Duty Dental Program and TRICARE Retiree Dental Program won't change. The TRICARE Dental Program will continue to provide access to a network of civilian dentists around the world. Your access to quality care will not change. However, some dentists currently in the TDP network may leave, while new ones will join. So, those currently enrolled may need to find a new dental provider. To find participating dentists please visit: <https://www.uccitdp.com/find-a-dentist>.

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Exercise Intensity -- The saying goes that “less is more,” but when it comes to exercise intensity, that might not be the case. We know that some exercise is better than no exercise, but is more-intense exercise better than moderate-intensity exercise? With the growing popularity of high-intensity workouts, it's important to consider both the risks and the benefits. Short-duration high-intensity interval exercise has similar, if not better, benefits compared to long-duration low-intensity exercise. These benefits include reduced risk for chronic disease, increased oxygen uptake, and overall improved exercise performance. You also can feel “afterburn” following high-intensity exercise, which means your body is burning calories even after you've completed your workout. The good news is that exercise intensity is relative, so you can benefit from exercise at a level that you consider high intensity, whether you're just starting out or you're a seasoned athlete. Shoot for your target heart rate as a good start to gauge intensity. Not every workout needs to top out the intensity scale. In fact, doing too much too often can lead to overtraining and injury. Remember to listen to your body and incorporate rest or light days into your workout regimen!

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Childhood Obesity -- Military hospitals and clinics are getting some help in the fight against childhood obesity. The 5210 Healthy Military Children campaign, a collaboration between the Defense Department's Office for Military Community and Family Policy and the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State University, provides some valuable tools in the battle. The program encourages children to get five or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day; fewer than two hours of recreational time in front of a TV, tablet, portable video game, or computer screen; one hour of exercise each day; and zero sugary drinks. Officials are promoting education efforts where military families live, work, and play. This includes doctor offices, recreation centers, and schools on base. Other specific messaging is placed at several locations around military posts and bases. For example, at the commissary, if a family knows the 5210 mnemonic and walks through the produce section and sees the logo, it reminds them to pick up fruits and vegetables.

Military Health System officials believe such awareness impacts readiness today, as well as the future of the force. According to Military OneSource, about 40 percent of service members have children. Many of those children follow their parents into military service. How they are cared for now is reflected in how they grow up and become functioning members of not just our military community but society as a whole. For healthy tips and resources visit <https://tricare.mil/livewell>.

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | April 7, 2017 ++]

*** Finances ***



Social Security Benefits Update 04 ► Five Steps to Financial Security

Nancy A. Berryhill, Acting Commissioner of Social Security, invites everyone to celebrate the first National Social Security Month in April by taking five steps toward financial security at www.socialsecurity.gov/5-steps-toward-your-financial-security. During the month, Social Security will provide educational articles and video messages on its website featuring personal finance expert Suze Orman. Each message will provide the public with practical tips for developing a sound financial plan that includes Social Security as a foundation.

“With retirement, disability, and survivors benefits, Social Security helps secure today and tomorrow for millions of people throughout life’s journey,” Acting Commissioner Berryhill said. “By hosting National Social Security Month, we hope to help the public understand their Social Security protections and promote financial education.”

The National Social Security Month campaign will emphasize the agency’s five key steps toward financial security:

1. **Get to know** your Social Security
2. **Verify** your lifetime earnings with a *my Social Security* account (<https://www.ssa.gov/myaccount>)
3. **Estimate** your future Social Security benefits at *my Social Security*
4. **Apply** online for retirement, disability, or Medicare benefits
5. **Manage** your Social Security benefits

On average, Social Security replaces approximately 40 percent of pre-retirement earnings. To enjoy a comfortable retirement, most people will also need income from other sources — like pensions, savings, and investments. Yet nearly a third of America’s workers have no money set aside specifically for retirement. Throughout the month of April, groups and organizations will join Social Security across the country to help spread the word. The agency will be conducting social media outreach, including a Facebook Live Chat:

Social Security will participate in a [Facebook Live Chat](#), hosted by USA.gov, on April 20, 2017, at 7:00 p.m. ET. The public may ask questions via livestream about the “5 Steps Toward Financial Security.” To participate, follow [USA.gov](#) and [Social Security](#) on Facebook. [Source: DAV | Marilyn Lewis | March 6, 2017 ++]

Car Loan ► How to Obtain - What to Expect

It appears that banks are tapping the brakes on easy car loan approval and tightening their lending rules. Vehicle sales in the U.S. plummeted to a two-year low in March, and caution on the part of banks might be a contributing

factor. Why are some lenders reeling in their auto loan approvals? According to CNBC, “after an extended period of low rates and easy money” for auto loans, lenders are now tightening their standards because of rising auto loan delinquencies. ValueWalk, a financial industry news site, reports that a recent Morgan Stanley Research report revealed that “subprime auto delinquencies are currently approaching crisis-era peak levels,” similar to the car loan default levels reached before the Great Recession.

If you’re in the market for a new loan, this might be bad news. Still, there are ways to get the money you need to buy the car of your dreams. Before you head to the car lot, check out “Don’t Take Out a Car Loan Before Reading This,” at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/dont-take-out-car-loan-before-reading-this> for tips on how to shop for a car loan, how to avoid common pitfalls and how to understand the actual cost of a car loan. One thing to keep in mind is length of the loan. As Marilyn Lewis writes in “Need a Car Loan? Here’s How to Get the Best Deal“: <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/4-simple-steps-get-the-very-best-car-loan%E2%80%8B>. Getting fixated on monthly payments can blind you to the actual cost of your loan and how long it’ll take you to pay it off. Shorter loans are cheaper, even though the payments probably will be higher, because you’ll pay fewer fees and less interest. Longer loans often carry a higher interest rate.

You can shop for loans online <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/rates/auto-loans>. If nothing else the site's table will give you a target set of figures when you type in the type of auto loan needed, your credit score, and loan amount. As you adjust each parameter it will give you the number of monthly payments, interest rate, and number of months necessary to pay of the loan.. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | April 11, 2017 ++]

Car Shopping ► Know Your Profile to Get the Best Deal

Spring auto shopping is underway — and as clever, as unique, as savvy as you think you are, you likely fit into one of three car buyer profiles:

- **Beeliners:** These are the buyers who know exactly what they want and make a beeline for the make and model.
- **Bargain hunters:** These are very cost-conscious buyers. They compare as many listed prices on various models as they can find.
- **Deal makers:** Yes, bargain hunters are cost-conscious, but deal makers go beyond those frugal buyers. Deal makers look for low prices and then seek to make deals that take the prices even lower.

This is according to the oft-quoted Rick Wainschel, AutoTrader’s vice president of automotive insights, according to Ward’s Auto (<http://wardsauto.com/dealer/online-tracking-reveals-three-types-car-shoppers>) . And according to his analysis, getting the best deal means being aware of how you shop for a vehicle. So, consider: Which one are you? Deciding will help you find the best car at the best price for your shopping style. Here are five expert shopping tips tailored for different types of car shoppers:

1. Compare - This advice is especially important for bargain hunters and deal makers:

Yes, we know you research styles and prices. But what about safety? Do you know there is an array of passive safety features (such as air bags) and active safety features (such as lane-departure warning signals)? Which ones are included on the model you’re eyeing? What about warranties? What service, if any, is included in the purchase price? All of the variables should be considered before you decide on a specific model at a dealership, noted Kelley Blue Book (<https://www.kbb.com/car-advice/car-buying/step-4-do-your-research-online/?r=97972035815100380>) Don’t assume you know what is included in the purchase price. Research it.

2. Talk to owners - This is for you, beeliners:

We've all spoken to people who are die-hard lovers of a certain brand of car. But the models rolling off assembly lines today might be different from those of yesteryear. New materials, new technology and other tweaks have left some buyers disappointed. Don't just read expert reviews about cars. Talk to owners of the current model you consider — whether through on social media or friends — to ensure the car you covet is really the one for you, recommended KBB.

3. Consider a preowned car - Good for beeliners, bargain hunters and deal makers:

Even if you're a die-hard new car buyer, you surely know that used cars are generally a much better bargain. That's especially true when car manufacturers don't make major changes to a car between model years. Many times you'll find that a manufacturer's changes are so minor, they are rarely outlined. Consider a certified preowned (CPO) car, recommended AutoTrader (<http://www.autotrader.com/car-shopping/how-to-save-money-when-buying-a-car-238531>). You'll save thousands on a lightly used car with a full warranty (sometimes a warranty might even top that of a new car) and receive extras (satellite radio, enhanced wheels) also without added cost.

4. Remain flexible - This addresses you, especially, deal makers:

It's a rare auto dealer who doesn't have perfectly good cars on the lot that just aren't moving. And dealers need to move those cars — whether they're new or used — to make way for new stock. Ask to see the car that the dealer has in stock rather than asking for a special order or dealer trade. You'll likely find dealers are much more willing to bargain on cars they have in stock than those that require them to order or trade, reported AutoTrader.

5. Simplify comparisons - Here's a tip for you, bargain hunters:

It's difficult to figure out which car dealer offers a better price because of the various options on models. One way to better understand the prices offered by different dealers is to ask how much the price is over invoice, advised Edmunds. <https://www.edmunds.com/car-buying/the-nonconfrontational-path-to-car-buying.html>? “In other words, if a salesperson says the car is \$23,457, you can ask, ‘How much over invoice is that?’ The answer might be that it's \$500 over invoice,” Edmunds wrote. “Using the ‘amount over’ invoice, you can then assume that, even when the options change, the price will be about the same in relationship to the invoice price of the vehicle. This is a handy way to simplify pricing and make accurate comparisons.”

Sure, it's great to find a car at a bargain price. But before you commit, consider this caveat from former car salesperson Matt Jones, Edmunds' Senior Consumer Advice editor (<https://www.edmunds.com/car-buying/top-shopping-tips-from-a-former-car-salesman.html>): “Make sure you really like the car you're buying and that it really meets your needs,” he wrote. “It sounds so obvious, but go check how many one- and two-year-old used cars sit on car lots. Most of them are trade-ins from people who just bought the wrong car. Take your time and make the right choice.” Otherwise, your bargain might not be a bargain, no matter your shopper profile and skills.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Nancy Dunham | April 11, 2017 ++]

Home Sale Tax Exemption ► How It works

Will you pay tax on the sale of your home? Likely not, unless you have gains that are more than \$250,000 (or more than \$500,000 for married couples). It used to be that once you reached the age of 55, you had the one-time option of excluding up to \$125,000 of gain on the sale of your home (your primary residence). That rule changed in 1997. Now, anyone, regardless of age, can exclude \$250,000 of gain (\$500,000 for a married couple filing jointly) on the sale of their home. That means most people will pay no tax on the sale of their home - unless they have lived there for less than two out of the last five years. You can use this capital gain exclusion to avoid tax on a home sale over and over.

As with all IRS regulations, there are rules you must follow to qualify for the tax-free gain. Below is an overview of the tax rules that apply when you sell your home. To qualify for the capital gain tax exclusion on your home sale, you must meet the following IRS requirements:

- Owned the home for at least 2 years (the ownership test),
- Lived in the home as your main home for at least 2 years (the use test - if you plan on renting your home for part of the year study this use test carefully, the amount of gain you can exclude from taxes may be proportional to how much you use it vs. rent it), and
- During the 2-year period ending on the date of sale, you did not exclude gain from the sale of another home.

How Are Gains or Losses Calculated? Calculate the capital gain on your home by taking the original purchase price of the home (what you paid for it), less any applicable selling costs, less the cost basis (what you paid for the home plus the cost of any qualifying home improvements.) For example, let's say you paid \$100,000 and spent \$20,000 in additions. Your cost basis is \$120,000. You then take the price your house sells for less any commissions. Let's say your house sells for \$250,000 and commissions and fees were \$6,000. You receive \$244,000. The difference between the \$244,000 and the \$120,000 is your capital gain. If you have lived in the home for the past two years, and meet the other requirements, you will not pay tax on this gain. If you have a loss - meaning your home is worth less than what you paid - you do not get to take the loss as a tax deduction.

What If You Have More than \$250k (\$500k if Married) of Gains? You will pay taxes on a home sale on amounts of gain that are more than the excludable amount. This type of gain is taxed at the capital gains tax rate. To help reduce the amount of taxable gains, keep receipts and records of any improvements you made to the home. Certain types of home improvements can be added to your cost basis, and will thus reduce the amount of reported gain.

What If You Haven't Owned and Lived in the Home for at Least Two Years? If you've owned the home less than one year, any gain over the excludable amount is taxed at a rate that will be the same as your ordinary income tax rate. If you've owned the home longer than one year, the capital gains tax rate will apply, which will likely be lower than your ordinary income tax rate.

How to Use Tax-free Home Equity to Accumulate Retirement Wealth. You can use this tax exclusion on gains to accumulate retirement assets. For example: Every two years you could buy land and build the family a new home. As soon as they moved into the new home you would sell the old home and use some of the tax-free money from the sale of that home to begin building the next one. Although moving every two years is not for everyone, it does allow you to accumulate assets tax-free. Every two years you could use some of the tax-free gains to build the next home and deposit some into your investment account. The risk of this strategy is that during times where real estate depreciates, this plan won't work. You could get stuck holding two homes for several years until the market recovers.

[Source: The Balance | Dana Anspach | February 17, 2017 + +]

Watching You Online Scam ► How It works

Creepy Email Con Claims to Be Watching You Online. This Email Scam Has Your Name, Address... and an attached Virus. It tries to trick recipients into downloading a malware-infected attachment. Sounds standard, right? It is, except this con has their targets' names and addresses, and claims to be monitoring their behavior online.

How the Scam Works

- You receive an email informing you that you've been caught performing fraudulent activities online. One version claims you've been using PayPal to illegally transfer funds. The accusation is false, of course, but the email has your real name and address (although targets report that the address is frequently out of date).
- The email's author warns that someone has been monitoring your online activities and collecting evidence to take to the police. Luckily, the scammer has attached the incriminating evidence to the email, so you can see it and respond. How kind!
- No matter how curious you are, don't download the file! The attachment adds malware to your device, which scammers then use to capture passwords or hunt for sensitive information.

How to Spot an Email Scam:

- Be wary of unexpected emails that contain links or attachments . Do not click on links or open files in unfamiliar emails.
- Check the reply email address. One easy way to spot an email scam is to look at the reply email. The address should be on a company domain, such a jsmith[at]company.com.
- Don't believe what you see . Just because an email looks real, doesn't mean it is. Scammers can fake anything from a company logo to the "Sent" email address.
- Consider how the organization normally contacts you . If an organization normally reaches you by mail, be suspicious if you suddenly start receiving emails or text messages without ever opting into the new communications.
- Be cautious of generic emails . Scammers try to cast a wide net by including little or no specific information in their fake emails. Be especially wary of messages you have not subscribed to or companies you have never done business with in the past.

For more information on avoiding scams, go to www.bbb.org/avoidscams. To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker www.bbb.org/scamtracker. Learn more about scams using PayPal's name, check by checking out this FAQ at <https://www.paypal.com/us/selfhelp/article/How-to-spot-fake-emails-FAQ2340>. NOTE: PayPal is a BBB Accredited Business. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | March 31, 2017++]

Civil Complaint Scam ► How It works

Some scams just don't quit! Debt collection cons are one of the most prevalent scams, often there's a new twist. This time, scammers are scaring victims into paying by claiming to have filed a "civil complaint" against them.

How the Scam Works:

- You receive a call from someone claiming to be collecting money for an overdue payment. This "collection agent" informs you that a civil complaint was filed against you. Con artists do a great job of making this seem real. The scammer may provide specific details, such as the amount of the debt, the complaint case number and a phone number where you can follow up. As convincing as the information seems, it's all phony.
- If you call the number, another "agent" will claim that the company tried to contact you about the debt. Now, to avoid a pending lawsuit, you need to pay immediately. To do so, you need to make a wire transfer or load a prepaid debit card with the funds immediately.
- Don't do it! No matter how intimidating the threats seem, these phony collection agents don't have any legal power. In most cases, the debt doesn't even exist.

Protect Yourself from Debt Collector Cons:

- To keep yourself protected against debt collector scams know your rights.

- Just hang up: If you don't have any outstanding loans, hang up. Don't press any numbers or speak to an "agent."
- Ask the debt collector to provide official "validation notice" of the debt. In the U.S., and most of Canada, debt collectors are required by law to provide the information in writing. The notice must include the amount of the debt, the name of the creditor and a statement of your rights. If the self-proclaimed collector won't provide the information, hang up.
- Ask the caller for his/her name, company, street address, and telephone number. Then, confirm that the collection agency is real.
- Do not provide or confirm bank account, credit card or other personal information over the phone until you have verified the call.
- Check your credit report. In the U.S., check with one of the three national credit reporting companies (Equifax, TransUnion, Experian). In Canada, check with Equifax Canada. This will help you determine if you have outstanding debts or if there has been suspicious activity.
- Place a fraud alert on your credit report. If the scammer has personal information, place a fraud alert with the three national credit reporting companies.

For more information check out this article at <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/stand-fake-debt-collectors> from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) about dealing with fake debt collectors. See other Scam Alert coverage of debt collection scams at <http://www.bbb.org/debtcollectionscam> . To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker at <https://www.bbb.org/scamtracker/us>. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | April 7, 2017 ++]

Pet Adoption Scam ► How It works

As warmer weather arrives and the end of the school year approaches, many American families are likely to be considering adding a four-legged friend to their households. Adopting a pet is usually a time of celebration and excitement. However, if you are not careful, fraudsters can take advantage of your eagerness to adopt that adorable puppy and scam you out of hundreds or even thousands of dollars. Since the beginning of 2017, Fraud.org has received dozens of complaints from consumers about fraudulent puppy sales.

How the Scam Works

- In a typical pet adoption scam, a consumer will see an advertisement for an animal, most commonly a dog, accompanied by heartwarming cute pictures. The puppy seller will usually claim to be far away, but will offer to ship the puppy to the new owner's location. Unfortunately for the buyer, the fraudster doesn't truly have any puppies for sale and is just sending pictures of puppies found on the Internet.
- Once the buyer sends the money, the fraudster will come up with extra fees like crate rentals, pet insurance, vet bills, and unexpected shipping costs that must be paid before the "puppy" can be delivered to its new home. As long as the victim is willing to pay, the scammer will continue adding on new fees. Additionally, the fraudster typically uses untraceable wire transfers so once the consumer catches on, their money is long gone.

A woman from Alabama recently shared her puppy scam story with Fraud.org. After wiring \$500 to purchase a puppy online, the seller requested \$50 for shipping. When the time came to ship the puppy, "they wanted an additional \$400 for health insurance" to cover the dog during transport. After that, the seller then wanted more money for "special airport gate" fees. After the seller's last request, the woman realized she was being scammed and stopped sending money. Unfortunately, puppy sale scams remain popular among fraudsters.

Tips to Avoid This Scam: There are several steps a consumer should take:

- Skip the pure breed puppy requirement and adopt from a local shelter. There are an abundance of reputable non-profit animal shelters (<https://www.aspca.org>) out there to choose from. By choosing to adopt your new family member instead, you will not only protect yourself from fraud, you will also benefit a worthy cause.
- Always meet your future pet in person before paying. Fraudsters will come up with a million reasons why you can't see the pet in person and will offer you pictures instead. Insist on seeing the pet in person. If the seller will not allow you to see the animal in person, it's almost certainly a scam.
- Never wire money for any purchase. If the seller asks for payment via wire transfer, that's a big red flag of fraud. Also beware of requests to pay by reloadable prepaid card, iTunes gift card, or another unusual payment method.
- Do your research. Websites and postings that fraudsters use can appear to be realistic because they steal photos and language from reputable breeders. Try copying some text from their page and pasting it into a search engine in quotes and see if another breeder uses that same language. If another website uses the same or similar language, you may be dealing with a scammer.
- Check references. Do your own due diligence about the background of the seller. A good place to start is
 - <http://www.akc.org/press-center/facts-stats/responsible-breeders> American Kennel Club; and
 - http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/puppy_mills/tips/finding_responsible_dog_breeder.html?referrer=https://www.google.com Humane Society of the United States.
- Don't trust "free pet" offers. Fraudsters will sometimes use the offer of a "free pet to a good home," as a way to ensnare an adopter into paying for made up vet bills or fake shipping costs.
- Make sure their pet shipper is legitimate. If you do take the risk of having your pet shipped, ask for the name and contact information of the shipping company they intend to use. After you have the name, use a search engine to find that shipping company and give them a call from the number on their website to make sure they know the breeder.

While the vast majority of pet breeders are legitimate, it can sometimes be difficult to spot a fraud. If you suspect that you have become a victim, report it immediately. You can file a complaint at www.Fraud.org via their secure online complaint form at <https://secure.nclforms.org/nfcweb/nfic.htm> . They'll share your complaint with their network of law enforcement and consumer protection agency partners who can and do put fraudsters behind bars. To learn more about puppy scams, go to http://www.fraud.org/pet_adoption_scams. [Source: Fraud.org | April 3, 2017++]

Citgo Russian Ownership ► Could Happen by End of 2017

In a crazy twist of international events, Russia's state-owned oil company Rosneft might end up owning Citgo, a US energy company based in Houston, Texas. This isn't a direct takeover. Instead, it hinges on the ability of Venezuela's state-run oil company to pay back its Russian loan. The Venezuelan company owns Citgo, which was used as collateral for the loan. Both Republican and Democratic lawmakers are highly alarmed. In hotly worded letters to the Trump Administration in recent days, members of Congress and senators warned that it could be a big problem for US national security if Russia gets a hold of Citgo.

"We are extremely concerned that Rosneft's control of a major US energy supplier could pose a grave threat to American energy security, impact the flow and price of gasoline for American consumers, and expose critical US infrastructure to national security threats," a bipartisan group of senators led by Republican Marco Rubio of Florida and Democrat Bob Menendez of New Jersey wrote 10 APR in a letter to US Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin.

All of this comes as tension is high between US and Russia over the conflict in Syria, cyber crime and Russia meddling in US elections, among other disputes. Rosneft is also currently on the US sanctions list for "violating international law and fueling conflict in Ukraine."

This entire situation stems from the fact that Venezuela has been desperate for cash lately. Venezuela's state-run oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), has owned Citgo since the 1980s. In exchange for a loan from Rosneft in December, Venezuela's oil company put up a large stake (49.9%) in Citgo as collateral. If PDVSA can't pay its bills on time, Rosneft will almost certainly get control of Citgo. All Rosneft would need to do is buy a few more of PDVSA's bonds to get over the 50% ownership threshold. "The Russians have a lot to gain through the PDVSA-Rosneft-Citgo asset transfer to the detriment of US interests," wrote Republican Congressman Jeff Duncan and Democratic Congressman Albio Sires in a letter to Mnuchin on Thursday. "We urge your immediate attention and review of this matter." Mnuchin is chair of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, which determines whether foreign ownership of US companies or assets is a good idea.

While Venezuela or PDVSA won't run out of money immediately, there is a reasonable chance they will by the end of 2017. That could mean PDVSA won't be able to pay back the Russian loan. It won't happen this week, says Francisco Monaldi, a fellow in Latin American Energy Policy at Rice University's Baker Institute. "But they may default with their next big payment in October or November." Russia has a history of playing politics with its oil and gas supplies. It has cut off natural gas to Ukraine several times when it's unhappy with what's going on there. It's one of the key reasons Europe has been trying to wean itself off Russian gas because of national security concerns. However, even if Rosneft does get control over Citgo, it's unlikely Russia would be able to do much to hurt US oil and gas prices.

"The Russians can't hold the US hostage," says John LaForge, an energy expert and head of Real Assets strategy at Wells Fargo. He says Citgo handles about 800,000 barrels of oil a day. While it's not miniscule, that's just a small fraction of the nearly 20 million barrels of petroleum the US consumes daily. If Rosneft stopped refining oil at Citgo's three US refineries, LaForge says, "Other refineries would love to pick up the slack." Citgo and the US Treasury did not return CNNMoney's request for comment. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Heather Long | April 10, 2017 ++]

Tax Burden for New Mexico Retired Vets ► As of APR 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 Mexico.

Sales Taxes

Gross Receipts Tax: 5.125% (prescription drugs exempt); county and city taxes may add another 1.500%. Certain food and medical expenses are exempt.

Gasoline Tax: 37.28 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 47.28 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$1.66/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 17%; High – 4.9%.

Income Brackets: Four. Lowest – \$5,500; Highest – \$16,000

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$4,000; Married – \$8,000; Dependents – \$4,000

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

Standard Deduction: Single – \$6,300; Married – \$12,600

Medical/Dental Deduction: Credit of 3% of unreimbursed prescription drug expenses to maximum of \$150 per individual or \$300 per return. Also, if you or your spouse are age 65 and over and have unreimbursed or uncompensated medical care expenses of \$28,000 or more for yourself, your spouse or dependents during the tax year, you are eligible for a \$3,000 exemption and a credit of \$2,800.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: The state offers a low- and middle income exemption. The maximum exemption is \$2,500. To qualify, the amount on line 7 of the state income tax form must be equal to or less than \$36,667 (single), \$27,500 (married filing separately), or \$55,000 (married filing jointly). A deduction also applies for those 65 and older if your adjusted gross income is not over \$51,000 for a joint return, \$28,500 for a single taxpayer, or \$25,500 for a married taxpayer filing separately.

Retired Military Pay: See above

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

Property Taxes

All property, whether real or personal, is subject to state and local property taxes. Rates vary substantially and depend on property type and location. The statewide weighted average rates, i.e., total obligations/total net taxable value, are about \$26.47 for residential property. Assessors usually determine market value by the sales-comparison approach which matches a property's value to that of similar properties. The valuation of a residence that did not change hands in the prior year may not increase by more than 3% annually. One-third of the property's market value (assessment) is its taxable value. The taxable value may be further reduced by exemptions of \$2,000 each of heads of households and \$4,000 for veterans.

There is a property tax rebate for residents age 65 and older. Their modified gross income cannot exceed \$18,000 for the tax year and they cannot have been claimed as a dependent on another taxpayer's return. Homeowners 65 and older who earn \$18,000 (\$25,000 in Sandoval County) or less are eligible for a credit of up to \$250 (married filing jointly) or \$125 for single taxpayers. Call 505-827-0870 for details.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax but an inheritance may be reflected in a taxpayer's modified gross income and taxed that way. The estate tax is related to federal estate tax collection. It applies to the New Mexico portion of the net estate as a proportionate share of the federal credit for state estate taxes. The net estate located in New Mexico of a nonresident is also taxable as a fraction of the federal credit.

Visit the New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department website <http://www.tax.newmexico.gov> for further information. [Source: <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#NEWMEXICO> | April 2017 ++]



Notes of Interest ► 1 thru 15 APR 2017

- **Stolen Valor.** Check out the video at <https://youtu.be/Pf8vTmw1w-k>.
- **Trump.** President Trump will donate the first three months of his salary (\$78,333.32) to the National Park Service, the White House announced 3 APR.
- **Gerald Ford.** The long-delayed supercarrier Gerald Ford set sail for builders' trials the first week of APR. If those builders' trials and subsequent Navy acceptance trials go well, Vice Adm. Thomas Moore told reporters at the Sea-Air-Space conference, "I think we'll get the ship delivered in the April-May timeframe and then we can move on with commissioning."
- **PRK.** US secretary of state Rex Tillerson issued a remarkably brief statement—"no comment". *North Korea launched yet another intermediate range ballistic missile. The United States has spoken enough about North Korea. We have no further comment.*
- **Baseball.** Several major league teams have announced they'll be providing discounted game tickets to present and past members of the military. For more information click on the following link to see if your favorite team is listed: http://www.military.com/discounts/military-discounts-for-major-league-baseball-games.html?ESRC=eb_170331.nl. Even if it's not you should check your team's website to see if they have discounts for military members.
- **USMC.** The nation's longest-serving Marine, Col. Edmund Bowen, has officially retired after more than 43 years of service.
- **USS Constitution.** After 2 years restoration work on "Old Ironsides" is nearly complete, and the world's oldest commissioned warship afloat is expected to return to the waters at the historic Charlestown Navy Yard on 23 JUL, officials said.
- **Towels.** Go to <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B7JMcGNEHdeYdFdJOHZvWnI5ejQ/view?pli> for a good laugh on their use.
- **Syria Strike Aftermath.** Russia has notified the U.S.-led coalition of its intent to suspend a communication channel for avoiding air accidents in the crowded airspace over Syria. The air safety agreement with the United States was originally drawn up to ensure that the two countries' planes did not collide.
- **Post-911 Vet Employment.** After a significant dip in February, the unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans ticked up again in March. Five percent were unemployed in March, according to data released 7 APR by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- **USMC OOPS!** A \$4,000 radio cable priced at \$64,000 was one of several wrongly valued parts discovered in the Marine Corps supply system in March, military officials said following an investigation.
- **United Airlines.** If you haven't seen it check out Jimmy Kimmel's parody on United Airlines at https://youtu.be/HV28_ENzFog.
- **Congress.** Congress is now on its two-week Easter recess after what some have described as a "flurry of inactivity" since January - or to borrow a line from Shakespeare, Congress has so far been "all sound and fury signifying nothing."
- **USNS Mercy.** Check out this video on the thousand bed Deployable Medical Center USNS Mercy at <https://www.dvidshub.net/c0ea4c44-5726-4eb5-99bd-4978d1cacdc0>.

- **Tax & Vet Issues.** MOAA has consolidated their annual State Report Card and State Tax Guide at http://www.moaa.org/StateReport/?utm_source=NexPaid&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=StateReportCard which includes a 2017 State Tax Comparison Map for Military Retirement Pay and SBP plus a 2017 Map of Issues Affecting Currently Serving Troops and Families.
- **Free Park Admission.** If you have family and friends in town this holiday weekend, take them out for a free day or two at your favorite national park. The National Park Service is offering four full days of free admission over the next two weekends — April 15-16 and 22-23. Admission is waived for all [400 national parks](#) on those days. Normally, [124 parks](#) charge an entrance fee. The other parks are free throughout the year.
- **Japan WWII Surrender.** Go to https://www.youtube.com/embed/vcnH_kF1zXc to view actual footage of the Japanese surrender aboard the USS Missouri.

The Accidental Hero ► Matt Konop

The Accidental Hero is a multi-media one-man show about a WWII American officer who miraculously liberates the Czech villages of his grandparents. It's a true story, written and performed by his grandson. Patrick Dewane's grandfather refused to talk about his service in the war. Yet when he died, his basement yielded a treasure trove of typewritten accounts, photos and rare film footage. Dewane brings this archival material to glowing life as an enthralling, humorous and heartwarming tale of miraculous escapes and astonishing coincidences. This touching show runs from belly laughs to tears. Dewane takes on a dozen different roles as he powerfully recounts his grandfather's journey from Omaha Beach, the Battle of the Bulge, and the end of WWII.



Matt Konop carried by townspeople of Domazlice, Czechoslovakia, 1945.

In the last week of the war, Konop's story turns away from a soldier's survival tale to something from mythology. He discovers his lost identity, embraced by the tribe he never knew. Like Luke Skywalker, Konop thought he was just fighting the Evil Empire, in this case the Nazis. But unlike Skywalker, this story is true. His was an epic homecoming. As he freed the Czechs, they liberated him. Audiences across the US and the Czech Republic have thrilled to this remarkable, uplifting story from The Greatest Generation. Konop's grandparents had left the Old Country in the 1860s to pursue the American Dream. Konop was raised with their language, Czech, but expected to "become American." To get ahead, he needed to discard the old ways and his first language.

Dropped into WWII, his fluency in Czech got him the dangerous assignment of commanding the Advance Party to liberate Czechoslovakia. And once at the Czech border, his curiosity drew him into the country of his

grandparents, well ahead of the rest of his division. What he found changed his life. The Czechs couldn't believe the miracle of "being liberated by one of our own." He couldn't believe the hero's welcome that greeted him. It deeply changed his notion of what it meant to be both Czech and American. However, like many of his generation Matt Konop didn't talk about the war when he returned. His story vanished with passing time. Back in Czechoslovakia, the Communist coup of 1948 brought an ugly, repressive regime that would last the rest of Konop's life.

The Communists also changed the official history of WWII and eliminated the fact that the US Army had liberated Southwestern Czechoslovakia. So while Konop's story faded in America, it was illegal to tell it in Czechoslovakia. When Konop died in 1983 his family knew little of his heroics, and the Czechs were forbidden to talk about it. At Konop's funeral, there was no American flag on the casket, no bugler playing taps at the grave. It seemed his war stories were buried with him. Twenty years after his death, his long-forgotten writings were discovered in a family basement. Along with his war manuscript were reels of color and black and white film he shot during the war on a Kodak 8mm handheld camera. Konop's grandson, Patrick Dewane, became obsessed with what was found and turned the story, film footage and period music into *The Accidental Hero*, a 90-minute one-man show.

Back in Czechoslovakia, the 1989 Velvet Revolution toppled the Communist regime and the Czechs were once again free. The cities that had been liberated by the US Army in WWII embraced their formerly-suppressed history, their special connection to America. These Czech cities -- Pilsen, Domazlice and Klatovy -- commemorate the end of WWII and their American liberators with large celebrations each May. Hundreds of Czechs spend the first week of May dressed in US Army WWII uniforms and parading their vintage US Army jeeps, trucks and other vehicles. Dozens of American WWII veterans, men now in their 80s and 90s, still return for the festivities. Patrick Dewane has performed *The Accidental Hero* at these celebrations each year since 2012.

On May 5, 2015 a bronze plaque honoring Matt Konop was dedicated on the main square of Domazlice, Czech Republic. The plaque includes a relief of Konop being carried on the shoulders of the townspeople in the very same square. The bronze memorial is just a few meters from a black granite plaque commemorating the US Army's liberation of Domazlice. That plaque had been taken down during the Communist regime from 1948 - 1989, the same period when it was illegal to speak of the American role in the liberation of Czechoslovakia. That plaque has been a scoreboard for freedom -- when it is up the Czechs are free. The owner of the building with Konop's plaque quipped at its dedication, "the Communists will need to remove me first before this plaque to Matt Konop ever moves from my family's building."

In a speech in Domazlice's main square on May 5, 2015, US Ambassador to the Czech Republic Andrew Schapiro said, "The US Army didn't come here in 1945 to take territory or resources. It came simply with an idea: freedom." For Matt Konop, the remarkable events of May, 1945 changed him profoundly. As commander of a liberation force, he was freed of his misunderstanding of his own identity. His story, once lost, is now told with great joy by his grandson. Remarkable! An Amazing Story. Difficult to categorize, but impossible to forget—those are the best words sum up the author's reaction to a recent production of Patrick Dewane's one-man show "The Accidental Hero." Whether thought of as a monologue, docudrama, reminiscence—or some other creative designation that does not come readily to mind—its unique mix of narration with multi-media enhancements has more to offer prospective audience members than any could anticipate in advance. [Source: Smithsonian Institute | Daniel Freeman | April 5, 2017 ++]

Cruise Missiles ► U.S. Has No Defense Against Russia's

U.S. Air Force Gen. John Hyten, commander of U.S. Strategic Command, told lawmakers that the U.S. and its allies have "no defense" against recently deployed Russian cruise missiles, according to AFP. During a 4 APR hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Hyten raised concerns over ground-launched cruise missiles positioned by

Moscow. The missiles have been deployed in the Volgograd region as well as a second, unidentified site, according to the New York Times. "We have no defense for it, especially in defense of our European allies," said Hyten. "That system can range and threaten most of the continent of Europe depending on where it is deployed. ... It is a concern and we're going to have to figure out how to deal with it as a nation," he added.

The ground-launch missiles deployed were considered a violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty by the Obama administration when the missiles were tested in 2014. The 1987 treaty bans land-based intermediate-range missiles. Russian officials have claimed they are not in violation of the treaty, blaming instead the United States for non-compliance. Hyten did highlight that Russia is cooperating with another treaty known as New START. That pact requires Russia and America to reduce the number of deployed warheads to 1,550 by February 2018. Hyten also raised concerns over Russia's overall modernization efforts of its nuclear arsenal. He additionally warned of growing threats to American military and intelligence satellites, citing Russian and Chinese efforts to target U.S. spacecraft in the event of armed conflict. [Source: DefenseNews | Christopher Diamond | April 5, 2017 ++]

Artificial Intelligence ► Future of AI Weaponry That Can Kill

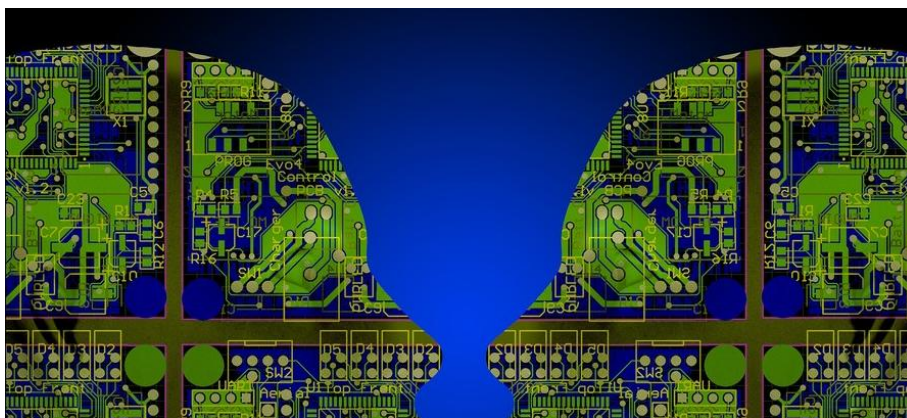
What is the future of autonomy and artificial intelligence? Many have postulated futuristic capabilities and scenarios involving intelligent and killer robots on the battlefield that have been delegated the authority to take human lives without the intervention of human operators. In fact, a group of esteemed scientists and influencers — including Stephen Hawking and Elon Musk — signed an open letter endorsing a “ban on offensive autonomous weapons beyond meaningful human control.”

But for all intents and purposes, the military is not interested in what the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff calls general AI. Narrow AI is teaching a machine to perform a specific task, while general AI is the T-1000, Gen. Paul Selva said 3 APR at an event hosted by Georgetown University, referencing the shape-shifting robot assassin from the "Terminator 2" movie. “General AI is this sort of self-aware machine that thinks it knows what’s right and what’s wrong,” he said. “The issue is whether or not a person or a country or an adversary would take narrow AI and build it into a system that allows the weapon to take a given life without the intervention of a human.” This could take the form of someone building a set of algorithms, saying, for instance, to make every gray-haired guy with a flat top a target, Selva said, using himself as an example. “I don’t think we need to go there,” Selva followed. “I think what we can do is apply narrow AI to empower humans to make decisions in an every increasingly complex battlespace.”

This type of so-called narrow AI will be able to sift through the kinds of things decision-makers have to sift through to get at an adversary at a high speed, complex battlespace. The way the character of war is changing today, war fighters must be able to sense the patterns of their adversary’s behaviors, then empower the decision quickly; the third part of that equation is acting at that speed, Selva said. The lesson here, he said, is if the U.S. is creating slow weapons to act on a fast battlespace, “we’re going to get our clock cleaned.” Sensing adversary patterns, empowering decision-makers and acting quickly are really at the heart of the so-called third offset strategy the Pentagon is war gaming, Selva said. “What’s that imply for this new battlespace? If you have an aware system that informs a decision-maker quickly and as quickly as they decide, they advance, that ought to change the battlespace,” he added.

However, interoperability will be a critical component as AI advances and the services look to leverage operations across domains and across coalitions. Selva said that U.S. export policies denying the sale of certain systems, such as large unmanned systems, creates a self-limiting factor within semi-autonomous systems. The U.S. has allies and partners who want to buy MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper drones, so they go to the Russians, the Chinese, the Israelis, the French, all whom are more than willing to sell their technology to others, he said. So the

U.S. ends up with an ally that has systems that are not interoperable with U.S. systems. “That’s a problem,” Selva said. He added that he has been an advocate for some kind of convention on how states use AI, but offered skepticism regarding how it could be enforced. [Source: C4ISRNET | Mark Pomerleau | April 5, 2017 ++]



IRS 2017 Filing Season Update 04 ► April Madness

Internal Revenue Commissioner John Koskinen on 5 APR gave a National Press Club talk on the “April Madness” that is tax filing season for his employees processing form 1040s from the nation’s 152 million filers. Below are some of his eye-opening numbers:

- **\$74 million.** Amount in refunds issued so far out of 93 million 2017 returns received (average amount: \$2,900)
- **87 percent.** Share of taxpayers who file electronically
- **3 million.** Number of 1040 forms completed by hand
- **500 million.** Visits to IRS.gov in 2016
- **6 million.** Visits to IRS.gov in one recent day
- **40 million.** Number of times the IRS2Go smartphone app has been downloaded
- **63 million.** Number of calls to IRS call centers last year
- **8 million.** Number of letters received IRS received last year
- **1 million.** Number of malicious cyberattacks on IRS daily
- **46 percent.** Reduction in identify theft victims reported in 2016 compared with 2015
- **\$6.5 billion.** Amount in fraudulent refund claims on 1 million returns the IRS prevented last year
- **\$290 million.** Extra appropriations funding in 2016, which allowed IRS to hire 1,000 temps
- **\$239 million.** Amount President Trump in March proposed cutting from IRS
- **17,000.** Number of employees IRS has lost since 2010, mostly due to budget cuts
- **50.** Number of employees who leave IRS every week for varying reasons
- **1 million.** Number of taxpayers audited last year, the lowest number in a decade
- **\$30 billion.** Revenue lost for each percentage point drop in taxpayer compliance rate
- **60 percent.** Portion of IRS hardware that is out of date
- **28 percent.** Portion of software considered obsolete
- **122.** Number of IRS employees 25 or younger

[Source: Fedblog | Charles S. Clark | April 5, 2017 ++]

RP~China Dispute Update 21 ► RP To Upgrade Existing Facilities

The Philippines will upgrade existing facilities on its inhabited islands and reefs in the South China Sea and not occupy new territories, adhering to a 2002 informal code in the disputed waters, defense and military officials said on Friday. A statement from Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's office on Thursday said he had ordered troops to occupy uninhabited islands and shoals that the Philippines claims in the disputed waterway, asserting Philippine sovereignty in an apparent change of tack likely to anger China. The firebrand leader, who on the campaign trail joked that he would jet ski to a Chinese man-made island in the South China Sea to reinforce Manila's claim, also said he may visit a Philippine-controlled island to raise the national flag.

But defense and military officials have subsequently clarified the president's comments. "The president's order was very crystal clear. Occupy only the existing areas that we claim," a navy commander, privy to development plans in the South China Sea, told Reuters on 7 APR. "The Philippines is not allowed to do that, occupy new territories in the Spratly, based on the 2002 agreement," said the navy official. China's Foreign Ministry on Friday expressed concern at Duterte's reported remarks and said it hoped the Philippines could continue to properly manage maritime disputes with China. China claims almost the entire South China Sea, where about \$5 trillion worth of sea-borne goods pass every year. Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan also have claims.

The president's comments were made after he was briefed by defense and military brass about South China Sea developments in Palawan, according to his communications office. "What he really meant was the already-occupied areas," military spokesman Brigadier-General Restituto Padilla told reporters on 6 APR. Defense Minister Delfin Lorenzana said there were plans to only repair and upgrade facilities in the Spratly. "The president wants facilities built such as barracks for the men, water and sewage disposal systems, power generators, light houses, and shelters for fishermen," Lorenzana said. Another general, who also declined to be named, said there were development plans in the South China Sea in 2012, which included building a secured port on Thitu island, helicopter pads in three smaller islands, where troops are deployed.

But the plan, which also called for an increase in troop deployment in the occupied islands, was stopped after the Philippines in 2013 filed an arbitration case against China in The Hague. The Philippines occupies nine "features", or islands and reefs, in the South China Sea, including a World War II-vintage transport ship which ran aground on Second Thomas Shoal in the late 1990s. The U.S. State Department declined comment on Duterte's remarks, but has in the past urged rival South China Sea claimants to lower tensions and resolve differences in accordance with international law. [Source: Reuters | Manuel Mogato | April 7, 2017 ++]

USCG Reunion ► June 10, 2017 | Hopkins MN

VFW Post 425 located at 100 Shady Oak Road, Hopkins, MN 55343 will host the 5th Twin Cities USCG Reunion on 10 June 2017. If you are planning on attending make your intentions known and send the \$35.00 per person banquet fee by 22May to Chris Kalogerson, 6100 Saxony Road, Edina, Mn. 55436 so they tell the caterer how many meals to prepare. To be included in the Biographical Booklet of Ex-Coasties, which will be available at the banquet, complete the questionnaire attached to this Bulletin and send it to the address provided in the attachment. [Source: VFW Post 425 | Chris Kalogerson | April 2017 ++]

PRK Nuclear Weapons Update 06 ► Trump Gives China Ultimatum

Donald Trump has issued China with an ultimatum that if it fails to put pressure on North Korea to disable its nuclear programme, then the US is prepared to take action against Pyongyang on its own. “Well, if China is not going to solve North Korea, we will,” the president said in an interview with the Financial Times that has alarmed experts on the region. Asked how he would tackle North Korea, Trump said: “I’m not going to tell you. You know, I am not the United States of the past where we tell you where we are going to hit in the Middle East.”



The North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, with tank crews, in an undated photograph.

Trump was scheduled to host the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, on 6 & 7 APR at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, where the two leaders were expected to discuss North Korea, China’s ambitions in the South China Sea and trade. There was speculation that North Korea could conduct another nuclear missile test to coincide with the talks. Trump said he had “great respect” for Xi and “great respect for China”, adding: “I would not be at all surprised if we did something that would be very dramatic and good for both countries and I hope so.” On North Korea, he said: “China has great influence over North Korea. And China will either decide to help us with North Korea, or they won’t. And if they do that will be very good for China, and if they don’t it won’t be good for anyone.” Asked what might motivate China to help, Trump said: “I think trade is the incentive. It is all about trade.”

He did not elaborate on his campaign suggestion that he wanted to hold talks with North Korea’s unpredictable leader, Kim Jong-un, over a burger. Theresa May hinted that president Trump should re-think his “go it alone” approach to North Korea, saying the UK backed co-operation with China to de-escalate the situation. Speaking after the US president said he was prepared to act without Chinese backing, the British prime minister said: “I think what is crucial, and where we have been working and will continue to work through the UN security council resolutions we’ve supported and with the United States is to encourage China to look at this issue of North Korea and play a more significant role in terms of North Korea, I think that’s where our attention should focus.”

Experts on the long standoff with North Korea, said there were few, if any, good options for acting without Chinese cooperation on the issue. “There is no solving this problem ‘alone’”, said Jim Walsh, of MIT’s Security Studies Programme. “It would be unwise for the US to act unilaterally, without the support of its ally South Korea. And frankly, there is no resolving this peacefully without China. A sanctions strategy will not be effective without Beijing’s help, and threatening China to win their cooperation strikes me as a contradiction in terms.” Robert Kelly, a professor at Pusan National University in South Korea, was also skeptical about Trump’s ability to act on his own. “America’s options are pretty poor, the North Koreans have been preparing for an American airstrike since the end of the Korean war in the 1950s,” he said. “They have been tunneling for decades and have put a lot of strategic assets deep inside mountains. Any serious campaign would almost certainly not be surgical. It would take days, maybe weeks.”

China is seen as crucial to dealing with the threat of North Korea. It is the North’s main trading partner, providing much-needed foreign currency for the cash-strapped nation and the two share an 870-mile (1,400km)

border. It has long provided diplomatic support in international forums, but denies it can fully control North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un. The Trump administration got off to rocky start in its relations with Beijing with accusations from the president that Beijing has militarized the South China Sea, manipulated its currency and hampered attempts to rein in North Korea. He also angered Beijing by hinting he could offer greater political recognition to Taiwan – a democratically ruled island that China claims as part of its own territory – though the White House later said Trump had agreed to honor Beijing's One China policy.

China is reported to have developed a good relationship with Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who plays a central role in the new administration. According to the New York Times, China's ambassador to the US, Cui Tiankai, has been sharing draft statements with Kushner on what will be issued after the Mar-a-Lago talks. Vivian Zhan, a politics professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, said China's cooperation was key. "If the US could really take unilateral action against North Korea, it should have done so earlier, not waited until North Korea developed its nuclear programme and missiles to this extent," said Zhan. "The US can't really handle North Korea by itself. China has to be involved." The former head of British intelligence service MI6, Richard Dearlove, said the threat posed by North Korea should be a priority for the Trump administration. In the latest episode of the podcast Talking Politics, recorded before Trump's latest comments, Dearlove said: "We are in the middle of a policy one crisis which is North Korea. There is only one solution to dealing with the North Koreans, which is to secure the cooperation of the Chinese."

In a separate conversation, Trump's deputy national security adviser, KT McFarland, told the FT there was a "real possibility" North Korea could be capable of hitting the US with a nuclear-armed missile by the end of Trump's first term. Intelligence experts disagree with McFarland's assessment. A Japanese government source with knowledge of the country's North Korea policy pointed out that UN sanctions, multiparty talks and attempts to encourage Beijing to stop North Korea from going nuclear "have all come to nought". The official told the Guardian: "The region is under a dramatically increased threat from Pyongyang, which now is gaining real first-strike capabilities. In these circumstances President Trump is right: it is high time for Washington to strongly urge Beijing to pull all possible strings to stop North Korea from advancing their nuclear ambitions, while seeking any means of their own to that same end." [Source: The Guardian | Matthew Weaver, Benjamin Haas, Justin McCurry, & Julian Borge | April 3, 2017 ++]

PRK Nuclear Weapons Update 07 ► China's Increased Tension Concern

China said on 14 APR tension over North Korea had to be stopped from reaching an "irreversible and unmanageable stage" as a U.S. aircraft carrier group steamed toward the region amid fears the North may conduct a sixth nuclear weapons test. Concern has grown since the U.S. Navy fired 59 Tomahawk missiles at a Syrian airfield last week in response to a deadly gas attack, raising questions about U.S. President Donald Trump's plans for North Korea, which has conducted missile and nuclear tests in defiance of U.N. and unilateral sanctions. The United States has warned that a policy of "strategic patience" is over. U.S. Vice President Mike Pence travels to South Korea on Sunday on a long-planned 10-day trip to Asia.

China, North Korea's sole major ally and neighbor which nevertheless opposes its weapons program, has called for talks leading to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. "We call on all parties to refrain from provoking and threatening each other, whether in words or actions, and not let the situation get to an irreversible and unmanageable stage," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters in Beijing. North Korea denounced the United States for bringing "huge nuclear strategic assets" to the region as the Carl Vinson strike group with a flagship nuclear-powered aircraft carrier steamed closer, and said it stood ready to strike back. "The Trump administration, which made a surprise guided cruise-missile strike on Syria on 6 APR, has entered the path of open threat and blackmail," the North's KCNA news agency quoted the military as saying in a statement. "The army and

people of the DPRK will as ever courageously counter those who encroach upon the dignity and sovereignty of the DPRK and will always mercilessly ravage all provocative options of the U.S. with Korean-style toughest counteraction."

DPRK stands for the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. North Korea, still technically at war with the South after their 1950-53 conflict ended in a truce, not a treaty, has on occasion conducted missile or nuclear tests to coincide with big political events and often threatens the United States, South Korea and Japan. On Saturday, it marks the "Day of the Sun", the 105th anniversary of the birth of state founder Kim Il Sung. U.S. ally South Korea warned against any North Korean "provocation", such as a nuclear or missile test. "There is certain to be powerful punitive measure that will be difficult for the North Korean regime to endure," the South's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

While Trump has put North Korea on notice that he will not tolerate any more provocation, U.S. officials have said his administration is focusing its strategy on tougher economic sanctions. Trump said on 13 APR North Korea was a problem that "will be taken care of" and he believed Chinese President Xi Jinping would "work very hard" to help resolve it. Trump has also said the United States is prepared to tackle the crisis without China, if necessary. He diverted the Carl Vinson aircraft carrier and its strike group toward the Korean peninsula last weekend in a show of force. Trump has also been pressing China to do more to rein in North Korea. China banned all imports of North Korean coal on Feb. 26 under U.N. sanctions, cutting off the North's most important export, and on Friday, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said national airline Air China was suspending flights to Pyongyang. It did not say why the flights, which operate on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, were being suspended and Air China could not be reached for comment.

Worry about North Korean aggression has also led to a deterioration of ties between China and South Korea because China objects to the deployment of a U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile system in the South. "It's not hard to see that ever since the United States and Republic of Korea decided to deploy THAAD, the situation has not become harmonious but has become more tense," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang, said in response to a question about the system. South Korea and the United States say the sole purpose of the THAAD is to guard against North Korean missiles, but China says that its powerful radar could penetrate its territory.

The dollar fell on 14 APR against a basket of currencies, on track for a losing week as tension over North Korea underpinned the perceived safe-haven Japanese yen. Japan's Nikkei business daily said the government had discussed how to rescue an estimated 57,000 Japanese citizens in South Korea as well as how to cope with a possible flood of North Korean refugees coming to Japan, among whom might be spies. [Source: Reuters (Beijing/Pyeongyang) | Dominique Patton and Sue-Lin Wong | April 14, 2017 ++]

Taiwan~China Dispute Update 02 ► Weapons Will Not Prevent Unification

China's Ministry of National Defense said 30 MAR it was futile for Taiwan to think it could use arms to prevent unification, as the self-ruled democratic island looks to fresh arms sales by the United States amid what it sees as a growing Chinese threat. China has never renounced the use of force to bring under its control what it deems a wayward province, and Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense says China has more than 1,000 missiles directed at the island. The Trump administration is crafting a big new arms package for Taiwan that could include advanced rocket systems and anti-ship missiles to defend against China, U.S. officials said earlier this month, a deal sure to anger Beijing. China is deeply suspicious of Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, believing she wants to push the island toward formal independence, a red line for China. She says she wants to maintain peace with China. "Separatist Taiwan independence forces and their activities are the greatest threat to peace and stability in the

Taiwan Strait," Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman Wu Qian told a monthly news briefing. "It is futile to 'use weapons to refuse unification,' and is doomed to have no way out," he added, without elaborating. Defeated Nationalist forces fled to Taiwan after losing a civil war to the Communists in 1949. Democratic Taiwan has shown no interest in being ruled by autocratic China. [Source: Reuters | Ben Blanchard |March 30, 2017 ++]

Japan~PRK Dispute ► New Level Of Threat

Japan's ruling party urged the government 30 MAR to consider arming the country with more advanced and offensive military capabilities, such as striking enemy targets with cruise missiles, further loosening the self-defense-only posture Japan has maintained since the end of World War II. The Liberal Democratic Party's council on defense policy urged the government to immediately start studying ways to bolster Japan's capability to intercept missiles with a system such as the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, that the U.S. and Seoul have agreed to install in South Korea. The panel cited a "new level of threat" from North Korea, which fired four missiles this month, three of them landing inside Japan-claimed exclusive economic waters. "North Korea's provocative acts have reached a level that Japan absolutely cannot overlook," the party's security panel said in the proposal given to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. "We should not waste any time to strengthen our ballistic missile defense."

The panel noted that North Korea's recent missile launches have shown advancing technology, including the capability to launch from mobile facilities or submarines, the use of solid fuel, and high-altitude trajectories, which make them harder to trace and respond. With higher levels of threat coming from North Korea, Japan should consider possessing "our own capability of striking back at an enemy base, with cruise missiles for instance, to further improve deterrence and response as part of the Japan-U.S. alliance," the proposal said. The panel said the government should consider introducing THAAD and a shore-based Aegis missile defense system, among other equipment, while pursuing upgrades to two existing missile defense systems — ship-to-air SM-3 interceptors and the ground-based PAC-3.

China, which was occupied by Japanese troops during World War II, quickly criticized the proposal. Beijing views any Japanese plan to boost its military capabilities with suspicion. "China is opposed to any actions by other countries to take the (North Korean) nuclear issue as an excuse to compromise the security of other countries," defense ministry spokesman Wu Qian told a monthly briefing 30 MAR. Beijing has strongly protested the THAAD deployment in South Korea, saying its powerful radar would allow the U.S. to monitor flights and rockets deep inside northeastern China. Japan has maintained that its right to strike a foreign base in case of an imminent attack is not banned under its pacifist constitution. Former defense minister Itsunori Onodera, who headed the defense policy council, told Abe that Japan needs to be prepared for being targeted by multiple missiles. "Our proposal is about how we can fight back and stop the other party from firing a second missile, instead of making a pre-emptive strike," he said.

Abe said he takes the report seriously and will cooperate with the party to improve Japan's ballistic missile response. The proposal does not call for a first-strike capability. Japan since its World War II defeat has limited its military to self-defense, while relying on the U.S. "nuclear umbrella" and the 50,000 American troops stationed in Japan under a bilateral security alliance as deterrence. Abe has stretched those restrictions by easing a self-imposed ban on weapon exports and reinterpreting the war-renouncing constitution to allow Japan's military to defend allies under attack. Japan and the U.S. have also revised their defense guidelines, giving Japanese Self Defense Force a greater role. Concerns in Japan about the level of U.S. commitment to the region under President Donald Trump have also prompted calls for Japan to take greater responsibility for its own security.

Critics say changing policies to allow Japan to fight back against a foreign base would only escalate tension and signal a weakening of the U.S. regional commitment, and that the consequences should be carefully studied. Japan's defense budget has steadily risen over the past five years under Abe, who ended a decade of defense budget cuts.

The annual increase is currently just over 2 percent, and Abe says he is ignoring a customary cap of 1 percent of GDP. [Source: The Associated Press | Mari Yamaguchi | March 30, 2017 ++]

Illegal Aliens Update 01 ► **Benefits | Net Income vs. Joe Legal**

Joe Legal works in construction, has a Social Security Number and makes \$25.00 per hour with taxes deducted. Jose Illegal also works in construction, has NO Social Security Number, and gets paid \$15.00 cash "under the table." Ready? Now pay attention....

Joe Legal: \$25.00 per hour x 40 hours = \$1000.00 per week, or \$52,000.00 per year. Now take 30% away for state and federal tax; Joe Legal now has \$31,231.00.

Jos Illegal: \$15.00 per hour x 40 hours = \$600.00 per week, or \$31,200.00 per year. Jose Illegal pays no taxes. Jose Illegal now has \$31,200.00.

Joe Legal pays medical and dental insurance with limited coverage for his family at \$600.00 per month, or \$7,200.00 per year. Joe Legal now has \$24,031.00.

Jose Illegal has full medical and dental coverage through the state and local clinics and emergency hospitals at a cost of \$0.00 per year. Jose Illegal still has \$31,200.00.

Joe Legal makes too much money and is not eligible for food stamps or welfare. Joe Legal pays \$500.00 per month for food, or \$6,000.00 per year. Joe Legal now has \$18,031.00.

Jos Illegal has no documented income and is eligible for food stamps, WIC and welfare. Jose Illegal still has \$31,200.00.

Joe Legal pays rent of \$1,200.00 per month, or \$14,400.00 per year. Joe Legal now has \$9,631.00.

Jose Illegal receives a \$500.00 per month Federal Rent Subsidy. Jose Illegal pays out that \$500.00 per month, or \$6,000.00 per year. Jose Illegal still has \$31,200.00.

Joe Legal pays \$200.00 per month, or \$2,400.00 for car insurance. Some of that is uninsured motorist insurance. Joe Legal now has \$7,231.00.

Jos Illegal says, "We don't need no stinking' insurance!" and still has \$31,200.00.

Joe Legal has to make his \$7,231.00 stretch to pay utilities, gasoline, etc.

Jos Illegal has to make his \$31,200.00 stretch to pay utilities, gasoline, and what he sends out of the country every month.

Joe Legal now works overtime on Saturdays or gets a part time job after work.

Jos Illegal has nights and weekends off to enjoy with his family.

Joe Legal's and Jose Illegal's children both attend the same elementary school. Joe Legal pays for his children's lunches, while Jose Illegal's children get a government sponsored lunch.

Jos Illegal's children have an after school ESL program.

Joe Legal's children go home. Now, when they reach college age,

Joe Legal's kids may not get into a State School and may not qualify for scholarships, grants or other tuition help, even though Joe has been paying for State Schools through his taxes, while Jose Illegal's kids "go to the head of the class" because they are a minority.

Joe Legal and Jose Illegal both enjoy the same police and fire services, but Joe paid for them and Jose did not pay.

Have You Heard? ► Embarrassing Medical Exams

A man comes into the ER and yells . . .'

'My wife's going to have her baby in the cab.'

I grabbed my stuff, rushed out to the cab, lifted the lady's dress and began to take off her underwear. Suddenly I noticed that there were several cabs - - - and I was in the wrong one.

Submitted by Dr. Mark MacDonald, San Francisco

-o-o-O-o-o-

At the beginning of my shift I placed a stethoscope on an elderly and slightly deaf female patient's anterior chest wall.

'Big breaths,' . . . I instructed.

'Yes, they used to be,' . . . replied the patient.

Submitted by Dr. Richard Byrnes, Seattle, WA

-o-o-O-o-o-

One day I had to be the bearer of bad news when I told a wife that her husband had died of a massive myocardial infarct.

Not more than five minutes later, I heard her reporting to the rest of the family that he had died of a 'massive internal fart.'

Submitted by Dr. Susan Steinberg

-o-o-O-o-o-

During a patient's two week follow-up appointment with his cardiologist, he informed me, his doctor, that he was having trouble with one of his medications.

Which one ?' . . . I asked. 'The patch . . . The Nurse told me to put on a new one every six hours and now I'm running out of places to put it!'

I had him quickly undress and discovered what I hoped I wouldn't see.

Yes, the man had over fifty patches on his body!

Now, the instructions include removal of the old patch before applying a new one.

Submitted by Dr. Rebecca St. Clair, Norfolk, VA

-o-o-O-o-o-

While acquainting myself with a new elderly patient, I asked, 'How long have you been bedridden?'

After a look of complete confusion she answered . . . 'Why, not for about twenty years - when my husband was alive.'

Submitted by Dr. Steven Swanson, Corvallis, OR

-o-o-O-o-o-

I was performing rounds at the hospital one morning and while checking up on a man I asked . . . 'So how's your breakfast this morning?'

It's very good except for the Kentucky Jelly. I can't seem to get used to the taste' . . . Bob replied.

I then asked to see the jelly and Bob produced a foil packet labeled 'KY Jelly.'

Submitted by Dr. Leonard Kransdorf, Detroit, MI

-o-o-O-o-o-

A nurse was on duty in the Emergency Room when a young woman with purple hair styled into a punk rocker Mohawk, sporting a variety of tattoos, and wearing strange clothing, entered . . .
It was quickly determined that the patient had acute appendicitis, so she was scheduled for immediate surgery. When she was completely disrobed on the operating table, the staff noticed that her pubic hair had been dyed green and above it there was a tattoo that read . . . 'Keep off the grass.'
Once the surgery was completed, the surgeon wrote a short note on the patient's dressing, which said 'Sorry . . . had to mow the lawn.'
Submitted by RN no name,

-o-o-O-o-o-

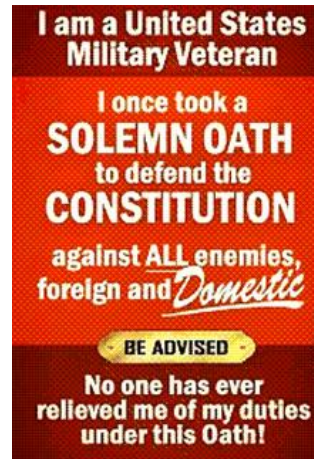
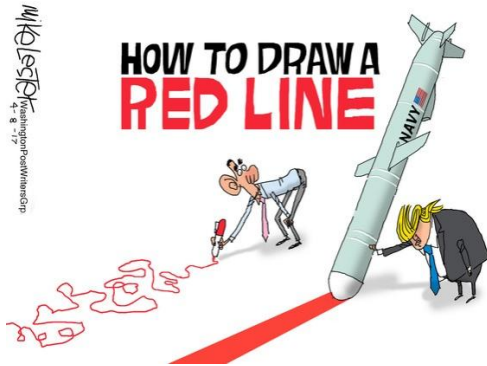
As a new, young MD doing his residency in OB, I was quite embarrassed when performing female pelvic exams... To cover my embarrassment I had unconsciously formed a habit of whistling softly.
The middle-aged lady upon whom I was performing this exam suddenly burst out laughing and further embarrassing me.
I looked up from my work and sheepishly said. . . 'I'm sorry. Was I tickling you?'
She replied with tears running down her cheeks from laughing so hard . . .
'No doctor but the song you were whistling was . . .
'I wish I was an Oscar Meyer Wiener.''
Dr. wouldn't submit his name....

-o-o-O-o-o-

A woman and a baby were in the doctor's examining room, waiting for the doctor to come in for the baby's first exam.
The doctor arrived, and examined the baby, checked his weight, and being a little concerned, asked if the baby was breast-fed or bottle-fed.
'Breast-fed,' she replied.
'Well, strip down to your waist,' the doctor ordered.
She did. He pinched her nipples, pressed, kneaded, and rubbed both breasts for a while in a very professional and detailed examination.
Motioning to her to get dressed, the doctor said, 'No wonder this baby is underweight. You don't have any milk.'
I know,' she said, 'I'm his Grandma,
But I'm glad I came.



B-17G damaged during a bombing mission over Cologne, Germany in 1944 and a Boeing B-17 "Wee Willie" has its left wing blown off by flak over Crantenburg Germany, April 10, 1945



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