

# RAO

# BULLETIN

## 15 August 2017

PDF Edition



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

**\* ATTACHMENTS \***

- Attachment - RAO Bulletin AUG 15, 2017
- Attachment - Michigan Vet State Benefits & Discounts AUG 2017
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## DoD MAVNI Program Update 01 ► Participants File Lawsuit

Soldiers in the U.S. Army Reserve are suing the Pentagon and the Department of Homeland Security for stalling their citizenship applications after they joined the military through a program that promised them fast-track naturalization for their service. “Each plaintiff-soldier has kept his/her end of the bargain,” their lawsuit states. The immigrant recruits did their part by enlisting, training in drills with their unit, and subjecting themselves to deployment. The U.S. Army certified their service, and the military is supposed to provide citizenship as soon as they complete basic training or attend drills.

But at the Pentagon’s request, the Homeland Security Department is not processing their applications, as required, while the U.S. government subjects the recruits to a more rigorous background check than those typically needed to naturalize. What’s more, Pentagon and Homeland Security officials now say they are considering going back and changing who is eligible to receive a certification of military service — required for naturalization under this military recruiting program — and possibly even revoking the certifications for those soldiers not in active-duty service.

The delay has put some soldiers at risk of deportation, the lawsuit states. These soldiers are “suffering irreparable harm” and financial strain as they face uncertainty about their status, unable to get a job, a drivers license, or a passport to visit sick family members, their attorneys say. It has also baffled the military lawyer who wrote the policy. *THE THING THAT STARTLED ME IS THAT I WROTE THE GUIDANCE MEMO, WHICH DOESN’T SAY THIS AT ALL. IT’S FLAT OUT FALSE.* Margaret Stock, lawyer and founder of the MAVNI program said. “Are they making up new rules there at DoD? I’ve never heard of decertifying someone who is eligible through the Reserves, it is outrageous,” said Margaret Stock, a retired Army officer and lawyer. “They’ve naturalized thousands of reservists and all of a sudden DoD noticed it and they’re going to revoke some of them?”

The 10 reservists who brought the suit were recruited through the Pentagon’s Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest program, known as MAVNI, which gives expedited citizenship to legal immigrants who enlist with critical language skills or medical training. Nearly 10,000 immigrants are in the MAVNI program, most of them serving in the Army. The popular program was allowed to accept 5,000 recruits in 2016, but was frozen last fall after security concerns about the vetting of recruits. Now the Pentagon is considering scrapping it altogether, according to an internal memo included in the suit. This would leave roughly 1,000 non-citizen recruits at risk of deportation despite being enlisted in the U.S. military.

Facing long delays and often contradictory answers from the military and government immigration agencies, some recruits told McClatchy they were afraid talking to the press would hurt them if they have to take their case to court. Others said they are wary that even speaking to immigration attorneys about possible litigation will get back to their recruiters and be a black mark on their record. The Pentagon, in its court filing in this case, is clear about the implications. Although the soldiers named in this suit received their certifications, they “could be considered signed in error and may be decertified,” Stephanie Miller, Director of Military Accession Policy at the Pentagon, said in a 28 JUL filing, citing the program’s guidance.

Two classified reports concluded that MAVNI recruits “present an increased risk or threat to intelligence activities against the U.S. by foreign intelligence services,” Miller said in last week’s filing. She also indicated the military wouldn’t protect recruits whose legal status is running out because their applications have come to a standstill: “For the MAVNIs who are no longer in a valid immigration status, and whether they will be subject to deportation...DoD defers to the authority of the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services,” she said.

The lawsuit was originally filed in late May, but last month a D.C. federal judge ordered that it be refiled to include extra legal claims. Despite that setback, U.S. District Judge Ellen Huvelle scolded the Pentagon in a three-hour hearing on 19 JUL for creating so much uncertainty through “baffling” policy changes. “How is that legal?” Huvelle asked. “How can that not be contrary to the statute?” Some reservists had already cleared all the hurdles. Nio Kusama, a surgeon serving in Fort Hamilton, N.Y., was scheduled for a citizenship ceremony oath in May. Three weeks before his naturalization, he was informed that it had been abruptly canceled. Another plaintiff, Jae Seong Park, completed basic training and served active duty for more than a year at Fort Jackson, S.C., before his application was placed on hold.

The next hearing in the reservists’ case is 23 AUG. This is one of several lawsuits filed by MAVNI recruits in recent months after increasingly stringent security checks left thousands who had already enlisted in limbo. In response to a different lawsuit, Defense Department officials cited enlistees using fraudulent student visas and falsified transcripts from universities owned by foreign national security agencies. Additionally, some failed to list foreign contacts. One recruit did not mention all of his connections “despite the fact that his father manages the military department of a foreign factory,” they said.

Advocates of the program argue that while none of these highly vetted immigrant recruits has ever been implicated in a serious security breach — which would result in revoking their citizenship, and would be public record — the same can’t be said of U.S.-born soldiers who go through far fewer checks. Last month, a U.S. soldier in Hawaii was arrested for attempting to provide military documents and a drone to ISIS. In May, another U.S. soldier was discharged after he fought with Russian-backed militants in Ukraine. Attorneys say that mistakes and omissions often occur on SF86s, the application form used to issue security clearances, because recruiters are often filling those forms out quickly within an hour.

Stock said security concerns cited by the Pentagon are overblown if these are the examples cited to shut down the entire program. “It’s not covering something up but being sloppy with your paperwork,” Stock said. “Jared Kushner had a team of lawyers helping him and he couldn’t even fill it out.” Thousands of MAVNI recruits stuck in uncertain legal situations and facing long delays to be shipped to basic training have taken to closed Facebook groups to anxiously ask for updates about the various lawsuits. Some share responses from recruiters and lawmakers they have asked for help, and many said they hope that good news for the reservists will mean good news for the entire program.

Several enlistees have said their recruiters have been silent and unable to give answers since the litigation started. Recruiters in the group admit they are concerned about posting “in fear of what we say will be taken out of context, and we end up as part of the lawsuit.” The Pentagon declined to comment due to pending litigation. Representatives for the Homeland Security Department did not respond to requests for comment. [Source: The Sacramento Bee | Vera Bergengruen | August 2, 2017 ++]

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## **NDAA 2018 Update 10 ► Active Duty/Retiree Out-Of-Pocket Costs**

In its estimates of the effects of key provisions in the House and Senate defense authorization bills for FY 2018, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) spotlights the higher out-of-pocket costs servicemembers and veterans and their families would face if certain Senate-devised personnel initiatives make it into the final bill.

On health care, for example, the Senate version of the bill proposes that TRICARE beneficiaries face higher copays for drug prescriptions not filled on base. By removing simple language regarding grandfathering, current retirees and servicemembers who eventually will retire would see higher TRICARE fees and deductibles. Though the Senate bill would expand other TRICARE options, the net effect of the health benefit changes it proposes would

be to lower government costs and raise costs for beneficiaries by \$6.7 billion from 2018 to 2022, according to the CBO.

A plan to curb housing allowances for dual-service couples with children would save \$221 million through 2022, and the Senate bill's embrace of the Trump administration's plan to cap next January's basic pay raise at 2.1 percent (instead of at 2.4 percent to match private sector wage growth as the House voted) would save the department another \$1.4 billion through 2022. These cost-saving ideas are included in S. 1519, the Senate Armed Services Committee's version of the defense bill, which awaits full Senate consideration with floor debate and amendments when Congress returns from its August recess.

Some of the money senators hope to save on compensation would be used to fund other programs to benefit segments of the military. Higher pharmacy copays at TRICARE retail outlets and mail order, for example, would go toward making the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) permanent and protect it from inflation. (The SSIA is set to expire next May for 69,000 survivors of servicemembers who died on active duty or from service-connected health conditions in retirement.) The Senate bill also would open TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) health insurance to drilling Guard and Reserve members who are full-time federal employees. Guardmembers and reservists now are barred from TRS because they are eligible for the federal civilian health insurance program, which can charge higher premiums.

The Military Coalition, a league of 32 associations and veteran groups, criticizes the practice of funding new benefits through budget offsets created by lowering the value of existing benefits. In the case of the Senate bill, the coalition argues the trophies don't match the drags planned for compensation packages.

Member groups of the Military Coalition have lined up against the Senate bill, trying to pressure the full Senate - or, if need be, House-Senate conferees tasked with shaping a final defense bill - to reject the most significant changes for housing allowances, TRICARE plans, and the next pay raise. Retired Air Force Col. Dan Merry, vice president of government relations for the Military Officers Association of America and cochair of the coalition, said one worry this year is Congress has so many pressing issues to tackle when it returns, including raising the national debt ceiling and advancing tax reform legislation, that a rush job on finalizing the defense bill might be inevitable.

Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), chair of the Senate committee, had hoped to see the full Senate debate and amend his committee's bill before the summer recess so he could floor manage before beginning treatment for brain cancer. That didn't happen. If the Senate's fall schedule gets too tight, Merry said, the defense bill might not be debated on the floor but referred directly to a conference committee. That has happened before, he said, with the conferees, all of them members of the armed services committees, working out compromises behind closed doors. Merry also said both the House and Senate bills exceed arbitrary budget ceilings established by the 2011 Budget Control Act. This will keep the threat of sequestration alive unless Congress also votes to suspend the law's effect. That could leave personnel accounts even more vulnerable, because higher priority would be given to protecting short-term readiness by fully funding training and war supplies and perhaps adding force structure without disrupting major procurement contracts.

As deadline pressures build, upsetting legislative routines, the coalition fears its lobbying efforts could be blunted, raising the prospect that some compensation curbs in the Senate bill will survive late-hour horse trading with House conferees. To reduce that possibility, the coalition is preparing a letter for conferees, listing the key personnel provisions it supports in authorization bills and warning against other provisions that break faith with the current force or retiree populations. Overall, the Senate committee's bill would authorize \$692.6 billion for DoD in the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1. That's \$3.6 billion more than the House-passed bill, H.R. 2810, would authorize. But the Senate would spend \$2.9 billion more than the House on the procurement of weapons systems. Here are two of the most worrisome personnel provisions highlighted by Merry, with the CBO's new cost estimates:

**1. Dual-couple allowances.** Senators would cut housing allowances to servicemembers married to other servicemembers with children. Currently, they receive two housing allowances, with the higher ranked member receiving stateside Basic Allowance for Housing at the with-dependents rate; the other person receives BAH at the

without-dependents rate. Senators want both of the individuals in such couples to receive the lower “without” rate when assigned to the same locale. Service couples who have children but are assigned together outside the U.S. also would see their maximum overseas housing allowances pinched. Of 16,500 dual service couples on active duty with dependents, 11,000 are assigned to the same area and would see combined housing allowances fall an average of \$400.

**2. Retiree health costs.** Last year Congress voted to raise TRICARE copays and enrollment fees for retirees but only for retirees who first join the military in 2018, delaying most savings from higher cost-shares until 2038. The Senate bill would remove that grandfathering protection so hikes in enrollment fees and copayments would apply to new and existing retirees beginning in 2019. Those who retire due to disability as well as certain survivors would not be affected. The change would affect 600,000 retiree households enrolled in TRICARE Prime, raising out-of-pocket costs for retirees who use TRICARE Prime only for themselves from \$530 a year to \$670 and for those with family coverage from \$1,270 to \$1,615.

Out-of-pocket costs for the 450,000 retirees using TRICARE Select plans would climb from an average of \$580 a year for individual coverage to \$1,105 a year, and from an average of \$1,685 for family coverage to \$2,655, the CBO estimates. If the Senate committee plan takes effect, the CBO estimates that by 2021 about 30,000 retiree households would stop using TRICARE, opting instead for health insurance from civilian employers or through their spouses' employment.

[Source: MOAA Leg Up | Tom Philpott | August 11, 2017 ++]

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## **DoD Preemptive Strikes ► Pentagon Plan for North Korea**

If President Trump were to ever order a pre-emptive strike on North Korea over its nuclear weapons program, the Pentagon has prepared a plan involving B1-B bombers originating from the U.S. Air Force base in Guam, according to a report 9 AUG. The Pentagon plan calls for the non-nuclear B1-B "Lancer" bombers to be supported by satellites and drones and surrounded by fighter jets and electronic warfare planes, NBC News reported.

North Korea's military said 8 AUG it is weighing a strike on Guam, a U.S. island territory in the western Pacific Ocean. On 9 AUG, North Korea made a similar threat, saying it will complete its plan to attack "waters near Guam" by mid-August. NBC News says pairs of B-1Bs have conducted practice runs of a similar mission since the end of May, the latest taking place on 7 AUG. Six B-1Bs are currently positioned in Guam, which is located about 2,100 miles from North Korea. The Pacific Air Forces tweeted 8 AUG that with U.S. airmen having arrived in Guam to work with Japan and South Korea to counter any threat posed by North Korea, the U.S. is "ready" to fight.

North Korea's military shot back 9 AUG at Trump's threat to impose "fire and fury" on Pyongyang, calling his comments a "load of nonsense." North Korea said that "only absolute force" can work on the Trump administration and "sound dialogue" over nuclear weapons is not possible with Trump, who Pyongyang said is "bereft of reason." U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis warned in a statement 9 AUG that North Korea risked "the end of its regime and the destruction of its people" if it did not "stand down" from its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

North Korea on 10AUG announced a detailed plan to launch a volley of ballistic missiles toward the U.S. Pacific territory of Guam, a major military hub and home to U.S. bombers, and dismissed President Donald Trump's threats of "fire and fury" if it doesn't back down. The announcement, made in the name of a general who heads North Korea's rocket command, warned the North is preparing a plan to fire four of its Hwasong-12 missiles over Japan and into waters around the tiny island. China won't come to North Korea's help if it launches missiles threatening U.S. soil and there is retaliation, a state-owned newspaper warned on 11 AUG, but it would intervene if Washington strikes first. [Source: Washington Examiner & AP | John Siegel & | Eric Talmadge, August 9 & 10, 2017 ++]

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## **Transgender Lawsuits ► First One Filed**

Five active duty service women have filed the first lawsuit against President Donald Trump for what they see as an unconstitutional effort to stop transgender personnel from serving. The women, who serve in the Air Force, the Coast Guard and the Army, were previously men who have transitioned. As a group, they have more than 60 combined years of military service, with deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. The case argues, among other claims, that “Trump’s directive to exclude transgender people from military service discriminates against Plaintiffs based on their sex and transgender status,” which they argue is in violation of the equal protection component of the Fifth Amendment. The case was filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

On 26 July Trump declared — in a series of three tweets — that transgender personnel are no longer welcome to serve in the military. In the days that followed the military scrambled to interpret whether the tweets were indicative of actual policy. It was subsequently deduced that the tweets were not, barring further guidance from the White House. The White House has yet to follow up on the tweets or issue any further guidance. The services, meanwhile, have communicated to their forces that the current policy allowing transgender personnel to serve would remain in place. The Pentagon, under former Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, announced transgender personnel would be allowed to serve openly in Oct. 2016.

“This unjustifiable reversal of policy is devastating to these soldiers and harmful to our country,” said Jennifer Levi, director of GLAD’s Transgender Rights Project and one of the attorneys for the women. “These plaintiffs put their lives on the line every day for all of us. We can’t afford to lose a single one of them.” The case also lists Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. Joseph Dunford and the individual service chiefs as defendants. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Tara Copp | August 9, 2017 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Update 90 ► Pvt. Dan Lawrence Feragen**

Pvt. Dan Lawrence Feragen survived the Bataan Death March during World War II, but later died while a prisoner of war. He was buried in an unmarked grave, his remains left undiscovered until after his parents passed away. His relatives never received his Purple Heart, but on Aug. 7, Purple Hearts Reunited will deliver the private’s medal to his nephew Lyle Feragen. This is Pvt. Feragen’s story, as told by Purple Hearts Reunited:





Feragen grew up on his father's cattle ranch in Montana and at the age of 17 moved to Colfax, Wash., where his older brothers were working. At 19, he enlisted in the Army at Fort Lewis. After training, he was selected to serve in the Philippine Department assigned to Service Company, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division stationed in Manila, Philippines.

On Dec. 7 1941, just hours after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, the Japanese Imperial Army invaded the Philippines. For four months with little food or supplies, the men of the 31st along with other American and Filipino military forces held off the Japanese invasion. On April 9, 1942 with most of the fighting forces on Bataan sick and wounded, Maj. Gen. Edward P. King made the decision to surrender the Bataan fighting forces.

Just hours after Gen. King waved the flag of surrender, the remaining 25 men of Service Company were ordered to form a line of resistance in their bivouac area and hold the enemy while 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry withdrew. Service Company was to follow, fighting a delaying action. The goal was to allow the 3rd Battalion to escape and make it to Corregidor Island where Gen. Jonathan "Skinny" Wainwright was still fighting.

The 3rd Battalion moved out rapidly to Mariveles. After about two minutes of small arms fire from an unseen enemy on a hill to their front, a platoon of Japanese tanks drove into their position stopped and delivered heavy machine gun fire. Armed with only rifles and pistols, Pvt. Feragen and the rest of the men of Service Company, 31st Infantry were captured.

From the bivouac area, Pvt. Feragen and the other men were marched over 60 miles in 110-degree heat with no food or water to POW Camp O'Donnell, what is now known as the Bataan Death March. On the Death March, the men suffered brutal treatment from their Japanese captors. If a man would fall out of the column, he was either struck with a bayonet or shot. Pvt. Feragen made it through the Death March to POW Camp O'Donnell. He stayed there for a month and was then one of 100 POWs selected for a POW labor detail and was transferred to POW Camp Olivas, San Fernando, Philippines. Camp Olivas was an old Philippine military training barracks. The labor detail involved gathering up scrap metal around the Bataan Peninsula. All the scrap metal was then loaded on ships bound for Japan to be recycled into war materials. On June 17, 1942, Pvt. Feragen died from mistreatment at the hands of his captors, malaria and dysentery.

The soldier was buried in an unmarked grave without his clothing or identification surrounded by 14 other POWs who died there. In 1945, after the liberation of the Philippines by Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the grave of PVT Feragen and the other men were exhumed by the US Army and transferred to Manila but the men could not be identified. In 1948, the Army hired an anthropologist to try and make identifications of the "Unknown" men. Through dental records and known information in PVT Feragen's service records, he was identified and buried in the American Military Cemetery in Manila, Philippines. But by this time, Pvt. Feragen's parents had died and never knew their son was found, therefore, a Purple Heart was never issued. [Source: NavyTimes | Tony Lombardo | August 3, 2017 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Update 91 ► Pvt. William Gruber**

Though he died 75 years ago, airman William "Bill" Gruber continues to watch over his little brother from a framed portrait in the younger man's Helena home. Frank Gruber was a boy when his older brother went overseas during World War II. His lone personal recollection of his brother is a visit to their Townsend-area home during a leave. "He came home from boot camp and that's all I really remember of him," Frank Gruber said, looking at a scrapbook of old letters home and photos. "I can't remember much. I just remember seeing him." Frank Gruber's basis of knowledge of his brother comes from stories shared by his family over the years. Bill Gruber's photo is perched atop his brother's desk, alongside a photo of their parents. The placement is fitting, as Bill Gruber was finally laid to rest

next to his parents just outside of Boulder on Saturday. “This is a pretty big thing,” Frank Gruber said. “It’s going to come to a close here.”

William Gruber was born Jan. 25, 1920, to Edward and Dora Gruber of Toston. The third eldest of nine children, Bill Gruber and his family lived on a ranch along the Missouri River and later in Clancy. He was known as a natural mechanic, and as an adult he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps. At the age of 20, Bill Gruber’s interest in aviation led him to enlist in the Army Air Corps with a desire to become a mechanic. Gruber was stationed in the Philippines and among the ranks defending the Bataan Peninsula from Japanese invaders. With supplies running low, 10,000 American soldiers and 60,000 Philippine soldiers were forced to surrender. Now in the hands of their captors, the ensuing 100-mile march to prisoner of war camps became known as the Bataan Death March. Half the Americans would not survive the march or internment, with many starving or succumbing to tropical diseases.

Gruber survived the march but would later die in a POW camp on Sept. 27, 1942, finally worn down by months of mistreatment but still defiant of his captors. Gruber’s family knew the 22-year-old was missing in action in the Philippines but did not learn of his death until 1943. He was buried in a mass grave. A few years later the remains were exhumed and relocated to a Manila cemetery. His family learned where the grave was located and even visited the site years later. But, the exact placement of the airman’s remains were unknown. Military officials said extensive commingling of remains and limited technology made identification impossible. Last year, after Bill Gruber’s nephew, Ken Gruber, began asking the military for assistance in bringing the airman home, there was a break in the case.

In May 2016, remains from two graves were being tested for identification. On 22 FEB, Army Air Forces Pvt. William Gruber’s remains were matched to the DNA collected from his four surviving brothers. It was the news his family waited 75 years to hear. “He’s coming home,” Frank Gruber said the day before his brother’s remains arrived in Montana on 3 AUG. Since learning of the match, Frank Gruber, 83, has lost two of his brothers. They died knowing that Bill Gruber was returning to Montana. “They had some closure before they moved on,” he said.

On 3 AUG the airplane carrying Bill Gruber touched down at Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport - the casket cloaked in an American flag and handled by military personnel. Family members covered their hearts to greet their long-lost uncle and brother and stood over him in prayer. The somber occasion brought a flood of emotions for some as they loaded the hearse, comforted by a knowledge that Bill was home in Montana and the realization of that 75-year journey. A man of Catholic faith, mourners filled the Cathedral of St. Helena in celebration of the life of Bill Gruber. Hymns were sung, scriptures were read and prayers were recited to properly lay to rest the man and the soldier who died in squalor thousands of miles from home.

Monsignor Kevin O’Neill spoke with rhythmic cadence, interweaving Biblical teachings with Bill Gruber’s life and death, and what those who mourned his loss could learn. “How many times he was hospitalized after the surrender, how long the march, how desperate the conditions and how principled he remained, even refusing to assist the occupational forces because he believed with integrity in the principles that led him to give his life to this circumstance and its possibilities,” O’Neill said. “Born into a good hardworking family, being by nature a kid at heart and an optimist, he was faced with all the darkness and yet we know his principles remained strong, his fidelity to his fraternity to those that served, his love of family always and his faith that compelled him.”

Bill Gruber’s faith must have been a source of comfort and strength as he faced the Bataan Death March and POW camp. “What a remarkable life,” O’Neill said. “There’s nothing I can do in the remainder of my life, there’s nothing I have done in my life to this moment that can even come close to what he and his companions in service suffered, endured, lived through and lived for: God and honor and family and nation. “It is a remarkable icon, his life and his death and his passing to fullness of life, an icon to you and to me, for our nation and even for the world. It’s not exaggeration. It’s not hyperbole. It’s God honest fact of what he did, and how he suffered and what he has become in the Lord.”

In a powerful moment, military officers presented Bill Gruber's family with his medals, including the Bronze Star and Purple Heart signifying his valor in war and ultimate sacrifice. From the Cathedral, Bill Gruber, his family and friends made the final leg of their long journey. They set out in a stretching processional, heading south and cresting Boulder Hill and into the valley. At St. John the Evangelist Catholic Cemetery Bill Gruber received his rite of committal and burial with full military honors.

"Unfortunately, I, and my cousins did not have the pleasure of knowing Bill," Ken Gruber said in prepared remarks. "He died before any of us were born. Nevertheless, from our family's fond stories about him, he lives in our hearts. And we are forever grateful for his service to his country and the thousands of others that surrendered at Bataan. "After 75 years, we are here together today to say prayers for Bill and to say one last goodbye to Bill Gruber. May our fallen loved ones not be forgotten." [Source: AirForceTimes | Angela Brandt & Tom Kuglin | August 7, 2017 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 01 thru 15 AUG 2017 | Fifteen**

"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 more than 73,000, Korean War more than 7800, Vietnam War more than 1600, Cold War (126), Iraq and other conflicts (5). 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**

None

**Korea**

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

-- **Army Cpl. Richard J. Seadore**, 21, whose remains were identified earlier, will be buried Aug. 4 in his hometown of Long Pine, Neb. In December 1950, Seadore was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, when Chinese forces attacked and penetrated his company's defensive line. Following the battle, Seadore could not be located. It would later be learned he had been captured and died in a North Korean POW camp in April 1951. Read more [here](#).

-- **Army Sgt. Willie Rowe**, whose remains were identified earlier, will be buried Aug. 8 at Arlington National Cemetery. He was a member of L Company, 3rd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, when on Nov. 25, 1950, his unit was attacked by Chinese forces in North Korea. Rowe, 22, of Hampton, Va., would be declared missing and unaccounted for following the battle. It would later be learned he had been captured but died in a North Korean POW camp in January 1951. To read more about Sgt. Rowe refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1266016/soldier-captured-during-the-korean-war-accounted-for-rowe>.



-- **Army Cpl. Dow F. Worden**, of Morrow, Ore., was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, and was near an area known as Heartbreak Ridge when the Chinese launched a probing attack on the forward slope of Hill 1024. After repelling the attack, Worden's company was then ordered to attack the enemy on nearby Hill 867. Worden could not be accounted for after the battle, and he was declared missing in action on Sept. 29, 1951. Interment services are pending. To read more about Cpl. Worden refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1263404/soldier-captured-during-the-korean-war-accounted-for-worden>.

-- **Army Cpl. Sgt. Stafford L. Morris**, 24, of Allentown, Pa., was buried Aug. 5 in Atlanta. In late November 1950, Morris was a member of Battery A, 503rd Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, which was fighting north of the town of Kujang-dong, North Korea. On December 1, his battalion began to withdraw under continuous enemy fire. It would be later learned that Morris had been captured but died in captivity on Jan. 21, 1951. To read more about Morris refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1268883/soldier-captured-during-the-korean-war-accounted-for-morris>

-- **Army Cpl. Roy J. Hopper** was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion 19th Infantry Regiment. He was reported killed in action on July 31, 1950, when his battalion was engaged in a fighting withdrawal against North Korean forces in Chinju, South Korea. Interment services are pending. **G** to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1273023/soldier> to read more about Hopper.

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Alfred G. Bensinger**, of Oklahoma, was a member of Company D, 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, when his unit was heavily engaged fighting Chinese forces in the Ch'ongch'on River area in northwestern North Korea, in late November 1950. Bensinger was reported missing in action as of Dec. 1, 1950. It would later be learned he had been captured but died in captivity. Interment services are pending. To read more about Bensinger go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1269833/soldier-captured-during-korean-war-accounted-for-bensinger>.

-- **Army Pfc. Walter C. Hackenberg**, of Beavertown, Pa., was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, when Chinese and North Korean forces attacked his unit west of

Chorwon, South Korea, in April 1951. The American troops were able to hold the line, but Hackenberg could not be accounted for at the end of the battle. He was declared missing in action as of April 25, 1951. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1269928/soldier-captured-during-korean-war-accounted-for-hackenberg> to read more about Hackenberg.

## World War II

**The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of remains and burial update of 8 U.S. servicemen who had been previously listed as missing in action from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:**

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Charles E. Carlson**, 24, whose remains were identified earlier, will be buried Aug. 4 in Indiantown Gap, Pa. On Dec. 23, 1944, Carlson was shot down in an air battle south of Bonn, Germany. The Flushing, N.Y., native was a P-47 Thunderbolt pilot with the 62nd Fighter Squadron, 56th Fighter Group, Eighth Air Force. German officials reported finding and burying Carlson's remains at the crash site near Buschhoven, Germany. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1262429/airman-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-carlson> to read more about 2nd Lt. Carlson.



-- **Army Air Forces Pvt. William D. Gruber**, whose remains were identified earlier, will be buried Aug. 5 in Boulder, Mont. On Dec. 8, 1941, Gruber was assigned to the Philippine Department, U.S. Army Forces in the Far East, when Japanese forces invaded. When Corregidor fell on May 6, 1942, Gruber and thousands of U.S. and Filipino service members were captured and forced to endure the Bataan Death March. Gruber, 22, of Townsend, Mont., reportedly died on Sept. 27, 1942, at the Cabanatuan POW Camp. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1262440/soldier-captured-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-gruber> to read more about Pvt. Gruber.



-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Kenneth L. Holm**, 29, of Clarkfield, Minn., will be buried Aug. 9 in Fort Snelling, Minn. Holm was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. He would be one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1266696/uss-oklahoma-sailor-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-holm> to read more Fireman Holm.

-- **Army Pfc. Lloyd J. Lobdell**, 23, of Janesville, Wis., was stationed in the Philippines with Company A, 192nd Tank Battalion, when Japanese forces invaded on Dec. 8, 1941. When Corregidor fell on May 6, 1942, Lobdell and thousands of U.S. and Filipino service members were captured and forced to endure the Bataan Death March. Lobdell reportedly died on Nov. 19, 1942, at the Cabanatuan POW Camp. Interment services are pending. To read more about PFC. Lobsell go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1263444/soldier-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-lobdell>.

-- **Navy Reserve Lt. j.g. Irwin E. Rink**, of Kansas, was an F4F-4 Wildcat pilot assigned to Fighting Squadron Twenty Seven (VF-27). On Aug. 4, 1943, he and seven others took off on an escort mission to New Georgia Island when they were attacked by Japanese fighter aircrafts. Rink did not return to base, and would be reported missing in action on Aug. 4, 1943. Interment services are pending. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1263415/sailor-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-rink> to read more about Lt. j.g. Rink.

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Lawrence H. Fecho**, whose remains were identified earlier, will be buried Aug. 13 in Bottineau, N.D. Fecho, 20, of Willow City, N.D., was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. To read more about Fecho go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/Article/1268887/uss-oklahoma-sailor-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-fecho>.



-- **Navy Radioman 2nd Class Walter H. Backman**, 22, of Walton, N.D., was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1269856/sailor-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-backman> to read more about Backman.

-- **Navy Radioman 2nd Class Quentin J Gifford**, 22, of Mankato, Minn., was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. Interment services are pending. Go to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1269851/sailor-killed-during-world-war-ii-accounted-for-gifford> to read more about Gifford.



[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> & <http://www.thepatriotspage.com/Recovered.htm> | August 15, 2017 ++]

\* VA \*



## VA Privatization Update 12 ► Not On Shulkin's Watch

David Shulkin says, "We are ramping up internal VA capacity along with private referrals. Critics don't want to lose all that VA has to offer. I don't either, and we won't. As a physician, my professional assessment is that the Department of Veterans Affairs has made significant progress over the past six months — but it still requires intensive care. In order to restore the VA's health, we must strengthen its ability to provide timely and high quality medical care while improving experiences and outcomes for veterans. I believe the best way to achieve this goal is to build an integrated system that allows veterans to get the best health care possible, whether it comes from the VA or the private sector."

This is not a novel idea. No health care provider delivers every treatment under the sun. Referral programs for patients to get care through outside providers (known as Choice or Community Care at the VA) are as essential to the medical profession as stethoscopes and tongue depressors. But VA attempts to offer veterans these options have frequently stirred controversy. Some critics complain that letting veterans choose where they get certain health care services will lead to the privatization of VA. Nothing could be further from the truth. VA has had a community care program for years. Congress significantly expanded these efforts in 2014 in response to the wait time crisis. As a result, since the beginning of this year, VA has authorized over 18 million community care appointments — 3.8 million more than last year, or a 26% increase, according to the VA claims system.

But as VA's community care efforts have grown, so has our capacity to deliver care in-house. The VA budget is nearly four times what it was in 2001. Since then, the department's workforce has grown from some 224,000 employees in 2001 to more than 370,000 today, according to the Office of Personnel Management. And we're delivering 3 million more appointments at VA facilities per year than we were in 2014.

In other words, community care or private capacity and VA's internal capacity are not mutually exclusive. We are ramping up both simultaneously in order to meet the health care needs of the veterans we are charged with serving. Our fiscal 2018 budget continues this trend. It will spend \$2.7 billion more for in-house VA care, compared to a \$965 million increase for community care. This means that the total dollar increase for medical care within VA is three times that of the increase for community care. Overall, when all funding sources are taken into account, we expect to spend \$50 billion on health care services within VA and \$12.6 billion on VA community care in fiscal 2018. Even though these numbers make it abundantly clear VA is not at all headed toward privatization, I understand the underlying concerns of some critics. They don't want to lose all that VA has to offer. I don't either — and we won't.

Many of VA's services cannot be replicated in the private sector. In addition to providing some of the best quality overall health care in the country, VA delivers world class services in polytrauma, spinal cord injury and rehabilitation, prosthetics and orthotics, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress treatments and other behavioral health programs. The department plays a critical role in preparing our nation's doctors and nurses — 70% of whom train at VA facilities. And we lead the nation in innovation, with VA research having contributed to the first liver transplant, development of the cardiac pacemaker, advancements in treatments for PTSD, cutting-edge prosthetics, and many other medical breakthroughs.

All of these factors underscore that fears of privatization are simply unfounded. President Trump is dedicated to maintaining a strong VA, and we will not allow VA to be privatized on our watch. What we do want is a VA system that is even stronger and better than it is today. To achieve that goal, VA needs a strong and robust community care program. Veterans deserve the best. If a VA facility isn't meeting the community standard for care, doesn't offer a specific service, or doesn't have an appointment available when it's needed, veterans should have access to care in their community. This is precisely what they have earned and deserve. It's what the VA is working with Congress

and Veterans Service Organizations to deliver. And it's what the system needs to remain a valuable resource for our country's great veterans, now and in the future. [Source: USA David Shulkin | July 24, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Claims Backlog Update 157 ► Speed-Up Bill Sent to President**

Congress has sent the president a bill aimed at trimming a rapidly growing backlog of veterans' disability claims. The House approved the bill by voice vote 11 AUG during a brief session, sending the measure to President Donald Trump. It would overhaul the appeals process, allowing veterans to file "express" appeals if they waive their right to a hearing or the ability to submit new evidence. The VA could test the new program for up to 18 months until Shulkin could certify it was ready for a full rollout with enough money to manage appeals effectively. Lawmakers hope the legislation ultimately could reduce average wait times to less than a year. Currently, veterans could wait five years or more to resolve their appeals over disability claims.

"Veterans have been waiting far too long for an answer from the VA. This bill will speed up the outdated appeals process so veterans can receive the disability benefits that they have earned," said Sen. Tester (D-MT). Still, the legislation offers no immediate fix for the bulk of the 470,000 appeals claims in VA's backlog; the changes would apply almost entirely to newly filed appeals. Shulkin has said Trump's proposed VA budget for the next fiscal year beginning Oct. 1 doesn't account for \$800 million in "hiring surges" that would be needed if VA hoped to clear the current backlog within 10 years. The department provides \$63.7 billion in disability compensation payments each year to about 4.1 million veterans with disabling conditions incurred during their military service. [Source: Associated Press | Matthew Daly | August 11, 2017 ++]

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## **VA White House Hotline ► Will Be Staffed With Vets**

On 11 AUG the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that the two-month pilot phase of the new White House VA Hotline that began in June has demonstrated that Veterans calling the hotline respond best when their calls are answered by fellow Veterans and others with first-hand experience on their issues.

As a result, VA announced that it will target highly qualified Veterans to staff the hotline going forward, instead of contracting the service to a third-party vendor, and is hiring additional VA personnel to complete the planned move to a 24-hour operation. "The message we've heard loud and clear is Veterans want to talk to other Veterans to help them solve problems and get VA services," said VA Secretary David J. Shulkin. "We're taking steps to answer that call." This decision will delay the full-time stand-up of the 24-hour service by two months, to no later than 15 OCT, in order to ensure the hiring and training processes are complete. Until that time, the hotline's current pilot program service is available to receive calls from Veterans from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday. The phone line 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. [Source: VA News Release | August 11, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Secretary Update 60 ► VA Should Treat Vets Like Consumers**

Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin thinks the federal government should take cues from entrepreneurs and focus on what veterans need. At the VA, he'd like to see the agency ensure it's "solving one of the problems that our



veterans are experiencing or one of the problems the VA [is] experiencing,” instead of providing services regardless of demand. On the NBC reality show "Shark Tank," business owners pitch products to a panel of celebrity judges and the ones whose products don't gain traction aren't solving relevant customers' problems, Shulkin explained.

That's why the department is focusing on issues such as expediting the disability claims process, staffing shortages, preventing veteran suicides, and cleaning up the VA's information technology problems, Shulkin said at an event Tuesday hosted by the VA Innovators Network, a set of laboratories dedicated to creatively solving internal problems at the department. The best way to address the VA's shortfalls is to be “open and honest with the problems we have,” he said. Thinking of veterans as customers who have the option to go to elsewhere could provide an incentive for the VA to improve its services, he explained. “Make them consumers [for whom] we have to have a product that they want,” he said. “We're going to have to open up our system to be more competitive with the private sector.”

Other priorities include reducing the wait time for benefit claims to 30 days. The VA is working on technology that could eventually process veterans' disability claims instantly -- similar to what happens when they request a credit score, he said. Broadly, the VA should focus on the services it provides more effectively than the private sector does, such as treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, prosthetics and rehabilitation, Shulkin said.

President Donald Trump's newly established White House Office of American Innovation also counts improving VA technology among its initial projects. Earlier this summer Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and head of that office, said his team had advised the VA to use the same electronic health record system as the Pentagon already does. In June, VA announced its intent to sole-source the contract in three to six months. The Obama administration struggled to tackle that same problem, attempting to build a database that would let personnel view records in two separate systems used by the Pentagon and the VA. [Source: NextGov | Mohana Ravindranath | August 8, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Presumptive AO Diseases Update 25 ► Expansion Decision By 1 NOV**

VA Secretary David J. Shulkin will decide “on or before” 1 NOV whether to add to the list of medical conditions the Department of Veteran Affairs presumes are associated to Agent Orange or other herbicides sprayed during the Vietnam War, a department spokesman said 1 AUG in response to a Tom Philpott enquiry. Any ailments Shulkin might add to VA's current list of 14 “presumptive diseases” linked to herbicide exposure would make many more thousands of Vietnam War veterans eligible for VA disability compensation and health care.

Ailments under review as possible adds to the presumptive diseases list include bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson-like symptoms without diagnosis of that particular disease. But hypertension (high blood pressure) and stroke also might be embraced, or ignored, as part of the current review. The process was sparked by the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) 10th and final review of medical literature on health effects of herbicide exposure in Vietnam. The 1,100-page report concluded in March 2016 that recent scientific research strengthened the association between herbicide exposure and bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson-like symptoms. Specifically, the institute, or IOM, found “limited or suggestive” evidence of an association to herbicide versus its previous finding of “inadequate or insufficient” evidence of an association.

The IOM report also reaffirmed from earlier reviews “limited or suggestive evidence” of an association between herbicide sprayed in Vietnam and hypertension and also strokes. That same level of evidence was used in 2010 by then-VA Secretary Eric Shinseki to add ischemic heart disease and Parkinson's disease to the Agent Orange presumptive list. Shinseki had stronger evidence, an IOM finding of “positive association” to herbicide for chronic lymphocytic leukemia, which he also added to the list that year. Shulkin, the current secretary, has authority to use

IOM findings to add all five diseases to the presumptive list, or he can choose to look at other studies and scientific evidence to support adding fewer ailments or none at all.

The IOM, renamed the National Academy of Medicine last summer, delivered its Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 2014, to then-VA Secretary Bob McDonald 15 months ago. He immediately ordered a technical work group formed to review IOM findings and original studies it relied on, as well as any new science relevant to Agent Orange ailments. The workgroup's findings then were reviewed by a smaller strategic workgroup, followed by an internal task force of senior VA leaders. "The entire VA response packet (with specific 17 FEB, a senior official said at the time. Shulkin that month was confirmed as VA secretary. The previous 18 months he was VA undersecretary for health and would have been familiar with the Agent Orange packet. So, what has happened since then?

VA officials are lean on those details. A spokesman said VA continues to work "diligently to review the National Academy of Medicine report on potential new presumptions for Agent Orange and prepare the Secretary to make an informed decision. This includes everything from what the science is indicating, necessary regulations and a complete regulatory impact analysis. There is no delay in the decision process. Rather VA is taking appropriate time to ensure we are prepared to provide any benefits and services based on the Secretary's decision." Past VA secretaries had rigid timetables for accepting or rejecting IOM findings. They also had to adhere to certain standards and procedures in determining if more diseases should be presumed service connected, and to explain in writing if they declined to add IOM-identified conditions to the presumptive list.

But Congress allowed those provisions of the Agent Orange law to "sunset" Oct. 1, 2015, six months before IOM delivered its last report. Shulkin therefore is under no "statutory deadline nor required to do anything" with the IOM report, except whatever he promised veterans and Congress, said Bart Stichman, co-director of the National Veterans Legal Services Program, a nonprofit that advocates for veterans and had lobbied to the Agent Orange provisions.

Many veterans know what's at stake and have been pressing VA to add more diseases to the presumptive list. Also, thousands of sailors and Marines who served on ships in the territorial waters off Vietnam continue to press VA and the Congress to make Blue Water Navy veterans eligible for Agent Orange benefits. "I've been doing everything I can to bug the hell out of Secretary Shulkin" on the latest IOM study, said Rick Weidman, executive director for policy and government affairs for Vietnam Veterans of America. Shulkin responds, Weidman said, that "he's trying and it's a process." Weidman said he suspects one big hurdle is the White House's Office of Management and Budget, which likely resists saddling VA with sharply higher disability pay obligations for high blood pressure, bladder cancer or stroke contracted by any veteran who stepped foot in Vietnam during the war.

OMB tried to block Shinseki in 2010 from adding three ailments, including heart disease, to the presumptive list. Shinseki went around OMB and appealed directly to then-President Barack Obama, who sided with veterans, Weidman said. The Congressional Budget Office calculated that within three years of that decision, ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's and leukemia accounted for 280,000 additional compensation claims and \$4.5 billion in retroactive disability payments. Beside resistance from OMB, Weidman said Shulkin is counseled by senior staff who run post-deployment health services and study environmental hazards for VA and yet are skeptical of the science associating herbicide dioxins with higher incidence of various ailments. The Agent Orange "experts" they rely on, Weidman charged, haven't published "one scientific paper in a reputable peer review journal. The whole crew should be fired and I've told the Secretary that."

But is VA studying more than whether to add Agent Orange ailments? Anthony Principi, VA secretary in President George W. Bush's first term, argues for more sweeping changes. Like Weidman, Principi served in combat in Vietnam but believes the Agent Orange law went too far, forcing VA secretaries to build out lists of presumptive illnesses based only on suggestive links to their wartime service, and ignoring the impact of unhealthy lifestyles, heredity and aging. Interviewed 1 AUG, Principi said it doesn't seem fair that an elderly Vietnam veteran can begin receiving more disability compensation for heart disease at 75 or 80 than a young Marine receives who loses a leg fighting in Afghanistan.

Principi said he wants “common sense” changes to the Agent Orange law so that, for example, diseases on the presumptive list are deemed service connected only if diagnosed within 30 years of a veteran exiting Vietnam. There’s legal precedent if Shulkin were to propose such a rule, perhaps while adding hypertension to the presumptive list, said lawyer Stichman. In 1994, he recalled, Congress allowed such a “manifestation 1rule” for Agent Orange-related respiratory cancers. By 2001, however, it rescinded it on complaints by veterans groups that there was no science to support limiting benefits in that way. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Tom Philpott | August 3, 2017 ++]

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## VA Mustard Gas Claims Update 01 ► Bill To Enhance Vet Care Chances

A measure headed to President Donald Trump’s desk could help World War II veterans exposed to mustard gas by the military, Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill said 3 AUG. The Arla Harrell Act, which the Senate passed as part of another bill to expand college aid for military veterans, would require the Veterans Affairs Department to reconsider disability benefits denied to those who claimed the testing caused health problems.

McCaskill said the military tested the effects of mustard gas and the blister agent lewisite on about 60,000 veterans by the end of World War II. Her office estimates a couple hundred participants could still be alive, including 90-year-old Missouri resident **Arla Harrell**, for whom the bill was named. “It says to Arla Harrell, ‘We believe you,’” McCaskill said. “And that is a very important thing to say to Arla and other men like him who were willing to give the ultimate sacrifice for their country.” A Department of Veterans Affairs spokesman didn’t immediately comment Thursday.



**Arla Harrell**

Harrell’s daughter, Beverly Howe, says he had mustard agents dabbed on his skin and was placed in a gas chamber without protections in southwestern Missouri’s Camp Crowder after he enlisted in the Army in 1945. He’s since had lung issues and skin cancer, but has been denied benefits. He and other veterans were sworn to secrecy until 1991, complicating efforts to get benefits. “When these men were released from this vow of secrecy, our country did not stand up at that point and say, ‘We got it. We’ve got your back,’” Howe said. “That’s where I find the moral ground for me.”

If signed by Trump, the legislation will require the Veterans Affairs Department to assume those who served at sites where McCaskill’s office says testing occurred and are trying again to get benefits are telling the truth and would need to prove otherwise. Other provisions would require investigations by the Veterans Affairs and Defense departments. [Source: The Associated Press | Summer Ballentine | August 2, 2017 ++]

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## VA Improper Payments ► \$5B & \$5.5B in 2015 & 2016

The ranking Democrat on the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee is seeking answers from the Department of Veterans Affairs after a VA watchdog found the agency made \$5.5 billion in improper payments last year. The amount of improper payments increased by \$500 million from the previous year, according to a report released in May from the VA Office of Inspector General. An improper payment can be either an over- or underpayment and is defined as one that “should not have been made or that was made in an incorrect amount.”

Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO) sent a letter last week to VA Secretary David Shulkin, asking for his detailed plans to reduce the amount of money spent improperly. The improper payments were largely made through two VA health care programs in 2016 – VA community care, which allows veterans to seek care in the private sector, and a program that helps the elderly and chronically ill. The community care programs recorded an improper payment rate of 75 percent, meaning three out of four payments made through the program shouldn’t have been made or were for an incorrect amount. The other program had a rate of 69 percent, according to the inspector general’s report. Both made more improper payments in 2016 than in 2015.

The inspector general found the VA didn’t fully comply with the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act, which requires federal agencies to review and report on major programs that are susceptible to improper payments. “Given the importance of eliminating waste, fraud and abuse and the scale of taxpayer spending on these programs, proper adherence to [the act] is warranted,” McCaskill wrote. In response to the inspector general report, VA Chief Financial Officer Edward Murray wrote the agency was “committed to stopping inconsistent compliance with laws and regulations” and is “working diligently to reduce improper payments.” The inspector general did find improvements from 2015 to 2016 in three benefits programs – compensation, pension and the Post-9/11 GI Bill. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | August 2, 2017 ++]

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## VA Opioid Therapy Update 05 ► S.T.O.P. P.A.I.N. Advices & Guidelines

When it comes to treating pain and substance abuse, the Department of Veterans Affairs is recognized by many as a leader in the pain management field and the responsible use of opioids across the VA healthcare system. “Recent studies and stories have pointed to VA’s success in its approach to pain management and responsible use of opioids with our Veteran patients,” said VA Secretary David J. Shulkin.

- “As Governor Christie, Chairman of the President’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis, said 31 JUL, our country’s opioid crisis is indeed a national public health emergency, and to fight it, we must all join forces across the cabinet and executive and legislative branches.
- “At VA, we have learned a lot over the past several years and, to Governor Christie’s point, we want to share our knowledge and experience right away with our federal, state and local partners, as well as our nation’s healthcare networks. This national crisis demands a national partnership and approach.”

To that end, Secretary Shulkin announced the release of VA’s top eight best practices to share with others in government and the healthcare industry who work to balance pain management and opioid prescribing, based on what VA has learned over the past four years. These best practices are summed up by the acronym S.T.O.P. P.A.I.N. which stands for:

**S - Stepped Care Model** – Adapted from the National Institutes of Health, this model encourages a continuum of care with effective monitoring and management of the condition from onset through treatment. It incorporates self-management through participation in such groups as Narcotics or Alcoholics Anonymous; counseling; treatment programs; involvement of primary care; and other medical specialists.

**T - Treatment alternatives/complimentary care** – Complimentary and Integrated health expands the availability of provider options beyond the use of standard care in the treatment of chronic pain. Complementary Health may include such evidence-based treatments as acupuncture, yoga, and progressive relaxation.

**O - Ongoing monitoring of usage**, which relies on multiple tools for tracking and monitoring individual usage of and risk of opioid therapy.

**P - Practice Guidelines** - Key Clinical Practice Guidelines (CPG) provide clear and comprehensive evidence-based recommendations for practitioners to minimize harm and increase patient safety in patients requiring Substance Use Disorder (SUD) treatment and opioid therapy. They can be found online at:

- <https://www.healthquality.va.gov/guidelines/MH/sud>; and
- <https://www.healthquality.va.gov/guidelines/Pain/cot>

**P - Prescription monitoring** – VA has a number of data sources to allow it to monitor opioid use to target specific education in real time. The practice patterns of providers differ, along with the case mixes, so a provider with relatively high opioid prescribing may have an appropriate practice, or be someone who could benefit from education. These tools allow the VA to drill down to the patient level to evaluate use. Other tools can evaluate the treatment of patient panels and the Veterans’ risk of potential abuse. Together, these allow identification of potential problems, educational targeting, and tracking of progress.

**A - Academic Detailing** - The Academic Detailing program is a one-to-one peer education program targeted to front-line providers. It gives specific information on practice alternative and resources, opioid safety, and can compare the practice of the provider to that of their peers. Veterans have improved pain control as a result of it. Information about this may be found at :

- <https://www.pbm.va.gov/PBM/academicdetailingservicehome.asp>; and
- [https://www.pbm.va.gov/PBM/academicdetailingservice/Pain\\_and\\_Opioid\\_Safety.asp](https://www.pbm.va.gov/PBM/academicdetailingservice/Pain_and_Opioid_Safety.asp)

**I - Informed consent for patients** - VA requires an informed consent process prior to long-term opioid therapy. This process includes education on the risks of opioid therapy, discusses opioid interactions with other medicines, and reviews safe prescribing practices such as urine drug screens.

**N - Naloxone distribution** - The Opioid Overdose Education & Naloxone Distribution, also known as the OEND program has focused on education of providers on Naloxone distribution to Veterans on long-term opioid therapy.

- [https://www.pbm.va.gov/PBM/academicdetailingservice/Opioid\\_Overdose\\_Education\\_and\\_Naloxone\\_Distribution.asp](https://www.pbm.va.gov/PBM/academicdetailingservice/Opioid_Overdose_Education_and_Naloxone_Distribution.asp)

Refer to <https://www.va.gov/painmanagement> for more information about VA’s pain management efforts. [Source: Veterans Health | July 28, 2017 ++]

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## **VA EFT ► Emotional Freedom Techniques Approved As A Safe Therapy**

Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) has been as a “generally safe” therapy by the US Veterans Administration (VA). After reviewing the extensive evidence for the safety and efficacy of EFT, a group of experts in the VAs Integrative Health Coordinating Center published a statement approving EFT and several other complementary and integrative health (CIH) practices. The approval means that VA therapists will be able to use EFT with their clients suffering from PTSD, depression, anxiety, pain and other conditions.

EFT has been studied in over 100 clinical trials . They show that the approach is effective for a variety of psychological and physical conditions. EFT combines elements of popular therapies, such as CBT, with acupressure—in the form of tapping with the fingertips on acupuncture points. For this reason it’s often called

“tapping. A meta-analysis examined the effect of treatment with EFT on PTSD. It aggregated the statistics from 7 randomized controlled trials and found that EFT had a very large treatment effect (Sebastian & Nelms, 2016). A meta-analysis of EFT for depression showed similar results, stating that: “The results show that Clinical EFT were highly effective in reducing depressive symptoms in a variety of populations and settings... The posttest effect size for EFT... was larger than that measured in meta-analyses of antidepressant drug trials and psychotherapy studies” (Nelms & Castel, 2016).

Therapists first began to draw the attention of the VA to EFT in 2004, when they found it a quick and successful treatment for the first cohort of veterans returning from Iraq. However, the VA rejected the approach for many years, despite the efforts of various members of congress to have it considered. Fort Hood offered a very successful PTSD treatment program incorporating EFT for many years, but shut it down at the end of 2015. To fill the treatment gap, a group of volunteer therapists established the Veterans Stress Project, a non-profit online portal to connect veterans with practitioners. Based on the experience of these and other therapists, The Permanente Journal, published by Kaiser Permanente, issued treatment guidelines for using EFT with veterans with PTSD. It recommends 10 treatment sessions, though half that number is often enough to eliminate symptoms like flashbacks, nightmares and hypervigilance (Church, Stern, Boath, Stewart, Feinstein, & Clond, 2017).

The web site of the Veterans Stress Project (<https://stressproject.org> ) connects EFT practitioners with veterans suffering from PTSD. Captain George Peters had this to say after completing 6 sessions through the Stress Project program: “For 35 years I was hard to get along with. Divorced, fired, and feared by my children because I over-reacted to any provocation. Six hours of therapy gave me the tools to change.”

VA employees can find the treatment guidelines at the Integrative Health Coordinating Center SharePoint portal. They state that based on study by “the expert scientific community (both internal and external to VHA) knowledgeable about the safety of CIH approaches,” EFT and several other methods including Healing Touch, Acupressure, and Reiki, are “generally considered safe.” [Source: Huff Post | Dawson Church | July 31, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Vet Choice Update 59 ► Trump Signs Emergency Spending Package**

President Donald Trump has signed an emergency spending bill that will pump more than \$2 billion into a program that allows veterans to receive private medical care at government expense. Trump, who made improving veterans care a central campaign promise, signed the VA Choice and Quality Employment Act while at his New Jersey golf club on Saturday. The bill, which addresses a budget shortfall at the Department of Veteran Affairs that threatened medical care for thousands of veterans, provides \$2.1 billion to continue funding the Veterans Choice Program, which allows veterans to seek private care. Another \$1.8 billion will go to core VA health programs, including 28 leases for new VA medical facilities. "Today is another milestone in our work to transform the VA where we're doing record-setting business," Trump said.

The Choice program was put in place after a 2014 wait-time scandal that was discovered at the Phoenix VA hospital and spread throughout the country. Veterans waited weeks or months for appointments while phony records covered up the lengthy waits. The program allows veterans to receive care from outside doctors if they must wait at least 30 days for an appointment or drive more than 40 miles to a VA facility. VA Secretary David Shulkin has warned that without legislative action, the Choice program would run out of money by mid-August, causing delays in health care for thousands of veterans. The bill will extend the program for six months. Costs will be paid for by trimming pensions for some Medicaid-eligible veterans and collecting fees for housing loans.

Veterans groups applauded the bill being signed, though some criticized the delay and the cost. "We're grateful President Trump is taking decisive action to ensure veterans using the Choice Program won't see lapses in their care due to a lack of funding," said Dan Caldwell, policy director for Concerned Veterans for America. "Unfortunately,

this bill took far too long to get to the president's desk and is \$1.8 billion more expensive than it needed to be." Leaders of the House Veterans Affairs Committee said the six-month funding plan was urgently needed and would give Congress more time to debate broader issues over the VA's future. While the bill may avert a shutdown to Choice, disputes over funding may signal bigger political fights to come.

During the 2016 campaign, Trump criticized the VA for long wait times and mismanagement, saying he would give veterans more options in seeing outside providers. Shulkin announced the budget shortfall last month, citing unexpected demand from veterans for private care and poor budget planning. To slow spending, the department last month instructed VA medical centers to limit the number of veterans it sent to private doctors. Currently, more than 30 percent of VA appointments are in the private sector, up from fewer than 20 percent in 2014. The VA has an annual budget of about \$180 billion. [Source: The Associated Press | August 12, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 01 thru 15 AUG 2017**



**Cibolo, TX** — The United States Department of Justice has released footage showing an Army veteran who told doctors he could no longer walk mowing his lawn and walking around his front yard. The footage, gathered over several months by undercover investigators with the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, was used in June to convict 54-year-old Mack Cole Jr. of federal health care fraud and making false statements about a health care benefit program. The video clips were released to the KSAT 12 Defenders following a Freedom of Information Act (<https://www.ksat.com/news/defenders/army-vet-who-defrauded-va-shown-walking-in-doj-footage>).

Cole was convicted after federal prosecutors convinced a jury that he exaggerated the extent and severity of a lower back injury for more than seven years in order to get "inflated payments" from the Veterans Affairs Disability Compensation Program. By misrepresenting the scope of his injuries, Cole was able to receive a higher level of benefits, adaptations to his home and durable medical equipment, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office. Cole, a retired Army master sergeant, remains free on bond while awaiting sentencing in September. He faces up to 50 years in prison.

Among the clips is footage of Cole being pushed in a wheelchair outside of the San Antonio VA hospital. He is also shown standing with a walking cane before bending down to move a motorized scooter off a lift attached to his vehicle, according to a description of the video provided by the U.S. Attorney's Office. Other clips show Cole pushing a lawn mower up hill in the front yard of his Cibolo home, at one point bending down quickly to toss away debris. The footage stands in stark contrast to statements Cole made to VA doctors about his back injury following a National Guard training incident in 2004.

According to Cole's federal indictment, he told doctors in November 2010 he no longer had "any ability to walk" and "dreams of walking again." Five months later, he said he "no longer walks because of fear of further impairment and last walked in January of 2011." In October 2011, Cole said he was "unable to raise (his) leg and (was) not walking at home." In September 2012, Cole said he "cannot stand without help and cannot walk without help. Cannot move feet." In November 2013, less than three months before Cole was indicted by a federal grand jury, he

was photographed in a wheelchair shaking hands with college football icon Herschel Walker during an event at Fort Sam Houston's Warrior and Family Support Center.

An official with the WFSC, which provides services to wounded veterans and their families, referred all questions about the event and Cole to U.S. Army North. A public affairs officer for Army North told The Defenders we would need to file a FOIA request to get answers about services provided to Cole and whether the WFSC is attempting to recoup any money from Cole. Cole's case is part of a nationwide increase in VA fraud investigations. According to a Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General report, VA investigators opened 111 health care cases during the first six months of this fiscal year and were able to obtain more than \$125 million in court ordered fines and restitution.

The U.S. Attorney's Office declined to comment on Cole's case until after he is sentenced. Reached via telephone, Cole said he wanted to do an interview about his case. He then called back and asked The Defenders to call his attorney. Cole's attorney said neither he nor Cole would comment about the case until after sentencing. [Source: KSAT ABC 12 | Dillon Collier | July 31, 2017 ++]

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## VAMC McGuire VA Update 02 ► Prostate Cancer Brachytherapy

Thanks to the nationwide scope of the Veterans Health Administration, a national referral program has allowed Veterans from around the country to descend on the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond for treatment of moderate to aggressive forms of prostate cancer. Prostate cancer is the second-most common type of cancer among American men, who make up the largest population of Veterans. The most common form of treatment in most VA facilities is external beam radiation, a six to nine week process that involves treatments five days a week.

At McGuire, brachytherapy offers a much better option for Veterans. Brachytherapy is a form of treatment that involves implanting radiated seeds directly into the prostate, where the seeds attack and eliminate the cancerous cells. McGuire's brachytherapy program dates back to the 1997. It was started by Dr. Michael P. Hagan, who is now the VA's National Director for Radiation Oncology. Dr. Drew Moghanaki, an attending physician in McGuire's Radiation/Oncology department, currently leads the brachytherapy program. "What we offer is access to high-quality treatment of prostate cancer with minimal side effects and recovery period," said Moghanaki. Research has shown brachytherapy to be a more effective treatment for moderate to aggressive forms of prostate cancer. Additionally, the treatment is completed in one day, allowing Veterans to quickly get back to their regular lives.

Veterans from places like Michigan, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico and many other areas around the country have come to McGuire to take advantage of this innovative treatment. It's only available in a handful of VA facilities, including McGuire. Research has shown brachytherapy is safer for the patient, minimizing radiation to the prostate area and drastically reducing recovery time. For Veterans around the country whose local facilities don't offer brachytherapy treatment, the national referral program gives them a chance to receive top-notch care at McGuire without leaving the VA system.

"Many Veterans prefer to stay within the VA," said Moghanaki. "We make that happen. It increases access for Veterans in areas where the VA doesn't offer radiation services onsite. We're leaving no man behind." Nurse Practitioner Sandy Troeschel is the brachytherapy clinical program manager. She helps determine which patients are eligible to come to McGuire for brachytherapy and works with them to make treatment plans. Using the VA's telehealth system, she is able to meet with Veterans through a video chat and walk them through the intake process. Once she has the information she needs to proceed, a social worker assists with arranging transportation to Richmond. Often, organizations like Mercy Medical Angels assist with transportation costs for Veterans who need it. "It has been very successful," Troeschel said. "Patients have been very happy. It's a fantastic program and it's expanding."



Carlos Alvarez, a Veteran who lives in Puerto Rico, was diagnosed with moderately aggressive prostate cancer. “The following morning, I was on my way home” Local doctors were running out of options. That’s when he was referred to McGuire for brachytherapy. From that point on, the process was a quick and easy one, Alvarez said. After Troeschel determined Alvarez was a strong candidate for the treatment, he came to Richmond for the procedure. “I went to Virginia, got everything hooked up, they did the procedure and the following morning, I was on my way home,” said Alvarez. After Alvarez went home to Puerto Rico, the doctors at his local VA were able to follow up with him and had access to all of the information about his treatment at McGuire. “Everything is documented in their records,” said Troeschel. “It doesn’t matter if things are done here or at their home VA facility, all the information is there.”

For the brachytherapy team, the continuity of care is a key to success. “We’ve definitely improved access to brachytherapy for Veterans,” said Brachytherapy RN Steven Schlink. “We’re filling a need, bringing people from all over. So far, we’ve had nothing but positive feedback. It’s a great program.” Approximately 100 brachytherapy procedures are performed at McGuire each year. Some of these Veterans are from the Richmond area, but many are Veterans who have been referred from other areas and who otherwise might have had to resort to weeks of external beam radiation treatment. [Source: VHA | Patrick Gordon | August 1, 2017 ++]

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### **VAMC Marion IL Update 03: Mismanagement Allegations**

U.S. Rep. Mike Bost of Murphysboro on 31 JUL called on U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin to investigate allegations of mismanagement at the Marion VA Medical Center that may have compromised quality of care and patient safety, according to news release from Bost’s office. In a letter sent to Shulkin, Bost, a Republican who is a member of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, along with that committee's chairman, Jack Bergman (R-MI) said a memorandum dated May 31, 2017, written by the VA National Center for Patient Safety program manager, stated the Marion VA experienced significant declines in patient safety culture metrics and employee morale since those areas were last assessed in 2014.

“Specifically, the memo describes a 2015 visit by NCPS to investigate employee complaints pertaining to worsening organizational and patient safety culture at the facility. Employees also alleged that senior leadership retaliated against them for reporting such problems. VA internal documents demonstrate a strong need for the Central Office to investigate and take action to address the safety concerns,” the members wrote. In the memo, NCPS recommended that appropriate Veterans Integrated Service Networks personnel intervene to ensure that the Marion VA employees’ complaints were fully investigated, but according to the letter from Bost and Bergman, this does not appear to have happened.

With regard to questions about organizational culture at the VA, the memo cites instances in which reports from medical center employees to leadership regarding patient safety and concerns “have either disappeared or were not appropriately submitted to [the] new Director by leadership staff.” Bost and Bergman are requesting answers as to who in the administration was responsible for the reports, why they were not submitted, and why the VISN director has failed to address the complaints and concerns that have been communicated over the years. Additionally, Bost and Bergman seek an assessment of the Administrative Investigation Board’s process’ effectiveness and a copy of that assessment and recommendations.

The NCPS memo includes an employee complaint stating that since October 2016, 15 veterans who were at the CLC for rehab have died during or shortly after discharge from the CLC. Bost and Bergman seek confirmation of the accuracy of the number of deaths, a review of all deaths in the CLC and reported deaths after discharge from the CLC from October 2016 to present, as well as the results of that review. Additionally, they seek an investigation of the reports of retaliation, unprofessional conduct, and bullying toward employees by Marion leadership, a report on

those findings, and copies of any and all internal and external employee surveys conducted within the last three years.

The NCPS memo also alleges that the chief of logistics for the Marion VA, Mel Gutierrez, inappropriately appointed his wife to be the administrative officer for the surgery department at the Marion VA, and fails to hold his staff accountable for inappropriate behavior and exhibits an alarming lack of transparency. Bost and Bergman are also calling for a review of the circumstances of Gutierrez's wife's hiring and promotion to surgery department administrative officer. A Sept. 1, 2017, deadline for answers to these questions and the appropriate supporting documentation has been requested. A spokesperson for Marion VA Director Jo Ann Ginsburg said her office is working on a response to these allegations. [Source: The Southern | Barb Eidlin | Aug 1, 2017 ++]

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## VAMC Washington DC Update 04 ► Former Director Fired

The former head of the main hospital for veterans in the nation's capital has been fired from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs after an investigation found that he sent confidential information about the running of the troubled hospital to his wife's personal email account. The departure of Brian Hawkins, who was removed from the post of director of the VA Medical Center in Washington in April, capped months of scrutiny by the inspector general for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. A probe revealed a hospital where patients were endangered by rampant organizational and managerial dysfunction.

In a statement, the VA said that Hawkins was fired 29 JUL "because he failed to provide effective leadership at the medical center." "This action underscores VA's commitment to holding all employees accountable if they fail to do their jobs or live up to VA's values," the agency's statement said. Hawkins was assigned to a different position within the agency in April, when Inspector General Michael J. Missal released an initial report detailing what he described as "the highest levels of chaos" at the hospital. Retired Army Col. Lawrence Connell was named acting director of the hospital and remains in that role.

In April, Missal found that roughly \$150 million in medical supplies were not inventoried, leading to conditions in which sterile surgical items were kept in dirty areas and nurses were forced to spontaneously rifle through hospital rooms for emergency equipment, such as oxygen tubes. The inspector general said he was taking the unusual step of making some of his findings public before the investigation was complete because of the immediate risk to patients. [Source: The Washington Post | Peter Jamison | August 2, 2017 ++]

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## VAMC Washington DC Update 05 ► Fired Director Rehired

The former director of the veterans hospital in the nation's capital who had been fired for poor leadership has been rehired. **Brian Hawkins** was put back on the Department of Veterans Affairs payroll after he appealed the decision to the Merit Systems Protection Board. Hawkins was let go last month after audits found mismanagement at the facility. The board is requiring the VA to keep Hawkins as an employee until the Office of Special Counsel reviews his claim. In a statement 9 AUG, the VA says Hawkins had been reassigned to administrative duty at VA headquarters in Washington and would not work directly with patients. It says VA Secretary David Shulkin will explore other ways to fire Hawkins under a newly enacted accountability law signed by President Donald Trump. [Source: The Associated Press | August 9, 2017 ++]



**Brian Hawkins, the former director of the VA Medical Center, in Washington D.C**

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### **VAMC Leavenworth KS Update 01 ► Employees Picket in Front of VA**

Employees of the Eisenhower VA Medical Center and others picketed Friday in front of the Leavenworth veterans hospital. Jennifer Gum said employees were concerned about vacancies at the hospital and proposed budget cuts. “They need to staff the VA,” she said. “We want to take care of our vets.” Gum is the president of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 85, which is the local union for VA employees. Participants of the picket stood along South Fourth Street near the main entrance to the Eisenhower VA Medical Center.



The Eisenhower VA Medical Center is part of the VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System. The VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System includes a hospital in Topeka as well as a number of outpatient clinics. The VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System currently has 1,735 employees and 400 vacancies, said Joseph Burks, public affairs officer for the system. He said this is about a 19 percent vacancy rate and officials are actively working to fill 306 of the vacancies. Burks said vacancies are an issue throughout the national VA system as well as community hospitals across the country. [Source: Leavenworth Times | John Richmeier | August 13, 2017 ++]

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### **VA-HCS Boston Update 01 ► Fentanyl Overdose in Lockdown Questioned**

A Marine Corps veteran fatally overdosed on fentanyl while under lockdown in inpatient care at a Department of Veterans Affairs psychiatric facility. Now his widow wants to know how he got ahold of the drugs, reports The Boston Herald. **Hank Brandon Lee** died 4 MAR of acute fentanyl intoxication at the age of 35. He was rushed to

Good Samaritan Hospital after being discovered unresponsive in the Department of Veterans Affairs psychiatric campus in Brockton, Massachusetts, according to the Herald.

At the time of his death, Lee was on lockdown by the facility — meaning he was checked on every 15 minutes by a nurse, and his trips outside the facility were strictly monitored, per the report.

Lee served in the Marine Corps from 2001-2008 as a mortarman. The lance corporal served in Iraq and Afghanistan during his enlistment. He was deemed 100 percent disabled for PTSD and a traumatic brain injury, according the Herald. “Since he has passed, the VA has told us nothing,” Jamie Lee Hasted told the Herald. “Answers, the bottom line is answers. ... Did he take it willingly, not willingly, mixed up in the medicine? You have video cameras, where is the video? What happened? Let me try to get some type of closure.”

The VA told the Herald that no patients had been prescribed fentanyl in the inpatient psychiatry unit at the time of Lee’s death, and that Lee had no personal visitors during his monthlong stay, per the report.

“This case is one of a kind. I have never heard of anybody die in lockdown,” Rick Collins of Veterans 360, an advocacy group that is assisting Lee’s widow, told the Herald. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | : Mackenzie Wolf | August 1, 2017 ++]

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## **Eastern Colorado HCS Update 01 ► What Is VA Doing About Wait Times**

U.S. senators Cory Gardner and Michael Bennet want to know what the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is doing to solve the agency’s recurring problems in Colorado with scheduling speedy medical appointments, according to letters they sent 1 AUG. Separate one-page letters from the Colorado Republican and Democrat to VA Sec. David Shulkin come five days after The Denver Post reported that waiting times in the Denver-based Eastern Colorado Health Care System are among the worst nationally, and are three times worse than in Phoenix, where the wait-list scandal erupted three years ago.

“The Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 was implemented to fix the shameful wait times for veterans,” Gardner wrote in a letter released Tuesday morning. “However, (The Post’s) report indicates that the VA has done very little to improve the situation in Colorado.” Wrote Bennet, later in the day: “This trend is deeply concerning and unacceptable for veterans living across the Rocky Mountain Region. ... it is unacceptable that wait times remain, on average, troublingly high.” A VA spokesman said Shulkin “appreciates” the senators’ input and “looks forward to engaging” with them directly.

U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman on 28 JUL said Shulkin “assured me veterans with urgent health care needs are able to receive same-day service at the Denver VA Medical Center,” but offered nothing specific about primary-care waiting lists. “The secretary believes that things are on track to improve further after the replacement Denver (VA Medical Center) opens in November, when veterans will begin receiving health care at the newest and most advanced VA medical center in the nation.” That center has been plagued with cost overruns that pushed its budget past \$1.7 billion and years of delays. VA patient-access data released on 1 JUL show that the average wait for a primary care appointment at just the Denver VA Medical Center has grown to more than 18 days, nearly four times the national average.

Administrators put part of the blame on a shortage of physicians and practical nurses, as well as a heavy influx of new patients. The newest veterans face the longest waits, data show, with periods averaging 47 days for a visit with a primary care physician in Denver and 37 days in Aurora. Throughout the 13 hospitals and clinics that make up the eastern Colorado system, the average wait for a primary care appointment as of July 1 was more than 12 days. Only Amarillo, Texas, and Palo Alto, Calif. — both smaller than eastern Colorado — were worse. In all, though, nearly 13.5 percent of all the appointments at the eastern Colorado had longer than a 30-day wait, federal data show —

worst in the nation. “Timely access to doctors for our veterans is essential, and anything less is an incredible disservice to the men and women who have served our nation,” Gardner’s letter says. “They deserve better.”

Bennet’s letter peppers Shulkin with seven questions about the issue, including concerns over the difficulty of hiring qualified physicians. The eastern Colorado system currently has a 16 percent vacancy rate — there are 336 physicians — even though it offers some primary care doctors as much as \$200,000 a year in salary and additional training. The number of scheduled appointments in the system has grown by 41 percent in 2½ years to 91,278, data show, while those in Phoenix have risen by 48 percent to 102,363. Since the scandal broke in 2014, average wait times at the Carl T. Hayden Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Phoenix have improved dramatically, to six days for a primary care appointment. Regionally, about 7 percent of all appointments in Phoenix were outside the 30-day window.

The wait-time scandal broke in 2014 with allegations that VA hospitals intentionally falsified records to make it appear patients were being seen promptly when, in fact, they were placed on long waiting lists. Some veterans in Phoenix died waiting to see a doctor. Findings from ensuing investigations caused the creation of the Choice program, which offers veterans federally paid medical care outside the VA when waiting times exceed 30 days or the drive to a VA medical facility is more than 40 miles. [Source: The Denver Post | David Migoya | August 1, 2017 ++]

**\* Vets \***



## **SCRA Website Lawsuit ► DoD Exposing Vet Personal Information**

Vietnam Veterans of America is suing the Defense Department for potentially exposing personal information of millions of current and former service members through lax oversight of its Servicemembers Civil Relief Act website. The federal lawsuit, filed in the U.S. Western District of New York Court on 2 AUG, demands an overhaul of the site and additional protections for personal information of individuals in the department databases. “By making this private information freely accessible, the defendants are putting veterans at risk of impostor scams, identity theft, and other frauds,” the lawsuit stated. “Defendants are also depriving veterans their ability to control who learns sensitive details about their military service.”

In recent days, defense officials have announced planned changes to the site, including “updates to the website’s code base” to “better protect servicemember active duty information.” But the lawsuit alleges the problems are fundamental to the set-up of the site. “The Defense Department is fueling the problem by leaving veterans’ private information easily accessible on the internet,” said VVA President John Rowan in a statement. “(Defense officials) have refused to properly secure veterans’ information; we are asking a court to order them to do so.” For now, the SCRA website <https://www.servicememberscivilreliefact.com> allows any visitor to search through an individual’s service records by providing their last name and either their birthdate or social security number. No restrictions are

put on who can read the results, which VVA officials say makes the resource attractive to scammers and identity thieves.

Retired Air Force Master Sgt. Thomas Barden, who is a party in the lawsuit, said online scammers used details from the site to win his trust, convince him to buy fraudulent computer security software and steal other financial records. “We expect the military to protect our private information, not to leave it unsecured,” Barden said in a statement. “The government should not be giving con artists easy access to information they can use to scam veterans like me.” The lawsuit accuses defense officials of violating both the federal Privacy Act and the Federal Information Security Modernization Act, along with a host of industry best practices for personal information. VVA officials are represented in the lawsuit by the Civil Liberties and Transparency Clinic of the University at Buffalo School of Law. The suit seeks at least \$1,000 in damages for Barden along with fixes in the site. [Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane | August 1, 2017 ++]

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## **WWII VETS 141 ► James Gavin | Youngest Lt. Gen Ever**

James Maurice “Jumpin’ Jim” Gavin was the youngest lieutenant-general in the US Army ever, and the only general to make four combat airborne jumps in the history of the United States. Hence his nickname. Before he became a general, he spent a life of struggle with very humble beginnings. He was an orphan born in Brooklyn in 1907. Jim was adopted as a two-year-old boy by Martin and Mary Gavin from Mount Carmel, Pennsylvania in 1909. Gavin grew up in a mining family, but he realized that life in the coal mines of Pennsylvania was not for him. He ran away from home in 1924, at the age of 17. He enlisted in the US Army as an orphan, as he required his parents’ consent being underage. He served in the U.S. Coast Artillery at Fort Sherman, Panama.

After serving for six months, Gavin was promoted to a corporal. In his free time, he read books about military tactics throughout history and dreamed about enrolling in the prestigious West Point Military Academy. In pursuit of his dream, he applied to a local army school and became a candidate for West Point. He again lied about his age stating he was 21, instead of 18. He had little formal education and, to keep up in class, he spent the early hours of every morning reading in the bathroom where there was light. Following four years of hard work he graduated in 1929, becoming a second lieutenant. He was stationed at Camp Harry J. Jones, Arizona, along with the 25th Infantry Regiment, one of the few units made up entirely of African American soldiers. There he became acquainted with the US Army segregation policy, against which he fought in the later years of his career.

During the pre-war years, Gavin advocated radical innovations within the US Army strategic doctrines. He was very much aware that the nature of warfare was changing. Tanks and airplanes, he believed would play a much greater role and to supply them with gasoline, along with other logistics, were the future problems of military leaders. His opinions did not go unnoticed, as he was sent back to West Point just before the outbreak of WWII, to work in the Tactics Faculty there. Gavin was amazed by the storming of the Belgian Fort Eben-Emael by German paratroopers. He decided to dedicate himself to the development of US Airborne Units. In August 1941, James Gavin, now a captain, commanded the experimental unit which became the core of the airborne troops. He was also recommended to contribute to developing tactics to be used in an airborne attack. Gavin collected his research into a book entitled FM 31-30: Tactics and Technique of Air-Borne Troops which served as a textbook for his recruits.

When the US entered the war, Gavin was promoted to colonel and given command over the airborne invasion of Sicily in 1943. It was his first combat operation. He implemented a high esprit du corps within his paratroopers, insisting on strong leadership and the highest commitment among his officers. They were “the first out of the airplane door and the last in the chow line,” as he used to say. He carried an M1 Garand rifle instead of the M1 carbine usually issued to officers, to demonstrate he was one of the men, as well as an officer. On July 9, he was the first to jump out of the plane and land in Sicily together with the 505th Airborne Regiment. He had a minor injury

on landing but was faced with a bigger problem. His troops were scattered all over the place, with practically none of them hitting the landing zone. Nevertheless, he gathered around him a group of twenty men and began marching towards the sound of battle, as the full-scale invasion of Sicily was under way.



**Left: James Gavin as Major General; Right Paratroopers during Operation Market Garden**

The scattered troops formed pockets of resistance, and the guerrilla tactics they had learned from Colonel Gavin were put to use, as they disrupted the enemy supply lines. After a few days, he had stabilized his positions and held some strategically vital positions while facing numerous larger enemy forces backed by Tiger tanks. His act of valor gained him yet another promotion. James Gavin was now a brigadier general. At 36 years of age, he was the youngest general in the army of both the Allies and Axis forces. Sicily taught him some great lessons which he needed to achieve his next assignment; Normandy. Once again he jumped with his troops in the 82nd Airborne Division into the campaign.

His men were tasked with capturing the town of Saint Mere Eglise. The goal was holding the Merderet River bank. The two bridges captured along the Merderet River were crucial for a link-up of troops that operated in that vicinity. Heavy firefighting occurred, and the bridges were held, lost and then regained. Gavin commanded tirelessly over his men, holding his ground and fulfilling his orders. Although not as planned, the elements of Gavin's 505th Airborne Regiment broke German counter-attacks and held on long enough to be relieved by the infantry. The next large-scale operation in which Gavin took place, this time as head of the 82nd Division, was Market Garden in 1944. Although the operation itself was a failure, Gavin once again distinguished himself particularly during the battle of the Nijmegen bridge on the Waal river.

Gavin receiving the Distinguished Service Order from British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery in Mönchengladbach on March 21, 1945. After the war he continued to write about military tactics, always thinking outside the box. Gavin took a decisive stand on integrating African-Americans within the US Army and formed the all-black 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion. He was considered to be the most "colorblind" man in the US military. Gavin ended the war as a major general. He then served as a US ambassador to France during the JFK term. He was the leading figure in developing the so-called Pentomic Division, in which vehicles were adjusted to be dropped by airplane, just like paratroopers. He also pioneered some of the helicopter tactics that were implemented in the Vietnam War.

General James Gavin received 20 medals altogether, including two from the French Government, one from the Belgians, and one from the Government of the Netherlands. He died on February 23, 1990, after leading an incredible and courageous life. [Source: <https://www.warhistoryonline.com> | Nikola Budanovic | May 26, 2017 ++]

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## Korean War Vets ► Fidel Gomez | Joined at 17

July 27 was Korean Armistice Day. On that day in 1953, U.S. Army Lt. Gen. William Harrison and North Korean General Nam Il, signed the armistice ending operations in a stalemate. The fighting was hard, and the weather even harder. Conditions like these often bring out the best in service members. One of America's best is Marine Veteran and San Antonio resident, **Fidel Gomez**. The young Gomez, 17, who in his service photo could pass for 15, was inspired by the Halls of Montezuma and the Mexican American War and joined the Marine Corps in 1949.



Fidel Gomez receives care at the South Texas VA and is a member of Fox Company 2/7, but most importantly, he is a rare member of the Frozen Chosin. The latter title refers to the group of Marines from Fox Company who were given the near-impossible order of holding off an overwhelming Chinese Army and defending a narrow passage out of the Chosin Reservoir for a United Nations force of 8,000 saving them from possible slaughter.

Gomez was greeted by fellow infantry Marine, and South Texas VA Fisher House program manager Erik Zielinski. It didn't take long to begin telling stories of Marine life, despite their service being five decades apart. The instant bond lends credence to the motto, "Once a Marine, always a Marine." "The Marine Corps is one branch of the service that sticks together," Gomez said. "Sure, our captains are a little tough and have no soul, but you know, you get to love them," the 86-year old said with a grin. Gomez's smile and spirit grew as Zielinski brought back Marine Corps vernacular Fidel has not heard in some time. Everything was covered, from beanies and weenies, to what was the best beer you've had which transitioned to a request for a cold one right there in the room.

Then the topic turned to something that transcends through time and every battle Marines have fought in...taking care of your feet. Gomez knows a thing or two about taking care of feet, seeing many of his fellow Marine's fall to frostbite, losing toes, limbs and even their lives. "Our unit started with 300 men and some got frostbite even before the fighting started," Fidel said. "I was from South Texas, but even I knew I had to change my socks." He explained one of the difficult things is that his unit was fitted with boots more suited for hunting.

Another long-held tradition the two Marines shared was the military coin. Zielinski presented Gomez with a Marine coin that had "once a Marine, always a Marine" etched on it. It made an impact on the elder Marine, clutching it tightly and refusing to hand it over to family members that wanted to add it to the makeshift Marine Corps display in his room. To reciprocate, he presented Zielinski with a Korean flag they took off a disabled vehicle. Over several Fox Company reunions, members of the illustrious group signed it with messages. The plan for the special flag is to have it mounted in a Veteran's museum in Texas.



As Zielinski read out names, it jogged the memory and brought with it, a whirlwind of emotions. One of those names was David Goodrich who Fidel went to high school with and who also joined the Marines at 17. David was severely injured in the fighting. “When I saw him, I thought he was dead, his head was wounded badly, so I picked him up anyway,” Fidel managed to say with a voice even more reserved. Fast forward three decades during an engagement party in 1980 for his daughter Linda. The future groom’s cousin, Michael was talking about being in the Marines. Once Michael began talking about the exploits of his father and Fox 2/7, Fidel realized it was the same man he had pulled off the snow that November day in Korea. “Here walks in uncle David, and these two gentlemen had not seen each other,” Linda said. “My dad thought he had been killed and he turned white after seeing him.”

In true straight-forward Marine Corps fashion, Fidel described the reunion. “I visited him, he’s worse off than I am,” Fidel said. “If I’d known he was going to wed my girls, I’d left him there,” he said laughing before he could finish the sentence. With consummate humility, Gomez reflected about his fortune, knowing that everyone wasn’t so lucky. “They flew me home because I was hurt,” he exclaimed. “They said I was a prisoner of war, but I made it home, I made it home.” Gomez said that 98 Marines out of the 300 in his unit made it back home.

He did make it home and by any account, made the most of it by marrying and having three wonderful daughters. They have been staying by his side in the Community Living Center and at the South Texas VA Fisher House. After his return, he also began working for the Defense Department and continued to serve his country and fellow Veterans by moving up the ranks and worked many years with Veterans service organizations. for all you have done for this country Mr. Gomez, Thank you and Semper Fi. [Source: Vantage Point | August 1, 2017 ++]

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## **Vietnam Vets [24] ► Richard Brye | Somebody boil some water!**

The “My Life, My Story” project lets Veterans share what they would like their VA care team to know about them as a person. After a story has been approved by the Veteran, it is added to their VA medical record. Here is Veteran Richard Brye’s story.



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Following college, I enlisted in the Army and was selected for a top-secret mission in a new unit within the Defense Department. “I was presented with the Chief’s crossbow and arrows which I still have.” I was assigned to an operation in Vietnam where I developed a cover as an agricultural advisor. I was able to establish a covert intelligence collection operation working with an indigenous, primitive, mountain people called Montagnards who also provided security at my compound. In December of 1966 a dental technician was sent to treat some of our personnel. A few days before Christmas, when the technician was to leave, monsoon rains developed and prevented him from returning to his ship. On Christmas Eve, we were getting ready to shut down operations. I had already prepared some vodka gimlets and put those in the fridge, when my interpreter informed me that a clan of Montagnards were heading toward our compound bearing a litter with a girl who was attempting to deliver a baby in the breach position.

When the chief of the clan said he needed my help my first thought went back to my younger days when I used to watch cowboy movies. Whenever a woman was about to give birth they always said, “Somebody boil some water.” That was really the first thing I thought. I was stuck. Then I remembered the dental technician. We frantically got on our shortwave radio to contact his ship. We were told we would have to perform a cesarean section but the only equipment we had were several scalpels and a little bit of Novocain. We agreed to attempt an episiotomy. Our generator didn’t have an extension that would allow us to use it in the annex where the girl was so we had to use flashlights. While the technician was performing the procedure I had to run back-and-forth, between the annex and the radio, relaying information. Eventually she delivered a little boy. For antiseptic I used the contents of a half a bottle of vodka.

A month later the entire Montagnard clan was heading up towards the compound. The men were dressed in full military regalia. They wanted to perform a ceremony to thank me for assisting with the birth of one of their clan’s people. More specifically, the chief wanted to make me a blood brother by slitting both his wrist and mine and co-mingling our blood. There was no way I wanted that to happen because my first thought was of contracting any of the diseases they may have - the hepatitis alphabet came to mind. I asked if he would consider an alternate ceremony whereby we would place several drops of our blood into the soil of the compound’s garden. Luckily he agreed and removed his ceremonial sword, slitting his wrist and mine. He then removed an arrow from his crossbow’s quiver and stirred our blood together in the soil. I said to him, “This way, my blood and your blood will forever remain in the soil of your homeland.”

As a token of their appreciation, I was presented with the chief’s crossbow and arrows, which I still have to this day. We were essentially sent to South Vietnam to eliminate an enemy. I never once thought I would be sent there to assist in helping to deliver a baby. That certainly was an unexpected consequence of war. [Source: Honoring the Voices and Experiences of Veterans | Rebekah E. Rickner | January 17, 2017 ++]

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## **GI Bill Update 237 ► Senate Passes Forever Bill**

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill have unanimously passed legislation to make major changes to education benefits for military veterans. Now all that’s left is for President Trump to sign it into law. The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2017 has garnered strong bipartisan support in Congress, where lawmakers have worked to fast-track the bill to the president’s desk. Senators passed the legislation by voice vote Wednesday, less than three weeks after the Forever GI Bill, as it’s become known, was introduced in the House of Representatives.

“This bill invests in the proven success of our veterans,” said Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA), chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. “When our veterans return home, they should have every opportunity available to them to pursue their desired profession and career. I thank Congress for quickly approving this bipartisan, bicameral legislative package. This is a great victory for our veterans and their futures.” The new GI Bill would bring significant changes to the current law passed in 2008. Among its most popular provisions are the elimination — for veterans who left the military in 2013 or later — of a 15-year use-or-lose rule, as well as the expansion of benefits for reservists, Purple Heart recipients and surviving dependents. It would also restore GI Bill benefits to veterans impacted by school closures since 2015 and allocate more funds for college degree programs in the science, technology, engineering and math fields.

If the Forever GI Bill becomes law, some of the provisions would take effect Jan. 1, 2018. Others would start next August, and others — like granting active-duty service members eligibility for the Yellow Ribbon Program — would not apply for a few more years. Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT), ranking member on Isakson’s committee, said the legislation will open doors for service members transitioning back to civilian life and aid them in their transition. “It also does right by Guardsmen and Reservists by getting them the education, housing and healthcare that they have

earned,” he said. “I look forward to working with President Trump to quickly sign our bill into law.” The White House did not comment by press time on when or whether the president plans to sign the legislation.

The legislation is the culmination of two years of legislative lobbying from several prominent veterans service organizations. Earlier efforts to expand the GI Bill by reverting to a pay-in structure for the benefits proved controversial — with some calling it a “tax on troops” — and temporarily halted congressional talks on the issue. The updated version of the bill calls for slight reductions in the monthly housing allowances for new GI Bill enrollees to pay for the estimated \$3 billion cost of the benefits expansion. The 1 percent reductions would take place over five years.

VSO leaders celebrated the bill’s passage 2 AUG4 and praised Congress for its bipartisan efforts. “The Forever GI Bill is proof that even a divided nation can come together to support our veterans and their families,” said Got Your 6 Director of Government Relations Lauren Augustine. “This comprehensive bill will provide millions of current and future veterans and their loved ones the peace of mind knowing the education benefits they’ve earned are secure.” [Source: Natalie Gross | August 2, 2017 ++]

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## **NPRC Military Records Update 05 ► 3K-5k Records Restored Weekly**

On July 12, 1973, approximately 16-18 million Official Military Personnel Files were destroyed when a fire ripped through the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis. More than 40 years later, staff at the NPRC still are attempting to piece together those records. Kevin Pratt, NPRC’s assistant director for Military Records, told American Legion Department Service Officers School attendees that teams at the facilities are reconstructing 2,000-3,000 records per week. Using information that was not destroyed, and working with other agencies and the military branches to get additional information, close to 6 million records have been reconstructed since the fire.

“It is probably the most painful thing I have to deal with on a day-to-day basis,” Pratt said. “It’s very difficult to tell a veteran and family members that we don’t have their records and that it was destroyed in the fire. It’s frustrating to deal with, but we’ve done a lot of things over the years to try to ... satisfy the requirement for the service veterans. “We’re at about 90 percent-plus able to do a record recreation of that veteran’s service and produce a document they can use for the (Department of Veterans Affairs) and other benefits. That’s a good thing, but there’s obviously a lot of history lost in that fire.”

The NPRC houses military records of individuals who served in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard dating as far back as 1886 and as recently as 2008. No National Guard records are stored at the NPRC unless a Guardsman served on active duty or was federalized. Those who were never called up to active duty will likely be referred to their respective state. No military unit information is housed at the facility, though Pratt said staff there has contacts with agencies that can help locate that info. “A lot of what we do at the NPRC is liaising with both the (military branches) and the VA in order to provide benefits for the veterans,” Pratt said. “In many cases, there’s a lot of complexity associated with it, and have to kind of weed through it to find out what we need to do to provide the benefits for the veteran.”

Pratt urged anyone seeking a veterans’ records for the sake of receiving VA benefits makes sure to state that is the reason for the request. There is a fee of \$25 per five pages to receive a record, but there is no fee if the request is to secure a veteran benefits. With 77 million records that include several of the same names, Pratt urged providing the most specific information possible when submitting a records request. But, “if a veteran sends it to us on a cocktail napkin, we’ll honor that request as long as they sign it,” he said. [Source: The American Legion | Steve Brooks | July 27, 2017 ++]

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## **AFL Q & A ► Retro Pay**

**Q:** I was recently granted a disability by the VA and have received my first check. When they notified me they mentioned retro pay. What is it and what are the guidelines for receiving retro pay? It was evident in the amount that I received that there was no retro pay.

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**A1:** You get retro pay from the date that you filed the disability claim. It will come in a separate payment. (MS) 11/30/16

**A2:** Retro pay is the money you will receive based on when the paperwork for your disability was submitted and when it was approved. If it took 6 months, your retro pay will be 6 months. Give them some time, they will send it to your account. (JB) 11/30/16

**A3:** The 38 CFR states that the date of claim is the date the condition began or the date of the initial claim - whichever is later. If your condition began in service but you don't file until 2000, then that will be the date of claim. The only exception is if the VA makes a clear and unmistakable error. If you can prove that they did, then you can get retro pay back to the date that they made the incorrect decision. (AP) 12/2/16

**A4:** Retro pay is legally called Past Due Benefits and go back to the date of the original claim if appealed. There are other things involved if you have a CUE, but it would take too much paper to write it out. (CP) 12/19/16

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Armed Forces Locator is an offline computer-based search system. It was developed to help veterans, active duty, servicemembers, Reservists, National Guard members and ROTC members locate old friends, current colleagues, and family members who serve or have served in the armed forces. Their mission is to provide an opportunity for those who served to reconnect again with war buddies. Also, locate many topics that are of interest to veterans, active duty servicemembers, and veterans organizations. [Source: <http://www.armedforceslocator.com> | July 1, 2017 ++]

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## **Retiree Appreciation Days ► Scheduled As of 15 AUG 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\ veterans activity related events such as Seminars, Veterans Town Hall Meetings, Stand Downs, Resource\Career Fairs and Other Military Retiree & Veterans Related Events for all military services. To get more info about a particular event, mouseover or click on the event under Event Location. Please report comments, changes, corrections, new RADs and other military retiree\ veterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager at [milton.bell126@gmail.com](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 | August 15, 2017 ++]

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## **Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 15 AUG 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. refer to <http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events>. Listings of up upcoming Vet Job Fairs nationwide providing location, times, events, and registration info if required can be found at the following websites. You will need to review each site to locate Job Fairs in your location:
- <https://events.recruitmilitary.com>
- <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs>
- <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs>



[Source: Recruit Military, USCC, and American Legion | August 15, 2017 ++]

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## Vet State Benefits & Discounts ► Michigan 2017

The state of Michigan 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 – MI** 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.michigan.gov/dmva/0,1607,7-126-2362---,00.html> and <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/michigan-state-veterans-benefits.html>

- 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> | August 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.

## Purple Heart Update 05 ► S.765/H.R.544 | Ban Sales

On 2 AUG, the Senate passed the VFW supported Private Corrado Piccoli Purple Heart Preservation Act S.765. Over past decades, businesses specializing in military artifacts have been selling military-issued Purple Hearts on the public market for inflated prices, which have made it extremely difficult for veterans and their loved ones to track and obtain lost or stolen medals. This bill puts an end to this practice by making it illegal for any business to sell military-issued Purple Hearts. A vote on H.R.544 in the U.S. House is expected following August’s recess. The Senate also passed a bipartisan, joint resolution this past week commemorating Purple Heart Day, which is 7 AUG. Purple Heart Day recognizes the sacrifices of those who have earned the Purple Heart Medal and is commemorated each year on the anniversary of George Washington creating the “Badge for Military Merit,” the precursor to the Purple Heart. The resolution supports the goals and ideals of Purple Heart Day, encourages citizens to learn about the history of the Purple Heart Medal, and requests that the president issue an annual proclamation calling on the people of the U.S. to demonstrate support for Purple Heart recipients. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly| August 8, 2017 ++]

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## Vet Suicide Update 15 ► H.R.3232 | Oath of Exit Act

A proposal in Congress intended to help reduce the suicide rate among U.S. military veterans might actually do more harm than good, its critics say. The “Oath of Exit Act,” sponsored by a Florida Republican who lost both legs to a roadside bombing in Afghanistan, recently passed the House as a provision in the National Defense Authorization Act, Stars and Stripes reported. Republican U.S. Rep. Brian Mast said he created the bill in hopes of helping veterans who struggle with emotional and psychological issues. “Nearly every week I hear from a veteran who is thinking about taking their own life -- maybe walking into their garage, turning on their car and never coming out,” Mast said while speaking on the House floor.

Mast said the idea for the oath grew from conversations he has had with friends who served in the military and had thoughts of suicide. The plan calls for veterans to take a voluntary pledge when leaving the armed forces, to continue to look after their brothers- and sisters-in-arms, as well as themselves. However, some experts say the no-suicide contract might have the opposite effect – resulting in more veterans harming themselves. “It won’t work, to put it bluntly,” Craig Bryan, a psychologist and executive director of the National Center for Veterans Studies at the University of Utah, told Stars and Stripes. “At best, it would be a neutral effect, but it could make things worse.” Bryan, whose research was funded by the Department of Justice, found in a six-month test period that crisis-response plans were more effective than no-suicide contracts in preventing veterans from committing suicide.

No-suicide pacts are not a new concept, and have actually been discouraged as a method for suicide prevention the past 10 years, said Caitlin Thompson, a former director of suicide prevention programs for the Department of Veterans Affairs, Stars and Stripes reported. The wording of the oath itself could have a negative impact on veterans struggling with suicidal thoughts, Heather O’Beirne Kelly, director of military and veterans’ health policy for the American Psychological Association, told Stars and Stripes in an email. “The ‘Oath of Exit’ language,” she wrote, “could backfire in lethal ways, by discouraging help-seeking among veterans in crisis and engendering a false sense of security among those to whom the oath is given.”

According to Veteran Suicide Prevention, an average of 20 veterans commit suicide each day, representing 18 percent of all suicide deaths in the United States in 2014 – when veterans constituted 8.5 percent of the U.S. population. [Source: Fox News | Benjamin Brown | August 11, 2017++]

**\* Military \***



## **USAF Up Or Out Policy ► 106 Enlisted Career Fields Extended**

The Air Force’s high-year tenure rules spell out how many years an airman can remain on active duty in a certain grade. For example, a senior airman can serve no more than eight years, a staff sergeant can serve no more than 15 years, a technical sergeant can serve no more than 20 years, and a master sergeant can serve no more than 24 years. But under the high-year tenure extension program, eligible senior airmen, staff sergeants, technical sergeants and master sergeants in the right AFSCs and grades can apply to have their tenure extended by anywhere from one to two years.

“Although retention is high in some career fields and FY 16 and 17 retention programs were successful, the Air Force needs to ensure experienced airmen are able to complete the mission as well as train new airmen,” Col. Erik Bovasso, military sustainment and transitions programs division chief for AFPC, said in the release. High-year tenure ”extensions will help improve mission capability in key areas where readiness is currently strained.” The extensions will be effective as of 1 AUG, AFPC said. To be considered for an extension, airmen must have been serving in the eligible control AFSC and grade, as listed in the Military Personnel Data System, on July 21. They also must have a high-year tenure date set between Oct. 1, 2017, and Sept. 30, 2018.

Airmen who were approved for a previous extension can get another extension, if they are still eligible, as long as their first extension wasn’t for 24 months. However, their total extension won’t be able to exceed 24 months, meaning if they originally got a one-year extension, they can get another year. Airmen can submit their applications between Aug. 1 and May 31, 2018. [Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | 1 August 1, 2017 ++]

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## **Enlistment Bonus Payback Update 10 ► DoD Initial Review Completed**

MOAA previously reported thousands of National Guard soldiers were being pursued by debt collectors for bonuses they were paid. Some soldiers suffered serious financial distress from the collection activities. The National Guard claimed the bonuses had been paid in error or the soldiers had not fulfilled their obligations to entitle them to the bonuses. This was dubbed the bonus “clawback.”

The House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Military Personnel held a hearing in December 2016 and in January 2017 then-Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter publicly announced all the debts would be reviewed for validity by July 2017. Earlier this week, DoD released an update on its progress. As of 31 JUL, a vast majority of the debts - 17,092 of the 17,485 bonuses reviewed - had been dismissed or waived by the DoD unilaterally. The others did not have enough evidence to support a waiver or dismissal and proceeded through the appeals process. Of those 393 cases, two ultimately were waived or dismissed, 191 are still in the appeals process, and another 200 soldiers have been notified of their right to appear before an appeals board but have failed to respond.

“MOAA is happy to hear DoD has completed their initial review by the July 2017 deadline it proposed. We are certain this has made a difference in the lives of the over 17,000 soldiers whose lives were affected,” says Lt. Col. Aniela Szymanski, USMCR, MOAA's director of Government Relations for Reserve and National Guard affairs. As the remaining soldiers further appeal the determinations made in their cases, MOAA will continue to seek updates from DoD to ensure no soldier is pursued for an unjust debt. If you have a concern regarding a National Guard matter, email MOAA at [legis@moaa.org](mailto:legis@moaa.org) .

[Source: MOAA Leg Up | August 11, 2017 ++]

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## Guam's Military Presence ► Q&A | What It Is

The small U.S. territory of Guam has become a focal point after North Korea's army threatened to use ballistic missiles to create an "enveloping fire" around the island. The exclamation came after President Donald Trump warned Pyongyang of "fire and fury like the world has never seen." Here's a look at the U.S. military's role on the island, which became a U.S. territory in 1898.

1. **WHAT INSTALLATIONS ARE ON GUAM AND HOW SIGNIFICANT ARE THEY?** There are two major bases on Guam: Andersen Air Force Base in the north and Naval Base Guam in the south. They are both managed under Joint Base Marianas. The tourist district of Tumon, home to many of Guam's hotels and resorts, is in between. The naval base dates to 1898, when the U.S. took over Guam from Spain after the Spanish-American War. The air base was built in 1944, when the U.S. was preparing to send bombers to Japan during World War II. Today, Naval Base Guam is the home port for four nuclear-powered fast attack submarines and two submarine tenders. Andersen Air Force Base hosts a Navy helicopter squadron and Air Force bombers that rotate to Guam from the U.S. mainland. It has two 2-mile (3-kilometer) long runways and large fuel and munitions storage facilities. Altogether, 7,000 U.S. military personnel are stationed on Guam. Most are sailors and airmen. The military plans to move thousands of U.S. Marines to Guam from Okinawa in southern Japan. Guam's total population is 160,000.

2. **WHAT ROLES DO THE BASES PLAY IN THE REGION?** Guam is strategically located a short flight from the Korean peninsula and other potential flashpoints in East Asia. Seoul is 2,000 miles (3,200 kilometers) to the northwest, Tokyo is 1,500 miles (2,400 kilometers) north and Taipei is 1,700 miles (2,700 kilometers) west. Because Guam is a U.S. territory, the U.S. military may launch forces from there without worrying about upsetting a host nation that may object to U.S. actions. The naval base is an important outpost for U.S. fast-attack submarines that are a key means for gathering intelligence in the region, including the Korean peninsula and the South China Sea where China has been building military bases on man-made islands.

3. **HOW HAS THE U.S. USED GUAM TO ADDRESS THE THREAT FROM NORTH KOREA?** The U.S. military began rotating bombers — the B-2 stealth bomber as well as the B-1 and B-52 — to Andersen in 2004. It did so to compensate for U.S. forces diverted from other bases in the Asia-Pacific region to fight in the Middle East. The rotations also came as North Korea increasingly upped the ante in the standoff over its development of nuclear weapons. In 2013, the Army sent a missile defense system to Guam called Terminal High Altitude Area Defense or THAAD. It's designed to destroy ballistic missiles during their final phase of flight. A THAAD battery includes a truck-mounted launcher, tracking radar, interceptor missiles and an integrated fire control system.



4. **WHAT'S THE HISTORY OF THE U.S. MILITARY ON GUAM?** The U.S. took control of Guam in 1898, when Spanish authorities surrendered to the U.S. Navy. President William McKinley ordered Guam to be ruled by the U.S. Navy. The Navy used the island as a coaling base and communications station until Japan seized the island

on Dec. 10, 1941. The U.S. took back control of Guam on July 21, 1944. During the Vietnam War, the Air Force sent 155 B-52 bombers to Andersen to hit targets in Southeast Asia. Guam was also a refueling and transfer spot for military personnel heading to Southeast Asia. Many refugees fleeing Vietnam were evacuated through Guam.

[Source: The Associated Press | Audrey McAvoy | August 9, 2017 ++]

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## Army Handgun Update 01 ► SIG 320 Accidental Discharges

Since winning the U.S. Army's coveted Modular Handgun System competition back in January, things have been less than smooth sailing for Sig Sauer. First, Sig's primary MHS rival Glock lodged a protest with the U.S. Government Accountability Office in February, which was subsequently thrown out. Then in May, Steyr launched legal proceedings to sue Sig for patent infringement. Sig's problems worsened last week when online rumors broke suggesting that the P320 was prone to accidental discharges when dropped. Two videos have since emerged that show the Sig pistol firing when dropped.

- The first <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tfe9silCI8> shows the pistol discharging when landing on its magazine base.
- The second <https://www.omahaoutdoors.com/blog/sig-sauer-p320-fails-drop-test>, from a gun store, Omaha Outdoors, shows the pistol firing when it lands on the rear of the slide assembly near the weapon's striker.



Both videos clearly show the pistols' trigger travelling rearward under inertia, suggesting that the mass of the trigger when jarred is causing it to move enough to trip the pistol's sear. Omaha Outdoors' video has racked up 90,000 views in just a day and the retailer have temporarily discontinued sales of the P320. The Truth About Guns have also subsequently replicated the test with similar results. The Sig lacks a built in trigger safety like that used by its rival Glock; however, it is worth noting that the MHS -winning XM17 has a frame mounted manual safety which would theoretically prevent accidental drop discharges.

The situation took a serious turn on after a police officer filed a \$7 million lawsuit against Sig Sauer after he was injured when his P320 accidentally hit the ground and discharged, hitting him in the left leg, according to Guns.com. Court documents show that the officer, an experienced member of Connecticut Police Department's Special Response Team, was injured in January and has claimed the weapon is not drop-safe. The report from Connecticut is the only accidental drop discharge so far reported to have caused injury. Stamford Police Department have subsequently shelved its duty-issue P320s because of the incident. The P320 is on the approved-carry lists of a large number of police departments including Dallas, Santa Barbara, and the North Dakota Highway Patrol. On Monday, Aug. 8, the Dallas Police Department also announced that they were removing the P320 from their approved-carry list pending an investigation into whether the pistol accidentally fires when dropped.

This isn't the first time Sig have come under fire for faulty duty pistols. Back in April, New Jersey sued Sig Sauer for \$2.5 million, claiming the company provided defective guns to state police. These pistols, however, were P229s not P320s. Sig claimed that it was the ammunition New Jersey police were using, not the guns themselves that were causing failure to extract malfunctions. On 4 AUG, Sig released a statement responding to the building allegations of P320 drop-test failures, stating, "The P320 meets and exceeds all U.S. standards for safety, including the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute, Inc. (SAAMI), as well as rigorous testing protocols for global military and law enforcement agencies." Task & Purpose approached Sig for fresh comment but has not had a reply by the time of publication.

It seems that the weight of opinion has pushed Sig Sauer to acknowledge there is a problem with the P320. On 8 AUG, the company announced a voluntary upgrade program for the P320's trigger. While Sig have not outlined what the modification will be yet; their most recent press release claims that details of this program on 14 AUG. The statement goes on to reaffirm that the P320 passed the ANSI and SAAMI tests and stresses that the unintentional discharges only occur when the P320 is dropped "beyond US standards for safety."

Sig was keen to emphasize that "The M17 variant of the P320, selected by the U.S. government as the U.S. Army's Modular Handgun System (MHS), is not affected by the Voluntary Upgrade." It seems likely that the upgrade will be incorporated into pistols destined for the U.S. military. While the P320 is the basis for the MHS XM17, it remains to be seen if the Army's new pistol will suffer similar issues with drop safety. Task & Purpose will continue to bring updates as this story develops. [Source: Task & Purpose | Matthew Moss | August 9, 2017 ++]

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## **Military Spouse Employment Update 03 ► White House Listening4 Session**

MOAA was invited to the White House the week of 31 JUL for a small-group listening session on military spouse employment challenges. The event brought together key administration officials and military spouse employment advocates as well as military spouses currently facing employment and licensure challenges. The military spouses - representing all services and many different career fields - shared stories of challenges they've faced maintaining careers while married to the military, including multiple moves to new states and countries and acquiring and maintaining licenses in multiple states.

Brooke Goldberg, MOAA's director of military family policy and spouse programs, attended the session, and said she felt "reassured of this administration's commitment to not let military spouses fall into the background." MOAA provided input on how the federal government can positively influence military spouse career issues. They look forward to working with the administration to alleviate challenges military spouses face as they try to both maintain their own careers and supporting their servicemembers. Here are four ways MOAA believes this administration can help:

- 1. Increase number of federal government positions open to use of the Military Spouse Noncompetitive Appointment Authority**
  - In 2008, President George W. Bush issued Executive Order 13473, creating a noncompetitive hiring authority to expedite recruitment of military spouses into federal positions. However, we have found many hiring managers don't know about this authority or are reluctant to use it. We estimate less than 10 percent of federal job postings in the Washington, D.C., area indicate they allow use of the appointment authority for military spouses. The president has the authority to increase the use of this tool. This does not give military spouses a guarantee of employment or a preference like veterans have. It would, however, allow spouses increased opportunity to compete for jobs in the federal work space.

2. **Federal tax breaks for military spouse licensure costs due to PCS across state lines<sup>4</sup>**
  - Since 2010, legislators have been introducing bills that would offset the expenses incurred by military spouses who must apply for a new license due to a permanent change of station (PCS) to a new state. Consistently, these bills, which must be initiated in the House because they are a tax/spending measure, have not been picked up by the House Ways and Means Committee. President Donald Trump has made tax reform a high priority, and he can help military families by making sure a tax credit for these expenses is included in reforms.
3. **Federal tax breaks for employers who hire military spouses**
  - We know that despite the mobile nature of military life, military spouses are not risky hires. Their resilient and adaptable nature make them strong and dedicated employees - but many employers are still reluctant to take a chance. Providing a tax break to those who make this a priority could bring significant growth in private-sector employment, especially with smaller businesses that have hesitated to bring military spouses on board.
4. **Presidential-level support for state use of interstate compacts to support portability**
  - While many states have passed legislation to accommodate licensure portability for military spouses, not all career fields are covered. Approximately half of all job-seeking military spouses want to work in fields requiring a license or certificate, as teachers, medical professionals and techs, or lawyers - all fields regulated by bodies falling outside legislation that's already been passed. One answer is for state-level bodies to join an interstate compact. This protects each state's authority to regulate independently but also allows for portability and increased visibility on professionals working in jurisdictions away from their permanent state of licensure or residence. A little encouragement to states, from a president supportive of states' rights, might go a long way.

[Source: MOAA Legislative Update | August 4, 2017 ++]

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## **USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) Update 03 ► Repair Cost \$250M+**

The cost to repair stricken destroyer USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) will easily be more than the \$250 million the U.S. Navy paid to repair USS Cole (DDG-67) after it suffered a 2000 terrorist attack in Yemen, USNI News has learned. While it's too early to craft a complete repair estimate, several naval analysts told USNI News a \$500-million bill to fix to the warship was not out of the question. According to three sources familiar with the early damage estimates, repairs to the extensive damage to the ship's superstructure, spaces below the waterline, and pricey electronics and radar systems will cost more than repairs to the damage suffered by Cole after an explosives-laden suicide boat attack hit the ship pier-side, blasting a hole in the waterline and killing 17 sailors.

The 17 JUN collision of Fitzgerald and the Philippine-flagged merchant ship ACX Crystal off the coast of Japan resulted in the death of seven sailors, extensive damage to the hull, and damage to several high-end electronic systems, such as the integrated radio room on the ship and the starboard forward array of the ship's A/N-SPY1D(v) air search radar. The port side of the flared bow of Crystal caved in the superstructure of the ship, crushing the radar face and twisting the metal of the superstructure.

A Navy official told USNI News the assessment on Fitzgerald is ongoing and that an official estimate is still being developed by the service. The service is also debating on how to get the DDG back to the U.S. for repairs, though a heavy-lift ship transporting Fitzgerald to the West Coast is the current favorite option in Navy leadership circles. Cole was taken back to the U.S. by MV Blue Marlin, a heavy-lift transport for oil rigs, and repaired over a period of two years at what is now the Ingalls Shipbuilding yard in Pascagoula, Miss. "The repair process, which cost about \$250 million, included removing and replacing more than 550 tons of steel, replacing two 27-ton main

engines and modules, installing a new stern flap, which will increase the ship's speed and fuel efficiency, replacing three gas turbines generators, and installing new galley equipment," the service said at the time.

The biggest difference in cost will be the replacement and upgrading the electronics of Fitzgerald. "The Cole was largely engineering, and it's electronics that gets you," retired Navy captain and naval analyst Chris Carlson told USNI News on 2 AUG. "An engine looks expensive, but it's a pretty basic repair compared to electronic systems." Additionally, the spaces that were flooded below the waterline would also need to be gutted, Carlson said. Bryan Clark, naval analyst with Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, said, based on photos of the damage published by the Navy, the costs to repair the ship would easily top the \$250 million of the Cole repairs, and could even double that figure.

Fitzgerald, commissioned in 1995, is one of the earliest Arleigh Burke-class destroyers and was due for a \$170-million basic hull, mechanical and engineering upgrade in Fiscal Year 2019, according to modernization information obtained by USNI News. The upgrade is meant to get an additional 10 to 15 years of life out of the hull. However, the Navy will probably elect to upgrade the damaged electronics to the new Baseline 9 standard that allows warships to both target ballistic missiles and fight traditional air warfare threats. That overhaul costs about \$270 million. "That makes the repair-plus-overhaul several times more expensive than originally planned. The problem will still be, what work won't get done on other ships to pay for the repair?" Clark said. "Does that mean two BMD modernizations don't get done? If that's the trade then it's not worth it."

While there are several unknowns around the repair schedule, the Navy has said it was committed to repairing the ship. "The ship is salvageable," U.S. 7th Fleet commander Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin told reporters on 17 JUN, Stars and Stripes reported. "It will require some significant repairs. You will see the USS Fitzgerald back as one of our warships here. [Repair time] will take months, hopefully under a year." While the repair plan is ongoing, several investigations continue into the cause of the 17 JUN collision off the coast of Japan. [Source: USNI News | Sam LaGrone | July 27, 2017 ++]

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## **U.S. Army Drones ► DJI Usage Stopped | Cyber Vulnerabilities**

The U.S. Army has ordered troops to stop using consumer drones made by Chinese manufacturer DJI, according to an 2 AUG memo seen by Defense One and confirmed by two Army officials. "Cease all use, uninstall all DJI applications, remove all batteries/storage media from devices, and secure equipment for follow on direction," reads the memo from Lt. Gen. Joseph H. Anderson, the Army's deputy chief of staff for plans and operations. Why? The memo cited "increased awareness of cyber vulnerabilities associated with DJI products." Service officials declined to elaborate.

Said one Army soldier about the decision, "I wonder how DJI camera stabilizers (which have no memory) can send information back to mainland China." DJI drones "are the most widely used non-program of record commercial off-the-shelf UAS employed by the Army," the memo says. They've also been the world's most popular consumer drones for several years running, according to the German-based analytics firm, Drone Industry Insights.

DJI products have not proliferated across the Army and onto the battlefield the way more tactical UAVs like Pumas or Switchblades have — both made by U.S. manufacturer Aerovironment. But, the Army's Aviation Engineering Directorate has already "issued over 300 separate Airworthiness Releases for DJI products in support of multiple organizations with a variety of mission sets," according to the memo, which amends existing Pentagon guidance on the domestic use of unmanned systems, finalized in February 2015.

The decision might cause no more than a small headache for units using DJI products — including the 10 or so Fort Hood public affairs soldiers who are licensed remote pilots, according to one Army official. But it is still a headache of inventory and secure storage, since it covers "any system that employs DJI electrical components or

software including, but not limited to, flight computers, cameras, radios, batteries, speed controllers, GPS units, handheld control stations, or devices with DJI software applications installed.”

The memo “could have a huge impact on DJI,” said Brett Velicovich, a former Army intelligence soldier who now runs Expert Drones, a consumer drone firm in Alexandria, Va. But the unnamed security vulnerabilities could affect the U.S. military — and not just those stateside. “There are U.S. special operators in Syria using DJI products,” said Velicovich. “So I get it. I’m glad [the Army is finally doing something about this.]” DJI accounts for at least 70 percent of the commercial unmanned aircraft vehicle market. In recent months, its Phantom series of UAVs has drawn the attention of hackers who’ve been able to break into and manipulate the drone’s GPS software, punching holes in the “geofences” that sought to keep the drones out of no-fly zones.

But hackers aren’t the only ones who can manipulate the drones long after they’ve left the factory floor, been plucked from a store shelf, and flown around the world. In May, DJI officials told users to register their drones with the company — or else the UAVs would suffer cuts to speed and range, even the ability to stream video. The company claimed it was part of a plan to upgrade its geolocation data to make its UAVs safer. (For what it’s worth, the two references cited in the Army memo — one a classified Army study — were produced just days after DJI’s 22 MAY announcement; and one month after DJI added portions of Iraq and Syria to its geofence system.) But it was a wake-up call to many in the industry, Velicovich said: “If they can turn off our drones, what else can they do with those things?” [Source: Defense One | Brn Watson | August 4, 2017 ++]

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## **Drones | Aerial Update 01 ► Military Bases Allowed to Shoot Down**

The Pentagon has signed off on a new policy that will allow military bases to shoot down private or commercial drones that are deemed a threat, Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. Jeff Davis said 7 August. The policy itself is classified and was transmitted to the services in July, Davis said. Broadly, it outlines the rules of engagement for a base when a private or commercial drone is encroaching upon its airspace. On 4 August unclassified guidance was sent to each of the services on how to communicate the new policy to local communities. The installations “retain the right of self-defense when it comes to UAVs or drones operating over [them,]” Davis said. “The new guidance does afford of the ability to take action to stop these threats and that includes disabling, destroying and tracking.”



**A small drone crash-landed at the White House in Washington, D.C. An increase in similar private drones above U.S. military complexes led to the Pentagon issuing guidance on how bases can now defend themselves against the private aircraft.**

Davis said the private or commercial drones could also be seized. However, in some instances where the military leases land for operations, the use of a drone may not always be a threat — and who owns the airspace may not always be clear. The Air Force, for example, maintains its arsenal Minuteman III nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles in 150 underground silos in vast fields around Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota. But the land is only leased from commercial and private farmers who use the rest of the area for crops or livestock. Those farmers sometimes find it easier to launch a drone to check on their cows or agriculture than to cover the miles by foot or truck. As of last fall, the sky above the silos at Minot AFB was also not previously restricted airspace.

It was not immediately clear whether the new policy has changed access to the airspace above the silos or at other bases. The policy would affect 133 military installations, DOD said. Davis said the policy was worked through the Federal Aviation Administration and other federal agencies, and the specific actions a base takes when a drone encroaches upon it “will depend upon the specific circumstances,” Davis said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Tara Copp | August 4, 2017 ++]

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## **Body Armor** ► **Army Investing in Genetically Engineered Spider Silk**

The U.S. Army is upping its investment in genetically engineered spider silk for body armor. Last year, the service paid almost \$100,000 to Kraig Biocraft Laboratories, which makes spider silk that can be produced at scale — with silkworms. On Wednesday, the company announced that the Army will move to the second phase of the contract and will look to Kraig to produce a customized strain of the silk for “high-performance fibers for protective apparel applications.” That is: flexible body armor made from genetically engineered spider silk. The total contract amount would reach \$900,000 if parameters are met. Army representatives said that interested in the material purely from a research perspective, for now.

Kraig Biocraft injects spider DNA into silkworm eggs, enabling the worms to produce its custom silk. The researchers describe the process in their 2011 PNAS paper <http://www.pnas.org/content/109/3/923.full>. Spider silk is much tougher than regular worm silk, and about half as tough as Kevlar. But it’s far more flexible, (3 percent elasticity for kevlar versus nearly 40 percent for spider silk.) The Army believes that the energy absorption of the material could be much higher than kevlar (as determined by multiplying the strength of the fiber by the elongation. “We want to evaluate, to test, to see if this is a better material to use,” said James Zheng, the chief scientist for the Army’s Soldier Program Executive Office. Among the top potential uses, said the representative, “extremity protection... for the groin area.” Read that to mean soldier underwear.

It’s also much more elastic and flexible than kevlar. But getting enough spider silk to clothe an Army is a tall order. The crawly arachnids don’t produce silk in high volume and when you crowd spiders too close together, they eat each other. The quest to produce spider silk in hosts other than spiders has led researchers to use a variety of other methods such as yeast, e. coli bacteria and mammalian cells. But silkworms are the best candidate to produce transgenic spider silk at scale, according to Jon Rice, Kraig Biocraft’s chief operating officer. Unlike those other hosts, silkworms actually produce silk fibers as opposed to what Rice characterized as “silk protein goo.” There are facilities to extract silk all over the world. “We’ve been using silkworms for over 4,000 years to make fibers. That process is well known.” he said.

In May, Kraig Biocraft delivered samples in the form of “shoot packs” as part of their contract. The Army tested the packs and determined that they wanted more of it. “I was pleasantly surprised to find a contract in my in box,” said Rice. Now the Army is looking for a new, customized strain of the transgenic silk, which Kraig Biocraft has named “Dragon Silk.” The key new desired feature? “Stronger,” said Rice. Rice doesn’t know exactly how the Army intends to test his company’s next material but said that he expects they would be more involved in the development of material and potential applications from this point out. [Source: DefenseOne | Patrick Tucker | August 2, 2017 ++]

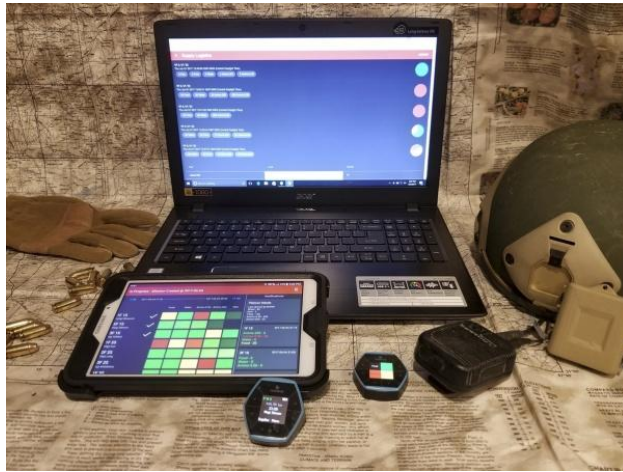
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## USMC Wearable Technology ► Supplies at Marines' Fingertips Vice Their Backs

One Marine staff sergeant is trying to bring wearable technology down to the fire team level with the hopes of streamlining logistics and having Marines carry only what they need, with “real-time” resupply a near future reality. “The common problem is the warfighter is too heavy,” Staff Sgt. Alexander Long V said. “We spend a lot of money just trying to make the equipment lighter. Units still go out with three days of supplies even if they’re just walking a kilometer on patrol.” Long is one of the Innovation Challenge winners from the event’s first year in 2016. His idea, the personal combat assistant and reporting device, or PCARD, is a wearable electronic device smaller than a playing card and about as thick as a thumb, and is months away from being in the hands of Marines.

The device has basic options such as food, water and ammunition that an individual fire team member can submit when they need more of any of those items. Squad leaders hold tablets, wirelessly connected to the smaller wearables. The information is funneled up to the platoon commander, who can make supply decisions quickly as Marines move in the field through operations. That data is then collected at battalion and regimental levels, bringing decision-making up from operational to tactical to strategic levels. Once in place, the commanders can forecast Marine resupply needs, Long hopes, to then deliver items when they’re needed, where they’re needed and in the right amount.

Long, an ammunition technician by trade, is currently the Action Officer for the Ammunition Logistics Focus team at Program Manager Ammunition at Marine Corps Systems Command in Quantico, Virginia. But since winning the competition he’s been working with civilian developers such as Jennifer Walsh to shepherd his idea into a reality. Walsh is the innovation challenge lead for the Headquarters of the Marine Corps’ NEXLOG Innovation Cell. A prototype of the device was tested this summer by undisclosed Marine units and is scheduled for further field testing at Camp Pendleton in October, Walsh said.



The device could be in the hands of Marines for training or operations as early as next year, Walsh said. But, Long said in a recent interview, he and his fellow Marines wondered if anyone would actually read their submissions when they first decided to offer their ideas. “We laughed at the idea that I would submit something and it would be taken seriously,” Long said. “The worst thing that happens is they told me no.” [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Todd South | July 31, 2017 ++]



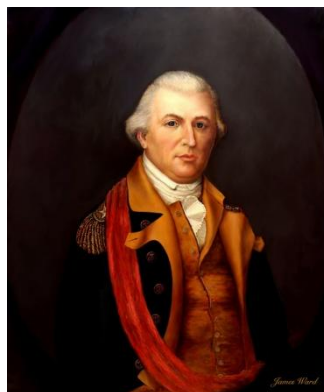


## **Nathanael Greene** ► **Revolutionary War General's 275th Birthday**

History buffs have one wish on the 275th birthday of a Revolutionary War general: That he'll get the recognition he deserves. Nathanael Greene was a major general in the Continental Army and a trusted adviser and good friend to George Washington. Historians say his decisions were crucial to the American victory in the South campaign, yet many people haven't heard of him. The anniversary of his birth will be marked 5 AUG at his homestead, a national historic landmark built in 1770 in Coventry, Rhode Island. David Procaccini, president of the homestead, says Greene is an "important national hero" and he's trying to get that message out.

Greene has been largely overlooked for many reasons, said Greg Massey, who co-edited a collection of essays about Greene. Greene oversaw the Army's supplies for part of the war, which was not a glamorous position. Greene also fought in the South. Especially after the Civil War, historians tended to write about the Revolutionary War through a northern lens. Greene wore down British forces but never decisively won a major battle. He died shortly after the war. Had he lived, he would've likely been one of the early leaders of the federal government. "We put a lot of stock in our independence, as independent people," said Massey, a history professor at Freed-Hardeman University. "He's one of the essential people to the winning of the independence."

After the Army retired to Valley Forge, Washington asked Greene in 1778 to become the quartermaster general to improve the system of supplies. Greene accepted, though he knew such a position wouldn't bring the military fame that many generals sought. "It would be good if Americans knew about the contributions of someone so humble as to be willing to take a job like quartermaster when it was necessary to save the Army," said Philip Mead, chief historian at the Museum of the American Revolution. "The willingness to sacrifice your own self-interest for the good of your country, that's an aspirational value in that period and in ours."



Greene then assumed command in the South. He fought the British in the Carolinas, weakening their forces enough so that the British commander, Charles Cornwallis, had to move to Wilmington, North Carolina, and then on to Yorktown, Virginia, where his forces were trapped by French and American troops in 1781. "That's the last big

battle of the war. They were still fighting, but the British government began negotiating for peace,” Massey said. “Greene isn’t at Yorktown but everything he did set the stage for that. Without him, that didn’t happen.” Massey describes Greene as one of the great American generals. [Source: The Associated Press | Jennifer Mcdermott, | July 30, 2017 ++]

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## USMC Semper Fi ► Origin

The few, the proud, the Marines: custodians of a proud martial tradition dating back to Nov. 10, 1775. So it might surprise you to know that the Marine Corps doesn’t know why its motto is Semper Fidelis. The iconic phrase, Latin for “always faithful,” has captured the spirit of Marines, past, present, and future, since the 1880s. But the reasoning behind its selection is still unknown. No, really. We asked the Marine Corps, and they didn’t know. Neither did anybody else. Turns out the only person who could have told us for sure is this guy, Col. Charles Grymes McCawley, the eighth commandant of the Marine Corps:



**Col. Charles Grymes McCawley**

The son of a Marine captain, McCawley served in the Mexican-American war at the Battle of Chapultepec and later during the Civil War. He held the Marine Corps commandant post for 15 years until retiring in 1891 and is credited with a number of lasting advances for the service. He was instrumental in raising training standards, securing a quota for Marine officers from the Naval Academy, and enforcing Corps-wide uniform regulations (though you can’t blame him for uptight grooming standards — just look at that ’stache.) He also made the Marines early adopters of cutting-edge technology, like the typewriter and the telephone.

In 1883, McCawley made “Semper Fidelis” the official Marine Corps motto. Beyond that, details are pretty scant. Here’s what we were able to find out about the Corps’ most cherished credo. It wasn’t the service’s first snappy slogan. There was “Fortitudine,” Latin for “with strength”; “To the shores of Tripoli,” commemorating the Marines’ action at the Battle of Derna in 1805, which got a song eventually, too; and then there was “Par Mare, Par Terrum,” Latin for “By Sea, By Land,” a motto shared by Britain’s Royal Marines.

The emergence of Semper Fidelis — often shortened to Semper Fi — as the Marines’ motto came a few years after the service decided to make some aesthetic changes to its uniforms and iconography, changes that would better capture the elite and professional nature of the Corps. In *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, noted military historian Allan Reed Millett draws a connection between these uniform changes, made by McCawley’s predecessor as commandant, Col. Jacob Zeilin, and the adoption of the Semper Fi motto. It all started, Millett writes, with Zeilin’s adoption of “a more distinctive and dynamic cap insignia: An eagle perched on a globe (showing the Western Hemisphere) superimposed over an anchor.”

The commandant, of course, had jacked that now-famous eagle, globe, and anchor from the British Navy's globe-and-laurel crest. Which is fine, since America pretty much stole the whole idea of a Marine Corps from Britain and made that, better, too. In any case, the E.G.A. became standard on all Marine uniforms by 1875. And the commandant went right back to the British well for inspiration: Zeilin stole the Royal Marines' "Par Mare, Par Terrum" motto, too. But after succeeding Zeilin as commandant — and perhaps thinking his predecessor had taken the British mimicry a little too far — McCawley changed the motto to the more original Semper Fi.

So, we know that in 1875 the service went through some changes for the sake of a sharper image; it got a new emblem, and a newish motto. And no one might begrudge McCawley's decision to trim back at the service's borrowed phrasings. But that doesn't answer the question: Where'd he come up with "Semper Fidelis," anyway? While we may never know for sure, there's plenty of history to the phrase itself. According to records provided by the Marine Corps History Division, the motto has its roots in Irish, Scottish, and English nobility, as well as among military outfits in 17th-century Europe whose members may have emigrated to the American colonies in the 1690s. [Source: Task & Purpose | James Clark | August 8, 2017 ++]

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## WWII-Era Boeing Clipper Boy ► Flying the Atlantic in the 30's & 40's

If You Thought Air Travel Was Luxurious In The 1970s, check Out What It Was Like Aboard The WW2-Era Boeing Clipper. Boy has air travel changed over the years. For most travelers in the 21st century, flying is a dreary experience, full of inconvenience, indignity, and discomfort. That wasn't the case in the late 1930s, when those with the money to afford trans-oceanic flight got to take the Boeing Model 314, better known as the Clipper. Even Franklin Roosevelt used the plane, celebrating his 61st birthday on board in 1943. Check out <https://deltavan1.wordpress.com/2017/03/31/flying-the-atlantic-during-the-30s-and-40s> . to view photos of what it was like aboard.

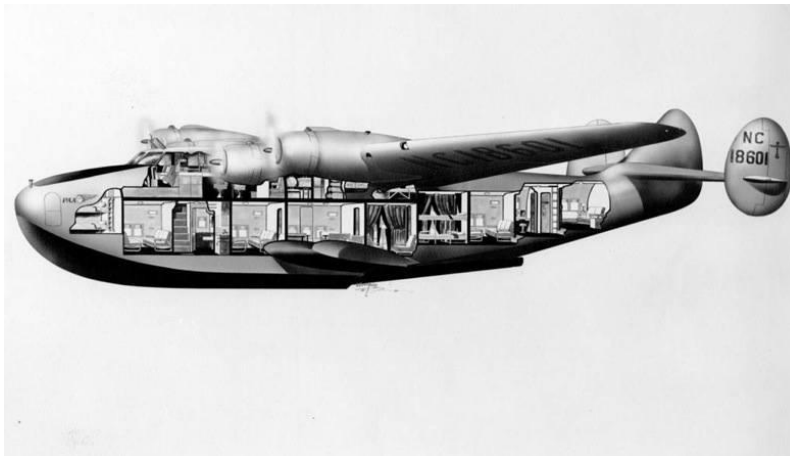


Diagram of the different areas of the plane

Between 1938 and 1941, Boeing built 12 of the jumbo planes for Pan American World Airways. The 314 offered a range of 3,500 miles — enough to cross either the Atlantic or Pacific —and room for 74 passengers onboard. Of course, modern aviation offers an amazing first class experience (and it's a whole lot safer), but nothing in the air today matches the romanticism of crossing the ocean in the famed Clipper. The Model 314's nickname Clipper came from an especially fast type of sailing ship used in the 19th century. The ship analogy was appropriate, as the Clipper landed on the water, not runways.

On Pan Am flights, passengers had access to dressing rooms and a dining salon that could be converted into a lounge or bridal suite. Clipper passengers took their meals at real tables, not their seats. The galley served up meals

catered from four-star hotels. If you want to sit at a table to eat with other people these days, you have to fly in a private jet. There was room for a crew of 10 to serve as many as 74 passengers.

On overnight flights, the 74 seats could be turned into 40 bunks for comfortable sleeping. The bunk beds came with curtains for privacy. The lavatory wasn't too fancy, but it did have a urinal — something you never see in today's commercial jets, where space is at a premium. The ladies lounge had stools where female passengers could sit and do their makeup. On the 24-hour flights across the Atlantic, crew members could conk out on these less luxurious cots. Unlike some modern jets that come with joysticks, the Clipper had controls that resembled car steering wheels. Navigating across the ocean used to require more manpower in the air. The Clipper made its maiden trans-Atlantic voyage on June 28, 1939. But once the US entered World War II, the Clipper was pressed into service to transport materials and personnel.

Prior to WWII, the Japanese Military became very interested in the new Pratt & Whitney radial engines that powered the PanAm Clipper. On a flight from San Francisco to China, a Clipper landed on Truk Lagoon to be refueled by Japanese authorities. Later, the Clipper was assumed lost over the Pacific. Years later, it was revealed that the crew and passengers were arrested and executed, the engines were retrieved and sent to Japan and the Clipper was sunk in deep water off Truk Lagoon. [Source: Deltavan 1 | Brian Colfack | March 31, 2017 ++]

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### **Abandoned Military Bases [05] ► Fort Tilden. New York**



**The former United States Army fort known now as Fort Tilden Historic District lays on the coast of the New York City borough of Queens.**

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### **Military History Quiz 3 ► Do you Know?**

1. Joan of Arc was a central figure in which war -- Peloponnesian War, War of the Roses. or the Hundred Years War?
2. Who successfully invaded England in 1066?
3. One of the most famous battles of the War of 1812 was fought after the war had technically ended -- True or False?

4. Which other war broke out in the middle of World War I?
5. Though Genghis Khan's empire was vast, he never personally conquered China - True or False?
6. Which U.S. president served in both World Wars?
7. Which battle is known for the legend of the 300 Spartans -- Battle of Normandy, Battle of Marathon, or the Battle of Thermopylae?
8. Which war resulted in the Star-Spangled Banner, the American national anthem?
9. What major offensive in the Vietnam War shocked the US public and reduced support for the war effort -- Tet Offensive Duc Offensive Min Offensive, or Tet-ris Offensive?
10. "The Charge of the Light Brigade" is about a battle in which war -- Boer War, Second Sino-Japanese War, Crimean War, or the War of 1812?
11. Which war is often blamed for the horrendous casualties that would later occur in World War I -- Russo-Japanese War, Napoleonic Wars, or the Crimean War?
12. Japan invaded and successfully conquered Korea in the 1590s during the war known as Hideyoshi's Invasion -- True or False?
13. What major battle in 1603 ultimately led to the unification of Japan under the Tokugawa Shogunate?

[Source: <http://offbeat.topix.com/quiz/17158/qidx1> | September 2016 ++]

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## Insanely Daring Air Raids ► No. 4 | Doolittle Raid

Air raids were one of the military strategies that were used to attack enemies using fighter planes which would drop bombs and blow buildings apart. This task was perhaps the most dangerous and terrifying mission during the times of war. However, many brave aviators risked their lives and conducted daring raids against insane odds. Following covers one often of the most daring raids to ever been conducted in history, the story behind the raids and the crews who flew the military planes.



After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Imperial Japanese forces rapidly extended their reach across the Pacific, making them the dominant force in the region. To stop them, the US began to build an unstoppable military force. However, until it became operational, the American leaders were desperately in need of something of that could boost their morale, and to demonstrate to their enemies and allies alike that the US is striking back.

A plan to raid Tokyo was launched and a group of sixteen men, who were secretly trained for the bombers volunteered to take this extraordinary and technically challenging mission. An excellent and highly experienced pilot, Lt. Colonel James H. Doolittle was appointed as the mission commander. In fact, it was Doolittle who selected the twin-engined B-25B Mitchell. 16 bombers to participate in the mission. While the take-off was scheduled for April 19 in the afternoon, the mission commenced earlier than expected (On April 18, 1942). The task force was detected by a Japanese patrol boat at dawn but was quickly sank by one of the cruisers.

The detection caused panic as the carriers were still over 600 nautical miles from Japan, and fuel was already a problem. Also, Admiral Halsey, who was the Commander of the Task Force 16, knew that the group might be attacked by Japanese carrier aircraft. He then ordered Doolittle's raiders to takeoff immediately. The mission which went on as planned stunned Tokyo, leaving the heads of the Japanese Air Force and Navy accusing each other and the commander of Tokyo's air defense committing suicide.

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### **Military History Quiz 3 ► Did you Answer Correctly?**

1. Joan of Arc, the "Maid of Orleans," was a French hero and general during the Hundred Years War.
2. William the Conqueror. He was the first Norman King of England, and is the only ruler to successfully invade the country since the Roman Empire.
3. True! Because texting wasn't around in 1815, the armies involved didn't know the Treaty of Ghent had been negotiated shortly before the Battle of New Orleans actually took place. Whoops!
4. The Russian Revolution (or Bolshevik Revolution) broke out in 1917, right in the middle of World War I -- and ultimately led to Russia withdrawing from the conflict.
5. True! Genghis Khan was never successful in conquering China -- though his grandson, Khubilai Khan, ultimately was.
6. Dwight D. Eisenhower. Though he never saw action in WWI, he was in charge of a tank corps training camp and was set to be shipped out when the war ended. He was also the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe in WWII.
7. The Battle of Thermopylae between the Greek and Persian armies is known for the 300 Spartans (and 1100 assorted other Greeks) who defended the mountain pass at Thermopylae against overwhelming odds, finally succumbing after a week.
8. War of 1812. Francis Scott Key wrote the Star-Spangled Banner after surviving the bombing of Fort McHenry during the War of 1812.
9. Tet Offensive. Though it was actually a huge net loss for the North Vietnamese, it was such a shock to the US public, and the losses were so heavy, that support for the war declined significantly, leading the US to seek negotiations to end the war.
10. Crimean War. Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem "The Charge of the Light Brigade" -- which gave us the famous line "theirs not to reason why; theirs but to do and die" is about the terrible casualties suffered by British cavalry troops in the Crimean War.
11. Russo-Japanese War (1904-05). Generals looked at it and learned the wrong lesson: namely, that fighting spirit and morale could overcome machine gun fire. As such, many officers hurled their troops into pointless, suicidal charges, convinced they would win if they only wanted it badly enough.
12. False! Named after Japanese ruler Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the Japanese twice attempted to invade Korea during the 1590s -- and were twice repulsed by the Korean navy under Admiral Yi Sun-sin.
13. "Battle of Sekigahara". It was the largest battle ever fought on Japanese home soil, and was ultimately responsible for the rise of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

[Source: <http://offbeat.topix.com/quiz/17158/qidx1> | September 2016 ++]

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## **Military History Anniversaries ► 16 thru 31 AUG**

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, **“Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 AUG.** [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | August 2017 ++]

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## **Medal of Honor Citations ► Foster~William Adelbert | WWII**



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

**William Adelbert Foster**

**Rank and organization:** Private First Class, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve

**Place and date:** Okinawa Shima, May 2, 1945

**Entered service:** Ohio 1944

**Born:** February 17, 1915, Garfield Heights, Ohio

### ***Citation***

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a rifleman with the 3d Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Okinawa Shima in the Ryukyu Chain 2 May 1945. Dug in with another marine on the point of the perimeter defense after waging a furious assault against a strongly fortified Japanese position, Pfc. Foster and his comrade engaged in a fierce hand grenade duel with infiltrating enemy soldiers. Suddenly an enemy grenade landed beyond reach in the foxhole. Instantly diving on the deadly missile, Pfc. Foster absorbed the exploding charge in his own body, thereby protecting the other marine from serious injury. Although mortally wounded as a result of his heroic action, he quickly rallied, handed his own remaining 2 grenades to his comrade and said, "Make them count." Stouthearted and indomitable, he had unhesitatingly relinquished his own chance of survival that his fellow marine might carry on the relentless fight against a fanatic enemy, and his dauntless determination, cool decision and valiant spirit of self-sacrifice in the face of certain death reflect the highest credit upon Pfc. Foster and upon the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country.



Following graduation from vocational high school, where he majored in machinist's subjects, Foster was employed as a planer and shaper at Cleveland's Star Machine and Tool Company. A veteran of six year's service in the Ohio National Guard, Foster was enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve through the Selective Service System on April 1, 1944. He received his basic training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, California. In late September 1944, after intensive combat training at Camp Pendleton, he embarked for overseas duty on board the USS General C. G. Morton bound for the Russell Islands in the Solomon group. There he joined his regular unit — Company K, 3rd Battalion 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division.

Foster landed with his unit during the Battle of Okinawa on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945, the first anniversary of his enlistment in the Marine Corps. In combat for the first time at Okinawa, PFC Foster performed an act of heroism on May 2, 1945 which earned for him the nation's highest military decoration: the Medal of Honor. On August 19, 1946, Gen Alexander A. Vandegrift, then Commandant of the Marine Corps, presented the Medal of Honor to his parents in a ceremony at the City Hall in Cleveland. In the words of the accompanying citation, presented by President Harry S. Truman, "... he had unhesitatingly relinquished his own chance of survival that his fellow Marine might carry on the relentless fight against a fanatic enemy..."

Foster was initially interred in the 1st Marine Division cemetery on Okinawa. On March 5, 1949, his remains were reinterred in the Calvary Cemetery in Cleveland. His remaining family lives in and around the Cleveland area.

<sup>4</sup>[Source: <http://www.history.army.mil/moh> | August 2017 ++]

### \* Health Care \*



## Fatigue ► How To Feel Less Tired

We all feel fatigued now and then. Some changes to your lifestyle can make you feel less tired. Here are some suggestions:



- Keep a fatigue diary to help you find patterns throughout the day when you feel more or less tired.
- Exercise regularly. Almost anyone, at any age, can do some type of physical activity. If you have concerns about starting an exercise program, ask your doctor if there are any activities you should avoid. Moderate exercise may improve your appetite, energy, and outlook. Some people find that exercises combining balance and breathing (for example, tai chi or yoga) improve their energy.
- Try to avoid long naps (over 30 minutes) late in the day. Long naps can leave you feeling groggy and may make it harder to fall asleep at night.
- Stop smoking. Smoking is linked to many diseases and disorders, such as cancer, heart disease, and breathing problems, which can drain your energy.
- Ask for help if you feel swamped. Some people have so much to do that just thinking about their schedules can make them feel tired. Working with others may help a job go faster and be more fun.

If you feel fatigued for several weeks with no relief, make sure to talk about it with your doctor go to [https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/fatigue-older-adults?utm\\_source=20170807\\_fatigue&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=ealert](https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/fatigue-older-adults?utm_source=20170807_fatigue&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ealert) to learn more about fatigue. [Source: National Institute on Aging | August 8, 2017 +]

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## Ambulatory Rescue Pack ► New Army Medical Treatment Kit

The Army is testing a new medical treatment kit designed to keep blood and other vital supplies cool in hot climates. The **Golden Hour Ambulatory Rescue Pack** is named for the “golden hour,” the time after a battlefield wound that can be the most crucial to saving lives, Army officials said. Soldiers can store and carry medical supplies in the ruggedized Golden HARP, and monitor the temperatures of the contents. The kit can be attached to any MOLLE frame pack to be carried into austere locations, officials say.



The Golden HARP is useful in hot climates like Iraq, where it’s difficult to give troops the appropriate medical treatment onsite. Blood must be kept at a cool range of 39 to 46 degrees F, and IV bags must be normal body temperature or below when they are used, officials say. In July, Golden HARP was sent to the Army’s Medical Materiel Agency for users to try out and provide feedback. “It would be great to have the Golden HARP available ... just in case somebody gets hit,” Ben Williams of the Defense Department’s Combat Feeding Directorate said in an Army release. “Now you have blood onsite, ready to go. If you have limited or no power, this may be your only solution for prolonged cold storage at that important time.”

The pack has a battery that can be charged by the system’s own solar panel, and with eight hours of sunlight per day, the Golden HARP can maintain its temperature indefinitely without recharging the battery if ambient temperature is below 90 degrees F, officials said. A single battery and solar power can keep the pack cool for at least 60 hours at 115 degrees F, and at least 30 hours at 135 degrees F or even higher. The battery can be replaced to double the storage times. “The goal for me was to make the system run indefinitely, on the move, with high reliability and have it fully automated so there’s minimal chance of user error, which could result in improperly

stored medical supplies,” Williams said in the Army release. [Source: ArmyTimes | Ashley Bunch | August 6, 2017 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 409 ► Language Assistance | Tick-Borne Illnesses**

**Real-time Language Assistance** -- Effective communication between TRICARE Overseas Program Prime beneficiaries and TRICARE providers is essential. To make sure beneficiaries receive the care they deserve, International SOS provides real-time language assistance services over the phone in more than 200 languages. If you need language assistance services over the phone during a medical appointment, contact your International SOS TOP Regional Call Center and press option 1. For toll-free country-specific contact numbers, visit [www.tricare-overseas.com/contactus](http://www.tricare-overseas.com/contactus). To ensure proper service, you should have the following information readily available:

- Your full name
- Your Social Security Number or DoD Benefits Number, and
- Your date of birth

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**Tick-Borne Illnesses** -- Ticks may be small, but they can spread damaging illnesses through one bite. Knowing what to look out for and how to prevent tick-borne illnesses can help you and your family enjoy the outdoors all year-round. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, infections from ticks are increasing. They carry different diseases and can be found in various parts of the country depending on their species. Of all the tick-borne illnesses in the U.S., one of the least-known viruses is also one of the most dangerous: Powassan virus. While this virus is rare, the number of reported cases has increased in recent years, according to the CDC. The virus shows no signs at first, but symptoms begin anywhere from one week to a month after a bite from a black-legged tick. These symptoms include seizures, weakness, headaches, fever, coordination loss, and speech issues. Most reported cases of Powassan have been in the Northeast and the Great Lakes region.

One of the most commonly reported tick-borne diseases in the U.S. is Lyme disease. About 20 to 30 percent of black-legged ticks are infected. Early symptoms of Lyme can seem flu-like, including fever, chills, fatigue, headache, aches, and swollen lymph nodes. A characteristic sign of Lyme is a bull’s-eye rash around the tick bite, but up to 20 percent of patients may not develop, or do not recall, a rash. You can protect yourself against ticks by avoiding wooded areas and areas with high grass, using a tick repellent on skin and clothing, and checking for ticks after being outside. Checking household pets can also help. For more information, visit [www.cdc.gov/ticks](http://www.cdc.gov/ticks).

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | August 11, 2017 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 410 ► Food Poisoning | Solar Eclipse | Moving Tips**

**Food Poisoning** -- The picnic table is packed with delicious summertime favorites. You’re eyeing the deviled eggs and bratwurst. On such a hot summer day, though, you wonder how long the food has been sitting out. Before you pile food onto your plate, remember that foodborne bacteria thrive in summer temperatures and humidity. They can cause illnesses and pose a serious threat to your health. Food poisoning occurs after you swallow food contaminated with germs or toxic substances. These include viruses, bacteria, mold, parasites and poisonous chemicals. Depending on the type of germs, symptoms range widely, from a mild upset stomach and abdominal cramping to

vomiting, diarrhea, fever and dehydration. Most foodborne illnesses are preventable. You can protect yourself from foodborne illnesses by making sure to:

- Stay Clean – Wash your hands regularly and food preparation surfaces.
- Separate Food – Separate foods as you prepare them. Cross contamination occurs when germs spread from one ingredient, especially meats, to another through a cutting board or plate.
- Cook thoroughly – Cook meats to the correct temperature on a food thermometer, and
- Chill Quickly – Keep your refrigerator below 40 F Fahrenheit. Return leftovers to the refrigerator quickly, or at a minimum, within two hours.

Most food poisoning symptoms are minor and resolve without treatment. If symptoms continue or worsen, see your doctor or go to the emergency room. You can always call the Nurse Advice Line with urgent care questions at 1-800-TRICARE and select option 1. Check out more tips for enjoying a safe and healthy summer from TRICARE at [www.tricare.mil/healthwellness](http://www.tricare.mil/healthwellness).

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**Solar Eclipse** -- The much-anticipated total eclipse of the sun on August 21<sup>st</sup> will be a spectacular event, but caution should be taken to keep your sight. Don't stare at the sun! Staring, even squinting, at the sun can cause serious damage to a person's eye. Ophthalmologists strongly recommend that you avoid looking directly at the sun during the upcoming total eclipse. Staring at the sun during the total eclipse for even a short time without wearing the right eye protection can permanently damage the retina. There's only one safe way to look directly at the sun, whether during an eclipse or not, and that's with special-purpose solar filters. These solar filters are used in "eclipse glasses" or in hand-held solar viewers. They must meet a very specific worldwide standard known as ISO 12312-2. Ordinary sunglasses, even dark ones, or using homemade filters, are not safe for looking at the sun.

Never look at the uneclipsed or partially eclipsed sun through an unfiltered camera, telescope, binoculars or other similar devices even if you're wearing eclipse glasses or holding a solar viewer at the same time. The sun's rays are too powerful coming through these devices and will damage a person's eyes as well as solar filter. That old adage that a person can go blind from looking at an eclipse isn't an easily ignored myth. It's a sight safety warning because a person could get solar retinopathy, a form of blindness. Visit [www.eclipse.aas.org/eye-safety](http://www.eclipse.aas.org/eye-safety) for more information on how to safely view the solar eclipse!

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**Summertime Moving Tips** -- Summer is the season when you and your family may fulfill new orders and move to a new duty station across the world. Or, if retiring, you may be considering relocating stateside or overseas. Although your TRICARE eligibility doesn't change when you move, your health plan options might. That's why understanding your TRICARE coverage after a move is important. Moving stateside or to a different stateside region of the country determines which regional contractor you fall under. When you arrive at your new duty station or location, update your address, phone number and other personal information in DEERS. Once you've updated DEERS, visit the TRICARE website at [tricare.mil](http://tricare.mil). Depending on your plan, you can find a doctor, manage prescriptions, book appointments and more.

If you're an overseas active duty service member or command-sponsored active duty family member moving to a new location, you can transfer your TRICARE Prime enrollment to your new overseas region. You can do this by calling International SOS or your TOP Regional Call Center at the phone number for your region. If you're a TRICARE Prime Overseas or TRICARE Prime Remote Overseas beneficiary, you must transfer your coverage within 60 days of arriving at your new location. If you use another plan, such as TRICARE Standard Overseas, update DEERS and call International SOS. If you're retired, your only option overseas is TRICARE Standard Overseas. You can get care from any overseas provider. If you have questions, call International SOS or visit a TRICARE Service Center. To find a provider, search the overseas provider directory at [tricare-overseas.com](http://tricare-overseas.com). Stay

cool and current this summer by learning more about moving with TRICARE as well as helpful summer information and tips at [www.tricare.mil/healthwellness](http://www.tricare.mil/healthwellness).

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | August 4, 2017 ++]

## \* Finances \*



### Forever Stamps Update 01 ► Price Increase Coming Soon

It may be time to stock up on Forever stamps. Regulators appear likely to accept the financially beleaguered Postal Service's request for more freedom to raise the price of mailing letters. It would be the biggest change in the Postal Service's pricing system in nearly a half-century, allowing stamp prices to rise beyond the rate of inflation. After a 10-year review, the Postal Regulatory Commission could make its decision next month. It might limit how high prices could go, but the cost of a first-class stamp, now 49 cents, could jump. It's not known how much.



Financial analysts praise the plan, but it has raised the ire of the mail-order industry, which could pay millions more for sending items like prescription drugs and magazines and pass the costs onto consumers. The Postal Service is trying to stay financially afloat as it seeks to invest billions in new delivery trucks to get packages more nimbly to American homes. An independent agency of government, the Postal Service has lost money for 10 consecutive years. While online shopping has led to years of double-digit growth in its package-delivery business, it hasn't offset declines in first-class mail. Overall mail volume, which makes up more than two-thirds of postal revenue, dropped 27 percent over the last decade as people rely more on email and online bill payments.

Congress' failure to address the Postal Service's underlying financial woes, such as onerous requirements to pre-fund retiree health benefits, has left the commission more likely to embrace the request for more pricing freedom. The Postal Service has ruled out closing post offices and ending Saturday delivery to reduce costs. "We are calling for action from Congress, but we'll do what we have to, based on the reality of what is," Robert Taub, the

Republican chairman of the regulatory commission, said in a telephone interview. He declined to comment on the upcoming decision, but stressed a need to fix the balance sheet at the 242-year-old Postal Service, which generates \$71 billion in annual revenue.

The decision comes as internet sales continue to flourish, led by Amazon, spurring consumer demand for ever-faster and cheaper delivery. Forty percent of the e-commerce giant's packages are delivered by the Postal Service, compared to 20 to 25 percent by United Parcel Service and 15 to 20 percent for FedEx, thanks to lower package delivery rates the Postal Service can offer by tapping into a network that already delivers to every U.S. household six days a week. Still, growing competition is challenging postal dominance in the "last mile" portion of delivery, the final and usually most expensive stretch of a package's journey to a customer's door. Amazon has been testing the use of drones and launched Amazon Flex, a network of contract drivers similar to courier services offered by Uber. UPS has been trying deliveries via golf carts.

The post office also takes hits for perceived bad service, including Reddit threads devoted to consumer complaints about lackluster home delivery attempts. "Price increases are long overdue," said David G. Ross, a shipping analyst at Stifel Financial Corp., noting that first-class stamp prices in countries like Germany cost the equivalent of 80 cents or more. He said the Postal Service needs "to make the investment and deliver the packages so that Amazon doesn't have to do it themselves." But shipping rival UPS views loosened stamp rates as anticompetitive, by having stamps essentially subsidize package deliveries. If the post office could freely raise stamp prices, UPS wrote the commission in March, mailers would "end up paying for investments and expenses they do not benefit from, while the Postal Service leverages those investments to undercut efficient private-sector rivals in competitive markets." The periodicals industry argues the Postal Service needs more pricing oversight, because of its monopoly in delivering letter-sized mail.

The Postal Service, which reached its debt limit of \$15 billion and runs perilously low in cash every October, has avoided bankruptcy by defaulting on billions of dollars in the health prepayments. It also has postponed much-needed upgrades to information technology systems. Still, the Postal Service hopes to replace its vehicles, many 30 years old and wearing down. A purchase order worth up to \$6 billion would cover up to 140,000 trucks. The tall right-hand drive vehicles would accommodate slim letters and oversized packages alike, more akin to fuel-efficient UPS trucks.

A big reason for the Postal Service's losses has been a requirement under a 2006 law that it prefund 75 years' worth of retiree health benefits. Neither the government nor private companies are required to do that. Bipartisan legislation passed by a House committee would ease much of the problems caused by the law. But it faces uncertain prospects. Ravi Shanker, an equity analyst at Morgan Stanley, said even if regulators lift the cap on stamp prices, legislation is still needed to address the health payments. "Given the size of the balance sheet hole, the Postal Service would have to raise prices astronomically to fix it," he said. Ross, the shipping analyst, said the Postal Service would have to show restraint in raising rates or risk losing price-sensitive customers. Overly high rates, Ross said, would only "accelerate the demise of first-class mail. [Source: The Associated Press | Hope Yen | August 9, 2017 ++]

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## **Apple Support Scam ► Beware Phony Responses Seeking Money**

Have an Apple device and iCloud account? Don't let this new scam fool you. Con artists are calling people across the United States and Canada and claiming that their iCloud accounts have been hacked. BBB Scam Tracker has gotten numerous reports of this scam in the past few weeks, and some targets say they've gotten 10 or more calls a day!

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

- You get a robocall claiming to be from Apple Support. You Caller ID may say "Apple Inc." or the name of your local Apple store. The message informs you that your iCloud account was hacked and prompts you to stay on the line and speak to an Apple support "technician."
- If you stay on the line, this "technician" will offer to fix your account. But first, they will need remote access to your computer. Unfortunately, allowing a scammer to access your computer can open you up to the risk of identity theft. Scam artists can install malware that records passwords or hunts for personal information, such as bank account numbers, on your computer.

**Protect yourself from tech support scams:**

- **Don't ever give a stranger remote access to your machine:** Granting someone remote access to your computer permits them to install malware and access your files. Don't do it!
- **Don't believe Caller ID:** Victims report falling for this scam because the calls appear to come from Apple Support. Scammers often spoof phone numbers, so don't believe what you see on your phone.
- **Check out BBB Tips:** Many tech support scams use similar techniques. For more advice see [www.bbb.org/techsupportscam](http://www.bbb.org/techsupportscam)

Thanks to the BBB Serving Central California & Inland Empire Counties for [their reporting](#) on this scam. Learn more about scams impersonating Apple by visiting [this page on support.apple.com](http://this.page.on.support.apple.com). To learn more about scams, go to BBB Scam Tips ([bbb.org/scamtips](http://bbb.org/scamtips)). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker ([bbb.org/scamtracker](http://bbb.org/scamtracker)). [Source: BBB Scam Alert | August 11, 2017 ++]

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**Tax Burden for South Dakota Retired Vets ► As of AUG 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 South Dakota

**Sales Taxes**

**State Sales Tax:** 4.50% (prescription drugs exempt); municipalities may add up to an additional 2.75%.

Residents who are age 65 and older and have a yearly income of under \$10,250 (single) or in a household where the total income was under \$13,250 are eligible for a sales tax refund.

**Gasoline Tax:** : 48.40 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 54.40 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Cigarette Tax:** \$1.53 cents/pack of 20

\* Tax rates do not include local option tax of 1 cent.

**Personal Income Taxes**

No state personal income tax

**Retirement Income:** Not taxed.

**Property Taxes**

Property is assessed at 85% of market value between counties. Assessors determine the market value of property by using a combination of the following three approaches: (1) Cost approach whereby the assessor estimates the cost of replacing the property (structures), reduces that amount by its age (depreciation) and adds the value of the land. (2) Market approach whereby the assessor compares the subject property to like properties that have recently been sold.

(3) Income approach in whereby the assessor uses the value of the projected income from a property to determine its value. For more information refer to <http://dor.sd.gov>.

Property taxes are assessed and collected by local government entities. A tax freeze and/or municipal property tax reduction is available for seniors age 65 and older, and disabled persons. Single homeowners 66 and older who earn \$10,250 or less can get a refund of up to 35% of taxes paid. Multi-person households headed by someone 66 and older, where the combined income is \$13,250 or less, are eligible for a refund of up to 55% of taxes paid. The state has several other property tax relief programs. For details, refer to

- <http://dor.sd.gov>,
- <http://dor.sd.gov/#Sales%20and%20Property%20Tax%20Refund%20for%20Senior%20&%20Disabled%20Citizens>

There is a property tax exemption for disabled veterans. Veterans that have been rated as permanently and totally disabled as the result of a service connected disability may be eligible for up to \$100,000 of their property value to be exempt from property taxes. For details refer to <http://dor.sd.gov>. The state has a property tax homestead exemption that delays payment of property taxes until the property is sold. Taxes are a lien on the property and must be paid along with 4% interest before the property can be transferred. For a single person annual income must be less than \$16,000. For a multimember household, the limit is \$20,000. For more information on this and all property taxes refer to <http://dor.sd.gov>.

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

There is no inheritance tax and the estate tax is limited and related to federal estate tax collection.

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For further information, visit the South Dakota Department of Revenue site <http://dor.sd.gov> or call 800-829-9188.

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com> | August 2017 ++]

**\* General Interest \***



## **Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 31 JUL 2017**

- **Weapons.** The body of a man convicted of fatally stabbing three people in 1972 has been removed from the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown. DVA spokeswoman Emily Hein recently told [the New Haven Register](#) that Guillermo Aillon's body was exhumed from the cemetery 3 JUL. The removal came after the Register reported last year that Aillon was illegally buried at the cemetery. Federal law bans people sentenced to life in prison for capital crimes from being buried in veterans cemeteries that receive federal funding.
- **Threats.** Terrence McNeil was sentenced 2 AUG to 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to charges involving threatening U.S. military members online on behalf of the Islamic State. He pleaded guilty earlier to five counts of solicitation to commit a crime of violence and five counts of making threatening interstate communications. McNeil posted a file on his Tumblr page in September 2015 containing names and addresses of military personnel. The 24-year-old Akron man allegedly urged Islamic State supporters to behead those mentioned in the file.
- **Icebreaker.** The Commandant of the Coast Guard is "very confident" US shipyards can build the country's first icebreaker in 20 years for less than the standard eye-watering \$1 billion estimate. Adm. Paul Zukunft dismissed the idea of cutting costs by buying abroad, a toxic concept for Congress.

- **VA Hiring Policy.** Congress has passed another bill (S. 114) with reforms to the Department of Veterans Affairs that is now on its way to the White House. The bill is primarily being hailed for authorizing more funds for the Veterans Choice Program. While it certainly does that, it contains a number of other human resources functions. It will prevent rehiring previously fired employees.
- **Military Transgenders.** Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin says his department has compassion for the transgender vets whom the President is kicking out of the military. He spoke with resolve ... if anyone -- transgender people included -- serves in the military, they will get medical and other care for life.
- **Driving.** AAA has **dubbed** the period between Memorial Day and Labor Day — when teen drivers are out of school — as the “100 Deadliest Days.” During this stretch of summer, the average number of fatal teen driver accidents is 15 percent higher than it is the rest of the year.
- **Driving.** There are three days of the week to be wary of: Thursday and Friday are the days on which distracted driving is most frequent. Friday is the day on which risky acceleration, such as hard acceleration, is most frequent. Sunday is the day on which speeding is most frequent.
- **USPS.** The U.S. Postal Service lost \$2.1 billion in the third quarter of fiscal 2017, including \$587 million in what the agency deems “controllable losses,” a significant increase over the previous year.
- **Federal Employees.** The Trump administration has shed nearly 11,000 federal employees during its first six months, reversing a two year trend of gains throughout the executive branch. Agencies had gained 50,000 feds during Obama's last two years.
- **JUL CPI.** The July CPI is 238.617, 1.5 percent above the FY 2016 COLA baseline. The CPI for August 2017 is scheduled to be released on September 14, 2017. The CPI is used to adjust annuities for other federal retirees, survivors, and Social Security recipients.
- **Legionnaires' disease.** Two Brooke Army Medical Center staff members tested positive for bacteria linked to the fast-spreading type of pneumonia known as Legionnaires' disease, the [San Antonio Current](#) in Texas reported. The two staff members work in an administrative building, not the medical center's hospital, according to the report, and workers in the building have been relocated. The two cases qualify as an “outbreak,” BAMC officials said in a news release.
- **B-24 Liberator.** Check out <https://www.youtube.com/embed/iKlt6rNciTo?rel=0> to see how Ford geared up 6 months before the start of WWII to build one every 55 minutes. Each was made up of 1,250,000 parts.
- **Venezuela.** The Pentagon has received no orders from the White House to attack Venezuela, spokesman Eric Pahon said 11 AUG. The Pentagon found itself in the unusual position to have to push back on any idea it would deploy troops to Venezuela after President Donald Trump offered at a press briefing Friday that “a military option is certainly something that we could pursue.”
- **USAF Bomber Fleet.** Less than half of the bombers President Donald Trump would rely upon to be “locked and loaded” against North Korea could launch as of 12 AUG if needed, according to the latest Air Force figures available.
- **Gulf War Claims.** A Veterans Affairs office in New Mexico during the 2015 fiscal year denied more than 90 percent of benefit claims related to Gulf War illnesses, marking the ninth-lowest approval rating among VA sites nationwide, according to a federal report.

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## War With Korea? ► Nobody Told the U.S. Military

If you watch cable news or follow the president's Twitter feed, you might be under the impression that the U.S. is heading to war with North Korea. But somebody, it seems, forgot to loop in the U.S. military. North Korea is threatening to launch missiles toward Guam; U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted 11 AUG that military options were “locked and loaded;” NBC News ran a story Wednesday claiming the U.S. had “prepared a plan” to strike



North Korean missile sites with B-1 bombers. But while the rhetoric is nearing a fever pitch in D.C., out in the Pacific you'd never know the world was on the brink of nuclear war.



**North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, center, inspecting the defence detachment on Jangjae Islet and the Hero Defense Detachment on Mu Islet located in the southernmost part of the waters off the southwest front.**

In Yokosuka, Japan, the U.S. Navy's forward-deployed ready aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan sits peacefully pier-side, along with the U.S. 7th Fleet command ship Blue Ridge. On the Korean Peninsula, the State Department has not advised American citizens to leave the country and U.S. military family members are not being evacuated. No Marines are being loaded on amphibious ships; no sailors have been recalled off leave to prepare for emergency operations; and no ballistic missile defense ships have been sortied to North Korea, the waters off Japan or to Guam, three sources said.

The frenzied rhetoric being propelled by the president's words and fed back by the news cycle is, for the second time this year, failing to match what's actually happening, sources told Defense News. Publicly, the U.S. military is saying that the United States maintains a high state of readiness to respond to any attacks. "We always maintain a high state of readiness and have the capabilities to counter any threat, to include those from North Korea," Marine Lt. Col. Christopher Logan said in a statement. But privately, military and U.S. officials are hard-pressed to avoid a sense of déjà vu. In April, a confusing statement from U.S. 3rd Fleet about the carrier Carl Vinson led the news media and, it seemed, the White House to believe the ship was steaming full-speed toward North Korea to send a message.

A series of confusing statements from the Pentagon and the White House sent world leaders and the media into a frenzy that only abated after Defense News reported that the carrier was not headed to North Korea but was, in fact, thousands of miles away in the Indian Ocean. "This may come as a shock, but the rhetoric doesn't match reality," a U.S. official said. "[I'm] worried about a 'Guns of August' scenario, where we stumble into a conflict," referring to the popular history book of World War I that argued the war happened because of a series of diplomatic miscues. Out at U.S. Pacific Command, or PACOM, the command that would lead any attack on North Korea, its situation normal, according to a source familiar who spoke on background. "Nobody at PACOM is setting their hair on fire; its calm and professional," the source said. "It's really D.C. rhetoric that's driving this whole thing."

The latest war frenzy was kicked off by a story in the Washington Post on 8 AUG that reported U.S. intelligence has concluded in a new assessment that North Korea had managed to miniaturize a nuclear warhead, a key step in being able to threaten the U.S. mainland with an intercontinental ballistic missile. That evening, Trump was asked about the report and responded by implying he would order military action if North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un

continued with his bellicose rhetoric. "North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States," Trump told reporters. "They will be met with fire and the fury like the world has never seen."

A good example of the tension and sensitivity around Korea was on example the afternoon of 11 AUG when the Korean analyst community was paying careful to the flights of any B-1 Lancer bombers stationed as Andersen Air Force Base, Guam. A 9 AUG statement from the North Korea KCNA newswire, a public mouthpiece for Pyongyang, specifically stated that the military is considering firing near Guam in order to "contain the U.S. major military bases on Guam including the Anderson Air Force Base in which the U.S. strategic bombers, which get on the nerves of the DPRK and threaten and blackmail it through their frequent visits to the sky above south Korea, are stationed and to send a serious warning signal to the U.S."

While the B-1 Lancer is no longer nuclear capable, analysts who closely monitor KCNA statements believe the "strategic bomber" phrase here is a reference to the planes, and raised concerns that further B-1 flights might be seen as a trigger for North Korea to initiate another missile launch. The U.S. has flown B-1s near Korean airspace in the past as a show of force. On 11 AUG, tweets citing publicly available aviation data seemed to indicate a pair of B-1s were just returning from a run into South Korea. The timing of those flights coincided with video, released on the Pentagon-run DVIDs site, showing two B-1s taking off at Anderson and marked as having launched on Aug. 11, leading to a rash of questions about whether the U.S. had purposefully challenged North Korea on that issue.

However, a U.S. Air Force spokesperson said the B-1s have not flown missions over the Korean peninsula since 7 AUG, a day before Trump's "fire and fury" comments helped ramp up tensions between the United States and North Korea. "The B-1s at Andersen routinely fly a variety of mission profiles across the Indo-Asia-Pacific," said Maj. Phil Ventura, a spokesman for Pacific Air Forces. "They did not fly any sorties yesterday from Andersen into Korean airspace. Last mission that fit that profile was the Aug 7 bilateral with Japanese and then Korean air forces." Asked specifically if any B-1s had flown over the Korean peninsula in the last 36 hours, Ventura said no.

Situations such as that, and the speed of the escalating crisis, has stunned veterans of the executive branch. "We went from 0 to 100 miles per hour because somebody decided it was a good idea to tell the Washington Post about an ... intelligence assessment and the president reacted to the story in the media," said one former Obama administration official who spoke on background. What's even more galling is that nothing has substantially changed in the situation with North Korea that would have precipitated the escalating rhetoric other than Trump's reaction to a news report, the source said. "We've known for years that Kim Jong Un has sought to miniaturize nuclear warheads," the source said. "What we are seeing is an how echo-chamber of hyperbole can spin out of control to the point where the entire Korean Peninsula is on the edge of a nuclear crisis. That's the power these leaks have now."

[Source: DefenseNews | David B. Larter | August 11, 2017 ++]

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## Teen Drivers ► Stressing safety

Sweet 16. Most teenagers can't wait to reach that birthday for one reason: a driver's license. But with that milestone comes a sobering statistic: Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Summer is an especially dangerous time of year for teenage drivers. Typically, more teens are behind the wheel, taking unfamiliar routes, carrying friends and staying out later. Those factors, combined with the usual risks of driving, make the months between Memorial Day and Labor Day the most deadly for teen drivers, according to the National Safety Council. Before you hand over the keys, here are some recommendations to help your new driver get to and from their destination safely:

**1. Set an example.** Have every passenger buckle up. Put your cellphone away, even at red lights. Drive the speed limit, and try to minimize distractions.

**2. Find a safe vehicle.** Check the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's list of the safest used cars for teens at [iihs.org](http://iihs.org). Vehicles — like Toyota Prius, Kia Sorento and Chevrolet Malibu — earn spots by doing well in crash rating tests.

**3. Monitor and coach.** Use USAA's Automatic License+™, a free program designed to help teens build safe skills behind the wheel. The program uses a free adapter to collect driving data, which can be viewed on a smartphone app so you can encourage good driving habits and discuss areas that need improvement. It's accessible at [usaa.com/coachingyoungdrivers](http://usaa.com/coachingyoungdrivers).

**4. Talk about texting.** Ask your teen to read and sign the It Can Wait texting pledge, at [itcanwait.usaa.com](http://itcanwait.usaa.com). "It's a great way for parents and teens to start the conversation about safe driving," says Shayna Dickson, a lead programs underwriter for USAA.

**5. Practice a lot.** Ride with your teen often, and consider a defensive driving course, which may qualify you for insurance discounts.

[Source: USAA | August 2, 2017 ++]

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## The Greatest Generation ► I Remember This - Do You?

Children of the greatest generation (and their children - so they will understand). Born in the 1930s and early 40s, we exist as a very special agecohort.

- We are the Silent Generation
- We are the smallest number of children born since the early 1900s.
- We are the last generation, climbing out of the depression, who can remember the winds of war and the impact of a world at war which rattled the structure of our daily lives for years.
- We are the last to remember ration books for everything from gas to sugar to shoes to stoves.
- We saved tin foil and poured fat into tin cans.
- We hand mixed 'white stuff' with 'yellow stuff' to make fake butter.
- We saw cars up on blocks because tires weren't available.
- We can remember milk being delivered to our house early in the morning and placed in the "milk box" on the porch. [A friend's mother delivered milk in a horse drawn cart.] We sometimes fed the horse, and our dog, Spot, a Fox Terrier, would greet the milkman when he made our delivery, then he would ride in Glenn's truck till the end of his route, when Glenn would drive by the house and let Spot off the truck just in time to greet us coming home from elementary school.
- We are the last to hear Roosevelt 's radio assurances and to see gold stars in the front windows of our grieving neighbors.
- We can also remember the parades on August 15, 1945; VJ Day.
- We saw the 'boys' home from the war, build their Cape Cod style houses, pouring the cellar, tar papering it over and living there until they could afford the time and money to build it out.
- We remember trying to buy a new car after the war. The new cars were coming through with wooden bumpers.
- We are the last generation who spent childhood without television; instead we imagined what we heard on the radio. As we all like to brag, with no TV, we spent our childhood "playing outside until the street lights came on."

- We did play outside and we did play on our own. There was no little league. There was no city playground for kids. To play in the water, we turned the fire hydrants on and ran through the spray.
- The lack of television in our early years meant, for most of us, that we had little real understanding of what the world was like.
- Our Saturday afternoons, if at the movies, gave us newsreels of the war sandwiched in between westerns and cartoons.
- Telephones were one to a house, often shared and hung on the wall.
- Computers were called calculators, only added and were hand cranked; typewriters were driven by pounding fingers, throwing the carriage, and changing the ribbon.
- The 'internet' and 'GOOGLE' were words that didn't exist.
- Newspapers and magazines were written for adults and the news was broadcast on our table radio in the evening by H.V Kaltenborne and Gabriel Heatter.
- We are the last group who had to find out for ourselves. As we grew up, the country was exploding with growth. The G.I. Bill gave returning veterans the means to get an education and spurred colleges to grow. VA loans fanned a housing boom. Pent up demand coupled with new installment payment plans put factories to work. New highways would bring jobs and mobility. The veterans joined civic clubs and became active in politics.
- In the late 40's and early 50's the country seemed to lie in the embrace of brisk but quiet order as it gave birth to its new middle class (which became known as 'Baby Boomers').
- The radio network expanded from 3 stations to thousands of stations.
- The telephone started to become a common method of communications and "Faxes" sent hard copy around the world.
- Our parents were suddenly free from the confines of the depression and the war and they threw themselves into exploring opportunities they had never imagined. We weren't neglected but we weren't today's all-consuming family focus. They were glad we played by ourselves 'until the street lights came on.' They were busy discovering the post war world.
- Most of us had no life plan, but with the unexpected virtue of ignorance and an economic rising tide we simply stepped into the world and started to find out what the world was about. We entered a world of overflowing plenty and opportunity; a world where we were welcomed. Based on our naïve belief that there was more where this came from, we shaped life as we went. We enjoyed a luxury; we felt secure in our future.
- Of course, just as today, not all Americans shared in this experience. Depression poverty was deep rooted. Polio was still acrippler. The Korean War was a dark presage in the early 50s and by mid-decade school children were ducking under desks. Russia built the "Iron Curtain" and China became Red China. Eisenhower sent the first 'advisors' to Vietnam ; and years later, Johnson invented a war there. Castro set up camp in Cuba and Khrushchev came to power.
- We are the last generation to experience an interlude when there were no existential threats to our homeland.
- We came of age in the 40s and early 50s. The war was over and the cold war, terrorism, technological upheaval, "global warming", and perpetual economic insecurity had yet to haunt life with insistent unease.
- Only our generation can remember both a time of apocalyptic war and a time when our world was secure and full of bright promise and plenty. We have lived through both.
- We grew up at the best possible time, a time when the world was getting better. not worse.
- We are the Silent Generation - "The Last Ones".
- More than 99.9% of us are either retired or deceased, and feel to have "lived in the best of times"!

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## Driver's Riskiest Periods ► EverQuote's Statistics

Ah, summer: the season of warm weather, vacations and school breaks — and therefore busier roads. AAA has dubbed the period between Memorial Day and Labor Day — when teen drivers are out of school — as the “100 Deadliest Days.” During this stretch of summer, the average number of fatal teen driver accidents is 15 percent higher than it is the rest of the year. If you’re out on the road, some days of the week are more dangerous than others, according to new statistics from the auto insurance data website EverQuote. The statistics come from EverQuote’s safe-driving app, EverDrive. The app passively monitors users’ driving habits to give them feedback they can review later with the aim of improving their driving skills.

- The data from the app show there are three days of the week to be wary of: Thursday and Friday are the days on which distracted driving is most frequent. Friday is the day on which risky acceleration, such as hard acceleration, is most frequent. Sunday is the day on which speeding is most frequent.
- There’s also a time of day to be wary of — rush hour. Specifically, between 4 and 6 p.m., the largest number of EverDrive users (69 percent) were found to speed. During the same time span, the largest number of users (68 percent) were also found to be using their phones — which could involve answering a call, texting or checking social media.
- Other discomfoting statistics include that the average drive lasts 21 minutes and people who use their phone while driving spend about 7 percent of that drive time on their phones, on average. That amounts to about 88 seconds of phone use per drive — enough time to drive the equivalent of 17 football fields, assuming a speed of 55 mph.
- Perhaps not surprisingly, Expedia found last year that texting is the behind-the-wheel behavior that sparks the most road rage among Americans.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsler | July 31, 2017 ++]

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## GTMO Prison Update 10 ► 9/11 Pretrial Hearings May Resume

A U.S. military judge ruled 2 AUG that pretrial hearings may resume for five men accused in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack after a delay over travel logistics at the Guantanamo Bay detention center was resolved. Army Col. James Pohl lifted his own stay on proceedings issued in July, the latest in a series of procedural delays in the prosecution of the five suspects before a military commission for alleged roles planning and adding the attacks.

For years Pohl and other judges presiding over terrorism cases at Guantanamo had traveled across the bay from an airstrip to the courthouse in a small Coast Guard speedboat instead of a ferry used by most other visitors to the isolated base. But in June the detention center commander abruptly said they could no longer use the vessel, for reasons that were never made public. In response, Pohl and the judge presiding over a separate case put future proceedings on indefinite hold. They said the change interfered with their attempts to avoid mixing with witnesses and other case participants and could jeopardize their effort to ensure a fair trial. They said they should have been consulted beforehand.

Pohl said in his 2 AUG ruling that the military agreed to provide a small boat to transport the judges and their staff, resolving the issue in time for a pretrial hearing scheduled to last up to five days later this month. The five men charged in the Sept. 11 case have been held at Guantanamo since September 2006 and were arraigned in May 2012 on charges including terrorism and nearly 3,000 counts of murder in violation of the law of war. They could get the death penalty if convicted. No trial date has been set. [Source: The Associated Press | August 2, 2017 ++]

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## Air Force One Update 01 ► Air Force to Buy Abandoned Jetliner

President Donald Trump said the projected cost of new Air Force One aircraft was too high, so the U.S. Air Force found a way to lower it: by buying a pair of Boeing 747 jetliners abandoned by a bankrupt Russian airline. Air Force officials are now finalizing a contract with Boeing for the two planes, according to three defense officials with knowledge of the deal. The Pentagon could publicly announce the deal as soon as this week. “We’re working through the final stages of coordination to purchase two commercial 747-8 aircraft and expect to award a contract soon,” Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek said in a statement.

The Air Force is not expected to disclose the specific value of the contract, but officials said that the military is getting a good deal on the planes. Boeing lists the average sticker price of a 747-8 as \$386.8 million; the actual amount paid by airlines and other customers varies with quantities, configurations, and so forth. “We’re still working toward a deal to provide two 747-8s to the Air Force — this deal is focused on providing a great value for the Air Force and the best price for the taxpayer,” Boeing spokeswoman Caroline Hutcheson said in a statement. The 747s that will be transformed for Presidential transport were originally ordered in 2013 by Transaero, which was Russia’s second-largest airline until it went bankrupt in 2015. Boeing built two of the four jets in the order, but the airline never took ownership of them.

Typically, an airline makes a 1 percent down payment when it orders a plane, then pays the balance in installments. Transaero did not fulfill its scheduled payments, according to an industry source. “Aeroflot absorbed most of Transaero’s existing fleet, but declined to pick up Transaero’s 747-8I orders worth \$1.5 billion at list prices,” FlightGlobal reported last month. So Boeing flight-tested the two completed jets and put them in storage. Flight tracking data shows that the aircraft, numbered N894BA and N895BA, were last flown in February, to the Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville, a sprawling facility in the Mojave Desert whose hot, dry air prevents corrosion.

This “boneyard” is largely occupied by retired commercial jets that still bear the liveries of Delta, FedEx, British Airways, and Cathay Pacific. Other planes, unmarked, sit with their engines shrinkwrapped in anticipation of one day returning to flight. Boeing has been paying to store the two 747s in new condition while searching for a buyer, which allowed the Air Force to negotiate a good deal for them, sources said. It’s similar to the way car dealers discount new vehicles from the previous year when new models hit the lot.

Turning a standard 747 into a flying White House requires more than a blue-and-white paint job. After the Air Force takes ownership of the planes, contractors will give them a state-of-the-art communications system, defensive countermeasures, and hardening to withstand an electromagnetic pulse caused by a nuclear explosion. New custom interiors will have conference rooms, offices and seating for White House staff, guests and journalists. The Pentagon’s 2018 budget request, sent to Congress in February, shows that the Air Force plans to spend nearly \$3.2 billion between 2018 and 2022 on two new Air Force One jets. Trump would likely fly on the new planes if he is elected to a second term.

The 747s currently flown as Air Force One are 747-200s, older models that started flying presidents in the early 1990s. Nicknamed the “Queen of the Skies,” the four-engined 747 has been a tough sell in recent years. Airlines instead have opted for cheaper-to-fly two-engine planes like the 777. Boeing has likely built the last passenger 747; any future orders are likely to be for cargo versions. United and Delta, the last two American carriers to fly older models of the 747, plan to retire the plane from service by year’s end. Just last week, the iconic aircraft made its last Planned Domestic Revenue Flight, A United Trip From Chicago To San Francisco. [Source: Defense One | Marcus Weisgerber | July 14, 2017 ++]

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## Garage Door Billboards ► Making Yours Stand Out (07)



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## Have You Heard? ► Silver Surfers | Trip to Rome

Silver Surfers sometimes have trouble with their computers. When one California retiree had a problem accessing his files he called Eric, the 11-year-old next door, whose bedroom looks like Mission Control, and asked him to come over.

Eric clicked a couple of buttons and solved the problem. As Eric was walking away, the retiree called after him, 'So, what was wrong?'

Eric replied, 'It was an ID ten T error.'

The retiree didn't want to appear stupid, but nonetheless inquired, 'An, ID ten T error? What's that? In case I need to fix it again.'

Eric grinned. 'Haven't you ever heard of an ID ten T error before? 'No,' the retiree replied.

'Write it down,' Eric said, 'and I think you'll figure it out.'

So he wrote down: **ID10T** and was able to figure it out

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A woman was at her hairdresser's getting her hair styled for a trip to Rome with her husband.

She mentioned the trip to the hairdresser, who responded: "Rome? Why would anyone want to go there? It's crowded and dirty. You're crazy to go to Rome. So, how are you getting there?"

"We're taking Continental Airlines," was the reply. "We got a great rate!"

"Continental?" exclaimed the hairdresser. "That's a terrible airline. Their planes are old, their flight attendants are ugly, and they're always late. So, where are you staying in Rome?"

"We'll be at this exclusive little place over on Rome's Tiber River called Teste."

"Don't go any further... I know that place. Everybody thinks it's going to be something special and exclusive, but it's really a dump."

The woman continued "We're going to go to see the Vatican and maybe get to see the Pope."

"That's rich," laughed the hairdresser. You and a million other people trying to see him. He'll look the size of an ant. Boy, good luck on this lousy trip of yours. You're going to need it."

A month later, the woman again came in for a hairdo. The hairdresser asked her about her trip to Rome.

"It was wonderful," explained the woman, "not only were we on time in one of Continental's brand new planes, but it was overbooked, and they bumped us up to first class. The food and wine was wonderful, and I had a handsome 28-year-old steward who waited on me hand and foot. And the hotel was great! They'd just finished a \$5 million remodeling job, and now it's a jewel, the finest hotel in the city. They, too, were overbooked, so they apologized and gave us their owner's suite at no extra charge!"

"Well," muttered the hairdresser, "that's all well and good, but I know you didn't get to see the Pope."

"Actually, we were quite lucky, because as we toured the Vatican, a Swiss Guard tapped me on the shoulder, and explained that the Pope likes to meet some of the visitors, and if I'd be so kind as to step into his private room and wait, the Pope would personally greet me. Sure enough, five minutes later, the Pope walked through the door and shook my hand! I knelt down and he spoke a few words to me."

"Oh, really! What did he say?"

He said: "**Who the Hell did your hair?**"

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