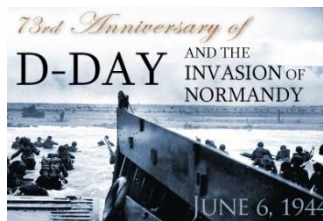


# RAO

# BULLETIN

## 15 June 2017

### PDF Edition



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

| Pg             | Article                               | Subject   |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>* DOD *</b> |                                       |   |
| 04 ==          | Transgender Troops [03] ----          | (Predecisional/Extremely Sensitive Issue)       |
| 06 ==          | Transgender Troops [04] -----         | (Implement Policy Recommendation)               |
| 06 ==          | Air Force Secretary -----             | (New Secretary's Force Assessment)              |
| 07 ==          | DoD Tuition Assistance [05] -----     | (Education Guide)                               |
| 09 ==          | Guard & Reserve Recommendations ----- | (RFPB Submits 3)                                |
| 10 ==          | Arlington National Cemetery [70] ---  | (Survey Coming this Summer)                     |
| 11 ==          | Exchange Online Shopping [10] -----   | (Verification Site Not A Scam)                  |
| 12 ==          | Commissary Click2Go Program -----     | (Online Shopping Locations)                     |
| 12 ==          | POW/MIA [88] -----                    | (1st Lt. Robert Eugene Oxford)                  |
| 14 ==          | POW/MIA Recoveries -----              | (Reported 1 thru 15 JUN 2017   Five)            |
| <b>* VA *</b>  |                                       |   |
| 16 ==          | VA Medical Marijuana [29] -----       | (VA Secretary   Could Help Vets)                |
| 17 ==          | VA EHR [08] ---                       | (VA & DoD to Use Same Electronic Health Record) |

- 19 == VA EHR [09] ----- (Conversion Cost)
- 19 == VA CARE Program ----- (Key to Veterans Choice)
- 21 == VA End of Life Care [04] ----- (No Vet Dies Alone Program)
- 22 == VA Back Pain Care ----- (Real Relief From Back Pain)
- 23 == VA Special Monthly Compensation [01] ----- (Are You eligible?)
- 26 == PTSD [229] ----- ( PTSD Treatment Decision Aid Launched)
- 26 == PTSD [230] ----- (Testimony | Some Vets Are Scamming VA)
- 28 == Homeless Vets [79] ----- (VA Drops Zero Goal)
- 29 == VA Budget 2018 [04] ----- (CVA Say's Doesn't Cut Enough)
- 30 == VA Budget 2018 [05] ----- (Vets Speak Out on Benefit Cuts)
- 31 == VA Drug Theft ----- (Problem Isn't Going Away)
- 33 == VA Hospital Care [02] ----- (A Veteran's Final Hours)
- 34 == VA Physician Ambassador Program ----- (Launched)
- 34 == Project 112/SHAD ----- (VA Compensation)
- 35 == Gulf War Presumptives [08] ----- (Fibromyalgia)
- 35 == VA Robotic Legs [03] ----- (Price Tag is Huge)
- 37 == GI Bill [230] ----- (Students Payments Progress)
- 38 == VA Claim Decision ----- (What To Do If you Disagree)
- 39 == VA Claims Processing [17] ----- (Concern Over Proposed Changes)
- 40 == VA STOPFWA ----- (Initiative To Be Launched Soon)
- 41 == VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ----- (Reported 1 thru 15 JUN 2017)
- 42 == VAMC Aurora CO [20] ----- (Perjury Charges Dropped)
- 42 == VAMC Omaha NE [02] ----- (Wait Time Creep)
- 43 == VARO Boston ----- (Disability Claim Error Rates | High)

**\* Vets \***

- 44 == Vet Complaint Hotline ----- (Launched 1 JUN 2017)
- 45 == Homeless Vets [80] ----- (Why so Many in LA)
- 47 == Vet Terrorism Conviction ----- (Tairod Pugh Gets 35 years)
- 48 == U.S. Constitution Emolument Clause -- (Military Retirees Impact)
- 49 == Stolen Valor [105] ----- (Reported 170601 thru 170615)
- 50 == Korean War Vets ----- (Barnhart~Ted | Air Sea Rescuer)
- 51 == WWII Vets 138 ----- (Richard Harmon | Invasion of Europe)
- 53 == GI Bill [231] ----- (Usage Declined in 2016)
- 55 == Obit | Samuel Wilson ----- (10 JUN 2017)
- 55 == Retiree Appreciation Days ----- (As of 15 JUN 2017)
- 56 == Vet Hiring Fairs ----- (16 JUN thru 15 JUL 2017)
- 58 == Vet State Benefits & Discounts ----- (Kentucky JUN 2017)

**\* Vet Legislation \***

- 59 == MOH Awards [06] ----- (S.1209 | Pension Increase)
- 60 == Atomic Service Medal ----- (S.1283 | Radiation Exposed Vets)
- 60 == VA Accountability [48] ----- (S.1094 | Passed and Sent to House)
- 62 == VA Facility Closures [01] ----- (H.R.2773 | Sell Pershing Hall)
- 62 == Military 2018 Pay Raise ----- (Leadership Recognition Act)

## \* MILITARY \*

- 63 == Project Recovery ----- (Locating WWII MIA Aircraft)
- 64 == Military Retirement System [27] ----- (401k Cap After 26 Yrs)
- 65 == Armor Piercing Bullet --- (M885A1 Enhanced Performance Round)
- 66 == USCG Respect ----- (Acknowledge National Security Role)
- 68 == USMC Quotes ----- (Some Famous Ones by and About Marines)
- 69 == USS Independence (CV-62) ----- (Last Port of Call)
- 70 == Supreme Court RFRA Petition [01] ----- (Appeal Rejected)
- 71 == Mothballed Fleet ----- (Not A Factor in Fleet Buildup)

## \* MILITARY HISTORY \*

- 72 == Memorial Day 1945 ----- (A Letter Home)
- 74 == HMS Gaspee Affair ----- (Declaration of Independence Role)
- 75 == USCGC McCulloch ----- (Shipwreck Found - Will Not be Moved)
- 76 == National WWII Museum [01] ----- (Salute to the Home Front)
- 77 == Abandoned Military Bases [01] ----- (Devil's Park Bunker, CA)
- 78 == Battle of Midway ----- (WWII Pacific Turning Point)
- 78 == Battle of Midway [01] ---- (LCdr C. Wade McClusky Jr Involvement)
- 80 == Brusilov Offensive WWI ----- (Largest Allied Offensive of the War)
- 81 == D-Day [07] ----- (Through the Eyes of Medics - 73 Years Later)
- 82 == D-Day [08] ----- (New Memorial Honors Native American Sacrifice)
- 83 == Military History Anniversaries ----- (16thru 30 June)
- 84 == Medal Of Honor Story ----- (Walter Joseph Marm | Vietnam)
- 84 == Medal of Honor Citations ----- (Flaherty~Francis C | WWII)

## \* HEALTH CARE \*

- 86 == Slipped Disc ----- (Back Pain That Keeps on Returning)
- 88 == TRICARE Select [01] ----- (Changes Coming Soon | 6 Months)
- 89 == TRICARE Healthy Living [01] --- (Men's Health Is Important Too)
- 90 == Poison Avoidance ----- (Lead & Household Products)
- 91 == Hemorrhage Control Foam ---- (Intracavitary Abdominal Bleeding)
- 91 == Colon Cancer [05] ----- (Screenings Save Vet Lives)
- 92 == Skin Protection ----- (Sunshine)
- 93 == Hearing Protection ----- (Noisy Activities)
- 93 == TRICARE Podcast 400 - (Mens Health Month | Weather | Food Safety)
- 95 == TRICARE Podcast 401 -- (Appointments | Blood Pressure | Sunscreen)

## \* FINANCES \*

- 96 == Dumb Insurance [02] ----- (Collision (old car), Flight & Critical Illness)
- 97 == Mutual Funds ----- (How To Invest in Them)
- 98 == Exchange Online Shopping [09] ----- (Early Registration)
- 100 == Military Divorce & Separation [06] -- (Disability Pay Not Divisible)
- 100 == Curb Appeal Enhancement ----- (House Selling)
- 103 == Homeowners Insurance [03] ----- (Tips For Getting The Best Deal)
- 105 == my Social Security [03] ----- (Access Procedure Change)
- 106 == Phone Scam ----- (Your Number Calling? Don't Pick Up)

106 == Tax Burden for New Hampshire Retired Vets ----- (As of JUN 2017)

**\* GENERAL INTEREST \***

- 108 == Sbcglobal Email Provider [01] ----- (Bulletin Blockage Action Taken)
- 108 == Notes of Interest ----- (01 thru 15 JUN 2017)
- 109 == WWII Last Man Club ----- (Annual Meeting to Toast Fellow Vets)
- 110 == U.S. Russia Tensions [02] ----- (Nuclear Weapon Use in Ukraine)
- 111 == Air Force Museum ----- (\$40,000 Granted in Lawsuit)
- 112 == PRK Nuclear Weapons [10] --- (North Korea's Warnings Continue)
- 113 == Cantaloupes [01] ----- (Tips)
- 114 == Law Breaking ----- (21 You May Not Know Your Doing)
- 116 == Steak ----- (How to Cook the Perfect One)
- 117 == Landline Phone Service [01] ----- (Going the Way of The Dinosaur)
- 118 == Garage Doors ----- (Making Yours Stand Out (4))
- 118 == Have You Heard? ----- (Wal-Mart Trips | Men Never Learn)

**]Note:**

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

**\* ATTACHMENTS \***

- Attachment - RAO Bulletin June 15, 2017
- Attachment - Kentucky Vet State Benefits & Discounts JUN 2017
- Attachment - Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 30 June

**\* DoD \***



**Transgender Troops Update 03 ► Predecisional/Extremely Sensitive Issue**

A controversial Pentagon directive that would allow transgender men and women to join the military beginning this summer now faces indefinite delay as senior leaders within each of the services voice lingering concerns about the Obama-era policy intended to end discrimination but dismissed by critics as social experimentation. This development, confirmed to Military Times by multiple sources with knowledge of these internal discussions, comes as the Defense Department faces a 1 JUL deadline to fully implement a policy that one year ago lifted the ban on transgender personnel already in uniform, and established the conditions and timeline by which new applicants could join either through enlistment or as officer candidates.

President Donald Trump does not share his predecessor's view on transgender rights, while plenty in the ranks and inside the Pentagon have questioned the practicality of expending such effort to accommodate a comparatively

small demographic (<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-lgbt-idUSKBN161243>). Those advocating for inclusiveness have suspected for many months that the administration could bring about the initiative's demise simply by declining to act upon it. It's unclear how Defense Secretary Jim Mattis eventually will rule on the matter, though in the past he has cast doubt on whether such moves ultimately advance the military's principal national security objectives. In early May, his deputy distributed a memo to the services' top leaders affording them an opportunity to raise concerns about the policy's implementation. As first reported by USA Today, the memo was carefully crafted to explain that plans would proceed “unless they cause readiness problems that could lessen our ability to fight, survive and win on the battlefield.”

A Pentagon spokesman, Army Lt. Col. Myles Caggins, would not address the prospect for delaying transgender accessions, saying only that there's been no change to existing military policy allowing transgender troops already serving to do so openly.” And,“ he added, “just like their fellow service members, [they may] receive all medically necessary care.” Spokespersons for each of the services referred questions to Caggins. The Army and the Marine Corps have been most vocal in advocating for a delay, according to one military official who, like others, spoke with Military Times on the condition of anonymity because the matter remains predecisional and extremely sensitive. No firm decisions have been reached, the official added, and senior leaders will continue to discuss the matter with Mattis's office as the deadline draws near.

Another defense official indicated that a host of practical matters, not institutional opposition, are fueling calls for a delay.” We had several questions for OSD seeking clarification on aspects of the policy that have not been addressed yet,“ said this official, referring to the Office of the Secretary of Defense.” It's not that we're unsupportive or unwilling to implement it; just that there were administrative matters to be addressed.” Funding also is a concern, this official said. The services had sought an undisclosed sum for related facilities upgrades, including, it appears, to retrofit group showers and make other unspecified accommodations within communal living spaces.” That funding,“ the official said, “did not come through.”

The Defense Department estimates as many as 7,000 transgender troops serve in the active-duty force of 1.3 million. As Mattis's predecessor, Ash Carter, sought to define accommodations for them, he encountered significant internal resistance among longtime civilian staff who believed the military's uniformed leadership did not support the change, a former Pentagon official told Military Times recently. At its most extreme, this individual said, there were calls to require transgender troops to wear bathing suits while using communal showers. Beyond those considerations, military officials are apprehensive about whether some transgender recruits or officer candidates could experience psychological side effects associated with their gender dysphoria. Last June, Carter indicated the accession policy would require individuals to have completed any necessary medical treatment and to have been “stable in their identified gender for 18 months, as certified by their doctor, before they can enter the military.”

As the Pentagon has debated the issue, officials have examined how other government agencies initiated such change. The Federal Aviation Administration, for instance, requires transgender men and women seeking a commercial pilot's licence to be transitioned and stable for at least five years. Otherwise, they can face closer scrutiny and more-intrusive medical screenings, according to the Federal Aviation Administration's website [https://www.faa.gov/about/office\\_org/headquarters\\_offices/avs/offices/aam/ame/guide/app\\_process/exam\\_tech/item\\_48/amd/gd](https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/avs/offices/aam/ame/guide/app_process/exam_tech/item_48/amd/gd).

A leading LGBT advocacy group called any delay “unacceptable.” In a statement, Ashley Broadway-Mack, president of the American Military Partner Association, said it would send a “deeply alarming signal“ from the Trump administration. “Thousands of transgender service members are openly and proudly serving our nation today,“ the statement reads, “and there is no reason not to move forward with the timeline as planned now for nearly a year. Any applicant, regardless of gender identity, who is qualified and willing to serve should be allowed to do so.” It's the latest in a series of related developments since Mattis took over at the Pentagon in January. Most recently, officials informed two transgender cadets set to graduate from the Army and Air Force military academies that they would not receive commissions and be allowed to serve on active duty.

Over the winter, the Pentagon quietly rolled back protections 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. [Source: MilitaryTimes| : Andrew deGrandpre & David Larter | June 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Transgender Troops Update 04 ► Implement Policy Recommendation**

A trio of retired generals is urging Defense Secretary James Mattis not to delay accepting transgender recruits into the military after reports that the Pentagon chief was considering such a move. “Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has stated that he will make personnel decisions based on evidence about what best promotes force readiness,” retired Army Lt. Gen. Claudia Kennedy, retired Army Major Gen. Gale Pollock and retired Army Brig. Gen. Clara Adams-Ender wrote in a statement provided to The Hill. “If he is serious about that commitment, he will maintain existing policy and make clear that there will be no return to the days of forcing capable applicants to lie in order to serve their country,” they said.

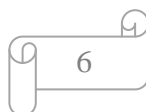
Transgender troops already in the military have been able to serve openly since then-Secretary of Defense Ash Carter lifted the ban in June 2016. But under the policy Carter crafted, transgender recruits haven't been allowed to enlist pending the end of a one-year implementation period. That day arrives 1 JUL under the timeline set under Carter, but reports emerged last week indicating that Mattis might indefinitely delay a decision. In early May, Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work sent a memo calling for the services to submit their plans for accepting transgender recruits by July 1. The memo said there's no intention of changing the policy “unless they cause readiness problems that could lessen our ability to fight, survive and win on the battlefield.” On the heels of the memo, senior leaders in the military, particularly the Army and Marines, have reportedly been voicing concerns about the policy and asking for a delay in its implementation.

In their 7 JUN statement, the retired generals likened not accepting transgender recruits to a return to “Don't Ask, Don't Tell,” the repealed ban on gay troops serving openly. “Military and political leaders insisted that lifting DADT would undermine cohesion, recruitment and retention, but none of these concerns were borne out and the change was uniformly hailed for improving readiness,” they wrote in the statement that was provided by the Palm Center, an independent think tank. “Similar fears were recycled about inclusive policy for transgender troops, but yet again, the fears turned out to be wholly unfounded.”

The officers cited a slew of studies as well as news stories with high praise from commanders for transgender troops. The group pointed to a 2014 commission of retired officers and a former surgeon general that concluded that “there is no compelling medical reason for the ban” on transgender troops in findings published in peer-reviewed journal “Armed Forces and Society.” Also, a RAND Corp. study commissioned by the Pentagon last year, as it prepared to lift the ban, said that researchers “estimate the impact on readiness to be negligible” with “no significant effect on cohesion, operational effectiveness or readiness.” In the interim the Army and Marine Corps submitted requests to Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work for delays as long as two years in implementing a policy to accept transgender applicants into their ranks, according to government officials. [Source: The Hill | Rebecca Kheel | June 7, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Air Force Secretary ► New Secretary's Force Assessment**





The U.S. Air Force needs to buy more planes, and faster, to meet worldwide demands, the service's new secretary said 5 JUM. In her first public appearance since she was sworn in on May 16, Heather Wilson sounded a lot like her predecessor Deborah Lee James. "We are too small for what the nation expects of us," Wilson said at an Air Force Association event. "It is unlikely that the need for air and space power will diminish significantly over the next decade." The former congresswoman also called for the repeal of the Budget Control Act, which caps defense spending through 2021. The Trump administration's 2018 Pentagon budget request exceeds those caps by \$52 billion. Wilson, like numerous service secretaries and defense secretaries before her, said the Air Force needs predictability. "If we don't provide relief from the Budget Control Act, we will further hollow out the force and set ourselves back years," she said.



**Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson testifies before the Senate Armed Services Committee**

After her speech to an audience largely made up of defense contractors, Wilson told reporters the Air Force must learn how to buy weapons more quickly. "We need to be able to modernize and get things from concept to the warfighter faster," she said. "We can't do everything that way. Big programs are still going to be big programs, but if we can do some innovation faster, we can turn inside the adversary." As for aircraft, there are three priorities: the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, the B-21 stealth bomber, and the KC-46 refueling tanker, Wilson said. "It's also true — and critics will also point out — that the air frames that we're buying are more capable, but we also have global responsibilities," she said. "Sometimes quantity has a quality all of its own."

The Air Force's 2018 budget plan, sent to Congress last month, includes 46 F-35s. Last week the service said it had an unfunded requirement for 14 more F-35s, which would bring annual purchases to the service's goal of 60. "I'm not sure whether we'll be able to get there," Wilson said. "I also really want to see what the new national security strategy says and then how do we array our forces to be able to meet the need." Why didn't the Air Force include 60 F-35s in its formal budget proposal? "We only have so much money and so many priorities and so much mission," Lt. Gen. Arnold Bunch, the military deputy for acquisition, said Monday morning after Wilson's press conference. "We do want to get to 60 [F-35s per year] as quickly as we can," he added. Wilson also stressed the need to restore readiness. "That means we've got to have people, pilots, maintainers and so forth," she said. [Source: Defense One | Marcus Weisgerber | June 5, 2017++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **DoD Tuition Assistance Update 05 ► Education Guide**

### **What is tuition assistance?**

Tuition assistance, informally called TA, is a federal benefit that covers the cost of tuition, up to particular limits, for active-duty service members of the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, as well as some National Guardsmen and reservists. The funds are paid directly to schools by the service branches.

### **Are there limits or specific requirements?**

Generally, TA funds can be used to pursue a higher degree than what you have already earned, up to the master's degree level. If you have a bachelor's degree, you can use it to pursue a graduate degree — not an associate or second bachelor's, though there are some exceptions. The Department of Defense caps tuition assistance at \$250 per semester hour and \$4,500 per fiscal year. The Coast Guard has an annual cap of \$4,000 per year, and the Navy and Army set limits at 16 semester hours per year. Keep in mind that some branches require you to create a degree plan or take a branch-specific course before your TA benefits are approved.

If you do not perform well in a class or need to withdraw for reasons other than personal illness or military duty, you will be required to pay back the funds used for that course. All branches set the threshold at a "C" grade for undergraduate courses and "B" for graduate school; anything lower requires reimbursement to the U.S. Treasury.

GPA matters, too. For example, in the Navy, if sailors have a GPA of 2.0 or lower, they are required to see a Navy college education counselor. In the Air Force, future TA funds will not be approved if, after 15 semester hours at the undergraduate level, an airman has a GPA lower than 2.0 or 3.0 at the graduate level after six semester hours.

### **When can I start using TA?**

- Coast Guardsmen can start using TA right after joining, provided they meet unit-specific requirements and are approved by their commanding officer.
- There is also no service-length requirement in the Air Force.
- Among other conditions, Marines must be in the service for 24 months before accessing TA funds, according to Heather Hagan, a public affairs officer with the Marine & Family Programs Division, who cautioned that the information was current as of August 2016. Navy sailors can start using TA after being at their first permanent duty station for one year unless they receive a waiver from their commanding officer to begin using TA sooner.
- The Army also has a one-year waiting period after completion of Advanced Individual Training or Basic Officer Leader Course. Army Continuing Education System Chief Pamela Raymer recommends that in the meantime, soldiers visit their local education center "to understand other education opportunities during the one-year wait and to be fully prepared to start taking college classes when they become eligible."

### **Is this benefit just for active-duty service members?**

If you are a member of the Army National Guard, either on drill status or full-time Active Guard Reserve, you are eligible for federal TA funds on a first-come, first-served basis one year after completing AIT or BOLC. Air National Guardsmen and reservists are eligible for TA once they are activated, and the use of TA often comes with a service obligation for a certain amount of time once the last course is completed. Guardsmen may also be eligible for help with tuition from their state.

### **Can I use these benefits anywhere?**

Not exactly, but there are a lot of schools to pick from. In order to accept tuition assistance funds, colleges and universities must sign a memorandum of understanding with the DoD, agreeing to comply with a set of rules related to recruiting and educating military students. To enter into the agreement, institutions must be regionally or nationally accredited, state-approved to accept the GI Bill, certified to participate in federal student aid programs and compliant with state authorization requirements. Thousands of institutions have signed the memorandum of understanding, and you can search for schools by name or see a full list online at [www.dodmou.com](http://www.dodmou.com).

"Selecting a degree and an academic institution is a serious decision," Raymer said. "Soldiers should take some time to research and assess the merits of a degree and an academic institution." The Marine Corps' Hagan notes that education service officers, or ESOs, and academic advisors are available to assist with educational choices, including Joint Service Transcript and the American Council on Education's college credit recommendations.



“ESOs provide high quality, individualized academic advisement, offer a full breadth of tuition funding sources, and determine how the Marine can advance their degree plan and academic achievement with appropriate courses and institution selections,” she said.

### **Can I use TA with the Post-9/11 GI Bill?**

If you have served for at least 90 days on active duty since September 10, 2001, then you are eligible to receive Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs. Generally, the longer you serve, the larger the benefit, and at 36 months you are eligible for the full amount. You may use the Post-9/11 GI Bill while on active duty, though experts suggest using your tuition assistance first. If you take advantage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill while you're still active, you will not receive an additional monthly housing stipend with the benefit as you would if you waited until separating from the military. Depending on the location of your school, the monthly housing allowance can be a pretty hefty sum. If you choose to use it while on active duty to supplement the cost of your education not covered by TA, you will need to apply for veterans benefits and contact your school's certifying official who will formally submit your enrollment in VA benefits.

### **How do I get started?**

Head to your nearest education service center or visit your branch's education website to get started!

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | June 12, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Guard & Reserve Recommendations ► RFPB Submits 3**

In Early JUN, DoD's Reserve Forces Policy Board (RFPB) voted to advance three key recommendations to Secretary of Defense Gen. Jim Mattis, USMC (Ret). The board, an advisory group within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, serves to provide policy recommendations to the secretary of defense.

**First:** The RFPB recommended the secretary support legislation to ensure Guard and Reserve members, when activated, receive the same benefits as their active duty counterparts. Currently, if these servicemembers are ordered to duty under Title 10, section 12304b, they do not receive eligibility for certain benefits, like the Post-9/11 GI Bill, credit towards drawing retired pay before age 60, and pre-mobilization TRICARE coverage. MOAA previously reported about the disparity in benefits between Guard and Reserve members ordered to active duty using differing authorities and how that affects the benefits they receive. Two bills introduced into Congress would correct this discrepancy and make both types of orders eligible for identical benefits: S. 667 and H.R. 1384. Citing MOAA's support, the RFPB recommended Mattis support both bills.

**Second:** The RFPB recommended Mattis support bills ensuring Guard and Reserve members placed on medical hold status continue to accrue eligibility towards Post-9/11 GI Bill as if they were still on active duty. Under current law, Guard and Reserve members injured while serving on active duty orders and subsequently transferred to medical hold status do not accrue time towards Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility while they are on medical hold, even though they were injured while on active duty. The RFPB recognized the inherent unfairness of this and recommended Mattis support S. 844 and H.R. 2099, bills that would close this loophole.

**Third:** The RFPB recommended the secretary support S. 492 and H.R. 1317, bills to change tax law to allow Guard and Reserve members to maximize contributions to their military Thrift Savings Plan and to their civilian 401(k) plans. Currently, all Americans can contribute up to \$18,000 per year towards employer-sponsored retirement plans. Under the military's new Blended Retirement System, set to launch in 2018, servicemembers will begin making automatic contributions to the federal government's Thrift Savings Plan. If Guard and Reserve members contribute to a civilian employer's 401(k) plan, they may not be able to also fully maximize the benefit of a TSP, given that they are only permitted to contribute \$18,000 per year between the two.

The new retirement system reduces retired pay 20 percent and relies more on direct contributions from servicemembers. Those changes could disproportionately affect future Guard and Reserve retirees, meaning they could be making a lot less in retired pay than current Guard and Reserve retirees. The bills introduced by Congress would change the law to allow servicemembers to contribute \$18,000 each to their 401(k) civilian plan and their TSP, for a total of \$36,000 per year. This would allow Guard and Reserve members to take full advantage of their military retirement plans, regardless of their civilian retirement plans.

-o-o-O-o-o-

Lt. Col. Aniela Szymanski, USMCR, MOAA's director of government relations for Guard and Reserve, said the RFPB's recommendations were a big boost to getting these bills passed by Congress. "MOAA and other veteran and military service organizations have consistently advocated for Congress to implement these changes. If the RFPB can convince Secretary Mattis to also support these changes to Congress, it will send a message to Congress that these changes are important to DoD, as well, and increase the chances of enactment. I applaud the RFPB for their focus on personnel and benefits for the Guard and Reserve community." Following the RFPB's recommendations, it will be up to the secretary of defense to decide whether to advance those recommendations to Congress. MOAA will continue to press Congress to support these bills to ensure the members of the Guard and Reserve receive their earned benefits. Write to your member of Congress today to support these bills: S. 667 and H.R. 1384, S. 844 and H.R. 2099, and S. 492 and H.R. 1317. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | June 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Arlington National Cemetery Update 70** ▶ **Survey Coming this Summer**



Representatives from the military community met with members of the Arlington National Cemetery Advisory Committee in an open roundtable discussion to review the final report on the future of the nation's most revered cemetery. According to the report (<http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/News/Post/4178/National-dialogue-begins-at-Arlington-National-Cemetery>) the only way to keep Arlington open for veterans well into the future is to limit eligibility. The report also lays out options for acquiring new land and looks at different ways to use the land currently available. The committee was tasked with identifying and analyzing potential options. It has yet to indicate a preferred course of action.

The meeting was the first opportunity to bring veteran service organizations, military service organizations, congressional staff, and cemetery administrators together in a public forum focused on the capacity dilemma. The conversation focused on which options from the report are most feasible, tenable, and achievable over different time spans. MOAA has held firm for many years against disenfranchising the currently eligible population, a sentiment reflected by other organizations and repeatedly mentioned at the roundtable meeting. All options for further physical expansion should be pursued before we begin turning away older veterans who planned for interment at Arlington. Many representatives of other associations expressed similar discontent with changing burial eligibility standards.

Attendees agreed a widely shared survey could help inform the committee of people's opinions on how to move forward. MOAA applauds this effort to engage individuals with even an inkling of interest in Arlington. It will provide an opportunity for all servicemembers, spouses, family members, and others to make a direct contribution to the discussion. MOAA will help prepare the survey to make sure the information collected accurately reflects

opinions on how Arlington's capacity issue ought to be handled. Survey results will be the next step in determining the best path forward, so it is important for all interested parties to participate.

MOAA carried out its own survey this past fall, and the results were quite informative. Arlington isn't going to last forever, and in their survey participants expressed a degree of acceptance and understanding that when the grounds are full, they're full. There's no singular reason people want Arlington to be their final resting place. Some want to be part of the rich history of the location, to continue a sense of military connection, or want the ceremony of interment. However, the vast majority of respondents said eligibility changes should not be considered as a first option - particularly if retirees are excluded.

Engaging the veteran and military communities on this issue is the right thing to do, and MOAA was pleased with the opportunity to speak openly and publicly about the effects of potential changes. With the report complete, it is encouraging that representatives of the veteran community are being included in discussions leading up to a formal recommendation. The survey is expected to launch this summer. In the meantime, the committee is still welcoming comments at <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/About/Contact/National-Dialogue>. [Source: MOAA Leg Up| June 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Exchange Online Shopping Update 10 ► Verification Site Not A Scam**

Exchange officials have verified 18,011 honorably discharged veterans for online shopping privileges, including nearly 15,000 in the first four days of the new verification process, officials said 9 JUN. And no, the site that handles the verification, [www.VetVerify.org](http://www.VetVerify.org), isn't a scam. A number of veterans have contacted Military Times and exchange officials with identity theft concerns, but "there is no need to worry about the security or authenticity of the site," said Chris Ward, spokesman for the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, which administers the verification process. "VetVerify.org is a shared service for all the four military exchanges with the sole purpose of supporting the newly approved veterans online shopping benefit."

The verification process began 5 JUN allowing honorably discharged veterans to get their credentials in order before the online exchanges open to veteran shoppers 11 NOV. The new benefit is for online shopping only, and doesn't extend to exchange stores on installations. The exchange provided a breakdown of the verification process as of noon 9 JUN:

- Of the 38,622 applications, 18,011 have been approved. Of those approvals, 3,200 came as part of a soft launch of the process, prior to Monday's announcement.
- Of the applicants who likely are honorably discharged veterans, about 73 percent have completed the process successfully. The site relies on veteran records that exist in the Defense Manpower Data Center database; if a veteran's records are not there or aren't complete, the veteran will receive instructions on how to upload the information.
- Nearly 14,000 applicants either weren't veterans or already were eligible to shop at exchanges.

All 3,200 veterans who were verified prior to Monday's launch received early access to the online exchanges, part of a beta testing program that will give some veterans the chance to shop prior to 11 NOV. Officials will add more beta shoppers as they continue to verify veterans for shopping privileges, Ward said. "We are allowing them to shop and provide us feedback on their online experience," Ward said. "Beta testing is critical to verify that the entire process from verification, to the ability to set up a profile, to the shopping experience, is a great one." Along with evaluating the technical support end of the veterans benefit, exchange officials will monitor shopping patterns so they'll stock the right mix of items on their online sites. At this point, among the veterans who have been shopping, officials have not seen any major differences in online shopping patterns compared with current shoppers, Ward said.

Actual online pricing can be seen only by those who are authorized to shop at the exchange websites: [www.shopmyexchange.com](http://www.shopmyexchange.com) ; [www.shopcgx.com](http://www.shopcgx.com) ; [www.mymcx.com](http://www.mymcx.com) ; and [www.mynavyexchange.com](http://www.mynavyexchange.com) . Veterans who have problems with the verification process can contact the VetVerify.org customer call center, toll-free, at 844-868-8672. [Source: Breaking Defense | Sandra Erwin | May 17, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Commissary Click2Go Program ► Online Shopping Locations**

More commissary shoppers soon will be able to order their groceries online and pick them up curbside thanks to an expansion of the Click2Go program, officials said, though new locations for the service haven't been revealed. Commissary officials expect to announce a timeline for the expansion shortly, according to Ronald Kelly, a spokesman for the Defense Commissary Agency. Click2Go was launched as a pilot program at three commissaries in the last half of 2013 — Fort Lee, Virginia; Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska; and Travis Air Force Base, California. Under the Click2Go program, customers of those commissaries choose their items online, choose a the time they want to pick up their items, then go to a designated curbside location to pay for and pick up the grocery order.

Along with expansion plans, commissary officials are considering a fee for the curbside pickup service that would be in line with civilian grocery retailers, Kelly said; the fiscal 2017 National Defense Authorization Act gave commissary officials that authority. Fees for such services offered by private-sector stores generally are low (less than \$3 in the case of one Washington, D.C.-area chain) or nonexistent: According to the Walmart Grocery website, that retailer doesn't charge a fee for the curbside pickup, or add any markups on items.

The “click and collect” concept is “rapidly moving from the experimental stage in the U.S. to an integral aspect” of many traditional brick-and-mortar retailers, according to a March report by the Grocery Manufacturers Association and the Boston Consulting Group. They noted that Walmart, Target, Kroger and Whole Foods are quickly building out these services. The curbside pickup is available at more than 400 Walmart stores in 60 markets, the report stated.

In the three commissaries that have been testing the Click2Go, an average of 2 percent of overall sales comes from curbside service, according to DeCA's Kelly — a figure he said is in line with civilian grocery retailers. Click2Go customers have an average basket of items worth about \$105, which is more than 60 percent higher than the average shopping basket of customers who shop inside the stores, Kelly said. The service is mostly used for “pantry loading” orders, with a wide spectrum of items that include perishable items, Kelly stated. Other statistics of the curbside customers using the Click2Go pilot programs:

- 65 percent have two to four family members.
- 60 percent are active-duty military, 29 percent are retirees and 9 percent are National Guardsmen or reservists.
- 53 percent are between E-4 and E-9.
- 68 percent are between the ages of 25 to 44

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | June 13, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **POW/MIA Update 88 ► 1st Lt. Robert Eugene Oxford.**

More than 70 years ago, a U.S. Army bomber plane dubbed "Hot as Hell" was headed for India on a supply mission. It never arrived, and no one went looking for the doomed aircraft or the eight men on board because military

officials had no way of pinpointing where it went down. All signs of the mission were lost until 2006, when a hiker in northeast India spotted a wing and panel sign inscribed with the bomber's name. It wasn't until 2015 that the U.S. Defense Department investigated the crash site and found the remains of 1st Lt. Robert Eugene Oxford.



The remains of the WWII veteran arrived at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport about 4 p.m. 8 JUN, said Terrell Moody of Moody-Daniel Funeral Home, which is handling burial arrangements in Oxford's tiny hometown of Concord, Georgia. Moody said the State Patrol, Patriot Guard and Pike County Sheriff's Office accompanied a hearse carrying Oxford's casket on the 50-mile (80-kilometer) journey from the airport to Concord, where the remains will be buried with full military honors alongside those of Oxford's parents this weekend. Photos of his seven fellow crewmen, none of whom was ever found, will lie beside the coffin and then be placed inside it for burial. "We were ecstatic that Eugene was found, but we feel guilty there are seven other men on that mountain top," said Merrill Roan, the wife of Oxford's nephew. "So we are honoring the other seven. ... We have to honor them as well, because they may never get any closure."

Oxford's plane departed Kuming, China, on Jan. 25, 1944, said Staff Sgt. Kristen Duus at the Defense Prisoners of War/Missing in Action Agency. Oxford was declared dead two years later. Oxford's family didn't know the wreckage had been found until 2007, when Merrill Roan saw a message on a genealogy website from a relative of another service member on the aircraft. That relative wanted help persuading military officials to investigate the crash site. Duus' agency confirmed the crash site correlated with the missing aircraft in 2008. But harmful weather coupled with access issues and security delayed recovery operation efforts until late 2015, Duus said. Officials say a DNA analysis of Oxford's remains matched his niece and nephew. Roan said the family was "shocked and excited" when they heard the news.

Duus said Oxford is one of 74 veterans who have been identified so far this year. She said all service members are returned to the U.S. for identification before their families are notified, and they are all given funerals with military honors. Eighty service members were identified in 2015, and that number more than doubled with 164 the following year, Duus said. The Missing in Action Agency website says there are more than 86,000 Americans still missing abroad from World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Advancements in DNA testing technology and partnerships with other nations have helped find and identify more missing service members than ever, Duus said.

Oxford's parents, siblings and any other relatives who saw him leave for World War II have all died since he went missing, said Moody. Still, the long-overdue homecoming of his remains won't go unnoticed. A funeral was scheduled to be held 11 JUN in a school auditorium, the biggest venue in Concord, Moody said. "It's just a huge historical event for our little town," Moody said. "The phone constantly rings from people wanting information." Oxford will be buried in the same plot with his parents, Charles and Bessie Oxford, who had placed a memorial marker for their lost son at the gravesite after his plane went missing seven decades ago. [Source: The Associated Press | Jonathan Landrum Jr. | June 8, 2017++]

\*\*\*\*\*

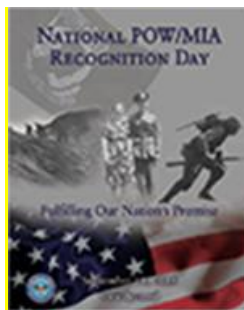
## POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 1 thru 15 JUN 2017 | Five

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

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

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

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



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

### **Vietnam**

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

-- Navy Cmdr. **Charles B. Goodwin** was an RF-8A pilot, assigned to Detachment D, VPF-63, CVW-15. On Sept. 8, 1965, Goodwin took off from the USS Coral Sea on a combat photo mission over North Vietnam. Fifteen minutes later, Goodwin radioed that he had encountered thunderstorms en route to the target area. No other transmissions were received from Goodwin and, after unsuccessful searches over the target area and adjacent coastal waters, Goodwin was declared missing in action. Interment services are pending. To read about Cdr Goodwin refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1201877/sailor-missing-from-vietnam-war-identified-goodwin>.





-- **Air Force Reserve Capt. Joseph Smith** was an F-100D pilot. During a combat mission over Cambodia, Smith's wingman noticed a stream of white vapor coming from the left wing of Smith's aircraft. Smith crashed a half-mile from the target. An aerial search was conducted the following day, but a recovery operation was ruled out due to intense enemy activity in the area. Smith was listed as missing in action as of April 4, 1971. Interment services are pending. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1201875/airman-missing-from-vietnam-war-identified-smith-j> to read more about Capt. Smith.

### **Korea**

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

-- **Army Pfc. Robert E. Mitchell**, 19, of Searcy, Ark., will be buried June 3 in Beebe, Ark. Mitchell was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. On Sept. 6, 1950, North Korean forces penetrated the Naktong Bulg portion of the Pusan Perimeter near Am-sin, South Korea, and engaged with Mitchell's unit. Mitchell could not be accounted for after the battle and was declared missing in action. To read more about Pfc. Mitchell refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1196333/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-mitchell>.



-- **Army Sgt. Edward Saunders**, 27, of Baltimore, Md., will be buried June 7 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Saunders was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. On the night of Feb. 11, 1951, Saunders' company was supporting a planned offensive with the Republic of Korea's 16th Regiment when they were attacked by Chinese forces. After heavy fighting, the unit was forced to withdraw to Hoensong, South Korea. Saunders could not be accounted for after the battle. To read about Sgt. Saunders refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1197912/soldier-missing-from-korean-war-accounted-for-saunders>.



### **World War II**

**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 World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:**

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Larry R. Roberts**, 18, of Damascus, Arkansas, will be buried June 14, in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Roberts was assigned to Special Weapons Group, 2nd Defense Battalion, Fleet Marine Force. Roberts' unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll on Nov. 20, 1943. After five days of intense battle against the Japanese, Roberts was declared killed in action on Nov. 25, 1943. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1205741/marine-killed-in-world-war-ii-accounted-for-roberts> to read about PFC. Roberts





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

\* VA \*



## VA Medical Marijuana Update 29 ► VA Secretary | Could Help Vets

Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin said medical marijuana could help veterans, a major split in tone from others in the Trump administration. “There may be some evidence that this is beginning to be helpful and we’re interested in looking at that and learning from that,” Shulkin said about medical use of the drug for veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in states with medical marijuana laws. “If there is compelling evidence that this is helpful I hope that people take a look at that and come up with the right decision,” he said during a White House press briefing, pointing out that the VA is barred by federal law from giving veterans prescriptions for pot to help deal with issues of depression, suicidal thoughts and other concerns. Congress recently changed the rules so VA doctors can now discuss medical marijuana with patients in states where it’s legal for the first time, but they still can’t prescribe the drug.

Shulkin suggested that the VA will look into studying what effects medical marijuana is having on veterans in states where it’s legal. That’s a big difference in tone from other top Trump administration officials. Attorney General Jeff Sessions is a vehement opponent to all marijuana use, saying applications for medical marijuana have been “hyped, maybe too much,” and saying he’s “dubious” about its use. Shulkin’s comments came in response to a question about a recent letter from the American Legion, a major veterans group known for its conservative lean, advocating for a reevaluation of the VA’s current rules against medical marijuana while talking up its potential to lower veteran suicide rates.

The VA boss said the agency is “still in critical condition” despite efforts that predate his tenure to reduce wait times for medical appointments and expand opportunities to seek care in the private sector. “There is a lot of work to do,” Shulkin said in his “State of the VA” report. He said veterans can get “same-day” services at medical centers but are still waiting too long — more than 60 days — for new appointments at about 30 locations nationwide. Many primary care centers are understaffed or running out of space. Appeals of disability claims remain backed up with years of wait. Inventory systems at several VA facilities are woefully out of date, and employee accountability is “clearly broken.” “Our veterans and their families have benefited from our early success, but have suffered due to the failures of the past to effect real change,” Shulkin said.

His biggest proposals for revamping the VA — and fulfilling President Trump’s campaign promises — will need to be acted on soon if measures are to be passed by this fall. The wish list includes an accountability bill to make it easier to fire VA employees, expanding the Veterans Choice program of private-sector care and stemming veterans’ suicide. About 20 veterans take their lives each day.”That should be unacceptable to all of us,” Shulkin said. [Source: New York Daily News | Cameron Joseph | May 31, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA EHR Update 08 ► VA & DoD to Use Same Electronic Health Record**

On 5 JUN U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David J. Shulkin announced his decision on the next-generation Electronic Health Record (EHR) system for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) at a news briefing at VA headquarters in Washington. Secretary Shulkin’s full statement is below.

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

I am here today to announce my decision on the future of the VA's Electronic Health Record system, otherwise known as EHR. I wanted to say at the outset that from the day he selected me for this position, the President made clear that we're going to do things differently for our Veterans, to include in the area of EHR. I had said previously that I would be making a decision on our EHR by July 1st, and I am honoring that commitment today. The health and safety of our Veterans is one of our highest national priorities. Having a Veteran's complete and accurate health record in a single common EHR system is critical to that care, and to improving patient safety.

Let me say at the outset that I am extremely proud of VA's longstanding history in IT innovation and in leading the country in advancing the use of EHRs.

- It was a group of courageous VA clinicians that began this groundbreaking work in the basements of VA's in the 1970's that led to the system that we have today, known as the Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture, or VistA.
- It has been this system that led to the incredible achievements made by VA clinicians and researchers and resulted in VA's ability to perform as well or better than the private sector in patient safety and quality of care.

That said, our current VistA system is in need of major modernization to keep pace with the improvements in health information technology and cybersecurity, and software development is not a core competency of VA. I said recently to Congress that I was committed to getting VA out of the software business, that I didn't see remaining in that business as benefitting Veterans. And, because of that, we're making a decision to move towards a commercial off-the-shelf product. I have not come to this decision on EHR lightly.

- I have reviewed numerous studies, reports and commissions, on this topic, including the recent commission on care report.
- I've spent time talking with clinicians, and I use our legacy VistA system myself as a current practicing VA physician.
- We have consulted with Chief Information Officers from around the country, and I've met personally with CEO's from leading health systems to get their own thoughts on the best next-generation EHR for VA.
- We've studied reports from management consulting companies and from the GAO and the IG on VA's IT systems.
- I can count no fewer than 7 Blue Ribbon Commissions, and a large number of congressional hearings that have called for VA to modernize its approach to IT.

At VA, we know where almost all of our Veteran patients is going to come from — from the DoD, and for this reason, Congress has been urging the VA and DoD for at least 17 years — from all the way back in 2000 — to work more closely on EHR issues. To date, VA and DoD have not adopted the same EHR system. Instead, VA and DoD

have worked together for many years to advance EHR interoperability between their many separate applications — at the cost of several hundred millions of dollars — in an attempt to create a consistent and accurate view of individual medical record information.

While we have established interoperability between VA and DoD for key aspects of the health record, seamless care is fundamentally constrained by ever-changing information sharing standards, separate chains of command, complex governance, separate implementation schedules that must be coordinated to accommodate those changes from separate program offices that have separate funding appropriations, and a host of related complexities requiring constant lifecycle maintenance. And the bottom line is we still don't have the ability to trade information seamlessly for our Veteran patients and seamlessly execute a share plan of care with smooth handoffs. Without improved and consistently implemented national interoperability standards, VA and DoD will continue to face significant challenges if the Departments remain on two different systems.

For these reasons, I have decided that VA will adopt the same EHR system as DoD, now known as MHS GENESIS, which at its core consists of Cerner Millennium. VA's adoption of the same EHR system as DoD will ultimately result in all patient data residing in one common system and enable seamless care between the Departments without the manual and electronic exchange and reconciliation of data between two separate systems. It's time to move forward, and as Secretary I was not willing to put this decision off any longer. When DoD went through this acquisition process in 2014 it took far too long. The entire EHR acquisition process, starting from requirements generation until contract award, took approximately 26 months. We simply can't afford to wait that long when it comes to the health of our Veterans. Because of the urgency and the critical nature of this decision, I have decided that there is a public interest exception to the requirement for full and open competition in this technology acquisition.

Accordingly, under my authority as Secretary of Veterans Affairs, I have signed what is known as a "Determination and Findings," or D&F, that is a special form of written approval by an authorized official that is required by statute or regulation as a prerequisite to taking certain contract actions. The D&F notes that there is a public interest exception to the requirement for full and open competition, and determines that the VA may issue a solicitation directly to Cerner Corporation for the acquisition of the EHR system currently being deployed by DoD, for deployment and transition across the VA enterprise in a manner that meets VA needs, and which will enable seamless healthcare to Veterans and qualified beneficiaries. Additionally we have looked at the need for VA to adopt significant cybersecurity enhancements, and we intend to leverage the architecture, tools and processes that have already been put in place to protect DoD data, to include both physical and virtual separation from commercial clients.

This D&F action is only done in particular circumstances when the public interest demands it, and that's clearly the case here. Once again, for the reasons of the health and protection of our Veterans, I have decided that we can't wait years, as DoD did in its EHR acquisition process, to get our next generation EHR in place. Let me say what lies ahead, as this is just the beginning of the process.

- VA has unique needs and many of those are different from the DoD.
- For this reason, VA will not simply be adopting the identical EHR that DoD uses, but we intend to be on a similar Cerner platform.
- VA clinicians will be very involved in how this process moves forward and in the implementation of the system.
- In many ways VA is well ahead of DoD in clinical IT innovations and we will not discard our past work. And our work will help DoD in turn.
- Furthermore VA must obtain interoperability with DoD but also with our academic affiliates and community partners, many of whom are on different IT platforms.

- Therefore we are embarking on creating something that has not been done before — that is an integrated product that, while utilizing the DoD platform, will require a meaningful integration with other vendors to create a system that serves Veterans in the best possible way.
- This is going to take the cooperation and involvement of many companies and thought leaders, and can serve as a model for the federal government and all of healthcare.

Once again, I want to thank the President for his incredible commitment to helping our Veterans and his support for our team here at the VA as we undertake this important work. This is an exciting new phase for VA, DOD, and for the country. Our mission is too important not to get this right and we will.

[Source: VA News Release | June 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA EHR Update 09 ► Conversion Cost**

VA will adopt the same EHR system as DoD, now known as MHS GENESIS, which at its core consists of Cerner Millennium. VA secretary Shulkin noted The dollar value of the solicitation is not yet clear, however. the lack of competition will allow VA to quickly “get to details on how much money will be required, what the length of the process is and how we involve other companies and thought leaders to make sure we do it right.” Shulkin said VA, which has approximately 9 million beneficiaries, put off the decision on whether to modernize its existing VistA system for too long—a statement he made shortly after being confirmed. He added veterans could not afford to wait another two years for a procurement.

In his announcement, Shulkin stipulated VA “will not simply be adopting the identical EHR that DOD uses,” but will be on a “similar Cerner platform.” In other words, VA’s solution will be an integrated product that uses the same platform DOD is building. DOD’s health records systems have begun rolling out at some of its more than 1,200 sites and could be worth as much as \$9 billion over 18 years. “This is pretty amazing,” said Brian Friel, founder of Nation Analytics. “VA and DOD have been trying to figure out ways to work together for more than a decade. In one fell swoop, they are now not only going to be working together but be on the same system.”

Lawmakers have been critical of DOD and VA, both of which have wasted billions over the years trying to make their individual health records systems interoperable. DOD commissioned IT contractor Leidos to integrate the commercial health records platform developed by Cerner, helping assist in the move from its Armed Forces Health Longitudinal Technology Application, better known as AHLTA, to MHS Genesis. VA’s sole-source award to Cerner likely means the agency will either hold a competition for integrators or issue a direct award to a contractor from its next-generation technology contract.

VA has spent nearly \$1.5 billion on IT services from Leidos since 2011 in that vehicle, which includes Booz Allen Hamilton, CACI and nearly two dozen other IT contractors. Rep. Phil Roe, chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said he was “encouraged” by the decision and promised to “closely monitor” the process going forward. “Despite spending more than a billion dollars in hopes of achieving interoperability, VA’s antiquated IT systems have stood between veterans and the care they deserve for far too long,” Roe said. [Source: NextGov | Frank Konkel & Eric Katz | June 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA CARE Program ► Key to Veterans Choice**

Just a little beyond his first 100 days in office, VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin presented more details on his plan to overhaul the current Veterans Choice Program and improve health care delivery in testimony 7 JUN before the

Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs. While the VA has yet to officially submit its plan to modernize and consolidate community care programs, MOAA has been able to obtain some details in addition to what we learned during the hearing. The new proposal would consolidate all purchased care programs into a single community care program called **Veterans Coordinated Access and Rewarding** Experiences (CARE).

The current Choice program has been cumbersome and difficult to navigate and understand since its inception. In some locations, the program has actually made it more difficult for veterans to access care because of administrative hurdles, contracting rules, and inconsistencies in implementing policies, with prime examples being the arbitrary eligibility standards of 30-day wait time and 40-mile distance criteria established under Choice in order to access care in the community. According to the secretary, the Veterans CARE proposal would “clarify and simplify eligibility requirements, build high performing networks, streamline clinical and administrative processes, and implement new care coordination support for veterans.”

So what will this new proposal mean to veterans? The secretary told lawmakers, “We believe that a redesigned community care program will not only improve access and provider greater convenience for veterans, but will also transform how VA delivers care within our facilities.” “We first need to move from a system where eligibility for community care is based on wait times and geography to one focused on clinical need and quality care. ... This gives veterans real choice in getting the care they need and ensures it is of the highest quality.” The fix for community care is moving to a program based on clinical criteria where the provider or health care team and veteran mutually determine the best care options, whether within the VA or in the community. The process is expected to empower veterans to work more closely and collaboratively with providers. A simple clinical appeals process would be available when a veteran does not agree with a provider's clinical referral recommendation.

The decision to use VA or community care will depend on who can provide the best clinical care based on availability of services, access to services, and the feasibility of the veteran getting those services. For instance, if the VA does not offer a service or specialized care, or VA is unable to provide care within the clinically appropriate time, or the quality of care at the VA does not meet performance standards, then community care would be an option for a veteran. Veterans also would have access to community walk-in clinics in the network to treat minor illnesses or injuries, with no referral required. Additionally, veterans would have a single contact for care coordination and new tools to easily schedule appoints with VA and community providers.

While committee members praised Shulkin for his fortitude and decisive leadership in fixing Choice, addressing system accountability, and announcing his plan to join with DoD in adopting the Cerner electronic health record (EHR) platform, some lawmakers voiced concerns and skepticism over these system changes. Ranking Member Jon Tester (D-MO) and Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) worried the community care and associated pilot program proposals would eventually hollow out the VA health system and lead the department down the path of privatization. Shulkin assured the committee CARE would make the health system sustainable and stronger in the long run by giving veterans more choice, and reiterated throughout the hearing he had no intention to privatize the VA. “But when you have 33 percent of your health care budget going to fund community care, yet only increasing VA direct care spending by 1.2 percent, then you are moving toward privatization, driving veterans to follow the money into the community,” Tester stated.

Lawmakers also questioned the secretary on his plans to fill the 45,000 existing vacancies and the administration's budget proposal to cut Individual Unemployability (IU) benefits for veterans at age 62 when becoming eligible for Social Security benefits. Shulkin also was asked how he planned to finally achieve full interoperability when the VA and DoD have been unable to do so over at least the last 17 years. Shulkin told members he expects to address the vacancy gap within the next year. While sensitive to the issue of cutting IU benefits, VA benefits have increased by \$12 billion in just the last two years, and he insisted a current review is warranted. In terms of the EHR, Shulkin tried to allay concerns by saying, “The president is fully committed to creating a single system, but I don't think it is fair to Congress or the president until VA provides a plan we can stand behind.” Shulkin is expected to come up with a plan in the next three to six months.

While there was universal support and commitment to fixing Choice permanently with the end goal of ensuring veterans get the highest quality of care they need, there remains much uncertainty around the actual details of the CARE and EHR plans and how to pay for these reforms. Like many veteran service organizations, MOAA supports much of Shulkin's community care plan but opposes cutting IU benefits to pay for veterans health care or making veterans with service-connected conditions pay for health care they earned. In closing, Committee Chair Johnny Isakson (R-GA) urged lawmakers and veteran organizations to not let pilot programs or other issues be the stopping point to finding a solution. "No problem is too big when people who want to solve them come together." [Source: MOAA Leg Up | June 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA End of Life Care Update 04 ► No Vet Dies Alone Program**

A VA-wide team of hospice and palliative care employees has developed new resources, including a comprehensive tool kit, orientation guide, and other educational materials, for hospice volunteers who contribute their time to the "No Veteran Dies Alone" program. These resources are designed to train and support volunteers who provide presence, companionship and reassurance at the bedside when family and friends are unable to be with a Veteran at end of life. In addition, this provides a set of national standards for volunteers to continuously raise our level of practice across the country.

"In our focus group with volunteers, we heard the passion and presence and willingness of people from Minneapolis to California, from New York to Martinsburg West Virginia," says Sheryl Terkildsen, RN, MSN, VA Loma Linda Healthcare System, who led the initiative. "We want to support these volunteers who provide comfort to the Veterans and their families." Terkildsen headed a task force of VA employees who defined and developed the toolkit and educational program. Working together via conference calls and email since December 2010, the group began by collecting information for the toolkit and purchasing the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) Hospice Volunteer Program Resource Manual as a framework to adapt for the VA health care environment. The manual addresses key issues including volunteer recruitment and retention, training and evaluation, and program development.

Terkildsen, a fourth generation Veteran whose husband is a hospice volunteer, credits the leadership of Dr. Scott Shreve and the enthusiasm, expertise and work of the members of the task force. "We have been supported by leadership at the medical centers and in voluntary services departments. We may not have the same resources as the private sector, but we have a passionate commitment that no Veterans will take their last breath without someone with them at that moment. We have volunteers in their 20s, and in their 70s and 80s. Their hearts are in this work." Over 140,000 volunteers gave more than 11 million hours in service to America's Veterans. It is impossible to calculate the amount of caring and sharing that these VAVS volunteers provide to Veteran patients. VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) volunteers are a priceless asset to the Nation's Veterans and to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Following are four volunteer opportunities that are available at varying VA facilities throughout the nation. If one or more of the opportunities peaks your interest, go to the Veterans Administration Volunteer or Donate page at <https://www.volunteer.va.gov/apps/VolunteerNow> to complete an introductory application and specify in the comments field your preference. When you click SUBMIT an email will be generated to the VA Voluntary Service Program Manager in your area. Once the email is received, someone from your local VA will contact you, either by phone or email (your choice) to provide you with further information and to possibly set up an appointment for an interview. If you prefer to volunteer in person contact your local VA Medical Center's Voluntary Service Office (click here for VA directory). Tell them of your interest in volunteering. An appointment will be scheduled for you to come in to tour the facility and learn more about the many ways to serve America 's heroes.

- **VA Homeless Veterans Program** -- VA offers a wide array of special programs and initiatives specifically designed to help homeless veterans live as self-sufficiently and independently as possible. In



fact, VA is the only Federal agency that provides substantial hands-on assistance directly to homeless persons. Although limited to veterans and their dependents, VA's major homeless-specific programs constitute the largest integrated network of homeless treatment and assistance services in the country.

- **VA National Cemetery Administration** -- The National Cemetery Administration honors veterans with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate their service to our nation.
- **VA Volunteer Transportation Network** -- VTN was established to provide needed transportation for veterans seeking services from a VA facility and/or authorized facility. VTN guidelines permit volunteer participation in providing transportation to veterans using a volunteer's privately-owned conveyance or a government-owned vehicle, including donated vehicles, county vehicles, DAV Department (State) or Chapter (local) vehicles, public transportation and contracted transportation.
- **VA Welcome Home Celebrations** -- VA sponsors Welcome Home events around the country for returning military service members and their families. The events provide important information and guidance on accessing health care and other benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs. Use the schedule below or contact your local VA Voluntary Service office for more information.

[Source: <https://www.volunteer.va.gov/faqs.asp> | June 7, 2017

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Back Pain Care ► Real Relief From Back Pain**

There's a revolution in the treatment of back pain now that research shows that physical therapy, spinal manipulation, and yoga can help as much as surgery or drugs—with far fewer risks. That advice is backed up by a new nationally representative Consumer Reports survey of 3,562 back-pain sufferers. It found that more than 80 percent of those who had tried yoga or tai chi or had seen a massage therapist or chiropractor said it had helped them. Altogether, a higher percentage of people in our survey who saw a yoga or tai chi instructor, massage therapist, chiropractor, or physical therapist said the advice or treatment was helpful, compared with those who said they saw a doctor.



“Tai chi helps with back pain in several ways,” says Benjamin Kligler, M.D., national director of the Integrative Health Coordinating Center at the Veteran’s Health Administration. “It strengthens the muscles in your abdomen and pelvic area that are crucial to supporting the lower back; it improves your balance and flexibility; and it makes you more aware of your posture when you sit, stand, and walk.”



One of these individuals is US Army Veteran Thomas Sells. Note that a typical week for Thomas Sells includes acupuncture, tai chi, yoga, and a couple of hours with a massage therapist and sometimes a chiropractor. You might think that the retired bank vice president and business manager in Southern California is simply enjoying a pampered spa lifestyle. But Sells gets most of those services through the Department of Veterans Affairs— all for his aching back. Those VA programs are more necessity than luxury, says Sells, who first injured his back carrying heavy packs as a combat soldier in the Vietnam War. “None of these therapies were available to me back then,” he explains. “Had I known then what I know now, I could have avoided decades of debilitating pain.” It used to be that those treatments were considered fringe, but no more. Growing research shows that a combination of hands on therapies and other nondrug measures can be just as effective as more traditional forms of back care, including drugs and surgery. And they’re much safer.

Back pain strikes most of us at some point. It’s one of the main reasons people go to a doctor, accounting for more than 24 million visits each year in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. More than one of four in our survey said that an episode of back pain “severely” interfered with their daily life. But there’s good news. “Even though back pain can be severe at first, it almost always gets better,” says Benjamin Kligler, M.D., national director of the Integrative Health Coordinating Center for the Veterans Health Administration. But “what has been considered ‘conventional’ care, including prescribing opioid pain medication, can short-circuit healing,” he says.

These drugs include opioids such as hydrocodone and oxycodone. As a young combat soldier, Sells says he turned to alcohol and illegal drugs to numb his back pain. “That took me down a dangerous road,” he recalls. “I became addicted.” With help from recovery programs, he says he has been clean and sober for 30 years. But even with his attempts to self-medicate, his low-back pain continued to worsen over time. “It became so bad I could barely walk,” Sells says. “I consulted with surgeons but I worried about the risks, and given my history, I didn’t want to take opioids.” Instead, he looked for something safer, and came across a class at the VA in tai chi, which combines slow, gentle movements with deep breathing and meditation. Soon he noticed improvements, gradually adding more exercise and hands-on therapies, which he says manage his pain while keeping his “mind, body, and spirit strong.” And he’s become so good at tai chi that he now studies with a grand master. “It’s given me back my life,” Sells says.

Success stories like this, combined with new research, convinced the agency to make nondrug therapies a foundation of its pain treatment strategy. As a result, the VA has cut overall opioid use by 25 percent since 2012, according to a March 2017 analysis published in JAMA Internal Medicine. Thomas Sells says that a combination of approaches has worked for him. “I feel better now than I did as a much younger man,” he notes. “Mentally, physically, and spiritually, I’m in the best place in my life.” Watch the 4-minute video and hear directly from Thomas Sells about his experience at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5zsoMXMuR8>. [Source: [https://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/features/Real\\_Relief\\_From\\_Back\\_Pain.asp](https://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/features/Real_Relief_From_Back_Pain.asp) | June 6, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Special Monthly Compensation Update 01 ► Are You eligible?**

Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) is an additional tax-free benefit that can be paid to Veterans, their spouses, surviving spouses and parents. For Veterans, Special Monthly Compensation is a higher rate of compensation paid due to special circumstances such as the need of aid and attendance by another person or a specific disability, such as loss of use of one hand or leg. For spouses and surviving spouses, this benefit is commonly referred to as aid and attendance and is paid based on the need of aid and attendance by another person. Learn about special monthly compensation benefit rates

The majority of service-connected disabilities are defined by a percentage ranging from 0 to 100 percent to reflect the severity of the condition(s) and the disabling effects they have on the veteran. These percentages are

explicitly defined by Federal Regulations under the Schedule for Rating Disabilities and are assigned a monetary compensation award based on the vocational limitations that these injuries or disorders cause and subsequently the effect they may have on monetary earnings.

Some injuries and disorders are more severe in nature and result in several additional debilitating residual conditions that can have additional adverse affects on an individual's socioeconomic state. To better assist with meeting the specialized needs of these individuals, additional benefits are available under Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) ratings provided under Title 38 of U.S.C. 1114. These ratings are in addition to the numerical ratings established under the standard rating schedule and are identified by letters such as SMC (k), SMC (l), SMC (m), SMC (n), SMC (o), SMC(p), SMC (r), SMC (s), and SMC (t). These rates are simply named after the subsections of the Code of Federal Regulations that outline the required eligibility requirements for each level of SMC.

SMC provides additional monetary compensation awards and where applicable can establish entitlement to additional ancillary benefits such as the VA's Specially Adapted Housing Grant and the Automobile and Adaptive Equipment Grants. The basic elements of Special Monthly Compensation Ratings include anatomical (or physical) loss or the loss of use of limbs, hands, feet and/or reproductive organs; aphonia; deafness; blindness; loss of bowel and bladder control; being permanently housebound; and a need for regular aid and attendance with activities of daily living or a higher level of care—all of which must be a result of the veteran's service-connected disabilities. Each level of SMC ratings are successive and are preceded by an entitlement to certain conditions included under SMC level (k).

**A rating of SMC(k) would include:**

- The anatomical loss or loss of use of:
  - i) one hand.
  - ii) one foot.
  - iii) both buttocks (where the applicable bilateral muscle group prevents the individual from maintaining unaided upright posture, rising and stooping actions).
  - iv) one or more creative organs used for reproduction (absence of testicles, ovaries or other creative organ, ¼ loss of tissue of a single breast or both breasts in combination) due to trauma while in service, or as a residual of a service-connected disability(ies). \*(these do not serve as eligible prerequisite conditions for the higher levels of SMC)\*
  - v) One eye (loss of use to include specific levels of blindness).
- Complete organic aphonia (constant loss of voice due to disease).
- Deafness of both ears to include absence of air and bone conduction.

**A rating of SMC(l) would include:**

- The anatomical loss or loss of use of:
  - i) Both feet
  - ii) One hand and one foot
- Blindness in both eyes with visual acuity of 5/200 or less.
- Permanently bedridden.
- Regular need for aid and attendance to assist with activities of daily living such as dressing oneself, tending to personal hygiene, care and adjustment of assistive appliances or prosthetics, feeding oneself, and the like. (specific criteria is established in 38 CFR § 3.352(a) ) (\*if such services are not being provided at the expense of the U.S. Government due to hospitalization).

Ratings above the SMC(l) level to include SMC (m), SMC (n), SMC (o), SMC (p), SMC(r) and SMC (s) are specialized multifaceted levels which are based on various specific combinations of anatomical loss or loss of use of designated extremities and/or senses, together with seriously disabling conditions and particular degrees of aid and attendance requirements, housebound or bedridden statuses deemed medically necessary, and explicit service-connection ratings. These levels also outline various requirements to include full and half step upgraded SMC level ratings. The conditions providing the basis of these levels are as follows.

**A rating of SMC(m) would include:**

- The anatomical loss or loss of use of:
  - i) Both hands.
  - ii) Both legs at the region of the knee
  - iii) One arm at the region of the elbow with one leg at the region of the knee
- Blindness in both eyes having only light perception.
- Blindness in both eyes resulting in the need for regular aid and attendance.

**A rating of SMC(n) would include:**

- The anatomical loss or loss of use of both arms at the region of the elbow.
- The anatomical loss of both legs so near the hip that it prevents the use of a prosthetic appliance.
- The anatomical loss of one arm so near the shoulder that it prevents the use of a prosthetic appliance along with the anatomical loss of one leg so near the hip that it prevents the use of a prosthetic appliance.
- The anatomical loss of both eyes or blindness in both eyes to include loss of light perception.

**A rating of SMC(o) would include:**

- The anatomical loss of both arms so near the shoulder that it prevents the use of a prosthetic appliance.
- Bilateral deafness rated at least 60 percent disabling along with service-connected blindness with visual acuity of 20/200 or less of both eyes.
- Complete deafness in one ear or bilateral deafness rated at least 40 percent disabling along with service-connected blindness in both eyes to include loss of light perception.
- Paraplegia – paralysis of both lower extremities along with bowel and bladder incontinence.
- Helplessness due to a combination of anatomical loss or loss of use or two extremities with deafness and blindness or a combination of multiple injuries causing severe and total disability.

**A rating of SMC(p) would include:**

- The anatomical loss or loss of use of a leg at or below the knee along with the anatomical loss or loss of use of the other leg at a level above the knee.
- The anatomical loss or loss of use of a leg below the knee along with the anatomical loss or loss of use of an arm above the elbow.
- The anatomical loss or loss of use of one leg above the knee and the anatomical loss or loss of use of a hand.
- Blindness in both eyes meeting the requirements outlined in SMC (l), (m) or (n) levels.

Ratings under SMC(r) are assigned for seriously disabled veterans in need of advanced levels of aid and attendance. SMC(r) ratings require a minimal combination of entitlement to both SMC(o) and SMC(l). Additionally, Veterans in receipt of SMC rates based on Aid and Attendance are strongly advised to contact their service representative and/or VA Regional Office should they become hospitalized at the expense of the U.S. Government (i.e. a VA medical facility) as failure to do so could create an overpayment of monetary benefits.

Ratings under SMC(s) are also available if the veteran is permanently housebound. The VA defines “permanently housebound“ as being substantially (as opposed to completely) confined to a dwelling as the result of service-connected disability and it is reasonably certain that that such disability will continue throughout the veteran’s lifetime. These kinds of determinations should be made by a physician, whose written opinions or reports in this respect would serve as the best evidence to submit in support of a claim for “s“ SMC benefits.

Ratings under SMC(t) are available to veterans who need regular aid A&A for residuals of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), but is not eligible for a higher level of A&A under (R)(2), and would require hospitalization, nursing home care, or other residential institutional care in absence of regular in-home aid and attendance. To determine what the 2017 SMC rates of compensation are for you based on your dependent status refer to [http://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/resources\\_comp02.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/resources_comp02.asp) . As Special Monthly Compensation ratings are very complex, this outline is simply to serve as an informational reference. It is important that you consult your service representative or local VA Office for assistance with determining eligibility and filing or maintaining claims for such ratings. [Source: <http://www.vetsfirst.org/special-monthly-compensation-ratings-are-you-eligible> | Melanie Cercone | May 28, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **PTSD Update 229 ► PTSD Treatment Decision Aid Launched**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched a new online tool in early June that will help Veterans compare various treatment options for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The PTSD Treatment Decision Aid at <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/Decisionaid> is a free, interactive online tool that helps educate patients about effective treatment options for PTSD and encourages them to participate actively in decisions about their care.”The health and well-being of the courageous men and women who have served their country in uniform is the VA’s highest priority,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin.”The PTSD Treatment Decision Aid is an important step in putting Veterans in control of their health care. By helping to bridge understanding and communication between Veterans and providers about the most effective treatment options available, we are ensuring Veterans receive the treatments that best promote their healing and recovery.”

The tool includes information about evidence-based PTSD treatments, such as talk therapy and prescription medication options. It also includes useful information designed for people who have served in the military. Users can watch videos of providers explaining different treatment options and what to expect with those treatments, and hear from Veterans who have benefited from them. Veterans can also build a chart to compare the treatments they prefer and print a personalized summary to share with their providers. All personal information is erased once the tool is closed to protect users’ privacy.

According to VA findings, approximately eight of every 100 people will experience PTSD at some point in their lifetimes, and almost 620,000 of the Veterans treated by VA have a diagnosis of PTSD.”We know from research and our own clinical experience that Veterans can recover and improve their quality of life with the right PTSD treatment plan,” said Dr. Poonam Alaigh, VA’s Acting Under Secretary for Health.”We want our Veterans and those who care for them to have access to effective treatment options. Knowing about the latest research can help them get the best care possible.” To learn more about PTSD visit the National Center for PTSD website at <https://www.ptsd.va.gov>. Health-care providers who have questions about the PTSD Treatment Decision Aid or other free resources can email the PTSD Consultation Program at [PTSDconsult@va.gov](mailto:PTSDconsult@va.gov) or call 866-948-7880.[Source: VA News Release | June 2, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **PTSD Update 230 ► Testimony | Some Vets Are Scamming VA**

The House Veterans Affairs Committee heard testimony 7 JUN that was both encouraging and disturbing about PTSD programs and allegations that some vets are faking symptoms to get a disability check. The Department of Veterans Affairs has greatly expanded its treatment programs for mental health problems overall, and for post-traumatic stress disorder in particular, said Dr. Harold Kudler, acting assistant deputy under secretary for Patient Care Services at the VA. In fiscal 2016, the VA provided mental health treatment to 1.6 million veterans, up from 900,000 in 2006, Kudler said. Of the overall figure, 583,000 "received state-of-the-art treatment for PTSD," including 178,000 who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, he added.

Kudler said the number of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation New Dawn veterans receiving VA treatment for PTSD has doubled since 2010, while VA services for them have increased by 50 percent. In addition, the VA is increasingly open to alternative treatments for PTSD, including the use of hyperbaric chambers and yoga, but an Army veteran who went through VA treatment for PTSD said the expansion and outreach leave the program open to scams by veterans looking to get a disability check.

Brendan O'Byrne, a sergeant with the 173rd Airborne Brigade who served a 15-month tour in the remote Korengal valley of eastern Afghanistan, told the committee he was overwhelmed by "crippling anxiety, blinding anger" compounded by drinking when he left the service in 2008. After four years, he was given a 70-percent

disability rating for PTSD and was immediately advised by administrators and other veterans to push for 100 percent to boost his check, O'Byrne said. "Now, I don't know if they saw something that I didn't but, in my eyes, I was not 100 percent disabled and told them that," O'Byrne said. But they continued to press him to go for a higher rating. His arguments for a lower rating went nowhere, he said. In VA group counseling sessions, "I realized the sad truth about a portion of the veterans there -- they were scammers, seeking a higher rating without a real trauma. This was proven when I overheard one vet say to another that he had to 'pay the bills' and how he 'was hoping this in-patient was enough for a 100-percent rating.' I vowed never to participate in group counseling through the VA again," O'Byrne said.

"When there is money to gain, there will be fraud," he said. "The VA is no different. Veterans are no different. In the noble efforts to help veterans and clear the backlog of VA claims, we allowed a lot of fraud into the system, and it is pushing away the veterans with real trauma and real PTSD." Committee members, who are accustomed to hearing allegations of fraud and waste within the VA but rarely about scamming by a veteran, did not directly challenge O'Byrne's allegations, but Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL) told him he was unique. "That's the first I've ever heard of a vet wanting to reduce the amount of benefits they're receiving," Bost said. O'Byrne was a central figure in the book "War" by author Sebastian Junger, who also testified at the hearing on "Overcoming PTSD: Assessing VA's Efforts to Promote Wellness and Healing."

Junger said society must share the blame for the prevalence of PTSD. "Many of our vets seem to be suffering from something other than trauma reaction. One possible explanation for their psychological troubles is that -- whether they experience combat or not -- transitioning from the kind of close communal life of a platoon to the alienation of modern society is extremely difficult." Then there is politics. "In order for soldiers to avoid something called 'moral injury,' they have to believe they are fighting for a just cause, and that just cause can only reside in a nation that truly believes in itself as an enduring entity," Junger said. "When it became fashionable after the election for some of my fellow Democrats to declare that Donald Trump was 'not their president,' they put all of our soldiers at risk of moral injury," he said. "And when Donald Trump charged repeatedly that Barack Obama -- the commander-in-chief -- was not even an American citizen, he surely demoralized many soldiers who were fighting under orders from that White House," Junger said. "For the sake of our military personnel -- if not for the sake of our democracy -- such statements should be quickly and forcefully repudiated by the offending political party."

The allegation that some veterans are bilking PTSD programs is not a major concern for Zach Iscol, a Marine captain who fought in Fallujah and now is executive director of the non-profit Headstrong Project. "If there are people taking advantage of us, that's OK, because we have a bigger mission," Iscol said, but he also noted that Headstrong does not give out disability payments. In partnership with Weill Cornell Medical College, the project's goal is to provide free assistance with experienced clinicians to post-9/11 veterans for a range of problems, from PTSD to addiction and anger management. Iscol said Headstrong currently has about 200 active clients, and "on average it costs less than \$5,000 to treat a vet." He cautioned there are no panaceas for treating PTSD, and "there's no simple app that will solve this problem. I don't think you can design a one-size-fits-all for mental health."

The witnesses and committee members agreed that PTSD is treatable, but disagreed over the types and availability of treatment programs and whether the VA is adequately funded to provide them or should rely more on non-profits. The issue of the estimated 20 suicides by veterans daily came up briefly when Rep. Jack Bergman (R-MI), a retired Marine lieutenant general, questioned Kudler on VA programs to bring down the rate. VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin has made combating veteran suicides a major priority and has focused on making treatment available for veterans with less than honorable discharges. Kudler said there is a "counter-intuitive" involved in addressing the veteran suicide problem. About 14 of the 20 daily suicides involve veterans who never deployed and experienced combat trauma, he said. "It would be premature to say we know why." [Source: Military.com | 8 Richard Sisk | Jun 8, 2017 ++]

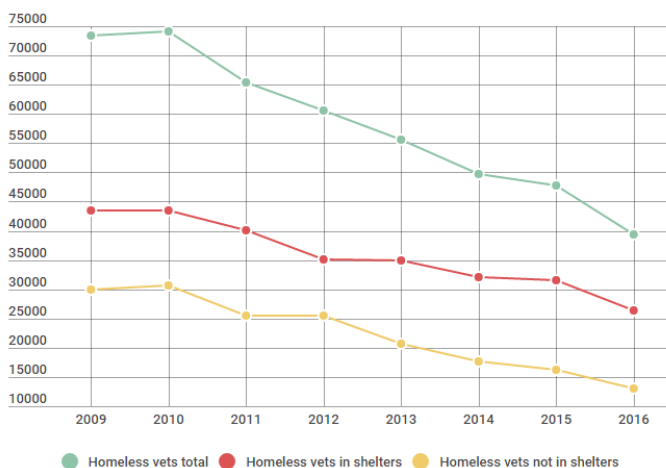
\*\*\*\*\*

## Homeless Vets Update 79 ► VA Drops Zero Goal

The new Veterans Affairs administration is backing off the department's 7-year-old target of reaching zero homeless veterans across America, but insists they aren't giving up on the cause. In an interview with Military Times this week, VA Secretary David Shulkin said he no longer sees zero as "the right goal" for his department's efforts, and instead is focused on cutting the current number of homeless veterans down from about 40,000 to somewhere below 15,000. For the last seven years, VA officials have focused on completely eliminating homelessness among veterans. The original plan was to reach the milestone by the end of 2015. Federal estimates say the number dropped by more than half from 2010 to 2016, but the goal of reaching zero remains far off.

"When VA Secretary (Eric) Shinsekki set this (homelessness) goal in 2010, he did the right thing," Shulkin said. "He set the most ambitious goal and timeline, and I think you need to do that. "But I think what we learned in this situation is that being able to reach zero is not necessarily the right number. There is going to be a functional zero, essentially somewhere around 12,000 to 15,000 that despite being offered options for housing and getting them off the street, there are a number of reasons why people may not choose to do that." We do have to respect the wishes of people who are adults and able to make their own decisions." Shulkin's comments came after his address to the annual National Coalition for Homeless Veterans conference, which brings together hundreds of housing advocates each year to discuss strategies for dealing with issues of mental health care, veterans unemployment and affordable housing.

The chart below shows the estimated total number of veterans who were homeless between 2009 and 2016, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Although the number has fallen significantly in recent year, there are still about 40,000 veterans who are homeless.



Attendees this year also talked about uncertainty surrounding the effort with the change in White House administrations. President Trump's fiscal 2018 budget includes boosts in funding to help house veterans but severe cuts in other areas of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Shulkin said he is confident the budget decisions won't harm the VA's efforts to continue helping those destitute veterans. "This is going to be a continued commitment," he said. "The issue of homelessness isn't solved when you put a person into a home. It's a constant, vigilant battle to make sure you maintain the conditions for them to maintain housing permanently." He also defended the shift away from the zero target. As recently as last fall, Shulkin's predecessor — then-VA Secretary Bob McDonald — said he was unsure when the VA could reach the zero milestone, but remained fixated on that goal.

Shulkin compared the change in philosophy to the VA's handling of hepatitis C treatments within the department. Although VA officials hope to eliminate the virus in all patients, several thousand veterans have opted to skip treatments in recent years for personal reasons. "I don't think it's giving up," Shulkin said of the

homelessness goal.”This is learning along the way, and I think when you attempt to do something ambitious, you are likely to learn.” VA officials said they have already discussed the shifting targets with HUD and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness to better coordinate efforts. Other housing advocates said they are not alarmed by the change. “How VA is talking about this now may be inartful, but probably a better depiction of where we all want to go,” said Kathryn Monet, CEO of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. “There have been changes to benchmarks and criteria of how to define these goals. The biggest concern of ours is whether the public advocacy for reducing veterans homelessness continues.”

The veterans homeless pledge was a key promise of Barack Obama’s presidency, and was followed by years of White House focus on the issue and routine funding boosts. Since 2010, more than 480,000 veterans and family members have received housing assistance from the department. Federal officials have certified 52 metropolitan areas and three states — Virginia, Delaware and Connecticut — as essentially ending homelessness among veterans by providing adequate shelter and rapid response programs for every impoverished individual. But Shulkin acknowledged that problem areas still remain. Nearly one-fourth of all the homeless veterans in America are living in California, and about another 25 percent are in six other states: Texas, Florida, New York, Colorado, Washington and Oregon. He said targeting those regions will be a priority in the coming years, as officials look for ways to help hard-to-reach populations. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 2, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Budget 2018 Update 04 ► CVA Say's Doesn't Cut Enough**

Like other advocacy groups, Concerned Veterans for America have problems with the president’s proposed Veterans Affairs budget. But unlike most of the veterans community, they think it doesn’t cut enough. The conservative group, which has ties to prominent Republican donors and several members of President Donald Trump’s administration, is releasing a policy memo this week calling for more belt tightening and increased scrutiny of the president’s \$186.5 billion budget proposal, which has already drawn criticism from groups like the American Legion for too many trims. “We recommend that Congress aggressively seek out more savings within the VA’s budget, especially in its construction, medical facility operations, personnel, and medical compliance accounts,” the document states.”Cutting waste and passing systemic reforms, not throwing money at the current system, are what will make the VA more efficient and effective in delivering our veterans the care they have earned.”

The stance is in line with the group’s message of fiscal restraint and bureaucratic reductions, but it puts them at odds with much of the rest of the veterans community. Most have attacked Trump’s proposal for cutting several benefits programs, including rounding down beneficiaries of cost-of-living increases to the nearest dollar and ending Individual Unemployability assistance for retirement-age veterans. Dan Caldwell, policy director for CVA, said his group supports the IU move as reforming a benefit that was intended only for working-age veterans, but would support phasing in the change over several years to ease the impact on individual veterans. More concerning to him are increases in VA construction and staffing funding. He said VA should be working towards a smaller footprint using more partnerships with private-sector resources than building up VA facilities. “This budget seems to be conflicting with the vision that (VA Secretary David) Shulkin is laying out,” he said.”He is promising to reduce administrative staff, but then we see more added in the budget.”

CVA has been a strong proponent of expanding outside care offerings for veterans, a move that critics have derided as a step towards privatization of VA but one that Shulkin has said has to be considered for more routine medical care. Legion officials last week attacked Trump plans to expand those programs — paid for in part with benefits cuts — as breaking faith with veterans. Caldwell rejected that, saying “simply increasing funding to VA hasn’t helped veterans in the past.” They’re pushing lawmakers to further tighten the budget, trimming back some of the \$800 million in new construction funding and \$6.5 billion for medical facility leases in the budget proposal in favor of more private care flexibility. The VA budget has grown dramatically in recent years, nearly doubling since



fiscal 2009 (\$93.7 billion) and almost four times the total when the war in Afghanistan began in fiscal 2001 (\$48.7 billion). [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Budget 2018 Update 05 ► Vets Speak Out on Benefit Cuts

The plan to cut financial support for aging and disabled veterans included in President Donald Trump's \$1.1 trillion federal budget proposal has led to bitterness and confusion among the estimated 225,000 vets who could lose the payments. The reductions may also trigger a political backlash against the president, who made reforming and increasing support for the Department of Veterans Affairs a major part of his campaign against Hillary Clinton.

- “Make that guy in the White House keep his promise to all of us veterans, lest we all fall by the wayside and be left on the battlefield,” said a former Army staff sergeant who served in Vietnam.
- “Please don't do this to us,” said a sailor who served on ships in the Tonkin Gulf during the Vietnam War. “My wife and I already live our later years in constant uncertainty. We thought our VA benefits were fairly safe.”
- “I have become aware that President Trump's VA budget sets to screw Vietnam veterans first in line by eliminating the unemployability benefit for those of us who actually served and sacrificed who have reached the age of Social Security benefits,” said a former Navy lieutenant who flew the EP-3E version of the P-3 Orion surveillance aircraft in Vietnam.
- “What can we do? Based on this, veterans would be in better shape if a Democrat had been elected,” said another vet. “I voted for Trump because of promises of helping the veterans, not taking away. I surely hope I don't regret voting for him.”

The comments came from a flurry of emails from veterans and spouses to Military.com in response to a story last week about the proposal in the White House budget plan to cut the Individual Unemployability (IU) benefit in part to pay for an expansion of the Choice program, which allows veterans to seek health care in the private sector. Veterans service organizations have also been flooded with calls and emails voicing concerns about the budget proposals and potential cuts to IU benefits. Veterans eligible now for IU have a 60-100 percent disability rating but are all paid at the 100 percent rate because a service-connected disability makes them unable to work. The budget proposal would cut off IU payments once the veteran reaches the minimum age for Social Security. The proposed cuts could impact about 225,000 vets currently receiving IU. At a House hearing last month, VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin said that about 7,000 of those vets are over the age of 80.

The White House Office of Management and Budget proposed a budget for the VA of \$186.5 billion for fiscal 2018, which begins 1 OCT, an increase of about 6 percent over fiscal 2017. OMB projected \$3.6 billion in savings from trims to benefits. Much of the savings would go toward a proposed \$2.9 billion expansion of the Choice program for fiscal 2018, which begins 1 OCT.

Some of the emails from veterans received by Military.com questioned why IU should be cut to pay for Choice. “Taking money from me to give to profit-making medical providers is wrong. You are screwing me and my wife,” said a former Marine sergeant who served with the 26th Marines at Khe Sanh. “It makes no sense for [the Department of Veterans Affairs] to have to fund the Choice program.” “We did our part by serving, and so many gave their lives. Maybe some of those supporting the bill should visit the VA hospitals with veterans suffering and just waiting for their final call. Then tell their families, ‘He was a good man,’” said the sergeant.

Major veterans organizations slammed the budget proposals as soon as they were issued and also questioned Shulkin's push to expand the Choice program. “We are very concerned the administration's request to make the Veterans Choice Program a permanent, mandatory program could lead to a gradual erosion of the VA health care system,” the Veterans of Foreign Wars said in written testimony to a hearing of the House Veterans Affairs

Committee last month. At the same hearing, Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA) said of the proposed cuts to IU, “If a veteran was provided this benefit because of the inability to maintain gainful employment, particularly at a young age, he or she would not have been able to pay for Social Security or put money into a 401(k) or other retirement savings account.”

He asked Shulkin, who was testifying, “If you end the [IU] payments for veterans like this, don't you risk plunging them into poverty?” Shulkin responded that the VA is “sensitive to the issue“ but had to find savings to pay for other programs. The change in eligibility for IU would save an estimated \$3.2 billion in fiscal 2018 and \$40.8 billion over 10 years, he said.”This is a way we think of appropriately utilizing the mandatory funds and looking at where we can make the [IU] program more responsible,“ Shulkin said. John Rowan, national president of Vietnam Veterans of America, said in a statement to the hearing, “We're extremely alarmed by this budget proposal, because this is the opposite of what President Trump promised veterans.” Many veterans echoed that sentiment.

- “I am appalled at the proposed cut,“ an Air Force veteran said in an email to Military.com.”At first, this cut may seem logical, but the logic is flawed in many cases. Sure, there are some vets with large Social Security benefit checks, but it is also so true that many vets will have such small checks that this cut would leave them destitute.”
- The wife of a veteran said, “My 70-year-old husband will be one of the thousands to lose his IU benefit if this legislation is approved. Frankly, it would be devastation to us financially.”

There was also confusion and anxiety among aging vets about having no way of knowing how the proposals will work out in Congress.

- “I have been receiving IU for three years. I also receive [Social Security],“ one said.”If IU is cut, how does this affect me?”
- Other vets worried about what would happen to their spouses.”If I die, my wife can apply for the DIC [Dependency and Compensation] benefit, but without the DIC benefit, my wife would only receive my Social Security benefit of around \$1,500 a month,“ a vet said.”She has told me that if this becomes her income, she will be forced to sell the house and take the selling price of the house and attempt to get into a low-income housing.” (DIC is a tax-free benefit paid to eligible survivors of service members who died in the line of duty or veterans whose deaths resulted from a service-related injury or disease.)

At a White House briefing 31 MAY, Shulkin said he is fully aware of the veterans service organizations' complaints as he again defended the proposed cuts for IU.”I have such great admiration and respect for VSOs, and I understand their passion and I share their commitment that it is so important that this country honor its responsibility to our veterans,“ he said. However, “that doesn't mean that you don't go back and revisit programs that have been around for a long time and figure out different ways to use those resources, as long as they are directed to helping veterans,“ Shulkin said.”Now, I understand there's not always going to be agreement. This is Washington, and we're always going to get passion over important topics.”

In a statement in response to Shulkin's remarks, American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt said that he welcomed Shulkin's “candor and commitment“ to reforming the VA, but “last week, our headquarters was overrun with questions and concerns about the disastrous impact proposed changes to the IU program would have on our aging veteran community.”We are also alarmed by the cannibalization of services needed for the Choice program,“ he said.”It is a 'stealth' privatization attempt, which The American Legion fully opposes.” [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | 1 Jun 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Drug Theft ► Problem Isn't Going Away

Federal authorities have launched dozens of new criminal investigations into possible opioid and other drug thefts by employees at Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals, a sign the problem isn't going away despite new prevention efforts. Data obtained by The Associated Press show 36 cases opened by the VA inspector general's office from Oct. 1 through May 19. It brings the total number of open criminal investigations to 108 involving missing prescriptions, theft or unauthorized drug use. Most of those probes typically lead to criminal charges.



The numbers are an increase from a similar period in the previous year. The VA has pledged “zero tolerance“ in drug thefts following an AP story in February about a sharp rise in reported cases of stolen or missing drugs since 2009. Doctors, nurses or pharmacy staff in the VA's network of more than 160 medical centers and 1,000 clinics are suspected of siphoning away controlled substances for their own use or street sale -- sometimes to the harm of patients -- or drugs simply went missing without explanation. Drug thefts are a growing problem at private hospitals as well as the government-run VA facilities as the illegal use of opioids has increased in the United States. But separate data from the Drug Enforcement Administration obtained by the AP under the Freedom of Information Act show the rate of reported missing drugs at VA health facilities was more than double that of the private sector. DEA investigators cited in part a larger quantity of drugs kept in stock at the larger VA medical centers to treat a higher volume of patients, both outpatient and inpatient, as well as for distribution of prescriptions by mail.

In February, the VA announced efforts to combat drug thefts, including employee drug tests and added inspections. Top VA officials in Washington led by VA Secretary David Shulkin pledged a more active role, holding conference calls with health facilities to develop plans and reviewing data to flag problems. The department also said it would consider more internal audits. Criminal investigators said it was hard to say whether new safeguards are helping.”Prescription drug diversion is a multifaceted, egregious health care issue,“ said Jeffrey Hughes, the acting VA assistant inspector general for investigations.”Veterans may be denied necessary medications or their proper dosage and medical records may contain false information to hide the diversion, further putting veterans' health at risk.” In response, the VA said it was working to develop additional policies “to improve drug safety and reduce drug theft and diversion across the entire health care system.” “We have a zero-tolerance policy regarding drug theft,“ Poonam Alaigh, VA's acting undersecretary for health, told the AP.”We have security protocols in place and will continue to work hard to improve it.”

AP's story in February included figures documenting the sharp rise in drug thefts at federal hospitals, most of them VA facilities. Subsequently released DEA data provide more specific details of the problem at the VA. Drug losses or theft increased from 237 in 2009 to 2,844 in 2015, before dipping to 2,397 last year. In only about 3 percent of those cases have doctors, nurses or pharmacy employees been disciplined, according to VA data. At private hospitals, reported drug losses or theft also rose -- from 2,023 in 2009 to 3,185 in 2015, before falling slightly to 3,154 last year. There is a bigger pool of private U.S. hospitals, at least 4,369, according to the American Hospital Association. That means the rate of drug loss or theft is lower than VA's. The VA inspector general's office said it had opened 25 cases in the first half of the fiscal year which began Oct. 1. That is up from 21 in the same period in 2016. The IG's office said the number of newly opened criminal probes had previously been declining since 2014.

Michael Glavin, an IT specialist at the VA, says he's heard numerous employee complaints of faulty VA technical systems that track drug inventories, leading to errors and months of delays in identifying when drugs go missing. Prescription drug shipments aren't always fully inventoried when they arrive at a VA facility, he said, making it difficult to determine if a drug was missing upon arrival or stolen later. Congressional auditors this year found that at least four VA hospitals skipped monthly inspections of drug stocks or missed other requirements, even after warnings about lax oversight dating back to at least 2009."It's still the same process," said Glavin, who heads the local union at the VA medical center in Columbia, Missouri. The union's attorney, Natalie Khawam, says whistleblowers at other VA hospitals have made similar complaints.

Criminal investigators stressed the need for a continuing drug prevention effort. The VA points to inventory checks every 72 hours and "double lock and key access" to drugs. It attributes many drug loss cases to reasons other than employee theft, such as drugs lost in transit. But the DEA says some of those cases may be wrongly classified."Inventories are always an issue as to who's watching or checking it," said Tom Prevoznik, a DEA deputy chief of pharmaceutical investigations."That would always be part of any investigation we do, asking "What are the employees doing, and who's watching them?"

The Senate was expected to vote 6 JUN on VA accountability legislation that would give the agency "the tools necessary to remove employees who are failing to perform at the high-quality level." A lead sponsor of the bipartisan bill, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) pointed to AP's findings as "troubling." "The theft and misuse of prescription drugs, including opioids, by some VA employees is a good example of why we need greater accountability at the VA," he said. [Source: Associated Press | Hope Yen | May 29, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Hospital Care Update 02 ► A Veteran's Final Hours

Carol Graves knew she needed to get her husband to a hospital in a hurry. His heartrate was over 150, and climbing rapidly. "When we got to the VA Medical Center in Shreveport his heart was racing at over 300, I think," she said. "He had bronchial emphysema. I brought him in on a Friday and a week later, he was gone, but it wasn't because of anything the doctors did. They did everything they could for him. They were right on top of everything that happened." Her 76-year-old husband was known to everyone simply as 'C.A.' He was an Army Veteran who, three decades earlier, had been fortunate enough to marry the girl of his dreams. "There was no doubt in my mind how much he loved me," Carol Graves said. "He was an awesome man, and he loved me completely. Even if I got mad and wanted to argue, he would not argue with me. Even if I wanted a good fight, he would not give me one. We had 32 really good years."



Army Veteran 'C.A.' Graves, his wife Carol and granddaughter Taylor Sky

About a week before their final trip to the VA together, C.A. confided something to his wife. “He told me he was ready to meet his Lord,” she said. “He didn’t want to die, but he wasn’t afraid to die.” She added: “He had suffered for so long. “Now he’s in a better place. He can breathe again. He can walk again.”

The Gary, Texas, resident said she was deeply moved by the care and attention her husband received at the VA. I got lots of hugs “The love and caring we experienced was above and beyond anything you can imagine,” she observed. “During that week we were on three different floors – the medical ward, the intensive care unit and finally hospice —and everyone was the same on each floor. All the doctors, nurses and staff cared as much about me as they did about C.A. I got lots of hugs.” Graves said she stayed by her husband’s side during the entire week, returning home only once or twice to check on their house and their pets. “I slept in a chair beside his bed,” she explained. “They made sure I was comfortable. They gave me blankets, a pillow, everything.”

And there’s another big reason she’s grateful to the VA. “Some time ago they had given him a chairlift so he could get his wheelchair into the back of his truck,” she said. “I think that really saved him, because it allowed him to continue driving. He was able to go to church. He was able to go shopping for groceries, which he loved to do. The VA just saved him with that lift.” That final week spent with her husband may have been an emotional blur, but Graves said she’ll never forget one particular incident that occurred as her husband was entering his final hours. “One time he didn’t want to take his medicine,” she said. “Several doctors and nurses came in, and they were all so kind and patient with him. He was giving them a hard time. But they were doing everything they could to talk him into taking his medicine. They were so nice to him that he finally gave in and took it. “I want them all to know how much their kindness means to me.” [Source: VHA Update | June 6, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Physician Ambassador Program ► Launched**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced 6 JUN that it has launched the Physician Ambassador Program, an effort to recruit volunteer medical providers, at the more than 1,700 VA health-care facilities across the nation. The physician and clinician “ambassadors” are qualified, trained and licensed health providers who will meet the same requirements as VA professionals in terms of credentials, supervision and evaluation. “Our Veterans deserve the highest quality of care — at all times,” said Dr. Poonam L. Alaigh, VA’s Acting Under Secretary for Health. “The Physician Ambassador Program is one of the many ways we are working to keep and honor our promise to care for Veterans and their families. Working with the health-care teams and staff in our VA facilities, these incredibly skilled and qualified volunteer physicians and clinicians will improve our ability to deliver great care and service.”

The Physician Ambassador Program will enhance access to urgent care, rural health care and emergency medicine for Veterans. In addition, the program will create stronger collaboration and allow both VA and community health providers to benefit from the sharing of best practices and experiences. Physicians or health-care providers interested in volunteering as a part of the Physician Ambassador Program should contact their local VA medical center at <https://www.volunteer.va.gov/directory>. [Source: VA News Release | June 6, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Project 112/SHAD ► VA Compensation**

Project 112/SHAD (Shipboard Hazard and Defense) is the name of the program for both shipboard and land-based biological and chemical testing conducted by the U.S. military between 1962 – 1973. VA will provide physical examinations to veterans who participated in the testing. Veterans will receive medical care free of charge for conditions related to exposure. Veterans may be eligible for disability compensation if they have a service-related



disability and were discharged under other than dishonorable conditions. VA does not presume by regulation that any specific disabilities are related to participation in Project 112/SHAD. Veterans' claims are decided on a case-by-case basis. VA presumes amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) diagnosed in all Veterans with 90 days or more continuous active military service is related to their service, although ALS is not related to Project 112/SHAD. Surviving spouses, dependent children and dependent parents of Veterans who died from health problems related to participation in Project 112/SHAD may be eligible for health care, compensation, education, and home loan benefits. [Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | June 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Gulf War Presumptives Update 08 ► Fibromyalgia**

Fibromyalgia is a health condition characterized by unexplained pain throughout the body. Symptoms include:

- At least 3 months of unexplained pain in the muscles, tendons, and other soft tissues
- Points on the neck, shoulders, back, hips, arms, or legs that are tender and hurt with pressure
- Additional health problems such as sleep disturbances, headaches, memory problems, or morning muscle stiffness

If you are concerned about symptoms related to fibromyalgia and would like to learn about health care options for Gulf War Veterans, go to <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/benefits/%20health-care.asp> or call 1-877- 222-8387. You can also, talk to an Environmental Health Coordinator near you about your concerns at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/%20coordinators.asp>. Fibromyalgia is a presumptive illness for Gulf War Veterans: VA presumes that some health conditions, including fibromyalgia, were caused by military service. As a presumptive illness, Veterans do not have to prove an association between fibromyalgia and their military service. The condition must be at least 10 percent disabling and have first appeared sometime between active duty in the Southwest Asia theater of military operations and December 31, 2021.

Symptoms can be managed. Researchers and health care providers do not currently know a direct cause or cure for fibromyalgia. However, Veterans can work with their health care team to manage symptoms. Prescription drugs are available to treat fibromyalgia. Learn more about presumptive service connection and benefits for Gulf War Veterans at <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/benefits/index.asp> or call 1-800-827-1000. More information about fibromyalgia is available at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/fibromyalgia.asp>. [Source: Veterans Health| June 12, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Robotic Legs Update 03 ► Price Tag Is Huge**

Ashley Barnes was 35 years old when doctors told her she would never walk again. A botched spinal procedure in 2014 paralyzed her from the waist down. The Tyler, Tex., resident had been an avid runner, clocking six miles daily when not home with her then-9-year-old autistic son, whom she raised alone. Life in a wheelchair was not an option. "I needed to be the best mom I could be," Barnes said. "I needed to be up and moving." So she threw herself into physical therapy, convinced she would one day run again. Soon she realized that wasn't a reality. Although she wore a brave face, "I would save my moments of crying for my room," she said.

About a year later, hope resurfaced when she learned of the ReWalk system, a battery-powered robotic exoskeleton that attaches to the legs and lower back. It contains motors at the knee and hip joints and sensors to help it adjust with each footfall. While wearing the device and holding two forearm crutches, someone with complete lower-limb paralysis can walk. Rehabilitation centers often employ such devices in physical therapy, which is how

Barnes first encountered one at the Baylor Tom Landry Center, a rehab clinic in Dallas. After seven months without being able to stand, she did. Then she took a step as she began to learn how to walk again.

In 2014, the ReWalk system became the first personal robotic exoskeleton approved by the Food and Drug Administration. The following year, the Department of Veterans Affairs agreed to cover the exoskeletons for qualifying vets. Meanwhile, several companies began touting similar devices. For example, Ekso makes units used to rehabilitate people after spinal cord injury or stroke. Health insurers, however, generally don't cover the expensive equipment. After working with the ReWalk system at her rehab center, Barnes, who uses a wheelchair at home to get around, decided she wanted one of her own. But Tricare, her insurer, denied the request. In a statement, Tricare said it "does not cover these devices for use on a personal basis due to concerns with their safety and efficacy. This is particularly important due to the vulnerability of paralyzed users in the event of a fall."

Two years and countless no's later, Barnes still doesn't have one because, according to Tricare, it isn't "medically necessary." Barnes strongly disagrees. "This is medically necessary," she said. If she had one of the devices, "I'd be able to go to the bathroom. I would be able to walk around, exercise in it. I would love to be able to stand up and cook things in my microwave or on my stove." She paused before adding, "I would no longer have to look up at my son."

**High prices, low incomes** -- The ReWalk Personal 6.0 System costs, on average, \$81,000. Ottobock's C-Brace is priced at \$75,000. For the Indego Personal, which received FDA approval last year, it is \$98,000. About 28 percent of the more than 5.2 million Americans living with paralysis survive on an annual household income of less than \$15,000, according to the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation. The basic expenses of living with paraplegia are, on average, \$519,520 in the first year and \$68,821 each subsequent year, according to the National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center. Furthermore, only 34.3 percent of people are employed 20 years after a paralysis-causing injury. To date, ReWalk has sold only 118 personal devices in the United States.

Some people do get devices covered by insurance, but it can be an onerous process, as evidenced by Mark Delamere Jr. The Boston native, 19, was paralyzed in a car accident in 2013, on the third day of his freshman year of high school. Like Barnes, he thought he would never walk again. Like Barnes, with the help of a robotic exoskeleton, he did. Unlike Barnes, though, he has an exoskeleton at home. But for two of his teenage years, he sat in a wheelchair while his family filed claims and appealed denials. "They don't really classify these things with the purpose of you getting better, because they think the injury is never going to change," his father, Mark Sr., said. Eventually, though, Mark Jr. got approved by his insurance company and received the ReWalk, which he uses for at-home therapy and just to "walk around the house and the neighborhood, up and down the street." Asked to describe the feeling, he was at a loss for words. More hospitals are putting patient comfort and wellbeing at the forefront of their operations — from staff hires to building design to team structure. "It's kind of crazy," he said. "It just feels kind of — I don't really know. It feels so different."

**They don't always work** -- But his story is rare. "People are paying out of pocket or fundraising" for exoskeletons, said Dan Kara, research director for robotics at ABI Research, a technology analysis and consultant company. The price of the devices exceeds their value in the eyes of insurers, which "want to be able to prove they actually improve quality of life and utility," said Howard Forman, a Yale professor of diagnostic radiology and public health. "Utility" means that an exoskeleton would provide a medical benefit beyond simply helping people move around and complete daily tasks. Virginia Tech researchers found that these devices, by getting otherwise immobilized people to move around, can help them manage spasticity — a continuous contraction of muscles, which can be quite painful — and improve bowel function. Barnes said when she was training with the exoskeleton, tending to her bowels took about 20 minutes each day, not the customary hour.

One major concern is how relatively untested the technology is outside the controlled environment of a rehabilitation facility. Indeed, they don't always work as planned. Stacey Kozal, a 42-year-old Ohio resident, was paralyzed from the waist down after what she said was a devastating flare-up of lupus. For more than a year, she fought with her insurance provider, Anthem, in hopes of obtaining Ottobock C-Braces. These devices have bendable



knee joints equipped with sensors that “measure the current position of the joint every .02 seconds,” according to Ottobock’s website. A built-in microprocessor adjusts ankle pressure while a hydraulic system moves the knee to help the user place her foot down in the right place.

Eventually, Anthem agreed to cover a C-Brace for each leg, which Kozal used to hike the Appalachian Trail, where limitations revealed themselves. The battery required constant recharging. Rain was problematic because the C-Brace isn’t waterproof. While she plans to wear her C-Braces around the house, she’s now hiking the Pacific Crest Trail using old-fashioned braces that lock her legs in place. She uses her core, hips and upper body to swing her legs forward, and she keeps her balance with the aid of forearm crutches. C-Braces are heavier than traditional devices, so when their batteries died on the Appalachian Trail, they made it more difficult for her to move around.

Another major issue for insurers, though, is the price. But Forman said, “Though these technologies are incredibly expensive now, we have all kinds of evidence that eventually . . . they can become affordable to anyone.” Indeed, some entrepreneurs are working on cheaper solutions. Silicon Valley start-up SuitX created a lightweight model called the Phoenix. While most exoskeletons have motors powering each joint, the Phoenix simply uses two hip motors. Even so, if approved by the FDA, the device would cost \$40,000, according to SuitX. “The rehabilitation marketplace is limited by the number of people who have these conditions,” Kara said. The exoskeletons are “basically handcrafted, which is expensive. If you could up the volume, you could lower the price.” The key would be expanding the user base. One way to do that, he noted, is to sell the devices for purposes other than rehabilitation. Warehouse workers might wear them to assist with lifting heavy loads. Some companies are already testing this idea: Lowe’s, for example, recently outfitted several of employees with exoskeletons as part of a pilot program.

The worldwide market for exoskeletons — \$97 million now — is expected to grow to \$1.9 billion by 2025, according to ABI Research. Kara compared the prospects for exoskeletons to the growth of LiDAR, which uses pulsed lasers to record topographic features. For years, researchers used LiDAR to create 3-D maps of the Earth, but it was expensive. However, the rise of self-driving cars, which use the technology to navigate roadways, fostered improvements in the technology. As a result, Kara said, the price of LiDAR systems has begun to fall and is “expected to drop dramatically, from tens of thousands of dollars to hundreds of dollars or less.”

Waiting for exoskeleton prices to drop is tremendously frustrating, Barnes said. “We take so much for granted when we don’t have physical problems,” she said. “Like just being able to reach up and grab something in my laundry cabinet without having to break my neck to get it.” She isn’t ready to just accept that she — and others who will face these issues — might never get a sense of greater normalcy. “My biggest reason for standing up tall to them is I want to do it for all those behind me,” she said. “The more it gets approved, the more it can’t get denied.” [Source: The Washington Post | Travis M. Andrews | June 12, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **GI Bill Update 230 ► Students Payments Progress**

The Department of Veterans Affairs is checking off a list of recommendations to improve the wait time for payments to veterans trying to attend school through the G.I. bill, but lawmakers are still unhappy with the progress. The Post-9/11 GI Bill gives student veterans direct payments for things like housing and books, whereas tuition is still paid directly to universities. But the complexities of the bill have left some veterans out to dry when it comes to making payments to their schools. VA Director of the Education Service Veterans Benefits Administration Robert Worley told Congress the VA cut its processing time for claims down to 21 days and to six days for supplemental claims for things like books and housing.

The use of the Long Term Solution (LTS) IT system has been partly to thank for that. The system processes an average of 5,200 claims a day without human intervention. A 2015 GAO report gave VA recommendations to

improve the system and other issues, which VA is acting on. But House Veterans Affairs Economic Opportunity Subcommittee Chairman Jodey Arrington (R-Texas) says that's not good enough. "I'm not satisfied. I think in this case you've got system LTS that was implemented that made some significant headway ... but they didn't go all the way," Arrington told Federal News Radio after a June 8 hearing. "It just doesn't seem like it's as strategic and well organized as it should be. So we are not yielding all the benefits that I think we could and should be getting from IT systems. Every organization deals with this, but I think the VA has more challenges in pulling all this together."

Worley said additional functionality is needed for the LTS system to get it working better. Features that could get it working faster include automated certificates of eligibility for original claims, electronically generated letters, expanded automation of supplemental claims, issuance of advanced payments, monthly certification of attendance and improved business analytics for reporting purposes. Other IT systems dealing with claims and benefits need much more work. The Benefits Delivery Network (BDN), which is a claims processing, payment, tracking and disposition system for education is in need of a total replacement. "Support and maintenance are difficult or impossible to find for 70's-era systems like BDN. Warranties have expired, security best practices that are common on newer systems cannot be used, integration with newer systems is increasingly difficult to support and the knowledge pool for ongoing support and maintenance is becoming nonexistent as experts retire," Worley said in his opening statement to Arrington's committee.

Those IT issues are leaving some decisions pending, which sometimes keeps students from attending class because of outstanding debts. Compounding the problem is Defense Department assistance in providing electronic records to the VA when requested. Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Lernes Hebert told the committee it takes about 10 days for DoD to get VA the information it needs on veterans. Overall, taking the VA claim average and the DoD delivery time together it would take more than a month students to get a claim if everything runs smoothly.

**Overpayments** -- VA is also struggling with overpayments to schools and beneficiaries. The 2015 GAO report stated the VA made \$416 million in overpayments in 2014. The VA hasn't made overpayments that large since, but the problem still persists. VA has \$106 million in outstanding overpayments from 2016. It also has \$49.5 million outstanding from 2015, \$31 million still uncollected from 2014 and \$47 million from 2013 and before. One major issue is that only \$6.9 million of that is in the hands of schools. The rest is spread out to individual students across the nation. "Somebody has got to be held accountable for not being able to manage [the debt] and now it's getting away from us. There's some management issues there," Arrington told Federal News Radio. [Source: Federal News Service | Scott Maucione | June 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Claim Decision ► What To Do If you Disagree**

When a veteran receives a VA decision letter, it states that if they disagree with the decision to let VA know. Included is VA Form 21-0958, Notice of Disagreement (NOD), on which to list disagreement specifics. A NOD must be filed within one year of the decision letter. However, in many cases, it's far more expedient to reopen the claim rather than send a NOD if you have evidence proving the decision was in error. Sending a NOD is the first step in the VA appeals process, which is a long one.

For example, service-connection for a claimed disability may be denied because VA says there's no evidence of a diagnosis in service medical records and/or there's no evidence of a current diagnosis. If you can provide the missing evidence when you reopen, you'll likely be successful sooner than through a NOD and appeal. Remember, a well-grounded claim means you provide VA evidence of a current diagnosis of a chronic condition and a "nexus" to service, which means the chronic condition was diagnosed and treated on active duty; or is a presumptive condition (such as a disability related to herbicide exposure in Vietnam); or is a secondary condition of one you are already service-connected for; or, for select disabilities, was diagnosed within a presumptive period after separation.

Veterans often disagree with a percentage assigned for a disability simply because they feel they deserve a higher rating. However, ratings for each disability are based on medical evidence, such as range of motion for joints or specific test results for heart disease, for example. All rating criteria is outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations 38. Each decision letter explains why you got denied or why you got a certain percentage and what needs to be in evidence in order to get a higher percentage.

If you do submit a NOD, you'll receive a letter acknowledging receipt and asking which appeal process you prefer. After you respond, you'll wait for many months. If the evidence you've outlined in the NOD proves your contention, you'll get a new decision. However, if you did not submit evidence to support your disagreement, you'll get a Statement of the Case explaining why the decision was correct according to VA regulation. If you want to continue the appeal, you must "perfect" it by returning VA Form 9, electing a specific Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) hearing. Currently the average wait from sending Form 9 to BVA hearing in Tennessee is two years. After the hearing, a year or more could pass before you get a decision from the BVA.

One reason it takes so long to get a BVA hearing is that many veterans do not file well-grounded claims or appeals. For example, a veteran will file a claim for a condition diagnosed years after service simply because he feels it began in service even though he was never treated or diagnosed with the condition. Or, a veteran may file for something he thinks is related to Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam, such as colon cancer. However, colon cancer is not on the presumptive list (list of conditions automatically granted service connection in regards to herbicide exposure.) and he will be denied. These veterans may appeal any decision and the VA must adjudicate them whether they have merit or not.

The best course of action is to visit an accredited veterans service officer for advice and guidance on how best to address disagreements, as there are many factors depending on the specific condition and claim, too numerous to highlight here. Sometimes the VA does make mistakes or misses evidence; in other cases, the rating is correct and the service officer can explain why, or give advice on how to gather evidence to be successful, if possible. [Source: Fort Campbell Courier | Sandy Britt | Jun 8, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Claims Processing Update 17 ► Concern Over Proposed Changes**

Concern over proposed changes to the rating standards applied to veterans service representatives as they work on veterans' claims is sparking opposition from the union representing Veterans Administration employees. Members of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 2344 and local veterans hosted an informational picket 9 JUN in front of the VA's Huntington Regional Benefit Office on 4th Avenue in downtown Huntington. "Workers in the VA are doctors, nurses and civil servants devoted to caring for our veterans. Their job has never been easy. But now, veteran service representatives in the Huntington VA regional offices are facing proposals from management that would greatly impact their ability to provide quality service to veterans," said AFGE Local 2344 President Patty Nash.

Nash claims the proposed work process would shorten the time a veterans service representative has to examine claims. "In reality, these proposed changes would not speed up the process, but instead slows the veterans' claims from being approved or disapproved in a timely manner," she said. "Imagine being in a situation where you're looking over a veteran's file that has hundreds of pages and not being able to thoroughly examine their records." Nash says the proposed standards are unattainable. "This process will affect the way that veterans' claims will be reviewed, and in reality would actually slow down an already slow process," she said. "It will put the employees in danger of performance actions that could cost them their jobs."

Nash said current employees have been in their positions for several years and have been able to meet the VA's current standards. "We are asking the public to call your congressmen and senators and tell them to put attainable

standards in place for the veterans service representatives so they will be able to complete claims timely for our veterans," she said. Brandon Ashworth, a union member, says the proposed changes are something all veterans should worry about. "This is a serious issue to our workforce and to the ones they serve who have served us all," he said. "Something could be missed that a deserving veteran really needs, so I believe the proposed changes in rating standards could really hurt veterans."

"Veterans Affairs is committed to providing veterans accurate and timely decisions," said Shannon Kelley, director of the Huntington regional office, in a prepared statement in response to the complaints. "To that end, standards for employees are developed on a national basis for most positions in consultation with our labor partners." Kelley said the recent change in the performance standards for service representatives are intended to more accurately represent the work the staff does in an electronic environment. "We understand that change can be difficult," she said. "This is why we have an initial 90-day phase-in as our employees get used to the new standards. This also allows us to identify where these changes are successful and where we may need to adjust. "I've encouraged the staff at Huntington Regional Office to share with me all of their concerns regarding the new standards through multiple meetings in April and May."

Kelley added that although these are national standards, this is a new way of doing things. "There will likely be adjustments to make it better for our workforce and better serve the veterans," Kelley said. "Our goal is to ensure that our veterans receive the benefits they deserve quickly and accurately." [Source: Huntington Herald-Dispatch | Fred Pace | June 10, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA STOPFWA ► Initiative To Be Launched Soon**

On 2 JUN, the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) announced it will launch the "Seek to Prevent Fraud, Waste and Abuse (STOP FWA)" initiative that will capitalize on existing departmental activities that prevent or identify FWA, as well as ensure a consistent approach to FWA risk management as a way to centralize organizational resources."VA will create an organizational culture that is committed to STOP FWA," said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin."The initiative will protect the resources that deliver services and benefits our nation's Veterans have earned."

Historically, VA has had a decentralized approach to identifying, responding and preventing FWA. For example, VA's three administrations — Health, Benefits and Cemetery — as well as its various staff offices all had separate budgets and programs dedicated to preventing FWA. Under the decentralized approach, VA's Office of Community Care prevented \$27 million of potentially fraudulent payments in fiscal year 2016 and VA's Debt Management Center referred more than \$11 million in potentially fraudulent activity, so far in this fiscal year. STOP FWA's centralized approach will consolidate VA's resources under one organization to achieve even greater success. The department-wide effort will eliminate duplicative activities and explore potential partnerships with other federal agencies to capitalize on their successes in detecting fraud, waste and abuse.

Finally, VA will establish a Prevention of Fraud Waste and Abuse Advisory Committee by July 2017. Secretary Shulkin is developing a list of potential co-chairs and committee members, and the department will also seek committee members through the Federal Register. The committee will provide insight into lessons learned and private-sector practices; identify analytical tools that can be used at VA to prevent FWA; and leverage a deep wealth of experience in building mature, effective STOP FWA programs that protect VA's resources. [Source: VA News Release | June 2, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

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



**Tacoma, WA** — A former Captain of the Idaho and Washington National Guard was sentenced 1 JUN in U.S. District Court in Tacoma to three years in prison, three years of supervised release, and \$646,300 in restitution for his lengthy scheme to defraud multiple government programs. **Darryl Lee Wright**, 48, who served as Chairman of the City of Snoqualmie Planning Commission, pleaded guilty to two counts of wire fraud in February 2016, admitting he defrauded the Veterans Administration, Social Security Disability, Washington State Employment Security, the Department of Commerce and others with his claims of being injured while serving in Iraq with the Army National Guard. In fact, WRIGHT lied about being injured in a rocket attack and submitted pictures of destruction which had no connection to his service in Iraq.

At the sentencing hearing U.S. District Judge Benjamin H. Settle said Wright dragged “many people into a web of deceit . . . this was a complex and nefarious scam implemented over a long period of time . . . it was a continuous fraud . . . a very lucrative scheme.” “This defendant brazenly lied about his combat history to get more than \$600,000 in benefits he did not deserve,” said U. S. Attorney Annette L. Hayes. “His willingness to steal from a system meant to take care of those who have bravely served our country, or are otherwise in need, is an outrage. There is no question that the defendant earned the significant sentence he will now serve for his crimes.” As early as 2006, Wright began his scheme to defraud by submitting phony statements to the Army and to the Veterans Administration to create the false narrative that he had been injured in a rocket attack. As the scheme progressed over the years, Wright made false and conflicting claims to various agencies in an effort to fraudulently obtain benefits. Government investigators estimate that Wright’s frauds cost government programs some \$737,539. The Army has stripped Wright of his Purple Heart Medal and Combat Action Badge.

In an evidentiary hearing lasting six days, the government presented evidence that Wright defrauded Veteran’s Benefit Administration of \$261,719 in claiming he was disabled by a rocket attack that did not occur as he described. Wright then defrauded a Veteran’s Caregiver program of \$83,967 claiming he was so disabled he needed a full time caregiver even as he was traveling, playing basketball, caring for his child and serving on the Snoqualmie Planning Commission. He defrauded Social Security Disability of \$181,438 claiming he was too injured to work even though at the time he was employed full time by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Later in the scheme, Wright defrauded the Office of Personnel Management of some \$48,226 by claiming disability from his job at the Department of Commerce. Wright defrauded Washington State Employment Security by collecting \$29,860 in unemployment benefits claiming he was able and willing to work while simultaneously claiming to the Social Security Administration that he was fully disabled and unable to be employed. Wright further used his disability status to avoid repayment of more than \$41,068 in student loans to the Department of Education. Finally, Wright defrauded his employer, the Department of Commerce, by submitting fake orders claiming he was on military leave. In all, pleadings indicate that Wright victimized 16 different federal, state, local, and private entities, including agencies, programs, organizations, individuals and benevolent institutions such as Disabled American Veterans. [Source: DoJ Western District of WA | U.S. Attorney’s Office | June 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VAMC Aurora CO Update 20 ► Perjury Charges Dropped

The Justice Department has declined to prosecute two Veterans Affairs Department executives after lawmakers accused them of misleading Congress about massive cost overruns at an Aurora VA hospital. The House Veterans Affairs Committee asked for a perjury investigation last fall, claiming the executives repeatedly gave false testimony that masked serious problems with the hospital construction project. The Justice Department told lawmakers in a 19 MAY letter that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute. Republican U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman of Colorado released the letter to The Associated Press on 6 JUN.

The decision means no one has yet been fired or charged since the cost of the hospital ballooned to nearly \$1.7 billion, almost triple earlier estimates. The VA has said everyone involved in the problems has retired or was transferred or demoted. The hospital is still under construction in the Denver suburb of Aurora and is expected to be finished next year. The VA executives targeted by lawmakers were Glenn Haggstrom, then the top official in charge of construction projects, and Stella Fiotes, director of the VA's Office of Construction and Facilities Management. Neither returned phone messages seeking comment Thursday. VA spokesman Paul Sherbo said the agency had no comment. Multiple investigations concluded that the VA bungled the project, providing insufficient oversight, approving lavish design elements, failing to get the designers and builders to agree, and trying to use a complicated form of construction contract that agency executives didn't fully understand.

The VA's inspector general, an internal watchdog, said last year that Haggstrom knew the project was veering toward huge cost overruns but didn't tell lawmakers when he testified before Congress in 2013 and 2014. That prompted lawmakers to call for the perjury investigation of Haggstrom and Fiotes. Coffman said he was disappointed in the Justice Department's decision. "I think that there is clear evidence that they intentionally misled Congress," he said. Committee chairman Phil Roe, a Republican from Tennessee, also expressed disappointment. "It cannot be disputed that VA's handling of this construction project was thoroughly mismanaged, and VA officials at the time decided not to provide Congress with an accurate picture of their failures," he said. Haggstrom retired from the VA in 2015, one day after he was interviewed under oath by VA officials about the problems. Fiotes is still at the department. [Source: The Associated Press | Dan Elliott | June 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VAMC Omaha NE Update 02 ► Wait Time Creep

VA officials said 9 JUN they hope that a new federal initiative plus more local hiring will stop a trend that has seen more Nebraska and western Iowa veterans waiting longer to see doctors. Two years ago, Department of Veterans Affairs data examined by The World-Herald showed that only one in 278 clients of the VA Medical Center in Omaha had to wait longer than 30 days to see a doctor. More than 99.6 percent saw a doctor on time. That placed the hospital among the top three of 152 VA hospitals in the country. Nearly every other clinic in the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System — which serves veterans from North Platte in the west to Shenandoah, Iowa, in the east — boasted similarly impressive numbers.

Since then those numbers have slipped. A new look at recent data shows that the rate has dropped to 98.3 percent in Omaha. Eleven other hospitals now rank ahead of it, though Omaha still ranked well above the VA's national average in April of 96.8 percent. The problem is even more serious at the VA clinic in Norfolk, where in April more than 6 percent of patients waited more than 30 days. That's far more than the national average. The problem in Norfolk began when the clinic lost two of three primary care physicians who work there, said Dr. David Williams, the health care system's chief of staff. "One of our big challenges is staffing," Williams said. "If a doctor gets sick or retires, it takes a long time to replace them." He said new physicians recently have been hired. "I would say by August we'll see significant improvement," he said.



VA officials said the slippage in Omaha and across the region is, ironically, the result of a program meant to help shorten veterans' wait times. Congress created the program, called Veterans Choice, in 2014, after revelations that some VA hospitals — but none in Nebraska or Iowa — had created phony waiting lists to cover up scandalously long waiting times. The law allowed veterans who had waited more than 30 days or live more than 40 miles from a VA clinic to visit a doctor in the private sector instead. A private contractor, called Health Net, was hired to run the program. But the company has struggled to keep up, said Jenny Rosenbalm, business office director for the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System. That has led to longer wait times for a few veterans needing to see certain specialists.

“Historically we had a very good non-VA care program. We would buy anything our veterans needed in the private market,” Rosenbalm said. “Choice has added some hurdles.” She said she expects improvements with the recent passage by Congress of a successor program, called Veterans Choice 2.0. Rosenbalm said the new version will involve the local VA more directly in setting up appointments for affected veterans. Since the current fiscal year began Oct. 1, 2016, the local VA has processed nearly 17,000 Veterans Choice claims, according to VA officials. That compares with 21,304 during the entire previous year. “We’re going to be one of the first sites to try it,” Rosenbalm said. “Our staff will be more heavily involved in the care of the veterans.”

Also, Health Care System Director Don Burman briefed reporters on planned improvements as part of a “State of the VA” initiative begun last month by VA Secretary David Shulkin that calls for improvements in 13 areas of service. Burman said the VA wants to offer wider choices for veterans, improve quality of care, modernize electronic records, boost employee accountability and enlist the community’s help in stopping veteran suicides. Among planned VA improvements are:

- » Begin construction next spring on an \$86 million ambulatory care facility at the Omaha VA hospital through a groundbreaking public-private partnership. When completed, the new facility will allow most outpatient services to move out of the aging and outdated hospital building, which opened in 1950.
- » At the same time, begin building a 350-stall parking garage to ease the hospital’s chronic parking woes. The garage is expected to cost between \$8 million and \$9 million, said Will Ackerman, a VA spokesman.
- » Begin construction of a new Fisher House on the Omaha campus. The house provides rooms for families to stay while veterans from out of town receive extended care.
- » Fill vacancies faster with the help of events like a recent job fair, at which VA recruiters collected résumés from more than 400 job candidates. The system has a particularly urgent need for nurses, said Eileen Kingston, associate director for patient services, with 15 current openings for acute-care surgical nurses.
- » Boost the Omaha VA hospital’s current four-star (out of five) quality rating to the top mark by the end of the year. “Our metrics all point to us as a five-star facility,” Burman said.

[Source: World-Herald | Steve Liewer | June 10, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VARO Boston ► Disability Claim Error Rates | High**

Some veterans have been denied the monthly income they deserve for war-related injuries due to high error rates at the troubled Boston VA — a dismal showing advocates blame on sloppy work due to quotas. The local Veterans Administration benefits office was ranked the second-least accurate in the North Atlantic region — with only Baltimore rated lower, according to a Herald review of the latest data available. “Some of these veterans have gone through almost bankruptcy, had to sell their house or move, had to make other concessions, because they didn’t have

the income to support their family properly,” said Dan Stack, who handles disability claims for the Massachusetts office of Disabled American Veterans, a nonprofit that helps wounded military vets.

The score for the Boston office at the end of the 2016 federal fiscal year was 84.8 percent for accurately rating a vet’s claim. The national average was 87.6 percent. And it was far from the VA’s stated “aspirational goal” of 98 percent accuracy. Advocates chalked up the lousy numbers to pressure on VA claims staff to clear daunting backlogs, limiting the time spent reviewing each claim. “All Boston cares about is numbers ... They have a quota they have to meet, and they have to make sure that’s processed in a certain period of time,” said Jason Kane, commander of Weymouth VFW Post 1399, who assists vets with their cases. “The VA gets a lot of pressure from Congress and the Senate and the White House saying, ‘Hey, you’ve got to get these claims through, get money in their pocket, get a roof over their head,’” Kane added.

Inaccurate ratings typically result when a claims specialist — who reviews medical paperwork to calculate payments — misses information or misinterprets the severity of a vet’s disability. The VA uses the ratings to decide how much an injured vet is paid in monthly disability checks. The amount can range from \$133 to \$3,285, depending on the severity of the disability and how many dependents someone has. The Boston benefits office, which oversees roughly 10,000 claims every year, says its numbers have been steadily improving since the most recent publicly available ASPIRE data, which runs up to September 2016. A spokeswoman for the national VA did not respond to questions on when the report would be updated. In a statement to the Herald, the Boston benefits office said its most recent claim accuracy score was 85.6 percent, and touted rates above 90 percent in a subset of the claims data. “While we continually strive to improve the quality of our decisions, it is clear that the quality of our decisions is on par with the rest of the nation,” the statement reads.

The Herald has previously reported that the VA’s inspector general, in recent reviews, blamed lack of training in the Boston regional office for high error rates in claims for traumatic brain injury (TBI), special compensation and ancillary benefits. The office’s 2011 report found one veteran had been underpaid by \$31,797 over two years because his TBI rating was wrong. Appealing a VA disability rating is an arduous process, and it can be hard to secure a lawyer. In 2015, it took an average of three years for a VA rating appeal to be resolved, five years if it reached an appeal board. That’s time struggling vets simply can’t afford, said Anthony Hardie, director of the D.C. advocacy group Veterans for Common Sense. “The terrible experiences they’ve had because the VA simply couldn’t get their claim right the first time around,” Hardie said, “that’s just beyond unacceptable.” [Source: Boston Herald | Jack Encarnacao | June 07, 2017 ++]

**\* Vets \***



### **Vet Complaint Hotline ► Launched 1 JUN 2017**

President Trump’s long-promised hotline for veteran complaints officially launched on 1 JUN, but questions remain about the long-term plans for the new resource. The phone line — live now at **855-948-2311** — is designed to

“collect, process and respond to the complaints of individual veterans in a responsive, timely and accountable manner,” according to Department of Veterans Affairs officials. VA Secretary David Shulkin on 31 MAY described the initial rollout of the line as a soft launch, with “live-answer agents“ receiving and processing some of the calls. He promised that by 15 AUG, the hotline will have continuous coverage from a live operator 24 hours a day, every day of the week. “This is something the president had talked about,” he told reporters.”We’re going to be testing that system starting tomorrow and fine-tuning it over the next several months.” Following are a couple of inputs I received from first day callers on the service that was provided:

- I just called about my personal issue, it took 10 minutes to wait for an operator, and then she spent 30 minutes interviewing me. She said they had to respond to my request in 14 days. She said they are manning the lines with military spouses, parents and veterans. So far it seems legit.
- I called in and only had to wait no more than 5 minutes. The operator was very pleasant and attentive . He took all my information down and promised me a team would call me back in 7 to 14 days . It was a good experience.

During the presidential campaign last year, Trump touted the hotline as a way for veterans to have a direct line to the commander in chief, 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.” Calls to the line will be kept confidential, but information will be shared with VA officials, and in some cases veterans will be asked to give personal information for responses to specific problems. Exactly which officials will respond to the problems and how they’ll be processed remain unclear. The call center is being billed as “the White House/VA Veterans’ Complaint Hotline,“ but during the presidential campaign Trump suggested the idea as a way to directly report issues to the Oval Office without interference from VA leaders.

Department officials said they will use information from the hotline to “improve the delivery of care and benefit services to all veterans, including their families, caregivers and survivors,“ but offered no further specifics. White House officials have deferred questions about the effort to the VA. The cost of the hotline also remains unclear. VA officials said the soft launch will total \$190,000, which includes one-time computer and phone setup expenses. In later phases, the recurring cost for the telephone line and maintenance alone is estimated to be \$5,700 per month. Money needed to pay salaries for around-the-clock operators has not yet been calculated. Democrats on Capitol Hill have been skeptical about the effectiveness and cost of the hotline idea. Last month, in a hearing on the fiscal 2018 budget, House Veterans’ Affairs Committee ranking member Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN) called it “a drain on (the VA’s) IT budget.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Homeless Vets Update 80 ► Why so Many in LA

Despite recent gains in the fight to end veteran homelessness, a sharp rise in the numbers living on the streets of Southern California has prompted veterans and advocates to call for more action and to question whether the problems at the root of the crisis are being adequately confronted. The number of homeless veterans hit 4,828, a 57 percent increase over the previous year, according to the Jan. 2017 homeless count released by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority last month.

That’s a strong indication that efforts are not getting to veterans early enough, said Nathan Graeser, a researcher at the Center for Innovation and Research for Military and Veteran Families at USC’s School of Social Work. “We don’t have a lot of help for people when they reach out before they are in crisis and before they are homeless,” said Graeser. And though progress has been made in helping some veterans find jobs and getting them mental health care, he said, it should start even before service members leave the military. “We’re still transitioning people out of the military into communities without a lot of local connection to resources and planning and programs, so for the

most part when people get out of the military, they really have to do it on their own," said Graeser. That can work for some vets, who are taught a culture of self-reliance. But each year, 12,000 veterans come to Southern California after military service, said Graeser, making it the biggest vet community in the nation. So it only takes a small percentage of vets running into trouble to add hundreds to the streets. 'It gets daunting'



Marine veteran Jose Luis Gonzalez ducked beneath a bridge in El Monte on a recent afternoon, where a clump of tents and tarps covered a dusty hillside. He was looking for homeless veterans, describing what he was doing in military terms. "We call it the search and rescue," said Gonzalez, 41. "It's very similar to the military where we go out into these types of areas, under bridges, in parks, deep in the fields of homelessness." His goal is to make contact with veterans, find out why they're homeless and connect them with help. He's a volunteer for Vet Hunters, a group whose mission is to seek out vets in some of the most remote areas of L.A. County. On the recent trip to El Monte, he was joined by two other volunteers, both military veterans themselves.

Gonzalez, who did two tours in Iraq, said he joined Vet Hunters because of his own struggles after returning to civilian life. "Once I got out of the military, I ended up pulling away from my family because I just didn't feel like I could explain what I saw and how I saw it and how it affected me," he said. "It was a tough transition." He watched friends and other vets struggle, too. Recently, he and the other vets in the program have been seeing more and more vets in the streets across the county. "Dodger Stadium, Chinatown, Highland Park, Eagle Rock, there's a huge growth," said Gonzalez. As he spoke, Sandy Conner pushed a bicycle nearby. The 50-year-old Navy veteran said he became homeless after losing his job as an auto mechanic. In the Navy, he worked as a welder on submarines, but he struggled to find steady work after leaving the military. Today, new arrivals are joining him where he now sleeps by the busy railroad tracks. "There's about a hundred or so that I know of between the 60 and the 10 freeway," said Conner. But, he added, their ranks are growing. "There's all kinds of new faces down here right now," he said. "In the last week, I've seen more people down here that I never knew."

Local officials are about to greatly expand efforts with money secured through two ballot initiatives. Measure HHH, approved by L.A. city voters last November, secures \$1.2 billion to invest in low-income housing. Measure H, greenlighted by L.A. County voters in March, is projected to raise about \$350 million annually through a quarter-cent hike in the sales tax. In addition, the VA is moving ahead with plans to build 1,200 housing units for vets at its West L.A. campus. Another bright spot could be the voucher program called VASH, or Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing, which can cover about 70 percent of a veteran's rent. It's a collaboration between the VA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Sandy Conner, the Navy vet living in the dry riverbed in El Monte, hopes to get one. "Once I get my VASH going, I can get housing and get more stable," he said, adding that Vet Hunters is helping him with his application. Conner said he can't find work without a place to live. "It's kind of hard to go for a job interview [when] it's been a day or so since last time you had access to water to take a shower; with the dust and dirt down here, everything is dirty," he said. "It gets a little daunting." But there's no guarantee Conner will get a voucher.

Last year the county gave away all of its 225 vouchers in just five months, according to Margarita Lares, who runs the program for the L.A. County Housing Authority. The program, which started in 2009, has so far awarded 1,754 vouchers, but there continues to be a shortage. And President Trump's budget proposal doesn't include funding for new vouchers. "We don't know where we are today," said Lares. "We have a lot of uncertainty whether there will be any vouchers." She said her office typically gets 5-10 referrals from the VA every week, but she's had to halt the referrals for now. For Jose Luis Gonzalez, the Marine veteran and volunteer with Vet Hunters, the homelessness he sees on the streets is part of a deeper challenge of making sure that all veterans are welcomed back to civilian life – with the services they need. "We served our country, we did what we could," he said. "Now all we want is to fit in and to bring purpose back to our society." [Source: 89.3 KPCC | Dorian Merina | June 09, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Terrorism Conviction ► Tairod Pugh Gets 35 years**

A U.S. Air Force veteran convicted of terrorism charges for trying to join the Islamic State group and die a martyr was sentenced Wednesday to 35 years in prison by a judge who called it a “very sad thing” a onetime airman would want to join a group seeking to destroy America. Last year's conviction of Tairod Pugh, of Neptune, New Jersey, was the first verdict from more than 70 cases the government brought against Americans accused of trying to support the militant group. “This isn't about whether you're a Muslim or a Christian or Jewish,” U.S. District Judge Nicholas G. Garaufis told Pugh, who's 49.”This is about whether you're going to stand up for your country.”



The Brooklyn judge called Pugh's military service “a long time ago” commendable but said the defendant squandered his training as an airplane mechanic and all the good things the United States did for him with a decision to betray his country. “The work of the Islamic State is to destroy our way of life,” the judge said. He added that he can't imagine a U.S. military veteran trying to join such a group. “It's a very sad thing,” he said. Prosecutors said Pugh was stopped at a Turkish airport in 2015 carrying a laptop with information on Turkey-Syria border crossing points, 180 jihadist propaganda videos, including footage of an Islamic State prisoner beheading, and a letter declaring: “I will use the talents and skills given to me by Allah to establish and defend the Islamic States.” At trial,



prosecutors showed jurors materials found on Pugh's computer and cited a letter Pugh wrote to his wife saying, in part, "There is only two possible outcomes for me: Victory or martyr." Prosecutors said he sought a route into Syria to join the Islamic State group. Authorities forced him to turn back. He was arrested soon after his return to New York.

Pugh was in the Air Force from 1986 to 1990, when he was trained to install and maintain aircraft engines and navigation and weapons systems. Pugh gave a rambling statement Wednesday, interrupted when he started to cry and when the judge cut him off, saying, "I can't listen to this whole thing. I just can't. ... I'm not the psychiatrist. I'm the judge, and I'm limited in what I can do." Before Pugh was interrupted, he was defiant. "I am innocent," he said. During closing arguments, defense attorney Eric Creizman said Pugh had no ill intent in Turkey a month after losing his job as an aviation mechanic and telling his supervisor to stop "talking to me like I'm an idiot." He said Pugh had hoped to move to the Middle East with his wife. He said his client was feeling small and inconsequential when he started researching the rise of the Islamic State group in the summer of 2014, impressed that Muslims somewhere were trying to establish a country and wouldn't "back down from anything." [Source: The Associated Press | Larry Neumeister | May 31, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## U.S. Constitution Emoluments Clause ► Military Retiree Impact

As many of you have heard, LTG Michael Flynn (Retired) has been accused of violating, among other things, the Emoluments Clause of the Constitution. Most people until recently had never heard of the Clause which applies to all federal employees and bars them from working for or receiving anything from a foreign government which is broadly defined. Even fewer people knew that retired uniformed service personnel (RUSP) are subject to it too after leaving active duty for the rest of their lives. The Emoluments Clause is comprised of 49 words in Article I of the United States Constitution and states:

*No Title of Nobility shall be granted by the United States: And no Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under them, shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State.*



According to the Washington Post, it was added due to concerns from the 1700s that American ambassadors who were overseas might be corrupted by gifts from rich European powers. It has never been the subject of a Supreme Court hearing which leaves some doubt as to what it ultimately means and how it might apply to modern-day life. There are over 1.9 million Retired Uniformed Service Personnel (RUSP) and there are probably at least a few thousand that are unaware they are in violation of the Clause since the definition of what is a foreign government entity is not always clear. For example, being a mechanic, pilot, or desk clerk for Qatar Airline, which is owned by



the Qatar government, needs “prior approval“ under current federal law from two federal agencies – the Secretary of the service one is retired from and the Secretary of State. Even working at the Qatar Airline’s ticket counter at Dulles Airport requires such approval.

The rationale for having the Clause apply to retired uniformed service personnel is that they are not really retired, but are “receiving reduced compensation for reduced service“ and thus remain subject to the UCMJ and to involuntary recall to active duty. That is why a retired President or member of Congress is not subject to the Clause and thus can get paid hundreds of thousands of dollars from a foreign government for giving a speech after they retire.

The penalty for non-compliance with the prior approval requirement is the **loss of one’s military retirement** until one gets approval and there are no retroactive approvals. Thus, a RUSP retiree who belatedly seeks and gets approval today after working for Qatar Airlines at its ticket counter for several years without prior approval would have to wait several years before he or she gets another military retirement check. For more information on how this all works and how one gets prior approval to work for a foreign government, please see: How to Avoid Losing Your Retirement by Going to Work for an Entity of a Foreign Government and Air Force Retired Office’s Afterburner article at <https://c.yomcdn.com/sites/www.roa.org/resource/resmgr/LawReviews/2017/17043-LR.pdf> and <http://www.retirees.af.mil/Portals/53/documents/AFTERBURNER-CURRENT/COLOR%20AFTERBURNER%20-%20SPRING-SUMMER%202017-FINAL.pdf?ver=2017-04-17-110700-73>. [Source: <https://www.fedsmith.com> | Wayne L. Johnson | May 19, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Stolen Valor Update 105 ► Reported 170601 thru 170615

Seattle, WA -- A federal judge on 1 JUN sentenced a former soldier who lied his way to a Purple Heart to three years in prison and ordered him to repay nearly \$650,000 in stolen government benefits. **Darryl Wright**, 48, a former Idaho National Guardsman, feigned injuries from an explosion in Iraq in 2005 and doctored statements from fellow soldiers to obtain two awards, a Combat Action Badge and a Purple Heart, which is reserved for those wounded in action. The Army has since revoked the awards, though Wright still has the medals.



He pleaded guilty to two counts of fraud last year. Prosecutors were seeking a prison term of five years, and they wanted the judge to order Wright to return the medals and a Purple Heart license plate. Settle declined to go that far,

but he did order Wright to serve three years, followed by three years of supervised release, and to repay \$646,300 in benefits. Wright's attorney, Christopher Black, called it “the right sentence.” “He acknowledged responsibility for the bad decisions that he's made and apologized for them,” Black said. He described the defendant as a “complicated man“ with psychological issues, but said he has been doing well in therapy.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys David Reese Jennings and Gregory Gruber said Wright parlayed the medals he received to obtain “every possible benefit that might be available to a wounded veteran,” including a wide range of disability benefits and the forgiveness of more than \$40,000 in student loans. Prosecutors said he defrauded 16 state, federal, local and private agencies, programs and organizations.”This guy was a master at weaponizing his phony status as a Purple Heart Veteran,” Jennings said. In applications for benefits, Wright claimed to be so severely disabled that he could only focus his attention for five to 10 seconds, and he said he needed a live-in caregiver. In reality, he served as chairman of the planning commission in Snoqualmie, a city east of Seattle where he lives; coached high school basketball; and had held a full-time federal government job in Seattle.

His fraud came to light because a co-worker in the U.S. Commerce Department discovered in 2009 that he had fabricated National Guard orders in an effort to be paid for a week of skipped work. Wright accused the co-worker, Cristina Jackson, of violating his privacy, and the department initially tried to punish her instead of him. Eventually, she reported what was going on to the department's inspector general, whose findings against Wright eventually made their way to federal prosecutors.”I can finally say it's over,” Jackson said after the sentencing 1 JUN.”I still think the judge was way too lenient and gave him more credit than he deserved, but for me it was enough that it was all memorialized in court.”

Wright claimed to have been injured in a rocket attack in Kirkuk, Iraq, on Aug. 30, 2005. Then a first lieutenant with the Idaho National Guard, he was near a battalion headquarters building when two rockets landed about 100 yards away. Initial reports filed by him and by others in his unit referenced no casualties.”As far as anyone on our team getting hurt, no, that didn't happen,” then-Capt. Mark Moeckli told The Associated Press last year. But in 2010, Wright successfully applied for a Purple Heart. In his paperwork, he claimed he “was violently thrown and knocked unconscious from the percussion of the rockets' impact.” Wright also claimed Social Security disability benefits, insisting he was frequently bedridden. The VA paid his sister to be his live-in caregiver, though investigators said she performed no such service. By May 2013, the siblings were bringing in benefits totaling \$10,000 a month, prosecutors said. The sister later pleaded guilty to related charges. [Source: The Associated Press | Gene Johnson | June 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Korean War Vets ► Ted Barnhart | Air Sea Rescuer**

Flying rescue missions during the Korean War, Ted Barnhart was the radar operator as his B-17 skimmed over polar seas. The Tolono native, now 85, did most of his missions in the Sixth Air Rescue around Labrador, Greenland and Iceland. In that part of the world, if you landed in the drink, hypothermia would kill you in five minutes, he says. Barnhart also helped with rescues off the ice. Planes flew from Maine to Labrador to Greenland in the area his B-17 patrolled.”One of our jobs was getting people to Korea by the northern route,” he says.”It was shorter, and the winds were often with you.”

One of four brothers in the service, Barnhart enlisted in the Air Force in 1950, right out of the new Unity High School — preferring not to serve in the infantry in the coldest of Cold War actions, where soldiers froze to the ground. He served from 1950 to 1954. After receiving radar and radio training, first on the ground, he was moved to air rescue. Barnhart often “flew the grid“ over the seas looking for lost aviators. With crews usually of eight, the B-17 flew with its gunnery removed.”We did carry .45s,” he says. His B-17 was fitted with a 37-foot-long Higgins Airborne Lifeboat strapped to the bottom that could be dropped into the Arctic sea.”It had three parachutes. They detached automatically, and ropes came out for the men to grab,” he says of help for survivors, who were usually in

open dinghies in the frigid air. The Higgins boat was sealed.”It had motors, food for two weeks, everything you could need until somebody could pick you up,” he says.

“It was very satisfying to rescue somebody,” he adds.”A lot of the time, we couldn't find anybody alive.” Sometimes the bomber flew over land, often to get to a U.S. base in Greenland, which is part of Denmark. In storms, the plane flew under the weather through fjords in Greenland, sometimes having to veer around mountains. Flying could be interesting in other ways, he says. The shifting magnetic North Pole threw off compasses and radio waves. “What we were looking for was Soviets trying to infiltrate over there,” Barnhart says. Before being reassigned to fly over the West Coast, Barnhart had put in a lot of Arctic air time. For all the missions, he says, he “never had to turn around, never lost a man.”



**In this May 2, 2017 photo, Ted Barnhart, a U.S. Air Force veteran who made sea rescues during the Korean War, shares his experience at his home in Champaign, Ill.**

In 1953, while still in the Air Force, he married his high school sweetheart, Wilma. She has passed away. They had three children. Barnhart was a University of Illinois Fire Department battalion chief for many years in Champaign — the first one here to drive the new snorkel truck. He says he's had about 20 jobs over the years, sometimes two at a time: “I guess it would be fair to say I'm a workaholic.” Even in his 80s, he has somewhere up to 18 lawns and two churchyards he mows. [Source: The (Champaign) News-Gazette | May 31, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **WWII VETS 138 ► Richard Harmon | Invasion of Europe**

Richard Homan remembers watching a movie in Bristol, England, when the theater manager stopped the show, turned up the lights and summoned military personnel in attendance to the stage. "He announced the war in Europe was over," Homan recalls. "Pure bedlam broke out." People jumped up and were screaming and clapping. It got to be a pretty wild night." That was May 8, 1945. Just two years earlier, the then-18-year-old Homan was working as a milk deliveryman in Henry County, Ohio — 53 stops on a 110-mile route — when he was drafted. His three older brothers were already serving. "I was so convinced we were right," Homan says, recalling his feelings about going to war.



**Richard Homan, 89, reflects on his service during World War II.**

After training at Fort Riley in Kansas and an Atlantic crossing in which his transport ship became separated from its convoy and was attacked by a German submarine, Homan was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division. His unit began additional training in Wales in early 1944. "We knew something was coming," he says. "We started running obstacle courses that included coming in from the ocean to shore." By mid-May, the 60th Regiment was in Bournemouth, England, and placed in isolation in a hotel. On June 7 or 8, his outfit was moved to Southampton on England's southern coast. Homan and the rest of his battalion had no idea the invasion of Europe had already begun. "We saw a ship that was shot up," Homan says. "It was the first time we realized that it was on."

Crossing the English Channel on June 9, the conversation among Homan and his fellow soldiers turned philosophical. He recalls the questions that were being asked: Is this trip really necessary? Should we be doing this? How do we justify this? "Generally, the conversation turned to the carnage that was going on there," Homan says. "And we were watching it. Everybody came to the conclusion: 'Let's get this on so we can get home. Whatever is going to come up, let's go.'" On the morning of June 10, Homan transferred from his transport ship to a heavily pitching Higgins landing boat off Utah Beach. He mistimed his jump and fell 15 feet to the bottom of the boat. He quickly regained his composure. "I yelled, 'Get us in close,'" he says. "The coxswain said, 'I'll get you so close the tops of your boots won't get wet.'" A sandbar stopped the Higgins boat short of that goal. Homan and others waded in with water up to their necks. There was only scattered artillery fire, and Homan's outfit suffered no casualties in the landing. That would come the next day.

The 9th Division pushed across the Normandy Peninsula with little resistance until reaching the area of Carteret, where it ran into heavy artillery fire. Homan sought cover behind a hedgerow next to a friend, Smith Griffin. "He told me to get down, and I said I can't because I won't be able to see them coming at us," Homan says. At that moment, an artillery shell burst right above Homan. "I saw a piece of shrapnel hit right between my feet." Another piece hit Homan in the hand. Blood was shooting in all directions. He suffered a concussion and a blown ear drum. The blast bent his M1 Garand rifle into an arc. "You could shoot it around a corner," Homan, now 89, jokes. As Homan regained his bearings, he turned to his buddy. Griffin was dead. "How that shrapnel missed me and hit him, I'll never know," Homan says quietly.

After several months recuperating in a military hospital in Bristol, Homan began training replacements for the Battle of the Bulge. One officer who came from the States happened to be his brother, Capt. Robert Homan. After the war, Richard Homan went on to serve as a special agent for the FBI. He has been married for 67 years. His wife, Mildred, was a Marine during World War II, stationed at Marine headquarters in Washington, D.C. They have five children, 14 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren, with twin great-grandchildren on the way. "Crossing the English Channel, I had this tremendous sense of history," Homan says from his Mountain Home, Ark., home. "Even

as a 19-year-old, I remember thinking there is no way this isn't going to be a historic moment." [Source: USA Today | Kevin Pieper | May 29, 2014 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **GI Bill Update 231 ► Usage Declined in 2016**

The number of service members using military tuition assistance dropped again in fiscal year 2016, continuing a years-long downward trend, while Post-9/11 GI Bill usage saw a slight decrease, the first since the benefit took effect in 2009, federal data indicate. The same schools that have historically attracted the most users of those education benefits kept their places at the top in fiscal 2016. But the University of Phoenix, the top GI Bill school, and American Military University, the top TA school, are each shedding thousands of students, as some of their competitors slowly gain ground.

Phoenix's losses come at a time of intense scrutiny for the controversial for-profit school. John Aldrich, a vice president at AMU, also a for-profit school, said recent TA rules and limitations are responsible for the TA enrollment drops, a view that others echoed. The Department of Defense "should indeed be very concerned about the continued trend of fewer TA students," Aldrich said. "DoD recruits men and women into military service in part because of education benefits. Failure to maintain or expand these benefits can predictably hurt recruitment, retention, promotion and readiness in the military."

Between fiscal 2015 and 2016, the total number of TA students fell by 4.7 percent, as all service branches but the Coast Guard saw a drop in users. The Navy saw the steepest decline, followed by the Air Force, Marine Corps and Army. Since 2013, the total number of TA users has declined more than 22 percent. Some of the top TA schools attribute the decline in their numbers to major changes to the DoD's Voluntary Education Program in 2014, which included limiting institutions' access to military installations. "All the rules on TA use have certainly become stricter, and that's certainly limited the TA use," said Tina Ady, deputy chancellor for Central Texas College, the fourth most popular destination for TA users, with a main campus located just outside Fort Hood. There was also sequestration in 2013, during which TA funds stopped for 30 days, said Kelly Wilmeth, a vice president at University of Maryland University College, which accounts for the vast majority of military students at the University System of Maryland, the second most popular destination for TA users.

AMU's TA population dropped by nearly 2,700 students from fiscal 2015 to fiscal 2016. This follows a 3,900-student decline from fiscal 2014 to fiscal 2015. Meanwhile, enrollment figures held steady at UMUC, where officials say they are ramping up offerings to make the institution more attractive to military and veteran students. This includes eliminating textbooks for all students to make courses more affordable, adding online degree programs, creating a veteran-focused unit of staff members and expanding onto more military installations. "It costs us money in time and people and resources, but we want to give back to the education centers because they really are the entry point for a lot of these military students who are coming to school and asking questions about college," Wilmeth said.

At Central Texas College, the TA student population dropped by nearly 950 in fiscal 2016, a development that Ady said the school is monitoring. "What we try to do is be as flexible as possible to develop new programs and develop new initiatives to hopefully turn this trend around."

**GI Bill trends** -- Following years of user counts increasing by tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of students annually, Post-9/11 GI Bill usage has plateaued. After hitting 790,408 students in fiscal 2014, benefit usage increased by about 100 students in 2015 and dropped by about 400 students in 2016, according to VA data. James Ruhlman, an acting deputy director for the Department of Veterans Affairs, chalked it up to fewer service members separating from the military and a decreasing veteran unemployment rate. Another major factor: In the early years of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, its usage increased dramatically each year, as students discovered the new benefit and chose it



over the Montgomery GI Bill. By now, the Post-9/11 GI Bill is widely known, and almost everyone who wants to make the switch already has.

Most Post-9/11 GI Bill users are going to degree-granting schools, with the majority attending public institutions, Ruhlman said. “If anything we’ve probably seen a little bit of a dip in some of the other ways to use benefits, like vocational flight training for people who want to become professional pilots or on-the-job training like apprenticeship, because of the fact that we do have a benefit now that pays tuition and fees, books and supplies, and a monthly housing allowance,” he added. AMU’s Aldrich said veterans can use their education benefits more freely than service members can use TA. As AMU has seen declines in its TA population in recent years, its Post-9/11 GI Bill population is growing. “There are a number of factors affecting TA enrollments – Naval base closures, confusing enrollment management tools, limited installation access, and force reductions,” Aldrich said. “Veterans are not subject to the same limitations and restrictions regarding their preferred school of choice.”

The California Community College System, the second most popular destination for GI Bill users, credits its place on the list to the inexpensive tuition rates and easy admissions rules at its 113 colleges. Director of State Government Relations Michael Magee said much of their popularity among veterans stems from word of mouth, as students feel welcome and veteran resource centers gain momentum across the state. To track Post-9/11 GI Bill use, Military Times evaluated VA data showing how many people used the GI Bill in fiscal 2016 and the resulting cost, as well as annual summary data. Yellow Ribbon program use was not included. Military Times combined this data with Education Department information to group institutions that are part of the same university system. To track tuition assistance use, information including student enrollment, course counts and cost was collected from the Defense Department, covering the Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. The Coast Guard provided similar information, and affiliated institutions were grouped together just as they were for the GI Bill analysis.

**For-profit representation** -- For-profit institutions, which operate as businesses, continue to be popular destinations for military-connected students. Half of the top 10 schools that attracted the most GI Bill users were for-profits, as were four of the top 10 for TA users. The embattled University of Phoenix educated 35,388 GI Bill students in fiscal 2016, nearly double that of the California Community College System, the second most popular veteran destination. But that’s down from nearly 50,000 GI Bill students in fiscal 2014, just two years prior. The school has come under intense scrutiny in recent years and was briefly placed on probation and barred from enrolling new TA students by the DoD in late 2015. That likely accounts for a substantial part of the nearly 42 percent decline in the school’s TA students in fiscal 2016, which included the period of probation.

According to a statement from the university, nearly 10,000 GI Bill and TA students completed their education at University of Phoenix in fiscal 2016. “We view their trust in our career-relevant programs not just as a privilege but as a responsibility. Under our new leadership, the University is looking forward to enhancing and accelerating efforts underway to ensure more military students pursue and complete their higher education goals,” the statement said.

The VA said in a statement that veteran students should be able to use their earned Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits at the institution that best meets their needs, regardless of whether the school is nonprofit, for-profit, or a state institution. “It is important to protect veterans and ensure that they are armed with information to make the right choice and prevent any institution from taking advantage of them solely for their GI Bill benefits — without providing a quality education in return. Veterans should not be aggressively recruited by institutions principally because of financial motives,” the statement continued. “The department understands the demand, especially among veterans, for non-traditional forms of education. But we also believe that we must do all we can to ensure veterans are well-informed and not taken advantage of by institutions that are not acting in their best interest.”

For their part, the California Community College System feels public schools “tend to be more reliable in terms of sticking around,” Magee said, giving the example of the sudden folding of ITT Tech – the seventh most popular GI Bill destination in fiscal 2015. “I don’t think a student would all of a sudden want to be nowhere.” While the Obama administration cracked down on the for-profit sector, Aldrich said the new administration doesn’t appear to



discriminate against for-profit and online schools. “They appear to be treating all students and institutions equally,” he said. “They have stated their understanding of the greater need for online education given adult learners’ having jobs and families that don’t allow them time to sit in a classroom. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross & George Altman | June 12, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Obit | Samuel Wilson ► 10 JUN 2017

Retired Lt. Gen. Samuel Wilson, who had a long military and intelligence career and was president of Hampden-Sydney College from 1992 to 2000, has died, the college announced. He was 93. Wilson, who was known as "General Sam," died 10 JUN at his home in Rice, Virginia. Wilson served as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, and was known for coining the term "counter-insurgency" as well as for helping to create Delta Force, the U.S. Army's Special Forces group. Long before that, he joined the Army as a 16-year-old private in 1940. He taught guerrilla and counter-guerrilla tactics at the Infantry School at Fort Benning in Georgia in 1942 and 1943. He became a first lieutenant at the age of 19 and was chief reconnaissance officer for a unit known as Merrill's Marauders, which operated behind enemy lines in Burma during World War II.



At the end of the war, he was assigned to the Office of Strategic Services, which was the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency, in Southeast Asia. He later worked as a CIA officer in West Berlin and a defense attache at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow during the Cold War. Wilson retired from the Army in 1977 and became a political science professor at Hampden-Sydney while continuing to consult with officials in Washington. Hampden-Sydney President Larry Stimpert says Wilson steered the college through a difficult period when enrollment growth slowed and the college considered whether to allow women. The governing board ultimately decided to keep college all-male, and under Wilson's leadership, enrollment growth resumed and the endowment nearly doubled. Hampden-Sydney remains one of the nation's few remaining private colleges for men. [Source: The Associated Press | June 12, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Retiree Appreciation Days ► As of 15 JUN 2017

Retiree Appreciation Days (RADs) are designed with all veterans in mind. They're a great source of the latest information for retirees and Family members in your area. RADs vary from installation to installation, but, in general, they provide an opportunity to renew acquaintances, listen to guest speakers, renew ID Cards, get medical checkups, and various other services. Some RADs include special events such as dinners or golf tournaments. Due to budget constraints, some RADs may be cancelled or rescheduled. Also, scheduled appearances of DFAS

representatives may not be possible. If you plan to travel long distances to attend a RAD, before traveling, you should call the sponsoring RSO to ensure the RAD will held as scheduled and, if applicable, whether or not DFAS reps will be available. The current updated schedule for 2017 is available at:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Source: RAD List Manager | Milton Bell | June 15, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Hiring Fairs ► 16 JUN thru 15 JUL 2017**

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



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

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| <a href="#">Camp Pendleton CA Job Fair</a>        | June 20 |
| <a href="#">Washington, DC Veterans Job Fair</a>  | June 22 |
| <a href="#">Atlanta GA Veterans Job Fair</a>      | June 22 |
| <a href="#">Indianapolis IN Veterans Job Fair</a> | July 13 |
| <a href="#">St. Louis MO Veterans Job Fair</a>    | July 13 |

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

[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](#)

[Joint Base San Antonio Transition Summit](#) July 12 to July 13

Fort Sam Houston, TX [Details](#) [Register](#)

[American Legion Department of Virginia Hiring Fair](#) July 13 - 9:00 am to 2:00 pm

Herndon, VA [Details](#) [Register](#)

**Veteran Career/Job Fairs**

[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](http://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.

**Fort Sam Houston, TX** July 12, 2017, 8am - 7pm **More information**

Fort Sam Houston Community Center 1395 Chaffee Road, Fort Sam Houston, TX 78234

\* TRANSITION SUMMIT (Day 1 of 2)

- 8-9 a.m. | Registration
- 9 a.m.-4 p.m. | Industry briefs for job seekers
- 5-7 p.m. | Networking reception

**Herndon, VA** July 13, 2017, 9am - 1pm **More information**

Hilton Washington Dulles Airport 13869 Park Center Road, Herndon, VA 20171

\* AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF VIRGINIA HIRING FAIR

- 9-10 a.m. | Personal branding workshop
- 10 a.m.-1 p.m. | Hiring fair

**Fort Sam Houston, TX** July 13, 2017, 8am - 4pm **More information**

Fort Sam Houston Community Center 1395 Chaffee Road, Fort Sam Houston, TX 78234

\* TRANSITION SUMMIT (Day 2 of 2)

- 8-9 a.m. | Registration
- 9 a.m.-Noon | General session including workshops, interactive forums and a panel discussion for job seekers
- 1-4 p.m. | Hiring fair

[Source: Recruit Military <https://events.recruitmilitary.com> & <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs> & <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs> | June 14, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

**Vet State Benefits & Discounts ► Kentucky 2017**

The state of Kentucky 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 – KY** 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://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-benefits/kentucky-state-veterans-benefits> and <http://veterans.ky.gov>.

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits> | June 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.

## **MOH Awards Update 06 ► S.1209 | Pension Increase**

A bipartisan group of lawmakers is again trying to boost pension payouts for the nation’s dwindling number of Medal of Honor recipients. Under the plan introduced in Congress in late MAY, the monthly pension for the military heroes would be increased from about \$1,300 a month to \$3,000, and all of the medal recipients would be eligible for travel stipends “to share their personal stories in even more character development programs and speaking engagements.” Currently, those pensions (which are separate from other post-military benefits they may be eligible for) are given a small inflation increases annually. Lawmakers behind the push say that’s not enough.

“Medal of Honor recipients represent the best among us,” bill sponsor Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) said in a statement. “These heroes have served our country with distinction, and this modest increase is the least we can do to convey our gratitude for their sacrifices.” Along with Graham, the proposal is backed by Sens. Tom Cotton (R-AK), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and Ed Markey (D-MA). The idea has been floated in past sessions but failed to become law, in part because of the cost of the change. Supporters estimate the legislation will \$15 million over a 10-year period. That’s not a large sum for a defense budget expected to top \$600 billion in fiscal 2018, but nearly every new appropriation has proven problematic on Capitol Hill in recent years due to federal spending caps and political infighting. Currently, there are 72 living Medal of Honor recipients. Eleven of those are from the war in Afghanistan, while the rest are in their 60s or older. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 27, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Atomic Service Medal** ► **S.1283 | Radiation Exposed Vets**

This week, Representatives Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) and Tom Emmer (R-MN) and Senator Edward J. Markey (D-MA) reintroduced The Atomic Veterans Service Medal Act, a bipartisan and bicameral bill that would authorize the award of a military service medal to members of the Armed Forces who were exposed to ionizing radiation as a result of participation in the testing of nuclear weapons or under other circumstances.

Between 1945 and 1962, about 225,000 members of our Armed Forces participated in hundreds of nuclear weapons tests. These GIs became known as the Atomic Veterans. They were placed in extremely dangerous areas and constantly exposed to radiation in performance of their duties. Sworn to secrecy, they could not even speak of their service. U.S. Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton recognized their valiant service, and acted to provide specialized care and compensation for their harrowing duty.

- “As part of our country’s nuclear program, hundreds of thousands of brave U.S. servicemembers – our Atomic Vets -- participated in atmospheric tests, exposing themselves to grave risks, without true recognition for their sacrifice,” Senator Markey said. “Many of these brave patriots suffered from radiation-related diseases and other health issues. As a nation, we must honor their sacrifice, and this legislation takes an important step in that direction.”
- “America has a responsibility to honor all of our veterans and the sacrifices they made to serve our country. Tragically, many of these Atomic Veterans have already died, without receiving recognition. They kept a code of silence that likely led to many passing away too soon,” Congressman McGovern said. “It is long past time for the Defense Department to honor their unique service with a medal recognizing all that they and their families have done to keep us safe. This bipartisan bill will help us to finally right this wrong and I urge Congress to pass it.”
- “Our veterans are the best our nation has to offer,” said Congressman Emmer. “They dedicate their lives and sacrifice so much to protect our freedoms and liberties, so the least we can do is show them our immense gratitude. Unfortunately, we have since lost many of our Atomic Veterans, but I am honored to work with Congressman McGovern and Senator Markey to ensure these brave soldiers get the recognition they deserve.”
- Keith Kiefer, the Director of the National Association of Atomic Veterans said, “The National Association of Atomic Veterans has worked hard to achieve acknowledgement of the consequences of exposure to the invisible bullets of radiation exposure. We thank Congressmen McGovern and Emmer and Senator Markey for spearheading our cause in the 2017 legislative session.”

Joining Congressmen McGovern and Emmer as original cosponsors of the House bill include Representatives Walter Jones (R-NC), Katherine Clark (D-MA), Betty McCollum (D-MN), Seth Moulton (D-MA), Keith Ellison (D-MN), and Rick Nolan (D-MN). [Source: The Associated Press | May 28, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Accountability Update 48** ► **S.1094 | Passed and Sent to House**

As promised, Senate lawmakers on 6 JUN passed new accountability rules for the Department of Veterans Affairs in the hopes of putting the legislation on the president’s desk by the end of June. The measure, which passed by a voice vote, eases firing rules for VA employees and allows department leaders to pull back bonuses and other specialty pays from individuals found guilty of wrongdoing. It’s the culmination of more than two years of debate on Capitol Hill on how to best manage the VA workforce and more quickly punish incompetent or criminal



individuals in the federal workforce. Numerous attempts at the issue last year resulted in stalled legislation and irritated lawmakers anxious to pass some changes.

Republicans — including President Donald Trump — have insisted that fear of consequences has been missing in VA for years, creating a culture of complacency and corruption that has resulted in a failing department. In recent years, and again on Tuesday, they cited dozens of anecdotes of VA workers delaying firing for months for offenses like neglecting patients, watching pornography at work, or embezzling federal funds. “We’re reaching into every corner of the problems at VA that exist over the last years,” said Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA), chairman of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee. “We’re making sure we make the corrections necessary to make the VA an accountable organization.” Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and one of the bill’s sponsors, said he hopes the measure spurs widespread change in the embattled department. These men and women are veterans have sacrificed much for our country and it is our duty to take care of them when they come home,” he said. “Sadly for many, this solemn obligation and promise has not been kept. Plain and simple, ineffective governance is unfair to our veterans and to the American taxpayer.”

Some Democrats and federal employee advocates have pushed back against that narrative, arguing the bill unfairly limits workers’ rights to create an easy political scapegoat. In a letter to lawmakers before the vote, Senior Executives Association President Bill Valdez blasted the bill’s provisions to “eliminate essential protections provided by Congress to career federal executives” and warned it would “enable undue or politically influenced terminations of dedicated VA senior executives.” But most of the major veterans service organizations have already given their endorsement of the measure, as have key Democrats in the House and Senate.

Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Ranking Member Jon Tester (D-MT) helped craft the legislation and defended it as “a bill that’s going to work.” “It’s going to give the VA what they need to hold people accountable,” he said. “Every once in a while we get a bad apple, and the VA needs to be able to remove that bad apple because that bad apple reflects poorly on everybody.” The voice vote allowed the measure to pass the chamber without any formal recorded opposition. Under the measure,

- The VA secretary would have the authority to reprimand or fire any senior executive in a 21-day internal department grievance process. Rank-and-file employees would have similar job actions appealed to the Merit Systems Protection Board, with a review process of no more than 180 days. Both are significantly shorter time frames than existing rules.
- Would allow VA leaders to claw back employee bonuses or relocation expenses, or reduce a former employee’s pension, if they are convicted of a felony related to their job. VA leaders in recent years have maintained they have no current authority to take those kinds of punitive actions.
- Mandates VA leaders provide more training on whistleblower rights and be prohibited from firing employees who have filed complaints through official channels.
- Expands department hiring authorities if the legislation becomes law. VA secretaries could directly appoint individuals as medical center directors and other leadership offices, which VA leaders have argued would translate into more highly qualified candidates for those posts.

The legislation now heads to the House, where Republican leaders are planning to move quickly on the legislation. In a joint statement, House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe (R-TN) and Ranking Member Tim Walz (D-MN) released a joint statement praising the Senate measure and asking House leaders to schedule a vote as soon as possible. “We are one step closer to creating a true culture of accountability at VA while protecting the whistleblowers who are essential to identifying and addressing problems within the department,” Roe said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 6, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Facility Closures Update 01 ► H.R.2773 | Sell Pershing Hall

Tennessee Congressman John Duncan is among a cohort of lawmakers that have filed a bill that would force the VA to sell a boutique hotel in France and use the money to maintain cemeteries and memorials. In a release, Duncan said the VA owns Pershing Hall (<http://www.pershinghall.com/en>), a boutique hotel in downtown Paris named for General John J. Pershing, the senior U.S. commander in World War I. Duncan said in the release that VA had no business owning a boutique hotel "This is not (VA's) role, and they need to concentrate more on taking care of our sick and wounded veterans," he said in the release. "I am pleased to join Congressman Coffman and our colleagues in introducing this bill to finally get the VA out of the hotel business."

The Sell Excess Luxury Lodgings' Act underscores a lengthy list of shortcomings that have recently been highlighted by VA leaders. VA Secretary David Shulkin gave a frank "State of the VA" address last week at the White House, which outlined 13 areas where he said the department can improve. One of those areas was facility management. Shulkin said the VA currently needs \$18 billion to upgrade its facilities, hundreds of which sit vacant. Nearly 450 date back to the Revolutionary War or Civil War, and 49 of those are vacant, Shulkin said. "In all, VA has 400 vacant buildings and 735 under-utilized facilities, and that costs the taxpayers \$25 million a year just to maintain vacant and under-utilized facilities," Shulkin said.

Duncan's bill, which he's co-sponsored with Reps. Mike Coffman (R-CO), Ed Perlmutter (D-CO), and Ann Kuster (D-NH) would direct the funds from the sale of the building to the American Battle Monuments Commission. Room rates on 6 JUN at the hotel were listed at €300 per night, about \$338. [Source: , USA Today Network | Jake Lowary | June 6, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Military 2018 Pay Raise ► Leadership Recognition Act

Frustrated over increasing issues with military salaries, a pair of senators on 14 JUN introduced new legislation to ensure "equal compensation" among senior enlisted service members and limit the president's ability to reduce troops' pay raises. The bill — sponsored by Sens. Joni Ernst (R-IA) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) — could affect President Trump's plans for the 2018 military pay raise, if lawmakers finalize the measure before the end of August. But it faces an uncertain future, given the busy budget schedule facing Congress in coming weeks and the restrictions it would place on the executive branch.

Under the measure, the president would no longer be able to use "economic concerns" as a reason to decouple the military pay raise from the Employment Cost Index, which estimates private sector wage growth. Both Trump and President Barack Obama used that clause in recent years to offer smaller-than-expected pay raises for troops, redirecting the money to other readiness and modernization accounts. The bill sponsors criticized that as bad policy. "Our men and women in uniform serve this country with honor," said Warren in a statement. "They know they won't get rich in the military, but they serve with skill and dedication, and they are entitled to basic pay increases that will give them a chance to build some economic security."

Trump's suggested pay increase for 2018 is 2.1 percent, equal to the 2018 pay raise but 0.3 percentage points below the Employment Cost Index figure. The 2.1 percent pay raise translates into about a \$600 annual boost from 2017 pay for younger enlisted ranks, and about \$950 a year for more senior enlisted and junior officers. A mid-career officer will see roughly \$1,700 a year extra under that plan. The 0.3 percentage point difference translates into about \$85 lost a year for the junior enlisted, \$130 for the senior enlisted and junior officers, and \$240 for mid-career officers. Under the measure, the president would still be able to lower or deny a military pay raise due to "a national emergency." The legislation would also mandate the defense secretary carry out a study on senior enlisted pay, and offer a sense of Congress that senior enlisted advisors to the commanders of the combatant commands

should get a pay boost. Currently, most senior enlisted personnel do not receive pay increases based on new responsibilities and assignments. Ernst and Warren said that creates upsetting discrepancies in pay among key advisers.

“Senior enlisted service members carry a great responsibility leading our men and women on and off the battlefield, and we must ensure they receive appropriate compensation as we seek to retain them and strengthen our military,” said Ernst, who served with the Iowa National Guard in the Middle East during the Iraq War. Military leaders in recent years have discussed building more flexibility into the military pay scale, which is currently based almost entirely on rank and time in service. But those types of suggestions have been met with mixed response from lawmakers and outside advocates. If it does not advance as a stand-alone measure, the Ernst/Warren bill could be included in the annual defense authorization debate later this summer. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 14, 2017 ++]

**\* Military \***



## **Project Recovery** ► **Locating WWII MIA Aircraft**

Project Recover, established in 2012 with help from the Office of Naval Research, is a team of marine scientists, archaeologists and volunteers who use advanced technology and historical research to locate aircraft and their crew who have been missing in action since World War II. According to a news release, in early 2017 with a search area spanning almost 10 square kilometers, Project Recover located two missing aircrafts, both B-25 bombers. Perhaps the most famous aircraft of the war, the B-25 bomber performed a range of assignments — most notably, the Doolittle raid over Tokyo — but also for routine missions such as bombing, photo reconnaissance, and submarine patrols.



One of aircraft discovered was on a mission bombing an airfield when they were hit by enemy fire and went down. Five crew members survived the crash and were taken prisoner by the Japanese; the sixth member remains missing in action. Now underwater, the wreckage of one B-25 is somewhat intact, the other is nearly unrecognizable. “People have this mental image of an airplane resting intact on the sea floor, but the reality is that most planes were often already damaged before crashing, or broke up upon impact,” said Katy O’Connell, Project Recover’s executive director.”And, after soaking in the sea for decades, they are often unrecognizable to the untrained eye, often covered in corals and other sea-life.”

While much of Project Recover’s focus is the underwater searching and surveying, they know the importance of historical accounts from village elders, listening to stories passed down for generations about the crashes many years ago. “Our team of divers and scientists conducts site surveys to fully document the wreckage,” explained Andrew Pietruszka, a staff scientist with Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California San Diego , and Project Recover’s underwater archaeologist.”That documentation can then be used by the U.S. government to correlate soldiers still missing in action with the aircraft site we discovered, and to evaluate that site for the possible recovery of remains.”

The serious natures of their discoveries is not forgotten: more than mechanical pieces, these ruins are often the final resting place of missing American military. “Any find in the field is treated with the utmost care, respect and solemnity,” O’Connell said.”There are still over 73,000 U.S. service members unaccounted for from World War II, leaving families with unanswered questions about their loved ones. We hope that our global efforts can help to bring closure and honor the service of the fallen.” If there is a possible connection to a service member still listed missing in action, the Pentagon’s Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) takes care of recovery and repatriation efforts. DPAA notifies the families of the discovered MIAs if a connection is made. In 2016, Project Recover conducted numerous missions to search for more than 20 aircraft and 100 military personnel still missing in action. They will be returning to Papua New Guinea later this year. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Rachel Rakoff | May 31, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military Retirement System Update 27 ► 401k Cap After 26 Yrs**

The Pentagon wants to upgrade its new retirement package, set to debut 1 JAN, so the military’s longest-serving enlisted personnel have greater incentive to remain in uniform. Introduced in late-May, the proposal calls for removing eligibility limits on the dollar-for-dollar contributions that will be made to troops’ 401(k)-style investment accounts, a key feature of the Defense Department’s new “blended” retirement plan. Current rules halt those payments once personnel reach 26 years of service. By lifting that cap, careerists who ascend to the military’s senior-most ranks could collect tens of thousands of dollars in additional retirement savings depending on the stock market’s performance over time.

Officials view the initiative as a means to help retain those who hold influential positions throughout the armed forces, men and women who’ve amassed deep expertise in their occupational fields or serve as key advisers to the military’s senior commanders. “We believe that, in the future, this will help to encourage our most experienced and capable enlisted members to stay in the military to fill critical leadership positions,” said Johnny Michael, a Pentagon spokesman. Defense Department officials included the proposal in their budget request for fiscal 2018. The spending blueprint will be dissected in both houses of Congress throughout the coming weeks, though it’s unclear how lawmakers will look upon the recommendation. The Pentagon tried unsuccessfully during the last two budget cycles to extend TSP contributions for all service members serving beyond 26 years. By limiting their request now only to enlisted troops, officials may increase their odds of success.

The recommendation comes as hundreds of thousands of service members face a difficult decision. They can either opt into the new retirement plan, which reduces lifelong pension payouts by 20 percent while offering

matching cash contributions of up to 5 percent of basic pay for individuals who invest in the government's Thrift Savings Plan. Or they can exercise their right to a grandfather clause and remain on course to collect the full, time-tested pension. Though the blended retirement package will be the only option offered to troops who join the military after Jan. 1, those with less than 12 years of service come Dec. 31 must choose. As such, the proposal to extend matching TSP contributions "will have very limited impact on the opt-in population in the immediate future," Michael said. But it will almost certainly factor into their decision-making in the weeks and months to come.

Troops will have all of 2018 to make their choice. And at the behest of DoD, the military services have begun introducing various programs and tools to educate the force about its options and how individuals can grow their retirement savings through the new program. Budget documents indicate there are an estimated 1.75 million troops eligible to opt in. As of April 30, more than 172,000 had completed an online explanatory course, Michael said, noting that training, especially for reservists and members of the the National Guard, is expected to pick up throughout the summer. "We anticipate this number to significantly increase in the coming months," he added. "There is still plenty of time to complete the training before January 1, the earliest date an eligible service member can opt in." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Andrew deGrandpre | June 11, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Armor Piercing Bullet ► M885A1 Enhanced Performance Round**

The Marines are looking for a bullet that can punch through the advanced body armor that enemy fighters are wearing, Corps officials said. "We're seeing more body armor wherever our Marines and soldiers deploy — more of it and better quality, or better capability," said Lt. Gen. Robert Walsh, head of Marine Corps Combat Development Command. The Marine Corps is testing an Army bullet that is designed to penetrate body armor, Walsh told lawmakers on 5 JUN. Both the Marines and Army are also looking at fielding a "higher caliber weapon," he said.

Walsh and Brig. Gen. Joseph Shrader, who leads Marine Corps Systems Command, both testified before the Senate Armed Services Seapower subcommittee. Sen. Mike Rounds (R-SD) asked both Walsh and Shrader how closely the Marine Corps is working with the Army to develop a bullet that can penetrate modern composite body armor amid concerns that the current 5.56 mm round is not strong enough to do so. "The 5.56 round, we recognize there is a type of body armor it does not penetrate, and adversarial states are selling that stuff on the Internet for about \$250," Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley told the full Senate Armed Services Committee on 25MAY. Milley said that the Army believes it has a bullet that can penetrate new ballistic plates that are resistant to the 5.56 mm rounds used by soldiers and Marines. "We think we have a solution," Milley said. "We know we have developed a bullet that can penetrate these new plates."

For more than a year, the Marine Corps has been testing the Army's M885A1 Enhanced Performance Round, which is better at penetrating enemy armor, Walsh told lawmakers on 6 JUN. "In fact, right now our Marines are deployed into Afghanistan with our weapons are using the Army round," Walsh said. The Marine Corps' testing on the M885A1 round is expected to be completed next month, Shrader said. One drawback to the Army's bullet is it "causes some durability issues" for the Marine Corps' M27 Infantry Automatic Rifle, he said. Marine Commandant Gen. Robert Neller is considering whether to issue infantry automatic rifles to nearly every 0311 infantrymen in rifle squads.

First fielded in 2010, the Corps' IAR is currently the M27 made by Heckler & Koch, but the Marine Corps has asked other firearms manufacturers if they have weapons that meet the IARs requirements, and if so, how expensive it would be and how long it would take to produce 11,000 rifles. The Marines are also working with U.S. Special Operations Command to develop a higher caliber round to defeat enemy body armor, Shrader said. "As late as last week, there was a limited technical demonstration that was done with SOCOM on a higher caliber round, specifically for their sniper rifles suite that we're working with on them that could potentially address that," Shrader



said. “So we're very in tune with that and we do understand that's that a capability we need to pay attention to.” Go to <https://youtu.be/yVZJ-DEKNR0> for some additional info on the new round. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Jeff Schogol | June 8, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **USCG Respect ► Acknowledge National Security Role**

When the White House proposed a \$1 billion cut to the Coast Guard's budget in a March budget outline, response was swift. The outcry from advocates and lawmakers led President Donald Trump's budget chief to back peddle, and in the end the fiscal 2018 budget proposal was flat for the service. But what emerged since is an interesting and perhaps long overdue dialogue about the needs of the Coast Guard, both in terms of budget and acknowledgement as a key player in national security. Adm. Paul Zukunft, commandant of the Coast Guard, sat down with Defense News Executive Editor Jill Aitoro to offer his candid thoughts on the matter.



**Adm. Paul Zukunft**

**Admiral, you have said that the Coast Guard’s identity as an armed service is forgotten. Can you tell me what you mean by that?**

I see it first forgotten, Jill, when I look at our appropriations. We are a military service. There are five. But about 4 percent of our budget is funded through DoD. We do a lot of work with the Department of Defense, yet a very small portion of our budget falls under defense discretionary budget funding. Ninety-six percent of that is considered non-defense discretionary. That’s where we found ourselves sometimes forgotten.

**Is a flat budget a victory to you?**

The reaction immediately when the Coast Guard was going to be defunded over a billion dollars, I would categorize it as organ rejection. We are a military service, and just as the other services are challenged with readiness, we are no different. In fact, we’re operating a very, very old fleet today and one of our biggest challenges is modernizing the fleet to bring it up to 21st century standards.

**Walk through the system modernization requirements.**

What’s changed in the last six or seven years is that the world has not become more tranquil. We’ve seen the largest flow of refugees since World War II. Unprecedented flows of cocaine destined for the United States coming out of Columbia. An ocean has opened up in the Arctic as well. We have even greater challenges as North Korea strives to be a nuclear nation targeting the United States. There’s a nine-dash line that’s now being contested in the east South



China Sea. Then we still have all our legacy programs that we had in addition to that. So, many more challenges. I think we have more challenges awaiting us. We want to be ready for those.

**Can you talk a bit about the mission of the Coast Guard from a national security perspective?**

I sit with all the other service chiefs and we frame a national military strategy that focuses on North Korea, Russia, China, Iran, violent extremism. But are there other threats in the world where our defense enterprise is stretched so far and wide that yes, there are threats we don't have the resources to attend to? Look at the Arctic. The Coast Guard has a strategy for the Arctic. We created an Arctic Coast Guard forum — as this sea opens, what fills that vacuum strategically? There's an opportunity to fill that with the Coast Guard. As we look at unprecedented flows of migrants destined for our southwest border — why are they leaving in the first place? They're leaving homes, countries that are rife with violent crime.

Some of the worst violent crime in the world is just south of our border here today. Why are they violent? Drugs arrive there in bulk. They're broken down in retail and they're then brought across our border for consumption in the United States. But they're all interrelated. Where they're most vulnerable is at sea. Most people don't realize that here on our ports, our waterways, the Coast Guard enables over \$4.5 trillion of commerce every year. This is a virtue of our geography, our waterways. We're a key enabler there for the secure movement of that cargo. We maintain that with a fleet of 35 ships.

If you can imagine you maintain your entire system with 35 construction crews, well, that's what we have. The challenge is that their average age is about 52 years old. We do need to recapitalize that. We're very involved in cyber. We operate on the Department of Defense Information Network. But many of our stakeholders are in the .gov or in the .com domain as well that we need to have access with and to. We want to make sure that we're not reaching out to partners that may have malware on their systems that we now introduce into the DOD Information Network. We have a strategy for that as well.

**Is there enough communication between the services and the Coast Guard?**

Absolutely. We have Coast Guard plugged into every combatant commander. We have a three-star officer who is the J6 on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. So, we have very good what I would call cross-pollination of Coast Guard with all the arm services and with all the combatant commands. The final piece in all this, Jill, is our people. It's very intriguing to stay focused on hardware, your capital plan, but we rolled out a strategy about a year and a half ago that focuses on how you recruit. How do you train, and more importantly how do you retain a workforce in this 21st century? Because if we don't get that right, all our recapitalization efforts will go for naught if we don't pay attention to our people.

**You have said in the past that the Coast Guard needs 5,000 additional personnel, 1,100 additional reservists to accomplish the primary mission. Where is the gap right now?**

It is across the board right now, Jill. We are trained and equipped, and by equipped I would say manned for a status quo environment. As we look at violent extremism breaking out, if we have a violent event, a terrorist event here in the homeland, we would be very challenged to sustain a heightened level of protection for any period with the manning levels that we have right now. We've been funded below the Budget Control Act floor for five years running now when it comes to our annualized operating expenses which includes salaries. So when you're funded below that level, we've made some difficult choices in the past.

We trimmed 1,100 billets out of our reserve component, which right now is the smallest it has been since before the Korean War. That is not a good place for us to be. We made difficult choices in offset active duty personnel under the same mantra as well. We're growing a cyber team. We don't have enough. As we build out new fleets we need to man those fleets and we need to look at how do we maintain those fleets as well. Then when I look at our civil servants, we need each one of those. I cannot afford to have a civilian retire and then go into a hiring freeze approach and not bring someone on board to take their place. Something as straightforward as our pay, most of that is done by civilians.

You cannot look at a civilian anywhere in our Coast Guard and not assign value to what they contribute to all our missions. In the case of incidents domestically, violent extremism for example, how would the Coast Guard respond? I'll take you back seven years ago when we had the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. I was the federal on-scene coordinator for that. As you may recall, just before that we have the earthquake in Haiti. You had all the triggering mechanisms in place for a mass migration out of Haiti. Now you've got the worst oil spill in history coinciding with hurricane season. Meanwhile, out in the Pacific Northwest we have what's called the Cascadia subduction zone. There's a lot of pressure on that tectonic plate, and if it releases, within 10 minutes that first tsunami comes ashore. Roadways are ruined and it becomes a maritime response. Today, the Coast Guard can respond to maybe one of those but not all three. Now you throw a terrorist event on top of that. We can just do that and not the other three.

If you have a terrorist event and it affects maritime — 95 percent of our trade right now moves by water. It would devastate our economy; it would devastate our manufacturing. If we just shut down the ports and allow nothing to come in or out, the Coast Guard would have to screen with our inner agency partners everything coming in and out of the port. But we would at least triple down what we do today in that contingency. That's why you need to grow the service, but you cannot assume that you only have one and only one in a given year. We don't get a choice in that.

### **There's a lot of talk of building up the Navy, the other services. What is it the Coast Guard asking for?**

Well, certainly I'm not in competition with the Navy. We have the world's best Navy. It's often not recognized; we also have the world's best Coast Guard as well. This was validated at the International Sea Power Symposium where I spoke last September. Many maritime nations, they can't afford a Navy. Many of the threats they see are very Coast Guard-like. In fact, they want to be like the United States Coast Guard. We have over 26 students at our Coast Guard Academy today that will go back to their countries and probably in the future be military leaders in their countries because they want to be like the United States Coast Guard.

We cannot be more relevant than we are now. But what we need is predictable funding. We have been in over 16 continuing resolutions since 2010. I need stable and repeatable funding. An acquisition budget with a floor of \$2 billion. Our operating expenses as I said, they've been funded below the Budget Control Act floor for the past five years. I need 5 percent annualized growth over the next five years and beyond to start growing some of this capability back. But more importantly, we [need] more predictable, more reliable funding so we can execute what we need to do to carry out the business of the world's best Coast Guard.

[Source: Defense News | Jill Aitoro | June 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **USMC Quotes ► Some Famous Ones by and About Marines**

- “The Marines I have seen around the world have the cleanest bodies, the filthiest minds, the highest morale, and the lowest morals of any group of animals I have ever seen. Thank God for the United States Marine Corps!” — *Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady of the United States, 1945*
- “They told (us) to open up the Embassy, or “we'll blow you away.” And then they looked up and saw the Marines on the roof with these really big guns, and they said in Somali, “Igaralli ahow,” which means 'Excuse me, I didn't mean it, my mistake'.” — *Karen Aquilar, in the U.S. Embassy; Mogadishu, Somalia, 1991*
- “Come on, you sons of bitches! Do you want to live forever?” — *GySgt. Daniel J. “Dan” Daly, USMC near Lucy-`le-Bocage as he led the 5th Marines' attack into Belleau Wood, 6 June 1918*
- “Gone to Florida to fight the Indians. Will be back when the war is over.” — *Colonel Commandant Archibald Henderson, USMC in a note pinned to his office door, 1836*

- “There are only two kinds of people that understand Marines: Marines and the enemy. Everyone else has a second-hand opinion.” — *Gen. William Thornson, U.S. Army*
- “I have only two men out of my company and 20 out of some other company. We need support, but it is almost suicide to try to get it here as we are swept by machine gun fire and a constant barrage is on us. I have no one on my left and only a few on my right. I will hold.” — *1stLt. Clifton B. Cates, USMC in Belleau Wood, 19 July 1918*
- “You cannot exaggerate about the Marines. They are convinced to the point of arrogance, that they are the most ferocious fighters on earth- and the amusing thing about it is that they are.” — *Father Kevin Keaney 1st Marine Division Chaplain Korean War*
- “The deadliest weapon in the world is a Marine and his rifle.” - *Gen. John “Black Jack” Pershing, U.S. Army Commander of American Forces in World War I*
- “Do not attack the First Marine Division. Leave the yellowlegs alone. Strike the American Army.” — *Orders given to Communist troops in the Korean War; shortly afterward, the Marines were ordered to not wear their khaki leggings.*
- “They (Women Marines) don't have a nickname, and they don't need one. They get their basic training in a Marine atmosphere, at a Marine Post. They inherit the traditions of the Marines. They are Marines.” — *LtGen Thomas Holcomb, USMC Commandant of the Marine Corps, 1943*
- “Some people spend an entire lifetime wondering if they made a difference in the world. But, the Marines don't have that problem.” — *Ronald Reagan*
- “Your soul may belong to Jesus, but your ass belongs to the marines.” — *Eugene B. Sledge, With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*
- “There are only two kinds of people that understand Marines: Marines and the enemy. Everyone else has a second-hand opinion.” — *Gen. William Thornson, U.S. Army*

[Source: Various | June 3, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## USS Independence (CV-62) ► Last Port of Call



The former CV-62 decommissioned USS Independence has arrived at its last port of call. The mothballed 61,000-ton Forrestal-class aircraft carrier passed through the jetties of the Brownsville Ship Channel on the afternoon of 1 JUN. A group of the ship's past crew members stood and watched as the ship was towed up the channel toward International Shipbreaking Ltd., the recycling company that won the contract to scrap the ship. The ship had left Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Washington, on 11 MAR and was towed around Cape Horn in South America to the Port of Brownsville. The USS Independence was launched from the Brooklyn Navy Yard in 1958, commissioned the following year and decommissioned in 1998. It was among several U.S. military ships to carry the name Independence. [Source: The Associated Press | June 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Supreme Court RFRA Petition Update 01 ► Appeal Rejected

The Supreme Court on 5 JUN rejected an appeal from a former Marine who was court-martialed in part for expressing her Christian faith in the workplace. Lower courts had concluded orders from her military superiors did not constitute a "substantial burden" on her First Amendment rights (Refer to RAO Bulletin 1 JAN 2017 article). The justices on Monday upheld her court-martial without comment. At issue was the extent a federal law on religious freedom protects members of the armed forces like Monifa Sterling, who continued posting biblical verses at her desk, despite orders from a superior that she remove them.



**Lance Cpl. Monifa Sterling**

The intersection of free speech on government property, especially within a military context, made this appeal closely watched by a number of advocates on both sides of the debate. The First Liberty Institute, which represented Sterling, lamented the Supreme Court's call on Monday. "Because the Supreme Court did not decide to review the case, the travesty below by the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces will now stand," Kelly Shackelford, CEO and chief counsel for First Liberty, said in a statement. "The military court's outrageous decision means federal judges and military officials can strip our service members of their constitutional rights just because they don't think someone's religious beliefs are important enough to be protected. Our service members deserve better."

Sterling, who was a lance corporal stationed at Camp Lejeune, N.C., originally was court-martialed for various offenses relating to separate incidents -- including disrespecting a superior officer, disobeying lawful orders, and failing to report to an assigned duty. But the part of the case that fueled her court challenge involved orders to remove a personalized version of the biblical phrase from Isaiah 54:17: "No weapon formed against thee shall prosper." Sterling taped the verses in three spots on her workspace. Court testimony said Sterling's superior repeatedly ordered her to remove the signs -- and when she refused, trashed them.

In its original 4-1 opinion, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces turned away Sterling's case. "We reject the argument that every interference with a religiously motivated act constitutes a substantial burden on the exercise of religion," the court said. Sterling was ultimately reduced in rank and given a bad-conduct discharge -- and later left the service. Her legal team acknowledged Sterling did not ask for permission to post or repost the verses but called the earlier ruling against her "shameful" and "wrong." [Source: Fox News | Bill Mears | June 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Mothballed Fleet ► Not A Factor in Fleet Buildup**

It was a compelling image in 1982: The president of the United States standing in the shadow of the battleship New Jersey's enormous 16-inch guns, recommissioning the World War II behemoth for a final run in the fleet — the centerpiece of Ronald Reagan's famed goal of a 600-ship Navy. Navy leaders say there probably won't be a similar ceremony for President Trump on the decks of the now-mothballed cruisers and destroyers sitting on the banks of the Delaware River in Philadelphia. In a recent interview, the admiral in charge of building and maintaining the Navy's fleet told Defense & Aerospace Report that the mothballed fleet at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard was probably not going to be a vital factor in getting the Navy to its new fleet goal of 355 ships — up from its current 275.

Vice Adm. Thomas Moore, head of Naval Sea Systems Command, told Defense & Aerospace Report's Vago Muradian that most of the ships in the inactive fleet are too far gone to make a major revival worth it. Some analysts have floated the idea of revitalizing the CG-47-class cruisers Ticonderoga, Yorktown and Thomas S. Gates, easing the burden on the Navy's strained and fast-wearing cruiser force. But Moore said the cruisers are not easy to bring back and have been picked over in recent years. "Most of those ships, from a combat systems perspective, are pretty obsolete," Moore said. "We probably wouldn't bring them back and they've kind of been spare-parts lockers the last couple of years."

Moore said the frigates, which had largely been used for low-end counter-drug and partner-support missions, might be OK to bring back. The carrier Kitty Hawk remains a possibility as well. "We'll go look at the FFGs, see if there is utility there," Moore said. "We'll look at the combat logistics force, see if there's utility there. Of the carriers that are in inactive force, probably Kitty Hawk is the one that you could think about. But we studied that when we decommissioned Enterprise, and the carriers are pretty old. So, there is limited opportunity in the inactive fleet but we'll look at it ship-by-ship." Bringing back inactive ships is an incredibly expensive process and wouldn't give the Navy a lot of utility in return, said Bryan Clark, a retired Navy officer and analyst with the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. "You could do that but what you'd get is essentially a frigate, capable of low-end missions. What you're not getting is a lot of capability — it's not going to be a ballistic missile defense shooter on patrol in the eastern Mediterranean."

The Navy announced in December that it had raised its ship-count goal from 308 to 355, five more than President Trump targeted while on the campaign trail. It's unclear, however, how the Navy plans to get there, with a number of programs like the littoral combat ship and DDG-2000 being truncated over the past decade. The Navy is looking to transition from the littoral combat ship to a more heavily armed frigate, but it has not announced what such a ship would look like or how soon it could get to the fleet. [Source: NavyTimes | David B. Larter | June 6, 2017 ++]

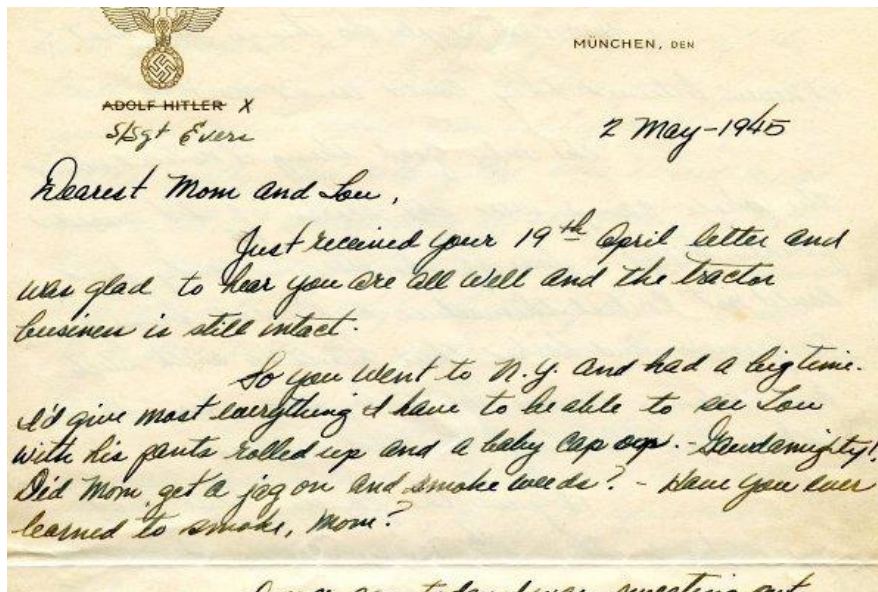




## Memorial Day 1945 ► A Letter Home

All of the U.S. graves were fresh across Europe for Memorial Day in May 1945, when a battle-weary GI in Munich a few weeks earlier grabbed some of the Fuhrer's stationery to write a letter home. Army Staff Sgt. Horace Evers crossed out Adolf Hitler's name, scribbled in his own, and wrote about what he had done in the war, and what it had done to him. "Dearest Mom and Lou (his stepfather)," began the correspondence. He asked about the tractor business back home, and he wished he had been with them on their daring trip to wicked New York City.

Then the words spilled out on how beyond strange his soldier's life had become. He had fought, he had killed, he had witnessed the unspeakable in the death camps. He had survived when so many hadn't, and now he was sitting in Adolf Hitler's living quarters in Munich. "A year ago I was sweating out shells on Anzio beachhead. Today I am sitting in Hitler's luxuriously furnished apartment in Munich writing a few lines home -- what a contrast," Evers wrote. "A still greater contrast is that between his quarters here and the living hell of Dachau concentration camp only 10 miles from here." "How can people do things like that? I never believed they could until now," Evers said. "I've shot at Germans with intent to kill before but only because I had to or else it was me. Now I hold no hesitancy whatsoever."





A few more days of the war in Europe were left for Evers and the other GIs who had defeated the Wehrmacht. He wrote the letter on May 2. Five days later in Reims, France, Gen. Alfred Gustav Jodl signed Germany's unconditional surrender to the allies. Jodl would be hanged in 1946 for war crimes.

Boyd Lewis of United Press was among the correspondents who had been summoned to a plane in Paris on 15 minutes' notice for the flight to Reims. They were told only that they would be on "an important out-of-town assignment." Aboard the Douglas C-47, Brig. Gen. Frank Allen Jr., of Cleveland, director of press operations at Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) told the reporters that they would be covering "the biggest story in a war correspondent's life -- the peace story," Lewis wrote. Allen added "This will be your first uncensored story -- when the surrender is completed, censorship goes off." The reporters "enjoyed a good laugh" at that, Lewis wrote.

In his dispatch, Lewis did something the big picture historians rarely do. He listed some of the everyday soldiers, like Evers in Munich, who were taking part in a momentous event. He noted the military police who guarded the German entourage at a guesthouse and, of course, their hometowns."They were Pfc. Jack Arnold of Lancaster, Pa.; Charles Trautner of Oakland, Calif.; Joseph Fink of Detroit; Frederick Stone of Pittsburgh; Clifford Cleland of Plattsburg, N.Y., and Elmer L. Cole of Little Falls, N.J. WAC (Women's Army Corps) Pfc. Joyce Bennett, of New York City, was manager of the house." On May 8, Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel signed similar surrender documents in Berlin. He also was executed in 1946 for war crimes. It was Victory in Europe, what would become just "VE Day," but the celebrations for the troops were mixed with anxiety, said Andrew Carroll, founding director of the Center for American War Letters at Chapman University in California, where Evers' letter on Hitler's stationery is preserved.

Last month, Carroll began a "**Million Letters Campaign**" to find and preserve at least one million articles of correspondence from every U.S. conflict, "from hand-written missives penned during the American Revolution to e-mails sent from Iraq and Afghanistan." In donating his letter to the archive after the war, Evers, who was living in Florida, told Carroll that "I'm afraid if I leave the letter (after his death), somebody is going to throw it out." Evers and the other troops in May 1945, leading up to a somber Memorial Day on May 28, also knew that they might be shipped off to another bitter fight in the Pacific. They knew that the Marines were then engaged in hellish combat on Okinawa. They knew that Gen. Douglas MacArthur was gearing up for the invasion of Japan.

On May 8, "the front-line troops didn't celebrate VE Day the way they did at home," Carroll said."There was a solemnity and a soberness about what had been lost. And these guys were bracing for the fact that they might have to fight again in the Japanese islands." Across Europe, where U.S. troops were stationed on May 28, they turned out before the endless rows of white crosses in the cemeteries. At the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery in Nettuno, Italy, Army Lt. Gen. Lucian Truscott, Jr., who had led the U.S. Sixth Corps through heavy fighting in Italy, presided at the Memorial Day event. There was no transcript of Truscott's speech, but Stars & Stripes reported he said, "All over the world, our soldiers sleep beneath the crosses. It is a challenge to us -- all allied nations -- to ensure that they do not and have not died in vain."

What happened next was reported by Bill Mauldin -- the Pulitzer Prize winner for his "Willie and Joe" cartoons in Stars & Stripes -- in his 1971 memoir "The Brass Ring," Nicolaus Mills, an American Studies professor at Sarah Lawrence College, told CNN."Before the stand were spectator benches, with a number of camp chairs down front for VIPs, including several members of the Senate Armed Services Committee," said Mauldin, who was at the ceremony. Truscott turned his back on the audience and spoke directly to the white crosses. He "addressed himself to the corpses he had commanded here. It was the most moving gesture I ever saw. It came from a hard-boiled old man who was incapable of planned dramatics," Mauldin said.

- "He apologized to the dead men for their presence here. He said everybody tells leaders it is not their fault that men get killed in war, but that every leader knows in his heart this is not altogether true."
- "He said he hoped anybody here through any mistake of his would forgive him, but he realized that was asking a hell of a lot under the circumstances. He promised that if in the future he ran into anybody,

especially old men, who thought death in battle was glorious, he would straighten them out. He said he thought that was the least he could do.”

As Truscott spoke in Italy, the town's burghers in top hats came to the cemetery at Margraten in the Netherlands to honor those from the U.S. 30th Infantry Division who had liberated them. In grainy and silent footage of the event, little girls in traditional dress skipped past stone-faced American MPs to join their parents at the gravesites. Some of the Dutch carried wreaths for the fallen GIs. A nun and two girls knelt and prayed. Grim U.S. officers paused to salute before the crosses and Stars of David. On May 29, this Memorial Day, the people of Margraten, a few miles from the German border, will turn out again at the 65-acre cemetery administered by the American Battle Monuments Commission. Each of the more than 8,000 graves has a local family as a caretaker. There is a waiting list of more than 100 to become caretakers.

In his letter home, Horace Evers went on at length about his bitterness over the death camps, but he also wrote of his satisfaction at having taken part in the liberation.”I guess the papers have told you about the 7th Army taking Nurnberg and Munich by now,“ he wrote to his mother and stepfather.”Our division took the greater part of each place and captured many thousands of prisoners.” “We also liberated Russian, Polish and British and American prisoners by the thousands -- what a happy day for those people.” He closed with “Well, enough for now, miss you all very much, your son, Horace.” [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | 26 May 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **HMS Gaspee Affair ► Declaration of Independence Role**

HMS Gaspee and her hated commander, Lt. William Dudingston, were sent by King George III to Rhode Island waters in March of 1772 to enforce the maritime trade laws and prevent smuggling. They made no friends amongst the colonists in harassing shipping and delaying, often unjustly, ships that had properly passed custom inspection in Newport. The latter was the case on June 9, 1772, when the packet sloop Hannah left Newport for Providence. When the Gaspee gave chase, Hannah's Captain Lindsey deliberately lured her across the shallows off Namquid Point (now Gaspee Point) and left the British ship hard aground on a sandbar, unable to move until the flood tide of the following day.



From an old engraving

Upon arrival in Providence, Captain Lindsey reported the event to John Brown, one of the most prominent and respected merchants in Rhode Island, who sent out a town crier inviting all interested parties to meet at Sabin's Tavern to plan the Gaspee's destruction. Under the leadership of Abraham Whipple, the small band of patriots rowed eight longboats with muffled oars to the stranded ship. The crew put up a feeble resistance; Lieutenant Dudingston was shot and wounded by Joseph Bucklin. Bucklin, was well known in Providence and kept a prominent restaurant, or place of resort, in South Main Street, where gentlemen resorted for their suppers. Here, too, they assembled, to discuss politics. Lieutenant Dudingston and his crew were taken prisoner and removed to Pawtuxet Village. Near

daylight on June 10th, the Rhode Islanders set fire to the Gaspee, burning her to the waterline whereupon her powder magazine exploded.

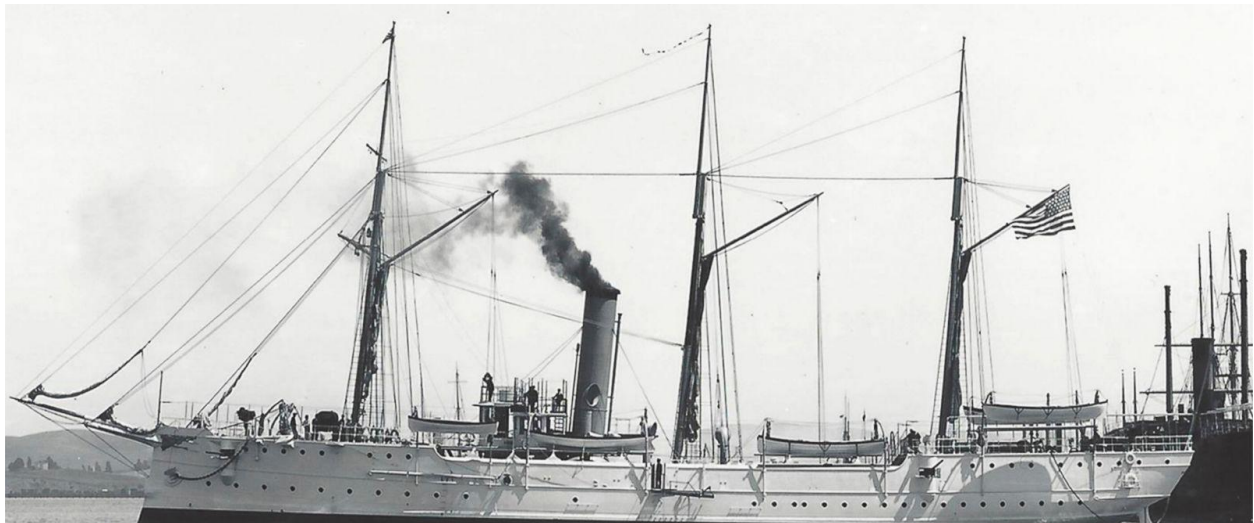
The event renewed hostilities between the American colonists and British officials. Following the Boston Massacre in 1770, British officials had worked to reduce tensions with the colonies by repealing some aspects of the Townshend Acts and working to end the American boycott of British goods. British officials in Rhode Island wanted to eliminate some of the illicit trade that had defined the small colony in order to increase revenue from the colony. British officials wanted to reduce hostilities between the Crown and the colonies—but the Rhode Island merchants did not. Colonists protested the Stamp Act, Townshend Acts, and other British impositions that had clashed with the colony's history of rum smuggling and slave trading.

Efforts of the Crown to learn the names of the culprits were unsuccessful, although a sizable reward had been offered. Public sentiment was in accord with the venture; this spirit of unity soon spread to the other colonies with the formation of the Committees of Correspondence to prevent further threats. It was but a short step from here to the First Continental Congress and eventually the Declaration of Independence. [Source: This Day In History | June 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **USCGC McCulloch ► Shipwreck Found - Will Not be Moved**

A hundred years ago in a blinding fog, a U.S. Coast Guard ship was sailing off the coast of Southern California when it smashed into a passenger steamship. The USCGC McCulloch sank within 35 minutes and lingered on the ocean floor undisturbed by people for a century. On the 100th anniversary of the vessel's June 13, 1917, disappearance, the Coast Guard announced 13 JUN that it found the shipwreck — not far from where it went down. And officials plan to leave it there. Strong currents and an abundance of sediment would make moving the delicate ship too difficult, officials said in detailing the discovery of the San Francisco-based USCGC McCulloch. They also paid tribute to its crews, including two members who died in the line of duty, but not in the crash.



Coast Guard Cmdr. Todd Sokalzuk called the ship "a symbol of hard work and sacrifice of previous generations to serve and protect our nation" and an important piece of history. The ship sank shortly after hearing a foghorn nearby and then colliding with the SS Governor, a civilian steamship. The McCulloch's crew was safely rescued and taken aboard the steamship. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Coast Guard discovered the wreck last fall during a routine survey. Researchers focused on the area of the shipwreck 3 miles (5 kilometers)

off Point Conception, California, after noticing a flurry of fish. Sunken ships offer a great place for fish to hide. The site is about 150 miles (240 kilometers) northwest of Los Angeles.

Commissioned in the late 1800s, the McCulloch first set out to sea during the Spanish-American War as part of Commodore George Dewey's Asiatic Squadron in the Battle of Manila Bay. Cutters based in San Francisco in the late 1800s and early 1900s represented American interests throughout the Pacific. They also played important roles in the development of the Western U.S. After the war, the cutter patrolled the West Coast and later was dispatched to protect fur seals in the Pribilof Islands off the coast of Alaska, where it also served as a floating courtroom in remote areas. The archaeological remains, including a 15-inch torpedo tube molded into the bow stem and the top of a bronze 11-foot propeller blade, are draped with white anemones 300 feet (90 meters) below the surface, officials said. A 6-pound gun is still mounted in a platform at the starboard bow. [Source: Associated Press | Linda Wang | June 13, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## National WWII Museum Update 01 ► Salute to the Home Front

A rusted fragment of the battleship USS Arizona sunk at Pearl Harbor, a woman's munitions plant uniform and ration books all tell the complex story of life on the homefront in a new exhibit at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans. "Salute to the Home Front," which opens Saturday, explores the bitter fight about entering the war, racial and gender prejudice, and the development of the atomic bomb. Museum president and CEO Nick Mueller said most of the museum's 6-acre campus shows how the war was won on the battlefield but the new permanent exhibit explains "why it was fought and how it was won on the homefront."



The 10,000-square-foot exhibit begins with the years after World War I. The peace treaty that ended the war in 1918 was "punitive and did not really solve the social and cultural ills" that led to the war, according to Owen Glendenning, the museum's associate vice president for education and access. "With democracy and capitalism under question, the rise of authoritarian regimes really shook the world," he said. Among the artifacts are British gas masks for children — one that might fit a 5-year-old and a much bigger one designed to hold an infant from head to waist. Gas had been a major weapon of World War I, and people feared that gas bombs might be dropped in civilian areas. "Fortunately, it never happened, but the population was scared stiff," Glendenning said. Headlines and newsreels show the strident debate between U.S. isolationists and internationalists, which ended when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. Survivors' accounts of that attack are among more than 50 videotaped oral histories interspersed throughout the exhibit.



"The signature of this museum is to engage people in personal stories. ... We hear from survivors of Pearl Harbor, people on Main Street USA. ... We hear first-hand stories about people who went into factories or into the service to fight," Mueller said. The exhibit's Main Street USA has a newsstand, a theater marquee and a store window filled with propagandistic wares such as Victory bobby pins and a charm bracelet of military service insignia.

- Within the picket fence outside two rooms representing a 1940s-style home, one wall is covered with a photo of a victory garden. Nearby are a real hubcap and other metal items for a scrap drive.
- Inside the kitchen, the shelves display pamphlets with titles such as "Victory Begins at Home!: Recipes to Match Your Sugar Ration" and "Health for Victory Club Meal-Planning Guide." Pull open kitchen drawers and you see items including ration books, matchbooks and an icebag.
- A living-room wall displays a framed map: "Esso War Map II: Invasion Edition." It's designed, an introductory statement says, so people can "follow the strategy of the Allies as it develops from day to day." An open closet in the same room displays children's military dolls, toy guns and dress-up uniforms.

Glendenning said the gallery on the rush to turn from a peacetime economy to a wartime one holds two of his favorite artifacts: a cutaway ship model from the Higgins boat-building plant in New Orleans, built as a reference to show workers how everything fit together, and the overalls and cap worn by a female munitions factory worker. "It has such a '40s sense of style," he said. "I love the big red buttons at the hip." Toni Kiser, assistant director for collections management, said one of her favorite pieces is at the bottom right corner of the living room's display cabinet: a statuette of Hitler bending over, with a pincushion as his rear end. [Source: Associated Press | Janet McConnaughey | June 6, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Abandoned Military Bases [01] ► Devil's Park Bunker, CA**



The bunker on Devil's Peak in California was constructed during World War II as a station for triangulation and observation, which was once a part of a larger group of structures built for similar purposes. When in service, a serviceman used binoculars to keep watch out at sea and if they discovered any enemy ships they would utilize a six-inch gun not far to sink them before they even got close to shore. The station became obsolete after the incorporation of longer-range weaponry and the site was completely abandoned in 1949, leaving an empty bunker atop Devil's Slide.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Battle of Midway ► WWII Pacific Turning Point**

Six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States defeated Japan in one of the most decisive naval battles of World War II. Thanks in part to major advances in code breaking, the United States was able to preempt and counter Japan's planned ambush of its few remaining aircraft carriers, inflicting permanent damage on the Japanese Navy. An important turning point in the Pacific campaign, the victory allowed the United States and its allies to move into an offensive position.

On 4 JUN 1942, the Battle of Midway began. During the four-day sea-and-air battle, the outnumbered U.S. Pacific Fleet succeeded in destroying four Japanese aircraft carriers while losing only one of its own, the Yorktown, to the previously invincible Japanese navy. In six months of offensives prior to Midway, the Japanese had triumphed in lands throughout the Pacific, including Malaysia, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines and numerous island groups. The United States, however, was a growing threat, and Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto sought to destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet before it was large enough to outmatch his own.

A thousand miles northwest of Honolulu, the strategic island of Midway became the focus of his scheme to smash U.S. resistance to Japan's imperial designs. Yamamoto's plan consisted of a feint toward Alaska followed by an invasion of Midway by a Japanese strike force. When the U.S. Pacific Fleet arrived at Midway to respond to the invasion, it would be destroyed by the superior Japanese fleet waiting unseen to the west. If successful, the plan would eliminate the U.S. Pacific Fleet and provide a forward outpost from which the Japanese could eliminate any future American threat in the Central Pacific. U.S. intelligence broke the Japanese naval code, however, and the Americans anticipated the surprise attack.

In the meantime, 200 miles to the northeast, two U.S. attack fleets caught the Japanese force entirely by surprise and destroyed three heavy Japanese carriers and one heavy cruiser. The only Japanese carrier that initially escaped destruction, the Hiryu, loosed all its aircraft against the American task force and managed to seriously damage the U.S. carrier Yorktown, forcing its abandonment. At about 5:00 p.m., dive-bombers from the U.S. carrier Enterprise returned the favor, mortally damaging the Hiryu. It was scuttled the next morning.

When the Battle of Midway ended, Japan had lost four carriers, a cruiser and 292 aircraft, and suffered an estimated 2,500 casualties. The U.S. lost the Yorktown, the destroyer USS Hammann, 145 aircraft and suffered approximately 300 casualties. Japan's losses hobbled its naval might—bringing Japanese and American sea power to approximate parity—and marked the turning point in the Pacific theater of World War II. In August 1942, the great U.S. counteroffensive began at Guadalcanal and did not cease until Japan's surrender three years later. [Source: <http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/battle-of-midway> | June 4, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Battle of Midway Update 01 ► LCdr C. Wade McClusky Jr Involvement**

C. Wade McClusky Jr. faced a tough decision on June 4, 1942: turn his low-on-fuel U.S. Navy air squadron around or keep searching for the Japanese fleet headed for Midway. He decided to go on and wound up changing history. The dive bombers McClusky led that day in the Battle of Midway helped to gut the Imperial Japanese Navy and turned the tide of the war in the Pacific in the Allies' favor after a string of defeats following the attack on Pearl Harbor. On 4 JUN, 75 years to the day of his heroics, a clay model of a planned bronze statue of McClusky is being unveiled in his hometown of Buffalo, New York, as part of a new public memorial dedicated to local war heroes. McClusky, who died in 1976, is depicted as he looked after returning from the June 4, 1942, attack, still wearing his flight suit, flying helmet and goggles. "Wade McClusky finally will be getting his due recognition," said Lee Simonson, one of the organizers behind the event and the fundraising effort for the new memorial. "He's one of the greatest heroes in American history."





**Adm. C. Wade McClusky Jr. official photo (left). In this May 30, 2017 photo (right) , sculptor Susan Geissler works on a clay likeness of World War II hero McClusky in her Youngstown, N.Y., studio. The clay model will form the basis for a bronze monument planned for the Buffalo and Erie County Naval & Military Park in McClusky's hometown of Buffalo, N.Y.**

McClusky, born in Buffalo in 1902, graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1926 and earned his pilot's wings a few years later. When the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor drew America into the war, he was a lieutenant commander in charge of the air squadron aboard the USS Enterprise, which escaped harm on Dec. 7, 1941, because it was at sea with the other U.S. carriers. In late May 1942, a large Japanese fleet was steaming toward the U.S. sea and air bases on Midway atoll, located about 1,300 miles (2,092 kilometers) northwest of Honolulu. Midway could provide the Japanese with a jumping-off point for more assaults on Hawaii, and possibly the West Coast.

The U.S. Navy, tipped off to the Japanese plans thanks to its breaking of the enemy's naval codes, ordered its only three aircraft carriers in the Pacific — Yorktown, Hornet and Enterprise — to head off the attack. McClusky's air squadron was tasked with finding the Japanese warships and sinking them. Despite the inside information, the planes initially were sent in the wrong direction after they took off on the morning of 4 JUN. More time — and fuel — was wasted as McClusky's group circled while waiting for other carrier-based planes that didn't show up. About two hours into the search and running low on gas, McClusky was faced with a choice: return to the Enterprise or keep searching, with the realization that most of his planes would have to ditch in the ocean. He kept going.

According to the U.S. Navy's official account of the battle, McClusky soon spotted a Japanese destroyer and correctly surmised it was headed toward the main Japanese fleet. Around 10:20 a.m., he led 30 other Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bombers into the attack against the Japanese aircraft carriers. When the day was over, the fliers from the Enterprise and Yorktown had sunk three carriers and mortally damaged a fourth. McClusky, wounded in the initial attack, made it back to his carrier with less than five gallons of fuel in his tank. Some of the other surviving two-man planes had even less. Ten planes in his squadron had to ditch in the sea and their crews were never found.

"This small group of people who did such a dynamite job at Midway should be lofted up as icons in American history, but for the most part their names go mostly forgotten," said Timothy Orr, who along with his wife Laura co-authored a recently published autobiography by N. Jack "Dusty" Kleiss, a member of McClusky's squadron who helped sink three Japanese warships at Midway. Kleiss was the last surviving Midway dive bomber pilot when he died last year at 100. For his actions at Midway, McClusky was awarded the Navy Cross, one of the U.S. military's highest decorations. He retired as a rear admiral in 1956. McClusky never lived in Buffalo after entering the Navy and has no family living there. According to his son, Phil, the Buffalo tribute is something the Navy hero would've never sought for himself. "He was a quiet guy. He was not a big talker," said the son, 63, who lives outside

Baltimore and plans to attend Sunday's ceremony. "He was a professional naval officer." [Source: The Associated Press | Chris Carola | June 3, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Brusilov Offensive WWI ► Largest Allied Offensive of the War

On 4 JUN 1916, the Battle of Lutsk marked the beginning of the Brusilov Offensive, the largest and most successful Allied offensive of World War I. When the fortress city of Verdun, France, came under siege by the Germans in February, the French pleaded with the other Allies, Britain and Russia, to mount offensives in other areas to force the diversion of German resources and attention from the struggle at Verdun. While the British plotted the offensive they would launch near the Somme River in early July, the first Russian response came more quickly—a failed offensive in March at Lake Narocz, in which Russian troops were slaughtered en masse by the Germans with no significant effect at Verdun. Still, the Russians plotted another diversionary attack in the northern region of the Eastern Front, near Vilna (now in Poland).



While the Vilna offensive was being planned, General Alexei Brusilov—a 63-year-old former cavalryman and aristocrat given command of the Southwestern Army (the Russians divided their army into three major groups, Northern, Eastern and Southwestern) in March —pressed his superiors at a meeting in April that he be allowed to attack as well, although no action was planned for the southwestern section of the front. At the very least, Brusilov reasoned, his attacks would draw troops away from the other area and ensure the success of their offensive in the north. Though he was given the go-ahead, the other Russian generals had little confidence in Brusilov's strategy.

Brusilov's troops began their attacks on the Austro-Hungarian 4th Army at the city of Lutsk (now in Ukraine), on 4 JUN with an impressive bombardment from nearly 2,000 guns along a 200-mile-long front stretching from the Pripet marshes to the Bukovina region to the southwest, in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. Though the Austrian troops at Lutsk, led by the over-confident Archduke Josef Ferdinand, outnumbered the Russians—200,000 men against 150,000—the success of the barrage obliterated this advantage, along with the Austrian front line, as Brusilov's troops swept forward, taking 26,000 prisoners in one day.

Within two days, the Russians had broken the 4th Army, advancing 75 kilometers along a 20-kilometer-long front, and effectively ending Josef Ferdinand's career. Some 130,000 casualties—plus the capture of over 200,000 prisoners—forced the Austrian commander, Conrad von Hotzendorff, to close down an offensive against Italy in the Trentino region to divert guns and divisions back east. On June 15, Conrad told his German counterpart, Erich von Falkenhayn, that they were facing the greatest crisis of the war so far—a fact that took Falkenhayn, who was optimistic about an imminent French surrender at Verdun, completely by surprise. Confronted with the Austrian panic against Russia, he was forced to release four German divisions from the west, a weakness that allowed a successful French counterattack at Verdun on 23 JUN, just one day before the preliminary British artillery bombardment began at the Somme.

Dubbed The Iron General and respected and beloved by his troops, Brusilov relied on absolute preparedness for battle and on the execution of even the most minute detail of his orders. The 4 JUN attacks began a string of crushing victories against the Austrian army across the southwestern portion of the Eastern Front, forcing Germany to abandon plans for their own 1916 offensive in France in order to bail out their hapless ally—even as they confronted a new British offensive at the Somme in July. By September, Russian resources had begun to run out, however, and the Brusilov Offensive reached its limits; it was shut down on September 20, 1916, having cost the Austro-Hungarian army a staggering total of 1.5 million men (including 400,000 taken prisoner) and some 25,000 square kilometers of territory.

Though turmoil and revolution shattered Russia in 1917, disintegrating its army and leading to its subsequent exit from the war—a fact that caused the success of the Brusilov Offensive to be largely forgotten—the offensive permanently secured more enemy territory than any other Allied offensive on either front. Moreover, a permanently debilitated Austria-Hungary never again played a significant role in the war. Its army was reduced to holding trenches against the weaker Italians, and Germany was left to fight virtually alone for the final two years of World War I. [Source: <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/brusilov-offensive-begins> | June 4, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **D-Day Update 07 ► Through the Eyes of Medics - 73 Years Later**

They trained with infantry soldiers, carrying first aid kits instead of weapons. They dodged bullets to tend to wounded soldiers, sometimes with whatever supplies they could find. And even in the midst of thick combat, they remained steadily focused on their mission of saving lives. They were the combat medics of World War II. No amount of training or planning could have prepared them for the casualties inflicted during the largest amphibious assault in history: the Allied invasion of Europe, commonly known as D-Day.



“Boy Scouts was the closest thing to medical training I had before that,” said Private First Class Edwin Pepping, who was just 21 years old at the time. “But you didn’t have a chance to be nervous.” In preparation for ground combat after Pearl Harbor, the United States Army hurried to create a ready force. Medical units made up of individuals of both military and civilian background were gathered and trained. Their duties included treating minor injuries, applying splints and tourniquets, and bandaging wounds. Known as “band-aid bandits” to their comrades, Pepping and Staff Sgt. Albert Mampre were attached to Easy Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 506th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division also known as the “Band of Brothers.”

Seventy-three years ago, the U.S. took part in the invasion of Normandy, which would ultimately be the turning point of the war in Europe. More than 13,000 aircraft and 5,000 ships were used in the D-Day landing, which was part of Operation Overlord. In the early morning hours of June 6, 1944, Pepping boarded a C-47 transport for the big jump. But as often happens in combat, the plan didn’t go as expected. “We were supposed to be dropped at 700 feet at 95 miles per hour, which was enough to get our parachute to open and get our equipment down safely, but they dropped us at 300 feet at 165 miles per hour, which is almost impossible to survive,” said Pepping, who turns 95 in July. As Pepping jumped, he was hit by a high speed gust of air that ripped 125 pounds worth of supplies off of him. His parachute opened at the same time, causing him to violently spin before falling to the ground. He hit the ground so hard that his own strapped helmet flew back and knocked him in the neck, leading to a concussion and three cracked vertebrae.

After landing near the town of Angoville-au-Plain behind Utah Beach, Pepping spent the next several hours helping another medic, Willard Moore, bring severely combat-wounded soldiers to a makeshift aid station in a nearby church. Moore drove the jeep while Pepping loaded his wounded and nursed them until they got back to the church, he said. “There were so many catastrophic wounds that a lot of the time it was beyond us to do anything except to see if we could get a doctor to help,” said Pepping. Two other medics treated patients at the aid station. They used whatever medical supplies they could find after losing most of theirs in the jump, and they treated whomever they found – American, French, and German alike. Together, they saved more than 80 lives that day.

“When we flew into Normandy, we met some very, very serious cases and a lot of the time we didn’t know exactly how to handle them,” said Pepping, adding that it taught him perseverance. Today, the church serves as a memorial. The blood stains where the wounded were laid remain on the pews. “A sense of humor is really what saved us,” said Pepping, who said the biggest lesson he learned as a medic was to duck. “You couldn’t make it through the war without it.” Although medics were unarmed, they were identified by the Red Cross symbol on their helmets and arm bands. Even so, they weren’t always spared as a target.

Mampre, who had to miss the jump on D-Day after coming down with a severe infection just a few days before, went on to receive the Purple Heart for action in Holland. After spotting a wounded lieutenant in a field, he was told the soldier was dead and best left alone. Mampre ran out to him through heavy gunfire and found him alive. Despite being shot through the leg, he and the lieutenant made it to safety and survived. “I’d do it all over again,” said Mampre about being a combat medic. “But if they need me again at 95 years old, boy we’re in trouble.” [Source: Health.mil| June 6, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **D-Day Update 08 ► New Memorial Honors Native American Sacrifice**

One of the few surviving American Indian WWII combat veterans, retired Master Sgt. Charles Norman Shay returned to the country he helped liberate to attend a memorial dedication in his honor, on 5 JUN.. "As one of the few surviving American Indian combat veterans who participated in the liberation of France, I speak here not only for myself but also on behalf of my comrades from Turtle Island," Shay said, citing the Native American name for North America. Shay, a Penobscot Indian from Maine, was only 19 years old when he struggled ashore Omaha



Beach on June 6, 1944, as a platoon medic serving in Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment. The 16th Infantry Regiment was one of three combat regiments in the 1st Infantry Division that spearheaded the assault on D-Day.



"On the evening of June 5, 1944, I was aboard the Henrico heading across the Channel, when I had a surprise visit from a Penobscot Indian warrior named Melvin Neptune," Shay recalled. "He didn't trouble me with his combat experience, nor did he offer me advice. Instead, we talked about home because he knew I had never been in combat... all hell was about to break loose on me." "Only two of us appear to have survived the war without being wounded," Shay continued. "We were lucky. Call it what you want, fate, destiny, angels, spirits or God. All I know is that my mother prayed for me." He said his mother prayed fervently for his other three brothers serving in World War II as well -- two in the U.S. Navy and one in the Army Air Corps as a B-17 gunner. "There were mothers across Turtle Island praying for their brave sons," Shay said. "My heart breaks for those women who were never able to welcome their sons home again".

According to Dutch Anthropologist Dr. Harald E.L. Prins, 175 Native Americans landed on Omaha Beach on D-Day -- but only 55 have been identified. The memorial dedication to Shay and his Native American comrades is part of an ongoing effort to recognize the Native American contributions to WWII. "This is the reason why we decided together with the Mayor of Saint Laurent sur Mer and city council to honor the Native Americans who landed on Omaha Beach on D-Day," Shay said. The memorial unveiled in the June 5 ceremony is aptly named the "Turtle Monument" after the ancestral home of Shay and his fellow Native Americans. It is the first time that this site has been recognized as part of a D-Day commemoration. "Every Soldier who landed on this beach was a hero," Shay declared, who also went on to serve in the Korean War. "There is now a plaque commemorating Indian Soldiers who left Turtle Island to help liberate our ancient French allies. We will not forget their sacrifices." [Source: ArmyTimes | Alexis Schultz | June 6, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Military History Anniversaries ► 16 thru 30 JUN

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, **“Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 30 June“**. [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | Jun 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Medal Of Honor Story ► Walter Joseph Marm | Vietnam



Go to <https://youtu.be/web4t4ECFhg> to listen to former Lt. Walter Joseph Marm recount the actions that led his team to a successful mission under heavy fire during the Battle of Ia Drang. [Source: The American Legion May 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Medal of Honor Citations ► Francis C. Flaherty | WWII



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

**Francis C. Flaherty**

*Rank and organization:* Ensign, U.S. Naval Reserve  
*Place and date:* USS Oklahoma, Pearl Harbor , December 7, 1941  
*Entered service:* Charlotte MI  
*Born:* 15 March 1919, Charlotte MI

### *Citation*

For conspicuous devotion to duty and extraordinary courage and complete disregard of his own life, above and beyond the call of duty, during the attack on the Fleet in Pearl Harbor, by Japanese forces on 7 December 1941. When it was seen that the U.S.S. Oklahoma was going to capsize and the order was given to abandon ship, Ens.



Flaherty remained in a turret, holding a flashlight so the remainder of the turret crew could see to escape, thereby sacrificing his own life.



Francis Flaherty was born on March 15, 1919 in Charlotte, Michigan. He was a parishioner at St. Mary's Catholic Church while living in Charlotte. He enlisted in the Naval Reserve in July 1940 and was commissioned as an Ensign in December of that year.

At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Flaherty was serving on board the USS Oklahoma. The Oklahoma was based at Pearl Harbor for patrols and exercises, and was moored in Battleship Row when the attack began. Almost immediately after the first Japanese bombs fell, the ship was hit by three torpedoes and began to capsize. Those who could began to abandon ship as more torpedoes struck home. Ensign Flaherty remained in one of the ship's turrets, providing light so that the turret crew could escape. When the Oklahoma rolled completely over, he was trapped inside the hull along with many others. Thirty-two crewmembers of the Oklahoma were rescued from inside the hull over the next few days, but Ensign Flaherty was not among them.

Over all, 429 men were entombed in the Oklahoma at Pearl Harbor, including Flaherty. The ship was raised for salvage in 1943, and the remains inside were eventually interred in mass graves marked "Unknowns" at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii. Flaherty's name is inscribed in the Courts of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, and a memorial headstone was placed in Maple Hill Cemetery in his hometown of Charlotte, Michigan.

The destroyer escort USS Flaherty (DE-135), commissioned in 1943 and decommissioned in 1946, was named in honor of Ensign Flaherty. Also, the American Legion Post 42 (Greenawalt-Flaherty) in Charlotte, Michigan is partially named after him.

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

**\* Health Care \***

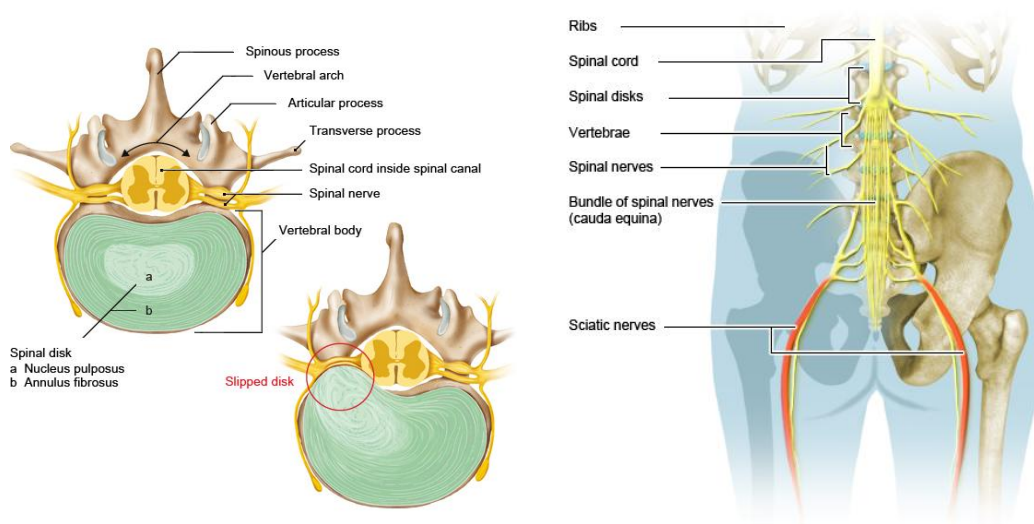


## Slipped Disc ► Back Pain That Keeps on Returning

Many people have back pain that keeps on returning. Usually it is hard to say what the exact cause is. But if you have pain that radiates down your leg and into your foot, it may be a sign of a slipped spinal disk, or “herniated disk.” The spinal disks are located between the spinal vertebrae. They have an elastic casing made of cartilage and a gel-like center (nucleus pulposus). A slipped disk occurs if the spinal disk tissue pushes out, or “herniates,” between the vertebrae. This herniated tissue may put pressure on the spinal nerves and irritate them. A slipped disk can be very unpleasant. But the good news is that the symptoms usually go away on their own within less than six weeks in most people with this problem. But not everybody who has a slipped disk will have symptoms.

**Symptoms --** A slipped disk can cause very sudden and severe shooting pain. Slipped disks in the lumbar region are the main cause of sciatica (sciatic nerve pain). Sciatica describes pain that radiates down one leg and into the foot. As well as the typical radiating pain, a slipped disk can also lead to pain in the low back region. In rare cases, numbness in the buttocks or signs of paralysis may develop in addition to the pain and restricted movement. These symptoms are signs of a more serious problem, like nerve damage. Immediate medical attention is needed if the functioning of the bladder or bowels is affected too. That is called “cauda equina syndrome“ (CES), and is a medical emergency. But a slipped disk doesn't always lead to noticeable symptoms. This can be seen in studies in which adults who didn't have back pain were examined using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). More than 50 out of 100 people who were examined had a bulging disk. In about 20 out of 100 of them, the core of the disk had already broken through several layers of its casing or had even entered the surrounding tissue, but without causing any noticeable symptoms.

**Causes --** In most people, slipped disks are the result of wear and tear. Over the years, the spinal disks lose their elasticity: Fluid leaks out of them and they become brittle and cracked. These changes are a normal part of aging, and already start happening when we are young. But not everyone's spinal disks age at the same pace. Very rarely, an accident or severe injury might also cause damage to a spinal disk and leave it herniated. Spinal disks act as shock absorbers between the vertebrae in our spine. If a spinal disk is no longer able to bear the strain, it can result in a slipped disk. The associated pain probably arises when part of the spinal disk pushes against a nerve in the spinal cord.



**Healthy and slipped disk (cross-sectional view of the lumbar spine – from above) on left and Position of the spinal and sciatic nerves on right**

When herniated disk tissue irritates a nerve root in the region of the lumbar spine, it often causes typical sciatic pain. The nerves that run through the spinal canal connect to the sciatic nerve at the pelvis. The sciatic nerve then

runs down the legs. As well as being painful, an irritated sciatic nerve can also cause pins and needles and numbness. Doctors categorize slipped disks by severity:

- Prolapse: The disk bulges out between the vertebrae, but its outermost layer is still intact.
- Extrusion: There is a tear in the outermost layer of the spinal disk, causing spinal disk tissue to spill out. But the tissue that has come out is still connected to the disk.
- Sequestration: Spinal disk tissue has entered the spinal canal and is no longer directly attached to the disk.

These categories reveal little about what symptoms occur or how severe they might be. But knowing what type of slipped disk someone has is important for the choice of treatment and understanding how the condition might go on to develop.

**Prevalence** -- It is estimated that 1 to 5% of all people will have back pain caused by a slipped disk at some point in their lives. Slipped disks are more common in people over the age of 30, and are about twice as common in men as they are in women.

**Outlook** -- Pain and restricted movement caused by a slipped disk usually subside on their own within six weeks in 90 out of 100 people with this problem. It is believed that, over time, the body gets rid of part of the bulging or prolapsed tissue or that it shifts position so that the nerves are not irritated anymore. A painful slipped disk can go on to develop in very different ways: The pain can start very suddenly, and then disappear again very quickly. Some people have pain that lasts a long time, while others have it again and again. If the symptoms last longer than six weeks, it is less and less likely that they will go away on their own or that non-surgical treatment will help.

**Diagnosis** -- Doctors are usually able to determine what is causing acute back pain by asking a few questions and performing a physical examination. X-rays are of little use in the diagnosis of a slipped disk. Other imaging techniques such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) are only needed in the following rare cases:

- Numbness or paralysis in one or both legs
- Impaired functioning of the bladder or bowel
- Unbearable pain despite treatment
- Severe symptoms remain for many weeks despite treatment
- Another condition is thought to be causing the pain, for example a tumor.

So if your doctor is reluctant to use imaging techniques at first, there are probably good reasons: The images may show a supposed cause of back pain that actually has nothing to do with the symptoms. This kind of misdiagnosis can then result in unnecessary treatment that may itself be harmful.

**Treatment** -- Even severe sciatic pain can subside on its own after a while. Until it does, various kinds of pain relief treatment can help to cope with the symptoms. But no treatments have been proven to significantly speed up recovery. Most of the work is usually done by the body itself. If severe sciatic pain persists for over six weeks and is definitely being caused by a slipped disk, surgery may be an option to try to relieve the pressure on the affected nerve. Surgery is also always done if the nerves are so severely affected that the bladder or the bowel is no longer functioning properly or certain muscles have become very weak. But that is rare.

**Rehabilitation** -- The goal of rehabilitation is to improve the symptoms and restrictions resulting from a slipped disk, and strengthen the muscles in the torso in order to improve the stability of the spine. Rehabilitation may include back-strengthening exercises, stretching and relaxation exercises, strength training and other measures. It is an option for people who have been greatly affected by their back pain and are unable to work or perform other duties. Follow-up rehabilitation may help after surgery too. For more information on getting fit again after a slipped disc refer to <https://www.informedhealth.org/non-surgical-treatment-options.2376.en.html?part=behandlung-dr>.

[Source: <https://www.informedhealth.org/slipped-disk.2376.en.html> | June 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## TRICARE Select Update 01 ► Changes Coming Soon | 6 Months

The 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) brought sweeping health care reforms, many of which will take effect in just a few months. MOAA is working closely with TRICARE program officials to learn what new processes and responsibilities these changes will bring for TRICARE beneficiaries and when they will occur. The new TRICARE Select option, which replaces TRICARE Standard and Extra, begins Jan. 1, 2018 -- just 6 short months from now. TRICARE Select is the self-managed preferred provider organization (PPO) option. It provides freedom of choice of providers, with reduced/fixed fee beneficiary out-of-pocket costs for care in the network. TRICARE Prime, TRICARE Reserve Select, TRICARE Retired Reserve, and TRICARE Young Adult and TRICARE for Life will remain as is.

Under the new model, beneficiaries must make an active, annual choice of health plan for themselves and/or their family. Because 2018 is the first year of the plan, there will be a grace period, and beneficiaries will be automatically renewed in their existing TRICARE option as of Dec. 31, 2017. This means beneficiaries currently in TRICARE Standard or Extra will be converted automatically into TRICARE Select. Active duty family members newly entitled to TRICARE will be automatically enrolled in TRICARE Prime if they live in a Prime Service Area (generally around a military treatment facility). If not, they will be enrolled in TRICARE Select. Two populations may be at risk of losing coverage:

- Active duty members who retire and do not elect to enroll in an option. MOAA is advocating for a seamless enrollment default option for this population, as well as increased transition education services.
- Retiree beneficiaries who fail to pay their enrollment fees. Officials have stated that eligible beneficiaries will never lose their benefit, as they will always be eligible for care at military hospitals. However, this would most likely be on a space-available basis.

### Enrollment Details

1. Year 1 (2018): Auto renewal (Jan. 1, 2018) and grace period: Can change TRICARE Prime or Select at any time in 2018
2. Year 2 (2019) and beyond: Can elect TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select coverage (enroll, disenroll, or change) only during annual open season (1 Nov - 20 Dec) or if the beneficiary has a qualifying life event:
  - Marriage, divorce, or annulment
  - Birth or adoption of a child
  - Placement of a child by a court in a member's home
  - Change in sponsor status
  - Loss of eligibility (due to age, Medicare, etc.)
  - Move to a new ZIP code
  - Loss/gain of other health insurance
  - Death of a sponsor, spouse, or child
  - Change in eligibility status of any single family member in another family ( e.g. joint service member)

All qualifying life events require a Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) update. If beneficiaries request a change in coverage, it must occur within 90 days of the life event. Beneficiary cost shares will be based on the sponsor's "date initially entered into service" (DIEMS). Per the 2017 NDAA, those who have entered into service prior to Jan. 1, 2018, are grandfathered into existing cost shares - unless the 2018 NDAA incorporates provisions from the administration's budget proposal to repeal grandfathering. As many of these changes show, beneficiaries will be expected to take more responsibility for their health care. MOAA will continue to work closely with DoD to ensure program changes will be beneficiary-centered and clearly communicated to all stakeholders.

What is the most important thing you can do right now? Make sure your DEERS information is updated for both you and your family. to update DEERS go to <https://www.tricare.mil/DEERS>. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | June , 201 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **TRICARE Healthy Living Update 01 ► Men's Health Is Important Too**

Do you know what the top health risks are for men? According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the leading causes of death among men in the U.S. include heart disease, stroke, cancer and respiratory diseases. How can you reduce men's health risks? Learn about common health problems facing men and how to prevent them. For example, TRICARE covers preventative services to help men of all ages get and stay healthy.

**Identify Potential Health Concerns** -- Men and women share many of the same health concerns, but there are certain conditions that predominately affect men. Examples include colon cancer, skin cancer, high blood pressure, obesity and heart disease. It's important to learn about these conditions in addition to the health conditions that are unique to men, such as prostate and testicular cancers. "Take the opportunity to put your health first today," said Dr. James Black, Medical Director for the Clinical Support Division at the Defense Health Agency. "Knowing the signs and symptoms of common conditions can help let you know if you need to speak to a medical provider and may even save your life." Your primary care manager (PCM) can also help you identify potential health concerns and assess your risk for developing certain health problems. If you don't have a primary care manager, find a PCM on the TRICARE website. You can also set up your appointment online.

**Get Screened Regularly** -- Women are 100 percent more likely to visit the doctor for annual exams and preventive services than men. However, TRICARE offers men several preventative services, such as cancer screenings, lab tests and immunizations. Your PCM can help you decide what tests you need based on your age and risk factors. Important health screening tests for men include:

- [Blood Pressure Screening](#)
- [Cardiovascular Screening](#)
- [Colorectal Cancer Exam](#)
- [Prostate Cancer Exams](#)
- [Skin Cancer Exams](#)
- [Testicular Cancer Exams](#)

**Make Healthy Lifestyle Choices** -- Although men seek regular medical care less often than women, they're more likely to smoke, drink and choose unhealthy or risky behavior. The more committed you are to choosing healthy lifestyle choices, the easier it is to maintain your health. Consider making the following choices to help you live a long and healthy life:

- **Avoid smoking:** Smoking can cause conditions such as heart disease and cancer. TRICARE provides resources to help you quit tobacco, such as toll-free quit lines, counseling, and tobacco-cessation medications. Also, UCanQuit2 provides useful tips and tools.
- **Limit alcohol:** Drinking too much can contribute to poor health. Visit the TRICARE Alcohol Awareness page for information about alcohol and drinking responsibly.
- **Eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly:** Eating healthy and being physically active can help prevent a variety of health problems. Learn about the benefits of healthy living and how you can improve your overall health.

Knowledge of men's health issues, regular health screenings and leading a healthy lifestyle is only half the challenge of maintaining your health. Taking steps to improve your health and reduce your risk for disease is just as

important. Visit the TRICARE website today to learn more and get started. [Source: TRICARE Communications | June 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Poison Avoidance ► Lead & Household Products

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 by exposure to lead. Lead can be found in the environment such as in the soil and water and from sources inside our homes. Even small amounts of lead can be dangerous for children. Poisoning with lead and with household products can happen all at once or gradually over time. TRICARE covers children's blood lead testing at well-child care visits when medically necessary. To be medically necessary means it is appropriate, reasonable, and adequate for your condition..

**Lead Poisoning** -- 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. The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that over 24 million homes in the U.S. contain lead-based paint or lead-contaminated dust. As reported nationally about water contamination in Flint, Michigan, 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. For more info on this refer to <https://www.epa.gov/lead/protect-your-family-exposures-lead>. At well-child care visits, TRICARE covers lead level screening for children from age six months to six years 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 used during well-child visits. If you are concerned about lead exposure and your child, talk to your child's primary care provider.

**Other Preventable Household Poisoning** -- In 2015, America's 55 poison centers received 2.2 million calls for help. Nearly 50 percent of all poison exposures involve children younger than six years old. That means half of all poisonings are due to young children eating or inhaling a product such as medicine or household cleaning products. These poisonings are largely preventable. Knowing which products are dangerous can prevent child poisoning. First, find the common household poisons you keep in your home. These include:

- Laundry and cleaning supplies, especially in brightly-colored packets
- Medicines and vitamins
- Pesticides
- Hand sanitizers
- Small button batteries

Next, create safe storage habits. Keep items in their original, labeled containers and kept out of sight, out of reach or locked up."Families should also be aware of dangerous substances and medications in homes where children are cared for such as a grandparents' or a baby sitters house" according to Terry Adirim, M.D., a pediatric emergency physician who is the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense in Health Affairs. Arm yourself against poisoning by learning more about toxic household products. 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 is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. [Source: TRICARE Healthy Living | June 2, 2017 ++]



\*\*\*\*\*

## Hemorrhage Control Foam ► Intracavitary Abdominal Bleeding Study

The U.S. Army Medical Materiel Agency, a subordinate organization of the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command, is supporting a pivotal clinical trial to test the safety and effectiveness of a self-expanding foam device to stop massive intracavitary abdominal bleeding. The device received an Investigational Device Exemption in early 2017 from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Throughout the next year, the device developer will select the clinical trial sites and complete pre-study approvals. The U.S. Army Medical Materiel Development Activity, which is also part of USAMRMC, will provide regulatory support for the project. The anticipated start date of the pivotal clinical trial is 2018.

"Right now, we are looking at this device as a potential stop-gap for patients awaiting surgical care," said Leigh Anne Alexander, USAMMA product manager. "This is not going to repair the injury but it could be a 'bridge to surgery,' keeping the patient alive long enough to give them a fighting chance at survival." The device resembles a caulk gun that contains expandable foam designed to be injected into a patient by a trauma surgeon. The injector allows two separate chemicals to mix, causing the product's material to rapidly expand inside the abdomen to about 35 times its original volume. The foam is designed to expand around the patient's internal organs to stop bleeding and can be left inside the patient for up to three hours.

Army Medicine is focused on identifying and transitioning solutions currently in research and development that reduce the number of hemorrhage deaths in the military. Exsanguination, or bleeding to death, remains the most common cause of potentially survivable death to wounded Warfighters. A study published in the Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery in 2012 reviewed nearly 5,000 battlefield fatalities from 2001-2011, categorizing them into two groups -- non-survivable and potentially survivable. Of those that were considered potentially survivable deaths, more than 90 percent were related to hemorrhage. Of those deaths, more than 67 percent were related to truncal hemorrhage.

The wound stasis program began in 2010 at the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency. Under that program, DARPA collaborated with a private vendor, along with the Massachusetts General Hospital and the Harvard Medical School, to develop a novel, self-expanding polyurethane foam that rapidly compresses major abdominal bleeding due to trauma. The project transitioned to the Army in 2015 after promising animal study results. "We are optimistic that this study will provide meaningful data and pave the way for future research," Alexander said. [Source: Army Release | Ellen Crown | June 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Colon Cancer Update 05 ► Screenings Save Vet Lives

Colon cancer is one of the most common diagnoses among both men and women in the United States. Approximately 4,000 Veterans are diagnosed with colon cancer each year. The American Cancer Society estimates in 2017 there will be 135,430 new cases of colon and rectal cancer in men and women, resulting in 50,260 deaths. This number exceeds the total number of American combat deaths during the Vietnam War. But it doesn't have to be. When colon cancer is found, and removed early, the chances of a full recovery are very good. **Most importantly — get screened.**

The most effective way to reduce your risk of colon cancer is by having regular colon cancer screening tests. It is recommended to begin screening for colon cancer at age 50 years and continuing until age 75 years. It can take as many as 10 to 15 years for a polyp to develop into colon cancer and there may not be noticeable symptoms at first.

The risk of getting colorectal cancer increases as you get older. More than 90 percent of cases occur in people who are 50 years old or older.

Colon cancer or polyps that lead to colon cancer often don't cause symptoms. That is why getting screened regularly for colon cancer is so important. If you have any of these symptoms, talk to your doctor:

- Blood in or on your stool.
- Stomach pain, aches, or cramps that don't go away.
- Losing weight and you don't know why.
- Colon cancer risks and prevention.

The risk of having colon cancer increases if you are over 50 years old, have a family history or personal history of colon cancer, smoke, or have type 2 diabetes. In addition to lifestyle factors and personal history, there are strong links between diet, weight, and exercise and the risk of colon cancer. To reduce the risk of colon cancer and improve your overall health it is important to:

- Stay at a healthy weight and avoid weight gain around the midsection.
- Stay physically active. Increasing your level of activity lowers your risk of colorectal cancer and polyps.
- Maintain a healthy diet. Overall, diets that are high in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains (and low in red and processed meats) have been linked with lower colorectal cancer risk.
- Limit alcohol intake to 1 drink on any one occasion.

VA has been an early leader in recognizing the value of colon cancer screening and in taking a comprehensive approach to its screening program by developing policies and guidance about screening. VA's screening rate exceeds the National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable (NCCR) goal and the national average, receiving Hall of Fame recognition by the NCCR.

- If you are 50 years or older talk to your VA provider about getting screened and your risk for colon cancer.
- Visit MyHealthVet website [http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.org/RelatedItems/142.87081\\_VA](http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.org/RelatedItems/142.87081_VA) to learn more about colon cancer and prevention.
- Women Veterans can call 1-855-VA-WOMEN (1-855-829-6636) to ask questions about available VA services and resources.

[Source: Vantage Point | June 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Skin Protection ► Sunshine**

### **Ultraviolet Radiation**

Protecting your skin from the harmful effects of the sun is very important during the spring and summer months. During the warmer months, the Earth is tilted in a way that allows more of the sun's Ultraviolet B (UVB) rays to make it the surface. More UVB rays means hotter temperatures and an increased risk to skin. The sun's Ultraviolet A (UVA) rays reach the Earth's surface year round.

### **Harmful Effects**

Ultraviolet A and B radiation from the sun can cause or contribute to a number of harmful effects to your skin including painful sunburn, cancer and aging. For those with fair skin, lupus, or those who take medications such as antibiotics or antihistamines, the risks are greater.

### **Protection**

To protect yourself from the harmful effects of the sun, consider wearing protective clothing such as hats, long sleeves, pants, or even sun-safe clothing, which is designed to provide even more protection. Also, consider

sunblock for UVA radiation or sunscreen for UVB radiation. To ensure maximum protection, choose a product that will protect against both UVA and UVB.

[Source: VA Press Release | Matthew E. Freeman | June 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Hearing Protection ► Noisy Activities

### Activities

Warmer months mean more opportunities to engage in activities that could result in noise-induced hearing loss. These activities include boating, motorcycling, sporting events, music concerts, or even mowing the lawn.

### Harmful Effects

The Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) sets safe noise levels at 85 dB. Noise levels higher than this can result in Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) or tinnitus. Those with NIHL have difficulty understanding other people when they talk, especially on the phone or in a noisy room. Tinnitus is a constant ringing, buzzing or roaring sound in one or both ears. The bad news is NIHL and tinnitus can be permanent, but the good news is they are preventable.

- Typical Lawn Mower – 85 to 90 dB, hearing damage occurs in 8 hours at this level
- Speedboat – can exceed 90 dB
- Motorcycle – can exceed 95 dB
- Sporting Event – as much as 115 dB, hearing damage can occur in 15 minutes

As a rule of thumb, if you have to shout to be heard by the person standing next to you or notice your ears are ringing after exposure, your environment is too loud.

### Protection

Hearing protection is useful when you cannot or choose not to avoid noise exposure. The two most popular forms of hearing protection are earplugs and earmuffs. Earplugs are inserted into the ear canal and earmuffs cover the ears. You can use one or both to protect your hearing. Both forms of protection work by decreasing the volume, or dB, of the noise reaching the sensitive structures in your inner ear.

[Source: VA Press Release | Matthew E. Freeman | June 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## TRICARE Podcast 400 ► Mens Health Month | Weather | Food Safety

**Mens Health Month** -- June is Men's Health Month, a time to remind the almost 4.8 million male beneficiaries in the Military Health System to get age-appropriate screenings for high blood pressure, testicular cancer, cholesterol, diabetes, and glaucoma; and to schedule annual exams for prostate and colorectal cancers. Being healthy means more than clinicians checking off boxes. It means men making smart choices every day about the amount and intensity of physical activity, the quantity and quality of food and beverages consumed, and the number of hours of sleep. It means avoiding tobacco products and limiting alcohol. Men must take responsibility for their own health and make it a priority.

- Gaining weight has become a significant problem for men as they age. Excess weight can negatively impact operational effectiveness and increase the risk of acute and chronic health effects, including musculoskeletal injury and cardiovascular disease.
- Many men also become lax about seeking medical treatment, routine or otherwise. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's most recent National Health Interview Survey found men were more than twice

as likely as women to report they hadn't seen a health care professional in two years, and three times as likely to say they hadn't seen one in more than five years.

- Also, don't forget about emotional health. Talk to your health care provider about any sadness, anxiety, or anger you may be experiencing. Spend time with family and friends who have a positive impact on your life.

Visit [www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices](http://www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices) to see what screenings are covered under TRICARE.

-0-0-0-0-0-

**Getting Care in Severe Weather** -- Summer rays and cool breezes can quickly turn into unexpected lightning and blinding rains. TRICARE makes it easy to get the care you need in the event of a natural disaster. In emergencies, the Defense Department can approve a waiver of primary care manager referrals. Waiving the referral requirement allows affected beneficiaries to get care from TRICARE-authorized providers without a referral, avoiding point-of-service charges. The "Emergency Refill Too Soon" waiver authorizes early prescription refills for affected beneficiaries. When a prescription waiver is authorized for an impacted area, information about early refills is posted on the TRICARE website at TRICARE.mil. Beneficiaries who've signed up for TRICARE updates via email or SMS text-messaging receive the update directly. Also check TRICARE's social media pages for updates.

Severe weather can happen at any time, during any season. Disaster preparation is important and being prepared is just as essential as knowing how to get help. Everyone should have an emergency "Go To" kit, and copies of important documents like your Uniformed Services ID, driver's license, Social Security card and list of prescriptions and shot records. Have the numbers to family doctors and the regional contractor close at hand for help getting care. Make a disaster plan and practice it. TRICARE has a downloadable contact wallet card with all the contacts you need for help with your health plan. Visit [www.TRICARE.mil/disasterinfo](http://www.TRICARE.mil/disasterinfo) for details on how to stay safe and get the care you need in a disaster.

-0-0-0-0-0-

**Summertime Food Safety Tips** -- Picnics and barbecues are just around the corner, so be mindful of food safety as you soak up the summer sun and fun. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates one in six Americans get sick from foodborne illnesses, including those associated with poorly cooked or stored foods in hot environments. Still, there are ways to keep your favorite foods safe – and your friends and loved ones healthy – this summer.

- Keep it clean. Wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling uncooked eggs or raw meat, poultry, and seafood. To prevent cross-contamination, wash utensils and cutting boards with hot, soapy water after food prep too.
- Cool it. Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator, not on the countertop. Safely marinate your meats, poultry, and seafood in the refrigerator until it's time to cook. Don't reuse marinade, and don't serve it with cooked foods.
- Cook foods thoroughly and use a food thermometer to check for doneness.
- Refrigerate your leftovers. Chill your foods to stop the growth of bacteria that can cause foodborne illnesses. Refrigerate items within two hours of cooking or one hour if the outside temperature is at or above 90°F.

To boost your "BBQ IQ," visit the CDC webpage at [www.cdc.gov/foodsafety](http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety).

-0-0-0-0-0-

The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | June 2, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## TRICARE Podcast 401 ► Appointments | Blood Pressure | Sunscreen

**Missing Appointments** -- It's happened to most of us. We call and set up an appointment with our doctor. We even write it down. But, life happens and we remember the appointment about an hour after we were supposed to check-in. We are now officially "no shows." A no-show occurs when a patient misses an appointment without making any attempt to cancel or reschedule 24 hours in advance. When you miss an appointment, it keeps another patient from using that appointment slot for care they need. When you miss an appointment, the office can't move all the rest of the day's appointments up to fill your space. The time slot goes unused.

Your provider may charge you because you didn't show up for your appointment. The American Medical Association policy says a doctor may charge for a missed appointment – or failing to cancel 24 hours in advance – if the office advises them they will be charged if they miss an appointment. The fee can range from \$20 to \$40 and isn't covered by TRICARE. It's best to keep your appointments or reschedule them at least 24 hours in advance. If you're being seen at a military hospital or clinic, you can do this through TOL at [www.tricareonline.com](http://www.tricareonline.com). TOL is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can use this portal to set appointment notifications and set up email and text message reminders. If you know you can't make the appointment, you can cancel your appointments right then. Missed appointments can result in reduced continuity of care and possibly late identification of other health problems. Take care of your health and your wallet and keep your appointments.

-o-o-O-o-o-

**High Blood Pressure** -- TRICARE encourages everyone to actively learn about preventing and controlling high blood pressure. When you have high blood pressure, the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries is too high. When you're active, it's normal for your blood pressure to increase. Once the activity stops, your blood pressure should return to your normal range. When it doesn't, you may have high blood pressure. Checking your blood pressure is quick and easy. It can be done in your health care provider's office or clinic. TRICARE covers blood pressure screening as part of its clinical preventive benefit. Children are screened every year between the ages of three and six, and every two years after. Adults may get a blood pressure screening every two years, but usually your health care provider checks it each time you visit. If you're diagnosed with high blood pressure, your health care provider will work with you to come up with a way to treat your condition. You may have to make lifestyle changes, like weight loss and exercise. And you may benefit from prescription medications. Whatever you do, be sure to follow your provider's plan for your care. This may be the best way to lower your blood pressure and maintain normal blood pressure readings. Visit [www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices](http://www.TRICARE.mil/coveredservices) For more information about your benefit.

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Sunscreen Safety** -- As the summer sun shines down on us, we need to remain vigilant against sun damage. Knowing the key differences in skin protection and using a full sunscreen regimen will best protect you and your loved ones from the sun. We all know that sunscreen or sunblock is a must for skin protection during the summer and all year, but do you know which one is best for you? The American Melanoma Foundation classifies sunscreens into two major types: chemical and physical.

- Chemical sunscreens contain special ingredients that act as filters and reduce ultraviolet radiation penetration to the skin.
- Physical sunscreens, or sunblocks, contain ingredients like titanium dioxide and zinc oxide which physically block ultraviolet radiation. Sunblocks provide broad protection against both UVB and UVA light.

Sunscreen is only one part of a full sunscreen regimen, which includes wearing a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, a long-sleeved shirt and pants. Sunscreens should be used daily if you are going to be in the sun for more than 20

minutes because even on a cloudy day 80 percent of the sun's ultraviolet rays pass through the clouds. And if you've spent time in the sun, it's important to watch for changes in your skin. A sudden or ongoing change in the appearance of a mole is a sign that you should see your doctor. Visit [www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin) for more sun safety tips!

-o-o-O-o-o-

The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | June 9, 2017 ++]

## \* Finances \*



### Dumb Insurance Update 02 ► Collision (old car), Flight & Critical Illness

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:

❁ **Collision coverage on an old car** -- The collision portion of your auto insurance policy pays for repairing or replacing your car in a solo crash, no matter the cause. Older cars lose value fast. ([Check values at Kelley Blue Book.](#)) Suppose your car is worth \$3,000, and the collision coverage alone runs \$500 per year. If you total the car — and it won't take a huge wreck to incur \$3,000 in repairs — the policy may pay even less than \$3,000. Ask yourself: Is \$500 a year worth it? In many cases, it is not. Do not, however, drop your auto liability insurance. It's generally mandated by law, and beyond that, if you hit someone else, you'll need it to pay the other guy's costs.

**Alternative:** Put the amount of what would go to premiums into savings to buy your next car.

❁ **Flight accident insurance** -- Flight accident insurance pays a lump sum benefit if you are killed or maimed in a plane crash. But there's already an [international standard](#) in place for paying your heirs (the airline foots the bill) if you are killed in a crash. Other [rules apply](#) if you are just injured (once again the airlines, though others may also be at fault).

**Alternatives:** Term life insurance. Also, some credit cards include flight insurance coverage when you buy a plane ticket using the card.

❁ **Critical illness insurance** -- Roughly a third of workplaces offer critical illness insurance, which helps with high deductibles and other out-of-pocket costs of treatment for certain acute illness, says MarketWatch. Employers do not contribute to these plans. The payments for basic policies are modest, and so are the benefits. For added coverage, you'll pay more and have to pass medical screening. MarketWatch says: *Through a sample MetLife policy, a 50-year-old would pay \$25.80 [monthly] for \$15,000 of coverage for cancer, heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, major organ transplants, and 20-some additional diseases, including ALS (also known as Lou Gehrig's disease), but excluding the very common diabetes.* The payout is a lump sum that you use for out-of-pocket medical



costs or related expenses — medical travel, for example. The problem with these policies is that the insurer and you may not agree on what's a critical illness. Definitions are very specific, and exclusions can be hidden in the policy's fine print. Also, payout amounts shrink as you grow older.

**Alternatives:** If you have a [qualifying high-deductible medical plan](#) and the discipline to save, open a health savings account. Your tax-free savings then are available for many more types of medical care and there's no need to meet an insurer's definitions of illness. Or, buy disability insurance to cover 60 to 70 percent of your earnings. It's more expensive but covers many more eventualities.

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

\*\*\*\*\*

## Mutual Funds ► How To Invest In them

In case you're not familiar with a mutual fund, let's start by understanding exactly what that means. A mutual fund is simply a bunch of investors who pool their money and hand it over to a manager. That professional, in exchange for a management fee, oversees a diversified basket of investments and takes care of the paperwork. Most mutual funds fall into one of three categories: a stock fund, a bond fund or a fund that holds both stocks and bonds, called a balanced fund. The chief advantage of a mutual fund is that it allows an investor to own a small slice of a big portfolio. Diversifying with a bunch of stocks or bonds is much safer than putting all your money into one or two stocks or bonds.

While mutual funds are most commonly made up of stocks, bonds or a mix of the two, there's a huge variety within those broad categories. You can find stock and bond funds that are extremely low risk, super-high risk and everything in between. One example of a mutual fund is the S&P passive no-load index fund. It is a fund that tracks the S&P 500: a stock index made up of 500 of the largest and most iconic American companies. It's a popular option because it's essentially an investment in the American economy. If you think the American economy will be bigger years from now than it is today — a pretty good bet — it's a solid long-term investment.

### Where can one open a mutual fund account?

Theoretically, almost anyplace that handles money or investments. Many bank branches now have a resident investment adviser, and many credit unions do as well. Brokerage firms offer all manner of investments, including mutual funds. Online investment firms also make it easy, and you can often go directly to many mutual funds as well. A potential problem with going to some of these purveyors of financial products is they charge commissions. To avoid commissions you need to obtain a "no-load" funds, which translates to "no commissions." This is important: You obviously don't want to lose a chunk of your investment up front to commissions. Practically all brokerage firms and many other institutions that offer in-person investment advice make money through commissions, so they won't offer no-load funds. And that radically reduces the choices. The best place to buy no-load mutual funds is directly from the fund, or through online discount brokerage firms.

### How do you do it?

Opening an online account with a no-load fund is not much different from opening a bank account. For the purposes of explanation this article uses Vanguard (<https://investor.vanguard.com>) which offers investments, including mutual funds. When you go to Vanguard's home page, at the very top of the page you'll see "Open an Account."

- Step 1: Click that, follow the prompts, and you'll be in business. According to Vanguard, it takes about 10 minutes to provide the information, which will include the type of account (IRA, individual, joint, etc.), your Social Security number, date of birth, email address, physical address, and employer name and address.

- Step 2: Pick the investment you want. For example select the Vanguard 500 Index Fund Investor Shares. That's an example of the "S&P passive no-load index fund".
- Step 3: Fund the account. You can either send them a check, or set up a direct transfer from an existing checking or savings account.

That's all there is to it. Other online firms may be slightly different from Vanguard, but the basics will be similar.

### Meeting the minimum

To open a mutual fund account, there are minimums to be met. For example, the Vanguard 500 Index Fund has a minimum initial investment of \$3,000. Too rich for your blood? There are workarounds. First, you could gradually save \$3,000 in a regular savings account, then transfer it to your investment account and buy the fund. Most online brokerages allow you to link your bank account to your investment account and easily transfer money back and forth. You could also ask about systematic investing. That's investing fixed amounts at regular intervals, such as monthly. Some firms waive their initial minimums for regular investors. For example, they might allow you to open an account with only \$50, providing you agree to automatically continue investing in \$50 increments at least monthly. Note that Vanguard does not offer this.

But Vanguard isn't the only option. Another giant investment firm, USAA, does allow \$50 a month investments to start in some of its funds. Schwab has funds with no minimum investment. Another option is to forgo traditional mutual funds and invest instead in exchange traded funds or ETFs. These funds trade on exchanges like shares of stock, and can be bought in increments as small as one share. Like stocks, there's typically a commission to buy or sell, but some companies, including both Schwab and Vanguard, allow commission-free ETF trades.

### General rules for beginning investors.

- Rule No. 1: Long-term money only -- When it comes to stocks, the longer your investment horizon, the lower the risk. Day trading is risky because nobody knows what's going to happen on any given day. Investing over decades carries far less risk, because quality companies become more valuable over time, and so do their shares. If you invest in stocks, you should never use money that you'll need within five years.
- Rule No. 2: Moderation -- Because the stock market is risky, it's not the basket for all of your eggs. A suggestion for determining how many eggs is to subtract your age from 100, and putting no more than the resulting number as a percentage of your long-term savings into stocks. So if you're 25, 100 minus 25 equals 75 percent in stocks. If you're 75, you'd only use stocks for 25 percent of your savings. But, that's just a rule of thumb. If you're nervous, you've invested too much.
- Rule No. 3: Don't buy individual stocks -- Buying individual stocks is fine if you're up for the additional risk and have the resources, but it's not necessary or, for most people, advisable. You can do perfectly well with a mutual fund or ETF, while at the same time limiting your risk and reducing your hassle.
- Rule No. 4: No trying to time the market -- Try to time the market and you'll likely find yourself on the sidelines when the market takes off — and overinvested when it crashes.

The best way to approach stocks is the one mentioned above — systematic investing. All you have to do is invest fixed amounts, like \$50, at regular intervals, such as monthly. This method works for a simple reason: It automatically buys more shares when they're cheap, and fewer when they're not. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacey Johnson | June 9, 2017 ++]

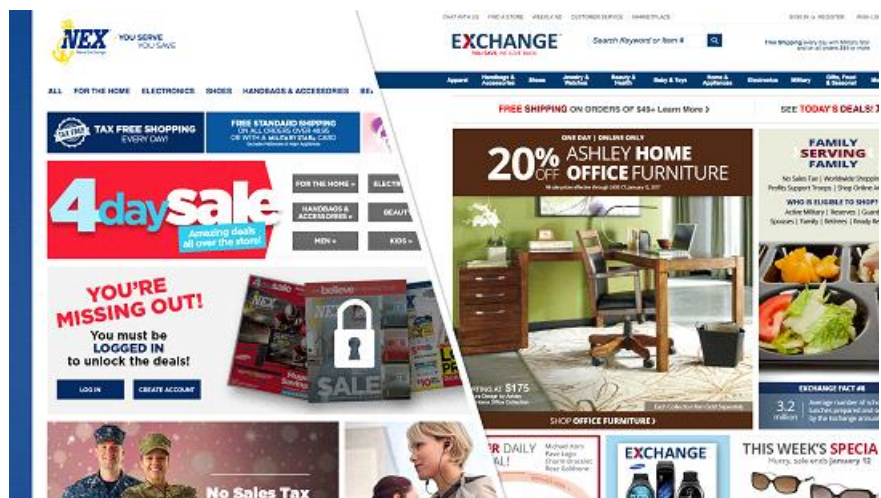
\*\*\*\*\*

## Exchange Online Shopping Update 09 ► Early Registration

All honorably discharged veterans interested in shopping online at the military exchanges can begin their verification process immediately, exchange officials said, and some may be able to shop prior to the program's full

launch. Some veterans who register at <https://www.vetverify.org> will be invited to be beta testers, with the ability to shop online earlier than the planned Nov. 11 launch date. Officials said the sooner veterans register on the site, the better their chances of being chosen as a beta tester. The exchange websites offer tax-free shopping, as well as discounted pricing. Actual online pricing can be seen only by those who are authorized to shop at the sites: <https://www.shopmyexchange.com>, <https://www.shopmyexchange.com>, <https://www.shopmyexchange.com>.

VetVerify.org uses information from the Defense Department's Defense Manpower Data Center to verify a veteran's status; veterans will receive notification of their acceptance as online shoppers or, if their records are incomplete, will receive guidance on the steps they can take to update those records. Doing this process ahead of time will allow veterans to start shopping 11 NOV, or earlier if they are among the "beta testers" chosen to try out the system in advance of the launch.



**It's official: Military exchanges plan to offer online access to veterans by Nov. 11**

This new benefit, which would increase the online shopping base by an estimated 13 million veterans, applies only to shopping online at the military exchanges, not at the physical buildings on military installations. Until now, online military exchange shopping was available only to active-duty, reserve and Guard members, retirees, 100 percent disabled veterans and their dependent family members, and certain others. "It's an honor to now provide this service and benefit to our well-deserving veterans. Once a Marine, always a Marine," said Cindy Whitman Lacy, Marine Corps Exchange Director of Business and Support Services at Headquarters Marine Corps Manpower and Reserve Affairs, in a statement today announcing the verifying website. "This initiative is one of many ways to keep our community connected."

Army and Air Force Exchange Service CEO Tom Shull formally proposed the idea of expanding the benefit to honorably discharged veterans on May 14, 2014, noting that it would provide a modest benefit to those who had served but left the military short of retirement. "The exchanges began working to recognize the service of millions of veterans without exchange privileges while generating additional financial support for critical budget-constrained quality-of-life programs," Shull said, in a statement. "We are proud to stand with our sister exchanges as we welcome our veterans home to their military family and protect and preserve hard-earned military benefits."

The exchanges currently provide more than \$300 million a year from their profits to support military quality of life programs. The veterans online shopping benefit is expected to increase that monetary support. In a 18 JAN DoD memo, officials noted that AAFES will invest about \$1.8 million a year to cover costs associated with the expansion of the online platform. If 0.3 percent of the newly eligible veteran group, or about 45,000 veterans, shop online, that cost is expected to be recouped. "We are excited to be welcoming our shipmates back to the NEX," said retired

Rear Adm. Robert J. Bianchi, CEO of Navy Exchange Service Command, in a statement. “Inviting veterans to shop online is just another way for us to honor them for their patriotism and service to our country.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | June 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military Divorce & Separation Update 06 ► Disability Pay Not Divisible**

State courts cannot order military retirees to divide their disability pay with ex-spouses to compensate for a drop in shared retirement triggered by the disability compensation award, the **U.S. Supreme Court has ruled**. The landmark 8-0 decision May 15 in *Howell v Howell* could impact contested military divorce settlements nationwide, although lawyers caution that family courts generally are reluctant to reopen settled divorce agreements. The greater effect will be on future military divorce cases, say attorneys involved. Family law experts already are discussing changes in divorce paperwork and practices to try to minimize lost financial protection for ex-spouses.

The *Howell* decision directs courts in Arizona and perhaps 30 other states to modify their interpretation of federal law regarding division of military retirement as marital property when retirees, after divorce, become eligible for disability pay from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and must waive a portion of retired pay shared with their former spouses to accept the tax-free payments. Under current law this occurs for retirees with VA disability ratings of 40 percent or less, and ailments or injuries unrelated to combat or combat training. More severely disabled retirees and those with combat-related injuries can receive disability compensation without a dollar-for-dollar offset to retired pay. So, their former spouses don’t see retired pay shares fall due to a disability-pay offset. For those who have seen, or will see, shared retired pay impacted by disability pay, the *Howell* decision delivers a surprise victory for retirees. It forces family law courts to reconsider treatment of disability pay under the 1982 Uniformed Services Former Spouses Protection Act (10 U.S.C., Sec. 1408).

TSgt. John Howell and wife Sandra divorced in 1991 after 13 years of marriage. A year later he retired from the Air Force and Sandra began receiving 50 percent of his retired pay. In 2005, John applied for and got a VA disability rating, of 20 percent, for a service-related shoulder injury, he told me. To accept \$262 a month in VA compensation, John had to waive a matching amount of retired pay. Sandra’s share of his disposable retired fell by half that amount, or \$131 a month. The same law that allows state courts to divide “disposable retired pay” as property specifies that it exclude retired pay waived to accept disability pay. Indeed, the Supreme Court in its 1989 *Mansell* decision affirmed this exclusion.

Over the next 28 years, however, different states came to interpret *Mansell* differently. A majority concluded that only at time of divorce must judges view disability pay as excluded from property divisible with an ex-spouse. After divorce and military retirement shares are set, disability payments shouldn’t be allowed to reduce the value of the ex-spouse’s property, a majority of state courts decided. That allowed family courts in many states to reopen divorce settlements for ex-spouses and issue “indemnity orders” that disabled retirees raise payments. It happened with the *Howells*. An Arizona judge ordered John to reimburse Sandra an additional \$131 month in retired pay lost to his disability compensation. John appealed and lost twice more. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed to review Arizona Supreme Court’s denial of his appeal “because different state courts have come to different conclusions on the matter,” the high court explained.

In writing the lead opinion in *Howell*, Justice Stephen Breyer noted that in *Mansell* the Supreme Court held that federal law “completely pre-empts” states from treating waived retirement pay as divisible property. In reversing the Arizona decision, Beyer dismissed its argument, used by many courts since 1989, that *Mansell* doesn’t apply to the *Howell* because the 1989 case involved waiver of retired pay before divorce, and *Howell* waived retired pay years after his divorce. That “temporal difference,” Breyer wrote, “highlights only that John’s military retirement pay at the time it came to Sandra was subject to later reduction (should John exercise a waiver to receive disability benefit to which he is entitled).” The state court, Breyer wrote, “did not extinguish ... that future contingency,” and “the

value of Sandra’s share of military retirement pay was possibly worth less – perhaps less than Sandra and others thought – at time of the divorce.”

Breyer acknowledged the hardship that “congressional pre-emption” of family court rulings “can sometimes work on divorcing spouses. But we note that a family court, when it first determines the value of a family’s assets, remains free to take account of the contingency that some military retirement pay might be waived ... when it calculates or recalculates the need for spousal support.” Washington, D.C., attorney Adam G. Unikowsky argued for John Howell before the Supreme Court in March. Howell’s experience, he said, was similar to that of many retirees over almost three decades depending on where they divorced. “The specific scenario came up over and over again (and) divided lower courts. Now there’s no more division. The effect of this Supreme Court decision is that this issue has been resolved nationwide, at least under federal law. If the issue of disability arises after divorce, and the amount of military retirement pay goes down as a result of a waiver, payments to the veteran and ex-spouse go down and the veteran keeps all the disability pay. That’s the practical effect of the ruling.”

Effective immediately courts must protect the value of disability pay and not “indemnify” ex-spouses from loss of retired pay with new or adjusted property right, Unikowsky said. But whether states apply Howell retroactively to nullify existing orders protecting ex-spouse payments is unclear, he added. “That’s probably a question of state law rather than federal law. Some states are pretty rigorous and rigid that once a judgment is final, it’s final. They’re not going to reopen it just because it was wrong when it was entered. It will depend really on state law governing the finality of judgments.”

Marshal Willink, a prominent Las Vegas attorney who has written books and given frequent talks on divorce and military retirement, agreed that Howell likely won’t result in many divorce settlements being reopened. That view, he said, was reinforced in a recent conference call with one family law expert who studied the wave of retirees who tried but failed to modify court orders after Mansell. Family courts cited the doctrine of res judicata which generally prevents civil cases, once decided on their merits, from being litigated a second time. Willink said the Howell decision surprised him. It reversed “the overwhelming majority position” of state courts since 1989, “that if a court has already distributed a retirement benefit, and one party retroactively takes some step to alter the distribution, that party has to make it up to whoever you take money from.”

Lawyers will need to change strategies to protect future clients, he said. For example, in states that allow alimony, Willink will advise military spouses during divorce to seek not only a share of retirement but also an award of at least one dollar of alimony so that alimony payment can be adjusted with relative ease if the retiree later opts to waive retired pay to accept VA disability compensation. [Source: Pensacola News Journal | Tom Philpott | June 3, 2017 ++

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Curb Appeal Enhancement ► House Selling**

Curb appeal is that indefinable something that draws you to a home at a glance. It is a combination of visual charm, good upkeep and attention to detail. An attractive entryway or appealing landscaping can make or break a sale. If your home lacks curb appeal, many prospective buyers will reject it without looking further, or will try to lowball you on price. In a Zillow survey, real estate agents named curb appeal one of the five most important factors in selling a home. Agent Kevin Kieffer told Zillow that homes with strong curb appeal fetch prices about 10 percent higher in his East Bay area of California: “Your house needs to be framed up: It needs to look like a picture when people pull up. They expect to see tasteful paint colors, well-trimmed grass, new bark, fresh flowers — the whole deal.” A small budget goes a long way, especially if you do some jobs yourself. Here are 17 ways to bump up your home’s curb appeal:





**1. Bust clutter** -- “Clutter,” of course, is in the eye of the beholder, so think of it this way: Buyers need to imagine your home as their own, with their possessions and their style. Go for a clean, streamlined look. Tips for doing this around your home include:

- Remove bikes, skateboards, trash cans, garden tools and other evidence of bustling family life.
- Walk around the house with a garbage can, tossing scraps of paper and plastic, branches, leaves, dog waste and anything else that doesn’t belong in the yard.
- Eliminate all but a few carefully selected pots and pieces of outdoor furniture.

**2. Freshen the entry** -- Clean the front door and give it a couple of coats of paint. Repair, replace or remove damaged screen doors and storm doors. Remove everything, including furniture and pots, from the porch, deck or entry and give the entire area a thorough cleaning. Repaint or touch up where needed. Finally, consider a new or custom front door to give the home a well-tended look. Polish any metal knobs and fixtures. Place a big planted pot on each side of the front door.

**3. Add front-door color** -- A bright note of contrasting color can bring a home’s front door to life. The trick is to choose colors that complement your home’s exterior landscaping and colors. House Beautiful offers at <http://www.housebeautiful.com/decorating/colors/front-door-color#slide-1> ideas for contemporary paint color choices. Better Homes and Gardens explains how to choose a front-door color that works with your home at <http://www.bhg.com/home-improvement/door/exterior/best-colors-for-front-doors>.

**4. Add living space outdoors** -- If your porch, deck or garden allows, install furnishings that expand the home’s living space into the outdoors. Outdoor rooms are a trendy attraction for homebuyers. Suggestions include adding an inexpensive indoor-outdoor rug, a porch swing, deck furniture, mood lighting, dining or barbecuing areas, or an outdoor bar.

**5. Repaint the exterior** -- Repainting the outside of your home isn’t a low-budget option. But if the home is ready for a paint job and you can swing it, a new coat of paint seriously pumps up curb appeal. Take a neighborhood tour to research colors and shades that appeal to you and that fit in with the neighborhood. If you see a paint color you like, ask the homeowner for the color name and brand.

**6. Paint trim** -- If you can’t paint the entire home, paint the trim — or just the window trim — in an accent color. This is a relatively simple upgrade that provides plenty of pop.

**7. Replace entry fixtures** -- Old fixtures often seem dated and unappealing to buyers. By contrast, new exterior light fixtures can quickly give a home an updated look. While you’re at it, replace the house numbers, the entry-door lock set and front-door mailbox. Brushed nickel gives a contemporary look, while an oiled bronze finish works well in traditional homes.

**8. Power wash** -- Rent a power washer if you don't own one and clean decks, the car port and pavement. If you can't repaint, use a power washer carefully to clean and brighten the home's siding. Power washers can damage wood if used incorrectly, so get instructions from your rental company.

**9. Clean and repair paving** -- Patch and repair concrete and asphalt paving, and apply a new coat of sealer to the asphalt. Spread a fresh layer of gravel on gravel drives and pathways.

**10. Clean the windows** -- Have the windows cleaned or do it yourself, but don't put your home on the market without sparkling windows, inside and out.

**11. Clean and repair the roof** -- If your roof has moss, weeds or mold, clean it until it looks great from the street. Replace missing or broken shakes or tiles. Clean the gutters.

**12. Mow, weed and trim** -- Keep the lawn carefully mowed. Spend a weekend shaping, pruning and cutting back overgrown shrubs. Mow neglected and overgrown areas. Prune trees and remove limbs that hang over the house. Weed gardens thoroughly, and cover beds with mulch or compost.

**13. Add high-impact landscaping** -- Tasteful landscaping can define a home's exterior. Better Homes and Gardens says "passers-by will notice plant groupings more than individual flowers, making greater streetside impact." Also, get instant results by installing a few trees in pots to fill holes or bare spots in the landscaping. Frame the front door or entrance with symmetrical pots holding small trees or medium-sized perennial plants. If your budget is limited, concentrate purchases on buying plants that will create a beautiful entrance.

**14. Improve the lawn** -- It's hard to make a home look great when the lawn is weedy or sickly. Get great ideas for boosting your lawn's health inexpensively by reading "11 Tips for a Less Expensive Lawn." at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/11-tips-for-a-less-expensive-lawn>.

**15. Shrink the lawn** -- Homebuyers today are all about low maintenance. Reduce the maintenance and the water bill by removing a section of lawn and replacing it with drought-tolerant landscaping. Create new garden beds filled with low-water plantings. Read "12 Excellent Drought-Resistant Plants." <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/12-best-drought-resistant-plants> To learn more. Installing an irrigation system is another low-maintenance amenity sure to prove attractive to buyers.

**16. Install outdoor lighting** -- Path lighting is an inexpensive, high-impact upgrade. You can install it yourself. Use a low-voltage outdoor system, or skip the wiring altogether and use individual solar path lights. The solar lights are less bright, but path lighting doesn't require blazing light, only visual cues for safety and attractiveness. Also, replace or add lighting fixtures to the home or garage exterior. Again, skip glaring floodlights. They can be blinding, creating a hazard.

**17. Edge the garden** -- Adding a border or edging to paths and garden beds gives landscaping a clean, professional appearance and adds to curb appeal. You have a choice of many materials, including stone, concrete, manufactured stone, wood, brick and metal edging. Be wary of plastic edging. It can look cheap and flimsy, turning off buyers.

. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | [www.courthousenews.com](http://www.courthousenews.com) | May 15, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Homeowners Insurance Update 03 ► Tips For Getting The Best Deal

Homeowners insurance is one of those things most of us rarely think about. It's easy to put a policy in place and then forget about it — until it's too late. But for most of us, our home is the most valuable thing we will ever own — and it is typically filled with valuable possessions. Insurance coverage must address the value of the building — including upgrades — and the value of our belongings, especially high-value items like jewelry, antiques and other collectibles. So taking the time to review your homeowners insurance — what it covers and how much you're

paying for it — is time well spent. Sure, it sounds mundane compared with planning a barbecue, but it can save you a substantial amount of money — and go a long way toward making you whole again if that barbecue turns into a blaze. Check out these top tips for getting the best deal:

**1. Shop around** -- Most of us spend more time shopping around for milk or gas than we do for insurance. But the internet makes it easy to shop around for insurance. As with anything else, though, you should not necessarily jump at the lowest rate. Do your homework on an insurance company before buying a policy. Start by visiting the website of the National Association of Insurance Commissioners. On its Consumer Information Source webpage, you can access key information about insurers, including closed insurance complaints, licensing information and financial data.

**2. Raise your deductible** -- Sure, raising your deductible can be scary. But the larger the loss you are willing to absorb before the insurance kicks in — in the event of damage — the less your insurance will cost month-to-month. For example, raising your deductible from \$250 to \$1,000 could slash your premium by 10 to 30 percent. That's a lot of savings, without taking on a lot of extra risk. Afraid that you may not be able to afford the higher amount you'd pay out of pocket in the event of an emergency? Beef up your emergency fund. That way, the money will be there when you need it, and in the meantime you'll save a substantial amount of money on premiums.

**3. Look into discounts on multiple policies** -- If you insure anything besides your home, such as a car, look into a multi-line discount. That's a break that some insurance companies will give you if you buy multiple policies, such as homeowners and auto insurance, from the same company.

**4. Know what you'll cover** -- This is often confusing to people: You don't necessarily need to insure a house for as much money as you paid for the property. So if you paid \$200,000 for your property, you don't necessarily need to insure it for that much. That's because the price you paid for your property includes the price of the land, not just your home. In other words, you want sufficient insurance to cover the cost of rebuilding your home from scratch if, say, it burns down or is blown off its foundation. But your land can't be incinerated into ashes or blown away, so you need not factor the cost of your land into the cost of your homeowners insurance. Just be careful: It is not unusual for homeowners to under-insure, and this isn't a place to cut corners.

**5. Inquire about discounts** -- Although discounts vary by insurance company, you may qualify for discounts if:

- Your home is equipped with a smoke detector or sprinkler system.
- Your home is protected by a burglar alarm system or dead-bolt locks.
- You have not filed a claim in a certain number of years.
- You don't allow smoking inside your home.
- You are over a certain age.
- Call your insurer to see what discounts may be available to you.

**6. Get to know your agent** -- You know how local mechanics give you extra tips and service because they've gotten to know you through the years? Insurance agents are similar. Plus, according to the Insurance Information Institute, your insurer may provide a 5 percent discount on premiums if you have been with the same company for three to five years, and 10 percent for six or more years. Although this incentive is enticing, it is still important to shop around annually to ensure you are getting the best price.

**7. Value your possessions** -- Be sure that your insurance is sufficient to cover the replacement cost of everything in your house, including items that increase in value over time. On the other hand, if you no longer own valuable diamond jewelry or an extensive collection of art or antiques, you no longer want to be paying for the extra coverage. An annual review of your policy is a good time to make sure your home inventory, including photos or a video of your possessions, is up to date and saved somewhere outside your home — in the cloud, for instance. Don't have an inventory of your possessions? Check out “6 Tips for Making a Home Inventory Right Now” at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/why-you-need-make-home-inventory-right-now>.

**8. Keep your credit score solid** -- If you have a poor credit score, you could be charged higher premiums or have a tougher time getting insurance coverage. So if your credit has any room for improvement, check out “Boost Your Credit Score Fast With These 7 Moves” at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/7-fast-ways-raise-your-credit-score>.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Kentin Waits | June 9, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## my Social Security Update 03 ► Access Procedure Change

Beginning 10 JUN you’ll need to take an extra step to log into your account at SSA.gov, the Social Security Administration website. The SSA will now “use a second method to check the identification of my Social Security account holders when they register or sign in,” according to an [online announcement](#). The second method will involve your phone or email address.

SSA.gov is the website of the Social Security Administration. But it’s also the website through which you can sign up for and access what the administration calls your “[my Social Security](#)” account, also referred to as simply an “SSA.gov account.” This online account enables you to manage certain aspects of your Social Security benefits — from changing your address or phone number to starting or changing direct deposit of your benefits payments. SSA says that this means SSA.gov account holders will receive a one-time security code by text message or email when they register and each time they log in. To access their accounts, users will have to provide that code along with their username and password. The goal of the change is simple. According to the SSA: Using two ways to identify you when you log on will help better protect your account from unauthorized use and potential identity fraud. There are a couple of ways you can further protect your SSA.gov account.

- **First**, create an account before a crook who has stolen or hacked your Social Security number or other personal information uses that info to create an SSA.gov account in your name — and then possibly uses that account to divert your benefits. Because it’s possible to create just one my Social Security account per Social Security number, registering an account on the portal is one basic way that Americans can avoid becoming victims.
- **Second**, SSA.gov offers what it calls “extra security,” which you can read more about on the “Privacy & Security Questions” page. The Social Security Administration describes it as “an extra level of protection” — but it’s optional. So your account can only benefit from this extra security if you create an account and manually enable the extra security. Most likely if a crook beats you to your account, they “won’t go through the more rigorous signup process — they’ll choose the option that requires less information. That means it is still relatively easy for thieves to create an account in the name of Americans who have not already created one for themselves. All one would need is the target’s name, date of birth, Social Security number, residential address, and phone number. This personal data can be bought for roughly \$3-\$4 from a variety of cybercrime shops online.”
- A **third** identity theft protection is putting a freeze on your credit, but that comes with both pros and cons. So check out “You Can Get Major Fraud Protection With a Credit Freeze, but Should You?” at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/how-get-heavy-duty-fraud-protection-with-credit-freeze> before going ahead with it.

**Warning:** If you have selected the extra security option and cannot remember the answers to the security questions you chose when you set it up, do not guess. After 3 wrong answers your account will be automatically locked and no longer accessible. This happened to me 2 years ago. When I called SSA to find out how to access it, I was told that the ONLY way was to go in person to my local SSA office and get it corrected. The last time I went to an office the waiting time was 3 hours to see someone. An experience I do not want to repeat. Now I only check my account when I get the annual statement they mail me. Note that if you sign up for online access you will no longer receive an annual statement by mail.

To learn more about the need for you to have a security card/number go to <https://youtu.be/Erp8IAUouus>. To locate your closest SSA office go to <https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp>. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Ari Cetron | March 16, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Phone Scam ► Your Number Calling? Don't Pick Up

If you recently received a scam call from your own phone number (or a very similar number), you aren't alone. People across the United States and Canada are reporting calls from lookalike numbers. It's a newly popular technique that scammers use to trick targets into picking up.

### How the Scam Works:

- Your cellphone or home phone rings. When you look at the number calling, you get a shock. It's your phone number! No matter how curious you may be, don't answer it. The person on the other end is part of a scam.
- A wide variety of cons are using this phone number spoofing ploy. They may be impersonating the IRS, claiming to collect a debt, or even pretending to be computer tech support.
- Variations of this con also spoof similar phone numbers. The area code and first three digits will be the same as yours, but scammers will vary the last four. This is because targets are more likely to pick up if they think the call is from someone nearby.

### Tips for dealing with a phone scam:

- Don't answer unfamiliar numbers. Use Caller ID to screen your calls and just don't answer if you don't recognize the number. If someone really needs to reach you, they will leave a message.
- Just hang up and don't call back. It is tempting to get the last word, but you may end up giving scammers information they can use later.
- Don't believe Caller ID. Caller ID spoofing makes it easy for callers to pretend to be someone else. Scammers have also posed as everyone from immigration authorities to utility company representatives to local police.
- Join the Do Not Call Registry ([DoNotCall.gov](http://DoNotCall.gov)). This cuts down on telemarketing and sales calls. Although it won't stop scammers, you'll get fewer calls, making it easier to spot the fraudulent ones.
- Always check your credit card, phone, and cable statements carefully for any unfamiliar charges. If you suspect you have been victimized, call the billing company and dispute anything you did not authorize.

Learn more at the Federal Trade Commission website. <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/spoofing-and-caller-id> about caller ID spoofing. To learn more about scams, go to [www.bbb.org/scamtips](http://www.bbb.org/scamtips). To report a scam, go to [www.bbb.org/scamtracker](http://www.bbb.org/scamtracker). [Source: BBB Scam Alert | June 13, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Tax Burden for New Hampshire Retired Vets ► As of JUN 2017

Many people planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales and property taxes can more than offset the lack of a state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn't necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. States raise revenue in many ways including sales taxes, excise taxes, license taxes, income taxes, intangible taxes, property taxes, estate taxes and inheritance taxes. Depending on where you live, you may end up paying all of them or just a few. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you retire in New Hampshire.



### **Sales Taxes**

**State Sales Tax:** None. However, there are some specific sales taxes: 9% tax on restaurants, prepared food, hotel rooms and car rentals; 55 cents per megawatt hour on electricity, 7% on telecommunication services, plus additional taxes on real estate transfers and alcohol.

**Gasoline Tax:** 42.23 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 48.23 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Cigarette Tax:** \$1.78 cents/pack of 20

### **Personal Income Taxes**

New Hampshire depends more upon real property taxes for revenue than most states since there are no general income, sales or use taxes. The state also receives substantial revenue from taxes on motor fuels, tobacco products, alcoholic beverages sold through the state liquor stores, and pari-mutuel betting. The state income tax is limited to a 5% tax on dividends and interest income of more than \$2,400 (\$4,800 for joint filers). A \$1,200 exemption is available for residents who are 65 years of age or older. For an overview of New Hampshire taxes, go to <https://www.revenue.nh.gov/assistance/tax-overview.htm>.

**Retirement Income:** Not taxed.

**Retired Military Pay:** Not taxed.

**Military Disability Retired Pay:**

Disability Portion – Length of Service Pay: Member on September 24, 1975 – No tax; Not Member on September 24, 1975 – Taxed, unless combat incurred.

Retired Pay – Based solely on disability. Member on September 24, 1975 – No tax. Not Member on September 24, 1975 – Taxed, unless all pay based on disability, and disability resulted from armed conflict, extra-hazardous service, simulate war, or an instrumentality of war.

**VA Disability Dependency and Indemnity Compensation:** 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**

- Local property taxes, based upon assessed valuation, are assessed, levied and collected by municipalities.
- A state education property tax rate of \$2.350 per \$1,000 of total equalized valuation is assessed on all New Hampshire property owners. An elderly exemption for property taxes can be age, net income limits, including Social Security income, and net asset limits. Property taxes can be deferred but accrue interest at the rate of 5% per annum. The deferred property tax may not exceed more than 85% of the equity value of the residence. The deferral is available (if granted) by the assessing officials, to any resident property owner who is at least 65 years old. For single homeowners 65 and older who earn less than \$5,000 and married couples who earn less than \$6,000, \$5,000 of their property's assessed value is exempt from taxes. In addition, the homeowner's other assets besides the home must be worth less than \$35,000.
- There is a Low & Moderate Income Homeowner's Property Tax Relief program in New Hampshire. Refer to <http://search.nh.gov/revenue-search.htm?q=property+tax+relief&cmd=> . You must own a homestead subject to the state education property tax; reside in such homestead as of April 1 of the year for which the claim for relief is made; have a total household income of (1) \$20,000 or less if a single person or (2) \$40,000 or less if married or head of a New Hampshire household. For more information refer to <https://www.revenue.nh.gov/index.htm>
- Call 603-271-2687 for details on property taxes.

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

New Hampshire's Legacy & Succession Tax was repealed in 2002 and is effective for deaths occurring on or after January 1, 2003. As a result there is no inheritance or estate tax.

For further information, visit the New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration site or call 603-271-2318.  
[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com> June 2017 ++]

**\* General Interest \***



### **Sbcglobal Email Provider Update 01 ► Bulletin Blockage Action Taken**

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. I have attempted to contact the 573 Bulletin subscribers as to how this impacted on their personal ability to receive the bulletin and whether or not they wanted to continue to receive the Bulletin with the following results.

- 49 subscribers had no problem receiving the Bulletin via YMLP
- 35 subscribers were no longer receiving it and provided an alternate mail addree to send it to.
- 229 Subscribers were no longer receiving it but wanted to continue to do so at their SBC addree.
- 23 subscribers cancelled their subscription.
- 237 subscribers did not respond to my messages.

I can only assume that those who did not respond either could not receive both direct email and YMLP email from me or no longer wanted to relive the Bulletin. Accordingly, I will be deleting these 237 subscribers from my mailing directory. For anyone wanting to be reinstated all they need do is to ask me to do so. For the 229 subscribers no longer able to receive the Bulletin via my mailing list provider YMLP, I am working on a solution and am in the process of setting up a separate email directory to use for them. In the interim they have been told to go directly to the websites that the Bulletin is posted on each month on the 1st and 15th. [Source: Editor/Publisher RAO Bulletin | James "EMO" Tichacek | June 15, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Notes of Interest ► 1 thru 15 JUN 2017**

- **Russian Hacking.** President Vladimir Putin acknowledged that some “patriotic“ individuals may have engaged in hacking but insisted Russia as a country has never done it, and he pledged 1 JUN to wait out U.S. political battles to forge constructive ties with President Donald Trump.
- **U.S. Embassy.** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 1 JUN gently rebuked President Trump's decision not to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. Trump had previously promised to move it from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a controversial move given the Palestinian Authority's ambition to have the capital of a future Palestinian state in East Jerusalem.
- **Don't Blink.** You might have to watch this video of amazing close-up magic two or three times at <http://newsletter.biggeekdad.com/t/i-l-uuitel-bhukrhuhd-t> before you even begin to think you can figure out how it's done.
- **Arlington.** Elite sentinels guard The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier 24/7, 365 days a year. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery represents all service members who lost their lives without their remains being identified. It has been guarded every hour of every day since 1937 by elite

Tomb Guard sentinels. To view it go to the seven minute video at to <https://youtu.be/XZnewAvONaE>. I took my grandson (at age 11) to see this and it was awesome.

- **Airborne Beer Story.** Check out <http://newsletter.biggeekdad.com/t/i-1-uuirhtt-bhukrhuhd-t> and listen to a 85 year old vet tell of his WWII experience while serving in the 101st Airborne at the Battle of the Bulge.
- **Normandy.** Go to <https://youtu.be/c0GVUXh4tQQ> and listen as Charles Durning, a famous actor and a veteran of D-Day, shares his personal experience of landing on the beach in Normandy on June 6, 1944.
- **Blended Retirement System.** Refer to <http://militarypay.defense.gov/calculators/brs> to use DoD's new comparison calculator for determining which system is most advantageous for you.
- **Unemployment.** 4.6 % of post-9/11 veterans were unemployed in May, compared to 3.9% in April — the lowest on record. Meanwhile, 4% of nonveterans were unemployed in May. Veterans overall fared better in May than in April. The unemployment rate for all veterans dropped slightly to 3.4%, on par with last year's May figure. The national unemployment rate was 4.3% in May. The U.S. added approximately 138,000 more jobs, primarily in the healthcare industry.
- **Tuition Assistance.** The number of service members using military tuition assistance dropped again in fiscal year 2016, continuing a years-long downward trend, while Post-9/11 GI Bill usage saw a slight decrease, the first since the benefit took effect in 2009, federal data indicate.
- **Grocery Store Ranking:** Military commissaries ranked among the top 10 grocery stores in a survey of shoppers published in the July edition of Consumer Reports. The ratings were based on 50,218 responses from Consumer Reports subscribers nationwide, stemming from 93,447 shopping trips to various supermarkets, supercenters, and warehouses between July 2015 and September 2016, according to the magazine. The military commissary ranked seventh, with a score of 85 out of 100. Wegmans ranked first, with a score of 89. Walmart Supercenter stores ranked last out of 62 stores, with a score of 66.

\*\*\*\*\*

## WWII Last Man Club ► Annual Meeting to Toast Fellow Vets

A bottle of champagne has been resting on its side in the American Legion's Francis Scott Key Post for more than six decades. It's pulled out once a year for a celebration, but the cork is yet to be popped. "I can tell you right now, it was not a high-priced bottle when we bought it," George Delaplaine Jr. said of the Piper-Heidsieck extra dry champagne.



The pact in the beginning — 1955 — was that the original 41 World War II veteran members would reunite once a year, help each other out when needed, support families after deaths and, when there was one man left, he would toast his longevity with a glass of bubbly. Delaplaine and Raymond F. Gafney, both nonagenarians, have been the last two men to gather for annual club meetings for the last six years now. In the ceremonial luncheon meetings, candles are lit for each of the men who are no longer here, and their names are read aloud. For Delaplaine, that's the most important part of the club's endurance. "The big thing was to keep the memory alive," he said, as the numbers of World War II veterans dwindles.

Delaplaine served in the Navy during the war, staying in the United States to work on electrical systems such as radios and sonar. Gafney also stayed stateside, and was a member of the Army's 12th Armored Division. "We might not have been that close if we hadn't met at the legion as legionnaires," Gafney said. "We got close and stayed that way. That's all." Delaplaine said the club helped the men stay close even as the years wore on and home addresses got farther and farther away. "The attendance at the annual meeting was really very good," he said. The meetings originally included just the men — no spouses allowed. "But then we did bring wives ... as we matured," Delaplaine said. So do they ever think about relaxing another rule and breaking open the bottle for a joint toast at the annual meeting? "I don't think so," Gafney said. "I don't see any reason to open it. After 50 years, I don't think it would be any good anyway." [Source: Frederick News-Post | Danielle E. Gaines | June 10, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## U.S.-Russia Tensions Update 02 ► Nuclear Weapon Use in Ukraine

Russia would be forced to use nuclear weapons in any conflict in which U.S. or NATO forces entered eastern Ukraine, a member of Russia's parliament told an international gathering of government security officials on 28 MAY. "On the issue of NATO expansion on our borders, at some point I heard from the Russian military — and I think they are right — If U.S. forces, NATO forces, are, were, in the Crimea, in eastern Ukraine, Russia is undefendable militarily in case of conflict without using nuclear weapons in the early stage of the conflict," Russian parliamentarian Vyacheslav Alekseyevich Nikonov told attendees at the GLOBSEC 2017 forum in Bratislava, Slovakia.



Russian military leaders have discussed Moscow's willingness to use nuclear weapons in a conflict with military leaders in NATO, as part of broader and increasingly contentious conversations about the alliance's expansion, Nikonov later told Defense One. Nikonov's threat might sound startling, but it's in keeping with the current state of Russia's ever-evolving policy on the use of nuclear weapons. While the Soviet Union maintained a policy against the first use of nukes, Putin's government turned away from that strict prohibition in 2000 with the signing of a new military doctrine that allows for the limited use of nuclear weapons "in response to large-scale aggression utilizing conventional weapons in situations critical to the national security of the Russian Federation."

Putin has also shown a growing willingness to invest in nuclear-weapons technology. In March, he vowed to put more money into new intercontinental ballistic missiles, so-called "strategic" nuclear forces, and to prioritize those

military investments “above all“ other areas. But the type of nuclear weapons that Russia would use to defend its stolen territory in Crimea might be far smaller: sub-kiloton tactical devices dwarfed even by the roughly 15 kiloton Little Boy bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. These small warheads have emerged as a big concern for U.S. military leaders. The Russians “maintain their tactical nuclear stockpile in ways that we have not,“ Maj. Gen. William Hix, the Army’s director of strategy, plans, and policy said in March at the Booz Allen Hamilton Directed Energy Summit.

Still, a growing nuclear arsenal doesn’t mean that Putin is itching to stage a sneak attack.”There is little indication that Russia plans to use nuclear weapons at the outset of a conflict, before it has engaged with conventional weapons, even though Russia could resort to the use of nuclear weapons first, during an ongoing conventional conflict,“ Amy Wolf, a nuclear weapons specialist with the Congressional Research Service, wrote in February.”This is not new, and has been a part of Russian military doctrine for years.”

Why is the Russian government telegraphing its willingness to go nuclear in Ukraine? In a word, NATO. The Cold War-born treaty organization of Western nations may seem obsolete to some, but not to Russia, which has watched with concern as NATO has added a dozen eastern members that used to be under Moscow’s sway.”For us, [NATO] is a military alliance spanning three-quarters of the global defense money, now planning to expand that figure,“ said Nikonov. In the two years since Russia annexed Crimea, NATO’s Baltic members have doubled their defense budgets. In 2018, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia are projected to spend nearly \$670 million, up from \$210 million in 2014.”This growth is faster than any other region globally,“ Craig Caffrey, principal analyst at IHS Jane’s, remarked last October.”In 2005, the region’s total defense budget was \$930 million. By 2020, the region’s defense budget will be \$2.1 billion.”

NATO has been expanding its troop presence in Eastern Europe as well. In April 2016, during the Warsaw summit, NATO agreed to increase the size of the NATO force deployed to Baltics, a posture move sometimes called enhanced forward presence. In January, the U.S. deployed some 4,000 troops to Poland. The following month, Germany, announced that it will send some 1,000 troops to Lithuania. It’s another mark of escalating tensions in the region due to continuing conflict in Ukraine and aggressive Russian activities across Europe, including a Kremlin-backed coup-attempt in Montenegro in October, complete with an assassination attempt on former Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic (Montenegro joined NATO in May.)

Nikonov said these regional tensions, and their causes, are perceived very differently in Russia than in the West.”For Russia, the definition of success in dealing with neighbors is to make them as friendly to Russia as possible,“ he said at the GLOBSEC forum.”The definition of success for many people sitting in this room is how to distance those countries from Russia. I think these are conflicting goals.” [Source: Defense One | Patrick Tucker | May 28, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Air Force Museum ► \$40,000 Granted in Lawsuit**





An Ohio family handcuffed and held at gunpoint during a visit to the National Air Force Museum has settled a federal civil lawsuit for \$40,000. The Dayton Daily News reports Alice and Wendy Hill -- a mother and mother-in-law -- must drop their claims as part of the settlement and pay their attorneys out of the \$40,000. Air Force base security drew guns on the Hills' van as the family left the museum parking lot in April 2014. A 911 caller reported a family casing visitor vehicles. The Hills say then 8-year-old Aaron was looking at car license plates from all the different states. The family originally sought \$75,000 and a jury trial in their lawsuit. Their attorney says he believes the settlement amount is fair. Air Force officials have since apologized, offering another visit. [Source: The Associated Press | June 1, 2017++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **PRK Nuclear Weapons Update 10 ► North Korea's Warnings Continue**

North Korea told the U.S. 1 JUN to withdraw its military assets from the region, warning via state-run media that a military showdown would end in nuclear destruction. North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency released an article titled "U.S. Urged Not to Adventure Military Actions," in which an official tasked with inter-Korean relations criticized the U.S.'s military moves in the region. Japan, an ally of Washington and rival of Pyongyang, began major naval and air force exercises 1 JUN with the U.S.'s Carl Vinson and Ronald Reagan aircraft carriers, Reuters reported. The U.S. warships were dispatched to the region in response to suggestions that North Korea would conduct a sixth nuclear weapons test, something President Donald Trump has vowed to prevent.



In a statement 1 JUN, a spokesperson for North Korea's Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee said the U.S. military moves proved it was to blame for heightened regional tensions."This evidently proves again that the U.S. intention to bring down the DPRK by force, hold a military edge in the Asia-Pacific region and, furthermore, realize its dream of world domination will never change and that the chief culprit rendering the situation of the Korean peninsula and the region extremely tense is none other than the U.S.," the statement said, using an acronym for the nation's official name: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. North Korea argues its pursuit of nuclear weapons technology is for deterrence purposes. The nation is believed to possess up to 20 nuclear warheads as well as an extensive ballistic missile arsenal. Analysts do not believe North Korea will be able to produce a viable nuclear-capable intercontinental missile until at least 2020, but the militarized, authoritarian state is thought to be capable of launching nuclear attacks against neighboring nations, including South Korea and Japan, both of which host U.S. military installations and personnel.

The Trump administration announced 1 JUN additional economic sanctions targeting companies that allegedly play a role in North Korea's development of nuclear weapons, according to the Los Angeles Times. The White House's latest efforts to prevent North Korea from carrying out another nuclear weapons test through sanctions come

as Trump seeks help from China, a traditional rival and North Korea's greatest ally, to rein in the North's nuclear ambitions. The presence of U.S. warships and ongoing military drills, however, could appear as a reminder of Trump's willingness to use military force quickly and unexpectedly, as he did in Syria in April.

These actions have left North Korea and its young leader, Kim Jong Un, deeply suspicious of any U.S. attempts to establish a dialogue. Since Trump dispatched the naval aircraft carrier strike group in April, North Korea's government-controlled media has been awash with criticism of U.S. foreign policy and reports of alleged U.S.-backed plots against Kim and his administration. The articles frequently cite North Korea's weapons of mass destruction as being existentially necessary to the country's survival, and assert the nation's right to possess and develop them in the face of U.S. threats of intervention. In Thursday's piece, the Korean Central News Agency called on Washington to reverse its course of action or face nuclear assault. "The U.S. had better make a wise option though belatedly, before it may face further disgrace, clearly understanding that time, justice and final victory all belong to the DPRK holding firm the most powerful nuclear weapon," the article warned. [Source: Newsweek | Tom O'Connor | June 1, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Cantaloupes Update 01 ► Tips

### SELECTION:

- For the sweetest and peak of flavor melons, choose those that have rinds that are yellow, tan or cream colored and have a pronounced, raised web-patterned surface. Avoid those with grayish green rinds that have a flat webbed surface, this is the sign the melon is unripe.
- Select melons that feel heavy for their size and when tapped you hear a low, solid sound. Overripe melons will sound hollow, make a sloshing sound when shaken, and may feel sticky.

### STORAGE:

- A ripe melon can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 7 days. To keep the flavor and smell from affecting the taste of other foods, it is best to store the whole melon in a plastic bag or covered container.
- Store unripe melons on the counter to ripen and then store in the refrigerator. • Wash melons thoroughly just before slicing.

### NUTRITION FACTS:

- Cantaloupe is filled with nutrients that help protect against cancer, and the sun's UV rays.
- Just one whole medium cantaloupe is only 200 calories so a half of a cantaloupe is a low-calorie, filling snack or addition to any meal.

### FUN FACTS:

- Christopher Columbus is credited with bringing cantaloupe to America.
- The cantaloupe is the most popular melon in the United States.

[Source: <http://www.commissaries.com/shopping/sales-events.cfm> | May 26, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Law Breaking ► 21 You May Not Know Your Doing

You're an honest, upstanding citizen. You pay taxes. You obey traffic signals. You don't even jaywalk. But there are some laws — both federal and in many states — that you may be breaking without even realizing it. Consider these 21 laws and see if you're guilty of violating any, some of which carry hefty fines and more:

**Gambling** -- No, you don't have a roulette wheel in your house or practice card counting. But if you play a friendly game of poker or other gambling games — even at home — in many states you may well be breaking the law “Some states explicitly allow home poker games, some states explicitly prohibit them, and some states don't have a stated policy toward them (which means they are illegal by default),” notes the website [HomePokerGames](#). “About half of all states allow ‘social games.’” Your best bet when gambling at home is to keep the stakes low and make sure everyone is there for social reasons. Check the [HomePokerGames website](#) for more guidance and resources.

**Hosting a movie night** -- You know that dense wording about copyrights that flashes on the screen when you play a DVD? It's important. One thing it says is that if you play the film, television show or other recording in public, you're violating copyright laws. That means if you play the video for your neighborhood group, co-workers or swim club, you can face fines of up to \$150,000 and other penalties. Even if you show it in your backyard and others can see it, you are in violation. Stay safe. If you show it outside your home, do some due diligence. [The Motion Picture Licensing Corporation](#) issues licenses that allow you to share the recording with others.

**Sharing Your Netflix or other streaming password** -- The bad news: Sharing your password for Netflix, HBO, Hulu or similar services is now [a violation of federal law](#). The good news is that Netflix seemed to indicate [they don't plan to monitor](#) where service is used. Still, might be a good idea to keep your passwords for your own use.

**Sharing prescription medication** -- No one is saying you can't offer an aspirin to a friend. But stop there. [Sharing prescription drugs and non-prescription drugs](#) that have the potential for abuse ([such as cough medicine and other medications](#)) is a crime.

**Singing ‘Macarena’ in public** -- It's probably still ok to sing the “Macarena” and other well-known, copyrighted songs around the campfire with your kids. ([You now can sing “Happy Birthday to You” without fear of being sued](#). Phew!) But you may want to think twice before you lead a large group — your swim club members, neighbors — to join in the catchy dance tune. Depending on many factors (volume and number of people [according to Business Insider](#)) doing so may break copyright laws. Think no one will care? In the 1990s, the American Society of Composers, Actors & Publishers (ASCAP) wanted the Girl Scouts to pay royalties for singing “Macarena” (originally by Spanish group Los Del Rio), [reports the New York Times](#). They also warned the group not to sing the Irving Berlin song “God Bless America,” [reports The Wall Street Journal](#). (Reportedly ASCAP later regretted going after the Girl Scouts from a public relations standpoint, but the potential to use the law in this way remains.)

**Connecting to an unsecured Wi-Fi** -- Is logging onto a device by way of a random, unsecured Wi-Fi a crime? Technically, yes. The Federal Computer Fraud and Abuse Act makes it a felony, according to [Wired magazine](#). While it's rare for those engaged in such activity — called “squatting” — to be prosecuted, it might be wise to avoid it.

**Allowing your pet to startle wildlife** -- If you take your dog or other pet to a national park, be careful to keep it quiet. There is a federal law — 18 U.S.C. §1865 & 36 C.F.R. §2.15(a)(4) for those who want to check it — that allows police to charge you if your pet startles wildlife, [according to Fortysixnews.com](#).

**Changing the weather** -- Rain, rain, go away... You know those different dances, songs and chants we all learned in grade school, the ones that would bring on rain or sunshine or other weather? Some were silly nursery rhymes. Some were forms of Native American worship. All are technically illegal. You're supposed to contact the U.S. Secretary of Commerce before you attempt to change the weather by those or other means, or you could be charged under 15 U.S.C. §§330a & 330d, [reports Fortysixnews.com](#).

**Throwing away someone else's mail** -- We've all received advertisements and other mail not addressed to us. We usually write “return to sender” on it and put it back in the mailbox. But sometimes we just grow tired of the misdirected mail and throw it away. That's a federal crime, [according to the Legal Information Institute](#).

**Damaging a government-owned lamp** -- So you're driving down the road, swerve and hit a light pole. Guess what? You can be charged with destroying it per federal law 40 U.S.S. §8103(b)(4), [reports Freedom Works](#). Damaging any government-owned light is a crime.

**Driving too slowly** -- Do you want to shake your fist at that slow driver in the left lane? Or are you sick of having others shake their fists at you for doing the same? Police in some states — California, Florida, Nevada, Alaska and Hawaii — can do more than that. They can charge you or fellow slow pokes for driving too slowly, [reports CNN](#).

**Fibbing about the weather** -- OK, the police won't charge you for fibbing and telling your kids it's going to rain and they need to carry umbrellas. And they don't care if you tell your mother-in-law a white lie, perhaps saying you are sure the weather will be too hot for her to visit. But if you publish a weather forecast and falsely say it's from the National Weather Service, you could be charged with a crime, [notes ONECLE](#).

**Doing interstate commerce in raw milk** -- So you love raw milk. There's nothing wrong with that. So do many of us. There are [various state laws](#) governing the sale of raw milk, but if you distribute it across state lines you are in violation of federal law, according to ProCon.org. Just ask the Amish who were charged for doing so after a yearlong sting operation, [something reported by the Washington Times](#).

**Forgetting to recycle** -- Many municipalities in the United States make recycling optional. But some places — such as municipalities in Florida and Massachusetts — take recycling very seriously. You may want to check the laws when you travel, especially if you'll stay somewhere for an extended period of time. Police can charge non-recyclers in Florida up to \$1,000. And in parts of Massachusetts, those who forget to recycle may have a sticker placed on their garbage cans alerting authorities to search the cans for possible violations, [according to theliberatarianrepublic.com](#)

**Operating a lemonade stand** -- You may want to raise your child's allowance and forget the plans for setting up a lemonade stand. Feds are cracking down on the stands due to the undocumented profits. Think we're kidding? Consider the 4-year old in Iowa, whose stand was shut down after 30 minutes of selling lemonade for 25 cents per cup. Unlicensed stands in Wisconsin, Georgia and elsewhere have also been shuttered, [according to Forbes](#).

**Gathering without a permit** -- Ready to have your friends over for a book group or party? Check your local laws first. A Phoenix man received a 60-day jail sentence and \$12,000 in fines for hosting a Bible study group at his home. The reason? Authorities said they were worried about safety in case of fire and felt the Bible study was akin to a home church, [reports The Blaze](#).

**Hanging dice — and other things — on rearview mirrors** -- Many states have laws against hanging air fresheners, fuzzy dice, graduation tassels and other items from your rearview mirror. But even if there's no law, don't do it. You can easily get in a crash because when you're used to seeing things dangling from the mirror, your brain learns to ignore motion from that area, [writes Road and Track](#). Stay safe. Keep the dice and air freshener off the rearview mirror.

**Photocopying a book** -- Yes, you may be allowed to photocopy a small amount of a text or other book, according to the FindLaw blog, [Law and Daily Life](#). But what about that little cookbook your friend owns? Or a short kids book? Then you're in violation of copyright laws. And that's a crime. Don't do it.

**Defacing U.S. currency** -- Does your new job give you money to (literally) burn? Do you think it's cute when your kid draws a picture on a dollar bill? Want to make a paper airplane out of a dollar bill? All of those things and more — defacement, cutting, mutilating and otherwise mishandling coins or bills — is a crime punishment by fine or imprisonment, according to the [U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing](#).

**Using someone else's accessible parking permit** -- You know you shouldn't use someone else's parking permit even if you really want to park in an accessible space. Just don't. There are penalties for doing so in almost every state, [according to Disability Scoop](#).



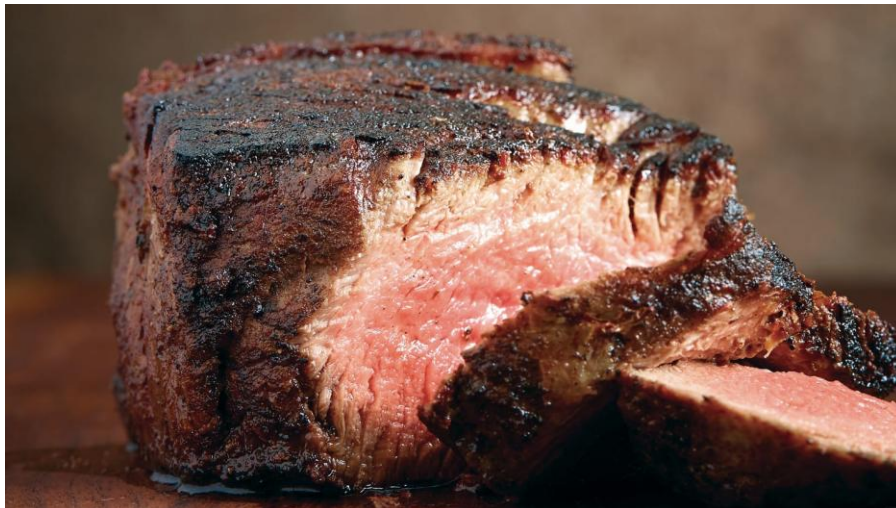
**Irritating someone to the point of violence --** You're in a national park and say something that irks someone else. If that person hits you as a result, code 7 USC §1011(f) & 36 CFR §261.4(b) allows federal officers to charge you with a crime for inciting the violence, [reports Fortysixnews.com](http://reports.Fortysixnews.com).

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Nancy Dunham | June 2, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Steak ► How to Cook the Perfect One

For many Americans, Memorial Day weekend was the unofficial start of backyard grilling season. But before you pull out your grill again and get it ready for your cookout, chef John Tesar has some advice that may make you rethink everything you thought you knew about cooking a steak. Tesar's techniques, which he developed by running acclaimed Dallas restaurant Knife, are so interesting and unorthodox that with the help of James Beard Award-winning writer Jordan Mackay, he recently wrote them down to share with professional and amateur chefs alike. The resulting book, *Knife: Texas Steakhouse Meals at Home*, was just released a few weeks ago and has the potential of giving pit masters across the country bad dreams until Labor Day.



For one, steady yourself: He says forget using your grill, no matter if it's a gas or a charcoal model. He only uses direct fire for cooking large cuts of meat, but for a steak he prefers a much simpler method: a cast iron or a carbon steel pan. "The pan works for everything," he swears. "It works for hamburgers. It works for filet mignon. It works for every cut of meat." And no matter what cut you choose, "the pan automatically sears the piece of meat immediately," he says, which makes it extra juicy. On the other hand, "if you [use] anything else, you're basically just putting burn marks on it and all of the juice is going into the fire." He does suggest buying a so-called portable gas cassette burner that allows you to cook outside. "The average person who cooks a steak in a pan will smoke out their house," he says. "That's why you don't have a barbecue grill in your house." To cook your steak:

- Tesar suggest you start by dry aging your meat yourself. It sounds complicated, but it just means keeping the meat unwrapped, lying on a bed of paper towels on a plate in your fridge for three or four days. Keep replacing the towels as they get wet and pouring off any liquids.
- Once you're ready to cook, pat the steak dry and allow it warm up. "You can't put a wet steak in a pan because then you have water in the pan and it wreaks havoc," he cautions.
- The cooking process is also fairly simple. Heat up the pan until it's "ripping hot," he says, and then add some canola or grapeseed oil as well as salt and pepper. Tesar doesn't like using olive oil or even a pat



of butter but prefers a neutral oil. A steak “has enough protein and enough fat and you don’t need butter. I want to taste beef,” he says. “I don’t want to taste butter.”

- Right after the steak has been added to the pan, Tesar quickly lifts it up to allow the oil and rendered fat to coat the bottom of the meat.
- He then flips the steak just once or twice and lets it cook the same amount of time on both sides, which “ensures evenness of cooking.” (Don’t keep moving it around the pan or flipping it over and over again.)
- After you get a nice crust, turn the “flame down to a medium to a medium high. You don’t want to char it,” he warns. “You really want to crust it. Brown is the color, not black.”
- Once the steak is done, pull it out of the pan and generally let it rest as long as you’ve cooked it.

Do people ever miss the grill marks? Tesar claims that nobody at his successful Dallas restaurant sends their steak back because it’s been cooked in a pan. If anything, they want to know why it tastes so delicious. [Source: Daily Beast | Noah Rothbaum | May 24, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Landline Phone Service Update 01 ► Going the Way of The Dinosaur

If you live in any of the U.S. states where AT&T is the primary phone carrier — prepare for a big change: Landline phone service might be going the way of the dinosaur. According to the Chicago Tribune, state legislatures in 20 of those 21 states have given AT&T the OK to end landline service in their states so the telecommunications company can focus and invest more in wireless or internet-based phone networks. California is now the only holdout among states where AT&T is the legacy phone carrier. In 2014, 2 in 5 U.S. households were mobile-only. Today, a majority of Americans (52 percent) live in cellphone-only households.

Paul La Schiazza, AT&T Illinois president, tells the Tribune: “We’re investing in a technology that consumers have said they don’t want anymore, and wasting precious hundreds of millions of dollars that could be going to the new technologies that would do a better job of serving customers.” Opponents of ending landline service say the move unfairly takes aim at America’s seniors, who disproportionately depend on their landline phone. Jim Chilsen is spokesman for the Citizens Utility Board, an Illinois nonprofit watchdog group that opposes AT&T’s plan to ditch the landline in the state. He tells the Tribune: “Many seniors have told us that they trust landline service more than any other option. A landline doesn’t go out in an internet or power outage, it doesn’t need to be charged, it doesn’t need a battery backup, and it doesn’t leave 911 dispatchers guessing.”

The Illinois bill still awaits federal regulatory approval and the governor’s signature. If it gets final approval there, AT&T will be able to cancel customers’ landline service with 60 days of notice, the Tribune reports. According to CBS, these are now the 20 states whose lawmakers voted to allow AT&T to end landline service:

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- Florida
- Georgia
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Michigan
- Mississippi
- Missouri

- Nevada
- North Carolina
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Wisconsin

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | June 5, 2017 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Garage Doors ► Making Yours Stand Out (4)



\*\*\*\*\*

## Have You Heard? ► Wal-Mart Trips | Men Never Learn

After retirement, a man's wife insisted that he accompany her on her trips to Wal-Mart. Unfortunately, like most men, he found shopping boring and preferred to get in and get out. Equally unfortunate, his wife is like most women - loved to browse & leaves me with endless time to fulfill. Recently, his wife received the following letter, from the local Wal-Mart:

Dear Mrs. Harris: Over the past six months, your husband has caused quite a commotion, in our store. We cannot tolerate this behavior and have been forced to, ban both of you from the store. Our complaints against your husband, Mr. Harris, are listed below and are documented by our video surveillance cameras:

1. June 15: He took 24 boxes of condoms and randomly put them in other people's carts when they weren't looking.
2. July 2: Set all the alarm clocks in Housewares to go off at 5-minute intervals.
3. July 7: He made a trail of tomato juice on the floor leading to the women's restroom.
4. July 19: Walked up to an employee and told her in an official voice, 'Code 3 in House wares. Get on it right away'. This caused the employee to leave her assigned station and receive a reprimand from her Supervisor that in turn resulted with a union grievance, causing management to lose time; and costing the company money. We don't have a Code 3.
5. August 4: Went to the Service Desk and tried to put a bag of M&Ms on layaway.
6. August 14: Moved a, 'CAUTION - WET FLOOR' sign to a carpeted area.
7. August 15: Set up a tent in the camping department and told the children shoppers he'd invite them in if they would bring pillows and blankets from the bedding department to which twenty children obliged.
8. August 23: When a clerk asked if they could help him he began crying and screamed, 'Why can't you people just leave me alone?' EMTs were called.
9. September 4: Looked right into the security camera and used it as a mirror while he picked his nose.
10. September 10: While handling guns in the hunting department, he asked the clerk where the antidepressants were.
11. October 3: He walked around the store suspiciously while, loudly humming the, 'Mission Impossible' theme.
12. October 6: In the auto department, he practiced his, 'Madonna Look' using different sizes of funnels.
13. October 18: Hid in a clothing rack and when people browsed through, yelled 'PICK ME! PICK ME!'
14. October 22: When an announcement came over the loud speaker, he assumed a fetal position and screamed; 'OH NO! IT'S THOSE VOICES AGAIN!'
15. October 22: Took a box of condoms to the checkout clerk and asked where is the fitting room?

And last, but not least:

16. October 23: Went into a fitting room, shut the door, waited awhile; then yelled very loudly, 'Hey! There's no toilet paper in here.' One of the clerks passed out.

-o-o-O-o-o-

### **Men Never Learn**

A woman ran a red traffic light and crashed into a man's car. Both of their cars are demolished but amazingly neither of them was hurt. After they crawled out of their cars, the woman said, "Wow, just look at our cars! There's nothing left, but fortunately we are unhurt. This must be a sign from God that we should meet and be friends and live together in peace for the rest of our days."

The man replied, "I agree with you completely. This must be a sign from God!"

The woman continued, "And look at this, here's another miracle. My car is completely demolished, but my bottle of 75 year old scotch didn't break. Surely God meant for us to drink this vintage delicacy and celebrate our good fortune." Then she handed the bottle to the man.

The man nodded his head in agreement, opened it, drank half the bottle and then handed it back to the woman. The woman took the bottle, immediately put the cap back on, and handed it back to the man.

The man asks, "Aren't you having any?"  
 She replies, "Nah. I think I'll just wait for the police."  
 Adam ate the apple, too!  
 Men will never learn!

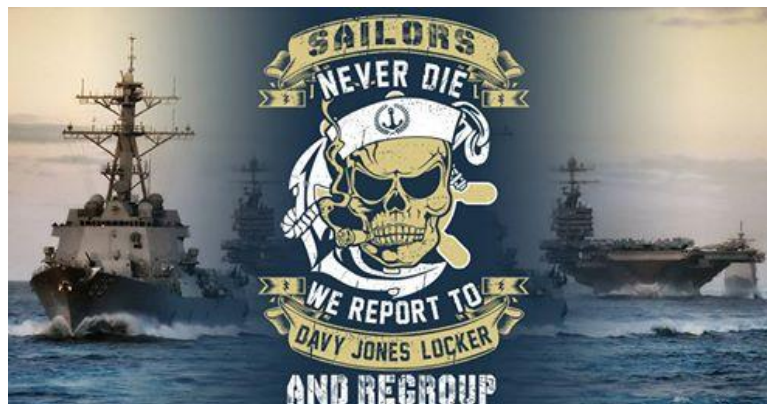
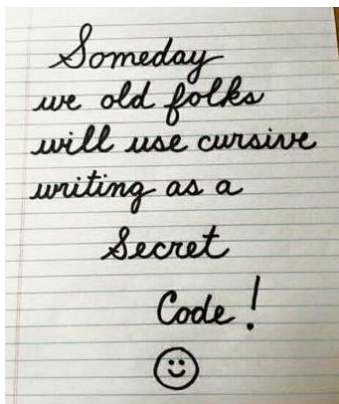
\*\*\*\*\*



In the 50's gas was very cheap. On some days, it was only \$0.20 a gallon, and beyond that, the people at the station could also fix just about anything! Car Seats Were More Like Couches: THAT's right - they were big, long, and you could slide all the way across!







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

-o-o-O-o-o-

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

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

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

## Notes:

1. The Bulletin will be provided as a website accessed document vice direct access until further notice. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 20,463 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others have or are in the process of being deleted from the active mailing list.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

\*\*\*\*\*

**RAO Bulletin Editor/Publisher:**

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

**RAO Baguio Director:**

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

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

**Warning:**

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

OO