

# RAO

# BULLETIN

## 15 May 2017

**PDF Edition**



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

Pg	Article	Subject
<b>* DOD *</b>		
04	DFAS Address Change -----	(Shift From Kentucky to Indiana)
05	DFAS myPay System [18] -----	(Beware Bogus email Messages)
05	USFSPA & DFAS -----	(Notice Of Statutory Change)
06	DoD Pro Sports Policy -----	(Revised   No Deferments)
07	DoD Procurement - (Update How Equipment/Technology is Bought)	
08	Commissary Prices [09] -----	(Changes Effect On Shoppers' Savings)
09	DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse -----	(Reported 1 thru 15 MAY 2017)
10	POW/MIA [84] -----	(Capt. Roger Helwig Final Farewell)
11	POW/MIA Recoveries -----	(Reported 1thru 15 MAY 2017   Seven)
<b>* VA *</b>		
14	VA Disabilities Overlooked -----	(Top 10 Compensatable Ones)
15	VA Budget 2018 -----	(Big Changes On Tight Budget Promised)
16	VA Caregiver Program [41] -	(Strategic Review 6-Week Extension)

- 17 == VA Whistleblowers [51] --- (Retaliation Continues After 4 Months)
- 18 == VA Facility Closures - (Secretary Shulkin Wants 1100 Nationwide)
- 19 == VA Services [02] ----- (Shulkin Mental Health & Caregiver Plans)
- 19 == VA EHR [07] ---- (Shulkin Exploring All Options for New System)
- 20 == VA Accountability [44] ----- (Vet Recourse Limited)
- 20 == VA Appeals Backlog [07] ----- (Process Overhaul in Works)
- 21 == VA Million Veteran Program [08] --- (ID'ing Genetic Risk Factors)
- 23 == VA/DOE ----- (New Big Data Science Initiative)
- 23 == VA Suicide Prevention [40] ----- (Suicide Line Outsourced)
- 24 == VA Pain Management [08] ----- (Opioid Research Findings)
- 25 == VA Claim Denial ----- (Galloway~Robert VN | Back Problems)
- 26 == VA Health Care Access [51] ----- ( FBI Director Firing Impact)
- 27 == VA Health Care Access [52] ----- (Ascertaining Your Wait Time)
- 27 == VA Telehealth [11] --- (Plans Technically Illegal | Licensing Rqmts)
- 29 == VA Vet Choice Program [53] --- (Vet Threatens DIY | VA Pays Up)
- 30 == VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ---- (Reported 1 thru 15 MAY 2017)
- 32 == VAMC Nashville TN [02] - (Sterilizer Problem Reduce Surgeries)
- 33 == VAMC Shreveport LA [03] ----- ( Director Mathew Fired)
- 34 == VAMC West Haven CT [05] ----- (Battlefield Acupuncture)
- 35 == VAMC Washington DC [03] ----- (Vets Air Grievances)
- 36 == VAMC Jefferson Barracks MO ----- (Whistleblower Complaints)
- 36 == VA-HCS Boston ----- (Failed to Identify Vet's Brain Tumor)
- 38 == VA-HCS Black Hills SD [05] ----- (Reconfiguration Put on Hold)

**\* Vets \***

- 40 == Memorial Day 2017 ----- (Flowers to Honor Fallen Servicemen)
- 40 == Vet Transitional Homes - (Montana Willis Cruse Facility Closure)
- 41 == Vet Jobs [219] ----- (Hilton/Starbucks to Hire 45,000)
- 42 == Vet Jobs [220] ----- (Military Retiree Foreign Employment)
- 43 == Stolen Valor [104] ----- (Reported 170501 thru 170515)
- 43 == Obit: Hamblet~Julia ---- (1 May 2017 | Former Women Marine Dir)
- 44 == Obit: Yamasaki~Eddie ----- (27 April 2017 | WWII Vet Author)
- 45 == Obit: Thorsness~Leo -- (2 May 2017 | Hanoi Hilton/MOH Recipient)
- 47 == Obit: Ross~Wilburn K ----- (9 MAY 2017 | WWI MOH Recipient)
- 48 == Retiree Appreciation Days ----- (As of 14 May, 2017)
- 48 == Vet Hiring Fairs ----- (16 May thru 15 JUN 2017)
- 51 == Vet Unemployment [12] ----- (Dropped to 3/7% in April)
- 52 == Vet State Benefits & Discounts ----- (Idaho MAY 2017)

**\* Vet Legislation \***

- 53 == VA Telemedicine - (H.R.2123/S-926 to Expand Use/Cut Wait times)
- 53 == VA Accountability [45] -- (H.R.1259 | Removal/Appeals Authority)
- 54 == VA Accountability [46] - (S.1094 | Bill Includes Sweeping Reforms)
- 55 == Vet Service Dogs [20] - (S.1014 PAWS Act | Provide to PTSD Vets)
- 55 == Vet Health Care [06] ----- (H.R.1628 | AHCA Impact on Access)
- 56 == GI Bill [227] ----- (H.R.758 | GI Internship Program Act)
- 57 == Vet Deportations [11] -- (Assembly Bill Passed to Provide Legal Help)

**\* MILITARY \***

- 57 == Military Bases Block Access to RAO Bulletin -- (Security Concerns)
- 58 == TRANSCOM ----- (Not Enough C-17s/Tankers/Ships for Hot War)
- 59 == Military Retirement System [26] ----- (New System Flaws)
- 60 == Military Pregnancy ----- (New Air Force Separation Policy)
- 61 == Navy Submarine Design ----- (Changing to Accommodate Women)
- 62 == Navy Dolphins ----- (Mine Locators)
- 63 == Military Logistics ----- (Army Need to Streamline)
- 65 == USS Tripoli (LHA-7) ----- (Launched 13 Weeks Early)
- 65 == Household Goods [01] ----- (Unclaimed Storage)
- 67 == Military Appreciation Month ----- (Quotes)
- 68 == Security Force Assistance Brigades --- (\$5K Bonus for Participants)
- 69 == Navy LCS Program [02] ----- (HASC Praises Frigate Delay)
- 71 == GBU-38 GPS-guided Bomb ----- (Added to the Reaper Drone Force)
- 72 == National Anthem [04] ----- (Refusal to Stand When Played)
- 73 == USMC Recruitment [01] ----- (Targeting Highly Motivated Women)

**\* MILITARY HISTORY \***

- 73 == WWII Dresden Bombing ----- (8,000 Tons of Bombs in 8 Raids)
- 75 == Operation Union II ----- (Vietnam Search & Destroy Mission)
- 77 == Battle of Los Angeles ----- (February 25, 1942)
- 79 == Battle of Cowpens ----- (January 17, 1781)
- 80 == U.S. Invasion of Britain ----- (John Paul Jones | Didn't Go Well)
- 81 == Military History Anniversaries ----- (16 thru 31 MAY)
- 81 == Medal Of Honor Story ----- (Kettles~Charles | Vietnam)
- 82 == Medal of Honor Citations ----- (Finn~John William | WWII)

**\* HEALTH CARE \***

- 84 == TRICARE Nexium Coverage ----- (Will Cease 29 JUN)
- 84 == TRICARE Preventive Health Program [06] --- (Expanded Services)
- 85 == Healthy Mouth Movement ----- (Free Vet Dental 24 JUN)
- 86 == Pericarditis ----- (Smallpox Vaccine Side Effect)
- 87 == Hepatitis C [01] ----- (Over 80,000 Patients – 90% Cure Rate)
- 87 == New Smiles for Vets ----- (Dental Care for Vets Organization)
- 88 == Medical Devices ----- (Cybersecurity Risks)
- 89 == TRICARE Podcast 396 ----- (Nexium | Babies & DEERS | NAL)
- 90 == TRICARE Podcast 397 --- (Urgent Care | Webiner | Medical Devices)

**\* FINANCES \***

- 91 == FBI IC3 ----- (How to File an Internet Crime Complaint)
- 92 == Homeowners Insurance [02] ----- (Credit Score Impact Growing)
- 93 == Dumb Insurance ----- (Identity Theft, Credit Life, Cellphone & Travel)
- 95 == Federal Reserve ----- (Rates Remain | What It Means For You)
- 97 == VA Loan Limits ----- (2017)

- 98 == Gasoline Savings [03] ----- (U.S. Gas Tax Potential Increase)
- 99 == Credit Reports [07] ----- (How to Make Delinquencies Go Away)
- 100 == Military Appreciation Month ----- (Discounts )
- 101 == Festival Scam ----- (How It works)
- 102 == Tax Burden for Oklahoma Retired Vets ----- (As of MAY 2017)

**\* GENERAL INTEREST \***

- 103 == Notes of Interest ----- (1 thru 15 MAY 2017)
- 105 == Nuclear Waste ----- (Largely Forgotten Decaying Infrastructure)
- 106 == China Island Building [02] ----- (New Yulin Installations)
- 107 == Presidential Trip Expense ----- (Mar-a-Lago Price Tag)
- 107 == President's Secret Air Force - (Ensuring CINC's Ability to Retaliate)
- 107 == Fisher House [04] -- (Founder Added to Philanthropy Hall of Fame)
- 108 == US-Philippines Relations [01] ----- (Trump-Duterte Phone Call)
- 109 == Loyalty Day ----- (1 MAY)
- 110 == Passwords [02] ----- (Q & A)
- 112 == RP Armaments ----- (\$100 Warship Purchase)
- 113 == My Son The Marine ----- (Essay: A Line to My Heart)
- 115 == Vicks Vaporub ----- (Alternate Uses)
- 116 == Garage Doors ----- (Making Yours Stand Out (2))
- 117 == Aging ----- (Language Advantages)
- 117 == Have You Heard? ----- (Happy Birthday | Bruce & Jenny's Love Story)

**]Note:**

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

**\* ATTACHMENTS \***

- Attachment - Idaho Vet State Benefits & Discounts MAY 2017
- Attachment - Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 MAY
- Attachment - President's Secret Air Force



**DFAS Address Change ► Shift From Kentucky to Indiana**

The Defense Finance and Accounting Service's addresses changed effective May 1, 2017. The old addresses are being discontinued and will be replaced by addresses in Indianapolis. The new addresses are:

**Retired Pay:**

Defense Finance and Accounting Service, U.S. Military Retired Pay, 8899 E 56th Street, Indianapolis IN 46249-1200

**Annuitant Pay:**

Defense Finance and Accounting Service, U.S. Military Annuitant Pay, 8899 E 56th Street, Indianapolis IN 46249-1300

The old PO Boxes in London KY will remain open and all mail will be forwarded to the new address for one year. However, sending mail to the old address will add three to five days to the normal processing time. The telephone and fax numbers are not changing. Recommend copy and paste <https://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary.html> the into your web browser for additional contact information. Continue to use <https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx> to access your Retiree Account Statements. [Source: Retired Pay, DFAS-Cleveland msg | May 11, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

**DFAS myPay System Update 18 ► Beware Bogus email Messages**

BEWARE! Several myPay customers have informed DFAS that fraudulent SmartDocs email messages are being sent that could put your information and finances at risk. The reported invalid emails contain what appears to be from a valid SmartDocs email address. The originators of these emails have "spoofed" their messages to hide their true origin and placed the SmartDocs address in the "From" line to make the email appear legitimate.

Valid SmartDocs messages from DFAS are always sent in plain text, do not include attachments and do not ask you to send any information in response. Your email program may automatically convert a valid SmartDocs message into HTML and convert some text into clickable links. DFAS recommends that you **do NOT click on any links within any email message**. To access a site referenced in an email, open your browser and type the link (URL) directly into the browser.

Don't get fooled. If you receive a SmartDocs message that contains a link, don't click on it. If a URL is listed in the message type it in manually within your browser. Delete unexpected or unsolicited messages that contain attachments or that request you to send information back. Becoming a victim is easy. Utilizing a few basic precautions with email handling are critical to protecting your information, finances and identity. Find other ways to keep yourself safe online at <https://www.dfas.mil/pressroom/onlineprotection.html>. [Source: DFAS Website at <https://www.dfas.mil> | May 11, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

**USFSPA & DFAS ► Notice Of Statutory Change**

A change to the law has occurred that affects the manner in which court orders submitted to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) as part of an application for division of military retired pay pursuant to the Uniformed Services Former Spouses' Protection Act (USFSPA) must be formatted. The following information provides notification of these statutory changes:

*The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2017, in Section 641, signed by President Obama on December 23, 2016, amended the definition of disposable pay in the Uniformed Services Former Spouses' Protection Act (USFSPA), 10 U.S.C. § 1408-- In the case of a division of military retired pay as property (that becomes final prior to the date of a member's retirement), the military member's disposable income is limited to "the amount of basic pay payable to the member for the member's pay grade and years of service at the time of the court order" and increased by the cost-of-living amounts granted to military retirees from the time of the (divorce) to the date the member retires.*

In order to enable the designated agent (the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), Garnishment Operations) to calculate the “new” disposable retired pay amount, a court order entered after December 23, 2016, (in a case where the order becomes final prior to the member’s retirement) that provides for a division of military retirement pay **must** provide the below listed three (3) variables.

- If the member entered the service *before* September 8, 1980:
  1. A fixed amount, a percentage, a formula, or a hypothetical that the former spouse is awarded;
  2. The member’s pay grade at the time of divorce;
  3. The member’s years of creditable service at the time of divorce; or in the case of a reservist, the member’s creditable reserve points at the time of divorce.
- If the member entered military service *on or after* September 8, 1980:
  1. A fixed amount, a percentage, a formula or a hypothetical that the former spouse is awarded;
  2. The member’s high-3 amount at the time of divorce (the actual dollar figure);
  3. The member’s years of creditable service at the time of divorce; or in the case of reservist, the member’s creditable reserve points at the time of divorce.

*If the award language in the court order is missing any of the above listed variables, DFAS will not be able to approve the order* and the court will have to clarify the award. For additional information refer to the web page at <https://www.dfas.mil/garnishment/usfspa/legal.html> . To see the language that the court order must use click on DFAS' "[Sample Order Language](#)" document. [Source: <https://www.dfas.mil/garnishment/usfspa/NDAA--17-Court-Order-Requirements.html> | May 11, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **DoD Pro Sports Policy ► Revised | No Deferments**

The Defense Department rescinded its revised pro sports policy less than a year after the 2016 change allowed military athletes to defer active-duty service so they could play professional sports. DoD officials released the news on 1 MAY, four days after Air Force Academy athletes hoping to be drafted into the National Football League found out the Air Force wouldn’t approve waivers that would allow the cadets to join the Ready Reserve and sign with a football team. Go to <http://snagfilms-a.akamaihd.net/54/71/3197a6b64a158c31081a02c72abd/policy-for-military-academy-and-rotc-graduates-participating-in-professi....pdf> to read the new policy.

Graduates from the service academies will serve as officers for their minimum commitment of two years, according to Pentagon Spokeswoman Dana White. The memo from the Pentagon, which cancels a May 5, 2016, memo, also affects recently commissioned ROTC graduates. “Our military academies exist to develop future officers who enhance the readiness and the lethality of our military services,” White said in a statement. “Graduates enjoy the extraordinary benefit of a military academy education at taxpayer expense.”

Last year, DoD eased up on the previous policy and began allowing academy athletes to apply for the Ready Reserve in order to defer their two-year active-duty commitment. The applications still needed to be approved, and there was no guarantee of a deferral, the Denver Post reported. “The department has a long history of officer athletes who served their nation before going to the pros,” White said in the statement, referencing Naval Academy graduates Roger Staubach and David Robinson, and Air Force Academy graduate Chad Hennings. The Air Force alerted academy officials of the change right as football players from the school were getting ready for the 2017 NFL Draft.

"The Air Force Academy released a statement from the Air Force prior to the NFL draft this week so NFL teams would be aware that the service would no longer support these requests and they could conduct their business in good faith, as Air Force Academy cadet Jalen Robinette was the lone NFL Draft prospect from any of the

academies," the Air Force said in a statement. Robinette, a wide receiver on the Air Force football team, was shocked by the news, according to the Denver Post. He had spent much time balancing his academy responsibilities with training for the draft. He will have an opportunity to pursue his "professional athletic goals after serving two years" as an officer in the Air Force, the statement said. "The Air Force Academy places tremendous value on our cadet athletes and their contributions to the nation as we continue to build leaders of character, engage in combat operations and continue to ensure our highest military readiness at home," Lt. Col. Allen Herritage, the academy's director of public affairs, said in an email.

The Air Force Academy football team will be honored as winners of the Commander-in-Chief's Trophy on Tuesday at the White House. The trophy goes to the winner of the annual service-academy football rivalry. Air Force beat both Army and Navy this season, according to The Gazette. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Charlsy Panzino | May 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **DoD Procurement ► Update How Equipment/Technology is Bought**

Future soldiers may enter a battlefield alongside autonomous fighting vehicles on the ground and a "ghost fleet" of unmanned ships at sea, as swarms of miniature drones buzz overhead. All the while, commanders will analyze data from social networks to understand the public sentiment and trends as the fighting unfolds. This is what the battlefield of the future likely will resemble. But for that to happen, several speakers at the National Defense Industrial Association's annual Armament Systems Forum in Fredericksburg, Virginia, said 2 MAY that much has to change about how the military acquires and implements new gear. And based on what the speakers said, the defense industry, both on the government and civilian side, may need to take some pointers from Silicon Valley's approach to research and development.

The conference schedule combined more than 300 military and industrial participants and covered topics that range from leadless bullet primers to special operations equipment acquisitions. The defense community is in the beginning stages of a "Third Offset" that will radically transform the military in ways that may take decades to unfold. Much of what is going to happen is in testing stages or on the drawing board, and much remains unknown. But experts at the conference made clear that these changes are happening, and enemies are not waiting. Instead, they are adapting.

The "First Offset" was when the U.S. military shifted from traditional war fighting common during the Korean War and previous modern wars that often resulted in "many soldiers — many bullets — one kill," said Ted Maciuba, deputy director of the Army's Mounted Requirements Division at the Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Benning, Georgia. Then-President Dwight Eisenhower moved the military into a nuclear-focused, Cold War fighting organization that meant "fewer soldiers — one big nuclear bullet — many kills." But the collateral damage associated with such attacks, along with nuclear waste and the Mutually Assured Destruction, or MAD, doctrine, was unsustainable and not applicable to counterinsurgency warfare and post-Cold War realities, Maciuba said.

At that time came the "Second Offset," which meant precision-guided weapons and communications systems such as GPS. That is credited for much of the stunning success of the Persian Gulf War, said Vincent Sabio, program manager at the Department of Defense's Strategic Capabilities Office. The military is in the beginning stages of the "Third Offset," which will include robotics, miniaturization of technologies and big data to produce "one soldier — many bullets — many kills." But to do that, Sabio argued, the industry/defense partnership needs to move away from a "high quality" production system that sometimes brings costly systems into the inventory, or fails to produce systems after decades of investment, to a "good enough" approach that aims to "fail early and fix early." That means prototypes being made and tested much earlier in the process, rather than trying to create a perfect system before putting it into the hands of the war fighter, Sabio said. He quickly cautioned that systems that protect

people’s lives must retain the highest standards of quality. Sabio said there cannot be anymore \$100 million field tests where “failure is not an option.” He did not specify any program as an example.

The future soldier must be adaptable, but the systems must have an “intuitive interface” like an iPhone, said Maciuba. Historically, training has been the last consideration when new equipment was developed. But direction from the Joint Chiefs of Staff has integrated training and users into the process, he said. Maciuba said new systems will require training, **but the military cannot equip a high-school educated soldier with equipment that takes PhD-level expertise to operate.** [Source: ArmyTimes | Todd South | May 2, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Commissary Prices Update 09 ► Changes Effect On Shoppers' Savings

Early results from widespread commissary pricing changes have shown little effect on shoppers' savings, a commissary official said, but some items could become more expensive thanks to greater price flexibility -- and the extra cash may not be going where customers expect. Some price cuts stem from new, cheaper deals with manufacturers. But other price changes come as the Defense Commissary Agency takes advantage of new rules approved by Congress that allow stores to better line up prices with outside-the-gate competition. If an item is well under the regional price average, for instance, that item's price could go up, and the money saved could go toward bringing down another item's cost.



Or, it could go somewhere else. “We are generating margin for the first time in DeCA’s history,” said Chris Burns, DeCA's executive director of business transformation, at a recent conference in Richmond, Virginia. Burns uses the term “margin” rather than "profit" because the extra cash will go to reduce the amount of taxpayer dollars used to operate the stores. Those tax dollars – about \$1.3 billion a year – had allowed stores to sell all groceries at cost from the manufacturer/distributor plus a 5 percent surcharge, which is used to build and renovate stores. New rules passed as part of the annual defense authorization act mean customers, for the first time, are helping to pay for the benefit.

And while the new pricing setup has shown no overall effect on savings under its limited rollout, that only applies to when customers buy the right selection of items, said Brooke Goldberg, director of military family policy and spouse programs for the Military Officers Association of America. Shoppers who may have bought goods because they were far underpriced compared to local vendors could see their savings vanish. “We hope Congress



will exercise the full extent of its oversight in watching these reforms implemented,” Goldberg said. “This is one of the most valued non-pay benefits that military families have, and it’s not just military families. It’s retirees, and survivors and wounded warriors who all value going to the commissary to receive a savings, and know what they’re getting. “Now, [officials] are tossing it all in the air and reshuffling everything, and we don’t know what that’s going to look like.”

#### A PRICING PRIMER

Two separate pricing changes are in effect. In the first, 10 commissaries adjusted prices on about 1,000 items to better line up prices with area competitors. No product's price can go up by more than 10 percent, per DeCA guidelines, Burns said. The second, which rolled out 1 APR in all 238 stores, lets officials look at specific categories to see what happens when they raise prices on some national brands, in order to help pay for operating costs. They also have negotiated lower prices from manufacturers on “a couple thousand” items, Burns said, so some costs could go down.

Not all savings will be passed on to customers. If DeCA's cost for an item drops by 10 cents, for instance, it may be sold at commissaries for its initial price, and that dime could go toward reducing the cost of another item in the store, or toward store operations, or both. Some of those cents may also go somewhere else: Members of industry have expressed concern privately that the contractor hired to design the pricing program, Boston Consulting Group, will benefit from the arrangement. Some unofficial reports from members of industry familiar with the program say BCG gets as much as 50 percent to 60 percent of the amount the price is reduced. This arrangement has not been confirmed by commissary officials, who say they can’t release any information on additional fees, awards or incentives paid to BCG until they are determined at a later date, based on actual contract performance.

Asked if any of the price reduction is going to a third party, Burns said it is not -- that it's going to either reducing prices on that particular item, reductions on other items, or to help fund store operations. It’s not clear whether consulting fees are included in store operations. Pressure on distributors and manufacturers to cut prices could mean cuts to special deals, sales or even scholarship donations, multiple sources said. It could also mean fewer brands from manufacturers -- Duracell batteries, for instance, no longer will be sold in commissaries.

#### STORE BRANDING

As negotiations with brand-name manufacturers continue, the stores expect to roll out their first "private label" product, bottled water, by the end of May. Trash bags are expected in June, and more private-label products, also known as generics, will be rolled out gradually. The exact price of the private-label products has not yet been determined, said DeCA spokesman Kevin Robinson, who said the new items will "definitely be cheaper than regular national brands.” While Congress has given DoD permission to implement the variable pricing and private label programs, lawmakers are monitoring the programs and their effects on commissary savings. “We really believe a certain amount of caution should be exercised in implementing those changes to make sure that if they push patrons away, the changes are reversible,” MOAA's Goldberg said. “It will be a lot harder to get patrons back than it is to push them out the door.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | May 4, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

### **DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 1 thru 15 MAY 2017**

A contractor who worked on the Navy’s supply and transport arm is facing a five-count indictment for his alleged role in a bribery scheme that allegedly netted him \$3 million. **Scott B. Miserendino Sr.**, 58, was charged on 4 MAY on charges that he accepted bribes over 15 years while working for a contractor at the Military Sealift Command. The indictment alleges that Miserendino, while employed as a contractor for Military Sealift Command, assisted Joseph P. Allen and his contracting company “in obtaining and expanding a commission agreement with a telecommunications company” that provided satellite services to MSC. Officials said that Miserendino used his

position to influence MSC to take “official acts” that benefited the telecommunications company, and Allen through the commission agreement, from 1999 until 2014.

Among the charges, the indictment alleges that Allen paid Miserendino to provide access to Navy ships so his company could perform services, including establishing the telecommunication company’s product as the default system over other providers. Miserendino also allegedly advised MSC officials on the use of the telecommunication company’s products and facilitated payment to the company. Allen already pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit bribery on April 19, and is awaiting sentencing, which is scheduled for July 28 in federal district court for the Eastern District of Virginia. Miserendino had already been sentenced to 96 months in prison and ordered to forfeit \$212,000 in 2014 for a separate bribery case involving his time at MSC. The current indictment charges him with one count of conspiracy to commit bribery and honest services mail fraud, one count of bribery and three counts of honest services mail fraud. [Source: FederalTimes | Carten Cordell | May 8, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **POW/MIA Update 85 ► Capt. Roger Helwig Final Farewell**

Thundering jets above Colorado Springs 10 MAY bid a final farewell to a native son who went missing 48 years ago on a mission to bomb the Ho Chi Minh Trail. It was a sound that Capt. Roger Helwig loved. Helwig, who was born in Trinidad and raised in Colorado Springs, was a free spirit known for meticulous honesty oddly melded with a wild streak that drove him to seek adventure in the sky. "He was a tremendous guy," said retired Maj. Jack Schnurr, a flight school friend, after an Air Force Academy memorial for the captain. Helwig loved the F-4 Phantom and new bride Carol in what some joking called equal measures when he flew off for his second tour in Vietnam in 1969. "He didn't have to be there," Schnurr said. "He volunteered to go back."



**Carol Helwig presented with an American flag flown in honor of her husband Capt. Roger D. Helwig**

On his first tour overseas, Helwig flew in the second seat of the F-4, running the plane's weapons systems and electronics as a GIB, the military acronym for "guy in back." After he came home, Helwig got more flight training and headed back to war as the guy in front. He was a forward air controller, one of the legendary "fast-FACs" who ranged far and wide over Southeast Asia spotting targets for troops on the ground. During his final flight, Helwig and Capt. Roger Stearns were 10 miles west of Vietnam on a mission to stop the flow of arms and troops that fueled the Viet Cong insurgency. Flights against targets in neutral Laos, though, were something the Air Force avoided discussing in public. Records say the two had just bombed a target, and the jet was trailing a mist of fuel before it

exploded. Searchers later found shredded parachutes and the remains of a life raft, but they didn't find Helwig or Stearns.

In 1990, a Defense Department team returned to the crash site and found Stearns' remains. Helwig stayed missing until last summer. His widow got a visit from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency in August. Searchers had found a tiny talisman at the jungle site: Helwig's dog tag. "It was surreal when I held that in the palm of my hand," Carol said Tuesday. "It was as if I was reliving the past." Dozens gathered at the academy Tuesday to relive the past with her and tell stories about the 26-year-old pilot. Lt. Col. Mike Newton, a chaplain, told mourners they need to remember Helwig's courage. "I have no idea what it took to fly 100 missions in Vietnam, each one of them harrowing," Newton said. "But he strapped it on every time."

Carol remembered the kind but kind of crazy young man she met when he was riding his motorcycle from Arizona to Washington, D.C. She knew she was competing with a twin-engined jet for Helwig's affection. "He loved flying," she said. Helwig left no children to mourn him, but a wide array of friends came to the Air Force Academy cemetery to remember. The academy supplied an honor guard, rifle team and a bugler to play taps. Air Combat Command offered up four F-15 Eagle fighters to blaze overhead in the missing man formation. Carol supplied her own touch. Bells played a last waltz for the man she loved - the theme song of Doctor Zhivago, the first film they had seen together. And as the bells played, quiet voices whispered the song's tale of love long lost but reclaimed. "Somewhere, my love, there will be songs to sing. Although the snow covers the hope of spring." [Source: The Gazette (Tribune News Service) | Tom Roeder | May 10, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

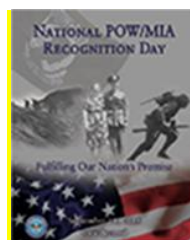
## **POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 1 thru 15 MAY 2017 | Seven**

"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 2 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**, 37, of McAllen, Texas, will be buried May 18 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Campbell was assigned to the 497th Tactical Fighter Squadron. Campbell was reported missing in action on Jan. 29, 1969, when his F-4D disappeared while on an armed reconnaissance mission over southern Laos. To learn more about Col. Campbell refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1179730/airman-missing-from-vietnam-war-accounted-for-campbell>.



-- **Marine Corps Reserve 1st Lt. William C. Ryan, Jr.**, 25, of Hoboken, New Jersey, will be buried May 10 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Ryan was an F-4B radar intercept officer, assigned to Marine Fighter Attack Force 115, Marine Aircraft Group 13, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Fleet Marine Force Pacific. Ryan was on a bombing mission over Savannakhet Province, Laos, when his aircraft was hit by enemy fire. Ryan was unresponsive after the attack and the pilot lost control of the aircraft and was forced to eject. The crash site location prevented a recovery search and Ryan was declared deceased as of May 11, 1969. To read more about 1st Lt. William C. Ryan refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1172481/marine-killed-in-vietnam-war-accounted-for-ryan-w>.



## Korea

**The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 2 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:**

-- **Army Cpl. Louis A. Damewood**, 21, of Carroll County, Md., will be buried May 12 in Suffolk, Va. Damewood was a member of Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, operating near Hoengsong, South Korea. He was declared missing after his unit attacked an opposition road block on Feb. 13, 1951. To learn more about Cpl. Damewood refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1173883/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-damewood>.



-- **Army Cpl. George A. Perreault**, 20, of Burlington, Vt., will be buried May 13 in his hometown. Perreault was part of Support Force 21, assigned to Headquarters Battery, 15th Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, near the Central Corridor in South Korea. While supporting Korean-led attacks on Chinese forces, they were caught in a massive Chinese counterattack on Feb. 11, 1951. Perreault was declared missing on Feb. 13, 1951. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1029293/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-perreault> to learn more about Cpl. Perreault.



## World War II

**The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 3 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:**

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class William H. Kennedy**, 24, of Titonka, Iowa, will be buried May 12 in his hometown. Kennedy was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Kennedy was one of 429 crewmen killed. To learn more about Fireman Kennedy refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1173879/uss-oklahoma-sailor-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-kennedy>.



-- **Marine Corps 2nd Lt. Harry H. Gaver Jr.**, was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Gaver was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. To learn more about 2nd Lt. Gaver refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1174594/remains-of-uss-oklahoma-marine-identified-from-world-war-ii-gaver>



-- **Army Pfc. Lonnie B.C. Eichelberger** was assigned to Company I, 371st Infantry Regiment, 92nd Infantry Division — the only African-American division to fight in Europe. As part of Operation Fourth Term, Eichelberger's regiment fought in the hills near the town of Strettoia, Italy. His regiment suffered heavy losses while attacking German defenses. Following the battle, Eichelberger could not be accounted for and was declared missing in action on Feb. 10, 1945. Interment services are pending. To learn more about Pfc. Eichelberger refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1179646/soldier-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-eichelberger>.

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



## VA Disabilities Overlooked ► Top 10 Compensatable Ones

There are many disabilities veterans and VA medical staff seem to overlook or set aside indefinitely, causing veterans to miss out on a chance to file a claim for a service-connected disability. Take a look at the Top 10 Overlooked Disabilities missed by veterans and VA medical staff. Don't miss out!

1. **Erectile Dysfunction** – Erectile dysfunction, or ED, is the inability of a man to have an erection hard enough to have sexual intercourse. It can also be known as impotence. It is not unusual for this to happen to a man on occasion, but frequent ED can be a sign of a bigger medical problem that needs attention. ED can also lead to complications in a man's life all on its own.

2. **Agoraphobia** – The essential feature of Agoraphobia is anxiety about being in (or anticipating) situations from which escape might be difficult or in which help may not be available in the event of having a Panic Attack (or panic-like symptoms). Oftentimes, when in this situation, an individual may have the vague thought that something dreadful may happen. Such concerns must persist for at least 6 months and occur virtually every time an individual encounters the place or situation (especially those that remind a veteran of battle situations). Agoraphobic fears typically involve characteristic clusters of situations that include being outside the home alone; being in a crowd or standing in a line; being on a bridge; and traveling in a bus, train, or automobile. More specifically, the diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5 requires that an individual experiences intense fear in response to (or when anticipating entering) at least 2 of the following 5 situations:

- Using public transportation, such as automobiles, buses, trains, ships, or planes.
- Being in open spaces, such as parking lots, marketplaces, or bridges.
- Being in enclosed spaces, such as shops, theaters, or cinemas.
- Standing in line or being in a crowd.
- Being outside of the home alone.

A person who experiences agoraphobia avoids such situations (e.g., travel is restricted; the person changes daily routines) or else they are endured with significant distress. For example, people with agoraphobia often require the presence of a companion, such as a family member, partner, or friend, to confront the situation.

3. **Keloids** – A scar that rises quite abruptly above the rest of the skin. It is irregularly shaped, usually pink to red in color, tends to enlarge progressively, and may be harder than the surrounding skin. Keloids are a response to trauma, such as a cut to the skin. In creating a normal scar, connective tissue in the skin is repaired by the formation of collagen. Keloids arise when extra collagen forms.

4. **Sexually Transmitted Diseases** – Under revision. check with your local VAO/VSO.

5. **Pseudofolliculitis Barbae** – a common condition of the beard area occurring in men and other people with curly hair. The problem results when highly curved hairs grow back into the skin causing inflammation and a foreign body reaction. Over time, this can cause scarring which looks like hard bumps of the beard area and neck.

6. **Plantar Fasciitis** – Plantar fasciitis is the pain caused by inflammation of the insertion of the plantar fascia on the medial process of the calcaneal tuberosity. The pain may be substantial, resulting in the alteration of daily activities. Various terms have been used to describe plantar fasciitis, including jogger’s heel, tennis heel, policeman’s heel, and even gonorrheal heel. Although a misnomer, this condition is sometimes referred to as heel spurs by the general public.

7. **Pleurisy** – Pleurisy is inflammation of the parietal pleura that typically results in characteristic pleuritic pain and has a variety of possible causes. The term “pleurisy” is often used to refer to a symptom and a condition. It is more precise to use the term “pleurisy” for the condition and “pleuritic pain” to describe the symptom. Pleuritic pain is a key feature of pleurisy; therefore, this article reviews the physiology and classic characteristics of pleuritic pain, focusing on the presentation and diagnosis of the patient and the management of various causes of pleurisy. Pleuritic chest pain is a common presenting symptom and has many causes, which range from life-threatening to benign, self-limited conditions.

8. **Tropical Phagedena** (Jungle Rot) – tropical phagedena, Aden ulcer, Malabar ulcer, and jungle rot (from Vietnam) , as well as various native terms. It occurs on exposed parts of the body, primarily the legs, arms, and feet. Frequently on pre-existing abrasions or sores, sometimes beginning from a scratch. As a rule, only one extremity is affected and usually there is a single lesion, although it is not uncommon to find multiple ulcers on two or more body parts.

9. **Hemorrhoids** – Hemorrhoids are swollen and inflamed veins around the anus or in the lower rectum. The rectum is the last part of the large intestine leading to the anus. The anus is the opening at the end of the digestive tract where bowel contents leave the body.

10. **Sleep Terror Disorder** - Sleep terror disorder is also known as night terrors. The disturbance cannot be due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or a general medical condition. Sleep terror is characterized by the following symptoms that a mental health professional looks for when making a diagnosis for this condition:

- Recurrent episodes of abrupt awakening from sleep, usually occurring during the first third of the major sleep episode and beginning with a panicky scream.
- Intense fear and signs of autonomic arousal, such as tachycardia, rapid breathing, and sweating, during each episode.
- Relative unresponsiveness to efforts of others to comfort the person during the episode.
- No detailed dream is recalled and there is amnesia for the episode.
- The episodes cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

[Source: <http://veteranprograms.com> | May 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Budget 2018 ► Big Changes On Tight Budget Promised**

“I’m planting the flag that we are not going to be able to go back to Congress and ask for these types of large (budget) increases year after year,” he told reporters after a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing on 11 MAY. “It’s going to mean a different way of doing business, but that is our primary objective.” The comments came after senators questioned whether a host of planned program moves at the department — including an ambitious revamp of outside medical care programs — can be done without a significant increase in VA’s budget, or without sacrificing other programs.

Shulkin insisted it's a reasonable goal. "We understand that there are limits to the amount of resources we can and should be asking for," he said. "We do seek this redesigned system to meet veterans needs better by taking our resources and putting them more into clinical care and less into administrative (costs). We will do this within the president's budget." President Trump has already proposed a 6 percent boost in VA discretionary spending next year, "so that VA can continue to meet the ever-growing demand for health care services while building an integrated system of care that strengthens services within VA and makes effective use of community services," according to White House documents. The full federal budget, with specifics on how that money will be spent, is due out in the next two weeks.

Since fiscal 2001, Congress has approved an increase in the department's budget every year, even as other government agencies saw their funding stalled or drawn back. Seven times those funding boosts have topped 10 percent of the previous year's budget. Only twice was the increase less than two percent. Trump's budget plan for fiscal 2018 would likely push the total VA budget over \$180 billion, almost twice the budget total when President Barack Obama took office in fiscal 2009 (\$93.7 billion) and almost four times the total when the war in Afghanistan began (\$48.7 billion). But that sizable increase has drawn concerns on Capitol Hill, especially given continued problems with medical care access and benefits processing at the 360,000-plus employee department.

In recent weeks, Shulkin has promised to expand access to mental health care for veterans with other-than-honorable discharges and change eligibility rules for the VA caregiver stipend program, within the current budget restraints. His plans for massive changes to programs for veterans seeking health care outside the VA system will follow the same general financial limits, he said Thursday. The department is also looking for ways to cut administrative costs and outsourcing some services. "We can't be in the business of doing things that can be done better by the private sector," he said, while simultaneously promising he's not in favor of "privatizing" the department.

At least some of the cost savings will come from a renewed VA effort to close underused and vacant department-owned buildings. Officials have identified more than 1,100 such facilities in recent years, some dating back to before the Civil War. "I worry about the sustainability of a system that is continually asking for larger increases than what the private sector is planning," he said. "I understand that is going to require tougher choices, it's going to require us to modernize our systems so that we're not continuing to throw good money after bad." VA's 6 percent planned budget increase is much more generous than most other non-defense agencies in Trump's budget. Several, including the State Department and Environmental Protection Agency, face sizable cuts under the White House's initial plans. Lawmakers will offer their views on the fiscal 2018 budget in coming weeks. While some conservatives have questioned the size of the VA budget increases in recent years, few have offered significant resistance to the idea. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 11, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Caregiver Program Update 41 ► Strategic Review 6-Week Extension**

On 11 MAY the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced a six-week extension of the strategic review of its Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. On 17 APR, the VA announced a decision to temporarily halt certain revocations from the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers because of concerns about inconsistent application of eligibility requirements for the program throughout its medical centers. VA will use the six-week extension of that temporary halt to complete its review of the program. At the end of that review, the VA intends to provide clarity on enrollment criteria for the program and to seek authorization to use the program's existing resources for those who need them most. "We are extending our strategic review of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers to make sure everyone — from our Veterans and their caregivers to our employees who work with them — has clear guidance on enrollment criteria for the program," said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. "Our Caregiver Support Program is making a difference in the lives of our



Veterans and the caregivers who support them, and we want to make sure the program is operating in the best way for them, and above all that the program’s existing resources go to those Veterans who need them most.” For more information about the VA Caregiver Program, visit [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov). [Source: VA News Release | My 11, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Whistleblowers Update 51 ► Retaliation Continues After 4 Months

It’s now been some four months since a Senate committee chairman called on the Department of Veterans Affairs to stop retaliating against a physician, who had acted as a whistle-blower, by blocking him from caring for veterans. Yet despite the intervention of Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI), Dr. Dale Klein, who is a double-board certified Yale fellow, has remained the object of a months-long order to not practice medicine at the VA. Now Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO) is joining Johnson, who chairs the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, in demanding action. The two are publicly calling for the scandal-plagued agency immediately to halt what they characterize as retaliation against Klein and fully cooperate with investigations already underway into the treatment of VA whistle-blowers.

“There is no excuse for retaliation against VA whistle-blowers like Dr. Klein. The president’s recent executive order makes that abundantly clear. The VA should fully comply with the committee’s request and stop the retaliation against Dr. Klein, who was only trying to expose substandard patient care,” Johnson told Fox News. Klein, who makes about \$250,000 a year, moved to Poplar Bluff, Mo., to work at John J. Pershing VA more than a year ago. But Klein alleges that after he blew the whistle on secret wait lists, wait-time manipulation and veterans abusing prescription drugs, his managers stripped him of his clinical responsibilities and placed him in a small, empty office with no tasks to perform. The VA then tried to fire Klein. That’s when the Office of Special Counsel (OSC), an independent federal investigative agency in Washington, D.C., stepped in and explained Klein could not be fired for being a whistle-blower.



**Dr. Dale Klein**

Last week Johnson and Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO) sent VA Secretary David Shulkin a letter asking him to “direct all VA employees to cease any retaliation against Dr. Klein and to cooperate fully and promptly with investigations by the VA OIG [Office of the Inspector General] and OSC.” But Klein says the punishment continued. Natalie Khawam, Klein’s lawyer, says her client’s case has wide significance. “The fact that Congress got involved, not once but multiple times, evidences how significant and important our case is, and the outcome it will have for veterans, and the whistle-blowers who are trying to protect our veterans,” Khawam said.

In April, President Trump signed an executive order creating the Office of Accountability and Whistle-blower Protection (OAWP) that will report directly to Shulkin. “Those who fail our veterans will be held, for the first time, accountable,” Trump said at the signing ceremony with Shulkin. Klein, who can’t get a job in the private sector because he hasn’t seen a patient in more than a year, hopes his case will be spotlighted by the OAWP. A spokesman for the VA provided Fox News with the following statement: “The Department of Veterans Affairs has received the letter from Sens. Ron Johnson and Claire McCaskill and will respond directly to them. We are looking into the situation, but at the present time, we cannot provide comment on ongoing investigations.” [Source: Fox News | Will Carr & Malia Zimmerman | May 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Facility Closures** ▶ **Secretary Shulkin Wants 1100 Nationwide**

Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin says his department is seeking to close perhaps more than 1,100 VA facilities nationwide as it develops plans to allow more veterans to receive medical care in the private sector. At a House hearing 3 MAY, Shulkin said the VA had identified more than 430 vacant buildings and 735 that he described as underutilized, costing the federal government \$25 million a year. He said the VA would work with Congress in prioritizing buildings for closure and was considering whether to follow a process the Pentagon had used in recent decades to decide which of its underused military bases to shutter, known as Base Realignment and Closure, or BRAC. “Whether BRAC is a model that we should take a look, we’re beginning that discussion with members of Congress,” Shulkin told a House appropriations subcommittee. “We want to stop supporting our use of maintenance of buildings we don’t need, and we want to reinvest that in buildings we know have capital needs.”

In an internal agency document obtained by The Associated Press, the VA pointed to aging buildings it was reviewing for possible closure that would cost millions of dollars to replace. It noted that about 57 percent of all VA facilities were more than 50 years old. Of the 431 VA buildings it said were vacant, most were built 90 or more years ago, according to agency data. The VA document did not specify the locations. While President Donald Trump’s budget blueprint calls for a 6 percent increase in VA funding, Shulkin has made clear the government’s second-largest agency with nearly 370,000 employees will have to operate more efficiently and that budget increases should not be considered a given in future years. The department recently announced hiring restrictions on roughly 4,000 positions despite the lifting of the federal hiring freeze and also left open the possibility of “near-term” and “long-term workforce reductions.” Shulkin is also putting together a broader proposal by fall to expand the VA’s Choice program of private-sector care.

The Pentagon’s BRAC process often stirred controversy in the past as members of Congress expressed concern about the negative economic impact of shuttering military bases and vigorously opposed closures in their districts. Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), a vice chair of the appropriations panel, told Shulkin that Congress was looking forward to working with the VA “constructively” on the issue in part by determining how excess VA buildings could be put to good community use, such as for fire-fighting, security or landscape maintenance. “Don’t ever use the term BRAC because it brings up a lot of bad memories,” Fortenberry cautioned. “You automatically set yourself up for a lot of controversy.” [Source: Washington Post | Hope Yen | May 3, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Services Update 02 ► Shulkin Mental Health & Caregiver Plans**

Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin promised House budget planners on 3 MAY that he'll move ahead with plans to expand mental health services and caregiver support programs, even if he can't get more money for the effort. "We're going to find a way to help," he said during testimony before the House Appropriations Committee. "We're going to find a way to do that." The comments came after the VA subcommittee's chairman, Pennsylvania Republican Rep. Charlie Dent, questioned the potential costs of the proposed expansions. President Donald Trump has already proposed a 6 percent boost in VA spending for fiscal 2018, but Dent noted that money likely will not include funds for those ideas.

Earlier this year, in appearance before a separate House committee, Shulkin announced plans to provide emergency mental health services and other assistance to veterans with other-than-honorable discharges. No price tag has been placed on what that expansion may cost. Veterans who are dishonorably discharged still would not be eligible for services. Veterans advocates for years have pushed for some care for the estimated 300,000 veterans who have been separated from the military with so-called "bad paper" discharges, arguing that a significant portion of those cases are troops dismissed for erratic behavior or substance abuse related to undiagnosed service-connected issues. Shulkin said he recently met one Afghanistan War veteran who left duty to search for his estranged wife and was kicked out of the ranks. "You could see he was suffering (from post-traumatic stress disorder), but when he showed up at VA, they told him he wasn't eligible for care," he said. "He served our country for six tours. That's not acceptable."

Shulkin said he is looking to provide those expanded services without additional funds, hoping that funding for increased staffing needs throughout the Veterans Health Administration will cover those needs. The caregiver expansion will be more complicated. Shulkin said earlier this year that he is looking into providing expanded support services and stipends to caregivers of veterans to all eras. Currently, only post-9/11 veterans are eligible for the monthly stipends. The idea has received support among veterans organizations but also comes with cost estimates up to \$10 billion a decade, a figure that has repeatedly discouraged lawmakers from pursuing.

But Shulkin said Wednesday that limiting the program to only one group of veterans may not be in the department's best interests, and that shifting resources to cover caregivers providing the most assistance to the department may make better financial sense than the current set-up. Shulkin noted that the entire caregiver program is under review at the moment, after an NPR report earlier this year identified numerous cases of families suddenly losing their stipends with little explanation. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 3, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA EHR Update 07 ► Shulkin Exploring All Options for New System**

Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin said he is open to adopting the new military electronic health record (EHR) system for his department but stopped short of promising that will happen this summer. "We're exploring all options," Shulkin told members of the House Appropriations Committee on 3 MAY. "It's a highly complex issue ... if there was an easy solution here, it would have been made already." The comments came in response to criticism from lawmakers related to the ongoing health records saga, a point of tension for the departments for decades. Committee members noted that more than \$1 billion has been invested in medical record interoperability in recent years but with mixed results. "We've been giving you all a lot of money, and it's not fixed," said Rep. Tom Rooney (R-FL). "You could be the best VA secretary of all time if you solved this one problem."

At issue is the seamless medical transition of active-duty troops and reservists to VA care. Veterans have long lamented missing records, repeated exams and frustrating inefficiencies with the dueling department systems. Last year, defense and VA officials certified that their Joint Legacy Viewer now allows physicians in both departments to share and read those critical health records, eliminating many of those problems. But the separate back-end systems still prevent VA doctors from editing or updating veterans' old military records, and vice versa. Shulkin acknowledged that "it is not the complete interoperability we would hope for." Earlier this year, officials with the Military Health System announced plans to shift to the new GENESIS system for all personal military health records, allowing easier access for both patients and doctors.

Shulkin said he hopes to settle on a similar new system for VA this summer. He said a number of factors will go into that decision, including long-term viability of the new system, ease of transferability from old systems and interoperability with defense records. But VA officials have long been resistant to simply adopting the same IT systems as the military because of specific agency needs. Lawmakers pushed Shulkin to break that trend, but he would not commit to any system at the hearing. He did say that "VA needs to get out of the software development business" and will be looking for more private sector "off-the-shelf" options for health record systems, to minimize the workload of maintaining any future health records systems. "It's not an easy project in a single hospital, much less a whole system the size of VA," he said.

Shulkin's appearance before the committee was billed as a conversation about next year's budget request, but so far only a few details of that plan have been released publicly. A full budget is expected to be released by White House officials later this month. The department would see a 6 percent boost in programming funds under the "skinny budget" outlined by President Trump, one of only a few federal agencies looking at a funding boost under his plan. Committee members told Shulkin to expect many more questions about the health records issue after the fiscal 2018 specifics are released. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 3, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Accountability Update 44 ► Vet Recourse Limited**

Veterans dissatisfied with their treatment at VA hospitals have limited legal recourse, due largely to laws that give the agency's doctors cover that private hospitals don't get, a leading veterans' advocate lawyer said. "It's very difficult to sue the VA for malpractice, and when you do, it's really hard to find an attorney who will help," said Benjamin Krause, a disabled veteran and Minnesota lawyer who founded the web site [www.disabledveterans.org](http://www.disabledveterans.org). Unlike private hospitals, VA hospitals are covered by the Federal Tort Claims Act, which spells out terms for lawsuits against the government. Under the act, plaintiffs can only plead their case to a federal judge, not jurors, who tend to be more sympathetic. "You're going up against the government, not some bad hospital with deep pockets," Krause said. "You're going after taxpayer money, basically, to right the wrong." Vets can find attorneys hard to secure, as well. Under a Federal Tort Claims Act case, attorneys can't collect more than 25 percent of judgments in their clients' favor, or more than 20 percent of any settlement. By comparison, lawyers can fetch as much as 40 percent in malpractice cases against private hospitals, Krause said. "It's almost impossible to enforce accountability," Krause said of the VA. "The risk the VA has when they screw up is so much lower than if they were a civilian hospital." [Source: Boston Herald | Jack Encarnacao | May 2, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Appeals Backlog Update 07 ► Process Overhaul in Works**

Veterans unhappy with their benefits payouts have a five-year average wait today if they appeal the decision, thanks to outdated and cumbersome review process. House lawmakers are hopeful that soon they can take years off that

wait. Members of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee debated draft legislation on 25 APR that would radically overhaul the Veterans Affairs benefits appeals process, a move designed to simplify a bureaucracy that has left tens of thousands of veterans flummoxed. Refer to 2:03 Hour video at [https://youtu.be/VSDurl\\_T8kc](https://youtu.be/VSDurl_T8kc) to listen to the debate. The number of pending appeals cases has grown by almost 100,000 cases over the last two years, topping 470,000 in April. That backlog comes even as VA successfully pulled down the number of overdue first-time cases and shifted more resources to the appeals problem.

At issue are a host of protections in the appeals system designed to allow veterans to submit new medical information at any time in the review process. The rules are designed to protect veterans interests by providing the most current information, but has the practical effect of frequently restarting the appeals process after minor updates. Lou Celli Jr., the American Legion's director of the National Veterans Affairs division, said the rules cause a "multi-year purgatory of claims and appeals waiting to be served." Committee chairman Phil Roe, R-Tenn., called the current system "broken" and frustrating. "VA's current appeals system is slow, cumbersome and just doesn't serve veterans well," he said at the hearing. "We have to do better ... Congress has to make some changes to give VA the tools it needs to ensure that veterans receive a fair and timely decision on their appeals."

Legion Department officials for the last year have lobbied Congress for fixes, but the bill under consideration in the committee appears to be the best hope so far in overhauling the system. It could create new options on how veterans can have their cases appealed. In some, they'd waive the chance to submit new evidence or official hearings in favor of quicker resolutions. In others, they'd retain those rights, but face stricter timelines for submissions and responses. That idea drew praise from VA officials. David Spickler, acting vice chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals, said the new process would "give veterans clear options after receiving an initial decision on a claim." The measure also includes simplified notification processes, better oversight of case management and more collaboration with outside groups on streamlining the process.

Implementing the changes will likely take 18 months from the measure becoming law, if it can get through Congress. At least one veterans advocacy group is standing in the way. Officials from Vietnam Veterans of America on Tuesday released a statement calling the proposed legislation problematic as drafted, saying it "ignores the need for legal precedent in the VA claims process, limits due process protections, and compromises the non-adversarial, pro-veteran claims system at the convenience of VA." But officials from other advocacy groups offered their support for the idea and the new legislation as a path ahead. "If we stay put, the situation will never improve," said Ryan Gallucci, director of the Veterans of Foreign Wars' National Veterans Service. "That's unacceptable."

He and other advocates invited to testify at the hearing pushed for minor fixes to the process, but endorsed the overall overhaul idea. Lawmakers at the hearing expressed frustration that millions of dollars put into the system in recent years has not led to better short-term fixes to the appeals process. But VA officials have repeatedly said that without changes in the law governing how often veterans can restart the appeals process, they can only make small improvements. No timetable has been set for when the committee may vote on the appeals overhaul. Both Roe and committee ranking member Rep. Tim Walz, D-Minn., said they hope to move quickly on the legislation and work with the Senate, with the goal of finalizing the bill later this year. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 2, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Million Veteran Program Update 08 ► ID'ing Genetic Risk Factors**

With funding from VA, research teams have begun to use data from the VA's Million Veteran Program (MVP) to identify genetic variants that contribute to the risk of multisubstance use and what it could mean for Veterans. To date, well over 550,000 Veterans have been enrolled in MVP, which enables researchers to link their genetic, clinical and lifestyle information for research on a variety of health conditions that affect Veterans. An important

component of MVP is the use of existing medical records to identify DNA sequence differences in study participants based on the presence or absence of any of a number of health conditions. Findings from this effort can yield insights into the causes of the conditions that affect health and identify targets for the development of medications to treat these problems.

The research group (Drs. Daniel Federman and Amy Justice from the VA Connecticut Healthcare System, and Dr. Henry Kranzler from the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA Medical Center in Philadelphia) is examining the genetic risk factors for chronic use of alcohol, tobacco, and opioids—and the use of all three together. Most people who smoke or use drugs also drink alcohol, and changes in one behavior are likely to be associated with changes in the others. These observations suggest that there is shared genetic risk for multiple substance use behaviors. To date, however, studies in this area have been limited by the small size of the available samples. MVP provides a unique opportunity to analyze longitudinal electronic health record data on alcohol, tobacco, and opioid use to support gene discovery in what will ultimately include a million Veterans.



The broad goal of this effort is to identify genetic variants contributing to sustained harmful substance use, which can provide opportunities for prevention and treatment. For example, it may be possible to reduce or stop the use of multiple harmful substances simultaneously by treating Veterans with one or more medications. The first target in this ambitious effort is heavy drinking, which adversely affects a large number of Veterans. To accomplish this, we are using the AUDIT-C, a self-report questionnaire that quantifies recent drinking. The AUDIT-C is administered annually to all Veterans. To inform the analyses in the large MVP dataset, we have analyzed data from the Veterans Aging Cohort Study (VACS), a smaller, more manageable project, to identify the best use of the AUDIT-C data for genetic analyses. Findings from an initial study showed that a trajectory analysis, which takes advantage of multiple AUDIT-C scores for each participant, is the best approach to categorizing individuals' drinking levels.

The findings, which were recently published in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, have paved the way for the analysis of AUDIT-C scores in the MVP sample, which is currently underway. Once the initial findings are validated, the AUDIT-C trajectory grouping will be combined with the genotype information obtained by MVP to identify novel genetic predictors of heavy drinking. We have also begun to use a similar approach to study chronic opioid use and smoking in the VACS and MVP samples. The ultimate goal will be to integrate all of the findings to yield genetic profiles for multi-substance use. [Source: VAntage Point | Daniel G. Federman, M.D| May 2, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA/DOE ► New Big Data Science Initiative**

On 1 MAY the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Energy (DOE) announced the formation of a new partnership focused on the secure analysis of large digital health and genomic data, or so-called “big data,” from the VA and other federal sources to help advance health care for Veterans and others in areas such as suicide prevention, cancer and heart disease, while also driving DOE’s next-generation supercomputing designs. Known as the **VA-DOE Big Data Science Initiative**, the partnership will be based within DOE’s National Laboratory system, one of the world’s top resources for supercomputing. The effort will leverage the latest DOE expertise and technologies in big data, artificial intelligence and high-performance computing to identify trends that will support the development of new treatments and preventive strategies.

“VA has developed unparalleled health data trend information from some 24 million Veterans who have used VA for health care over the past two decades,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “We are partnering with DOE to use their high-performance computing capabilities to allow thousands of researchers access to this unprecedented data resource over time in a secure environment. The transformative science that will be developed through this partnership will improve health care for Veterans and all Americans.” DOE high-performance computing represents the state of the art in global computer science, involving machines capable of millions of billions of calculations per second. VA takes privacy seriously and has ensured all reasonable safeguards are in place to protect the records at the DOE National Laboratory.

“Driving innovation through our national laboratories in ways that can improve Veterans’ health care is a remarkable opportunity,” said DOE Secretary Rick Perry. “I look forward to working together to shape this VA-DOE partnership.” One part of the new initiative is MVP-CHAMPION— short for the Million Veteran Program (MVP) Computational Health Analytics for Medical Precision to Improve Outcomes Now. MVP, VA’s landmark genomics program, has already enrolled more than 560,000 Veteran volunteers, who have provided DNA samples; completed surveys about their health, lifestyle and military experiences; and granted secure access to their electronic health records for research purposes. The partnership with DoE will maximize the impact of studies using MVP data. Along with data from MVP and VA’s electronic health records system, the new VA-DOE program will use health data from the Department of Defense, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and the Center for Disease Control’s National Death Index.

An initial suite of specific studies that are part of VA-DOE Big Data Science Initiative is already being planned. One aims to build algorithms to generate highly tailored personalized risk scores for suicide. The scores could be used by VA clinicians and researchers to help predict which patients are at the highest risk, and to evaluate prevention strategies. The researchers will work with VA’s Office of Suicide Prevention to enhance current algorithms already in use in VA. Another project focused on prostate cancer will seek new ways to tell which tumors are lethal versus nonlethal cancer and require treatment, and, by contrast, others that are slow growing and unlikely to cause any symptoms. Yet another study will explore what sets of risk factors are the best predictors of certain forms of cardiovascular disease to inform individualized therapy and treatments for patients based on their individual risk factors. For more information on MVP, informatics and VA research in general, visit [www.research.va.gov](http://www.research.va.gov). [Source: VA News Release | Mary O’Leary | May 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Suicide Prevention Update 40 ► Suicide Line Outsourced**

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) who sits on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, blasted the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for outsourcing its suicide line. In an interview broadcast 30 APR on AM 970 in New York,

Blumenthal said he is demanding accountability from the VA on veterans' suicides and the care offered to members of the U.S. military. Blumenthal said that outside contractors are not qualified to handle the veterans crisis line. The Democratic senator called for "real action" over rhetoric, noting there is a bipartisan effort in Congress to address the issue.



"What we need is more than words — real action," Blumenthal said. "The chairman of our committee [Sen.] Johnny Isakson of Georgia, who is a Republican, myself, others in the committee, are determined to do better for our veterans and we're going to pass more appropriations and more accountability so that the VA employees are held more responsible." Blumenthal asserted that VA employees "were running amok" due to the lack of accountability. The Democratic senator is working on legislation that would deny pensions for employees of the VA who are convicted of a felony. Blumenthal also said he is confident in newly confirmed Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin. "He's a good man, I believe," Blumenthal said. "I have trust that he really cares about this issue." [Source: The Hill | Mallory Shelbourne ||April 30, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Pain Management Update 08 ► Opioid Research Findings**

First-of-its-kind research at the Minneapolis VA has found no long-term benefits for patients taking opioid medications for chronic pain — a finding that is likely to strengthen the case for reducing use of the addictive medications that have been responsible for a sharp rise in drug overdoses and deaths. Focusing on patients who suffer from chronic back pain or arthritic knees and hips, the study compared 120 who didn't receive opioids with 120 who did as part of their pain management. After a year, pain levels dropped by the same amount in both groups, and pain intensity decreased more in those who didn't receive opioids such as hydrocodone or oxycodone. Meanwhile, treatment-related complications were more common in the opioid group.

"The data don't support opioids' reputation as painkillers," said Dr. Erin Krebs, who led the study, called Strategies for Prescribing Analgesics Comparative Effectiveness (SPACE). She presented the findings 3 MAY at the annual research day at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center, and in April to the Society of General Internal Medicine. Krebs' findings could influence state and federal policies on opioid prescribing. A Minnesota task force has debated over the past year whether to discourage the use of opioids for patients with chronic pain, largely because of the relative lack of evidence that the drugs work for such patients. "This is a valuable reinforcer of what our group is moving to," said Dr. Chris Johnson, a member of the opioid task force and a leading critic of opioid prescribing. "And if pain doctors still think these medicines are effective, then they have a lot of explaining to do, and their competence and professionalism deserve to be challenged."

Attitudes about opioid medications and their addictive hazards evolved so rapidly over the five years of the study that Krebs said she isn't sure a follow-up study would receive ethical clearance today — to keep one group of chronic pain patients on opioids. It wasn't always so. At first, critics raised the opposite question: the ethics of denying half the study



group access to opioids. “This was an incredibly challenging trial to execute,” Krebs said, noting that at the outset 37 percent of the patients placed in the non-opioid group actually wanted those drugs for their pain. Attitudes changed in part because of a startling increase in overdose deaths from prescription opioids or illicit versions such as heroin. Even in Minnesota, where doctors have long been more conservative in their opioid prescribing, the number of deaths rose from 56 in 2000 to 336 in 2015, according to a Star Tribune analysis of state death certificate data.

Deaths and inpatient treatment admissions for opioid addiction started to increase in the United States after 1999 — shortly after the American Pain Society deemed pain to be the fifth “vital sign” that required medical management. The rising rate of deaths tracks uniformly with the increase in U.S. opioid prescriptions — which Johnson said was promoted by drugmaker Purdue Pharma through its “pain management education program.”

### ‘SHOCKING’ PRESCRIPTIONS

Krebs said she laments that her research didn’t take place two decades ago, before the broader use of opioids. Around that time, she had completed her residency at the University of Minnesota and the Minneapolis VA, and taken a fellowship in North Carolina. She said she was struck by the more aggressive use of opioids in that state, and the relative lack of evidence at the time over their effectiveness. “It was actually shocking,” she said. That lack of evidence — and the disparity in prescribing across states — inspired her career-long research interest in pain management. Now, Krebs said, there is a particular need for studies to determine which non-opioid forms of pain management work best. “We have to move on that parallel track of actually improving pain care,” she said. “Perhaps yoga works, but who should teach it? How many classes should you have” for maximum pain control?

Opioid medications are still considered effective for acute pain after injuries or surgeries. The state opioid prescribing work group, though, has advised that doctors prescribe only three-day supplies or 20 pills at a time. It also advises doctors to check a state monitoring database to make sure patients don’t have histories of drug abuse or of shopping among doctors for opioid prescriptions. Opioids remain some of the most commonly prescribed drugs in the state, according to the Drug Abuse Trends Report by local substance abuse expert Carol Falkowski. However, the number of prescriptions in Minnesota is dropping. In December 2014, pharmacists dispensed 113,656 prescriptions of hydrocodone paired with acetaminophen, compared with 87,962 prescriptions last December. [Source: Star Tribune | Jeremy Olson | May 4, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

### **VA Claim Denial ► Robert Galloway VN | Back Problems**

Despite being disabled by Vietnam War-era shrapnel lodged in his back, Army veteran Robert Galloway has been waiting two years for disability benefits. Galloway applied for benefits through the VA, but after a clinic in Gainesville said his injuries weren’t service-connected, he’s said he’s gotten little help. “It’s really frustrating. There shouldn’t have been an appeal to start with,” said Galloway, who lives in Gulf County and is in his 70s. “I walk [for a few feet] and I start limping because it’s cutting into that muscle. ... How can it not be service-connected? My wife didn’t throw a grenade at me. My goodness. It’s crazy.” Stories like Galloway’s are common among veterans, who frequently say they deal with what they see as a slow bureaucratic system that denies disability benefits and demands a lengthy appeal process.

The problem has not gone unnoticed by Congress, which recently introduced bipartisan legislation called the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017. The legislation includes several safeguards to overhaul the appeals process, including ensuring appeals are quickly acted upon and allowing dissatisfied veterans to seek higher-level review by a regional office. Between fiscal years 2015 to 2017, the number of pending appeals increased from approximately 380,000 to 470,000, said a statement from the office of Sen. Johnny Isakson, chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. The Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System, the VA’s regional provider, did not respond to a request for comment for this story.

The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs also questioned the VA about wait times during a hearing last week. Rep. Neal Dunn, a Panama City Republican who sits on the committee and is a veteran himself, spoke with The News Herald about wait times following the hearings and said **the agency hadn't made headway since 2015**, when the committee last asked them to address the issue. "Appeals take at least five years on average," Dunn said. "And that looks to be getting longer." Wait times are a common complaint Dunn said he hears from veterans, who feel they're being stalled throughout the appeals process. Dunn said delays weren't due to a lack of VA resources, as the agency has huge resources. Yet the VA currently is bound by law to go through a cumbersome and antiquated process for appeals, he said. "We want the appeals to be processed in a more appropriate way," Dunn said.

One veteran who supports the legislation is Bill Brown, who belongs to the local Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Chapter 17 and served in the Navy from the 1950s to 1990s. Brown is bound to a wheelchair due to service-connected injuries to his calves and also deals with ataxia, which makes it hard to speak. The VA has denied his claim for ataxia, said Brown, who's written to the national DAV asking if they can help him get benefits. He, too, has spent three years so far trying to get disability claims, he said. "The VA is slow," said Brown, who lives in Callaway and is in his 70s. "They are pretty narrow as far as what they will give you compensation for. They have a set number of diseases and even if you get close to that, they won't accept it." [Source: Panama City News Herald | Collin Breaux | May 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Health Care Access Update 51 ► FBI Director Firing Impact**

In a complicated twist, the firing of FBI Director James Comey could hurt efforts to reform health care at the Department of Veterans Affairs. VA Secretary David Shulkin was scheduled to testify 10 MAY on proposed changes to department's Choice Program, a hearing that lawmakers were billing as a key step forward in improvements to veterans' medical care access. But the hearing was postponed just minutes before its start time after Senate Republicans failed to get the necessary agreements from chamber Democrats to host any events, save for a few exempted activities. That agreement is usually a mundane, routine part of daily business in the Senate. But earlier in the day, Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) and the second-ranking party leader in the chamber, announced Democrats would withhold the permissions "because of the decision the night before by the president to terminate the director of the FBI and the questions that it's raised."

On the evening of 9 MAY, the White House announced it was firing Comey to restore "public trust and confidence" in the FBI. Administration officials had cited his handling of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's email scandal among the reasons for the dismissal, but Democrats have questioned whether the FBI's investigation into Trump's connection to Russian operatives played a larger role. Efforts by Senate Veterans Affairs Committee members to get a waiver for the veterans hearing throughout the early afternoon failed. Staffers said the committee will be rescheduled, but no date has been announced. The event would have been only the second major hearing by the Senate committee this year, following Shulkin's confirmation hearing in February.

It's unclear what long-term effects the delay could have in developing health care reform plans for the VA, a pledge of both Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill. Congress has several summer recesses approaching in coming months, and only has nine weeks of legislative work left scheduled between 10 MAY and the start of September. The Wednesday delay upset both veterans organizations scheduled to testify at the hearing and Republican senators, who accused Democrats of playing politics. "That hearing has absolutely nothing to do with the FBI," Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS) said on the Senate floor. "We have a new (VA Secretary) scheduled to testify about the department's plan for a new program ... but because of a peak of anger, a political posturing, the hearing is apparently no longer able to take place."

Shulkin met with Moran, committee chairman Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA) and other lawmakers in lieu of the Wednesday hearing. He is scheduled to return to Capitol Hill Thursday morning, for a Senate Appropriations subcommittee hearing on VA medical care issues. That hearing was exempt from a possible Democratic protest, under Senate rules. The VA secretary was scheduled to offer a broad outline of his plans for the controversial Choice program, which lawmakers have lamented is too cumbersome and bureaucratic to help veterans seek medical care outside the department. Shulkin has promised to revamp that and other outside care programs, simplifying applications and speeding up approvals. But he has also said that work needs to be done by the end of the year, to ensure that veterans using the existing Choice program offerings can transition to a new program before funding runs out. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 10, 2017++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Health Care Access Update 52 ► Ascertaining Your Wait Time**

A new website is good news for veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs has started a website that will assist veterans seeking information on wait times at veterans facilities. Army veteran John Plahovinsak considers this a great resource for veterans in the area who may need medical care. Plahovinsak is commander of Disabled American Veterans Chapter 63 in Clermont County. Plahovinsak and the chapter have made themselves available to answer questions veterans may have about the site. “It is much needed,” said Plahovinsak. “If I need a specific specialty care, I can go to the website to find the shortest wait time. “Veterans will have an opportunity to pick and choose facilities to schedule an appointment.

To access the information, go online to <https://www.va.gov> and click on the box titled “Access and Quality in VA Healthcare.” The site provides information on:

- How quickly can the VA facility see the individual.
- How satisfied are veterans with the care at the facility.
- How does the care at the VA facility compare to other hospitals in the area.
- How is the VA system doing with access nationally.

“In the past (getting care) was a challenge,” Plahovinsak said. “If it was a five-day wait, it was a five-day wait.” Plahovinsak said veterans can now access wait times on other facilities and more than likely see a doctor in a time frame that is convenient for the veteran. He said the website is also a step toward re-establishing some of the goodwill that had been lost. Veterans facilities had been criticized in recent years for what many considered inadequate treatment. “Veterans can see the VA is making strides and improvements in (its) service,” Plahovinsak said. Anyone with questions can contact John Plahovinsak via email at [Plahovinsak@msn.com](mailto:Plahovinsak@msn.com). [Source: Cincinnati.com | Forrest Sellers | May 10, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Telehealth Update 11 ► Plans Technically Illegal | Licensing Requirements**

The Veterans Affairs Department has an ambitious long-term outlook for how it might dramatically expand the medical services it delivers to veterans through telehealth. As of now though, many of those plans are technically illegal because of state-by-state medical licensing requirements, and the department says that needs to change. VA is already regarded as a national leader in telemedicine. It spent \$1.2 billion last year, up from \$500 million in 2013, for a total of 2 million clinical encounters between veterans whose doctors were at distant locations. Overall, about 12 percent of the Veterans Health Administration’s enrolled patients got at least some portion of their treatment through telehealth. But the department says it wants to do a lot more.

Most of its current services connect a doctor at one VA facility with a patient at another one. That's perfectly legal, as long as the doctor has an unrestricted license in at least one state. But the rules are different if the patient is not on federal property — say, at his or her home, or at a private-sector medical clinic. In that case, the VA clinician would have to be licensed in the state where the patient happens to be sitting. “Legislation is really critical to realize our vision,” Dr. Kevin Galpin, the executive director of telehealth services in the Veterans Health Administration, told the Senate Appropriations Committee. “We really need to be authorized to deliver care to a veteran in any location: libraries, post offices or academic sites, or any private site where a veteran can come for care.”

Specifically, VA wants Congress to invoke the Constitution's supremacy clause to override state licensing laws, making clear that, at least in the case of VA, doctors don't need to be licensed in the same state where they're practicing. The department says the change would have major implications for how the VA runs its medical system at the local, regional and national levels, but perhaps the biggest impact would be in smaller, more rural communities where veterans need specialized care that's not available through private providers, or where it's very hard for VA to recruit its own medical staff. The department has about 45,000 vacancies, most of them in health care operations.

“What we have in this country is there are certain places where there are just gaps in services,” Galpin said. “We need to look and say, ‘Where can't you get a certain service in the VA? Where, for example, can't you get neurology care, and where is that care also not available in the community?’ That's on the top of our work list. We need to figure out a program so we can remote-in that care or do a hybrid model where we bring in some in-person and some remote care. And at our rural sites, if you lose one of your primary care providers, we don't want to wait six months to a year to get someone else in there.” The department says it is not looking to replace face-to-face contact with medical providers. The decision to use telehealth is ultimately up to the patient, and whether it works at all is highly dependent on the type of care the patient needs.

But in some cases it would, for example, let snowbird patients, who spend part of the year in one area of the country and several months in another, see the same doctor for all of their visits, if that's the patient's preference. ‘If you're a really good federal worker, you should welcome’ the reorganization plan, OMB says Galpin said it would also let VA make better use of its specialists who are experts in medical conditions that are more common to veterans than the general population. “If there's a national expert in a rare condition at one of our academic sites — let's say there's 10 veterans in the country that have that rare condition — that provider is providing input into all of their care,” he said. “We're already trying to move to a model where we're doing more interstate, more across the [Veterans Integrated Services Network], but where we expect to go is to leverage the VA enterprise in a way that you can't do if you don't have a national integrated health care system. And I think that's where it starts getting incredibly exciting.

Relaxing current rules would also help VA partner with other medical providers and extend care to veterans the department simply isn't reaching today, said Michael Adcock, the executive director at the center for telehealth at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. In his state, Adcock said VA's two hospitals and eight clinics are only used by about a third of Mississippi's eligible veterans, partly because those that do face long wait times to get appointments. That could change if VA and the university medical system could partner to treat veterans at brick-and-mortar facilities that the university has already networked together.

“By layering veterans services across our 200 active telehealth access points, the VA could quickly reach more patients without significant investment,” he said. “Because of the deep nexus that already exists between academic medical centers and the nation's VA hospitals, it seems a natural progression for us to partner to provide health care and chronic disease management for our veterans. We've attempted this type of partnership in the past, but were unsuccessful due to administrative red tape and the VA's challenges in engaging with external health care partners. After multiple attempts to bring requested dermatology and mental health services to the VA, progress stalled and the services were not implemented.”

Even without new legislation, the department sees several ways in which it can continue to make more and better use of telehealth. As of now, most of VA's telemedicine programs are administered by local facilities that usually don't face the problem of treating patients across state lines, and those programs can certainly expand. "Telehealth is just going to be integrated into our daily operations," Galpin said. "Probably every specialty is going to adopt some portion of remote care or virtual care to make their services more accessible. It's just going to be a part of routine operations. When a veteran leaves a clinic appointment, there's going to be the question, 'How do we best deliver the next visit? Is it in-person? Is it by telephone? Is it by video? So it's just going to be kind of part of the regular routine and thought processes."

VA thinks telemedicine has important near-term implications for critical, acute health care issues. The department is piloting a "tele-stroke" program at 10 of its sites over the next five years, making it a priority, because stroke victims often need the right treatments within minutes in order to avoid permanent brain damage. "We focus a lot on ambulatory care, but the in-patient potential for this is dramatic," Galpin said. "You can use it to build a specialty consultant network so that you have a button on the wall in an intensive care unit and say, 'I need to talk to an intensivist' or 'I need the neurologist right now.' That's critical, and that's lifesaving. [Source: Federal News Radio | Jared Serbu | May 8, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Vet Choice Program Update 53 ► Vet Threatens DIY | VA Pays Up**

Former Army National Guard soldier John Irish had cut himself badly in an accident with a table saw. "I looked down and there was a piece of my finger missing," Irish of Burlington, Massachusetts, told Boston 25 News on 9 MAY. As a long-time EMT, Irish was used to seeing household injuries like this one, and he took himself to get treatment at Lahey Medical Center, a nonprofit teaching hospital in the Boston suburbs. Everything went smoothly until it came time to have his stitches removed. The care providers at Lahey handed Irish a slip and said, "We are going to have to have you sign this, because the VA says they're not going to pay the bill." The hospital wouldn't finish his procedure until he paid for it up front, in cash.



Irish is on the Veterans Affairs Choice program, which allows VA enrollees to seek care at a private community medical facility if they don't have access to VA medical facilities, or if VA wait times prove excessive. It's a program that President Trump has sought to expand as a release valve for overloaded VA medical centers. Irish says this wasn't the first time he'd had issues with the Choice program. In December 2015, he claims, a complication from a routine surgery left him \$100,000 in debt, with VA refusing to pay for his care at Lahey. "The VA is required

under the constitution to supply the veterans with the best medical care in the country, bar none,” Irish said. “Realistically, we get the worst medical treatment in the world.”

So when the sutures on his finger became an issue, Irish decided to take things into his own hands. “I thought it was about time the VA of New England got exposed for what it’s doing on this Choice program,” he said. He threatened to remove the stitches and livestream the DIY procedure on social media, by himself. “Within hours,” Boston 25 reports, “the VA agreed to pay for the procedure.”

Lahey Medical Center showed Boston 25 medical records that indicate last week, the hospital received a call from the Manchester VA regarding the sutures procedure. It also requested a follow-up physical for him for later this year. But a VA spokesperson told the news station that no request for payment had ever been filed for Irish, and as a result, “no care or payment had been denied.” “We continue to work very closely with Veterans, community providers and importantly HealthNet to resolve any patient issues brought to our attention,” Kristin Pressly, Veteran’s Affairs spokesperson, told the station in a statement. Irish, though, remains unimpressed. “It’s totally disgusting that they have to threaten, beg or borrow to get medical treatment,” he said. [Source: Task & Purpose | Sarah Sicard | May 10, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

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



**Amarillo, Panama city, FL** — A woman who feigned blindness to receive veterans’ benefits has been sentenced to serve nine months in prison and repay hundreds of thousands of dollars, according to the U.S. Attorney’s Office. **Veronica Dale Hahn**, 60, of Bonifay FL was sentenced 28 APR in the Panama City federal court. She pleaded guilty during her jury trial on charges of defrauding the U.S. Department of Veterans Administration (VA) for years in order to receive about \$400,000 in benefits. Hahn now will have to repay that amount after serving nine months in federal prison. The U.S. Attorney’s Office reported Hahn lied from November 2001 to February 2016 about being rendered blind in both eyes, which she claimed to be directly connected to her service in the military. However, within a year of receiving her disability benefits for loss of vision, she obtained driver’s licenses in New Mexico, Alabama and Florida with no vision restrictions, after passing vision exams in each state with at least 20/40 vision.

During this time, Hahn also was observed driving her personal automobile on numerous occasions. Further, she worked full time as a case manager and transition counselor at several state correctional facilities, all of which required normal eyesight to perform her duties. In the course of Hahn’s jury trial in January, several government witnesses took the stand before she abruptly decided to enter a guilty plea to the charges on the second day of trial. “Instead of providing benefits and assistance to worthy veterans who are justifiably in need, significant resources from the Department of Veterans Affairs were diverted to uncover an extensive and persistent fraud by Ms. Hahn, who repeatedly gave dishonest information and collected hundreds of thousands of dollars to which she was not entitled,” said U.S. Attorney Christopher P. Canova. “This case sends the message that you cannot make false disability claims and just walk away from such a crime.” [Source: News-Herald | Zack Mcdonald | April 28, 2017 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

**National** — VA is taking action in response to a phone line that appears to be set up to take advantage of Veterans who misdial the Veterans Choice Program phone line. The two phone lines differ only in area code. The correct Choice Program phone line is 1-866-606-8198, while the imposter phone line is using **1-800-606-8198**. The fake line does not provide information on the Choice Program or its eligibility criteria, instead it claims to offer callers a \$100 rebate if they provide a credit card number. VA would never ask Veterans for this information or offer this type of financial incentive through the Choice Program phone line. This potential attempt to impersonate VA’s Veterans Choice Program phone line is being taken very seriously. VA is acting to ensure Veterans are not exploited by getting the word out and also by working with the Office of Inspector General to take legal action and ultimately shut the fake line down.

Veterans can tell if they have reached the correct phone line, if the phone line automatically states the caller has reached the “U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.” Please note, the fake line will incorrectly confirm callers have reached the “Veterans Choice Program” if the caller asks this question. If Veterans are unsure if they have reached the correct phone line, they should hang up and make sure they dial 1-866-606-8198 correctly. Do not hesitate to call the Veterans Choice phone line at 1-866-606-8198 to ask questions about the program and determine if you are eligible. More information on the Veterans Choice Program can also be found here.

In addition, the VA Identity Safety Service offers a toll-free identity theft help line to Veterans and their beneficiaries who believe that they are at risk for identity theft. The number is 1-855-578-5492, and it operates Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. EST with voicemail for after-hours calls. Any calls pertaining directly to VA data are referred to VA staff and investigated accordingly. Find out more about how you can protect yourself from identity theft at VA’s More Than A Number: Identity Theft Protection website. [Source: This Week at VA | May 12, 2017 ++]



-o-o-O-o-o-

**Cincinnati, Oh** — A federal grand jury has indicted a former acting chief of staff at the Cincinnati VA Medical Center on three felony charges of distributing a controlled substance. WCPO-TV (<http://bit.ly/2p1R0Qh>) reports the indictment alleges Dr. **Barbara Temeck** illegally distributed Valium and hydrocodone in 2012 and 2013. A report states Temeck prescribed the painkillers for the wife of her former boss. The Department of Veterans Affairs suspended Temeck last week. Temeck’s employment attorney has said she was targeted because she disagreed with management practices in Cincinnati. Attorneys representing her in the criminal case didn’t immediately return calls seeking comment 4 MAY. Temeck said previously that her suspension was less about painkillers and more about “getting rid of me so that the fraud, waste and mismanagement at the Cincinnati VA can continue.” [Source: The Associated Press | May 4, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VAMC Nashville TN Update 02 ► Sterilizer Problem Reduce Surgeries

Thousands of veterans in Middle Tennessee rely on the Veterans Administration health system for their medical care. But NewsChannel 5 Investigates has discovered equipment problems at the Nashville VA Hospital has forced the facility to cut way back on the surgeries it's performing. While Tennessee has one of the fastest-growing veteran populations in the country, the VA hospital here is having trouble handling all that growth -- and one veteran fears it's putting lives in danger.

Ted Butler served in the Philippines, in Okinawa, Japan, and the Caribbean. He gave nine years of his life to the Marines. But the Hartsville veteran is frustrated and his wife is angry. "I'm just livid about it," Connie Butler told NewsChannel 5 Investigates. They said doctors at Nashville's VA Hospital told them back in March that Ted needed double bypass surgery right away to fix two blocked arteries. He was admitted and set to have surgery two days later, but then suddenly the operation was cancelled. Butler was sent home with explicit directions to take it easy. "Could you go back to work," we asked Butler. "No," he replied. "Because?" "I would have a heart attack. Might," Butler explained.

He was told his heart bypass would be rescheduled as soon as possible. But, more than a month later, he's still waiting. His wife is afraid. "If he has a heart attack or that bursts in there, if that were to burst, he'd die immediately," she stated. The problem? The number of surgeries here in the last two years has grown significantly, but the equipment hasn't been able to keep up -- namely, the hospital's two sterilizer machines that are used to clean the instruments after each surgery.

As the head of the Tennessee Valley Healthcare System, Jennifer Vedral-Baron is in charge of the hospital. "I need to feel confident that it [the sterilizer] is going to work every day but given what we've seen over the last six months, I don't necessarily know that," she revealed. "You don't trust it?" News Channel 5 Investigates asked. "Personally, I don't trust it," she admitted. In fact, hospital records show one of the machines has been serviced nearly three dozen times in the last year. The other one has also needed repeated repairs. Every time one of them breaks down, administrators admit the hospital suddenly has more surgical instruments to clean than it can handle. So last month, the hospital chief ordered an immediate slow-down -- cutting the number of surgeries performed by half. They dropped from an average of 140 surgeries a week down to just 70 surgeries a week. "There's nothing we're not doing right now. We're just doing less of them," Vedral-Baron said.

She insisted that veterans' lives have never been in danger. She said the hospital is still doing emergency operations, but putting off elective surgeries. And in many cases, veterans are being allowed to go outside the VA system for their operation. But the Butlers said Ted wasn't given the option to go to another hospital until just recently, after several weeks of anxiously waiting and repeatedly calling the VA for updates. "You're going to be on a waiting list because we can't get our equipment fixed," Connie Butler recalled being told. "I don't understand that!" It turns out though that the sterilizer was repaired nearly a month ago, but the hospital still is just doing a limited number of surgeries. "What I've said is let's not stress that system. It's very conceivable it could break down again tomorrow. I don't know," Vedral-Baron explained.

So this is where you're probably asking why doesn't the hospital just get new sterilizers? Apparently, the hospital had been asking for them for a while but only got emergency funding approved in December. Because of government contracting rules, the hospital couldn't just run right out and immediately buy them. Vets and their families said they feel the VA has let them down. "I don't understand how you can tell somebody we cannot do surgeries," Ted Butler exclaimed. "Some say these veterans earned this medical care and they say they deserve more," NewsChannel 5 Investigates said to the hospital's top administrator. "They do! You're absolutely right!" Vedral-Baron replied. "I wish I could do a hundred percent of our veterans every day. I do. But, I also need to think of patient safety and what is the right thing. "

So when will this all be fixed? Not any time soon. The first of the new machines isn't set to arrive until the end of next month. The other won't be ready until late October. The VA expects they'll be under this surgery slowdown



until at least the end of May. As for Ted Butler, he has now been referred to Vanderbilt and was scheduled for heart surgery in early MAY. [Source: News 5 Channel Network Nashville | Jennifer Kraus | Apr 28, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VAMC Shreveport LA Update 03 ► Director Mathew Fired

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has fired Toby Mathew from the position of Shreveport VA medical center director after transferring him to another facility in a non-supervisory role. Aaron Robison, an attorney at the VA's Office of General Counsel, stated that Mathew was removed from his position on 13 APR "based on charges related to general misconduct, and failure to follow policy and provide effective oversight of the Center's credentialing and privileging program," in a legal memo obtained by The Daily Caller News Foundation.



The DCNF also obtained numerous complaints lodged against Mathew back in September 2016. Those complaints, sent by an anonymous employee to David Shulkin, then-undersecretary for health, former VA Secretary Robert McDonald and other top officials at the department detailed more than two dozen allegations of misconduct against Mathew. "It is the combined opinion of a significant group of senior staff including both clinical and administrative service chiefs that the situation here has reached the point where action is required," read one of the complaints from Sept. 2, 2016. "I am requesting and strongly suggesting that Mr. Mathew be put on leave effective on receipt of this document, while you investigate these charges."

"This man displays ALL the signs and symptoms of someone suffering from extreme, malignant narcissism," the complaint continued. It's unknown which specific allegations prompted the VA to make its final determination to remove Mathew on 13 APR. Robison added in the memo that it's likely Mathew will try and appeal the action, as is common with senior executives who are removed from top positions at the agency. The memo, dated 14 APR, comes after the VA reassigned Mathew on 1 FEB to the VISN 16 office in Missouri, while the Office of Accountability Review completed an investigation into serious allegations about his oversight of the Overton Brooks VA medical center in Shreveport, Louisiana. At the time, the VA stated that "we promptly and thoroughly investigate all allegations of serious misconduct and, where such allegations are substantiated, observe all due process while we discharge our solemn duty to maintain the efficient and effective operation of the VA."

But such a promise rang hollow to social worker Shea Wilkes, a well-known whistleblower at the Shreveport VA, who told USA Today in February that "Instead of disciplining leaders, it's a time-honored tradition to move them to different positions of authority at different VA facilities across the country." President Donald Trump signed an executive order T27 APR establishing a new office at the VA to hold wayward employees accountable and protect whistleblowers suffering retaliation as a result of their disclosures. This office, unlike the Office of Accountability

Review which just focuses on senior executives, has all employees under its purview. The VA originally appointed Mathew as director at the Shreveport VA in December 2014. Neither Mathew, nor the VA responded to a request for comment from The Daily Caller News Foundation by press time. [Source: The Daily Caller | Jonah Bennett | April 29, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VAMC West Haven CT Update 05 ► Battlefield Acupuncture

The Department of Veterans Affairs is increasingly embracing non-traditional methods for managing pain – acupuncture. But, veterans at the VA hospital in West Haven are not getting the traditional way acupuncturists provide treatment. It's Thursday — the only day of the week this clinic is open for military veterans looking to manage their pain. This is the Battlefield Acupuncture Group Clinic for Chronic Pain at the VA Medical Center in West Haven – developed by an air force flight surgeon – explains Dr. Daniel Federman, “Who was trying to employ a new technique to get soldiers either with minor maladies to go into the field or people who were wounded.” Now — those out of uniform are also benefiting.



Instead of the traditional technique of thin needles inserted into areas of the body, tiny ones are pressed into five specific locations of the ear. Eventually- they fall out on their own. Dr. Federman says, “The theory is there’s some connection between the ear, parts of the ear and parts of the brain that experience pain. It’s really just to get the blood flowing. So it doesn’t cure but it decreases the activation of the painful centers.” Internal studies show it’s effective for short term relief. “We found that 80% of the people.” says Dr. Federman, “will have a decrease in their pain score immediately after completion of the first treatment.” Marine veteran, Rick Bakies says, “I can feel it about the third set. Between the 3rd and 4th set. I can feel actual relief. It just takes the pain and drops it.” The standard acupuncture and medication didn’t work for his knee pain. “You gotta try- keep trying – until you find something that works. And to use something without medication is the big thing,” says Bakies.

It’s back and joint pain for Air Force veteran Albert Ottaviano. He says, “As I was getting the needles I was talking to him and I was saying it’s gotten down to about a two.” Ottaviano comes in every two weeks, “I can get back to exercising – to bring back strength to those muscles. What matters most to both men is that more veterans take advantage of this novel approach. For more information – call Nurse Coordinator Lorie Poulin at 203-932-5711 – extension 7153 or 7289. Veterans can also e-mail – [Lorie.Poulin@VA.Gov](mailto:Lorie.Poulin@VA.Gov) or [Lysette.Gabriel@VA.Gov](mailto:Lysette.Gabriel@VA.Gov) for information or appointments. [Source: News WTNH-8 | Jocelyn Maminta | April 27, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VAMC Washington DC Update 03 ► Vets Air Grievances

"You just can't do this to veterans," said the wife of a sick veteran. "You're the captain of the Titanic," said a former Army staff sergeant. "My neurologist, I don't know what he's doing," said a veteran. "Get rid of them all, except my doctor," said another vet. But other veterans told a different story about treatment at the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center, the flagship hospital in the vast Department of Veterans Affairs health care system, which serves nine million vets annually with 370,000 employees on a \$180 billion budget.



**VAMC Washington D.C.**

"I'm here to say good things about the center," said James Preston, a Vietnam veteran who said he has survived three bouts with cancer. "It was this center that took care of me." "I have nothing but good to say about the women's clinic" at the center, said former Petty Officer Second Class Lisa Del Duca. "I haven't had any problems," said former Lance Cpl. Orlando Herrera. All of this was aimed at retired Army Col. Lawrence Connell, the newly named acting director at the D.C. VA Medical Center and a top policy adviser to VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin. Connell presided at a town hall meeting at the center 3 MAY sponsored by the American Legion. Verna Jones, the Legion's executive director, worked the floor with an open microphone and sought to maintain order when things became confrontational.

"We've got some issues we need to fix," Connell said, but he urged the vets to give the new team a chance. "This is a new VA, and we'll be holding ourselves to the highest of standards. I will be the first to admit we've got to do better; I've got to earn your trust." Connell also roamed the floor with Jones, coming close and listening intently to the loudest and longest complaints. At times, when the veterans had finished venting, Connell would huddle with them and could be overheard passing on his phone number. Some of the complaints had to do with the Choice program, allowing vets to choose private care, and the sometimes conflicting diagnoses they receive from private doctors and VA doctors. Other complaints had to do with getting prescriptions filled and appointments made. And, of course, there were complaints about parking at the center. Connell said he is working on that.

Connell was named acting director last month following a VA Inspector General's report detailing conditions "sufficient to potentially compromise patient safety." The two million member Legion periodically sponsors "System Worth Saving" town halls at VA facilities nationwide to hear from vets about local services, but the one at the D.C. VA Wednesday night was prompted by the report from VA Inspector General Michael Missal. In his introductory remarks, Louis Celli, director of the Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division, said the problems outlined in the IG's report should never have occurred at what should be the VA's showcase center. "This should be the shining star on the hill," Celli said.

In his scathing report, Missal said storage areas for medical supplies at the facility were filthy, management was clueless on what was in the storage areas, medical supply rejects may have been used on patients, and more than \$150 million in supplies and equipment had never been inventoried. The risk to the 98,000 vets served by medical

center was such that IG's office took the unusual step of issuing a preliminary report to alert Shulkin to the danger. "Although our work is continuing, we believed it appropriate to publish this Interim Summary Report given the exigent nature of the issues we have preliminarily identified and the lack of confidence in VHA (Veterans Health Administration) adequately and timely fixing the root causes of these issues," Missal said in the report. The IG's office began looking into the problems based on a whistleblower's complaint describing equipment and supply issues, the report said.

However, Connell disputed how the IG's report came about. He said the VA's Veterans Integrated Service Network first learned of problems at the center and requested a Quality Control Review, which was forwarded to the IG's office. Despite the problems, "No patients, no patients, have been harmed" by the medical supply chain and management issues at the center, Connell said. Following the IG's report, Shulkin removed center director Brian Hawkins and named Connell acting director. In addition, Connell said Wednesday night that three center employees with responsibility for acquisition, storage and distribution of inventory have received proposed removals. Federal hiring regulations require employees to receive 30-day notice before being fired or demoted for performance issues. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | May 4, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VAMC Jefferson Barracks MO ► Whistleblower Construction Complaints**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs says it is investigating whistleblowers' complaints of shoddy construction at the \$366 million overhaul of the Jefferson Barracks VA Medical Center. The claims were first reported on 8 MAY in a story by KMOV-TV (Channel 4) investigative reporter Lauren Trager. She said two construction workers contacted her with pictures depicting several construction errors at a clinic and rehab facility being built. Among the errors were cracks in concrete floors, rusted wall frames and doors, water backed up in areas with live wires and water falling from duct work. "VA is investigating concerns regarding construction of the facilities and is working with all parties to respond to these concerns," the VA said in a statement emailed to the Post-Dispatch.

KMOV interviewed the workers. Their names were not revealed. One said the errors were keeping him up at night. He estimated 2,000 feet of wall and as many as 80 door frames had rust damage. The workers also alleged the contractors had been paid \$1.4 million for work that had not been completed. The contractors did not respond to questions from the Post-Dispatch. A spokesman for St. Louis-based Alberici Constructors referred questions to Chicago-based Walsh Construction, the project's majority partner. A Walsh representative could not immediately be reached.

In a May 5 letter to the VA inspector general, Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO) asked for more information about the administration's oversight of medical facilities in Missouri and around the country. She noted that while the inspector general had received a hotline complaint about the construction problems in January, the VA's medical center director in St. Louis, Keith Repko, testified on 26 APR before a Senate committee that he had "just recently" become aware of concerns. The letter pointed out that the Government Accountability Office has criticized a lack of coordination in VA construction projects. [Source: St. Louis Post-Dispatch | Jeremy Kohler | May 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA-HCS Boston ► Failed to Identify Vet's Brain Tumor**

U.S. Marine combat vet Brian Callahan sat in stunned silence. A doctor at Massachusetts General Hospital had just asked him what the Veterans Administration thought about a brain mass he spotted on Callahan's MRIs. "I looked at him and I said, 'Excuse me?'" said Callahan, who was seeing the growth for the first time on the neuroendocrinologist's screen. "He just kept pointing at it with a mouse on all the scans. He just kept looking at me

going, ‘And the VA’s never said anything?’ He was dumbfounded.” Callahan felt a moment of vindication, then fear, then anger “The VA kept telling me that, you know, there’s really nothing wrong,” he said. “I was like, finally, I’m not crazy. This is something that’s really going on ... I was horrified.”



The 30-year-old former lance corporal from Dracut had been a machine gunner with 3/8 Marines in Iraq and Afghanistan. He had been rattled by several improvised explosive device blasts, and got a concussion from one. His November 2016 visit to Mass General was the first time the VA’s images of his brain were reviewed by a non-VA doctor. In the six years Callahan had been going to VA hospitals in Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury for treatment of debilitating seizures, he had never been told anything about the mass, which is benign and located between his pituitary gland and ocular nerve. He said the VA docs always chalked up his symptoms to stress, migraines or vertigo, and told him they couldn’t see anything amiss on his brain.

Callahan — with a faulty diagnosis and a low disability rating — continued to struggle with the seizures, lost his job at a diesel trucking company and went on Mass Health, through which he ended up at Mass General. Doctors there told him the mass was causing a growth hormone deficiency. They put him on hormone injection and an anti-seizure medication that the VA had never prescribed. Since then, he said his seizures have been much less severe and less frequent, and he’s feeling less irritable and less depressed. “I can’t believe that if I hadn’t gone to Mass General,” Callahan said, “I would have just kept living my life like this.”

Callahan’s story comes on the heels of a Herald report 1 MAY on how the Boston VA’s benefits office has been repeatedly criticized by the VA Inspector General’s office for mishandling TBI evaluations over the past six years, failing to assign the proper degree of disability, and in some cases stiffing vets thousands of dollars in benefits. Callahan’s frustrations echo those of thousands of vets who suffered traumatic brain injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan, said Benjamin Krause, a Minnesota attorney whose work prompted the VA to offer retests to 20,000 vets last year for faulty TBI evaluations. “VA tends to under-evaluate and under-utilize diagnostic testing, and just happens to miss all of these things, like the tumor, and fails to examine medical evidence that supports that,” said Krause, who is not involved with Callahan. “The connection between brain tumors and traumatic brain injury is something the VA doesn’t like to talk about,” Krause added. “It’s very expensive to treat somebody with that condition, when it’s connected with a brain tumor that’s operable.”

Pallas Wahl, a spokeswoman for the Boston VA, told the Herald the VA has no record of finding a mass on Callahan’s brain. “Mr. Callahan’s imaging performed at VA Boston detected no presence of a mass,” Wahl said. “We will review the MGH findings and work with the veteran on a course of care.” Callahan said he has ample documentation on the mass and its effects, most notably an 6 APR assessment from the War Related Illness and Injury Study Center, a VA-affiliated clinic in New Jersey he visited in March. That letter says Callahan’s MRIs dating back to 2010 “definitely show you have an abnormal brain mass above the pituitary gland,” and that his symptoms — muscle stiffness, nausea, forgetfulness, excessive sleepiness — are “more likely than not linked to the

brain mass.” The letter concludes that the mass and “any related symptoms/complications would be expected to be service connected conditions.”

Callahan, a father of two, has a 10 percent disability rating for his brain injury from the VA, on the far low end. He’s deemed 50 percent disabled for post traumatic stress disorder. He and his family receive \$1,839 a month in VA disability benefits. His seizures start with a vision change like blurriness, followed by nausea, intense muscle rigidity and fatigue so drastic he has to sleep immediately for a few hours. He tried to work upon returning from his third deployment in 2009, but the seizures caused him to fall asleep at his desk, and he was worried about having one while driving. He first noticed the symptoms when he became disoriented and didn’t know where he was while grocery shopping with his kids.

Callahan was close to several IED explosions, most severely in 2006 while driving a Humvee in Ramadi, Iraq. The vehicle struck an IED, ripping a hole in the fuel tank and leaving him with a concussion. “I remember it hit on my left side, and after I looked to my right, and I just remember seeing mouths move, but I couldn’t hear at all,” he said. Callahan had joined the Marines the year before. After Iraq, he was deployed to Afghanistan’s Helmand Province from 2008 to 2009. His wife, Alisha, recalls Callahan giving up on the VA doctors after meds they gave him didn’t help, and his frustration over having to recount his entire medical history to a revolving door of doctors. “The military and the government broke you, they need to fix you, or at least help,” she said. “Why can’t we get outside care? If you want to go see a specific doctor for a thing, why do they make it so difficult to make that happen?”

Even more infuriating, Callahan said, was the reaction of VA doctors after he presented them with Mass General’s findings. “We would ask why they hadn’t told us about the mass, and they would be like, ‘Well, you know, it wasn’t really life-threatening,’ or, ‘It wasn’t growing, it was benign, we didn’t think it was necessary to report it to you,’ ” Callahan said. “If there’s a mass or anything that I wasn’t born with on my brain, I would like to know.” Wahl, the Boston VA spokeswoman, said she “can’t confirm or deny what was said” to Callahan, but reiterated that the VA’s records “show no finding of a mass.” [Source: Boston Herald | Jack Encarnacao | May 02, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA-HCS Black Hills SD Update 05 ► Reconfiguration Put on Hold**

Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary David J. Shulkin said 4 MAY that he has deferred the decision to reconfigure the VA Black Hills Health Care System in South Dakota, including the Hot Springs campus. U.S. Senator Mike Rounds ( R-SD), said Shulkin has decided to put the reconfiguration of the VA’s Black Hills Health Care System “on stay” while the VA re-evaluates all of its facilities nationwide. The focus of the review will be to determine which facilities provide the best care, Rounds said. "This will allow veterans to continue to receive high-quality care that they have been receiving to date at Hot Springs, delivered with a holistic approach. This decision also will include allowing veterans a choice of where they receive their health care," according to a news release from the VA.

According to the release, Shulkin notified the South Dakota congressional delegation, which includes Rounds, U.S. Sen. John Thune (R-SD) and U.S. Rep. Kristi Noem (R-SD) during a meeting on 4 MAY. Shulkin also called Gov. Dennis Daugaard. The news was widely praised by the South Dakota delegation. “I appreciate Secretary Shulkin’s willingness to meet with us and keep these lines of communication open,” Thune said in a joint release with Rounds and Noem. “Although he did not reverse his predecessor’s decision to realign services within the Black Hills, he demonstrated a sincere interest in looking at how to best provide the quality care our selfless veterans have earned through their service and sacrifice. "I look forward to working with the secretary to ensure veteran care and safety are prioritized and encourage him to visit the Hot Springs campus before making further decisions.”

The news is especially good for Hot Springs — particularly the Save the VA group — which has fought long and hard to retain the historic, 110-year-old Battle Mountain Sanitarium VA facility. The future of the facility looked dire when — following a December visit by Obama administration VA Secretary Robert McDonald — the VA agreed to reconfigure the Black Hills Health Care System and essentially shutter Hot Springs. This move would have left 100 hospital jobs in the city, while taking 300 health care jobs north to a new Rapid City facility. However, the community and Save the VA group fought back, engaging the South Dakota congressional delegation, the American Legion and others in their cause.

“Veteran needs must drive any decision about Hot Springs,” Noem said in the joint release. “From the first town hall I held in Hot Springs days after the VA first announced it would close the hospital, to the U.S. House VA Committee hearing held on site at my request, to the hundreds of one-on-one discussions, veterans have consistently stressed that Hot Springs is the veterans’ town and we’d like to keep it that way. "I am grateful to Secretary Shulkin for giving us the opportunity to share what makes this facility so indispensable, but I strongly urge him to visit the campus before additional decisions are made.”

Shulkin has assured the South Dakota delegation that his primary focus is on quality of care for veterans, Rounds said in a separate news release. “He has also told us that while nobody throughout the United States is going to be off the hook with the threat of a possible change as he goes through, he could not understand why they could look at Hot Springs — which has proven to be a five-star facility — and that we were going to close that facility without looking at other facilities that were not providing near the quality of service,” Rounds said. “They do still plan on bringing in about 140 jobs for a service center to make contact with and receive phone calls from veterans around the United States,” he continued.

Speaking at a U.S. House of Representatives VA hearing on 3 MAY, Shulkin said the VA is seeking to close more than 1,100 facilities as it develops plans to allow more veterans to receive medical care in the private sector. Shulkin said the VA identified more than 430 buildings that are vacant, and another 735 “underutilized” buildings that were costing the federal government \$25 million a year. Shulkin said the VA would work with Congress to prioritize those buildings for closure and was considering whether to follow the Base Realignment and Closure process the Pentagon has used to decide which of its underused military bases to shutter.

An internal VA document obtained by The Associated Press pointed to aging buildings as prime candidates for closure. About 57 percent of all VA facilities were more than 50 years old, this document noted, and most of the 431 buildings the VA said were vacant were built 90 or more years ago. The VA document did not specify the locations. Although President Donald Trump's budget blueprint calls for a 6 percent increase in VA funding, Shulkin has made clear the VA, which has 370,000 employees, will have to operate more efficiently. The department recently put hiring restrictions on some 4,000 positions despite a federal hiring freeze lifting and left open the possibility of "near-term" and "long-term workforce reductions." Shulkin is also putting together a broader proposal to expand the VA's Choice program of private-sector care. [Source: Hot Springs Star | John D. Taylor | My 4, 2017 ++]

**\* Vets \***



## Memorial Day 2017 ► Flowers to Honor Fallen Servicemen

It's a well-known Christmas tradition for volunteers to place wreaths at the grave sites at Arlington National Cemetery, but a similar tradition that honors our fallen also takes place around Memorial Day in Arlington and 18 cemeteries across the country on 29 MAY. The Memorial Day Flowers Foundation is organizing its seventh year commemorating servicemen and women by holding an event where the public can place roses at grave sites and hand out flowers to families in Section 60 — where fallen service members from the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars are buried.



The foundation works with the Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery Administration. “We gave out 10,000 roses that first year at Memorial Day, and it's grown from there to 60,000 the next year and last year, about 140,000,” said Ramiro Penaherrera, one of the organizers behind the Memorial Day Flowers event. The foundation works with the Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery Administration, and they're expecting 200,000 flowers total throughout national and veterans cemeteries across the country. The flowers are from Colombia, Ecuador and California, and this year they will also be receiving roses from Ethiopia.

Ramiro Penaherrera lives in Ecuador where he has a flower farm, but he was born, raised and educated in D.C. He has five family members at Arlington, “so Arlington has always played special role, a huge role in our family's life,” he said. And he sees how special Arlington Cemetery is for others. Families of fallen service members are very appreciative of the solemn event, said Penaherrera, who was in Section 60 at Arlington during the first year of the event. He recalled an emotional experience at Section 60. A woman came up to him to thank him for the flower and said, “My husband gave me flowers when he was born.” Then he realized what she meant. “I was giving her flowers for her son who was buried in Section 60,” Penaherrera said, pausing, overcome with emotion. He said that experience was so emotional; he has delegated the task of handing out flowers there to someone else.

Penaherrera has seen many of the volunteers return year after year. Jack Bacarra, an 11-year-old Boy Scout, has volunteered for this event for more than half of his life. He spends his Memorial Days at Arlington Cemetery. “I feel very reverent 'cause I'm honoring the people who served our country,” said Bacarra. [Source: WTOP ABC 103.5 | Kathy Stewart | April 28, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Vet Transitional Homes ► Montana Willis Cruse Facility Closure

The Willis Cruse Facility in Helena is a 12 bed transitional facility for homeless veteran men. Veterans receive room and board in exchange for community service. In addition they receive access to variety of rehabilitation help



including diagnosis of mental illness by qualified mental health professionals, addiction recovery services, and general medical attention. As part of their recovery program veterans are provided with continuing education opportunities, employment training services, and applied work experience. There is a standing zero-tolerance policy for drugs and alcohol and all veterans are required to offer their free time to community service efforts.



Since its inception, there have been over 270 veterans who have successfully completed the recovery program and moved on to lead healthy fulfilling lives. It will officially close after months of uncertainty and the residents there will be forced to find a new place to go. March started off rocky for the 13 veterans living there finding out they would have to look for a new place to live after financial instability. “The money’s not there,” said Mike Hampson, Willis Cruse president. The National Grant and Per Diem Office (GDP) reduced the number of authorized beds at the living center from 12 to eight in December of 2015 -- meaning the national VA office would subsidize payments for eight veterans living in the Willis Cruse House, instead of 12. Late March brought a surprise: Spring Meadow Resources, a Helena nonprofit aimed at providing independent living services for people with disabilities, was planning to take over the Willis Cruse contract with the VA.

But now, that’s not happening. “National [VA] said they would not assume the contract that we have with the VA,” Hampson explained. Hampson said they are back to square one and are focused on relocating the veterans. The eight VA GDP subsidized veterans living at Willis Cruse have a plan for what’s next after the doors close permanently. “I think I have homes or facilities or apartments for all of them to go to,” said Hampson. There are five other VA GDP facilities in Montana, located in Missoula, Billings, and Poplar, that the veterans would be eligible to move to after applying. Ray Dempsey, a veteran living in the home, is not looking forward to leaving, despite planning on moving to Idaho with his daughter. “I’ll stay here for as long as I can,” said Dempsey.

Hampson is working with the rest of the veterans to find them their next home, with the help of other organizations in the community. “Volunteers of America, a great organization, they’re helping find them jobs and housing,” Hampson added. The house is in the process of being sold, and once the paperwork is signed, Hampson said, “Then we’ll have 30 days from then.” But until the doors close, the work continues so the vets do not return to the streets. Go to <https://www.va.gov/homeless/gpd.asp> to learn more about the GDP. [Source: CBS 8 KPAX-TV | Mikenzie Frost | May 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Jobs Update 219 ► Hilton/Starbucks to Hire 45,000**

Hilton announced in early MAY that they plan to hire 20,000 veterans, including spouses, dependents and caregivers, by 2020. The international hotel company, which is based in Virginia, recently completed its 2013 goal of hiring 10,000 veterans, according to CNN Money. Florida, Texas and California saw the bulk of hires, in addition

to many hires in Nevada, South Carolina and Hawaii. The unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans stand half a percent above the national unemployment rate of 4.5 percent, with 5 percent jobless, according the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. While many veterans have struggled to translate their military skill sets to the civilian world, Hilton has created a coding system that matches Hilton jobs with the Military Occupational Specialties codes, or MOS, that each member of the armed services receives. "That gets the ball rolling helping them to figure out the comparable job set to the skills that they have," Matt Schuyler, chief human resources officer at Hilton, told CNN Money. With a work force of over 300,000, Hilton also has provided 1,700 free hotel stays to 1,100 veterans.

Starbucks has also reached their goal of hiring 10,000 U.S. military veterans and active-duty spouses a year ahead of schedule. The company set a new, expanded goal of hiring a total of 25,000 veterans and military spouses by 2025. It also plans to dedicate 100 more military family stores — those Starbucks stores located close to military bases and operated by veterans and their supporters — across the U.S. in the next five years. Its previously stated plan to open 12,000 new stores globally over the next five years will result in more than 240,000 jobs worldwide. That includes 3,400 stores, representing 68,000 jobs, in the U.S. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Christopher Diamond | April 27, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Jobs Update 220 ► Military Retiree Foreign Employment**

Military retirees seeking any civil employment with a foreign government agency -- or any instrumentality of a foreign government agency -- must apply for permission in advance or risk losing their military retirement pay. For retired Airmen, the Secretary of the Air Force and Secretary of State serve as approval authorities for requests, though the Air Force Personnel Center's Airman & Family Readiness Center which functions as the administrative manager for Foreign Government Employment program.

Legally, there are certain situations in which an employee receives compensation where the payment is indirectly received from a foreign state. Examples include consulting and legal services, as well as payments from domestic professional corporations. Before accepting employment, retirees should contact an ethics attorney at their local base legal office to discuss the implications, according to AFPC legal officials. "This is a very complex program, and retirees should know the rules anytime they consider working for a foreign government or a company in a foreign country," said Tom Badman, the program's manager at AFPC. "Pre-approval is required whether or not compensation is received."

If retired Airmen start working for a foreign government without preemployment approval, Badman says they take the risk of having to repay some or all of their retirement pay. Air Force Instruction 36-2913, Request for Approval of Foreign Government Employment of Air Force Members, outlines the rules and necessary paperwork, as well as application instructions. The application package includes the Foreign Government Employment Memo, Foreign Government Employment Questionnaire and a Standard Form 312, Nondisclosure Agreement, which can all be found on the Air Force Retiree Services website Foreign Government Employment page.

Retirees can mail application packages to: AFPC Directorate of Airmen and Family Care, Airmen and Family Readiness Division, 550 C Street W, JBSA-Randolph TX 78150. Packages can also be faxed to 210- 665-2322, or emailed to [afpc.retiree@us.af.mil](mailto:afpc.retiree@us.af.mil). Retired Airmen with questions about foreign government employment can send email to [afpc.retiree@us.af.mil](mailto:afpc.retiree@us.af.mil). To protect personal privacy, applicants are asked not to include Social Security numbers or any other personally identifiable information in emails. [Source: Afterburner | Vol. 59, No. 1 | Spring-Summer 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Stolen Valor Update 104 ► Reported 170501 thru 170515

**Canton, GA** -- A former Georgia police officer has been convicted on six of seven charges related to falsely claiming he received a military Purple Heart. News outlets reported that **Shane Ladner** was found guilty 2 MAY of five counts of making false statements to the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office and the county tax commissioner to use the honor to get free license plates, as well as one count of a theft by taking. He was found not guilty of one theft charge. The county sheriff's office conducted a six-week investigation into Ladner's Purple Heart claims in 2013, after he and his wife were injured during a wounded veterans' parade in Texas, drawing national attention. His wife, Meg Ladner, who lost a leg in the accident, said in testimony that her husband was an "honorable man" who had been treated poorly since the crash.

Ladner had initially said he was wounded in Panama in 1989 during an operation to capture President Manuel Noriega, but hit attorneys later said he was awarded the medal after being wounded by shrapnel during a classified drug action in Honduras in 1991. Superiors disputed the award in testimony. Ladner claimed the medal was lost when he sent it home from Central America. His attorney said during the trial that the Department of Veterans Affairs had verified the Purple Heart, but the attorney could not find the citation confirming receipt. A sentencing date hasn't been set. Ladner faces up to five years in prison for each count. To view the reading of the verdict refer to <https://www.facebook.com/CBS46/videos/10155255775156252> . [Source: Associated Press | ABC News | May 3, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Obit: Julia Hamblet ► 1 MAY 2017 | Former Women Marine Dir

At 100-years old, retired Marine Col. Julia Hamblet, the longest-serving director of the women's branch of the Marines, died 1 MAY at a nursing home in Williamsburg, Virginia, according to the Washington Post. She was 100 years old. Hamblet's military service that began with the U.S. Information Service, where she worked for six years. In 1943, she became one of the first women to be commissioned officers during World War II, a decision that would take her from being the adjutant to Col. Katherine A. Towle, director of Women Marines, to being decorated with the Legion of Merit. By the end of World War II, Hamblet had commanded 2,600 women in the aviation group. In 1946, she became the director of the Women's Reserve.



In 1953, Hamblet became the director of Women Marines, a position she would hold until 1959 when, according to the Washington Post, she voluntarily stepped down claiming she was "blocking other women officers for promotion." She retired from the Marine Corps in 1965, but never stopped serving the nation. She began her new civilian life with a position working at the U.S. Office of Education (now the Department of Education). After 13 years, she retired to Alexandria, Virginia, where she volunteered with the American Red Cross and the YWCA. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Rachael Kalinyak | May 3, 2017++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Obit: Eddie Yamasaki ► 27 April 2017 | WWII Vet Author

An Army veteran who wrote a memoir about how eight soldiers in his Japanese-American company survived while rescuing a battalion of Texans in World War II has died. Edward Yamasaki, author of “And Then There Were Eight,” a story about Japanese-Americans rescuing 211 Texas soldiers surrounded by Germans, died April 27 in a hospital in Nagasaki, Japan, after suffering a stroke. He was 92. He had been living with a daughter in Japan.

The memoirs of the men of Company I, 442nd Regimental Combat Team, constitute the core of his book. Most of them are told by the surviving men themselves; a few of them, by their family members or friends. There is no central theme in this book. There couldn't be one because each story is told by an individual with a unique background, facing unique experiences. Thus, the book is not intended to convey a single viewpoint. It is simply the product of former comrades-in-arms responding to a broad call to send in stories and personal photos of their wartime experiences. There is, however, a common thread underlying the stories - an uncommon loyalty to country and to their comrades and families - which, after the war, turned into an uncommon bond of friendship and devotion to one another that survives the passage of time and the separation of distance.

Highlighted is the one battle - the rescue of the "Lost Battalion" - for which I Company along with other units of the 442nd has gained national recognition. Stories by men involved in the battle - not only the men of I Company but also the field observers of the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, the 442nd medics, and the survivors of the liberated "Lost Battalion," 141st Infantry Regiment - have been included. Barney Hajiro, recipient of the Medal of Honor, does not speak for himself; but his comrades and the military citation itself do so. Presented also are historical perspectives that reveal why the general population of Japanese ancestry in the Territory of Hawaii did not face the harsh treatments of their counterparts on the West Coast. Key individuals reflect on these contrasting happenings and on the eventual formation of the 442nd Combat Team. History is revisited at a very personal level by a few I Company men.



**Eddie Yamasaki**

Yamasaki, born in Honolulu on May 15, 1924, served as chapter president of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team Foundation and was book chairman for the memoirs about I Company. He volunteered to join the Army during World War II after graduating from Punahou School. After the war he attended graduate school at Harvard University. In his book, published in 2003, Yamasaki said he volunteered to join the Army to show his loyalty to his country, as did many of his fellow soldiers, including those whose Japanese-American families were confined in internment camps. “There is ... a common thread underlying the stories — an uncommon loyalty to country and to

their comrades and families — which, after the war, turned into an uncommon bond of friendship and emotion to one another that survives the passage of time and the separation of distance,” he said.

Yamasaki recalled being overwhelmed with sadness as he carried out the bodies of at least 20 of his I Company comrades daily during the battle to rescue the Texas “Lost Battalion.” Of the 141 soldiers in I Company, only eight survived. The 442nd Regimental Combat Team suffered more than 800 combat casualties, according to the Department of Defense. The department said the rescue of the Texas battalion, which involved hand-to-hand combat, “is recorded in U.S. military annals as one of the great ground battles of World War II.” For his role in liberating France, Yamasaki received the Legion of Honor, that country’s highest decoration.

Yamasaki’s story was included in a 2012 manga/graphic novel “Journey of Heroes,” by Stacey Hayashi, who also is producing the feature film “Go for Broke,” about the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. She said Yamasaki was instrumental in bringing the film to life. A service was held by family and friends in Japan. A service is pending in Honolulu. Before his death, Yamasaki requested to be interred at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl, friends said. [Source: The Honolulu Star-Advertiser | Gary T. Kubota | May 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Obit: Leo K. Thorsness ► 2 MAY 2017 | Hanoi Hilton/MOH Recipient**

Col. Leo K. Thorsness, one of the most highly decorated American airmen of the Vietnam War and a belated recipient of the Medal of Honor for his heroism on a mission that took place 11 days before he was shot down and taken prisoner, died 2 MAY in Jacksonville, Fla. Thorsness was born on Feb. 14, 1932, in Walnut Grove, Minn., where his parents had a farm. He enrolled at South Dakota State University in 1950, then enlisted in the Air Force a year later. In fall 1966, he was assigned to a fighter wing based in Thailand as one of the airmen who became known as Wild Weasels for their prime missions: knocking out SAM batteries, an especially hazardous operation, to protect fighter-bombers during raids.

Colonel Thorsness, who had been brutalized during his six years of captivity at the notorious North Vietnamese prison known as the Hanoi Hilton, where he was a cellmate of John McCain’s, was 85. His death was announced by the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, which said he had been treated for cancer. Colonel Thorsness, who lived in St. Augustine, Fla., died at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, WHNT News 19 in Huntsville, Ala., reported. He had been living in Alabama before moving to Florida.

The skies some 40 miles southwest of Hanoi were filled with North Vietnamese MIG fighters, surface to air missiles (known as SAMs) and anti-aircraft fire on the afternoon of April 19, 1967, when Major Thorsness — he was promoted to colonel on his retirement — carried out his 88th mission for the Air Force piloting an F-105 Thunderchief. He and his weapons specialist, Captain Harold Johnson, shot down one MIG, damaged another and struck at least two SAM batteries as they accompanied fighter-bombers attacking a North Vietnamese Army barracks. Although running out of ammunition and low on fuel, Major Thorsness hovered in the area to ward off MIGs and shot one down as airmen sought to rescue his wingmen, two F-105 crewmen who had parachuted from their craft when it was struck by enemy fire. They were later captured.

Major Thorsness passed up a chance for aerial refueling, instead directing a tanker plane to replenish another fighter whose pilot had become lost in the skies amid the chaos. He finally headed to the nearest airfield in Thailand, 70 miles to the south. “I pulled the power back to idle and we just glided in,” he told Air Force Magazine in 2005. “We were indicating ‘empty’ when the runway came up just in front of us and we landed a little long. As we climbed out of the cockpit, Harry said something quaint like ‘that’s a full day’s work.’” Eleven days later, on Major Thorsness’s 93rd mission, with only seven remaining to make him eligible to end his tour, a MIG hit his plane with an air-to-air missile. He bailed out with Captain Johnson, suffering severe knee injuries as he ejected, and both were captured.



**Colonel Thorsness during his time as a prisoner of war (left), being presented the MOH by President Nixon (center) , and at a Republican political rally in Iowa in 2016 (right)**

Major Thorsness and Captain Johnson were held captive at the same prison camp, sarcastically labeled the Hanoi Hilton by prisoners, where Mr. McCain, later a United States senator and presidential candidate, was held. Guards there routinely beat and tortured P.O.W.s. Major Thorsness was in captivity when he learned that he had been recommended for the Medal of Honor, for aiding fellow airmen while in great peril on that 88th mission. Word of it came from the officer who had written the recommendation; he had later been shot down and taken to the Hanoi Hilton as well. But no announcement was made by American military officials until Major Thorsness's return home in March 1973 out of fear that his captors would retaliate with even greater brutality. He received the medal from President Richard M. Nixon in a White House ceremony on Oct. 15, 1973, for "extraordinary heroism, self-sacrifice and personal bravery." He was also awarded two Silver Stars and five Distinguished Flying Crosses for his exploits in the war. Captain Johnson was awarded the Air Force Cross.

In an op-ed article he wrote for The New York Times in September 2008, Colonel Thorsness recalled how Senator McCain, whose Navy plane had been shot down in October 1967, was among his cellmates. "I still see us sitting on a bed slab in a 6-by-7-foot cell talking about the questions we always talked about: When would the war end? Would we ever be able to catch up with our peers, our families, our faith and our friends?" He could not resume flying after he returned home because of his damaged knees and the injuries he suffered as a prisoner. He retired from the Air Force 10 days later and was promoted to colonel. While living in South Dakota, he entered politics as a Republican and waged an unsuccessful bid in 1974 to capture the United States Senate seat held by George S. McGovern, a staunch opponent of the Vietnam War, who had been defeated by Nixon when the president won a second term two years earlier. Mr. McGovern was re-elected to a third term. In a 1978 race to fill a vacant South Dakota seat in the House of Representatives, Colonel Thorsness lost narrowly to Tom Daschle, a future Senate majority leader.

Colonel Thorsness was later director of civil affairs for Litton Industries in Beverly Hills, Calif., then moved to the Seattle area and was a Washington State senator from 1988 to 1992. He received a bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska Omaha in 1964 and a master's degree in systems management from the University of Southern California while working at Litton. Senator McCain issued a statement on 3 MAY saying that Colonel Thorsness had endured "unspeakable pain and suffering because of his steadfast adherence to our code of conduct" during his six years in captivity, including a year in solitary confinement, "but Leo never let this experience break his spirit, and inspired the rest of us with his patriotism, perseverance, and hope that we would someday be free."

Mr. McCain profiled Colonel Thorsness in "13 Soldiers: A Personal History of Americans at War" (2014), written with Mark Salter. McCain wrote that "word had circulated among the P.O.W.s" that Colonel Thorsness had been recommended for the Medal of Honor, "as had the story of how he earned it." As McCain put it: "Valor like his is hard to keep secret from men who have need of it." His survivors include his wife, Gaylee, their daughter, Dawn, and grandchildren. [Source: Washington Post | Matt Schudel | May 3, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Obit: Wilburn K. Ross ► 9 MAY 2017 | Hanoi Hilton/MOH Recipient

The Congressional Medal of Honor Society announces that Wilburn K. Ross, Medal of Honor recipient, passed away Tuesday morning, May 9, 2017, in Washington State at the age of 94. Ross was born on May 12, 1922, grew up in the small town of Strunk, Kentucky. When he was 20 years old, he worked at the naval shipyard in Norfolk, Virginia, but in the fall of 1942, his draft notice arrived.



**Ross being congratulated by President Kennedy and holding a history of the 3d Infantry Division's exploits during World War II.**

Private Ross received the Medal of Honor for risking his life beyond the call of duty near St. Jacques, France, while serving with Company G, 350th Infantry, 3d Infantry Division, U.S. Army. On 30 October 1944, his company had lost 55 of 88 men in an attack on an entrenched, full-strength, elite German company. Ross placed his machine gun 10 yards ahead of his own company, absorbing the brunt of eight enemy assaults. Each time, he and his supporting riflemen were able to repel the enemy, and Ross held his forward position, despite the close explosion of rifle grenades and concentrated enemy fire. By the eighth assault, Ross fought on, virtually without assistance, because his supporting riflemen were out of ammunition.

Finally out of rounds himself, Ross declined to withdraw. When the enemy launched their ninth, and last, all-out attack, they converged their fire on Ross, who stood between them and a decisive breakthrough. Fresh ammunition brought to Ross just as the assault was about to swarm his position. He broke the assault, singlehandedly forcing the Germans to withdraw and saving the remnants of his company. He was awarded the Medal of Honor by Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Patch III at Zepman Stadium, Nuremburg, Germany, on April 23, 1945. Ross remained in the Army for the next 20 years. He was badly wounded in Korea and retired as a Master Sergeant in 1964.

Ross was asked in a 2013 interview if certain people were genetically wired to withstand such stressful situations with cool confidence or did his upbringing make him especially equipped for this act of valor that October day in France? He responded he did an awful lot of hunting and fishing in his childhood. He would hone his marksmanship by placing a match in the crook of a tree, backing up, and shooting just right as to light the match with the bullet from his .22 caliber rifle. Indeed, sometimes his accuracy with a firearm was almost too good. One time with his cousin they wanted to go down to the river and go fishing and stay the night. Ross told his cousin to shine a light over his uncle's cow pasture because they thought they saw a rabbit out there. Ross readied his .22 caliber rifle. "I laid it up on that post there and shot. And this other guy jumped over the fence went over there and said, 'Yep, you got him, but he's too heavy. I can't carry him.'" "I shot my uncle's calf," Ross says, laughing. No doubt his childhood outdoor adventures helped keep him alive during the War. Wilburn K. Ross is survived by his

6 children. Funeral services are pending. There are 73 MOH recipients alive today. [Source: PR Newswire | May 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 14 May 2017

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

== HTML: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.html](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html)

== PDF: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.pdf](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf)

== Word: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.doc](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc)

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

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

To quickly locate events in your geographic area just click on the appropriate State\Territory\Country listed at the top of the schedule. They will look like this:

**AK AL AR AS AZ CA CO CT DC DE FL GA GU HI IA ID IL IN KS KY LA MA  
MD ME MI MN MO MS MT NC ND NE NH NJ NM NV NY OH OK OR PA PR RI  
SC SD TN TX UT VA VI VT WA WI WV WY Belgium Germany Italy Japan Korea  
Netherlands Thailand**

[Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | May 14, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Vet Hiring Fairs ► 16 MAY thru 15 JUNE 2017

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's (USCC) Hiring Our Heroes program employment workshops are available in conjunction with hundreds of their hiring fairs. These workshops are designed to help veterans and military spouses and include resume writing, interview skills, and one-on-one mentoring. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date in the below list. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown below for the next month. For more information about the USCC Hiring Our Heroes Program, Military Spouse Program, Transition Assistance, GE Employment Workshops, Resume Engine, etc. visit the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's website at <http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events> . Vet Job Fairs being conducted in the next 30 days in state order include:





**Recruit Military Listings** *Note: Click on site for details*

<a href="#">San Antonio TX Veterans Job Fair</a>	May 18, 2017
<a href="#">Milwaukee WI Veterans Job Fair</a>	May 18, 2017
<a href="#">Lawton OK Veterans Job Fair (Fort Sill)</a>	May 18, 2017
<a href="#">Fort Walton Beach (Eglin AFB / Hurlburt Field) FL</a>	May 24, 2017
<a href="#">New York NY Veterans Job Fair</a>	May 25, 2017
<a href="#">Cincinnati OH Veterans Job Fair</a>	May 25, 2017
<a href="#">Greater Seattle WA Veterans Job Fair</a>	May 25, 2017
<a href="#">Western Region Virtual Career Fair</a>	May 31, 2017
<a href="#">Colorado Springs CO Veterans Job Fair</a>	June 1, 2017
<a href="#">Fort Wainwright AK Job Fair</a>	June 1, 2017
<a href="#">Fort Knox KY Job Fair</a>	June 1, 2017
<a href="#">Greater Phoenix AZ Veterans Job Fair</a>	June 8, 2017
<a href="#">Houston TX Veterans Job Fair</a>	June 8, 2017
<a href="#">Fort Bragg NC Job Fair</a>	June 14, 2017
<a href="#">Detroit MI Veterans Job Fair</a>	June 15, 2017
<a href="#">Los Angeles CA Veterans Job Fair</a>	June 15, 2017
<a href="#">Fort Bragg NC Job Fair</a>	June 15, 2017

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

[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](#)

[San Diego Hiring Expo with the San Diego Padres](#) June 2 - 9:30 am to 2:00 pm  
San Diego, CA [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst Transition Summit](#) June 7 to June 8  
Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, NJ [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Buffalo Hiring Fair](#) June 9 - 8:30 am to 1:30 pm  
Cheektowaga, NY [Details](#) [Register](#)

### **Veteran Career/Job Fairs**

[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

**San Diego, CA** June 2, 2017, 9:30am - 2pm **More information**  
Petco Park, 100 Park Blvd., San Diego, CA 92101  
9:30-11 a.m. | Personal branding 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 Padres and the Rockies.

**Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, NJ** June 7, 2017, 8am - 7:30pm **More information**  
Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, NJ 08641 Multiple Venues \* TRANSITION SUMMIT (Day 1 of 2)  
8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. | Afterburner Military Transition Seminar, Tommy B's-Bldg. 2705, East Arnold Ave. Special registration is required for this session.  
8 a.m.-2 p.m. | MOAA Military Spouse Symposium, Tommy B's-Bldg. 2705, East Arnold Ave.  
9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. | Industry briefs for job seekers, Timmerman Center.  
5:30-7:30 p.m. | Networking reception, Tommy B's-Bldg. 2705, East Arnold Ave.

**Fort Campbell, KY** June 7, 2017, 10am - 3pm **More information**  
Cole Park Commons, 1610 101st Airborne Division Road, Fort Campbell, KY

**Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, NJ** June 8, 2017, 9am - 4pm **More information**  
Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, NJ 08641 Multiple Venues \* TRANSITION SUMMIT (Day 2 of 2)  
9 a.m.-noon | Speaking program and workshops, Timmerman Center.  
1-4 p.m. | Hiring fair, VR-64, 3370 Wonnacott Ave.

**Fredericksburg, VA** June 8, 2017, 3pm - 7pm **More information**  
Fredericksburg Expo & Conference Center , 2371 Carl D. Silver Parkway, Fredericksburg, VA 22401  
3-5 p.m. | Veterans, military or cleared candidates only & 5-7 p.m. | Open to all job seekers

**Cheektowaga, NY** June 9, 2017, 8:30am - 1:30pm **More information**  
Knights of Columbus, 2735 Union Road, Cheektowaga, NY 14227  
8:30-10:15 a.m. | Employment workshop; 9-10 a.m. | Employer brunch and learn; 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> | May 14, 2017 ++]

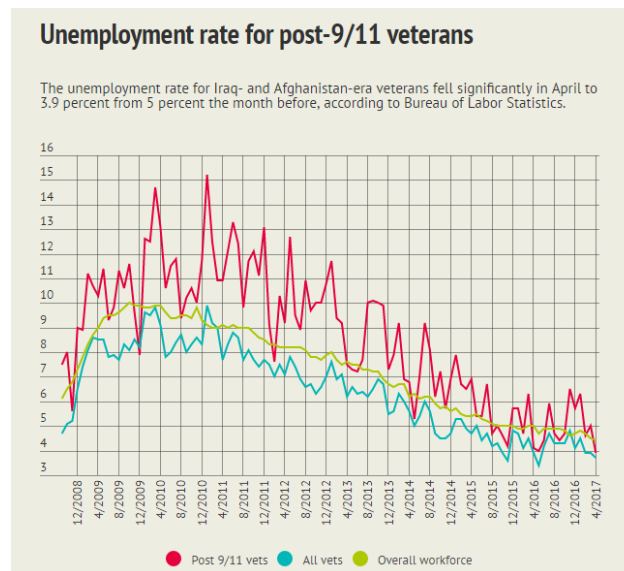
\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Unemployment Update 12 ► Dropped to 3/7% in April**

April federal employment figures are out with good news for post-9/11 veterans: Employment is at an all-time high. The unemployment rate for the youngest generation of veterans dipped from 5 percent in March to 3.9 percent

last month -- the lowest since the federal government started tracking this group in 2008, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Overall veteran unemployment dropped to 3.7 percent, the lowest since last May, after two months of a 3.9 percent unemployment rate. The record low for post-9/11 veterans comes after a slight uptick in unemployment between February and March. The volatility of the month-to-month figures is one reason critics of the monthly U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics unemployment data say not to put too much stock in the numbers. The data are based on a monthly Current Population Survey, which calculate the veteran unemployment rate from a much smaller sample size than the overall rate.

The unemployment rate for nonveterans in April was also 3.9 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The unemployment rate for Americans overall also dropped slightly, as the U.S. added a total of 211,000 jobs last month, primarily in the hospitality, food service and healthcare industries. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | May 5, 2017 ++]



\*\*\*\*\*

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

The state of Idaho 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 – ID**” 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/idaho.html> and <http://www.veterans.idaho.gov>

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/idaho-state-veterans-benefits.html> May 2017 ++]

**\* Vet Legislation \***



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

**VA Telemedicine ► HR-2123/S-926 to Expand Use/Cut Wait Times**

Newly offered bipartisan bills (HR-2123 and S-925) seek to expand the VA’s use of telemedicine, a strategy already in some use that sponsors say has the potential to reduce patient waiting times and enable the VA to make more use of its available medical personnel. The VA continues to experience difficulties in filling medical care positions, and at a recent House hearing more use of telemedicine was singled out as one potential response. Under current law, VA health professionals can only provide telehealth treatment across state lines if both they and the veteran are in a federal facility. The proposal would allow telemedicine without that restriction, so long as the provider is qualified and is acting within the scope of official duties. The result would be that veterans no longer would have to travel to a VA facility, but rather could receive telemedicine treatment from anywhere, including their home or a community center, sponsors say. [Source: Fedweek | April 28, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

**VA Accountability Update 45 ► H.R.1259 | Enhance Removal & Appeals Authority**

On 9 MAY, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in *Helman v. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)* ruled that the expedited Senior Executive Service (SES) removal and appeals authority provided by the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 is unconstitutional. As a result of this ruling, the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) has been directed to review the administrative judge’s decision upholding VA’s November 2014 removal of the director of the Phoenix VA Healthcare System. The former director’s removal remains in effect at this time. Commenting on the ruling, Veterans Affairs Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin said, “Today’s ruling underscores yet again the need for swift congressional action to afford the Secretary effective and defensible authority to take timely and meaningful action against VA employees whose conduct or performance undermines Veterans’ trust in VA care or services. “We appreciate the House passing H.R. 1259, VA Accountability First Act of 2017 as a vital step toward providing the tools necessary to address misconduct while ensuring due process. Just as importantly, we look forward to the Senate taking up the legislation and helping to ensure passage as soon as possible.” [Source: VA News Release | May 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Accountability Update 46 ► S.1094 | Bill Includes Sweeping Reforms

A bipartisan group of senators introduced a new Veterans Affairs accountability legislation 11 MAY that features a sped-up firing process for misbehaving employees, a mechanism for stripping those workers of ill-gotten bonuses, and an endorsement from key congressional leaders. The measure represents lawmakers' best chance at sweeping department reforms since the wake of the 2014 VA wait times scandal, which forced the resignation of then VA Secretary Eric Shinkseki and thrust problems at the massive bureaucracy into the public consciousness. It also would reinforce President Donald Trump's repeated promises to clean up the embattled department, ridding it of what he sees as widespread incompetence and apathy in the workforce.

It comes after repeated failed attempts last year between House and Senate veterans policy leaders to find a compromise on changes to department employment rules after accusations the proposals cut too deeply into federal workers' rights. This legislation, which closely matches similar proposals passed by the House earlier this year, already has the endorsement of top leaders from both chambers. The measure was introduced by Sens. Marco Rubio (R-FL), Johnny Isakson (R-GA), and Jon Tester (D-MT). The latter two are the top ranking lawmakers on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, which is expected to take up debate on the measure in mid-MAY.

Rubio has been a frequent critic of VA and the author of several similar bills pushing for more firing authorities for department managers. "To fully reform the VA and provide our nation's veterans with the quality care they were promised and deserve, we must ensure the department can efficiently dismiss employees who are not able or willing to do their jobs," he said in a statement 11 MAY. "We must make real changes that put the well-being of our service members before the best interests of bureaucrats." The introduction comes just two days after a federal court struck down a 2014 law which shortened the appeals process for senior VA executives. Members of Congress had called that rule change an important tool to rid the department of problematic managers, but the appeals court ruled the law was unconstitutional because it violated protections for those federal employees.

Whether the new law can hold up under the same legal scrutiny remains to be seen. Federal union officials have criticized past proposals as unfairly blaming staffers for systemic failures at the department and unjustly depriving them of due process. They've also lamented lawmakers' attempts to treat VA employees differently than other federal workers, questioning the need for new rules for a single department. But senators said they are confident the new legislation will withstand those challenges. Tester called it "common sense solutions" to VA's problems and said it will "hold bad employees accountable while protecting the hardworking folks who care for our veterans." Isakson said the measure would give department leaders "the tools necessary to discipline bad employees in a timely manner while protecting whistleblowers from the threat of retaliation and ensuring the quality of care that our veterans receive at the VA."

Under the measure, the VA secretary would have the authority to reprimand or fire any senior executive in a 21-day internal department grievance process. Rank-and-file employees would have similar job actions appealed to the Merit Systems Protection Board, with a review process of no more than 180 days. Both are significantly shorter time frames than existing rules. The legislation also includes language which would allow VA leaders to claw back employee bonuses or relocation expenses, or reduce a former employee's pension, if they are convicted of a felony related to their job. VA leaders in recent years have maintained they have no current authority to take those kinds of punitive actions.

Under the bill, VA leaders would be required to provide more training on whistleblower rights and be prohibited from firing employees who have filed complaints through official channels. The department would also see expanded hiring authorities if the legislation becomes law. VA secretaries could directly appoint individuals as medical center directors and other leadership offices, which VA leaders have argued would translate into more highly-qualified candidates for those posts.

In a statement, House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe (R-TN). — who sponsored the House accountability bill — praised the “bipartisan agreement” of the Senate plan and said he would support the measure if it is advanced to the House. House Democrats largely opposed Roe’s measure, but the Senate bill already has several Democratic co-sponsors. Officials from Concerned Veterans for America, one of the most vocal critics of VA employment rules in recent years, also offered their backing for the measure, even though they had been vocal supporters of more stringent appeals rules. “The changes (from the House version) don’t undermine the main aim of the bill, to reform VA,” said Dan Caldwell, policy director for CVA. “We think this is a good accountability measure.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 11, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Service Dogs Update 20** ► **S.1014 PAWS Act | Provide to PTSD Vets**

Two U.S. senators resumed their PAWS for a cause 3 MAY in Washington -- providing service dogs to veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. "Service dogs can provide support, peace, and joy to these Americans as they confront the invisible scars of war," Sen. Deb Fischer (R-NE) said in reintroducing Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers, or PAWS Act. Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ) co-sponsored the bill, which was first introduced last year but not enacted. Fischer noted that veterans with physical disabilities already can receive a service dog. The PAWS Act would authorize a five-year, \$10 million pilot program to provide trained canines to veterans with PTSD. "Service dogs can be an effective approach to supporting veterans who are struggling with PTSD or other combat-related illnesses, just as they have shown to be effective for physically disabled veterans," she said. Rep. Ron DeSantis (R-FL) appeared with Fischer and three service dogs and their owners at the news conference. He said the Department of Veterans Affairs now supports the program despite inconclusive medical evidence that dogs help relieve PTSD. "Say we're wrong about this -- people get a dog," said DeSantis, who introduced the House version of the PAWS Act. "There's not really a big downside to this." [Source: UPI | Mike Bambach | May 4, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Health Care Update 06** ► **H.R.1628 | AHCA Impact on Access**

House lawmakers passed a controversial health care overhaul on 4 MAY without a clear answer on what the changes could mean for veterans. Republicans maintain that the new law H,R,1628 won't affect any veterans' access to health care and related tax credits. But Democrats insist that it could jeopardize access to care for millions of veterans nationwide, and labeled it an embarrassing mistake for Congress. “This is not fear mongering, this is not hyperbole,” Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA) and a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, said before the vote. “This bill jeopardizes health care for up to seven million veterans, and everyone should oppose it.” The new American Health Care Act, which passed the House by a 217-213 vote with no Democratic support, is designed to replace the Affordable Care Act signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2010.

The repeal of “Obamacare” was a key campaign promise of President Donald Trump and a host of Republican lawmakers. But the replacement “Trumpcare” measure has faced an uneven path in the House this year, with numerous amendments and concessions in recent weeks to gain enough Republican support for passage. One of those early changes in March stripped out language specifically stating that veterans who were eligible for VA medical services but not enrolled in them would be eligible for health care tax credits. Republicans have called the language superfluous, saying that existing Internal Revenue Service rules have already established that. “No matter what verbiage you hear, nothing in this bill changes how veterans are treated under the law,” said Rep. Phil Ro (R-TN) “Nothing. The criticisms are flat-out wrong. I'm a veteran, a doctor, and chairman of the Veteran's Affairs Committee. It ain't going to happen.” “I am disturbed that our colleagues in the minority would assert that it does in an effort to score political points against this legislation.”

But Democrats have countered that the IRS rule only applies to the Affordable Care Act, not the new health care bill, and removing the language took away their tax credit eligibility. House Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Tim Walz (D-MN) called the situation "absolutely shameful." "We were loud and clear about the disastrous impact AHCA could potentially have on millions of veterans when the bill was brought up for debate in March," he said. "Unfortunately, House Republicans never listened to our warning, and as a result, if this deeply flawed legislation passes as it is written, millions of veterans and their families could have diminished choice in where to seek care."

The Department of Treasury officials have backed Roe's position, but it remains unclear whether the IRS rules would need to be updated. If so, the new rules could run afoul of Trump's executive order mandating that for every new rule created, two existing regulations must be eliminated. Officials from Paralyzed Veterans of America earlier this week announced their opposition to the new health care bill, in part because of concerns that it could leave millions of veterans ineligible for the tax credits. But House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) said the measure "delivers on the promises we have made to the American people" and will provide better health care options for all Americans.

The fight is likely to continue in the Senate, where a number of Democrats have already decried the potential negative impacts of the new plan for veterans. Under current Senate rules, Republican leaders will need at least a few Democratic supporters to force a full-chamber vote on the legislation. Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) said she'll make the veterans issue a key point in her fight against the legislation. "I'm surprised there wasn't a fix (by Republicans)," she said. "For people who say they want to help veterans, I've not seen any evidence of it." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 4, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **GI Bill Update 227 ► H.R.758 | GI Internship Program Act**

The GI Bill is among the best known government programs of all time. Now it might be getting a tweak. U.S. Reps. Ted Yoho (R-Gainesville) and Brad Schneider (D-Illinois) have teamed to introduce the GI Internship Program Act, which adds an internship option for post-9/11 veterans who wish to take advantage of the popular GI Bill in a slightly different way. "It's just a common sense approach," Yoho said during an interview. "It just gives them (eligible veterans) greater flexibility." The benefit can be used at colleges, universities, trade schools, as well as for on-the-job training, apprenticeships and flight schools. Benefits can be used to help cover tuition, fees, housing and books. Tutorial assistance, licensing and certification tests also are covered expenses.

This new bill would give veterans an additional option: to receive their benefit as a stipend that helps them complete a career transition internship with a qualifying business. And not just any business, either. To maximize the overall benefit, the sponsors said "special consideration" will be given to "sectors most affected by the economy's growing skills gap, such as manufacturing and small business," according to a news release announcing the bill. "Matching veterans with businesses is a win-win that helps bridge the skills gap and expand employment opportunities for those who served," Schneider said in the release. The bill sponsors said this additional option would be in keeping with the spirit of the GI Bill, which has been providing educational opportunities to returning veterans since 1944. "We should do all we can in Congress to help those who have helped defend our nation," Yoho said in that statement. His congressional district includes part of Marion County.

During the interview, Yoho said he hopes the bill will clear the House of Representatives before September. He expects smooth sailing there and in the Senate. According to the news release "Participating businesses must impart valuable training and experience, and verify a reasonable expectation of hiring the participating veterans upon completion of their internships," the release said. H.R.758 was introduced on 31 JAN 2017 and had 7 cosponsors as of 8 MAY. Under the bill:



- The VA will pay individuals who are full-time participants in such an internship the amount of educational assistance they are due.
- Each internship shall last for at least 180 days but for no more than one year.
- Each intern would be considered to be an employee of the VA for purposes of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.
- Each intern and employer would provide the VA with a monthly certification that the intern worked at least 35 hours each week performing functions that provided the individual with valuable experience.

[Source: Ocala Star Banner | Jim Ross | May 7, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Vet Deportations Update 11 ► Assembly Bill Passed to Provide Legal Help

California may start giving legal help to veterans who have been deported. The state Assembly passed a bill 8 MAY to provide legal representation for people who were honorably discharged from the military but have since been deported. Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher says her bill is intended to help deported veterans return to the country. The San Diego Democrat says the bill would help them reunite with their families and access health services and other benefits. "It's time we bring our deported vets back," Gonzalez Fletcher said. "California can lead the way by trying to bring them home." The American Civil Liberties Union says it has found dozens of cases where veterans have been deported. Many deported veterans would have been eligible to become naturalized citizens but were not properly informed about the process, Gonzalez Fletcher said. Funding for the bill will be subject to availability of money in the state budget. The bill directs the state to contract with a nonprofit legal services organization. AB386 passed the Assembly without any dissenting votes and now goes to the Senate. [Source: The Associated Press | Sophia Bollag | May 8, 2017 ++]

**\* Military \***



## Military Bases Block Access to RAO Bulletin ► Security Concerns

I have been advised by two of my 135 subscribers who utilizes an email addee "...@us.af.mil" that their commands (Scott & Nellis AFB) have started blocking their access to the RAO Bulletin links as were the "...@uscg.mil" subscribers. 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 the best way to get around it is to provide your home or an alternate email addee for me to send to. [Source: Bulletin Subscribers | May 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## TRANSCOM ► Not Enough C-17s, Tankers, or Ships for Hot War

Believe it or not, the global command responsible for getting weapons, fuel, and food to troops had, until recently, never used a war game for planning. Nor did Transportation Command factor into its plans the possibility that transport ships would be sunk and transport planes would be shot down. On top of that, TRANSCOM doesn't have enough ships, airborne tankers or cargo aircraft to get a large number of troops to a battlefield and sustain them. That was the bracing testimony this 2 MAY by Air Force Gen. Darren McDew, head of Transportation Command.



**Gen. Darren McDew**

Sen. John McCain, a former naval aviator with a penchant for things nautical, noted during the hearing before his committee that the U.S. is “already 10 ships short of the current requirement — enough to move two full armored combat brigade combat teams.” And the Air Force component of TRANSCOM can only move one brigade combat team to a theater of operation like Korea in C-17s and C-5s. “We can do 200 C-17s,” Gen. McDew. “I doubt there’s a conflict in Korea for which one brigade combat team would be sufficient,” McCain noted wryly. McDew didn’t take McCain on. “We do not have the capability I wish we had,” the general answered, “but the initial force can be delivered organically. Then, we’ll have to see where we go from there.”

Much of “where we go from there” is rely on the shrinking US maritime cargo capability, the leasing of foreign ships and, presumably, the use of America’s cargo and passenger airlines. But McCain put that into perspective: “Military Sealift Command’s organic surge sealift fleet is essential for rapid response in the event of a crisis or wartime scenario. But the average age of ships in our surge fleet is now 39 years. Over a recent 5-month period, less than 60% of sealift ships were able to activate during planned exercises due to various maintenance problems. The requirement for so-called ‘Roll-on/Roll-off’ ships has been relatively stable since the 1990s. But since Desert Storm, the surge sealift fleet has been cut nearly in half to just 27 ships. We’re already 10 ships short of the current requirement—enough to move two full armored brigade combat teams. And over the next six years, another 9 will likely age out.”

The other vulnerable part of TRANSCOM’s mission is its deeply intertwined cyber relationship with commercial companies. Some 90 percent of the data upon which TRANSCOM relies resides in commercial companies, who, McDew made clear, often don’t have a clue they’ve been the subject of a cyber attack, let alone know how to respond to one. “Most of the time the attack or intrusion takes place, no one knows an attack has occurred,” he said, referring to the CEOs with whom he works. Sen. Angus King of Alaska, who sits on both the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Senate Intelligence Committee, urged McDew to write cyber standards into the contracts companies sign with TRANSCOM, citing the strong profit incentive they have. [Source: Philipino American Military Retiree Association | April 17, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Military Retirement System Update 26 ► New System Flaws

Two years ago when Congress was considering changing the military retirement system the Enlisted Association (TREA) was skeptical about what they wanted to do. While they were not opposed to giving active duty personnel a retirement account they could take with them if they left the service before twenty years, they were opposed to making military retirees pay higher fees for medical services in order to pay for those portable retirement savings accounts. They were also concerned that Congress was trying to rush legislation through because history has taught us that when Congress rushes legislation that makes major changes in programs they usually make some serious mistakes. Nonetheless, Congress went ahead and implemented a new retirement system that will go into effect for all individuals who enter the services after January 1 of next year.

However, just as feared, it has been discovered that there are some major flaws in the new retirement system. For active duty personnel, it turns out that if they take a lump sum payout as soon as they retire from the military, they could lose a tremendous amount of money that they would otherwise receive as retirement pay. This is a complicated issue, but according to military reporter Tom Philpott, a 37-year old E7 could take a lump sum payment after 20 years of service and receive \$174,454 in return for forfeiting 50 percent of retired pay until age 67. On the other hand that same E7 could receive a lump sum payment of \$87,277 in return for accepting a 25-percent cut in retired pay until age 67. However, it turns out that if he accepted the \$174,454 lump sum payment immediately after retiring, he would lose \$488,363 in retired pay between ages 38-67. His net loss would be \$313,909. In the case of the \$87,277 lump sum, that individual would lose \$244,182 in retired pay that he would otherwise have gotten. His net loss would be \$156,905.

This is extremely unfair. In fact, the DoD Board of Actuaries has called it inappropriate and has asked Congress to not allow servicemembers to have this choice. But if Congress doesn't act to stop it, or unless someone lets servicemembers who come in under the new system know about this, it is likely that thousands of them will end up losing a tremendous amount of money they would otherwise have had. Unfortunately, that's not the only problem. It turns out that members of the Reserve Components (RC) also may end up losing out in the new retirement plan.

The new retirement system reduces the amount of retirement pay that is guaranteed to be paid by DoD in return for establishing new individual retirement accounts (IRAs) for each Reserve Component member. The idea was supposed to be that by establishing the IRA, an individual can leave the RC prior to reaching 20 years of service and still be able to have earned part of a retirement. If the individual stays until 20 years, the IRA was supposed to make up for the cut in guaranteed retirement pay that will be in place. However, in order for this system to work as was theorized, the individual would have to contribute the maximum amount of money allowed by law (\$18,000) to their IRA every year. But if that individual already has an IRA through their full-time employer, she can only contribute the maximum amount of \$18,000 to one of their IRAs. If that individual contributes to his/her full-time employment IRA, he/she loses out on her military retirement. If individual contributes to the military IRA, he/she loses out on the full-time employment IRA.

New legislation to correct this problem for RC members has been introduced. The Servicemember Retirement Improvement Act (H.R.1317) would fix this problem by allowing RC members to contribute the maximum of \$18,000 per year to both IRAs. Of course, how many members earn enough money to contribute a total of \$36,000 to their IRAs in a single year is another question altogether and one that convinces us that we were right to be skeptical of this new retirement system in the first place. [Source: TREA Washington Update | May 9, 2016 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military Pregnancy ► New Air Force Separation Policy**

Female airmen who give birth now have up to a year to decide whether they want to stay in the Air Force, under a new policy that went into effect 10 MAY. The Air Force Personnel Center said in a Thursday release that the change is part of the latest slate of diversity and inclusion initiatives. Previously, pregnant airmen had to separate before childbirth if they wanted to leave the Air Force, the release said. AFPC said this will give new mothers time to adjust and figure out if they want to continue to balance their military career with their family needs. And new parents can use the MyVector online mentoring system to find other airmen who are also parents and get their help and advice on how to balance work and family.

"Our country has a natural advantage in our incredibly diverse population," said Daniel Sitterly, acting assistant secretary of the Air Force for manpower and reserve affairs. "We just need to maximize it. This is another initiative which allows airmen flexibility in making decisions for their careers, their families and their futures." New mothers who decide to leave must apply for separation on the virtual Military Personnel Flight system within 12 months of giving birth, and their date of separation must be set for no more than 12 months after applying. The policy applies for active duty, National Guard or Air Force Reserve mothers who gave birth on or after April 26. New parents who have recently adopted are not eligible for this separation.

In addition, the policy for pregnant airmen to separate before giving birth will remain in place and unchanged, and they will continue to be able to leave the Air Force with a separation date of between 30 and 90 days before their projected delivery date. "To succeed in meeting current and future mission requirements, the Air Force relies on access to the best talent our nation has to offer," Sitterly said. "To compete for that talent in the future, we must place consistent emphasis on diversity and inclusion in order to attract and retain talent." The Air Force also on 9 MAY announced it had finalized implementation plans for the latest slate of diversity initiatives. In addition to the change to the separation policy for new mothers, the Air Force's new diversity policies include the following changes:

- Require at least one qualified, diverse airman is included in the slate of candidates considered for military developmental positions, such as executive officer, aide de camp, military assistant, senior enlisted adviser, career field manager and commander's action group chief. This policy, which will go into effect in May, does not set any hiring requirements. The Air Force wants, "to the extent practicable," slates to include candidates with more than one characteristic of diversity, including race, ethnicity, age, gender, personal life experiences, geographic background, socioeconomic background, cultural knowledge, educational background, work background, language abilities, physical abilities, or philosophical or spiritual perspectives.
- Ensure development teams and command screening boards — which identify developmental opportunities for officers, enlisted and civilians and find colonels who are good candidates for wing and group command — are made up of diverse panelists. This went into effect in April.
- Set up a Human Capital Analytics Office by October to help the Air Force make recruiting and retention decisions based on data.
- Beginning in fiscal 2018, provide new tools and resources to recruiters that will help them spread out to new geographic communities to find recruits. This will include technology such as Internet-enabled tablets and smart phones, data analytic tools that allow recruiters to micro-target diverse communities likely to produce recruits, and databases that can be shared between various recruiting components. The Air Force also wants to increase the diversity of its recruiting force.
- Increase funding for Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps scholarships and college internships so new officers come from a more diverse geographic and career background, and encourage women and minorities to serve in career fields that now lack diversity.

- Cut red tape when providing accommodations for people with disabilities. Currently, funding requests for reasonable accommodations often aren't budgeted by the unit and must be sent up to the major command or higher headquarters for approval, which slows the process down. The Air Force has set up a new funding code that will identify all unit-level requests for accommodations and speed up approval.
- Provide senior leaders, career field managers, development team members, and other supervisors training on identifying and mitigating unconscious bias before they conduct performance evaluations, at least once per year.

[Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | April 29, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Navy Submarine Design ► Changing to Accommodate Women

Every submarine in the U.S. fleet was designed with the height, reach and strength of men in mind, from the way valves are placed to how display screens are angled. That's going to change. With women now serving aboard [submarines](#), defense contractor Electric Boat is designing what will be the first [Navy](#) subs built specifically to accommodate female crew members. The designers are doing the obvious things, such as adding more doors and washrooms to create separate sleeping and bathing areas for men and women and to give them more privacy. But they are also making more subtle modifications that may not have been in everyone's periscope when the Navy admitted women into the Silent Service. For example, they are lowering some overhead valves and making them easier to turn, and installing steps in front of the triple-high bunk beds and stacked laundry machines.

The first vessel built with some of the new features is expected to be delivered to the Navy in 2021, the future USS New Jersey. The Navy lifted its ban on women on submarines in 2010, starting with officers. About 80 female officers and roughly 50 enlisted women are now serving on subs, and their numbers are expected to climb into the hundreds over the next few years. For now, the Navy is retrofitting existing subs with extra doors and designated washrooms to accommodate women. But Electric Boat in Groton, Connecticut, is at work on a redesign of the Navy's Virginia-class fast-attack subs and is also developing a brand-new class of ballistic-missile submarines, relying on body measurements for both men and women. "We have a clean sheet of paper, so from the ground up, we'll optimize for both men and women," said Brian Wilson, Electric Boat director of the new ballistic-missile sub program. Electric Boat officials had no immediate estimate of how much the modifications will cost.



**Lt j.g. Marquette Leveque, left, and Lt. j.g. Kyle McFadden, receive their pins to indicate that they're qualified to serve on submarines**

As anyone who watches war movies knows, submariners are always turning valves, whether to operate machinery, redistribute water between tanks or isolate part of a system that has been damaged. On the Columbia-class boats, valves will generally be placed lower, Wilson said. Sometimes there will be an extension handle, and some will be easier to turn. Sailors will be able to connect their masks into the emergency air system at the side of passageways, instead of overhead. Emergency air masks are being moved on fast-attack submarines, too, but the bulk of the changes on those subs are to ensure privacy. Seats in the control room on the ballistic-missile submarines will adjust forward a little more so everyone can touch each display and reach every joystick. Steps will be added so shorter people can climb into the top bunk or see into the washers and dryers, since clothes that get stuck in the machines are a fire hazard. The first Columbia-class ballistic-missile sub is scheduled to join the fleet in 2031.

At 5-foot-6, Lt. Marquette Leveque, one of the first women to serve on a submarine, said that she didn't have any trouble reaching valves and other equipment but that the ergonomic changes will be helpful for shorter crewmates. Leveque was assigned to a compartment with two other female officers on the USS Wyoming. They shared a washroom with male officers. A sign on the door could be flipped to show whether a man or woman was using it. With so few women on board, the timesharing worked, she said. But with more on the way, the need for separate spaces is greater, she added. "Privacy is important anywhere you are," she said. "We live on this boat, as well as work there." [Source: Associated Press | Jennifer Mcdermott | April 19, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Navy Dolphins** ► **Mine Locators**

WLRN reports that Constellation, an Atlantic bottlenose dolphin, has been training in Key West with three of her teammates as part of the Navy's Marine Mammal program, based in San Diego. Constellation's job is vital — she and her dolphin teammates search for mines on the ocean floor and drop transponders that allow the crews to safely retrieve the explosives. "Probably their most impressive capability is their ability to find objects that are completely buried underneath the seafloor," said Bob Olds, business manager for the Marine Mammal program. The Navy typically takes the dolphins to Hawaii for training in warmer waters, but this year, they traveled to Key West. "We like to introduce them to different environments as part of their training cycle," Olds said. "They get the warm water, they get the reef type environment, which we don't have in San Diego, the coral heads and things. We're working with their sonar so different sonar pictures are good for them to get trained up against them and here, you've got a pretty cluttered bottom when it comes to the coral heads."



Cmdr. John Fairweather, the surface and subsurface operations officer for Naval Air Station Key West, says the team is like any other special operations team that trains there. "They're amazing, to watch these animals work and do the job that they do," Fairweather said. "They're part of the whole team of special operations and they have their niche to fill." There are some who hope this niche will be filled by other means, including former Navy dolphin trainer, Rick Trout, who rallies against the program. "We've got better technology," Trout said. "And Lord knows, we've got to save our tax dollars and put them towards good national security instead of depending on Flipper for national security."

In April a 46-year-old bottlenose dolphin who served in the Iraq War for the U.S. Navy was euthanized had to be euthanized. 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. "He was one of our most celebrated veterans of the Iraq War, 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 & May 2, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military Logistics** ► **Army Need to Streamline**

A grim vision of future battlefields has the Army urgently exploring every option to streamline its logistics, everything from cargo drones to "compact fusion reactors." Moving iron mountains of supplies has been a signature strength of the US military since the Civil War. But against an adversary with precision weapons, those sprawling supply dumps, the long convoys that venture out from them, and the large units that live off them are just big targets. In a future Multi-Domain Battle, the Army wants to fight in small units that can disperse, hide, and keep on the move. That's not possible while tethered to traditional supply lines. So what the Army calls "demand reduction" isn't a nice-to-have administrative efficiency, it's a battlefield necessity.

That's why the Army: held a "Demand Reduction Summit" in April, will issue a new logistics strategy this year, and is holding major field experiments both now and in 2018. There are a lot of intriguing technologies to look at, especially in robotics. There's also a fundamental problem. The lion's share of battlefield demand is the fuel consumption of heavy weapons, like the M1 Abrams tank with its three-gallon-to-the-mile turbine, and the Army doesn't have the money to replace them for decades. "The M1... that's the primary driver of demand in an armored brigade combat team," Col. Mark Simerly, chief of capability development and integration at the Army's logistics center, said. "Certainly, the designers of the future combat vehicle understand the vulnerability" and are exploring solutions, he told reporters 2 MAY.

The cancelled Future Combat System and Ground Combat Vehicle programs explored hybrid-electric tanks. The Army's Tank-Automotive center, TARDEC, has built a prototype hydrogen fuel cell car. (Fusion reactors, compact or otherwise, remain science fiction). Ultimately the Army does want to replace the M1, the M2 Bradley, and the M109 Paladin howitzer with vehicles that are more lethal, more mobile, and less fuel hungry — but there's no funding even to start building new designs until the 2030s.

So what is the Army looking at to streamline logistics in the nearer term? Perhaps the lowest-hanging fruit is electronics. Better electrical power management at forward bases and field command posts — software that cycles generators on and off depending on demand, for example — can reduce both heat generated, which shows up on enemy sensors, and fuel consumed. On a larger scale, moving fuel more efficiently to forward units can reduce both the number of vulnerable tanker truck convoys and the frequency with which troops have to stop to gas up again. That's the idea behind the Automated Fuel Management System, which would transmit information on how long a

given unit could keep operating on its current fuel supplies and what resupply was available where. Of course, all such efficiency initiatives rely on relaying accurate data over networks — the first thing an enemy like Russia might attack.

The greatest vulnerability of the logistics system, however, is not its digital networks but the human beings who have to move the supplies around. Some of the heaviest casualties in the 2003 capture of Baghdad came when unarmored, flammable fuel trucks pushed through to the forward-most tanks, and fuel convoys suffered heavy casualties to roadside bombs in Iraq and Afghanistan thereafter. No wonder, then, that the Army wants to minimize the number of soldiers driving supply trucks. An exercise now getting underway at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, is testing so-called “leader-follower” technology, in which ordinary Army trucks are modified to drive themselves, using their sensors to follow a manned vehicle in convoy. The Army is eagerly learning from the commercial sector, but Tesla, Google, and so on aren’t building vehicles to operate off-road, let alone under fire, so the military’s algorithms need to be a bit more robust. The long-term goal is completely autonomous vehicles, said Simerly, but that will require major improvements in artificial intelligence and vision: “Our sensors right now can’t tell the difference between a toddler and a tumbleweed.”



**The unmanned TerraMax M-ATV with its mine roller.**

Flying through empty air is actually a lot easier on AI than navigating obstacles on the ground, and it has the added advantage of avoiding roadside bombs and mines — though a sophisticated adversary will have plenty of anti-aircraft weapons. The Army, said Simerly of the Combined Arms Support Command (CASCOM), is looking at three tiers of cargo-carrying unmanned aerial vehicles, all significantly smaller than the unmanned K-MAX helicopter used in Afghanistan:

- A high-end drone capable of carrying 1,500 to 2,000 pounds (less than a third of K-MAX’s payload) up to about 70-90 miles (110 to 150 km);
- A mid-tier drone able to carry 300-500 pounds to resupply, say, a single infantry squad for three to four days; and
- A “micro UAV” able to carry 25-50 pounds from a forward supply point to, say, a wounded soldier needing first aid or a broken-down vehicle needing repair parts.

Ultimately, the Army wants to print spare parts on-site instead of hauling them around, which is why it’s looking very hard at 3D printing. But additive manufacturing still requires raw materials. The Star Trek replicator that makes supplies out of nothing isn’t likely to be a reality in the next few centuries. Ultimately, no amount of brilliance by the supply corps will solve the problem by itself. The combat arms that they support — infantry, armor, artillery, aviation — need to figure out new ways of operating and create new units that can operate on Spartan amounts of supply. Addressing the whole problem was the point of the Demand Reduction Summit held April 29. It wasn’t just



a meeting of logisticians — from the Army’s Pentagon HQ, Army Materiel Command, and CASCOM: Representatives of the combat arms, as well as Special Operations Command, Forces Command, Army Research Laboratory, the Marines, the Navy, and the Army’s acquisition secretariat all showed up.

“The main goal for the summit was to get the word out about demand reduction and to get everybody’s buy-in that this is not just a sustainment challenge, this is a Total Army challenge,” said Col. Stephanie Gradford, chief of the sustainment division at ARCIC, the Army Capabilities Integration Center. “(It’s) everybody’s effort to try to reduce demand to make our brigade combat teams nigh-independent.” [Source: Breaking Defense | Sydney J. Freedberg Jr. | May 03, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **USS Tripoli (LHA-7) ► Launched 13 Weeks Early**

The newest America-class amphibious assault warship was launched by Ingalls Shipbuilding 13 weeks ahead of schedule, according a report from Huntington Ingalls Industries. The Tripoli is the second warship Ingalls built, the first was delivered to the Navy in 2014 and named the America. And another vessel, the Bougainville (LHA-8), is slated to begin construction in late 2018. The Tripoli’s keel was laid down on 22 June 2014 at Huntington Ingalls Industries, Pascagoula, Mississippi. Tripoli is the third U.S. Navy ship named for the Battle of Derne in 1805. It was the decisive victory of a mercenary army led by a detachment of United States Marines and soldiers against the forces of Tripoli during the First Barbary War. It was the first recorded land battle of the United States fought overseas.



Brian Cuccias, president of Ingalls Shipbuilding, told WLOX that Ingalls has been the go-to company for the construction of amphibious, large-deck vessels since the early 1970s. “Our vast knowledge and experience in the design and construction of these great ships is paying dividends — not only for the American taxpayer, but also for the Navy-Marine Corps team and the sailors and Marines who will be operating these important warships in defense of our country.” These LHA vessels are used to transport Marine expeditionary units and their equipment. They weigh over 44,000 tons, stand 20 stories tall and are almost three football fields long at 841 ft. Its armament consists of 2 Rolling Airframe Missile launchers, 2 Evolved Sea Sparrow Missile launchers, two 20 mm Phalanx CIWS mounts, and 7 twin .50 BMG machine guns. Refer to <https://youtu.be/ZDq80ucrJ-U> for a video of the launch [Source: NavyTimes | Rachael Kalinyak | May 4, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Household Goods Update 01 ► Unclaimed Storage**

A Portsmouth, Virginia, moving and storage company postponed an auction of 105 crates containing 47 service members’ household goods following an onslaught of social-media outrage. Part of the firestorm may have been lit by one of the photos that accompanied a since-removed post advertising the event. It featured boxes that weren’t part

of the auction, the seller says -- including boxes belonging to at least one service member who'd dropped off his items in April. The vice president of Bay Area Movers, Robin Villers, insists the company was not planning to auction off "lost freight," as some have alleged. The property being auctioned off has been at the storage facility after the service members' entitlement for government-paid storage expired -- 20 years, in some cases. The service members have not paid the storage fees during that time, Villers said, adding that nothing set for auction had gone less than five years without payment.



A spokesman for Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, which oversees and sets policy for the program that moves service members' household goods, said "there's more to the situation than meets the eye," and that the moving company had followed proper procedures to attempt to contact the owners of the goods. "We want the people who have been outraged to understand this personal property is very old and has been at the storage facility for decades," command spokesman Fred Rice told Military Times.

A 3 MAY post at USMC Life (a non-DoD endorsed website) highlighted the auction, the photo featuring recently packed goods, and the advertising copy written by Gene Daniels Auctioneers, which suggests the sealed boxes could include "HIDDEN TREASURES" obtained by service members and their families during overseas duty. It also asked readers to register their complaints on social media. The auction site's Facebook rating sat at 1.2 stars as of 4 MAY, with the overwhelming majority of one-star reviews coming this week. The mover's Yelp review page has been similarly bombarded with negative feedback, so much so that the review site is monitoring it "for content related to media reports."

#### 'WE DON'T WANT TO HURT THEM'

Villers said the company has repeatedly -- for years -- tried to contact the service members whose property was scheduled to be sold. She said they don't have information to know whether they are still in the military. "We've never taken any military member to collections, never taken any military member to court. We don't want to hurt them financially or hurt their credit," Villers said. "A lot of these members are enlisted and don't get paid a lot." Since the family-owned business started operating in 1985, they're never held an auction of storage items, she said. But because the company hasn't taken any of these people to court, it's not clear whether auctioning off these household goods would be illegal, especially if these service members are still on active duty. Under the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, a storage lien can't be enforced against service members during, or 90 days after, their period of military service -- without a court order.

The Justice Department has taken enforcement action in the past against companies who sold service members' items in storage, in some cases while troops were deployed. And over the years, service members have filed suit against storage companies after their household goods were sold off without their knowledge, and without a court order. A source in the legal community said the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the Justice Department

are aware of the situation and are monitoring it. Rice said the Norfolk personal property shipping office is checking into whether any of the service members are still on active duty.

### UNWANTED GOODS

About half of the people whose property is being sold had responded to the company earlier that they no longer want their property, Villers said. Many people have left the area, and it would be cost-prohibitive for them to pay to ship these items, especially if they no longer want or need them, she said. "We want them to have their things. But we can't make people take their things," she said. "We've begged them to take their items." Villers said she found out too late that supposedly-generic pictures the auctioneer had taken at the warehouse of service members' crates included some crates that were not in the batch that will be auctioned off. A service member called the company, concerned that his property was being sold – just days after it was picked up by Bay Area and brought to their warehouse awaiting shipments overseas. When the photo was blown up, his name was visible on the crate. Puzzled, company officials checked the files, then tracked down the picture on the website and realized what had happened, Villers said. They quickly called the auctioneer and he took down the photos. "He made an innocent mistake," she said. Rice said SDDC officials had checked into that service member's personal property, and confirmed with him that it's on track to be shipped from Norfolk to Germany.

The military pays for temporary storage for 90 days, and can provide extensions of time based on the situation. The personal property office contacts the service members 30 days before the storage entitlement runs out, and the storage company contacts the service member about the property, by certified mail. If the service member needs more time in temporary storage after the military entitlement ends, he or she makes arrangements with the storage company to pay them. In this case, Rice said, the proper notification steps were taken. Most of the crates involve "unaccompanied baggage" shipments, Villers said. Those shipments are small shipments generally with linens, dishes and clothing which are sent ahead to provide items needed immediately, before the bulk of the household goods arrive. She cited cases where service members have negotiated much lower payments on unpaid bills, including a recent case where a service member owed \$10,000 but retrieved the household goods after a payment of \$1,500. "We follow the government's rules," Villers said. "We've been letting this pile up. ... It's overtaking our warehouse." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | May 4, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Military Appreciation Month ► Quotes

Americans and other world leaders have given us wise and witty military appreciation quotes since long before Military Appreciation Month was officially designated in 1999. These quotes help us put into words our feelings about our troops and what their service means to our nation.

- "There is nothing stronger than the heart of a volunteer." -- *Gen. James H. Doolittle*
- "No man is entitled to the blessings of freedom unless he be vigilant in its preservation." -- *Gen. Douglas MacArthur*
- "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." -- *John Quincy Adams*
- "This will remain the land of the free so long as it is the home of the brave." -- *Elmer Davis, WWII Director of U.S. Office of War*
- "When the will defies fear, when duty throws the gauntlet down to fate, when honor scorns to compromise with death -- that is heroism." -- *Robert Green Ingersoll, The Great Agnostic*
- "Word to the Nation: Guard zealously your right to serve in the Armed Forces, for without them, there will be no other rights to guard." -- *President John F. Kennedy*

- "The object of war is not to die for your country but to make the other bastard die for his." -- *Gen. George S. Patton*
- "No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks." -- *James Allen, British Philosophical Writer*
- "A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself." -- *Joseph Campbell, American Mythologist*
- "The brave die never, though they sleep in dust: Their courage nerves a thousand living men." -- *Minot J. Savage, American Unitarian Minister*
- "We sleep safely at night because rough men stand ready to visit violence on those who would harm us." -- *Winston S. Churchill*
- "America without her Soldiers would be like God without His angels." -- *Claudia Pemberton, Military Writers Association Of America.*
- "War is too important to be left to the generals" -- *Georges Clémenceau, French Politician*
- "What counts is not necessarily the size of the dog in the fight -- it's the size of the fight in the dog." -- *Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower*
- "For what avail the plough or sail, or land or life, if freedom fail?" -- *Ralph Waldo Emerson*
- "The patriot's blood is the seed of freedom's tree." -- *Thomas Campbell, Scottish Poet*
- "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." -- *Nathan Hale*
- "America is hope. It is compassion. It is excellence. It is valor." -- *Paul Tsongas, American Politician*
- "These fallen heroes represent the character of a nation who has a long history of patriotism and honor -- and a nation who has fought many battles to keep our country free from threats of terror." -- *Michael N. Castle, American Politician*
- "True patriotism isn't cheap. It's about taking on a fair share of the burden of keeping America going." -- *Robert Reich, American Political Commentor*
- "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." -- *Winston Churchill, 1940*

[Source: NavyTimes | Mark Faram |April 6, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Security Force Assistance Brigades ► \$5K Bonus for Participants

The U.S. Army is authorizing \$5,000 bonuses to woo top-performing troops into a new training brigade as the service once famous for shouldering the burden of America's wars works to meet the growing demand for advisers in places ranging from Iraq and Syria to Afghanistan and Africa. The plan recognizes the new reality of America at war: Army soldiers are more often training and building local security forces rather than doing the fighting for them on foreign soil. It replaces what has been a hodgepodge of programs over the past dozen years with projections for five new, permanent, fully-trained brigades that can be deployed around the world as professional advisers. "It's a recognition that this is an enduring requirement for the conventional Army," Gen. Robert Abrams, head of U.S. Army Forces Command, told The Associated Press in an interview. "Most times we're falling in on existing institutions that are probably failing, and bringing them up to a certain competency level so they can secure themselves. And we've got to be able to do that on a large scale."

The new program and its signing bonuses also illustrate how the Trump administration has endorsed the Obama administration's emphasis on working "by, with and through" local forces. That policy emerged from the deadly and tumultuous years after the 2003 Iraq invasion, when as many as 160,000 American troops were on the ground

battling insurgents while struggling to transform a rag-tag mix of often ethnically-opposed Iraqi troops into a functioning fighting force. U.S. troops left Iraq in 2011. Less than three years later, the Iraqi security forces largely collapsed as Islamic State militants seized control of large swaths of territory. U.S. troops then returned to Iraq, training, advising and enabling the Iraqis to oust IS from the country.

The \$5,000 bonus got final authorization on 3 MAY and is expected to be available beginning in June. The Army has chosen a colonel to lead the first training brigade and he will travel to a number of military posts in the coming weeks to recruit soldiers for the unit. Joining is strictly voluntary. Since it's a new program, Abrams acknowledged some soldiers may be reluctant to shift away from current career paths by taking a chance on something they fear may fail or lose support over time. "There is natural apprehension in the field: 'Is this a flash in the pan?' It's not a flash in the pan," Abrams said. "The chief is committed and the Army senior leadership is committed, I'm committed. This is going to be an enduring capability." The challenge, he said, is getting mid-grade non-commissioned officers to sign up. That's where the bonus will help.

Of the 529 soldiers in the brigade, 360 will be officers who don't qualify for the bonus. The rest will be enlisted soldiers and non-commissioned officers who can earn the extra money. The objective is to fix some problems created by the current training programs. In Iraq and Afghanistan, chunks of combat brigades have been deployed to serve as trainers and advisers to local forces, often leaving the remainder of their units back at home. Right now, for example, portions of three brigades are in Afghanistan and Iraq. "It separates the leaders from those they lead, and it degrades (unit) readiness significantly," Abrams said, adding that Army leaders have expressed frustrations over breaking units apart to staff the mission.

The plan calls for a military assistance training academy to be created at Fort Benning, Georgia. About 90 civilian and military staff members are being recruited. The first class will begin in October. Members of what is being called the new Security Force Assistance Brigade will go through a training course of six-to-eight weeks. Almost 200 will receive 16 weeks of intensive language instruction. Others will get an eight-week language course.

The first brigade could be ready to deploy by the end of 2018, Abrams said, but there has been no decision on where they will go. Iraq and Afghanistan are the most likely locations, he said. As more brigades are created, they would deploy to other areas of the world. While the Army initially conceived of one base in each geographical military command around the globe, it's more likely they'll simply be sent where most needed. The Army will select soldiers for the second brigade in about a year. All five brigades will be created by 2022. [Source: Associated Press | Lolita C. Baldor | May 4, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Navy LCS Program Update 02 ► HASC Praises Frigate Delay**

The Navy's decision to slow down its LCS frigate program is "reassuring," the chairman of the House seapower subcommittee said yesterday evening. Delaying contract award from 2019 to 2020 gives the service more time to do "due diligence" on the designs, Rep. Rob Wittman told reporters after a hearing on the Littoral Combat Ship. The extra time not only reduces the risk of mistakes that would require costly rework, Wittman went on: It also gives the Navy and the shipyards to fully explore options such as heavier armament — potentially including heavy-duty Vertical Launch System missile tubes. While there are other launchers, VLS accommodates not only the Navy's largest missiles but also the widest variety of weapons, from anti-aircraft to anti-submarine, from missile defense to land attack.

"It's reassuring in the sense that we want to make sure that we go through the proper due diligence," Wittman said of the delay. "(We need) a good discourse between Congress, the industry, and the Navy about what's the requirement... so I have no problem with taking a little bit of additional time. That way, Wittman went on, "when we go to award and construction starts, design's gonna be mature, we truly understand the requirements set, all the

competitors understand what the needs are and how they can put out their proposals there, and we end up with the best decision.”



**LCS-3 Fort Worth, the monohull variant built by Marinette.**

Just two weeks ago, the Government Accountability Office, Congress’s watchdog, issued an updated argument that the Navy was moving too fast to upgrade the current, controversial LCS to a frigate and urged a year’s delay. Yesterday, the head of the LCS program, Rear Adm. John Neagley, and the Navy’s director of surface warfare, Rear Adm. Ronald Boxall, told Wittman’s subcommittee that the frigate contract would now be awarded in 2020 — a year later than the Navy had been shooting for. “The specifics on that will come out when we come out with the budget, but we are now focused on a 2020 contract award for a future frigate,” Boxall confirmed to reporters after the hearing. “That’s what the work of the team is shooting for. That’s our goal.”

Does the additional time mean options like the Vertical Launch System — originally ruled out by the task force that developed the frigate concept — are now back on the table? “All that is kind of in play right now,” Boxall said. “All those are in the (process of) look at what we’d like to have vs. what we think we need vs. what we can afford.” “You can drive yourself nuts on all the things you’d like to have,” Boxall warned. “We don’t want this to become ... untenable.”

Boxall only mentioned VLS once during the hearing, specifically in the context of anti-ship weapons. The competition to add an Over The Horizon missile to both the current LCS and the frigate envisions a relatively small weapon fired from a launcher mounted on the deck, but what about a VLS option? “If we choose to go with a vertically launched system that could take any other longer-ranged missile of the future, that would be a bonus if you will, it would increase the flexibility to adapt to future weapons, but from an anti-surface standpoint that is not one of the focuses of this team at this time,” Boxall told the subcommittee. (Emphasis ours). “Most of the efforts we’re looking at right now is focused on the survivability aspects, (especially) improving the air defense capability.” (What he didn’t mention was that the Navy’s most powerful air defense missiles are all fired from, you guessed it, VLS).

That said, Boxall made clear that the Navy is now reexamining options initially ruled out for the frigate by the Small Surface Combatant Task Force back in 2014. Under orders from then-Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, the task force faced a tight timeline to come up with a more powerful ship that still met strict cost constraints. As a result, said Boxall, “it was... reactive in nature (and) we made some assumptions then that weren’t exactly right.” The new Frigate Requirement Evaluation Team, by contrast, is operating on a less cramped schedule and without a predetermined cap on what its proposed ship should cost. That allows it to consider a greater breadth of options in greater depth. In particular, Boxall said, the 2014 task force didn’t get as much information as desired on alternative foreign designs, something the new effort hopes to correct. The task force also didn’t consider the sensor, electronic warfare, and networking requirements of the Navy’s Distributed Lethality concept, which was only rolled out in January 2015.

Distributed Lethality envisions LCS — and indeed every vessel from aircraft carriers to cargo ships — as armed nodes in a fleet-wide network. Under DL, a ship should be able to take targeting data from aircraft, satellites, and other ships in order to strike targets its own radar cannot see. That kind of high-tech, high-intensity battle is considerably more complex and lethal than the auxiliary roles for which the original LCS was built: hunting submarines, clearing mines, and defeating fast attack boats. “They’re looking a little bit differently about how it operates,” Wittman told reporters. “It’s going to be a lot of different mission sets, and it’s going to operate in an anti-access environment.” That is, the frigate will have to go against the layered defenses of long-range missiles, aircraft, submarines, and ships that Russia, China, and to a lesser degree Iran are building to keep US forces at a distance. “Where’s there going to be anti-access, we need to make sure that it has the ability to self-defend and the ability also to engage (offensively),” Wittman went on. “The Navy in its whole concept of distributed lethality will have to look very carefully at what you can efficiently deploy on board this platform.”

“Vertical launch tubes (and) SM-2 missiles” — which are fired from VLS — are options Wittman wants the Navy to consider for the frigate, he said. While the frigate doesn’t need the full-up Aegis air and missile defense system installed on much larger cruisers and destroyers, he said, it needs to be able to connect to Aegis ships, receive targeting data, and fire at enemies threatening the entire fleet, not just in its immediate vicinity. “That’s the whole concept of distributed lethality,” he said. “Without having to put an Aegis system on board, you actually get a lot of capability in that ship if you’re able to do that.”

How much is Wittman willing to pay for that capability? “I don’t have a particular target in mind,” he said. The frigate needs to stay “significantly less expensive than a destroyer” — the current LCS costs about \$550 million, an Arleigh Burke destroyer \$1.8 billion, three times as much — so the Navy can afford them in large numbers, he said. If the frigate capable enough, he added, he could see the Navy ultimately buying more LCS variants potentially than the 52 envisioned in the current Force Structure Assessment. “I’d like to see first of all what the Navy comes back to us with a requirement set,” Wittman said. “That then can drive the discussion about what do we actually see price-wise, what do we think can be realistically and efficiently delivered with that requirement set.” [Source: Defense One | Patrick Tucker | April 11, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **GBU-38 GPS-Guided Bomb ► Added to the Reaper Drone Force**

The Air Force has added the Joint Direct Attack Munition (GBU-38) a 500 lb GPS-guided bomb, to the Reaper drone force, dropping the first one in a combat strike in Operation Inherent Resolve on 4 MAY Lt. Col. David \_\_\_ , director of the Creech Wing Operations Center, said in a Friday morning interview that the weapon had been used for the first time roughly a week after a final test drop. (We were allowed to quote him on the condition we didn’t publish his last name). Col. Case Cunningham, the 432 Wing Commander here, tweeted 5 MAY that the strike was an “historic milestone.” This expands the aircraft’s weapons mix of Hellfire missiles and GBU-12 Paveway II bombs. The use of the JDAM marks a potentially important expansion of the drone’s combat capability, pushing it closer to the weapons mix — though not the capacity — of a so-called fast mover fighter like the F-16 or F-15.



**MQ-9 Reaper with GBU-38 JDAMs loaded.**

GBU-38 can be either guided to the target or dropped on pre-programmed coordinates. The Paveway is guided to the target. Given the great and recent expansion in the use of the Reaper for danger-close Close Air Support (CAS) missions in Syria and Iraq, adding another guided munition to the mix should increase the ability to strike better protected targets and keep collateral damage to buildings and people as low as possible. In Libya, some 70 percent of the Reaper strikes were danger-close, meaning US, allied and coalition forces were so close together any strike carries with it a higher chance of killing or wounding friendly forces, Lt. Col. David noted. [Source: Breaking Defense | Colin Clark | May 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **National Anthem Update 04 ► Refusal to Stand When Played**

Football player Colin Kaepernick’s playbook may direct him not to stand for the National Anthem but his playbook does not supersede Navy Regs. On 19 SEP 2016, Petty Officer 2nd Class Janaye Ervin, an eight-year veteran and an Intelligence Specialist in the Naval Reserves refused to stand for the National Anthem during morning colors while on reserve duty at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii. She claimed she was trying to make a statement about the persecution of blacks in America, the International Business Times reported. “I just didn’t want to stand at that moment,” Ervin said. “I can’t stand for this song knowing that the song isn’t for me, being black. The song doesn’t represent me at all. To be honest, I never really thought about the flag my entire life, I had no reason to. It’s just a flag.”



The next day, Ervin was read her rights before being given a warning about potentially compromising her security clearance — one that she needed for both her civilian and military jobs. Within 24 hours, she was stripped of her clearance and escorted out of her secure workplace. Ervin claimed she wasn’t informed which order she was violating. It was the 10th general order for sentries, which is taught in Navy boot camp. You memorize the 11 general orders until they are burned into your brain. Violation of any one of them is subject to Article 92 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice and is subject to whatever punishment is decided by court-martial. That’s how the military works, and for good reason. Everyone knows it going in.

PopularMilitary.com reported on 22 SEP, Ervin decided to go public. She posted to Facebook on 21 SEP, “The Navy has decided to punish me for defending the Constitution and has taken away my equipment I need to do my Naval job.” In her statement, she goes on to say that “ I made the conscious decision to not stand for the Star Spangled Banner because I feel like a hypocrite, singing about “land of the free” when, I know that only applies to some Americans. I will gladly stand again, when ALL AMERICANS are afforded the same freedom.”

The Washington Post reported that a petition was started to keep black service members out of jail for refusing to stand for the national anthem. While the U.S. Navy was not pursuing charges, they did not have much to say on the matter. A Navy Reserve Forces spokesperson said only that “Petty Officer Janaye Ervin has fulfilled her obligation of enlistment and was honorably discharged from the United States Navy.” When you’re a sailor, the



Navy is your boss. You may disagree with the rules all you want, but you never, never break them.. [Source: Conservative Tribune | Shari Savage | December 30, 2016 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **USMC Recruitment Update 01 ► Targeting Highly Motivated Women**

Most Marine Corps recruiting commercials have not shown female Marines fighting – until now. The latest commercial “Battle Up” shows the evolution of a female Marine, starting when she is a young girl stopping bullies at school, through her days as a rugby player and ultimately as a convoy commander, leading her Marines as they fight through an ambush. It ends showing her as a vet helping the homeless. “Marines don’t back down from a fight – whether personal, in combat, or when confronted with injustice; Marines fight and win the battles they face throughout their lives,” Marine Corps Recruiting Command spokesman Lt. Col. John Caldwell said in a news release.

The new commercial comes after female poolers and recruits told market researchers between that there was a disparity between how male and female Marines were depicted in recruiting material, Jonathan Chavez, co-founder and chief analytics officer with the analytics company Social Sphere, told Marine Corps Times in April 2016. “One of the things that we heard in particular is that depictions of females up to that point in Marine Corps advertising had largely depicted females in training environments,” Chavez said. “Male advertising — or general market advertising — also featured Marines actually in service, in fleet, doing their jobs.” “Battle Up” makes clear that the Marines are looking for fighters, and that includes highly motivated women.

“No one knows where it comes from; why some have it and some don’t: It’s the fighting spirit, and it needs to be fed,” a narrator says in a voice-over. “It consumes fear, self-doubt and weakness. It stands ready to protect those in danger and to fight whatever shape the battle takes.” Capt. Erin Demchko, who plays the convoy commander in the commercial, has served on a Female Engagement Team in Afghanistan, a Defense Department news story says. Her awards include the Combat Action Ribbon. “I fight every day to sharpen my mind, strengthen my body, and to take care of the Marines to my right and left,” Demchko said in the news release. “My fighting spirit is the continuous drive that I have to accomplish my mission.” [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Jeff Schogol | May 12, 2017++]

**\* Military History \***



## **WWII Dresden Bombing ► 8,000 Tons of Bombs in 8 Raids**

The bombing of Dresden was a British/American aerial bombing attack on the city of Dresden, the capital of the German state of Saxony, that took place during the Second World War in the European Theatre. In four raids between 13 and 15 February 1945, 722 heavy bombers of the British Royal Air Force (RAF) and 527 of the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) dropped more than 3,900 tons of high-explosive bombs and incendiary devices on the city. The bombing and the resulting firestorm destroyed over 1,600 acres of the city centre. An estimated 22,700

to 25,000 people were killed, although inflated casualty figures have been claimed over the years. Three more USAAF air raids followed, two occurring on 2 MAR aimed at the city's railroad marshaling yard and one small raid on 17 April aimed at industrial areas.



Immediate German propaganda claims following the attacks and post-war discussions on whether the attacks were justified has led to the bombing becoming one of the moral causes célèbres of the war. A 1953 United States Air Force report defended the operation as the justified bombing of a strategic target, which they noted was a major rail transport and communication centre, housing 110 factories and 50,000 workers in support of the German war effort. Several researchers have asserted that not all of the communications infrastructure, such as the bridges, was targeted, nor were the extensive industrial areas outside the city centre. Critics of the bombing have claimed that Dresden was a cultural landmark of little or no strategic significance, and that the attacks were indiscriminate area bombing and not proportionate to the commensurate military gains.

Dresden's air defenses had been depleted by the need for more weaponry to fight the Red Army, and the city lost its last heavy flak battery in January 1945. By this point in the war, the Luftwaffe was seriously hampered by a shortage of both pilots and aircraft fuel; the German radar system had also been degraded, lowering the warning time to prepare for air attacks. The RAF also had an advantage over the Germans in the field of electronic radar countermeasures. Of a total of 796 British bombers that participated in the 14 FEB 1945 raid, six bombers were lost, three of those hit by bombs dropped by aircraft flying over them. On the following day, a single US bomber was shot down, as the large escort force was able to prevent Luftwaffe day fighters from disrupting the attack.

In all there were 8 raids on the city during the period 7 OCT 1944 thru 17 April 1945 that dropped a total of 8,000 tons of high explosive and incendiary bombs. Large variations in the claimed death toll have fueled the controversy. In March 1945, the German government ordered its press to publish a falsified casualty figure of 200,000 for the Dresden raids, and death toll estimates as high as 500,000 have been given. The city authorities at the time estimated no more than 25,000 victims, a figure that subsequent investigations supported, including a 2010

study commissioned by the city council. [Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombing\\_of\\_Dresden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombing_of_Dresden) | May 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Operation Union II ► Vietnam Search & Destroy Mission**

Operation Union II was a military operation that took place in the Vietnam War. It was a search and destroy mission in the Que Son Valley carried out by the 5th Marine Regiment. Launched on May 26, 1967, the operation ended 5 JUN. It was a bloody 10-day battle that resulted in 594 NVA killed and 23 captured, while U.S. casualties were 110 killed and 241 wounded.

The Que Son Valley is located along the border of Quang Nam and Quang Tin Provinces in South Vietnam's I Corps. Populous and rice-rich, the valley was viewed as one of the keys to controlling South Vietnam's five Northern provinces by the communists and by early 1967 at least two regiments of the 2nd Division of the People's Army of Vietnam had been infiltrated into the area. The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines (1/5) and 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines (3/5), experienced units that had fought in Vietnam since their arrival in the summer of 1966, were assigned to the valley in 1967 to support the outnumbered the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) forces in the area.

From 21 APR to 16 MAY, the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines had fought the PAVN 21st Regiment near the Marine outpost on Loc Son Mountain for control of the southern part of the Que Son Valley. Operation Union II was launched on 26 MAY to destroy the withdrawing remnants of the PAVN with a helicopter assault by the U.S. 5th Marine Regiment, commanded by Col. Kenneth Houghton. The assault was coordinated with ground attacks by the 6th ARVN Regiment and the 1st ARVN Ranger Group.

The operational plan called for 1/5, commanded by Lt. Col. Hilgartner, to establish blocking positions in the western portion of the valley while the 3/5, commanded by Lt. Col. Esslinger, was to make a helicopter assault into the southern part of the valley and sweep northeast. At the same time, the three battalions of the ARVN Ranger Group would attack southwest from Thang Binh, while two units of the 6th ARVN Regiment attacked northwest from a position near Tam Ky. The ARVN named their part of the operation Lien Kit 106.

The operation began the morning of the 26th with the 1/5 and ARVN troop movements proceeding as planned. 3/5, composed of three infantry companies, one weapons company, and a command group, was carried by helicopters to Landing Zone Eagle, an area five kilometers east of the Loc Son outpost. The first two waves to arrive at the landing zone (LZ) experienced only light small arms fire, but as the bulk of the battalion landed, the LZ was subjected to heavy weapon and mortar fire. An attack by Lima and Mike Companies launched to relieve the pressure on the LZ found a well-entrenched PAVN (NVA) force, identified as being elements of the PAVN 3rd Regiment, northeast of the landing zone.

Supported by artillery and air strikes, India Company enveloped the PAVN's flank, and the Marines soon gained the upper hand. By the late afternoon, the Marines had overrun the last PAVN positions, counting PAVN 118 dead for a Marine loss of 38 killed and 82 wounded. The Marine and ARVN forces swept the area for the next three days but contacts declined as the PAVN withdrew from the area. Concluding that the enemy had been routed, the ARVN ended their part of the operation.

Col. Houghton, however, was not convinced and responding to intelligence reports he directed the 5th Marines to continue sweeping the region. On the morning of 2 JUN, the Regiment was sweeping toward the Vinh Huy Village complex. 3rd Battalion 1st Marines encountered 200 PAVN troops entrenched 1,000 meters east of the scene of the May 26th battle, engaging and overrunning the PAVN by 1:30 that afternoon. At the same time the 1st Battalion, pushing forward to relieve pressure on the 3rd, was ambushed by PAVN troops while crossing a 1,000-meter-wide rice paddy. Caught in a crossfire the Marines were pinned down and consolidated their positions while calling artillery and air strikes on enemy positions. During heavy fighting Foxtrot Company, commanded by Capt. James A.

Graham, was decimated. Capt. Graham was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor for defending to the last his company's dead and wounded.

At 2 p.m. Col. Houghton, commander of 1/5 called for the commitment of the First Marine Divisions Reserve "Bald Eagle Reactionary Force," a battalion sized reactionary force unit made up of three different companies from different battalions, commanded by Lt. Col. Mallett C. Jackson Jr., the Battalion Commander of 2/5, to include Jackson's own Echo Co. 2/5; Delta Co. 1/7; and Echo Co. 2/7. At 7 p.m., in total darkness, the Bald Eagle Reactionary Force units of E-2/5 and D-1/7 were inserted by helicopter northeast of the fortified enemy positions and quickly moved south to engage the (NVA) PAVN's left flank positions in order to relieve battle pressure on the 5th Marine units of 1/5, 2/5, and 3/5, that were now pinned down by a large entrenched NVA force.

The Bald Eagle Reactionary Force companies of Echo 2/5 and Delta 1/7 quickly moved forward and were soon hit with heavy automatic weapons fire and heavy barrages of large 82 mm high explosive mortar rounds by the well-entrenched NVA enemy force. It was only when E-2/5 and D-1/7 came under attack that Lt. Col. Mallett C. Jackson Jr. and his S-3 Operations Officer, Maj. Richard Esau who were together in a fighting hole in the middle of this attack when word came over the command radio, that the pressure had been taken off the pinned down companies of the 5th Marines. Delta Company 1/7 had taken many casualties and their 2nd Platoon Commander, Lt. David Harris radioed requests for medevac choppers, but all requests were denied because of the extreme darkness.

In desperation, Lt. Harris repeatedly called out several SOS's and MAYDAY's for an emergency medevac on the radio. Quickly the voice of Capt. N.J. Chilewski, the pilot of a large CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopter that had just dropped off the Bald Eagle Reactionary Force Marines of Echo 2/7 at the original landing zone, had taken off and now was flying at an altitude of 2,000 feet. His reply back was "Of course we would" and with the help of a D-1/7 strobe light, the chopper was guided into the landing zone directly in the middle of the battlefield. The Marines with life-threatening wounds were loaded aboard the chopper and were flown back to the hospital for medical treatment. When the chopper returned to its Da Nang Airbase, it was noted that the chopper had received a total of 57 holes in its sides from the exploding mortar rounds and automatic weapons fire during the battlefield landing.

Later Col. Hilgartner described the insertion of the Bald Eagle Division Reactionary Force, led by Lt. Col. Mallett C. Jackson as crucial and helped change the dynamic in favor of the Marine. The sudden presence of the strong Division Reactionary Force on its northern flank caused the NVA (AVN) units to disengage and make a hasty withdrawal to the southwest, but the move proved costly to them. Once the NVA (PAVN) soldiers left the protection of their fortifications, they were easy targets for the Marines supporting arms fire. The action of June 2 - 3 marked the last significant battle of Operation Union II.

Total enemy casualties were 701 killed and 23 captured, a favorable ratio to 110 Marines killed and 241 wounded. For actions in both Union I and Union II the 5th Marines and all units under its operational control, including the division reactionary force companies of Delta Company 1/7 Marines and Echo 2/7 Marines received the Presidential Unit Citation for its actions during Operation Union II.

The unwelcome discovery of a strong enemy force on its northern flank prompted the PAVN forces to attempt a hasty withdrawal during the night, exposing themselves to Marine supporting arms fire. Meanwhile, the 5th Marines regrouped and evacuated casualties. The Marines themselves suffered 71 killed and 139 wounded in the battle. The following morning, when the battalions swept the battle area, 476 PAVN dead were counted in and around the contested rice paddy and its formidable hedgerow complex. 31 weapons were captured. Leaving a rear guard to slow pursuit, the main body of the PAVN withdrew rapidly, escaping to rearm and refit, a process that would eventually allow them to launch new attacks in September. However, for three months, the PAVN 2nd Division was no longer an effective fighting force. The entire 5th Regiment received the Presidential Unit Citation (US) awarded by President Lyndon Johnson. [Source: Together We Served Newsletter | April 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Battle of Los Angeles ► February 25, 1942

In the early morning hours of February 25, 1942, the city of Los Angeles found itself in the grip of a mass panic. Spurred on by reports of a Japanese air raid, local military units sounded warning sirens, ordered a mass blackout and lit up the sky with machine gun fire and over 1,400 anti-aircraft shells. The so-called "Battle of Los Angeles" would eventually drag on for several terrifying hours, yet when the guns finally fell silent, no evidence of an enemy attack was found. Military brass chalked the false alarm up to "jittery nerves" caused by the bombing of Pearl Harbor, but it remains one of the most mysterious chapters of World War II.

In the frantic weeks that followed the Pearl Harbor attack, many Americans believed that enemy raids on the continental United States were imminent. On December 9, 1941, unsubstantiated reports of approaching aircraft had caused a minor invasion panic in New York City and sent stock prices tumbling. On the West Coast, inexperienced pilots and radar men had mistaken fishing boats, logs and even whales for Japanese warships and submarines. Tensions were high, and they only grew after U.S. Secretary of War Henry Stimson warned that American cities should be prepared to accept "occasional blows" from enemy forces. Just a few days later on February 23, 1942, a Japanese submarine surfaced off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, and hurled over a dozen artillery shells at an oil field and refinery. While the attack inflicted no casualties and caused only minor damage, it marked the first time that the mainland United States had been bombed during World War II.

The day after the oil field raid, paranoia and itchy trigger fingers combined to produce one of the most unusual home front incidents of the war. It began on the evening of February 24, 1942, when naval intelligence instructed units on the California coast to steel themselves for a potential Japanese attack. All remained calm for the next few hours, but shortly after 2 a.m. on February 25, military radar picked up what appeared to be an enemy contact some 120 miles west of Los Angeles. Air raid sirens sounded and a citywide blackout was put into effect. Within minutes, troops had manned anti-aircraft guns and begun sweeping the skies with searchlights.



It was just after 3 a.m. when the shooting started. Following reports of an unidentified object in the skies, troops in Santa Monica unleashed a barrage of anti-aircraft and .50 caliber machine gun fire. Before long, many of the city's other coastal defense weapons had joined in. "Powerful searchlights from countless stations stabbed the sky with brilliant probing fingers," the Los Angeles Times wrote, "while anti-aircraft batteries dotted the heavens with beautiful, if sinister, orange bursts of shrapnel." Chaos reigned over the next several minutes. It appeared that Los Angeles was under attack, yet many of those who looked skyward saw nothing but smoke and the glare of ack-ack fire. "Imagination could have easily disclosed many shapes in the sky in the midst of that weird symphony of noise and color," Coastal Artillery Corps Colonel John G. Murphy later wrote. "But cold detachment disclosed no planes of any type in the sky - friendly or enemy."

For others, however, the threat appeared to be very real. Reports poured in from across the city describing Japanese aircraft flying in formation, bombs falling and enemy paratroopers. There was even a claim of a Japanese plane crash landing in the streets of Hollywood. "I could barely see the planes, but they were up there all right," a

coastal artilleryman named Charles Patrick later wrote in a letter. "I could see six planes, and shells were bursting all around them. Naturally, all of us fellows were anxious to get our two cents' worth in and, when the command came, everybody cheered like a son of a gun." The barrage eventually continued for over an hour. By the time a final "all-clear" order was given later that morning, Los Angeles' artillery batteries had pumped over 1,400 rounds of anti-aircraft ammunition into the sky.

It was only in the light of day that the American military units made a puzzling discovery: there appeared to have been no enemy attack. "Although reports were conflicting and every effort is being made to ascertain the facts, it is clear that no bombs were dropped and no planes were shot down," read a statement from the Army's Western Defense Command.

Ironically, the only damage during the "battle" had come from friendly fire. Anti-aircraft shrapnel rained down across the city, shattering windows and ripping through buildings. One dud careened into a Long Beach golf course, and several residents had their homes partially destroyed by 3-inch artillery shells. While there were no serious injuries from the shootout, it was reported that at least five people had died as a result of heart attacks and car accidents that occurred during the extended blackout. In a preview of the hysteria that would soon accompany the Japanese internment, authorities also arrested some 20 Japanese-Americans for allegedly trying to signal the nonexistent aircraft.

Over the next few days, government and media outlets issued contradictory reports on what later became known as the "Battle of Los Angeles." Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox dismissed the firefight as a false alarm brought on by "jittery nerves," but Secretary of War Henry Stimson echoed Army brass in saying that at least 15 planes had buzzed the city. He even advanced the provocative theory that the phantom fighters might have been commercial aircraft "operated by enemy agents" hoping to strike fear into the public. Stimson later backpedaled his claims, but there was still the matter of the thousands of military personnel and civilians who claimed to have seen aircraft in the skies over L.A. According to an editorial in the New York Times, some eyewitnesses had spied "a big floating object resembling a balloon," while others had spotted anywhere from one plane to several dozen. "The more the whole incident of the early morning of Feb. 25 in the Los Angeles district is examined," the article read, "the more incredible it becomes."

What caused the shootout over Los Angeles? The Japanese military later claimed it had never flown aircraft over the city during World War II, providing fuel for a host of bizarre theories involving government conspiracies and visits by flying saucers and extra terrestrials. Still, the most logical explanation for the firefight is that trigger-happy servicemen and rudimentary radar systems combined to produce a false alarm. In 1983, the Office of Air Force History outlined the events of the L.A. air raid and noted that meteorological balloons had been released prior to the barrage to help determine wind conditions. Their lights and silver color could have been what first triggered the alerts. Once the shooting began, the disorienting combination of searchlights, smoke and anti-aircraft flak might have led gunners to believe they were firing on enemy planes even though none were actually present.

While it's likely that the Battle of Los Angeles was only a mirage, it was still a chilling reminder of the vulnerability that many Americans felt at the beginning of World War II. The Japanese would later hatch several schemes to attack the American mainland - including launching over 9,000 explosives-laden "fire balloons" - yet none of them ever produced the level of mass hysteria that accompanied the phantom shootout over Los Angeles. Even at the time, many journalists noted that it was fitting that the incident had taken place in the home of the film industry. In an article from March 1942, the New York Times wrote that as the "world's preeminent fabricator of make-believe," Hollywood appeared to have played host to a battle that was "just another illusion." To view a video on the alleged attack refer to <https://youtu.be/VujrBpvLqko>. [Source: Together we Served Newsletter | April 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Battle of Cowpens ► January 17, 1781

On the early morning of January 17, 1781, in South Carolina, American troops under Brigadier General Daniel Morgan defeated a force under British Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton in one of the more decisive victories for the Americans in the south during the Revolutionary War. In late 1780, the American commander-in-chief of the southern theater, Nathanael Greene, made the daring decision to split his already limited number of troops in the face of a superior force under British Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis. Accordingly, part of Greene's force was given to Daniel Morgan. The British saw Morgan's troops as a threat to some crucial posts, so Cornwallis sent troops under up-and-coming commander Banastre Tarleton to take on Morgan.

When word reached Morgan of Tarleton's approach, he decided to face his enemy in a cow pasture called Cowpens rather than risk being overrun while trying to cross the Broad River. Knowing Tarleton favored frontal attacks, Morgan deployed his infantry troops into three lines - meant to exhaust the energy and resources of the British - with his dragoons positioned in reserve behind the third line. When Tarleton's men arrived, they were met by fire from riflemen in Morgan's first line, who after a few shots withdrew to join the second line, composed of militia. Morgan had instructed the militia to fire two volleys at the approaching British and then retire, which they did. Seeing the American militia appearing to flee, Tarleton sent dragoons after them, but they were met by the American dragoons, led by Lieutenant Colonel William Washington.



The British infantry had been stunned by the fire from the American's first two lines and now faced the third line, predominately composed of experienced Continental troops overseen by Lieutenant Colonel John Howard. Meanwhile, Tarleton sent his reserve infantry and additional dragoons to try to outflank their opponents on the Americans' right. The Americans on that side were commanded to turn to face the British, but the order was misunderstood, and they instead began marching to the rear, triggering a retreat in neighboring parts of the line. The confusion was corrected, however, and they turned to face the British in time. Those Americans were joined in the fight by the militia of the first and second lines, who had circled around the back of the American position.

Morgan's near-genius plan worked, and the Americans decimated the British. Although the two forces were relatively evenly matched, with roughly 1,000 men each, the British sustained 110 killed and 830 captured or wounded, while the Americans had 12 killed and 61 wounded. The battle wiped out nearly all of Tarleton's force, striking a serious blow to Cornwallis's army. [Source: Together We Served | April 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **U.S. Invasion of Britain ► John Paul Jones | Didn't Go Well**

After midnight, the 30 men began paddling the two miles to shore. Then the wind died, and just before sunup, Capt. John Paul Jones set foot once more on Whitehaven, the first and only time American forces ever attacked the British Isles. Jones - the Revolutionary War hero most famous for the vow "I have not yet begun to fight!" - had grown up there, on the west coast of England. He was an apprentice at sea by age 13, and captain of a merchant vessel at 21. By 23, he'd escaped British authorities who wanted him for murder. By 30, he commanded The Ranger and her crew of 140 American sailors. The ship's mission: antagonize the British. The Ranger launched from New England in 1777 to deliver news of the British surrender at Saratoga to France with hopes the victory would persuade King Louis XVI to lend troops to the cause of American liberty.

On the voyage, The Ranger sunk a brig loaded with flax seed, a schooner with barley and oats and a merchant sloop from Dublin filled with beer. On clear days, Jones sailed along the friendly French coasts of the English Channel. Spoiling for a fight, he sailed into the Irish Sea. That's where he hatched his plan to take the American Revolution to Britain's shores. He summoned all hands to hear his scheme. The Ranger under the cover of darkness would anchor at sea and launch two dinghies into Whitehaven harbor, where 200 odd ships sat docked at low tide. One crew would storm the British garrison nearby and spike the cannons. The other would set fire to the ships and the town. Both boats would slip back into the water before sunrise. The British, already fighting an unpopular war, would finally feel the cost at home, Jones told the crew, which he later recounted in his journals. Immediately, his top lieutenants protested. Ezra Green, the surgeon on board, argued, "Nothing could be got by burning poor people's property," he wrote in his diary.

Jones, who is buried in an elaborate crypt on the campus of the U.S. Naval Academy, was not a particularly popular captain. He'd once flogged a sailor so brutally, the man died weeks later. In Tobago in 1772, he shot a mutineering crewman, and ran away to his home in Fredericksburg, Va., to avoid a trial. He spent the day on board The Ranger pressing 30 men - none of them his top lieutenants - into the raid. The boats launched at 3 a.m., April 23, 1778, and landed two hours later. Jones insisted he be the first ashore. In the name of the United States Navy, he'd invade his hometown.

Jones' crew took the British fort without incident, wrote local newspaper The Cumberland Chronicle and Whitehaven Public Advertiser. The second boat, sent to the harbor to raze the ships, veered off course. The men from the second dinghy broke into a tavern. When Jones arrived, they were already drunk, and staggered back aboard their boat. One crewman, Daniel Freeman, escaped his comrades and ran through the village to alert the fire brigade of the impending destruction. The groggy-eyed townspeople of Whitehaven surrounded the docks where a coal ship smoldered, the only boat ablaze in the harbor. Jones posted guards at the end the dock, and threw extra "candles," pine cones covered with canvas, soaked in brimstone and set alight, in the cargo hold. If the coal caught fire, it would spread, Jones wrote in his journal. He stood with his pistol drawn at the dock as the crew piled into the dinghy and paddled in the morning daylight to the awaiting Ranger, taking cannon fire from townspeople while in retreat.

"The fire on board [. . .] was speedily extinguished, without damaging any other vessel; thus were the malicious attempts of those daring Incendiaries frustrated," wrote Lloyd's Evening-Post newspaper. The raid was a failure intolerable to Jones. He sailed The Ranger north to Selkirk, home of the local lord whom he planned to kidnap,



drafted a smaller posse of sober crewmen and rushed ashore before noon the same day. But Lord Selkirk was neither important - Jones had confused him with another British nobleman - nor home. Instead the crew was greeted by a pregnant Lady Selkirk, who calmly handed over the estate's silver and tea set. The raid and kidnapping plot were failures so grand that Jones narrowly avoided a mutiny, Green documented in his diary.

But the operations ravaged public opinion of the war in Britain, according to Tim McGrath, a revolutionary war naval historian and author of "Give Me a Fast Ship: The Continental Navy and America's Revolution at Sea." British generals assured Parliament the British mainland was safe from the likes of France and Spain, McGrath said. Then some pesky American buccaneer landed in England. "The papers were furious," McGrath said. The London Public Advertiser and London Public Chronicle published illustrations of Jones, who stood barely 5-foot-5, as a hulking Blackbeard-esque pirate. "This guy came to shore," McGrath said. "There's a lot of angst in the newspapers of 'What the hell are we doing?' The act itself didn't help win the war, but the reaction helped end the war." [Source: The Washington Post | Jacob Bogage Published | May 6, 2017++]

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Military History Anniversaries ► 16 thru 31 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 16 thru 31 MAY"**. [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | May 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Medal Of Honor Story ► Kettles~Charles | Vietnam**



Go to [https://youtu.be/a8qeU\\_neQ7o](https://youtu.be/a8qeU_neQ7o) to listen to President Obama MOH awardee Florent A. Groberg recount the actions of Lt. Col. Charles Kettles in Korea during an emergency extraction rescue operation in the Song Tra Cau riverbed Battle. [Source: The American Legion | April 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Medal of Honor Citations ► Finn, John William | WWII



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

**John William Finn**

**Rank and organization:** Lieutenant, U.S. Navy

**Place and date:** Naval Air Station, Kaneohe Bay, Territory of Hawaii, 7 December 1941

**Entered service:** California July 1926

**Born:** 23 July 1909 Compton California

### *Citation*

For extraordinary heroism distinguished service, and devotion above and beyond the call of duty. During the first attack by Japanese airplanes on the Naval Air Station, Kaneohe Bay, on 7 December 1941, Lt. Finn promptly secured and manned a .50-caliber machinegun mounted on an instruction stand in a completely exposed section of the parking ramp, which was under heavy enemy machinegun strafing fire. Although painfully wounded many times, he continued to man this gun and to return the enemy's fire vigorously and with telling effect throughout the enemy strafing and bombing attacks and with complete disregard for his own personal safety. It was only by specific orders that he was persuaded to leave his post to seek medical attention. Following first aid treatment, although obviously suffering much pain and moving with great difficulty, he returned to the squadron area and actively supervised the rearming of returning planes. His extraordinary heroism and conduct in this action were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.



Finn dropped out of school after the seventh grade. He enlisted in the Navy in July 1926, shortly before his seventeenth birthday, and completed recruit training in San Diego. After a brief stint with a ceremonial guard company, he attended General Aviation Utilities Training at Naval Station Great Lakes, graduating in December. By April 1927 he was back in the San Diego area, having been assigned to Naval Air Station North Island. He initially worked in aircraft repair before becoming an aviation ordnanceman and working on anti-aircraft guns. He then served on a series of ships: the USS Lexington (CV-2), the USS Houston (CA-30), the USS Jason (AC-12), the USS Saratoga (CV-3), and the USS Cincinnati (CL-6).

He continued to serve in the Navy and in 1942 was commissioned an ensign. In 1947 he was reverted to chief petty officer, eventually rising to lieutenant before his 1956 retirement. In his later years he made many appearances at events celebrating veterans. At the time of his death, Finn was the oldest living Medal of Honor recipient and the last living recipient from the attack on Pearl Harbor. From 1956 until shortly before his death, Finn resided on a 90-acre ranch in Live Oak Springs, near Pine Valley, California. He and his wife became foster parents to five Native American children, causing him to be embraced by the Campo Band of Diegueño Mission Indians, a tribe of Kumeyaay people in San Diego. His wife, Alice Finn, died in 1998. John Finn was a member of the John Birch Society.

In his retirement he made many appearances at events honoring veterans. On 25 March 2009, he attended National Medal of Honor Day ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery. With the aid of walking sticks, he stood beside U.S. President Barack Obama during a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Later that day, Finn was a guest at the White House. It was his first visit to the White House, and his first time meeting a sitting President. On June 27, 2009, a crowd of over 2,000 made up of family, friends and well-wishers came to Pine Valley to celebrate Finn's 100th birthday. The Association of Aviation Ordnancemen presented him with an American flag which had flown on each of the 11 aircraft carriers then in active service. When called a hero during a 2009 interview Finn responded: *That damned hero stuff is a bunch [of] crap, I guess. [...] You gotta understand that there's all kinds of heroes, but they never get a chance to be in a hero's position.*

Finn died at age 100 on the morning of 27 May 2010, at the Chula Vista Veterans Home. He was buried besides his wife at the Campo Indian Reservation's cemetery, after a memorial service in El Cajon. He was the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient from the attack on Pearl Harbor, the oldest living recipient, and the only aviation ordnanceman to have ever received the medal. He was also awarded a Purple Heart, Navy Unit Commendation, Good Conduct Medal with two bars, Yangtze Service Medal, American Defense Service Medal, American Campaign Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, and a World War II Victory Medal

The headquarters building for Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Force, United States Pacific Fleet at Marine Corps Base Hawaii Kaneohe was named in Finn's honor, and in 2009 a boat used to bring visitors to the USS Arizona Memorial was also named after him. In that same year, part of Historic U.S. Route 80, was named "John Finn Route". Three buildings in the former Naval Training Center San Diego were named the John and Alice Finn Office Plaza. On 15 February 2012, the U.S. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus announced that an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer would be named the USS John Finn (DDG-113) in his honor. [Source: <http://www.history.army.mil/moh> | May 2017 ++]

**\* Health Care \***



## **TRICARE Nexium Coverage ► Will Cease 29 JUN**

Starting on June 28, 2017, TRICARE will no longer include the drug Nexium in the preferred, or formulary, drug list, and it will no longer be available in military hospitals and clinics. In order to prepare for the change, patients are currently being asked to switch to one of the following three preferred alternatives that have been shown to demonstrate effective results.

- Omeprazole
- Pantoprazole
- Rabeprazole

Your doctor may determine that the preferred alternatives are not right for you and that Nexium is medically necessary. To be medically necessary means it is appropriate, reasonable, and adequate for your condition.. In those cases, TRICARE will continue to cover the cost of Nexium, minus the \$20 copay for a 90-day supply of home delivery and \$24 copay for a 30-day supply via a retail outlet. Your doctor must submit a prior authorization and a reason why it is medically necessary via the Express Scripts doctor line in order for you to fill your prescription. For patients who continue to use Nexium with a prior authorization but WITHOUT a doctor's medical necessity determination, the non-formulary copay cost will be \$49 for a 90-day supply via home pharmacy delivery or \$50 for a 30-day supply via a retail outlet.

Nexium is a popular drug to treat gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). GERD is a chronic digestive disease, which occurs when stomach acid flows back into the esophagus (or food pipe). This acid irritates the lining of the esophagus which over time can lead to GERD. Many people can make lifestyle changes and take over-the-counter medication to manage their GERD symptoms. Other people need stronger medicine to reduce symptoms. Proton pump inhibitors (PPI) is the drug class used to treat GERD. PPIs decrease the amount of acid created in the stomach and relieve GERD symptoms. The drugs also work to heal previous acid damage to the stomach and esophagus.

The Military Health System is committed to supporting the health and well-being of all beneficiaries. For more information regarding the PPI alternatives please visit the National Institutes of Health's MedlinePlus website <https://medlineplus.gov>. For more information regarding brand, generic drugs and which drugs are on TRICARE's formulary list please visit the TRICARE website [https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Pharmacy?sc\\_database=web](https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/Pharmacy?sc_database=web). [Source: TRICARE Communication | May 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **TRICARE Preventive Health Program Update 06 ► Expanded Services**

Preventive health care is an effective way to protect your health. It helps find problems early so you can make changes or get treatment, if needed. TRICARE Standard recently expanded the preventive care services available at no additional cost. They include:

- One yearly Health Promotion and Disease Prevention exam (when received in connection with a covered cancer screening or immunization)
- Yearly well-woman exams for women under age 65, which may be performed separately from a vaccine or cancer screening.
- BRCA1 or BRCA2 genetic counseling and testing for women identified at high risk (by their primary care managers) for breast cancer.

- Stool DNA tests and computed tomographic (CT) colonography for colorectal cancer screening.
- Other cancer screenings that occur during any covered office visit, including testicular, mouth and pharyngeal, skin and thyroid cancer screenings.
- Other screenings and services when done during a covered Health Promotion and Disease Prevention exam, when beneficiaries meet designated criteria. These include prenatal screenings and screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), osteoporosis, rubella antibodies, hepatitis B, hepatitis C and tuberculosis, as well as intensive behavioral counseling for STIs.

The new policy removes age limits for covered school physicals. Also, Pap tests are now covered beginning at age 21, rather than age 18, in accordance with U.S. Preventive Services Task Force guidance. Learn more about covered preventative health services online at [www.tricare.mil/healthwellness/preventive](http://www.tricare.mil/healthwellness/preventive) . [Source: TRICARE Health Matters | Issue 1 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Healthy Mouth Movement ► Free Vet Dental 24 JUN

Aspen Dental dentists and teams are pleased to bring free dental care to veterans nationwide once again on 24 JUN. Nearly 450 Aspen Dental offices in 35 states will open their doors to serve veterans in their local communities as part of the Healthy Mouth Movement, a community giving initiative. Interested veterans should call 844-ASPEN-HMM to find a participating Aspen Dental office and schedule an appointment in advance. Advance appointments are required. During appointments on 24 JUN, volunteer dentists and teams will focus on treating the most urgent need of each veteran by providing free services – including fillings, extractions and basic denture repair – to help get them out of dental pain.

Last year, Aspen Dental dentists and teams from Maine to Washington - and hundreds of practices in between - volunteered their time and talents to give back to veterans in their communities on one big Day of Service on Saturday, June 25. As part of the Healthy Mouth Movement, this marked the third annual Day of Service where nearly 400 participating Aspen Dental offices donated more than \$2.1 million dollars in dentistry in one single day – empowering more than 4,000 veterans with a healthy smile. For more information on Aspen Dental's Day of Service refer to <https://www.aspendental.com/about/healthy-mouth-movement?platform=hootsuite>.



[Source: Department of Consumer & Veterans Services | Marti Ryan | May 12, 2017 +]

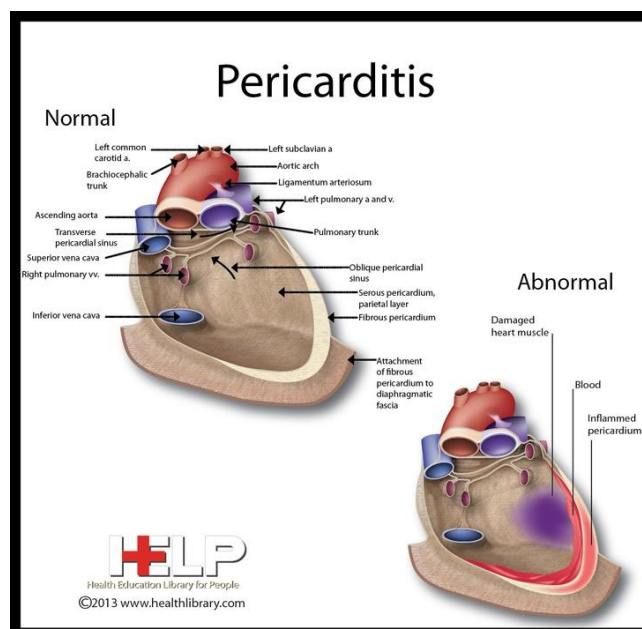
\*\*\*\*\*

## Pericarditis ► Smallpox Vaccine Side Effect

A recent investigation has revealed that the federal government is refusing to compensate some veterans who suffered debilitating side effects from the smallpox vaccine they said they were forced to get during their time in uniform. Smallpox was eradicated in 1977 and routine vaccinations ended a few years later. After the September 11 attacks, the federal government began inoculating some volunteer first responders and active duty military. The Department of Veterans Affairs says between 2002 and 2008, 1.7 million service members were vaccinated with ACAM2000 (smallpox vaccination).

"When I first started having symptoms from the small pox vaccine, they told me it was heartburn," Kelly said. "And it wasn't one of those things where I'd say, 'I don't want to go out on patrol because I have heartburn.'" Kelly was a machine gun section leader for the Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment – a group of men trained to be tough. "I got tightness in my chest, I chalked it up to heartburn and took my omeprazole and went on my way," Military records document Kelly's complaints of chest tightness, which was described as heartburn. He didn't know at the time that chest pain is a possible side effect of the small pox vaccine. It wasn't until years later that Kelly said he made the connection. "It all clicked," he said. "I said, 'Something is wrong. It's been wrong this whole time. And my wife said, 'You need to go to the hospital.'"

Kelly was diagnosed with Pericarditis, or inflammation of the pericardium (the fibrous sac surrounding the heart). It is a documented side effect of the smallpox vaccine. He couldn't work and spent weeks in the hospital. He said he filed for VA benefits for a vaccine-related injury and was denied. In 2008, ACAM2000 replaced the aging Dryvax supply and the remaining Dryvax vials were destroyed. The warning label on ACAM2000 lists Myocarditis and Pericarditis as a possible side effect. When the VA was asked how many veterans have received benefits from vaccine-related injuries, the VA said: "We have no tracking mechanism for injuries due to smallpox (or any other) vaccination." The VA did provide the number of veterans granted or denied benefits for Pericarditis and Cardiomyopathy. Between 2007 and April of 2017, more than half of all claims for those two conditions were denied.



Symptoms typically include sudden onset of sharp chest pain. The pain may also be felt in the shoulders, neck, or back. It is typically better sitting up and worse with lying down or breathing deep. Other symptoms may include fever, weakness, palpitations, and shortness of breath. Occasionally onset of symptoms is gradual. The cause of pericarditis is believed to be most often due to a viral infection. Other causes include bacterial infections such as tuberculosis, uremic pericarditis, following a heart attack, cancer, autoimmune disorders, and chest trauma. The cause often remains unknown. Diagnosis is based on the chest pain, a pericardial rub, specific electrocardiogram (ECG) changes, and fluid around the heart. Other conditions that may produce similar symptoms include a heart attack.

Treatment in most cases is with NSAIDs and possibly colchicine. Steroids may be used if those are not appropriate. Typically symptoms improve in a few days to weeks but can occasionally last months. Complications can include cardiac tamponade, myocarditis, and constrictive pericarditis. It is a less common cause of chest pain. About 3 per 10,000 people are affected per year. Those most commonly affected are males between the ages of 20 and 50. Up to 30% of those affected have more than one episode. [Source: <http://veteranprograms.com> | U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | May 8, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Hepatitis C Update 01 ► Over 80,000 Patients – 90% Cure Rate**

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month and VA has made great progress in testing, treating, and curing hepatitis C (Hep C) for Veterans enrolled in VA health care. As of December 2016, 75 percent of VA's patients born between 1945 and 1965, (a group shown to have higher rates of Hep C) had been tested. And 98 percent of all Veterans tested have had reflex confirmatory testing performed on those results, an important step. These are far better rates than any other large health care organization in the U.S. VA has also treated more patients for hepatitis C than any other health care system in the U.S. and in almost all other countries. Since the availability of all oral antiviral treatments in 2014 through January 2017, they treated over 80,000 patients with cure rates over 90 percent. They are continuing to treat approximately 2,000 Veterans each month. As of December 31, 2016, there were approximately 64,000 Veterans with Hep C in VA care who are potentially eligible for treatment.

VA wants to reach those patients and get them treatment as quickly as possible. VA also estimates that as many as 30 percent of those Veterans in VA healthcare who are still awaiting treatment are not currently willing or able to initiate treatment. Their offices are focusing on outreach to bring these patients in for testing and treatment. In March, VA launched a national advertising campaign to increase efforts in local areas that had the highest numbers of Veterans that need treatment. These advertisements feature four Veterans who have been cured of Hep C and want to pass along the importance of testing and treatment. VA will continue to promote hepatitis C testing and treatment for Veterans. If you or a Veteran you know needs treatment, please contact your local VA. You can locate one using <https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp>. If you are not sure if you are eligible for VA services, contact VA benefits via <http://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits>. [Source: VAntage Point Blog Update | Elizabeth Maguire | May 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **New Smiles for Vets ► Dental Care for Vets Organization**

The Daily Herald in Utah reports Vietnam veteran Dennis Matthews recently launched a non-profit organization to help veterans get dental care. New Smiles for Veterans (<http://www.newsmilesforveterans.org>) began in November with the goal of getting dentists to "adopt" one veteran a month. The Department of Veterans Affairs provides limited dental care to veterans unless they are rated at 100% disabled. "Eligibility and benefits for Veteran Dental Care are limited by law and categorized into VA dental classifications or classes," according to the VA. "If you are a

Veteran who has recently served (e.g. OEF/OIF/OND), you may be entitled to a one-time course of free dental care, but you must apply for dental care within 180 days of your discharge (under conditions other than dishonorable) from a period of active duty of 90 days or more.

Matthews is now partnered with 30 dentists in Utah and has helped 35 veterans so far. One dentist, Dr. Nathan Huntington from Huntington Dental in Mount Pleasant, Utah, told the Daily Herald his involvement was “a great way to help out and use my services to give back” to veterans. Matthews said he plans to keep growing his organization through Utah, and hopefully beyond. “Most of these veterans I talk to are very moved, very emotional about it,” Matthews said. “It’s a good service to them, so I’m going to keep working on it. I’m looking for funds and I’m looking for more dentists.” To submit for assistance go to the website above and send an email message on its contact page. You will be contacted and ultimately be required to submit:

- What service where you in.
- Your Discharge Papers.
- Your DD214.
- Any Other Veterans Identification from the V.A.
- Your address, phone number, what time they can contact you, and
- What dental work is needed..

Currently New Smiles for Veterans is only accepting applications in Utah, but soon will be expanding into other U.S States. [Source: MilitaryTimes| Rachael Kalinyak | May 2, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Medical Devices ► Cybersecurity Risks

More and more medical devices are getting more sophisticated and connected to each other through the internet, hospital networks, other medical devices and smartphones. While “smart” health information technology helps improve patient care and reduces errors, it comes with cybersecurity risks that could affect the safety and security of your medical device. Cybersecurity issues have been found in certain medical devices according the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) confirming that some medical devices can be at risk for cybersecurity intrusions and exploits.



The FDA recommends that medical device manufacturers identify any risks or hazards and find ways to mitigate any issues their medical devices may have, including cybersecurity risks. Health care facilities and hospitals should evaluate their network security and protect their hospital systems. In a recent case where cybersecurity risk was confirmed in a medical device, a software patch was created to address the vulnerability, and health care providers were encouraged to remind patients to keep their device connected so that it could maintain the latest software and



updates. In addition to keeping them connected, there are other ways to be smart in using and securing your medical devices.

- Before you even go home with your device, be sure to talk to your doctor and address any concerns you may have.
- Make sure that the device works properly and that you know how to use it. This includes knowing how to configure your device so that it is secure as possible.
- Be aware if your medical device uses radio frequency, then common household devices like computers or cell phones may interfere with the device's signal and its ability to work properly.
- If your device connects to wireless networks, make sure yours has a strong, unique password and don't share it. Do not connect your device to public Wi-Fi.
- When you are in public places with your medical device, make sure that you maintain physical control over it.
- If you have cybersecurity issues with your device, report them to your provider.
- If you no longer need your medical device, then delete all the information you have stored on it before getting rid of it, where applicable.

For more tips on how to be cyberfit learn more at <https://tricare.mil/cyberfit>. [Source: TRICARE Communications | May 11, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **TRICARE Podcast 396 ► Nexium | Babies & DEERS | NAL**

**Nexium Coverage** -- Starting on June 28th, 2017, TRICARE will no longer include the drug Nexium in the preferred, or formulary, drug list, and it will no longer be available in military hospitals and clinics. In order to prepare for the change, patients are currently being asked to switch to three preferred alternatives that have been shown to demonstrate effective results. They are: Omeprazole, Pantoprazole and Rabeprazole. Your doctor may determine that the preferred alternatives are not right for you and that Nexium is medically necessary. In those cases, TRICARE will continue to cover the cost of Nexium, minus the \$20 copay for a 90-day supply of home delivery and \$24 copay for a 30-day supply via a retail outlet. Visit [www.TRICARE.mil/medicalnecessity](http://www.TRICARE.mil/medicalnecessity) for more information. The Military Health System is committed to supporting the health and well-being of all beneficiaries. For more information regarding the alternatives please visit the National Institutes of Health's MedlinePlus website at [www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov). And for more information about the TRICARE Pharmacy Program, visit [www.TRICARE.mil/pharmacy](http://www.TRICARE.mil/pharmacy) ..

**-o-o-O-o-o-**

**Babies & Updating DEERS**-- Welcoming a new child into your family is an exciting time. Here are a few important reminders about the steps you must take within a year to ensure TRICARE coverage for your child. First, you must register your child in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System or DEERS. You can do this at any ID card-issuing facility. A birth certificate, certificate of live birth, or adoption papers are required. And while a Social Security number is not required to register your child in DEERS, you will need to update the DEERS record as soon as you get it. Only a sponsor, or a sponsor-appointed individual with valid power of attorney, can add family members in DEERS. Visit [www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsi](http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsi) to find a uniformed services ID card-issuing facility near you.

Once your child is enrolled in DEERS, you can also enroll your child in a TRICARE Prime option if he or she is eligible. To do this, call your regional contractor, enroll online using Beneficiary Web Enrollment or submit the TRICARE Prime enrollment form to your regional contractor. If you do not enroll your newborn or newly adopted child in a TRICARE Prime option prior to day 61, he or she will be covered under TRICARE Standard and

TRICARE Extra. If your child is not registered in DEERS within one year after the date of birth or adoption, DEERS will show "loss of eligibility," and your child will lose all TRICARE coverage until he or she is registered in DEERS. Visit [www.TRICARE.mil/baby](http://www.TRICARE.mil/baby) for more information.

**-0-0-0-0-0-**

**Calling the Nurse Advise Line** -- It's midnight, your spouse is deployed and your toddler's fever is rising. The last thing you want to do is load your other sleeping children into the car for a long night in the ER. Should you wait it out until morning? Give another dose of fever reducing medication? Thanks to the Nurse Advice Line, that medical professional is just a phone call away. Registered nurses, including pediatric nurses, help stateside TRICARE beneficiaries decide what course of action they should take. When you call the NAL at 1-800-TRICARE, option 1, the nurse will: check your DEERS eligibility, ask questions about your medical situation and assess if you need to see a health care provider. They will also determine what level of care is best. Please remember that for the nurse to assess a beneficiary's medical condition, the beneficiary will need to be present either on the phone or with the parent or caregiver. The NAL is available to all TRICARE beneficiaries in the U.S., except those enrolled in US Family Health Plan. Beneficiaries who live overseas can call the NAL for health care advice while traveling in the U.S., but must coordinate care with their Overseas Regional Call Center.

**-0-0-0-0-0-**

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> | May 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **TRICARE Podcast 397** ► **Urgent Care | Webiner | Medical Devices**

**Emergency & Urgent Care** -- When you're sick or in pain, it can be hard to determine the level of care you need. In those moments, you need to decide whether to go to an emergency room, an urgent care center, or to schedule an appointment with your primary care manager and the best way travel there. If a condition threatens to your life, limb or eyesight, it's an emergency and a trip to the emergency room is necessary. Examples of medical emergencies include the inability to breathe, severe bleeding, spinal cord injury or psychiatric emergencies. If you feel as though you are experiencing an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. In an emergency you might need emergency transportation, either by land or by air. TRICARE covers the following ambulance transfers:

- Emergency transfers to or from your home, accident scene or other location to a hospital, and transfers between hospitals;
- Ambulance transfers from a hospital-based emergency room to a hospital more capable of providing the required care and
- Transfers between a hospital or skilled nursing facility and another hospital-based or freestanding outpatient therapeutic or diagnostic department or facility

If you or someone else calls an ambulance on your behalf, TRICARE pays if you are transported to a hospital. TRICARE also covers medically necessary air evacuations to take patients to the closest, safest location that can provide the required care when:

- An ambulance is unable to reach you
- The nearest facility is far away or there are other obstacles
- You must be seen quickly for your medical condition or
- You can't safely receive the care you need in your location

If you feel your situation is urgent, but not an emergency, make sure to learn about our options for urgent care at [www.TRICARE.mil/urgent](http://www.TRICARE.mil/urgent) And to learn more about Emergency and Urgent Care, air evacuations and coverage costs visit [www.TRICARE.mil](http://www.TRICARE.mil) .

**-o-o-O-o-o-**

**TRICARE Tools Webiner** -- Did you know TRICARE offers you tools to help you get the most out of your benefit? TRICARE and Military OneSource are hosting a webinar to discuss TRICARE tools and how you can best use them. Join us on Monday, May 15th from 1 pm to 2 pm Eastern Standard Time, to learn about TRICARE tools and ask questions. These tools let you: update contact information, enroll a family member and schedule a next day appointment. To register, visit [www.militaryonesource.mil/social](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/social) and click on “Webinars”. Registration is on a first-come, first-served basis and is limited due to system capacity. Participants must avoid sharing personal health information when asking a question.

**o-o-O-o-o-**

**Securing Your Medical Device** -- Medical devices are getting more sophisticated and connected to each other through the internet, hospital networks, other medical devices and smartphones. While “smart” health information technology helps improve patient care and reduces errors, it comes with cybersecurity risks that could affect the safety and security of your medical device. There are several ways to be smart in using and securing your medical devices. Before you even go home with your device, be sure to talk to your doctor and address any concerns you may have. Make sure that the device works properly and that you know how to use it. This includes knowing how to configure your device so that it is secure as possible. Be aware if your medical device uses radio frequency. Common household devices like computers or cell phones may interfere with the device’s signal and its ability to work properly. And if your device connects to wireless networks, make sure yours has a strong, unique password and don’t share it. Do not connect your device to public Wi-Fi. Finally, if you no longer need your medical device, delete all the information you have stored on it before getting rid of it. Want more tips on how to be cyberfit? Learn more at [www.TRICARE.mil/cyberfit](http://www.TRICARE.mil/cyberfit).

**-o-o-O-o-o-**

The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | May 5, 2017 ++]

**\* Finances \***



## **FBI IC3** ► **How to File an Internet Crime Complaint**

Have you received any email from anyone alleging to know you and requesting a favor of a financial nature. If so, report it to the FBI's Internet Crime complaint Center (IC3) at <https://www.ic3.gov/default.aspx>. The IC3 accepts

online Internet crime complaints from either the actual victim or from a third party to the complainant. They can best process your complaint if they receive accurate and complete information from you. Therefore, they request you provide the following information when filing a complaint:

- Victim's name, address, telephone, and email
- Financial transaction information (e.g., account information, transaction date and amount, who received the money)
- Subject's name, address, telephone, email, website, and IP address
- Specific details on how you were victimized
- Email header(s)
- Any other relevant information you believe is necessary to support your complaint

To File a Complaint go to <https://www.ic3.gov/complaint/default.aspx>. You can also use this site to submit a suspected terrorism or threat complaint with the FBI or a complaint with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).

Internet crime includes any illegal activity involving one or more components of the Internet, such as websites, chat rooms, and/or email. Internet crime involves the use of the Internet to communicate false or fraudulent representations to consumers. These crimes may include, but are not limited to, advance-fee schemes, non-delivery of goods or services, computer hacking, or employment/business opportunity schemes. Trained analysts at the IC3 review and research the complaints, disseminating information to the appropriate federal, state, local, or international law enforcement or regulatory agencies for criminal, civil, or administrative action, as appropriate. The IC3 does not conduct investigations and, therefore, is not able to provide the investigative status of a previously filed complaint. Investigation and prosecution is at the discretion of the receiving agencies. Once a complaint has been filed with the IC3, it cannot be canceled.

Internet crime schemes that steal millions of dollars each year from victims continue to plague the Internet through various methods. For preventative measures that will assist you in being informed prior to entering into transactions over the Internet refer to <https://www.ic3.gov/preventiontips.aspx>. [Source: RAO Subic | May 7, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Homeowners Insurance Update 02 ► Credit Score Impact Growing**

Your credit scores don't just play a role in the interest rates you get on loans. They can also affect your insurance rates — and that impact appears to be growing. A particular type of credit score influenced homeowners insurance premiums to a larger degree last year, the most recent InsuranceQuotes study of the impact found. It's called a "credit-based insurance score." The study found that, on average, Americans with a fair credit-based insurance score paid 36 percent more for home insurance in 2016 than Americans with excellent scores. That was up from the 32 percent more in 2015 and 29 percent more in 2014 found by previous studies.

Americans with a poor credit-based insurance score paid 114 percent more than Americans with excellent scores in 2016. That was up from 100 percent in 2015 and 91 percent in 2014. As with other types of insurance, these increases vary from state to state. But the study report notes: "... it would appear that insurers are placing an increasingly greater emphasis on credit-based insurance scores in setting homeowner premiums. Credit-based insurance scores are used by insurance companies to determine how likely folks are to file a claim, according to the study. The study is based on data from consumers' credit reports maintained by the three national credit reporting agencies — Equifax, Experian and TransUnion). That data can include:

- Outstanding debt

- Length of credit history
- Late payments
- Collections
- Bankruptcies
- New applications for credit

The InsuranceQuotes study emphasizes that insurance companies use credit-based insurance scores differently. So one insurer might give more weight to your credit history than another insurer. Amy Bach, executive director of the consumer advocacy group United Policyholders, tells InsuranceQuotes:

*“If you ask your insurance agent how they calculate your insurance-based credit score in figuring out your homeowner premium, he’s not going to have any idea. Nine times out of 10 they won’t have a clue what that algorithm is ...”*

Nonetheless, Lamont Boyd of credit scoring company Fair Isaac Corp., or FICO, tells InsuranceQuotes that improving your credit-based insurance score is not unlike improving more well-known credit scores. That means paying credit card bills on time and keeping your card balances low, for example. Low balances are necessary for a good credit utilization ratio — the amount of money you owe compared with the amount of credit you have. As we explain in “Boost Your Credit Score Fast With These 7 Moves,” 30 percent of a FICO credit score is based on utilization ratio. Low balances are necessary for a good credit utilization ratio — the amount of money you owe compared with the amount of credit you have. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | May 11, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Dumb Insurance** ► Identity Theft, Credit Life, Cellphone & Travel

Insurance, at its best, helps protect against events that could send your finances into a death spiral. Crucial products include insurance against serious car crashes, the loss of or damage to a home, and the loss of income due to death or disability. Other products? Many offer little value, or they’re filled with exclusions and caveats. Following are some potentially dumb insurance buys:

🌐 **Identity theft insurance** -- Federal law limits your liability from credit card fraud, so even if a thief uses your credit card, you’re off the hook if you report theft promptly. Says [the Federal Trade Commission](#): Your liability for unauthorized use of your credit card is limited to \$50. If you report the loss to the credit card company before your credit card is used, you are not responsible for any unauthorized use. Most card companies go a step further and offer \$0 fraud liability. Report an ATM card missing within two business days after you realize it’s gone, and you are liable for no more than \$50 in stolen money. Wait longer to report, and you could be responsible for up to \$500 in purchases. If you let 60 days go by after your bank sends a statement with unauthorized purchases, you could face unlimited liability, the FTC says.



In 2014, only 14 percent of identity theft victims paid \$1 or more out-of-pocket, says a U.S. Department of Justice report. “Of these victims, about half suffered losses of less than \$100,” it says. Repairing your credit and damage to your identity, on the other hand, can be time-consuming and costly. The National Association of Insurance Commissioners says: Identity theft insurance provides coverage for the cost of reclaiming your financial identity, such as the costs of making phone calls, making copies, mailing documents, taking time off from work without pay (lost wages) and hiring an attorney. Identity theft insurance may cover those costs. Or it may not. Policies vary. Questions to ask: Can you recover lost wages from time away from work? What will the company do to reclaim your identity for you? Read the exclusions, limits and deductibles to decide if a policy is worth it.

**Alternative:** Protect yourself before you’re hit. Monitor your bank and credit accounts regularly. Get three free annual credit reports. If you think your identity has been compromised, place a 90-day fraud alert on your credit file. Follow the guidelines not at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/10-ways-to-protect-yourself-against-identity-theft>.

☉ **Cellphone insurance** -- In speaking about cellphone insurance, Stacy Johnson says, “If your phone is super expensive and you’re super likely to lose it, it could be worth it.” However, if your problem is a tendency to drop your phone, you could instead invest about \$10 to get a shatterproof cellphone screen cover — essentially tempered glass that is very difficult to break. So, unless you tend to drop your phone in water, you probably don’t need insurance, according to [iGrad.com](http://iGrad.com). The average cost is around \$5 a month and there is usually a fairly high deductible. If you’re still interested, check first to see whether your phone has a warranty and what it covers, and make the decision from there. For more detail on this subject, see “[Why Cellphone Insurance Is Not Worth the Cost](#),” which illustrates that in some cases, premiums and deductibles are greater than the cost of replacing the phone.

☉ **Credit life insurance** -- You may be offered credit life insurance when you obtain a car loan or a mortgage. It pays all or part of your loan balance if you die. The beneficiary is your lender, not your family. Occasionally, it is built into the loan and can’t be declined. Most often, though, it is a separate and optional purchase. The Federal Trade Commission warns consumers to beware of lenders slipping it into a purchase without asking. That’s illegal. The FTC advises borrowers to resist lenders’ sales pressure. You can’t be denied credit for declining optional credit insurance. If someone tries, report them to your state attorney general ([find yours here](#)) or state insurance commissioner ([click your state](#) on the map or select it from the drop-down menu). You may encounter other types of credit insurance:

- **Credit disability (or accident and health):** It covers loan payments if you can’t work because you are sick, injured or disabled.
- **Involuntary unemployment (or loss of income):** It covers loan payments if you are out of work involuntarily — a layoff or termination, for instance.
- **Credit property:** It protects the property you used to secure the loan — your home, for example, in the case of a mortgage — against damage, loss in an accident, disaster or theft.

The value of these products depends on the price and your situation. Is your job insecure, for example? Is your health or mobility at risk? Also, does it really make all of your payments or only partial ones?

**Alternative:** Compare the price of term life insurance. “Regular term life insurance is usually much cheaper in the long run,” says Money Talks News founder Stacy Johnson. Also, you may be able to get disability insurance through your workplace.

☉ **Travel insurance** -- Travel insurance can be confusing. There’s protection against canceled trips, interrupted trips, medical expenses and many other risks. Policies vary in quality and in coverage. Some cover many eventualities; others insure against a single risk, like a medical evacuation. The New York Times recommends

a one-stop site, [InsureMyTrip](#), for policies, articles and detailed information about what products cover. [Travel Insured International](#) is another site for comparison shopping, Forbes says. Expect travel insurance to cost about 4 percent to 10 percent of the cost of the trip, depending on how comprehensive the plan is, says The Simple Dollar. It recommends six companies and urges readers to look for exclusions and loopholes in policies.

Travel insurance is a waste of money when:

- Your policy is riddled with exclusions.
- You choose a policy that doesn't cover the risks you are likely to encounter.
- You buy coverage for risks you aren't likely to encounter.
- You only stand to lose the cost of the airline ticket cancellation fee.

When is it worthwhile? Travel insurance makes sense if you anticipate unusual risks, beyond the broad fear that "anything could happen." Examples:

- The traveler, or a family member back home, is in precarious health or elderly and fragile.
- The trip involves a bigger-than-usual possibility of a major disruption — traveling in the tropics during hurricane season, for example, or visiting a country prone to political unrest.
- A hitch in child care arrangements could force you to cut short or cancel the trip.
- Airline connections are tight and missing one of them could set you up for significant costs.
- Prepaid trips where a big deposit is on the line.
- You'll just sleep better knowing you're covered and are happy to pay for peace of mind.

Another travel-related precaution: Medical and/or evacuation travel insurance:

- Medical insurance covers your care abroad when your medical plan doesn't. (Medicare, for one example, does not cover Americans outside of the United States.) First, call your medical plan to find out what it does and doesn't cover.
- Emergency evacuation coverage flies you home if medically necessary — a good idea if your trip entails risky activities (climbing or trekking, for instance) or if your health is fragile. But policies with lots of exceptions and exclusions may be a waste of money.

**Alternatives:** You may already be covered for some of these situations through your homeowners, life, auto or health insurance. Credit cards also may offer some forms of travel insurance, like lost luggage, theft and life coverage.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Marilyn Lewis and Hiram Reisner | April 30, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Federal Reserve ► Rates Remain | What It Means For You



The Federal Reserve announced 3 MAY it is leaving the benchmark federal funds rate right where it is — in a range between 0.75 and 1 percent. The Fed last raised rates in March, so today's inaction offers a bit of a breather between that rate hike and anticipated increases later in the year. If you have a mortgage, another loan or credit card debt, consider the Fed's pause as an opportunity to get your financial house in order before rates inevitably climb again.

Following are some key areas of your financial life that might feel the impact when interest rates resume their climb. We also suggest tips for blunting the impact of a rate hike so you can keep more money in your wallet.

### **Mortgages**

If you have an adjustable-rate mortgage — or are shopping for one — know that the monthly cost of these loans might rise once the Fed begins to hike rates again. An adjustable-rate mortgage is tied to an index, such as the London Interbank Offered Rate, more commonly known as Libor. When the Federal Reserve raises the federal funds rate, indexes such as Libor tend to follow suit. As the index climbs, so will the rate on your adjustable-rate mortgage — and the size of your monthly mortgage payment — the next time your loan is scheduled to “adjust.” If you are shopping for a fixed-rate mortgage, you also can expect rates to climb. Fixed-rate mortgages are not directly tied to the federal funds rate, but tend to follow the same direction over time.

If you already have a fixed-rate mortgage, you have no worries — your rate is locked in and will not change. The stable nature of a fixed-rate mortgage is one reason homeowners with adjustable-rate mortgages might consider refinancing now to a fixed-rate mortgage before rates resume their climb.

### **Other loans**

Interest rates for other types of loans, such as auto loans, might also be on the rise once the Fed resumes its rate hikes. There are two key actions you can take to minimize the cost of these loans:

- Consider refinancing to lower your interest rate while rates remain low.
- Pay off those loans as fast as possible.

Car loans are secured by putting your car up as collateral. Finding a lower rate can shave hundreds off the cost, so looking for the best deal is time well spent. Keep in mind that the longer the loan, the lower the monthly payments, but the more interest you’ll ultimately pay. When it comes to car loans, as well as many other types of loans, credit unions tend to have the lowest rates. Here are eight smart ways to pay off debt fast:

1. Stop using your cards -- If you really want to get out of debt, you will have to stop using your cards. The more you swipe, the more the balance climbs. Having a hard time letting go? Try freezing the cards in a cup of ice. By the time you are able to access them again, hopefully you’ve changed your mind. And if you feel as if you can’t afford to let go because of financial constraints, start by setting up a spending plan and building an emergency fund to get you through those tough situations without having to resort to debt.
2. Pay as much as you can afford each month -- Once you have an emergency fund intact, use any residual funds you have at your disposal to put toward debt, even if it’s only a few dollars. The more you pay, the faster you’ll get out of debt. Did you save money at the grocery store by stacking coupons with sales? Use the savings to pay off debt. Did you work some overtime last week? And if you find spare change lying around, use that as well.
3. Make cuts to your spending -- This may be tough to accomplish, as you’ll have to take a good look at where your money is going and separate the necessities from the mere wants. I’m not suggesting that you cut every single expense in the book by 75 percent, because your well-being is of the utmost importance. However, you can go without the daily trips to the local coffee shop or to your favorite lunch spot. Over time, these savings can add up and dig you out of the hole much quicker than you probably expected.
4. Double up on payments -- So you’ve paid off one credit card? Congratulations, but that doesn’t mean it’s party time. A small and reasonably priced reward for your accomplishment is OK, but you need to keep the momentum going by allocating those funds that are now freed up to the next balance in line.
5. Use nonrecurring sources of income to pay down balances -- As tempting as it is to use a source of nonrecurring income to buy something that you really want, bite the bullet and use a portion of the funds to pay off debt. Tax season is upon us, so here’s your opportunity if you will be receiving a refund. Or maybe you’re set to receive an inheritance? Be wise about where you spend your money; completely ignoring the debt to go on a shopping spree is definitely not a wise choice.



6. Freelance to earn extra money -- Do you have a talent or skill in an area that people would be willing to pay you for? Try your hand at freelancing to make a few dollars on the side. In some instances, you may be able to generate a substantial amount of cash, all of which should be contributed to the debt-payoff fund to move things right along, unless you are behind on your bills or you barely have enough money in your possession to meet your basic needs.

7. Tackle those debts with the highest interest rates first -- Although some prefer the debt snowball method — which suggests that you pay the debts with the lowest balances first to build momentum — it makes more financial sense to get those with the higher interest rates out of the way first. The ultimate goal is to pay off debt, however, so the choice is yours.

8. Don't sacrifice the things you love the most -- Paying off debt may require you to make a few lifestyle changes, but it doesn't have to be depressing. If you have a difficult time adjusting to new circumstances, implement gradual changes so the process won't become too overwhelming.

### **Credit card debt**

Unless you pay off your credit card bills in full every month and are certain you can continue doing so, now is the time to lower your borrowing costs. Most credit card interest rates are variable, meaning they go up and down along with interest rate trends as a whole. Again, take two key actions:

- Lower your interest rate — either by asking your current credit card company for a lower rate or finding a new card with a better rate.
- Pay off existing credit card debt ASAP.

According to a survey conducted by the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, 6 in 10 Americans don't shop their credit cards. Instead, they just take the one offered by their bank, or answer a direct mail ad. This is not the way to pick your plastic, because you could easily end up paying too much interest, or missing the opportunity for cash back or valuable rewards like free flights and hotels. Why leave serious money on the table? If you pay off your card every month, find one with rewards that match your lifestyle, or earn the most possible cash back. For a quick comparison of a few reward cards go to <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/credit-cards>. If you carry a balance, find the card with the lowest interest rate, or maybe one with a zero percent introductory rate. Card searches only take a few minutes and could mean hundreds more in rewards or hundreds less in interest. New cards and deals come out all the time, so once you've found that perfect plastic, do it again every few months!

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | May 3, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Loan Limits ► 2017**

The VA loan guaranty program does not impose a maximum amount that an eligible veteran may borrow using a VA loan but limits the maximum guaranty amount to \$424,100 for 2017. However, if you live in one of the counties listed at [http://www.military.com/money/va-loans/home-purchase/va-loan-limits-for-high-cost-counties.html?ESRC=navy-a\\_170503.nl](http://www.military.com/money/va-loans/home-purchase/va-loan-limits-for-high-cost-counties.html?ESRC=navy-a_170503.nl), follow the data on the chart to determine the VA's maximum guaranty amount for a particular county. These limits apply to all loans closed January 1, 2017 and afterwards.

### **Notes from the VA:**

- Lenders may make loans to veterans greater than the maximum county loan limit; however, lenders may require Veterans to make a down payment for the amount borrowed in excess of the applicable county loan limit.
- VA loan limits are based on county median home values reported by the Federal Housing Administration. These values are the basis for which VA calculates limits for their program. For 2017, some limits increased, some stayed the same and a few decreased.

- The maximum guaranty amount for loans over \$144,000 is 25 percent of the 2017 VA county loan limit shown below. Veterans with full entitlement available may borrow up to this limit and VA will guarantee 25 percent of the loan amount.
- If a Veteran has previously used entitlement that has not been restored, the maximum guaranty amount available to that Veteran must be reduced accordingly. Lenders should check their own investor requirements regarding guaranty amounts and down payments. Questions about VA loans in a particular county may be directed to the VA Regional Loan Center of jurisdiction.

**Regional loan center contact information:**

- *Cleveland* -- Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Regional Loan Center, 1240 East Ninth Street, Cleveland, OH 44199 <http://benefits.va.gov/cleveland/regional-loan-center.asp>
- *Denver* -- Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Regional Loan Center, 155 Van Gordon Street, Lakewood, CO 80228 (Mail: Box 25126, Denver, CO 80225 <http://www.benefits.va.gov/denver/regional-loan-center.asp>
- *Honolulu* -- Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Regional Office, Loan Guaranty Division (26), 459 Patterson Rd. Honolulu, HI 96819 \*Although not an RLC, this office is a fully functioning Loan Guaranty operation for Hawaii. <http://www.benefits.va.gov/honolulu/regional-loan-center.asp>
- *Phoenix* -- Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Regional Loan Center, 3333 N. Central Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85012-2402 <http://www.benefits.va.gov/phoenix/regional-loan-center.asp>
- *Roanoke* -- Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Regional Loan Center, 210 First Street, Roanoke, VA 24011 Mailing Address:, 116 N. Jefferson Street, Roanoke, VA 24016 <http://www.benefits.va.gov/roanoke/regional-loan-center.asp>
- *St. Paul* -- Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Regional Loan Center, 1 Federal Drive, Ft. Snelling., St. Paul, MN 55111 (Mail: P.O. Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731) <http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpaul/regional-loan-center.asp>
- *St. Petersburg* -- Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Regional Loan Center, 9500 Bay Pines Blvd., St. Petersburg, FL 33708 (Mail: P.O. Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731) <http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/regional-loan-center.asp>

[Source: Mlitary.com | May 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

**Gasoline Savings Update 03 ► U.S. Gas Tax Potential Increase**

President Donald Trump says he’s open to the idea of raising the U.S. gas tax and using the money for infrastructure improvements. “It’s something that I would certainly consider,” Trump said in an interview 1 MAY in the Oval Office with Bloomberg News. Trump said truckers support increasing the federal gas tax “if we earmarked money toward the highways,” according to Bloomberg. The federal per-gallon taxes of 18.4 cents on gasoline and 24.4 cents on diesel haven’t been raised since 1993, notes Bloomberg. But at least 40 states have hiked their fuel levies since then. Increasing the gas tax, or tying the rate to inflation, has historically been an idea opposed by Republicans, notes NBC News. White House communications director Sean Spicer says the president isn’t committing to a hike in the gas tax, but is simply keeping an open mind “out of respect” for trucking-industry interests, reports Bloomberg.



No matter how much you're forking over for a gallon of gas, there are ways to save money at the pump. For example, you may want to consider joining a warehouse club. In "5 Ways to Slash the Cost of Gas" found at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/5-ways-slash-the-cost-gas>. Money Talks News contributor Melissa Neiman writes: Warehouse clubs such as Costco, BJ's and Sam's Club all sell gas to members, and it is often — though not always — among the lowest-priced in town. Another easy way to save money at the pump is to pass up the premium gas. Get more information in "U.S. Drivers Waste Billions on Expensive Premium Gas" at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/drivers-waste-billions-expensive-premium-gas>.

Neiman also recommends using a smartphone app — like GasBuddy or GasGuru — to help you locate the cheapest gas station in town to fill up your car. Gas prices are as high as they've been in more than 19 months and projected to rise further due to the impending summer driving season, according to GasBuddy. But there is some good news. A recent study by the tech company found that you can save money by buying gas at the beginning of a week. Specifically, Monday offers the lowest average gas prices, while Thursday offers the highest, based on GasBuddy's analysis of three years of gas price data. As the company notes: *"To put the amount of savings into perspective: If every U.S. motorist bought gasoline on Thursday for an entire year, they'd collectively spend an extra \$1.1 billion versus filling up on Monday ..."*

The best day of the week for buying gas does vary from year to year and state to state. But the study concludes that buying gas earlier in the week — as well as shopping around for the lowest price — still will save money for "many motorists." GasBuddy, the company behind the free app of the same name, estimates that drivers can save an average of \$325 per year by shopping around and using the GasBuddy app. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz & Karla Bowsheer | May 2 & 3, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Credit Reports Update 07** ► **How to Make Delinquencies Go Away**

If you don't pay a debt, the company you're not paying isn't going to be happy. That unhappy company may stop hounding you, but that doesn't mean they'll go away. They can add a notation to your credit history indicating the debt wasn't paid and damaging your credit. The pain will last for seven years on your history, although it will be less significant to your credit score as it ages. If you want that pain to go away before it expires, you have leverage, but only until you pay the debt. Once you've sent the check, the company has no incentive to help you. So ... You should never settle a debt without first obtaining a written guarantee from the company stating it will remove any and all negative information pertaining to the debt from your credit history. This written, signed letter must be received before giving them a dime.

When dealing with anyone trying to collect a debt, whether the original creditor or a collection agency, verbal assurances are meaningless. If it's not in writing, it never happened. Period. No exceptions. Simply paying off the debt won't help. You'll still have the delinquency on your credit history, so you'll still have the damage to your credit score. If you want to improve your score, the goal is to get the delinquency removed. If a creditor tells you it won't remove the negative information, fine. That's their prerogative. But if they tell you they can't, that's hogwash. Nearly any company that can put negative information on your credit history can remove it.

Recommend contact the company, not the credit reporting agency, and offer to settle for a lesser amount. When you've negotiated that amount then insist as part of the deal that the company remove any negatives from his credit history. After you receives a written, signed document stating the amount and confirming the negative item will be removed, pay the agreed-upon sum. The delinquency should disappear shortly thereafter, and his credit score should rise. Debt negotiations can be tricky, and the company you're negotiating with is probably going to be better at it than you. If the amounts are large, you might want to get a consumer attorney or other expert in your corner. If not, at least read about how to do it. There's plenty of free information on the internet. For example, check out "Ask

Stacy: Can You Help Me Clean Up My Credit History?" at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/ask-stacy-can-you-help-clean-credit-history>. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacy Johnson | May 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military Appreciation Month ► Discounts**

Congress designated May as National Military Appreciation Month in 1999 to ensure the nation was given the opportunity to publicly demonstrate their appreciation for the sacrifices and successes made by our service members -- past and present. Each year the president makes a proclamation, reminding Americans of the important role the U.S. Armed Forces have played in the history and development of our country. May was selected because it has the most days set aside for celebrating and commemorating our military's achievements.

Service members and families are being honored during Military Appreciation Month with a variety of discounts. Below are some highlighted offerings. Visit the [Military.com Discounts Center](#) for more discounts and articles. And sign up for the [Military Deals and Discounts Newsletter](#) to get even more discounts and information in your inbox on how military families can save big.

[Affinia Hotel Collection](#) -- Book your summertime stay at any Affinia hotel in NYC and receive up to 25% off. Plus, they will donate \$10 for every reservation made to Operation Homefront.

[Blue Star Museums](#) -- Blue Star Museums is a collaboration among the National Endowment for the Arts, Blue Star Families, the Department of Defense, and more than 2,000 museums across America to offer free admission to the nation's military, from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

[California's Great America](#) -- All active duty service members and veterans get free regular admission to California's Great America now through May 29 with a valid military ID. Plus, each military guest will be able to bring up to six additional guests at a discounted rate.

[Carowinds](#) -- Carowinds offers free park admission to any active, inactive or retired service men and women May 28 and 29.

[Cincinnati Zoo](#) -- Active and retired military receive free admission on Memorial Day. The offer also allows military personnel to purchase up to 6 half-price admission tickets for members of their immediate family.

[Colonial Williamsburg](#) -- Colonial Williamsburg offers free admission during Memorial Day weekend to all active-duty military, retired, veterans, reservists, National Guard and their direct dependents.

[Home Depot](#) -- All veterans are eligible for Home Depot's 10% military discount on Memorial Day with a DoD-issued ID, a DD214 or a Veterans Driver's License. (This discount is good for veterans on July 4th and Veterans Day as well.)

[Kings Dominion](#) -- Kings Dominion is offering free park admission to any active or retired service members May 27-29.

[Kings Island](#) -- Kings Island is offering military personnel free admission May 26 through May 29.

[Lowe's](#) -- Just in time for Military Appreciation Month, Lowe's has updated their military discount to include veterans in their year-round 10% discount.

[Michigan's Adventure](#) -- Michigan's Adventure is offering military personnel a free admission May 28 and 29. Military personnel may also purchase up to six additional tickets for immediate family members at \$26 each.

[Mystic Aquarium](#) -- Veterans and active duty members who visit Mystic Aquarium May 27 to May 29 will receive free general admission. Dependent family members receive a discounted admission rate of \$20.99 per adult, \$15.99 per youth (13-17) and \$13.99 per child (3-12). Get 10% off at the gift store too!

[Rack Room Shoes](#) -- Rack Room Shoes offers their regular year-round Tuesday 10% military discount on Memorial Day.

[Twin Peaks](#) -- Twin Peaks is offering veterans and active military personnel a free select meal on May 29.

[Valleyfair](#) -- Active duty and veterans will receive a free regular admission ticket into Valleyfair May 26-29. They can also purchase discount admission tickets for members of their immediate family.

[Virginia Aquarium](#) -- The Virginia Aquarium offers active duty, dependents and retirees half off general admission on Sunday or Monday during the month of May.

[Source: Military.com | Heather Sweeney | May 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Festival Scam ► How It works**

Each summer, scammers and promoter wannabes tempt would-be festival goers into buying tickets for events promising all-you-can-eat crabs, live music, and other fun. Whether the event is non-existent or merely disappointing, the result is the same: someone had pocketed your hard-earned money!

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

- You see a social media post or online ad for a great deal on tickets to a summer festival. The type of festival varies; it can be a music extravaganza, an all-you-can-eat crab feast or BBQ, a craft beer festival, or a themed fun run. When you click the link, and it takes you to a flashy website with fantastic pictures. You enter your credit card information to buy tickets, and you are set.
- Don't do it! Better Business Bureaus across North America have gotten reports of fake festivals or festivals that promise way more than they deliver. Victims purchase tickets and show up at the time and location, only to find a crowd of frustrated ticket holders. The festival either never existed or fell far short of organizers' promises.

### **How to Spot a Festival Fake-Out:**

- Research before purchasing. Search online for the name of the festival and make sure the name advertised matches the website. Scammers often use names that sound similar to real festivals. Check BBB.org and BBB Scam Tracker to see if reports have been filed about the event.
- Check for (working) contact information: Be sure the festival website has a phone number, physical address, and email address. Be wary of sites that make it hard to reach someone, such as those that rely on a contact form instead of offering a customer service phone number.
- Prices too good to be true: There is no way a festival can offer tickets at extremely low prices without losing money. If the prices are much lower than elsewhere, it's likely a scam.
- Claims too good to be true: Do a little online sleuthing to see if claims add up. If a music festival offers top entertainment, check out those bands' actual touring schedule. See what other users or news outlets have said about the festival in the past.

### **What Can You Do?**

- Pay with a credit card: You can dispute the charges if the business doesn't come through. Be wary of online sellers that don't accept credit cards.
- Look for secure sites: The website should begin with https (the extra "s" is for secure) and have a little lock symbol on the address bar.
- Avoid tickets sold on Craigslist and other free online listings: Scammers are skilled at providing realistic tickets and fake receipts. Check out third-party ticket sites at bbb.org before making purchases.

At <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/eat-drink-and-be-wary> learn more about festival scams in the Federal Trade Commission's alert. To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker <https://www.bbb.org/scamtracker/us>.  
[Source: BBB Scam Alert | May 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Tax Burden for Oklahoma Retired Vets ► As of May 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 Oklahoma.

### Sales Taxes

**State Sales Tax:** 4.5% (prescription drugs exempt); cities, towns and counties may levy local sales taxes. The county tax cannot exceed 2% but some cities have sales taxes over 6.35%. Sales of tangible personal property or services to persons who are residents of Oklahoma and have been honorably discharged from active service in any branch of the Armed Forces of the United States or Oklahoma National Guard and who have been certified by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs or its successor to be in receipt of disability compensation at the 100% rate and the disability shall be permanent and have been sustained through military action or accident or resulting from disease contracted while in such active service are exempt from state sales tax.

**Gasoline Tax:** 35.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 38.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Cigarette Tax:** \$1.03/pack of 20

### Personal Income Taxes

**Tax Rate Range:** Low – 0.5%; High – 5%. The top rate is scheduled to be reduced to 4.85% in subsequent tax years, contingent upon certain revenue growth.

**Income Brackets:** Lowest – \$1,000; Highest – \$12,200

**Number of Brackets:** 6

**Personal Exemptions:** Single – \$1,000; Married – \$2,000; Dependents – \$1,000. The first \$1,500 received, as salary for service in the United States Armed Forces shall be deducted from taxable income.

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

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

**Medical/Dental Deduction:** Federal amount

**Federal Income Tax Deduction:** Full but higher rates apply to the remaining taxable income

**Retirement Income Taxes:** The state does not tax Social Security benefits. Each individual may exclude their retirement benefits, up to \$10,000, but not to exceed the amount included in the Federal Adjusted Gross Income. For any individual who claims the exclusions for government retirees on Schedule 511-A, line 4 and 5, the amount of the exclusion cannot exceed \$10,000 minus the amounts already claimed on Schedule 511-A, 4 and 5 (if less than zero, enter zero). The retirement benefits must be received from an employee pension benefit plan, an eligible deferred compensation plan, an individual retirement account, annuity or trust or simplified employee pension under IRC section 408, an employee annuity (a) or (b), United States Retirement bonds under IRC section 86, or lump-sum distributions from a retirement plan under IRC section 402 (e). There is no longer a modified AGI limit beginning with tax year 2010.

**Retired Military Pay:** An individual may exclude the greater of 75% of their retirement benefits or \$10,000, but not to exceed the amount included in the Federal Adjusted Gross Income. The retirement benefits must be from any component of the Armed Forces of the U.S.

**Military Disability Retired Pay:** Retirees who entered the military before Sept. 24, 1975, and members receiving disability retirements based on combat injuries or who could receive disability payments from the VA are covered by laws giving disability broad exemption from federal income tax. Most military retired pay based on service-related disabilities also is free from federal income tax, but there is no guarantee of total protection.

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

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

### **Property Taxes**

Real property is assessed at an amount between 11% and 13.5% of its fair cash value. Oklahoma offers a homestead exemption for homeowners which reduces the property's assessed value by \$1,000. In most cases this will result in a tax savings of \$80 to \$120. If gross household income is under \$20,000 a year or less and you meet all of the homestead exemption requirements, you may qualify for an additional \$1,000 exemption. A property tax refund worth up to \$200 is available if you are 65 or older, or totally disabled, and have an income of \$12,000 or less. There is a 100% property tax exemption for disabled veterans. Veterans and the surviving spouse of a veteran may also qualify for a property tax exemption.

Senior citizens with a household income of less than \$25,000 previously qualified for a valuation freeze on their primary residence. This meant that their property tax would not go up just because the value of other homes in the neighborhood has gone up. As the result of a law passed in 2004, the amount of qualifying income would be fixed to the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development's estimate of median family income. Call 405-713-1236.

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

There is no inheritance tax but there is an estate tax. Estate tax is 1/2% to 10% of the net estate at the time of death and is independent of the federal estate tax. It also imposes an additional estate tax that is essentially designed to absorb any available federal estate credit for state death taxes. The amount of Oklahoma estate tax imposed depends on who gets what.

For further information, refer to the Oklahoma Tax Commission site <https://www.ok.gov/tax> or call 405-521-3160. [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com> May 2017 ++]

**\* General Interest \***



### **Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 30 APR 2017**

- **Female airmen.** Female personnel who give birth now have up to a year to decide whether they want to stay in the Air Force, under a new policy that went into effect 26 APR. The Air Force Personnel Center

said that the change is part of the latest slate of diversity and inclusion initiatives. Previously, pregnant airmen had to separate before childbirth if they wanted to leave the Air Force.

- **Compassion.** When the best of us step up our nation stands a little taller. Check out the video at <https://www.facebook.com/NewsnerEspanol/videos/1325783294169910>.
- **Military discounts.** National home improvement retailer Lowe's has expanded its everyday military discount program to include all honorably discharged veterans, as of May 2017.
- **New York.** Honorably discharged veterans who are members of a state retirement system can now purchase service credit for up to three years of military service performed, thanks to a bill sponsored by Senator William Larkin (Cornwall-on-Hudson) and co-sponsored by Senator Simcha Felder (Brooklyn).
- **VA Secretary Interview.** Go to <https://audioboom.com/posts/5887663-rita-cosby-exclusive-with-va-secretary-david-shulkin> to listen to a 21 minute audio clip on WABC-77 Radio's Rita Cosby exclusive with VA Secretary David Shulkin about the potential impacts that the repeal of Obamacare will have on Veteran healthcare, the 7th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea, the realignment of VA facilities, and other topics.
- **Birthright Citizenship.** United States is the only remaining country that honors it. Every other modern developed nation in the world has gotten rid of birthright citizenship policies. There used to be all kinds of developed countries that gave away their citizenship as freely as we do in the US to Illegal aliens. However, the last one, Canada, stopped granting citizenship for their newborn babies in 2009.
- **Cert Pool.** The cert pool was established in 1973 during the early days of the Burger Supreme Court, in order to efficiently review the near 8,000 petitions received each term. In practice, the petitions are apportioned among the Court's law clerks, who then circulate a memo to the justices recommending a grant or denial. The obvious problem here is that this gives the power in these 8000 cases to the law clerks instead of the Justices. It also, in theory, allows 3rd parties to unfairly influence a case through the clerks. On 3 MAY the newest justice Neil Gorsuch broke 40 years of precedent when he REFUSED to join the SCOTUS "cert pool."
- **Bicycling.** Check out <https://youtu.be/5PyFLgTTOsU> to view a new concept in going for a walk with a Lofpifit bicycle.
- **Handbook.** DoD Compensation and Benefits Handbook (Published September 2016; Updated January 2017) is available in PDF format at [http://warriorcare.dodlive.mil/files/2017/01/DoD-Compensation-Benefits-Handbook\\_UPDATED-January-2017.pdf](http://warriorcare.dodlive.mil/files/2017/01/DoD-Compensation-Benefits-Handbook_UPDATED-January-2017.pdf). Due to its size allow a minute or 2 to open.
- **USMC.** A 9 MAY amendment to the Marine Corps separation manual now states Marines with substantiated cases of improper photo sharing will face mandatory separation proceedings.
- **Cigarette Taxes.** State taxes are levied on top of the federal rate of \$1.0066 federal rate for a pack of 20 cigarettes. The five highest state pack rates are NY @ \$4.35, CT @ \$3.90, RI @ \$3.75, and HI @ \$3.20. The five lowest are MO (\$0.17), VA (\$0.30), GA (\$0.37), ND (\$0.44) and NC (\$0.45). In some places local taxes are imposed in addition to state and federal tax.
- **Gangs.** Federal agents arrested nearly 1,400 gang members in a six-week national sting, making it the largest-ever gang bust the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations branch has conducted. Officers and local law enforcement agencies seized 238 firearms, \$491,763 in U.S. currency and a significant amount of narcotics during the raids.
- **Quotes.** Two to consider: Of the four wars in my lifetime, none came about because the U.S. was too strong. (Ronald Reagan) & We sleep safely at night because rough men stand ready to visit violence on those who would harm us. (Winston Churchill).
- **Pray for Paris.** Check out <https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/xh9GaDgRWX4?rel=0> to view a card trick developed by a magician after attacks in France.

\*\*\*\*\*



## Nuclear Waste ► Largely Forgotten Decaying Infrastructure

On the morning of 9 MAY, workers at the Hanford Site, a Cold War-era plutonium-production facility turned nuclear-waste cleanup project in Washington, discovered a giant hole in the ground. A tunnel had collapsed. Because “tunnel collapse” and “nuclear waste” are two phrases you don’t want to see in the same sentence, the news quickly ricocheted around the national media. It’s too early to give a full account of how bad this is. (As of this writing, the Department of Energy says it has detected no radiation release.) But the tunnel, which houses an old railway used to transport irradiated fuel rods to a uranium extraction facility, is hardly the most dangerous place at Hanford. The most dangerous places are its giant underground tanks, filled with 53 million gallons of radioactive sludge. Over the years, 67 of the 177 tanks have collectively leaked a million gallons—a slow-motion infrastructure collapse that doesn’t lend itself to dramatic photos or headlines. These and other spills have resulted in 61 square miles of contaminated groundwater at the site.



**A tank farm at Hanford**

This has long been the problem with the troubled and oft-delayed cleanup efforts at Hanford. The possibility of true crisis lurks in the background, but not urgently enough to speed things up. A single-shell tank of waste, for example, began leaking in 2013. The Department of Energy has since evaporated liquid from that tank, but has that stopped the leaking permanently? “It’s not clear,” says Randy Bradbury, communication manager at the Washington State Department of Ecology. And in 2012, the inside shell of a double-shell tank—the type that contains the most dangerous high-level radioactive waste—was discovered leaking and not emptied until 2016. As the tanks keep springing leaks, the DOE is left shuffling waste from tank to aging tank.

These long-term tank problems don’t quite have the dramatic value of “tunnel collapse.” The incident this week may end up releasing radiation or it may not—either way, it’s another symptom of the aging and decrepit infrastructure at Hanford. And perhaps it’ll bring some attention to the site’s deeper problems. The plan to move this high-level radioactive waste out of the tanks has been agonizingly slow. DOE was supposed to “vitrify” the high-level radioactive waste into glass logs and put it in a permanent storage site in Nevada—originally by 1998. That vitrification plant is still under construction. (The Nevada storage site is not even under construction yet, but that’s another story.) Cheryl Whalen, cleanup section manager at the Washington State Department of Ecology, once likened the cleanup efforts to “watching glaciers move.”

The scientists and engineers who built Hanford during the Manhattan Project probably did not give much thought to what would happen to the contaminated site in the future. They had a war to win. Hanford produced the plutonium for the bomb dropped on Nagasaki. And during the Cold War, the site ramped up production to supply the country's growing nuclear arsenal. A site once emblematic of U.S. scientific and military might is now a sprawling complex of decaying infrastructure, dotted with nuclear waste. And it's largely forgotten except by the people who live near it and thus bear the brunt of its potential disasters. [Source: The Atlantic | Sarah Zhang | May 10, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## China Island Building Update 02 ► New Yulin Installations

Imagery captured 8 MAY from an ImageSat International (ISI) Eros B satellite indicates Chinese preparations for new land-based missile installations on an increasingly strategic island base in the South China Sea. The high-resolution imagery, shown here for the first time, reveals recent changes in the layout of the People's Liberation Army's Yulin Naval Base at the tip of Hainan Island in the disputed South China Sea. In less than two months, the PLA deployed multiple missile launchers on the western side of the base, deployments that ISI imagery analyst Amit Gur has concluded are anti-ship missiles. "The direction in which the launchers are facing leads us to believe these are shore-to-ship missiles," Gur told Defense News.



**Yulin Naval base - suspected anti-ship missile deployment**

He said that similar systems had shown up in satellite data about two years ago, but had been removed in recent months to accommodate infrastructure upgrades at the site. ISI's imagery from 15 MAR shows an empty plateau, but by 8 MAY the firm's Eros B captured a clear image of newly paved infrastructure and multiple launch sites. "They must have concluded renovation work, as the systems are clearly visible," Gur said. "We just don't know if they are new systems, or a [redeployment] of the ones that were stored during the renovation." Perhaps even more interesting, according to ISI, is progress taking place on Yulin's eastern side. "We're seeing the building of infrastructure that wasn't there before and what looks like preparations for shore-to-ship missiles, just like on the western side," company spokesman Gil Or said. Gur noted that expansion of the Yulin base fortifies Beijing's strategic triangle of forward bases with which to quickly project its power well beyond neighboring Vietnam and the Philippines. [Source: Defense News | Barbara Opall-Rome | May 8, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Presidential Trip Expense ► Mar-a-Lago Price Tag

A pair of President Donald Trump's recent weekend trips to his Mar-a-Lago resort cost taxpayers more than \$1.2 million, new documents released by a conservative group show. The documents made public 4 MAY by Judicial Watch are some of the first to put even part of a price tag on Trump's frequent visits to his Palm Beach, Florida, club. The numbers reflect only the costs associated with the president's plane, Air Force One. Not included are expenses for Secret Service protection or support vehicles provided by the Department of Defense, which must be airlifted into place. A Trump trip in early February cost about \$670,000, and a second trip in March cost about \$612,000, according to the U.S. Air Force, which operates and maintains Air Force One. He's visited seven times as president.

Judicial Watch obtained the documents under the Freedom of Information Act. The group has spent years studying the cost of presidential travel and has argued that taxpayers are bearing far too much of the costs. Tom Fitton, president of the group, previously told The Associated Press that Trump should be transparent about the expense of his trips and should make the case to the American public that it is important for him to be at his resort. Trump has used Mar-a-Lago — which not only is a vacation home but also a for-profit resort that charges \$200,000 for memberships — to entertain foreign dignitaries and to meet with members of his Cabinet and senior leadership team.

Based on other travel reports for other presidents, Defense Department costs far exceed all other expenses related to such trips. Judicial Watch did not request that information, although its request for Secret Service expenses is pending, Judicial Watch said. The Government Accountability Office agreed to a Democratic request to price out a few of Trump's Mar-a-Lago trips, and its forthcoming report promises a more accurate estimate. [Source: The Associated Press Chad Day | Chad Day | May 4, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## President's Secret Air Force ► Ensuring CINC's Ability to Retaliate

The photo this winter of a smiling Mar-a-Lago guest with the uniformed military aide who carries the “nuclear football” was a rare—and unease-inducing—public reminder that just steps from the president at all times are the keys to end the world as we know it. Americans normally see very little of the massive apparatus that surrounds the modern presidency—and it’s easy to forget that much of it exists primarily to help ensure that the commander in chief, wherever he is in the world, is able to access the nation’s nuclear weapons and launch a retaliatory strike.

That communications and security infrastructure drives the enormous cost of moving a president around the country. Critics have said that President Donald Trump’s weekend jaunts to Mar-a-Lago cost upward of \$3 million each, but even that is just a rough estimate. The true costs of presidential travel are spread through so many offices, budgets and secret funds that it’s unlikely that even the government has any real sense of the precise cost of White House travel. One GAO study in recent years suggested it was upward of \$100 million a year, with much of that price tag reflecting the roughly \$180,000-an-hour cost of flying the Boeing 747s that normally operate as “Air Force One,” the codename for any Air Force plane carrying the commander in chief. To learn more on the history and what's involved in ensuring our president can retaliate with nuclear weapons if called for, refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**President's Secret Air Force**". [Source: Politico Magazine | Garrett M. Graff | May 02, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Fisher House Update 04 ► Founder Added to Philanthropy Hall of Fame

The Almanac of American Philanthropy has added Zachary Fisher, the founder of the Fisher House Foundation, to the Philanthropy Hall of Fame, joining the likes of Andrew Carnegie, George Washington, Henry Ford and J.P.

Morgan. A knee injury prevented Fisher from joining the Marine Corps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Zachary and his brothers Martin and Larry created Fisher Brothers and went on to become one of the most prominent developers in New York City. He supported the nation's military and veterans throughout his life. "There is a dignity and majesty in the efforts of all our armed forces, and it is well for us to remember the noble deeds of those who have worn the uniform," he said. Zachary Fisher led the mission to recover and transform the retired Intrepid on Manhattan's West Side. But his biggest philanthropic creation was the Fisher House Foundation.



In 1990, he began a partnership with the Department of Defense and the Department of Veteran Affairs that would lead to the beginning of the Fisher House program, a place where the families of wounded veterans and service members could stay nearby the military or VA hospital. "Where there is military, there is a Fisher House. Where there is a Fisher House, there will always be caring, warmth, security, and compassion," Zachary said. Although Zachary Fisher died in 1999, his legacy lives on through his grandnephew, Ken Fisher, who now helms the Fisher House Foundation. Ken Fisher said his granduncle taught him "a lot about the real meaning of giving," telling him: "Instead of sitting back and pointing out problems, let's try and be part of the solution." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Rachael Kalinyak | May 2, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **US-Philippines Relations Update 01 ► Trump-Duterte Phone Call**

U.S. President Donald Trump has called Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte and expressed Washington's commitment to their treaty alliance and his interest in developing "a warm, working relationship," a Filipino official said 30 APR. Presidential spokesman Ernie Abella said Trump mentioned he was looking forward to visiting the Philippines in November to attend an East Asia summit that Duterte will host with several world leaders and that Trump invited Duterte to visit the White House. "The discussion that transpired between the presidents was warm, with President Trump expressing his understanding and appreciation of the challenges facing the Philippine president, especially on the matter of dangerous drugs," Abella said in a statement.

A White House statement described late Saturday's call as "very friendly" and said the U.S.-Philippine alliance "is now heading in a very positive direction." Trump's chief of staff, Reince Priebus, said the friendlier ties are needed even with concerns about Duterte's human rights record, which includes extrajudicial killings of suspected drug dealers and users as part of the government's drug war. Priebus cited the military threat of North Korea. "The

purpose of this call is all about North Korea," Priebus told ABC's "This Week" on Sunday. "It doesn't mean that human rights don't matter."

Abella's remarks reflect the friendlier attitude Duterte has taken with Trump versus the antagonistic stance he had toward President Barack Obama, who he once asked to "go to hell" for criticizing the Philippine leader's bloody anti-drug crackdown. During Obama's final months in office, the Philippine president moved to build closer economic ties with China and Russia while repeatedly threatening to end his nation's longstanding military alliance with the U.S. Duterte's apparent dislike for Obama began when the U.S. State Department expressed concern over his drug war — which has left thousands of suspects dead — and asked Philippine government officials to take steps to stop extrajudicial killings. At one point Duterte suggested he may even move to abrogate a 2014 defense agreement that allows U.S. military access to five Philippine military camps. He has walked back most of those threats but has proceeded with his efforts to align closer with China.

On 30 APR, three Chinese navy ships, including a guided-missile destroyer and a guided-missile frigate, were welcomed in Davao city, Duterte's southern hometown, by officials, including presidential daughter and city Mayor Sarah Duterte, military officials said. Asked if the rare Chinese naval visits were a sign that Duterte was backing away from Washington, Department of National Defense spokesman Arsenio Andolong said: "We are not veering away from the U.S. but rather we are expanding our relations with our fellow nations in the global community." Abella said without elaborating that concern over North Korea came up in Trump's talk with Duterte. Priebus indicated that the issue was Trump's primary concern, citing a North Korean threat "so serious" that it will require cooperation from Asian countries in the region. "So if something does happen in North Korea, ... we have everyone in line backing up a plan of action that may need to be put together with our partners in the area," he said.

Duterte suggested in a news conference 29 APR that the Trump administration should back away from an intensifying standoff with North Korea, not in surrender, but to avoid risking a nuclear holocaust that could smother Asia. "It would be good for America to just restrain a little bit and if I were President Trump, I'll just back out, not really in surrender and retreat, but just to let the guy realize that, 'Ah, please do not do it,'" Duterte said. Washington, he said, should not play into provocations of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. "It behooves upon America, who wields the biggest stick, just to really be prudent and patient. We know that we are playing with somebody who relishes letting go of his missiles and everything," Duterte said.

Mr. Duterte, who once referred to President Barack Obama as a "son of a whore," suggested on 1 MAY that his differences with the United States had had much to do with Mr. Obama. "It was not a distancing, but it was rather a rift between me, maybe, and the State Department and Mr. Obama, who spoke openly against me," Mr. Duterte said. He added: "Things have changed. There's a new leadership." However, he said that he might not accept President Trump's invitation to visit the White House, because he was "tied up" with a busy schedule. "I cannot make any definite promise," adding, "I'm supposed to go to Russia; I'm also supposed to go to Israel." Criticism of Mr. Trump's invitation to Mr. Duterte continued on Monday. "Countries with close bilateral ties to the Philippines, particularly the United States, have an obligation to urge accountability for the victims of Duterte's abusive drug war, rather than offer to roll out the red carpet for official state visits with its mastermind," said Phelim Kine, a deputy director in Human Rights Watch's Asia division. [Source: The AP & New York Times | Jim Gomez & Felipe Villamormay | April 30 & May 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Loyalty Day ► 1 MAY

Loyalty Day is on May 1 each year. It is a special day for people to reaffirm their loyalty to the United States and to recognize the heritage of American freedom. It also falls on the same day as Law Day in the USA. The United States of America was founded by patriots who risked their lives to bring freedom to the nation. The nation's founders are

remembered on Loyalty Day, which is a day when people celebrate their freedom while remembering their responsibilities to continue the legacy of liberty. Loyalty Day is celebrated with parades and ceremonies in several communities across the United States. Schools, churches, and various organizations participate in these events.  
Public Life



**Loyalty Day is an observance but it is not a public holiday in the United States. Schools, post offices, stores and other businesses and organizations are open as usual. Public transport services run to their usual schedules and no extra congestion on highways is to be expected.**

Loyalty Day was first observed in 1921 as "Americanization Day" to counterbalance Labour Day on May Day (May 1), celebrated in other parts of the world. On May 1, 1930, about 10,000 Veterans of Foreign War members staged a rally at New York's Union Square to promote patriotism. Through a resolution adopted in 1949, 1 MAY evolved into Loyalty Day. Observances began on April 28, 1950, and climaxed on 1 MAY when more than five million people across the nation held rallies. In New York City, more than 100,000 people rallied for America. On July 18, 1958, the Congress designated 1 MAY of each year as Loyalty Day to foster loyalty and love of the country. According to the Legal Information Institute, the President is requested to issue a proclamation, calling on United States government officials to display the flag of the United States on all government buildings on Loyalty Day, and inviting the people of the United States to observe Loyalty Day with appropriate ceremonies in schools and other suitable places. [Source: WAA sNewsletter #131 | May 2, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Passwords Update 02 ► Q & A



World Password Day was 4 MAY, an event designed to promote good password habits online because weak logins like "123456" and "qwerty" continue to top the lists of the most common passwords. The frequent use of weak passwords isn't from a lack of information, however. Results from a Pew Research Center cybersecurity quiz show most people do know better when it comes to password security, but they just choose not to follow best security practices. It's unclear whether that's because of laziness or the false assumption "it won't happen to me," despite hacking attempts and security breaches happening daily across the web. But your identity, privacy and finances are

at stake, so it's time to get smart. Here are answers to some of those password questions you thought were too dumb to ask:

**Why is “password” a bad password? Why shouldn't I use words as my password? Does using numbers instead of letters make my password harder to guess?**

- In general, it's a bad idea to make your password a single dictionary word, and that includes "password." When hackers want to crack a password, they can set a computer to try every combination of characters until one finally works. That makes length and complexity some of the most important attributes to a good password. Try combine letters, numbers and symbols in different ways. Another way to create a memorable but difficult to crack password is to come up with a short sentence. If you're unsure, play around with this website to see what it takes to create a strong password.

**Does it really matter if I reuse a password? What if I vary it just a little bit?**

- "Reusing passwords is one of the worst things people can do," said Michael Kaiser, executive director for the National Cyber Security Alliance. "Basically, it's using the same key on different locks." If one website or account is compromised, the hackers can then try those username and password combinations on other accounts and websites. The 500 million Yahoo users who had their accounts compromised probably wish they had varied their passwords more.

**If I can't remember all my passwords, should I use a password manager? Is it safer?**

- When just about every website requires a password, it can be difficult to remember them all, especially if you're following the advice above and making them complicated. If you're having trouble, consider using a password manager. It's safer than writing passwords down in a Word document or email draft. Writing passwords down on paper is marginally better than that, but it could still be swiped by a vindictive ex or burglar or accidentally thrown in the trash. "Password managers are useful because they give you the ease of access to that information, probably across multiple devices from where ever you may be," said Laura Bate, program associate with the Cybersecurity Initiative at New America. If you use a password manager, know they aren't fool-proof in terms of risk reduction. Make sure to pick a reputable company. And the password to that password manager should be ironclad and fully committed to memory.

**How often should I change my passwords? Does it help security that my job makes me reset passwords every three months?**

- The logic behind frequent password changes is that if hackers get access, they won't have it for long. But many hackers could be in and out of a network much faster than password changes occur. But according to Kaiser, the emerging consensus is that the more frequently you ask people to change passwords, the worse password practice they use.

**If your workplace does require you to reset your password often, you should follow that protocol—but don't get lazy.**

- For personal accounts, you should change passwords if you feel they need to be changed. But having one strong password is better than a string of weak ones, Kaiser said.

**If I need to tell someone else my password, how should I do that?**

- "Always be skeptical of someone asking for your password," Bate said. "There are very few cases where anyone should ever ask for your password." But if it's your spouse asking for the Netflix password, the best way to share that information is verbally and in person. Verbally over a phone call to or from a recognized number is not as good, but Bate said it's still better than through email or a text message—two worst possible ways of sharing a password.

**Does two-factor authentication secure my account better?**

- Two-factor authentication can be a pain, but it's one of the smartest online security tactics, Kaiser said. Start with your email account, the hub of your online life. This is where links are sent to reset all of your

other accounts. Most major online email providers offer a multifactor login scheme, so there's no excuse. "Does it make your account impervious to hacking? No. But it does improve your odds considerably," Bate said. If available, you should also set up two-factor authentication on any online banking and social media accounts.

### **Are passwords better or worse than biometrics like a thumbprint?**

- We already know when left to their own devices, many people create weak passwords and generally fail at managing their own personal security. Biometrics seems like a great way to circumvent that: You can't have a weak thumbprint. But it's important to know biometrics aren't completely hack-proof. Just ask the more than 5 million people who had their thumbprints stolen in the massive Office of Personnel Management breach. So while you can use biometrics to access your iPhone, for now most online accounts still require a password. And it should be a strong one.

"The truth of the matter is, people know if their passwords aren't any good," Kaiser said. "If you know, then make a better password." [Source: NextGov | Caitlin Fairchild | May 4, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

### **RP Armaments ► \$100 Warship Purchase**

The Republic of the Philippines is getting a real bargain. In this age of \$1.3 billion guided missile destroyers, the island nation is "buying" a used warship from South Korea for the bargain-basement price of just \$100. While that sounds like a screaming deal, exactly what is it getting for its money? The Philippines is in the midst of a defense buildup. The island country has been locked in a political face-off with China over competing territorial claims in the South China Sea. With no end in sight, the concern is the political dispute will escalate to a military one, a hypothetical conflict the Philippines would be woefully unready for. The country has been fighting an insurgency against various internal groups, including the Al Qaeda-aligned Abu Sayyaf guerrilla force, funding its army at the expense of its navy and air force.



**Pohang-class corvette firing its stern mounted 76-millimeter gun during a fleet review, 2015.**



The country has been on a low-grade shopping binge, purchasing a dozen F/A-50 fighters from South Korea and accepting donated Coast Guard cutters from the United States. Now, according to The Jakarta Post, it is about to get a Pohang-class corvette from South Korea for the fantastic sum of \$100. The ship, ROK Chungju, was decommissioned from the Republic of Korea Navy in December 2016. The "purchase" is actually a transfer, and the \$100 is largely symbolic.

The Pohang-class corvettes were some of the first large warships built by South Korean shipyards. Twenty-four corvettes were built during the mid 1980s and early 1990s between 1984 and 1993. Each weighed 1,200 tons fully loaded and had a maximum speed of 32 knots, armed with a pair of Italian-made 76-millimeter deck guns, four Harpoon anti-ship missiles, two 40-millimeter cannons, and anti-submarine torpedoes as well as depth charges. The Pohang-class ships were built mainly to patrol South Korean coastal waters and square off against North Korea's fleet of small gunboats and coastal submarines.

While the ex-Chungju is essentially free, the Philippines has also committed to paying to bring the ship back into service. One Philippine former naval officer-turned-blogger describes the necessary work as "repair, minor refurbishing works, replacement of obsolete systems required for safe use of the ship, crew billeting and training, and other expenses." That will cost an estimated 200 million Philippine pesos, or the equivalent of \$4 million dollars. The ship will also not transfer with all of its weaponry. The Harpoon missiles are not part of the sale—the missiles are still useful to South Korea and Seoul would have to get permission from the United States to sell them, a process that could take years. The ship might also lose its American-made Mk. 46 anti-submarine torpedoes.

There's also the question of what kind of condition the ship is in. In 2014 the Philippine Navy looked at another Pohang-class ship, Mokpo, and found it in "very poor condition" and not worth refurbishing. Chungju is two years younger and presumably inspectors found it in slightly better condition. Another Pohang-class corvette, ROKS Cheonan, was sunk by a North Korean torpedo in its 21st year of service. At the time of the sinking, one news report quoted the mother of a crewmember as saying her son thought the ship was in poor condition and complained about serving on it. Still, given that some of the ships in the Philippine Navy were built during World War II, even a worn-out thirty year old ship is better than a seventy year old one.

Even if the ex-Chungju is stripped of its weapons, South Korea is well positioned to re-equip it for the Philippines, at a price. Harpoon missiles can be replaced with Korean Haeseong missiles and Mk. 46 anti-submarine torpedoes can be replaced with Blue Shark torpedoes. This is not a coincidence, as South Korea is pushing to develop its own arms export industry. Think of Chungju as a free ice cream cone—it's the ice cream that's going to cost real money. The Philippines' "new" warship will end up costing a lot more than a hundred dollar bill, but it's still likely a welcome upgrade. While it's still not on equal terms with a brand-new Type 056 corvette, the Chungju's second career will give the People's Liberation Army Navy something to think about. [Source: Popular Mechanics | Kyle Mizokami | May 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **My Son The Marine ► Essay: A Line to My Heart**

"Before my son became a Marine, I never thought much about who was defending me. Now when I read of the war on terrorism or the coming conflict in Iraq, it cuts to my heart. When I see a picture of a member of our military who has been killed, I read his or her name very carefully. Sometimes I cry.

In 1999, when the barrel-chested Marine recruiter showed up in dress blues and bedazzled my son John, I did not stand in the way. John was headstrong, and he seemed to understand these stern, clean men with straight backs and flawless uniforms. I did not. I live in the Volvo-driving, higher education-worshipping North Shore of Boston I write novels for a living. I have never served in the military.

It had been hard enough sending my two older children off to Georgetown and New York University. John's enlisting was unexpected, so deeply unsettling. I did not relish the prospect of answering the question, "So where is John going to college?" from the parents who were itching to tell me all about how their son or daughter was going to Harvard. At the private high school John attended, no other students were going into the military.

"But aren't the Marines terribly Southern?" (Says a lot about open-mindedness in the Northeast) asked one perplexed mother while standing next to me at the brunch following graduation. "What a waste, he was such a good student," said another parent. One parent (a professor at a nearby and rather famous university) spoke up at a school meeting and suggested that the school should "carefully evaluate what went wrong."

When John graduated from three months of boot camp on Parris Island, 3000 parents and friends were on the parade deck stands. We parents and our Marines not only were of many races but also were representative of many economic classes. Many were poor. Some arrived crammed in the backs of pickups, others by bus. John told me that a lot of parents could not afford the trip.

We in the audience were white and Native American. We were Hispanic, Arab, and African American, and Asian. We were former Marines wearing the scars of battle, or at least baseball caps emblazoned with battles' names. We were Southern whites from Nashville and skinheads from New Jersey, black kids from Cleveland wearing ghetto rags and white ex-cons with ham-hock forearms defaced by jailhouse tattoos. We would not have been mistaken for the educated and well-heeled parents gathered on the lawns of John's private school a half-year before.

After graduation one new Marine told John, "Before I was a Marine, if I had ever seen you on my block I would've probably killed you just because you were standing there." This was a serious statement from one of John's good friends, a black ex-gang member from Detroit who, as John said, "would die for me now, just like I'd die for him."

My son has connected me to my country in a way that I was too selfish and insular to experience before. I feel closer to the waitress at our local diner than to some of my oldest friends. She has two sons in the Corps. They are facing the same dangers as my boy. When the guy who fixes my car asks me how John is doing, I know he means it. His younger brother is in the Navy.

Why were I and the other parents at my son's private school so surprised by his choice? During World War II, the sons and daughters of the most powerful and educated families did their bit. If the idea of the immorality of the Vietnam War was the only reason those lucky enough to go to college dodged the draft, why did we not encourage our children to volunteer for military service once that war was done?

Have we wealthy and educated Americans all become pacifists? Is the world a safe place? Or have we just gotten used to having somebody else defend us? What is the future of our democracy when the sons and daughters of the janitors at our elite universities are far more likely to be put in harm's way than are any of the students whose dorms their parents clean?

I feel shame because it took my son's joining the Marine Corps to make me take notice of who is defending me. I feel hope because perhaps my son is part of a future "greatest generation." As the storm clouds of war gather, at least I know that I can look the men and women in uniform in the eye. My son is one of them. He is the best I have to offer. John is my heart.

Faith is not about everything turning out OK; Faith is about being OK no matter how things turn out."

[Source: PBS Newshour | Frank Schaeffer | December 10, 2002 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

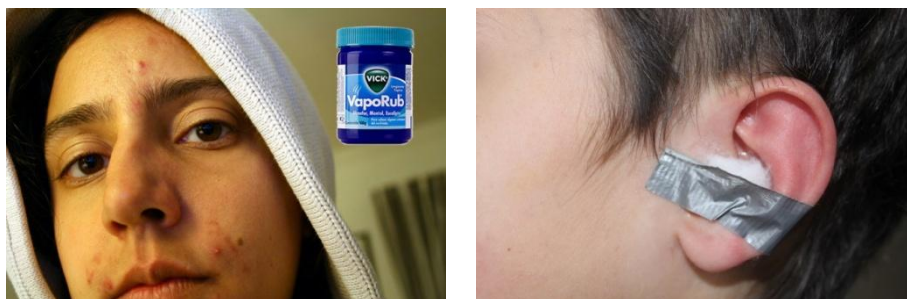
## Vicks Vaporub ► Alternate Uses

Chances are, if you look in your medicine cabinet right now you'll find a jar of Vicks VapoRub. After all, it's a staple for anyone who gets colds (and isn't that all of us?). Sure, its main use is to relieve chest and nasal congestion, but did you know there are a million other ways VapoRub can make your life better? When your cold is gone and you have some leftover Vicks, don't put the container away. Use it to solve one of these other common problems!

1. VapoRub can keep the bugs at bay: Bugs hate the smell of eucalyptus, which is very strong in VapoRub. Dabbing it behind your ears will keep them away. No harsh chemical sprays needed!
2. Keeping pets from going to the bathroom indoors: Put some VapoRub on the spot where your dog likes to have its accidents and he'll stay away. Dogs do not like the powerful smell.
3. Heal your stretch marks by rubbing the product on them.



4. Use VapoRub to soften callouses by applying it nightly.
5. Ease migraines by applying Vicks onto your temples.
6. Soothe aching muscles by rubbing some Vicks into them. The cooling sensation will feel great!
7. Dry up acne breakouts: A dab of VapoRub on a zit will eliminate pimples overnight.



8. Cure earaches: Saturate a cotton ball with VapoRub and leave it in the infected ear. This will reduce pain and inflammation.
9. Keep the cat from scratching everything you own by wiping a bit on their favorite scratching places. This will stop them in their tracks.
10. Use VapoRub to safely remove ticks without breaking them apart and risking infection. Just wipe some over the tick and they'll release on their own.
11. Spread some on your feet to reduce cold symptoms excluding coughs. Your feet absorb the medicinal properties of VapoRub and you should wake up feeling better!
12. Use Vicks to help heal bruises. It reduces the appearance of bruising by driving blood away from the surface of the skin.
13. VapoRub can be used as an antiseptic for cuts, too! Dabbing them with the product can help heal them fast and prevent infection!

14. Clear up sinus headaches fast.

15. Treat eczema.

16. Heal tennis elbow by rubbing Vicks onto the area that hurts.

17. You can use Vicks VapoRub to reduce belly fat. To do this, mix one tablespoon of baking soda, one tablespoon of crushed camphor, one tablespoon of alcohol , and half a jar of Vicks. Then, stir it until it becomes a paste. Now, apply this solution to your belly and wrap it with saran wrap and perform your cardio exercise. Once you are finished, rinse it off and continue for several weeks.

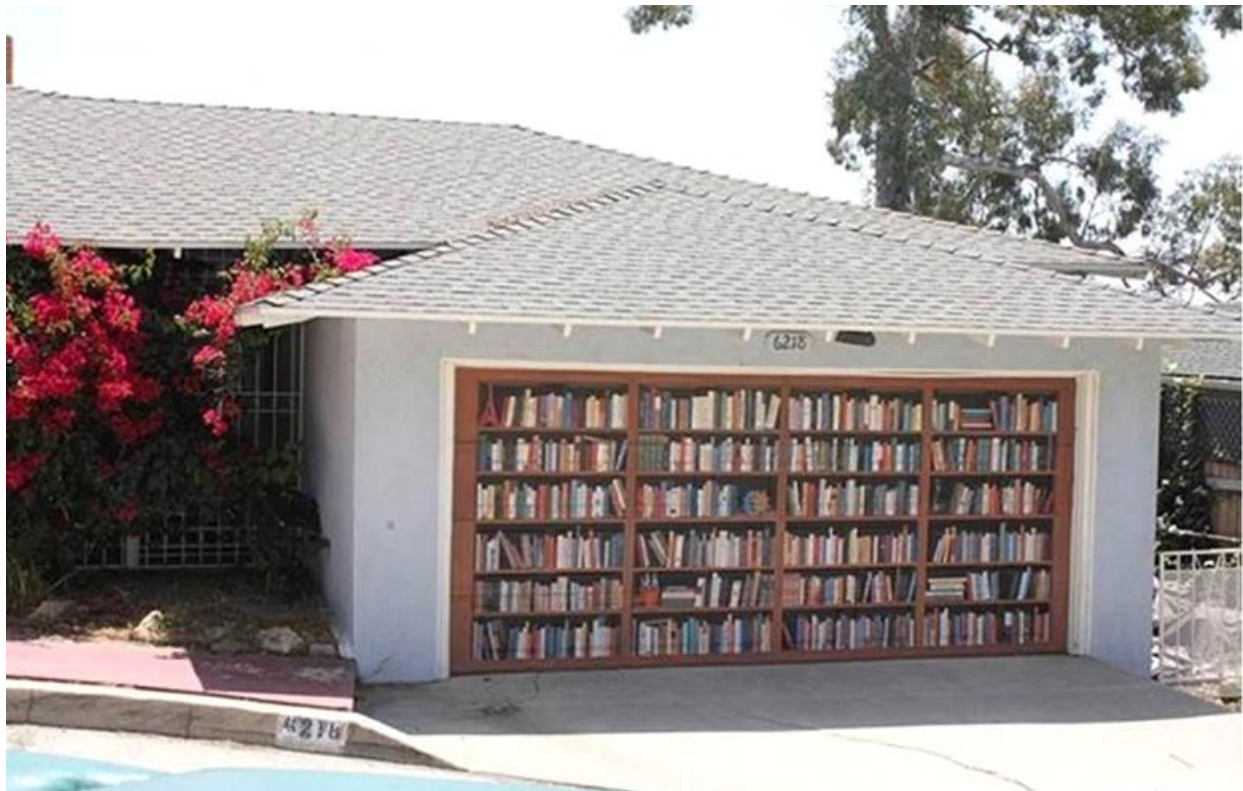
18. Vicks VapoRub can also be used when removing a splinter. If you rub a small amount on top of the affected area before you take it out with tweezers, it will help cool and ease the pain you feel when it pinches the nerve endings on your skin.

19. this may come as a surprise, but many people rub VapoRub below the nostrils of their male racehorses to keep them from attempting to follow the scent of other female horses. This way, it keeps them focused on the task at hand—winning a race!

[Source: The Daily Wire | May 3, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Garage Doors ► Making Yours Stand Out (2)



\*\*\*\*\*

## Aging ► Language Advantage

Question! Would you recognize the word Murgatroyd? - Heavens to Murgatroyd! Lost Words from our childhood: Words gone as fast as the buggy whip! Sad really! The other day, a not so elderly (65) lady said something to her son about driving a Jalopy and he looked at her quizzically and said what the heck is a Jalopy? He had never heard of the word jalopy! She knew she was old but not that old! Well, I hope you are Hunky Dory after you read this article by Richard Lederer and chuckle -

About a month ago, I illuminated some old expressions that have become obsolete because of the inexorable march of technology. These phrases included "Don't touch that dial," "Carbon copy," "You sound like a broken record" and "Hung out to dry."

Back in the olden days we had a lot of moxie. We'd put on our best bib and tucker to straighten up and fly right - Heavens to Betsy! Gee whillikers! Jumping Jehoshaphat! Holy moley! We were in like Flynn and living the life of Riley and even a regular guy couldn't accuse us of being a knucklehead, a nincompoop or a pill. Not for all the tea in China!

Back in the olden days, life used to be swell but when's the last time anything was swell? Swell has gone the way of beehives, pageboys, spats, knickers, fedoras, poodle skirts, saddle shoes and pedal pushers. Oh, my aching back.

Kilroy was here but he isn't anymore.

We wake up from what surely has been just a short nap and before we can say, well I'll be a monkey's uncle! This is a fine kettle of fish! We discover that the words we grew up with, the words that seemed omnipresent as oxygen have vanished with scarcely a notice from our tongues and our pens and our keyboards.

Poof, go the words of our youth, the words we've left behind. We blink and they're gone. Where have all those phrases gone? Long gone: Pshaw. The milkman did it. Hey! It's your nickel. Don't forget to pull the chain. Knee high to a grasshopper. Well, Fiddlesticks! Going like sixty. I'll see you in the funny papers. Don't take any wooden nickels. Heavens to Murgatroyd!

It turns out there are more of these lost words and expressions than Carter has liver pills. This can be disturbing stuff! We of a certain age have been blessed to live in changing times.

For a child each new word is like a shiny toy, a toy that has no age. We at the other end of the chronological age have the advantage of remembering there are words that once did not exist and there were words that once strutted their hour upon the earthly stage and now are heard no more, except in our collective memory. It's one of the greatest advantages of aging.

[Source: [www.lexigame.com](http://www.lexigame.com) | May 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Have You Heard? ► Happy Birthday | Bruce & Jenny's Love Story

### Happy Birthday

That morning. I went downstairs for breakfast hoping my husband would be pleasant and say, 'Happy Birthday,' and possibly have a small present for me.

As it turned out, he barely said good morning, let alone 'Happy Birthday.' I thought....well, that's marriage for you, but the kids.... they will remember.

My kids came bouncing down stairs to breakfast and didn't say a word. So when I left for the office I felt pretty low and somewhat dejected.

As I walked into my office, my handsome boss, Rick, said, 'Good morning, lady, and by the way, Happy Birthday!' It felt a little better that at least someone had remembered.

I worked until one o'clock, when Rick knocked on my door and said, 'It's such a beautiful day outside, and it is your birthday, what do you say we go out to lunch, just you and me.'

I said, 'Thanks, Rick, that's the greatest thing I've heard all day. Let's go!'

We went to lunch. But we didn't go where we normally would go. He chose instead a quiet bistro with a private table. We had two martinis each and I enjoyed the meal tremendously.

On the way back to the office, Rick said, 'It's such a beautiful day...we don't need to go straight back to the office, do we?' I responded, 'I guess not. What do you have in mind?'

He said, 'Let's drop by my place, it's just around the corner.'

After arriving at his house, Rick turned to me and said, 'If you don't mind, I'm going to step into the bedroom for just a moment.'

Make yourself comfortable, I'll be right back.'

'Ok.' I nervously replied.

He went into the bedroom and, after a couple of minutes, he came out carrying a huge birthday cake, followed by my husband, my kids, my mother and father, my sister and brother, and dozens of my friends and co-workers, all singing 'Happy Birthday.'

And I just sat there....

on the couch....

Naked.

-o-o-O-o-o-

### **Bruce & Jenny's Love Story**

Little Bruce and Jenny are only 10 years old, but they know they are in love. One day they decide that they want to get married, so Bruce goes to Jenny's father to ask him for her hand.

Bruce bravely walks up to him and says, "Mr. Smith, me and Jenny are in love and I want to ask you for her hand in marriage."

Thinking that this was just the cutest thing, Mr. Smith replies, "Well Bruce, you are only 10. Where will you two live?"

Without even taking a moment to think about it, Bruce replies, "In Jenny's room. It's bigger than mine and we can both fit there nicely."

Mr. Smith says with a huge grin, "Okay, then how will you live? You're not old enough to get a job. You'll need to support Jenny."

Again, Bruce instantly replies, "Our allowance, Jenny makes five bucks a week and I make 10 bucks a week. That's about 60 bucks a month, so that should do us just fine."

Mr. Smith is impressed Bruce has put so much thought into this.

"Well Bruce, it seems like you have everything figured out. I just have one more question. What will you do if the two of you should have little children of your own?"

Bruce just shrugs his shoulders and says, "Well, we've been lucky so far."

Mr. Smith no longer thinks the little shit is adorable.

\*\*\*\*\*



What do you See?

**FAIR USE NOTICE:** This newsletter may contain copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. The Editor/Publisher of the Bulletin at times includes such material in an effort to advance reader's understanding of veterans' issues. We believe this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, the material in this newsletter is distributed without profit to those who have expressed an interest in receiving the included information for educating themselves on veteran issues so they can better communicate with their legislators on issues affecting them. To obtain more information on Fair Use refer to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>. If you wish to use copyrighted material from this newsletter for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.

-o-o-O-o-o-

**TO READ and/or DOWNLOAD THE ABOVE ARTICLES, ATTACHMENTS, OR PAST BULLETINS  
Online GO TO:**

- <http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html> (PDF Edition w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://www.veteransresources.org> (PDF & HTML Editions w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions in Word format)
- <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> (PDF & HTML Editions w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://www.veteransresources.org/rao-bulletin> (past Bulletins)

**Note: The above websites are blocked by some, if not all, USAF & USCG military commands for security purposes. To gain access you need to open them using a non "...@us.af.mil" "...@uscg.mil" source. Contact [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) if you are unable to do this.**

**Notes:**

1. The Bulletin will be provided as a website accessed document vice direct access until further notice. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their

subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 20,501 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others have or are in the process of being deleted from the active mailing list.

2. Anyone who wants to remove or change their email addree from the Bulletin mailing list **DO NOT USE** the automatic “UNSUBSCRIBE” or “Change of Address” tabs at the bottom of this message as they are no longer fully functional. Send a message to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) with the word “DELETE” or “COA” in the subject line.

3. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines, whether or not they live there, can request to be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of notices on Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, and TRICARE in the RP.

4. New subscribers and those who submit a change of address should receive a message that verifies their addition or address change being entered in the mailing list. If you do not receive a message within 7 days it indicates that either I never received your request, I made an error in processing your request, or your server will not allow me to send to the email addree you provided. Anyone who cannot reach me by email can call (858) 432-1214 to ask questions or confirm info needed to add them to the directory.

5. If you have another email addree at work or home and would like to also receive Bulletin notices there also, just provide the appropriate addree to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net).

6. Past Bulletin articles as well as an index of all previously published article titles are available on request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net). Bear in mind that the articles listed on this index were valid at the time they were written and may have since been updated or become outdated.

7. The Bulletin is normally published on the 1st and 15th of each month. To aid in continued receipt of Bulletin availability notices, recommend enter the email addree [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) into your address book. If you do not receive a Bulletin check either <http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html> (PDF Edition), <http://www.veteransresources.org> (PDF & HTML Editions), <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> (PDF & HTML Editions), or <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions) before sending me an email asking if one was published. If you can access the Bulletin at any of the aforementioned sites it indicates that something is preventing you from receiving my email. Either your server considers it to be spam or I have somehow incorrectly entered or removed your addree from the mailing list. Send me an email so I can verify your entry on the validated mailing list. If you are unable to access the Bulletin at any of these sites let me know.

8. Articles within the Bulletin are editorialized information obtained from over 100 sources. Provided at the end of each article is the primary source from which it was obtained. The ++ indicates that that the information was reformatted from the original source and/or editorialized from more than one source. Because of the number of articles contained in each Bulletin there is no way that I can attest to their validity other than they have all been taken from previously reliable sources. My staff consist of only one person (myself) and it is a 7/10-12 endeavor to prepare and publish. Readers who question the validity of content are encouraged to go to the source provided to have their questions answered. I am always open to comments but, as a policy, shy away from anything political. Too controversial and time consuming.

== To subscribe first add the RAO email addree [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) to your address book and/or white list. Then send to this addree your full name plus either the post/branch/chapter number of the fraternal military/government organization you are currently affiliated with (if any) “AND/OR” the city and state/country you reside in so your addree can be properly positioned in the directory for future recovery. Subscription is open at no cost to all veterans, dependents, military/veteran support organizations, and media.

== To change your email addree or Unsubscribe from Bulletin distribution DO NOT USE the “Change address / Leave mailing list” tab at the bottom of the Bulletin availability notice that advised you when the current Bulletin was available. **It is currently not fully functional.** Instead send an email to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) indicating the change you want.

== To manually submit a change of email addree provide your old and new email addree plus full name.



\*\*\*\*\*

**RAO Bulletin Editor/Publisher:**

Lt. James (EMO) Tichacek, USN (Ret) Tel: (858) 432-1214 Email: [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net)  
Bulletin Web Access: <http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html>, <http://www.veteransresources.org>, <http://frabr245.org>, and  
<http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> [PDF & HTML Editions w/ATTACHMENTS]

**RAO Baguio Director:**

SMSGt Leonard (Len) D. Harvey, USAF (Ret) PSC 517 Box 4036, FPO AP 96517-1000, Tel: 63-74-442-3468;  
Email: [lenharvey@live.com.ph](mailto:lenharvey@live.com.ph)

**RAO Baguio Office:** Mountain Lodge, 27 Leonard Wood Road, Baguio City, 2600 Philippines  
FPO Mail Pickup: TUE & THUR 09-1100 --- Outgoing Mail Closeout: THUR 1100

**Warning:**

DELETE the end-paragraph of the Bulletin before you forward it to others. The end-paragraph following this warning is required by law and offers the recipient an opportunity to "UNSUBSCRIBE", if they choose to. Although it is currently not functional if it should start to work this "unsubscribe" link contains your email address and whoever receives your re-distribution has the opportunity, whether purposely or inadvertently, to terminate your future receipt of Bulletin messages.