

RAO

BULLETIN

1 May 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 - Wyoming Vet State Benefits & Discounts APR 2017
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*** DoD ***



Pentagon Accounting Update 01 ► How Many People Are On Payroll?

The Pentagon is the only federal agency that has not been able to pass an audit since Congress required federal agencies to be audited nearly a quarter of a century ago. It’s not surprising, as I don’t think any senior leader inside the Defense Department even knows how many people are on the payroll of the military, civilian, and contractor workforces. Also, none of them can tell us about workforce costs and how personnel reforms could save billions of dollars. Recently, the House Armed Services Committee held a hearing to gather ideas on achieving greater efficiency inside the Pentagon. One subject that was raised—which deserves a lot more attention—is something called rightsizing the DoD workforce. In plain English, that means figuring out how many employees DoD needs and how much it should spend on personnel.

Former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Michèle Flournoy testified that a human capital strategy is important for the agency. She said: This [strategy] should include an assessment of the optimal mix of military, civilian, and contractor personnel across the department and by function. Of note, a recent study by the Congressional Budget Office found that shifting 80,000 positions from military to civilian personnel, and eliminating the military positions, could save the federal government \$3.1 billion to \$5.7 billion a year once fully implemented. Optimizing the mix of contractors and civilian employees would undoubtedly save money as well. A Secretary-directed Human Capital Strategy that would inform DoD’s planning, programming, budgeting, and evaluation process and determine the optimal mix of military, civilian, and contractor personnel would be a powerful enabler for reshaping the Department for the future.

John Hamre of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, testified, “We need to look honestly at the price of labor—uniformed service labor, civil service labor, and contractor-provided labor. We do not honestly show the fully burdened costs and compare them objectively.” Since 2011, the Project On Government Oversight has been mortified by the lack of effort inside DoD and Congress to better understand who is performing work at the Pentagon and the costs of the agency’s mixed workforce. Certainly there is a need for contractors to supply goods and services to the federal government. However, there is a culture within Defense that is committed to transferring to contractors responsibilities that are most cost-effective when performed by Defense civilians.

DefenseOne has exposed internal and external studies showing that civilian employees offer the best bang for the buck when compared to military and contractor personnel. Scott Amey of Government Executive has been personally contacted by government officials who described situations where hiring contractors resulted in higher costs than would have been incurred if civilian employees had performed the work. Nonetheless, there has been little movement to properly inventory all three workforces, and review the work, performance, and costs of each. As a result, funds that could be provided for critical readiness needs are squandered. In fact, contractors are so resistant to any such proposal that they have been arguing to eliminate the inventory of service contractors. Albeit of limited use in its current form because the inventories don’t provide the data needed to compare the relative cost of performance by federal employees versus contractors, the inventories are the only yardstick for learning about the costs, number of contractor employees, and types of services being performed.

Despite the numerous outside experts telling Congress that the DoD needs to strategically balance its workforce to improve outcomes, save money, and bolster military readiness in the long run, Amey predicts we will see more of the same. The Pentagon and Congress will continue their efforts to avoid genuine cost comparisons and ignore the math. Here’s a novel idea: Congress should hold a hearing on the DoD workforce, and instead of inviting senior-level appointees to testify, it should seek input from the managers who are familiar with personnel issues, specifically Department of Defense Instruction 7041.04 (“Estimating and Comparing the Full Costs of Civilian and Active Duty Military Manpower and Contract Support”). Invite those experts to bring cost comparisons and allow them to testify about ways to obtain the most appropriate and cost effective workforce. It would be ill-informed to continue to require workforce changes and pay a price premium at the same time. [Source: DefenseOne | Scott Amey | April 17, 2017 ++]

Selective Service System Update 24 ► Women Draft Issue

Women do not have to register for the United States draft. And no American has been pressed into involuntary service since the last draft, during the Vietnam War. However, the viral spread of a 10-month-old New York Times story has potentially given millions of internet users misleading impressions to the contrary. Following the web traffic and social media commentary around the article illustrates how a hot-button cultural issue can be taken out of context and amplified by hyperpartisan bubbles, inflaming passions and spreading misinformation.

On June 14, 2016, The Times published a story online with the headline, “Senate Votes to Require Women to Register for the Draft.” The story reported on the approval of a budget amendment by the Senate. The final version of the bill, which President Barack Obama signed six months later, in December, did not include the provision. In late January 2017, the article was shared by several Facebook pages in the military community, leading to an increase in traffic. In April, after President Trump launched a strike on a Syrian air base, fan pages for Senator Bernie Sanders spurred a smaller spike in readership. In total, nearly 2 million people have clicked on this 2016 congressional procedural story, making it one of the 100 most-read Times stories of 2017 so far. And Google Trends data showed an obvious bump in searches for questions like “Do women have to register for the draft?” around the spikes in viral social sharing.

A scan of the thousands of comments left on the different Facebook posts reveals obvious confusion. Some readers, responding only to the dated headline, are under the impression that Congress recently voted to draft their daughters or, alternatively, to finally move the army toward greater gender equality. In a way, the online ideological confusion channels the passion that brought the issue under congressional consideration in the first place. The Obama administration opened combat roles to women back in December 2015, stirring a national conversation that, as demonstrated by the article’s resurgent popularity, has continued to this day.

Representative Duncan D. Hunter (R-CA) introduced the initial amendment to expand the draft to women in April 2016, but voted against it. Mr. Hunter introduced it to “force the conversation” in Congress about the administration’s new policy, said his chief of staff, Joe Kasper. Though the amendment passed 32-30 in the House Armed Services Committee, Claude Chafin, a spokesman for the committee, told The Times it was clear it would not survive a vote by the full House. So the provision was taken out of the House version of the bill. And while the amendment passed the Senate, it was ultimately stripped out of the final Senate version of the bill as well. Instead, the final law, as passed in December, established a national commission to study the draft’s “utility and future use.”

Fast forward to this month. Mr. Trump ordered airstrikes in Syria amid heightened tension with North Korea and Russia. The liberal Facebook page “Bernie Sanders Lover” shared a link to the June story without additional comment. The page’s administrator, Chris Friend, told The Times that he was reminded of the earlier story and shared it with his readers after the Syria strikes for a reason. Mr. Friend said he understood that the amendment was stripped from the final legislation, “but to me, it is a bigger story that it was included in the first place and that people missed the story. Personally, I’ve been feeling a ramp-up for a large-scale conflict for a while now.”

While Mr. Friend had a bigger picture in mind, he said that many of his readers were incensed by the article, suggesting that a “white, male, dominant, Christian, warmongering” Congress wanted to send “your sons and daughters to fight for Trump’s cause.” Mr. Friend, essentially, had given old news a new context — a not uncommon phenomenon in the digital age, said Peter Adams, senior vice president for educational programs at the News Literacy Project. Multiple studies have shown that most news consumers seldom read entire articles. For many, in this new and continuously expanding information landscape, a glance is enough to confirm existing biases and emotions. “They think they know what it’s about, based on the headline,” Mr. Adams said. “Fear can drive people to share quickly and not think as much or be as critical. That’s where it gets its virality.” [Source: New York Times | Linda Qiu | April 26, 2017 ++]

Government Shutdown Update 21 ► Impact on Troops/Vets

When Congress can't agree on a deal regarding the budget or a continuing resolution troops, veterans, and their families could face a government shutdown similar to the one they experienced in 2013. A shutdown could leave some DoD personnel without paychecks and access to some on-base services. Military officials were bracing for a shutdown in December before Congress passed legislation funding the government through 28 APR. Here's a look at how a shutdown might affect things like military operations, pay, and access to medical care.

Who's on duty? All military personnel remain on active duty during government shutdowns, continuing to carry out their normal roles. Before the December shutdown was averted, Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work sent a memo explaining that active-duty troops' duties would not be affected if some portions of the government closed. That's not true for all civilian DoD employees though. Only those whose roles "are necessary to carry out or support expected activities" would be asked to come to work. The rest would be furloughed, meaning they'd be placed in a nonwork, nonpaid status.

Troops' pay. Military personnel and civilian DoD employees shouldn't expect to get a paycheck during a government shutdown - even if they're showing up for duty every day. During the 2013 shutdown, which lasted for more than two weeks, Congress passed legislation that allowed uniformed personnel to receive their paychecks during the shutdown. But that doesn't always happen. "In case of a potential government shutdown, the Department of Defense has no legal authority to pay any personnel - military or civilian - for the days during which the government is shut down," the Defense Finance and Accounting Service website states. In 2013, civilian employees who were furloughed weren't paid during the shutdown. Congress later approved back pay for those workers.

Retirees' checks. A government shutdown won't affect payments for retirees or those receiving annuities, like surviving spouses who are paid under the Survivor Benefit Plan, said Steve Burghardt, a spokesman for the Defense Finance and Accounting Service. Those funds come from a military retirement trust fund, he said. They're not based on the Continuing Resolution Act appropriations, so the payments continue as scheduled.

Training and operations. The fight against the Islamic State group or other overseas operations won't stop with a government shutdown. "The Department will, of course, continue to prosecute the war in Afghanistan and ongoing operations against al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, including preparation of forces for deployment into those conflicts," Work wrote in his December memo.

Medical care. Servicemembers and their families should still be able to get medical and dental care at on-base facilities even if the government shuts down. They also can seek private-sector care using TRICARE, according to Work's December memo. Elective surgeries or procedures, however, could be postponed or rescheduled.

VA. While some Veterans Affairs employees could be furloughed, most of the department's facilities and clinics remain fully functional during government shutdowns, according to a VA memo on the topic. Access to in- and outpatient care, prescriptions, surgeries, and mental health appointments likely won't be interrupted. Some VA hotlines, websites, and claims processes could slow or stop in the event of a government shutdown.

Base services. Morale, welfare, and recreation-related activities are likely to continue if they support military missions. That means mess halls, physical training centers, and childcare activities will remain running if they're required for readiness, the December memo states. If civilian employees who run those facilities or programs are furloughed, though, uniformed personnel will be reassigned to carry out the duties.

PCS. Families with an upcoming permanent change of station, some moves may be limited in the case of a government shutdown. Troops should check with their commands to make sure everything is still on schedule.

[Source: MOAA News Exchange | Gina Harkins | April 26, 2017 ++]

PRK Nuclear Weapons Update 08 ► U.S. Range Missile Trump Policy

A senior Republican senator says he emerged from a dinner meeting with Donald Trump confident the president will not allow North Korea to build a nuclear-tipped missile capable of striking the United States. "If I were North Korea, I would not underestimate President Trump's resolve to stop them from getting a missile to hit our homeland," Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina told reporters Tuesday. Graham joined Sen. John McCain of

Arizona for the dinner at the White House on 24 APR. Graham and McCain are defense hawks and have been two of Trump's sharpest GOP critics on foreign policy matters. But both senators are backing Trump's approach on North Korea, which has threatened to use pre-emptive strikes or any other measures it deems necessary to defend itself against the "U.S. imperialists."

The Trump administration has warned that all options, including a military strike, are on the table to block North Korea from developing a nuclear-tipped missile that could reach the U.S. mainland. But a pre-emptive strike against North Korea's nuclear and missile facilities isn't likely. The Trump administration is instead seeking to put pressure on North Korea with the help of China. Graham said it's uncertain whether North Korea may actually launch a weapon of mass destruction at the U.S. But, he said, Trump "is not going to allow this problem to get any worse than it is today." The key, Graham added, is to make North Korea realize there's a **"new sheriff in town."**

McCain, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, declined to discuss the specifics of the meeting with the president. But he said the Trump administration's tough talk of defusing North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs is justified. "Obviously you have to follow words with action, but I think their expressed concern is very legitimate. And I don't think it's inflammatory rhetoric," McCain said. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un "is intent on having the capability to strike the United States of America. That is the threat." McCain said Trump is "exploring all options" on North Korea. But a pre-emptive strike, he said, "would be the last one."

In a show of force, Trump has dispatched to waters near the Korean Peninsula what he's called an "armada" of ships, including an aircraft carrier. South Korea's navy is planning to hold joint naval drills with U.S. aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson battle group, which has trained with Japanese destroyers in recent days, around the weekend. Trump also has sought to press Chinese President Xi Jinping to exert greater pressure on North Korea, given China's status as the country's economic lifeline and sole major ally. McCain said he welcomed the outreach to China. But he also criticized Beijing for repeatedly refusing to use its influence to bring North Korea to the negotiating table and curb what McCain considers Pyongyang's bellicose behavior.

"Instead, China has chosen to bully South Korea for exercising its sovereign right to defend itself from the escalating North Korean threat," McCain said, referring to a decision to deploy the THAAD missile defense system to the Korean Peninsula. China, in response, has waged a campaign of economic retaliation against South Korea, which McCain said has inflicted real damage. "The twisted reality is that China is doing all of this to stop the deployment of a missile defense system, which is only necessary because China has aided and abetted North Korea for decades," he said. [Source: The Associated Press | Richard Lardner | April 25, 2017 ++]

DoD Appropriations Act Update 03 ► **CR Damage to the Military**

On 5 APR, the House Armed Services Committee heard from the Service Chiefs on the "Damage to the Military from a Continuing Resolution." To watch the hearing or read testimony click here. Below are excerpts from some of the stories identifying critical readiness shortfalls:

- **Congress' failure to budget is "malpractice":** Warning that the "world is more dangerous by the day," the Army Chief of Staff said Congress' failure to pass a budget is "professional malpractice." He also used a smoking analogy to describe the deadly collective impact of stopgap funding on the military, saying, "One cigarette's not going to kill. But you do that for eight, 10, 20 years, 30 years, you're eventually going to die of lung cancer." ([AP](#))
- **CR and no Supplemental increase risk to troops:** Army's top general warned that the "lack of 2017 appropriations and no supplemental increase in funding will significantly impact readiness and increase the risk to our force." ([Defense News](#))

- **Ships will stay home, Navy pilots won't fly, pay could be cut:** Unless the 2017 spending bill and the \$30 billion supplemental is approved, the Chief of Naval Operations said, "three ships scheduled to deploy to Europe and the Middle East will stay home, our pilots will not fly and their jets will sit on the ramp needing maintenance, (and) we may lose skilled sailors because we cannot fund their bonuses." He also warned munitions remain too low and known vulnerabilities to cyberattacks will go unrepaired. [AP](#)
- **Troops could die on the battlefield:** The Army's top general said more troops will unnecessarily die on the battlefield if Congress decides to pass another stop-gap budget measure this month. [Washington Examiner](#)
- **Threats grow, Army shrinks:** "We've reduced the Army by 80,000 or 90,000 soldiers in -- in the last eight years. We've taken out 17 brigade combat teams...still have 180,000 soldiers today deployed in under 40 countries around the world. We're still actively engaged the terms of op tempo and common operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Central Africa, West Africa and several other places." General Mark A. Milley, Chief of Staff of the Army
- **Air Force will stop flying:** "We'll stop flying in late June when the money runs out," said the Air Forces top General. [Washington Examiner](#)
- **Marine Corps will stop flying:** "Under a full year CR, flight operations within the continental U.S. will cease and hard fought gains in Marine Corps aviation readiness will stall or be reversed." General Robert B. Neller, Commandant of the Marine Corps
- **15 Years of War and stress is getting worse due to budget:** "The Eisenhower Strike Group was deployed five times in the last seven years. Contrast that level of effort with eight years of continuing resolutions and five years of budget restrictions imposed by the Budget Control Act and the Balanced Budget Acts (sic). This gap creates years of stress over and above the inherent stress of deployed operations. And the Navy team -- in fact, the Joint Service Team -- the Joint Force Team; sailors, civilians and their families, have been absorbing that stress." Admiral John Richardson, CNO, U.S. Navy
- **Cannot afford maintenance or gas for Navy ships:** The Chief of Naval Operations outlined the lack of funding for ship and aircraft maintenance, for fuel, saying, "in many ways this is irreversible. You can't get lost training time back, we will be less proficient when we do go to sea.
- **4 of 9 Navy carrier air wings shut down entirely:** "Four of the nine carrier air wings that aren't already deployed would be shut down entirely, and about a third of the Navy's newest pilots wouldn't be able to finish their initial training. That would leave squadrons undermanned by 20-to-30 percent by the end of the year, causing shortages that the Navy said would have ripple effects for the next several years." Admiral John Richardson, CNO, U.S. NAVY
- **Air Force Pilots who don't fly, maintainers who don't maintain, air traffic controllers that don't control, leave:** "Chairman, it takes approximately 10 years and \$10 million to train a fighter pilot. One thousand short equates to \$10 billion of capital investment that walked out the door and it will take us 101 years to replace that experience. Of all the things that we can do to retain pilots the most important is to get them airborne." General David Goldfein, Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force.
- **America squabbles, competitors make big gains:** "Risks are getting worse as other nations grow their fleet and operate them in the Pacific, Atlantic, Indian and Arctic oceans. As they extend their influence over trade routes that are the lifeblood of the international economy, including ours." Admiral John Richardson, CNO, U.S. Navy



"THE WORLD IS MORE DANGEROUS BY THE DAY. PASS A BUDGET." GEN. MILLEY

To view a video of the Committee for Armed Services 5 APR hearing go to <https://youtu.be/Hejge9U3niU> (2hrs 44 min) [Source: NCOAdvocate Newsletter | April 17, 2017 ++]

POW/MIA Update 84 ► SITREP as of 19 APR 2017

AMERICANS ACCOUNTED FOR. The number still missing and otherwise unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War is now 1,611. Of these still missing (POW/MIA) and unaccounted-for (KIA/BNR), 90% were lost in Vietnam or in areas of Cambodia or Laos under Vietnam's wartime control: Vietnam-1,258 (VN-463, VS-795); Laos-297; Cambodia-49; PRC territorial waters-7. (Country-specific numbers fluctuate when investigations result in changes to loss locations.) Since formation in 1970, the League has sought the return of all POWs, the fullest possible accounting for the missing, and repatriation of all recoverable remains. The total accounted for since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is now 972.

Following is a breakdown by country of the 972 Americans accounted for since the April 30, 1975 end of the Vietnam War: Vietnam – 661, Laos – 268, Cambodia – 40, and the PRC – 3. In addition, 63 US personnel were accounted for between 1973 and 1975, for a grand total of 1,035. Of the 63, 9 were from Laos, 53 from Vietnam, and 1 from Cambodia. These Americans were accounted for by unilateral US efforts in areas where access was possible, not due to cooperation with the post-war governments of Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia. Added together, a total of 276 have been recovered and identified from Laos, 715 from Vietnam, 41 from Cambodia and 3 from the PRC.

DPAA FIELD OPERATIONS. There is only one field operation now taking place, a WWII recovery operation in Tarawa, contracted by Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) with History Flight, a partnership that has proven to be most effective. Due to budget constraints, no DPAA personnel are currently deployed to conduct Vietnam War investigations and recoveries; however, DIA's Stony Beach specialists and DPAA Detachment-based personnel continue to pursue answers. DPAA recently had one Recovery Team (RT) conducting excavation operations in central Vietnam. Also, an Investigation Team (IT) conducted operations with the assistance of several US Veterans, and a Research Investigation Team (RIT) conducted investigations in late March. Three RTs conducted operations in Laos throughout the month of March, the third Joint Field Activity (JFA) of this fiscal year in Laos, attempting to excavate several sites to account for five US servicemen. Another RT operated throughout March, assisted by a former US Army Special Forces soldier who visited the site shortly after the incident. They were attempting to account for two US servicemen from an aircraft crash site in northern Cambodia, a Joint Field Activity (JFA) postponed from January and cut from 60 to 30 days,

VIETNAM WAR ACCOUNTING OPERATIONS REDUCED. DPAA drastically cut the Vietnam JFA in Vietnam that occurred in March. With initial plans to conduct multiple recovery operations and investigations, DPAA deployed only one IT and one RT, as well as a team to handle a Field Forensic Review (FFR) and a Joint Forensic Review (JFR). Thankfully, Vietnamese Government provided one Unilateral Recovery Team (URT) and one Research Investigation Team (RIT).

The earlier JFA in Laos was also postponed by three weeks due to an aircraft breakdown and delay in Guam; however, the trilateral investigation reportedly began as scheduled on January 9th and the three RTs and one IT began three weeks late. The lost time was due to US budget constraints, NOT any obstruction from the Lao Government, and could not be recovered.

Of Note: Symbolic of how far the accounting mission has come: During January 8th-11th trilateral (SRV/KOC/LPDR) defense-related talks in Da Nang, Vietnamese Defense Minister General Ngo Xuan Lich thanked the Cambodian Government for supporting Vietnam's "search for and repatriation of the remains of Vietnamese volunteer soldiers and experts who sacrificed their lives in Cambodia" and agreed with Cambodian Defense Minister Tea Banh to continue this cooperation. Standing by those who serve, and achieving the fullest possible accounting for them, is now truly accepted worldwide.

DPAA BUDGET REQUIREMENTS NOT MET. DPAA will NOT have the funding in Fiscal Year 2017 (FY17) required to "increase the pace and scope of operations," as has repeatedly been requested by Vietnam. Despite continuing internal dysfunction, DPAA had been proceeding well since becoming fully operational in January of 2016. After assurance from Acting DPAA Director Fern Sumpter Winbush that funding was secured, though at a lower level, but adequate to sustain operations until April 28th, the reduction in field operations was a serious blow to confidence in DPAA's commitment to pursue Vietnam War accounting as a continuing priority.

Now, due to inadequate funding, the damage is increasingly clear. The plus-up of \$20 million to reach the necessary FY17 budget total of \$132 million for planned operational requirements could not be requested until 45 days after a budget was approved. It now appears there may be no budget approval this fiscal year, meaning it is already too late to receive, contract and utilize additional funds for the 3rd and 4th quarters of FY17. Of DPAA's initial funding for FY2017, funds were already obligated for WWII and Korean War accounting, including recovery of remains from US cemeteries for individual identification; thus the ID count for WWII and Korean War continues to rise significantly.

YOUR HELP IS URGENTLY NEEDED! Write your elected officials to object to the lack of funding for DPAA to meet FY17 operational requirements and ask for additional FY2018 funding to handle worldwide accounting and recovery efforts, as well as exemption of DPAA funding from any/all reductions. Funding for Veterans' care is rightfully protected by exempting VA budgets from across-the-board reductions and/or sequestration. Our UNRETURNED Veterans, America's POW/MIAs, deserve that same protection and adequate funds to achieve the fullest possible accounting.

DPAA DIRECTOR SELECTION PROCESS. As of this date, a new DPAA Director STILL has not been selected; however, advertisements seeking applicants for this crucial position were sought and the closing date was April 6th. The responsible official now "Acting in the Capacity of" Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (USD-P) is Ms. Theresa Whelan, a career DoD official. It is doubtful that a new person to permanently fill the USD-P position will be confirmed and in place by the time the selection must be made. Hopefully, Secretary of Defense Mattis will ensure serious consideration of recommendations provided by the League, Special Operations Association (SOA), Special Forces Association (SFA) and others. Up to now, there has been no indication that important qualifications – such as experience, character, commitment and dedication to the mission – were given consideration, nor crucial factors such as having earned the trust and respect of affected families, Veterans and foreign officials whose willingness to authorize necessary cooperation is critical to success.

DPAA-HOSTED FAMILY UPDATES. The remainder of the 2017 calendar for DPAA-hosted Family Updates is April 22nd, Kansas City, MO; May 20th, Syracuse, NY; during the League's 48th Annual Meeting June 21st-25th; and September 9th, Detroit, MI. You may have noticed postings on the DPAA website indicating 1,276 family members had attended these updates in 2016. What is unstated, therefore unclear, is that despite only roughly 20% of that number being Vietnam War-related family members, the representational percentage for Vietnam War family members is much higher than for other wars, even though we have fewer missing!

[Source: <http://www.pow-miafamilies.org/about-the-issue.html> | April 19, 2017 ++]

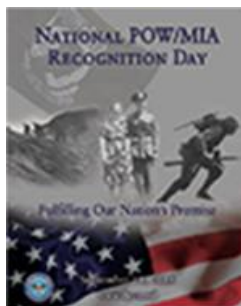
POW/MIA Recoveries ► **Reported 16 thru 30 APR 2017 | 13**

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

-- **Air Force Col. William E. Campbell** was assigned to the 497th Tactical Fighter Squadron. Campbell was reported missing in action on Jan. 29, 1969, while operating in Laos. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1150984/airman-missing-from-vietnam-war-identified-campbell> to read more about Col. Campbell.



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 Pfc. Kenneth R. Miller**, 23, of East Cleveland, Ohio, will be buried April 21 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. Miller was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. On April 23, 1951, his unit was forced to withdraw from their position while fighting Chinese forces. Miller was reported missing following the withdrawal. To read more about Pfc. Miller go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1152153/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-miller>.



-- **Army Cpl. Leslie R. Sutton** was assigned to Battery C, 99th Field Artillery Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. Sutton was reported missing in action on Nov. 2, 1950, while fighting in Korea. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1151790/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-sutton> to read more about Cpl. Sutton

-- **Army Pfc. Richard A. Lucas** was assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. Lucas was reported missing in action on Nov. 26, 1950, while fighting in Korea. Interment services are pending. To read more about Pfc. Lucas refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1152108/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-lucas>.

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Richard G. Cushman** was assigned to Company A, 72nd Medium Tank Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. Cushman was reported missing in action Dec. 5, 1950, while fighting in Korea. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1150909/soldier-missing-in-korean-war-identified-cushman> to read more about 1st Class Cushman.

-- **Army Cpl. Freddie L. Henson**, 19, of Klamath Falls, Ore., will be buried May 4 in Houston. 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. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1164653/soldier-killed-in-korean-war-accounted-for-henson> to read more about Cpl. Henson.

-- **Army Pvt. Walter F. Piper** was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. Piper was reported missing in action on Feb. 13, 1951, while fighting in Korea. Interment

services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1156088/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-piper> to read more about Pvt. Piper.

World War II

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 6 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Michael Galajdik**, 25, of Joliet, Ill., will be buried April 22 in Elwood, Ill. Galajdik was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Galajdik was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. To read more about 1st Class Galajdik got to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1152126/uss-oklahoma-sailor-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-galajdik>.



-- **Navy Ensign Verdi D. Sederstrom**, 25, of Montevideo, Minn., will be buried April 26, in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C. Sederstrom was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Sederstrom was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1157468/uss-oklahoma-sailor-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-sederstrom> to read mor about Ensign Sederstrom.



-- **Seaman 1st Class Milton R. Surratt** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Surratt 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/1153401/sailor-killed-in-world-war-ii-identified-surratt> to read more about Seman Surratt.

-- **Army Air Forces Pvt. Harold S. Hirschi** was assigned to Headquarters Squadron, 19th Bombardment Group. Hirschi died Nov. 19, 1942, in the Philippines. Interment services are pending. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1151792/airman-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-hirschi> for more on Pvt. Hirschi.



-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Robert N. Walkowiak**, 20, of Oshkosh, Wis., will be buried April 28 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. Walkowiak was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Walkowiak was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1158896/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-walkowiak> to read more about PO3 Walkowiak

-- **Marine Corps 2nd Lt. George S. Bussa** was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Bussa's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Bussa was killed on the first day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. Interment services are pending. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1159098/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-bussa> to read more about 2nd Lt. Bussa.



[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | April 30, 2017 ++]

* VA *



VA Privatization Update 10 ► Not Under Trump Administration

Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin reiterated that President Donald Trump's administration is "in no way" trying to privatize the VA, after Mr. Trump earlier this week signed a law extending private care options for veterans. "In no way are we seeking to privatize the VA," Shulkin said Saturday on "CBS This Morning," adding that the VA needs to work "closer" with the private sector to use an "integrated" approach to veteran care. Shulkin said when he took office that he was against privatizing the VA, a stance that stirred fears from some conservatives that the Obama-era holdover would continue the status quo at the VA. Shulkin's latest remarks came two days after the president signed a law eliminating the August expiration date of a program born out of the 2014 VA wait time scandal. The new law allows enrolled veterans to see doctors in their communities instead of waiting for a VA appointment.

Shulkin wouldn't reveal any details about a press conference Mr. Trump will be holding in a week about veterans issues, but said the news conference will cover the "tremendous progress" the VA has made. Three years

after the wait time scandal, many VA medical centers are still forcing veterans to wait for care. Last year, former VA Secretary Robert McDonald -- who took the helm to reform wait times in the wake of the 2014 scandal -- made headlines when he compared the wait times to long lines at Disneyland. Federal authorities have also stepped up investigations at VA medical centers due to a startling increase in opioid theft, missing prescriptions and unauthorized drug use by VA employees, according to government data the Associated Press obtained earlier this year. Shulkin said there's a "bipartisan" commitment to fixing the VA under Mr. Trump.

"Well, what I'm seeing is really a bipartisan commitment to making sure that we fix the issues that have been plaguing the VA for years, and what I'm seeing is just a consistent desire to move quickly and to make some hard decisions to fix the VA," Shulkin said. [Source: CBS NEWS | April 22, 2017 ++]

VA Appeals Update 26 ► Class Action Challenges Allowed

The Veterans Legal Services Clinic at the Yale Law School has won a major victory that allows a class-action challenge to appeals of benefit denials by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims has for decades denied individual veterans the ability to speak on behalf of others similarly situated, claiming it did not have the authority to do so. Conley Monk, a New Haven Vietnam War veteran, had been waiting more than a year for a ruling on a denial of benefits by the VA when he asked the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) to order the VA to process his appeal, as well as other veterans who were facing the same delays. They denied his request.

More than 427,000 veterans face average delays of three years waiting for a ruling from CAVC, according to the Government Accountability Office, while some 81,000 veterans face an average delay of five years. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit on 26 APR ruled that the "Veterans Court has the authority to certify a class for a class action and to maintain similar aggregate resolution procedures." The appeals court sent the case back to the lower court to determine whether a class action is suitable in Monk's case. CAVC is a court, established under Article 1 of the Constitution, and is subject matter specific. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit is the equivalent of the federal Courts of Appeals, set up under Article 3, which hears appeals of federal district court rulings.

"In the military, we fight as a unit. Now, at long last, the court has recognized that veterans also may fight together," Monk said in a statement. The Federal Circuit found that class actions by the CAVS would "promote efficiency, consistency, and fairness in its decision." It also said a class-action ruling would allow the court to "serve as a lawgiver and error corrector simultaneously, while also reducing the delays associated with individual appeals." "For years, veterans were prevented from bringing claims on behalf of themselves and their fellow veterans," John Giammatteo said in a statement. "Today, the Federal Circuit corrected this critical oversight and affirmed that veterans should be able to join together and claim the benefits to which they are entitled through their service." Giammatteo is a law student intern at the Yale Law School Veterans Legal Services Clinic, which represents Monk.

After decades of being denied benefits, as well as an upgrade of his discharge status, Monk in May 2015 was given an honorable discharge and was later found to be eligible for full disability benefits for his service-connected post-traumatic stress disorder and diabetes. Monk hoped that the court finding helps veterans get timely rulings on their benefit denials. The law school's clinic has shepherded several suits for veterans who have received less-than-honorable discharges because of behavior associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. These veterans subsequently did not qualify for the mental health benefits they needed to address those injuries. At the time of Monk's injuries, PTSD had not yet been recognized as a medical condition. While he now receives benefits himself, Monk continues to be an advocate for other veterans. [Source: New Haven Register News | Mary O'Leary | April 26, 2017 ++]

VA Accountability Update 43 ► Trump Establishes New AWP Office

President Trump signed an Executive Order to establish a new accountability office for the Veterans Affairs employees and create a new task force to look for waste and fraud in the sprawling bureaucracy during his visit to department headquarters on 27 APR. VA Secretary David Shulkin told reporters the moves could lead to faster firing of problem employees at VA offices and a downsizing of corporate staffs across the 365,000-person department, “We’re working hard to make sure there is a culture (at VA) where everyone understands their mission is to serve veterans,” he said. Trump’s short trip across Lafayette Park from the White House to VA headquarters in Washington was designed to follow his campaign promises to clean up the embattled department, which lawmakers have criticized in recent years for being slow to respond to incompetence or criminal behavior.

The new Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection -- which mirrors a proposal from Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA) introduced last year -- will help “discipline or terminate VA managers or employees who fail to carry out their duties in helping our veterans” by reviewing existing regulations for dismissing federal workers. Shulkin said that will include recommending new legislation governing department employment rules, and better enforcement of existing ones. But it won’t create new changes in the appeals processes for dismissal, a safety net that federal union officials have argued needs to be preserved to protect workers’ rights. They’ve sparred with Republican lawmakers over new accountability legislation already passed by the House (and endorsed by Shulkin) which would shorten appeals times and allow easier firing of employees involved in wrongdoing. That legislation is currently under consideration in the Senate. Iskason's legislation from last year would have also tackled those issues, but the idea got mired down in congressional infighting over some of the appeals changes and unrelated program expansions. The bill even included the same name for the new office as the one rolled out by White House officials Thursday.

Shulkin said the new office will also work to preserve whistleblower rights — “we will investigate any reports of retaliation” — but on a broader scope than past such initiatives. The new task force will look at VA’s overall national footprint and whether current services are duplicating efforts. But they’ll take a particular focus on the headquarters staffs, with an eye towards reducing the number of department employees who don’t interact directly with veterans. “We’re not anticipating adding any new staff, but instead using our existing staff in a more efficient way,” he said.

“We appreciate that President Trump is taking steps to fix the VA’s toxic culture, but the job will not be finished with just this executive order,” said Dan Caldwell, policy director at Concerned Veterans for America. “This new office will only be effective if it is coupled with strong accountability legislation ... identifying bad VA employees won’t do any good if you still can’t fire them.” Shulkin said establishing the new office will incur some costs, but did not offer further details about its employee totals or budget. It will report directly to the VA Secretary with suggestions.

Earlier in the day, VA officials announced they planned to leave open thousands of positions left vacant by the recent federal hiring freeze, citing the need for leaner department operations. Similar efforts on more efficient management were started by Shulkin’s predecessor, VA Secretary Bob McDonald, during President Obama’s administration. But while McDonald and Obama made promises of increased accountability within the department, neither made the issue a public point of emphasis like Shulkin and Trump. Even before the official announcement, news of Trump’s new executive order drew concern from critics and praise from supporters of stronger VA accountability rules.

The VA will establish the AWP office and appoint the executive director within 45 days of the signing of the Executive Order. The executive director will advise and assist the Secretary in using all available authorities to

discipline or terminate any VA manager or employee who has violated the public's trust and failed to carry out his or her duties on behalf of Veterans. The executive director will also assist the Secretary in recruiting, rewarding, and retaining high-performing employees. At the signing ceremony for the Executive Order, Secretary Shulkin also announced three new key initiatives at the Department.

VA Partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services

Effective 27 APR, VA is entering a partnership agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services that will allow the assignment of medical professionals from the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps to provide direct patient care to Veterans in VA hospitals and clinics in underserved communities. "My priority has been to improve access to care for our nation's heroes," said Dr. David J. Shulkin, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "By partnering with our colleagues at HHS, we will enhance the availability of clinical care in those areas most in need." The initial agreement enables up to 20 officers from the Commissioned Corps to treat Veterans in VA facilities that are most in need of staffing support. The agreement also allows up to 10 more officers to help support coordination for veterans receiving non-VA community care.

New Fraud, Waste and Abuse Taskforce

The Secretary announced a major new initiative to detect and prevent fraud, waste and abuse in the Department of Veterans Affairs. Effective 26 APR, this initiative has the potential to save tens of millions of taxpayer dollars currently at risk, for fraud, waste and abuse that can be redirected to better serve Veterans. The initiative will include bringing in the leading thinkers from the private sector and other government organizations in an advisory committee to identify and leverage cutting-edge fraud detection tools and; and coordinate all fraud, waste and abuse detection and reporting activities across the Department through a single office. The Department has identified potential savings in the area of improper payments to health care providers, major contracts, contracts for pharmaceuticals, and the delivery of benefits to Veterans. "Restoring the trust of Veterans and improving system-wide accountability are among my top priorities. It's essential to ensure that all our employees and the companies that we do business with are being good stewards of the resources available to care for our Veterans," said Dr. Shulkin.

Removing Red Tape at State-owned Veteran Nursing Homes

Effective 27 APR, VA is amending guidelines to allow state-owned Veteran nursing homes to follow state guidelines in the construction design of their facilities - removing red tape, while increasing access to services for Veterans. Up to now, to qualify for federal grant funding for Veteran nursing homes in their state, Governors and state officials have had to follow federal construction design guidelines. With today's announcement by the Secretary, that is no longer the case, and Governors are freed up to follow their own state guidelines in the construction design of these facilities while still qualifying for the same level of federal grant funding as before. In announcing the move, Secretary Shulkin noted that State design guidelines already are sufficient to the task of providing safe conditions for our Veterans and the Department recognizes the need to move quickly to reduce unnecessary barriers to providing much needed services to our Veterans.

[Source: MilitaryTimes & VA News Release | Leo Shane III | April 26 & 27, 2017 ++]

VA Unions Update 01 ► Why So Many Workers & What do They Do

According to a report by the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office an estimated 346 employees in the Department of Veterans Affairs do no actual work for taxpayers. Instead, they spend all of their time doing work on behalf of their union while drawing a federal salary, a practice known as "official time." Why so many are doing it is not clear. The VA doesn't track that, and the GAO report offers no clue. Rep. Jody Arrington (R-TX), a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, thinks the number on 100 percent official time may be much higher. He also notes that the 346 workers don't include those who spend most, not all, of their time doing union work. "The

lack of accountability at the VA when it comes to monitoring official time suggests it might be worse," said Arrington, who has introduced legislation that would require the department to track the use of official time, among other reforms.

Pointing to the waiting list scandals at the department, Arrington said the official time situation is reflective of the "broken culture at the heart of the VA" and adds, "I haven't heard one good, acceptable reason why the practice has continued." The VA was not eager to discuss the matter with the Washington Examiner. After several days of inquiries, it responded with the following statement: "VA believes that the appropriate use of official time can be beneficial and in the public interest as stated in the Federal Service Labor-Relations Statute, which governs how executive branch agencies treat official time. VA takes the position that labor and management have a shared responsibility to ensure that official time is authorized and used appropriately. VA practices are in compliance with the Federal Service Labor-Relations Statute."

Official time is allowed under the 1978 Civil Service Reform Act. The idea behind it is to ensure that a federal employee who is also a union official won't be penalized for being away from work if he or she is negotiating a contract or addressing a worker grievance, for example. It is essentially a trade-off for the limitations put on federal unions, such as prohibitions on striking. At least 700 federal workers do nothing but work on official time, according to the GAO and data obtained from various Freedom of Information Act requests. The VA uses official time far more than any other agency. "Employees spent approximately 1,057,00 hours on official time for union representation activities ... In addition, the data show that 346 employees spent 100 percent of their time on official time," the GAO found in a January report.

It is possible that even those figures are conservative. The GAO said the VA's poor monitoring meant the data was "inconsistent and not reliable." The GAO didn't know what the employees are doing with all of that time. "We just didn't get into that in that particular study," said Cindy Barnes, the GAO's director of education, workforce and income security issues and author of the report. Part of the explanation is that the VA is one of the largest federal agencies with 373,000 workers, making it second only to the Pentagon in the sheer size of its workforce. About 250,000 VA workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements, according to the GAO, citing 2012 data. Arrington puts the covered figure at 285,000. By comparison, the Department of Homeland Security has 240,000 workers and the Department of Commerce has just under 44,000 workers. But those departments get by with proportionately far fewer people working exclusively on official time. DHS has 39, while Commerce has just four.

Another factor is that the VA's workforce is represented by no less than five unions: The American Federation of Government Employees, the National Association of Government Employees, National Nurses United, the National Federation of Federal Employees and the Service Employees International Union. National Nurses United representative Irma Westmoreland was the only union official willing to talk about the practice with the Washington Examiner. She is one of five nurses union members who work exclusively on union time at the VA. The union has another nine who spent 80 percent of their time at the VA on official time, she said.

Westmoreland said her work was necessary because nurses can't simply stop taking care of a patient to do something like address a worker grievance. People such as her do the union work and make it possible for the other nurses to focus on providing care. "I have to travel across the country working with 23 VA facilities in four time zones," she said. "The management teams want somebody at 100 percent official time so they don't have to pull somebody out of care." But not everyone at the VA is involved in care. So what are the other 341 exclusive official time workers doing? Westmoreland had no insight. "I don't know how the other people do it," she said.

American Federation of Government Employees President J. David Cox told Arrington's subcommittee in February that official time involved activities such as "designing and delivering joint training of employees on work-related subjects and introduction of new programs and work methods that are initiated by the agency or by the union." He added that "in no way did the [February GAO] report suggest that the use of official time presents problems for the department." The report sought only to quantify the amount of time used. Arrington argues that the practice has to change if the VA is ever to be truly reformed. He has sponsored the Veterans, Employees and

Taxpayer Protection Act, which would require the VA to track the use of official time. It also would prohibit employees involved with direct patient care from spending more than a quarter of their work hours on union activities and bar any VA employee from spending more than half of their time on official time.

The legislation would effectively put VA employees under right-to-work protection. The VA would be prohibited from agreeing to union contracts that force workers to join or otherwise support a union as a condition of employment. Westmoreland said she has no trouble with better tracking the use of official time but warns against putting any limitations on its use. "It makes it very difficult if you cannot have set official time," she said. [Source: Washington Examiner | Sean Higgins | Apr 27, 2017 ++]

VA ID Card Update 09 ► Wait Time Unknown

Veterans will have to wait an unknown amount of time before they can get a photo ID card from the Department of Veterans Affairs under a law passed in 2015. The law, known as the Veterans Identification Card Act 2015, orders the VA to issue a hard-copy photo ID card to any honorably discharged veteran who applies for one. Getting the card can come with a fee, the law states, and the card must contain the veteran's name, photo and a non-Social Security identification number. The VA estimated in March 2016 that the cards would be available this year. However, repeated requests by Military.com to VA officials for an update on the timeline for availability went unanswered. "VA is currently making plans to implement the new law in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible while protecting veterans' personal information," officials said in a 2016 statement. "We estimate that VA will be able implement the program in 2017". (<http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/26568/veteran-id-cards-options>)

The legislation is designed to help all veterans have a way to prove their service without carrying a copy of their DD-214. "Goods, services and promotional activities are often offered by public and private institutions to veterans who demonstrate proof of service in the military, but it is impractical for a veteran to always carry Department of Defense form DD-214 discharge papers to demonstrate such proof," the law states. Veterans who receive health care from the VA or have a disability rating can get a Veteran Identification Card photo ID, also known as the VA health card, and military retirees hold an ID card issued by the Defense Department.

Proof of service letters are also available to all veterans through the VA's ebenefits website <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage>, but don't include a photo. Some states will include a veteran designation on driver's licenses if requested. Before offering the new identification cards, a proposed policy governing the program and fees must be published in the Federal Register and opened for comment. No policy proposal has been published. [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | 24 Apr 2017 ++]

VA Health Care Access Update 50 ► VA Partnership With CVS

Some ailing veterans can now use their federal health care benefits at CVS "**MinuteClinics**" to treat minor illnesses and injuries, under a pilot program announced Tuesday by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The new program, currently limited to the Phoenix area, comes three years after the VA faced allegations of chronically long wait times at its centers, including its Phoenix facility, which treats about 120,000 veterans. The Phoenix pilot program is a test-run by VA Secretary David Shulkin who is working on a nationwide plan to reduce veterans' wait times. Veterans would not be bound by current restrictions under the VA's Choice program, which limits outside care to those who have been waiting more than 30 days for an appointment or have to drive more than 40 miles to a facility.

Instead, Phoenix VA nurses staffing the medical center's help line will be able to refer veterans to MinuteClinics for government-paid care when "clinically appropriate."

Shulkin has made clear he'd like a broader collaboration of "integrated care" nationwide between the VA and private sector in which veterans have wider access to private doctors. But, he wants the VA to handle all scheduling and "customer service" — something that veterans groups generally support but government auditors caution could prove unwieldy and expensive. On 19 APR, President Donald Trump planned to sign legislation to temporarily extend the \$10 billion Choice program until its money runs out, pending the administration's plan due out by fall. That broader plan would have to be approved by Congress.

"Our number one priority is getting veterans' access to care when and where they need it," said Baligh Yehia, the VA's deputy undersecretary for health for community care. "The launch of this partnership will enable VA to provide more care for veterans in their neighborhoods." Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), a long-time advocate of veterans' expanded access to private care, lauded the new initiative as an important step forward. "Veterans in need of routine health care services should not have to wait in line for weeks to get an appointment when they can visit community health centers like MinuteClinic to receive timely and convenient care," he said.

The current Choice program was developed after the 2014 scandal in Phoenix in which some veterans died, yet the program has often encountered long waits of its own. The bill being signed by Trump seeks to alleviate some of the problems by helping speed up VA payments and promote greater sharing of medical records. Shulkin also has said he wants to eliminate Choice's 30-day, 40 mile restrictions, allowing the VA instead to determine when outside care is "clinically needed." Despite a heavy spotlight on its problems, the Phoenix facility still grapples with delays. Only 61 percent of veterans surveyed said they got an appointment for urgent primary care when they needed it, according to VA data.

Maureen McCarthy, the Phoenix VA's chief of staff, welcomed the new CVS partnership but acknowledged a potential challenge in providing seamless coordination to avoid gaps in care. She said a veteran's medical record will be shared electronically, with MinuteClinic providing visit summaries to the veteran's VA primary care physician so that the VA can provide follow-up services if needed. The VA previously experimented with a similar program last year in the smaller market of Palo Alto, Calif., a \$330,000 pilot to provide urgent care at 14 MinuteClinics. CVS says it is pleased the VA has opted to test out a larger market and says it's ready to roll the program out nationally if successful. CVS, the biggest player in pharmacy retail clinics, operates more than 1,100 of them in 33 states and the District of Columbia. "We believe in the MinuteClinic model of care and are excited to offer our health care services as one potential solution for the Phoenix VA Health Care System and its patients," said Tobias Barker, chief medical officer of CVS MinuteClinic. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Hope Yen | April 18, 2017 ++]

VA Suicide Prevention Update 39 ► VA Sees As Top Priority

Curbing suicide among military veterans and boosting access to mental health care are among the top priorities of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Deputy Secretary Scott Blackburn said 21 APR. Blackburn, an Army veteran, said staffing shortages when it comes to mental health and other specialties were among the concerns he heard about while meeting with patients, doctors and others at New Mexico's largest VA medical center. Administrators acknowledged that recruiting psychiatrists has been a challenge in New Mexico and that the shortage extends far beyond the VA system. The state currently has a shortage of about 130 psychiatrists and needs dozens more primary care physicians to meet demand, officials said.

Blackburn said the VA has been busy trying to reimagine many of its processes and policies in hopes of removing bureaucratic and logistical hurdles to care. He was among those who joined the VA in late 2014 as the agency began rebuilding itself following a scandal in which as many as 40 veterans died while waiting months to be

scheduled for appointments at the Phoenix VA medical center. Long wait times were also documented at the Albuquerque medical center, but Blackburn said Friday that progress has been made and the agency plans to keep moving forward with a program that allows veterans to seek care in the private sector. Earlier in the week, President Donald Trump signed legislation temporarily extending the Choice Program. Blackburn pointed to the importance of veterans having options before he ticked off statistics related to suicide.

About 20 veterans a day commit suicide. Statistics show that only six were part of the VA system, and only three of those six had seen a mental health provider in the past couple of years, Blackburn said. "If we as a country are serious about addressing this issue, we need to attack it from all angles and we need to work together," he said. "This is something the VA won't be able to do all by itself. We're going to have to partner with states, with cities, with nonprofits, with private health care systems, with whoever has an interest in this." Given the rural and personnel challenges in New Mexico and other Western states, Blackburn said telemedicine will likely become a bigger part of reaching veterans in remote areas.

Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin is among the doctors taking advantage of telemedicine. He sees patients in Oregon from his office in Washington, D.C., Blackburn said. "That's a great wave of the future," he said, noting that the VA is working with the White House and others to tackle some of the federal restrictions that currently limit the ability of health providers to work remotely and prescribe medications across state lines. [Source: Associated Press | Susan Motoya Bryan | April 22, 2017 ++]

VA Women Vet Programs Update 28 ► At Risk or Homeless

As the number of women serving in the military has increased, female Veterans have become the fastest growing demographic in America's homeless community. Today, women comprise approximately nine percent of all Veterans, and the best available official estimates suggest that they make up the same proportion of the homeless Veteran population. Although the overall Veteran population is expected to decline over the next two decades, the number of women Veterans is projected to increase during the same period. Moreover, the number of women Veterans who may require assistance from VA programs for Veterans who are homeless or are at-risk of homelessness is expected to rise by nearly 5% by 2025.

Both in deployment and at home, female Veterans may be more likely to face some challenges than their male counterparts. Without intervention, these risk factors – such as experiencing military sexual trauma (MST), domestic violence, wage disparity or discrimination – can put them at risk of homelessness. For example, women Veterans who have experienced MST are nine times more at risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and more prone to substance abuse disorders, factors that greatly increase their susceptibility to homelessness. Despite these many risk factors, women Veterans are still less likely to access VA care and less likely to self-identify as Veterans. Additionally, there are more community programs – like grants for single mothers, local domestic violence support programs, and more – tailored to supporting women's needs, making female Veterans less likely to seek support through VA programs. VA continues to tailor programs and strengthen local, state and federal partnerships to help us break down barriers to access, so that all Veterans in need receive the care and support they deserve.

Specialized housing, child care and employment services

VA provides a range of resources to meet the unique needs of women Veterans who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness.

- **Family housing and wraparound support** with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and VA Supportive Housing Program (HUD-VASH). A higher percent of women Veterans have a service connected disability, have no income, and are in poverty than men – compounding risk factors that greatly increase the risk of homelessness. Designed to provide permanent housing to chronically homeless

Veterans, HUD-VASH prioritizes disabled Veterans with dependent children, many of whom are women. Unlike grant-based housing programs, HUD-VASH provides eligible Veterans with housing subsidies that can be used to securing housing options that can accommodate an entire family instead of a single person. This program is part of the Housing First approach, an evidence-based, low-barrier housing model that emphasizes housing as the initial service, followed by supportive services such as employment and healthcare.

- **Child care subsidies and rapid rehousing** through Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program (SSVF). While the average homeless male Veteran is single, many female Veterans experiencing homelessness are parents. This brings a host of other considerations to bear when caring for this community like access to family housing and affordable child care. In fact, VA and community providers ranked child care as the highest unmet need of homeless Veterans from Fiscal Year 2008-2010. The SSVF program has awarded grants to organizations that provide supportive services to very low income Veterans, survivors of domestic violence and those struggling with mental health conditions and addictions, as well as their family members. This program can be particularly helpful for single mothers, who can find rapid rehousing assistance through the program and use SSVF subsidies to cover child care costs that could otherwise be a prohibitive employment and housing barrier
- **Employment and professional development** opportunities through Homeless Veteran Community Employment Services (HVCES). Employment plays an important role in helping Veterans – male and female alike – exit homelessness and reintegrate back into their community. Amongst homeless women Veterans who have access to VA services, 77 percent are unemployed. HVCES helps businesses and industry identify, interview and hire job-ready Veterans exiting homelessness, and pairs this employment emphasis with wraparound services to address the root causes of homelessness and help Veterans maintain long-term stable employment. Through a network of over 150 community employment coordinators, HVCES staff work alongside community partners to identify gaps in employment services for homeless Veterans and helps to fill them.

The impact of several of these programs can be seen in Tracey Staff's experiences with VA. After relocating to Houston, Tracey had trouble securing a stable job. Soon, she and her son were living in low-rate motels and couch-surfing at friends' houses. Tracey eventually sought assistance from VA's SSVF program, which offers employment services, referrals to housing, case management, temporary financial assistance and help applying for VA benefits. The assistance she received led to stable housing and secure meaningful employment in Goodwill's Veteran Services Office. With a stable income and the support of SSVF, she is now able to take care of her family and also support local Veterans like her.

Or take Ayana Jones, a 40-year-old mother of three who became homeless after experiencing domestic violence and going through a divorce. After seeking assistance from her local VA Medical Center, Jones was provided with supportive services and entered programs that allowed her and her three children to be rehoused. Jones is now eager to purchase her own home and volunteers in her local community's domestic violence shelters, churches, and Veteran clinics.

The experiences of Staff and Jones are not unusual: in fiscal year 2016, women Veterans accounted for approximately 12% of those served by HUD-VASH, 13% of those served by SSVF, and 10.4% of those served by HVCES. In addition to the thousands of women Veterans who exit homelessness each year as a result of the interventions provided by VA homeless programs, many more are prevented from becoming homeless. VA will remain committed to serving all Veterans, no matter their circumstances or background. Moreover, we will continue to use all available data to refine VA programs and adjust the allocation of VA resources — when necessary — to ensure that the needs of all subpopulations of Veterans, including women Veterans, are met.

If you are a woman Veteran experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, call 1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838), or visit your nearest VA Medical Center or regional benefits office where dedicated advocates for women Veterans are ready to assist. [Source: VAntage Point | Kayla Williams & Dr. Keith Harris | April 25, 2017 ++]

VA Health Care Enrollment Update 12 ► 229K Letters Bounced in 2016

Hundreds of thousands of applications from veterans to enroll in the Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare system have been delayed because VA failed to reach them by mail last year. Data provided by a VA whistleblower on 21 APR show that the VA tried last year to reach 494,428 veterans by mail to tell them it needed more information before their VA application could be completed. But the data show that almost half of those letters bounced back. According to an internal VA document, 229,366 letters never reached the veterans in question, or 46 percent. Nearly 77,000 addresses were identified by a "bad address indicator" in the VA's system. Another 54,000 letters were not accepted by software, so those letters were never sent. And more than 98,000 letters were "undeliverable."

Scott Davis, a VA employee in Atlanta and a known whistleblower who has testified in Congress about the VA's various problems, wrote a letter to President Trump outlining the problem. Davis said the VA's problems sending letters to veterans shows that its attempt to secure coverage for veterans is "grossly mismanaged." He also said the document he provided shows the VA knows about these problems, but isn't talking about them. And, he said it shows that the VA shouldn't be allowed to scuttle these applications just because it failed to reach the veterans. "The VA's own documents confirm that nearly half of the veterans who were supposed to receive notification letters didn't receive them," he wrote. "Based on this information it would be unconscionable for the administration to allow VA to go forward with their plans of purging these applications."

"Mr. president, I urge you to intervene in this matter by instructing VA to halt any plans to declare these applications abandoned and/ or incomplete," Davis wrote. Davis issued a similar warning in February that the VA was about to improperly toss out hundreds of thousands of applications. [Source: Washington Examiner | Pete Kasperowicz | Apr 21, 2017 ++]

VA Caregiver Program Update 39 ► Senators Demand Answers

U.S. Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and Patty Murray (D-WA) are demanding stronger support services for caregivers of disabled or injured veterans. Following a recent report that finds the VA is dropping veterans' caregivers from the Caregiver Support Program, Tester and Murray are calling on VA Secretary David Shulkin to investigate why some VA hospitals across the country are removing caregivers from a support program that is critical for veterans and their families. "The Caregiver Support Program is indispensable in giving caregivers the tools they need to care for their veterans, and keeping those veterans at home and out of institutions," the Senators wrote to Shulkin. "It's inappropriate and unacceptable to remove veterans' caregivers from the program. It's imperative that you address discrepancies in program eligibility and benefits across multiple states."

According to NPR, caregivers across the nation, including in Montana and Washington, are reportedly being kicked out of the Caregiver Support Program, which provides essential support services to those who care for disabled or injured veterans. Many caregivers are not given a cause for their removal and aren't notified until they attempt to access benefits through the program. Tester and Murray wrote to urge Secretary Shulkin to clarify why caregivers have been removed from the program and to make sure that the Caregiver Support Program is administered consistently across the nation. While VA provides essential health care services to disabled and injured

veterans, day-to-day care often falls on family caregivers. VA provides training, health care, and other services to caregivers who often put their own lives on hold to care for their loved ones.

Tester and Murray are also fighting to expand caregiver services to veterans of all eras. Currently, only caregivers to veterans who served after September 11, 2001 are eligible for the full range of support services. Go to <https://www.testersenate.gov/files/Letters/04-13-2017%20Letter%20to%20VA%20on%20Caregivers.pdf> to read the Senators' letter. [Source: NCOAdvocate Newsletter | April 17, 2017++]

VA Caregiver Program Update 40 ► Revocations Suspended for 3 Weeks

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that, effective April 17, it has suspended revocations initiated by VA medical centers based on eligibility for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) for three weeks. "VA is taking immediate action to review the National Caregiver Support Program to ensure we honor our commitment to enhance the health and well-being of Veterans," said Dr. David J. Shulkin, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "I have instructed an internal review to evaluate consistency of revocations in the program and standardize communication with Veterans and caregivers nationwide."

VA Medical Centers will continue accepting PCAFC applications, approving applicants based upon current eligibility criteria, processing appeals and monitoring eligible Veterans' well-being at least every 90 days, unless otherwise clinically indicated. "Caregivers play a critically important role in the health and well-being of Veterans, and caring for an injured Veteran is a labor of love," said Dr. Poonam Alaigh, Acting VA Under Secretary for Health. "We remain focused on process improvements and support services for our family caregivers so they can take care of our Veterans." Revocations exempted from this suspension include those made at the request of the Veteran or caregiver; by the local Caregiver Support Program for cause or noncompliance; or due to death, permanent institutionalization or long-term hospitalization of a Veteran or caregiver.

VA recognizes that family caregivers who care for Veterans in their homes have been putting Veterans first since the founding of our nation. VA's Caregiver Support Program will continue to provide a menu of training, education and resources to enhance the family caregiver role. These support improved family caregiver understanding of the impact that their work has on the health and well-being of the Veteran they care for. To learn more about the VA Caregiver Support Program, visit the Caregiver Website <https://www.caregiver.va.gov> or call the Caregiver Support Line at 855-260-3274. [Source: VA News Release | April 17, 2017 ++]

VA Vet Choice Program Update 52 ► Trump's S.554 Signing Remarks

Remarks by President Trump at Signing of S. 544, The Veterans Choice Program Extension and Improvement Act on 19 APR.

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THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. We're honored to join and be joined today by some absolutely tremendous people and great veterans. Thanks, as well -- and I have to thank them dearly -- but as well to Representative Phil Roe. Where is he? What a job you've done. And all the members of Congress who worked on the bill that we're about to sign. Such an important bill.

I especially want to thank Senator John McCain and Senator Johnny Isakson. They have been incredible in working with us. Let me also welcome my good friend, Florida Governor Rick Scott, a Navy veteran who's here with us to

represent more than a million veterans from the state of Florida. We're also joined by the leaders of a number of veterans groups. I want to thank all of them for being here and all of the tremendous and important work that they do. We would not be here if it weren't for them, I can tell you that.

Finally, I want to thank our Secretary of the VA, David Shulkin, who, by the way, was approved with a vote of 100 to nothing. That's shocking, right? (Laughter.) One hundred to nothing, really. Now, you wouldn't be getting 100 to nothing. (Laughter.)

We met earlier today in the Oval Office, and Secretary Shulkin updated me on the massive and chronic challenge he inherited at the VA, but also the great progress that he is making. He's got a group of people that are phenomenal at the VA. It's one of my most important things. I've been telling all of our friends at speeches and rallies for two years about the VA, how we're going to turn it around. And we're doing that.

And, actually, next week, on Thursday at 2 o'clock, we're going to have a news conference with David and some others to tell you about all of the tremendous things that are happening at the VA and what we've done in terms of progress and achievement.

The veterans have poured out their sweat and blood and tears for this country for so long, and it's time that they're recognized, and it's time that we now take care of them, and take care of them properly.

That's why I'm pleased today to sign into law the Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act. So this is called the Choice Program Improvement Act. It speaks for itself. This bill will extend and improve the Veterans Choice Program so that more veterans can see the doctor of their choice -- you got it? The doctor of their choice -- and don't have to wait and travel long distances for VA care. Some people have to travel five hours, eight hours, and they'll have to do it on a weekly basis, and even worse than that. It's not going to happen anymore.

This new law is a good start, but there is still much work to do. We will fight each and every day to deliver the long-awaited reforms our veterans deserve, and to protect those who have so courageously protected each and every one of us.

So we've made a lot of strides for the veterans. These are, like, the most incredible people we have in our country as far as I'm concerned, and they have not been taken care of properly.

I want to thank David. You've done an incredible job. And you're going to see some of that on Thursday. So thank you all very much. And we're going to sign this. And I think I'm going to have to give this pen -- the way I look at it, we should probably give it to Phil. What do you think?

PARTICIPANT: I agree.

THE PRESIDENT: Does everybody agree? I think Phil is --

REPRESENTATIVE ROE: I'll agree with that. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Phil agrees. But congratulations, everybody. Really fantastic. Thank you very much. (Bill is signed.) (Applause.) Phil, maybe you could say a few words, if you'd like.

REPRESENTATIVE ROE: Well, Mr. President, thank you very much. And this was a very, very important bill to get started with so we can get Choice 2.0 to get to the place exactly where the President said he wanted to be. And it's a privilege to work with all of these great people up here to help make the VA better.

I've spent the last week on the break going to Los Angeles and Phoenix to get a firsthand view of what's going on. And what we want to do is put the veteran in charge of these choices, not the bureaucracy. And I think Dr. Shulkin is just the person to see that happen. Mr. President, thank you so much.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. It's fantastic. And David? Where's David?

DR. SHULKIN: Yeah, I'm right behind you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Go ahead. I won't look back. You just talk. (Laughter.)

DR. SHULKIN: Well, first of all, I want to thank everybody here as well, and thank Congress for seeing this done, and Mr. President to be signing this.

This is a good day for veterans. This is a great day to celebrate not only what veterans have contributed to the country, but how we're making things better for them. And by working together, we're going to continue this progress. I think, as the President said, we're actually going to do this a week from Thursday, Mr. President --

THE PRESIDENT: Right.

DR. SHULKIN: -- and talk about the tremendous accomplishments, but most importantly, about the great things that are to come to fulfill the President's commitments that he made to veterans. And so thank you all for being here today.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Great job. So again, next week, on Thursday, at 2 o'clock -- it may change a little bit, but about that time we're going to have a conference to talk about the progress and the achievement.

I'd like to ask Rick Scott, the governor of Florida -- he's done a fantastic job as governor, by the way, and really understands his subject, and really understands a lot of subjects. Rick, do you want to say a few words?

GOVERNOR SCOTT: Sure. Well, I was really proud. My father was in the 82nd Airborne, he did all the combat jumps, and I grew up listening to all his stories about the war. I had the opportunity to serve in the Navy. Unfortunately, in 2014, I had to sue the VA because we had -- our state healthcare agency couldn't go inspect their hospitals when we heard all the stories about deaths, delays, and poor conditions.

And so Mr. President and I want to thank Congress for doing this to create certainty of care while we figure out how to fix the VA system. And David, I want to thank you for what you're doing. You've got actually the right background to do this. I know President Trump has been focused on our veterans and our military before he was President, and I know he's going to continue to do a great job. We have 1.5 million veterans. I want them all to move to Florida. (Laughter.) But thank you for doing this, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much.

Most importantly, thank you, thank all of the great veterans. Would you like to say something to all of these people out there? You'll become a movie star tomorrow. (Laughter.)

PARTICIPANT: Well, our nation will be judged by how it treats its veterans, and I'm sure our country will allow generations -- right now, they're children, but they're going to be our future servicemen. And so we have to treat veterans well. It's about national security, it's about patriotism, and this is a great step forward to doing it.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Nobody can say it better than that, so we're going to end. But I want to just thank you all. Thank you for being here. Thank you. (Applause.)

[Source: White House | Office of the Press Secretary | April 19, 2017 ++]

VA Records Update 03 ► Modernization Initiative

The Department of Veterans Affairs recently started digitizing older, inactive paper records, which will save taxpayer dollars through reduced, leased office-space that currently houses these records. "This is just one of the ways in which we are modernizing our capabilities, not only to be more responsive to Veterans and their families, but also to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars," said VA's Acting Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy.

This new “paper-extraction” process ensures that when a claim is filed, the Veteran’s electronic record is already available in VA’s computer systems, reducing processing time for benefit claims from Veterans and their survivors. In the past, when a Veteran filed a new or supplemental claim, if a medical condition had worsened, the retired paper files were boxed and shipped to a central site to scan into VA’s systems before work would begin on the new claim.

Nearly 2 million inactive files were housed in 33 regional offices across the country before the change. As of April 14, more than 500,000 files have been collected from eight regional offices for scanning. Once the records have been digitized, VA will archive and store them in less expensive long-term storage for safekeeping. The agency plans to remove and scan paper claim records from the remaining regional offices by the end of 2018. “This modernization initiative seeks to eliminate delays caused by shipping and digital conversion,” said Bradley Houston, director of VA’s Office of Business Process Integration, which oversees the initiative. “It will give claims processors nationwide the ability to instantly access millions of inactive claim records when needed.”

Over the past five years, VA has made concerted efforts to modernize the way it processes compensation and pension claims. Since 2012, 397 million records — consisting of 2.6 billion images — have been scanned, indexed and uploaded into the agency’s electronic-claims processing system, Veterans Benefits Management System. In fiscal 2016, VA provided compensation and pension benefits to more than 5.1 million Veterans and family members, totaling over \$80 billion. For more information about VA’s benefits, go to www.benefits.va.gov/benefits or call 800-827-1000. [Source: VAntage Point | April 21, 2017 ++]

VA Blue Water Claims Update 40 ► Larry Howell's Appeal

Forty years ago, Larry Howell served aboard the USS Newport News, a heavy cruiser that spent the fall of 1967 shelling targets along the coast of Vietnam. Along the way, it plowed through clouds of dust that sailors later discovered consisted mostly of Agent Orange, a herbicide that stripped away vegetation and wound up causing serious long-term health problems for millions of soldiers and civilians exposed to it. The Standish veteran said 18 APR that he was one of those who suffered, experiencing heart issues that doctors linked to his service. After the Veterans Administration initially rejected his claim years ago, he filed an appeal — a plea that has gone unheard even though federal officials in the meantime have begun to pay out automatically for other cases on his ship. It turns out that 427,000 people have appeals pending. Their average wait time is more than three years, according to a 2015 General Accounting Office study. About 81,000 veterans had been waiting more than five years for a decision.

That kind of delay, U.S. Sen. Angus King (I-ME), said, “is just inexcusable.” King told several dozen veterans gathered at the American Legion’s William J. Rogers Post 153 in Auburn that a bill introduced recently offers a way to revamp the appeals process at little cost in a bid to speed it up. When a former service member doesn’t agree with an initial decision by the Veterans Benefits Administration about the eligibility of a disabling condition — cases that can mean thousands of dollars monthly for some veterans — there’s an option to appeal. But that appeals process, the GAO report said, “is fundamentally broken.” The proposed legislation would tackle some of the problems found by the GAO by trying to streamline decision-making and ease the way for veterans who want to present additional evidence for their appeal. Much of it is focused on administrative changes that supporters say will help reduce the backlog and help the agency keep up with demands.

Amedeo Lauria, a service officer for Maine veterans, said the VA has “an incredibly archaic tracking system” for appeals that’s so complicated King said nobody understands it. Veterans who are pursuing a claim “just want an answer,” Lauria said, but instead find themselves “stuck in this limbo” within a bureaucracy that is so undermanned and overwhelmed that it can’t help. The appeals process hasn’t been thoroughly overhauled since its introduction in

1933, supporters said, and needs one badly. King said the agency also needs to fill nearly 700 vacant positions so there's enough staff to keep cases moving along, another suggestion the GAO made. Without more staff, the GAO found, delays of more than eight years will be the rule by 2026.

The **Department of Veterans Affairs Appeals Modernization Act** has 17 co-sponsors, all of them Democrats except for King and fellow independent Bernie Sanders of Vermont. It was first introduced last September but didn't get anywhere in the final weeks of the last congressional session. King and other senators are hoping the measure will have more traction this year. "I don't really think there's much controversy about it," King said. "We ought to be able to put politics aside." King said some Republicans in the House are already on board. He said he plans to talk soon with the chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, Georgia Republican Johnny Isakson, about the measure. "I hope we have the horsepower behind it to get it through," Lauria said. Howell hopes they meet with success. "I'd like to be living for a few years" after his case is finally resolved, he said, especially since he is confident that once someone looks at it, they will realize that Agent Orange claims for sailors on the ship on which he served are now granted automatically. problem is that he asked too soon. And so Howell waits. And waits. And waits. [Source: Maine Sun Journal | Steve Collins [April 17, 2017 ++]

VA Hospital Quality of Care Update 04 ► Outcomes, Readmission & Mortality

Though the Veterans Affairs health system has been under fire for various reasons, a look at quality data shows VA hospitals actually outperform non-VA hospitals in outcomes, readmission and mortality measures, according to a research letter in JAMA Internal Medicine. However, the data suggest VA hospitals need to work on patient experience and behavioral health. Researchers examined hospital-level quality and patient experience data on 129 VA hospitals and 4,010 non-VA hospitals on CMS' Hospital Compare website. They found VA hospitals had better outcomes than non-VA hospitals for six of the nine patient safety indicators and found no significant difference on the three other indicators. VA hospitals also had better mortality and readmission rates than their non-VA counterparts.

When it came to patient experience measures, however, non-VA hospitals outperformed VA hospitals on nursing and physician communication, responsiveness, quietness, pain management and if the patient would recommend the hospital. Non-VA hospitals also outperformed VA hospitals on most of the behavioral health metrics examined by the researchers. The research letter authors speculate that VA hospitals outperform non-VA hospitals on outcome measures because the VA invested time and effort into quality improvement and care coordination in the last 30 years and the system has a leg-up on care coordination because patients usually receive all of their care within the one system.

"While concerns remain about the validity of some of the measures used in current public reporting of health quality, the available data suggests that VA hospitals have a similar or more favorable quality compared with non-VA hospitals," the authors conclude. "On the other hand, these results suggest that VA hospitals should focus on improving certain aspects of patient experience and behavioral health." The VA recently launched a tool at <http://www.beckershospitalreview.com/quality/va-makes-quality-patient-satisfaction-and-wait-times-transparent.html> that allows veterans to compare patient wait time and quality data of VA hospitals with non-VA hospitals in the area in an attempt to be more transparent with its patients and empower veterans to choose the best care option for themselves. [Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Heather Punke | April 17, 2017

VA VEO ► Effort To Fix Customer Service For Veterans

Did you know VA has \$55 mil effort to fix customer service for veterans? The “veterans experience” campaign started under former VA Secretary Bob McDonald, the retired Proctor & Gamble executive brought in by President Barack Obama in mid-2014 following a national scandal over wait times for VA medical care. Trying to emerge from scandals that shook the agency to its core, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is attempting to overhaul what officials admit was sometimes pretty bad customer service. Quietly since 2015, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has built a national Veterans Experience Office.

The office’s first steps have been rolling out more than 100 community veterans committees nationwide and retraining employees to be less rigid and more customer-focused. The VA even hired professional writers to redraft the language of 1,200 official letter templates to make them more reader-friendly. “(We) had somehow gotten away from the primary mission of organizing the enterprise through the eyes of the customer,” said Joy White, who leads the office’s Pacific district, which includes California and the West Coast. “(We did) things that made sense to us, made it easy for us as the VA,” White said. “But, in all of that, we lost the voice of the customer.” The task at hand: How to change the culture of a massive federal agency that provides everything from medical care to monthly disability checks to funerals. Some might wonder if — with what’s a famously dense bureaucracy — it can be done. Even new VA Secretary David Shulkin has said it’s a struggle to fire bad apples, including employees who watch porn on the job.

The new Veterans Experience Office’s budget this fiscal year is \$55.4 million, up from \$49 million last year, “to lead the My VA transformation,” according to a budget document. About 150 jobs now fall under this office’s umbrella. The VA is examining 1,200 different letters it sends for possible rewriting. Two years in, the nation’s veterans organizations are still taking a wait-and-see position. “We’re not sure how much the VEO has improved the VA to date, but we are encouraged by this initiative and hope to see it succeed,” said Joe Plenzler, spokesman for the American Legion. “Any effort to improve dialogue between veterans and VA employees and administrators is time and money well spent.” One vocal critic of the VA said the office has potential but not if it tries to just “paper over” structural issues facing the veterans agency. “Doing things that are more feel-good measures, but actually don’t address some of the core problems of the VA, could distract from what’s needed to be done,” said Dan Caldwell, policy director at Concerned Veterans for America. “That’s the danger I see, potentially, with this office. But I want to say there’s a lot of opportunity here. If this office is managed well and insists that they are here to improve the outcomes for veterans — and not just ‘the experience’ — they could be successful.”

The “veterans experience” campaign started under former VA Secretary Bob McDonald, the retired Proctor & Gamble chief executive brought in by President Barack Obama in mid-2014 following a national scandal over wait times for VA medical care. McDonald installed a “chief veterans experience officer” in early 2015. The office reports directly to the VA secretary — now Shulkin, a doctor and health-care executive who is the first non-veteran to lead the agency. Whether he will continue the “experience” campaign is an open question. This month he named Lynda Davis, a former Army officer and Pentagon civilian executive with experience in personnel and suicide prevention, to head the office. She replaces a former McDonald’s executive, Tom Allin, who held the job for about two years. Some of the hiring was for “human-centered design” teams. These teams, which include people from Stanford’s prestigious D School, are supposed to re-engineer VA routines that aren’t working. They produced a “journey map” showing what VA patients experience. (Go to <http://www.customerbliss.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/161216-JM-18x24-V14-SUBMISSION.pdf> to view map). It identifies “pain points” along the way, such as canceled appointments. It also calls out “moments that matter,” such as the check-in process and whether it’s hard or easy to park.

Two early goals were to establish one consumer-oriented website and one toll-free telephone number for all VA divisions. The result was www.vets.gov and (844) My-VA311. The VA is now looking for inspiration from national

brands famous for good service. Starbucks, Marriott and Walgreens are on the list. “We get the experience that we design. Historically, we haven’t put an emphasis as an organization on customer service. There was no program of record that said ‘this how we do customer service,’” White told The San Diego Union-Tribune. “You walk into a Starbucks anywhere in the country, there is something that looks and feels very familiar wherever you go.”

One change the Veterans Experience Office has led: hiring for customer-service skills, instead of just looking for people qualified for a position. “We weren’t hiring for attitude,” said White, who said her office identified questions to insert in the VA’s interview process to draw out whether an applicant had customer service aptitude. In a changing health-care industry, this is a bandwagon that the VA is belatedly jumping on. Other hospital organizations have rebooted their customer experience in the past decade in response to a shift in Medicare reimbursement policy that now rewards for patient satisfaction, experts said. The power of social media is also a factor. The Cleveland Clinic was the first major academic medical center to appoint a chief experience officer in 2007. Across the country, hospitals have built grand entrances, opened restaurants intended to draw non-patients and put flowers by bedsides. “My sense of it is that we live in the age of the empowered consumer,” said John Romley, an economist at the University of Southern California’s Schaeffer Center for Health Policy and Economics. “VA customers maybe have less choice in the matter, but at the same time, there’s a great deal of sensitivity in the broader population about how we treat these people in the VA system.”

The VA’s new customer service motto — “Own the Moment” — sounds a bit like a commercial TV jingle. Training is rolling out across the country, including at the VA hospital in La Jolla, CA. The premise: VA employees should “own” their time with each customer, the veteran, and do their best to ensure the person gets the help he or she needs. That contrasts to the like-it-or-lump-it experience that veterans have sometimes complained about in the past. “We’re moving away from a rules-based organization to a more of what we call a values, principle-based organization,” said Allan Castellanos, the VA employee teaching the La Jolla seminar. “I call it more like integrated ethics, like doing the right thing for the right reason,” he said. The employees were shown a video of VA workers going the extra mile to welcome an uncertain new veteran into a clinic. In another, VA workers allowed the family of a dying veteran to bring his horse onto hospital grounds.

The VA is trying to emerge from bunker mentality after back-to-back national embarrassments. First, in 2013, the backlog of disability claims rose to mountainous proportions, bringing down the wrath of Congress and the public. Then, in 2014, news reports revealed that VA medical workers were keeping secret lists of patients waiting for appointments to make wait-time data appear satisfactory. All of this occurred as the VA struggled to handle a flood of new veterans coming home from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. A few of the ideas being pursued by the Veterans Experience Office have origins in San Diego. Officials acknowledge that what they are calling Community Veterans Experience Boards — the 152 community boards they eventually want to create nationally — came from San Diego’s longstanding example. San Diego veterans leaders meet monthly with VA officials here in both closed-door and public sessions. Additionally, the tragic suicide of 35-year-old Marine Corps veteran Jeremy Sears appears to have helped spur a campaign to redraft VA correspondence to make it more user friendly.

Sears shot himself at an Oceanside gun range in 2014 after being rejected for VA disability benefits despite the cumulative effects of several combat tours. Veterans advocates suggested that the VA rejection letter could have offered advice on where to go for counseling and other assistance, instead of just a “no.” “That was one of the ‘pain points’ that was identified,” White said, referring to the veteran’s “journey mapping” that her office did. “There was a lot of legalese, when in fact we just want it to be simple and clean.” They started with the Veterans Benefit Administration’s correspondence and are working their way toward the Veterans Health Administration’s appointment cards. Veterans Experience Office officials first told the Union-Tribune that they could provide examples of the rewritten letter formats, but later said they weren’t ready yet.

The Veterans Experience Office, headquartered in Washington, now has split the country into five districts and dispatched “relationship managers” to each. The Veterans Experience Office is now trying to finesse those moments that matter to veterans. In 2017, officials expect to roll out a veterans real-time feedback tool in 10 locations. They also plan to release a patient experience “program of record.” “Our goal is to build trust with veterans, their family members and survivors,” White said. “How do we do that? By bringing their voices to everything we do.” [Source: The San Diego Tribune | Jeanette Steele | April 17, 2017 ++]

VA Pharmacy Update 08 ► Annual Income Verification Requirement

A new administrator at the Bay Pines Healthcare System is being credited by veterans for resolving a paperwork snafu that had some low income VA clients being billed for medications they should have gotten for free. And what’s worse, some of the low income veterans, who may have been unaware of the VA charges or thought they were a mistake, ended up having the money taken from their benefits checks, according to Bill Dreyer, a veteran and peer counselor. “I have a lot of problems with, right now, the billing system for the VA,” Dreyer told a veterans’ roundtable at the Florida Madeira Beach American Legion Post 273 last week.

Dreyer described how a female veteran with military sexual trauma, who he is counseling, was charged for her VA medications, yet she never received a bill. “The reason I found out about this is I’ve been counseling Megan for a while and she got a letter from the Treasury Department that said we are now docking your Social Security benefits,” Dreyer said. An unidentified veteran in the audience chimed in, “I got one of those (letters) too.”

Unexplained charges for VA medications that are supposed to be free to qualified, low income veterans is not something new to veteran and advocate Randall McNabb, a ride captain with the Patriot Guard Riders. McNabb said many low income veterans who qualify for free medications don’t know they are required to verify their income status every year. It’s known as a **'means test'**. “If their means test goes out of date, it says they’ll be notified at their next appointment. That next appointment could be 10, 12, 14 months down the line,” McNabb said. “Meanwhile, they’re being charged for their medications unknown to them.” If the veteran ignores the VA bill, thinking it’s just a mistake, it goes to collections. McNabb said that scenario was happening too often especially among veterans who had gone through the VA homeless programs.

“Most of the low income veterans mistakenly believe that it’s a mistake,” McNabb said “Instead of going and checking on it.” So, McNabb started speaking up like at the quarterly town hall held by the Bay Pines Healthcare System last fall. One of the people who heard him was Jonathan Benoit, the new, chief of health administration service at Bay Pines Healthcare Systems. Benoit dug into the data and found 600 veterans who needed to renew their “means test”. But instead of waiting for the veterans to come in for their appointments, Benoit sent letters to all 600 immediately. “What’s nice is we started with that 600 and in our recent run, I coincidentally saw the stack of letters and it’s only a little more than 100 right now,” Benoit said. “And that’s all the way out for the entire year and I’m hoping it gets lower and lower to a point where we’re on top of every single one of these veterans and they don’t have to experience that inconvenience of having to pay copays.”

McNabb mentioned Benoit’s efforts at the roundtable and said the solution should be shared nationally. Benoit is working on that. “This is certainly something that I’m going to share with other chiefs and I actually just transferred from Eastern Colorado and I have already shared the process with them,” Benoit said. He was gratified to see results within just a few months and he is thankful for the veterans’ feedback because he’s a veteran too. Now, Benoit is moving on to his next VA mission: fixing the scheduling system at Bay Pines. [Source: Off the Base | Bobbie O'Brian | April 28, 2017 ++]

VA Claim Denial ► Veteran Bob Ratz | Spinal Problems

Roseburg Oregon Navy veteran Bob Ratz, 85, injured his back as a young man, when he was serving with the Sea Bees construction battalion in Guam and in the Philippines in the 1950s. Today, he suffers spinal problems he believes are connected to those injuries. Even though his doctors agree with him, Ratz's efforts to convince the Department of Veterans Affairs of the connection haven't been successful so far, and appealing its denial of his claim has been a difficult and time-consuming process. He's been at it for two and a half years. Douglas County Veterans Service Officer Pat Plourd said Ratz isn't alone. Hundreds of Douglas County veterans are in the middle of lengthy waits on their appeals. On average, the Portland regional VA office takes 420 days to decide on the first level of appeals, and it takes another 534 days on average to get a hearing with the Board of Veterans Appeals.



Robert Ratz and his wife Pamela

The problem has garnered national attention. For the second year in a row, a group of U.S. senators has introduced a bill that would overhaul the appeals process. But for now, Ratz and others like him are stuck waiting. Bob Ratz's wife Pamela Ratz said she hopes Douglas County residents will contact their U.S. senators and representative to voice support for the Department of Veterans Affairs Appeals Modernization Act. This piece of legislation was introduced in the U.S. Senate last year, and reintroduced into the Senate in March by Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Jon Tester (D-MT). A similar bill was introduced in the U.S. House last year. According to a press release issued by Blumenthal's office, the current appeals process was designed in 1933 and hasn't been updated since. The result is that more than 450,000 veteran appeals are currently pending. The bill, S.3328, has been referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs. It would create a three-track system to simplify and speed up appeals.

The buildings Ratz and other Sea Bees worked on had been designed to withstand the impact of atom bombs. The materials used to construct them were solid, heavy and hard on the back. "The interior walls were cement blocks and the exterior walls were too," Ratz said. "The first deck was cement, the second deck was cement and the roofs were cement. They tested several houses when they were dropping that A bomb. They made steel houses, wooden houses, to see which ones would withstand the bomb the best, and I guess these were the best," he said.

Like many young men in the military, Ratz's approach to back pain was to ignore it, for the most part. A couple of times, though, he did see a medic about injuries to his back. "They basically told him take some aspirin, go to bed, and go back to work in the morning," Pamela Ratz said. It didn't occur to Bob Ratz that the pain would linger into his senior years. Today, he suffers from bulging and herniated discs and degenerative arthritis in his spine, and he has filed a benefit claim asking the VA to pay for his care. The regional VA office rejected his claim, and Ratz

appealed. A spine specialist wrote to the VA that Bob's problems are related to the injuries he received during his service, but the VA again rejected the claim. After a two-year wait, it issued a decision denying his appeal. The Ratzes have now moved on to the next level of appeal, and have been waiting a year so far.

Plourd works for the county, not the VA, and represents veterans seeking VA benefits. He said Ratz's experience is typical of many veterans. During their service, they may have injured a joint, a back, an arm, a shoulder, but they see it as an acute problem. They don't anticipate the chronic pain. That will come later, and be much harder to prove. Unfortunately, Plourd said, the VA is reluctant to tie those two things together. If it doesn't see the pain as connected to the injury received during the veteran's service, then it won't pay for the treatment the veteran needs now. "It works to the disadvantage of the veteran, because the benefit of the doubt, which should always go to the veteran, doesn't always go to the veteran," Plourd said.

The Roseburg Veterans Affairs Medical Center doesn't determine whether veterans receive benefits. That's the job of the Veterans Benefit Administration. But Plourd said doctors at the VA hospitals can help bolster a veterans' claim by writing letters to the benefits office. In the past, though, doctors at the Roseburg Veterans Affairs Medical Center have been reluctant to provide such letters, arguing they have a conflict of interest since they work at the VA. Plourd doesn't buy that logic. It's not an issue at other VAs, as far as he can tell from talking to his counterparts in other areas. Plourd said issues with the Roseburg VA have been improving since Director Doug Paxton took charge. Some doctors there have recently written really good letters in support of their veteran patients' appeals, drawing the links between their service injuries and their current conditions. Sometimes, a doctor will turn down a patient's request for such a letter, but agree to do it when Plourd asks. Plourd said he wishes he didn't have to step in, that a patient's request would be enough.

Roseburg VA Chief of Staff Ratnabali Ranjan said in a written statement that the Roseburg VA has to follow the procedure laid out by the Veterans Benefit Administration, which involves having specially trained clinicians fill out medical forms. She said the VBA discourages additional information being provided. [Source: The News-Review | Carisa Cegavske | April 19, 2017 ++]

GI Bill Update 224 ► Improper Payments | Reform Needed

U.S. Senator Jon Tester is using his powerful position on the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs to save taxpayers money and cut debt for veterans. In a letter to VA Secretary David Shulkin, Tester is calling on the VA to reform its administration of the Post-9/11 GI Bill after reports surfaced that student veterans were being overcharged for their education benefits because of miscommunication between their schools and the VA. "I am very concerned by the rate of improper payments being made to veterans receiving education benefits," Tester wrote. "Overpayments are a serious matter. They cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars each year and the way they are clawed back from veterans creates nothing but confusion and financial hardship. Veterans should not be left holding the bill for programmatic mistakes for a benefit they have earned, and it's past time for further action from the VA to reform this process."

Last October, the Government Accountability Office reported that the VA made \$416 million worth of inaccurate Post-9/11 GI Bill payments in 2014. This waste of taxpayer money has left approximately one out of every four student veterans who use the program holding the bill for mistakes that could have been easily avoided. According to the Government Accountability Office, schools were reporting veterans' enrollment status to the VA before enrollment deadlines, so many student veterans changed their course load after their enrollment status was already reported to the VA. This resulted in schools charging the VA for classes veterans did not take. When the VA realized this mistake, it fell upon student veterans to pay back the difference.

The VA has previously agreed with the Government Accountability Office's recommendations to reform this process, but has yet to take any action to implement them. Tester is pushing Shulkin to inform student veterans and schools about the cause and ramifications of overpayments, improve reporting methods, and alleviate the financial burden on veterans. Under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the VA has issued \$66 billion in education benefits to over 1.6 million veterans and beneficiaries. The report was released by the Government Accountability Office, a non-partisan congressional watchdog service that studies how the government is using taxpayer money. Tester's letter can be viewed at https://www.testersenate.gov/files/Letters/04_12_17_To_Shulkin_GI_Bill_Overpayments.pdf. [Source: NCOAdvocate Newsletter | April 17, 2017++]

GI Bill Update 226 ► Reforms This Year Are All But Dead

Plans for GI Bill reforms this year are all but dead after a high-profile, emotional fight among veterans advocates in recent days over proposed dramatic changes to the popular benefit. The conflict comes after months of behind-the-scenes work testing the idea of charging future active-duty troops for an improved veterans education benefit, a proposal that proved more controversial when it became public sooner than supporters had anticipated. But a casualty of the fight may be a series of less sensational changes to veterans education benefits that a host of advocacy groups had hoped to push through Congress this year. Now, the legislative appetite for those moves appears gone. House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe (R-TN) called the strong negative response from some groups to the pay-in idea "a giant step backwards" for GI Bill debate on Capitol Hill this year.

"We've got plenty of other issues before us already," he said. "We have to fix the (VA) Choice program. There are big IT issues to fix at VA. "We can't let one issue suck up all the oxygen in the room."

Veterans groups on both sides of the fight say they're hopeful they can change Roe's mind. Still, his comments are a stark change from the multiple GI Bill roundtables held by the committee since January, where a host of veterans groups offered ideas on possible improvements to the education benefits. They include expanding eligibility to certain reservists currently excluded from the Post-9/11 GI Bill — a benefit that awards 36 months of tuition and a monthly housing stipend to all eligible troops, with no pay in — and more money for scholarships for families of service members killed on duty. Those plans have broad support in the veterans community, but they also come with a problematic price tag. Officials at Student Veterans of America estimate that package of expansion ideas will cost about \$3 billion over the next decade, a significant amount for a Republican-run Congress eyeing the federal deficit.

Attempts to pass similar changes last year were stalled when lawmakers linked the funding to trims in the current GI Bill. A House proposal to cut housing stipends for dependents of veterans using the benefits was met with protests on Capitol Hill. A Senate plan to reduce all housing stipends by a small percentage received an even harsher response. Officials at SVA in recent years have viewed those proposals not as temporary problems but as long-term threats to the existence of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. "It's naive to think the support for veterans will always be as high as it is now," said Will Hubbard, SVA's vice president of government affairs. "We've seen cuts to the benefit in the past. "Some are saying there is no wolf lurking. I hate to say it, but it's a real thing."

The response from SVA — founded as part of the 2008 debate over improving veterans education benefits — has been their "Forever GI Bill" campaign. That includes significant research work proving the value of the benefit in terms of veterans' graduation and employment rates, as well as an attempt to shift public perception of the tuition payouts from a wartime benefit (the Post-9/11 GI Bill was passed in large part as a recruiting tool at the height of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars) to a benefit for military service anytime. It also envisions consolidating all of the existing GI Bill benefits into a single offering, with generous post-9/11 benefit payouts as a framework for the new

program. That provision includes a pay-in of \$2,400 from future troops to be eligible to collect the benefit after service, which sparked the controversy.

Hubbard said the pay-in idea is similar to how previous benefits, in particular the the Montgomery GI Bill, were handled. Not only would it raise money for the desired expansions, Hubbard argued, but it would also make it more difficult for lawmakers to trim benefits later because of the personal investment involved. But it's a significant shift in how the GI Bill is viewed by many in the Iraq and Afghanistan generation of veterans. When the new benefit was approved by Congress in 2008, basing the entitlement on military service time instead of troops' contributions was a key focus for many advocates. Last year, officials at Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America publicly stated they will oppose any cuts or pay-ins for the education benefit. Leaders at Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion expressed concerns with the idea of a pay-in during the congressional roundtables in recent months.

But lawmakers and supporters of the idea drafted legislation earlier this month on the topic and scheduled a hearing for 26 APR for a formal public debate on the idea. Opponents took that as a signal the idea was gaining momentum and their objections were being ignored. "We were very honest all along that we would be opposed to this," said Kayda Keleher, legislative associate for Veterans of Foreign Wars. "We felt it was best that we let it be known publicly where we stood before the hearing took place." That response took the form of a scathing news release 18 APR, labeling the idea "a tax on troops" that named Roe as the author of the draft bill (his staff said he did not intend on sponsoring the legislation) and accusing lawmakers of looking to find savings at the expense of veterans. Within hours, officials with Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America released a similar statement repeating the "tax" line. Leaders from veterans groups involved accused each other of broken promises on releasing information, exaggeration and outright lies. Democratic lawmakers on the committee quickly distanced themselves from the idea.

Within days, the hearing was canceled. "This proposal was so outrageous, we doubted it would actually ever move forward to a public debate," said Paul Rieckhoff, CEO of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. "Now that it has, our members and the American people have spoken, and they think it is unacceptable." SVA officials have pushed back on that. Several groups — including Vietnam Veterans of America, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, the Association of the Untied States Navy and Concerned Veterans for America — have come out in favor of the pay-in plan, at least as a general concept. And even though the hearing was meant to be the public unveiling of debate on the topic, its cancellation is not a death knell for the proposal, according to Hubbard. "This is just the beginning of this conversation," Hubbard said. "We're disappointed that several groups out there are not interested in having the conversation. But it's something we'll continue to look at."

Advocates in the "Forever GI Bill" camp are pressing for an open debate on the idea, calling it an important step toward protecting the education benefit for decades to come. "We can't shut down debate before it begins and expect to help those that the GI Bill leaves behind," John Rowan, national president of Vietnam Veterans of America, said in a statement. "We're excited to talk about closing loopholes, and expanding and protecting this benefit." But they also acknowledge they need a better response to the "tax" label, which damaged the idea almost immediately, and a better explanation for why a change is needed sooner rather than later. Opponents say regardless of the marketing of the education benefit pay-in, it's a non-starter.

Keleher said the sooner lawmakers completely dump the pay-in proposal, the sooner they can start looking to other areas to fund the needed GI Bill expansions. Rieckhoff echoed that. "The GI Bill is a cost of war," he said. "As long as America is at war, and it looks like that'll be for the indefinite future, it's a price America must find a way to pay for." But it may not be a price that's explored much for the rest of this year. Roe said while he's open to discussion on the topic in the coming months, it's not one of the committee's top priorities during that time frame. "I'm disappointed with the backlash," he said. "Our idea was to expand benefits. We'll continue to work on that. "But there are a lot of big lifts for us to do." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 27, 2017 ++]

VA CCI ► Center for Compassionate Innovation Launched

On 18 APR, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the launch of the Center for Compassionate Innovation (CCI), which will explore emerging therapies that may enhance Veterans' physical and mental well-being. In addition, VA is accepting proposals to fulfill CCI's mission of finding innovative approaches to health care, which may support those Veterans who are unsuccessful with conventional treatment. Proposals may be submitted through <https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships> and will be evaluated through a rigorous algorithm that critically assesses the safety and efficacy of the innovation. "VA is unique in our approach to health care," said Veterans Affairs Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. "We are committed to offering Veterans cutting-edge and innovative care. That means carefully exploring every avenue that will promote well-being."

CCI explores innovations in the health-care industry as well as innovative practices currently being piloted on a small scale within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). CCI is primarily interested in innovations that address post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, chronic pain and suicidality. However, CCI will explore any safe and ethical innovation intended to improve Veterans' health and well-being. CCI is not an implementation office intended to conduct research, clinical treatment or establish a vendor relationship. CCI is strategically positioned to spotlight cutting-edge therapies and treatment modalities emerging in private industry. CCI is an example of VA's quest to continue as a leader in providing innovative and effective treatments for Veterans. [Source: VA News Release | April 18, 2017 ++]

VA Medical Marijuana Update 27 ► Could Replace Vet's 9,828 Yearly Pills

The Department of Veterans Affairs prescribes Joshua Lee a lot of pills – 9,828 a year by his count. His medical record shows Lee, who attained the rank sergeant in the Missouri National Guard before a convoy attack in Afghanistan led to his medical retirement, has received a raft of opioid painkillers, muscle relaxants and psychotropic drugs from the government. He struggles with back and knee injuries, fibromyalgia, arthritis and post traumatic stress disorder. But Lee, 33, says the drugs have not helped him get better. Instead, he said, he's become addicted, particularly to one of the drugs prescribed by VA doctors. "I am absolutely addicted to tramadol and have gone through some of the worst withdrawal symptoms I've ever experienced," he said.



Despite the deluge of medication, his pain endures. Chiropractic care and other non-pharmacological services, which the VA trumpets, have been difficult to access. Sometimes he's felt his "only hope was to eventually take stronger and stronger opiates. That's my only hope," he joked. Then, in March, Lee tried something different. He and his wife used the occasion of their 15th wedding anniversary to drive to Colorado Springs, Colorado, in one of 29 states and the District of Columbia where medical marijuana is now legal. "I hit up the recreational dispensary,

bought 4 ounces of weed, edibles and topicals,” he said. “I needed to figure out what it would take to replace these meds.” After four days, he said, his mind had cleared and the pain had subsided.

When he returned home to Holts Summit, Missouri, he wanted to send a message. So he bought the entire stock of Smarties from a local candy shop, counted out capped them in plastic. He snapped a photo and posted it on Facebook with a cry for help and a call for action. I’m a 100% disabled veteran, prescribed 10,000 (pills) annually by the VA. I take them willingly, as the best hope to improve the lives of my wife and children. They’re killing me. They kill thousands each year. Medical marijuana can reduce these pointless, tragic deaths. Come save lives with us. His below picture has been shared more than 1,500 times.

Reached for a response, VA spokesman James Hutton, said there was no way the agency could prescribe marijuana, which remains illegal under federal law. But the VA has been quietly researching marijuana’s viability as a treatment. In 2014, a team of VA researchers published an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association that found opiate overdose rates were much lower in states which allowed medical cannabis. Researchers found the longer the medical marijuana law had been in effect, the stronger the correlation. On the other hand, the National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which is run by the VA, reports that “the belief that marijuana can be used to treat PTSD is limited to anecdotal reports from individuals with PTSD who say that the drug helps with their symptoms.”

While federal law forbids the VA from prescribing, dispensing or recommending marijuana, VA spokeswoman Ndidi Mojay said the agency’s “health care providers do not report use of medical marijuana to law enforcement or agencies.” Veterans who tell their doctor about their “their personal use are provided information to reduce unintentional consequences such as drug interactions,” Mojay added. Lee said his VA doctors were helpful in telling him which prescriptions to reduce and which to stay on during his trip to Colorado. The VA has also become more restrictive in its provision of narcotics in response to congressional pressure. The number of veterans receiving prescription opiates from the VA has declined by more than 170,000 since 2013. But Lee wants a bigger change. He wants federal law to change. Failing that, he’d like Missouri to become the 30th state where medical marijuana is legal. [Source: www.revealnews.org | Aaron Glantz | April 25, 2017 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 30 APR 2017



Amarillo, Tx — Amarillo Veteran Affairs Health Care System is warning veterans of a fake phone line mimicking the Veterans Choice Line. The mimic line offers callers a \$100 rebate if the caller provides a credit card, and does not state callers have reached the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or the Veterans Choice Line. Callers have reported that the mimic number incorrectly confirms callers had reached the "choice program" if that caller asks that question. The VA does not ask for credit card information. Officials have identified 1-800-606-8198 as the fake number. Do not answer calls from this number. The correct number for the Veterans Choice Line is 1-866- 606-8198. [Source: CBS News Channel 10 Amarillo | April 27, 2017 ++]

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Los Angeles, Ca — The owner and operator of a California trucking company are accused of bilking more than \$4 million from the Department of Veterans Affairs by collecting federal tuition reimbursements for veterans who never actually attended any classes, federal prosecutors said 13 APR. **Emmit Marshall**, 50, and **Robert Waggoner**, 54, were indicted in Los Angeles on federal wire fraud charges and each face up to 20 years in prison if they are convicted, prosecutors said. Authorities allege Marshall, who owned the Alliance School of Trucking in Chatsworth, and Waggoner, the school's director, recruited veterans by telling them that they could collect housing fees and other benefits from the government without having to attend any classes. The school was certified under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, a program where the VA pays tuition and other fees for college classes or on-the-job training programs for active duty and honorably discharged members of the military, prosecutors said. As part of the program, the VA paid tuition and fees to the school and also paid housing allowances to veterans who said they were enrolled full-time at the school. Prosecutors allege Marshall and Waggoner created false enrollment certifications and then submitted them to the VA and also created phony student files. Between 2011 and 2015, the federal government paid the school more than \$2.3 million for tuition and fees and paid nearly \$2 million to the veterans who never attended the classes, prosecutors said in announcing the charges. [Source: Associated Press | Michael Balsamo | April 13, 2017 ++]

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Buffalo, Ny — **Dwayne Brice** was supposed to manage his father-in-law's veterans benefits. Instead, he stole \$38,904 in benefits and, according to prosecutors, used some of it to gamble at local casinos. Brice, 37, of Buffalo, pleaded guilty this week to theft of government money before Chief U.S. District Judge Frank P. Geraci Jr. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Scott S. Allen Jr. and Stephanie O. Lamarque said Brice was appointed a fiduciary for his elderly father-in-law by the Department of Veterans Affairs, but instead stole his veteran's benefits over a two-year period ending in September 2015 Brice's guilty plea is the result of an investigation by the Criminal Investigations Division of the Veterans Affairs' Office of Inspector General. [Source: The buffalo News | Phil Fairbanks | April 20, 2017 ++]

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Kansas City, Mo — The owner of a medical business has admitted in federal court in Kansas City, Missouri, his role in a fraud scheme involving disability examinations of veterans under contract for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Eighty-year-old **David Biersmith** waived his right to a grand jury and pleaded guilty 21 APR to one count each of health care fraud and making a false statement to a federal agency. As the owner and operator of Industrial Medical Center, Biersmith also admitted making false statements about his role in the physical examinations of commercial truck drivers. Seventy-four-year-old Wayne Williamson, a former doctor who worked as a medical consultant Biersmith's business, pleaded guilty in January to similar health care fraud charges. [Source: Associated Press | April 20, 2017 ++]

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Dallas, Tx — A former North Texas Marine has been sentenced to 21 months in prison after receiving veterans benefits, including a house, due to fraudulent claims he was injured during combat in Iraq. **Brandon Blackstone** was sentenced in Dallas federal court on 21 APR. The 35-year-old Blackstone had pleaded guilty in September to one count of wire fraud and one count of fraudulent representation about the receipt of a military decoration for financial gain. According to court documents, Blackstone, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 2004 until 2006, falsely claimed he had been injured when his Humvee vehicle hit an anti-tank mine. The Department of Veterans Affairs awarded Blackstone disability benefits as a result of his fraudulent claims and he also received a mortgage-free home from a military foundation. Blackstone has been in prison since February for violations of his pretrial conditions. [Source: The Associated Press | April 23, 2017 ++]

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Kansas City, Mo — The owner of an Independence, Mo., medical clinic pleaded guilty in federal court 20 APR to his role in a fraud scheme that involved disability examinations of veterans and to making false statements regarding his role in the physical examinations of commercial truck drivers. **David L. Biersmith**, 80, of Kansas City, waived his right to a grand jury and pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Howard F. Sachs to a federal information that charges him with one count of health care fraud and one count of making false statements to a federal agency. Biersmith was the owner and president of Industrial Medical Center (IMC) in Independence. Although Biersmith had no medical license or other medical credentials, IMC was a drug- and DNA-testing center and had contracts with various entities to provide medical services to patients and to provide drug testing and physical examinations for drivers of commercial motor vehicles.

On April 23, 2013, Biersmith signed a contract with Logistics Health, Inc., to provide disability examinations for veterans to determine the extent of veterans’ impairments and eligibility for benefits. Initially those examinations were conducted by a licensed physician at IMC. When the physician left in July 2013, Biersmith directed Wayne W. Williamson, 74, of Kansas City, and another person to perform the examinations, although they were not authorized to do so under the contract with Logistics Health. Williamson was formerly a physician but lost his medical license due to an earlier fraud scheme and a narcotics distribution charge. In a separate but related case, Williamson pleaded guilty on Jan. 17, 2017, to health care fraud. Williamson was a medical consultant at IMC during various periods beginning at least as early as 2013 through at least March 2015. Williamson was formerly a medical doctor but voluntarily surrendered his medical license in 2010 after he pled guilty to health care fraud; conspiracy to distribute Oxycotin, Percocet, and Xanax; and harassing or attempting to harass an investigator with the Missouri State Board of Healing Arts. Williamson was sentenced to three years in federal prison and permanently excluded from participation in Medicare or Medicaid programs.

Williamson admitted that he performed disability examinations for the Department of Veterans Affairs under IMC’s contract with Logistics Health. This was done in violation of Logistic Health’s contract with the Department of Veterans Affairs, which required that disability examinations be conducted by credentialed providers and that the examiners must have a clear and unrestricted license and not be excluded from participation in the Medicare or Medicaid programs. IMC falsely represented that a licensed physician had completed and electronically signed the Disability Benefits Questionnaires. IMC submitted invoices to Logistics Health to be paid for 209 disability examinations on 53 veterans. In turn, Logistics Health submitted invoices to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the disability examinations performed by its subcontractor, IMC. The Department of Veteran’s Affairs paid Logistics Health \$39,155 for the disability examinations performed by its subcontractor, IMC. In April 2014, Logistics Health contacted the Department of Veterans Affairs—Office of Inspector General hotline and reported the fraudulent activity. Because a credentialed provider did not conduct the disability examinations, the Department of Veterans Affairs had to re-adjudicate all those claims. Some veterans had to be physically re-examined, and others had their claim file reviewed.

In addition to the health care fraud, Biersmith admitted that he made materially false and fraudulent statements related to IMC’s drug testing and medical examinations on drivers of commercial motor vehicles. Those examinations are required by Department of Transportation regulations. In a signed affidavit provided to federal agents, Biersmith stated that he had only signed a “few” physicals and only before, during, or after an examination had been performed by a chiropractor. In fact, Biersmith admitted today, he signed at least 65 such documents using the chiropractor’s name, including instances when the chiropractor did not perform the exam. Under federal statutes, Biersmith is subject to a sentence of up to 15 years in federal prison without parole. The maximum statutory sentence is prescribed by Congress and is provided here for informational purposes, as the sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the court based on the advisory sentencing guidelines and other statutory factors. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled after the completion of a presentence investigation by the United States Probation Office. [Source: Western Dist of MO | U.S. Attorney's Office | April 20, 2017 ++]

VA Vet Center Update 12 ► Oklahoma | 90-day Hold on Talihina Referrals

The Veterans Affairs hospital in Muskogee has placed a new 90-day hold on admission referrals to the Talihina Veterans Center — placing additional financial stress on a nursing home for veterans that already is struggling for survival. "Issues of concern regarding staffing, ongoing decrease in bed levels, and recent patient incidents," were cited as reasons for the new 90-day hold on referrals. This is the second time in less than six months that the hospital has placed a 90-day hold on referrals to the center. The move is a blow to the already shaky financial stability of the Talihina center because it relies on the medical center's referrals for about 60 or 70 percent of its new patients, said Doug Elliott, deputy director of the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs. Every patient the center loses represents a loss of from \$106 to \$350 a day in revenues, Elliott said Friday.

Rocked by troubling deaths and a severe nursing staff shortage, the department announced a few weeks ago that it had quit accepting residents with behavioral issues at the 175-bed Talihina center and had begun phasing out its 48-bed special-needs unit. The center's remote location in a heavily forested region of southeastern Oklahoma has made it virtually impossible to fill some open staff positions, even with enhanced pay, Elliott said. State veterans department officials have sought authorization to move the center to Poteau, which is surrounded by a much larger labor pool, but have run into opposition in the state Legislature.

The center has come under scrutiny in recent months because of two high-profile deaths. Vietnam War veteran Owen Reese Peterson, 73, was found with maggots in his body and later died from sepsis at the center on Oct. 3. About three months later, Leonard Smith, a 70-year-old advanced dementia resident, choked to death. A plastic bag was later found in his throat. State officials were notified of the new hold on referrals in an email 14 APR from Clinton "Butch" Coward, assistant chief of social work service for the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center in Muskogee. "It is our sincere hope, that within this time frame, the above issues will be addressed in a manner that will regain our confidence in referring our veteran patients to your facility," Coward wrote.

The Talihina Veterans Center was originally constructed as the Eastern Oklahoma Tuberculosis Sanatorium in 1921. The name was changed in 1972, to Oklahoma State Sanatorium. On July 1, 1975, the Sanatorium was transferred to the control of the War Veterans Commission to provide nursing care to Oklahoma veterans, both male and female. [Source: The Oklahoman | Randy Ellis | April 17, 2017, ++]

VAMC Shreveport LA Update 02 ► In Praise of Overton Brooks

I am writing this letter in hopes that your newspaper will see fit to print it since it is a praise instead of a gripe. I want the Overton Brooks VA Medical Center to know how much they mean to me and my family and for others to see what a wonderful job they are doing.

I took my husband to the VA hospital on a Friday with his heart rate of over 150 a minute. They ran a test on him and put him on blood thinners to bring his heart rate down, but since he had a breathing problem and was on oxygen 24/7 the breathing treatments that he had to have were fighting against the heart rate. Needless to say, my husband's condition became worse, but not because of anything the doctors and nurses did. The care they gave him was so awesome. I cannot describe how wonderful everyone who took care of him was. The doctors and nurses were right on top of anything that happened.

When it was obvious that nothing was going to help him, they put him on comfort care, which is a hospice ward. The doctors, nurses and staff were so wonderful to the family and were alert to any change in my husband. I would highly recommend the VA hospital as a caring and confident medical facility. The love and caring that I experienced was above and beyond anything you can imagine. We were on three different floors and everyone was the same on

each floor. I could not have asked for more support than what we received. I hope that you will feel free to post this letter so that others will know that the VA hospital is indeed loving and caring and totally able to take care of our soldiers and veterans.

Carol Graves, Gary, Texas

[Source: The Times | Ltr to the Editor | April 18, 2017 ++]

VAMC Hampton VA Update 06 ► Hiring Freeze Impact

Although President Trump has lifted a federal hiring freeze, Virginia's two senators say the impact of what they call "an incredibly short-sighted measure" continues to hamstring the Hampton VA Medical Center. The medical center has reported more than 200 open clinical positions. Even though the freeze granted exceptions for most clinical positions, it did not spare the human resources department, which is down 40 percent at Hampton. Because HR oversees and processes hiring, the Hampton VA has had difficulty making new hires that had been allowed under the freeze, said Sens. Mark R. Warner and Tim Kaine. That difficulty hasn't gone away since Trump lifted the freeze 12 APR, they said. The senators requested more information 21 APR in a letter to Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin.

The senators' letter states that "it remains unclear whether facilities like the Hampton VAMC have the authority to restart hiring for these positions following M-17-22 (the memo that lifted the freeze) or whether they still require a specific exemption, which may delay the process." Hampton recently reported it had 203 unfilled clinical positions, breaking down as follows: 14 physicians, 97 nurses, 14 nurse practitioners/physician assistants, 24 psychiatrists or psychologists, four in the area of dental care and 50 in other clinical disciplines that include therapists and dieticians. "The inability to fill these positions due to the hiring freeze has undoubtedly caused delays for veterans seeking access to health care in Hampton Roads and across the Commonwealth," the letter states. In addition to the 203, another approximately 100 positions were unfilled, which would include the HR jobs.

The senators want to know how many positions are unfilled across the VA and what, if any, additional resources or authorities are required to fill vacancies. In addition to VA health-care positions, Kaine and Warner said they're concerned about the processing of veteran benefit claims. "VA data shows a measurable increase in backlogged claims since the freeze's implementation," the letter states. "Administration staff have also indicated that the freeze has hindered their ability to process claims in a timely manner." The letter notes that Virginia is home to more than 750,000 veterans and the number is growing. [Source: Daily Press | Hugh Lessig | April 21, 2017 ++]

VAMC Cincinnati Update 07 ► COS Suspended After 14 Months

A former acting chief of staff at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center has been suspended without pay, more than a year after whistleblowers accused **Dr. Barbara Temeck** of initiating a series of management actions that forced out experienced surgeons, reduced access to care and put patients in harm's way. "Dr. Temeck has been suspended indefinitely without pay effective today," said Randy Noller, a spokesman for the VA in Washington, D.C. A joint investigation by the Scripps Washington Bureau and WCPO led to Dr. Temeck's demotion with full pay in February of 2016. That was followed by several management changes and a series of investigations that did not substantiate "any impropriety" regarding the "quality of care for veterans" but did substantiate an allegation that Dr. Temeck prescribed controlled substances to the wife of her regional boss, former VA Network Director Jack Hetrick.

After her demotion, Dr. Temeck filed a whistleblower complaint alleging she was unfairly targeted by surgical staffers from the University of Cincinnati who wasted millions of dollars at the Cincinnati VA by collecting "full-time salaries and benefits" for "less than full-time work." In a two-page statement to WCPO, her attorney Ken Hawley said Dr. Temeck will appeal the suspension. Go to <https://www.scribd.com/document/346359207/Hawley-Statement> to read the full statement. "This is unfortunate for the Cincinnati VA Medical Center," Hawley said. "Their best resource has been suspended." On the one-year anniversary of the Cincinnati VA controversy, whistleblowers told WCPO that much had improved in the 12 months following Dr. Temeck's departure. "We've got dynamic, honest people running the hospital right now," said Dr. Richard Freiberg, former chief of orthopedics at the Cincinnati VA. "Yes, it's on the right track."

The hospital recruited three new orthopedic surgeons and invested \$1 million on new equipment to sterilize surgical equipment. This, after Dr. Freiberg and others complained Dr. Temeck forced out experienced surgeons and caused veterans to seek care outside the VA system. Whistleblowers also complained that Dr. Temeck told operating-room staff they were being "too picky" when they reported surgical instruments delivered to operating rooms with blood and bone chips from previous surgeries. While the VA maintained throughout that no veterans were harmed by improperly sterilized surgical equipment, it also replaced the hospital's chief of sterile processing and completed a multi-year project to modernize the cleaning facility and move it closer to VA operating rooms. [Source: WCPO-9 Cincinnati | Dan Monk & Mark Greenblatt | April 25, 2017 ++]

* Vets *



Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Memorial ► Arlington Approves



The [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) reports that a small monument was proposed to honor helicopter pilots who died in the "Helicopter War" during a meeting between the new executive director of Army National Military Cemeteries and Vietnam veterans. Previous attempts by the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association for a monument were denied by cemetery officials, according to the Journal Sentinel. The concern was that other groups would want a

memorial and the dwindling space at Arlington Cemetery should be reserved for graves. However, the new director seems to be more receptive to the group's efforts. Bob Hesselbein, Middleton veteran and former president of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, said the proposed location of the monument next to a tree is ideal, the newspaper reported.

The design of the marker would feature an UH-1 "Huey" helicopter etching with logos of all military branches and the phrase "In honored memory of helicopter pilots and crew members who gave the full measure of devotion to their nation in the Vietnam War." The exact cost of the 27.5-by-32-inch marker is not yet known. Hesselbein, who piloted Cobra attack helicopters in Vietnam, told the Journal Sentinel that the memorial's cost is "a humble amount that we, of course, will pay to donate." After all, the cost of the memorial is much less important than the recognition of the group's fallen comrades. The group has raised enough money for the the memorial's creation, shipment, installation and upkeep. The next step for the creation of the memorial is the approval of the design by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts. Hesselbein told the Journal Sentinel that he is hoping the memorial will be complete by the end of the year so it can be dedicated in 2018. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Rachael Kalinyak | April 10, 2017 ++]

Vet Deportations Update 10 ► Pardons Could Help 3 Return

Hector Barajas is constantly dreaming about the day he'll return to the United States legally. On the eve of Easter, California Gov. Jerry Brown granted Barajas and two other veterans full pardons for crimes they committed before being deported to Mexico. Brown granted a total of 72 pardons and seven commutations Saturday. A pardon is usually granted to individuals who have demonstrated "exemplary behavior and have lived productive and law-abiding lives following their conviction," the governor's office said in a statement. The pardons could open a pathway for the men to come back to the United States, according to the [American Civil Liberties Union of California](#).

A veteran without US citizenship can be deported if convicted of various crimes. When the men's public records are cleared, an immigration judge could revisit their cases and halt their deportations, allowing them to return as lawful permanent residents, also known as green card holders. "Oh my God, this is huge. The process will be easier for me to go home to my family," Barajas said [in a Facebook live video](#). "Hector Barajas, Erasmo Apodaca, and Marco Antonio Chavez Medina long ago paid their price for their mistakes, but their deportation has been the worst price of all, as they have been permanently separated from their families and the only country they knew," Jennie Pasquarella, director of immigrants' rights for the ACLU of California, said in a statement.



Hector Barajas

Barajas served in the Army's 82nd Airborne Division from 1995 until he was honorably discharged in 2001. When he returned to Compton, he struggled to adjust to civilian life. One night, he was arrested for shooting a gun from his vehicle. Even though nobody was hurt, he was charged with assault. He pleaded guilty to illegal discharge of a firearm and served two years in prison. "Don't worry about it, you service in the military, you'll be all right," Barajas told CNN. He was deported to Mexico. More than a decade has passed since Barajas was deported to Mexico, but he hasn't abandoned his dream of coming back to the country he calls home. In Tijuana, Mexico, he supports fellow deported veterans in a two-story apartment covered in military posters and hung U.S. flags. It's a safe house called Deported Veterans Support House or "The Bunker", he founded in 2013

Erasmio Apodaca Mendizabal

When he was 16, Apodaca's parents brought him to Calexico, California. As a lawful permanent resident, he joined the US Marine Corps after graduating from high school. During Apodaca's three years of service, he was deployed to Iraq in Operation Desert Storm. He earned a national defense service medal and other military honors, according to this pardon. In 1996, he broke into his ex-girlfriend's house when he was drunk and stole \$500 worth of goods, his pardon explains. He was convicted of burglary. While he was in prison, Apodaca was part of an inmate program that allows him to fight fires with trained firefighters, according to the San-Diego based group Honorably Discharged, Dishonorably Deported. He was deported in 1997 after serving a 10-month sentence.

Marco Antonio Chavez

Chavez grew up in Los Angeles after he arrived to the US with his parents in 1973. He was just 1 at the time. At 19, he enlisted in the Marine Corps and served for four years. In 1998, he was convicted for animal cruelty and served 10 months in prison. An immigration judge considered his conviction an aggravated felony, which led to his deportation in 2002. In an effort to stay together, his family first moved with him to Tijuana, Mexico. After a while, his wife continued struggling with the language barrier and the daily commute back to the US for work. Chavez' wife and three sons moved to Iowa, according to YouTube's 22 min "Honorably Discharged, Dishonorably Deported" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGK48Ky6hHw> site.

[Source: CNN | Nicole Chavez| April 16, 2017 ++]

PTSD Punitive Discharges Update 05 ► Class Action Lawsuit Filed

Two former soldiers who have been diagnosed with PTSD have filed a federal class-action lawsuit to have their general discharges upgraded, according to a complaint filed 17 APR in Connecticut. Former Pfc. Stephen Kennedy, 30, and Spc. Alicia Carson, 28, are plaintiffs in a suit alleging that despite the requirement for the Army Discharge Review Board to give "liberal consideration" to veterans claiming their discharges were related to post-traumatic stress disorder, diagnosed veterans are having their reviews denied. The complaint was filed — officially against acting Army Secretary Robert Speer — on the veterans' behalf by Yale Law School's Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization, whose students successfully sued the Army in 2014 on behalf of Vietnam veterans with PTSD. As a result, then-Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel wrote a memo to the Defense Department's review boards requiring them to take "liberal consideration" with discharges for misconduct that could have been connected to PTSD.

"That should have been the end of it, and here we are, three years later, asking them to actually do what they said they would do," Yale law student Helen White told Army Times on Monday. "We think it's really shameful that it's taken not one, but two, class actions filed by vets with PTSD to get the military to do something about it," White said. Reached for comment, an Army spokeswoman declined to discuss the case. "As a matter of policy, the Army does not comment on ongoing litigation," Lt. Col. Jennifer Johnson told Army Times. Though the lawsuit names

two soldiers specifically, White said, the team filed it as a class-action case both to point out how common they say the problem is and so that the ruling could cover anyone fighting for or thinking of filing for an upgrade. "To prove to the Army that this is not a one-off, they are not one-off mistakes," she said. "We want to make sure that we're bringing as many people in as we can."

Kennedy served as an infantryman with the 82nd Airborne Division and deployed to Iraq before his discharge in 2009, White said. Carson, then a member of the Connecticut National Guard, deployed to Afghanistan and served as a gunner for a Special Forces unit. Both received general discharges after going absent without leave, according to the suit. The lawsuit argues that both were suffering from PTSD: Carson's was diagnosed, while the Army called Kennedy's condition "major depressive disorder," which was later diagnosed as PTSD by a VA doctor. Both filed to have their discharges upgraded in 2015, but Hagel's memo hasn't been applied liberally or equally, White said. Both Carson and Kennedy's cases were denied. "In neither case did the board seem to believe that they had PTSD at the time of their discharge," she said of the board's written decisions.

In Kennedy's case, she said, the reasoning was that he never sought treatment for PTSD, specifically while on active duty, though he was diagnosed with depression. "They don't even mention the Hagel memo in their discussion," she added. The team is seeking both new reviews for Kennedy and Carson, as well as changes to the system that would uphold the liberal consideration policy. This would include "a court order saying that the board must apply the Hagel memo, fully and keeping with its purpose," White said. [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | April 17, 2017 ++]

Blue Star Memorial ► Alabama National Cemetery Marker

The Alabama National Cemetery dedicated a Blue Star Memorial Marker on 15 APR. "In remembering today, we dedicate this Blue Star Marker to the honor and glory of all those men and women who have served, are now serving and will serve in the Armed Forces of this great nation," Montevallo Evening Garden Club president Melanie Poole said. The marker was placed as part of the Blue Star Memorial Program. The National Council of State Garden Clubs – now known as The National Garden Clubs, Inc. – started the program in 1945 to honor those serving in World War II, according to Garden Club of Alabama president Tricia Mitchell. The program has since expanded and continues to erect markers along highways, at veterans' facilities, in national cemeteries and at civic and historic sites.



Mayor Hollie Cost acknowledged the dedication of the marker on behalf of the city of Montevallo. Glenn Nivens with the Blue Star Salute of Alabama read a proclamation from Governor Kay Ivey acknowledging the dedication of

the Blue Star Memorial Marker. Nivens and Marshall Goggins represented the Blue Star Salute of Alabama at the program. The Blue Star Salute organizes an annual day to honor military, veterans and fallen soldiers. The group also attends deployment ceremonies of military units to show their support. ALNC director Quincy Whitehead and cemetery caretaker supervisor Brian Hudson accepted the marker after its dedication. The Montevallo Evening Garden Club placed a wreath as Robert Robinson played the guitar and sang "Angel Flight" by Rodney Foster. The song honors fallen soldiers and references the flight of a military plane bringing the deceased home to the U.S. The ceremony concluded with a benediction and the playing of taps. [Source: Shelby County Reporter | Steven Calhoun | April 18, 2017 ++]

U.S. Air Force Monument ► **Into the Wild Blue Yonder** | 1st of 5

The creation of a monument in California honoring U.S. Air Force veterans has begun, but the project is still \$50,000 short of the \$90,000 price tag, according to a report from television station KRCR in Redding. The U.S. Air Force Monument is intended to be the first of five service monuments to be built at the Northern California Veterans Cemetery in Igo, southwest of Redding. It will also be the first Air Force monument to be placed at a California state-run veterans' cemetery. The monument, titled "Into the Wild Blue Yonder," is intended to honor the sacrifice and dedication of all airmen will be a place of reflection for families and visitors to the cemetery. The design by Vietnam War combat veteran Gideon Carl Turner III, an artist in Redding, has been approved by the California Department of Veterans Affairs. The aluminum monument will be placed along a newly designated monument walkway that will honor veterans of all eras and all branches of service.



"Into the Wild Blue Yonder"

Steve Trammell, an Army Vietnam veteran and owner of Eagle Iron Works, a metal fabrication company, and his son, Khay, were chosen to build it. "I'm flattered that I was picked, and we are proud as punch to have our name on it," he told KCRC. The 5-foot globe rests on top of a 3-foot pyramid with a 6-foot base. A deltoid-shaped aerospace vehicle will sit on the tip of a contrail that encircles the globe and thrusts upward 4-feet. Trammel told the TV station that the project will require a total of about 300 hours of metal work. It marks the first time in 20 years of business that he will be paid for artwork. Organizers hope the monument will be done by late summer and installed by Veteran's Day. Trammell told the television station that he plans on completing the monument as soon as possible, even if the money is not immediately available. "It doesn't matter when the money shows up," he said in

the report. "The money is important but we have business here already and so it's just a good thing to be working on." To contribute to the creation of the monument and help the organizers reach their \$90,000 goal, go to <http://www.usairforcemonument.com/make-a-donation>. [Source: AirForceTimes | Rachael Kalinyak | April 18, 2017 ++]

Vet Cemetery Arkansas Update 03 ► Fort Smith New Director

The new U.S. National Cemetery in Fort Smith director commands respect for the nation's veterans and their families. Gerard Lyons, a 32-year-old Iraq War veteran who served as an Army forward observer, was appointed the new cemetery director in February after serving as assistant director of the Phoenix National Memorial Cemetery, the Southwest Times Record reported. He also was the first director of the new Yellowstone National Cemetery in Montana, which opened in May 2014. While Lyons focuses on the day-to-day operations of the national cemeteries in both Fort Smith and Little Rock, he also has plans to improve signage on directions, rules and regulations. "The new signs will just let people know this is a place of honor and a hallowed place and don't bring your pets in here and you can't exercise in here," Lyons said. "I know it's not malicious, but if you're in your track suit running around here, come on, get out."

Lyons went on to say although he can understand why someone would want to exercise in the cemetery, he won't have it. "These people are heroes," Lyons said. "Every single headstone out there is a monument to somebody's service and some of these people did incredible things. They deserve the utmost respect." A Davenport, Iowa, native who comes from a large military family, Lyons said he spent some time "wandering" after his service. Through a program for veterans he learned of a caretaker's position at the Rock Island National Cemetery near his hometown. Lyons worked at Rock Island National Cemetery for three years before moving to Montana to lead the new cemetery at Yellowstone. From there, he was accepted and graduated from the Veteran Administration's yearlong National Training Center program at St. Louis. He was as the Phoenix cemetery for six months when the position in Fort Smith became open. He is married and has a 3-year-old son.

The U.S. National Cemetery in Fort Smith has averaged about 40 burials a month, Lyons said when pointing out the National Cemetery Administration within the VA was recently given the highest approval rating given by the American Customer Satisfaction Index among both private and public sectors. It was the sixth consecutive year for the VA's National Cemetery Administration to top the index. "The nation loves its national cemeteries," Lyons said. Something the new director would eventually like to explore in his career is environmentally aware "green burials." He also is in support of historical projects like VA's Legacy Program, which offers digital learning tools like interactive maps and videos to connect communities with an enshrined veterans' legacy.

On March 23, the VA announced a new online Daily Burial Schedule (DBS) for all VA national cemeteries, (<https://www.cem.va.gov/cem/dailyburialschedule/index.asp>) which will allow families and loved ones to retrieve time and location information for those being interred, via its National Cemetery Administration (NCA) website <https://www.cem.va.gov>. "We pride ourselves on continuously improving customer satisfaction and meeting the wishes of Veterans and their loved ones," interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Ronald E. Walters said in a VA news release. "We want manageable information for anyone wishing to pay their respects." The public can search by national cemetery or last name. DBS will give the scheduled committal service date and time, location of the cemetery and funeral home providing services. The location of the committal shelter will be provided at the cemetery. Users may also navigate to the specific VA national cemetery website for directions and further information.

The VA operates 135 national cemeteries and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites in 40 states and Puerto Rico. More than 4 million Americans, including veterans of every war and conflict, are buried in national cemeteries. The VA also provides funding to maintain 105 veterans cemeteries in 47 states and territories including tribal trust lands,

Guam, and Saipan. For veterans not buried in a national cemetery, the VA provides headstones, markers or medallions to commemorate their service. In 2016, there were more than 345,000 veterans and their loved ones honored with memorial benefits in national, state, tribal and private cemeteries. [Source: Southwest Times Record | John Lovett | April 23, 2017 ++]

Obit: John Jacobson ▶ 13 APR 2017 | QM In Patton's 3rd Army

When Army veteran John “Jack” Jacobson died at age 106 on 13 APR. He was among the oldest living World War II veterans in the U.S. Jacobson enlisted in 1940 and was sent to England in 1944 to help prepare for the invasion of France, according to AL.com in Alabama. He served as a quartermaster in Gen. George Patton’s Third Army for the next two years. He separated from the Army Reserve in 1953. Jacobson and his wife, Georgia, moved to Missouri in 1962 to close a family-owned packing plant; and instead he expanded it and moved it to Liberal, Kansas, according to his obituary. He became chief executive officer of National Beef and chairman of the board of Idle Wild Foods, Inc., which under his leadership became a Fortune 500 company.



He retired in 1986, moved to Florida, and then to Alabama where he lived in Point Clear. He was an avid golfer and took part in many community activities, often saying “another day to live is another day to serve,” according to the AL.com story. "Major Jacobson used every opportunity to come and be around young people. He knew what he represented and he knew the values that he wanted to pass on to the younger generation ... what a blessing he was to us and what a blessing that he was able to live his life so completely to the very end," Janet Cobb, director of Battleship Park, where Jacobson was a frequent visitor, told Fox News.

Jacobson worked at veterans events with Dr. Barry Booth, a Vietnam War veteran, and talked with school children about World War II. Jacobson was a local hero who touched the lives of thousands of people, Booth said in the Fox report. Before the service for Jacobson on 18 APR, children lined Highway 225 outside a school in Point Clear and waved flags as a tribute to him. The service took place at Alabama State Veterans Cemetery in Spanish Fort. “Tears just fell out of my eyes when we came by the school and all the kids were out there waving the flags,” Jacobson’s son, John Jacobson, told Local 15 TV News. [Source: ArmyTimes | Rachael Kalinyak | April 20, 2017++]

Obit: Norm Hatch ► 22 APR 2017 | Iwo Jima Photographer

Norm Hatch, a Marine Corps veteran who played a crucial role in the famous Iwo Jima photo and whose footage from the Battle of Tarawa won an Academy Award, died 22 APR at his home outside Washington. He was 96.

His family members plan to hold a memorial service at Arlington National Cemetery later this year. Born in 1921, Hatch enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1939, where he eventually joined the photographic unit, according to the Washington Post. As the United States entered World War II, Hatch and his camera deployed with the Marines to the Pacific.

In 1943, Hatch and his hand-cranked 16 mm camera recorded scenes from the Battle of Tarawa. His footage would be made into the 1944 documentary short “With the Marines at Tarawa,” which received the 1945 Academy Award for Best Documentary Short, officially presented to the Marine Corps. Roughly 15 months after Tarawa, Hatch wound up with the Marines on the island of Iwo Jima, capturing moments from one of the most historic battles in the Corps’ history. He came ashore with the first wave of Marines in which nearly 6,000 were killed. Four days into the battle, an order came down to get a larger American flag to the top of Mt. Suribachi, a large volcanic peak and the highest point on the island.

With no hesitation, the 24-year-old combat cameraman grabbed Staff Sgt. Bill Genaust and Pfc. Bob Campbell and ordered them to join the Marine detachment heading up the mountain with the larger flag. On their way up, the trio encountered Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal, who happened to know Campbell, as the two had worked together at the San Francisco Chronicle. Rosenthal then decided to join them for the rest of the hike up. “Rosenthal said he thought [the peak] looked like a good place to take a picture,” Hatch told the Washington Post in 2013. “He got there just in time.”

Campbell and Genaust began capturing the changing of the flag on their still and video cameras, while Rosenthal moved some rocks and sandbags around to create a better vantage point. Five Marines and a Navy corpsman hoisted the flag as Rosenthal quickly captured the now iconic photo. Within a day and a half, Rosenthal's picture was on newspaper covers back home. The picture would become a symbol for the Corps, eventually featured as the centerpiece statue for the United States Marine Corps Memorial in Arlington, Va. Without Hatch's involvement getting Campbell to go up the mountain, Rosenthal might have not joined for the trek and the photo may never have been captured. Additionally, Hatch carried with him Genaust's film when he left the island as Genaust was killed at Iwo Jima.



Norm Hatch

Hatch has tirelessly defended the photo's authenticity throughout his life, as rumors circulated that the photo was staged. “Had I posed that shot, I would of course have ruined it,” Rosenthal said in Charles “Chip” Jones's book “War Shots,” about the combat photographers. “I'd have picked fewer men. . . . I would have made them turn their heads so they could be identified [and] nothing like the existing picture would have resulted,” he added. Norm Hatch retired from the Marines in 1946 as a major. In his later years he worked as a consultant to the White House Press Office during four administrations and to the House and Senate Photo and Television Galleries, according to

the U.S. Naval Institute. He passed away Saturday at his home in Alexandria, Va. He was the last living Marine connected to the Iwo Jima flag raising photo. Go to <https://youtu.be/JJf49O9fuiY> to listen to Hatch recount the events of the picture taking. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Christopher Diamond | April 25, 2017 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 29 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\veteterans 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\veteterans 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 29, 2017 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► 01 thru 31 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*

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
San Antonio TX Veterans Job Fair	May 18, 2017
Milwaukee WI Veterans Job Fair	May 18, 2017
Lawton OK Veterans Job Fair (Fort Sill)	May 18, 2017
Fort Walton Beach (Eglin AFB / Hurlburt Field) FL	May 24, 2017
New York NY Veterans Job Fair	May 25, 2017
Cincinnati OH Veterans Job Fair	May 25, 2017
Greater Seattle WA Veterans Job Fair	May 25, 2017
Western Region Virtual Career Fair	May 31, 2017

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Listings

[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](#)

[Dallas/Forest Hill Hiring Fair](#) May 16 - 8:30 am to 1:00 pm
Forest Hill, TX [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Camp Pendleton Military Spouse Career Event](#) May 16 - 9:00 am to May 17 - 1:00 pm
Camp Pendleton, CA [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Fort Buchanan Hiring Fair](#) May 18 - 9:00 am to 4:00 pm
Fort Buchanan, PR [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Boston Hiring Expo with the Boston Red Sox](#) May 23 - 9:30 am to 2:00 pm
Boston, MA [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Fort Belvoir Military Spouse Networking Reception and Hiring Fair](#) May 23 - 7:00 pm to May 24 - 1:00 pm
Fort Belvoir, VA [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Pensacola Hiring Fair](#) May 25 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm
Pensacola, FL [Details](#) [Register](#)

Veteran Career/Job Fairs

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

Forest Hill, TX May 16, 2017, 8:30am - 1pm **More information**
Forest Hill Civic & Convention Center, 6901 Wichita Street, Forest Hill, TX 76901
8:30-10 a.m. personal branding workshop 10 a.m.-1 p.m. hiring fair

Camp Pendleton, CA May 16, 2017, 5:30pm - 8:30pm **More information**
Pacific Views Event Center, 202850 San Jacinto Road, Camp Pendleton, CA 92058
* MILITARY SPOUSE CAREER EVENT (Day 1 of 2) 5:30-8:30 p.m. networking reception and Arts in the Armed Forces performance.

Camp Pendleton, CA May 17, 2017, 10am - 1pm **More information**
Pacific Views Event Center, 202850 San Jacinto Road, Camp Pendleton, CA 92058
* MILITARY SPOUSE CAREER EVENT (Day 2 of 2) 10 a.m.-1 p.m. hiring fair

Fort Buchanan, PR May 18, 2017, 9am - 4pm **More information**
Fort Buchanan Community Club & Conference Center, 660 Depot Road, Fort Buchanan, PR 00934
9 a.m.-10 a.m. Resume workshop provided by The American Legion , 10:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m. Financial literacy workshop provided by The American Legion , 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Networking lunch, & 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Hiring fair

Springfield, VA May 18, 2017, 10am - 2pm **More information**
American Legion Post 176-Springfield , 6520 Amherst Ave, Springfield, VA 22151
10 a.m.-noon Reserved for candidates who have active Security Clearance/Military & Veterans (Active, Retired, Reservists, National Guard, Wounded Warriors-Discharged & Caregivers and Family Members)
Noon-2 p.m. Open to all job seekers.

Boston, MA May 23, 2017, 9:30am - 2pm **More information**
Fenway Park, 4 Yawkey Way, Boston, MA 02215
9:30 a.m.-11 a.m. employment workshop , 11 a.m.-2 p.m. hiring fair
All registered veterans and military spouses are eligible to receive up to two free tickets to attend that evening's game between the Red Sox and the Rangers.

McLean, VA May 23, 2017, 7pm - 9pm **More information**
Capital One Headquarter, 1680 Capital One Drive, McLean, VA 22102
* MILITARY SPOUSE CAREER EVENT (Day 1 of 2) 7 p.m.-9 p.m. networking reception

Seattle, WA May 24, 2017, 9am - 2pm **More information**
Doubletree by Hilton Hotel, Seattle Airport, 18740 International Boulevard, Seattle, WA 98188

Fort Belvoir, VA May 24, 2017, 10am - 1pm **More information**
Fort Belvoir Community Center, 10300 Taylor Road, Fort Belvoir, VA 22060
* MILITARY SPOUSE CAREER EVENT (Day 2 of 2) 10 a.m.-1 p.m. hiring fair

Pensacola, FL May 25, 2017, 8:30am - 1:30pm **More information**
Florida Army National Guard Armory, 8709 Grow Drive Pensacola, FL 32514
8:30 a.m. Employment workshop & 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Hiring fair

[Source: Recruit Military <https://events.recruitmilitary.com> & <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs> & <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs> | April 29, 2017 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► Wyoming 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 – WY**" 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/wyoming-state-veterans-benefits.html> | April 2017 ++]

* Vet Legislation *

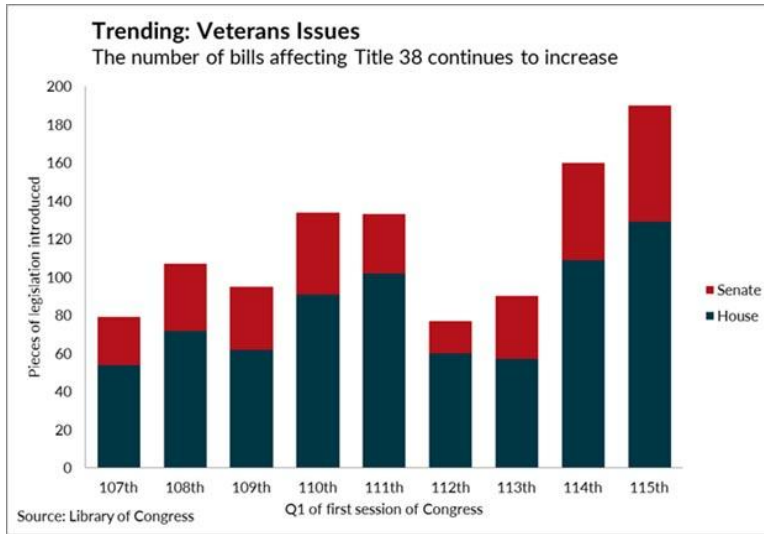


Note: To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 115th Congress. Bills are listed in reverse numerical order for House and then Senate.

Vet Congressional Issues ► Trending In Congress

Lawmakers have been busy early in the first session of the 115th Congress, introducing almost 200 bills to help veterans. Lawmakers' increased focus on veterans continues an upward trend since 2001. Anyone keeping up with what's going on in the VA will tell you it has been a bumpy ride for the department since 9/11. Fast forward to 2014, when news of hidden wait lists at the Phoenix, Ariz., VA medical center broke in the media. Reports surrounding the Phoenix scandal, coupled with rising veteran suicide rates, investigations of VA employee misconduct, claims appeal backlogs, and other issues continue to plague the VA. The department remains in the crosshairs of the administration and Congress, both aiming to fix and reform the agency.

“The good news is all this attention has brought to light the very issues we veterans and veterans service organizations have been talking about for decades,” says MOAA's Director of Government Relations for VA Health Care Cmdr. René Campos, USN (Ret). “It gives us an opportunity to make real and lasting change, perhaps more so today than at any other time in history,” Campos says. Lawmakers have enthusiastically pushed out veteran-centric legislation in recent years. While not all bills become law, the sheer activity on Capitol Hill indicates a very engaged Congress and administration. It shows elected officials are working hard on behalf of veterans to address their issues.



MOAA anticipates this flurry of activity will continue through the remainder of this year. There is much more work ahead to reform and modernize the VA, as outlined in reports from the Government Accountability Office, the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, and the VA's Commission on Care. Though the work will not be easy, our troops and veterans and their families deserve our full attention to get meaningful legislation passed. As one lawmaker recently stated, "We must do everything we can to help - as careful protectors of our national treasure, veterans should have what they need when they need it. It is up to us [Congress] to find the money to do so." It is up to MOAA and all other military fraternal organization plus their members to help Congress in this important mission. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | April 28, 2017 ++]

VA VJO Program ► Veterans Treatment Court Improvement Act

Senator Jeff Flake (R-AZ) introduced the Veterans Treatment Court Improvement Act on 11 APR. The bill seeks to require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to hire additional Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialists in order to ensure veterans have greater access to effective and tailored treatment. The Veterans Treatment Court model requires regular court appearances (a bi-weekly minimum in the early phases of the program), as well as mandatory attendance at treatment sessions and frequent and random testing for substance use (drug and/or alcohol). Veterans respond favorably to this structured environment given their past experiences in the Armed Forces. However, a few will struggle and it is exactly those veterans who need a Veterans Treatment Court program the most. Without this structure, these veterans will reoffend and remain in the criminal justice system. The Veterans Treatment Court is able to ensure they meet their obligations to themselves, the court, and their community.

The VJO program was created by the VA to provide veterans with timely access to VA services and engage justice-involved veterans in specialty treatment courts. The veterans' treatment court model removes veterans from the regular criminal justice process and helps to address symptoms that are unique to veterans, such as post-traumatic stress disorder or substance abuse. In a veterans' treatment court, the presiding judge works alongside the veteran and the VJO specialist to establish a structured rehabilitation program tailored to the specific needs of that veteran.

Flake made the announcement during a visit to the Mesa Municipal Court with Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich to observe the court's veterans docket. During the visit, Flake and Brnovich met with several dedicated

VJO specialists who are responsible for connecting veterans to available veterans' treatment court services under the VJO program. [Source: TREA Washington Update | April 17, 2017 ++]



VA Medical Staff Update 03 ► S.899 | 1st Year Paid Sick Leave

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS) joined Sens. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Jon Tester (D-MT) in recently introducing the Department of Veterans Affairs Veteran Transition Improvement Act (S. 899). The legislation would ensure veterans with a disability rating of 30 percent or higher who are hired by the VA in critical medical positions can access additional paid sick leave during their first year on the job to receive medical care related to their service-connected condition. “I’m pleased to support legislation to assist service-disabled veterans in Kansas and across the country in the transition into the federal workforce and civilian life,” Moran said. “This legislation builds on the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act to ensure veterans who sustained wounds or injuries while defending our nation can take time off to seek medical treatment without affecting their livelihood or paycheck. Providing men and women with service-related disabilities greater flexibility to pursue medical care is a simple way to show our gratitude for protecting our freedoms.”

Since the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act — led by Moran — became law in November 2016, 104 hours of additional paid sick leave has been available to newly hired service-disabled veterans for positions in the federal government. The law currently applies to most federal agencies, but personnel occupying certain VA medical positions are not currently eligible. S. 899 will ensure all newly hired VA physicians, physician assistants, registered nurses, chiropractors, podiatrists, optometrists, dentists and expanded-function dental auxiliaries who are service-disabled veterans will not have to face the added financial hardship of taking unpaid leave to receive necessary medical treatment. With this benefit expanded to these VA medical positions, disabled-veterans may be more incentivized to apply and fill the more than 18,000 vacancies for medical personnel across the VA health system, including 118 vacancies in Kansas.

“It is imperative that our great nation protects veterans seeking medical treatment for service-connected disabilities from discrimination or reprisal,” said American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt. “Under the current Wounded Warrior Federal Leave Act, disabled veterans employed by the VA do not enjoy the same benefits as other veterans who are federal employees. Specifically, the law as currently written excludes them from participating in the paid sick leave program available to other veteran federal employees. On the behalf of our 2.2 million members around the world, the American Legion strongly urges our elected officials to pass Sens. Hirono, Moran and Tester’s proposed Department of Veterans Affairs Veteran Transition Improvement Act - enabling all qualified veterans in the federal workforce to participate in this important paid sick leave program.”

The VA Veteran Transition Improvement Act is also supported by the National Association of VA Physicians and Dentists, Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Disabled American Veterans, National Federation of Federal Employees and the Federal Managers Association. [Source: McPherson Sentinel | March 31, 2017 ++]

VA Telehealth Update 10 ► Across State Line Access

Telehealth services for veterans have expanded dramatically in recent years, but a group of lawmakers worries that federal rules governing that remote care haven't kept up. On 25 APR, a bipartisan group of House members and senators reintroduced legislation designed to boost access for veterans by easing those rules, arguing that patients in rural areas or facing travel difficulties are being disadvantaged by outdated regulations. "This is allowing our veterans to access VA health care across state lines," said Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA), and a National Guard veteran. "That is so important, because there may be a specialist (somewhere) right now that they don't have access to. "This would allow those veterans, in the comfort of their own home, to be able to consult with a physician, over the phone or the internet."

The legislation amid a years-long push from the Department of Veterans Affairs to expand medical access and appointments to a growing list of patients, and amid continued criticism that the bureaucracy can't keep up with demand. In 2015, the VA conducted 2.14 million telehealth visits, reaching more than 677,000 veterans. But supporters of the efforts say even more patients could benefit. Under current law, VA doctors can provide treatment via the phone or internet chat services for a host of routine appointments, including some mental health services. But the rules bar physicians from providing those services across state lines, unless both the veteran and the doctor are located in federal facilities. That limits the telehealth options for individuals in remote areas, like Alaska and Hawaii, and still forces many veterans to travel significant distances to get to an approved facility.

The bills introduced in the House and Senate would change that, allowing veterans to receive remote care anywhere, including a home or nearby community center. "The VA has seen tremendous growth and interest in telehealth," said Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA) a bill sponsor and member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. "And we should continue to find new ways to connect veterans with the providers that they need, no matter their physical location." Brownley is co-sponsoring the House legislation with Rep. Glenn Thompson (R-PA) whose son serves in the Army. Ernst's mirror legislation in the Senate is co-sponsored with Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) who serves on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

The group is hopeful the bipartisan, bicameral push will advance the legislation this session. Last year, similar efforts stalled in Congress. Ernst called it a common sense measure. "Many of (my colleagues) don't know you can't do home telehealth over state lines, and are asking, 'Well, why not?'" she said. "And I'm saying, 'exactly, that's why we're doing this bill.'" The bills would change some monitoring and oversight rules regarding VA telehealth program, requiring VA to provide more information on the effectiveness of current offerings. No hearings have yet been scheduled for the measures. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 25, 2017 ++]

VA Chiropractic Care Update 04 ► S.609 | Expand VA Facility Coverage

Senator Jerry Moran (KS) introduced S. 609, the Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act of 2017, on 13 MAR to amend the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act of 2001 and title 38, United States Code, The bill would require VA to offer chiropractic care at a minimum of 75 VA medical centers by the end of 2018 and at every VA medical center by the end of 2020. VA currently offers chiropractic services as part

of its medical benefits package. However, VA's website indicates that only about 65 VA medical centers have chiropractors on site who are integrated into primary care, rehabilitation and other specialized care teams. DAV Resolution 244 supports access to a "full continuum of care, from preventive through hospice services, including alternative and complementary care such as yoga, massage, acupuncture, chiropractic and other nontraditional therapies." Readers are requested to write their Representative to urge co-sponsorship and enactment of S. 609. To facilitate this the DAV has provided at <https://www.votervoicenet/BroadcastLinks/KK3n4nuKvH9J08A1w-Wpsw> suggested editable message that can be automatically sent to your representatives. [Source: DAV | April 26, 2017 ++]

GI Bill Update 225 ► Lifetime GI Bill Act Would Tax Troops

A congressional proposal to make service members buy into their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits surprised veterans groups on 17 APR, with advocates divided over whether it amounts to a long-term fix for the benefit or an unfair bill for veterans. "This new tax on troops is absurd," said Veterans of Foreign Wars National Commander Brian Duffy in a statement. "Ensuring veterans are able to successfully transition back to civilian life after military service is a cost of war, and not a fee that Congress can just pass along to our troops. "Congress must stop nickeling and diming America's service members and veterans." The plan — draft legislation from House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe (R-TN) — would deduct \$2,400 from future service members' paychecks to establish eligibility for revamped post-military education benefits.

Currently, the post-9/11 GI Bill offers full tuition to a four-year state college (or the equivalent tuition payout for a private school) plus a monthly housing stipend to any service member who spends at least three years on active duty, and to reservists who are mobilized to active-duty for extended periods. Troops wounded while serving are also eligible. Unlike the older Montgomery GI Bill benefit, the post-9/11 GI Bill does not require any fees or pay reductions for eligibility. The new proposal would change that, taking up to \$100 a month from new enlistees' paychecks for the right to access the benefit after they leave the ranks.

The money collected would amount to a fraction of the overall cost of the veterans education benefit. Congressional staff estimate the move would bring in about \$3.1 billion over the next 10 years, while total GI Bill spending is expected to total more than \$100 billion over the same decade. Supporters of the plan say having service members "buy in" to the benefit would strengthen it against periodic attempts by budget planners to trim veterans education benefits. Last year, veterans advocates sparred over proposed cuts to GI Bill benefits given to the children of troops, and a plan to cap some housing stipends connected to the program. "It's infinitely more difficult to get rid of or cut the GI Bill if troops have paid into that benefit," said Will Hubbard, vice president of government affairs for Student Veterans of America (SVA). "This is about how we can make the GI Bill protected and buffered against budget fights for years to come."

SVA is one of several groups expected to testify before Congress on 26 APR on Roe's bill, known unofficially as the "**Lifetime GI Bill Act**," and a host of other changes to current Veterans Affairs education benefits. They include expanding eligibility for wounded troops, families of deceased service members, and some reservists currently excluded from the program. Most of those changes have broad support in the veterans community, although how to pay for them has been a point of contention. The new buy-in would create enough money for that expansion, although veterans groups in the past have opposed similar ideas. Hubbard said SVA officials believe the GI Bill program needs changes to survive and transform from a wartime benefit to an enduring contract with future military volunteers.

Officials from the Tragedy Assistance Program for survivors, who are also scheduled to testify next week, echoed that support. Officials from the American Legion, who will also testify at the hearing, do not support the draft proposal. VFW officials have gone further, vowing to fight the plan. They argue the Post-9/11 GI Bill "is

earned through honorable service, not through out-of-pocket fees” and accused lawmakers of moving “to claw back this critical educational benefit” even while troops are still serving in wars overseas. Paul Rieckhoff, CEO of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, offered similar frustration with the proposal. He said his group will fight any "tax" on troops to pay for education benefits, and that he doubts there is much support in the public for such a plan. "Pushing this GI Bill tax proposal on troops in a time of war is political cowardice," he said. "Some politicians would rather make backroom deals than raise taxes or find other ways to support our troops as bombs continue to fall overseas."

Roe’s staff said the proposal is part of a larger effort in recent months to “address long-sought improvements to educational assistance benefits for veterans.” The chairman also promised an “open, transparent and inclusive” debate on the issue, and said none of the ideas under consideration is guaranteed to advance through the committee. Democrats on the committee have already voiced concerns behind the scenes about the proposal, saying they want to make sure that all voices are heard on any drastic education benefits changes. That could include not just veterans groups and VA officials but also Defense Department representatives, since the GI Bill is a major recruiting tool for the services. No similar legislation has yet been introduced in the Senate, although advocates have been discussing the plan with lawmakers in both chambers for several months. Hubbard said the cuts proposed by Congress to the benefit last year played a role in drafting the new legislation. As written, the draft bill would cover only new enlistees, and would not charge the \$2,400 eligibility fee to troops already in the ranks. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 18, 2017 ++]

Reserve Legislation ► **S.667/H.R.1384 | S.492/H.R.1317 | S.646**

While Congress has had many competing priorities during these past 100 days, legislators did manage to pay some attention to the Guard and Reserve community. Some bills currently under consideration include:

- **Reserve Component Benefits Parity Act:** This bill would amend the federal law to ensure that an order to serve on active duty under section 12304a or 12304b of Title 10, U.S. Code, is treated the same as other orders to serve on active duty for determining eligibility and for calculating deadlines for certain benefits. Those benefits include accruing eligibility credits towards the Post-9/11 GI Bill as well as access to pre- and post-deployment health care. (S. 667, introduced by Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.); H.R. 1384, introduced by Rep. Steven Palazzo (R-Miss.)
- **Servicemember Retirement Improvement Act:** This bill amends the Internal Revenue Code to allow members of the reserve components to make the maximum allowable contribution (\$18,000 in 2017) to their Thrift Savings Plans (TSPs) without limiting the amount members may contribute to a retirement plan based on other employment. The bill also doubles the maximum allowable contribution amount for federal employees in the Ready Reserve who are not eligible to make contributions to any plan other than the TSP. (S.492, introduced by Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas); H.R. 1317, introduced by Rep. Sam Johnson (R-Texas).
- **Justice for Servicemembers and Veterans Act of 2017:** This bill would improve the enforcement of employment and reemployment rights of members of the uniformed services under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) and amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) to improve the protection of members of the uniformed services. More specifically, this bill would make mandatory arbitration clauses in contracts unenforceable against servicemembers using their legal rights under USERRA or SCRA. (S. 646, introduced by Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.)

[Source: MOAA Leg Up | April 28, 2017 ++]



USCG Admin Blocks RAO Bulletin Access ► Security Concerns

I have been advised by one of my subscribers that his command has started blocking his access to the RAO Bulletin per the below message he was sent. Apparently there is no problem in receiving the Availability Notice that lists all the articles in the current Bulletin. The problem exists in their blockage of the website on which the Bulletin articles are posted. If this is happening to you or if you anticipate it might, the best way to get around it is to provide your home or an alternate email addree for me to send to.

-o-o-O-o-o-




Your requested URL has been blocked by the Global Threat Intelligence Reputation System. The URL is listed with a reputation that is not allowed by your administrator at this time.

User: (10.36.58.135)

URL: <http://t.ymlp119.com/quwjakaebuweakaebapaujjhw/click.php> (185.83.49.104)

URL Categories: Phishing, Spam URLs

Reputation: High Risk (127)  **High Risk**

You can:

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If this is an operational emergency, please call the COAST GUARD CYBER COMMAND's Cyber Security Operations Center (CSOC) at (866) 424-2478 (Toll Free) or (703) 313-5678 (Direct) to escalate this incident. If after normal working hours contact TISCOM Information Technology Operations Center at (800) 847-2479 Option #3 (Watch Sup).

Internet Usage Policy

In accordance with COMDTINST 5375.1b Limited Personal Use of Government Office Equipment, the Coast Guard's Automated Internet Web Filtering and Reporting Appliance has detected that you are attempting to access an Internet web site that is being blocked due to the category for which it is listed or its reputation level. The category and reputation is listed above, as well as the full path URL that was attempted. You may have reached this site by accident or it may have been a legitimate site that is being blocked based on the filtering criteria. If this is a legitimate site required for official business, please contact the Coast Guard Information Assurance Division (IAD) via the email link under Available Options. An email will be generated that provides IAD with the necessary details listed above. It is also recommended that you include a business justification as to why you require access or believe the site to be incorrectly categorized. Once submitted, please allow for up to 48 hours, at which time a response will be provided via email as to IAD's determination. Repeated and intentional attempts to access inappropriate web sites is punishable under the UCMJ for military, and can result in disciplinary actions against civilian employees per Paragraph 8 of COMDTINST 5375.1b. If this is an operational emergency, please call the COAST GUARD CYBER COMMAND's Cyber Security Operations Center (CSOC) at (866) 424-2478 (Toll Free) or (703) 313-5678 (Direct) to escalate this incident. If after normal working hours contact TISCOM Information Technology Operations Center at (800) 847-2479 Option #3 (Watch Sup).

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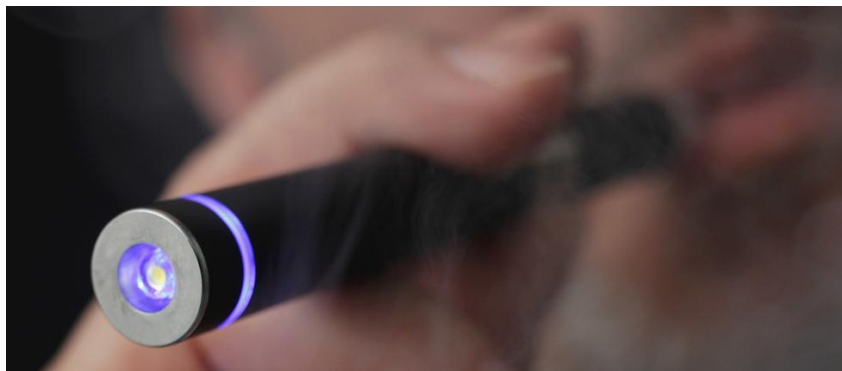
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Rules.CurrentRule.Name: GTI Reputation: Block MediumRisk and HighRisk(URL Filter)

[Source: Philipino American Military Retiree Association | April 17, 2017 ++]

Navy e-Cigarette Ban ► Vaping Lamp Out Throughout The Fleet

The Navy has banned electronic cigarettes and vaping devices throughout the fleet, citing concerns that the battery-powered gadgets can explode and injure sailors. The new rule "suspends the use, possession, storage, and charging of Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems aboard ships, submarines, aircraft, boats, craft and heavy equipment," according to a Navy press release 14 APR. "The prohibition applies to Sailors, Marines, Military Sealift Command civilians and any personnel working on or visiting those units."



"This new policy is in response to continued reports of explosions of [electronic nicotine delivery devices] due to the overheating of lithium-ion batteries," the release said. "Multiple sailors have suffered serious injuries from these devices, to include first- and second-degree burns and facial disfigurement. "In these cases, injuries resulted from battery explosions during ENDS use, charging, replacement, or inadvertent contact with a metal object while

transporting.” The move was announced internally Friday in a joint message from Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces and Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet. The prohibition takes effect 30 days from the release of the new policy, or 14 MAY. The ban means the devices must be completely removed from the fleet by the compliance date, but deployed units can ask for extra time to wait until the next port visit.

The Navy calls the ban a "suspension" while officials review safety concerns. It comes after the Naval Safety Center sounded the alarm in August about a sharp rise in injuries to sailors from exploding lithium ion batteries. The Safety Center recommended the ban in an Aug. 11, 2016 memo. Between October 2015 and the present, the Safety Center has logged 31 incidents of sailors being injured by exploding batteries, some seriously, according to the Navy's statistics. Many of those incidents occurred on Navy ships and at least two required the use of shipboard firefighting equipment to extinguish fires. Many occurred while the e-cigarette was in a sailor's pocket, resulting in first- and second-degree burns. At least two sailors have had their e-cigarettes blow up in their mouths, resulting in facial and dental injuries.

It's difficult to tell how many sailors use e-cigarettes. In recent testimony, the Air Force's surgeon general told Congress that about five percent of airmen use the products. E-cigarettes can explode and cause injuries when the battery overheats and expands, which can turn your vaping device into a mini-IED. The issue of overheating batteries has been one that E-Cigarette makers have tracked closely, with major companies such as the Richmond, Virginia,-based Altria taking steps to make their products more safe. "Recent research shows that in about 80 percent of cases where the battery overheats come from when the device is charged incorrectly or was charged with a different charger than the manufacturer intended," said an Altria official who spoke on background.

Altria is the parent company of tobacco giant Phillip Morris. The company's e-cigarette manufacturer is called NuMark. NuMark's e-cigarettes, including the Mark Ten, come with chargers with unique connectors that are the only way to charge the device, making it impossible to charge your device with, say, a cell phone charger that wasn't designed for the task, the official said. Altria was participating in an upcoming workshop with the Food and Drug Administration, which is looking into the battery issue and adding new ways to regulate the product and make them safer, the official said. Queries to several other e-cigarette manufacturers were not returned by press time. [Source: NavyTimes | David B. Larter | April 14, 2017 ++]

Military Retirement System Update 25 ► BRS Lump Sum Payouts

When the first wave of active duty personnel who opt into the new Blended Retirement System (BRS) next year start to retire a decade later, they will face a decision on retired pay so unusual the DoD Board of Actuaries has called it inappropriate and asked Congress to rescind the choice. The decision they will face might be explained like this:

Congratulations on your pending retirement. Do you want your full immediate annuity? Or do you prefer to get part of its value in a discounted lump sum at retirement, in return for forfeiting either one-half or one-quarter of your retired pay until age 67, when you would see full annuities restored?

Lump-sum buyouts of pension obligations are common in the corporate world but not the formula Congress has prescribed for setting military lump sums. The amounts offered will be too large to ignore for many retirees seeking to get out of debt, buy a home, or start a business. But the lump-sum choice also will have members lowering the lifetime value of their own retirement packages significantly. Most disturbing to actuaries and other critics of the BRS is that Congress ordered lump sums calculated using "personal discount rates," a concept that pension guardians don't recognize as actuarially sound or perhaps even fair. Personal discount rates measure an individual's preference for current dollars over promised future dollars. The higher the discount rate assumed for folks being

offered lump sums in exchange for reduced annuities, the greater the savings realized by the retirement plan's designers, in this case the U.S. government.

In January, Defense officials announced the formula to be used for setting an aggregate personal discount rate for enlisted and officer retirees. It will combine an inflation-adjusted, seven-year average of the Department of Treasury High-Quality Market (HQM) Corporate Bond Spot Rate Yield Curve at a 23-year maturity with an adjustment factor of 4.28 percentage points. That last factor seeks to capture some of what past studies have learned about military personal discount rates. It's a formula incomprehensible to most of us. But Air Force Capt. Daniel Kopp, who has an economics degree from Purdue, is studying to be a financial planner, and operates a financial advice blog called militarylifeplanning.com, has it figured out. He said if adopted today, the formula would support applying a discount rate of 7.3 percent in calculating lump-sum amounts under the BLS.

What sort of dollars are we talking about? Defense officials will not announce the actual personal discount rate to be used to illustrate lump-sum values until June 1. But here are calculations Kopp made that actuaries have deemed as reasonable:

If a 38-year-old E-7, completing a 20-year career, could retire today under the BRS formula, the lump-sum offer would be \$174,454 in return for forfeiting 50 percent of retired pay until age 67, when this generation also reaches full retirement age for Social Security. The second lump-sum option for the same E-7, payable for accepting a 25-percent annuity cut until old age, would be \$87,277.

Kopp looked at a 42-year-old officer retiring after 20 years in the rank of O-5. The lump-sum offer would be \$309,132 to take a 50-percent retired pay cut until age 67, and \$154,566 to accept a 25-percent annuity cut for 25 years. Kopp also calculated total retirement dollars these retirees would forfeit to accept lump sums. From age 38 to 67, the E-7 who accepted a 50-percent cut in retired pay would get total retired pay of \$488,363 - and would forfeit an equal amount to accept a lump sum of \$174,454 at retirement. The E-7 who accepted the 25-percent cut until 67 would forfeit \$244,182 to receive \$87,277 at retirement. To allow these calculations, Kopp assumed retired pay cost-of-living adjustments of 3 percent to match annual inflation. He also plugged in that personal discount rate of 7.3 percent for both officers and enlisted retirees.

The BLS plan enacted for new entrants starting in 2018, with opt-in option for current members having fewer than 12 years' service by then, is the vision of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission. Besides a lump sum to attract a 50-percent annuity cut, the commission proposed one big enough to entice new retirees to suspend any retired pay until age 67. "Research shows that the value a person attaches today to a stream of future payments is typically less than the cumulative amounts eventually paid out," the commission explained in its final 2015 report. To estimate required lump sums, however, the commission used RAND Corp. analyses that assigned a personal discount rate of 12.7 percent to a 38-year-old E-7 retiring at 20 years, and a 6.4-percent rate for the 42-year-old officer retiring at 20 years as an O-5. That sharp disparity in rates dampened significantly lump sums projected for enticing enlisted to accept annuity reductions.

DoD asked Congress not to include the commission's lump-sum scheme in the final BRS plan. The House initially agreed while shaping its retirement reform legislation. Senators, however, favored the feature to hold down costs. So, the final compromise that became law allows lump-sum offerings for accepting a 50-percent or a 25-percent cut in retired pay until age 67. The law also directs the department to establish lump-sum amounts based on the "discounted present value" of forfeited annuities using "average personal discount rates" derived from "reputable studies" of military personnel behavior.

Last April, as Defense officials focused on how to implement the BRS features, the American Academy of Actuaries sent a letter to the department roundly criticizing the law's mandate that personal discount rates be used to calculate lump-sum offerings at retirement. "Such discount rates would result in lower lump-sum amounts ... than would be paid, for example, by private pension plans," the Academy complained. Discount rates to calculate lump sums for pensions should be shaped by financial input only, not "individual preference or utility," two factors that

influence personal discount rates, the Academy said. It added that there “are no generally accepted actuarial principles ... for selecting or utilizing personal discount rates.” Discount rates typically used to calculate lump sums for corporate pension plans had ranged from 2 to 4 percent from 2010 to 2015, the Academy said.

The DoD Board of Actuaries delivered its own critique of the lump-sum scheme in its December report to the president and Congress on the Military Retirement Fund. Calculating lump sums using personal discount rates is “not an appropriate approach for discounting in a retirement plan environment,” it said. The board predicted accurately the department would settle on “some type of aggregate personnel discount rate” for both enlisted and officers. But it also predicted the resulting lump sums could produce behaviors by retirees significantly different than what the commission or Congress had projected. It also could feed a belief the lump sums are designed “to take advantage of our service members.” [Source: MOAA Legislative Update | Tom Philpott | April 21, 2017 ++]

Navy Dolphins ► Iraqi Vet Euthanized

A bottlenose dolphin who served in the Iraq War for the U.S. Navy has been euthanized, reports CBS News 8. The male dolphin, named Makai, was housed at the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command facility on San Diego Bay. “Makai had been receiving critical care for ailments associated with old age,” said SPAWAR Public Affairs Director James Fallin. Navy officials announced Makai’s death in response to CBS News 8 inquiries about the dolphin’s health. “Today, one of our eldest dolphins, a 46-year-old male named Makai, and one of our most celebrated veterans of the Iraq War, was peacefully and humanely put to rest. He was a beloved and accomplished member of the Navy Marine Mammal Program team, and an American hero who lived to be more than twice the average age of dolphins in the wild,” a SPAWAR statement said on Tuesday. Makai was one of about 85 dolphins and 55 sea lions trained by the Navy Marine Mammal Program to detect underwater mines and divers. He was deployed to the Persian Gulf in 2003 in support of the Iraq War.



[Source: NavyTimes | Mackenzie Wolf | April 14, 2017 ++]

Navy Knowledge Online ► To Be Replaced by Navy Portal

Love it or hate it, Navy Knowledge Online will soon be gone. Navy officials will decommission the 14-year-old online training, education and cyber gathering place and replace it with the recently launched My Navy Portal, currently undergoing beta testing. NKO's "sunset" as the Navy is calling it, was announced 6 APR in NavAdmin message 087/17. "We believe that My Navy Portal is easier to navigate, provides sailors a more user-friendly interface, all while keeping the majority of popular training content previously found on NKO," said Lt. Cmdr. Nathan Christensen, spokesman for the chief of naval personnel. "Sailors will still be able to access tools such as Navy eLearning, Navy Advancement Center information, Personnel Qualification Standards and other career management tools from My Navy Portal's front page."

In recent years, NKO has become a lightning rod for sailor discontent with complaints ranging from firewall navigation issues, poor connectivity, broken links and a Windows 98-style interface. And what's replacing it isn't perfect, yet. But officials say it is newer online technology that will be easily upgraded and tweaked as the Navy works through the new portal's beta testing period, which officials call a "field test" that's expected to last up to a year. "There are currently challenges for platforms with limited, low, or intermittent bandwidth or connectivity," said Lt. Jessica Anderson, spokeswoman for CNP. "We are diligently working to improve sailor access and use in these environments — A sailor will be able to view information in My Navy Portal differently than in NKO through a better user interface that is easier to navigate and search." And officials say that the most commonly used parts and content from NKO will find their way to the new site, My Navy Portal, which is expected to become the single home for all sailors' online service records over the next few years.

According to the message, much of what was formerly available on NKO will be found on My Navy Portal in "Communities of Practice." It's here that commonly used content such as the "Navy Advancement Center, General Skills Training, Personnel Qualification Standards, Career Management, and 'Learning and Development Roadmaps,' are accessed by hovering over 'Professional Resources' or 'Organizations,'" the message says. It's the end of an era as NKO was the first of its kind military web portal and is also the last vestige of the Navy's early 2000's "Revolution in Training." "NKO was a first-of-its kind Navy website created in 2003 designed to provide important educational, leadership and personal development resources to our sailors," Christensen said. "While it has served an important purpose throughout the years, we've heard our sailors loud and clear, and that is why we have been working hard to provide them with a better online system using current technology." [Source: NavyTimes | Mark Faram |April 6, 2017 ++]

USCGC Munro ► Commissioned April 2017

The commissioning ceremony for the U.S. Coast Guard National Security Cutter Munro was held in Seattle 1 APR according to the Coast Guard. The Munro is named for Coast Guard's only Medal of Honor recipient, Signalman First Class Douglas A. Munro. Munro was fatally wounded while providing covering fire for 500 U.S. Marines who were being evacuated during the Guadalcanal campaign in 1942.

The Munro is the second cutter and third ship to be named in honor of Douglas Munro. The first cutter was a high-endurance cutter built in 1971. The U.S. Navy also honored Munro, naming a destroyer escort, the Douglas A. Munro after, which served in World War II and the Korean conflict. The crew accepted their positions aboard the ship when the Munro was 'brought to life' by Douglas Munro's great niece, Julie Sheehan, alongside the ship's commander Coast Guard Capt. Thomas H. King. Saturday's ceremony, held at the Port of Seattle's Pier 91, was presided over by Homeland Security Secretary and retired Marine Corps Gen. John Kelly, as well as Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Paul Zukunft.



Display containing Petty Officer First Class Douglas Munro's Medal of Honor and accompanying citation hangs in Munro Hall at the U.S. Coast Guard Training Center in Cape May, N.J

The Munro is the Coast Guard's sixth and newest National Security Cutter and the fourth to be home-ported on the west coast at U.S. Coast Guard Base Alameda, California. "National Security Cutters are state of the art platforms that can operate seamlessly within the Navy's fleet and leverage our unique authorities to push our maritime borders thousands of miles beyond the homeland in order to ensure our national security and prosperity," said Adm. Zukunft. "Our nation faces significant threats posed by violent transnational organized crime networks and the men and women of the Coast Guard are on the front lines of this fight," he added.

The Legend-class National Security Cutter Munro was built by Huntington Ingalls Industries at the Ingalls Shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi. The Munro is 418 feet in length and has a displacement of 4,600 long tons. It has a top speed in excess of 28 knots, a range of 12,000 nautical miles, endurance of up to 90 days and can hold a crew of 150, according to the Coast Guard. The National Security Cutters are replacing the 378-foot High Endurance Hamilton class cutters, which have been in use since the 1960s. National Security Cutters like the Munro will be used to conduct alien migrant interdiction operations, domestic fisheries protection, search and rescue, counter-narcotics and homeland security operations.

The west coast based cutters can be used as far north as the Bering Sea and as far south as South America. "Since the first operational deployment of a National Security Cutter in Fiscal Year 2009, three NSCs (Waesche, Bertholf and Stratton) removed more than 98 metric tons of cocaine worth an estimated \$2.9 billion wholesale combined," according to the Coast Guard. "It's significant," Sheehan told Seattle NBC affiliate NBC K5. "He's an inspiration to us. His namesake lives on in our family. My dad's name is Doug. My brother's middle name is Doug. My son's middle name is Douglas." [Source: NavyTimes | Christopher Diamond | April 3, 2017 ++]

Kinetic Energy Projectile ► Can Destroy Anything in its Path

Were the United States to go to war with Russia, both sides could draw on deadly weapons that the world has never seen on a battlefield. On the Russian side, there are new and smaller tactical nuclear weapons. To counter them, the U.S. Army is taking another look at a "devastating" weapon it first tested in 2013: the Kinetic Energy Projectile, or KEP, a tungsten-based charge moving at three times the speed of sound that can destroy anything in its path. "Think of it as a big shotgun shell," Maj. Gen. William Hix, the Army's director of strategy, plans & policy, said a few

weeks ago at the Booz Allen Hamilton Direct Energy Summit. But unlike a shotgun shell, Hix said, the KEP moves at incredible speeds of “Mach 3 to Mach 6.”



A monorail dry-run test at Holloman AFB in July 2013 had no payload and used three representative carbon-epoxy panels mounted on the top and sides of the sled

Randy Simpson, a weapons programs manager at Lawrence Livermore National Lab, explains that kinetic energy projectiles are warheads that “take advantage of high terminal speeds to deliver much more energy onto a target than the chemical explosives they carry would deliver alone.” Said Hix: “The way that they [Lawrence Livermore] have designed it is quite devastating. I would not want to be around it. Not much can survive it. If you are in a main battle tank, if you’re a crew member, you might survive but the vehicle will be non-mission capable, and everything below that will level of protection will be dead. That’s what I am talking about.” The general emphasized that the exploration was in a conceptual phase and not yet any sort of actual program: “We’re looking at ways we might — key, might — use that capability in one of our existing launch platforms as part of the weapons suite that we have.” He said the main contender for a launcher would be the Army Tactical Missile System, made by Lockheed Martin.

In October 2013, an Air Force test team strapped the projectile to a “sled” on the high-speed test track at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico. The goal: to get it moving faster than Mach 3 and see how it might actually work in the air. The test showed that the warhead design worked; it also provided data to help simulations and modeling. Why would the U.S. military, which has put untold billions of dollars into precision weapons over several decades, need such a blunt and terrifying weapon? To counter small Russian nuclear weapons. “The Russians ... maintain their tactical nuclear stockpile in ways that we have not,” Hix said.

Potomac Institute head Philip Karber, who helped write the Pentagon’s Russia New Generation Warfare Study (<https://www.nga.mil/MediaRoom/News/Pages/Russia's-'New-Generation-Warfare'.aspx>), offered a bit more explanation when Defense One spoke to him in January. While the United States retains just a few of its once-large arsenal of tactical nukes, Karber estimates that Russia currently has anywhere from 2,000 to 5,000 of the weapons. “Look at what the Russians have been doing in low-fission, high-fusion, sub-kiloton tactical nuclear technology,” he said. “It appears that they are putting a big effort...in both miniaturizing the warheads and using sub-kiloton low-yield warheads.”

Why is that significant? By shrinking the warhead, you can shoot it out of a wider variety of guns, including, potentially, 152-millimeter tank cannons. “They’ve announced that the follow-on tank to the Armata will have a 152-millimeter gun missile launcher. They’re talking about it having a nuclear capability. And you go, ‘You’re talking about building a nuclear tank, a tank that fires a nuke?’ Well, that’s the implication,” said Karber.

Hix says that the use of tactical battlefield nuclear weapons, even very low-level ones, is not part of official Russian military doctrine, but it is a capability that they are increasingly eager to show off (and discuss) to

intimidate neighbors and adversaries. “They certainly exercise the use of those weapons in many of their exercises, including the one that participated in the parking of 30,000 to 40,000 soldiers on the Ukrainian border right before [the 2014 invasion of] Crimea. That coercive intimidation is a part of their design,” he said. And while even Soviet generals may have shied away from using tactical nukes, Blix said, Putin’s military is “a lot more inclined philosophically to see the utility of them.” [Source: Defense One | Patrick Tucker | April 11, 2017 ++]

MEHEL ► **Mobile High-Energy Laser**

An experimental system on a Stryker armored vehicle destroyed a drone without firing a bullet or making a sound, the Army reports. The Mobile High-Energy Laser is one of the systems the Army tested at the Maneuver Fires Integrated Experiment at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, April 3-13. Capt. Theo Kleinsorge called the system valuable, and sees more uses for directed energy, "to destroy incoming anti-tank missiles, mortars, field artillery rounds," he said in an Army report. Kleinsorge, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2-12 Cavalry, at Fort Hood, Texas, came to see if the system, called MEHEL, could be handled by a forward-observer crew, or if others should use it instead. His team took down around 50 targets, even though none of the soldiers had used directed energy before. He said the soldiers are "excited" to see what can be done with the system.



The system was easy to use and learn, and takes about a half hour to figure out, according to Spc. Brandon Sallaway, a fire support specialist and forward observer from Fort Carson, Colorado. “It uses stuff, controllers, that we’re all familiar with,” he said. This project was originally presented last year with a 2kW laser, but the MEHEL 2.0 is fixed with a 5kW laser capable of both a hard kill, using the laser, and soft kill, in which communications are cut between the drone and its ground control station, according to the report. The MEHEL does not require ammunition, only fuel, and the batteries that are used to fire the laser can be recharged from generators powered by the same fuel the Stryker uses. "If the entire Army today adopted directed energy and it was able to solve all of our engagement problems, Class V ammunition would no longer exist, and Class III, our fuel, would now be essentially our only logistical requirement for the vehicle to be offensive," Kleinsorge said in the report.

The system was one of three anti-drone systems at MFIK this year. The exercise had several goals this year, such as improving ways to pinpoint targets, looking at whether traditional supporting soldiers can execute a counter-unmanned aircraft system mission while also conducting traditional artillery missions, and new ways to deliver supplies using unmanned aerial systems. [Source: Army Times | Rachael Kalinyak | April 18, 2017 ++]

Military Drinking Age ► Should It Be Lowered

When 19-year-old Purple Heart recipient Marine Cpl. Samuel “Lee” Anderson was injured by a land mine after intense fighting, he was transported back to the U.S. and likely did what most red-blooded Americans did after the war: He had a beer. Compare that to the story of Army Sgt. Monica Lin Brown (then a private first class), who was awarded the Silver Star for saving the lives of five of her fellow soldiers when a roadside bomb exploded amid a convoy of Humvees on patrol. After the bomb struck one of the vehicles, Brown grabbed her aid bag, ran through enemy gunfire to reach her wounded comrades, and used her own body to shield them from falling mortars.

Like Anderson, Brown was barely 19 years old when she was in battle. But unlike Anderson, if Brown had chosen to partake in the American pastime of drinking a beer after coming home, she might have been prosecuted for underage drinking. The difference? Anderson fought in the Battle of Iwo Jima in 1945. Brown was in Afghanistan in 2007. Prior to the 1980s, military leaders had more leeway to allow on-base drinking under 21, and during World War II uniformed military personnel were routinely served in pretty much any bar in the U.S. In those days, military commanders abroad were more concerned with killing Nazis and frequenting French taverns than obsessing over the official military drinking age.

Today's 18-year-old service members can do almost anything under the sun — get married, vote, buy a house, go to adult prison, smoke a cigarette — but they can't have a cold one after “shield[ing] wounded [soldiers] from falling brass and enemy fire,” as Sgt. Brown's Silver Star citation reads. It's well past time to once again allow troops under age 21 to enjoy a brew. “If you're willing to die for your country, you should be able to drink a beer” is a good sound bite, but it's also good policy. We give those who enlist (as young as age 17) weapons and teach them how to kill people — the ultimate power and responsibility — yet simultaneously agonize over them so much as touching alcohol. This makes no sense. Opponents argue that allowing underage military drinking would risk a dangerous mix of alcohol and gun-toting troops. But the military severely restricts the access service members have to firearms on base, and past experience with on-base drinking under the age of 21 actually supports the idea of allowing younger troops to imbibe.

Back in the day, active-duty troops under 21 could drink responsibly on base. Even when Congress changed the law in the 1980s to require American military bases to adhere to local drinking age laws (which in a number of states had increased to 21 after experiments with lowering the age in the 1970s), bases located within 50 miles of Canada or Mexico continued to permit 18-year-olds to drink. Although no branch of the military takes advantage of the 50-mile rule today, commanders overseas occasionally allow underage drinking for “special circumstances,” such as the recognized birthday of one of the military branches. And in 2007, the Marine Corps loosened its rules further, allowing 18-year-old Marines to drink in foreign ports, so long as local laws permit it. In other words, we've been here before. We've allowed 18-year-old service members to drink, and it didn't trigger a military crisis or lead to booze-infused gun violence on military bases.

Forbidding off-base drinking makes even less sense, and it would be easy to implement a system that allowed it. In recent years, a wave of state legislation has cropped up that would give military members the green light to drink at 18. While no such laws have passed, they show that the issue is gaining attention. All U.S. armed service members have a ready form of identification: The Common Access Card. Congress could pass a law allowing service members to present their CAC cards, rather than a driver's license, whenever they walk into a bar and want to order a drink. Both common sense and history show that 18-year-old troops are sufficiently responsible to drink. If we entrust soldiers like Sgt. Brown to wield a weapon in defense of our precious freedoms, it's well past time we also let them wield a beer. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Jarrett Dieterle & Arthur Rizer | April 23, 2017 ++]

Worst Job Report ► No. 4 | U.S. Enlisted Service Member)

An annual worst-jobs report has ranked enlisted service member as the fourth-worst occupation in the country — a step down from last year. CareerCast put enlisted troops ahead of only newspaper reporters, broadcasters and loggers in its 2017 list, which factors in salary, hours, stress, work environment and multiple other data sets. Last year, the career site ranked enlisted personnel as fifth-worst, a position held in 2017 by pest control workers. Troops slid behind disc jockeys, who rose from fourth-worst in 2016 to the No. 6 spot in the countdown this year. Thinking of going officer to improve your lot? CareerCast ranks "military general" as the 170th-best job among the 200 occupations listed, despite the attached median salary of more than \$200,000.

The financial figures may be subject to interpretation: The report put enlisted troops at a median salary of \$27,936 in 2017, down from \$45,374 last year. The only change to base pay during that period was a 2.1 percent raise signed into law in December, although other factors such as overall time in service may have affected the median salary to a small degree. Beyond money, the likely driver for the low position is stress level: Enlisted troops were second in the website's 2016 list of most stressful jobs, just ahead of generals. Firefighters took top honors on that list, and ranked eighth overall on the 2017 worst-jobs list. The survey ranked newspaper reporter as the worst job for the third straight year. Lumberjack held the title in 2014. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Kevin Lilley | April 27, 2017 ++]

M2AI Machine Gun ► Marines Receive Upgraded .50-caliber

Marine units have received an upgraded .50-caliber machine gun that aims to make firing quicker, safer and less visible to the enemy. Marine Corps Systems Command officials in Quantico, Virginia, released information 27 APR about the upgrades, which include a quick-change barrel, fixed headspace and timing, and a flash hider that reduces the machine gun's signature by 95 percent at night. "The improved M2A1 makes Marines more lethal because they're able to get rounds down range quicker," said Maj. Harry Thompson, team lead for General Purpose Weapons at the command. The current machine gun requires Marines to manually set headspace and timing before firing and after the barrel heats from high fire volumes.



Headspace is the distance between the face of the bolt and the base of the cartridge when chambered, while timing is the adjustment of the weapon so firing occurs when the recoiling parts are in the correct position. The quick-change barrel is now possible because the headspace and timing are now fixed, Thompson said. The current version requires Marines to screw in the barrel and set the headspace, he said. Now the improved version allows Marines to "pop" the receiver and lock it in place similar to the M240B machine gun. The combination reduces the time Marines are exposed to enemy fire and shortens the time the weapon is out of operation for barrel changes, he said. The third improvement is a flash hider at the end of the barrel that reduces muzzle flash to mask Marines' position and limits whiteout conditions, helping the use of night vision while firing, Thompson said.

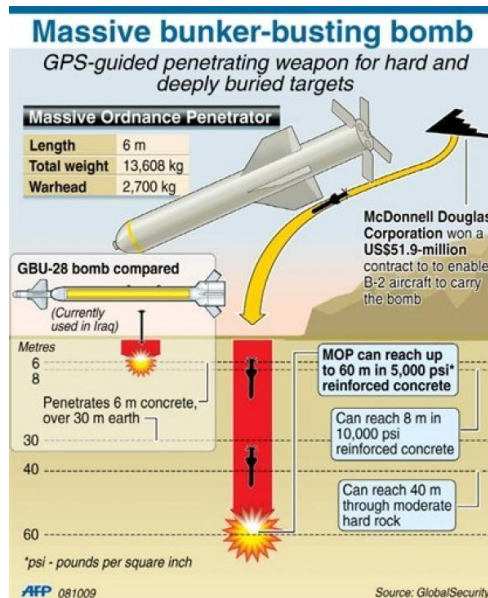
In total, the command will field 3,600 M2A1s to Marines, said Kelly Sullivan, a General Purpose Weapons program analyst. Phase one concluded in March and included infantry and most infantry-like units and infantry reserves. Phase two will run through May. The Army began its upgrades to the .50-caliber machine gun in 2011. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Todd South | April 27, 2017 ++]

Massive Ordnance Penetrator ► MOP | GBU-57A/B



If the United States seriously intends to punish North Korea for continuing to develop nuclear warheads and the rockets to deliver them, then the punitive blow will likely come from Missouri. That is, in the form of stealth bombers carrying America's biggest non-nuclear bombs. Not the 11-ton Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) fuel-air bomb that U.S. forces dropped on suspected ISIS positions in eastern Afghanistan on April 13. Rather, an even bigger munition. Since the 1990s, the U.S. government has been preparing to attack North Korea's most heavily protected military facilities, specifically in order to slow or halt Pyongyang's nuclear program. The American plan involves long-range, radar-evading stealth bombers hauling gigantic, earth-penetrating bombs.

MOP was ready for combat in 2011. Each of the Air Force's 20 B-2 stealth bombers based at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri can carry two of the 21-foot-long munitions. So, forget carriers, stealth fighters, and ground troops. The B-2s and the massive bombs are, at present, America's only non-nuclear options for destroying Pyongyang's best-protected weapons sites. The 30,000 pound 20.5 foot long GPS-guided GBU-57A/B has a 2.7 metric ton high explosive warhead, and can penetrate 200 feet (60 meters) of 5,000 psi reinforced concrete, 26 feet (8 meters) of 10,000 psis reinforced concrete, or 130 feet (40 meters) of moderately hard rock. It can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/WlaI19J14H4>



[Source: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2017/04/19/world-s-biggest-baddest-non-nuke-bomb-designed-just-to-hit-n-korea.html> || April 5, 2017 ++]

* **Military History** *



USS San Diego ► **Last Days of WWI Armored Cruiser 6**

Originally launched as the California on April 28, 1904, by Union Iron Works in San Francisco, she was commissioned on August 1, 1907. She was the third of six Pennsylvania-class armored cruisers 503'11" long by 69'7" wide with a displacement of 13,680 tons. She served as part of Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet. Her twin props pushed her at a top speed of 22 knots. The warship's armament consisted of 18 three inch guns, 14 six inch guns both mounted in side turrets, four eight inch guns and two 18 inch torpedo tubes. On September 1, 1914, she was renamed San Diego and served as the flag ship for our Pacific fleet. On July 18, 1917, she was ordered to the Atlantic to escort convoys through the first dangerous leg of their journey to Europe. The Diego held a perfect record, safely escorting all the ships she was assigned through the submarine infested North Atlantic without mishaps.

On July 8, 1918, the San Diego left Portsmouth, New Hampshire, en route to New York. She had rounded Nantucket Light and was heading west. On July 19, 1918, she was zig-zagging as per war instructions on course to New York. The sea was smooth, the visibility 6 miles. At 11:23 AM, an ear shattering explosion tore a huge hole in her port side amidships. Captain Christy immediately sounded submarine defense quarters, which involves a general alarm and the closing of all water-tight doors. Soon after, two more explosions ripped through her hull. These secondary explosions were determined later to be caused by the rupturing of one of her boilers and ignition of her magazine. The ship immediately started to list to port. Officers and crew quickly went to their stations. Guns were fired from all sides of the war ship at anything that was taken for a possible periscope. Her port guns fired until they were awash. Her starboard guns fired until the list of the ship pointed them into the sky.

Under the impression that a submarine was surely in the area, the men stayed at their posts until Captain Christy shouted the order " All hands abandon ship ". In a last ditch effort to save his ship, Captain H. Christy had steamed toward Fire Island Beach, but never made it. At 11:51 AM the Diego sank, only 28 minutes after the initial explosion. In accordance with navy tradition, Captain Christy was the last man to leave his ship. As the vessel was turning over, he made his way from the bridge down two ladders to the boat deck over the side to the armor belt, dropped four feet to the bilge keel and finally jumped overboard from the docking keel which was then only eight feet from the water. As the Captain left his ship, men in the life boats cheered him and started to sing our National Anthem. Most survivors were picked up by nearby vessels, but at least four life boats full of men rowed ashore, three at Bellport and one near the Lone Hill Coast Guard Station. The San Diego was the only major warship lost by the United States in World War I.

The original casualty reports ranged from 30 to 40. Apparently, the muster roll on the San Diego was not saved. The only list of men on board was the payroll of June 30, but since the end of June, they had received and transferred over 100 men. When the Navy eventually finalized the death toll, the official count was only six. Since her sinking, there has been much debate about whether it was a torpedo, German mine or U.S. mine that sent the cruiser to Davy Jones Locker. Captain Christy wrote in his final log that they had been hit by a torpedo. The Navy, however, found and destroyed five or six German surface mines in the vicinity, so it is generally accepted that a mine laid by the U-156 did the job. Ironically, the U-156 was sunk on its homeward journey possibly by a U.S. mine.

A pocket watch from the sunken WWI armored cruiser San Diego was returned to the family of its owner, Alfred Vernon Jannotta Jr., in Maryland 99 years after it sunk, according to the Washington Post. Jannotta was among the survivors who were in the water for six hours before being rescued by a Dutch freighter. “The story was that the Navy didn’t want to send a ship to pick them up because they were afraid it would be torpedoed,” Sharon Covington, Jannotta’s granddaughter told the Washington Post. The freighter dropped the men off at a warehouse in Hoboken, New Jersey, across the Hudson from New York City. As the San Diego’s survivors had lost all of their possessions, Jannotta telegraphed his uncle who wired him \$2,000. He lent each sailor \$10 to buy clothes. The final sailor paid him back in 1939 after tracking him down, according to a biography of Jannotta by his nephew Joseph.

After WWI, Jannotta continued serving in the Navy Reserve, while becoming a successful businessman. He was able to return to service in WWII, serving with the Navy in the Pacific and overseeing hundreds of Marine Corps landing craft. He was eventually promoted to rear admiral and received the Navy Cross. “He was a character, a wonderful guy,” said Sharon. “He had a real presence.”

The ship settled 110 feet beneath the ocean, landing upside down although relatively intact. This has made the ship a popular home for lobsters and a popular destination for divers. Two divers found a pair of pocket watches inside the wreckage in 1981. One of the watches was gold and engraved with “AJV” on one side and “To my beloved son Vernon” on the other. As time went on, the creation of the internet eventually allowed one of the divers, Mike Boring, to locate Jannotta’s family. He also found the family of the other pocket watch’s owner, John Henry Russell.

The other diver chose to remain anonymous as Navy rules have since banned salvaging items from their ship wrecks. Although the 1981 dive occurred before the policy change, the other diver told the Post that people still get upset at salvage divers past and present. On 22 APR, the two divers joined relatives of Jannotta in Potomac, Maryland, for a gathering where the watch was finally shared with the family and where stories of Jannotta’s life were told. Jannotta died in his 70’s in 1972. [Source: NavyTimes & Shipwreck Expo | Christopher Diamond | April 25, 2017 ++]

WWI American Military Build Up ► What Was Done

War! That was the headline screaming from newspapers around the country on April 6, 1917, as the United States declared war on the German empire. The United States had avoided being drawn into what was then known as “The Great War,” which had been raging in Europe since 1914. But German unrestricted submarine warfare – which U.S. leaders regarded as war on civilians – led to this juncture. President Woodrow Wilson, who had just been re-elected under the slogan “He Kept Us Out of War,” felt he had no other option. Congress provided the then-astronomical sum of \$3 billion to build a million-man Army. “The United States was in it, but they had to define what ‘it’ meant,” said Brian Neumann, a historian at the Army’s Center of Military History. Neumann, who edited a series on the Army during World War I, said it wasn’t a done deal that Americans would go to France to help man the Western Front.

Some Americans believed that because a naval provocation led to the war, the proportional response would be a naval campaign against Germany. Others felt it was all right to help France, but not to help Great Britain, he said. Still others believed that going to war had to mean something greater than simply returning to the status quo on the continent, Neumann said. They saw the war as an inferno that would topple empires so democracy and the will of the people could triumph. This was the camp that led.

“For the United States to have a voice at the peace table, it had to make a significant contribution to the war effort,” Neumann said. “That meant building an Army and engaging the enemy on the Western Front.” Doing that was no simple task. On April 6, the U.S. Army was a constabulary force of 127,151 soldiers. The National Guard had 181,620 members. Both the country and the Army were absolutely unprepared for what was going to happen. The United States had no process in place to build a mass army, supply it, transport it and fight it. Continental European powers had a universal military service program in place, and when war broke out, reservists – already trained – went to their mobilization points and joined their units. Germany, France, Russia and Austria-Hungary had large standing armies and reserve formations in 1914 that the nations could call up in the event of a war. Great Britain maintained a robust naval reserve, but did not have a commensurate universal service reserve for its army. “Britain and the United States didn’t see the need for universal service because of the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean. Those were two pretty good barriers,” Neumann said. “But after the war broke out, Britain began building its army.”

In 1917, Britain had an army of roughly 4 million soldiers, not counting the contributions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and the other parts of its empire. At its peak, the French army had 8.3 million “poilus” – as the French called their soldiers. The German army had 11 million under arms, the Ottoman Empire had 2.9 million, Russia had 12 million, and Austria-Hungary had 7.8 million. The United States had to match that level of manpower. What’s more, it had to be an American army. The United States did not formally join the alliance against Germany. Rather it was an Associated Power, which meant the United States would work with the Allies, but would be free to pursue its own strategic objectives.

The British and French desperately needed soldiers, and they wanted them fast. “This was the heart of the whole amalgamation debate,” Neumann said. “The French proposed taking American battalions and merging them into French brigades until enough arrived to form an American Army. The British wanted American soldiers to go through their training and be assigned to British units. No one on this side of the Atlantic agreed to either proposal.” Wilson believed that without an independent American fighting force, he would not be able to shape the post-war peace – that the overwhelming sacrifices made by all would mean nothing without a change to the status quo. But the overriding reason for an independent American expeditionary force was the belief was that the American public would not support their soldiers fighting and dying under a foreign flag, Neumann said. Wilson and Secretary of War Newton D. Baker chose Army Gen. John J. Pershing to lead what would become the American Expeditionary Forces in France. Pershing was one of the few Army leaders to command large formations, having been in charge of the U.S. intervention in Mexico in 1916. He had been a successful combat leader in Cuba and the Philippines. Much of his time in France would be spent simply building -- and protecting -- the independent American presence in the country.

Building an army takes more than just opening recruiting stations. Soldiers needed barracks, training areas, uniforms and equipment as well as a steady supply of recruits. While many Americans rushed to recruiting stations and enlisted, the War Department recommended a draft to build what was called the National Army. “America’s only other experience with the draft – during the Civil War – was not pleasant,” Neumann said. “There were too many loopholes. It allowed rich men to buy substitutes. It was unfair.” And Americans had a distrust of a large standing army, going back to the founding of the republic. Many recent immigrants also disliked the idea of forced national service. But a draft – or Selective Service – was the only way to go, and officials crafted legislation to eliminate most of the unfairness. The Selective Service Act passed on May 18, 1917, and all men age 21 to 30 were

required to register with local draft boards. As the war continued, the age for registration went up to 45. Overall, 24,234,021 men registered for the draft, and inductees comprised 66 percent of those who served.

Building the barracks and training facilities was also a priority. Many of the bases still familiar today were established in 1917. Camp Jackson, South Carolina; Camp Meade, Maryland; Camp Lee, Virginia; Camp Lewis, Washington and Camp Gordon, Georgia were among the 30 camps and cantonments the Army built to handle the hundreds of thousands of draftees that came in. The camps needed roads, railroad spurs, sewage, barracks, mess halls, headquarters buildings, hospitals -- all the things that a post needs to function -- and they needed to build them all at once. Camp Jackson was a good example. Camp Jackson had a total military strength of 42,498, according to the Fort Jackson website. In six months, they built 1,519 buildings, spending a total of \$8,897,375. This did not include the cost of roads, electricity or plumbing. This effort was duplicated at Camp Funston, Kansas; Camp Shelby, Mississippi; Camp Devens, Massachusetts; and at 26 other places around the United States.

Some camps were better than others. There is a classic bit of testimony before Congress about a barracks built so badly that snow came in the cracks and coated sleeping soldiers. Still, it was a tremendous accomplishment to build the camps and cantonments, even as soldiers were reporting for training. Equipment was another bottleneck. The first troops showed up and trained with wooden rifles. There were delays in getting uniforms and boots. Heavy equipment or weapons? Nope. Machine guns or artillery? Not really. British and French personnel came to the United States to help train the doughboys, but it was mostly marching, target practice and small unit movement. Finally, what would the units themselves look like? Pershing decided each American division would have four infantry regiments, an artillery brigade and ancillary units to allow it to function. Each would have 28,000 soldiers -- about two to three times the size of British or French divisions. Part of the reasoning was to give the units combat power. Part was because there was a dearth of qualified military leaders.

While all this was happening in the United States, there was still a war going on, and the situation was desperate. By April 1917, a million soldiers in the French army had been killed. In 1916's Battle of Verdun alone, the French lost about 160,000. In April 1917, the French poilus in seven corps were ordered to attack Chemin des Dames, a massive limestone formation that the Germans had transformed into a perfect defensive position. French units suffered 40,000 casualties the first day of the offensive and 271,000 over the course of the offensive. French soldiers had had enough, and about half of its infantry divisions refused to fight. These mutinies -- which the Germans never found out about -- caused the commander to resign and brought Gen. Philippe Petain, the hero of Verdun, to command of French forces. Petain, who collaborated with the Nazis in World War II, would rest the forces, grant leave and order no new offensives. His strategy "was to wait for the tanks and the Americans."

Across the continent, Russian Czar Nicholas II had abdicated. While Russian forces were still in the field against German and Austro-Hungarian forces, they were stumbling toward dissolution with units already choosing sides for what would become a civil war. And in Italy, a combined German-Austrian offensive pushed the Italian army back 60 miles from the battle line along the Isonzo River in the Battle of Caporetto. To stabilize the front, British and French units -- desperately needed in France -- had to deploy to Italy.

This was the situation Pershing faced when he arrived in France on June 10. A cobbled together U.S. Army provisional division -- which morphed into the 1st Division, "the Big Red One" -- began arriving later in the month to a rapturous welcome. On July 4, the Big Red One paraded through Paris and stopped at the tomb of the Marquis de Lafayette -- the French nobleman who valiantly fought in the American Revolution. "Lafayette, we are here," said Army Col. Charles E. Stanton during a speech at the tomb. And more would be coming. After surveying the strategic situation, Pershing sent a telegram to the War Department: "Plans contemplate sending over at least one million men by next May." It was a tall order, and at the time it was written, a seemingly impossible one. [Source: DoD News, Defense Media Activity | Jim Garamone | March 29, 2017 ++]

WWII Doolittle Raid ► April 18, 1942

Tokyo. April 18, 1942. A clear and quiet morning. The one hundred and thirty-third day of Japan's war with the United States. Everything seemed normal in the island empire's sprawling capital. Tokyo staged an air raid drill that Saturday morning, but it bore little realism. No sirens sounded. Air raid wardens gazed at a placid sky. Fire-fighting brigades trundled their equipment through the streets. Barrage balloons rose along the waterfront. It all seemed a matter of going through the motions. At about noon the drill came to an uneventful end. Because no sirens had announced its beginning, none signaled its conclusion. War workers laid down their tools and began their midday break. Millions of other Tokyo residents went shopping, visited parks and shrines, attended festivals, and watched baseball games. Although their nation was now engaged in a world war, Tokyo's citizens had reason enough to feel secure. Radio Tokyo had repeatedly assured the people that they, their nation, and, most importantly, Emperor Hirohito, were safe from enemy attack. However, the Doolittles Raid proved them wrong. To read about the raid and what the flyers experienced during and as a result of it refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**WWII Doolittle Raid**". [Source: <http://www.historynet.com/jimmy-doolittle-and-the-tokyo-raiders-strike-japan-during-world-war-ii.htm> | April 20, 2017 ++]

Ernie Pyle ► KIA April 18, 1944

Every year since 1952, Okinawa's American Legion Post 28 has made a solemn pilgrimage to Ie Shima to honor the life of famed World War II correspondent Ernie Pyle. Pyle – who was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for telling the story of America's troops overseas to an anxious nation back home — was felled by Japanese machine-gun fire on April 18, 1945. His grave lies alongside the troops he covered in Hawaii's National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific.

On Easter Sunday, two days before the 72nd anniversary of his death, legionnaires, soldiers, Marines, local officials and Boy Scouts from Troop 112 gathered to discuss Pyle's legacy and the challenges associated with keeping it alive so many years removed from the war.



The road sign (left) for the spot where acclaimed World War II correspondent Ernie Pyle was felled by a Japanese bullet in 1945 has been fading in recent years in Ie Shima, Okinawa. Members of Okinawa's American Legion Post 28 salute Ernie Pyle (right) at the memorial marking the site of the acclaimed World War II correspondent's death, during a ceremony on, April 16, 2017, in Ie Shima, Okinawa.

The road sign above the pristine historical site is faded, as is the board that features information about the acclaimed war correspondent; the plaque on the monument that marks the spot where Pyle fell is also withering. "He was an inspiration and a voice for the men and women thousands of miles from their homes facing combat," Army

Col. Derek Jansen said, addressing the audience at Sunday’s memorial service. The 10th Regional Support Group commander recalled Pyle’s suggestion in one of his columns that combat infantrymen receive “fight pay,” which Congress granted; such was Pyle’s influence.

Pyle was born Aug. 3, 1900, near Dana, Ind. After graduating high school, he joined the Navy Reserve, just in time to see the final months of World War I on active duty. He was discharged with the rank of petty officer 3rd class. After the war, Pyle studied journalism at Indiana University. He went on to write for newspapers in Indiana and Washington, D.C., but won acclaim writing daily feature columns as a war correspondent for Scripps-Howard newspapers. As his profile grew, his work was featured in a growing number of newspapers, including Stars and Stripes.

Pyle traveled to London in 1940 to report on the German bombs falling from the sky. It wasn’t long before he joined the American troops stationed there. He covered the war in North Africa, Italy and finally Normandy, France. He was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1944 for his coverage of the war in Europe. After a short respite, Pyle volunteered to cover the Pacific campaign. He linked up with the 77th Infantry Division as it bore down on Okinawa, Japan. “He walked through mud, crouched in foxholes and thumbed rides in jeeps and tanks,” said Marine Master Gunnery Sgt. Bennie Helton, American Legion Post 28 commander. “He didn’t file his stories from the rear, but hammered out his columns while bullets and exploding shells whistled over his head ... Next to President Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, Ernie Pyle was one of the most idolized civilians during the World War II period.” Pyle was known as “the GI Journalist” and the “soldier’s best friend,” Helton said.

He was killed on Ie Shima, a tiny scrape just a short distance off Okinawa’s main island that saw heavy fighting at the tail end of the war. It was a deflating moment for troops still fighting and a loss for a nation that felt connected to the war through his work. As memories of the war fade into legend, it remains a struggle to keep memories of what Pyle meant to that generation alive, Legion officials said. “I know a little bit, not a lot about Ernie Pyle,” said Marine Sgt. John Whitney, a trumpet player from the III Marine Expeditionary Force who played taps at the ceremony. Whitney said he believes someone like Pyle is integral when it comes to covering conflict. “A lot of times the media will have their own idea of what they want to say, but when they’re actually in the thick of things and they see what it’s like, I think it’s healthier that way,” he said.



Legion Post 28 leases the site where Pyle died and maintains the memorial with the help of Marines stationed on the island. For Sunday’s service, the monument and the steps up to it were freshly painted a bright white, providing contrast with the grass and surrounding farmland. Yet rust and the elements threaten the hallowed World War II site. Legion officials plan a fundraising effort to restore the memorial plaque soon. “It’s a great honor for us. It’s really important that we keep this going,” said Post 28 vice commander Brad Reeves. “My father fought in World War II and Ernie Pyle meant a lot to him.” Reeves’ voice wavered. He said he was afraid that today’s generation would forget who Pyle was and what he represented. “He’s such a great part of history,” Reeves said. “As we move further and further away, generations forget and that’s one of the reasons behind our memorial — so we don’t forget.”

Following is an excerpt from Ernie Pyle’s most famous and most widely reprinted column, Jan. 10, 1944’s “The death of Captain Waskow,” from the front lines in Italy:

“Dead men had been coming down the mountain all evening, lashed onto the backs of mules,” Pyle wrote. “They came lying belly-down across the wooden pack-saddles, their heads hanging down on the left side of the mule, their stiffened legs sticking out awkwardly from the other side, bobbing up and down as the mule walked. I don’t know who that first one was. You feel small in the presence of dead men, and ashamed at being alive, and you don’t ask silly questions.”

Pyle then recounted the soldiers’ reaction to the body of their beloved Capt. Henry Waskow of Belton, Texas being laid out before them.

“Then the first man squatted down, and he reached down and took the dead hand, and he sat there for a full five minutes, holding the dead hand in his own and looking intently into the dead face, and he never uttered a sound all the time he sat there. And finally he put the hand down, and then reached up and gently straightened the points of the captain’s shirt collar, and then he sort of rearranged the tattered edges of his uniform around the wound. And then he got up and walked away down the road in the moonlight, all alone.”

[Source: Stars & Stripes| Matthew M. Burke | April 17, 2017 ++]

WWI Harlem Hellfighters ► Untold Stories of 369th Infantry Regiment

This year marks the centennial of the United States’ entrance into World War I — a conflict that claimed millions of lives, redrew the world map, and changed war forever. Countless stories of heroism and hardship emerged from the fight in Western Europe, and many of them involve the 369th Infantry Regiment. The first black American infantry regiment to fight in World War I, the 369th spent more time in the trenches and under fire — 191 days — than any other U.S. unit. A National Guard regiment, the 369th recruited out of New York City in large numbers, and German soldiers who witnessed their battlefield prowess quickly dubbed them the Harlem Hellfighters. Though their actions didn’t immediately alter the fight for equal rights at home, the regiment’s wartime service heightened a sense that sending African-Americans to fight for democracy abroad — while racial segregation and inequality went unchecked at home — smacked of hypocrisy. Here are five stories of bravado and courage from the 369th — the first U.S. regiment to cross into Germany over the Rhine River, and one of the most decorated American units of the war.



Members of the 369th who were awarded the Croix de Guerre for gallantry.

1. Even the Harlem Hellfighters' rifles were segregated -- By the time the United States joined the war, its allies were in desperate need of reinforcement. The men of the 369th were sent to assist the French Army's 16th Division on the Western Front in spring 1918. It was a strategic necessity — the Western Front desperately needed reinforcement — but it was also motivated by racial bias: Many white American soldiers refused to fight alongside their black counterparts. The decision to hand off command of the 369th to the French started with some small-arms complications. After the regiment's limited combat training stateside, they were issued Springfield rifles, which they had to give back after being assigned to the French, along with “almost every bit of American gear” they had — including helmets, Army greens, and food rations, according to author Stephen L. Harris' book, “Harlem's Hell Fighters.”

In place of their Springfields, the 369th received the French Lebel rifle — which had a reputation for reliability, but was temperamental and annoying to load. Some members of the regiment, like Capt. Hamilton Fish, saw the exchange as a bit of a disappointment. “Their Lebel's were nowhere near as good as our Springfields,” Fish said in Harris' account. “The French, you see, were great believers in the hand grenade — their rifles seemed more or less something to put a bayonet on.”

2. That's okay: The Hellfighters had “Black Death” and bolo knives -- While standing watch in the Argonne Forest in May 1918, two 369th soldiers, Pvt. Henry Johnson and Pvt. Needham Roberts, were attacked by a 12-man German raiding party. Outnumbered and under fire, the two men fought off the initial attack, but after Roberts was badly wounded. Johnson remained with the injured soldier to keep him from being taken prisoner by the Germans. Wounded, advancing on the enemy with only a bolo knife, Johnson killed one German soldier by stabbing him in the head and forced the survivors to retreat. Johnson's actions earned him national acclaim, as well as the incredibly metal nickname “Black Death.” Johnson and Roberts were among the first Americans to be presented the Croix de Guerre for valor by the French military. And in 2015, Johnson became the second African-American to receive the Medal of Honor for actions during World War I, presented by President Barack Obama during a posthumous award ceremony at the White House.

3. When not kicking ass in the Marne, be-bopping Hellfighters helped bring jazz to Europe -- Among the Hellfighters' many distinguished members was James Reese Europe, a renowned ragtime and jazz musician who served as both an infantry officer and the regiment's bandleader. Europe had a hard time finding enough trained recruits to play in the regimental band in New York, so he traveled to Puerto Rico and enlisted more than a dozen black instrumentalists from the island to round out his band, according to the New York Folklore Society. “The band, which recruited up to a third of their members from Puerto Rico, introduced European audiences, particularly in France, to live jazz music and influenced the careers of notable musicians” on both sides of the Atlantic, according to the Society.

Musicians like Europe continued to play while serving abroad, touring thousands of miles to perform, according to Rod Paschall, director of the U.S. Army's Military History Institute. This exposure to a deeply American style of music — jazz — had a profound and lasting impact in France. It also produced a corps of Latin and black musicians who found themselves in demand in New York after their service. “While concrete proof is impossible to produce in these sorts of social movements,” Paschall writes. “It is likely that the regiment's band performances in 1917 and 1918 had much to do with creating or accelerating the French tastes for American jazz — a phenomenon that has persisted until this day.”

4. To fight alongside the French, they had to learn to fight like the French: badass -- By the time the 369th made its way into the trenches, each member of the regiment was paired off with a French counterpart — a stab at forced harmony that would have been unthinkable in the American military at the time. The pairs then trained intensely for three weeks, near the front and amid sporadic attacks by German aircraft and artillery. The Hellfighters quickly learned the tricks of trench warfare from their French counterparts, according to author Peter N. Nelson's “A More Unbending Battle: The Harlem Hellfighters' Struggle for Freedom in WWI and Equality at Home.” Those tricks included cutting off the tails of their overcoats so they wouldn't get weighed down with mud and water;

carving grooves in the mud wall with shovels to make it easier to climb out of the trenches; or curling up balls of barbed wire during the day, so that at night they could be carried with ease and then quickly unfurled to reinforce the defenses. Knowing when to take cover, or when to be wary of a gas attack — i.e., when the wind was blowing toward your lines — all had to become second nature for the men who survived half a year in the trenches.

5. Even in death, the Hellfighters made French friends for life -- Many of the U.S.-French pairs of soldiers ended up cementing permanent bonds. George Cuffee, a young soldier in the 369th, became close to his French counterpart, Ruby Garnett, who taught him to speak French — a fact that Cuffee’s wife, kids, and grandkids were unaware of for decades, until one night, when they caught him parlez-ing Français in his sleep. When asked why he never spoke French around his family before, his sardonic reply was: “None of you all speak French, why should I waste time talking it to you?” Cuffee’s great nephew, Glenn Jones, told Task & Purpose. One night in the days before the Meuse-Argonne Offensive — a massive battle that stretched along the Western Front, and lasted 47 days, ending on Armistice Day — Garnett took Cuffee’s place on watch. Tragically, Garnett was killed in an unexpected attack, and his death stayed with Cuffee for years. “They were buddies, so they’d be together all the time in the trenches,” Jones said. Cuffee “vowed to name his first child” after Garnett — and he did, naming his eldest daughter Ruby Garnett after his fallen friend. If they hadn’t traded watches, Cuffee’s great nephew said, “he felt it would have been him and not Ruby.”



[Source: Task & Purpose | James Clark | April 20, 2017 ++]

WWI Hello Girls ► Denied Vet Status Until 1977

During World War I, some 223 members of the U.S. Army Signal Corps performed a highly specialized service which demanded great skill, nerve and tenacity: Over the vast network of telephone lines that had been hastily constructed across France, these soldiers worked the complicated switchboards connecting the ever-shifting front lines with vital supply depots and military command. At the height of the fighting, they connected over 150,000 calls per day. They had been specifically recruited for this task.

They underwent physical training, they received medical examinations and inoculations, they swore the Army oath, they wore regulation uniforms and "identity discs" (akin to dogtags) to identify their remains. They observed strict military protocol, they were subject to court-martial, and many found themselves stationed a few short miles from the front during the bloodiest days of that very bloody war, at outposts that came under sustained mortar fire.

General "Black Jack" Pershing, who had issued the call that caused so many of them to volunteer, singled them out for praise.

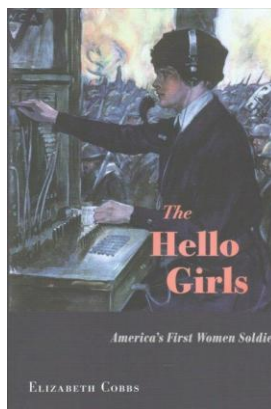


Six members of the U.S. Army Signal Corps preparing to ship off for France in 1918, where they and 217 other women served as switchboard operators.

They were brave. They were resourceful. But when they returned home, they discovered to their dismay that, according to the United States government at least, there was one thing they most certainly were not: veterans. They were the "Hello Girls" — a cadre of patriotic women who volunteered when the U.S. Army realized that the war would be won or lost on the Allies' ability to exploit the new technology of telephone communication. In the crisply written book 'The Hello Girls: America's First Women Soldiers', Elizabeth Cobbs detailed exactly what was asked of these women during the war, and reveals, with an authoritative, dispassionate, this-was-some-self-evident-nonsense lucidity, the dismaying extent to which their country failed them when it was over.

Because they were women, the Department of War denied them veteran status — including benefits, medical care, commendations, honorable discharges, military funerals, even the right to wear their uniforms. For 60 years they fought to be recognized for their service. Although this struggle is relegated to The Hello Girls' final chapter, the blunt matter-of-factness that marks Cobbs' prose quietly slam-dunks her thesis:

Stubborn pride, bureaucratic arrogance, and the belief that women simply did not merit recompense blinded senior staff officers to faceless female veterans.



The Hello Girls is built around the diaries of several young women who served as operators; we come to know Berthe Hunt, Grace Banker, Merle Egan and others as they trace the arc familiar to every young soldier: raring to get as close to the fighting as possible, pining for home, and gradually growing all-too-intimate with the horrors of war.

(Cobbs outlines the tactics of several WWI battles and offensives in which the Hello Girls played key roles with an unhurried precision that will keep even the least military-minded reader's eyes from glazing over.) Smartly, she also walks us through the sundry and simultaneous technical demands of switchboard operating, noting that women could connect five calls in the time it took a man to complete one.

Cobbs is particularly good at spotlighting how closely the service of military women like the Hello Girls was tied to the success of the suffrage movement — specifically, how their example steadily wore down fervently held beliefs about the status of women, and changed that national mood. She painstakingly charts the steady shift in the attitudes of President Woodrow Wilson and his cabinet towards the women's vote, with an eye for the perfect, lacerating detail. Here she is, for example, on Secretary of War Nelson Baker: "... a small man, not much above five feet, the bespectacled secretary often sat with one leg bent under him to give an impression of greater height when receiving visitors at his giant desk in the War Department." Yee-ouch.

The Hello Girls is clear-eyed about the root cause of the Army's disingenuous confusion over these women's status: the document signed by General "Black Jack" Pershing that called them into being. "Every word of Pershing's order implied military service without stating it." That imprecision proved something the U.S. government would successfully cower behind until 1977, when President Jimmy Carter signed the order granting the few surviving Hello Girls full veterans status. It's an abiding irony of American military history that one poorly communicated order kept the very soldiers tasked with communicating orders from receiving, for six long decades, the recognition they deserved. [Source: NPR| Glen Weldon | April 6, 2017 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 1 thru 15 MAY

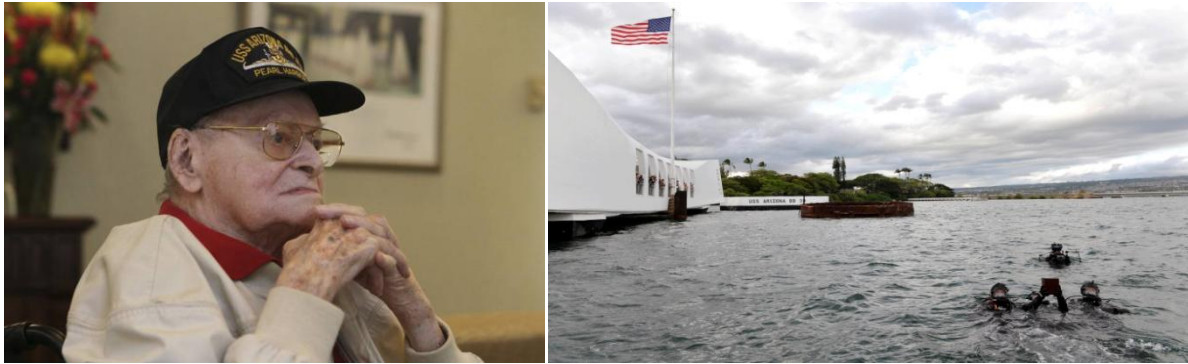
Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 1 thru 15 MAY**". [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | April 2017 ++]

WWII Vets 136 ► Raymond Haerry | USS Arizona Survivor

One of the last surviving veterans of the sinking of the USS Arizona during the attack on Pearl Harbor has been reunited with his fallen shipmates. Raymond Haerry was interred on the ship 15 APR in a ceremony that his granddaughter says was solemn and beautiful. Haerry was 19 years old when bombs started falling on his battleship on Dec. 7, 1941. He never returned to Pearl Harbor while he lived because the memories were too painful. As he neared the end of his life, he told his family he'd like to be laid to rest there. Haerry died 27 SEP in Rhode Island at age 94. Five Arizona survivors remain. Haerry's granddaughter, Jessica Marino, traveled from New Jersey to Hawaii with her family for the ceremony. She handed his urn to divers, who placed it within the ship's sunken hull. Hundreds of sailors and Marines are entombed there.

"That was the point at which I kind of lost it," Marino said. "It was really sad, but also really sweet to see. It was amazing." Only USS Arizona survivors can be interred on the ship. Haerry served for 25 years in the Navy, retiring as a master chief. He's the 42nd survivor to rejoin his shipmates, according to the National Park Service. Spokesman Jay Blount said these ceremonies help bring closure to the families, allow sailors to return to their shipmates and raise awareness of the sacrifices made 75 years ago. The National Park Service and the Navy conducted the interment. Rear Adm. John Fuller talked about Haerry's courage— not the absence of fear, but a deep abiding belief in something greater than oneself. "I can't help but think about him being reunited into these simple,

hallowed spaces. The calm that comes from being again with your crew, and the lessons we can learn from all he taught us," said Fuller, commander of Navy Region Hawaii and Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific.



Marino said she knows her grandfather better now. "I know this part of his life that really did shape him," she said. "To be a part of getting him back to his ship and with his shipmates, it's an honor for me." Health issues prevented Raymond Haerry Jr. from joining his daughter in Hawaii. It was Haerry Jr. who pieced together the narrative of what happened in Pearl Harbor by asking questions of his father over 50 years. Haerry was trying to get ammunition when a large bomb detonated, igniting fuel and powder magazines, Haerry Jr. told The Associated Press in October. Most of the bow was instantly separated and the ship was lifted out of the water. Haerry Jr. said his father swam through flaming waters, sweeping his arms in front of him to push the flames away. He shot at Japanese planes from shore. Later, he helped retrieve corpses from the harbor.

The ship lost 1,177 men, nearly four-fifths of its crew. At first, Haerry's family was surprised by his request to be laid to rest there, but soon they understood. "That brotherhood doesn't go away and as he got closer to the end of life, it resonated with him," Marino said. "He didn't want to see the site or relive that disaster, but he wanted to relive that camaraderie." [Source: The Associated Press | Jennifer McDermott | April 18, 2017 ++]

Medal Of Honor Story ► Groberg~Florent | Afghanistan



Go to <https://www.legion.org/legiontv/PLHMR9MmnivfPEHKG6CSDJEBn3yF6jm5HM/Lje4RUFhB64> to listen to MOH awardee Florent A. Groberg recount his actions in Afghanistan after coming face-to-face with a suicide bomber. [Source: The American Legion | April 2017 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ► Fields, James H. | WWII



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

James H. Fields

Rank and organization: First Lieutenant, U.S. Army, 10th Armored Infantry, 4th Armored Division

Place and date: Rechicourt, France, 27 September 1944

Entered service: Houston, Texas November 11, 1942

Born: June 26, 1920, Caddo Texas

Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty, at Rechicourt, France. On 27 September 1944, during a sharp action with the enemy infantry and tank forces, 1st Lt. Fields personally led his platoon in a counterattack on the enemy position. Although his platoon had been seriously depleted, the zeal and fervor of his leadership was such as to inspire his small force to accomplish their mission in the face of overwhelming enemy opposition. Seeing that 1 of the men had been wounded, he left his slit trench and with complete disregard for his personal safety attended the wounded man and administered first aid. While returning to his slit trench he was seriously wounded by a shell burst, the fragments of which cut through his face and head, tearing his teeth, gums, and nasal passage. Although rendered speechless by his wounds, 1st Lt. Fields refused to be evacuated and continued to lead his platoon by the use of hand signals. On 1 occasion, when 2 enemy machineguns had a portion of his unit under deadly crossfire, he left his hole, wounded as he was, ran to a light machinegun, whose crew had been knocked out, picked up the gun, and fired it from his hip with such deadly accuracy that both the enemy gun positions were silenced. His action so impressed his men that they found new courage to take up the fire fight, increasing their firepower, and exposing themselves more than ever to harass the enemy with additional bazooka and machinegun fire. Only when his objective had been taken and the enemy scattered did 1st Lt. Fields consent to be evacuated to the battalion command post. At this point he refused to move further back until he had explained to his battalion commander by drawing on paper the position of his men and the disposition of the enemy forces. The dauntless and gallant heroism displayed by 1st Lt. Fields were largely responsible for the repulse of the enemy forces and contributed in a large measure to the successful capture of his battalion objective during this action. His eagerness and determination to close with the enemy and to destroy him was an inspiration to the entire command, and are in the highest traditions of the U.S. Armed Forces.



Fields graduated from Mirabeau Lamar High School in Houston, Texas in 1939. He attended the University of Oklahoma before he was drafted into the U.S. Army from Houston in February 1942. He was awarded his Medal of Honor five months later, on February 27, 1945. He was the first person decorated in the field with the Medal of Honor by General George S. Patton Jr. He was also promoted to captain. Once Fields received his Medal of Honor, General George S. Patton Jr. had him sent back to the United States. General Patton stated in his book, "War as I knew It": "I told Gaffey I did not want Lieutenant Fields sent to the front anymore, because it has been my unfortunate observation that whenever a man gets the Medal of Honor or even the Distinguished Service Cross, he usually attempts to outdo himself and gets killed, whereas, in order to produce a virile race, such men should be kept alive".

After the war Fields became an independent oil operator. He died at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Houston (now the Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Houston) on June 17, 1970, and was survived by his wife, Mathilde, and four children. He was buried on 20 June in the VA Houston National Cemetery in Houston, Texas.

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

*** Health Care ***

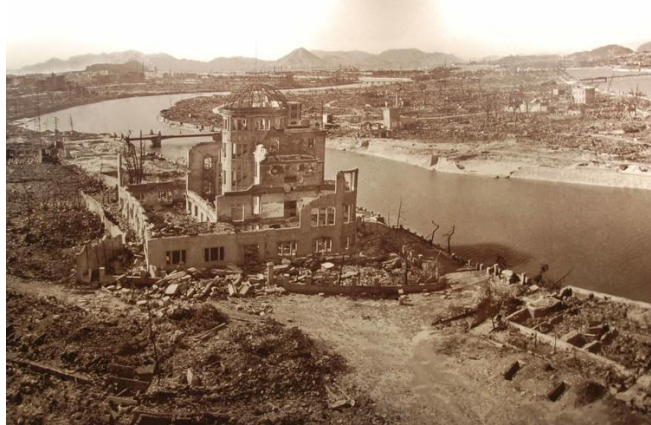


Nuclear Global Health Workforce ► What We Need to Do

Almost two years on from the 70th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it might seem like the threat from nuclear weapons has receded. But it hasn't; the threat is actually increasing steadily. This is difficult to face for many people, and this denial also means that we are not very well-prepared for nuclear and radiological events. Cham Dallas has been studying the effects of nuclear events – from detonations to accidents – for over 30

years. He's been involved in research, teaching and humanitarian efforts in multiple expeditions to Chernobyl- and Fukushima-contaminated areas. Now he is involved in the proposal for the formation of the Nuclear Global Health Workforce.

Such a group could bring together nuclear and non-nuclear technical and health professionals for education and training, and help to meet the preparedness, coordination, collaboration and staffing requirements necessary to respond to a large-scale nuclear crisis. Any nuclear weapon exchange or major nuclear plant meltdown will immediately lead to a global public health emergency. The Ebola outbreak taught the world that we should have resources in place to handle a major health emergency before it happens. What would a Nuclear Global Health Workforce need to be prepared to manage? For that we can look back at the legacy of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the nuclear accidents like Chernobyl and Fukushima.



The Hiroshima Prefecture Industrial Promotion Hall after the blast

What happens when a nuclear device is detonated over a city?

Approximately 135,000 and 64,000 people died, respectively, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The great majority of deaths happened in the first days after the bombings, mainly from thermal burns, severe physical injuries and radiation. Over 90% of the doctors in nurses in Hiroshima were killed and injured, and therefore unable to assist in the response. This was largely due to the concentration of medical personnel and facilities in inner urban areas. This exact concentration exists today in the majority of American cities, and is a chilling reminder of the difficulty in medically responding to nuclear events. What if a nuclear device were detonated in an urban area today? Dallas explored this issue in a 2007 study modeling a nuclear weapon attack on four American cities. As in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the majority of deaths would happen soon after the detonation, and the local health care response capability would be largely eradicated.

Models show that such an event in an urban area in particular will not only destroy the existing public health protections but will, most likely, make it extremely difficult to respond, recover and rehabilitate them. With medical facilities decimated after a detonation, treating the injured will be a tremendous challenge. We would need predicted casualty distributions and locations to figure out how to best allocate what resources and personnel remain. Very few medical personnel today have the skills or knowledge to treat the kind and the quantity of injuries a nuclear blast can cause. Health care workers would have little to no familiarity with the treatment of radiation victims. Thermal burns would require enormous resources to treat even a single patient, and a large number of patients with these injuries will overwhelm any existing medical system. There would also be a massive number of laceration injuries from the breakage of virtually all glass in a wide area.

Currently, it has not been worked out how medical systems in affected areas are supposed to cope with the overwhelming numbers of patients from an urban nuclear detonation. This makes it that much more important to have an effort like the Nuclear Global Health Workforce to work to address and help nations prepare for these overwhelming events.

Getting people out of the blast and radiation contamination zones

A major nuclear event would leave large swaths of territory uninhabitable for decades, with catastrophic impacts on humans, the economy and the environment. Decisions to evacuate at-risk populations must be made within hours, but plans for and criteria to evacuate are lacking. And the scale of these evacuations and potential resettlement is tremendous. For instance, within a few weeks after the Chernobyl accident, more than 116,000 people were evacuated from the most contaminated areas of Ukraine and Belarus. Another 220,000 people were relocated in subsequent years. But thousands continue to live in areas classified by Ukrainian and Belarussian authorities as strictly controlled zones, where chronic radioactive cesium contamination remains a problem.

The day after the Fukushima earthquake and tsunami, over 200,000 people were evacuated from areas within 20 kilometers (12 miles) the nuclear plant because of the fear of the potential for radiation exposure. On Day 3, people living in the 20-30 kilometer (12-18 mile) zone around the plant were asked to remain indoors, and eventually advised to self-evacuate. The evacuation process was plagued by misinformation, inadequate and confusing orders and delays in releasing information. There was also trouble evacuating everyone from the affected areas. Elderly and infirm residents were left in areas near the plant, and hospitalized patients were not always taken where they needed to go. All of these troubles lead to a loss of public trust in the government.

Chernobyl and Fukushima were both reactor meltdowns. A high-yield nuclear weapon – that is, a large device with a very large blast and radiation capability – would bring patient and evacuation numbers to incomprehensible levels. However, the current Department of Homeland Security most-anticipated scenario for a nuclear attack in the US is for smaller nuclear weapons – 10 kilotons – about the size of the weapons used to attack Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And new evidence has altered previous dire predictions in relatively low-yield nuclear blasts such as Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Current US nuclear war response protocols do not rely as much on large-scale evacuations from nearby areas. For instance, in a hypothetical low-yield (10 kiloton) nuclear bomb over Washington DC, only limited evacuations are planned.

Despite projections of 100,000 fatalities and about 150,000 casualties, the casualty-producing radiation plume would actually be expected to be confined to a relatively small area. People upwind would not need to take any action, and most of those downwind, in areas receiving relatively small radiation levels (from the point of view of being sufficient to cause radiation-related health issues), would need to seek only “moderate shelter.” A Nuclear Global Health Workforce could start to lay out plans for how to rapidly respond to such an attack and project whether and what sort of evacuation plans would be needed.

The long-term effects of radiation exposure

The Radiation Effects Research Foundation (RERF), which was established to study the effects of radiation on survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki, has been tracking the health effects of radiation for decades. According to RERF, about 1,900 excess cancer deaths can be attributed to the atomic bombs, with about 200 cases of leukemia and 1,700 solid cancers. Japan has constructed very detailed cancer screenings after Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Fukushima; Chernobyl research has also been extensive, but not to the extent as in ongoing in Japan. But the data on many potential health effects from radiation exposure, such as birth defects, are less conclusive.

While it has been shown that intense medical X-ray exposure has accidentally produced birth defects in humans, there is considerable debate about whether there were birth defects in the descendants of Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bomb survivors. For example, one study found more than a doubling of brain malformations in some children from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, while other respected long-term investigations have concluded there are no statistically significant increases in birth defects resulting in atomic bomb survivors. Looking at data from Chernobyl, where the release of airborne radiation was 100 times as much as Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined, there is a similar lack of definitive data for radiation-induced birth defects.

A wide-ranging WHO study concluded that there were no differences in rates of mental retardation and emotional problems in Chernobyl radiation-exposed children compared to children in control groups. A Harvard

review on Chernobyl concluded that there was no substantive proof regarding radiation-induced effects on embryos or fetuses from the accident. Another study looked at the congenital abnormality registers for 16 European regions that received fallout from Chernobyl, and concluded that the widespread fear in the population about the possible effects of radiation exposure on the unborn fetus was not justified. Indeed, the most definitive Chernobyl health impact in terms of numbers was the dramatic increase of elective abortions near and at significant distances from the accident site. This was due to “nuclear phobia,” lack of information and inadequate official guidance. Not having been informed about the actual lack of risk, there was understandable anxiety regarding the possible effects of radiation on the fetus, and a panic among expectant mothers about giving birth to a child with a birth defect.

A Nuclear Global Health Workforce could help health care practitioners, policymakers, administrators and others understand myths and realities of radiation. In the critical time just after a nuclear crisis, this would help officials make evidence-based policy decisions and help people understand the actual risks they face.

What’s the risk of another Hiroshima or Nagasaki?

Today, the risk for a nuclear exchange – and its devastating impact on medicine and public health worldwide – has only escalated. Nuclear weapons are spreading to more nations, and international relations are increasingly volatile. The developing technological sophistication among terrorist groups and the growing global availability and distribution of radioactive materials are also especially worrying. Despite the gloomy prospects of health outcomes of any large scale nuclear event common in the minds of many, it is our mutually shared moral and ethical obligation to respond.

[Source: Cham Dallas | The Conversation | April 22, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Reform Update 04 ► Historic Redesign of Our System

Military health care is eight months from rolling out “historic” reforms to improve patient access and quality of care; to streamline health operations across Army, Navy and Air Force; and to better integrate that direct care system with networks of private-sector providers supporting TRICARE insurance beneficiaries, said Vice Adm. Raquel Bono, director of the Defense Health Agency (DHA). DHA is responsible for implementing the changes while following through on many previous reforms the last two defense secretaries set in motion for modernizing the military health care system.

“This is historic because we have the opportunity here to redesign our system of health,” says Bono. “At the heart of it, I believe, is a growing recognition, both in the military health system and the commercial and private health care system, that our patients truly need to be co-designers.” Many elements of military health care are in flux due to three factors:

- A hefty package of reforms voted by Congress last December;
- A new generation of TRICARE support contracts taking effect soon; and
- The introduction of MHS Genesis, the military's new electronic records and scheduling system, which began at few medical facilities earlier this year and will be running department-wide by 2022.

Bono sees all three as opportunities to more tightly integrate the goal of improving health care delivery with enhancing medical readiness, and doing so “around our patients” by incorporating their feedback in all system-wide reforms. “They need to help us understand what the best ways are to integrate. And that's part of the historic nature that I see here,” Bono said.

The FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) directs scores of changes not only to the TRICARE benefit but also to how on-base hospitals, clinics, and staffs are organized and operate so military providers care for more patients. Additionally, last July, DHA announced new TRICARE support contracts so three regions (North, South, and West) are reorganized into two (East and West). Health Net Federal Services of Rancho Cordova, Calif.,

will replace United Healthcare in managing the West, a contract valued at \$17.7 billion. Humana Government Business of Louisville, Ky., will consolidate northeastern and southeastern states into the East Region under a contract worth \$40.5 billion.

To make a complex situation more clear to patients and providers, DHA got authorization from Congress to time the start of key TRICARE reforms to coincide with the new contracts, moving the contracts' effective date for delivering health care from Oct. 1, 2017, to Jan. 1, 2018, Bono said. One key TRICARE change is to replace two legs of the current benefit -- TRICARE Standard, the fee-for-service insurance option, and Extra, the preferred provider option -- with TRICARE Select. Select will combine features of both. Meanwhile, the managed care option, TRICARE Prime, will not change. Health Net and Humana will establish networks of providers to serve both Prime and Select.

Under Prime, enrolled beneficiaries will continue to be assigned to primary care managers in designated Prime Service Areas, which aren't changing. Those provider networks must meet certain access standards. Under TRICARE Select, patients can choose their own providers but if they use a non-network provider, they will incur higher out-of-pocket costs. Cost-sharing will revert to a percentage of TRICARE's allowable charge. TRICARE Select patients using non-network providers also will have a higher deductible to pay. Select also will differ from TRICARE Standard by introducing a "fixed fee" for care received from a network provider. For example, if an active duty family member seeks primary care from a network provider, they will pay \$15 as a fixed fee, versus 15 percent of the allowed TRICARE charge. This is expected to simplify cost sharing for both beneficiary and provider. Retirees will have different fees.

TRICARE Select, unlike Standard, also will require an enrollment fee, but only for servicemembers and families who enter active duty on or after Jan. 1, 2018. Beneficiaries who currently use Standard or Extra will be grandfathered from TRICARE Select enrollment fees at least through 2019. In areas where Prime is not offered, TRICARE will expand networks to reach at least 85 percent of the U.S.-based beneficiary population, up from an estimated 82 percent of the population having network access today.

TRICARE also will test the concept of value-based health care by customizing networks to include high-performing providers who use high-value reimbursement incentives to deliver quality care, facilitate greater access, and encourage their patients to more actively participate in health care decisions. Bono said DHA is consulting Congress to prioritize adoption of many reforms ordered, focusing first on those that better serve patients. For example, a mandate that by Oct. 1, 2018, urgent care clinics on base be kept open until 11 p.m. might be impractical at the sprawling Quantico Marine Corps Base in Northern Virginia, given that most family members live off-base and many miles away the clinic. "In that situation, we're having conversations like, 'Should we put something right outside the base?' Or, 'Maybe we partner down in Fredericksburg' [with civilian providers] because that's where the patients are."

DHA by 1 JAN will adopt other changes, such as ending a requirement that Prime users must get referrals from primary care doctors before using a neighborhood urgent care facility. On some reforms, like standardizing appointment scheduling across the military, DHA will build on progress already made in its Enhanced Multi-Service Markets, areas where two or more services operate medical facilities and have adopted new scheduling systems. DHA will be choosing the best of those as a temporary solution, but also eyeing the enhanced appointment scheduling system to be delivered through MHS Genesis, Bono said. DHA also will be implementing provisions passed to better measure military physician productivity, to shorten hold time for patients trying to set appointments in single phone calls, and to incentivize TRICARE contractors to improve beneficiary access and care outcomes.

Congress considered but rejected the idea of dismantling medical headquarters of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. But it diminished their authority and expanded the power of DHA to standardize and streamline health operations. "I had oversight of the managed care support contract and the network. Now, with [passage of] NDAA, there's authority for a single budget authority for the direct care system. Now we actually have the ability to fully

integrate direct and purchased care health services as well as integrate and interoperate the capabilities and functions each of the services bring into the MHS,” Bono said.

Beneficiaries will see these and many more changes, Bono said. She wants to hear from them on the changes and also fresh ideas to enhance their care. “We are totally in receive mode [for] their suggestions, ideas, feedback on what we can do to make their military health system better,” she said. Beneficiaries can engage with Vice Admiral Bono on Twitter at @DHADirector (www.twitter.com/dhadirector) and on Facebook through the Defense Health Agency (www.facebook.com/defensehealthagenc). [Source: MOAA Leg Up | Tom Philpott | April 28, 2017 ++]

Liver Cancer ► Cutting Edge Palliative Treatment

For patients battling cancer, quality of life is most often achieved through treatment options. At the Fort Belvoir Virginia Belvoir Hospital, a new localized option – the first of its kind for any military hospital on the East Coast – is giving patients with liver tumors another choice to enhance their quality of life. The targeted treatment delivers millions of the tiny beads to fight the tumor's growth and is injected directly into the liver artery. The process to insert the beads takes about 30 minutes and is minimally invasive. Following the insertion, patients are typically discharged within 4 to 6 hours. Side effects from the treatment can include flu-like symptoms in some patients, said Army Lt. Col. Llewellyn Lee, chief of Radiology at Belvoir Hospital.



The palliative treatment is delivered through microscopic beads injected into arteries feeding the tumor.

Called SIR-Spheres Y-90 resin microspheres, the microscopic resin beads contain the radioactive isotope Yttrium-90 (Y-90) and emit radiation to kill cancer cells. Due to their small size – about 1/3 the width of a human hair – they travel easily with the bloodstream directly to the liver tumors. The microspheres become lodged inside the microvasculature that supplies the tumor and kills the cancer cells through radiation, said Lee. “This technology allows us to administer high doses of radiation directly to liver tumors without affecting other organs,” he said. The localized therapy won't impact other parts of the body and works to control the progression of the disease. "This treatment is for patients who have disease or tumors in their livers and specifically tumors that have metastasized, or grown out from colon cancer,” said Lee, who noted because the liver has a unique blood supply, doctors can target the tumors and preserve more healthy tissue.

While the treatment improves quality of life, it isn't curative. “This procedure is palliative,” said Army Lt. Col. Shahnin Nassirkani, a Nuclear Medicine Fellow at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center on hand to watch the procedure at Belvoir Hospital. “But the beads can cause some tumors to shrink, extending patients' lives and the

quality of them, with research showing improvements in patients are statistically significant.” Using only chemotherapy, analysts found that liver tumors progressed within about 14 to 15 months. Adding Y90, bumped that time up to around 22 months. “This treatment is another tool for us to give patients diagnosed with liver cancer something invaluable – time,” said Lee. “I’m thrilled to offer it at Belvoir Hospital to our patients who can benefit from it.” [Source: Health.mil | Alexandra Snyder | April 26, 2017 ++]

Sodium ► To Salt Or Not to Salt

Sodium – found in table salt, kosher salt, and most sea salts – is an essential mineral your body uses to control blood pressure, help your muscles and nerves work properly, and balance fluids. However, it’s important to watch your sodium intake because it can increase your risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and some cancers. On average, Americans (ages 1 and older) consume more than 3,400 mg of sodium every day, mostly in the form of salt. But the 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that adults limit their sodium intake to less than 2,300 mg per day, or roughly the amount in one teaspoon of table salt. The Guidelines also recommend that those who are “salt-sensitive” – older adults, African Americans, and people with obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, or kidney disease – limit their sodium intake to about 1,500 mg per day.

Most Americans get more than 75% of their sodium from prepared and processed foods, including tomato sauce, soups, gravies, canned foods, bread, frozen pizzas, snack foods, and salad dressings. Sodium adds flavor and helps preserve prepared foods. It enhances food color and gives it a firmer texture too. Many restaurant foods also are high in sodium, but you can choose low-sodium items when they’re available. What’s the best way to reduce your sodium intake?

- Eat whole foods such as fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables, lean meats, poultry, fish, unsalted nuts and seeds, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products.
- Check the Nutrition Facts panel on all packaged-food labels to compare sodium amounts in foods and drinks.
- Choose low-sodium, reduced-sodium, or no-salt-added products whenever possible. When buying prepared meals, look for those with less than 600 mg of sodium per meal. †
- Ask your grocer if they have a low sodium shopping list available

At home help your family consume less sodium with the following tips:

- When cooking, use alternatives to replace or reduce the amount of salt you use such as garlic, onion powder, citrus juice, or salt-free seasonings.
- Prepare rice, pasta, beans, and meats from their most basic forms (dry and fresh) when possible.
- If you don’t have a lot of time, allow dry beans to soak overnight then drain and store them in the refrigerator so they are ready to cook for dinner the next day.
- Prepare healthful meals and snacks in advance so they are ready to eat during the week. Chop and pre-portion fruits and vegetables, prepare a salad for the week, and make dressings and sauces from scratch.
- Encourage your children to eat more healthful, lower sodium foods by making it fun. Have your kids help you freeze fresh fruit for popsicles. Create a low-fat or nonfat yogurt and herb dip for vegetables. Make trail mix using unsalted nuts, dried fruit, and whole grain cereal.

Check with your healthcare provider or registered dietitian about whether you need to reduce your salt intake. To learn more about how to reduce sodium in your diet, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention web page <https://www.cdc.gov/salt>. [Source: Health.mil | April 21, 2017 ++]

PTSD Assistance Update 02 ► What to Do If you Think You Have It

After a traumatic event, it's normal to think, act, and feel differently than usual. Most people will start to feel better after a few weeks or months. If your symptoms last longer than a few months, are very upsetting, or disrupt your daily life, treatment may help. If thoughts and feelings about a trauma are bothering you:

- Go to https://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/understanding_ptsd/booklet.pdf to learn about PTSD and PTSD treatment.
- Go to <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/treatment/therapy-med/what-if-think-have-ptsd.asp> and fill out a PTSD questionnaire or self-screen.
- Go to <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/assessment/trauma-symptom-checklist.asp> for guidance on how to talk to your doctor or therapist about trauma and PTSD. The only way to know for sure if you have PTSD is to talk to a mental health care provider. The provider will ask you about your trauma, your symptoms and any other problems you have.

Find the Best Treatment for You. Today, there are several treatment options for PTSD. For some people, these treatments can get rid of symptoms altogether. Others find they have fewer symptoms or feel that their symptoms are less intense. You can learn about effective PTSD treatment options using the National Center for PTSD's Treatment Decision Aid at <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/Decisionaid> . It includes videos to explain how the treatments work. You can also build a chart to compare the treatments you like most. Both psychotherapies (also called talk therapy or counseling) and medications are included in the decision aid. [Source: PTSD Monthly Update | April 2017 ++]

Sustainable Foods ► Health Impact

Sometimes we don't think about what goes into the production, processing, packaging and transportation of the foods we eat. All those elements play a role in what is called sustainability. If a food is considered more sustainable it is found to have a more positive impact on public health and communities, animal welfare, and the environment. According to the Centers for Disease Control, making sustainable food decisions is not hard, but it takes a commitment. When we think of food that is sustainable, we should look for a few specifics according to the Centers for Disease Control:

- Food production that does not harm the environment
- Supports and preserves rural communities
- Is healthy and nutritious
- Respects farm animals
- Provides farms with fair wages
- Is free of added toxins
- Is grown locally
- Does not harm the health of farm workers

So how does that translate to what we eat daily and put on our dinner plate? Nutrition handout Healthy Sustainable Eating Tips (<https://www.nutrition.va.gov/docs/Sustainability/GEMSHalthySustainableEatingTips.pdf>) gives us tools to eat healthy and take care of our planet. Are you interested in eating in a way that is more sustainable? You could try these tips:

- Prepare meals from plant-based food more often. Not only does eating a plant-based diet decrease the risk for chronic disease such as diabetes and heart disease, it reduces greenhouse gas emissions and uses less land and water for food production than meat does. Have you ever heard of Meatless Mondays?
- Choose local fruits and vegetables and eat what is in season. The nutrients will be preserved longer and fewer chemicals will be used. Look for farmers markets in your area.
- Plan meals ahead of time to use things before they “go bad” – this prevents food waste.

Together, the Veterans Administration and you can work towards improving the health and environment for future generations. Do you want to live a sustainable lifestyle? Check out this Sustainability Checklist at <https://www.nutrition.va.gov/docs/Sustainability/GEMSChecklistforhomeApr2016.pdf> for your home. Are you interested in learning more about nutrition? Contact your local VA and ask to speak with a registered dietitian! Your VA may offer a Healthy Teaching Kitchen program. This would help you learn how to take what you bought locally or grew at home to create healthy meals and snacks like this spaghetti squash recipe at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6Xmlh62ZSA>. Following that video are a number of other recipes. [Source: VAntage Point | Laura Dolena | April 26, 2017 ++]

Traumatic Brain Injury Update 61 ► Managing Light Sensitivity

Members of the military as well as Veterans face a greater risk for traumatic brain injury (TBI), concussion (also known as mild TBI), and post-concussion syndrome as a direct result of their service, according to a large body of research. In fact, first-time TBI diagnoses of active-duty military members rose every year from 2000 to 2012, with the majority of those being listed as concussion according to the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center.

Traumatic brain injuries, mild or otherwise, can lead to additional complications for many Veterans, including ongoing physical disabilities related to chronic migraine, headache disorders and associated vision or neurological problems. Painful light sensitivity, or **photophobia**, is another of these debilitating symptoms of TBI and post-concussion syndrome. In soldiers returning from Iraq or Afghanistan, 77 percent complained of light sensitivity associated with blast-related TBI; it is the most common of many reported visual complications experienced by post-war Veterans. Studies have also shown that post-concussion light sensitivity can last for weeks or months after the initial injury, and in some cases it never fully recedes. In addition, it can have a significant impact on a person’s daily life—such as reducing one’s ability to participate in activities or impairing performance in the workplace.

Researchers still do not have a firm grasp on what causes light sensitivity in people with traumatic brain injury, but they do have an idea of the types and characteristics of light that can be problematic. These include:

- Bright, intense light
- Blue light (specifically wavelengths in around 480nm)
- Fluorescent lighting
- Glare and other repetitive light patterns

It is important to note that any light can cause pain for a hyperreactive brain—even lower levels of light, such as that which is produced by an overcast day—due to heightened pain responses to external stimuli. However, the types mentioned above are especially troublesome.

The most important action for Veterans to take is to see a doctor or specialist and ensure proper diagnosis of any underlying condition, whether it is TBI, migraine or another neurological disorder. This can help rule out a more serious health issue that is causing painful photophobic reactions as well as identify strategies for addressing the condition. Currently, there is no medication that can directly treat light sensitivity. As a result, it is often recommended that Veterans identify and minimize the effect of light-specific triggers in order to prevent symptoms

from manifesting. Unfortunately, people with light sensitive eyes commonly choose to wear sunglasses indoors, but doctors do not endorse this behavior because photophobia can actually worsen over time as a result; this is a process known as “dark adaptation.”

Instead, a more effective treatment is the use of special photophobia glasses that are precision-tinted with FL-41. This tint filters the most painful wavelengths of light that are abundantly present in everyday light sources such as fluorescent lighting, sunlight, and computer and mobile device screens. In addition, research has shown these tinted lenses not only lessen painful photophobia but also can reduce overall headache and migraine frequency—another common side effect of TBI and concussion for Veterans—by as much as 74 percent. Veterans who are eligible for VA benefits should also inquire with their doctor or neurologist as tinted glasses that treat photophobia are often covered through the VA as a “low vision device” in the category of sensory aids. Durable goods are typically purchased through the VA Rehabilitation and Prosthetics Services department and/or its local representative(s).

There are numerous other behavioral suggestions for managing light sensitivity, and these might include: reducing amount of blue light exposure by taking frequent eye breaks from computer or mobile devices and avoiding extended usage before bed; providing more natural light and/or alternatives to fluorescents for the office or home environment; wearing dark and polarized sunglasses and a hat outside on bright, sunny days; using eye drops to keep your eyes well lubricated and reduce chances of developing temporary eyestrain or dry eye, both of which can worsen light sensitivity. All of these can be valuable in a Veteran’s efforts to diminish the negative impact of harmful light. [Source: VAntage Point | Greg Bullock | April 24, 2017 ++]

Nutritional Claims ► Tips on Evaluating Validity

It seems like every day the news touts the results of yet another study on diet and health. Often, the ones that make the news are those that contradict last year's wisdom. What's healthier - whole milk or nonfat? Butter or margarine? Here are a dozen tips to help you sort the wheat from the multigrain.

- **Be a skeptic.** The latest study should have no bearing on your diet; the study after that might debunk it all. Stick with trusted recommendations based on years of research. The government's health recommendations rarely change, and that's a good thing.
- **Consider marketing messages.** The healthiest items in the grocery store often have no marketing at all. What does it say when an item needs to boast about its healthfulness?
- **Identify your target, and stick to your guns.** Do you want fresh carrots or potato chips? Processed items that try to sell to both points likely are neither healthy nor satisfying.
- **Tread carefully with “multigrains.”** Companies have found myriad ways to sell breads, cereals, crackers, and even cookies that contain healthy grains, albeit oftentimes in laughable quantities or with undesirable quantities of sugar or fat.
- **Get to know** the sugar, salt, and fat recommendations so you can shop smarter.
- **Read labels like a detective.** Is the serving size reasonable? Does the ingredient list meet your expectations?
- **Nutritional deficiencies** are very rare in the U.S. and other developed countries, so it's unlikely you need more protein or other particular nutrients.
- **Eat more** whole fruits and vegetables. There is no substitute.
- **Get your nutrition information from licensed professionals.** Personal trainers, fellow dieters, and morning show hosts aren't experts - and some of them accept kickbacks for plugging products.

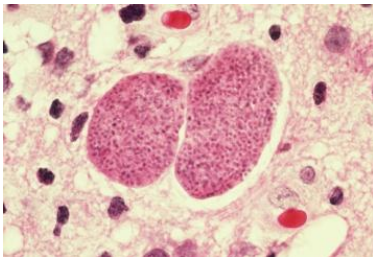
- **Fad diets** can be a fun way to reframe healthy eating, but there are no silver bullets. Trendy diets also tend to be highly unscientific, so tread carefully.
- **Be supplement-smart.** Many dietary supplements are unregulated. That means there's little research to certify what's on the label is in the bottle - or whether your body can make use of it in a particular format. Check for a seal from U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP) or NSF International that indicate product quality and safety. And always consult a doctor before beginning any supplement regimen.
- **Don't substitute** popular advice for a serious conversation with your doctor.

Experts recommend these reliable sources for nutritional information:

- myplate.gov
- The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020*, a 100-page report that focuses on healthy eating patterns and their nutrient characteristics, and its accompanying USDA fact sheets, recipes, and tools
- The [American Heart Association](http://AmericanHeartAssociation.org)
- *The Nutrition Source* from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
- The [Defense Health Agency Nutrition Guide Program](http://DefenseHealthAgencyNutritionGuideProgram.org) provides an easy-to-follow rubric for choosing commissary products that align with a healthy diet.
- DoD's [Human Performance Research Center](http://HumanPerformanceResearchCenter.org)

[Source: MOAA News Exchange | Willow Nero | April 19, 2017 ++]

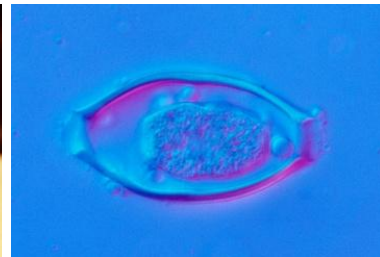
Parasites Update 03 ► What's Eating You (4)



Toxoplasma



Guinea Worm



Good-Guy Parasites

Toxoplasma -- This bug makes its home in meat, water, and infected cat feces. It causes an illness called toxoplasmosis, which can feel like the flu. Pregnant women and people with weak immune systems can have serious symptoms, like cysts in the muscles, brain, and eyes. Usually it isn't treated, but a doctor can prescribe medication for a severe infection.

Guinea Worm -- This roundworm's days of spreading disease are nearly done, thanks to health groups that teach people how to avoid getting infected. People catch the bug by drinking water from ponds infected with larvae. The worms mate and grow in the stomach, then burst out through a blister on the skin. Symptoms can include fever, swelling, and pain near the blister, but it usually takes a year after infection for warning signs to show up. There's no treatment.

Good-Guy Parasites -- Parasites do a whole lot of bad, but some researchers are trying to find out if they might be used for good, too. Studies of "worm therapy," in which you swallow parasite eggs to treat disease, show it helps relieve symptoms of colitis, Crohn's disease, type 1 diabetes, and asthma. It's still experimental in the U.S.

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

TRICARE Podcast 393 ► Prime | Healthy Exercise | Overbrushing

Moving with Prime -- Moving season is right around the corner. Transferring your TRICARE Prime enrollment by phone, online or by mail is easy. Call, go online or mail changes to DEERS. You are the key to a smooth transition. Follow these easy steps.

- Before moving, first, fill your prescriptions.
- Second, carry your current primary care manager's contact information with you.
- Third, if your family is enrolled in the Extended Health Care Option Program, call your current regional contractor to tell them you are moving. They will help transfer care to a new primary care manager and will share your Exceptional Family Member Program information with the new contractor if your move takes you to a different region.

While traveling if you need care, you can use urgent care without a referral. TRICARE Prime members living in the U.S. are allowed two urgent care visits each fiscal year. The visits must be with a TRICARE-authorized provider. The Urgent Care Pilot Program is not available to beneficiaries overseas. However, if you are enrolled overseas and traveling stateside, you don't need a referral and you aren't limited to two visits. If you have an emergency, call 911 or go to an emergency room. You don't need a referral. For more information when traveling with TRICARE visit www.TRICARE.mil/traveling. Once you arrive at your new duty station or location, update and verify your new address, phone number or other personal information in DEERS. Visit www.TRICARE.mil/deers for more information.

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Healthy Exercise -- The benefits of physical exercise are undeniable, but finding motivation to work out can be tough. Before jumping into any workout plan, it's important to consider why you want to work out, what your goals are and any possible challenges that may prevent you from completing them. Identifying what drives you is essential to being motivated and achieving your fitness goals. Those who are beginning a new workout regimen should start gradually and build momentum. Joining a gym or an exercise program can add a social element to your regimen, while alternating routines helps prevent boredom and music can be a resource for support. The combination of all three can provide a productive environment toward your fitness goals. Exercise is not just about weight and it's not just about fitness. It's really about health for life.

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Overbrushing Your Teeth -- Brushing your teeth is an important part of good oral care, but you can overdo it. Brushing too often, too long or too hard can lead to tooth and gum sensitivity, gum erosion and loss of tooth enamel. These conditions can be permanent, may require surgery and can lead to other serious dental issues. According to the American Dental Association, one common risk factor for overbrushing is using a hard-bristle toothbrush. They recommend using a softbristle toothbrush with the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance. Brush and massage your teeth without scrubbing or applying too much pressure. To avoid overbrushing, they also recommend that you brush twice a day for two minutes and consider the following:

- Place your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle to the gum line when brushing.
- Move your toothbrush back and forth in short, gentle strokes that are about the width of a tooth. Brush the outer, inner and chewing surfaces of your teeth.
- Clean the inside surfaces of your front teeth by tilting the brush vertically and making several up-and-down strokes.
- And don't forget to brush your tongue! Many people forget that removing bacteria from their tongue helps keep their mouth clean and prevents bad breath.

To ensure the health of your teeth, visit your dental provider every six months. Visit www.TRICARE.mil/dental for more information dental coverage options under TRICARE.

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | April 14, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 394 ► Allergies | Refusal Right | Sodium Intake

Allergies -- In the spring, many people are happy to spend time outside after being inside for the winter. Temperatures are warmer, the days are longer and flowers are in full bloom. Unfortunately, spring is also the time of year when allergies flare and can cause discomfort to many. Allergies occur when your immune system reacts to substances that do not bother most other people. Common allergens are:

- Animal dander
- Insect bites
- Plants, and
- Pollens.

Reactions vary when a person is exposed to something to which they are allergic. First-time exposure may only produce a mild reaction. Repeated exposures may lead to more serious reactions including facial swelling or difficult breathing. One of the most severe allergic reactions, anaphylaxis, is a sudden and severe allergic reaction that occurs within minutes of exposure. Anaphylaxis requires immediate medical attention. Without treatment, anaphylaxis can lead to death within 15 minutes. Doctors use skin and blood tests to diagnose allergies. Treatments can include medicines, allergy shots and avoiding the substances that cause the reactions. TRICARE covers proven services and supplies needed to diagnose and treat allergies. For more information, visit www.TRICARE.mil/allergy.

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Right of First Refusal -- Military hospitals and clinics have the right of first refusal in providing specialty care to TRICARE Prime beneficiaries. This means that when you're referred for specialty care or treatment, your local military hospital or clinic must first be considered if the services are available there. If they have the capability to provide your specialty care, you'll get treatment there and not from a civilian provider. Right of first refusal is cost-effective for both you and TRICARE. By using military hospitals or clinics, there isn't an added cost of involving civilian providers and you may avoid a copayment.

Your regional contractor will send the referral request for specialty care to your local military hospital or clinic. If they can accommodate your specialty care need, it will notify your regional contractor. If accepted, you may receive a call from them to schedule an appointment. You might also hear from your regional contractor with information on how to schedule an appointment with the military hospital or clinic. You must be offered an appointment with a specialist within 28 calendar days, or sooner, and within a one-hour travel time from your home. If you have any questions, contact your regional contractor at www.TRICARE.mil/contactus.

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Reducing sodium Intake -- Sodium is an essential mineral your body uses to control blood pressure, help your muscles and nerves work properly and balance fluids. However, it's important to watch your sodium intake because it can increase your risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and some cancers. So, what's the best way to reduce your sodium intake?

- Buy fresh, frozen, or no salt added canned vegetables.
- Use fresh poultry and lean meat, rather than canned or processed meats.
- Buy low sodium, lower sodium, reduced sodium, or no salt added versions of products.

- And limit your use of sauces, mixes and “instant” products.

Check with your healthcare provider or registered dietitian about whether you need to reduce your salt intake. To learn more about how to reduce sodium in your diet, visit www.cdc.gov/salt .

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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 21, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 395 ► Child Mo | Nutrition | Identity Theft/Fraud

Month of the Military Child -- Although April is the Month of the Military Child, recognizing our military’s youngest heroes is a year-round effort. Nearly two million U.S. military children serve our country as part of service members’ families. For these children, TRICARE offers benefits for their well-being, including well-child care and mental health services. Adults can do a lot to help kids deal with the stress that may come with being a military kid. Begin by asking your kids what they like and dislike about being a military kid. Talking about their feelings can help them cope with stress. Being sensitive to the added anxiety they feel during moves and deployments will also help.

TRICARE covers medically or psychologically necessary counseling. It also covers well-child visits and school enrollment physicals. These visits give you a chance to speak with a doctor about physical, emotional or behavioral concerns you may have about your child. Visit TRICARE.mil for more information. Service members and their families can also turn to Military OneSource. Military OneSource is a hub for the military community, helping connect families with help. Learn more by visiting www.militaryonesource.mil. Military kids serve too, and they deserve the best support and care possible!

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Performance Nutrition -- Many people only think about performance nutrition in terms of what to eat just before or after a competition. However, the effect of nutrition on your training and performance starts long before. Performance nutrition really begins during training, when you’re consistently fueling your body with calories and nutrients. Here are some tips to help fuel your success!

- Your body performs best on a regular schedule. No matter what your goal, skipping meals is never the answer. Skipping meals may lead you to have trouble losing weight, have a higher percentage of body fat, and are more likely to reach for energy drinks or supplements to re-energize your body. Make nutrition a priority no matter how busy you are.
- Fad diets are bad for performance. They’re typically used for a quick fix, such as rapid weight loss. Many omit an entire food group, such as grains or dairy. Unless you have a special medical condition, omitting a food group is more harmful than helpful and could lead to nutrient deficiencies.
- Finally, it’s fine to have a few “go-to” meals, but the more variety in your diet the better. Eat balanced meals. This includes eating grains, fruits, vegetables, protein, and dairy every day.

For more healthy living tips and resources, visit www.health.mil/olw.

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Preventing Health Care Identity theft and Fraud -- Did you know that health care is the number one target for identity theft and fraud? Your health information is important to you and your health care provider. But in the wrong hands, it can be valuable to someone else. Identity theft affects millions of people each year. Here are several steps you can take to make sure your health care information remains secure.

- First, read your medical and insurance statements regularly and completely. They can show warning signs of identity theft. Look for services you didn't receive or providers you didn't see.
- Next, read your Explanation of Benefits statement or Medicare Summary. Again, check the name of the provider, the date of service, and the service provided. Do the claims paid match the care you received? If you see a mistake, contact your regional contractor and report the problem immediately.

Being cyber fit requires us to be mindful of our health information at all times. Remember, you are the center of your healthcare. Empower yourself to protect your information! For more information about cyber fitness, visit the www.TRICARE.mil/cyberfit.

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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 28, 2017 ++]

*** Finances ***



Air Force Recruit Overpayment ► Collections To Start in June

The Air Force in June will start collecting a \$400 overpayment made two years ago to 526 basic trainees. But contrary to an earlier email from an Air Force finance official that said a partial payment plan was not possible under the current system and airmen would have to repay the \$400 in one lump sum, the Air Force is now allowing airmen to make their payments in four installments of \$100. In an email, Oscar Balladares, spokesman for the 502nd Air Base Wing at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, said that all basic trainees receive a partial payment in the form of a \$400 EZpay card within their first few days to cover their personal costs while their personnel and pay records are created. Once that is done, Balladares said, the Air Force is supposed to deduct the amount of that card from their paycheck, but that didn't happen in the case of those 526 trainees.

Balladares said that an ongoing financial audit at Joint Base San Antonio found that the military pay voucher had not been reconciled with the pay system. But because the \$400 was a partial pay advance, Balladares said the existing law and policy does not allow the Air Force to forgive the payments. The overpayment was originally reported 31 MAR by former airman Tony Carr on his John Q. Public blog (<https://www.jqpublicblog.com/2-year-old-finance-screw-poised-create-hardship-hundreds-junior-airmen>). Carr published a 28 MAR email from Lt. Col. Jessi Schaefer, commander of the 502nd Comptroller Squadron, that said the Air Force "explored, and eliminated, the possibility of creating payment plans for the individuals involved to avoid a single payment of \$400. The pay system doesn't provide the option of splitting partial payments into smaller, incremental payments."

But in the email to Air Force Times, AETC said a partial payment plan has now been authorized. "We deeply regret the financial hardship this oversight has caused our airmen," Schaefer said in the email from AETC. "They need and deserve time to prepare for this unexpected situation, so we've been authorized to delay corrective action until June and to provide an option for an extended payback over several months. In addition, the airmen's

comptrollers, command team and wing leadership were notified and are assisting in every way possible to seek assistance and reduce the financial impact."

Of those affected trainees, Balladares said 418 are still on active duty or in the Air National Guard or Air Force Reserve. The other 108 airmen have since separated from the Air Force. The 502nd Comptroller Squadron contacted the active-duty airmen and gave them the option of either paying the \$400 back in full by having it deducted from their mid-June paycheck, or repaying it on a monthly installment plan of four \$100 payments starting in June if that will make it easier to handle the repayments. Guardsmen and reservists will have similar options.

The Defense Finance and Accounting Service will collect the overpayments from the remaining 108 separated airmen through their standard collection processes, Balladares said. The Air Force notified affected airmen, as well as their wing commanders and the comptrollers servicing them, at the end of March, and followed up with them on April 10 and 11 to tell them about their payment options. "Each members' wing commander and command team is engaged with helping agencies such as the Air Force Assistance Fund, local charities, and the banks or credit unions on their installation to assist the airmen who are impacted the most," Balladares said. [Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | April 17, 2017 ++]

Retiree Finances ► Steps to Prevent Financial Troubles

The title of a Wall Street Journal article from 17 Feb 2017, shouted “**Retiring Baby Boomers Face Crushing Debt.**” The article peaked the interest of Lt. Col. Shane Ostrom, USAF (Ret), CFP who is MOAA's Program Director, Finance and Benefits Information because it neatly dovetailed with another theme he had written about concerning an oncoming retirement predicament. The predicament that soon-to-be-retirees don't have enough assets to fund several decades of living as a retiree. Together, these issues paint a picture that many people are not financially prepared to retire. For those of you on the verge of retirement and facing these issues, there are no magic solutions. You know it comes down to working longer and reducing your living standard to address the debt and lack of assets. You should get professional help so you can map out a plan to reduce debt and build assets.

Ostrom's objective is to present insights to prevent the scenario above by eliminating debt and ensuring you have enough funds for retirement. Often after his financial classes, participants approach him about their difficult financial situations. From these conversations, he has outlined below some of the basic issues facing people today that may lead to the situations in the opening paragraph. In these conversations people think they are doing everything correctly in the application of their financial knowledge. Yet, they have issues. With his financial ear Ostrom hears one financial misconception after another which led to the behaviors that led to their troubles. Some overestimate their financial sophistication and others are just too close to the situation to see the mistakes they are making.

The need to work should not be in your retirement future. For those of you with time and still in the work world, your working lifetime is your one chance to get this right. Based on Ostrom's class conversations, here are things we can do to head off problems and better ensure future financial success.

This first insight is tough but necessary. When you find yourself in financial straits, have the courage to face the possibility that you are the source of the problem; obviously excepting catastrophic situations that are truly beyond our control. Start by assuming the blame for your issues until proven otherwise. Consult trusted people to validate your objectivity. Too often we want to blame outside forces before ourselves. “That stupid stock market screws you every time.”...“We deserved a big house.”...“That college cost a fortune but we'll make it happen.” “I've earned this (insert favorite adult toy).” Usually it is not outside forces behind our troubles because these could have been managed with a solid plan. Only by being open to finding the root cause of problems can we confirm we are not just tinkering with the symptoms.

Next, establish a plan. Review your family's cash flow as though it were a business. Revenues come in. Expenses go out. Some revenue is kept for savings and investments for specific objectives. Control the cash flows to ensure expenses don't overwhelm your revenues and you are able to meet your needs for the future. You wouldn't establish a business without a business plan. Your family is no different. Winging it is not a strategy. This one idea, a plan, helps in so many ways. It gives you a structure and logic behind your actions. It builds in discipline. It takes the emotions and guess work out of your financial management. Creates visibility to identify problem areas. It sets outcomes or goals so you can track and measure your success.

Communication. Continuing with the business metaphor above, how can you run a business, your family operation, if the two partners don't discuss, plan and run the operation as a team? You can't have the partners running off in different directions. Lack of cooperation between partners leads to organizational failure. Each partner has a role. Each partner needs visibility into the process and understands the plan. As partners, you have to agree on the management of the cash flow. Because you will not always agree, you must be willing to compromise and build consensus to find workable solutions you will each carry out. If one partner prefers to remove them self from the financial management role, the partner with total control needs an outside consultant. Having all the financial decisions under the command of one person creates an opportunity for a breakdown as described in the first insight above—"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." per Sir John Dalberg-Acton. Not to say you are corrupt but have that objective third-party consultant on standby for regular reviews.

Those are some big issues. Now for some specific issues that trip some folks along the way to retirement.

Not saving enough for the future. We underestimate how much it takes to retire. Retirement is funding 40 years of unemployment. Confusion is part of the problem. There are so many ways to measure your potential financial need for retirement how do you know what's an appropriate amount?

Have a goal to invest 15% of your earned income. This is a good base line but you should regularly recalculate your total retirement income requirement. How much monthly income will you need to retire based on your retirement expenses per month? Hint, you can control your retirement income needs by planning to enter retirement with no debt. Say you need \$6250mo/\$75,000yr. Starting with \$75,000yr, subtract out military retirement and Social Security and any other form of known income sources to get your actual invested asset need. Say you are left with \$45,000yr after other retirement income sources are subtracted. Divide \$45,000 by 4% and you need roughly \$1,125,000 in assets. The sooner you start these projections, the better. You see how time is your greatest asset given the amounts involved. You also see the importance of a plan. This level of assets doesn't happen by accident.

Secret accounts. These decrease visibility enabling potential problems to fester as bad things usually happen in the darkness. Do secret accounts indicate a problem by their nature? Ostrom's experience is that these accounts are either the cause or a symptom of a problem. A cause; a secret credit card gets maxed out. A symptom; a secret savings account. The savings account is a good thing but the reason for the hidden account (the cause) is a bad thing..."If my spouse knew, he would spend it." Or, "I'm saving the money to escape a bad relationship." On the other hand, if you are secretly saving for your spouse's surprise birthday party, more power to ya!

Individual stock portfolios. People with financial challenges shouldn't have portfolios of individual stocks. Even people without financial challenges but are in the process of building a foundation of assets, shouldn't have an individual stock portfolio. They pose too much risk for someone who needs to get their financial house in order. In fact, the individual stock portfolio tends to be a reason behind some families' financial problems. Individual stocks are better suited for people who have established a solid financial status.

Lacking a sound investment strategy. An investment portfolio requires a proven strategy based in sound research and history to succeed. Too often Ostrom hears of people shooting from the hip with their stock selections and their buy and sell processes. Their selections are based in hot tips, uncle Joe and Jim Cramer. Throw in some greed and fear and you have a recipe for failure. It's not the stock market's fault you have issues with your

investment status. Money and our emotions go hand and glove. Your investment strategy requires objective thought and action. Emotions, media, and lack of financial knowledge make for a toxic cocktail.

Too much debt. Too many credit cards or loans. Having too much debt indicates a lack of cash flow management. A lack of financial discipline. Lack of visibility. A possible emotional weakness tied to spending. Other than an emotional weakness, all these issues can be fixed and prevented by having a plan. Credit is not a substitute for income. Overextending for a car, boat, house, vacation, education, kids toys, electronics is obvious trouble. Debt negates income. No extra income means no assets. Which all equals no retirement.

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Hopefully these insights cause you to rethink your situation. Do not be ashamed to seek help. We are all experts in our specialties but outside that, things get sketchy. We don't practice veterinary medicine on our pets. Is the need for a financial specialist any different? [Source: MOAA News Exchange | Shane Ostrom | March 14, 2017 ++]

FICO Credit Score Update 11 ► Paying Off Balance Impact

Your credit history is important to your overall financial health for at least three reasons. First and foremost, a bad score means higher rates when you borrow. Second, because a bad credit history can also impact other expenses, like your car insurance. And finally, lousy credit could also impact your ability to find work. Is this fair? Debatable. But like it or not, it's a fact. So it literally pays to keep track of your credit history and score and keep them in the best possible shape. To do so you should be aware of what different types of accounts impact your score the most.

Keep in mind that a perfect FICO score is 850, and to get the best possible deals, depending on the lender, you'll need 730-760. Those numbers will be reduced as indicated below:

- 30-day late: 60-110 points
- Debt settlement: 45-125 points
- Foreclosure: 85-160 points
- Bankruptcy: 130-240 points
- Maxed-out card: 10-45 points

The impact of accounts in collections would fall somewhere between a 30-day late and a bankruptcy. Not good. Note that the higher end of the ranges above generally would apply to those with the highest scores (780) and the lower end to those with lower scores (680). Also important: The older the offense, the less the impact. Because unpaid bills will devastate your credit score, logic would suggest that paying them off would send it in the opposite direction. But not all is logical when it comes to credit scores. According to the creator of the most widely used credit score, the FICO score, paying accounts in collections won't help. Here's what myFICO.com says: *As far as your FICO score is concerned, two things are considered: Has a collections appeared on your credit report, and when it was reported. So whether or not you pay your collections off is really a personal decision.* What FICO is saying here is that paying off a debt in collections won't improve your score.

One of the big three credit reporting agencies, Experian, agrees. Here's what the "Ask Experian" team says: *Paying the debt won't necessarily help your credit scores. Accounts that get to the collection stage are about as negative as it gets. Only bankruptcy is worse. As a result, any improvement, especially right away, probably will be very minor.* In short, paying debts in collection won't influence your credit score. It may, however, influence a lender who looks beyond your score to its source, which is your credit history. If you were a lender, which would you rather see in a borrower's credit history — an account they paid years late, or one they blew off and never paid at all? Then there's your personal morality score, otherwise known as a conscience. When you borrowed money, you gave your word you'd pay it back. So barring a legitimate dispute, that's exactly what you should do.

The Fair Credit Reporting Act allows you to dispute anything on your credit history. Once you file a dispute, the Credit Reporting Agency, or CRA, typically has 30 days to investigate the item, which they do by going back to the agency or lender who put it on your report. If that agency or lender doesn't respond, the CRA can't determine the item is accurate, so they have to remove it. They are then required to notify the other CRAs so it gets removed with them as well. You're obviously not supposed to dispute items you know to be accurate. While all these companies will try to get you to buy your credit history from them before filing a dispute, don't bite. Get it free at <https://www.annualcreditreport.com/index.action>. To learn how to dispute items go to

- <https://www.experian.com/blogs/ask-experian/credit-education/faqs/how-to-dispute-credit-report-information> for Experian.
- <https://www.equifax.com/personal/disputes> for Equifax.
- <https://www.transunion.com/credit-disputes/dispute-your-credit> for Trans Union

Some negative marks in your credit history (like a foreclosure or tax lien) aren't going away, but collection agencies and lenders may remove charge-offs or collection accounts if you negotiate with them. Before you pay anything, write a letter to the creditor and ask to have the account removed or marked as "paid as agreed" in exchange for your payment. After the creditor agrees (in writing) to remove the negative mark, pay the balance. It's called "pay for delete."

If you don't require an instant fix to your credit score, the best idea may be just to let it go. Other than a clear conscience, you're not going to gain much by simply paying off the debt. And the older it gets, the less it will impact your score. After seven years, it drops off entirely. But if you do decide to contact the lender or collection agency, a word of caution. Be careful of the language you use in any communications with them. It should not be interpreted as recognition of the debt or acknowledgment of liability for the debt. Making a partial payment on a debt or in any way acknowledging its accuracy could restart the clock. Not the seven-year clock when the debt falls off your credit report — that never changes — but the statute of limitations clock. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacy Johnson | April 28, 2017 ++]

National Park Passports Update 07 ► Price Increase for Seniors

The price to enjoy America's great outdoors will be going up — at least for seniors. Right now, Americans ages 62 and older can score a senior lifetime pass to national parks, monuments and other federal recreational lands for just \$10. But according to AARP. The pass price is expected to jump to \$80 — the same fee charged for a [standard annual pass](#) — later this year. Although it's unknown exactly when the fee hike will be implemented, the U.S. Department of the Interior says it does not expect changes to the senior pass price or program "within the next few months." AARP says the increased park fees will help pay for "major projects and enhanced services" on federally managed recreational lands. Here are three ways to get a senior pass now before the price soars:

- **Online:** Older Americans can [obtain a \\$10 senior pass online](#). Note that you'll have to shell out \$20 to get the pass, which includes the \$10 lifetime pass and a \$10 document processing fee.
- **Paper:** At https://store.usgs.gov/pass/senior_pass_application.pdf you can also fill out and submit a paper application to the government to get your pass to America's great outdoors. It costs a total of \$20, including the pass and the document processing fee.
- **In-person:** Seniors can also purchase a pass in person for \$10 from a participating federal recreation site or office. A list is available at <https://store.usgs.gov/pass/PassIssuanceList.pdf>. If you get your pass this way, you don't have to pay the \$10 processing fee.

If you have a tight timeline and you need a pass within 15 days or less, the DOI recommends you either obtain the pass at the first site you visit, or simply request expedited shipping services on your order. The National Park Service is celebrates National Park Week 22-23 APR annually by waiving its entrance fees at parks on those days.

You can also score free entrance to parks on Aug. 25, Sept. 30 and Nov. 11-12. If you're the parent of a fourth-grader, your family gets free access to federally owned parks, lands and water through the Department of Interior's "Every Kid In a Park" program (<https://www.moneytalksnews.com/fourth-graders-and-families-get-free-entry-national-parks>) which began last fall and expires 31 AUG.

National parks are America's Best Idea, and there are more than 400 parks available to everyone, every day. Go to <https://www.nps.gov/findapark/index.htm> to locate one near you. The fee-free days provide a great opportunity to visit a new place or an old favorite, especially one of the 117 national parks that normally charge an entrance fee. (<https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/fee-free-parks-state.htm>). The others are free all of the time. Plan your visit and enjoy our country's history and nature.

The fee waiver includes entrance fees, commercial tour fees, and transportation entrance fees. Other fees such as reservation, camping, tours, concession and fees collected by third parties are not included unless stated otherwise. Fee-free days make parks accessible to more people. However, national parks are always economical, with entrance fees that range from \$3 to \$30. In addition, active duty military and citizens with a permanent disability can also get free passes. For more information about the variety of discounted passes available, please visit the America the Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass page <https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/passes.htm>. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | April 23, 2017 ++]

Social Security Statistics ► 30 of Most Stunning

For better or worse, Social Security is a vital program for our nation's retired workforce. As of February, according to the Social Security Administration's (SSA) monthly snapshot, more than 61.1 million people were receiving a benefit, and this figure is only expected to grow as baby boomers age and continue to leave the workforce. Social Security is also pretty darn complicated and difficult for many working and older Americans to fully understand. With this in mind, it might be worthwhile to take a closer look at 30 of the most stunning Social Security statistics in the hope of better explaining Social Security's importance and how it works, from a visual perspective.

1. **41.51 million** -- While Social Security is paying out benefits to more than 61 million people each month, its primary task, and why it was conceived in the mid-1930s, is to provide income to retired workers. As of February 2017, 41.51 million, two-thirds of those 61 million beneficiaries, were retired workers.
2. **40 credits** -- To qualify for Social Security benefits when you retire, you need to have collected 40 lifetime work credits. You can earn a maximum of four credits per year, meaning you'll have had to have worked at least 10 years during your lifetime to qualify based on your own work and earnings history.
3. **\$1,300** -- What does it take to qualify for a lifetime work credit? Though it changes each year, often on par with inflation, a work credit can be earned in 2017 for each \$1,300 in earned income. In other words, \$5,200 in earned income in 2017 will max out your work credits for the year.
4. **61%** -- Social Security's importance can't be understated. SSA data shows that 61% of retired workers counts on their benefits to comprise at least half of their monthly income. This includes a whopping 71% of unmarried elderly individuals, and 48% of married elderly adults.
5. **\$1,363.66** -- As of February 2017, according to the SSA's data, the average retired worker was bringing home \$1,363.66 each month, or \$16,363.92 per year. That's only about 38% ahead of the recognized federal poverty level in 2017.
6. **\$1,123.12** -- However, Social Security isn't just for retirees. It's there to provide protection to spouses, children, and even parents to a lesser extent, of qualifying workers who pass away. A little more than 6 million survivors were receiving benefits as of February 2017 that averaged \$1,123.12 per month.

7. **\$1,032.25** -- Additionally, Social Security is a program designed to protect a majority of the working population should they become permanently disabled. Some 10.59 million people were receiving an average benefit of \$1,032.25 a month as of February 2017.

8. **15.2%** -- According to data from the SSA in 2014, 10% of all beneficiaries were living below the poverty line based on their income. Another 5.2% were considered to be "near poor" and earning between 100% and 125% of the federal poverty level. While Social Security income has unquestionably helped keep millions of seniors out of poverty, it's still not enough to lift all retired workers above the poverty level.

9. **35 Years** -- Ultimately, three factors decide what you'll be paid on a monthly basis. Two of them (we'll get to the third in a moment) are interconnected: your earnings history and the number of years you worked. The SSA takes into account your 35 highest-earning years when calculating your monthly benefit. For each year less than 35 that you worked, a zero will be averaged in, thusly dragging down your payout.

10. **66 years, 2 months** -- The third factor that affects your payout is your full retirement age, or FRA. Your FRA is determined by your birth year, and it represents the age at which the SSA deems you eligible to receive 100% of your monthly benefit. For those born in 1955 and newly eligible to receive Social Security, your FRA is 66 years and two months.

11. **8%** -- The SSA offers a pretty big incentive to seniors who are patient. For each year that an individual holds off on filing for benefits, their eventual payout grows by approximately 8%. Claim benefits before your FRA, and you could face up to a 25% to 30% permanent reduction in your monthly payout. Wait until after your FRA to file your claim, and your payout could be as much as 24% to 32% higher than what you'd receive at your full retirement age.

12. **62 years** -- The earliest age a person can begin receiving benefits from Social Security is age 62, although taking benefits as early as possible means accepting a reduction in your permanent payout. Earlier claims can often make sense for people in poor health, those who had a substantially lower lifetime income than their spouse, people who aren't in any way reliant on Social Security income (e.g., the wealthy), and those who can't find work or generate income.

13. **60%** -- Interestingly enough, approximately 60% of seniors, according to the Centers for Retirement Research at Boston College, file for benefits before hitting their full retirement age. That means more than 24 million of the current 41.51 million retired workers would be expected to receive a monthly payout that's below what they would have received had they waited until their full retirement age.

14. **70 years** -- Conversely, once an individual has reached age 70, his or her benefits will stop accruing on an annual basis. You could technically still hold off on filing a claim for Social Security until later, but there's no longer any incentive to wait. Healthy individuals, higher-earning spouses, and people with little to nothing saved often gain from waiting as long as possible to file for benefits.

15. **12 months** -- Should you regret your decision to file for benefits at an early age, or if you find work shortly after claiming benefits, you have options. Within the first 12 months of your claim, you can file Form SSA-521 with the SSA to undo your claim. As long as you pay back every cent you've received in benefits, it'll be as if your claim never happened, and your eventual payout can continue growing once again.

16. **\$16,920 and \$44,880** -- This two-for-one data point summarizes the exempt income levels for early filers who claim benefits before hitting their full retirement age. If you're under your FRA, the SSA can withhold \$1 in benefits for every \$2 earned income above \$16,920. If you're expected to hit your FRA later this year, the SSA can withhold \$1 in benefits for every \$3 in earned income above and beyond \$44,880. After hitting your FRA, the SSA won't withhold a cent. In other words, claiming early doesn't mean you'll necessarily be able to pocket any extra money if you're still working. Also, you do get the withheld benefits back in the form of a higher monthly payment after you hit your FRA.

17. **\$2,687** -- However, no matter what you earn or how many years you work, Social Security won't be paying out more than \$2,687 per month at full retirement age. This maximum benefit does change on a year-to-year basis, more often than not with inflation.

18. **86.4%** -- The bulk of the money generated by Social Security is derived from its payroll taxes. In 2015, SSA data shows that 86.4% of the \$920.2 billion in revenue came directly from payroll taxes. The collection of payroll taxes from working Americans also ensures that Social Security can never go bankrupt, although benefit cuts are a possibility.

19. **12.4%** -- Social Security's payroll tax is a 12.4% tax on earned income that's often split between employers and employees. That means the responsibility for most workers is 6.2% of what they earn, up to a certain dollar amount, which is discussed in the next point. Sorry, self-employed folks – you'll owe the full 12.4%.

20. **\$127,200** -- Payroll taxes are collected on earned income ranging from \$0.01 all the way up to \$127,200. This peak figure is known as the maximum taxable earnings amount, and it's adjusted every year to match the percentage increase in the Average Wage Index. The one exception is when no cost-of-living adjustment is passed along to seniors, whereby the maximum taxable earnings figure remains unchanged until the next positive cost-of-living increase.

21. **\$92 billion** -- Though a considerably smaller component of revenue next to payroll taxes, the interest earned on Social Security's more than \$2.8 trillion in spare cash generated 10.1% of its revenue in 2015, or about \$92 billion. The SSA primarily invests its spare cash in special issue bonds and to a lesser extent certificates of indebtedness.

22. **\$31 billion** -- The third and final component of revenue generation for Social Security is derived from the taxation of benefits. Individuals earning more than \$25,000 annually, and joint filers with earned income above \$32,000 are subject to having up to half of their Social Security benefits taxed by the federal government. In 2015, 3.4%, or \$31 billion, of the revenue generated by the program came from the taxation of benefits.

23. **34 years** -- Interestingly enough, though, the income-taxation thresholds of \$25,000 for individuals and \$32,000 for couples hasn't been adjusted for inflation in 34 years. What was once designed to affect around 10% of senior households in 1983 is affecting 56% of households as of 2015, according to The Senior Citizens League.

24. **\$11.4 trillion** -- Despite being such a vital source of retirement income, Social Security is in trouble. The ongoing retirement of baby boomers and lengthening life expectancies are expected to result in an \$11.4 trillion budgetary shortfall over the next 75 years.

25. **2020** -- According to the latest report from the Social Security Board of Trustees, the program is expected to bring in more revenue than it's paying out through 2019. By the year 2020, the Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance Trust will be paying out more in benefits than it's bringing in, reducing the trust's spare cash.

26. **2034** -- The real date seniors and future retirees are worried about is 2034. The trustees' report has suggested that the trust's entire \$2.8 trillion in spare cash will be exhausted by 2034, necessitating major changes to keep the program solvent for future generations.

27. **21%** -- Though they are merely educated guesses from the best actuaries in the business, the trustees' report suggests that across-the-board benefit cuts of up to 21% may be needed to sustain payouts through the year 2090. That's a terrifying thought, with a majority of seniors dependent on Social Security for at least half of their income.

28. **2.66%** -- The trustees' report also lists the actuarial deficit of the program at 2.66% as of 2016. In plainer English, if payroll taxes were increased by 2.66%, or 1.33% for most workers who split their payroll tax liability down the middle with their employers, no benefit cut would presumably be needed for another 75 years.

29. **33 years** -- Just in case the threat of benefit cuts wasn't scary enough, Social Security's annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) have come in below the medical care inflation rate in 33 of the past 35 years. In fact, since the

Great Recession, there have been three years where beneficiaries received no COLA. In October, seniors were rewarded with only a 0.3% increase in benefits for 2017, which is the lowest increase on record.

30. **0.7%** -- Finally, and on a slightly different note, the Social Security Administration is actually a very well-run and cost-efficient agency. Data has shown that of the \$920.2 billion collected in revenue in 2015, just 0.7% was used for administrative purposes to keep the agency running.

[Source: USA TODAY | Sean Williams | April 21, 2017 ++]

Facebook Giveaway Scam ► How It works

Scammers are great impersonators. They spoof phone numbers, logos, websites... you name it. In this con, they make a scam website look like a Facebook sponsored giveaway. Don't fall for it!

How the Scam Works

- You are browsing online with your smartphone, and, suddenly, a popup appears. "Congratulations," it reads, "you're today's lucky visitor." The prize is a \$1,000 gift card, and you can select from a list of famous stores. You only have two minutes to claim your prize, so you better decide quickly.
- Don't fall for it! The site looks like Facebook -- scammers used the site's colors, font, and blue navigation bar -- but there is no affiliation. The con artists also give their phony giveaway another level of credibility. They use a technology to insert the model of phone you are using to browse online. In this example, the target is identified as a "loyal Apple customer."

How to Spot a Giveaway or Gift Card Scam:

- Don't believe what you see. It's easy to steal the colors, logos, and header of any other established organization. Scammers can also make links look like they lead to legitimate websites and emails appear to come from a different sender.
- Legitimate businesses do not ask for credit card numbers or banking information for coupons or giveaways. If they do ask for personal information, like an address or email, be sure there's a link to their privacy policy.
- When in doubt, do a quick web search. If the giveaway is a scam, this is likely to reveal an alert or bring you to the organization's real website, where they may have posted further information.
- Watch out for a reward that's too good to be true. Businesses typically give out small discounts to entice customers. If the offer seems too good to be true (a \$100 voucher or 50% discount) it may be a scam.
- Look for a mismatched subject line and email body. Many of these scams have an email subject line promising one thing, but the content of the email is something completely different.

Facebook is a BBB Accredited Business. Learn more about scams that appear to be from Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/help/324203247669141/?ref=u2u>. To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker at <https://www.bbb.org/scamtracker/us>. [Source: BBB Scam alert | April 14, 2017 ++]

Investment Fraud ► 21.3 Million Potential Vet Targets

There are more than 21.3 million Veterans in the United States -- that's 21.3 million potential targets for fraud. Unfortunately, fraudsters like to try to gain the trust of a group of people with common backgrounds and interests. That's why as a Veteran, they may zero in on you or your family and try to draw you into their fraudulent investment schemes. The fraudster may even be a Veteran or at least pretend to be.

Investment fraud comes in many shapes and sizes and fraudsters use various tactics to scam potential investors. Often, the fraudster pretends to be your friend, encourages you to get in on the “ground floor” of a new investment opportunity, promises huge returns and pressures you into buying right away. These are all red flags that should set off alarms. You can see examples of these kinds of fraud and how to avoid them by checking out the Securities and Exchange Commission’s (SEC) new public service videos accessible at <https://www.investor.gov/additional-resources/specialized-resources/public-service-campaign>. Bottom line – if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!

Whether you’re a first time investor or a seasoned pro, the SEC has valuable information on ways to stay clear of con artists and their investment scams, and how to invest wisely and consider the costs and fees associated with investing. Learn more at Saving and Investing: A Roadmap to Your Financial Security Through Saving and Investing at <https://www.investor.gov/system/files/publications/documents/english/Saving-and-Investing.pdf> and take advantage of all of the free investor education tools and resources at <https://investor.gov> including its military page at <https://investor.gov/additional-resources/specialized-resources/military>

The very first thing you need to do is make sure you have done a background check on your investment professional. It’s easy to do. Just go to the SEC’s Investor.gov website to check on your financial professional before you invest. Being informed about the fees and expenses of investing is also an important part of being a wise investor. These fees may seem small, but over time they can have a major impact on your investment portfolio. Be sure to ask your financial professional questions so that you understand what you will be charged, when and why. These questions can range from what fees are charged for transactions and advisory services to how the financial professional is compensated. And just like shopping for the best price on a car, shop around before you invest and consider how much you are paying for investing services.

Remember, all investments involve some degree of risk. By picking a mix of investments you may be able to limit your losses and reduce the ups and downs of your returns without sacrificing much in potential gains. And most importantly, don’t be a victim of investment fraud. Your best defense is self-defense—through education, research and common sense. [Source: VAntage Point | Lori Schock | April 24, 2017 ++]

Tax Burden for New York 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 York.

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 4.0% (food, prescription and non-prescription drugs exempt); Other taxing entities (cities and counties) may add up to 4.45% in additional sales tax.

Gasoline Tax: 62.28 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 67.08 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$4.35/pack of 20; New York City adds an additional \$1.50.

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 4.0%; High - 8.82%. New York has “tax benefit recapture,” by which many high-income taxpayers pay their top tax rate on all income, not just on amounts above the benefit threshold.

Income Brackets: 5. Lowest – \$8,450; Highest – \$2,140,900. For joint returns, the taxes are twice the tax imposed on half the income

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$7,950; Married filing jointly – \$15,950; Dependents – \$1,000

Standard Deduction: none

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security, military, civil service, New York state/local government pensions are exempt. Also, up to \$20,000 of qualified private pensions for those 59½ and older. Out-of-state government pensions can be deducted as part of the \$20,000 exemption. For more information on senior citizen and retiree benefits refer to <https://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/publications/income/pub36.pdf>.

Retired Military Pay: Exempt from taxes.

Military Disability Retired Pay: Disability Portion — Length of Service Pay: Member on September 24, 1975 — No tax; Not Member on September 24, 1975 — Taxed, unless combat incurred. Retired Pay — Based solely on disability. member on September 24, 1975 — No tax. Not Member on September 24, 1975 — Taxed, unless all pay based on disability, and disability resulted from armed conflict, extra-hazardous service, simulated war, or an instrumentality of war. For information on taxes for military personnel in New York State, [click here](#) and [here](#).

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

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

Property Taxes

Property taxation is limited to real property. New York State law gives local governments and public school districts the option of granting a reduction on the amount of property taxes paid by qualifying senior citizens. This is accomplished by reducing the assessed value of residential property owned by seniors by 50%. To qualify, seniors must be 65 years of age or older and meet certain income limitations and other requirements. For the 59% exemption, the law allows each county, city, town, village or school district to set the maximum income limit at any figure between \$3,000 and \$24,000. Localities have the further option of granting an exemption of less than 50% to senior citizens whose incomes exceed the local income limit by less than \$1,000 in three income ranges or \$900 in six other income ranges. For example, in a community that has taken this “sliding-scale” option and has adopted the \$21,500 income maximum, an eligible resident whose income is more than \$21,500 but less than \$22,500, is entitled to a 45% exemption. If a person’s income is more than \$29,000 but less than \$32,400, the exemption is 5%. For more information refer to <https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property>

There is no general, statewide homestead property tax exemption. However, a taxpayer’s primary residence may be partially exempted from school taxes under the state’s School Tax Relief Program (STAR) program. Seniors can take advantage of this program that provides a partial exemption from school property taxes. All New Yorkers who own and live in their one-, two-, or three-family home, condominium, cooperative apartment, manufactured home, or farm dwelling are eligible for a STAR exemption on their primary residence. There are three parts to the STAR program:

- The Basic STAR exemption is available for owner-occupied, primary residences regardless of the owners’ ages or incomes. It works by exempting the first \$50,000 of the full value of a home from school taxes if a senior citizen’s income in 2009 was under \$79,050 and at least \$30,000 for all other homeowners. [Refer to https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/star/basicincomelimit.htm](https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/star/basicincomelimit.htm).
- The Enhanced STAR exemption is available for the primary residences of senior citizens (age 65 and older) with yearly household incomes not exceeding the statewide standard. For qualifying senior citizens, the Enhanced STAR program works by exempting the first \$62,200 of the full value of their home from school property taxes.
- For property owned by a husband and wife, or by siblings, only one of them must be at least 65 years of age as of December 31 of the year in which the exemption will begin to qualify for the Enhanced exemption. Their combined annual income, however, must not exceed the STAR income standard. Call 877-678-2769 for details.

Refer to <https://www.tax.ny.gov/pdf/publications/income/pub36.pdf> for general information on senior citizen and retiree benefits in New York,

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax. Regarding the estate tax, if the date of death is on or after January 1, 2004, the estate must file a New York State estate tax return if any one of the following conditions are met: (1) The decedent was domiciled in New York State at the time of death and the total of the federal gross estate, federal taxable gifts and specific exemption exceeds \$1 million; (2) The decedent was not domiciled in New York State at the time of death and the estate includes real or tangible personal property with a situs in New York State, and the total of the federal gross estate, federal taxable gifts and specific exemption exceeds \$1million; or (3) The decedent was neither a resident nor a citizen of the United States, the estate includes real or tangible personal property with a situs in New York State, and the estate is required to file a federal estate tax return. For more information refer to <https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/estate/etidx.htm>.

For further information, visit the New York Department of Taxation and Finance site www.tax.ny.gov.

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-by-state> | April 2017 ++]

* General Interest *



Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 30 APR 2017

- **COLA.** The March CPI is 237.477, 1.1 percent above the FY 2016 COLA baseline. The CPI for April 2017 is scheduled to be released on May 12, 2017.
- **German Combat Video.** Go to https://youtu.be/GmY5V_Sa86o to view 6 minutes in color of WWII German troops in action.
- **Overseas School Lunch Prices.** School lunch prices will increase at Defense Department schools on overseas bases in the fall. Elementary school lunches will rise to \$2.75, and secondary school lunches will cost \$3. It's a hike of 25 cents or less, depending on branch of service and location. Prices will be increasing gradually over the coming years, AAFES officials said in a news release.
- **Grounded C-5 Galaxies.** The Air Force has grounded a big portion of its newly refurbished, multibillion-dollar fleet of C-5 Galaxy transport planes, just to avoid spending the relatively small amount of money it costs to fly them.
- **B-24 Liberator.** One every 55 minutes from the Willow Run Assembly Plant. See how they did it in this 7 min film at <https://www.youtube.com/embed/iKlt6rNciTo?rel=0>.
- **Photos.** Posting nude pictures of service members without consent is now, for all intents and purposes, a crime in the Navy and Marine Corps — a response to the nude photo-sharing scandal that surfaced when a reporter outed a private Facebook group of Marines and sailors that was used at times to swap nudes.
- **PTSD.** Colorado is closer to becoming at least the 15th state to allow medical pot for post-traumatic stress. The state House on 20 APR approved a bill adding PTSD to the list of qualifying conditions for medical pot. Though marijuana is legal for all adults in Colorado, people under 21 still need a doctor's recommendation to get the drug. And veterans receiving federal benefits need a doctor's recommendation in order to use pot without risking some benefits.
- **Medicaid.** The number of uninsured veterans in the U.S. declined by nearly 40% from 2013 to 2015, but that number could drop even more if more states opt to expand Medicaid coverage under the Affordable

Care Act. An additional 110,000 veterans could gain coverage if states that opted not to expand Medicaid reversed course.

- **CV Flight Decks.** To see the operations and dangers of working on a carrier's flight deck check out the video at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B3UFuSaY0u3YNkQtejk3X1BjNkk/view?pref=2&pli=1>.
- **USN Flotilla.** The U.S. Navy flotilla sailing toward the Korean peninsula to deter Kim Jong Un's regime lacks a key capability: It can't shoot down ballistic missiles.
- **USCG.** The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Mohawk returned to Key West, Florida, on 22 APR after seizing more than 13 tons of cocaine, worth an estimated street value of over \$390 million, during a three-month tour in the Pacific.
- **Thailand Sub.** The Thai junta on 25 APR defended the US\$393 million earmarked for a Chinese submarine, battling back criticism of the secrecy of the deal, its cost and the questionable utility of the warship.
- **Eagle Eyes.** Go to <https://www.youtube.com/embed/6g95E4VSfj0?rel=0> to view an eagle fitted with a camera and released from the top of the 2,715 foot Burj Khalifa tower in Dubai. The eagle has no idea where the tiny speck of land was that his handler is standing on or what it looked like among all of the other islands and buildings and people. Note how efficiently the eagle spots his trainer from that altitude and how smooth its flight is with no camera shake whatsoever, even when it goes into a power dive.
- **GI Bill.** The House Veterans Affairs Committee this week postponed a planned hearing on potential updates to the GI Bill amid growing opposition to a proposal that would require new service members to pay into the GI Bill for future benefits. To sign the petition opposing the proposed payment of \$2400 by new enlistees go to <https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/Bt43t2128SKOqlidZRaxQg>.
- **Age.** The son of a woman believed to be the oldest person in the world died at their home 19 APR in at the ripe old age of 97. Harlan Fairweather lived with his 117-year-old mother, Violet Brown, in the rural northwestern Jamaican community of Duanvale. Brown is considered to be the oldest person in the world with credible birth documentation -- March 10, 1900.



RP~Russia Relations Update 02 ► Ships Arrive for Joint Exercises

Russian navy vessels arrived in the Philippines on 20 APR for joint exercises as part of a drive for new security ties under President Rodrigo Duterte's revamped foreign policy of courting the traditional foes of Manila's top ally, Washington. The guided-missile cruiser Varyag, accompanied by the fuel tanker ship, Pechenge, are on a four-day goodwill visit to the Philippines, the second port call by Russian warships in three months.

The move is part of what Duterte describes as a pursuit of a constitutionally mandated "independent foreign policy." He has made no secret of his grudge against the United States and has made befriending Russia and China the priority of his diversification drive. Captain Lued Lincuna, director of the Philippine navy's public affairs, said the Philippines hoped to learn from the Russians during training activities and a demonstration of advanced equipment and weapons systems. The schedule includes training and sports activities with the flagship vessel of the Russian Pacific fleet, plus a Russian concert in a park. Russian commander Captain Alexsei Ulyanenko said the port call would make a "significant contribution" to strengthening relations and maintaining stability in the region.



Russian Navy Commanding Officer Captain Alexsei Ulyanenko, of the guided missile cruiser Varyag, answers questions during a news briefing upon their arrival at Pier 15, South Harbor, Manila, April 20, 2017 for a goodwill visit to the Philippines.

Moscow wants to help Manila combat extremism and piracy, stepping up cooperation and training in areas where the Philippines has traditionally worked closely with its former colonial master the United States. The relationship is expected to develop further next month when Duterte and Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin witness the signing of defense agreements in Moscow. When Duterte met Putin for the first time last year, the Philippine leader spoke at length about what he called U.S. "hypocrisy". Duterte has instructed his defense minister to look into how the Philippines could acquire modern military equipment from Russia, like drones, night-vision gear, sniper rifles, and even helicopters. [Source: NavyTimes/Reuters | Manual Mogato | April 20, 2017 ++]

China's Offensive Capability Update 04 ► 2nd Carrier Launched

China's first domestically built aircraft carrier was launched on 26 APR in the latest display of Beijing's growing naval power. The carrier was released into open water from a shipyard in the port of Dalian, northeastern Liaoning province, on Wednesday morning as a bottle of champagne was smashed for good luck and the national anthem played in the background. The launch came three days after the 68th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army Navy on Sunday, and against the backdrop of a rising China seeking to project its influence over the regional maritime security pattern. The announcement of the launch on China's official media sparked patriotic discussion in China's online community.

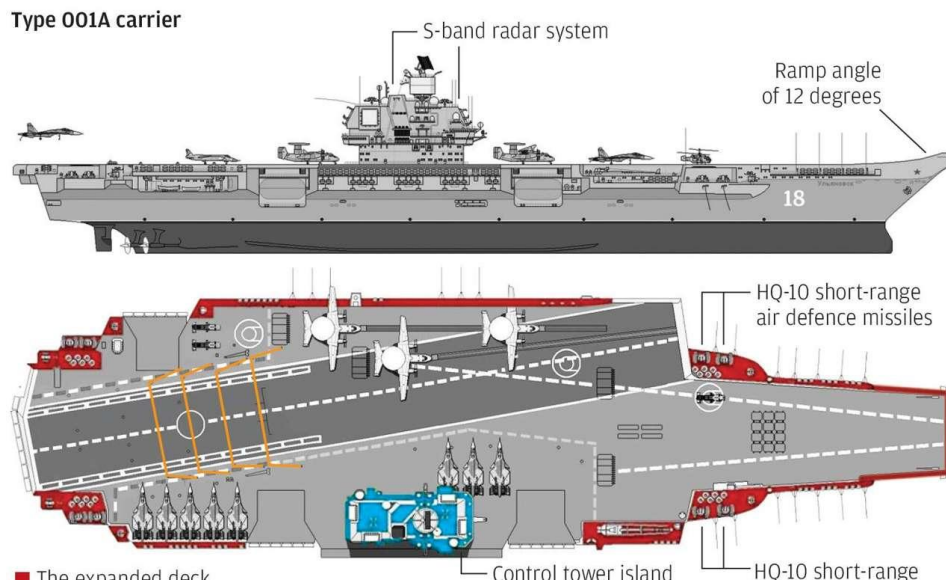
"It's a symbol of China's technological power, industrial capability and overall strength," an internet user wrote on Weibo, the country's version of Twitter. Another internet user referred to China's humiliation in the late 19th century when it was defeated by the Japanese navy, expressing delight that "a great country like China has finally got its own big weapon". The ceremony to launch the carrier was chaired by Fan Changlong, vice-chairman of the powerful Central Military Commission. President Xi Jinping, who is the commission's chairman and hence the country's top military leader, was not present. In battle to control sea and air, how do China's aircraft carriers stack up against other nations?

The carrier, which had earlier been temporarily named the Type 001A, is China's second after the Liaoning, a refitted former Soviet Union-made carrier that was put into commission in the PLA Navy in 2012. The carrier, 315 metres long and 75 metres wide, has a cruising speed of 31 knots and a displacement of 70,000 tonnes. It is slightly larger than the Liaoning, China's first aircraft-carrier, which was refurbished from the semi-completed Soviet carrier Varyag, which Beijing bought from a Ukrainian shipyard in 1998.

China started developing the 001A in November 2013, and building it in the dock in March 2015. Even though its layout is almost the same as the Liaoning, the carrier features new equipment and a more advanced operational concept, including a bigger hangar to carry more J-15 fighter jets and more space on deck for helicopters and other aircraft. But military experts said the launch of the new carrier represented only modest progress of China’s military modernisation, given the huge technological gap between the PLA Navy and its most powerful rival in Asia-Pacific, the US Navy. “While China is celebrating the launch of its first home-grown aircraft carrier, the country should also be mindful that the United States is possibly deploying its most advanced Ford-class supercarrier to the Asia-Pacific,” Beijing-based naval expert Li Jie said.

“The US is deliberately going to remind China that the generation gap between PLA navy and the US carrier strike groups as well as their fighting capabilities will be further enlarged when the carrier Gerald R. Ford is commissioned this year.” The 100,000-tonne nuclear-powered US carrier is almost twice the size of the 001A. The giant ship is powered by two advanced nuclear reactors, and equipped with electromagnetic aircraft launching system, even though its recovery device was changed to cable arresting gears for safety consideration. The conventional powered 001A retains the ski-jump take-off ramp of the Liaoning, and when China’s next generation aircraft carrier, the Type 002, is launched around 2021, it will not be nuclear-powered vessel with electromagnetic aircraft catapults, according to Li. The Type 002 carrier would most likely retain standard steam-driven catapults because “it’s impossible to develop a completely new generation carrier in just a few years”, said Li, who published a book about the Ford-class carrier this month.

“To some extent, we should recognize that the technological gap in key aircraft carrier technologies between China and the US is widening, and there is no sign of it narrowing.” The Ford-class carrier was launched in November 2013, and expected to be commissioned this year. But Washington has not announced where it will be stationed. [Source: South China Morning Post | April 26, 2017 ++]



Japan~PRK Dispute Update 01 ► 10 Minute Missile Warning Notice

North Korea might be talking about building missiles that can reach the United States, but Kim Jong Un’s regime already has lots of missiles that can reach Japan. So the Japanese government is preparing its citizens in case a missile comes their way — possibly with less than 10 minutes’ warning. The prime minister’s office issued new

“actions to protect yourself” guidelines this week, including for the first time instructions on how to respond if a North Korean ballistic missile is heading toward Japan at <http://www.kokuminhogo.go.jp/en/pdf/protecting.pdf>. Three of the four missiles that North Korea launched 6 MAR fell within Japan’s exclusive economic zone in the Sea of Japan, the body of water that separates Japan and the Korean Peninsula. North Korea later said that it was practicing to hit U.S. military bases in Japan.

North Korea showed almost two decades ago that it has all of Japan in its reach. In 1998, North Korea fired a Taepodong-1 missile — ostensibly for launching a satellite — over Japan and into its economic zone on the Pacific Ocean side. The Japanese government’s advice isn’t exactly helpful, amounting to basically: You won’t get the warning in time, but if you do, then go to a strong building. As North Korea has issued threats and paraded missiles this month, Japan’s official civil defense website has had 5.7 million visitors in the first 23 days of April — compared with usual monthly traffic of less than 400,000 hits. Under the “frequently asked questions” section, the government poses the question of how many minutes it would take for a missile to reach Japan.

“When a missile is launched from North Korea, it will not take long to reach Japan,” the answer reads. “For example, the ballistic missile launched from [North Korea] on February 7 last year took 10 minutes to fly over Okinawa.”

The central government has also been holding meetings to instruct local governments what they should do if a North Korean missile hits their region. This meeting was unprecedented in post-war Japan, the Asahi Shimbun newspaper reported, marking the first time the Japanese government has taken steps to instruct residents on how to prepare for enemy attacks.

- In Yamagata prefecture, which extends to the Sea of Japan, plans are underway to conduct an evacuation drill as soon as possible.
- In Akita prefecture to the north, Gov. Norihisa Satake instructed his disaster management department to stay on alert around the clock this month.
- To the south, in Fukui, the local government will have its staff stay on alert overnight Tuesday, in case of any provocations linked to the anniversary of the founding of North Korea’s army.
- In “Actions and Other Measures In Case of Falling of Ballistic Missile” posted on its website last week, Fukui’s prefectural government told citizens to “evacuate to a substantial building or underground shopping area” if they were outside, and to lie down under cover and away from windows if inside.

Japan has a system called “J-Alert” designed to broadcast information about an imminent missile attack to disaster management officials at the local level. Here’s how The Japan Times described the system:

- From there, local governments will relay warnings via outdoor loudspeaker systems, emergency broadcast channels on cable TV, FM radio broadcasts and cell phone alerts.
- If you are outside when a warning is sounded or received, the government’s advice is to proceed calmly to the strongest concrete building you can quickly get to, or to go underground, if possible. Families in their homes are advised to stay low to the floor, take cover underneath tables and to stay away from glass windows.

But Osaka Mayor Hirofumi Yoshimura said that there would be almost no time to respond to a North Korean missile. “A missile may not be detected as soon as it leaves the launch pad ... and that could take several minutes,” he said, according to the Japan Times report. “Depending on the case, the warnings and alarms might only sound four or five minutes before a missile arrives.”

Meanwhile, sales of nuclear shelters and radiation-blocking air purifiers have surged in Japan, Reuters reported. A small company that specializes in building nuclear shelters, generally under people’s houses, has received eight orders in April alone compared with six orders during a typical year. Increased efforts to make contingency plans in response to growing public concern will also likely accelerate a push by the government and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party for an upgraded ballistic missile defense system for the nation, the Asahi Shimbun wrote. An influential group of politicians is publicly arguing for technically pacifist Japan to acquire the ability to strike North

Korea instead of having to rely on the United States for its defense, and has submitted a recommendation to the government to this effect. [Source: The Washington Post | Anna Fifield | April 25, 2017 ++]

Young Adults ► Demographic Changes | Abode/Income/School

In 1975, 31.9 million young people lived with a spouse, compared to just 19.9 million in 2016, while the number of young people staying with their parents has risen from 14.7 million to 22.9 million, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Despite this vast difference, the number of young unmarried partners living together has risen from around 700,000 to over 9.2 million, while the number of young people living alone has also gone up from 5 percent to 8 percent. “What does it mean to be a young adult? In prior generations, young adults were expected to have finished school, found a job, and set up their own household during their 20s—most often with their spouse and with a child soon to follow,” explained the Census Bureau study. “Today’s young adults take longer to experience these milestones.”

“What was once ubiquitous during their 20s is now not commonplace until their 30s. Some demographers believe the delays represent a new period of the life course between childhood and adulthood, a period of ‘emerging adulthood’ when young people experience traditional events at different times and in a different order than their parents did,” they continued. “What is clear is that today’s young adults look different from prior generations in almost every regard: how much education they have, their work experiences, when they start a family, and even who they live with while growing up.”

The report also added, “More young men are falling to the bottom of the income ladder,” pointing out that “In 1975, only 25 percent of men, aged 25 to 34, had incomes of less than \$30,000 per year.” “By 2016, that share rose to 41 percent of young men (incomes for both years are in 2015 dollars),” they continued. “There are now more young women than young men with a college degree, whereas in 1975 educational attainment among young men outpaced that of women.”

The majority of states with the highest number of young people staying with their parents were predominantly coastal. New Jersey took the top position with 46.9 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds staying at home, followed by Connecticut (41.6 percent), New York (40.6 percent), Maryland (38.5 percent), Florida (38.3 percent), and California (38.1 percent). At the bottom with the least amount of young people living with their parents was North Dakota with 14.1 percent, following by South Dakota (19.9 percent), Wyoming (20.9 percent), Nebraska (22.7 percent), Iowa (22.8 percent), Montana (24.1 percent), and Colorado (24.6 percent). [Source: Briebart | Charlie Nash | April 20, 2017 ++]

Car Longevity ► 14 Longest-Lasting Vehicles

If you’re looking for a car that will last as long as possible, consider an SUV. Sports utility vehicles dominate iSeeCars.com’s recent ranking of the longest-lasting vehicles — taking the top seven of 14 spots on the list. The ranking is based on the automotive research firm’s analysis of more than 13 million preowned cars, from model years 1981 through 2017, that were sold in 2016. For each model in the analysis, iSeeCars.com calculated the percentage of cars on the road that had more than 200,000 miles.

The site found that, for the average vehicle model, 1.3 percent of cars on the road have more than 200,000 miles. But for the top seven SUV models, anywhere from 3 percent to 5.7 percent of vehicles on the road have more than

200,000 miles. The 14 highest-ranked models in the analysis — each of which had at least 2 percent of cars on the road after 200,000 miles — are:

- Ford Expedition (SUV) — 5.7 percent have more than 200,000 miles
- Toyota Sequoia (SUV) — 5.6 percent
- Chevrolet Suburban (SUV) — 4.8 percent
- Toyota 4Runner (SUV) — 4.7 percent
- GMC Yukon XL (SUV) — 4.2 percent
- Chevrolet Tahoe (SUV) — 3.5 percent
- GMC Yukon (SUV) — 3 percent
- Toyota Avalon (car) — 2.6 percent
- Toyota Tacoma (pickup truck) — 2.5 percent
- Honda Accord (car) — 2.3 percent
- Honda Odyssey (minivan) — 2.3 percent
- Chevrolet Silverado 1500 (pickup truck) — 2.2 percent
- Ford F-150 (pickup truck) — 2.1 percent
- GMC Sierra 1500 (pickup truck) — 2.0 percent

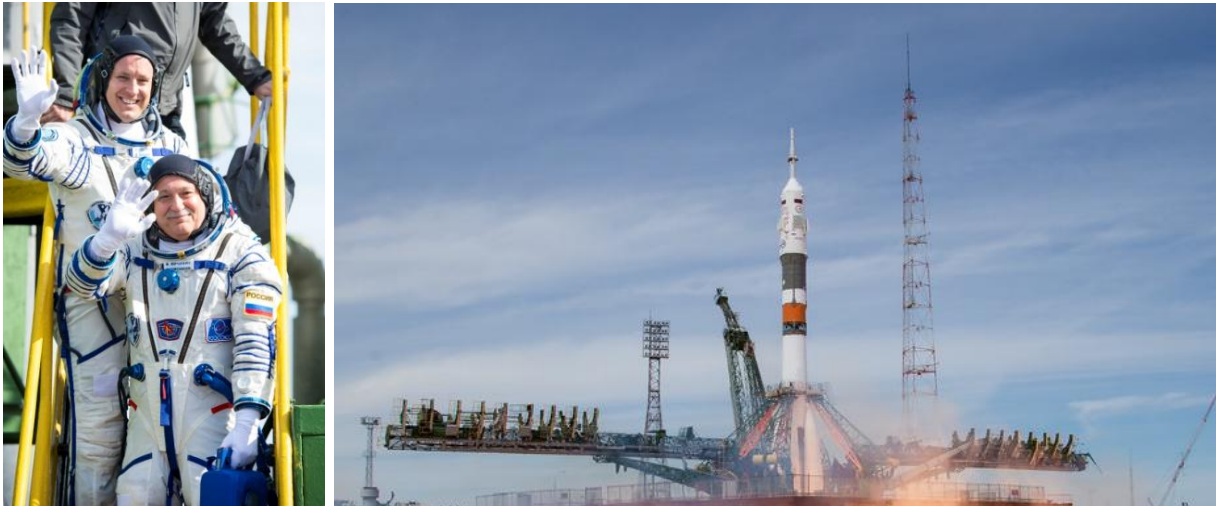
No luxury vehicles made the top 14. The luxury model with the largest percentage of cars on the road after 200,000 miles is an SUV, the Lincoln Navigator, with 1.9 percent. Phong Ly, iSeeCars.com CEO, notes: “Super-sized SUVs, such as the Ford Expedition, Toyota Sequoia, and Chevrolet Suburban, are often workhorses for families. For parents who don’t want to drive a minivan, these are the vehicles of choice to transport the kids from one activity to the next. They typically transport eight people and usually have significant towing capacity for active families who boat or camp.” [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | April 21, 2017 ++]

Garage Doors ► Making Yours Stand Out (1)



International Space Station ► USAF Pilot Col. Jack Fischer Arrives

Air Force pilot Col. Jack Fischer arrived at the International Space Station 20 APR after blasting off from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. Fischer, along with Russian cosmonaut Fyodor Yurchikhin, blasted off in their Soyuz spacecraft at 3:13 a.m. EDT, and docked about five hours later at 9:18 a.m. Over the next four-and-a-half to six months, Fischer, Yurchikhin, and the other astronauts aboard the space station will conduct about 300 experiments on subjects such as creating lighter and stronger alloys, new medicines, and testing new technologies for exploration.



Expedition 51 Soyuz Commander Fyodor Yurchikhin of Roscosmos, bottom and Flight Engineer Jack Fischer of NASA, top, wave farewell prior to boarding the Soyuz MS-04 spacecraft for launch, Thursday, April 20, 2017 at the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. Yurchikhin and Fischer will spend the next four and a half months aboard the International Space Station.

Fischer, who has test-flown F-22s and flown F-15s in combat above Iraq and Afghanistan, was saluted by Chief of Staff Gen. Dave Goldfein, who tweeted a NASA video of the launch and said "Godspeed @Astro2fish [Fischer's Twitter handle] & Fyodor Yurchikhin. May your mission be successful." On 24 APR, President Trump and his daughter, Ivanka, will call the space station to speak to astronaut and space station Commander Peggy Whitson, as well as Fischer. That day, Whitson will break the American record for most cumulative days in space. The previous record of 534 days was held by astronaut Jeff Williams. Whitson, who has been on the space station since 19 NOV, is also the first woman to command the space station twice, and has conducted the most spacewalks of any female astronaut. Fischer will be sharing his experiences aboard the station on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Stephen Losey | April 20, 2017 ++]

Pushups Update 01 ► What They Do for You & How to Do Them

Push-ups are a simple, but telling, exercise. They measure your upper-body strength and endurance, but they're often a sticking point for service members during their fitness tests. So, how can you improve your push-up performance? The short answer is: Do more push-ups. Just like you have to train faster to run faster, "practicing" your push-ups is the best way to increase your strength and endurance. That said, there still are other components to a push-up that you might consider when trying to improve your overall performance.

- Core strength is critical to a good push-up and injury prevention. Improving your core strength with balance and vertical core exercises and planks will help improve your performance and push-up form. No sagging!
- Push-ups require a lot of shoulder, chest, and arm strength too. Building up those muscle groups also will help improve your endurance and power. If you can't do a full push-up, start with incline push-ups (against a bench or box) or bent-knee ones to build your strength.
- You also might notice that your legs get tired during your push-ups; that's because they're working to support your body as well. Increasing leg strength, particularly your quads, also will help reduce overall fatigue.

It's time to stop considering the pushup an arm workout and start accepting it for the body-altering, core-strengthening move it truly is. You don't have to drop and give me 50; simply incorporating more pushups into your regular routine can help you reach all sorts of fitness goals, by helping you improve everything from your posture on your bike to your balance to your arm swing. If you want to see what the Perfect Pushup looks like go to <http://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/sarahpushup1.gif>. To do all moves correctly:

- Start on your hands and toes, in full plank position, with your hands slightly to the sides of your shoulders.
- Engage your core muscles by trying to bring your belly button toward your spine, then slowly lower your body toward the ground while keeping your neck and spine aligned — no drooping allowed.
- When your chest is about the size of a fist away from the ground, slowly press back up to full plank position.
- Repeat! Try for 10 if you're just starting out — or challenge yourself and see how many you can do before your form starts to falter.

Pushups are hard. That's why they're so awesome. But, like any challenging exercise, that means form is paramount. You're better off doing 10 modified pushups with perfect form than five full pushups with hunched shoulders or a drooping neck or hips. You'll work the same core, chest and arm muscles while relieving a bit of the pressure, allowing you to train safely. The same rules apply as above; instead, start on hands and knees (and don't cross the ankles). In both a modified or full pushup, the wider you place your hands, the more you work your chest. The closer to your body you place your hands, the more you work your triceps. Once you've mastered the pushup, you can experiment with a whole bunch of variations to not only mix up a tired routine but also to work different muscles in different ways. Here are three:

Pushup Variation #1: BOSU Ball Pushups. Originally an acronym for “both sides up”, this versatile gym gadget requires extra core work if you're going to stay balanced during your pushups. To view what it looks like got to http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/28/how-to-do-a-pushup_n_5716563.html

- Start by gripping the sides of the ball's platform, with the round side down.
- Perform your pushups as usual, trying to wobble as little as possible.

Pushup Variation #2: Renegade Row Pushup. Adding a row to your pushup makes this variation a two-for-one deal: You'll be working your back muscles to complement all that chest work. To view what it looks like got to <http://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/sarahkleinpushup8.gif>:

- Hold the handles of two dumbbells.
- Complete one pushup, and when you get back to starting position, lift your right arm until the upper arm is about level with your back.
- Pause, then lower the weight back down and repeat with your left arm before completing your next pushup.
- Focus on pinching your shoulder blades together with each row, with as little sideways movement as possible.

Pushup Variation #3: T Pushups. Work your obliques by incorporating a mini side plank into your pushups. If When this gets too easy, try it while holding a pair of dumbbells. To view what it looks like got to <http://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/sarahkleinpushup9.gif>

- Complete a pushup as usual, and when you get back to starting position, rotate your body to one side into a side plank position with your arm extended (your body will form a T).
- Pause, then return to pushup position.
- Complete another pushup, then rotate to the other side.

[Source: Health.mil & The Huffington Post | April 19, 2017 ++]

April Fools Day ► Origin

April 1, 700, English pranksters began popularizing the annual tradition of April Fools' Day by playing practical jokes on each other. Although the day, also called All Fools' Day [Athiest's Day also], has been celebrated for several centuries by different cultures, its exact origins remain a mystery. Some historians speculate that April Fools' Day dates back to 1582, when France switched from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar, as called for by the [Roman Catholic] Council of Trent in 1563. People who were slow to get the news or failed to recognize that the start of the new year had moved to January 1 and continued to celebrate it during the last week of March through April 1 became the butt of jokes and hoaxes. These included having paper fish placed on their backs and being referred to as "poisson d'avril" (April fish), said to symbolize a young, easily caught fish and a gullible person.

Historians have also linked April Fools' Day to ancient festivals such as Hilaria, which was celebrated in Rome at the end of March and involved people dressing up in disguises. There's also speculation that April Fools' Day was tied to the vernal equinox, or first day of spring in the Northern Hemisphere, when Mother Nature fooled people with changing, unpredictable weather. April Fools' Day spread throughout Britain during the 18th century. In Scotland, the tradition became a two-day event, starting with "hunting the gowk," in which people were sent on phony errands (gowk is a word for cuckoo bird, a symbol for fool) and followed by Tailie Day, which involved pranks played on people's derrieres, such as pinning fake tails or "kick me" signs on them.

In modern times, people have gone to great lengths to create elaborate April Fools' Day hoaxes. Newspapers, radio and TV stations, and Web sites have participated in the April 1 tradition of reporting outrageous fictional claims that have fooled their audiences.

- In 1957, the BBC reported that Swiss farmers were experiencing a record spaghetti crop and showed footage of people harvesting noodles from trees; numerous viewers were fooled.
- In 1985, Sports Illustrated tricked many of its readers when it ran a made-up article about a rookie pitcher named Sidd Finch who could throw a fastball over 168 miles per hour.
- In 1996, Taco Bell, the fast-food restaurant chain, duped people when it announced it had agreed to purchase Philadelphia's Liberty Bell and intended to rename it the Taco Liberty Bell.
- In 1998, after Burger King advertised a "Left-Handed Whopper," scores of clueless customers requested the fake sandwich.
- In 2017, the Mayor of Poway California announced on TV that on 1 APR they were gluing back together their famous 'Potato Chip Rock' (below) which had allegedly broken off.



[Source: VFW Post 10132 | April 01, 2017 ++]

National Poppy Day ► 26 MAY 2017 | Origin

After World War I, the poppy flourished in Europe. Scientists attributed the growth to soils in France and Belgium becoming enriched with lime from the rubble left by the war. From the dirt and mud grew a beautiful red poppy. The red poppy came to symbolize the blood shed during battle following the publication of the wartime poem “In Flanders Fields.” The poem was written by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, M.D. while serving on the front lines.

In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses row on row.
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

On September 27, 1920, the poppy became the official flower of The American Legion family to memorialize the soldiers who fought and died during the war. In 1924, the distribution of poppies became a national program of The American Legion. Each year, members of The American Legion family, led by the American Legion Auxiliary, distribute poppies with a request that the person receiving the flower make a donation to support the future of veterans, active-duty military personnel and their families with medical and financial needs. Poppy Day is celebrated in countries around the world. This year, The American Legion brought National Poppy Day to the United States by asking Congress to designate the Friday before Memorial Day, as National Poppy Day. [Source: The American Legion | April 26, 2017 ++]

U. S. NAVY, THEN and NOW

THEN - If you smoked, you had an ashtray on your desk.
NOW - If you smoke, you get sent outside and treated like a leper, if you're lucky.

THEN - Mail took weeks to come to the ship.
NOW - If the ship is near land, there's a mob topside to see if their cell phones work.

THEN - If you left the ship it was in Blues or Whites, even in home port.
NOW - The only time you wear Blues or Whites is for ceremonies.

THEN - You wore bell bottoms everywhere on the ship.
NOW - Bell Bottoms are gone and 14 yr-old girls wear them everywhere.

THEN - You wore a Dixie cup all day, with every uniform.
NOW - It's not required and you have a choice of different hats.

THEN - Say "DAMN," people knew you were annoyed and avoided you.
NOW - Say "DAMN," you'd better be talking about a hydro electric plant.

THEN - The Ships Office yeoman had a typewriter on his desk for doing daily reports.
NOW - Everyone has a computer with Internet access and they wonder why no work is getting done.

THEN - We painted pictures of pretty girls on airplanes to remind us of home.
NOW - We put the real thing in the cockpit.

THEN - Your girlfriend was at home, praying you would return alive.
NOW - She is on the same ship, praying your condom worked.

THEN - If you got drunk off duty, your buddies would take you back to the ship so you could sleep it off.
NOW - If you get drunk off duty, they slap you in rehab and ruin your career.

THEN - Canteens were made out of steel and you could heat coffee or hot Chocolate in them.
NOW - Canteens are made of plastic, you can't heat them because they'll melt, and anything inside always tastes like plastic.

THEN - They collected enemy intelligence and analyzed it.
NOW - They collect our pee and analyze it.

THEN - If you didn't act right, they'd put you on extra duty until you straightened up.
NOW - If you don't act right, they start a paper trail that follows you forever.

THEN - Medals were awarded to heroes who saved lives at the risk of their own.
NOW - Medals are awarded to people who show up for work most of the time.

THEN - You slept in a barracks, like a soldier.
NOW - You sleep in a dormitory, like a college kid.

THEN - You ate in a Mess Hall or Galley. It was free and you could have all the food you wanted.
NOW - You eat in a Dining Facility. Every slice of bread or pat of butter costs, and you can only have one.

THEN - If you wanted to relax, you went to the Rec Center , played pool, smoked and drank beer.
NOW - You go to the Community Center and can still play pool, maybe.

THEN - If you wanted a quarter beer and conversation, you could go to the Chief's or Officers' Club.
NOW - The beer will cost you three dollars and someone is watching to see how much you drink.

THEN - The Exchange had bargains for sailors who didn't make much money.
NOW - You can get better merchandise and cheaper at Wal-Mart.

THEN - If an Admiral wanted to make a presentation, he scribbled down some notes and a YN spent an hour preparing a bunch of charts.
NOW - The Admiral has his entire staff spending days preparing a Power Point Presentation.

THEN - We called the enemy things like "Commie Bastards" and "Reds" because we didn't like them.
NOW - We call the enemy things like "Opposing Forces" and "Aggressors or Insurgents" so we won't offend them.

THEN - We declared victory when the enemy was dead and all his things were broken.
NOW - We declare victory when the enemy says he is sorry and won't do it again.

Thank God I was in the "OLD NAVY." And proud of it.



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