

RAO

BULLETIN

1 June 2017

PDF Edition



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*** DoD ***



DoD Basic Pay to Salary Conversion ► Plan Due NLT Jan. 1, 2018

By year's end the Department of Defense expects to launch its 13th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRMC), which will assess the pros and cons of converting service members from traditional basic pay and tax-free allowances to a single, civilian-like salary system. That's a slower pace of study than Congress wanted last December when it ordered the department to prepare a plan to begin to transition to a salary system no later than Jan. 1, 2018, and in the interim to provide "an initial assessment and progress report" on the effort by March 1 this year.

The under-staffed department delivered that initial report 17 APR, as a two-page letter to Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) and Rep. Max Thornberry, chairmen of the Senate and House armed services committees. The letter advised that assessing the ramifications of moving to military salaries is an enormous task, and "necessarily and most appropriately" performed by the next QRMC. The department takes "very seriously" that order from Congress, wrote senior defense executive A. M. Kurta. However, he explained, transitioning to a salary system "would be a change of historic proportions" requiring "significant additional study [of] second and third order effects, the potential risk to readiness, if any, and the effects on DoD's ability to recruit and retain" a volunteer force.

By law, the president every four years must direct a QRMC to review principles and concepts of military compensation. Lawmakers agreed that the work of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission in 2015-16, which resulted in enactment of a new Blended Retirement System to take effect in 2018, satisfied the legal requirement for conducting the 12th QRMC. The next QRMC will be chartered by President Trump, perhaps in the next several months, said Jeri Busch, the department's director of military compensation policy, in an interview Wednesday. A QRMC draft charter is being prepared. A director and staff could be named and begin its review by December. "For something like this," she said, "the work might take two years or more."

Meanwhile, the Trump administration soon will unveil its first defense budget request, for fiscal 2018. That will reveal whether Defense Secretary James Mattis and the White House accept the last administration's playbook on capping pay raises a half percentage point below private sector wage growth for a while longer to free up more budget dollars for training and other readiness needs. Busch said she couldn't discuss what the pay raise request will be for Jan. 1, 2018, until the budget is unveiled. A 2018 raise to match private sector wage growth would be 2.4 percent. Last year Obama sought a 1.6 percent increase. But Congress interrupted a string of pay caps, voting a 2.1 percent pay hike instead.

The Congressional Research Service in April released for interested members of Congress a report on military compensation. It described how lawmakers, in the decade following the September 11 attacks, used various pay increases to improve recruiting, retention and overall force quality in wartime. But more recently, to deal with tighter defense budgets, Congress accepted the view of military leaders that compensation growth needed to slow so they could "rebalance" defense spending more toward weapon modernization, training and readiness accounts.

From 2014 through 2016, basic pay raises were capped a half percentage point below private sector wage growth as measured by the government's Employment Cost Index. Congress voted to trim annual adjustments in Basic Allowance for Housing for five years so that, by 2019, service members living off base will be pay five percent of their average rental costs out of pocket. Congress and the department also committed to cutting the \$1.3 billion annual subsidy for commissary stores. The goal is to slice the subsidy at least by half through more business-like operations while still preserving shopper savings. Commissaries reforms are underway. Busch indicated the department will not seek repeal of the statute dampening housing allowance adjustments. But whether it will push for full pay raises or something less will be known soon.

The department's view of pay overall, said Busch, is that there is no gap currently in comparing military pay with private sector wages or salaries, though bonuses and special pays continue to be needed to keep high-demand skills.

“We do believe, as of today, that we still have a very robust compensation package that compares very favorably to the private sector,” said Busch. “As of today it meets our needs in helping us recruit and retain the talent we need.” The 9th QRMC, which issued its report fifteen years ago, embraced the notion that if Regular Military Compensation (RMC) matched or exceeded the 70th percentile of wages in the private sector for workers of the same age and educational background of military folks, then military pay is deemed adequate.

RMC is defined as a member’s basic pay plus average tax-free allowances for their pay grade, plus a calculated value of the tax advantage on allowances. Busch said RMC remains the foundation for judging adequacy of compensation, with the understanding special and incentive pays also are needed to retain different skills. “RMC is what we [use] to make those comparisons between the military and the private sector,” Busch said. The Congressional Research Service noted that by 2012, when the 11th QRMC reported, RMC had grown past the 70th percentile benchmark set a decade earlier. Officer pay was at the 83rd percentile of college-educated private sector salaries; enlisted pay had reached the 90th percentile compared with their civilian peers. That finding made military leaders comfortable in asking Congress for a series of annual pay raise caps to rebalance defense spending toward other needs. Is the 70th percentile standard still relevant and useful? “We think we need to review and validate whether that’s the right benchmark,” said Busch. “After more than 15 years of war, does that need to be in a different place?”

The department has the think tank Rand Corp. studying the issue, she said. Busch reinforced another point that congressional analysts also underscored in their April review of military pay issues: that the nature of service life makes pay comparisons to the private sector imperfect. The “conditions of military service are frequently much more arduous than those of civilian employment, even in peacetime, for families as well as military personnel themselves,” the Congressional Research Service report explained. This factor “is sometimes cited as a rationale for military compensation being at a higher level than it otherwise might be. “On the other hand,” said the report, “the military services all mention travel and adventure in exotic places as a positive reason for enlistment and a military career, so it may be misleading to automatically assume this is always a liability.” [Source: The Military Advantage Blog | Tom Philpott | April 17, 2017 ++]

DoD 2018 Budget Update 02 ► \$639.1B Request Sent to Congress

On 23 MAY President Donald J. Trump sent Congress a proposed budget request of \$639.1 billion, \$574.5 billion in the base budget and \$64.6 billion in the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) budget. This budget request is \$52 billion above the defense budget cap in the Budget and Control Act (BCA) of 2011. This funding is required to continue to rebuild warfighting readiness and will restore program balance by fixing the holes created by previous budget cuts. Since enactment of the BCA, the world has become more dangerous. Over this period, the military has become smaller and training, maintenance, and modernization have been deferred, resulting in degraded warfighting readiness. This budget request reverses that degradation and starts restoring the readiness of our armed forces to meet the challenges of today and the future. To do so, it is essential that the defense sequestration caps be reversed. As Secretary Mattis recently told members of Congress, the BCA and sequestration have “done more damage to our readiness than the enemies in the field.”

The funding in the OCO budget provides resources in support of Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (OFS) in Afghanistan, Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) in Iraq and Syria and other global counterterrorism operations. In addition, the funds enhance U.S. assurance and deterrence in Eastern Europe through the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI). The FY 2018 budget request is the second step in a three-step process to rebuild the Armed Forces. The first step was the FY 2017 Appropriations Act. That money is for immediate warfighting readiness shortfalls and funds the increased operating tempo in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). This request

builds on those resources and focuses on restoring a balanced defense program. The FY 2018 budget request includes:

- Sustainment of the increased manning levels for the Army and Marine Corps in the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act as well as increases in Air Force and Navy manning levels.
- Additional funding for operating forces, logistics, maintenance, training and spares
- Additional shipyard capacity and aviation depot maintenance for the Navy
- Increased unit and flight training for the Army
- Increased weapons sustainment and increased end strength to address pilot and maintainer shortfalls in the Air Force
- Increased investment in a wide range of preferred munitions
- Increased facilities sustainment, restoration and modernization across all Services

This budget request also invests in modernization and advanced capabilities to reassert our technological edge over future adversaries. Major investments include:

- F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, 70 aircraft; \$10.3 billion
- KC-46 Tanker, 15 aircraft; \$3.1 billion
- B-21 Bomber, \$2.0 billion
- Virginia Class Submarine, 2 ships; \$5.5 billion
- DDG-51 Destroyers, 2 ships, \$4.0 billion
- CVN-78 Class Aircraft Carrier, 1 ship, \$4.6 billion
- Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, 2,647 vehicles; \$1.1 billion
- Science and Technology, \$13.2 billion

The military and civilian personnel are the foundation of the Department and constitute its premier asset. They have the full support of the Nation to accomplish the arduous mission of defending the United States of America. This budget includes a 2.1% pay raise for military personnel and a 1.9% pay raise for civilian personnel. The budget supports a competitive compensation package that reflects the unique demands and sacrifices of our service members. The Department continues to seek compensation reforms that will:

- Expand access to telehealth and nurse advice lines
- Exempt medically retired and family members of those who die on active duty from cost share increases
- Incentivize members to make effective choices between mail order versus retail pharmaceuticals
- Modify blended retirement system to allow enlisted members beyond 26 years to receive government contributions under the Thrift Savings Plan

The Department continues to support a wide range of family support programs, such as:

- Non-medical counseling services
- Financial readiness training
- Joint Family Support Assistance through Military One Source
- Family Advocacy Program
- Military Spouse Education and Career Assistance
- Tuition Assistance for Off-Duty Education Support
- Child and Youth Programs

The FY 2018 budget request also continues the broad institutional reform agenda, which will:

- Continue the effort to reduce major headquarters activities staffs and overhead by 25%
- Continue acquisition reform
- Begin a full financial statement audit
- Reorganize the acquisition management function

- Establish a chief technology officer
- Establish a chief acquisition and sustainment officer
- Establish a Chief Management Officer
- Elevate the Cyber Command
- Seek authority to commence a new Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round in FY 2021

The third step is the approval of the FY 2019 budget (and beyond). This budget will be the first budget informed by the new National Defense Strategy that the Department is currently developing. With that strategy in hand, the Department will be able to determine the budget needed to rebuild capacity and lethality across the Joint Force. Refer to <http://comptroller.defense.gov/budgetmaterials.aspx> to review the entire budget proposal and additional material. [Source: DoD Press Release | No. NR-192-17 | May 23, 2017 ++]

DoD 2018 Budget Update 03 ► TRICARE Impact

The FY 2018 budget was released this week, and it feels like *Back to the Future*. MOAA had hoped, as was the case in last year's National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), that the budget would contain more actual health care reforms. That is not the case. The money collected through the establishment of new TRICARE fee increases, according to DoD officials, will be “plowed back into readiness.”

Congressional intent in last year's 2017 NDAA legislation was to pave the way for sweeping changes to the Military Health System and the TRICARE program. The reforms focused on improving the beneficiary experience ranging from access to care, to streamlining TRICARE benefit options. For years, MOAA has advocated for many of these improvements. Part of the accepting this package of improvements means accepting some reasonable fee increases and the establishment of new TRICARE participation fees where none had previously existed. Central to this package of sweeping TRICARE reforms last year was that all currently serving, as well as those retiring prior to Jan. 1, 2018, would be grandfathered into the existing fee structures. New entrants into the services after Jan 1., 2018, would be subject to much higher fees. **This budget seeks to eliminate the grandfathering and places almost all beneficiary categories in line for these much higher fee hikes.**

The proposed budget would keep all program requirements in the newly formed TRICARE benefit option structures of TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select. That includes the establishment of open season for enrollment as currently exists in many civilian health plans. MOAA is encouraged by the following key initiatives rolled out in this administration's first budget proposal:

- No fee changes for active duty.
- Medically retired members and their families and survivors of those who died on active duty would be treated the same as active duty family members with no participation fee and lower cost shares.
- To ensure equity among active duty family members who might not live near a military treatment facility, there would be a no-cost care option available regardless of their assignment location.

In contrast, the budget was very specific in detailing a variety of fee changes and increases, including:

- A rollback in the grandfathering of large TRICARE fee increases. All categories of beneficiaries, except active duty, active duty family members in TRICARE Prime, and TRICARE for Life, would see even larger fees across the board. There are no changes for TRICARE for Life beneficiaries. Retired TRICARE beneficiaries under age 65 would be hit the hardest.
 - 1) \$350/\$700 (single/family) for TRICARE Prime (retiree) enrollment
 - 2) \$450/\$900 (single/family) for TRICARE Select enrollment
 - 3) Various copayments and deductibles would also rise. For instance, with family coverage under TRICARE Select, deductibles would be reset at \$300 to access network providers and \$600 for

non-network providers. The deductible for single coverage would be \$150 for network coverage and \$300 for out-of-network providers.

- Raises TRICARE pharmacy fees, tripling them over a ten-year period. This includes generic medications obtained through the TRICARE home delivery program.
- Increases in the catastrophic caps for retirees from \$3,000 to \$3,500.
- All new increases in premiums, copayments and deductibles and catastrophic caps would increase annually based upon a previously unused National Health Expenditures (NHE) index instead of the currently used index of annual COLA rates. The NHE is projected to be 5.9 percent by 2019.

These are selected highlights of the proposals. MOAA will provide additional details in their next update with calculations to illustrate how the cumulative changes would affect various categories of beneficiaries. MOAA's initial concerns about the proposals, in addition to the disproportional fee hikes that would occur through the repeal of the grandfathering clause, include:

- Breaking faith and precedent with the troops, who are traditionally grandfathered into the current cost and benefit structure.
- The focus on driving more care into the Military Treatment Facilities through higher cost incentives before most access to care initiatives have been implemented and tested.
- Tying all health care fees, including premiums and copays, to a medical inflation index that is projected to grow at close to 6 percent per year. MOAA continues to believe fee adjustments should be capped at the annual COLA percentage.
- The continued effort to escalate pharmacy copays, which have already been doubled and tripled over the past 5 years.

"It's important to appreciate the budget submission is just the first step in a long process," says MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret). "MOAA and our partners in The Military Coalition will be working with leaders and staffs of the House and Senate Armed Services committees in the coming months in our ongoing efforts to improve the Military Health System while doing our best to protect against imposing disproportional fee increases on those who earned their military health care coverage through decades of service and sacrifice." [Source: MOAA Leg Up | May 25, 2017 ++]

DoD 2018 Budget Update 04 ► Military Family Support Impact

Military family support programs would see a \$600 million boost under President Trump's proposed budget, but the request comes with a \$100 million cut in funding for child care and youth programs despite calls from families for more support in those areas. Family support programs would receive \$8.3 billion in fiscal 2018 under the proposal, which was submitted to Congress earlier this week. Commissaries would receive \$1.4 billion of that, up \$200 million over fiscal 2017. Child care and youth programs would get \$1.2 billion, down from \$1.3 billion in fiscal 2017. Information was not available about why officials requested less this year, especially as the services implement their programs to expand the hours of operation for child development centers.

"We thought the decrease was striking," said Eileen Huck, deputy director of government relations for the National Military Family Association, adding that families have long asked for more child care. She said the NMFA found the plan "disappointing." A \$200 million increase in "warfighter and family services" across all branches would raise that budget to \$1.7 billion. A breakdown of the funds was not immediately available from defense officials; programs on this budget line include military exchanges, family support centers, tuition assistance and nonmedical counseling support services for active duty, National Guard and Reserve members and their families. As the services plan to add personnel, the NMFA's government relations director questioned whether that increase

would be enough to pay for benefits across a larger number of military families. "We do appreciate [Defense] Secretary [Jim] Mattis' recognition that families need support," NMFA's Kelly Hruska said. "It's not a lot of money, but we do appreciate the effort."

The commissary budget boost comes as defense officials have sought to cut funding in recent years, only to have the figures restored by Congress. Plans call for fundamental changes to the benefit that would reduce the amount of taxpayer dollars required to operate the 240 stores around the world. Among the changes: A "variable pricing" program that allows officials to raise prices on some items to make money to help operate the stores. The overall average regional savings levels would stay steady, officials claim. "We're pleased they recognize that, regardless of planned changes, funding is required to operate and maintain the commissary benefit," Huck said. "Even if they think their transformation will reduce the need for [taxpayer dollars], we're not there yet. We're pleased to see full funding in the budget request." Other military family-related budget items in the president's proposal:

- Taxpayer funding for "mission-sustaining" morale, welfare and recreation programs would remain constant at \$1.5 billion. These programs include fitness centers, libraries and some education and recreation programs; other programs such as golf courses must be self-sustaining, operating on patron fees. While the number remains flat, Hruska noted, she's hearing from families about cuts in services.
- Funding to operate Department of Defense Education Activity schools would move from \$2.1 billion in fiscal 2017 to \$2.4 billion. DoDEA operates 111 schools in 12 countries and 58 schools in seven states, Puerto Rico and Guam. Factoring in proposed construction costs, the DoDEA budget proposal reaches \$3.1 billion.
- The budget proposal would provide \$100 million for the Spouse Employment and Career Opportunities Program, the same amount provided in each of the last two fiscal years. This pays for some tuition assistance programs for certain spouses of junior enlisted personnel and junior officers, as well as education and employment counseling and assistance to all military spouses, among other benefits.

Hruska said families need to be reminded that the budget request is just the first step in a process, and that the House and Senate will now take that request through their own decision-making process. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | May 25, 2017 ++]

BRAC Update 57 ► 2021 Closures Sought by DoD

Defense Department leaders will seek a new military base closing round in fiscal 2021 under the budget proposal for next year released by the White House on 23 MAY. The recommendation is sure to spark a contentious debate on Capitol Hill, where lawmakers have been reluctant to even discuss the idea of shuttering military facilities across the country. But military leaders have pushed for another base realignment and closure (BRAC) process since 2013, arguing that their current domestic footprint is too large given reductions in force size and equipment modernization in recent years. "(The Defense Department) estimates that it has approximately 20 percent excess capacity spread across the military departments and projects it could save \$2 billion or more annually by 2027," the budget documents state. "By executing BRAC in 2021, DOD will have the opportunity to reduce unnecessary infrastructure and align its facilities with the force structure determined by the National Defense Strategy."

The proposal does not immediately impact the \$603 billion in defense funding requested by President Trump for fiscal 2018, which begins 1 OCT. But administration officials argue the move is needed to create long-term savings for the military and help balance the federal budget. Trump's predecessor, President Barack Obama, made similar arguments in recent years, but was repeatedly rebuffed by Republicans and Democrats in Congress. That stems largely from controversies surrounding the 2005 BRAC round, which produced disputed savings totals while forcing hundreds of reorganizational moves that lawmakers complained hurt military communities and local businesses.

But Pentagon officials have estimated the five previous base closing rounds since 1990 combined have saved taxpayers at least \$12 billion annually. Earlier this year, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said lawmakers must begin debating another base closing process, calling Congress' handling of the issue in recent years "cowardice."

House lawmakers have called for updates to the military's excess infrastructure estimates, calling the 20 percent figure outdated and possibly out-of-touch with current mission demands. Copies of the budget began circulating on Capitol Hill ahead of the official White House release and Pentagon briefings on the spending plans. Trump's budget proposal faces a long legislative road before becoming law, with numerous controversial program extensions and cuts likely to face revisions from both congressional chambers. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 23, 2017 ++]

Pentagon Procurement Update 01 ► 809 Panel Interim Report | Not Good

The Pentagon acquisition system has gotten so bad that it is undermining the nation's military and literally obstructing modernization efforts, a panel of independent advisers told the House Armed Services Committee 17 MAY. Representatives of the congressionally-mandated "809 panel" painted an alarming picture of the state of defense procurement. The panel delivered an interim report to the committee a day before HASC Chairman Rep. Mac Thornberry is scheduled to unveil his own procurement reform proposal. Thornberry's first question to the panel: Are things worse now than they were in the past? The answer was a resounding 'yes.'

Former Air Force procurement chief Bill LaPlante said it has been obvious for years that DoD has failed to adapt to the realities of the modern world. "Our technological superiority has been eroding," LaPlante told the committee. "We have seen that over the past decade. ... In space, cyber, air superiority, it has been eroding right in front of us." The panel's report chastises the Pentagon's acquisition bureaucracy for holding on to antiquated practices that date back to the Cold War, when the U.S. Defense Department was a beacon of innovation and had an impressive monopoly on advanced technology. There is no sense of urgency even as other countries modernize their militaries and close the gap with the United States, said LaPlante: "Our adversaries are not studying things, they are building things." Innovation at DOD, meanwhile, is "worse than it's ever been."

Panel Chair Deidre Lee, a former director of defense procurement and acquisition policy, said the group does not intend to deliver yet another reform proposal to add to the huge stack of studies that Washington has produced over the past decades. Speaking with reporters after the hearing, she said she hopes "people will gasp" when they see the panel's final recommendations. The panel will provide detailed guidance to the Pentagon on how to simplify defense contracting and to encourage innovative tech companies to work with the military. The Pentagon, Lee said, has built barriers around the defense market that keep the best and brightest away. By excessively emphasizing oversight and compliance with regulations, the government has unwittingly "criminalized commerce," Lee said. Contractors should play by the rules, she said, but government procurement has gone too far in the direction of being a "gotcha, punitive" system.

The panel was sharply critical of the Pentagon wasting money on legacy technology. Even with a budget of \$300 billion a year for equipment and services, the bulk of defense equipment today is outdated and does not benefit from the rampant innovation happening in the civilian economy. "There is an imperative," said Lee. "We have to be more agile, more responsive." Thornberry said the panel's conclusions are consistent with what he has heard from businesses that have deliberately chosen to not work with the Pentagon. Charlie Williams, former director of the Defense Contract Management Agency, said he worries that the defense industry is becoming too segregated and isolated from the larger technology ecosystem. Not having a vibrant supplier base "is a huge challenge" for DOD, he said. The panel's report notes that the defense industry as we know it is rapidly shrinking while the "game

changing” technological advances are happening outside the defense sector. The Pentagon seems oblivious to these trends, putting the U.S. military at risk. it says.

The 809 panel, in an ironic twist, has not moved as quickly as it had hoped in developing its proposal. The members were sworn in in August 2016, but because of administrative delays, didn’t get going full speed until March. Lee asked Thornberry to extend the panel’s deadline for its final report until January 2019, although she insisted they would submit interim proposals between now and then. The 18 commissioners include the nation’s top procurement experts. They brag that they collectively have 350 years of government procurement experience. Thornberry told reporters after the hearing that he was “encouraged” by what he heard from the panel, and that he hopes it will bring a “sense of urgency” in DOD procurement, as opposed to the usual cynical attitude that “we’ve tried everything, and we keep beating our heads against the wall” while nothing ever changes.

The HASC procurement reform bill Thornberry plans to unveil 18 MAY acknowledges that “we can’t fix everything in one bill,” he said. “We have to eat this elephant one bite at a time. What you’ll see tomorrow is consistent with what this panel described.” [Source: Breaking Defense | Sandra Erwin | May 17, 2017 ++]

Okinawa U.S. Military Bases ► Continued Presence Frustrates Governor

As Okinawa marked the 45th anniversary of its reversion to Japanese rule, Okinawa Gov. Takeshi Onaga expressed frustration 15 MAY with the continued presence of U.S. military bases in his prefecture. “Even after the reversion, (Okinawa) continues to suffer from incidents and accidents linked to U.S. bases, environmental and other concerns,” Onaga said in a statement, calling the bases the “biggest impediment to development” there. Okinawa hosts the bulk of the U.S. military facilities in Japan, and the consequences of that decades-long task have caused fierce resentment against U.S. servicemen. Crimes linked to the bases are a source of constant grievance. Despite initial hopes that its base-hosting duties would ease after the reversion, Onaga said Okinawa remains in a “difficult situation.”

In May 1972, when Okinawa was returned to Japanese control, the area exclusively used for U.S. military facilities there amounted to about 27,893 hectares. As of January this year, the area had shrunk to 18,609 hectares, down around 33.3 percent. Compared with what happens on Japan’s main islands, the pace of base reduction in Okinawa is slow. Despite accounting for only 0.6 percent of the country’s land, Okinawa holds 70.6 percent of the area occupied by U.S. military facilities in Japan. Referring to a long-stalled plan to move U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma elsewhere on Okinawa, Onaga said he would keep up the fight. “I will devote myself to tackling matters such as the bases issue to build a peaceful and prosperous Okinawa” for future generations. Onaga, who opposes the plan, has demanded the Futenma base be kicked off Okinawa rather than transferred to a replacement facility under construction in less-populated Henoko, a coastal area in Nago.

On 14 MAY, around 2,200 people gathered on the shores near Henoko to protest the contentious plan as protesters began a march Friday for the same cause. “We will not condone the (central) government’s high-handed way of imposing the bases on Okinawa,” said Fujiko Matsuda, a 77-year-old Nago resident. Tokyo and Washington agreed on the transfer back in 1996, but the process has been delayed by fierce local opposition. The sea off Henoko hosts coral reefs and is home to the endangered dugong. Despite the opposition, the central government began land reclamation work in Henoko on April 25. It maintains the relocation plan is not opposed by all in Okinawa, and says it will continue to push for its completion to eliminate the risk of accidents posed by the base, which is situated in a densely crowded residential part of Ginowan.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, the government’s top spokesman, defended Tokyo’s policy on Okinawa 15 MAY, citing improved economic indicators in the prefecture and an agreement with the United States to move a portion of the Marines based in Okinawa to Guam. Pledging the government’s continued assistance to the people of Okinawa, Suga told a news conference that Tokyo will fulfill promise to allocate ¥300 billion (\$2.65 billion) in

economic development funds to Okinawa in each annual budget until 2021. [Source: The Japan times | Kyoda | May 15, 2017 ++]



DoD Recognized Religions ► Increased to 221 Faiths

Although the armed services' new list of recognized religions is cause for celebration for some, military officials say it won't change much in daily life. Last month, the Department of Defense released a complete list of the religions it recognizes, including some that hadn't been recognized by all branches in the past. On the list are heathenry, humanism, paganism, Wicca and more. Although the military chaplaincy has "a long history of respecting diversity," Ohio National Guard State Chaplain Col. Andrew Aquino said the list could make troops more willing to divulge their religion. "In the past, if (the person's religion wasn't) on the list, we wouldn't know how to clearly identify them," Aquino said. In the past, people might have identified as having no religious preference because their religion wasn't on the list, he said.

Jason Torpy, president of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers and an Army veteran, has been trying to get humanism recognized by the military for 10 years. Humanists believe not in a god but in science and compassion, according to the American Humanist Association. "Humanists should be able to be comfortable in their own skin with who they are and not fear they're going to be separated from their team for having different beliefs," Torpy said. If more people identify their religion using the list, Aquino and other chaplains can generate a religious-preference profile to help the military better support unique religious needs. The list is a compilation of faiths already recognized by at least one of the military branches, Department of Defense spokesman Johnny Michael said in an email.

The memorandum came after the Armed Forces Chaplains Board reviewed the recognized faith groups and recommended additions. The list has 221 faith options, an increase from the approximately 100 on previous lists, according to the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers' website <http://militaryatheists.org>. Torpy is looking at the list as a way to further the military's support of humanism, with a focus on the chaplaincy. Having chaplains who are either humanist or informed about humanism could be "very beneficial and help military personnel do their job better," Torpy said. Humanist chaplains are important for "all the reasons people think chaplains are important to support Christians," Torpy said. "They're asking for a connection to a community of like-minded people ... Without a connection, it's not as easy for them to be part of the team, to deal with the stress of

daily life.” Regarding humanism, the military can employ humanist chaplains, have chaplains welcome humanists in, and train chaplains on humanism, Torpy said.

It’s unclear whether the military will add humanism and other religions to the list of those that endorse chaplains, although chaplains have always been open to people of any religion, said Stephanie Beougher, an Ohio National Guard civilian spokeswoman. Chaplains are endorsed to represent Jews, Catholics, members of the American Orthodox Church, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans and Presbyterians. Each has a religious-affairs specialist to help them with administrative, logistical and support tasks, Beougher said in an email. Michael said chaplains won’t be trained on the added belief systems. “Chaplains perform or provide for specific religious ministration when a member of the unit articulates a need,” he said. “Commanders and chaplains receive training to ensure that every member of the organization enjoys the right to the free exercise of their religion, or to practice no religion at all.”

Aquino, asked about helping a service member who identifies with a religion with which he’s unfamiliar, joked that “Google’s a great thing.” “With emerging religions and religions we haven’t been familiar with in the past, it is kind of an evolving process,” he said. “We study up on them so we can better inform our commanders on supporting those needs.” For example, if the unit he’s working with has a Muslim member who tells him of specific dietary needs, Aquino can request that the commander have the mess hall accommodate that.

Religion also can become important when a service member dies. Lonny Heft, a heathen who lives in Lithopolis, served in the Army from 2002 to 2008 and said the addition of his religion, which isn’t widely practiced, is a big deal. Heathenry is a pagan religion that worships pre-Christian gods such as Thor and Odin. Not being able to specify the religion a person practices while in the military can be difficult. “For example, if you die overseas and you’re buried at Arlington National Cemetery, your religion’s symbol might not necessarily be one you can choose from,” Heft said.

Dog tags are another issue. When people enter the military, they are asked their religion, Heft said. His answer was agnostic, which he was at the time, but a Christian religion was printed on his dog tags. Aquino, endorsed by the American Baptist Churches USA, has been a chaplain for almost 30 years. He said he enjoys his job and sees it as “really a great opportunity to help our country meet religious needs.” “A happy soldier, a happy airman, is one that is spiritually supported.” [Source: The Columbus Dispatch | Danae King | May 12, 2017 ++]

Transgender Troops Update 02 ► Policy Decision Deadline 1 JUL

The Pentagon is prepared to implement a new policy clearing the way for transgender men and women to join the armed forces, Military Times has learned, but final approval rests with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who could endorse, revise, delay or even abandon it. Mattis faces a 1 JUL deadline, according to the parameters defined by his predecessor as defense secretary, Ash Carter. But the sensitive matter has become much more urgent for two transgender students now within days of graduating from the Army and Air Force military academies. The unidentified cadets were recently informed that, absent a policy formalizing new accession standards, they won’t be commissioned as military officers with the rest of their graduating class. Those proposed guidelines were sent to the defense secretary’s office but Mattis has yet to act on them, according to multiple sources familiar with discussions surrounding the policy’s implementation.

Meanwhile, neither the Army nor the Air Force has granted waivers to the cadets so they may proceed to serve in the active-duty military, causing some to question whether Mattis might decide against the proposed policy. Already, the Trump administration has moved to scale back federal protections for transgender students attending public schools, sending a strong signal it opposes further expanding such rights. The Air Force Academy holds its graduation 24 MAY in Colorado Springs. West Point’s ceremony, at which Mattis is slated to provide the commencement address, will be held 27 MAY in New York. The Defense Department is “reviewing the readiness

of the services to implement the accession of transgender personnel," Army Lt. Col. Myles Caggins, a Pentagon spokesman, told Military Times. He did not elaborate except to say there have been no changes to the policy, enacted by Carter in June, allowing transgender personnel already serving to do so openly and seek related medical care.

This readiness review follows a related decision, quietly approved by the Pentagon's sometime after Mattis took over in January, concerning bathroom and locker room access for transgender students attending Defense Department schools. A directive, issued last year after an incident in Germany, granted full access to transgender students' preferred facilities with no questions asked. Now, school principals — in consultation with students, their parents and teachers — address such matters case by case, as they had done previously. These developments have led some to question whether Mattis, a retired Marine Corps general, may repeal or simply choose not to enforce this and other social policies adopted during the Obama administration that aim to streamline military recruiting practices by providing equal opportunity for men and women, regardless of gender and sexual orientation.

Mattis is a "hard read," said Todd A. Weiler, who, under Obama and Carter, served as the assistant secretary of defense for manpower and reserve affairs. "We'll know a lot more very soon about how he intends to stake his ground — and not just his stance on the transgender issue, but about 'don't ask don't tell' and expanding opportunities for women." Weiler, who authored the military-wide school bathroom directive, was referring to two other signature personnel policies pursued by Obama during his eight years as commander in chief: One ending the ban on military service by homosexuals and the other opening ground combat jobs to women.

Mattis has questioned those moves in the past, telling Military Times last year: "We have to be very careful that we do not undercut battlefield effectiveness with shortsighted social programs." But during his Senate confirmation hearing, the retired general indicated he had "no plan to oppose women serving in any aspect in our military" and that he "never cared much about two consenting adults and who they go to bed with." "If someone brings me a problem, I'll look at," Mattis told lawmakers in January. "But I'm not coming in looking for problems."

The Defense Department estimates as many as 7,000 transgender troops serve in the active-duty force of 1.3 million. As Carter sought to define accommodations for them, he encountered significant internal resistance among the department's longtime civilian staff who believed the military's uniformed leadership did not support such a significant change, said a former Pentagon official who spoke to Military Times on the condition of anonymity. At its most extreme, this individual said, there were calls to require transgender troops to wear bathing suits while using communal showers.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Carter's policy calls for the Defense Department, and thus American taxpayers, to provide transgender personnel with medical care, to include reassignment surgeries and hormone treatment. In his June address lifting the ban, Carter indicated the accession policy would "require an individual to have completed any medical treatment that their doctor has determined as necessary ... and to have been stable in their identified gender for 18 months, as certified by their doctor before they can enter the military." But that policy was never put into practice, according to Army and Air Force officials who've said that the services are not accepting transgender troops.

Carter also ordered the department to field a transgender policy for current personnel, which was published 30 SEP and followed by service-specific directives. Weiler, who left the Pentagon in January, said an official count conducted that month suggested there were approximately 100 transgender troops currently serving who intended to fully transition and pursue related medical care. "It's a nonissue," he said. "The numbers weren't going to be that big. I thought they'd just let it go through quietly ... because the overall cost becomes so minimal."

Since becoming President Trump's defense secretary, Mattis has said repeatedly that he intends to focus on bolstering the military's size, strength and war-fighting capabilities while curtailing expenses. Recent estimates suggest the necessary medical procedures and hospitalization for someone to transition from one gender to another can cost between \$125,000 and \$150,000. Writing in the New England Journal of Medicine, the Palm Center's

Aaron Belkin calculated those costs to be much lower within the military's health-care system, averaging around \$30,000 per person. When approved last June, Carter's policy called for implementation to take place within 12 months. In that time, comprehensive training was expected to occur — "from commanders, to medical personnel, to the operating forces and recruiters," according to his guidance. That appears to be complete now and awaiting Mattis's review, according to multiple Pentagon officials.

But until that's settled, there will be no resolution for the two cadets stuck in limbo. The Air Force has said it is encouraging the student to work for the service in a civilian capacity. A West Point spokesman, Lt. Col. Christopher Kasker, was unsure whether its student would be allowed to commission when and if the final policy is signed. "The bad part for these cadets is they were planning to be Army and Air Force officers. Now we don't want them," Weiler said. "We've messed up their lives." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Andrew deGrandpre, Meghann Myers and Stephen Losey | May 17, 2017 ++]

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Update 18 ► USS Frank E. Evans Decision

The Pentagon has refused a long-standing request to add the names of 74 U.S. sailors who died in a 1969 ship collision to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. The USS Frank E. Evans was participating in a nighttime training exercise in the South China Sea when it turned into the path of an Australian aircraft carrier and was split in half. The World War II-era destroyer's stern section stayed afloat while the bow section sank. Survivors and relatives of those killed have been pushing the Department of Defense for years to add the 74 names to the wall because the ship had supported ground operations in Vietnam just weeks earlier and likely would've been sent back to the war zone after the exercise. But Pentagon officials in a decision this month stuck to their position that the Evans victims are precluded from being added to the wall because the accident occurred outside the Vietnam combat zone.

It was a decision that angered retired Navy Master Chief Lawrence Reilly Sr., an Evans survivor whose 20-year-old son, also named Lawrence, was among those killed. "I'm not happy with the whole thing," the 92-year-old WWII and Vietnam veteran said from his Syracuse home. "It's a bad deal." Instead of granting an exemption to the war zone rule, the Pentagon has offered to pay tribute to the fallen sailors by listing their names on a memorial plaque to be placed inside the education center to be built near the wall. But with less than half of the \$130 million cost of the center raised so far, the offer is being dismissed by some Evans survivors. "They're throwing us a bone," said Steve Kraus, a survivor and vice president of the USS Frank E. Evans Association. "They're thinking, 'OK, maybe this will all go away now.'"



In the above June 3, 1969 photo U.S. Navy destroyer USS Frank E. Evans is partially submerged after it was cut in half in a collision with the aircraft carrier HMAS Melbourne of the Royal Australian Navy during joint maneuvers in the South China Sea and (right) sailors inspect damage

Kraus, a 70-year-old retired utility supervisor from Carlsbad, California, said some in the Evans association reluctantly accepted the Pentagon's offer of a separate memorial, while others advocate continuing the fight for inclusion on the wall. Randy Henderson, of Mayville, New York, is among the latter faction. He was 13 when his older brother Randy died on the Evans. "We're still steadfast and moving ahead," he said. The Pentagon's latest rejection came after the Evans survivors pinned their hopes on Navy records that the group said showed the ship had been awarded a Vietnam Service Medal for June 2, 1969, a day before the accident. The medal was only given to ships and sailors who served in the Vietnam combat zone. But the Navy's review of its records last fall determined there was no documentation to support such a claim.

The Evans sailors "do not meet the established criteria for the inscription of their names on the wall," Navy Lt. Cmdr. Courtney Hillson, a Pentagon spokeswoman, said. "The deputy secretary of defense extensively reviewed information and records to make an informed decision." The Evans veterans say the Pentagon has previously granted exceptions to the eligibility criteria for adding names to the memorial, including for dozens of Marines who were killed when the plane carrying them back to Vietnam from leave in Hong Kong crashed during takeoff. The Evans group's effort has the backing of U.S. Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, the New York Democrat who got involved two years ago on behalf of the four sailors from his state who died in the collision.

Also killed in the accident were the three Sage brothers — Gary, Gregory and Kelly — of Niobrara, Nebraska. Their mother, Eunice Sage, wanted to see her sons' names placed on the memorial, Kraus said. She died in 2010. "She wanted this so bad," Kraus said. "That's all she would talk about." [Source: The Associated Press | Chris Carola | May 21, 2017 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 MAY 2017

Miami, FL -- A Miami-Dade police officer was arrested and charged with two counts of official misconduct as a public servant and one of grand theft for lying about being in the Florida Army National Guard, the Miami Herald reports. After 9 years as a county cop, William Weaver told his supervisor he was being deployed to Texas in 2015, which allowed him to collect 62 hours of pay from the department while he was away. His lieutenant found a discrepancy in his paperwork and called one of Weaver's military supervisors. The military supervisor said the deployment was never scheduled and that Weaver was not assigned to the unit. Weaver had actually been honorably discharged from the military three years prior, in 2012, the Miami Herald reported. The arrest warrant said Weaver's ex-girlfriend, a National Guard sergeant and mother of their child, said he asked for copies of the training orders she had received for an upcoming deployment. Weaver's bail has been set for \$15,000. [Source: ArmyTimes | Rachael Kalinyak | May 12, 2017 ++]

POW/MIA Update 86 ► Army 1st Lt. Ewart Theodore Sconiers

Marilyn Walton had sat in her New Albany home office and punched on her computer keyboard the same search terms she had typed hundreds of times before during the decade or so she had been researching the potential overseas gravesite of Army 1st Lt. Ewart Theodore Sconiers, who died in a Nazi POW camp in World War II. But this time, in August 2015, a new photograph popped up, one she never had seen before. Until that day, Walton and an army of interested civilian historians and researchers who wanted to find Sconiers' remains and bring them home had assumed — based on historical photos and accounts — that he was buried in a corner of what was once a cemetery but is now a public park in Lubin, Poland.

Pamela Sconiers Whitelock, Sconiers' niece and his closest living relative, thought so, too. That day, even as Walton was searching in a last-ditch effort to help, an archaeological team contracted by the federal government was digging in Lubin. The photograph on Walton's screen — from the website www.billiongraves.com, complete with an accompanying map and locator arrow — had only recently been taken and uploaded. It marked Grave 908 of a French military cemetery in Gdansk, Poland, and showed a white cross bearing the name Edouard Sconiers and the dates of the war, 1939-1945. Sconiers had often gone by "Ed" in the military. Could it be? wondered Walton, a Stalag Luft III historian and author. Could this somehow be him?



A funeral (left) is held for American Army Corps Officer Ewart Sconiers in a POW camp in Lubin, Poland in 1944. For year his family thought this and other such photos were Nazi propaganda, but they have been shown to be legitimate. His final resting place (right) was located in the Wojkowy Cmentarz Francuski, Gdańsk Pomeranian Voivodeship.

It turns out that it was. A government team exhumed the remains and positively identified them through DNA last year. Now, the remains of Sconiers, the last unrecovered American POW from the Germans' infamous Stalag Luft III in WWII, have been returned to Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. He will be buried with full military honors in January next to his mother in the family's hometown of DeFuniak Springs, Florida.

Whitelock, also of New Albany, said it is surreal to finally near the end of an emotional journey that began for her family in January 1944, when Sconiers died in the camp. "This is such a powerful story in so many ways about the price of freedom and the human impact of war," said Whitelock, 69. "The overarching theme of it to me is that America keeps its promise because my uncle is coming home." Sconiers was an Army Air Corps bombardier in the war. While on a mission to the Netherlands in August 1942, he famously took the controls of a B-17 bomber, the Johnny Reb, after its pilot and co-pilot were killed by German fire. Sconiers saved the crew by safely guiding the plane to a landing. But in October of that year, his plane was shot down; he was taken prisoner and held in Stalag Luft III. His wife and his parents were notified in 1944 that he had died in the camp at age 29.

As an officer, he received a burial from the Germans. Photos showed that happening in Lubin. Finding him someplace else was shocking, but the uncovered explanation was extraordinary, Walton said. (Her father, too, had been a POW at Stalag Luft III, and Walton has written several books about the camp.) She said that after the war, the Soviet Union, which had driven the German military out of Poland, allowed the French to recover their war dead from graves there, a concession the Soviets never afforded the United States. It appears that when the French recovered five of their fallen from Lubin, they also took Sconiers, their ally. The other markers in the French cemetery all say *Mort pour la France* (this man died for France); Sconiers' did not. "They knew he wasn't French," said Walton, 70. "They honored him anyway. This is a story that brings a lump to your throat in so many ways."

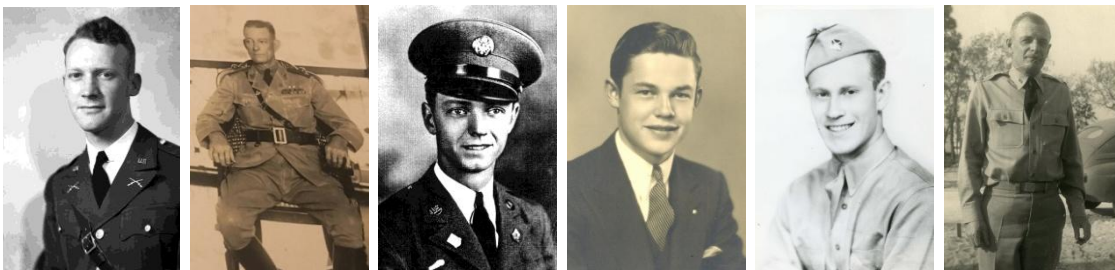
According to the federal Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, 73,119 U.S. troops from WWII remain unaccounted for, including 3,194 from Ohio. For Whitelock's part, she wishes the answers and homecoming would have happened when more of her family were still alive to see it. But her grandchildren have followed the story and now know the family's legacy and this country's commitment to its war dead. "There is a whole community — here and internationally — of kindred spirits who want American families to get answers," she said. "I hope my story

convinces those who still have a lost loved one to never give up.” [Source: The Columbus Dispatch |Holly Zachariah | May 12, 2017 ++]

POW/MIA Update 87 ► Families Sue to Identify Remains

In the early days of World War II, a baby-faced West Point graduate with a rifle in one hand and a tommy gun in the other made a one-man attack in the Philippines against the invading Japanese that altered the course of the war. Jumping from foxhole to foxhole in the jungle, he downed enemies with grenades, gunfire and eventually his bayonet before he was killed. The attack repelled an advance that delayed the Japanese for months, and within weeks the soldier, 23-year-old First Lt. Alexander Nininger, was awarded the first Medal of Honor of the war. In the decades since, he has been venerated with a statue, an annual award at West Point and even a Malcolm Gladwell treatise on human potential. But his body has not been found. The Army officially lists him as “nonrecoverable.”

His family disagrees. It says the lieutenant’s bones rest in grave J-7-20 at the American Cemetery in Manila. For 70 years, the family has been pressing the military to identify the remains and bring the fallen lieutenant home. Now, the family and six other families of soldiers buried as “unknowns” in Manila are suing the Department of Defense to compel it to identify the bodies. In a complaint filed in federal court 25 MAY, they argue that by not using readily available DNA testing to identify the remains, the department is flouting its legal duty to track down “missing persons from past conflicts or their remains after hostilities have ceased.”



Left to Right: First Lt. Alexander (Sandy) Nininger Jr., 23; Brig. Gen. Guy O. Fort, 63; Pvt. David Hansen, 25; Pvt. Arthur Kelder, 26; Technician Lloyd Bruntmyer, 21; and Col. Loren Stewart, 49

Among the missing dead are a defiant general killed by a firing squad after he refused to aid the Japanese, a colonel cut down by machine guns during the Americans’ last stand on the Bataan Peninsula and a private who died months later in a Japanese prison camp of dysentery and bayonet wounds. In the confusion of warfare, all were buried in graves labeled “unknown,” but the families say that in the years since, they have compiled enough evidence to once again give names to the nameless. “It seems like the least we could do,” John Patterson, 80, Lieutenant Nininger’s nephew, said in an interview in his study in North Kingstown, R.I., where bookshelves sagged with research compiled in an effort to bring his uncle’s body home. “He was a real hero who sacrificed himself.”

John Patterson has been searching for the remains of Lieutenant Nininger, his uncle, since the 1960s. “It became my avocation,” he said. “Some in my family would say my obsession.” Credit Ryan Conaty for The New York Times The target of the suit is the Defense P.O.W./M.I.A. Accounting Agency, an arm of the Pentagon with a \$115 million annual budget that is tasked with accounting for the roughly 45,000 recoverable lost service members dating back to World War II. For years, the agency and a group of agencies that preceded it have been plagued by reports of waste and dysfunction. Despite its hefty budget, the recovery effort has averaged fewer than 90 bodies annually in the past five years. Congress, frustrated by the low numbers, mandated that the agency increase the number to at least 200 per year by 2015, but it has yet to meet that total.

The agency said connecting remains with lost fighters was a meticulous process that often took years. It has tried to streamline the effort, and identified a record 164 remains in 2016, but staff members warned in recent interviews that extracting usable DNA from 70-year-old remains damaged by the chaos of battle would continue to be a plodding endeavor. “We completely understand there is frustration and pain of families,” said John Byrd, the director of the agency’s lab. “We are going to do the best we can to ramp up the most robust capability while trying to do the work properly.”

But many families have run out of patience. Lieutenant Nininger’s family has been rebuffed by the agency for decades, even though the family claims it can literally draw a map to his grave site and has provided DNA to make a match. “We’re not talking Sherlock Holmes here. We’re not even talking ‘Murder, She Wrote.’ Many of these cases are imminently solvable,” said Rick Stone, a former police chief and forensics professor who was deputy of the agency’s World War II branch from 2011 to 2012. “But the system is so dysfunctional that they resist all efforts.” During his year at the agency, he said, he found 179 cases where the identity of a body could be narrowed to a few names and easily identified through DNA. The agency acted on none, and he soon quit.

Lieutenant Nininger was an unlikely war hero. At West Point, the soft-spoken cadet from Florida gravitated to theater and liked listening to Tchaikovsky. But when the Japanese stormed the Philippines shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, it was as if a switch flipped, his nephew said. Lieutenant Nininger volunteered to go to a spot on the front lines that had splintered under the pounding of a larger Japanese force. With a satchel of grenades and a gun in each hand, he crept through a grove of mango trees and surprised the enemy at close range. He was wounded three times but kept going. After he ran out of ammunition, witnesses said, he killed three more men with his bayonet, then collapsed. He was wrapped in tent canvas and buried in a hasty grave in a churchyard. A few months later, Americans on the island surrendered. Ever since, his resting place has been in dispute. After the war, the Army assigned unidentified bones found in a churchyard grave the number X-4685 and reburied them, along with thousands of others, in the American Cemetery in Manila.

Veterans from the lieutenant’s battalion told the family that the grave held the fallen hero, and Army grave technicians sorting remains at the time concurred. The workers concluded twice that X-4685 was Lieutenant Nininger, citing matching dental records and other details. But the central office overruled the identification, saying the bones appeared to be a few inches too short. In 1951, the agency closed the case, labeling him “nonrecoverable,” and sent a letter to his parents saying, “It is regretted that there is no grave at which to pay homage.” “I don’t think my mother ever got over it,” said Mr. Patterson, a former Rhode Island state senator. In the decades since, his beard has grown white as he has tried to bring his uncle home.

In the 1960s, at the urging of his mother, Mr. Patterson wrote letters to the Department of Defense asking about the grave, but got only stock responses that the body was lost. In the 1970s, he began rooting through historical accounts of the battle for clues. In the 1980s, he tracked down witnesses the Army had never spoken to: a scout who had conveyed the body to the churchyard, an intelligence officer who drew a map showing an ancient mango tree 50 paces southwest of the church, next to the spot where the lieutenant was buried. “It became my avocation,” Mr. Patterson said. “Some in my family would say my obsession” In the 1990s, he made a pilgrimage to the churchyard, then tracked the remains to the Manila American Cemetery, where a white marble cross at grave J-7-20 bears the words “Here rests in honored glory a comrade in arms known only to God.” He asked the Department of Defense again to exhume the grave in 1993. The request was denied. He asked in 2015. It was denied again. He requested instructions on how to appeal the denial. He never got a response.

Agency anthropologists warn that the messy confusion of combat is often preserved in World War II’s many graves. Single coffins can hold multiple skeletons. Bones are often broken and commingled. And burned and degraded remains can make extracting DNA unlikely. “It’s not as straightforward as pointing to a grave,” said Greg Gardner, chief of the Army’s Past Conflicts Repatriations Branch, “We still have a lot of unknowns.” He added that he was not sure who is in grave J-7-20. Mr. Patterson hopes a lawsuit will force the agency to find out. And in the process, he hopes Lieutenant Nininger’s case will compel the government to identify hundreds of other missing

soldiers. "Once again maybe he can lead," Mr. Patterson said. "This time from the grave." [Source: The New York Times | Dave Philipps | May 29, 2017 ++]

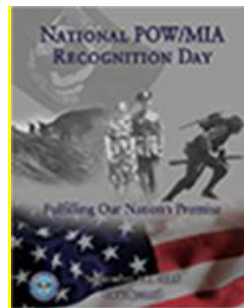
POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 16 thru 31 MAY 2017 | 14

"Keeping the Promise", "Fulfill their Trust" and "No one left behind" are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II (73,515) Korean War (7,841), Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,627), 1991 Gulf War (5), and Libya (1). Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home. For a listing of all personnel accounted for since 2007 refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/> and click on 'Our Missing'. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

== Mail: Public Affairs Office, 2300 Defense Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20301-2300, Attn: External Affairs

== Call: Phone: (703) 699-1420

== Message: Fill out form on <http://www.dpaa.mil/Contact/ContactUs.aspx>



Family members seeking more information about missing loved ones may also call the following Service Casualty Offices: U.S. Air Force (800) 531-5501, U.S. Army (800) 892-2490, U.S. Marine Corps (800) 847-1597, U.S. Navy (800) 443-9298, or U.S. Department of State (202) 647-5470. The remains of the following MIA/POW's have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:

Vietnam

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 1 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from Vietnam. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- Navy Lt. Cmdr. Frederick P. Crosby, 31, of Lockport, N.Y., will be buried May 28 in San Diego, Calif. Crosby, an RF-8A pilot, flew a bomb damage assessment mission over Thanh Hoa Province, North Vietnam, on June 1, 1965. His plane crashed after being hit by enemy ground fire while flying at high speed and low altitude over the target area. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1188950/navy-pilot-killed-in-vietnam-war-accounted-for-crosby> to read more about LCdr Crosby.



Korea

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

-- **Army Pfc. Manuel M. Quintana**, 19, of Klondyke, Ariz., will be buried May 19 in Boulder City, Nev. Quintana was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 29th Infantry Regiment. In late July 1950, the regiment unexpectedly encountered enemy forces while moving toward Hadong, in present day South Korea. Following the battle, Quintana could not be accounted for and was declared missing in action as of July 27, 1950. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1180925/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-quintana> to read more about Pfc. Quintana.



-- **Army Cpl. John Lane** was assigned to Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. In late July 1950, Lane's unit set up in defensive positions in Chinju, South Korea, after Chinese forces attacked the city. After his unit was forced to withdraw east to regroup, Lane could not be accounted for and was reported missing in action as of July 31, 1950. Interment services are pending. To read more about Cpl. Lane refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1182327/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-lane>.

-- **Army Cpl. Richard Seadore** was assigned to Company D, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. Seadore's unit was set up in defensive positions north of Uijong-bu, South Korea, on Dec. 14, 1950, when they were attacked by Chinese forces. Seadore could not be located after the battle. Originally listed as absent without leave, his status was later changed to missing. Interment services are pending. To read more about Cpl. Seadore go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1182323/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-seadore>.

-- **Army Cpl. Glen E. Kritzwiser** was a member of Battery C, 15th Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. Kritzwiser's unit, part of Support Force 21, provided artillery fire support for South Korean forces from Changbong-ni. On Feb. 11, 1951, Chinese forces launched a massive counter offensive, forcing the support force to withdraw. Kritzwiser could not be accounted for after the unit reassembled in Wonju on Feb. 13. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1182332/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-kritzwiser> to read more about Cpl. Kritzwiser.

-- **Army Pfc. Everett E. Johnson**, 21, of Cincinnati, will be buried May 29 in Madisonville, Ohio. Johnson was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division located near Taegu, South Korea. On Sept. 3, 1950, Johnson's company was cut off by enemy penetrations and withdrew to join the rest of the battalion. Johnson was killed during the attack. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1188960/soldier-killed-in-korean-war-accounted-for-johnson> to read more about Pfc. Johnson.



-- **Army Cpl. Frank L. Sandoval** was a member of Battery A, 15th Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. Sandoval's unit, part of Support Force 21, provided artillery fire support for South Korean forces from Changbong-ni. On Feb. 11, 1951, Chinese forces launched a massive counter offensive, forcing the support force to withdraw. Sandoval could not be accounted for after the unit reassembled in Wonju on Feb. 13. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1182330/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-identified-sandoval> to read more about Cpl. Sandoval.

-- **Army Pfc. Thomas C. Stagg**, 21, of Jefferson, Ala., will be buried May 29 in Birmingham, Ala. Stagg was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment. On Nov. 29, 1950, Stagg was on a reconnaissance patrol near Hajoyang-ni, North Korea, when it was ambushed. Following the battle, Stagg could not be accounted for and he was declared killed in action. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1189082/soldier-killed-in-korean-war-accounted-for-stagg> to read more about Pfc. Stagg.



World War II

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

-- **Army Staff Sgt. Michael Aiello** was a member of Company G, 401st Glider Infantry Regiment (GIR). Attached to the 325th GIR for Operation Market Garden in September 1944, Aiello's unit battled German forces in a dense forest in the Netherlands, known as Kiekberg Woods. During four days of intense battle, the Americans incurred many losses, including Aiello. Interment services are pending. To read more about Staff Sgt. Aiello refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1182423/soldier-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-aiello>.

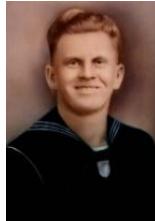


-- **Navy Musician 1st Class Elliot D. Larsen**, 25, of Monroe, Utah, will be buried May 26 in his hometown. Larsen was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Larsen was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. To read more about Larsen go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1187378/uss-oklahoma-sailor-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-larsen>.



-- **Navy Coxswain Verne F. Knipp**, 22, of Salida, Colo., will be buried May 26, in Auburn, Calif. Knipp was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Knipp was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. To read more about Knipp refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1187372/uss-oklahoma-sailor-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-knipp>

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Glaydon I.C. Iverson**, 24, of Emmons, Minn., will be buried May 27 in his hometown. Iverson was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Iverson was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1187378/uss-oklahoma-sailor-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-larsen> to read more about Fireman 3rd Class Iverson.



-- **Marine Corps Reserve Cpl. Henry Andregg, Jr.**, was assigned to Company C, 2nd Amphibious Tractor Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Andregg's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Andregg was killed on the first day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1187339/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-andregg> to read more about Cpl. Andregg.



-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Sam J. Kourkos** was assigned to Company M, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Kourkos's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Kourkos was killed on the second day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. Interment services are pending. To read more about Pfc. Kourkos refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1187334/marine-missing-from-world-war-ii-identified-kourkos>.

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

* VA *



VA Reform Update 07 ► Trump 10-Point Plan Status

To date the White House has not set up a promised hotline for veterans' complaints which Trump vowed would speed up reforms at the Department of Veterans Affairs. The idea was part of candidate Trump's 10-point plan to help veterans unveiled last July. Most of the other promises are also unfulfilled, although several will require cooperation from Congress regarding additional funding or new legal authorities. But the hotline, which Trump promised would be "devoted to answering veterans' complaints of wrongdoing at the VA and ensure no complaints fall through the cracks," was largely assumed to be within the new president's executive office powers and budget.

White House officials said they have no updates on when or whether the hotline will be established. VA officials did not respond to requests seeking comment on the idea. On the campaign trail, Trump pledged the hotline would be "active 24 hours a day and answered by a real person," and even suggested that he would answer it himself if the opportunity arose. "This could keep me very busy at night, folks," he told a crowd of supporters during a July 26 rally last summer. "This will take the place of Twitter." The idea was part of a larger theme by the Trump campaign of widespread problems at the Department of Veterans Affairs, which has faced accusations of failing to address concerns about long wait times for medical appointments and lax oversight of employees in recent years.

The 10-point VA plan was recently removed from Trump's campaign website along with a host of other documents from last summer and fall. Trump's re-election campaign said the changes were made to help better inform the public with "fact-based information" on Trump's accomplishments, in preparation for the 2020 campaign. The president has not made any direct reference to the plan since taking office in January, but has echoed several of the promises. Two of the plan's points referred to punishing VA employees for incompetence or criminal activity. Last month, Trump signed an executive order establishing a new accountability office within the department, with the charge of determining what new laws need to be adopted to meet those goals. Trump also pledged to create a commission "to investigate all the fraud, cover-ups, and wrongdoing that has taken place in the VA." No such commission has yet been announced.

Two other promises focused on bonuses and pay for VA staffers. Last week, House and Senate lawmakers announced a compromise on new accountability legislation for department staffers that includes the ability to revoke specialty pays. That deal was reached without direct collaboration with the White House but following Trump's general parameters. Trump also promised to "ensure every veteran has the choice to seek care at the VA or at a private service provider" and that "under a Trump Administration, no veteran will die waiting for service." VA Secretary David Shulkin has announced plans for a revamp of the department's outside care programs, due later this year.

Shulkin's nomination and confirmation are the only promise in the 10-point plan that appears to have been completed. On the campaign trail, Trump vowed to "appoint a VA Secretary whose sole purpose will be to serve veterans." Shulkin, the only high-level holdover from President Barack Obama's administration, was confirmed 100-0 by the Senate in February, vote tally that Trump frequently cites in public appearances with the Cabinet secretary. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 14, 2017 May 1, 2017 ++]

VA Secretary Update 59 ► Shulkin's First State of VA Address

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David J. Shulkin delivered his first "State of the VA" address 31 MAY, highlighting the activity and direction of the agency since his appointment in February. In his address, Secretary Shulkin stated that he wanted to update Veterans on the progress the agency is making while also acknowledging the shortcomings that the VA has identified and will address in the upcoming months. "As a physician, I tend to look at

things in terms of the way I was trained — assess, diagnose and then aggressively treat the patient,” Secretary Shulkin said. “Though we are taking immediate and decisive steps, we are still in critical condition and require intensive care.”

The address covered a wide spectrum of issues within the VA, including Access to Care; Community Care and Choice; Accountability; and the quality of care provided to Veterans. Secretary Shulkin identified multiple priorities, such as reducing backlogs and getting more Veterans access to mental health care and suicide prevention programs. Addressing improvements in accountability and VA administration, Secretary Shulkin stated that while he was able to initiate the Executive Order establishing the Accountability and Whistleblower Protection signed by President Trump, “further legislation is needed and needed now.” The goal, the Secretary said, is to “turn the VA into the organization Veterans and their families deserve, and one that America can take pride in.” A fact sheet highlighting some of the elements of Secretary Shulkin’s address as well as the text of his address can be found at: http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/StateofVA_FactSheet_5-31-2017.pdf. [Source: VA News Release | May 31, 2017 ++]

VA Budget 2018 Update 01 ► \$186.5 billion Proposed

In his fiscal year (FY) 2018 budget, President Trump is proposing \$186.5 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The budget request will ensure the nation’s Veterans receive high-quality health care and timely access to benefits and services. The budget also supports the continued transformation of VA to rebuild the full trust of Veterans as a premier provider of choice for their services and benefits. “The 2018 budget request reflects the strong commitment of the president to provide the services and benefits that our nation’s Veterans have earned,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “VA has made significant progress in improving its service to Veterans and their family members. We are fully committed to continuing the transformation across the department, so we can deliver the standards of performance our Veterans expect and deserve.” This year’s budget request includes 82 legislative proposals that will help enable the department to better serve Veterans.

Highlights From the President’s 2018 Budget Request for VA

The FY 2018 budget includes \$82.1 billion in discretionary funding, largely for health care, and \$104.3 billion in mandatory funding for benefit programs, such as disability compensation and pensions, and for continuation of the Veterans Choice Program (Choice Program). The discretionary budget request is \$4.3 billion (5.5 percent) above the 2017 enacted level, including nearly \$3.3 billion in medical care collections from health insurers and Veteran copayments. The budget also requests \$74 billion, including collections, for the 2019 advance appropriations for medical care, an increase of \$1.7 billion and 2.4 percent above the 2018 medical care budget request. The request includes \$107.7 billion in 2019 mandatory advance appropriations for Compensation and Pensions; Readjustment Benefits; and Veterans Insurance and Indemnities benefits programs in the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

Health Care -- With a total medical care budget of \$75.2 billion, including collections and new mandatory funding for the Choice Program, VA is positioned to continue expanding health-care services to over 7 million patients. Health care is being provided to more than 858,000 Veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn/Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. Major categories funded within the health care budget are:

- \$13.2 billion for community care;
- \$8.8 billion for long-term care;
- \$8.4 billion for mental health care;
- \$1.7 billion for programs for homeless and at-risk Veterans;

- \$751 million for Hepatitis-C treatment;
- \$604 million for Caregivers' benefits; and
- \$316 million for treatment of traumatic brain injuries.

Expanding Access -- The president's budget ensures that care and other benefits are available to Veterans when and where they need them. Among the programs that will expand access under the proposed budget are:

- \$13.2 billion for community care, compared with \$11.2 billion in 2017, a 13 percent increase;
- \$505 million for gender-specific health-care services for women, an increase of 7 percent over the 2017 level;
- \$862 million for the activation of new and enhanced health-care facilities;
- \$855 million for major and minor construction projects, including a new outpatient clinic at Livermore, California, and expansion of cemeteries at Calverton, New York; Sacramento, California; Bushnell, Florida; Phoenix, Arizona; Bridgeville, Pennsylvania; and Elwood, Illinois.

Disability Compensation Claims Backlog and Appeals Reform -- VBA has continued aggressive efforts aimed at bringing down the disability compensation claims backlog, completing a record-breaking 1.3 million claims in 2016 and reducing the claims backlog by 88 percent, cumulatively, from a peak of 611,000 claims in March 2013 to 71,690 on Sept. 30, 2016. In 2016, Veterans waited, on average, 203 fewer days for a decision than four years ago. In 2018, VBA is projected to complete 1.4 million claims, and the number of claims pending longer than 125 days is anticipated to remain at about 70 thousand claims. This pending claims status may change as the volume of claims receipts increases or decreases, and as claims processing becomes more efficient. VBA's success in reducing the rating claims backlog has also resulted in a growing appeals inventory.

From 2010 through 2016, VBA completed more than 1 million disability compensation rating claims annually. Approximately 11 percent to 12 percent of VBA decisions are appealed, with nearly half of those being formally appealed to the Board of Veterans' Appeals (the Board). While the appeal rate has remained steady over the past two decades, the appeals volume has increased proportionately to the increase in claims decisions. The average processing time for resolving appeals in 2016 was three years. For those appeals that reached the board, average processing time was six years, with thousands of Veterans waiting much longer.

VA has worked with Congress, Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and other stakeholders to develop a legislative proposal to reform the appeals process. The appeals process under current law is ineffective and confusing, and Veterans wait much too long for a decision on appeal. The new process will:

- 1) establish options for Veterans.
- 2) provide early resolution and improved notifications as to best options.
- 3) eliminate the perpetual churn of appeals inherent to the existing process.
- 4) provide Veterans feedback loops to VBA, and
- 5) improve transparency of the process by clearly defining the roles of VBA and the board throughout the appeals process.

Appeals reform is one of VA's top legislative priorities, and the department will continue to work with Congress and the VSOs to ensure Veterans receive the best possible service.

Improving the Veteran Experience

- National Call Centers (NCCs): In 2018, VA expects the NCCs to sustain the average speed of answering in 30 seconds or less, while maintaining exceptional customer satisfaction.
- National Work Queue (NWQ): In 2017, disability compensation claims are moving through the process faster than before implementation of the NWQ process — on average, claims are ready for decision 14 days faster. In 2018, NWQ will be expanded to other key VBA priorities such as the nonrating and appeals workload distribution.

- Veterans Claim Intake Program (VCIP)/Centralized Mail: By the end of 2018, VCIP will relocate the entire file banks of remaining Regional Offices and convert the documents electronically, an integral element of VBA's comprehensive transformation and modernization strategy.
- In 2018, Centralized Mail will build upon sustained progress in disability compensation and expand to additional stakeholders, to include the Board of Veteran Appeals, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, Fiduciary Service, Support Services Division, Debt Management Center (DMC) and Loan Guaranty.

Veterans Homelessness -- The budget requests \$1.7 billion for programs to prevent or reduce Veteran homelessness, including:

- \$320 million for Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) to promote housing stability;
- \$543 million for the HUD-VASH program, wherein VA provides case management services for at-risk Veterans and their families and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides permanent housing through its Housing Choice Voucher program; and
- \$257 million in grant and per diem payments that support transitional housing provided by community-based organizations.

Veterans Choice Program—Community Care -- VA is requesting a total of \$13.2 billion in 2018 for Veterans Community Care. This consists of a request for \$9.7 billion in discretionary funding for the Medical Community Care account, plus an additional \$2.9 billion in new mandatory budget authority for the Choice Program. When combined with \$626 million in estimated start-of-year unobligated balances from the original Choice Program appropriation, the total Community Care funding level is \$13.2 billion in 2018. The budget also requests \$3.5 billion in mandatory budget authority in 2019 for the Choice Program. This additional funding will allow VA to continue increasing Veterans' access to health-care services by allowing them to choose VA direct care or community care.

Other Key Services for Veterans

- \$306 million to administer VA's system of 136 national cemeteries, including funding for the activation of three new cemeteries that will open in 2018 and 2019. Funds are also included to raise, realign, and clean headstones to ensure VA national cemeteries are maintained as shrines.
- \$4.1 billion for information technology (IT), including investments to strengthen cybersecurity, modernize Veterans' electronic health records, improve Veterans' access to benefits, and enhance the IT infrastructure; and
- \$135 million for state cemetery grants and state extended-care grants.

Enhanced Oversight of VA's Programs -- The 2018 budget requests \$159.6 million for the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to enhance oversight and assist the OIG in fulfilling its statutory mission of making recommendations that will help VA improve the care and services it provides.

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

VA Budget 2018 Update 02 ► Benefit Trims

The White House's proposed \$186.5 billion budget for Department of Veterans Affairs operations next year includes more than \$13 billion for medical care outside VA and \$3.6 billion in savings from benefits trims. The proposal, officially released 23 MAY and now facing months of scrutiny on Capitol Hill, represents another sizable boost for the department, which over the last decade has seen annual increases while other government agencies have faced funding reductions. Officials said the VA spending request reflects that "veterans' access to timely, high quality health care is one of this administration's highest priorities." But they also promised their focus is on

“providing veterans with the most efficient and effective care and benefits,” and proposes several trade offs to pay for program expansions.

The most dramatic of those is an end to Individual Unemployability (IU) benefit payments to retirement-age veterans, a move expected to save \$3.2 billion next year alone and \$41 billion over the next decade. Under current policies, the Individual Unemployability program allows VA to award payouts at the 100-percent disabled rate to veterans who cannot find work due to service-connected injuries, even if they are not deemed 100-percent disabled. The number of program recipients has tripled since 2000, reaching almost 339,000 in fiscal 2016. Trump has proposed stopping those payouts once veterans are eligible for Social Security retirement benefits, arguing the practice now amounts to “the duplication of benefits.” It would impact more than 225,000 veterans receiving the payouts today.

All veterans receiving benefits checks from the department would also be affected by a plan to “round down” cost-of-living increases to the nearest dollar, which was VA policy from the late 1990s until 2013. VA officials say the move would save \$20 million in fiscal 2018 and cost individual veterans “no more than \$12 per year.” But the idea has proven controversial in the past, and is likely to face opposition from outside advocates. Administration officials hope to save another \$42 million by capping GI Bill tuition payments to flight schools, a provision which some veterans groups have supported in recent years. Tuition at the schools sometimes costs \$100,000 or more a year. The new plan would limit payments to \$21,000 annually, the same as other private universities. A large portion of those savings will go towards reauthorizing the controversial Choice Card program, established in 2014 to allow veterans to seek medical care outside VA if they meet certain eligibility requirements.

VA Secretary David Shulkin has promised an overhaul of that program later this summer, but it will need congressional approval to go into effect. Administration officials have asked for \$2.9 billion for the program in fiscal 2018 and \$3.5 billion for the effort in subsequent years, a substantial total for lawmakers who have questioned the usability of the program. The budget calls for \$8.4 billion for mental health care and \$1.7 billion for homeless assistance programs, both at the same level that President Barack Obama’s administration requested last year. Lawmakers will get their first input on the budget on 24 MAY, when Shulkin testifies before the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee on the funding request at a morning hearing. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 23, 2017 ++]

The Independent Budget FY 2018 Update 02 ► IBVSO's Response to VA

Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans) and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)—authors of The Independent Budget (IB)—on 24 MAY responded to the Administration’s proposed budget for the delivery of health care for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for FY 2018 and advance appropriations for FY 2019. The Independent Budget Veterans Service Organizations (IBVSOs) entered a statement for the record at the hearing before the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. “We appreciate the fact that the Administration’s budget request just released includes some increases in discretionary dollars for the Medical Care accounts,” stated the IBVSOs. “However, it is important for us to address the notion that VA does not need any additional resources, based on the expansive growth of overall VA expenses in the last 10 years. These ideas are not grounded in thorough analysis of demand and utilization of VA health care.”

The IBVSOs released a report on VA’s funding requirements in February 2017 warning that a potential funding crisis could arise before the end of FY 2017, and would exist in FY 2018 if VA did not address the new community care demand it has fostered without necessary resources. For FY 2018, The Independent Budget recommended approximately \$77 billion in total medical care funding. Congress previously approved only \$70 billion in total medical care funding for FY 2018, which included an assumption of approximately \$3.6 billion in medical care collections. “Last year’s advance appropriation request for FY 2018 medical care remains woefully inadequate to

meet the ever-increasing demand for services both inside and outside the VA health care system, a fact acknowledged by VA officials. The Administration's budget request includes a not-insignificant overall medical care funding recommendation of approximately \$75.2 billion, however we remain concerned that this level of funding will not keep pace with the continually increasing demand and utilization."

The IBVSOs expressed specific concern for the funding of the Choice Care program, which calls for a combined \$6.4 billion for FY 2018-19 which would indefinitely continue the program as currently implemented. The IB's recommendations for FY 2018 took into account the estimated \$1 billion VA was expected to have remaining in the Veterans Choice Fund and anticipated increases in demand for care, including community care, that will not diminish or go away if the Choice Program expires. As such, for FY 2018, The Independent Budget recommended \$64.5 billion for Medical Services. This recommendation included:

- Current Services Estimate – \$60,897,313,000
- Increase in Patient Workload – \$1,595,242,000
- Additional Medical Care Program Cost – \$2,001,000,000
- Total FY 2018 Medical Services – \$64,493,555,000

"Congress must reject continued funding of the Choice Care program through a mandatory account. We recommend adhering to all other community care funded through the discretionary Community Care account established previously. This will eliminate competing sources of funding for delivery of health care services in the community, while maintaining visibility on spending through the Choice program," the IBVSOs said.

The IBVSOs also strongly objected to two legislative proposals included in the budget; one that would penalize millions of disabled veterans or survivors by rounding down cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) for recipients of VA disability compensation and certain other benefit programs; and the other to cutoff eligibility to recipients of disability compensation due to individual unemployability (IU) once they reach age 62. "We are adamantly opposed to a 10-year round down of veterans' disability compensation, which would have the cumulative effect of taking \$2.7 billion away from injured and ill veterans who rely on such payments. We are equally opposed to arbitrarily cutting off eligibility for IU for veterans who turn 62, an age at which millions of American's continue working and saving money for their retirements, a luxury that many disabled veterans do not have. Congress must reject any proposals that seek to shift the cost of VA health care or benefits onto the backs of disabled veterans," said the IBVSOs. To read the complete statement entered by the IBVSOs to the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, refer to <http://www.pva.org/about-us/recent-news/paralyzed-veterans-independent-budget-statement>.

For more than 30 years, the three Independent Budget co-authors have presented budget and policy recommendations to Congress and the Administration. These recommendations—which are supported by 27 other health, family, military and veteran service organizations—are meant to inform Congress and the Administration of the needs of all veterans, and to offer substantive solutions to address the many health care and benefits challenges they face. This budget serves as the veterans groups' benchmark for properly funding the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure the timely delivery of quality health care and accurate and appropriate benefits. To view the full budget report, refer to www.independentbudget.org. [Source: PVA Press Release | May 24, 2017 ++]

VA Budget 2018 Update 03 ► American Legion | A Stealth Privatization Attempt

Officials from the American Legion on 26 MAY slammed the White House's fiscal 2018 budget proposal as "a stealth privatization attempt" of veterans services and an "unacceptable" attack on veterans benefits. "The administration's budget for (Veterans Affairs) would effectively lower the earnings of our most vulnerable veterans by reducing or eliminating disability payments from veterans who are the most in need," Legion National Commander Charles Schmidt said in a statement. "This plan breaks faith with veterans."

The comments are the latest shot from veterans groups at what President Trump has billed as a veteran-friendly budget, one that includes a nearly 6 percent increase in discretionary spending and a \$54 billion boost in defense funding above congressionally mandated budget caps. But outside advocates have been critical of the details, saying many provisions in the budget could undermine the promised goals of fixing VA and Defense Department operations. Earlier in the week, officials from the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Military Order of the Purple Heart and Vietnam Veterans of America all voiced opposition to plans to “round down” cost-of-living increases for veterans benefits and end Individual Unemployability payments for retirement-age beneficiaries.

The two proposals combined are designed to save more than \$3 billion, money that administration officials have said will be used to offset the cost of an expansion of the VA’s Choice Card program, which allows veterans to seek medical appointments with private-sector physicians at taxpayers’ expense. But officials from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America questioned that plan, saying VA officials have focused too much attention and funding on the embattled Choice program. Legion officials took their criticism even further. “We are alarmed by the cannibalization of services needed for the Choice program,” Schmidt said in his statement. “It is a ‘stealth’ privatization attempt which The American Legion fully opposes. “Choice should not be advanced to the detriment of cost-of-living increases for veterans.”

VA officials have been wary of the “privatization” term since Trump’s election. During his campaign, candidate Trump repeatedly promised to make it easier for veterans to seek outside care if they so choose. Critics called that a step toward dismantling VA, a charge Trump supporters denied. VA Secretary David Shulkin has repeatedly promised not to privatize VA services, but also said the department must find a balance between providing specialized care to veterans and using community resources for routine medical needs. Earlier in the week, he defended the benefits trims as tough but necessary moves for his department to provide fiscally responsible services to a growing number of veterans. “There are always hard decisions that have to be made,” he said following a House Veterans’ Affairs Committee budget hearing. “Sometimes that means you have to adjust current programs to support the growth of other benefits. That’s what we’re seeing here.”

Legion officials — along with other veterans groups — are promising a fight. “We hope all veterans, families and supporters of veterans call their elected officials and demand a well-functioning, properly-funded, transparent, and accountable Department of Veterans Affairs, and a presidential budget that fully supports veterans’ needs,” Schmidt said. Lawmakers have already distanced themselves from many parts of the \$1.1 trillion White House budget proposal, calling it at best a guideline for spending and policy priorities. They’ll spend the next several months offering their own suggestions for fiscal 2018 spending, likely including multiple changes to the VA budget plan. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 26, 2017 ++]

VA Individual Unemployability Update 03 ► Social Security Offset

Veterans Affairs officials on 25 MAY defended plans to strip tens of thousands of dollars in unemployment benefits from elderly veterans as responsible reforms to the department’s growing budget, but opponents promised to fight the idea. Included in President Donald Trump’s \$186.5 billion VA budget for fiscal 2018 are plans to dramatically cut the department’s Individual Unemployability (IU) program. Up to 225,000 veterans over the age of 60, at least 7,000 of whom are over 80, could be impacted by the change. Under current rules, the IU program awards payouts at the 100 percent disabled rate to veterans who cannot find work due to service-connected injuries, even if actual rating is less than that.

Administration officials want to stop those payouts once veterans are eligible for Social Security retirement benefits, arguing those individuals should no longer qualify for unemployment benefits. Veterans who cannot collect Social Security would be exempt. “There are always hard decisions that have to be made,” VA Secretary David

Shulkin said following a House Veterans' Affairs Committee budget hearing on Wednesday. "Sometimes that means you have to adjust current programs to support the growth of other benefits. That's what we're seeing here. "I don't think we can continue to only expand services and not look at the ones we are delivering ... I think people can understand paying veterans who are above age 80 unemployment benefits isn't what makes sense to the average American."

For veterans who aren't already retirement age, the change could largely be offset by their new Social Security payouts. But for veterans already receiving both, it will mean a sudden loss of a significant income source. The IU payouts can total more than \$22,000 a year. Shulkin said the move, which is expected to save \$3.2 billion next year alone, is proof that "we're trying to refine our approaches to use our resources efficiently." "The budget plan unveiled 23 MAY completely abandons many of the most severely disabled veterans of the Vietnam generation and could make thousands of elderly veterans homeless," said John Rowan, national president of Vietnam Veterans of America. "We're extremely alarmed by this budget proposal, because this is the opposite of what President Trump promised veterans."

VVA officials said they spent the last day since the budget announcement fielding panicked calls from veterans dependent on the program, wondering how they'll make ends meet. VFW National Commander Brian Duffy said his membership likes many parts of the budget "we are absolutely against forcing wounded, ill and injured veterans to pay for improvements elsewhere within the VA." AMVETS released a statement 24 MAY demanding the IU provision be dropped, labeling it "stealing" benefits from veterans. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 24, 2017 ++]

VA Suicide Prevention Update 41 ► OTH Mental Health Care Plans

Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin touted new efforts 24 MAY to expand urgent mental health care to thousands of former service members with less-than-honorable discharges, even while acknowledging his department isn't seeking additional money to pay for it. Testifying at a House hearing, Shulkin offered new details on his initiative announced in March to stem stubbornly high rates of suicide. Stressing a need at that time for "bold action," he noted the additional coverage would help former service members who are more likely to have mental health distress. Of the 20 veterans who take their lives each day, about 14 had not been connected to VA care.

There are more than 500,000 former service members with other-than-honorable discharges. Still, Shulkin indicated there won't be much additional spending to pay for the medication, lab work, case management and psychotherapy now being covered. "There is no higher priority, so we will do this within the funding the president has proposed," Shulkin told the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. He did not indicate what other programs could be cut. "We are not going to let the fact there are not additional monies right now to prevent us from offering these additional services," Shulkin said.

It was one of several gaps in the VA's proposed budget that Shulkin acknowledged Wednesday. He also said a massive appeals backlog of more than 400,000 claims from veterans unhappy with their disability payouts will still take nearly 10 years to resolve, even with legislation the House passed on 23 MAY. The measure aims to streamline the process, because the budget proposal doesn't currently account for that. "I don't really have an answer for you on that backlog," he said, citing a "new injection of funding to hire more lawyers and support staff" that would be needed.

Separately, the House approved legislation Wednesday to require the VA to fully comply with appointment scheduling practices that followed a 2014 scandal at the Phoenix VA medical center. Some veterans died waiting months for appointments. Wednesday's vote was 419-0. The bill now goes to the Senate. Shulkin, meanwhile, announced plans to set up a White House telephone hotline to receive veterans' complaints about the VA, a key

campaign promise from President Donald Trump. Shulkin said a "soft launch" was planned June 1, with "the full White House hotline" operating by the end of August. Trump had pledged "a private White House hotline," answered by a real person 24 hours a day, to make sure no complaint "falls through the cracks." Shulkin said the VA was now contracting with professional call centers. He did not provide an estimate on costs.

Beginning this summer, veterans with "other than honorable" discharges from the military would be able to receive urgent mental health care at a VA emergency room, outpatient clinic or Vet Center. They can also get help by calling the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and pressing 1, or texting 838255. "Other than honorable" discharges are typically for misconduct, such as violence or use of illegal drugs, and can prevent veterans from receiving federal benefits. That proposed program has already stirred questions about scope and cost. A group of Senate Democrats led by Montana's Jon Tester asked Shulkin in a letter in March to detail the new services, noting that treatment at VA emergency rooms is already offered to any veteran. The senators said Shulkin's policy announcement was raising "more questions than answers for veterans in crisis." Rep. Charlie Dent (R-PA), who chairs an appropriations panel, also has questioned Shulkin about the price tag, wondering aloud at a hearing earlier this month how the VA could fit "added costs into your budget, when you're obviously already struggling to cover expenses for your current VA patients." Shulkin said he didn't care about costs, but then responded he had no plans to ask for more money.

While as many as 500,000 former service members have "other than honorable" discharges, the VA says a smaller number at risk of suicide will likely seek urgent treatment, and it will only provide emergency care — not preventative services. The coverage also includes up to 90 days of follow-up mental care as part of an "emergency episode." The Army has dismissed at least 22,000 combat veterans diagnosed with mental health disabilities or traumatic brain injury for alleged misconduct since 2009. Pressed by lawmakers 24 MAY, Shulkin agreed to take a second look at what other coverage he can provide. He was addressing suicide prevention as he urged Congress to approve Trump's budget proposal, which calls for a 3.7 percent increase in total VA funding. The proposal includes \$8.4 billion for veterans' mental health services, an increase of 6 percent from 2017. The VA hopes to hire 1,000 more mental health providers and establish hubs in rural areas to provide veterans with mental health assistance by phone. It also launched a new predictive model to analyze veterans' health records to identify and reach out to those at risk. [Source: The Associated Press | Hope Yen | May 24, 2017 ++]

VA Arthritis Care ► Variety of Treatments Available to Vets

Did you know that arthritis affects 1 in 5 adults in America? Did you know that arthritis is our nation's #1 cause of disability and that two-thirds of arthritis sufferers are working-age adults who are striving to stay employed in the face of pain and functional limitations? The burden of arthritis is even greater among U.S. military Veterans. About 1 in 3 Veterans has arthritis. About half of all Veterans with arthritis report limitations in their daily activities because of joint symptoms. May is Arthritis Awareness Month. It's a time for us to pay attention to the tremendous impact arthritis has among Veterans, and to the ongoing need for new, better treatments. It's also a time to focus on what Veterans, their health care providers and their communities can do now to face arthritis as a team.

Researchers are working hard to understand the causes of arthritis and to develop better treatments, and ultimately a cure. In the meantime, arthritis is best managed with a combination of clinical therapies (like medicines) and healthy behaviors. Years of research have shown that physical activity and weight management help to improve pain and function for people with arthritis. But it can be hard to exercise when your joints hurt! So Veterans with arthritis need tools and a team of supporters to help them stay active and manage their arthritis. Here are some tips and key resources for Veterans with arthritis:

- Take advantage of online and community-based physical-activity and arthritis-management programs. The Arthritis Foundation provides a set of free, online tools that can guide Veterans and others with arthritis in appropriate exercise and healthy eating, identify local arthritis management programs, and connect people with arthritis for mutual support.
- See a physical therapist. Physical therapy is a recommended part of care for arthritis, but many individuals with arthritis do not receive physical therapy until years after diagnosis, or don't receive it at all. Physical therapists can help Veterans with arthritis to address functional limitations, develop a home exercise program, and meet needs for knee braces or assistive devices that can help with daily tasks. The Durham VA Healthcare System delivers a group-based physical therapy program that was found in a research study (funded by VA Health Services Research and Development) to be as effective as individual physical therapy, and it has the added benefit of peer support.
- Try something new! There is emerging evidence that some complementary and integrative health approaches can be helpful for people with arthritis. Yoga, tai chi and massage therapy are three examples of treatments Veterans may want to try.

VA has a very active and diverse portfolio of arthritis research, ranging from laboratory studies of potential new medications for rheumatoid arthritis to studies on complementary and rehabilitative therapies. During Arthritis Awareness Month, take some time at <https://www.research.va.gov/topics/arthritis.cfm> to read some highlights of VA arthritis research. [Source: VAntage Point | Kelli Allen | May 22, 2017 ++]

VA Vision Care Update 05 ► Outsourcing | What Could Vets Expect?

Suzanne Gordon decided to check out just how good it would be for vets if VA's Optical/Audiology services were outsourced. Following is what her secret shopper experience was like and potentially what vets could expect.

As a 71- year-old civilian and non-veteran, I don't rely on my local veterans hospital for help with an artificial limb. But, like many, VHA patients of my generation or younger, I do need vision and hearing care. So when Trump Cabinet Secretary David Shulkin suggested recently that ' There's A LensCrafters On Every Corner that could just as effectively deliver optometry services, and that the VHA should eliminate its audiology services, ' I was well positioned to become a secret shopper who could market test this out-sourcing possibility. So the other day, when I needed to update a backup pair of glasses with a new prescription, I didn't head down to my local optometrist but instead decided to try LensCrafters. I would get, I thought, quicker service, pay far less, and have a much better customer experience.

Turns out that there isn't a LensCrafters on "every corner" in my Richmond, California neighborhood. There isn't a single one. The closest one is located across the Richmond San Rafael bridge in an upscale shopping mall in Marin County. I called to make sure I didn't need an appointment and was assured that there would be no problem, no waits, just come on in. With my optometrist's prescription in hand, I headed their way. Although the LensCrafters in Corte Madera is sleekly decorated, the first thing I noticed was the store's shortage of staff. One technician was trying to juggle answering the phone as well as waiting on two customers. The woman he was serving was irate because the store had screwed up an order. The technician disappeared to try to figure out what had gone wrong.

I strolled around the shop, sure that someone else would emerge from the back of the store. Someone did, but he began to serve the customer ahead of me. I sat down and waited. The technician finally came back, explaining patiently to his frustrated customer that he simply couldn't figure out what had gone wrong. She stormed out of the store, muttering curses under her breath.

When the technician was finally ready for me, it seemed to take him forever to enter all my data into the computer. So I sat down and waited some more. The phone rang and he had to answer it. More waiting. An optometrist came out of his exam room with another customer, and the “consultant” had to spend ten minutes looking up his information and processing his bill. Finally, 45 minutes later, the consultant gave me a quote for my replacement glasses. It was only fifty dollars more than the cost I had initially been quoted at my local optometrists. Thanks but no thanks, I told him. I really prefer to go local, even if I have to pay more. I can hardly imagine how they would have responded to a homeless veteran or a veteran with mental illness who would not be able to tolerate such long waits.

When I went down to the my local optometrist’s, which actually is just around the corner, the cost of my new glasses was actually a hundred dollars less than the price quoted at LensCrafters. There was no wait. The office was well with staffed two optometrists, a technician and a receptionist who was answering the phone. They had all my information, tightened my current pair of glasses, and gave me a new lens cloth and a bottle of lens cleaner for which they didn’t charge. Plus they actually knew my name and my vision history.

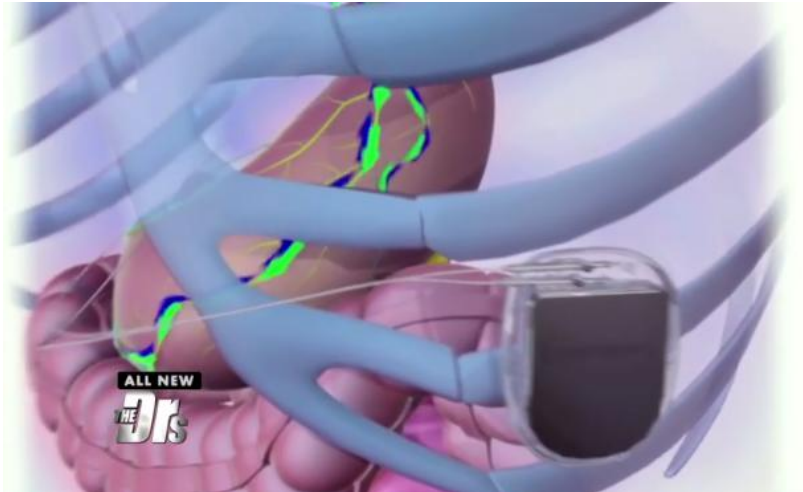
As for outsourcing audiology, which VA leaders are also promoting, I can only say that my recent experience seeing a local, private sector ear, nose and throat (ENT) doctor was nothing like what I have observed watching veterans get audiology care in the VHA. The doctor did efficiently diagnosed my tinnitus (ringing in the ears) and hearing loss but had nothing to advise but that I grin and bear it and turn on classical music if it gets too bad. There was no discussion of the kind of special hearing aides the VHA routinely offers, no offer of tinnitus groups that could help if it got really bad and no information about the kind of risks that make tinnitus worse. On the other hand, just by observing VHA audiologists counseling their patients, I learned something that makes total sense but would never have occurred to me — that hair dryers can cause or aggravate that incessant whirl. I now use earplugs when I dry my hair, and have even convinced my local hair dresser to consider using them herself.

Although my experiences are only “anecdotal,” they do raise questions about the purported greater efficiency and superiority outsourced services. Will veterans who receive these services be as disappointed as I was? Will they cost the taxpayer a whole lot more for a whole lot less? My glasses — just replacing the lenses — would have cost over \$500 at LensCrafters. They cost about \$360 at my local optometry shop. At the VA I am told glasses cost \$37. My advice to veterans is fight for what you have and to make it even better. If things go wrong at LensCrafters or the local ENT, veterans won’t be able to call their congressional representatives and get swift action. Although most Americans don’t realize it, that kind of accountability is only found in a government healthcare system like the VHA. [Source: BeyondChron | Suzanne Gordon | May 30, 2017 ++]

Obesity Pacemaker ► vBlock Neurometabolic Therapy Implant

McGuire VA Center has just implanted its first device to help veterans lose weight, and there are more than one million of them who could have the procedure done at little or no cost to them. It is called the vBlock neurometabolic therapy implant. “It looks sort of like a hockey puck”, said Dr. James Maher, “We usually put it over the ribs on the left side, it goes underneath the skin.” It is then connected to the vegus nerves controlling the stomach and digestive tract and adjusted to give patient’s a feeling of fullness.

It goes back to studies from the 1960’s during which researchers discovered cutting the vegus nerves worked for a short time, until the body learned how to go around it. But researchers were able to fine-tune that response. Dr. Maher says, “And what they did was to devise a device that blocks the vegus nerve for five minutes out of every ten, so that the body can’t really find ways around that blockade as it would if you had just cut the nerves.” For the severely obese, it can be a live-saver. “Weight loss of the kind you get with surgical weight loss procedures cures diabetes, cures sleep apnea, extends life-span by about ten years, and reduces the death rate from strokes, heart attacks and cancer,” said Dr. Maher.



The vBlock device is a lifelong device. It has been approved by the FDA for general use after some 600 successful operations. Most insurance companies have not yet agreed to cover the costs, but most eligible veterans are covered, and continued success with the procedure could result in better coverage for others. McGuire's first patient had the procedure a week ago. McGuire says, "He went home Monday, we talked to him today and he says he's doing fine." For a video of "The Doctors" TV show in which this device is shown and discussed refer to <http://www.thedoctorstv.com/f51813b3-99d3-43d1-8cc0-fceb2c7ac6be> . [Source: NPR WCVE PBS | Charles Fishburne | May 22, 2017 ++]

VA Postpartum Depression Care ► What is Offered to Women Vets

The birth of a baby is a life-changing event that can trigger all kinds of emotions from happiness and joy to jitters and fear. It can also lead to something you might not expect — postpartum depression. Postpartum depression — a depression that occurs after having a baby — is the most common complication of giving birth. It affects one in seven new mothers. Left untreated, postpartum depression can have long-lasting negative results, harming the health of new mothers, their babies, and their families.

After giving birth, many women have the “baby blues,” which are feelings of worry, sadness, and tiredness that usually last a few days. Symptoms of postpartum depression are like those of “baby blues,” however, postpartum depression symptoms are more intense and can last for many months. Women Veterans commonly suffer from depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder after military service. Veterans who become pregnant have an increased likelihood of having a mental health issue, which puts them at a higher risk for postpartum depression. With more women serving in the military than ever before, it is important to support women Veterans by providing information and treatment options.

Postpartum depression is never anyone's fault. Pregnancy, childbirth, and caring for a child can be a challenge for all parents, physically and mentally. Postpartum depression affects more than half a million American women each year and can affect any woman who becomes pregnant — women with easy pregnancies or difficult pregnancies, first-time moms and mothers with one or more children, women who are married and women who are not, and women of any age, race, ethnicity, culture, education, or income. Only about 15 percent of women who suffer from postpartum depression receive professional care. There are many reasons that women do not seek treatment, including misdiagnosis, denial, and lack of access to care.

Postpartum depression can begin anytime within the first year after giving birth. Signs you have postpartum depression may include extended periods (two weeks or more) of:

- Feeling sad, down, or depressed
- Losing interest in what you usually enjoy
- Difficulty in thinking or decision making
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of energy
- Frequently thinking about death or suicide
- If you think you may have postpartum depression, seek help.

VA and Women's Health Services offers many care options to help you get treatment for postpartum depression. Consider the following if you need or want help:

- MomMoodBooster at <https://mummoodbooster.com/public/us> is a free online program designed to help women Vets recover from postpartum depression. Women complete six sessions and receive calls from a phone coach.
- Go to <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/web/myhealthvet/depression-screening> for an Anonymous Screening Tool to help you evaluate if you are suffering from this condition.
- Check out Make The Connection at <https://maketheconnection.net/stories/515> to learn about local support.
- Go to the Women Veterans Call Center. Chat online or call 1-855-VA-WOMEN (1-855-829-6636) Monday through Saturday to get help about VA benefits and services, including postpartum depression treatment.
- Go to the Veterans Crisis Line. Chat online, send a text to 838255, or call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1 to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.
- Go to <https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/allstate.asp> to locate your local VA Medical Center to seek therapy and treatment options tailored to women Veterans' needs.
- Go to Maternal Mental Health at <http://www.postpartum.net> to seek postpartum support during pregnancy AND postpartum. Online resources are available or call 1-800-944-4PPD (4773).

[Source: NCOAdvocate Newsletter | Dr. Alicia Christy | May 22, 2017 ++]

VA Medical Marijuana Update 28 ► AL Asking for Research Approval

One of the nation's most conservative veterans' groups is appealing to President Donald Trump to reclassify marijuana to allow large-scale research into whether cannabis can help troops suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. The change sought by The American Legion would conflict with the strongly anti-marijuana positions of some administration leaders, most vocally Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

Under current rules, doctors with the Department of Veterans Affairs cannot even discuss marijuana as an option with patients. But the alternative treatment is gaining support in the medical community, where some researchers hope pot might prove more effective than traditional pharmaceuticals in controlling PTSD symptoms and reducing the record number of veteran suicides. "We are not asking for it to be legalized," said Louis Celli, the national director of veterans affairs and rehabilitation for the American Legion, which with 2.4 million members is the largest U.S. veterans' organization. "There is overwhelming evidence that it has been beneficial for some vets. The difference is that it is not founded in federal research because it has been illegal."

The Legion has requested a White House meeting with Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and close aide, "as we seek support from the president to clear the way for clinical research in the cutting edge areas of cannabinoid

receptor research," according to a recent letter shared with POLITICO. The request marks a significant turn in the debate over medical marijuana by lending an influential and unexpected voice. The Legion, made up mostly of Vietnam and Korean War-era veterans, is breaking with other leading vets' groups such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars in lobbying for the removal of the major roadblock in pursuing marijuana treatment. But it also comes as the new administration, led by Sessions, is sending strong signals of its desire to thwart marijuana decriminalization and legalization efforts. Expectations are growing in Congress that DOJ may even try to roll back medical marijuana laws in 29 states.

Federal regulators classify marijuana as a "Schedule 1" drug, a category that includes heroin and LSD, saying it offers a "high potential for abuse" and has no accepted medicinal properties. That means that with few exceptions it cannot be studied for therapeutic purposes. And the exceedingly small number of research studies, which have taken years to get off the ground due to the bureaucratic hoops, must rely on only a single government-sponsored lab to provide the cannabis.

"We desperately need more research in this area to inform policymakers," said Sue Sisley, a psychiatrist at the Scottsdale Research Institute in Arizona who is running one of the only cannabis studies underway focused on vets suffering from PTSD. "I really want to see the most objective data published in peer reviewed medical journals." She added that she isn't prejudging what the outcome of the research will be. "I don't know if cannabis will turn out to be helpful for PTSD," Sisley said. "I know what veterans tell me but until we have rigorous controlled trials, all we have are case studies that are not rigorous enough to make me, medical professionals, health departments or policymakers convinced."

Some veterans' activists are angry at the federal government's continued resistance to even studying cannabis, even as an average of 20 vets kill themselves every day. "We need solutions," said Nick Etten, a former Navy SEAL who runs the Veterans Cannabis Project, a health policy organization. "We need treatment that works. We need treatment that is not destructive. The VA has been throwing opiates at veterans for almost every condition for the last 15 years. You are looking at a system that has made a problem worse the way they have approached treatment." PTSD's symptoms include sleeplessness, nightmares, flashbacks and feelings of hyperarousal. Sisley's study includes 14 vets so far and is striving to enroll a total of 76 — with participants who are not receiving a placebo being provided with different varieties of 1.8 grams of marijuana per day, or less than two cigarettes' worth.

The VA declined to address whether it is reconsidering its stance on the issue, citing the illegality of marijuana in all its forms under federal law. "Possessing, distributing and dispensing marijuana are criminal offenses under the Controlled Substances Act," the department told POLITICO in a statement. "Even if a state in which a provider practices has a legalized medical marijuana program, federal law prohibits Department of Veterans Affairs physicians from prescribing medical marijuana and from completing forms/paperwork necessary for patients to enroll in State medical marijuana programs." It added that "VA will not provide for use or conduct research with illegal substances regardless of state laws."

Most leading veterans' groups are toeing that line, including Veterans of Foreign Wars. "The VFW has no official position regarding this ongoing debate because marijuana is illegal under federal law," said Joe Davis, the group's spokesman. But grassroots support is growing among veterans — both young and older — and in Congress to reconsider the current approach. Much of that is because of growing anecdotal evidence that marijuana helps some veterans with PTSD control their symptoms when approved drugs do not, such as ridding them of nightmares and helping them sleep. And that is what is driving the efforts of the American Legion. Celli said the group's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission, which represents veterans from World War II to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, recently gave the Legion "overwhelming support" to advocate changes. "President Trump has received testimony on this epidemic and The American Legion would like to present a sample of our research," its letter seeking a meeting with Kushner says.

In addition to cannabis, the organization is advocating for more research on so-called Quantitative EEG neurometrics, which measures the brain's electrical activity. "The American Legion believes these two areas alone

can help cut the amount of veteran suicides and cases of chemically addicted veteran by more than half," the letter to the White House says. "The American Legion respectfully requests a meeting with President Trump as soon as possible and looks forward to partnering with this administration in the fight against narcotics addiction and reducing the veteran suicide rate from the tragic loss of 20 warriors per day, to zero." [Source: POLITICO | Bryan Bender | May 20, 2017 ++]

MyVA Way ► VA Seeks Indoor Navigation App

The Department of Veterans Affairs is looking for an app that can provide veterans, visitors and staff with turn-by-turn navigation, both indoors and out, at its medical facilities. The goal of the MyVA Way app is to offer 24/7 navigational assistance to the different floors, buildings and outpatient clinics associated with VA Medical Centers. According to a request for information, the VA expects such an app would not only decrease confusion in areas that are difficult to locate but also reduce the load on front-desk staff.

The application, which must operate without an internet connection on both iOS and Android devices, would quickly locate the desired location and provide routes based on the user's current location. Bluetooth beacons would be strategically placed throughout the campus to determine the user's precise location. Besides providing directions to doctor's offices and testing facilities, the application would also include building entrance/exits, restrooms, cafes, gift shop, pharmacy, chapel, library, elevators and stairwells.

The MyVA Way mobile app must also be searchable so users can query a specific service or clinic and get not just directions but also general information, such as phone numbers, hours of operation, emergency contact numbers, manager and patient advocate. The solution must meet Section 508 accessibility standards and employ large-sized fonts and text boxes so that visually impaired patients or visitors can use the application on their smartphones and tablets. According to the VA RFI (Request for Information), the contractor would provide hardware beacons, software development, system testing, backend server hosting (if applicable) and software maintenance services.

Bluetooth beacons are increasingly used for indoor navigation. Airports have installed beacons that address travelers needs based on where they are in the airport, and the University of Oklahoma library's NavApp uses Aruba beacons to power indoor navigation, proximity-aware push notifications and other location-based mobile engagement services. Columbus, Ga., meanwhile, has plans to become the first iBeacon city. Piper Networks invested more than \$10,000 to blanket the city with its own technology, rather than compete with various beacon apps and protocols already in use in larger cities. The accompanying app gives residents proximity messages wherever they go.

The Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate worked with TRX Systems on a Firefighter Accountability and Proximity system uses beacons that send alerts when a firefighter is down, pinpointing the location by measuring the relative distance and elevation between beacons. And the National Institute of Standards and Technology recently made it easier for indoor navigation app developers by collecting and making available timestamped and surveyed data from four smartphone models that were walked through different buildings. By using the data generated from smartphone sensor readings, radio frequency signal strengths and GPS fixes, NIST hopes developers can build indoor navigation apps that can be validated against fixed locations.

Initial work on MyVA Way was funded by a Spark grant from the VA Innovators Network, a program that helps VA employees test new ideas and join forces with stakeholders across the Veteran community to improve the way VA serves veterans. The MyVA Way app prototype will be tested at the Raymond G. Murphy Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Albuquerque, N.M. More information on the RFI can be located on the FedBizOpps.gov website https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=d919e9822ffa31d7f8793efd8e43cfe2&tab=core&cvie_w=1. [Source: GCN | Susan Miller | May 16, 2017 ++]

VA Hearing & Vision Benefit Update 07 ► Only 1 in 4 Vets Utilize

Approximately 46 million Americans experience some form of communication disorder. Communication disorders can compromise physical and emotional health and affect the social, educational, vocational and recreational aspects of life. Hearing loss, loss of speech and other communication disorders can lead to feelings of isolation and a lack of connection with family, friends and community.

Veterans have higher rates of hearing loss and tinnitus than the general public due to the occupational injury that can be incurred as a result of the noise levels encountered while in the service, including gunfire, aircraft, machinery and much more. Tinnitus and hearing loss are the top two service-connected disabilities among Veterans enrolled in VA for care. In 2016, more than 190,000 Veterans were awarded service-connection for tinnitus and more than 103,000 Veterans were awarded service-connection for hearing loss. In total, more than 2.7 million Veterans currently receive disability benefits for hearing loss and/or tinnitus.

Although noise-induced hearing loss can be permanent, rehabilitative technology such as hearing aids can significantly improve users' quality of life. Yet, only about one in four of those who could benefit from hearing aids have ever used them. This is why VA provides comprehensive hearing health care services to Veterans as part of their medical benefits and Veterans have direct access to audiology clinics for evaluation and treatment of hearing loss. VA's delivery of hearing health services includes access to a full continuum of hearing health care from prevention to diagnostics to treatment, continued follow up and maintenance. Access covers:

- Screening, assessment, evaluation, treatment, and/or management of hearing loss, tinnitus and balance disorders
- Fitting and programming of hearing aids, wireless accessories, and other assistive listening devices (e.g., TV and telephone amplifiers) and post-surgical rehabilitation for cochlear and other osseointegrated auditory implants
- Hearing screening and prevention services; auditory rehabilitation services to optimize residual hearing
- Progressive Tinnitus Management which includes education, sound therapy (including hearing aids) and interdisciplinary counseling
- Vestibular Diagnostics and Rehabilitation
- Audiology Compensation and Pension Exams
- Utilizing an evidence base for delivery of best practices and services, supported by expertise at VA regional and national centers of excellence (e.g., Cochlear Implant centers, Research Centers)
- Utilizing multiple contracts to provide high quality technology for digital hearing aids, wireless communication systems, assistive/alerting devices, cochlear implants to provide devices needed to meet communication needs of the Veteran (i.e., six hearing aid companies currently on national contract)
- Widespread utilization of audiology telehealth for remote diagnostics, hearing aid fittings and maintenance, and both tinnitus and auditory rehabilitation education
- Partnering with community providers to contract and offer hearing health care in a timely manner closer to home. VA also collects clinical outcomes for patients using hearing aids reported across multiple categories (e.g., Hearing Aid Use, Perceived Benefit, Satisfaction, Impact on Others, Activity Limitation, and Quality of Life). Across all categories, reported clinical outcomes are consistently high for Veterans receiving hearing health services within VA, and exceed those reported for general norms.

[Source: VAntage Point | Dr. Rachel McArdle | May 15, 2017 ++]

Traumatic Brain Injury Update 62 ► mTBI 20-Year Study

According to the Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium (CENC), nearly 20 percent of the 2.5 million service members and veterans who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan sustained at least one mild traumatic brain injury (mild TBI). A U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs/Department of Defense study aims to track mild TBI (mTBI) over a decades-long period. The federally-funded study is enrolling service members and veterans who fought in Iraq or Afghanistan. Researchers hope to follow participants for 20 years or more to better understand the long-term neurologic effects of mild TBI and other deployment-related conditions. The researchers published the first stages of the study in the journal *Brain Injury*. Of the approximately 700 participants enrolled so far, 80 percent have a history of at least one mild TBI, while the others have no TBIs, for comparison purposes. The focus is strictly on mild TBI; those with more severe brain injuries are excluded.

Leading the study is Dr. William Walker, a TBI expert at the Richmond VA Medical Center and Virginia Commonwealth University, where CENC is based. He says the long-term observational study is one of the most comprehensive TBI projects to date. He states that the study will focus on lifetime concussive events. The research team will conduct diagnostic interviews of participants concerning not only possible mild TBIs that occurred in combat zones, but also those that occurred earlier in life, or following military service. In addition, the study will involve brain scans, eye-movement tracking, computerized balance tests, neuropsychological tests, blood tests, and others exams. Study participants will undergo approximately eight hours of tests, once every five years. In the intervening years, there will be a 45-minute phone assessment.

TBIs can have long-term effects on cognitive ability, memory, mood, and focus. Other symptoms may include headaches, vision, and hearing problems. Walker notes that some mild TBIs resolve in weeks or months with no long-term effects, and there is growing debate about how frequently the brain does not fully heal. One goal of the CENC is to research how the circumstances of the injury make a difference in long-term outcomes. Of particular focus is whether mild TBI increases the risk for early dementia. Walker hopes the long period of the study will enable researchers to look at neurodegenerative conditions that develop later in life, such as Alzheimer's or chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). [Source: The National Law Review | Bruce H. Stern | May 16, 2017 ++]

Traumatic Brain Injury Update 63 ► Low Disability Rating Assignments

U.S. Rep. Stephen F. Lynch said the Veterans Affairs is needlessly leaving vets hanging with low disability payments for brain injuries while figuring out what's wrong with them.. Following a meeting with top Boston VA brass in Jamaica Plain 22 MAY, Lynch said he called for more coordination between VA staff that diagnoses and treats vets, and those who determine and administer their benefits.

Lynch cited a hypothetical scenario in which a vet who suffered three traumatic brain injuries (TBI) — a signature diagnosis among those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan — is deemed only 10 percent disabled while specialists parse the many problems stemming from the damage. “There’s got to be a way of, if you’re waiting for further research, at least give them a fair benefit rating, and if you find out that you’re incorrect, then correct it later on,” Lynch said. “But you can’t leave a veteran hanging out there that’s got serious traumatic brain injury without the necessary benefits that they need to get themselves better, to recover and to transition into civilian life,” he said. “You just can’t leave them hanging out there like that.”

Lynch’s visit was prompted by a Herald special report on internal inspections of the Boston VA that found an “unacceptable” error rate in assessing the degree of disability for those who filed TBI claims — 1 in 6 of the cases reviewed that year. This was despite a warning four years earlier to add more oversight and safeguards. In one case,

a vet was underpaid by \$31,797 over two years for a 70 percent TBI disability rating that should have been 100 percent. The Boston VA says it has resolved all those issues. Another review by the VA's inspector general is due next year. The Herald also reported on a Dracut Marine who received a 10 percent disability rating for his brain injury despite suffering debilitating seizures and a mass on his brain the VA failed to detect.

Lynch joins U.S. Sen. Edward J. Markey and U.S. Rep. Seth Moulton as members of the Massachusetts delegation to exert public pressure on the agency in the wake of the Herald reports. Markey has called for VA Secretary David Shulkin to get involved. Lynch sat yesterday with Vincent Ng, director of the VA Boston Healthcare System, and Brad Mayes, director of the VA's regional benefits office. He was joined by state veterans services secretary Francisco Urena, Boston veterans service commissioner Giselle Sterling, Brockton Mayor Bill Carpenter, state Sens. Michael F. Rush and Michael D. Brady and state Rep. John Velis. While offering some critiques, Lynch was eager to heap praise on the Boston VA for its research into TBI issues. "Look, I've spent a fair amount of time at our VA hospitals, and we're blessed in this region," he said. "Ironically, we are the center for TBI research and developing these protocols nationally and globally."

Despite the poor inspection results, Ng called the Boston VA "the leader in treating TBI, concussions, PTSD, and we are the facilities that develop the tools with advanced research that export to other VAs throughout the country." Mayes said there has been incremental improvement across the country in adhering to rapidly-evolving TBI procedures, and that the VA is "continuing to evolve." Lynch said he's worried criticism of the VA will keep vets with TBI away from VA hospitals. "The VA is the best place for them," Lynch said. "This is where they're going to get their help." [Source: Boston Herald | Jack Encarnacao & Chris Villani | May 23, 2017 ++]

PTSD & TBI Update 06 ► HVAC Passes MeRT Treatment Bill

Emphasizing a focus on veterans' mental health services, Representative Steve Knight's (R-Palmdale) No Hero Left Untreated Act passed the House Veterans Affairs Committee on 7 MAY. If this legislation is made law, House of Representative's Bill 1162 would recover veterans from post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, military sexual trauma, chronic pain and opiate addiction. "Our veterans face many challenges after returning home and it is our job to try to limit those challenges as much as we can," Knight said in a statement.

The bill directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot program on Magnetic eResonance Therapy (MeRT), a neurological treatment for mental trauma. The treatment restores proper brain function by magnetic stimulation through a procedure that is not pharmaceutical or invasive, Knight's office said. Over 400 veterans have reported an improvement using this method, according to Knight's office. "As new technologies are proven to be beneficial to the health of others, we need to be on the front lines of expanding those technology options to our veterans," Knight said. "The No Hero Left Untreated Act would support those technologies and their access to our veteran community."

Both political parties have expressed support for the bill, as it currently has 54 cosponsors. Multiple veteran service organizations, including AMVETS, Veterans Advantage PBC, the Patriot Project and the Veterans House Council have supported the bill, the statement from Knight said. "This small pilot would be instructive to VA in understanding the benefits and deciding whether to offer this promising therapy to those receiving VA health care," Executive Director of AMVETS Joseph R. Chenelly said in a statement. The House passed this legislation unanimously in November, but an updated vote is needed from the new Congress before it can move onto the Senate. The full House of Representatives will vote on the bill next. [Source: The Signal | Gina Ender | May 18, 2017 ++]

VA Accountability Update 47 ► AFGE Opposes S.1094

Senate bill S.1094 that would allow VA managers to fire rank-and-file workers based on scant evidence of wrongdoing and with little ability to appeal is a dangerous step toward politicizing the federal government's career civil service, the head of the largest government employee union testified 18 MAY "In AFGE's (American Federation of Government Employees) view, this bill not only decreases accountability at the VA, it eviscerates the agency it is supposed to improve, and ensures that no employee ever gets a fair shake on any proposed adverse action," said J. David Cox Sr., national president of the AFGE, in testimony before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

President Cox, who was a registered nurse in the VA for 22 years, said the Senate bill will undercut the quality health care and services that veterans receive by eroding checks and balances that ensure hiring and firing decisions are based on merit. "It is astounding that while there are reportedly up to 45,000 unfilled positions in VA health care, Congress has chosen to focus on attacking the rank and file employees who have made the choice to spend their careers caring for this cherished group," Cox said. "Rather than addressing the critical need to fill thousands of urgently needed positions at VA in order to better serve veterans, this cynical, ideologically driven bill seeks to fire more VA personnel. Talk about misplaced priorities."

The Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017 (S.1094) bill would undercut many of the workplace rights and protections that are designed to protect government workers from disciplinary actions that are politically or personally motivated. It is a politically motivated response to rare but highly publicized issues of misconduct that managers could address today with proper documentation and effort, Cox said. "We are here today because politicians understand that 'You're Fired!' is popular as a way to address complex issues. 'You're Fired!' is popular as a way to deflect responsibility from management decision-makers and place it on the rank and file," Cox said. "The VA can and should terminate people whose conduct or performance justifies termination. But it is absolutely not necessary to destroy the foundation of the civil service in order to allow them to do so."

While the Senate bill only targets VA workers, its passage would open the door to eliminating due process rights for all federal employees and politicizing the civil service. "The importance of maintaining a nonpartisan, apolitical civil service in an increasingly partisan environment cannot be overstated," Cox said. "Whatever lack of public confidence in government exists today will be magnified a hundredfold if all civil servants become de facto political appointees, serving at the whim of supervisors. And that is exactly what this horrible piece of legislation will do." [Source: PR Newswire | May 17, 2017 ++]

VA Disputed Claims Update 18 ► Henry Mayo Jr. | Fort McClellan Victim

Every time Army veteran Henry Mayo Jr. looks in the mirror -- his appearance permanently altered by medical conditions -- he is reminded of his service to the United States. But the Department of Veterans Affairs denies the connection between his sickness and his service, a problem that hinges on the fact that Mayo wasn't sent overseas, but served his country on US soil. The former Army specialist says he developed a number of health conditions years after he served in the 21st Chemical Company. "I done lost my skin, my glands don't work. I don't sweat, so I just have to live with it," Mayo told CNN's "The Lead with Jake Tapper." "I started losing my hair and then my skin started getting bad, then the knots started rising on my head ... that was something to be scared of, you know. You didn't know what was going to happen next."



VA records show that Mayo, 80, sought coverage for medical conditions that include a type of lymphoma often associated with exposure to Agent Orange. Mayo was drafted in 1959 and sent to Fort McClellan in Alabama, where Mayo says mustard gas was tested on his skin and he participated in radiation tests without protective gear. "We went out to this radiation area and we was there for about three hours. No kind of instruction or nothing. They just gave us the badge and told us to pin it on us," Mayo says of the radiation test, during which he wore a device to monitor exposure. Fort McClellan was closed in 1999 after the Environmental Protection Agency labeled it a "Superfund site," a term used for areas so contaminated by hazardous waste that they pose a threat to human health.

The Department of Veterans Affairs argues there's no proof Mayo's medical issues are a result of his Army service, which means it doesn't have to cover the high cost of care. Other veterans who served at Fort McClellan say they have gotten the same response. According to the VA, veterans deployed to Vietnam have a presumption of exposure to chemicals commonly used in combat, which allows them to access benefits more easily. But service members who say they were exposed to the same chemicals on US soil bear the burden of proof. Mayo's daughter, Wendolyn Lacy, said there are many soldiers and their doctors reaching out to Congress asking for help. "It just seems like it doesn't matter right now. Fort McClellan was a war zone within itself. They were training there but they ended up with the same conditions just like someone who was, you know, on the front line," she said.

New York Rep. Paul Tonko, a Democrat, has introduced legislation to help ease access to care for Fort McClellan veterans, but the bills have not passed. When reached for comment regarding Fort McClellan veterans, the VA told CNN it reviews claims case by case, but it "has no evidence of a widespread contamination" on the base and has no plans to create health care policies to address this group of veterans. [Source: VVA Web Weekly | May 25, 2017 ++]

VA Phone Scam Update 01 ► Do Not Use (800) 606-8198 for VCP

While many of us are spent Memorial Day honoring those who gave the ultimate sacrifice, experts say thieves are continue to target our veterans through their medical care. The Federal Trade Commission says thieves are pretending to be from the Department of Veterans Affairs office and are taking hundreds, even thousands of dollars from innocent veterans over the phone. Officials say schemers are using the phone number (800) 606-8198 that's almost identical to the Veteran's Choice Program (VCP) number (866) 606-8198 which allows certain eligible vets to use approved health care providers who are outside of the VA system. Veterans or families can call the VCP's toll-free number (866) 606-8198 to verify their eligibility for the program.

However, with that fake line setup, confused veterans call and think they've actually reached the VCP line. Experts say the fake line's message says they're entitled to a rebate if they provide a credit card number. That's how thieves are getting their bank information and debiting it from their accounts. "They move very fast when you give them your information. Never give out private information over the phone. No legitimate person is going to ask you for that information over the phone," said Hunter Unschild, Fractal Profile Wealth Management. To protect yourselves from schemes like this one, Unschild also suggests that veterans do research ahead of time, avoid any wire transfers, and put an "**active duty alert**" on their credit reports. Unschild says doing so will help to minimize the risk of identity theft because it requires lenders to verify your identity before approving new credit lines and removes your name from preapproved credit offers for two years.

Every piece of personally identifiable information, whether it's a Social Security number, date of birth, home address, etc., is more than just a number. It represents a person's identity, livelihood, and personal or financial well-being. VA's More Than a Number identity protection program provides information to educate Veterans and their beneficiaries on how to protect themselves from identity theft. On the website <https://www.va.gov/identitytheft>, you will find a wide range of information on identity theft, how to spot it, ways to prevent it, and what to do if you suspect you are a victim. You can also browse through links to other useful identity theft resources from across the Web. In addition, VA has created a toll-free Identity Theft Resource Line for Veterans and their beneficiaries at 855-578-5492 to call for more information or if they suspect that their identities may have been compromised.

[Source: Albuquerque, NM KRQE News 13 | Sara Yingling | May 29, 2017 ++]

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



Dayton, OH — An area veteran pleaded guilty in federal court 11 MAY to submitting fraudulent claims for the miles he said he drove to get treatment at the Dayton Veterans Administration Medical Center. **Troy J. Miller**, 33, allegedly submitted travel voucher expenses of \$19,974.59 from August 2014 through August 2015, saying that he had been driving to the VAMC from Lima when he actually was traveling from places within Dayton, according to a bill of information. U.S. District Court Judge Walter Rice accepted Miller's guilty plea, ordered a pre-sentence report and scheduled Miller's sentencing for 17 AUG in Dayton's U.S. District Court. The non-binding, advisory sentencing range calculated by Miller's attorney is 6-12 months in prison. The statutory maximums for false, fictitious and fraudulent claims is five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Miller also will be ordered to pay restitution in an amount to be determined.

Traveling from Lima to Dayton and back is approximately 160 miles round-trip. The VA website said eligible Beneficiary Travel Program (BTP) veterans can claim 41.5 cents per mile for general travel. A 2012 internal audit of the VA's BTP program showed it need to strengthen authorization, payment and oversight controls. The reimbursement rate rose from 11 cents per mile starting in 1978 to 28.5 cents per mile in February 2008 and to 41.5 cents per mile in November 2008. "As a result, BTP experienced a significant growth in both usage and cost," the report stated. "VHA also estimated that if all veterans eligible for reimbursement sought reimbursement for their mileage, VA would incur expenses in excess of \$1.5 billion per year." A 2012 Dayton Daily News story noted that nine local veterans filed more than \$56,000 in false travel claims and that more than \$2 million was paid to a total of

9,074 veterans for travel reimbursement through the Dayton VA Medical Center in fiscal year 2012, according to VA figures. [Source: Journal-News | Mark Gokavi | May 11, 2017 ++]

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Whitman, MA — A former Whitman, Massachusetts police sergeant pleaded guilty MAY to wire fraud, preparing false income tax returns for clients of his tax preparation business, obstructing the internal revenue laws and misappropriating funds from the accounts of disabled veterans while he was a fiduciary appointed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). According to documents filed with the Court, from 2007 to 2012, **Glenn P. Pearson**, 61, was appointed a VA fiduciary for eight disabled veterans of the U.S. armed forces. A veteran, who has been awarded VA benefits but is unable to manage his or her funds due to injury, disease, mental incompetence or infirmities of advanced age, can have another individual, referred to as a fiduciary, appointed by the VA to receive funds on the veteran's behalf and to manage those funds for the benefit of the veteran. Pearson used his position as a fiduciary to misappropriate and embezzle more than \$250,000 in VA-issued benefit money from the accounts of several veterans.

Moreover, beginning in 2012, Pearson operated FTS Tax Services, a tax preparation business through which he prepared false tax returns for clients for a fee. From 2012 through 2015, Pearson prepared numerous tax returns that included false credits and fictitious deductions in an effort to get his clients bigger refunds than they were entitled to receive. When Pearson's clients were audited by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Pearson took steps to obstruct the IRS—including making false statements to the IRS and preparing false documents for his clients to submit to the IRS during the audits. Pearson admitted to causing a tax loss of more than \$1.5 million. "Glenn Pearson took advantage of disabled military veterans who could not manage their own financial affairs, by diverting hundreds of thousands of dollars in VA payments to his personal benefit," said Acting Deputy Assistant Attorney General Goldberg. "He then used his tax preparation business to generate more than \$1.5 million in bogus refunds and obstructed IRS audits looking into the fraudulent returns he prepared. Today, Pearson is held fully accountable for his abuse of trust and fraudulent conduct."

"Mr. Pearson abused his position as a fiduciary and took advantage of vulnerable members of our society," said Acting U.S. Attorney Weinreb. "Our veterans deserve the best care, and we will hold accountable those who seek to profit at their expense." "Mr. Pearson now finds himself on the opposite end of the very laws he was once sworn to uphold," said Special Agent in Charge Harold H. Shaw of the FBI's Boston Field Division. "He took advantage of his position as a fiduciary to steal hundreds of thousands of dollars from disabled veterans. The FBI will do everything we can to protect citizens against fraud, and stop those who steal from them." "The American tax system is designed to provide vital government services to our citizens, especially disabled veterans, who have paid the highest price for our freedom," said Acting Special Agent in Charge Kristina O'Connell of the IRS Criminal Investigation (CI). "Mr. Pearson took advantage of both, motivated by greed and his desired lifestyle. The IRS will use all lawful means to identify and prosecute those, like Pearson, who prepare false tax returns."

"Pearson deliberately targeted our most vulnerable veterans – those who were unable to handle their own financial affairs," said Special Agent in Charge Donna L. Neves of the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG), Northeast Field Office. "Fiduciary fraud, especially in this case of multiple victims, is considered a high priority and aggressively investigated by the VA Office of Inspector General because those veterans deserve protection, not deceit." Sentencing is scheduled for 19 SEP before Judge Saris. Pearson faces a statutory maximum sentence of 20 years in prison for wire fraud, five years in prison for misappropriation of funds by a fiduciary, three years in prison for preparing false tax returns, and three years in prison for attempting to interfere with the administration of internal revenue laws. As part of the terms of the plea agreement, Pearson will make restitution to the veterans, the VA and the IRS. Pearson also faces a period of supervised release and monetary penalties. Actual sentences for federal crimes are typically less than the maximum penalties. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors. Additional information about the Tax Division and

its enforcement efforts may be found on the division's website <https://www.justice.gov/tax>. [Source: USDOJ | Justice News | May 16, 2017 ++]

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Kenosha, WI — A man was sentenced to more than four years in prison for crimes related to his false claims that he was a Navy SEAL wounded four times in Vietnam, said David A. Sierleja, Acting U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio, and Gavin McClaren, Resident Agent in Charge of the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General's Cleveland office. **Kenneth E. Jozwiak**, 68, previously pleaded guilty to unlawfully exhibiting a military discharge certificate, theft of government money, making false statements to federal agents, and attempting to obstruct an official proceeding. "This defendant's lies about his service are an affront to those who saw combat and those wounded fighting on behalf of our nation," Sierleja said. "This defendant did neither, and falsely inflated his service record in an effort to get additional benefits." "Falsifying service records to defraud taxpayers and plagiarize other veterans' valorous service will not be tolerated," McClaren said.

Jozwiak in 2014, exhibited a DD-214 (military discharge certificate) that claimed, in part, that Jozwiak was a highly decorated Vietnam War veteran, that he was a four-time recipient of the Purple Heart, and that he was a Navy SEAL -- all entries Jozwiak knew were totally false, according to court documents. Additionally, Jozwiak defrauded the Department of Veterans Affairs of \$2,289 through veteran's entitlements he received between August and December 2014. In January 2015, Jozwiak made several false statements to federal agents about his fraudulent activities and his military service, and that he attempted to obstruct an official proceeding by tampering with a material witness, according to court documents. [Source: DOJ, Northern district of Ohio | U.S. Attorney's Office | May 18, 2017 ++]

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VAMC St. Louis, Mo — **Tony Pedretti**, 43, of Whiting, Indiana, admitted to his role in a kickback scheme that ran for three years while he supervised the HVAC shop and the John Cochran Veterans Administration Medical Center in St. Louis from 2012 to 2015. Pedretti appeared before Judge Audrey G. Fleissig in St. Louis. Judge Fleissig accepted his plea and set his sentencing for September 7, 2017. According to the plea agreement, Pedretti conspired with Scott Geary, David Graham and others to collect kickbacks for work done at the HVAC shop. Pedretti was authorized to pay up to \$2500 to outside contractors without prior approval and most of the jobs involved in the scheme were near that limit. It was a part of the parties' agreement that, for each job, Pedretti would receive a cash kickback. In all, Pedretti admitted that more than \$270,000 in work was let by him in furtherance of the kickback scheme. **Scott Geary** has already pleaded guilty to his role in the scheme and awaits sentencing. Graham is a co-defendant with Pedretti and is awaiting trial of his case. Pedretti faces up to five years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000 for his conspiracy conviction. [Source: DOJ, Eastern District of Missouri | U.S. Attorney's Office | May 23, 2017 ++]

* Vets *



Florida Veterans Homes Update 06 ► Construction Red Tape Removed

A White House meeting has cleared way for two Florida VA Nursing Homes. It was approved almost three years ago, and finally, construction could begin soon on a 120-bed VA nursing home in St. Lucie County. Commissioners will get an update on the Ardie R. Copas State Veterans Nursing Home in Port St. Lucie on 16 MAY from Glenn Sutphin, executive director of the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs (FDVA). Plans for the nursing home were delayed because of a federal design change. When Florida first planned the Port St. Lucie home, it did so using conventional architectural designs. But the federal VA - which provides 65 percent of the construction costs - wanted a newer concept called community living centers. That design costs more and serves eight fewer veterans. Redrawing the plans delayed the project.

Then Gov. Rick Scott and Sutphin, met with President Donald Trump and the new VA Secretary David Shulkin on 19 APR. "Eight days later after the White House meeting, the VA released a statement saying that governors of the states could now use state designs in construction of the homes while qualifying for the same level of federal grant funding," said Steven Murray, FDVA communications director. That means the Port St. Lucie nursing home can proceed using its original design for 120 beds. Murray said the state design also will save money and allow the state to move forward on renovating another veterans nursing home in the Lake Baldwin area of Orlando. There's no timeline yet for when construction will start because the state still needs to get approvals. Sutphin will provide the latest details to commissioners during their regularly scheduled meeting. [Source: WUSF 89.7 | Bobbie O'Brien | May 15, 2017 ++]

Veterans' Treatment Court Update 23 ► A Second Chance

Three years after a tour in Iraq, an Army Veteran was settling back into civilian life in Texas when he witnessed a terrible accident at work. "I applied first aid on a fellow employee," said M.V., who requested that he only be identified by his initials. "I had this uneasy feeling the rest of the day. This building tension was like a slow tidal wave." On his way home from work that evening, he bought some beer. When it was gone, he decided to go to a local band, when it closed, he continued drinking at an after-hours place. "When I left that place, I was lost and drunk," M.V. said. "A police officer stopped me for failure to signal at an intersection."

M.V. was arrested and charged with DWI. After he was released from jail, he sought help from VA, which diagnosed him with PTSD and prescribed an anti-depressant. He pleaded guilty to DWI, successfully completed two years' probation and tried to put the unfortunate 2007 event behind him. Seven years later, he was arrested again for DWI. "This time, I was so drunk I passed out at a stop sign," M.V. said. "The cops had to smash the window to get me out. I'm glad I did not hurt anyone; that would have been tough to live with."

Realizing that he needed legal help and treatment for underlying service-related issues, he began online research into Veterans Court (<http://www.courts.ca.gov/11181.htm>) – a rehabilitative program he had heard about for Veterans caught up in the criminal justice system. A mental illness or mental disorder is no longer a pre-requisite for Veteran's Court. Government Code 124.002 was expanded to allow consideration of circumstances of the defendant's conduct, personal and social background, and criminal history, is likely to achieve the objective of ensuring public safety through rehabilitation of the veteran.

He found, a law firm based in Fort Worth that had successfully assisted other Veterans entry into the local Tarrant County Veterans Treatment Court (<https://www.versustexas.com/criminal/tarrant-county-veterans-court>) . Among other things, the website touted the program as "exceptionally successful" and described how Veterans Court focuses on judicially supervised treatment options for Veterans facing criminal prosecution. M.V. contacted

the law firm which, after an initial screening to see if he was a good candidate, began the application process to Tarrant County Veterans Treatment Court (VTC). The process is time-consuming and paper-intensive, requiring military and medical records.

With VTC veterans must first obtain preliminary approval from the Tarrant County District Attorney's Office. Once candidates cross that hurdle, they are required to have a face-to-face meeting with VTC Administrative Assistant Sylvia Magana and Program Manager Courtney Young. "This meeting is very important because the VTC policies and procedures are reviewed with the Veteran so he or she is aware of what is expected," Young explained. "This is the time for the Veteran to ask questions and express concerns." After the meeting, Young completes a comprehensive assessment to determine the Veteran's needs and whether he or she is suitable for the program. Viable candidates must then get final approval by the Tarrant County District Attorney's Office.

Once accepted into the program, Veterans must plead guilty to the offense and then dedicate themselves to an intensive correction and treatment plan that includes frequent court appearances, intensive supervision and counseling. **Veterans who complete the program, which can last anywhere from six months to two years, will have their case dismissed and later expunged.** Judge Brent CARR, a Veteran himself and the founder of the Tarrant County's Veterans Treatment Court, said the program is not a way to skirt the law or responsibility, but to rehabilitate Veterans and give them a second chance. "When I hear the horrific details of what many of these young men and women have had to endure in their service to their country, I am convinced this is the least we can do," Carr said. "Here in Tarrant County, we have a dedicated team of professionals who work very hard to put these Veterans back in a position to lead a successful life. "Over seven years, we have graduated almost 200 Veterans with a re-arrest rate of less than 6 percent," Carr said. "These programs work and they are a proper opportunity to afford those who were willing to sacrifice everything in defense of our freedom."

Nearly a year after he was arrested, M.V. was finally accepted into the Veterans Treatment Court program. It was rigorous, to say the least. "For the first 90 days, everyone wears an alcohol monitoring ankle machine – 24 hours a day for 90 days straight and there is a monthly fee," M.V. said. "When that is removed, you have to have a breath monitor on your vehicle and that has a monthly fee. There are also a lot of meetings and appointments that you have to go to — a lot of them are during normal work hours." M.V. said the best part of the program was being around fellow soldiers again and finally receiving much-needed counseling. "Without the counseling that was required, it would just be a matter of time before I was in trouble again," he said. "I have been off all medication for over a year now, and I feel great.

M.V. put in the work, graduated from the program, and had his case dismissed and expunged. Best of all, he discovered a newfound sense of purpose. "I was definitely given a second chance," he said. "Before the Veterans Court, I was short tempered and grouchy towards my wife and kids. My relationships have improved and my stress levels have gone way down. And, I have started a new career where I can give back to society." Although the road was difficult at times, M.V. said the sacrifice was well worth it. "You will be expected to commit to the program and make it your priority," M.V. said. "Just remember that everyone there wants to help you. Their goal is for you to exceed – not just in the program but in life." [Source: VAntage Point | Benson Varghese | May 18, 2017 ++]

Vet Homeless Recovery Programs Update 03 ► Tampa FL Problem

Taxpayers are shelling out \$60 million to house chronically homeless veterans, but you should take a look at what you are paying for. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (H.U.D) web page, the H.U.D/V.A.S.H (Veterans Assistance Supportive Housing) program is providing rental assistance for 8,000 families. The best the program can do for a Tampa veteran is a rat infested apartment. "I think it's atrocious," said Navy veteran Lee Hoffman. "My whole life I've never lived with rats." Days after moving his fiancée and family into a

Lake Shore Drive apartment this month, Hoffman discovered he had a problem. "Rats," he said. "Rats in the tree. I've seen a rat in my hallway. My neighbor downstairs directly below me has killed eight rats."

Hoffman lived on the street for years. V.A. housing specialists found the Lake Shore Drive apartment for him as part of the H.U.D./V.A.S.H. program. On the first visit, they discovered holes in the walls. A Marine who happened to occupy the apartment at the time had a message for the landlord who was among the visitors. "The Marine said 'you better tell these people about the rats,'" Hoffman recalled. "And then the owner, Lisa Tamplin, said 'what rats?' And then he turned around and said 'I've been calling you about rats.'" The apartment somehow passed a Tampa Housing Authority inspection.

Owner Lisa Tamplin told Target 8's Steve Andrews she is doing the best she can. She is placing traps and repellent around the property. Ms. Tamplin claims that from time to time rats come up through the sewers and gain entry to the house through air conditioner lines. She did confirm that the V.A. contacted her after Mr. Hoffman complained. According to Ms. Tamplin she placed traps in the apartment before Mr. Hoffman moved in as well as downstairs. She does not want to close the holes in the walls because she says she does not want the rats dying in the walls. She claims she thought she had the problem eliminated until 11 MAY, when Mr. Hoffman contacted her with a complaint. The owner assured Hoffman the rat problem was under control.

Not so. "What's atrocious is that guys who go in and serve our country come back and are put in this," said Hoffman. Target 8 called the Tampa Housing Authority Section 8 Counselor Kimsy Jenkins-Brown for some answers about why taxpayers are spending good money to house people in rat infested apartments. Jenkins-Brown said she could not speak with Andrews and referred him to her director, Margaret Jones. Jones has not returned the call. Target 8 also reached out to V.A. Housing Specialist Sara Danon. She did not respond to the call either.

The government will spend \$60 million on the H.U.D./V.A.S.H. program this year and this is the best it could do for Lee Hoffman. "It's telling me, you don't give a s— about me, is what you're telling me," stated Hoffman. "See my finger nails, that's how I've been since I've been here. I'm chewing them, I got nowhere to go." Following Target 8's call, Jenkins-Brown relayed to Hoffman that the housing authority now plans to schedule a special inspection of his unit. [Source: Tampa FL News Chanel Target 8 | Steve Andrews | May 17, 2017 ++]

Gold Star ID Card ► Available for Air Force Gold Star Families

Immediate family members of fallen troops now can receive long-term access cards for Air Force bases thanks to a program launched this month. The Gold Star Base Access ID program started at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, on 1 MAY and was implemented service wide 15 MAY, officials said. "The chief of staff of the Air Force expressed consideration for more outreach to Gold Star families so they know they will always be part of the Air Force family," said Brooke Brzozowske, an Air Force spokesperson. "These families have had access to and have received long-term care and support through the Air Force Families Forever program located with Airman and Family Readiness Centers," she added. "The base access cards will make it easier to access support services, attend ceremonies and events."

In the past, Gold Star family members had to be escorted on Air Force bases by a current ID card holder, despite the presence of survivor services programs on base specifically for their use. The new card will allow families to come on base without an escort. The Army and Navy have similar programs, officials with those services said. The Navy's program, in place since 2014, has issued 559 cards, officials said. Army officials said their program, launched in 2015, issues cards through the DA Form 1602 or "civilian ID card" system. Officials with the Marine Corps did not respond by deadline for requests for information.

Air Force officials said surviving family members will be notified about the new program through mail sent from their closest base. Family members eligible for the card are the same as those eligible to receive the official Gold

Star lapel button, including parents, siblings and adult children of those killed in combat. Widows and minor dependents already have base access through the dependent ID card system. The ID cards allow only base access and are not good for entrance into Morale, Welfare, Recreation (MWR) activities, medical facilities, exchange or commissary services, officials said. Card applicants are run through a background check before they are issued the ID. [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | May 17, 2017 ++]

WWII Vets [136] ► Joseph Aquilante | Army Air Force

Like many of the men he served with, Joseph Aquilante was eager to get home after World War II and left the military without collecting the medals he had earned. It wasn't until decades later when he built a model of the bomber he trained on for his grandson, Anthony, that he started talking with his family more about his service. Aquilante, of North Providence, began thinking lately that it would nice to leave the medals for his two grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. In March, as he was celebrating his 91st birthday, he asked his daughter to enlist the help of U.S. Sen. Jack Reed's office. The Rhode Island Democrat presented Aquilante with his medals 15 MAY in Cranston. "I don't know what it'll mean to them down the road, but I wanted to give these to them as a keepsake, a part of history," Aquilante said.



His daughter, Sally Veltri, said the medals are part of his legacy. Reed said he has held hundreds of similar ceremonies to give veterans the recognition they deserve. Aquilante was drafted into the U.S. Army Air Forces in 1944 at age 18 and spent most of his two years of service in the Pacific. He reported on new developments in Japan and retrieved Japanese aircraft from airfields for technical knowledge before preparing them to be sent to Washington, D.C. He returned to Rhode Island in 1946, got married, settled in North Providence and began his career as an auto mechanic. He and his wife of 60 years, Elsie, had three children. He was widowed a decade ago.

Aquilante received the Good Conduct Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, WWII Victory Medal and Army of Occupation Medal, Japan Clasp. Pointing to the Good Conduct Medal now affixed to his jacket, Aquilante said each holds a special meaning and significance. "They say as you get older you kind of get more sentimental and whatever, but it's not that at all. It's just the honor that goes with these things," he said. [Source: The Associated Press | Jennifer McDermott | May 15, 2017 ++]

Vet Cemetery Idaho Update 02 ► New Eastern Idaho State Cemetery

Plans for a second Idaho state veterans cemetery in eastern Idaho won approval from the state Land Board on 16 MAY, nearly a decade after plans for a North Idaho state veterans cemetery were dropped. That earlier plan was foiled when the feds chose a site for a new veterans cemetery in Spokane County, across the state line from Idaho's planned Kootenai County location. That meant another wouldn't be approved for federal funding so close. So the state turned its eyes toward eastern Idaho. The Washington State Veterans Cemetery in Medical Lake, adjacent to Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane County, opened in 2010. It serves an estimated 140,000 veterans and their families in the region. The new Idaho site is on 40 acres of farmland adjacent to State Hospital South in Blackfoot that's already owned by the state. The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare is turning it over to the state Land Board by quit-claim deed to meet federal requirements for a new veterans cemetery.

Tracy Schaner, deputy director of Idaho's Division of Veterans Services, told the Land Board the land is being leased to farmers. The planned deal would allow the leasing to continue until the ground is needed for various phases of the new cemetery. Schaner said the division is expecting additional federal grant money in October. "Ground could be broken as early as 2018 for the first phase of the site," she said. The state division has identified 23,000 current eastern Idaho veterans and their families who could make use of the new cemetery. The Idaho State Veterans Cemetery in Boise, which opened in 2004, has room for more than 8,000 gravesites, a scatter garden, flag plaza, memorial walk and other features.

At the new site in Blackfoot, the initial phase of construction will develop up to 23 acres and include 500 preplaced crypts, 400 columbarium niches and 150 in-ground burial plots. The initial phase also would include construction of a main entrance, committal shelter, in-ground cremains burial areas, roads, a maintenance facility, an assembly area and supporting infrastructure. Gov. Butch Otter, who leads the state Land Board, asked if the division already has heard from veterans who want to be buried there. Schaner said: "Once we are ready to break ground, we will start taking applications and preregistrations." Dave Taylor, health and welfare deputy director, said the Department of Health and Welfare obtained the land when State Hospital South was formed in the 1880s and added onto it over time. The residents of the state mental hospital previously used it as a working farm.

In addition to the new state veterans cemetery, the U.S. Veterans Administration announced in 2016 that it had purchased 8.1 acres in Buhl, Idaho, for a national veterans cemetery under its National Cemetery Administration Rural Initiative program. That program is aimed at establishing small national veterans cemeteries in states that don't have an open national cemetery. That location will serve an estimated 14,000 veterans and family members in the Magic Valley. The new eastern Idaho state veterans cemetery won't require any state general funds for construction, though the state will cover operating costs once it's up and running. The estimated full construction cost is \$8.3 million. State lawmakers approved a resolution calling for the new eastern Idaho cemetery in 2016. [Source: The Spokeman-Review | Betsy Z. Russell | May 16, 2017 ++]

UCX ► Unemployment Compensation for Ex-Servicemembers

People who leave the military often face different challenges when searching for civilian employment than people who move from one civilian job to another. The recession of 2007 to 2009 increased policymakers' focus on how well veterans who left active-duty service during or after the recession have fared in the civilian labor market. In its new report *Labor Force Experiences of Recent Veterans*, CBO compares the labor market outcomes of veterans who have left active-duty service since September 2001 with the outcomes of civilians (people who have never served on active duty in the armed forces). In this companion report, CBO describes the use of unemployment benefits among service members who have recently transitioned to the civilian workforce.

Unemployed veterans who are newly separated from the military's active component (the regular Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Air Force) or who are deactivated after serving on active duty in the reserve component (the National Guard or Reserves) may be eligible for a special type of unemployment insurance, called Unemployment Compensation for Ex-Servicemembers (UCX). The UCX program is administered by the states on behalf of the Department of Labor, but it is paid for by the military, as the recipients' former employer. In all, the Department of Defense (DoD) spent \$310 million on UCX benefits in 2016, down from a peak of \$1.0 billion in 2011. (Those amounts, which are expressed in 2017 dollars, include spending for Extended Benefits, additional weeks of unemployment benefits that are available in states with especially high unemployment rates.)

CBO analyzed data from the Army about the UCX program in fiscal year 2013 (the most recent year for which complete data were available when the analysis was conducted). In that year, nearly half of the soldiers who left the Army's active component applied for UCX benefits, as did about 20 percent of Army reservists who had served for at least 90 days on active duty and then been deactivated. Those data are only for the Army and cover only one year, so the results do not necessarily reflect the Army's experience in other years—particularly as the economy has improved—or the experiences of the other military services. However, because veterans generally begin receiving UCX benefits shortly after they leave the military, those data suggest that many soldiers did not or could not find a job near the end of their Army enlistment or soon thereafter.

To apply go to <http://www.careeronestop.org/localhelp/unemploymentbenefits/unemployment-benefits.aspx> to contact your State Workforce Agency via as soon as possible after discharge. It may be helpful to have a copy of your service and discharge documents (DD-214 or similar form) when you open your claim. In many states, you may now file your claim by telephone and/or internet. [Source: Congressional Budget Office | Report | May 16, 2017 ++]

GI Bill 229 ► Vet Groups Meet Consensus on 4 Needed Changes

After their public disagreement stalled a congressional hearing in April, 35 veterans groups came together 18 MAY in Washington to reach some consensus on changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill and restart their activity on Capitol Hill. The groups agreed the Post-9/11 GI Bill needed to change, at least to close several loopholes excluding some servicemembers from receiving education benefits. What divided the groups is a proposal from Student Veterans of America, a national organization that focuses on education policy, that the GI Bill's expansion be funded by new enlistees who would pay \$2,400 over a two years to opt into the benefit. Veterans of Foreign Wars and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America vehemently and immediately opposed the idea, describing it as a "tax on troops." The groups started competing hashtag campaigns, and the rift caused the postponement of a House Committee on Veterans' Affairs subcommittee hearing April 26.

While the groups still differ on how to pay for improved education benefits for servicemembers, they agreed 18 MAY to build momentum in Congress on four changes to the GI Bill. "This conversation – having 60-plus people in the room – made it real," said Kristofer Goldsmith, assistant director for policy at Vietnam Veterans of America. "This isn't some Twitter spat, it's not a hashtag war. We're representative of millions of veterans across the country, and we all believe the GI Bill needs to be improved." Concurrence was agreed to on the following

1. First, the groups agreed there should be a fix to a Pentagon deployment authorization that is unfairly preventing thousands of reservists and guardsmen from earning GI Bill benefits. About 4,700 reservists and guardsmen who deployed under Title 10, Section 12304b have been restricted from accumulating education benefits. A measure to bring the mobilization authority up to par with active-duty entitlements was set to be discussed at the 26 APR hearing. Jared Lyon, president of Student Veterans of America, stressed the urgency of fixing the problem, as well as other restrictions in the GI Bill. "There are lives impacted by these things not being fixed every single day," Lyon

said. "If you could see some of these fixes by the fall semester, you're really talking about true impact in the lives of folks for whom every semester, this is a problem."

2. Another change agreed on to on 18 MAY would expand eligibility for the Yellow Ribbon Program to surviving spouses and children of servicemembers killed in the line of duty. The program allows veterans to attend schools or enroll in programs that cost more than the GI Bill tuition cap.

3. They're also looking to expand full GI Bill benefits to all Purple Heart recipients. Currently, a veteran must be medically retired from the military or have 36 months of active-duty service to qualify. Aleks Morosky, national legislative director for the Military Order of the Purple Heart, said there are approximately 1,500 Purple Heart recipients who aren't eligible for full education benefits. "We'd like to see that fixed," Morosky said. "We think if you've been wounded on the battlefield, you've met the service requirement."

4. Lastly, the groups want to address, in some way, assisting student veterans whose schools close. Last year, for-profit ITT Technical Institute closed its doors, and thousands of veterans who attended the campuses were unable to recover lost education benefits. The situation has also happened with other for-profit schools that have closed.

Will Hubbard, vice president of government affairs at Student Veterans of America, said the groups plan to send a letter to Congress early next week to push for the four changes. "We've all seen tons of letter urging Congress to do various things. Why is this letter different? The people in that room are going to be pounding the pavement," Hubbard said. "This is something we're all going to get behind and rally around."

Hubbard said there would likely be further discussions between the groups, including talk of ideas to pay for GI Bill changes. There are more than a dozen other ideas for improvements to the bill besides the four agreed on Thursday. The meeting Thursday didn't resolve divisions about whether to charge servicemembers for the GI Bill. Pat Murray, associate director at VFW, said the VFW continues to disagree with Student Veterans of America on that point. The groups did find common ground on the four changes, though, and VFW plans to sign onto the letter, Murray said. "It's good for the community to come out with one voice, especially with something we can all agree on, to show we're together on this," Murray said. "We want this pushed through." [Source: Stars and Stripes | Nikki Wentling | May 19, 2017 ++]

Iwo Jima Flag Raising Monument ► Camp Pendleton to Get Replica

Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California, will receive a monument of the famous World War II flag-raising at Iwo Jima. The monument's design by Curt Fentress, designer of the National Museum of the Marine Corps Quantico base in Virginia, will replicate the version found at Quantico, while also protecting the monument from weather damage, according to a press release. The bronze design and cast will be done by Tom Bollinger, whose uncle was killed at Iwo Jima. The monument will be able to be seen by drivers on Interstate 5, ships off of the shore and military aircraft flying overhead. Currently, the goal is to complete the monument by the Marine Corps' birthday on November 10, 2018. The budget was set for \$10.7 million with a 15 percent contingency and must be secured before the construction begins. Dietz said that the Iwo Jima battle is not mentioned enough. "It was an all-American force of 75,000-plus that secured that small island for its airstrips," she said in a news release. "The Marine Corps' bloodiest battle (with casualty rates of up to 80 to 90 percent) saved the lives of as many as 26,000 US airmen." "We are thrilled that this very important American symbol of courage will be on each coast for all Americans to see and acknowledge the sacrifices made," Dietz said in the release. For more information about the monument's creation, design or how to donate, refer to <http://www.marinesoniwojima.com>. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Rachael Kalinyak | May 19, 2017++]



Vet Jobs Update 221 ► Wells Fargo | 20,000 by 2020

A new employment program targets military veterans transitioning into the civilian workforce. Wells Fargo & Co. on 19 MAY announced the launch of its **ApprenticeshipUSA program** for veterans. Established through the U.S. Labor Department, the nationwide program offers companies the tools to develop a workforce with sought-after skills and provides veterans an opportunity to earn a salary while learning additional skills necessary to succeed in high-demand civilian careers, explained Lance Lavergne, senior vice president of enterprise talent acquisition and strategy for Wells Fargo.

"Veterans often shy away from financial services roles because they don't think they have the skills or the training or the experience to qualify for those opportunities," he said. "ApprenticeshipUSA is a broad program that allows an individual to come into a situation that has a built-in learning and training component so that even if you don't have the skills and experience at the beginning, you'll develop all that (through the program) in order to become a full-time, gainfully employed person in the particular role (within Wells Fargo)."

The company has established a plan to hire 20,000 veterans to its national team by 2020, he noted. In addition to ApprenticeshipUSA, Wells Fargo offers other veteran career transition initiatives, including the Veteran Employment Transition Internship Program, American Corporate Partners mentorships, scholarships and emergency grants through Scholarship America. "Our commitment to hiring veterans remains a top priority for Wells Fargo," said Carly Sanchez, an executive vice president. "The ApprenticeshipUSA program is an excellent resource for us to attract and retain eligible veterans who have strong leadership competencies and other skills, but may not have strong financial industry knowledge."

Lavergne explained that eligible veterans can use their GI Bill education benefits to receive a tax-free monthly payment. The Post-9/11 GI Bill payment is the equivalent of the monthly housing allowance of an enlisted rank five — or E-5 — with dependents, with amounts varying by employer location. The funds are paid by the government in addition to the wages earned as an apprentice, and veterans also receive a payment for every month of their apprenticeship, he noted. Following six months of a veteran's apprenticeship, the payment is gradually reduced and offset by progressive wage increases, he said. "The whole goal of this program is to allow servicemen and women who are interested in financial services careers the opportunity to get the skills and training to be viable and effective team members," Lavergne said. "We can take people from a wide variety of backgrounds. It enables us to hone in on the qualitative and leadership skills that service members develop while they're in the military."

The company will target candidates with pertinent attributes for its various career paths and provide the training necessary to help them become efficacious, he said. "We identify people who are very team oriented, who can influence without authority (and) who can take initiative," Lavergne said. "We can recruit for those attributes, put

people in this program and teach them the technical skills they need to be successful." The ApprenticeshipUSA Program will be piloted in the company's Community Bank, Consumer Lending, and Payments, Virtual Solutions and Innovation divisions. Interested veterans can visit www.wellsfargojobs.com/military for more information about the pilot program and where to apply. [Source: Desert News | Jasen Lee | May 18, 2017 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 222 ► Wal-Mart Leave-Of-Absence Policy

Wal-Mart Stores Inc. announced 23 MAY that it's expanding its military leave-of-absence policy by offering differential pay to all eligible employees who are on military assignments lasting more than three days. The Bentonville, Arkansas-based company said in a news release that the differential pay will cover the duration of military leave, including basic training, for employees whose military salary is less than what they earn working for Wal-Mart. The company says its employees took more than 4,400 military leave of absences last year. The new policy takes effect 24 JUN. Wal-Mart senior director for military programs, retired Brig. Gen. Gary Profit, said employees who want to serve in the military will now be able to do so more easily. "We believe that anyone who wants to serve in our Armed Forces should be able to do so without fear of losing wages or leaving their family in a lurch." Profit said. "The changes we're making will remove financial barriers for all associates serving their country, including those who are starting their service journey through basic training. Wal-Mart also announced that it was giving a \$100,000 grant to the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, a group that helps those grieving the death of a loved one who served in the Armed Forces. [Source: The Associated Press | May 23, 2017 ++]

Military Retiree Best/Worst States ► Florida Stands Out

Florida reigns as a paradise for snowbirds. Beachside motels lure Canadians and spring-breakers. And according to personal-finance site WalletHub at <https://wallethub.com/edu/best-and-worst-states-to-retire/18592>, Florida also is the best state for military retirees ranked number 1 out of 51. WalletHub's analysis compared the 50 states and the District of Columbia using 22 key indicators of retirement-friendliness toward veterans. From job opportunities to housing affordability to quality of VA hospitals, the data use common challenges faced by veterans to determine the best states. WalletHub used three main categories: economic environment, quality of life and healthcare. Florida is home to the third-largest veteran population in the nation and is the top state for a veteran getting hired and for state tax on military pensions. Military retired pay and survivor benefit plans are tax exempt in Florida.

This year, WalletHub included two more metrics: the share of population 40 and older and the presence of veteran-treatment courts for mental health and drug addiction. According to the findings, more than half of the state's veteran population is over the age of 40. Florida's VA hospitals, and the number of them, also ranked high. "For the quality of VA hospitals metric, Florida ranked 19th because patients were more willing to recommend the state's VA hospitals," analyst Jill Gonzalez said. A score of 25 is considered average, and lower scores like Florida's are better, she said. "Florida ranked high [fifth best] for the number of VA health facilities per number of veterans," Gonzalez said. Analysts determined the number of job opportunities for veterans by looking at eligible jobs and subtracting the veteran unemployment rate, Gonzalez said. In hiring for federal government jobs, veterans in Florida may receive preference depending on their disability status and when they were active.

Bob Graham serves as the regional manager of the nonprofit Veteran's Outreach and helps tackle unemployment. The Army veteran said the ranking makes sense, although in his experience waiting times for VA hospitals vary. And for what Veterans Affairs can't do, Graham said organizations like his step in and help. "The VA can't help veterans meet their financial obligations, like light bills and rent and car payments," said Graham, whose office is in

Sarasota. "Many of them are or will become homeless unless they get help." There are over 56,000 veterans in Miami-Dade County, according to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. [Source: Miami Herald | Brooke Henderson | May 22, 2017 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure | GTMO ► No Cancer Link Found

U.S. military health experts found no link between several cases of cancer and environmental conditions in an area used for legal proceedings at the Guantanamo Bay detention center, according to a report released 25 MAY by the Navy. The report found no evidence that people working in Camp Justice were exposed to carcinogens above standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It said there were five cases of cancer among 700 people who worked at the legal compound from 2004-2016 but could not trace them to conditions at the Navy base in southeastern Cuba. The report was prepared by the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center. Four attorneys who have worked at Camp Justice filed suit in April against the Department of Defense, challenging an earlier finding that the area is safe. Their lawyer, Daniel Small, said he was reviewing the new report and could not comment further. The Defense Department has asked a judge to dismiss the suit. Camp Justice is a compound of temporary and permanent structures at a former airfield on the base that includes two courtrooms for use in legal proceedings against prisoners facing trial by military commission, including five men charged with planning and assisting the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack. [Source: The Associated Press | May 25, 2017 ++]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 31 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

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

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

This schedule has been expanded to include dates for retiree\veterans 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\veterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager at milton.bell126@gmail.com.

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

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

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

[Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | May 31, 2017 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► 1 thru 30 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*

Colorado Springs CO Veterans Job Fair	June 1, 2017
Fort Wainwright AK Job Fair	June 1, 2017
Fort Knox KY Job Fair	June 1, 2017
Greater Phoenix AZ Veterans Job Fair	June 8, 2017
Houston TX Veterans Job Fair	June 8, 2017
Fort Bragg NC Job Fair	June 14, 2017
Detroit MI Veterans Job Fair	June 15, 2017
Los Angeles CA Veterans Job Fair	June 15, 2017
Fort Bragg NC Job Fair	June 15, 2017

[Camp Pendleton CA Job Fair](#) June 20, 2017

[Washington, DC Veterans Job Fair](#) June 22, 2017

[Atlanta GA Veterans Job Fair](#) June 22, 2017

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Listings

[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](#)

[Fort Gordon Transition Summit](#) June 21 to June 22
Fort Gordon, GA [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Los Angeles Hiring Fair](#) June 23 to June 24
Los Angeles, CA [Details](#) [Register](#)

[Seattle Hiring Expo with the Seattle Mariners](#) June 27 - 11:00 am to 2:00 pm
Seattle, WA [Details](#) [Register](#)

Veteran Career/Job Fairs

[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

Fort Gordon, GA June 21, 2017, 9am - 7pm **More information**

Multiple Venues, Fort Gordon, GA 30805

* TRANSITION SUMMIT (Day 1 of 2)

- 9 a.m. | Afterburner Military Transition Seminar, Dinner Theater, 32100 3rd Ave. Special registration is required for this session.
- 9 a.m. | MOAA Military Spouse Symposium, Gordon Conference and Catering Ctr, Bldg. 18402, 19th St.
- 1 p.m. | Industry briefs for job seekers, Reserve Center, 15th & Lane.
- 5-7 p.m. | Networking reception, Gordon Conference and Catering Center, Bldg. 18402, 19th St.

Fort Lee, VA June 21, 2017, 10am - 2pm **More information**

Fort Lee Regimental Club, 2609 C Avenue, Fort Lee, VA 23801

- If you do NOT have an installation pass: Individuals will need to access the Lee Gate from Highway 36 and proceed to the Visitors Center to gain access to the installation. Be prepared to show vehicle registration and insurance documents. At the Visitor's Center you will be asked to fill out a short form and provide ID (picture) for the background screening process. This should take no longer than 10 to 15 min. based on the number of individuals needing access to the installation that also have to report through the Visitors Center.
- FAQs- Caution- www.lee.army.mil/pmo/documents/Fort_Lee_Installation_Access_FAQ.pdf
- If you are a passenger (driver must have an installation pass) then you do not need to get a pass. All passengers should have a picture ID to show the gate guard.

Fort Gordon, GA June 22, 2017, 9:30am - 7pm **More information**

Multiple Venues, Fort Gordon, GA 30805

* TRANSITION SUMMIT (Day 2 of 2)

- 9:30 a.m. | Employment workshops, Dinner Theater, 32100 3rd Ave.
- 1-7 p.m. | Hiring fair, Gordon Conference and Catering Center, Bldg. 18402, 19th St.

Los Angeles, CA June 23, 2017, 9am - 5pm **More information**

Westfield Century City, 10250 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90067

HIRING FAIR (Day 1 of 2)

- 9 a.m. | Registration opens for military job seekers
- 9:15-10:30 a.m. | Resume Engine workshop
- 10:30-11:30 a.m. | Hiring Fair open to military job seekers ONLY. This includes transitioning service members, Guard and Reserve, veterans and military spouses.
- 11:30 a.m.-5 p.m. | Hiring Fair open to general public

Los Angeles, CA June 24, 2017, 9am - 5pm **More information**

Westfield Century City, 10250 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90067

HIRING FAIR (Day 2 of 2)

- 9 a.m. | Registration opens for military job seekers
- 9:15-10:30 a.m. | Resume Engine workshop
- 10:30-11:30 a.m. | Hiring Fair open to military job seekers ONLY. This includes transitioning service members, Guard and Reserve, veterans and military spouses.
- 11:30 a.m.-5 p.m. | Hiring Fair open to general public

Seattle, WA June 27, 2017, 9:30am - 2pm **More information**

Safeco Field, 1st Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98134

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 Mariners and the Phillies.

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

Vet State Benefits & Discounts ► Kansas 2017

The state of Kansas 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 – KS** 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 following refer to <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/kansas.html> and <http://kcva.ks.gov> .

- Housing Benefits
- Financial Assistance Benefits
- Employment Benefits
- Education 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. Bills are normally initially assigned to a congressional committee to consider and amend before sending them on to the House or Senate as a whole.

VA DIC Rates Update 06 ► H.R.1329 | Make DIC COLA Equal SSA

The Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2017 (H.R.1329) would increase the amounts paid to veterans for disability compensation and to their survivors for dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) by the same cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) that recipients of Social Security receive in 2018. The increase would take effect on December 1, 2017. The COLA that would be authorized by this bill is assumed in CBO’s baseline, consistent with section 257 of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act. Because the COLA is assumed in CBO’s baseline, authorizing the COLA would have no budgetary effect relative to the baseline. Relative to current law, CBO estimates that enacting this bill would increase spending for those programs by \$1.8 billion in fiscal year 2018. CBO estimates that the COLA effective on December 1, 2017, will be 2.5 percent. (The annualized

cost would be about \$2.3 billion in subsequent years.) Pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply because enacting H.R. 1329 would not affect direct spending relative to the baseline and would not affect revenues. [Source: Congressional Budget Office | May 17, 2017 ++]

VA Claim Medical Evidence ► H.R.1725 | Private Medical Evidence Use

H.R. 1725 would require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to submit several reports to the Congress regarding the use of private medical evidence in lieu of a VA-provided examination for purposes of establishing eligibility for disability compensation or pension. CBO estimates that implementing H.R. 1725 would cost less than \$500,000 to prepare those reports over the 2018-2022 period; such spending would be subject to the availability of appropriated funds. Section 1 would require VA to submit a report detailing the progress of the Acceptable Clinical Evidence initiative—a VA initiative created to allow the department to accept private medical evidence to support an eligible individual’s claim for disability compensation or pension—and recommendations on how VA can best use private medical evidence in its claims process. That report would be due within 180 days of enactment of the bill. [Source: Congressional Budget Office | May 16, 2017 ++]

VA Facility Smoking Ban ► H.R.1662 | Indoor and Outdoor

The House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs voted unanimously by voice vote 17 MAY to move forward with legislation that would immediately ban smoking inside Department of Veterans Affairs facilities and require the agency to eliminate outdoor smoking areas by 2022. No one on the committee spoke against the bill, despite a lukewarm response to the legislation from major veterans organizations. The bill would strike a 25-year-old mandate that requires the VA to maintain smoking areas at its health care facilities. “A lot has changed in 25 years,” said Rep. Brad Wenstrup (R-OH), who introduced HR 1662. “It’s an outdated law that exists in direct violation of industry standards.” The bill moves to the full House, where it could be scheduled for a vote.

The VA has attempted for years to rally congressional support against the mandate, the Veterans Health Care Act of 1992. While smoking areas at other federal facilities were closed in 2009, the law required VA to maintain them. The American Legion, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Disabled American Veterans and Veterans of Foreign Wars took no firm stance on the bill in March, but warned in prepared testimony of unintended consequences, such as forcing a lifestyle change and eliminating a form of stress relief and social interaction for veteran patients. There are now nearly 1,000 outdoor smoking areas at VA facilities nationwide, as well as 15 indoor smoking areas. The VA, which views them as a health concern to patients and employees, estimated it would save about \$1.2 million each year spent on maintaining the areas. Some of the areas are climate-controlled.

“VA strongly supports this,” VA Deputy Undersecretary for Health Jennifer Lee told a House subcommittee in March. “We have proposed legislation for many years to reverse the requirement. We believe veteran patients have a right to be protected from secondhand smoke exposure when seeking health care.” The Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service as well as more than a dozen health care agencies have come out in support of Wenstrup’s bill. A study published in the American Journal of Public Health in 2013 contends the tobacco industry manipulated veterans organizations and Congress to create the law after the first VA secretary, Ed Derwinski, announced in 1990 his intentions to prohibit smoking inside VA facilities. [Source: Staars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | May 17, 2017 ++]

PCS Moves ► H.R.279/S.1154 | Military Family Stability Act

Lawmakers will try again to give more military families flexibility in their permanent change-of-station moves with a pair of bills introduced 18 MAY. The Military Family Stability Act, sponsored by two Democrats and two Republicans in the House and Senate, would allow families who receive move orders to either leave up to six months before their servicemember's assigned date to set up their new home or remain behind six months to ease the transition. "Making it easier for (families) to manage the challenges that come with military life is both a readiness and retention issue," said Sen. Roy Blunt (R-MO) "This bill would address one of the major challenges I hear from military families: an ill-timed move that takes a child out of school or prevents a husband or wife from pursuing an educational or career opportunity." Under current rules, families must move within a narrow window or cover the costs of a second residence on their own.

Blunt and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) introduced identical legislation (S.2137) last session and worked to include it in the annual defense authorization act. It was eventually dropped, due in part to concerns about the costs of the new policy. The final policy bill did include a new study on DoD efforts to ease the burden on military families of frequent moves, including other possible rule changes. The topic is likely to be linked to the 2018 defense authorization bill as well. Lawmakers are expected to begin debate on that measure in coming weeks. The House co-sponsors, Susan Davis (D-CA) and Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC), are key military personnel figures on the House Armed Services Committee.

"As the son of a World War II Flying Tiger, a 31-year retiree of the Army Reserves and South Carolina Army National Guard, and the grateful father of four sons who have served in the military, I know firsthand the challenges placed on the families of our service members," Wilson said in a statement. "Our common-sense legislation supports military families by giving them greater flexibility to plan for relocation — thereby increasing the overall well-being of military families." The legislation has already received support from a host of outside advocacy groups, including the National Military Family Association, the Military Officers Association of America and Blue Star Families. Pentagon leaders in recent years have promised a closer look at issues like the frequent military moves to better respond to the changing population of recruits, possibly allowing more flexibility to troops in their assignment choices and duration. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 18, 2017 ++]

VA Employee Accountability Update 06 ► H.R.1461 | Official Time Limitations

The Vet Protection Act of 2017 (H.R. 1461) would amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit an annual report to Congress relating to the use of official time by employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to limit the instances in which official time may be granted for certain purposes to employees of the Department, and for other purposes. Limitations would include:

- a) Employees of the Department may not use official time to carry out political activities or activities relating to lobbying.
- b) A physician, dentist, podiatrist, chiropractor, or optometrist employed by the Department may not use official time for any purpose.
- c) An employee of the Department not covered by (b) may spend no more than 25 percent of the time such employee would otherwise be in a duty status on official time if such employee is involved with direct patient care; or occupies a position with a rate of basic pay equal to or higher than the rate of basic pay for GS-13 of the General Schedule.

- d) An employee of the Department not covered by subsection (b) or (c) may spend no more than 50 percent of the time such employee would otherwise be in a duty status on official time.

In response H.R. 1461, as amended by Rep. Jim Banks of Indiana, passing through the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, American Federation of Government Employees National President J. David Cox Sr. issued the following statement:

- "We are sick and tired of the political witch hunt unfolding before our eyes in Congress. Federal public servants are under constant attack because of the narrow agendas of insiders on Capitol Hill, and the latest salvo makes a terrible idea even worse.
- "We strongly opposed H.R. 1461 – introduced by Rep. Jodey Arrington of Texas – when it was first announced because its sole intention was to break the back of the union and undermine federal employees' rights at work. Now, that horrendous bill has been amended to double down on Arrington's cynical attacks and put the health care system millions of American veterans and their families rely on at risk.
- "Official time allows for the very best way for federal employees to bring forward evidence of waste, fraud, and abuse. AFGE uses official time to protect whistleblowers on issues large and small. And by denying the medical professionals who care for our nation's heroes protections on the job, Congress is placing their misguided ideals far above the rights and needs of working people in our country's most important health care system – many of whom are veterans themselves.
- "There are more than 49,000 job vacancies in the VA right now. That means there are fewer doctors and nurses to care for veterans, fewer intake staff to handle incoming patients, and an inadequate number of support staff to keep these medical centers running. Instead of focusing on remedying the obvious problem, Congress seems content to make the hiring – and retention – of these necessary positions more difficult.
- "Today we call on Congress to stop the political posturing with their extremely anti-union legislation and solve the real problem facing the VA. The men and women who served our country – and who now make up one-third of the VA's workforce – deserve a world-class health care system. And that system is the VA. To ensure it can continue to deliver the high-level of care we know it's capable of, Congress must vote 'NO' on H.R. 1461."

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) is the largest federal employee union, representing 700,000 workers in the federal government and the government of the District of Columbia, including 360,000 employees at the Department of Veterans Affairs. [Source: PR Newswire | May 17, 2017 ++]

Burial in a National Cemetery Update 02 ► S.1179 | Laos Supporters

S.1179 - A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to inter in national cemeteries individuals who supported the United States in Laos during the Vietnam War era, and for other purposes was introduced 18 MAY by Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). The bill was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans Affairs. The last time this issue was addressed by Congress was in 2013 when H.R.3369, The Hmong Veterans' Service Recognition Act, was reintroduced in late October of that year. The legislation would affect an estimated 6,000 Hmong veterans and numerous others who fought in Laos that want nothing more than to be buried in a U.S. national cemetery.

If Murkowski's bill becomes law, the Hmong and other Lao would become the first members of a foreign guerrilla army to qualify for U.S. military burial benefits. The case of the Philippines' WWII soldiers differs because the country was a U.S. commonwealth at the time of the war, transitioning to independence, and its fighters were eventually recognized as veterans. While natives of other nations have a long history of fighting alongside U.S.

troops, the Hmong mercenaries present a special case, said Lt. Col. Tony Palumbo, director of the California State Military Museum, in 2013.

“For centuries we have been paying people to help fight our wars and if they lost their lives they were always shipped back to their home countries,” Palumbo said. “But the Hmong are unique because they became U.S. citizens, and the U.S. is their home turf and that’s where their families are,” Palumbo said. “That’s the huge difference between the Hmong and the guerrillas that fought alongside us in the military events we had in Central America in the 1980s.” As U.S. citizens, “they have earned every right to be buried alongside U.S. born soldiers and airmen,” said Palumbo, a veteran of the war in Iraq.

After the Communists took over Laos in 1975, more than 100,000 Hmong refugees fled to the United States, where they struggled mightily to fit in. Few could read, write or speak English. As political refugees, they could apply for citizenship and receive welfare benefits, but those who fought were not recognized as military veterans. Thousands of Hmong soldiers have died in poverty and obscurity, never appreciated by their country or their Americanized children, said 68 year old Charlie Moua, president of the Special Guerrilla Unit Vietnam Veterans (SGUVV), representing 1,200 former soldiers left in California, most of whom live in the Central Valley between Fresno and Chico. [Source: <https://www.congress.gov> & The Sacramento Bee| Stephen Magagnini | November 9 2013 & May 18, 2017 ++]

VA Women Vet Programs Update 29 ► H.R.91 Women Veterans Act

On 3 JAN Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA-26) introduced the following Building Supportive Networks for Women Veterans Act (H.R.91) which was referred to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. As ordered reported by the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs on May 17, 2017, CBO submitted the following to the Committee:

The bill would require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish a permanent program that provides counseling in group retreat settings to certain women veterans who have recently separated from military service. The bill also would require the VA to submit to the Congress a biennial report on the outcomes of the program. VA is completing the final year of a pilot program that provides similar services to women veterans. According to VA, roughly 270 women participated in the program at 12 retreats over the 2011-2016 period at an average cost of \$3,400 per participant. On the basis of information from VA, CBO expects that the department would use the authority provided under H.R. 91 to hold six retreats a year. CBO estimates that implementing this program would cost \$3 million over the 2018-2022 period after accounting for anticipated inflation; such spending would be subject to the availability of appropriated funds. Enacting the legislation would not affect direct spending or revenues; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply. CBO estimates that enacting H.R. 91 would not increase net direct spending or on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2028. [Source: CBO Cost Estimate | May 22, 2017 ++]

HVAC Update 23 ► Newly Passed Bills for Floor Vote

The following bills were passed out of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs on May 15. To read the text of the bills as introduced and any amendments added click on the bill's PDF Tab:

- H.R. 1005, to improve the provision of adult day health care services for veterans; [[PDF](#)]
- H.R. 1162, the No Hero Left Untreated Act; [[PDF](#)]
- H.R. 1329, as amended, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2017; [[PDF](#)]

- H.R. 1461, as amended, the VET Protection Act of 2017; [\[PDF\]](#), [\[PDF\]](#), [\[PDF\]](#), [\[PDF\]](#), [\[PDF\]](#), [\[PDF\]](#), & [\[PDF\]](#)
- H.R. 1545, the VA Prescription Data Accountability Act 2017; [\[PDF\]](#)
- H.R. 1725, as amended, the Quicker Veterans Benefits Delivery Act of 2017; [\[PDF\]](#) & [\[PDF\]](#)
- H.R. 1848, the Veterans Affairs Medical Scribe Pilot Act of 2017; [\[PDF\]](#)
- H.R. 2288, the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017; [\[PDF\]](#)
- H.R. 467, the VA Scheduling Accountability Act; [\[PDF\]](#)

[Source: VVA Web Weekly | May 19, 017 ++]

* Military *



UCMJ Update 02 ► Death Row Inmate Ronald Gray Appeal Denied

Ronald Gray, a serial rapist and murderer on military death row, has lost his appeal to have his death sentence vacated. Gray, formerly an Army cook, was convicted in 1988 of murdering two women and raping a third woman, and he was sentenced to death, NBC News reported on 25 MAY. He pleaded guilty to killing two other women in 1986 and 1987 among crimes committed on and near Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and received a life sentence related to those killings, the report said. In his petition to the Army Court of Appeals, Gray claimed he was incompetent to stand trial, he was denied due process, the death penalty is racially biased and other objections.



The decision against his appeal was unanimous, The Fayetteville Observer reported 24 MAY. "Pvt. Gray now has 30 days to file for reconsideration with the court or, alternatively, 20 days to petition for review at the next

appellate level, the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces," the Army said in a statement. Although President George W. Bush signed off on his execution in 2008, the case was held up in the civilian federal courts until late last year when a stay of execution was lifted. His appeals in military court have to be exhausted before a date can be set for what would be the military's first execution since 1961. Gray, now 51, could be the first inmate put to death by the military since 1961. He has been confined at the U.S. Army Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Ed Bowman, whose 23-year-old daughter Kimberly Ann Ruggles was stabbed to death, said it was a relief to hear Gray's latest appeal was turned down. "He should be executed and dragging it out and dragging it out is absolutely insane," he said. "He should have been dead a long time ago. There's a lot of people been waiting a long time to see this man die." [Source: ArmyTimes | Ashley Bunch | May 26, 2017 ++]

USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN-72) ► 4-Yr Overhaul Completed

The Navy's aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln was redelivered to the fleet by Newport News Shipbuilding after completing a four-year mid-life refueling and modernization servicing. Built to last 50 years, the Nimitz-class carrier was redelivered on May 12 after completing four days of sea trials, where a team of ship's crew, yard workers and Navy officials put the ship through the paces. "The sea trials period we completed today went exceptionally well," said Capt. Ronald Ravelo, Lincoln's commanding officer. "Of course there was some discovery, the ship hasn't been underway for over four years, but everything went for the most part on schedule."

Not everything was smooth, given the long absence from operating at sea. Many of the ship's crew were getting underway for the first time in their careers, despite being stationed on the ship for a few years already. The ship, too, needed to fully stretch its legs. "During the buildup to our high-speed runs we had to do some cleaning of our lube oil coolers, things like that," said Ravelo. "It wasn't like anything broke, per se, the lube oil coolers rely on sea water and they needed to be cleaned out as we went into our high-speed runs." The mid-life servicing included a refueling of the carrier's nuclear power plant, a modernization of its computer and warfighting systems throughout the ship and total rework of its flight deck gear. But most notable — in terms of the Navy's future — is that Lincoln is the first ship that has been reworked to accommodate the new F-35C Lightning aircraft which is expected to enter the fleet in the next few years.

The ship's high-speed turns were arguably the highlight of the at-sea period, not only for senior sailors like Ravelo, but for some of the crew's most junior members. Boatswain's Mate 3rd Class Addison Mila has been on board the ship for nearly three years, but before these trials, his only time at sea was during temporary duty to qualify as a helmsman while on board the carrier Truman. Time spent qualifying, though, wasn't anything compared to being at the ship's helm during the high-speed turns. "It was awesome," said Mila. "The reason we do those big turns is to see how the ship reacts — if the ship needed to quickly move to avoid an unexpected navigational hazard, we rely on these tests to understand how our ship would perform."

The refueling and complex overhaul — or RCOH — is the fifth mid-life servicing of the Navy's Nimitz-class carriers completed by Newport News Shipbuilding of Huntington Ingalls Industries. "The successful completion of sea trials and redelivery of the ship to the Navy is the culmination of over 48 months of teamwork between Newport News shipbuilders, the CVN-72 crew, our government partners and all of our suppliers," said Chris Miner, Newport News Shipbuilding's vice president of in-service aircraft carrier programs, in a news release. "The completion of the refueling and complex overhaul returns a fully recapitalized ship to the fleet, ready to support any mission and serve our nation for another 25 years."

The carrier Lincoln's RCOH began in March 2013 and required more than 2.5 million man-hours of labor, according to the Navy. Upgraded features include repairing, replacing and modernizing tanks, the hull, shafting, propellers, rudders, piping, ventilation, electrical, combat and aviation support systems. At the peak of the

renovation, 4,000 shipbuilders were assigned to the project. “Every sailor, shipyard worker and contractor involved with RCOH and redelivery should be standing tall as we bring this mighty warship back home to Norfolk and put her back into service for the U.S. Navy,” Ravelo said. “Getting Lincoln back into the fight was truly an all-hands effort, and I could not be more proud of the crew who helped make that happen.”



The Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) conducts high-speed turn drills during sea trials on May 11, 2017.

With the return of the Lincoln, the Navy has nine carriers in its training and deployment rotation. The new carrier Gerald R. Ford, namesake of the Ford-class, is expected for delivery sometime this year. The Ford was built at Newport News Shipbuilding as well. The Nimitz-class carrier George Washington is expected to complete its RCOH in 2021. For a 16 minute video on the redelivery of the USS Abraham Lincoln to the Navy refer to <https://youtu.be/DnQA3szyhPM>. [Source: NavyTimes | Mark Faram | May 20, 2017 ++]

Ticonderoga-Class Cruisers ► No Replacements in Sight

Less than an hour after a recent dawn rolled west into the Pacific Ocean, Capt. Joe Cahill sat in his starboard chair, a lined face pointed toward a line of warships wheeling north around San Clemente Island. In the lead, the destroyers Halsey and Higgins cut through the waves in a tight turn toward land, trailed by the looming flattop Theodore Roosevelt and the destroyer Sampson in its wake. And in the far rear, like a bear protecting her cubs, was the San Diego-based Bunker Hill, the 10,000-ton cruiser that orchestrates the air defenses for Carrier Strike Group 15. It's on guard in case there's ever a need to blast to dots enemy jets, helicopters, drones and missiles arcing toward the flotilla.

The ships' path in mid-MAY was designed to mimic the world's most dangerous sea channels — the bustling Strait of Malacca and the Singapore Strait, traveled by a third of the globe's commercial ships, plus the Strait of Hormuz, a flash point between U.S. Navy vessels and the Iranian patrol boats and aircraft that pester them.

“Reps and sets. The geography of Southern California helps make these exercises more realistic,” said Cahill, 46, who has performed this ballet on water dozens of times in his quarter-century career.

Cahill is widely considered as one of the most penetrating minds on Navy surface warfare, with years both at sea and on teams that designed futuristic warships and advanced tactics. Until he took the helm of the guided-missile cruiser Bunker Hill last July, Cahill directed Vice Adm. Tom Rowden's Distributed Lethality Task Force, the cell that created a new doctrine of savagely prosecuting sea battles across vast distances, the warships widely spaced out so they can hit an enemy from multiple angles without warning.

And no Navy surface ship throws a harder punch than the Bunker Hill, a cruiser armed with a high-tech battery of missile tubes and advanced sensors that probe for faraway targets to destroy “They provide our civilian and uniformed military leaders with a persistent, maneuverable warfighting capability, where and when needed around the world,” Rowden, the Naval Forces commander, wrote in an email to The San Diego Union-Tribune. “The complexity of integrated air and missile warfare is growing more challenging by the day. We need these cruisers, and the follow on to the cruiser, to be as flexible and capable as possible ...”



USS Bunker Hill (CG-52)

plans to decommission the Ticonderoga-class cruiser in 2019, mothballing it after 33 years of service. It will be the first of the Vertical Launch System “Ticos” to exit the fleet. The brass wanted to swap these aging cruisers for a futuristic warship called the CG(X), but admirals balked at the estimated price tag of \$3.5 billion to \$6 billion each. The last of the Tico litter, the Port Royal, is slated to retire in 2045. Until then, it and eight other cruisers will receive hundreds of millions of dollars in high-tech upgrades, including advanced radar and sonar, launchers and a much more potent missile interceptor.

“The bottom line is that the upgrades will add life to the cruisers and those upgrades are necessary. They will remain the most impressive integrated missile platforms afloat, but they’re not the long-term solution,” said Bryan McGrath, a retired destroyer commander who now directs the Maryland-based FerryBridge Group of consultants. Escalating crew costs in an age of austerity — at full staff, the Bunker Hill has about 360 sailors — also doomed the Ticos. Paced by the Zumwalt, the latest class of destroyers are bigger than the Bunker Hill but boast a crew less than half its size, thanks to robots and software.

The Bunker Hill’s crew is considered to be one of the best on the high seas. On 10 MAY, it received the Navy’s coveted Battle “E” award for superior combat effectiveness. Six weeks earlier, Lt. Ryan P. Kelly, the Bunker Hill’s plans and tactics officer, was named the Surface Warfare Officer of the Year for 2016 by Naval Surface Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet. During the past nine months, Kelly and the rest of the crew have been honed for new missions built around “distributed lethality.” It’s a debated topic within the Navy, but at its heart, distributed lethality is a bundle of tactics wrapped in a swagger that’s designed to give a potential enemy pause before daring to challenge America at war.

Distributive lethality returns the Navy to its historical roots, when “rat catcher” captains and their crews hunted with ruthless precision their foes at sea. With an offensive mindset, it prizes commanders who evade their foes before jabbing them like boxing champs. Distributive lethality requires nimble skippers who aggressively exploit an enemy’s mistakes and drive home an attack until a foe’s warship, aircraft or land target is obliterated. To wage that type of smart, sneaky and relentless battle, the Bunker Hill’s crew drinks daily what Cahill calls a “warfighting ethos.” Distributive lethality is a way of “owning the problem” caused by potential foes worldwide who increasingly field potent, stealthy, long-ranged and super-fast missiles and planes capable of crippling an aircraft carrier, he said.

Cahill said the payoff is peace.

“There’s a perspective about conventional deterrence,” Cahill said. “So if an adversary is advantaged to move first, in any environment, and that adversary understands that if he chooses to move first he will not accomplish his aims, then he will not move first.” And that might be the last great act of the Bunker Hill and its sister cruisers. Once the feared warships of their age, they now must hang on long enough for the Pentagon to build their replacements while cowering rising powers such as China, Russia and Iran from shooting first. [Source: The San Diego Union-Tribune | Carl Prine | May 20, 2017 ++]

NAS Oceana ► 94K Gal Jet Fuel Spill | Switch in Wrong Position

U.S. Navy officials say they believe the jet fuel spill at Naval Air Station Oceana was caused by a fuel switch in the wrong position during a tank refueling. The 94,000-gallon spill was first discovered 11 MAY and closed down London Bridge Road in Virginia Beach, VA until 14 MAY. The official briefing held 19 MAY noted:

- Workers have been working around-the-clock to clean up the 94,000-gallon spill
- While the official cause is still under investigation, initial indicators point to a mishap during a tank refueling that occurred on Wednesday, May 10. Officials say a fuel switch was in the wrong position, which caused fuel to flow into a small 2,000-gallon tank instead of into one of three larger 880,000-gallon tanks. Once the capacity of the smaller tank was reached, the fuel overflowed for several hours. The Navy is still investigating how the switch was in the incorrect position.
- The spill was discovered on Thursday, May 11 around 6 a.m.
- By 18 MAY 80 percent of the spill had been removed.
- The Navy estimated the loss of fuel to cost about \$184,000, with jet fuel valued at about \$1.91 per gallon.

Approximately 200 homes in the Nottingham Estates and Cheltenham Square neighborhoods have been affected. Those residents have been given the option to stay at a hotel, courtesy of the Navy, while the cleanup continues. As of 19 MAY, 48 residents and families have requested temporary relocation. The Navy says they do not believe anyone has been exposed to any major health risks and all readings from the Environmental Protection Agency are at normal levels. As far as property damage is concerned, the Navy says they’re still assessing. Approximately 701 deceased wildlife have been recovered, approximately 75% of which are common fish. Wildlife experts with the Navy, U.S. Department of Agriculture-Wildlife Services, NOAA, Virginia’s Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife are also actively looking for impacted wildlife and taking precautions to make sure additional wildlife avoids the affected area. [Source: WYKI News 3 TV | Becca Mitchel | May 19, 2017 ++]

Navy Ship Under Manning ► In port Workload 70-Hours per Week

GAO, the government's watchdog, is calling out the Navy for continuing to underman its ships years after the official demise of "optimal manning" initiatives that stripped sailors off ships but didn't adequately address the workload. The Navy isn't measuring or monitoring its in-port workload, including duty section security watch requirements and other tasking, because the Navy assumes the workload will always be higher at sea, according to the Government Accountability Office. But officers and enlisted personnel for 12 crews interviewed by GAO all reported being overworked in port.

- "Sailors consistently said that there were fewer crew members in port than during deployment, because sailors were attending training and taking leave, or because the Navy was prioritizing the manning of ships on deployment over ships in port," the report read. "Both officers and enlisted personnel told us

that ship crews are stressed and overburdened during in-port periods because they must stand watch and cover the workload of multiple sailors.

- "Crew members told us that when they returned from deployment, this additional workload placed a strain on them and their families, affecting crew member morale."

Some departments told the GAO that their workload was the same at sea as it was in port, but they had fewer people to do it when they were in port. The Navy only began studying in-port workloads in December, and is scheduled to complete a report this summer, the report said. "Without identifying the manpower needed to execute in-port workload, the Navy risks overworking its sailors during in-port periods and having this workload executed without the appropriate number and mix of sailors, which in turn may affect ship readiness, safety, and sailor morale," the report said.

The report also found that the Navy doesn't have an accurate handle on how much work sailors can accomplish in any given week and all-but says the Navy's got it wrong. The Navy has restored some billets since ending optimal manning, but retained its benchmark 70-hour workweek. The report found that the Navy increased the standard workweek from 67 to 70 hours during optimal manning and it has not adjusted downward, meaning they are probably still underestimating how many sailors the ship actually needs. n"The Navy's manpower requirements process does not account for growing in-port workload, which is distributed among fewer crew members than when ships are at sea," the report reads.

Despite changing assumptions about the need for more sailors on ships, the Navy hasn't changed its underlying analysis of how many sailors it needs, something GAO recommends changing. The GAO said the Navy needs to get a handle on its manpower needs before it thinks about growing the fleet. In responsive comments, the Navy concurred with all the main points of the report. [Source: NavyTimes | David B. Larter | May 19, 2017 ++]

Portable Battlefield Brain Scanner ► Detects Bleeding in Skull

Marine Corps Systems Command is bringing a portable scanner to front line Marines, one that can quickly catch brain bleeding and potentially save lives, said the U.S. Marine Corps. The Infrascanner can detect intracranial hematomas early on, meaning it can tell if there is bleeding in the skull. And it can even be used on the battlefield. Current remote facilities do not have the capability for such immediate diagnosis. When Marines encounter close proximity blasts or fall and hit their heads, they become susceptible to traumatic brain injuries and bleeding. "Intracranial hematomas — if gone untreated — can put pressure on the brain, causing potential brain damage or even death," Mark Urrutic, project officer for the Family of Field Medical Equipment Team at MCSC and a retired Navy chief hospital corpsman, said in a Marine Corps release.



Traumatic brain injuries can be treated, but success often relies on a timely diagnosis, and sometimes just finding that diagnosis takes a lot of resources. Before the new medical device, medical personnel gauged severity through symptoms and a Military Acute Concussion Evaluation, or for a more definitive answer, a CT scan. “This isn’t going to replace the CT scan,” said John Philpott, a medical team engineer at MCSC. “In addition to helping us determine if Marines have suffered brain injuries, it can help us rule out Marines who haven’t. So, Marines who aren’t suffering from a brain hematoma can get back to the action sooner, rather than having to send every Marine back for a CT scan, which uses time and resources. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Ashley Bunch | May 15, 2017 ++]

USMC Photo Scandal Update 03 ► Marines United Response

The Marine Corps invited MOAA to a briefing by the Assistant Commandant, Gen. Glenn Walters, to discuss the service's response to the Marines United scandal and broader cultural issues within the organization. The changes are dramatic and far-reaching. The Marine Corps has the fewest number of women and it has had the most public struggles with gender integration. The recent incident of Marines and others sharing inappropriate photos of women Marines on a private Facebook page appears to have been the last straw.

Following the scandal, investigators set up a task force to find those responsible for posting, sharing, and commenting on the photos of women Marines. To date, 40 Marine perpetrators have been identified. Disciplinary action is pending in a majority of those cases. **Gen. Walters explained his primary focus is getting the perpetrators out of the Marine Corps using whatever means possible.** He also indicated the commandant would not hesitate to relieve commanding officers who allow this conduct to occur in their commands, pointing out he relieved eight commanding officers in the past year. Another senior Marine official had a stern warning for the Marines United group: “Disassociate yourself, don't use 'Marine' in your name because, whatever you are, you are not a part of the Marine Corps.”

Recognizing the Marines United scandal was a symptom of a broader problem throughout the service, Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Robert Neller formed a task force to address cultural change and gender diversity Corps-wide. The task force is comprised of Marines and civilian-experts on organizational change, 40 percent of whom are women. Initial plans are to impart cultural change from recruitment through a Marine's entire career, including transition from service. The Marine Corps released a new recruiting commercial featuring women that it had been developing since last year. It also has been targeting women for recruiting in other ways, such as using outreach to encourage women to join the Marine Corps flight program. The service's efforts appear to be paying off; almost 10 percent of all new recruits are women. Other changes include the development of a new Talent Management Office within the Marine Corps that will work to ensure gender diversity throughout the Corps' ranks and occupational fields.

When it comes to those who are transitioning from their military careers, Gen. Walters explained, “Marine alumni are the key to policing alumni” and called on Marines of all eras to uphold the highest standards of the Corps. MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret), said, “It is very encouraging to see the transparency with which the Marine Corps is proceeding and the comprehensive approach to addressing gender diversity throughout the Corps. The Marine Corps' determination is obvious in the actions they are already taking and MOAA looks forward to continuing the effort with them.” Further, the Marine Corps is open to any and all ideas about how to change culture within the Corps to one that is dignified and respectful of all Marines. If you have ideas, email them to beartotheresolution@usmc.mil. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | May 19, 2017 ++]

Other than Honorable Discharge Update 07 ► Mental Health Factor

The top government watchdog said 16 MAY that nearly a quarter of U.S. troops discharged for misconduct were given other-than-honorable discharges despite previously being diagnosed with a mental health condition. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) in its report faulted branches of the Department of Defense (DOD) for having policies inconsistent with — or poor enforcement of — official Pentagon rules for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI) or sexual trauma. “As a result of policy inconsistencies and limited monitoring, DOD has little assurance that certain service members diagnosed with PTSD or TBI receive the required screening and counseling prior to being separated for misconduct and that all service members, including officers, have been trained on how to identify symptoms of mild TBI in the deployed setting,” the GAO wrote.

“Unless the policy inconsistencies are resolved and routine monitoring is undertaken to ensure adherence, the risk increases that service members may be inappropriately separated for misconduct without adequate consideration of these conditions’ effects on behavior, separation characterization, or eligibility for VA benefits and services.” The report bolsters arguments from veterans’ advocates who have said that thousands have received “bad discharge papers” despite suffering from one of the conditions. Such discharges haunt veterans for the rest of their lives, advocates say, by denying them veterans benefits and casting a stigma that can affect civilian life, such as finding employment.

According to the GAO, 57,141 of the 91,764 troops separated for misconduct from 2011 through 2015 had been diagnosed with PTSD, TBI or another condition at least two years before their discharge. Of those with a diagnosis, 13,283, or about 23 percent, received other-than-honorable discharges. Among the inconsistencies found by the GAO, the Navy does not require a medical exam for certain sailors being separated in lieu of court-martial to determine whether a PTSD or TBI diagnosis is a mitigating factor in the misconduct. Such an exam is Pentagon policy. The Army and Marine Corps, meanwhile, may not follow to their own screening, training and counseling policies, according to the GAO.

In a written response included with the report, the Pentagon took issue with the “accuracy and clarity” of the data. For example, the response said, troops with both PTSD and TBI diagnoses were counted twice, and the GAO included other mental health disorders with little clinical or published research linking them to the type of misconduct that results in discharge. “In combination, these errors greatly exaggerate the number of service member separated for misconduct that the GAO reports have been diagnosed with mental health conditions GAO proposes are associated with misconduct,” David Smith, acting assistant secretary of Defense for health, wrote. “As such, the inflated figures create the false impression that the majority of service members administratively separated for misconduct had psychological health conditions that would explain their misconduct.”

Vietnam Veterans of America called the GAO report “immensely disturbing” and again called on President Trump to pardon affected veterans. “It’s horrific to think of these young men and women as statistics, but that’s what they’re becoming,” John Rowan, national president of Vietnam Veterans of America, said in a statement. “These are veterans who volunteered to serve in a time of war, yet they’ve been failed by previous administrations. They didn’t hesitate to run into battle. Our current commander-in-chief can’t hesitate now. President Trump has always supported our veterans, and we are confident that he will listen to our plea on behalf of these veterans.” [Source: The Hill | Rebecca Kheel | May 16, 2017 ++]

Bullet Stopping Goo ► Air Force Cadet Makes it Work

A gooey substance normally wouldn’t seem like it could stop a bullet, but an Air Force Academy cadet has created just that. Cadet 1st Class Hayley Weir’s interest in bullet-stopping materials was piqued when she took a chemistry

class at the academy in 2014. The class was given three materials to combine in a way that could stop a bullet. “Up to that point, it was the coolest thing I’d done as a cadet,” Weir, a senior at the academy, told Air Force Times. The students were given an epoxy, Kevlar and carbon fiber — materials that would harden together to stop a bullet but that could also shatter. That prompted Weir to come up with an alternative combination of materials that would produce the same result without shattering.

The academy put her in touch with a chemistry adviser who wanted to research body armor, and he suggested a shear thickening fluid as an alternative to the epoxy that hardened when dried. The fluid, also known as a non-Newtonian fluid, changes viscosity depending on whether stress or force is applied to it. This means the material would feel gooey until struck with something, like a bullet — then it would harden enough to stop it. The idea to separately use shear thickening fluid, Kevlar and carbon fibers as anti-ballistic materials is not new, but they’ve never been used together. Ryan Burke, a military and strategic studies professor at the academy who teamed up with Weir on the project, said he fully expected that it had already been tried before. “The armor industry is a multibillion dollar industry with people studying this on a daily basis as their main profession,” he said. Weir and Burke did a review of previous studies, but they couldn’t find anything similar, he said.

“We knew Hayley had stumbled onto something unique here and innovative,” said Burke, a Marine veteran. They also ran the idea past researchers and chemists at the Air Force Civil Engineer Center, who thought it was a valid idea worth pursuing. Weir began researching in 2015 and switched majors from chemistry to military strategies, where she linked up with Burke to continue the research. In the first few months of testing the goo in 2016, Weir said it kept failing. “Bullets kept going straight through the material with little sign of stopping,” she said. Weir and Burke watched video footage of the testing and found that when the bullet hit the material, it would balloon backward as the round was caught. The cadet thought maybe they weren’t putting the materials together in the best way, so they redesigned the layering sequence.

In December 2016, they had their first successful test. “From then on, we had a hard time getting the material to fail,” Weir said. They went to the Air Force Civil Engineer Center for a week of testing, and the material stopped a .44 Magnum bullet. “It’s a gigantic bullet — this is the highest caliber we have stopped so far,” Weir said. The team tested 9 mm, .40 Smith & Wesson, and then the .44 Magnum rounds. Burke said the stronger and faster the round, the quicker it was stopped by the material. In the 9 mm testing, the rounds went through most of the layers but were caught by the fiber backing, Burke said. The larger .40-caliber round was contained in the third layer of Kevlar. The .44 Magnum was caught in the first layer. “The greater the force, the greater the hardening or thickening effect” of the material, Burke said.

Weir said they’re looking at the possibilities of using the material as extremity armor as well as coating vehicles and aircraft in it. The possibilities are endless, she and Burke said. The material could be turned into tents that would protect people from small-arms fire and shrapnel, she said. In the civilian world, it could be used as emergency barricades. For example, if there was a mass shooting, some form of the material could cover people to protect them. After Weir graduates from the academy this month, she will continue her research at Clemson University in South Carolina. In the meantime, there’s a patent pending on the material that will last 12 months. Weir said she and Burke will use that time to optimize the technology so it will be more advanced when they file for the official patent. [Source: AirForceTimes | Charlsy Panzino | May 14, 2017 ++]

Pvt. Manning Prison Release ► Wikileaks Document Leaker

Pvt. Chelsea Manning was released from prison 17 MAY, and because her court-martial conviction is still under appeal, she’ll be staying in the Army for the foreseeable future. Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison back in 2013, but an order by former President Obama in January commuted her sentence to seven years from her initial arrest, which added up to May 17, 2017. She won’t draw a paycheck but she will be eligible for some benefits,

according to an Army spokesman. "Pvt. Manning is statutorily entitled to medical care while on excess leave in an active duty status, pending final appellate review," said Dave Foster. "In an active duty status, although in an unpaid status, Manning is eligible for direct care at medical treatment facilities, commissary privileges, Morale Welfare and Recreation privileges, and Exchange privileges."



The former intelligence analyst, who was court-martialed as Pfc. Bradley Manning, was convicted of leaking thousands of documents to Wikileaks in 2010. Soon after being incarcerated at U.S. Disciplinary Barracks in Leavenworth, Kansas, Manning came out as transgender and began taking hormones and living as a woman in prison. Manning's fragile mental state, including a suicide attempt and subsequent stay in solitary confinement, were factors in Obama's decision to order her early release. It was a decision that was met with fierce opposition from lawmakers and service members alike. Shortly after his decision was announced, Obama told reporters he granted clemency to Manning because she had gone to trial, taken responsibility for her crime and received a sentence that was harsher than other leakers have received. He added that he did not grant Manning a pardon, which would have symbolically forgiven her for the crime. "I feel very comfortable that justice has been served," Obama said at the time. The Army declined to provide details about where Manning will be stationed, citing privacy and security concerns. A few hours after her release she posted the below photo on social media debuting her new look as a woman.



. [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | May 15, 2017 ++]

Missile Defense 101 ► North Korea Could Hit With Little Notice

The scenario has become pretty familiar by now. Sometime in the early morning, a missile roars off its launcher in North Korea and flies off — to a splash zone somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. But what if Pyongyang wasn't just testing its hardware or drilling its troops? How long would it take to hit its real-world, primary targets? Below, two experts talk to The Associated Press about what would happen if North Korea fired at targets near and far. They are David Wright, senior scientist and co-director of the Global Security Program of the Union of Concerned Scientists, and analyst Markus Schiller, of ST Analytics, an independent space technology and rocketry consulting company based in Germany. The takeaway: It would get very messy, very fast.

SEOUL: FROM ESSENTIALLY ZERO TO 6 MINUTES

Well before North Korea had a nuclear program, it realized it could hold the 10 million people of greater Seoul, the capital of South Korea, hostage with the threat of a massive, conventional artillery strike from its dug-in gun batteries concentrated just north of the Demilitarized Zone. If it were to launch such a strike first, the first wave of shells could land with essentially no warning. Estimates vary as to how much damage such an attack could actually wreak — Pyongyang can't, as it has claimed, reduce Seoul to a sea of ashes before a pulverizing counterattack — but it would be considerable.

Seoul's defenses are porous. It has Patriot missile-defense batteries, but they are intended to protect against short-range Scud missiles. They would not help against an artillery attack. The much-talked-about, state-of-the-art THAAD missile defense system deployed in South Korea this month also cannot protect Seoul from either artillery or incoming missiles — it isn't designed to do that from its current site. To make things uglier, the North could hit the South with chemical or biological warheads. One nuclear scenario that has been raised is an attack on the city of Busan, a major port sometimes used by the U.S. Navy. That's an option Pyongyang might consider if it believed it was under immediate threat of attack and wanted to make a show of overwhelming force to keep Washington from committing further.

TOKYO: 10-11 MINUTES

Japan also has Patriot missiles it deploys, among other places, on the grounds of its Defense Ministry in downtown Tokyo. It helped develop with the U.S. the ship-based Aegis system, which is designed to intercept medium-range missiles and potentially intermediate-range ones — that means missiles with a range of less than about 5,000 kilometers (3,100 miles). The Patriots are designed to intercept an incoming missile at its "terminal stage" — just before it hits — if the Aegis' ship-based SM-3 missiles fail to intercept them farther out and higher up, at mid-course.

Schiller has one strong caution at this point: It remains unknown whether Pyongyang actually has a working nuclear warhead, "not just some nuclear device that goes boom in a tunnel, under laboratory conditions." But serious questions have been raised over whether this multilayer strategy, even when augmented by the THAAD system, would be a reliable missile shield. One problem is whether it could be overwhelmed by a "swarm" attack — several incoming missiles at the same time. North Korea, likely aware of that fear, simultaneously launched four medium-range Scud ER missiles into the Sea of Japan in March. Recognizing the current shield's weaknesses, some Japanese ruling party lawmakers are pushing for a first-strike plan of Japan's own, using ballistic or cruise missiles, or F-35 stealth fighters.

SAN FRANCISCO: 30-34 MINUTES

To be classified as an ICBM — intercontinental ballistic missile — the missile must have a minimum range of 5,500 kilometers (3,400 miles). North Korea does not at this time have such a missile, as far as the experts can tell. The missile it launched on 14 MAY came close, flying for 30 minutes on a highly "lofted" trajectory that if flattened out would suggest a range of about 4,500 kilometers (2,800 miles). That's good enough to get it to Guam, the key U.S. military hub in the Pacific, in about 15 minutes. Beyond that, its capabilities are in doubt.

Schiller explains that the time it takes for an ICBM to cover its first 5,500 kilometers is usually a little more than 20 minutes. If you fire at something 10,000 kilometers (6,200 miles) away, however, he says it will still reach it in less than 30 minutes. So while Wright suggests 33-34 minutes to San Francisco, Schiller predicts a faster trip to the West Coast — saying a missile could hit Seattle (8,000 kilometers, or 5,000 miles away) and Los Angeles (9,000 kilometers, or 5,600 miles) away in under 30 minutes from launch. But that's assuming a North Korean launch from within its own territory. To get around the distance problem, and to bolster its stealth, North Korea is already developing submarine-launched ballistic missiles. Experts believe it will take years for the North to have a sub-based missile it could actually use in an attack, but it successfully tested its first one — named Polaris, the same name as the first U.S. missile of that kind — last year.

WASHINGTON, D.C.: 30-39 MINUTES

New York and Washington are less than 11,000 kilometers (6,800 miles) away. That translates into about 30 minutes according to Schiller, or 38-39 minutes by Wright's estimate. The United States relies in large part on its Ground-based Missile Defense system, with bases in Vandenberg Air Base in California and Fort Greely, Alaska, to intercept incoming ICBMs. According to the U.S. Missile Defense Agency, which estimates that North Korea now "fields hundreds of missiles that can reach U.S. forces forward deployed to the Republic of Korea and Japan," U.S. missile defense systems like the GMD and THAAD "discourage adversaries from believing they can use ballistic missiles to coerce or intimidate the U.S. or its allies."

But critics point out the GMD, which has cost \$40 billion, had six out of its nine test intercepts fail between 2002 and 2016. They claim the strategy has "no credible plan for defeating countermeasures" such as decoys. "In its current form, strategic missile defense is a waste of resources at best and dangerous at worst," the Union of Concerned Scientists wrote in a report published last year. "It is not a reliable defense under real-world conditions; by promoting it as a solution to nuclear conflict, U.S. officials complicate diplomatic efforts abroad, and perpetuate a false sense of security that could harm the U.S. public." Wright said that aside from stopping an incoming missile, another big question is what would — or should — a U.S. president do in response.

"The timelines are short," he said. "Even for long-range missiles, there are a lot of steps that go into detecting the launch and figuring out what it is, leaving the president with maybe 10 minutes to decide whether to launch a retaliatory strike." What if the president does decide to hit back hard? Land-based ICBMs could be in the air within five minutes. Submarine-based missiles in 15. And once launched, they can't be recalled.

[Source: The Associated Press | Eric Talmadge | May 16, 2017 ++]

Missile Defense 101 Update 01 ► Trump Budget

Donald Trump's first defense-budget request contains large increases for weapons intended to shoot down North Korean missiles or even attack them on their launchers. The budget bumps aren't unexpected — many appeared in the outgoing Obama administration's final spending plans as well. Still, they reveal the Pentagon's intensifying focus on Pyongyang's missile threat. Here are a few of the most important adds:

Missile Defense from Alaska

The President requests \$821 million for the Ground-based Midcourse Defense program. Midcourse defenses hit an incoming missile after its engine has shut down and before it gets too close to its target. The Missile Defense Agency, or MDA, is adding four Ground Based Interceptor, or GBI, missiles at Fort Greely, Alaska, bringing the total to 44 by year's end. (There are also four GBIs in California.) This year's \$821 million request, follows a plan announced by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel in 2013, (that's one reason why this year's number is down from last year's for the same program. Last year's ask was about \$1 billion.) But the program takes on new relevance because

of North Korea's quickening progress toward an operational ICBM. MDA says that the extra missiles will "improve protection against North Korean and potential Iranian ICBM threats."

The budget request also features \$465 million for components and testing for the Redesigned Kill Vehicle, or RKV, the most important part of the interceptor missile. It's kind of a big, smart bullet. The RKV, which carries no explosives, destroys an incoming warhead by ramming it at 15,000 miles per hour. The requested \$465 million would fund targeting upgrades to the kill vehicle's software. It would also help replace old ground control systems.

Missile Defense from Destroyers

The new budget request also bumps spending for the AEGIS missile defense system, primarily deployed on U.S. Navy cruisers and destroyers but also on land as AEGIS Ashore. The proposal would boost AEGIS spending to \$1.6 billion from last year's \$1.5 billion, funding 34 Standard Missile-3 Block IB interceptor missiles. The budget increase follows a historic and successful February test in which sailors aboard the John Paul Jones intercepted a mock ballistic missile with an SM-3 Block IIA. The ability to intercept mid- and intermediate-range North Korean missiles from ships will allow the U.S. military to much better protect Japan, Guam, and other potentially vulnerable targets. That's a big improvement over the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, missile battery, which is land-based and limited in what it can cover.

Find The Orange Plume

Before you can shoot at North Korean missiles, you have to know that they've launched and where from. Intelligence collection in North Korea is notoriously difficult — the U.S. almost never has advance warning of a launch — so the U.S. military relies on infrared satellites in Geosynchronous Earth Orbit and in Highly Elliptical Earth Orbit to detect the thermal signature (basically big orange clouds of pure heat) that rockets emit during liftoff. The new budget allocates \$1.4 billion, up from \$500 million, to acquire new satellites for the Space Based Infrared System, or SBIRS, which provide initial warning of a strategic missile attack on the United States. The budget also requests \$1.861 billion, about \$61 million more than last year's request, for the Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle — basically, a big rocket that can lift SBIRS' large satellites into GEO orbit.

Kill It With Nuclear Cruise Missiles

Just in case things with North Korea get really rocky, the budget also requests \$451 million, up from compared to \$95 million last year, for the Long-Range Stand-Off missile, or LRSO. It's a nuclear cruise missile that the Air Force can fire from a jet, which has attracted considerable controversy. But it's more important function is as an intimidation weapon; it transforms any aircraft that can carry cruise missiles into a de facto bomber. Manufacturing contracts are expected no earlier than 2022. "LRSO provides a reliable cost-effective force multiplier for the B-52, B-2 and the B-21 bomber" according to Pentagon budget documents. Think about that in the context of how the military today uses B-52s as menacing props, such as in January 2016, when the U.S. flew a B-52 over the nearby South Korea following nuclear tests. Given the North Korean goal of accelerating missile testing, it appears the skies over the China Sea will be considerably more crowded in the years ahead.

[Source: Defense One | Patrick Tucker | May 23, 2017 ++]

GI Bill Update 228 ► Spouse/Children In-State-Tuition Eligibility

You may be aware that some veterans along with their spouses and children are eligible for in-state tuition at public schools when they are using the GI Bill. A new law going into effect July 1, 2017 expands that eligibility to children and spouses of active duty members. Under current law, the following classes of students are eligible for in-state tuition while using the Post-9/11 or Montgomery GI Bills:

- Veterans who live in the state where the school is located (regardless of their formal state of residence) and enroll in the school within three years of discharge from active duty

- Individuals using transferred benefits who live in the state where the school is located (regardless of their formal state of residence) and enroll in the school within three years of the veteran transferor's discharge from active duty
- Anyone who is eligible as described above as long as they remain continuously enrolled at the same school

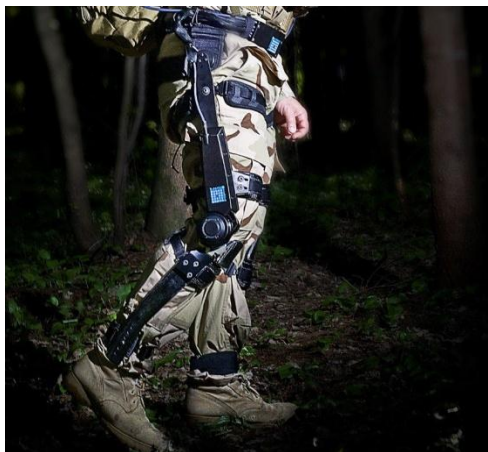
Public law 114-315, also known as the "Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016" added provisions the GI Bill requiring that public schools also charge in-state tuition to:

- Anyone using transferred post-9/11 GI Bill benefits who lives in the state where the school is located and the transferor is an active-duty member of the military
- Anyone using benefits under the Fry scholarship who lives in the state where the school is located (regardless of their formal state of residence).

This law doesn't apply to active-duty members themselves, only their dependents who are using transferred Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. According to the VA, not all states are compliant with the new law yet, you can check out their website at <http://benefits.va.gov/gibill/417.asp> for more details. Some people are reporting that schools are honoring the in-state tuition for children of active duty members, even though the VA says the state isn't fully compliant with the law. As always, it is recommended you check with your school or the VA if you have questions. [Source: Military.com | May 16, 2017 ++]

Exosuits Update 02 ► Lockheed Martin's Newest Exoskeleton

It is not Iron Man. It isn't even Iron Fist. Lockheed Martin's newest exoskeleton is more like Iron Leg. But for a soldier humping his weapons, ammo and body armor up a mountain in Afghanistan or a high-rise building in a future urban battle, a device to take the load off would be welcome. And, unlike science fiction supersuits, we can build it now. Exoskeletons are part of the Pentagon's Third Offset Strategy, which seeks to use robotics and artificial intelligence to enhance humans on the battlefield, rather than to replace them. There's no area where the need is more acute than in the infantry, which takes the vast majority of casualties.



Lockheed Martin FORTIS K-SRD exoskeleton.

One particularly persistent problem: weight. US foot troops have been overburdened since at least D-Day, where some men drowned in shallow water under their heavy packs. The problem has become especially acute since 9/11, with US troops in body armor laboring to chase Taliban in flip-flops. The military is constantly looking at ways to make equipment lighter, but those improvements are mainly on the margins, a pound shaved here or there. It's also experimenting with wheeled or tracked robots that can carry some of a squad's equipment, but these robotic mules

can't yet keep up with nimble infantrymen over rough terrain. So if you can't lighten the soldier's load, and you can't take it off him, can you make him stronger? Nowadays, the answer is yes: We have the technology.

How It Works. The Lockheed exoskeleton's full and unwieldy designation is FORTIS Knee-Stress Relief Device (K-SRD), which makes it sound like a piece of molded plastic your insurance would refuse to cover. In fact, it's a sophisticated synthesis of multiple technologies:

- A rigid load-bearing framework to transfer weight off the wearer to the ground;
- Compact actuators at the knee to increase strength (future models may add actuators at the hip as well);
- Soft materials that buffer between the human being and the rigid frame, helping translate analog human movements into digital signals to the actuators; and
- An artificial intelligence that adjusts the machinery to move seamlessly with the wearer — unlike past earlier exoskeletons that often resisted the body's natural movements.

In tests, elite Tier One special operators wearing K-SRD found they could do twice as many squats lifting 185 pounds of weight, going from an average of 20-25 reps to over 50. There were similar improvements climbing stairs carrying a 185-lb simulated casualty, said Lockheed product manager Keith Maxwell, a former Navy and “Other Government Agency” operator himself. “It literally pushes you up flights of stairs,” he told me. “(You) do it faster, with much less fatigue.” However, the gains are greatest with vertical movement and least on level ground, Maxwell emphasized. On a 15-degree slope, he said, the device reduces the human's energy expenditure — the “net metabolic cost” — by only about 9 percent. On level ground, it doesn't save any energy, he said. Why? Humans evolved over millions of years for long-distance chases across the savannah: The theory of persistence hunting suggests our ancestors, lacking bows and arrows, simply ran after prey until it collapsed from exhaustion. Nothing modern technology can make is likely to improve on human performance over level ground, at least any time soon.

With K-SRD on level ground, said Maxwell, “what we're able to do is break even” — which is a marked improvement over past exoskeletons. Lockheed spent years on an 85-lb rigid exoskeleton called HULC (Human Universal Load Carrier), which was good at carrying heavy weights but lousy at matching human movements. “The problem was that terrain is irregular and human gait is infinitely variable,” Maxwell said, so HULC's computer kept misunderstanding what the wearer wanted to do and moving the wrong way. Overall, Maxwell said, walking around in a HULC actually cost 15 to 25 percent more energy than having no exoskeletal “help” at all.

Lockheed moved on to the less ambitious FORTIS, essentially a rigid support frame — it doesn't require electricity because it doesn't have actuators — that could help factory and shipyard workers handle heavy tools without fatigue. The wearer has enough mobility to relocate, tools in hand, to another worksite within 100 yards, but the industrial FORTIS far too awkward for the battlefield. The FORTIS K-SRD, by contrast, uses its mix of rigid and flexible components, and a much more sophisticated set of algorithms than HULC, to move with the wearer's body. Testers were able to operate it with only 15 minutes of training, Maxwell said, and some of the special operators didn't bother with the training at all. “They can run, they can climb, they can squat,” Maxwell said. They can hit the dirt, take cover, and crawl, then jump up and dash forward and take cover again. They can even walk along a balance beam although for such precision movements he recommends turning the strength-magnifying actuators off, done with a simple thumb movement on the controls. One tester even found his K-SRD comfortable enough to sleep with it on.

The Case Against Iron Man. After decades of exoskeleton development, Lockheed wants to get this device out into the field soon. The K-SRD team is working mostly closely with the Army's Soldier Systems Center in Natick, Mass., which they expect to buy a number of K-SRDs for test purposes and institute a Cooperative Research & Development Agreement (CRADA) in the next 30-60 days. Other partners include the Army's Rapid Equipping Force and the Marine Expeditionary Rifle Squad initiative. Lockheed is even working with the Department of Homeland Security and some foreign fire departments on potential firefighting and rescue applications, since those also involve heavily burdened humans climbing up and down with life and death and stake.

Maxwell did not mention Special Operations Command, whose TALOS program envisions a full-body suit of mechanical armor able to resist point-blank gunshots — what then-SOCOM chief Adm. William McRaven compared to Iron Man’s suit. “Can we have an up-armored solution that’s capable of breaching and entering and being relatively invulnerable to 7.62 AP (armor piercing) bullets at point-blank range? Yeah, we can do that,” said Maxwell. That said, it’d probably be heavy and slow, far from the flight-capable suit in the comics. “Iron Man has...hurt exoskeleton development,” Maxwell said, because it’s created impossible expectations — literally impossible, since the CGI suit in the movies routinely violates the laws of physics. When Iron Man drops from the sky to a neat three-point landing, in particular, the sudden deceleration would liquefy Tony Stark inside the suit.

Nevertheless, Maxwell said, while real-world exoskeletons may not copy the comic books, they’re still a marvel. When our best troops put them on, he said, “they become something more than human.” They become something more than mere machines, as well, he said: “The man in the machine will beat the machine (by itself) every time.” That’s the so-called centaur model of human-machine teaming at the heart of the Pentagon’s Third Offset Strategy. It’s the synergy of a human imagination and agility controlling the strength and speed of a machine, like the mythical centaur combining rider and horse into a single being. “As long as there’s judgment (required) in situations in which the person is going to have to make a call, we’re going to want a human in the loop. Eventually, if we can get machines to do that for us...we’ll just make these robots,” Maxwell told me. “Until then...you take the absolute best human beings and combine them with the absolute best in machines.”

[Source: Breaking Defense | Sydney J. Freedberg | May 17, 2016 ++]

Military Hearing Loss ► Research Aims to Reverse Hearing Loss

The engines, aircraft, machinery, and weapons servicemembers regularly use and are around are loud, painfully loud. So it's not surprising hearing injuries top the list of VA medical disability for all servicemembers. To protect servicemembers from potential hearing injuries caused by loud noises, the Office of Naval Research's Noise-Induced Hearing Loss program is investigating technologies and approaches to prevent hearing damage and even restore hearing.

Susceptibility to hearing damage -- The inner ear cochlear hair cells are exquisitely designed but can be damaged easily by noise, and they don't grow back. According to program lead Kurt Yankaskas, a world-recognized expert in the field of military noise who has a background as a naval engineer and previously worked in undersea sound detection, research in the past two years has shown that during an auditory insult, nerve cells are damaged and withdraw or disconnect from the inner ear hair cells, resulting in a silent nervous system failure over time.

When the nerves are damaged, Yankaskas says it can result in the “cocktail party effect,” which he describes as an inability to discriminate the speaker in a room where multiple conversations are going on. ONR's research investment in nerve regeneration and nerve cell connections is leading the field in many ways, including how to regenerate both hair and the nerve cells. “We've been identifying new metabolic pathways and genetic markers that can help us anticipate who would be more susceptible to an auditory injury and how to protect them,” he says. Studying susceptibility to hearing damage at the cellular level would help those individuals to take precautions. “If you have tender ears, you need to go into intense hearing conservation program, just as somebody with very fair skin needs to use SPF 50 sunscreen,” Yankaskas says.

Research breakthroughs -- While mammals can't regenerate damaged cochlear hair cells, birds and amphibians can. During human fetal development, proteins are turning on and off the genetic assembly code, including the formulation of hearing apparatus. “It turns off when it's done,” he says. “We're sponsoring research at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital to turn it back on again.” By splicing DNA from a chicken into that of a mouse, researchers were able to show that damaged hearing apparatus could begin to regenerate. Though there's much

progress, results will not be immediate. “We were the first to demonstrate regeneration of hair cells in a live mouse,” Yankaskas says and, “researchers at Harvard University have identified 18 new genes in the past two years that have an effect on hearing. The genes determine what the cells do or don't do. He says ONR is looking into pharmacological approaches and what compounds and combinations of compounds have a positive effect on those cells and perhaps help the body be more resilient in the event of an auditory assault.

St. Jude's High-Throughput Screening Center is exploring novel drug treatments that might have an effect on the inner ear cells, taking advantage of the center's library of a half million compounds covering the entire range of known chemicals. Hair cells are grown in the lab and then exposed to the different compounds to see which ones show promise for further study. The hope is a precision-medicine approach can fine-tune the appropriate compounds to be prescribed for a specific individual. To best treat patients, Yankaskas says a “personalized medicine” approach might identify a particular gene where the formation of a specific protein might indicate a vulnerability. “We want to learn how to counter the stress caused by an auditory injury, we're trying to outwit Mother Nature, and it will take us years. But with every year that goes by, we unlock new clues.”

Prevention is key -- For now, prevention still is the best medicine. The Navy has invited small businesses that offer protection from noise but enable the user to have situational awareness. This is especially important for people who work in dynamic and loud environments, such as on an aircraft carrier flight deck or in machinery spaces, and who need to be able to communicate with others and be aware of what's happening around them in that same environment. If you already suffer from hearing loss and are in need of a hearing aid, the DoD-sponsored Retiree At-Cost Hearing Aid Program might help with the costs.

- To learn more about this program go to <http://www.moaa.org/Content/Publications-and-Media/Features-and-Columns/Health-Features/Hearing-Aid-Cost-Help-for-Military-Retirees.aspx?list=4294967917&cat=4294967326> to learn
- Also, go to <http://www.moaa.org/Content/Publications-and-Media/Features-and-Columns/Health-Features/Say-What--3-Reasons-You-Might-Need-Hearing-Help.aspx?list=4294967917&cat=4294967326> to make yourself aware of some signs you might need hearing help.

[Source: MOAA News Exchange | Capt. Edward Lundquest | May 24, 2017 ++]

USCG Icebreaker Fleet ► Soon Only 1 Operational | More Needed

In a few weeks, the U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker Healy will plot a course for the Arctic, and set off on a nearly five-month research mission in some of the most challenging conditions on the planet. Capt. Jason Hamilton ran his crew through drills and exercises in Puget Sound this week, to make sure all systems are a "go" for the big journey. By July, they'll be pretty much on their own in a remote expanse of ice and ocean at the top of the globe. “During the summer months we are the only icebreaker that is operational,” Hamilton said between drills on the ship. The summer journey north offers scientists a rare on-the-ice opportunity to figure out why the Arctic is melting, and what that means for the rest of us down south. It's also a chance for the U.S. to wave its flag in a region that's attracting new interest from shipping companies, the oil industry, cruise lines, and other countries, all pondering the potential of newly opened waters. “We need a U.S. presence up there, and the fact that other nations have a greater presence, that is something that our senior leadership is concerned about,” Hamilton said.

The Healy is one of just two functioning polar icebreakers in the Coast Guard fleet. The other is the Polar Star, which travels to Antarctica. A third, the Polar Sea, which is considered too old and beyond repair, is docked in Seattle and is now used for parts. When lawmakers and others talk about the United States' limited ability to crush through remote sea ice, they often mention a neighbor with a much bigger fleet of icebreakers. “Russia has 40. They

are in the process of completing another. It'll be the most powerful nuclear icebreaker in the world,” Adm. Paul Zukunft, Commandant of the Coast Guard, said during a U.S. Senate committee hearing last year



USS Healy.

Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA) has been trying to convince Congress that it's time to buy another icebreaker so that the U.S. can maintain a more robust, year-round presence in the Arctic. “You're not saying that our response to an oil spill or something in the Arctic is (to) call the Russians?” Cantwell asked Zukunft during the hearing. “We may have to,” he responded. “We don't think the United States response to the Arctic should be (to) call the Russians,” Cantwell said. The pursuit of new icebreakers seemed, in recent years, as though it had drifted to a halt, but now that mission appears to be gaining speed. “We will be building the first new heavy icebreakers the United States has seen in over 40 years. We're going to build many of them,” President Donald Trump said last week while addressing the U.S. Coast Guard Academy.

Trump's latest budget commits \$150 million toward the estimated \$1 billion cost of a new heavy-duty icebreaker, which will be even stronger than the Healy. Coast Guard leaders aren't stopping there. They want six new icebreakers in total. “We need them. We need them,” Trump said during his speech. The Coast Guard says a ship builder is expected to start cutting steel on a new vessel next year. They're hoping to have it delivered in 2021. The Healy is now back in Seattle for a few weeks. It leaves for the Arctic at the end of June and won't return until the fall. [Source: K5 King TV | Ted Lang | May 24, 2017 ++]

Navy Rail Gun Program ► Battle Readiness

Consider 35 pounds of metal moving at Mach 5.8. Ten shots per minute. 1,000 shots before the barrel wears out under the enormous pressures. That's the devastating firepower the Navy railgun program aims to deliver in the next two years, and they're well on their way. “We continue to make great technical progress,” said Office of Naval Research program manager Tom Boucher. Boucher and an aide briefed me in the blazing hot courtyard of the Pentagon, which was hosting the annual DoD Lab Day — a kind of military-grade science fair.

Three years ago, then-Chief of Naval Operations Jonathan Greenert declared that railguns — which fire projectiles with electromagnetic pulses rather than gunpowder — had come so close to battle-ready that he wanted to test-fire one at sea. Since then the Navy has changed course, deciding that permanent land-based test sites would

provide more and better data for fewer dollars than an ad hoc installation aboard a repurposed fast transport (variously known as JHSV or EFP). So on 17 NOV 2016, along the Potomac River at the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Dahlgren, Va., a new 32-megajoule railgun built by BAE Systems opened fire for the first time. (See video at https://youtu.be/Pi-BDfu_umo). A second railgun is being set up at the Army's White Sands Missile Range in the New Mexico desert, where there's enough wide-open space to fire the weapon at its maximum range of more than a hundred nautical miles.



While White Sands tests the long-range performance of the projectile, Dahlgren will work on the weapon itself. Previous test weapons were like medieval bombards, firing just a few times per day. The Dahlgren team is now making multiple shots per hour as they work out the bugs, and by the end of the year they expect to reach the goal of 10 shots per minute. For comparison, a standard 5-inch deck gun can fire 20 rounds a minute, albeit only for a single minute before its quick-reload drum runs empty; the 16-inch guns on battleships fired about twice a minute. Once they've reached the 10-round a minute rate, Dahlgren will switch focus to barrel life. A decade ago, experimental railguns often wore out their barrel with a single shot. With new materials better able to endure the intense stresses, the barrels on the current test weapons can last for hundreds of shots before requiring replacement — roughly how long a battleship's 16" barrels lasted back in World War II. The goal is a barrel that lasts 1,000 rounds.

The next big question — beyond the scope of the current test program — is power. The current railguns fire a 16 kg slug at 2,000 meters per second (roughly, 35 lbs at Mach 5.8), which takes 32 megajoules of energy per shot. Pumping out 10 such shots a minute requires 20 megawatts of power. Unfortunately, the only ships in today's Navy that have sufficient energy are nuclear-powered aircraft carriers — of which there are just 11 in service — and Zumwalt-class destroyers — just three. Firing railguns off anything else would require expedients. One model might be Dahlgren itself, where the Navy has literally wired up several 20-foot CONEX containers full of batteries, good for fifty shots: Such an ad hoc power source could conceivably go in a cargo hold. Retired Navy strategist Bryan Clark has proposed just such a solution, converting EFP transports into expedient railgun platforms to shoot down incoming missiles.

In the nearer term, however, not only the Navy but also the Army want to capture some of the benefits of railgun technology in their current cannon. Sponsored by the Pentagon's Strategic Capabilities Office, both services are testing Hyper-Velocity Projectiles designed for the railgun from existing 5" inch naval guns and 155 mm (6") howitzers. (The HVP itself is the same, but is wrapped in a different fly-away package called a sabot). Using gunpowder rather than electromagnetic impulses means the muzzle velocity is lower, which in turn means the projectile can't escape the atmosphere to fly without friction over vast distances. Even so the 5" gun firing HVP more than doubles its normal range, to about 30 nautical miles. (The Navy officials present didn't have the latest figures on the Army tests).

Gunpowder-propelled HVP is not enough to replace the railgun in all aspects. The electromagnetically-launched weapon not only travels further but hits harder, rendering a high-explosive warhead unnecessary for many targets. But for crucial missions such as shooting down incoming cruise missiles, conventional cannon firing Hyper-Velocity Projectiles can play a crucial role as a second line of defense around 30 nautical miles out. Beyond that, out to 100 miles, the giant railguns can take over with crushing force. For more on electromagnetic guns refer to <https://youtu.be/i737rM6Fqxg>. [Source: Breaking Defense | Sydney J. Freedberg Jr. | May 19, 2017 ++]

Fort Hood Memorial ► 4th Inf Div Iraqi Statue



This statue is part of the memorial at Ft Hood and was made from two giant bronze statues of Saddam Hussein, captured in Iraq by the the 4th Infantry Division, were melted down by an Iraqi artist to make a memorial to their fallen comrades. The cost of the memorial was paid for by donations from Ivy Soldiers, 4ID Association members and businesses and citizens from Central Texas and beyond.

* **Military History** *



WWII Vets 137 ► William J. Ely | Oldest West Point Grad

Almost 85 years after graduating from the U.S. Military Academy, retired Lt. Gen. William Ely returned to West Point 23 MAY as the academy's oldest living grad and took part in the school's alumni review. Ely laid a wreath during the ceremony, one of several on-campus events leading up to Saturday's graduation. Although Ely's 85th reunion is next year, he's the only remaining graduate from the Class of 1933 and was invited to this year's festivities. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime event," the 105-year-old veteran told Army Times. The alumni review includes a parade and review, as well as the wreath laying at the Thayer Statue near the parade field.



Ely, of Pennsylvania, commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army Corps of Engineers after graduating from West Point in 1933. His assignments included civil works construction, military construction and troop duty with an engineer unit. He said he started out on the Mississippi River learning how to build bridges and levees, but then his Army career took him out to the Pacific. "The most important job that I had was at Midway Island from 1938 to 1940, building an entrance channel into the harbor," Ely said. "It was one of the most difficult bridging jobs the Corps of Engineers ever had. ... Here I was, a lieutenant in charge of about 300 or 400 civilians. It set the stage for my later assignments."

The construction of the entrance channel paved the way for the Navy to build Naval Air Station Midway, roughly halfway between North America and Asia. Less than a year after the air station's commissioning, the U.S. Navy would defeat Japanese forces at Midway in what many consider the pivotal naval battle of World War II. Ely's decorations include the Legion of Merit with one oak leaf cluster, the Silver Star and the Bronze Star, according to the Defense Department.

Ely said last week that he would be flying from his home in Florida to New York with two of his sons, courtesy of a good friend who owns a private jet. While he was looking forward to the entire experience, the event took on another meaning because Ely said it's the first time he'll be meeting his great-grandson. "His parents are bringing him from Seattle to be with me for the first time," Ely said. "I have six grandchildren, and he's the only great-grandchild I expect to see." Ely advises graduating cadets to remember what they learned during their time at the academy. "It's a different world than the world I graduated into," he said. "It's hard to imagine what challenges they're going to face militarily in the next few years. It's an uncertain world, and getting more so." [Source: ArmyTimes | Charlsy Panzino | May 23, 2016 ++]

Operation Catapult ► WWII | Destruction of French Fleet

With the occupation of France, the German aggressor was but a Channel away from Britain. In order to prevent the Germans from using French battleships and cruisers in an attack on Britain, Operation Catapult was conceived: the destruction or capture of every French ship possible. The easiest stage of Catapult was the seizure of those French ships already in British ports. Little resistance was met. But the largest concentration of French warships was at the Oran, Algeria, port of Mers-el-Kebir, where many warships had fled to escape the Germans. This stage of Catapult would prove more difficult. Britain gave the French ships four choices:

- Join British naval forces in the fight against Germany;
- Hand the ships over to British crews;
- Disarm them;
- Or scuttle them, making them useless to the Germans.

If French Admiral Gensoul refused to accept any of these choices, Somerville would use force to destroy the ships. However, many British senior officers were wary of using force against a navy that had until recently been fighting on their side. They expressed their reservations to Somerville who, impressed by their arguments and stance, forwarded this information to the Admiralty. He received a reply that the government expected the French ships to be destroyed and that was their “firm intention”. Britain then made a concession: Sail to the French West Indies, where the ships would be disarmed or handed over to the United States.

Tense talks occurred between the French and the British. Gensoul refused to meet the British naval officer – Captain Holland – on his flagship ‘Dunkerque’. However, Holland was informed that the French would not start any action but force would be met with force if the Royal Navy did start to attack Gensoul’s fleet. Matters were made more tense when the British mined the entrance to the harbour at Mers el Kébir using planes from the ‘Ark Royal’. Gensoul kept in contact with Darlan during this stand-off. However, the records show that Gensoul only told French Admiral of the Fleet Darlan of one of the British ultimatums – that the fleet would be destroyed within six hours – the other choices were never relayed to Darlan. In response to this message, Darlan ordered all other French naval ships in the Mediterranean to steam to Mers el Kébir to assist Gensoul. The Admiralty picked up this message and relayed it to Somerville – that he could shortly expect far more French warships in the area around Oran. This effectively forced Somerville’s hand.

At 1800 on July 3rd, the British opened fire. The Royal Navy’s ships were in open water and could maneuver themselves into a perfect firing position. The French could not do this as they were in the confined space of a harbor. The first ship to be sunk was the battleship ‘Bretagne’. A shell exploded her ammunition and within seconds the ship capsized. 977 men were lost. The ‘Dunkerque’ was also hit and damage to her boiler room took away her power so that she had to drop anchor in harbor. The ‘Provence’ was also hit and was beached by her captain to prevent the ship from sinking with subsequent loss of life. The destroyer ‘Mogador’ was also hit with the loss of 37 men. In the confusion and disguised by the extensive smoke, the battleship ‘Strasbourg’ managed to leave Mers el Kébir and somehow avoided the mines at the harbor entrance.

After a thirteen minute bombardment, Somerville ordered an end to the firing. The ‘Strasbourg’ managed to get the Toulon. The British returned to Gibraltar. On July 4th, planes from the ‘Ark Royal’ were ordered to return to Mers el Kébir and finish off the ‘Dunkerque’ as it was believed that the ship had only sustained minor damage. The attack led to the deaths of 150 men and put the ‘Dunkerque’ out of action for one year. An attack by the aircraft carrier ‘Hermes’ on the ‘Richelieu’ at Dakar damaged the new battleship but never put it completely out of action. In all 1,250 French sailors were killed. On 4 JUL, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill told the House of Commons that he would leave Britain’s actions to “history.” On 5 JUL, Vichy France broke off diplomatic relations with Britain.

Delicate negotiations at Alexandria led to a non-violent settlement whereby the French disarmed their ships and de-fuelled them after Cunningham gave his word that no force would be used against men who had worked so well

with the British fleet under his command in the Eastern Mediterranean. At Plymouth and Portsmouth, armed British sailors took over the French ships that were harbored there. In the struggle to take control of the submarine 'Surcouf' a French officer was killed and two British officers were wounded. The French crews were interned in the Isle of Man or in a camp near Liverpool. [Source: <http://www.historylearning-site.co.uk> | C.N. Trueman | May 2017 ++]

Battle of Cold Harbor ► Civil War | May 31 - Jun 12 1864

After the Battle of North Anna, Grant ordered Maj. Gen. Philip Sheridan's cavalry to move south and capture the strategic crossroads at Old Cold Harbor in Hanover County, near Mechanicsville, Virginia. This was the same ground as the Battle of Gaines's Mill during the Seven Days Battles of 1862. Union soldiers were disturbed to discover skeletal remains from the first battle while entrenching. Cold Harbor was not a port city, despite its name. Rather, it described two rural crossroads named for the Cold Harbor Tavern (owned by the Isaac Burnett family) which provided shelter (harbor) but not hot meals.



On 31 MAY, after a sharp contest with Confederate cavalry under Maj. Gen. Fitzhugh Lee, Sheridan and his men seized the intersection. The Confederate troopers were soon joined by Confederate infantry of Maj. Gen. Robert Hoke's division. In a short battle, Union cavalry drove the Confederates beyond the crossroads where they began to build defensive trenches.

Hearing reports that Lee was extending his line to the James River, Grant was determined to extend his left flank, overpower Lee, and come between the Confederates and Richmond, all while keeping access to the James River open. On the morning of 1 JUN, Sheridan beat back a half-hearted attack by Hoke's and Maj. Gen. Joseph Kershaw's divisions. Encouraged by this success, Grant ordered up Maj. Gen. William "Baldy" Smith's Eighteenth Corps and Maj. Gen. Horatio Wright's Sixth Corps to relieve Sheridan, and strike the Confederate defenses that same day. However, confused orders and bad roads slowed the movement of the two federal corps; Grant's impromptu attack was delayed until 5pm. The Yankees briefly broke through the Confederate line, only to be

pushed back by a strong counterattack. Meanwhile, General Meade ordered Maj. Gen. Winfield S. Hancock's Second Corps to march twelve miles overnight to provide support for another assault.

Meade ordered an early morning attack for 2 JUN, but Smith refused. Hancock's Second Corps had gotten lost during the night march and did not arrive until about 6:30 am that morning. Meade postponed the attack until 5 pm that day but Grant, concerned that Hancock's men wouldn't be ready to attack due to exhaustion, advised Meade to wait until the next day. General Lee, taking advantage of this gift, ordered his troops to construct an impressive and intricate series of entrenchments to reinforce his position in the heavily wooded and uneven territory.

At 4:30 am on the morning of 3 JUN, the Second, Sixth, and Eighteenth Corps launched the main attack through the darkness and fog. As the attack began, the corps became caught in the swamps, ravines, and heavy vegetation, losing contact with each other. Angles in the Confederate works allowed Lee's men to easily enfilade the Federal ranks as they advanced. An estimated 7,000 men were killed or wounded within the first thirty minutes of the assault and the massacre continued through the morning. In Hancock's sector, elements of the Second Corps managed to seize a portion of the Rebel works only to be bombarded by Confederate artillery that turned the trenches a deathtrap. Smith's Corps was unfavorably funneled into two ravines and subsequently mowed down when they reached the Confederate's position. Pinned down by the tremendous volume of Confederate fire, the remaining Federals dug trenches of their own, sometimes including bodies of dead comrades as part of their improvised earthworks. At 12:30 pm, after riding the beleaguered Union lines himself, Grant suspended his attack.

From June 4 to June 12, the days were filled with minor attacks, artillery duels, and sniping. On June 7, Lee and Grant a two-hour truce to allow the Federals a chance to retrieve their wounded. However, by then few of the wounded were found alive as thousands had died under the summer sun during those five days. Grant later wrote, "I have always regretted that the last assault at Cold Harbor was ever made... No advantage whatever was gained to compensate for the heavy loss we sustained." On 12 JUN ordered Meade to evacuate Cold Harbor, cross the James, and proceed toward Petersburg. This battle is remembered as one of American history's bloodiest, most lopsided battles. Casualties and losses for the Union and Confederate armies were 12,738 and 5,287. [Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Cold_Harbor | May 2017 ++]

Man In The Balloon ► Thaddeus Lowe | Inventor of Aerial Reconnaissance

As the moon hung high in the morning Cincinnati sky, an eccentric aeronaut blasted one last puff of coal gas into his balloon, the "Enterprise." It was April 20, 1861, and just eight days earlier the first shots had rang out at Fort Sumter and ignited the Civil War, a conflict that would eventually claim nearly 625,000 American lives. But on this day, dressed in a fancy silk hat and a black long frock coat, Prof. Thaddeus Lowe prepared for his latest and most important test flight. He knew that a divided Union would need him—and his balloon. To learn more of Lowe's exploits and his part in the development of aerial reconnaissance refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**The Man In The Balloon**". [Source: Popular Mechanics | Matt Blitz | May 9, 2017 ++]

Mexican-American War ► 1846-1848

The Mexican-American War (1846-1848) marked the first U.S. armed conflict chiefly fought on foreign soil. It pitted a politically divided and militarily unprepared Mexico against the expansionist-minded administration of U.S. President James K. Polk, who believed the United States had a "manifest destiny" to spread across the continent to the Pacific Ocean. A border skirmish along the Rio Grande started off the fighting and was followed by a series of

U.S. victories. When the dust cleared, Mexico had lost about one-third of its territory, including nearly all of present-day California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico.

CAUSES OF THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR

Texas gained its independence from Mexico in 1836. Initially, the United States declined to incorporate it into the union, largely because northern political interests were against the addition of a new slave state. The Mexican government was also encouraging border raids and warning that any attempt at annexation would lead to war. Nonetheless, annexation procedures were quickly initiated after the 1844 election of Polk, who campaigned that Texas should be “re-annexed” and that the Oregon Territory should be “re-occupied.” Polk also had his eyes on California, New Mexico and the rest of what is today the U.S. Southwest. When his offer to purchase those lands was rejected, he instigated a fight by moving troops into a disputed zone between the Rio Grande and Nueces River that both countries had previously recognized as part of the Mexican state of Coahuila.

THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR BEGINS

On April 25, 1846, a 2,000-man Mexican cavalry detachment, under the command of General Arista, attacked a 70-man U.S. patrol under the command of Captain Seth Thornton, which had been sent into the contested territory north of the Rio Grande and south of the Nueces River. In the Thornton Affair, the Mexican cavalry routed the patrol, killing 11 American soldiers. On 3 MAY they then laid siege to the American fort Texas along the Rio Grande. Mexican artillery at Matamoros opened fire on the fort which replied with its own guns. The bombardment continued for 160 hours and expanded as Mexican forces gradually surrounded the fort. Thirteen U.S. soldiers were injured during the bombardment, and two were killed. Among the dead was Jacob Brown, after whom the fort was later named.

Zachary Taylor and 2,400 troops arrived on 8 MAY to relieve the fort. However, General Arista rushed north and intercepted him with a force of 3,400 at Palo Alto. The U.S. Army employed “flying artillery”, their term for horse artillery, a type of mobile light artillery that was mounted on horse carriages with the entire crew riding horses into battle. It had a devastating effect on the Mexican army. In contrast to the “flying artillery” of the Americans, the Mexican cannons at the Battle of Palo Alto fired at such slow velocities that it was possible for American soldiers to dodge artillery rounds. The Mexicans replied with cavalry skirmishes and their own artillery. The U.S. flying artillery somewhat demoralized the Mexican side, and seeking terrain more to their advantage, the Mexicans retreated to the far side of a dry riverbed (resaca) during the night. It provided a natural fortification, but during the retreat, Mexican troops were scattered, making communication difficult.

During the Battle of Resaca de la Palma the next day, the two sides engaged in fierce hand to hand combat. The U.S. Cavalry managed to capture the Mexican artillery, causing the Mexican side to retreat—a retreat that turned into a rout. Fighting on unfamiliar terrain, his troops fleeing in retreat, Arista found it impossible to rally his forces. Mexican casualties were heavy, and the Mexicans were forced to abandon their artillery and baggage. Fort Brown inflicted additional casualties as the withdrawing troops passed by the fort. Many Mexican soldiers drowned trying to swim across the Rio Grande. Both these engagements were fought before war was declared. Following those battles, Polk told the U.S. Congress that the “cup of forbearance has been exhausted, even before Mexico passed the boundary of the United States, invaded our territory, and shed American blood upon American soil.” Two days later, on 13 MAY, Congress declared war, despite opposition from some northern lawmakers. No official declaration of war ever came from Mexico.

At that time, only about 75,000 Mexican citizens lived north of the Rio Grande. As a result, U.S. forces led by Col. Stephen W. Kearny and Commodore Robert F. Stockton were able to conquer those lands with minimal resistance. Taylor likewise had little trouble advancing, and he captured Monterrey in September. With the losses adding up, Mexico turned to old standby General Antonio López de Santa Anna, the charismatic strongman who had been living in exile in Cuba. When the U.S. declared war on Mexico, he wrote to the Mexican government, saying he no longer had aspirations to the presidency, but would eagerly use his military experience to fight off the foreign

invasion of Mexico as he had before. President Valentín Gómez Farías, a civilian, was desperate enough to accept the offer and allowed Santa Anna to return. Meanwhile, Santa Anna had secretly been dealing with representatives of the U.S., pledging that if he were allowed back in Mexico through the U.S. naval blockades he would work to sell all contested territory to the United States at a reasonable price. Once back in Mexico at the head of an army, Santa Anna reneged on both agreements. He declared himself president once again and unsuccessfully tried to fight off the U.S. invasion.

At the Battle of Buena Vista in February 1847, Santa Anna suffered heavy casualties and was forced to withdraw. Despite the loss, he assumed the Mexican presidency the following month. Meanwhile, U.S. troops led by Gen. Winfield Scott landed in Veracruz and took over the city. They then began marching toward Mexico City, essentially following the same route that Hernán Cortés followed when he invaded the Aztec empire. The Mexicans resisted at Cerro Gordo and elsewhere, but were bested each time. In September 1847, Scott successfully laid siege to Mexico City's Chapultepec Castle. During that clash, a group of military school cadets—the so-called niños héroes—purportedly committed suicide rather than surrender.

Desertion was a major problem for the Mexican Army, depleting forces on the eve of battle. Most soldiers were peasants who had a loyalty to their village and family, but not to the generals who had conscripted them. Often hungry and ill, under-equipped, only partially trained, and never well paid, the soldiers were held in contempt by their officers and had little reason to fight the Americans. Looking for their opportunity, many slipped away from camp to find their way back to their home village. The desertion rate in the U.S. Army was 8.3% (9,200 out of 111,000), compared to 12.7% during the War of 1812 and usual peacetime rates of about 14.8% per year. Many men deserted to join another U.S. unit and get a second enlistment bonus. Some deserted because of the miserable conditions in camp. It has been suggested that others used the army to get free transportation to California, where they deserted to join the gold rush; this, however, is unlikely as gold was only discovered in California on January 24, 1848, less than two weeks before the war concluded. By the time word reached the eastern U.S. that gold had been discovered, word also reached it that the war was over.

Several hundred U.S. deserters went over to the Mexican side. Nearly all were recent immigrants from Europe with weak ties to the U.S.; the most famous group was the Saint Patrick's Battalion composed primarily of Catholic Irish and German immigrants, the battalion also included Canadians, English, French, Italians, Poles, Scots, Spaniards, Swiss, and Mexican people, many of whom were members of the Catholic Church. The Mexicans issued broadsides and leaflets enticing U.S. soldiers with promises of money, land bounties, and officers' commissions. Mexican guerrillas shadowed the U.S. Army and captured men who took unauthorized leave or fell out of the ranks. The guerrillas coerced these men to join the Mexican ranks. The generous promises proved illusory for most deserters, who risked being executed if captured by U.S. forces. About 50 of the San Patricios were tried and hanged following their capture at Churubusco in August 1847.

TREATY OF GUADALUPE HIDALGO ENDS THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR

Guerrilla attacks against U.S. supply lines continued, but for all intents and purposes the war had ended. Santa Anna resigned, and the United States waited for a new government capable of negotiations to form. Finally, on Feb. 2, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, establishing the Rio Grande and not the Nueces River as the U.S.-Mexican border. Under the treaty, Mexico also recognized the U.S. annexation of Texas, and agreed to sell California and the rest of its territory north of the Rio Grande for \$15 million plus the assumption of certain damages claims. Of the 13,283 Americans who died during the conflict 1,733 were killed in battle. In all Mexico suffered about 25,000 dead.

[Source: History.com & Wikipedia | May13, 2017 ++]

Last Cavalry Charge ► Led by 1st Lt. Edwin Ramsey | WWII

Most of us associate US Cavalry charges with Hollywood or John Wayne but the last American mounted charge was not against American Indians in the "Wild West"; it was in the equally wild Far East during the Second World War, and it was led by First Lieutenant Edwin Ramsey on 16 January 1942. He and the rest of his 27-man platoon (G Troop of 26th US Cavalry), their heads low over their horses' necks and firing their Colt 1911 pistols (the US Cavalry had hung up its traditional sabres a decade earlier), galloped headlong into a far larger force of Japanese infantrymen in the village of Morong on the Bataan peninsula of the Philippines.

Most of Ramsey's platoon were Filipinos he had personally trained and were known as the Philippine Scouts. The surprise charge, with Ramsey on his beloved chestnut gelding Bryn Awryn, scattered the Japanese invaders, even though they were backed by tanks, and helped the allies organise their retreat from the Philippines by stalling the enemy advance. By that time Cavalry units, with their famous motto of "shock, mobility and firepower", were already an anachronism, but Ramsey and his men proved that a small horse-mounted force could still wreak havoc on the enemy. "Bent nearly prone across the horses' necks, we flung ourselves at the Japanese advance, pistols firing full into their startled faces," he wrote in his memoirs. "A few returned our fire but most fled in confusion. To them we must have seemed a vision from another century, wild-eyed horses pounding headlong; cheering, whooping men firing from the saddles."

Escaping capture during the Japanese advance, Ramsey retreated to the jungle and mountains, building a guerrilla force of Filipinos, eventually totaling 40,000 men. They harassed the enemy for the next three years while most American soldiers and their allies had retreated or been captured, many forced into the infamous Bataan Death March. The Japanese offered a reward of \$200,000 for his capture (the equivalent of millions now) and capture meant certain execution. For three years Ramsey's family assumed he was dead – as did General Douglas MacArthur, US commander of the Pacific, who had been forced to retreat from the Philippines – until Ramsey started getting messages to him from the Central Luzon jungle, via guerrillas, sympathizers and American warships. Ramsey recalled how he smuggled messages through enemy lines: "You take lemon juice and write with it and you don't see it until you put heat under it. Unless you put ... a match under it, you couldn't see it."

He had also had his appendix removed with a pen-knife, with rum as anaesthetic. "Give me a couple of drinks and go ahead and cut it out," he told his pro-guerrilla doctor. He later recalled: "No anesthetic, a little bit of rum, chewing on the nurse's arm, and cussing. It burst in his hands as he took it out." Ramsey's men had been forced to kill their starving and dying horses and eat their meat, something which haunted the horse-lover Ramsey for the rest of his days.

On retreating from the Philippines MacArthur had said "I shall return." He did, famously wading ashore in October 1944, and after the Japanese surrender the following year he insisted on personally pinning the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star and the Purple Heart on Ramsey for harassing the enemy for those three years, a major factor in securing an eventual allied victory in the Pacific. Ramsey, who had seen his weight halve to 93 pounds in the jungle and had lost around 5,000 of his Filipino guerrillas, was ordered home by MacArthur. He spent nearly a year recovering from malaria, dysentery, and acute malnutrition in the hospital. Lieutenant Colonel Ramsey received a medical discharge in 1946.

MacArthur later estimated that Ramsey's guerrilla activity, and the intelligence he gathered, had saved tens of thousands of American and Filipino lives. His operations became a blueprint for modern-day US Special Forces and to this day, to Filipinos of a certain age, the name Ramsey is second only to MacArthur as their most-loved American. After the war Ramsey worked as an executive with Hughes Aircraft Corporation and returned to the Philippines as a private businessman before retiring to California. In 1948, in Manila, he married the daughter of the French ambassador there and they went on to have four children. He remained active in US Veterans' affairs for the rest of his life and recorded his wartime exploits in the 1991 book *Lieutenant Ramsey's War*. [Source: Independent | Phil Davison | 2 April 2013 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 1 thru 15 JUNE

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

Medal Of Honor Story ► Ryan Pitts | Afghanistan



Go to <https://youtu.be/IXaLDNrZHIs> to listen to former Staff Sgt. Ryan Pitts talk about the action in which he earned the Medal of Honor in Afghanistan. [Source: The American Legion May 2017 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ► Almond E. Fisher | WWII



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

Almond Edward Fisher

Rank and organization: Second Lieutenant, U.S. Army, Company E, 157th Infantry, 45th Infantry Division

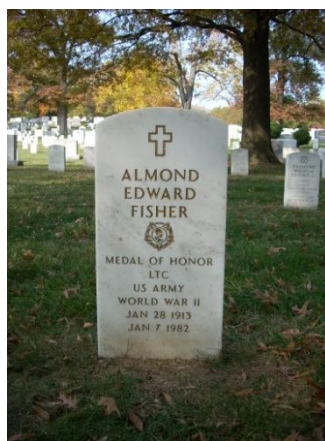
Place and date: Near Grammont, France, 12-13 September 1944

Entered service: Brooklyn N.Y. July 1926

Born: 28 January 1913 Hume, New York

Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty on the night of 1213 September 1944, near Grammont, France. In the darkness of early morning, 2d Lt. Fisher was leading a platoon of Company E, 157th Infantry, in single column to the attack of a strongly defended hill position. At 2:30 A.M., the forward elements were brought under enemy machinegun fire from a distance of not more than 20 yards. Working his way alone to within 20 feet of the gun emplacement, he opened fire with his carbine and killed the entire guncrew. A few minutes after the advance was resumed, heavy machinegun fire was encountered from the left flank. Again crawling forward alone under withering fire, he blasted the gun and crew from their positions with hand grenades. After a halt to replenish ammunition, the advance was again resumed and continued for 1 hour before being stopped by intense machinegun and rifle fire. Through the courageous and skillful leadership of 2d Lt. Fisher, the pocket of determined enemy resistance was rapidly obliterated. Spotting an emplaced machine pistol a short time later, with 1 of his men he moved forward and destroyed the position. As the advance continued the fire fight became more intense. When a bypassed German climbed from his foxhole and attempted to tear an M1 rifle from the hands of 1 of his men, 2d Lt. Fisher whirled and killed the enemy with a burst from his carbine. About 30 minutes later the platoon came under the heavy fire of machineguns from across an open field. 2d Lt. Fisher, disregarding the terrific fire, moved across the field with no cover or concealment to within range, knocked the gun from the position and killed or wounded the crew. Still under heavy fire he returned to his platoon and continued the advance. Once again heavy fire was encountered from a machinegun directly in front. Calling for hand grenades, he found only 2 remaining in the entire platoon. Pulling the pins and carrying a grenade in each hand, he crawled toward the gun emplacement, moving across areas devoid of cover and under intense fire to within 15 yards when he threw the grenades, demolished the gun and killed the guncrew. With ammunition low and daybreak near, he ordered his men to dig in and hold the ground already won. Under constant fire from the front and from both flanks, he moved among them directing the preparations for the defense. Shortly after the ammunition supply was replenished, the Germans launched a last determined effort against the depleted group. Attacked by superior numbers from the front, right, and left flank, and even from the rear, the platoon, in bitter hand-to-hand engagements drove back the enemy at every point. Wounded in both feet by close-range machine pistol fire early in the battle, 2d Lt. Fisher refused medical attention. Unable to walk, he crawled from man to man encouraging them and checking each position. Only after the fighting had subsided did 2d Lt. Fisher crawl 300 yards to the aid station from which he was evacuated. His extraordinary heroism, magnificent valor, and aggressive determination in the face of pointblank enemy fire is an inspiration to his organization and reflects the finest traditions of the U.S. Armed Forces.



Fisher joined the Army from Brooklyn, New York, and by September 13, 1944 was serving as a Second Lieutenant in Company E, 2nd Battalion, 157th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division. In the early morning hours of that

day, near Grammont, France, he led a platoon in an attack on German positions. Throughout the advance, he repeatedly went forward alone and silenced German machine gun emplacements. Just before daybreak, he ordered the platoon to dig in and hold their position. During the ensuing German counter-attack, he was wounded in both feet but refused medical aid and continued to crawl among his men, giving them encouragement and direction. For these actions, he was awarded the Medal of Honor seven months later, on April 23, 1945.

Fisher reached the rank of lieutenant colonel before leaving the Army. He died at age 68 and was buried in Section 6 of Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington County, Virginia.

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

* Health Care *



Pain Update 02 ► Improving Care & Safety in Pain Management

You're in pain, and it's not going away. You go to your doctor wondering if there's a way to relieve it, and you rest easy knowing you're in good hands. With patient safety as a top priority, the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs have updated their clinical guidance on opioid therapy used to manage chronic pain. "There has been a rapid advancement in the science and the knowledge of opioid therapy, and of the risks associated with it," said Dr. Christopher Spevak, director of the National Capital Region Opioid Safety Program and a provider at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

Updated every five years - available online at <https://www.healthquality.va.gov/guidelines/pain/cot>, and in a "pocket card" version - this clinical practice guideline is a tool that helps providers better manage the use of powerful drugs. It serves as a resource rather than a standard of care by helping doctors set reachable goals while coming up with treatment plans for their patients. The updates in the 2017 guideline reflect a continued commitment to beneficiaries for safety and safe opioid prescribing, which will result in better quality of care, said Spevak. Since opioids like Vicodin, OxyContin, and morphine are powerful pain relievers, they can lead to dependence, misuse, or overdose if they're not managed properly. Some of the most important updates to the recommendations include avoiding long-term opioid prescriptions for patients under the age of 30 and putting strategies in place to lessen risk.

The guideline also recommends helping patients manage their pain symptoms through non-drug and non-opioid treatments whenever possible. This can include a range of options, such as behavioral health, mental health, or physical approaches, and non-opioid based medications. Army Lt. Col. Robert Brucher, deputy director of the Department of Pharmacy at Walter Reed in Bethesda, supports the use of alternative approaches to care for chronic pain. "The goal of updating recommendations is to help providers improve the quality of the care for patients who experience chronic pain," said Brucher, describing the new approach to pain management as holistic. Physicians may discuss alternative pain therapies and remedies with their patients. By focusing less on strong pain medication, surgery or other treatment options, patients can work with doctors to learn how to self-manage their pain, which can lead to better quality of life, increased physical function, and improved pain coping skills.

That's not to say prescriptions are discouraged in all cases. When patients start, or continue, opioid therapy, doctors are encouraged to evaluate the risks and benefits of this treatment plan every three months. The guideline encourages providers to start opioid therapy when needed for a short amount of time with the lowest dose allowed depending on a patient's needs and health risks. Risk strategies for patients who are already on long-term treatment plans include overdose education and random urine drug testing. "As research evolves and more evidence becomes available," said Brutcher, "you have to adapt treatment strategies, and health care has to change with the information available. We're trying to look out for what's best for the patient." [Source: Health.mil | May 15, 2017 ++]

PCS Moves Update 01 ► Health Tips

Service members and their families relocate a lot, and moving to a new home is hard enough without adding a back injury to the mix. So be mindful of how you're lifting and moving while you're packing up and loading up. Try these tips to help reduce your risk of injury and properly move heavier things such as boxes and furniture.

- Warm up, just like you would before any workout.
- Remember to keep your core tight, and use your leg muscles, rather than your back, to lift heavy objects.
- Keep objects as close to your body as possible.
- Wear closed-toe shoes to protect your feet from falling items.
- Take breaks when necessary. Stretching and reassessing your mechanics can help you maintain proper posture when lifting.

The best way to prevent back injury is to strengthen your back and core muscles. You can prep for your PCS by doing exercises, such as planks, lunges, and vertical core training, that focus on these areas.

If you're sore from all the lifting or think you might have pulled something, you can treat the pain with ice and rest, and perhaps an over-the-counter pain reliever, for the first 48 hours. Follow the MedlinePlus guidelines available at <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007425.htm> on how to further treat your back pain if it's acute. However, if the pain persists, consult your doctor to rule out a more serious back problem or injury before you do any more heavy lifting. Certain yoga stretches also might relieve your pain, build your muscles, and return your back to normal function. Read the U.S. Army Public Health Command's "How to Safely Perform Pushing and Pulling Tasks" <https://phc.amedd.army.mil/PHC%20Resource%20Library/Pushing%20and%20Pulling%20FS%2088-023-0511.pdf> for more tips. And visit HPRC's Injury Prevention section <http://hprc-online.org/physical-fitness/injury-prevention> to learn more about how to protect your back. [Source: Health.mil | May 23, 2017 ++]

Medicare Card Update 04 ► Changes Coming

Changes are coming to your Medicare card so keep your mailing address updated. By April 2019, your card will be replaced with one that no longer shows your Social Security number. Instead, your card will have a new Medicare Beneficiary Identifier (MBI) that will be used for billing and for checking your eligibility and claim status. And it will all happen automatically – you won't have to pay anyone or give anyone information, no matter what someone might tell you. Having your Social Security number removed from your Medicare card helps fight medical identity theft and protect your medical and financial information. But even with these changes, scammers will still look for ways to take what doesn't belong to them. Here are some ways to avoid Medicare scams:

- Is someone calling, claiming to be from Medicare, and asking for your Social Security number or bank information? Hang up. That's a scam. First, Medicare won't call you. Second, Medicare will never ask for your Social Security number or bank information.
- Is someone asking you to pay for your new card? That's a scam. Your new Medicare card is free.
- Is someone threatening to cancel your benefits if you don't give up information or money? Also a scam. New Medicare cards will be mailed out to you automatically. There won't be any changes to your benefits.

For more on the new changes to your Medicare card, visit [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services](https://www.cms.gov/medicare/ssnri/index.html). <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/ssnri/index.html>. Also, report scams to the Federal Trade commission at <https://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov/#&panel1-1>. [Source: FTC | May 18, 2017 ++]

Drug Cost Increases Update 07 ► Prospect of Change Uncertain

The Trump administration is working on actions it can take without Congress to fight high drug prices, according to people who have attended listening sessions that officials are holding on the issue. It is unclear what exactly the administration will do or how consequential the measures will actually be. But the prospect of changes has the pharmaceutical industry, a powerful lobbying force in Washington, facing some unpredictability. It's a new circumstance for an industry that has traditionally been aligned with GOP administrations and members of Congress. It's now facing a Republican president who is on record as being critical of the way they set prices. During the 2016 campaign, President Trump railed against the pharmaceutical industry and its prices, saying in January they are "getting away with murder."

The listening sessions held by Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Tom Price appear to be a step toward policymaking on drug pricing by the new administration. Price has been holding the sessions with a range of industry groups and advocates. Those who have attended the meetings say they came away with the impression that the administration is serious about taking action on drug prices, though the details remain unclear. One lobbyist said some attendees went in expecting a "dog and pony show" but instead found a meeting that was "more substantive than expected," with Price and other top officials engaged and asking questions, though they did not tip their hand on what they are planning. One attendee said HHS officials invited the group back at some point in the future to provide feedback once there is a set of proposals.

A major question is whether the administration will stick with safely Republican solutions or break with much of the party and opt for more sweeping ideas usually associated with Democrats. Trump broke with his party during the campaign, calling on Congress to allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices. White House Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney caused a stir in health policy circles last week when he said on a panel at Stanford University that the administration was considering proposing that drug companies give discounts through rebates in Medicare the same way they do in Medicaid. That would be a striking break from Republican orthodoxy on drug prices if the administration ended up proposing it, though that could require action from Congress.

Mulvaney said that in addition to items to propose to Congress, "we are looking at things that we can do internally ... without Congress." "The president keeps telling me again and again and again: 'What are we doing to fix this?'" Mulvaney said. Price, though, was resistant to government action on drug prices when he was a lawmaker and could lead the process down a more traditionally Republican path of restrained action, some observers think. "I think it's safe to say they're looking at market-based mechanisms," said Joel White, president of the Council for Affordable Health Coverage, a coalition of industry groups and other health interests. White, who recently attended a listening session with Price, mentioned ways to speed up the Food and Drug Administration's approval of new drugs in order to increase competition and bring down prices. That idea has been welcomed by

Republicans. Still, White noted, “the president has been a little unpredictable” on the issue, so “who knows what happens.”

One lobbyist said that other possibilities for action being floated include allowing Medicaid to exclude coverage of high-priced drugs. Another option, according to the lobbyist, is changing how Medicare Part B pays for drugs. That move could prove ironic given that the Obama administration faced intense blowback for proposing changes in Part B drug spending. Many of those involved in the HHS meetings said they did not expect actions to be announced until the fall, though some said they thought moves could come earlier — and as soon as June. An HHS spokeswoman referred back to readouts the department has given of the various listening sessions. Those readouts did not provide details of the administration’s plans but did note that during the meetings, “the Secretary reaffirmed President Trump and the administration’s commitment to address rising prescription drug costs.” [Source: The Hill | Peter Sullivan | May 16, 2017 ++]

Drug Cost Increases Update 08 ► Fair Drug Pricing Act

A liberal Democrat from Illinois and a maverick conservative Republican from Arizona are teaming up to target a widely despised phenomenon: soaring prices for pharmaceuticals. In a joint statement, U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, (D-Evanston) and U.S. Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) —along with U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) **unveiled legislation** that would require drugmakers to give warning of some price increases and to explain more about why. Identical bills are being introduced in each chamber. Specifically, the Fair Accountability & Innovative Research Drug Pricing Act of 2017 would direct manufacturers to notify the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services at least 30 days before raising prices on certain drugs that cost at least \$100 a month by more than 10 percent a year or 25 percent over three years.

The report also would have to justify the increase—for instance, disclosing certain research costs, net profits and marketing expenses. "The need for action to solve the prescription drug price crisis facing Americans is undeniable," Schakowsky said in a statement. "If a prescription drug corporation wants to hike the price of life-saving medications, they should have to face the American people and explain why." Said McCain in the statement: "The American people should not be forced to choose between filling a prescription and making their monthly mortgage payment. This legislation would bring much-needed transparency."

The lawmakers have enlisted some influential backers, including AARP, the AFL-CIO and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. But drugmakers have one of the better lobbies in Washington, and certainly will argue that high prices are needed to encourage innovation. Spokespeople for a trade group, the Washington-based Biotechnology Innovation Organization, and Chicago-based drugmaker Abbott Labs were not immediately available to comment. In normal times, I'd say the bill has only the slimmest of chances. But in the age of Donald Trump, who knows. Refer to <https://www.baldwin.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/9.15.16%20-%20FAIR%20Drug%20Pricing.pdf> for more information on the Act. [Source: Crains Chicago Business | Greg Hinz | May 16, 2017 ++]

Ticks Update 01 ► Removal Procedure | Peppermint Oil Hazard

Scientists already predict Lyme disease to surge this year, but a viral tick "trick" could put people even more at risk. The popular Facebook video advises dousing the parasites in peppermint oil, causing them to float up and away from the skin. "Death to ticks!!" the caption exclaims. Almost a half million viewers have since shared the post, recommending it to their friends and family. The only problem? **The "tip" directly contradicts experts' advice** and actually increases the likelihood of contracting tickborne illnesses, like Lyme and Powassan virus. The brown

dog tick, carries a disease that can be fatal in canines. Worryingly, this species of tick lives indoors all year round, unlike our native ticks, which only live outside and tend to be more common in the spring and autumn months.

"Ticks carry all sorts of diseases," entomologist Dr. Neeta Connally recently told KFGO. "Those are actually salivated into the body when the tick attaches, and so we don't want to agitate the tick in any way that is going to make it salivate more and thereby be more likely to transmit anything." That includes drowning them in peppermint oil, of course. The Centers for Disease Control also discourages "folklore remedies" like nail polish, petroleum jelly and heat that lift the tick away from the skin. "Your goal is to remove the tick as quickly as possible – not wait for it to detach," the CDC says.



Instead of wasting your essential oils, pull out a pair of fine-tipped tweezers. Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible, and pull straight up with steady pressure. Then thoroughly clean the bite (and your hands) with rubbing alcohol or soap and water. Calamine lotion and antihistamines may help soothe any discomfort. To get rid of the pests, put them in a sealed bag or container, or just flush them down the toilet. Of course, if you develop a rash or fever soon afterwards, go to the doctor straight away. Since the parasites transmit over 10 dangerous diseases to their human (and pet!) hosts, it's important to get immediate care. Early recognition and treatment can decrease the risk of serious complications later on. [Source: Good Housekeeping | Caroline Picard | May 19, 2017 ++]

PTSD Update 228 ► Heart Disease Link Study

The negative effects of post-traumatic stress disorder on the psychological health of veterans are well-documented. Moreover, veterans battling PTSD encounter a variety of other issues such as work and relationship problems. But can PTSD be bad for your heart? Research shows that it may be. A study published in the respected medical journal The Lancet revealed that high levels of stress were associated with increased risk for cardiovascular disease. The greater the stress, the more likely a person was to experience chest pain, heart failure or stroke ... and they were more likely to experience these problems earlier than others.

What does this have to do with PTSD? Stress is associated with increased activity in a small structure in our brain called the amygdala, which regulates memory and our decision-making ability, as well as helping process our emotions. The more emotionally stressed we are, the more active this structure becomes. Prior research has found that those with PTSD have a hyperactive amygdala. This makes sense, as emotional stress goes hand in hand with the disorder.

Although the direct mechanism for how an overactive amygdala in PTSD sufferers leads to heart disease is unclear, it's believed to be related to our bone marrow, the fatty substance in our bones that's responsible for producing red and white blood cells. Red blood cells deliver oxygen to the tissues in our body. White blood cells are

responsible for fighting off infections when we get sick. It's believed that an overactive amygdala tells our bone marrow to produce more white blood cells. This increase in white blood cell leads to the development of plaque in arteries. It also causes them to become inflamed or swell. Those conditions can lead to angina (chest pain) and, in extreme cases, a heart attack.

The Lancet study is not the first to document a connection between PTSD and heart disease. A 2015 study published in the American Journal of Public Health revealed that veterans with PTSD had a 50 percent greater chance of developing heart failure compared with other veterans. In the same year, an article published in the scientific journal Circulation reported that women with severe PTSD may have a 60 percent higher lifetime risk of heart disease. As we learn more about the effects of PTSD on the heart, and other organs, the view that PTSD is a purely psychiatric disorder may give way to the notion that it's a systemic disease affecting the whole body. Effective treatment will not only improve a person's quality of life, but possibly extend it as well. [Source: ArmyTimes| Bret A. Moore | May 29, 2017 ++]

Chagas Disease ► Deadly | Triatomine Bug is Parasite Carrier

A disease spread by an insect that is now found in most U.S. states is more deadly than previously thought, new research shows. Chagas disease, also known as “American trypanosomiasis,” is caused by a parasite (*Trypanosoma cruzi*) that can be transmitted to people by a triatomine bug (in photo at top of page) that is carrying the parasite, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Chagas disease also can be transmitted other ways, such as through blood transfusions and by eating contaminated uncooked food.

Someone with Chagas disease can be without symptoms for decades — the disease is sometimes called a “silent killer.” But if Chagas disease goes untreated, the infection “is lifelong and can be life-threatening,” the CDC says. The most serious symptoms can include cardiac complications, including heart attacks, and intestinal complications. Even when someone with Chagas disease is without symptoms, however, their risk of death is more than double that of someone who does not have Chagas, according to a study recently published in the PLOS journal Neglected Tropical Diseases.

The lead study author, Ligia Capuani of the University of Sao Paulo (Brazil) School of Medicine’s Department of Infectious Diseases, tells CNN: “In every age category, people who had Chagas died more than people who didn’t have Chagas. So if you’re infected early in life, you should be treated.” Another study released this month found that 1.24 percent of Latin American-born residents of Los Angeles County have Chagas disease. That translates to more than 30,000 people in that county. The CDC estimates that 300,000 people in the U.S. are infected with the disease. That study, published in the journal Clinical Infectious Diseases, was coordinated by the Center of Excellence for Chagas Disease at Olive View-UCLA Medical Center. It has been described as the first large-scale survey of the disease in the U.S.

Triatomine bugs are blood-sucking insects also known as “kissing bugs” because they bite people’s faces. The bugs, which are about 1 inch in length, are found only in the Americas, from South America to the Southern United States, according to the CDC. Indoors, they live in cracks and holes of substandard housing. The CDC notes the bugs are primarily found in rural, poverty-stricken parts of Latin America. Outdoors, the bugs can be found in various settings, such as under porches and concrete.

Not all triatomine bugs are infected with the parasite that causes Chagas disease, however, and contact with one does not necessarily lead to infection. So the CDC considers the likelihood of catching Chagas disease from a triatomine bug in the U.S. to be “low, even if the bug is infected.” Still, there are steps you can take to decrease your odds of contact with a triatomine bug abroad or at home. If you plan to travel to rural Latin America, know that there is no vaccine for preventing Chagas disease yet. But for travelers who sleep in well-built structures, such as an

air-conditioned or screened hotel room, the risk of exposure to infected bugs is low. For travelers who stay in poorly built dwellings, the CDC says preventative measures include:

- Spraying infested dwellings with residual-action insecticides
- Using bed nets treated with long-lasting insecticides
- Wearing protective clothing
- Applying insect repellent to exposed skin

To prevent triatomine bug infestations at home, the CDC says measures include:

- Sealing cracks and gaps around windows, walls, roofs and doors
- Removing wood, brush and rock piles near your house
- Using screens on doors and windows and repairing any holes or tears
- If possible, making sure yard lights are not close to your house (lights can attract the bugs)
- Sealing holes and cracks leading to the attic, crawl spaces below the house and to the outside
- Having pets sleep indoors, especially at night
- Keeping your house and any outdoor pet resting areas clean, in addition to periodically checking both areas for the presence of bugs

. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | May 22, 2017 ++]



TRICARE Podcast 398 ► Lead | Food Plan | Allergies/Asthma

Lead Poisoning -- The word poison suggests a bubbling vial marked with skull and crossbones. However, poisonings can result from misuse of common household products or even from our home itself in the form of lead. Poisoning can happen all at once or gradually over time. TRICARE covers children's blood lead testing at well-child care visits when medically necessary. Blood lead poisoning occurs when a person or child eats, drinks or inhales lead or a lead-contaminated item. Lead is commonly found in homes built in 1978 or earlier in the form of paint, pipes or plumbing fixtures. Lead poisoning is a serious health threat to children. Lead exposure can damage the developing brain and nervous system, slow growth and development, lead to learning and behavioral problems

and cause hearing and speech problems. Symptoms of lead poisoning don't appear until after dangerous amounts of lead have built up in the person.

The EPA notes that there are steps you can take to protect your family from lead exposure. Those steps include understanding your home's lead risks, maintaining your home's condition and testing your home's drinking water. At well-child care visits, TRICARE covers lead level screening for children from age six months to age six who are at high risk. A child's risk level is based on results of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's lead poisoning form given during well-child visits. If you are concerned about lead exposure and your child, talk to your child's primary care provider. Also, be sure to keep the national phone number for Poison Help, 1-800-222-1222, posted in your home and on your cell phone. It's available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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Healthy Eating Plan -- Eating foods with probiotics and prebiotics might aid your digestion, so try to include them in your healthy-eating plan. Probiotics are live microorganisms, such as bacteria, similar to the healthy bacteria that live in your GI tract. Prebiotics are natural, non-digestible food ingredients that promote the growth of "good" bacteria. Prebiotic foods include bananas, onions, garlic, leeks, asparagus, artichokes and whole grains. Eating foods with prebiotics might improve your digestive health and enhance calcium absorption too.

Some research shows two strains of bacteria – Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium – seem to offer the greatest benefits. Both can be found in probiotic foods such as buttermilk, olives, pickles and some yogurts and cheeses. Eating these foods might help prevent diarrhea caused by antibiotics and infections. They also might provide relief from symptoms associated with constipation, colds, allergies and irritable bowel syndrome. The greatest benefits from eating foods with probiotics and prebiotics occur when they're part of a diet that includes whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat sources of dairy and protein. For more information about probiotics, visit the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health's web page at www.nccih.nih.gov.

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Allergies and Asthma -- May is peak season for asthma and allergy sufferers. Take some time to educate yourself and your loved ones about proper care and treatment for these diseases. More than 50 million Americans suffer from different kinds of allergies – pollen, skin, latex and more. And unfortunately, the rate of allergies is climbing. The most common allergy symptoms can simply make you uncomfortable, like a runny nose, sneezing or an itchy rash. However, more serious reactions, like swelling in your mouth or throat, can be life-threatening. The same substances that trigger your allergy symptoms, such as pollen, dust mites and pet dander, may also trigger or worsen asthma signs and symptoms. In some people, skin or food allergies can cause asthma symptoms.

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America reports that asthma affects 24 million Americans and 6.3 million of those are children under the age of 18. Asthma is a chronic disease that causes your airways to become inflamed, making it hard to breathe. The best way to manage asthma is to avoid triggers, take medications to prevent symptoms and prepare to treat asthma episodes if they occur. You should also create an Asthma Action Plan. This plan gives information and instructions on how you manage your asthma and what to do if you have an asthma episode. Learn more at www.cdc.gov/asthma. Both asthma and allergies are manageable conditions, so it is very important that we all learn about how to best manage and treat it. TRICARE covers services and supplies required to diagnose and treat asthma as well as proven services and supplies needed to diagnose and treat allergies. For more information, visit www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices.

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | May 19, 2017 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 399 ► Unused Drugs | Back Injuries | Personal Info

Unused Prescription Drug -- If you're preparing for a move this summer, one area of your home you shouldn't overlook is your medicine cabinet. Now is the perfect time to get rid of items that are expired or no longer needed. With the Military Health System Drug Take Back program, you can safely and easily dispose of unwanted and expired medications at U.S. military pharmacies. Beneficiaries have two free options to dispose of their prescription and over-the-counter drugs safely. They can drop off old or expired drugs in secure collection boxes at military pharmacies or send them by mail in a special envelope available at the military pharmacy. To find out which Drug Take Back option your pharmacy has, contact your military hospital or clinic.

Removing medications from your home helps prevent accidental drug misuse and drug abuse by family members and visitors to your home. More than 60,000 children in the United States go to the emergency room every year for accidentally swallowing medications. And over 70 percent of prescription pain drug abuse involves drugs obtained from a friend or relative. Getting rid of unused drugs keeps them out of the hands of children and others. Practicing good drug disposal habits benefits you, your family, and your community. If your medicine cabinet is full of expired or unneeded drugs, participate in a Drug Take Back option near you. While moving season is an easy time to do it, you can safely dispose of unwanted drugs year round. For more information on how to safely dispose of drugs through the Drug Take Back program, visit www.TRICARE.mil/drugtakeback.

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Preventing Back Injuries -- Moving to a new home is hard enough without adding a back injury to the mix. You should be mindful of how you're lifting and moving while you're packing up and loading up. Try these tips to help reduce your risk of injury and properly move heavier things such as boxes and furniture.

- Warm up, just like you would before any workout.
- Remember to keep your core tight, and use your leg muscles, rather than your back, to lift heavy objects.
- Keep objects as close to your body as possible.
- Wear closed-toe shoes to protect your feet from falling items.
- And take breaks when necessary. Stretching and reassessing your mechanics can help you maintain proper posture when lifting.

Visit www.hprc-online.org/physical-fitness to learn more about how to protect your back.

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Protecting Personal Information -- Protecting your personal information is vital to your privacy, and prevents abuse of taxpayer funds. Be safe; don't share your military ID or other personal or family information with an unknown person. Fraudsters often target TRICARE beneficiaries, including active duty service members. Examples include fake surveys used to collect personal information or offering gift cards to get your information, then billing TRICARE for services you didn't need or never received. If you think you are the victim of TRICARE related fraud, you can report it to the Defense Health Agency. You can also report cases where you think someone is trying to defraud TRICARE. For example, if your TRICARE explanation of benefits shows a bill for something you didn't get, tell your regional contractor. TRICARE usually doesn't contact you asking for personal information, such as your military ID number or Social Security number. And only provide that information to a trusted entity, like your doctor, a claims processor. Be wary of an unknown person offering a gift or reward in exchange for providing a health service. They may be trying to get your information to commit fraud. For more information about fraud, visit www.health.mil/fraud.

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | May 26, 2017 ++]

* Finances *



Trump Budget Plan Update 02 ► \$1.1 Trillion Spending Proposed for 2018

President Donald Trump's "taxpayer focused" budget for fiscal 2018 includes smaller cost-of-living adjustments for veterans benefits payouts and eliminating those adjustments for some federal civilian retirees altogether. The controversial suggestions are likely to be met with opposition from outside advocates and some lawmakers, but White House officials insist the moves are part of a broader strategy to balance the budget without sacrificing essential government services. "(In past budgets) we haven't put ourselves in the role of going back to taxpayers and say, 'Here's a program that is worth spending your money on,'" said Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney. "These are the programs we can justify. 'I can look a taxpayer in the eye and say, 'I need your tax money so I can help a veteran who lost two legs in the Middle East.' But we're not doing that for a long list of social programs that have little impact."

The \$1.1 trillion spending plan includes \$54 billion more for the Defense Department than is currently allowed under congressionally approved spending caps, and a \$4 billion boost in Veteran Affairs discretionary spending from current levels. To offset those costs and balance the budget over the next decade, the proposal calls for significant cuts in State Department funding, foreign aid accounts and a host of other non-military programs. It also includes the cost-of-living adjustment changes. The White House plan would extend the practice of rounding down veterans payouts to the nearest whole dollar, trimming a few cents off their checks. Veterans groups have successfully fought the practice in recent years, arguing the small amounts build up to significant losses for veterans over time. White House officials say the move will save about \$20 million in fiscal 2018 alone and almost \$2.7 billion over the next decade.

The civilian retirees changes would be even more dramatic. Trump's plan calls for eliminating annual cost-of-living increases Federal Employee Retirement System enrollees completely, and lowering the adjustments for Civil Service Retirement System enrollees by 0.5 percent. Together, those changes generate more than \$500 million in savings for fiscal 2018 and almost \$42 billion in savings over 10 years. But they also represent substantial reductions in payouts for the estimated 70,000 federal retirees each year, along with the hundreds of thousands more already collecting their pensions. CSRS beneficiaries are not eligible for Social Security payments. FERS employees are, but those government pensions still make up a significant portion of their retirement income.

White House officials did not directly address any of those payout reductions ahead of the official budget roll out Tuesday morning. But explanatory documents released early said the plan will "restore fiscal discipline and make the hard decisions to put our country on a path to repay the debt in full." The plan also includes almost \$29 billion more for the VA's Choice Card program over the next decade, extending the contentious program which allows veterans to seek care outside the department's medical system with taxpayers paying the bill. Administration officials also plan to increase the number of additional Afghan Special Immigrant visas in coming years, spending an extra \$15 million on the program next year alone. That effort has drawn praise from many in the veteran community for helping to bring translators and other at-risk foreign nationals to the U.S. And Trump White House

officials hope to close a loophole in the post-9/11 GI Bill benefits that allows veterans to attend pricey flight schools. Capping tuition at those institutions would save at least \$42 million annually.

House and Senate officials have already voiced skepticism about the overall Trump budget plan, noting that it still requires lawmakers to find a deal to lift the federal spending caps. They've been unable to reach that compromise for the last six years. For full FY18 budget coverage, go to <http://www.defensenews.com/budget-2018>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | May 22, 2017 ++]

USFSPA & Divorce Update 30 ► Supreme Court Vet Pay Ruling

The Supreme Court of the United States ruled 15 MAY, that states cannot increase a former spouse's share of a veteran's military retirement pay to make up for a loss in benefits caused by a waiver to receive disability payments. John and Sandra Howell divorced in 1991, and they agreed that Sandra was entitled to half of her ex-husband's military retirement pay when it took effect. John retired from the Air Force in 1992 after a 20-year career, and both John and Sandra began receiving retirement pay the next year. Years later, John claimed that degenerative joint disease in his shoulder was directly related to his military service and the Department of Veterans Affairs approved that claim in 2005. He qualified for monthly VA disability payments and elected to receive them, which required that he waive an equal amount of money from his military retirement pay to avoid "double dipping," according to court records.

The government accordingly reduced retirement payments to both John and Sandra, causing her to receive \$127 less per month. Sandra filed a motion in 2013 to enforce the divorce decree's division of retirement payments. The family court ruled in her favor, finding that she had a vested property right in 50 percent of John's retirement pay and neither his election of disability payments nor Arizona law deprived her of that right. The specific state law at issue prohibits courts from "making up" for a reduction in retirement benefits by awarding more assets to the nonmilitary former spouse.

In 2015, the Arizona Supreme Court affirmed the family court and held that neither state law nor federal law prevents courts from allowing such relief for an ex-spouse when a veteran chooses to waive retirement pay. Five months after agreeing to hear the case, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed that affirmation and ruled that the Uniformed Services Former Spouses' Protection Act pre-empts the state court's order for John to indemnify Sandra for the reduction in her portion of his retirement pay due to his election of disability benefits. "A federal statute provides that a state may treat as community property, and divide at divorce, a military veteran's retirement pay. The statute, however, exempts from this grant of permission any amount that the government deducts 'as a result of a waiver' that the veteran must make 'in order to receive' disability benefits," Justice Stephen Breyer wrote for court.

Breyer cited the high court's 1989 decision in *Mansell v. Mansell*, in which it held that federal law prohibited California from treating the waived portion of a major's retirement pay as community property divisible at divorce. "Can the state subsequently in-crease, pro rata, the amount the divorced spouse receives each month from the veteran's retirement pay in order to indemnify the divorced spouse for the loss caused by the veteran's waiver? The question is complicated, but the answer is not," Breyer wrote. "Our cases and the statute make clear that the answer to the indemnification question is 'no.'" Breyer was joined in the decision by Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Anthony Kennedy, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Samuel Alito, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan.

Justice Clarence Thomas filed a separate opinion concurring in part and concurring in the judgment. "I join all of the opinion of the Court except its brief discussion of 'purposes and objectives' pre-emption. As I have previously explained, [that framework is an illegitimate basis for finding the pre-emption of state law]," Thomas wrote. "In any event, that framework is not necessary to support the court's judgment in this case." The high court's newest

member, Justice Neil Gorsuch, did not participate in the consideration or decision of the case. [Source: Courthouse News Service | www.courthousenews.com | May 15, 2017 ++]

Car Insurance Update 14 ► Prior Insurer Factor in Higher Rates

Perhaps you knew that being a renter or having lackluster credit could negatively affect your car insurance rates. But what about your previous insurance company? A new analysis by the Consumer Federation of America (CFA) found that three major auto insurance companies tend to charge higher premiums for good drivers who were previously insured by smaller insurers rather than big insurers. These three companies are:

- **Allstate** — which charged an average of 15 percent, or \$235, more to good drivers previously covered by a nonstandard insurer than it charged to good drivers previously covered by a big insurer
- **American Family Insurance** — 9 percent, or \$260, more
- **Farmers** — 9 percent, or \$166, more

CFA's analysis found that three other large insurers — Liberty Mutual, Progressive and State Farm — did not engage in this practice. Geico engaged in this practice in only one of the 20 cities CFA examined: Tampa, Florida — where Geico charged up to 72 percent more to drivers previously covered by a nonstandard insurer. Smaller car insurance companies, which CFA also describes as “non-standard,” account for about 7 percent of the car insurance market. Examples from CFA's analysis include:

- Access
- Direct General
- Equity Insurance Co.
- Safe Auto Insurance Co.
- Safeway Insurance Co.
- Titan Insurance

For its analysis, CFA used car insurance companies' websites to get quotes for a driver across 20 cities. For every quote requested, that driver was a 30-year-old female with a perfect driving record. The only differences were in the company listed as her prior insurer. Douglas Heller, an insurance expert who helped conduct CFA's analysis, described the findings as “unfair pricing schemes”: “Where you've shopped for insurance in the past should not be used against you, especially when the history that really matters — your driving record — is perfect. Because state laws require us to buy auto insurance, we need insurance commissioners to do a better job protecting us from unfair pricing schemes like this.”

CFA's findings are also yet another reason to comparison shop — which we cite as step No. 1 in “9 Ways to Drive Down Your Auto Insurance Rates” at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/9-ways-drive-down-your-auto-insurance-rates>. As the article explains: “That sounds like a no-brainer, but many people don't understand that policies differ among companies based on subjective criteria. Some companies specialize in insuring young drivers. Others are best suited for those with less-than-stellar driving records. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsheer | May 23, 2017 ++]

Credit's True Cost if Bad ► An Expensive Burden

Your credit is critical to your overall financial health for at least three reasons. First, bad credit means you pay higher interest rates when you borrow money. Second, it can impact other expenses, like your car insurance, because

some insurers figure that people who wreck their credit are also more likely to wreck their cars. And, third, it can hurt your ability to find work: Many employers also believe that those who aren't responsible with their money might not be responsible with the boss's either. Is this fair? It's debatable. But like it or not, these things are facts. So it quite literally pays to keep track of your credit and keep it in the best possible shape.

One way to get a sense of your credit is by looking at your credit score. The company that produces the most-used credit score, the FICO score, is Fair Isaac Corp., which also goes by FICO. You can use FICO's Free Credit Scores Estimator <http://www.myfico.com/free-credit-score-range-estimator> to get an idea of how various mistakes in your use of credit can affect your score. Several years ago, FICO also allowed a peek behind the curtain and showed us exactly how badly common credit mistakes can mangle your credit score. A few examples of mistakes and their effects that FICO revealed at that time include:

- Maxed-out card: This mistake costs 10 to 30 points for someone with a 680 FICO score, and 25 to 45 points for someone with a 780.
- 30-days-late payment: 60 to 80 points, and 90 to 110 points
- Debt settlement: 45 to 65 points, and 105 to 125 points
- Foreclosure: 85 to 105 points, and 140 to 160 points
- Bankruptcy: 130 to 150 points, and 220 to 240 points

The higher your score, the more points you'll lose due to such mistakes. Keep in mind that a perfect FICO score is 850, and you'll generally need a score of at least 730 to 760 to get the best possible rates on loans, depending on the lender.

Translating point losses into dollar losses

The most obvious reason to maintain a good credit score is that bad scores mean less access to credit and higher interest rates when you receive credit. Reduced access to credit means lost opportunities for you. Higher interest rates can cost you a ton of money. Consider the mother of all debt: a home mortgage. Let's say you're borrowing \$200,000 on a 30-year mortgage with a fixed interest rate. Show up at the lender's office with a credit score in the 620-639 range, and you'll pay 5.34 percent interest. If you make minimum payments, your total interest bill for that mortgage will amount to \$201,610. But if you waltz in with a score in the 760-850 range, you'll only pay 3.751 percent and your total interest bill declines to \$133,484. That means that over the life of that loan, that lousy score cost you \$68,126 — enough to finance your own business, put a kid through college or retire at least a year earlier. By the way, the numbers above came from FICO's Loan Savings Calculator. Check it out for yourself.

The opportunity cost of bad credit

An even more dramatic way of looking at the same thing is to consider the opportunity cost, that is, what money you spend today costs you in terms of the opportunity to have more money tomorrow. For example: Going into your \$200,000 mortgage with a lower credit score means a monthly payment of \$1,116 compared with a \$926 payment with a higher score. In short, the person with the higher score has the opportunity to save an extra \$190 a month. If they use that opportunity wisely and invest that \$190 monthly for 30 years and manage to earn 6 percent on it, they'll end up with \$181,343.93. Those numbers came from the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission's Compound Interest Calculator. Check it out, too. Some other ways bad credit will impact on your are:

- The cost of your utility deposits
- Your options for cellphone service
- The price of your car insurance
- Your ability to rent an apartment

Bottom line? Bad credit is a very expensive burden. If more people realized that, maybe we'd have fewer lousy credit scores floating around out there. According to FICO's numbers, about 44 percent of Americans have a FICO score below 700. Of course, if you lose your job, can't find another one, can't pay your mortgage and can't sell your house, there's not much you can do to prevent getting behind. The same is true if you have a long illness and are saddled with huge medical expenses. But if you screw up your credit through carelessness or living beyond your

means, you're giving up more than a low rate on a mortgage. You're mortgaging your future and risking your retirement. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacy Johnson | May 18, 2017 ++]

Tuna Pricing ► You Might Be Getting Taken

Americans might be getting taken — hook, line and sinker — when they purchase canned tuna at the grocery store. Walmart and other big retailers have filed suit against America's three largest tuna brands — Bumble Bee, StarKist and Chicken of the Sea — for allegedly colluding to fix prices for the popular U.S. sandwich staple, CBS News reports. The litigation describes regular telephone calls and meetings where “executives agreed that all three companies would collective[ly] raise prices.” They also agreed to “limit promotions and packaged tuna that undercut their published pricing,” according to court records. “We believe there is strong evidence that suppliers of canned tuna to Walmart conspired to artificially inflate and wrongfully fix prices in order to increase their own profits at the expense of consumers,” says Walmart spokesman Randy Hargrove, The Washington Post reports.

In a related case filed by the U.S. Justice Department, Bumble Bee Foods last week agreed to plead guilty and pay a \$25 million fine for conspiring to fix prices, according to CBS. You can protect yourself from getting gouged at the supermarket. MoneyTalksNews has some tips to help you save big bucks on food costs. For example, in “[25 Ways to Spend Less on Food](#),” Maryalene LaPonsie says you should keep processed foods out of your shopping cart because they typically provide poor value.

A box of macaroni and cheese might not seem expensive when you can buy it for a buck, but portion sizes are dwindling and that box likely won't get your family very far. You might be better off investing that dollar toward the ingredients for homemade macaroni and cheese. You might pay a little more upfront, but you'll get a meal that will feed the family and maybe even leave you with leftovers. Clipping coupons is also a great way to save some cash. If you don't want to spend the time cutting out paper coupons, LaPonsie recommends signing up for your supermarket's loyalty or e-coupon program. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | May 17, 2017 ++]

Dumb Insurance Update 01 ► Dental, Children's & Permanent Life

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:

✿ **Dental insurance** -- If you have dental insurance through work, you're golden. Otherwise, a plan can run \$50 a month or more for benefits that top out at as little as \$1,000 a year. Don't buy it thinking you'll collect thousands of dollars' worth of implants or other complex treatments. Your policy might just pay 50 percent for oral surgery and restorative care. It may not cover cosmetic dentistry at all. The problem is the yearly cap on payouts. Dental plans haven't raised these maximum payouts over the years, even though the premiums keep growing.

Affordable Care Act dental coverage: Dental coverage is optional under the rules of the federal law also known as Obamacare, but it can be purchased. The Affordable Care Act requires some health insurance plans to include affordable dental care for children. Some states allow insurers to offer family dental plans too. Healthcare.gov describes the ACA dental options.

Alternatives:

- *Discount dental plan:* [NerdWallet says](#) discount plans charge “an enrollment fee of about \$80 to \$120 each year to get discounts ranging from 10 percent to 60 percent on all of your dental visits and procedures.”

- *Charitable clinics:* Free or low-cost care by volunteer dentists is offered periodically at community events. Check [Dentistry From the Heart](#), [America's Dentists Care Foundation](#) or find your state's dental association online.
- *Dental schools:* Many dental schools provide free or reduced-cost care. Accredited programs are listed at the [American Dental Association website](#).
- *Federally qualified health centers:* These private clinics receive some government funding. Find clinics in cities and rural areas across the country on the federal [Health Resources and Services Administration website](#).
- *Medical travel:* Some Americans travel long distances for dental care abroad, particularly in Mexico. They can often find care that's comparable in quality but considerably cheaper than at home. Medical travelers typically "need a lot of work, like 10 or 20 crowns," Dr. Jessica Nitardy, who lives in El Paso, Texas, and practices in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, [tells The Atlantic](#).

✿ **Children's life insurance** -- Adults buy life insurance coverage for themselves to provide for their families in case they die. Arguments in favor of taking out life insurance on children include locking in insurance for them at a young age in case it becomes impossible or too expensive to insure them later because of illness or playing high-risk sports, for a couple of examples. Some advocate coverage for possible funeral expenses and time off work for grieving. But unless the family depends on the child's income, there's no need to insure his or her life.

Alternatives: Save for the child's education or open an investment account for him. If necessary, you could use those funds to pay his death expenses without giving a penny to insurers.

✿ **Permanent life insurance** -- [Life insurance](#) is valuable when people who depend on your income would be financially hurt if you die. But if you don't need to leave a pile of cash to pay off a mortgage or to leave a bequest, skip it. There are two main types of life insurance:

- Term life insurance covers you for a specified period — 10, 20 or 30 years, for example. It's the cheaper option by far.
- Permanent insurance covers you for life. The insurance company takes part of the extra premium and invests it. That gives your policy a cash value, like a savings account. However, permanent life insurance comes with high premiums and high fees.

Alternative: If you're wealthy and need to leave a big chunk of money to pay your estate taxes, permanent insurance might be for you. Otherwise, it's a dumb insurance buy, says Stacy Johnson. He suggests term life insurance instead. Do your investing elsewhere.

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

Pet Care Costs ► Dog vs. Cat and Others

In addition to the initial cost of adoption, there's a whole litany of expenses that the average pet owner will incur within a year. How much dog and cat owners spend on their four-legged family members varies widely. Cats are cheaper than dogs, but small dogs breeds can be cheaper to own than cats according to an ASPCA financial breakdown of the annual costs of caring for a variety of species. The group examined capital costs — one-time expenditures such as a leash, a carrier and the cost of getting the pet spayed or neutered. They also tallied recurring costs, including medical bills, food, litter for cats, licenses, toys/treats and health insurance. The dog/cat breakdown is as follows:

- **Small dog:** \$470 in capital costs + \$737 in recurring costs per year
- **Medium dog:** \$565 in capital costs + \$894 in recurring costs per year
- **Large dog:** \$560 in capital costs + \$1,040.41 in recurring costs per year
- **Cat:** \$365 in capital costs + \$809 in recurring costs per year

Of course, those are averages. “You shouldn’t expect to pay less than this, and you should definitely be prepared to pay more,” the ASPCA says. “Don’t forget to factor in the costs of unexpected veterinary care, as well as boarding facilities, pet sitters and dog walkers, if you plan to use them.” Grooming costs for long-haired dog breeds are not included, but can easily add a few hundred dollars annually. And then there’s the new couch you’ll need after your cat decides it likes that better than a scratching post, or the new carpet you’ll need after the dog decides to leave his mark on yours. To see the cost for the seven pet species that ASPCA compiled data on refer to https://www.asPCA.org/sites/default/files/pet_care_costs.pdf . [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsheer | May 3, 2017 ++]

Tax Burden for Oregon 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 Oregon.

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: None

Gasoline Tax: 49.52 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 54.76 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$1.32/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes (Click here)

Tax Rate Range: Low – 5%; High – 9.9%.

Income Brackets: Lowest – \$3,350; Highest – \$250,000. Bracket levels adjusted for inflation each year. Some or all of federal income tax paid are allowed to be deducted from state taxable income

Number of Brackets: 3

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$195; Married – \$390; Dependents – \$195.

Additional Exemptions: The personal exemption credit is not allowed if federal AGI exceeds \$100,000 for single filers or \$200,000 for joint filers.

Standard Deduction: Single – \$2,135; Married filing jointly – \$4,295

Medical/Dental Deduction: Full only for age 59 or older, if itemized. Oregon allows a tax credit on long-term care insurance premiums. The credit is the smaller of 15% of premiums paid or \$500.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: \$5,000 (\$2,500 if married filing separately)

Retirement Income Taxes: Most retirement income is subject to Oregon tax when received by an Oregon resident. This is true even if you were a nonresident when you earned the income. However, you may subtract some or all of your federal pension income from Oregon income. The state does not tax Social Security or railroad retirement benefits. Depending on your age and income, you may be entitled to a retirement income credit on your Oregon return. If you receive a U.S. government pension, you may be entitled to subtract part or all of that pension on your Oregon Individual income tax return. For more information, refer to <http://www.oregon.gov/Pages/index.aspx>.

Retired Military Pay: Federal retirees, including military personnel, may be able to subtract some or all of their federal pension income. This includes benefits paid to the retiree or to the surviving spouse. The subtraction amount is based on the number of months of federal service before and after October 1, 1991. Retirees can subtract their entire federal pension if all the months of federal service occurred before October 1, 1991. If there are no

months of service before October 1, 1991, retirees cannot subtract any federal pension. If service included months before and after October 1, 1991, retirees can subtract a percentage of their pension income.

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

Oregon does not grant homeowners a homestead exemption. Tax rates are set by the counties and any special considerations are levied by county officials. Homeowners 62 or older may delay paying property taxes based on certain income criteria. The state offers a Disabled Citizen Property Tax Deferral Program and a Senior Citizen Property Tax Deferral Program. Both deferral programs allow qualified taxpayers to defer payment of their property taxes on their homes. The state pays the taxes to the county, maintains the account, and charges 6% simple interest, which also is deferred. Taxes are owed when the taxpayer receiving the deferral dies, sells the property, ceases to live permanently on the property, or the property changes ownership.

To qualify for either program, the taxpayer must live on the property and have a total household income of less than \$39,500 for the year before application. Participants may remain on either program as long as their federal adjusted gross income does not exceed that amount. If a participant's income exceeds the \$39,500 limit, part of the taxes still may be deferred. Participants can come in and out of the programs if their income changes. In addition to meeting the income limitation and property ownership requirement, disabled persons must be receiving or be eligible to receive federal Social Security Disability benefits to qualify. Residents must be 62 years old or older to qualify for the Senior Citizen Property Tax Deferral Program. Call 800-356-4222 or 503-376-4988.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

The laws governing Oregon's inheritance tax have changed. First the name of the tax changed from an "inheritance tax" to an "estate tax." This is consistent with the majority of states and the federal government which defines an estate tax as a tax on an entire estate while an inheritance tax is defined as a tax assessed against only certain beneficiaries of an estate.

In addition, while the estate tax exemption of \$1,000,000 remains in effect. The tax will only apply to the value of an estate in excess of \$1,000,000. Under current law once an estate exceeds \$1,000,000 the tax applies to the entire estate and the rates change such that the majority of estates valued between \$1,000,000 and \$2,000,000 will pay slightly less in taxes and estates valued over \$2,000,000 will pay slightly more in taxes.

For further info, visit the Oregon Department of Revenue site <http://www.oregon.gov/DOR/pages/index.aspx> or call 503-378-4988. Refer to <http://www.oregon.gov/DOR/pages/index.aspx> if you are thinking of moving to Oregon. [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com> May 2017 ++]

*** General Interest ***



SBCGLOBAL Email Provider ► Blocking RAO Bulletin Notices as Spam

The majority of sbcglobal.net email users are no longer capable of receiving the RAO Availability Notices I send to them via my mailing list provider YMLP. The notices sent on the 1st & 15th of each month are a heads up of what is in the current Bulletin and that it is available for reading. So far I have sent messages via an alternate means to 200 of the 573 subscribers on my email directory to verify this and only 2 have responded they are still receiving the notices. Apparently, SBC's email processing program is configured to allow only a specified number (unknown) of emails per hour/day sent from one source to be delivered to their customers. When that number is exceeded it considers the email to be spam and blocks all their customers from receiving it.

SBC will not change their program's parameters which means the number of their users I send to (573) has to be reduced or an alternate means of reaching them must be found. Accordingly, all of their users that do not respond to the message I have been sending them will be deleted. For those who do respond I will continue to attempt to get the notices to them by alternate means. The message I have been sending asks three questions:

- a. Have you stopped receiving these notices?
- b. Do you want to continue to receive the RAO Bulletin notices or not??
- c. Do you have an alternate non-SBC email addree I can reach you at. If so, what is it???

I am in the process of developing a separate mailing list of SBC users who respond to my message stating they still want to receive the notices and do not have an alternate email addree to send to. [Source: RAO Bulletin Editor/Publisher | James "EMO" Tichacek | May 27, 2017 ++]

Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 31 May 2017

- **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.
- **RP.** Philippine lawmakers killed a bid on 15 MAY to impeach President Rodrigo Duterte on the grounds that it lacked substance.
- **Illegal Cubans.** For the first time in nearly a decade, the Coast Guard in April didn't intercept any Cubans trying to sail illegally to the U.S., a change due in large part to new policies set by both the Obama and Trump administrations.
- **NTAS Bulletin.** The latest National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) Bulletin pertaining to the homegrown terror threat is available at https://www.dhs.gov/ntas/advisory/ntas_17_0515_0001.
- **Insomnia/Sleep Apnea.** Researchers found both insomnia and sleep apnea for military personnel are on the rise based on data from 2005 to 2014, according to the [Journal of Sleep Research](#).
- **USN Nude Photo Policy.** The Navy has implemented a zero-tolerance policy for sharing nude photos of coworkers online without consent — a no-nonsense stance reminiscent of its strict policy on drug use. New guidance announced sailors caught violating new regulations prohibiting cyberstalking and online harassment will face a mandatory administrative discharge.
- **USCG Ops.** The U.S. Coast Guard cutter Hamilton at Port Everglades off loaded cocaine worth nearly \$500 million from 20 separate seizures along the Central and South American coasts. Coast Guard officials said the seizures totaled about 18.5 tons of cocaine.
- **iPad Magic.** Go to https://youtu.be/b_xhSQGKxO4 and watch Simon the Magician on the Ellen show wow her audience and blow her away.
- **Commercial.** Go to https://youtu.be/uoABty_zE00 and check out this commercial with no dialogue in it that Food City in Bristol, Tennessee is using.

- **Burial At Sea.** Here's footage you'll see only once in a lifetime. Just imagine being there to witness it! Loyce Edward Deen, an Aviation Machinist Mate 2nd Class, USNR, 72 years ago was a gunner on a TBM Avenger. On November 5, 1944, Deen's squadron participated in a raid on Manila where his plane was hit multiple times by anti-aircraft fire while attacking a Japanese cruiser. Deen was killed. The Avenger's pilot, Lt.; Robert Cosgrove, managed to return to his carrier, the USS Essex. Both Deen and the plane had been shot up so badly that it was decided to leave him in the plane. It is the only time in U.S. Navy history (and probably U.S. military history) that an aviator was buried in his aircraft after being killed in action. <http://loyceeedeen.webstarts.com/uploads/GoingHome.mp4>.
- **Farmer/Veteran.** A documentary that follows a combat vet as he builds a civilian life hatching chickens and raising goats in rural North Carolina, will debuted Memorial Day on PBS. It is available to stream at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/farmer-veteran> and will air as part of Independent Lens, PBS's weekly documentary series.
- **Drones.** AeroVironment has unveiled a new miniature UAV. The Snipe Nano Quad is a Class 0 ISR UAV. Weighing 5 ounces, it is equipped with EO/IR and low-light sensors. "With its quiet electric motors, flight speeds exceeding 20 mph and more than one-kilometer range, Snipe is difficult to detect in operating environments with even minimal ambient noise," said an AeroVironment news release.
- **Tug-of-War.** For the seventh year in a row, the Navy beat the Marines during the New York Fleet Week's annual tug-of-war competition on May 28. Each team was comprised of five participants.
- **U.S. Intercept Test.** A ground-fired interceptor launched from an Air Force base in California struck and destroyed an intercontinental ballistic missile-like target in space 30 MAY, in the first test of the United States' ability to intercept the long-range ballistic missiles that North Korea aims to develop.
- **Car Buying.** The Federal Trade Commission recommends visiting dealerships at the end of the month, when dealers are more motivated to make a sale to meet monthly sales quotas. Also, go in the middle of the week when it's less crowded and don't be afraid to walk if you are not satisfied with the deal. Consider buying a vehicle that's at least two years old: It could mean cheaper insurance payments, along with a lower sticker price, and may be under warranty.

U.S.-Russia Tensions Update 01 ► Putin Comes to Trump Defense

Vladimir Putin rushed 17 MAY to defend U.S. President Donald Trump from criticism over sharing classified information with Moscow, issuing a strongly worded statement that reflected the degree of the Russian leader's frustration with the Washington infighting that has thwarted Kremlin hopes for a detente. Trump's decision to divulge classified intelligence with Russian diplomats marked a step toward Putin's long-held goal of forging an alliance with the U.S. in the fight against terrorism. Putin has pushed for anti-terror cooperation for years, arguing that the fight against the Islamic State group and other extremist organizations would only succeed if Moscow and Washington combined their efforts. In his view, such a partnership could provide further benefits by defusing tensions between Russia and the West and eventually leading to the lifting of sanctions the U.S. and the European Union imposed on Moscow over its role in the Ukraine.

The Kremlin's expectation that Trump and Putin would meet soon after Trump took office have withered amid congressional and FBI investigations of the Trump campaign's ties to Russia. Putin still hopes to meet his American counterpart on the sidelines of a G-20 meeting in Germany in early July. However, the Russian leader revealed his growing impatience with a stinging attack on Trump's critics. While the Kremlin initially refrained from comment about the intelligence controversy, Putin finally dropped decorum and lashed out at Trump's detractors in decidedly undiplomatic language. *"I'm surprised to see them upsetting the domestic political situation in the United States under anti-Russian slogans," he said. "These people either don't understand that they are hurting their own country,*

and in that case they are just dumb. Or they do understand everything, and that means that they are dangerous and unscrupulous."

Trump has been put on the defensive for sharing classified information with the Russian foreign minister and the Russian ambassador during a White House meeting last week. The president's critics say the disclosure could compromise the source of the intelligence provided by a U.S. ally and make other nations wary about sharing sensitive information with the United States. Trump tweeted 16 OCT that as president he had an "absolute right" to share with Russia "facts pertaining to terrorism and airline flight safety," adding that he did it for "humanitarian reasons, plus I want Russia to greatly step up their fight against ISIS & terrorism." For the Kremlin, Trump's conversation with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Ambassador Sergey Kislyak was a welcome indication of his willingness to pool efforts with Russia in the fight against the Islamic State.

U.S. President Barack Obama's administration shunned such cooperation, citing the Kremlin's efforts to shore up Syrian President Bashar Assad. Trump's gesture was particularly important for Moscow given the spike in tensions following the U.S. missile strike in April on a Syrian air force base that Washington said was a staging point for a chemical attack. Moscow has insisted that the Syrian government was not involved in the chemical attack, a claim dismissed by Washington and its allies. Putin said he was pleased by the results of Lavrov's meeting with Trump, but demonstrated his irritation with what he described as anti-Russian "political schizophrenia spreading in the U.S." "We initially watched the evolving political struggle with amusement, but today it makes us feel sad and causes concern," he said. He added that "it's up to the American people to judge President Trump's actions, and obviously it can only be done when he's allowed to work at full capacity."

On a sarcastic note, Putin said he issued Lavrov a reprimand for failing to share the classified information he had received from Trump with him and the Russian intelligence agencies. "It's very bad of him," Putin said following talks with visiting Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni as Lavrov and other Russian officials present exchanged smiles and laughed. Putin went on to say that Russia was ready to provide the notes taken at Trump's meeting with Lavrov and Kislyak to Congress, if the White House approves. Top Russian lawmakers also have vented frustration and anger over the latest commotion over Trump's relationship with Russia.

Konstantin Kosachev, who leads the foreign affairs committee in the upper house of Russia's parliament, denounced what he described as a "perverted" attitude to Trump sharing classified data. "Imagine for a second that we in Russia criticize our president for warning you Americans of a looming threat," Kosachev wrote on Facebook. "Don't you feel sick of or scared with such 'American values?'" Fyodor Lukyanov, who chairs the Council for Foreign and Defense Policies, an association of top political and security experts in Russia, said Putin's comments suggest the Kremlin was increasingly losing hope for normalized ties with Washington. "No one expected that political infighting could reach such a pitch," Lukyanov said. "If Trump's meeting with Lavrov has caused such fallout, one can only wonder what his meeting with Putin would entail." [Source: The Associated Press | Vladimir Isachenkov | May 17, 2017 ++]

RP~China Dispute Update 22 ► Duterte Gets A Firm, but Friendly Warning

China and the Philippines held their first bilateral talks over the South China Sea on 19 MAY but announced little progress aside from an agreement to meet again before the end of the year. The talks came as Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said in Manila his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping had warned him on 15 MAY there would be war if Manila tried to enforce an arbitration ruling and drill for oil in a disputed part of the sea. Jose Santiago Sta. Romana, the Philippine ambassador to China, met deputy foreign minister Liu Zhenmin for about three hours at a luxury hotel in Guiyang in Guizhou province. Sta. Romana told reporters afterwards the two sides had touched on sensitive issues.

“This is the purpose of this bilateral consultation mechanism, to discuss issues that are contentious, while we pursue non-contentious issues in other fields,” the journalist-turned-ambassador said. “But we didn’t dwell, we didn’t impose on the Chinese. We just wanted to ... present the Philippine position,” he said. Both sides agreed to meet again before the end of the year in the Philippines, the ambassador said. In a statement released after the meeting, the Chinese delegation said that both sides exchanged views on the importance of addressing concerns and handling incidents and disputes in the South China Sea in an appropriate manner.

The meeting came only days after a visit by Duterte to Beijing, where the outspoken president attended a summit hosted by Xi on China’s belt and road plan. During the visit, China and the Philippines agreed to a US\$72 million grant, instead of loans, for social and economic planning. Duterte said on 19 MAY he discussed the South China Sea issue with Xi when the two met and got a firm, but friendly warning. “We intend to drill oil there, if it’s yours, well, that’s your view, but my view is, I can drill the oil, if there is some inside the bowels of the earth because it is ours,” Duterte said in a speech, recalling his conversation with Xi. “His response to me, ‘we’re friends, we don’t want to quarrel with you, we want to maintain the presence of warm relationship, but if you force the issue, we’ll go to war.’” [Source: South China Morning Post | Larua Zhou | May 19, 2017 ++]

PRK Nuclear Weapons Update 09 ► Three More Missile Tests

North Korea fired a missile on 21 MAY, a week after its successful test of a new intermediate-range ballistic missile, South Korean officials said. The missile took off from a location near Pukchang, northeast of Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, and flew 310 miles before falling in waters off the county’s east coast, the South Korean military said in a statement. The United States Pacific Command said it had “detected and tracked” a medium-range ballistic missile that was launched by the North around 9:59 p.m. Hawaii time and landed in the Sea of Japan. It said that “the missile launch from North Korea did not pose a threat to North America.”

The launch was made while President Trump, who has pressed China to rein in the nuclear ambitions of the North’s leader, Kim Jong-un, was on a nine-day trip to the Middle East and Europe. In a statement, the White House said: “We are aware that North Korea launched an MRBM. This system, last tested in February, has a shorter range than the missiles launched in North Korea’s three most recent tests.” The Japanese military said it was analyzing the height and trajectory of the missile. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that by conducting another test just a week after the last one, the North was “trampling on the international community’s efforts aimed at a peaceful settlement.”

On 22 MAY, North Korea said the missile was a Pukguksong-2, a ground-to-ground, medium- to long-range missile. The state-run Korean Central News Agency said Mr. Kim had watched the test, which it called successful, and had ordered rapid mass production of the missile system for deployment. On May 14, North Korea successfully launched what it called a new ballistic missile that can carry a large, heavy nuclear warhead. The ground-to-ground missile, known as Hwasong-12, landed in the sea between the North and Japan, prompting angry comments from Mr. Trump, as well as from the newly elected president of South Korea, Moon Jae-in, and Mr. Abe.

The missile soared to an altitude of 1,312 miles before falling in open water about 480 miles from the launching site. It was believed to have a longer range than any North Korean missile tested before. Analysts said it looked like an intermediate-range ballistic missile that could fly far enough to target key American military bases in the Pacific, including those in Guam. In its statement 22 MAY North Korea claimed that the Hwasong-12 was capable of reaching Hawaii and Alaska. The successful test drew keen attention in the region because its extended range indicated that North Korea was making progress toward building an intercontinental ballistic missile. North Korea later claimed that the launch was in part to test the “re-entry” technology, which is needed to protect a warhead from the intense heat and vibration as a long-range missile crashes through the atmosphere.

After an initial analysis of the flight data from the test on 21 MAY, the South Korean military also identified the missile as a Pukguksong-2. The North last test-launched a Pukguksong-2 on 12 FEB, while Mr. Trump was hosting Mr. Abe on an official visit. That missile flew 310 miles. North Korea has said a Pukguksong-2 could carry a nuclear payload. The missile was also fired from a mobile-launch vehicle and used a solid-fuel technology that experts say will make it easier to hide and launch on short notice. Although North Korea has vowed to develop the ability to attack the United States with nuclear warheads and has tested missiles that can reach throughout the Korean Peninsula and its vicinity, it has never tested a long-range missile that could fly across the Pacific.



At a military parade in April, North Korea displayed several missiles at a time of heightened tensions with the United States.

Missile experts say North Korea may still be years away from mastering the technologies needed to build a reliable intercontinental ballistic missile. Under a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions, the country is banned from developing or testing ballistic missiles.

On 29 MAY North Korea fired at least one short-range ballistic missile from its east coast. It landed in the sea within Japan's exclusive economic zone, according to the Japanese government. The missile, which flew about 400km, is assumed to be a Scud-class ballistic missile, according to the South Korean military. Pyongyang has a large stockpile of short-range Scud missiles developed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. South Korean military is confirming the details, with the possibility that multiple Scud-class missiles were fired. North Korea's latest missile is the fourth to fall into Japan's exclusive economic zone, with the most recent one landing on March 6.

North Korea's Missile Launch Attempts 2017

- 01 JAN - North Korea Leader Kim Jong U says his country is in final stage of preparing ICBM test launch
- 12 FEB - Fires KN-15 new medium-range ballistic missile.
- 06 MAR - Fires 4 ballistic missiles into Sea of Japan, 3 of which landed within Japan's exclusive economic zone.
- 22 MAR - Ballistic launch fails.
- 05 APR - Ballistic launch fails.
- 16 APR - Ballistic launch fails.
- 29 APR - Ballistic launch fails.
- 14 MAY - Fires KN-17, new medium-range ballistic missile.
- 21 MAY - Fires ballistic missile
- 22 MAY - Korea Central News agency reported that Kim had ordered mass-production of KN-15.

- 28 MAY - Korea Central News agency reported that North Korea had successfully test fired new anti-aircraft guided missile.
- 29 MAY - Fires ballistic missile successfully.

[Source: The New York times | Choe Sang-Hun | May 21, 2017 ++]

George Washington's Mother ► She Was A Handful

When George Washington was elected president, he did what a good boy should do: rode to Fredericksburg, Va., to tell his mom. Mary Ball Washington was 80 years old, ancient for a woman of that time, but still formidable. George's visit, according to some accounts, produced one of the great archetypal mother-son conversations.

George: Guess what? They want me to be president.

Mom: *I'm dying.*

George, flustered: Well, as soon as I get settled in New York, I'll come back and ...

Mom: *This is the last time you'll ever see me. But go, do your job. That's more important.*

George and his mother had an unusual relationship for the 1700s, more like what you might see in a sitcom from the 1970s. She was indispensable to him but intolerable. She hectored him; he performed Enlightenment-era eye rolls with quill and ink. Two hundred years ago, when the mythology of George Washington was being etched in marble, Mary Washington enjoyed a flowering of attention as the Grandmother of Our Nation. Then historians recast her as a controlling shrew. There's so much material.

- When George was 15, he was all set to go off and join the British Navy. But his mother wouldn't let him. Too dangerous.
- In the heated final months of the Revolutionary War, George got a heads-up from a buddy in Williamsburg that his mother had written to the House of Delegates asking for money. From the battlefield, grappling with the Benedict Arnold scandal, Washington dashed off an exasperated reply, begging the House not to give her anything.
- Listing all that he had done for her — bought her a house, rented her land, “answered all her calls for money” — George fumed that any of her five children would “divide the last sixpence to relieve her from real distress. This she has been repeatedly assured of by me.”
- In 1755, when young George was fighting the French alongside Gen. Edward Braddock in the wilds of Pennsylvania, things were going poorly; Braddock would be killed in the next few weeks. And George got a letter from his mother asking him to send her a servant and some butter. Addressing his response to “Honour'd Madam,” George replied that he was “sorry it is not in my power to provide you with a Dutch Servant, or the Butter ... you desire. We are quite out of that part of the Country where either are to be had, there being few or no Inhabitants where we now lie Encamp'd, & butter cannot be had here to supply the wants of the army.” Plus, he apologized for not visiting the last time he went to Williamsburg.

So, yeah, George's mom was a handful. As Washington's cousin Lawrence later remarked about her: “Of the mother, I was ten times more afraid than I ever was of my own parents.” But it's possible now to look at the fullness of Mary Washington's story and see something else. Those qualities that made her hard to deal with also served her well in a harsh era in which the odds were stacked against her. Or, more significantly, against her son — born in the Virginia colony to a distracted British businessman who already had two sons from a previous marriage.

In the world of his father, Augustine Washington, George was a middle child and nothing special. But to Mary Ball, he was her firstborn, and he was going to get what was coming to him. Augustine died when George was 11 and Mary was about 35. She could have remarried. But a new husband would have gotten title to her land. And Augustine's will had provisions giving his eldest son control over George's inheritance, if that happened. So she did

the hard thing and stayed single. She managed the property herself, saddling up and riding around to collect rent. She had been an orphan by age 13 and was used to standing alone. Raising five kids and managing a farm and a corps of enslaved workers was demanding. Mary Washington was known to jangle as she swooped about, clusters of keys dangling from her waist. She gardened and rode horses until near the end of her long life.

“I’ve seen her original will in the courthouse in Fredericksburg. While the rest of the ink has faded, her signature is very bold. You can see she had a very firm hand when she wrote ‘Mary Washington,’ ” said Michelle Hamilton, who manages the Mary Washington House historic site in Fredericksburg. Hamilton, who dresses in period-style apron and bonnet while giving tours of the house, has a master’s degree in history from San Diego State University. She got to know Mary Washington after coming to work here in 2015. “I love stories of strong women — the underdog,” she said. “I just came to love her here.” And Hamilton grew to resent historians’ harsh characterizations. That quote from Washington’s cousin Lawrence, about being afraid of her? It goes on, as Hamilton can recite: “She awed me in the midst of her kindness, for she was, indeed, truly kind.”

Mary lived down the hill from her daughter and up the street from another son. She may have pestered them for money, from time to time, but she insisted on being self-sufficient — with the help of a half-dozen slaves — until the end. After she died, the people of the town and the new nation who worshiped her son also revered the mother. She was buried near an outcropping called Meditation Rock, where Mary was said to have prayed for George every day during the Revolution. A grand monument was planned, but the pieces fell into disrepair. In the late 1800s, it was the women of Virginia who came forward to rescue Mary Washington’s legacy. They led a crusade for the preservation of her home (someone wanted to dismantle it and reassemble it at the Chicago World’s Fair) and to erect a stone monument near what’s now the University of Mary Washington.

In 1954, President Eisenhower placed a wreath at that monument in honor of Mother’s Day. Sure, she was a little kooky — the constant harping on money. The butter. But she not only gave birth to George Washington, she also nurtured and protected the icon who still stands as almost universally admired. Created him, in many ways. And she lived life, as much as she could, by her own terms. Mary was right, by the way. George never saw her again after that visit in spring of 1789. But according to the memoirs of Washington’s step-grandson, George Washington Parke Custis, she sent him off in grand fashion. “But go, George,” she said, dying of breast cancer, “fulfil the high destinies which Heaven appears to have intended for you; go, my son, and may that Heaven’s and a mother’s blessing be with you always.” [Source: The Washington Post | By Gregory S. Schneider | May 12, 2017 ++]

Father's Day ► 3rd Sunday in June

The first known celebration of Father's Day was on July 5, 1908 in Fairmont, West Virginia, where it was commemorated at William Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church South – now known as Central United Methodist Church. Grace Golden Clayton is believed to have suggested it to her pastor after a deadly explosion in nearby Monongah in December, killing 361 men. It was also during a sermon in 1909 that Sonora Smart Dodd became inspired by Mother's Day. After the death of her mother, Sonora and her siblings were raised by their father William Jackson Smart, a Civil War veteran. Sonora wanted to show how thankful she was to her father and, because William was born in June, she worked to have the first Father's Day celebrated on June 19, 1910.

There are conflicting accounts of when the first Father's Day was celebrated, but it's certain that in 1924, President Coolidge recommended that Father's Day become a national holiday. President Johnson designated the third Sunday of June to be Father's Day in 1966. It was not until 1972 that President Nixon instituted Father's Day as a national observance. Since then, honoring fathers worldwide has become a great tradition. Unfortunately, when dear old dad is deployed, military families must come up with creative ways to celebrate. MOAA asked, you answered: Here are some inspiring ideas from military spouses to celebrate fathers in spite of distance:



- Susan R. and her children had two celebrations - one on Father's Day, and one when her husband returned from deployment! Just because a father's not there, you can still spend the day celebrating and honoring his role in the family.
- Erin G., Michelle M., and Meghan L. have their children create special art projects to send to dad. Make a special photo album of shared moments between a father and his children, and send it as a reminder of how much fun you've had and what the future might hold.
- Kathleen H. traced her daughter's hands onto paper, measured the distance across her outstretched arms, and then secured a string of that length between the paper hands to send a hug to dad.
- Father's Day gifts are typically ties, beer-of-the-month club subscriptions, and money clips ... things military fathers can't exactly enjoy in a hostile environment. So Shannon S. had special dog tags made for her husband. Dog tags are the perfect gift he can keep with him wherever he goes. Shannon told us her husband says he takes them with him whenever he travels because they are so special to him.
- Ashley F. has her children create a care package for their dad on Father's Day itself, so they'll be spending the day thinking of their dad. She also tries to have her girls spend time with an uncle or grandfather, as they often provide more comfort when dad is deployed on his special day.
- Colleen L.'s son made a care package full of Legos and a couple matchbox cars so he could "play with dad" even while they were apart.
- Tiffany R. is doing a "Day in the Life" photo album to capture her son's daily activities! She also put together a "Daddy Survival Kit" for her husband's return, complete with energy drinks, snacks, and daddy-themed movies!
- If you decide on flowers note that roses are the official flower on Father's Day, red for fathers who are still living and white for those who have passed on.

Hopefully these ideas will inspire some creative ways for you to celebrate the military father in your family, especially if he's deployed. [Source: MOAA News Exchange | Jennifer Goodale | May 23, 2017 ++]

Smart Phone Update 01 ► Steps to Take if Lost

It's remarkable how much information we can cram into our cellphones. Unfortunately it's also amazing how easy it is to misplace those little devices — and how easily a lost phone can become a stolen phone, exposing all that valuable information. To recover your phone — or at least keep your information safe, you need to know how to respond — and quickly — when you can't find it.

1. Call your device

Start simple. If you can't find your phone, you may have just misplaced it or the good Samaritan who found it may be standing nearby, waiting for your call. If your device is set to silent or vibrate, don't worry — Step 3 may help you out.

2. Lock your phone remotely

Though most of us have protected our devices by setting a pass code, your phone could be temporarily unprotected and provide a thief a period of time needed to steal your sensitive financial information. That unprotected interval depends on how you set up your pass code frequency — or the period of inactivity after which a pass code is required. Therefore, it's best to immediately lock your phone remotely.

Find My iPhone and Find My Device (for Android users) features allow you to lock your device in addition to locating, ringing or erasing your phone remotely. To access these features, type "Find My iPhone" or "Find My Device" (for Android phones) into the browser of another device or computer or log directly into your Find My Device (formerly called Android Device Manager) or iCloud account. However, in order for you to remotely lock your phone (and remotely locate, ring or erase it), the lost smartphone must:

- Be turned on
- Be connected to cellular data or Wi-Fi
- Have Find My iPhone or Find My Device turned on in phone settings
- Have "Location" turned on in phone settings (Android users only)
- Be signed into a Google Account (Android users only)

3. Add a recovery message to the lock screen

It's a good idea to display a message with a contact number on your device's lock screen so whoever finds it can call you without accessing the rest of your phone's information. This can easily be done via the Find My iPhone or Find My Device feature.

4. Locate your device via GPS

See where your lost phone is by accessing the "locate phone feature" on the Find My iPhone and Find My Device option. Hopefully you'll be able to see its approximate location on a map. To see its current location, your phone needs to be turned on, but even if it's not, you should be able to see where it was last located.

5. Ring your phone

If you can't see your phone via GPS, you may be able to hear it by choosing the "Play Sound" option in the Find My iPhone and Find My Device features. It will ring your device at full volume for 2 minutes (iPhone) or 5 minutes (Android) even if it's set to silent or vibrate.

6. Report your device lost or stolen

Contact your carrier as soon as possible and report your phone as lost or stolen to minimize the risk of a thief racking up long-distance and data charges on your phone. Depending on the carrier, they may be able to disable or suspend your phone service temporarily until you've recovered your phone.

It's also a good idea to file a police report. A thief can potentially add thousands to your cellphone bill in just an hour by making international calls. Some carriers may require proof that the phone was actually stolen instead of being lost, and having a police report may make your wireless carrier more cooperative.

7. Safeguard your accounts

If you do any mobile banking, it's best to inform your financial institution immediately that you've lost your phone, and they'll most likely deactivate your account, ending any text alerts you may have set up through your mobile banking app. Even if you don't have a mobile banking app, your emails may likely contain bank statements, account information and perhaps even your Social Security number so it's a good idea to monitor your accounts. Also, changing your passwords for all banking, email and social media accounts can help keep your data safe. Apps like Facebook and Twitter let you view current sessions and log devices out of the sites remotely.

8. Erase your phone remotely

If you're pretty sure your phone's gone for good or want to err on the side of caution, the ultimate way to safeguard your phone's information is to delete all of it. Both the Find My iPhone and Find My Device features allow you erase your phone's information remotely. If you erase and then find your device, all is not lost. You can restore your phone's information using iCloud Backup or your Google account if you had backed it up before you erased it.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Christine Gallup | May 21, 2017 ++]

Garage Doors ► Making Yours Stand Out (3)



Aging Update 01 ► Cell phones, GPS, and Grocery Bags

When I bought my Smart Phone, I thought about the 10 years flying as a fighter pilot, and 30 years as an airline pilot, all without a cell phone that plays music, takes videos, pictures and communicates with Facebook and Twitter. I signed up under duress for Twitter and Facebook, so my four kids, their spouses, my eight grandkids and one great grandson could communicate with me in the modern way. I figured I could handle something as simple as Twitter with only 140 characters of space. My phone was beeping every three minutes with the details of everything except the bowel movements of the entire next generation. At age 85 I am not ready to live like this. I keep my cell phone in the garage in my golf bag.

The kids bought me a GPS for my last birthday because they say I get lost every now and then going over to the grocery store or library. I keep that in a box under my tool bench with the Bluetooth [it's red] phone I am supposed to use when I drive. I wore it once and was standing in line at Barnes and Noble talking to my wife and everyone in the nearest 50 yards was glaring at me. I had to take my hearing aid out to use it, and it got a little loud. I mean, the GPS looked pretty smart on my dash board, but the lady inside that gadget was the most annoying, rudest person I had run into in a long time. Every 10 minutes, she would sarcastically say, "Re-calc-u-lating." You would think that she could be nicer. It was like she could barely tolerate me. She would let go with a deep sigh and then tell me to make a U-turn at the next light. Then, if I made a right turn instead. Well, it was not a good relationship... When I get really lost now, I call my wife and tell her the name of the cross streets and while she is starting to develop the same tone as Siri, the GPS lady, at least she loves me.

The world is just getting too complex for me. They even mess me up every time I go to the grocery store. You would think they could settle on something themselves, but this sudden "Paper or Plastic?" Every time I check out, just knocks me for a loop. I bought some of those cloth reusable bags to avoid looking confused, but I never remember to take them with me. Now I toss it back to them. When they ask me, "Paper or plastic?" I just say, "Doesn't matter to me. I am bi-sacksual." Then it's their turn to stare at me with a blank look.

I was recently asked if I tweet. I answered, No, but I do fart a lot." We senior citizens don't need any more gadgets. The TV remote and the garage door remote are about all we can handle. [Source: VFW Post 10132 | Rich McMeekin | May 20, 2017 ++]

Have You Heard? ► Old and cranky and you ain't fixin' me! | Welfare Kids

- I don't need anger management. I need people to stop pissing me off!
- Old age is coming at a really bad time! When I was a child I thought Nap Time was a punishment now, as a grown up, it just feels like a small vacation!
- The biggest lie I tell myself is ..."I don't need to write that down, I'll remember it."
- Lord, grant me the strength to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can & the friends to post my bail when I finally snap!
- I don't have gray hair. I have "wisdom highlights". I'm very wise.
- My people skills are just fine. It's my tolerance to idiots that needs work. Teach your daughter how to shoot, because a restraining order is just a piece of paper.
- If God wanted me to touch my toes, he would've put them on my knees.
- The kids text me "plz " which is shorter than please. I text back " no " which is shorter than " yes "
- I'm going to retire and live off of my savings. Not sure what I'll do that second week.
- When did it change from "We the people" to "screw the people"?
- I've lost my mind and I'm pretty sure my kids took it!
- Even duct tape can't fix stupid ... but it can muffle the sound!
- Why do I have to press one for English when you're just going to transfer me to someone I can't understand anyway?
- Lord, Give me patience and give it to me NOW.
- Of course I talk to myself, sometimes I need expert advice.

- Oops! Did I roll my eyes out loud?
- At my age "getting lucky" means walking into a room and remembering what I came in there for.

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Welfare Kids

A woman walks into the downtown welfare office, trailed by 15 kids.

'Wow,' the social worker exclaims, 'Are they all yours?'

'Yep, they're all mine, the flustered momma sighs, having heard that question a thousand times before. She says, 'Sit down 'Terry.' All the children rush to find seats.

'Well,' says the social worker, 'Then you must be here to sign up. I'll need all your children's names.'

"Well, to keep it simple, the boys are all named Terry and the girls are all named Terri."

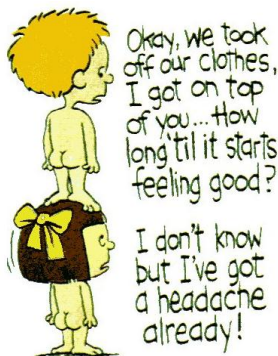
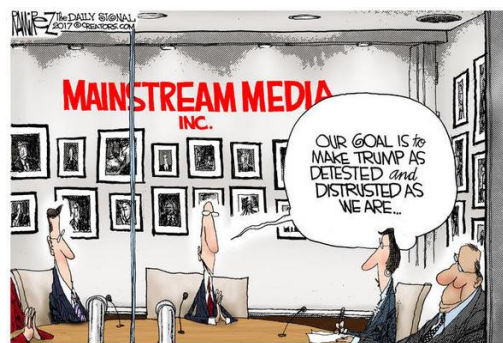
In disbelief, the case worker says, 'Are you serious? They're all named Terry?'

Their momma replied, 'Well, yes - it makes it easier. When it's time to get them out of bed and ready for school, I yell, Terry! And when it's time for dinner, I just yell Terry! And they all come a running.

If I need to stop the kid who's running into the street, I just yell Terry and all of them stop. It's the smartest idea I ever had, Naming them all Terry.'

The social worker thinks this over for a bit, then wrinkles her forehead and says tentatively, 'But what if you just want one kid to come, and not the whole bunch? '

'Then I call them by their last names.'



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