

# RAO

# BULLETIN

## 1 October 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).

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## BRAC Update 59 ► Pentagon Supports McCain/Reed 2019 Proposal

The Pentagon supports a proposal to authorize a base closure round in 2019 from Sens. John McCain and Jack Reed, the top Pentagon official in charge of military installations said Tuesday. The Pentagon's new assistant defense secretary for energy, installations and environment, Lucian Niemeyer, said the Department of Defense backs their proposal to launch a base realignment and closure, or BRAC, process. That proposal would have the Government Accountability Office, and not an independent commission, validate the analysis before Congress makes the final call.

Speaking at a Heritage Foundation forum, Niemeyer said base closures could not only save money but help the military reorganize for the next generation of military technologies as it conducts a highly anticipated defense strategy review. "For us, it's not just a matter finding efficiencies; it's a matter of improving military value and effectiveness and lethality of our forces," Niemeyer said. "That's why we continue to push hard and we support the Senate's attempt to try to get a BRAC authorization started in 2019 [through] the [National] Defense Authorization Act."

Yet the proposal faces headwinds in Congress, where BRACs are notoriously unpopular for hurting communities where bases are closed. Because McCain and Reed — the Senate Armed Services Committee chairman and ranking member respectively — are championing the BRAC round, "there is real hope this year" it will be approved, said Andrew Hunter, a former congressional staffer now with the Center for Strategic and International Studies. McCain (R-AZ) and Reed (D-RI) proposed a new BRAC round as an amendment to the annual defense policy bill. Under the plan, the list of potential base closures and realignments would be compiled by the DoD and reviewed by the GAO before it is certified by the president and submitted to Congress by the fall of 2019. There would be a 60-day public comment period and, finally, an up or down vote by Congress.

Niemeyer hailed its provision, capping the cost of the closures and realignments at \$5 billion and nodded to a BRAC alternative from the House Armed Services Committee's ranking member, Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA) that would require more detailed cost estimates to be submitted to Congress. That may be a step toward winning over lawmakers like HASC Chairman Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX), who is among lawmakers who have attacked the upfront costs associated with the last BRAC round in 2005. He quashed a pro-BRAC amendment during a floor debate on the House defense policy bill in July.

There has been pushback against the McCain-Reed proposal from at least one SASC member, Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-NM). He told the Albuquerque Journal earlier this month it would invite more lobbying of the Pentagon by Congress, a development he says would not be productive. "I understand that the Pentagon wants to divest of assets that aren't materially contributing to our national security, but I'm not sure what problems are addressed by a new version of BRAC that involves more lobbying," Heinrich told the newspaper. Military leaders have pushed for another BRAC round since 2013, arguing that their current domestic footprint is too large given reductions in force size and equipment modernization in recent years. The DoD estimated under the last administration that it could close 22 percent excess capacity for a savings of \$2 billion or more annually by 2027.

In any case, almost none of that excess capacity is in the Navy, with most in the Army and Air Force, Hunter noted. He suggested lawmakers with ties to naval facilities may as a result find it easier to vote for a BRAC round. Still, the politics will likely be difficult to overcome. “In the past, the theory has been: When you know whose bases you are targeting with your vote, and that may be your friend, that may be someone who’s an ally to you on other issues, it makes it harder,” Hunter said. “That will be an interesting dynamic to see.” [Source: NavyTimes | Joe Gould | September 5, 2017 ++]

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## **BRAC Update 60 ► Support For The Initiative Is Gaining**

The Pentagon may finally get its wish for a new round of base closures. After requesting a new round of Base Realignment and Closure, or BRAC, for each of the last five years, it appears that support for the initiative is gaining. The intent of BRAC is efficiently maximizing readiness; having the right people, supplies, and support programs in the right places. The final decision on proceeding with a new round of BRAC will be made in conference committee during discussions on the National Defense Authorization bill. Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Jack Reed (D-RI), the top two lawmakers on the Senate Armed Services Committee, filed a joint amendment to the annual defense authorization bill to authorize a new BRAC. In the House, Rep. Adam Smith (D-Wash.), the number two member of the Armed Services Committee, spearheaded the initiative.

BRAC rounds often are justified by billions in annual savings from the defense budget. However, loss of military facilities can drastically change the economic dynamic of a region, occasionally for the worse. Some lawmakers remain skeptical, citing the initial losses incurred from the last round of closures in 2005 before any savings could be claimed. This week, Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-OK) penned an op-ed in the Washington Times arguing that resources to conduct a new BRAC could be better spent on military readiness. But with three of the top four members of the Armed Services Committees actively supporting a BRAC, it looks increasingly likely that the initiative could make it into the defense authorization bill’s final language.

Though all states are subject to review, five states harbor over half of all active duty military personnel: California, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. And just the rumors of another round of BRAC have several states scrambling to establish task forces to find ways to preserve their bases. This time, there is a new cause for concern. Typically, BRAC commissions decide how best to go about closing bases and shifting resources. The McCain-Reed amendment gives the Government Accountability Office (GAO) responsibility for picking which bases will be targeted. With recent reports suggesting over 20 percent excess capacity throughout current military infrastructure, GAO could be looking to make significant cuts. GAO is a numbers-based assessor, unlike commissions comprising individuals with knowledge of force-structure needs from past BRAC rounds.

Given an appropriate business case and the needs of servicemembers and their families are addressed, MOAA could support a BRAC. But it is imperative that GAO must look at this as more than just a numbers game. “If a BRAC is approved, we will work with our members to ensure the cascading effects on our retirees and veterans and their families are being addressed,” says Col. Dan Merry, USAF (Ret), MOAA’s vice president of Government Relations. “And we will have time to watch this develop, given the lengthy lead time and notification requirements.” [Source: MOAA Leg Up | September 15, 2017 ++]

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## **Exchange Online Shopping Update 12 ► Registration Required**

More than 95,000 people visited the military exchanges' [VetVerify.org website](http://VetVerify.org) in its first month, seeking to register for the new veterans online shopping benefit that starts 11 NOV, officials said. All honorably discharged veterans

will have access to the online exchanges as of that date. VetVerify is the first step in the eligibility process. Some veterans will be chosen as "beta testers" and will have access to the online stores before 11 NOV; the earlier veterans complete the verification process, the better their chances of becoming beta testers, according to officials with the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, which administers the verification for all the military exchange services. Veterans who register through VetVerify.org will receive notification of their acceptance as eligible online shoppers or, if their records are incomplete, will receive guidance on the steps they can take to update those records.

Officials were not able to provide information about how many of the 95,000 verification attempts have been successful. About 13 percent of the site's visitors have been chosen as beta testers, AAFES spokesman Chris Ward said, and others who registered for verification already were eligible to shop. Officials started the verification process early in preparation for at least 13 million people who will be newly eligible to shop online at the exchange. Until now, online military exchange shopping was available only to active-duty, reserve and National Guard members; retirees; 100 percent disabled veterans; the dependent family members of those individuals; and certain others. Online pricing can be seen only by those who are authorized to shop at the exchange websites:

- [www.shopmyexchange.com](http://www.shopmyexchange.com);
- [www.shopcgx.com](http://www.shopcgx.com);
- [www.mymcx.com](http://www.mymcx.com); and
- [www.mynavyexchange.com](http://www.mynavyexchange.com).

Military Times and the exchanges continue to get questions about the VetVerify website and the new shopping benefit. Here are a few frequently asked questions, and some answers, supplied by AAFES:

**Q. Is this site a [phishing scam](#)?**

**A.** No. VetVerify.org is a shared service for all the military exchanges with the sole purpose of supporting the newly approved veterans online shopping benefit. VetVerify.org uses data from Defense Manpower Data Center, which holds the most comprehensive dataset on veterans, to verify eligibility.

**Q. Do I qualify if I served for four years, or if I was in the reserves, or if I'm on disability?**

**A.** All honorably discharged veterans and those with a general (under honorable) discharge can shop their military exchanges, through the veterans online shopping benefit, beginning on Veterans Day.

**Q. Can my spouse (or other family member) shop?**

**A.** No. The new benefit is specific to veterans with honorable and general (under honorable conditions) discharges.

**Q. Does the veterans online shopping benefit extend to shopping at the commissary?**

**A.** No.

**Q. What if my service can't be verified?**

**A.** There may be further information needed, so you will need to submit a digital copy of your discharge paperwork to be reviewed for eligibility. After you submit your verification form through VetVerify.org, you will be prompted to upload the necessary paperwork.

**Q. Who should I call if I have problems with the verification process?**

**A.** The VetVerify.org customer call center, toll-free, at 844-868-8672.

**Q. Why does VetVerify ask for my entire Social Security number?**

**A.** VetVerify is required to obtain the last four digits of your Social Security number, date of birth and last name in order to validate and authenticate shoppers. If a match is not found with the minimum information, then the Social Security number is requested for a more detailed search. Social Security number is the unique identifier by Defense Manpower Data Center data. When customers visit the website of their favorite online exchanges for the first time,



however, they will create a new username to be used as the unique identifier with the exchange. VetVerify has taken appropriate measures to safeguard your personal information.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | July 10, 2017 ++]

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## **Hack The Air Force ► Pentagon Bounty Program Paid out \$130,000**

Jack Cable is 17 years old. With a thin build and large, square glasses, he looks like any unassuming high school senior from the Chicago suburbs. Except he's a military-grade hacker. Cable recently finished first in Hack the Air Force, a Pentagon-sponsored bug bounty program that recruited ethical hackers to find security holes within Air Force networks. In total, the service paid out \$130,000 for 207 vulnerabilities hackers uncovered in the competition. Cable himself found more than 30 of those, including one faulty admin panel that could have been exploited to upload files and modify content on a military website.

Cable is ranked 73rd overall among members of HackerOne, a worldwide community of thousands of hackers that organizes bug bounties in the public and private sector. His success in Hack the Air Force helped him rise to fifth in the group's third quarter rankings. The bug bounty program comes at a time when the government finds itself struggling to attract top talent like Cable to cybersecurity positions. Last week, the General Services Administration announced it will host its first ever tech and cyber recruiting event in November, where federal agencies could offer jobs to qualified candidates on the spot. [Source: NextGov | Jack Corrigan | September 2, 2017 ++]

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## **NDAA 2018 Update 12 ► Annual CRs Impact on Military Readiness**

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis scolded the Senate Armed Services Committee last June after some senators said they wouldn't be able to pass a defense authorization bill on time this year. "It's like we're all walking around as if we're victims." It appeared the target of his ire were lawmakers who routinely praise the military and habitually lament deteriorating readiness, yet lack the political courage year after year to reach a budget compromise with opponents so DoD can return to on time, predictable, and less wasteful budget cycles. The predictions from June came true 5 SEP when congressional leaders ignored warnings of armed services committee chairs and cut a deal with President Donald Trump that ensures for a ninth straight year DoD spending will be frozen for at least a quarter of the new fiscal year, which starts 1 OCT.

Military leaders have warned that chronic reliance on continuing resolutions (CRs) hobbles troop training, delays routine maintenance, erodes overall readiness, and drives up the cost of purchased services and weapons by billions of dollars annually. Combined with artificial caps on defense and nondefense spending imposed by the 2011 Budget Control Act (BCA), the CRs are harming a military now 16 years at war that faces increasing worldwide threats. Mattis told senators he was "shocked" by the deterioration in "our readiness to fight" in the four years since he retired as a four-star Marine Corps officer. He said "no enemy in the field has done more to harm" the military than Congress has in its refusal to end sequestration and restore budget stability.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, cited that criticism from June and separate testimony from the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the opening floor debate 12 SEP on the Senate's version of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act. McCain underscored that the greatest damage done to U.S. security over recent years has been "self-inflicted" by Congress. Apart from \$60 billion to fund current wars, or "overseas contingency operations," the Senate bill would authorize a base defense budget of \$640 billion. That would exceed



the cap set by the BCA by \$91 billion, McCain said, triggering sequestration, or automatic across-the-board cuts to all DoD programs, unless Congress intervenes.

Senate passage of the bill at least “will serve as evidence that an overwhelming bipartisan majority of this body agrees the status quo is not sufficient and we need to spend more money on defense to keep our nation safe,” McCain said. “Even so, the unfortunate truth is BCA is the law of the land, and \$549 billion is the only defense budget currently legal unless Congress acts.” McCain blamed the accidental deaths of 42 servicemembers in recent months during ship-at-sea collisions and other routine operations on Congress allowing an undersized, underfunded, and overburdened military to face worldwide threats:

- “We are killing more of our people in training than our enemies are in combat,” McCain said. He cited increasingly dire warnings from the joint chiefs that years of artificial caps and herky-jerky budget funding have allowed readiness to deteriorate for all but deployed forces and those next-to-deploy.
- “Every one of our military leaders have said ... what we've done with the so-called sequestration ... has put the lives of our servicemembers at greater risk. Don't we have an obligation not to do that?” McCain asked.

McCain and Sen. Jack Reed , ranking Democrat on the armed services committee, sent a letter two weeks ago to Mattis requesting details on readiness impacts of starting another fiscal year under a CR, which blocks new programs from starting and freezes spending at previous year levels. Mattis responded 8 SEP, three days after Trump already had cut a high-profile deal with Democrats and reluctant Republican leaders to raise the debt ceiling and keep the government funded through 8 DEC under a CR. The same legislation provided billions of dollars in hurricane relief to Texas and Florida. In his letter, Mattis played down the significance of another short-term CR and emphasized the greater risk to national security if arbitrary spending caps under the BCA weren't lifted. But a five-page attachment summarized the expected pain of another short-term CR for the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps.

- Ground forces training days will have to be “re-scoped and scaled” to meet essential tasks and requirements. Aircraft flying hours and ship steaming days will be restricted for units not in next-to-deploy rotations.
- The Air Force said a lack of funds during the CR would delay the stand up of two F-16 fighter training squadrons.
- The Navy predicted a shortage of maintenance dollars would delay 11 ships returning to the fleet.
- The Army said the new CR would leave operating accounts \$400 million short, forcing it to restrict home-station training and “noncritical” maintenance work orders. Military recruiting and civilian hires also will be cramped until the CR is lifted.
- Significant impacts are forecast for military contracts involving weapon buys and services, driving up costs and slowing modernization programs. The Army, for example, said 18 new weapon program starts will be delayed and so will eight production rate increases planned for items such as handguns and TOW2 (tube-launched, optically-tracked, wireless-guided) missiles.
- Budget instability also could hurt efforts by military associations to derail some cost-savings initiatives embraced by the Senate committee, or urged by the Trump administration, to curb spending on military personnel in 2018 and beyond.

The Senate committee embraced the Trump plan to cap the January 2018 military pay raise at 2.1 percent versus a full 2.4-percent raise to match private sector wage growth as endorsed in the House-passed version of the bill. Senators also support the administration's call to remove “grandfathering” protection from last year's defense bill that protects current retirees from higher TRICARE fees. The Senate bill also endorses the department's call for higher pharmacy copayments on TRICARE beneficiaries who use mail order or TRICARE retail outlets. The administration, however, opposes a Senate bill provision to cut Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) for many servicemembers married to other servicemembers. For dual service couples with children, the more senior-ranked member no longer would receive BAH at a higher “with dependents” rate. Both members would get the “without

dependents” rate. The administration argues this idea should be tossed as unfairly penalizing “families in which both spouses have chosen to serve their country and, by providing a lesser compensation package than other members of equal grade, send a clear message that their service is not valued as highly.”

McCain announced 13 SEP that Democrats and Republicans had agreed on a block of 104 amendments, but couldn't reach a deal on four others. The Senate was expected to pass its version of the defense authorization within a week. A House-Senate conference committee must iron out any differences before a final bill is passed by both chambers. [Source: MOAA Leg Up | Tom Philpott | September 15, 2017 ++]

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## **NDA 2018 Update 13 ► Remaining Issues to Resolve**

The U.S. Senate on 18 SEP voted 89-8 to pass a \$700 defense policy bill for 2018 that would exceed President Donald Trump's budget request and break statutory caps on defense spending. Now that the Senate has passed its draft of the annual defense authorization bill, Capitol Hill staffers can begin the complicated process of trying to reconcile it with the House's version in hopes of reaching compromise on a host of military policy issues. But some of the most controversial topics are already off the table, due to Senate leadership's decision to sideline a collection of controversial amendments. If a policy issue isn't included in either chamber's authorization legislation, lawmakers generally cannot include it in intramural conference.

In the conference, the House and Senate will have to hammer out their differences before a final version of the bill can be sent to the White House for a signature from the president. The conference committee will have to work quickly if they hope to pass a final version of the legislation before the end of the calendar year. Typically, the reconciliation work on the two competing bills begins in late summer, but the Senate vote was delayed by more than a month because of the ongoing health care fight and the cancer diagnosis of Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain (R-AZ) Here's a look at what items were left out of that upcoming conference committee work and what fights still lie ahead:

### **\*\* UNDER DISCUSSION — A pay raise for troops**

Troops will get a pay raise next year thanks to the final defense authorization bill. The only question that remains for lawmakers is how much. The Senate has backed a 2.1 percent pay boost for troops starting in January, while the House has approved a 2.4 percent one. The Senate's version syncs with the White House's planned raise for next year, while the House plan equals the expected rise in private sector wages. The differences between the plans is about \$85 less a year for junior enlisted personnel, \$130 for senior enlisted and junior officers, and \$240 for mid-career officers. But it's also about \$200 million in federal spending, money Pentagon officials have said would be better spent on other training and readiness. Despite agreeing with the president's plan this year, the Senate authorization bill calls for tighter restrictions on White House plans to limit military pay boosts in the future. House members have not yet weighed in on that proposal.

### **\*\* OFF THE TABLE — Base closings**

McCain and others had hoped to include a new base closings proposal in the Senate's draft of the military budget bill, but fights over other amendments blocked his ability to offer the proposal. The result is another authorization bill without any provisions for a Base Realignment and Closure commission, despite repeated pleas from Pentagon officials to cut the military's footprint across the country. The Defense Department's own studies have hinted that the armed forces may have up to 20 percent more capacity than the force needs now, but Defense Secretary James Mattis has publicly questioned the validity of that work in recent months. Nevertheless, the White House insists a base closing round could save billions annually. But the idea remains unpopular with many in Congress, especially after the 2005 round produced fewer savings than military experts predicted. Expect the issue to come up again in next year's budget debates.

**\*\* UNDER DISCUSSION — More troops**

In contrast to former President Barack Obama’s plans for a smaller military force, Republican leaders in the House, Senate and executive branch are intent on boosting military end strength in coming years. Last year, lawmakers approved an increase of 16,000 soldiers over Obama’s objections. In upcoming negotiations, they’ll have to decide how much further they want to go. President Donald Trump has called for a boost of about 4,000 sailors for the Navy and another 4,100 airmen for the Air Force. The Senate’s plan calls for those increases plus 5,000 more active-duty soldiers, 1,000 more Marines, and 1,000 more Army reservists and Guardsmen. But a plan outlined in the House draft of the authorization is even more ambitious. It calls for Trump’s additions plus another 1,700 members to the Air Force Reserves and Air National Guard, 1,000 to the Naval Reserve, 10,000 active-duty soldiers, 4,000 Army guardsmen and 3,000 Army Reservists. Conference committee members will have to balance those increases with costs. The House plan is expected to add as much as \$1.1 billion in additional spending annually, further boosting the country’s defense spending total.

**\*\* OFF THE TABLE — Transgender troops**

Like the base closing issue, several senators had hoped to broach the issue of new limits on transgender individuals serving in the ranks during debate on the chamber floor last week, but those plans were shelved by Senate leadership. Back in June, House members tried to do the opposite, unsuccessfully attempting to add language to their authorization bill that would prohibit the military from paying for transgender medical services. The issue became moot when Trump issued an executive order blocking those services later in the summer. The end result is neither draft of the budget legislation includes transgender policy language. A bipartisan group of senators has offered stand-alone legislation to force Trump to allow those individuals to serve, but it won’t be included in conference negotiations. Meanwhile, McCain has promised close oversight on the issue in months to come.

**\*\* UNDER DISCUSSION — More ships and aircraft**

Trump touted his proposed fiscal 2018 budget as the first step in a multi-year rebuild of the military, but lawmakers in both chambers see opportunities for even more new platforms. Trump’s plan calls for a ramp up of the embattled F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program, adding 70 new aircraft. The House plan calls for 87. The Senate’s version authorizes purchase of 94 of them. The Senate plan also calls for more F/A-18 Super Hornets for the Navy and more Army helicopters than either of the other two proposals. Both House and Senate lawmakers backed plans to add five more Navy ships to the procurement plan for next year to the president’s slate of eight planned builds, but with significant differences in where the money should be spent. That leaves the authorization conference committee with a common goal of more equipment purchases but a long list of details to work out.

**\*\* OFF THE TABLE — A new military force authorization**

Sen. Rand Paul (R-Kent) had hoped to attach to the budget bill a rule mandating lawmakers repeal the existing use-of-force authorizations passed early in President George W. Bush’s tenure and replace them with updated guidelines for the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. But that bid failed last week when 61 senators voted to table the idea. The authorization of military force issue has been a frequent topic of debate in Congress since 2014, when Obama first ordered airstrikes against Islamic State group fighters in Iraq. But those discussions have produced little action. House lawmakers briefly attached a similar provision to a separate appropriations measure earlier this summer before leadership stripped it out. Paul’s amendment was the first real debate on the issue before the full Senate in the last six years. If the issue is resolved in the near future, it won’t be in the defense budget bill. The House included no language on the issue in their draft, leaving it out of the final negotiations.

**\*\* UNDER DISCUSSION — Space Corps**

House officials included in their authorization draft a proposal for U.S. Space Command, a new sub-unified command within Strategic Command. The command would operate as an independent service from the Air Force, a stark departure from the current set-up. Military officials have been cool to the idea, and Senate officials included language to block the move. They also added language in the bill requiring the commander of Air Force Space Command serve a term of at least 6 years for continuity and stability assurances, further entrenching the existing structure. House lawmakers argued the move would “delayer complicated bureaucracy in the Pentagon” and better

prepare the country for future threats from space. But convincing conference negotiators to go along with the massive overhaul appears to be a difficult proposition.

**\*\*OFF THE TABLE — A spending cap fix**

The total price tag on both the House and Senate budget proposals is close to \$700 billion, once overseas contingency funds are factored in. That's about \$30 billion more than Trump's own proposal. But more importantly, all three violate mandatory spending caps in place for fiscal 2018. Unless Congress can reach a broader deal to adjust those caps, lawmakers will be constrained to a military base budget ceiling of \$549 billion. Conference committee negotiations won't be debating a solution to that problem in their work, but they will be watching outside talks on the issue closely to adjust their authorization bill to appropriate measures. That will likely mean the final conference draft won't be finished until December, when Congress' next budget deadline looms.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | September 18, 2017 ++]

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## **Transgender Troops Update 10 ► Pentagon Releases Policy Details**

The Pentagon released the details of its transgender policy 18 SEP, outlining how the department will navigate tricky personnel issues while it finalizes a decision on whether any transgender military members will be allowed to continue to serve. The interim guidance remains in effect until at least Feb. 21, 2018, when the Pentagon is due to provide its guidance to President Donald Trump on how to implement Trump's directed transgender ban.

- During the interim timeframe, the following policies will be in effect.
- First, no new accessions into the military will be allowed for men or women who are currently being treated for gender dysphoria, which is a condition where a person identifies as the opposite of the biological gender they were born into.
- Second, current service members receiving treatment for gender dysphoria will be allowed to continue to serve and continue to receive treatment. However, no new sex reassignment surgeries will be allowed after March 22, 2018, "except to the extent necessary to protect the health of the individual."
- Third, service members who have completed their transitions will be able to continue to serve in their preferred gender while the Pentagon continues its study.
- Last, transgender service members may reenlist during the interim period and may not be involuntarily separated from service on the basis of a gender dysphoria diagnosis.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Tara Copp | September 18, 2017 ++]

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## **Israel's First Permanent U.S. Base ► Army Site 883 Life Support Area**

U.S. and Israeli officers broke ground in Israel on 18 SEP for a permanent U.S. Army base that will house dozens of U.S. soldiers, operating under the American flag, and charged with the mission of defending against rocket and missile attack. The American base, officers in Israel say, will be an independent facility co-located at the Israel Defense Forces Air Defense School in southern Israel, near the desert capital of Beersheba. Once completed, the base will house U.S. operational systems to identify and intercept a spectrum of aerial threats, along with barracks, recreational and other facilities required to support several dozen American air defenders. "A few dozens of soldiers of our American allies will be stationed here permanently. They are part of an American task force that will be stationed here," said Israeli Air Force Brig. Gen. Zvika Haimovich, the IDF's air defense commander.

According to Haimovich, the co-located, permanent U.S. presence will enhance Israel’s ability to detect and defend against the growing rocket and missile threat. “The purpose of their presence is not for training or for exercises, but rather as part of a joint Israeli and American effort to sustain and enhance our defensive capabilities.”

Maj. Gen. John Gronski, deputy commanding general of the Army National Guard in U.S. Army Europe, led the U.S. delegation participating in 18 SEP ceremonies. Referring to the site as Site 883 Life Support Area, Gronski said the planned base “signifies the strong bond” that exists between the United States and Israel. “This life support area represents the first ever stationing of a U.S. Army unit on Israeli soil,” he said. “The U.S. and Israel have long planned together, exercised together, trained together. And now, with the opening of this site, these crucial interactions will occur every day. We’ll have Israeli airmen, US soldiers living and working side by side.”

While the new U.S. base marks the first to be co-located within an Israeli base and the first in which active interceptors are to be deployed, the U.S. military has operated an independent facility for nearly a decade in the same general area of Israel’s Negev desert. That facility — which is operated only by Americans without an Israeli presence — houses the U.S. AN/TPY-2, an X-Band radar that is integrated with Israeli search and track radars to augment early warning in the event of ballistic missile attack from Iran. In his briefing to reporters, Haimovich said the IDF has been working with its U.S. counterparts for nearly two years to establish the new facility. He emphasized that the American presence “would not hamper the IDF’s ability to act independently against any threat to the security of the State of Israel.”

He also noted that in recent weeks, the IDF’s Air Defense Command stood up a new Iron Dome battalion to enable the Jewish state to more equitably deploy active defenses along its northern as well as southern borders, where Israel faces growing threats from Lebanon and Gaza, respectively. One of Israel’s operational Iron Dome systems is now in the U.S., where it is competing with U.S.-proposed systems for an interim — and possibly longer-term — solution to the medium- and short-range air defense requirement. [Source: DefenseNews | Barbara Opall-Rome | September 18, 2017 ++]

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## **DoD Procurement Update 01 ► Bomb/Missile Stockpiles Low | Budgetary Inaction**

More than three years into its airstrike campaign against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the Pentagon is still struggling to replenish its bomb and missile stockpiles. Now it’s Congress’ budgetary inaction that is thwarting Air Force efforts to persuade arms makers to increase production. “Probably the most important thing with respect to munitions is to get a budget,” Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson said Tuesday at an Air Force Association-sponsored conference in the Washington suburbs.

Wilson blamed Congress’ decision to freeze spending for the first three months of fiscal 2018 at lower 2017 levels, instead of passing a budget in time for the fiscal year to start on 1 OCT. “We have a continuing resolution and budget uncertainty impacts our ability to work with industry and give them certainty on the amount that we’re going to buy and ramping that up where we can,” Wilson said. “We have been engaged with industry directly probably at least four or five months ago, starting at the very senior level with our logistics and munitions people to see how we can expand the production capacity of precision weapons. The most important thing that we have to do now is get a budget.”

The U.S. military is dropping about 100 precision weapons per day on ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Wilson said. As of 31 AUG U.S. and allies aircraft had dropped 98,532 bombs since the campaign began in August 2014, according to Air Forces Central Command data. Top military officials have said the Pentagon has had to bring weapons from elsewhere in the world to the Middle East to keep up with the pace of the strikes.

In their 2018 budget proposal, Air Force leaders requested funds to boost production of precision weapons. But until a budget is passed, they cannot. For example, they want to more than double the production of Lockheed

Martin's Hellfire missile from about 1,500 in 2017 to more than 3,600 in 2018. The same is true for the Small Diameter Bomb. One version is made by Boeing, the other Raytheon. About 4,500 SDBs were included in the 2017 budget, but more than 7,300 are in the 2018 spending request. The two bombs are among those frequently used in the ISIS campaign.

Defense firms are looking for budget certainty, Wilson said, because they must make workforce and capital investments in order to boost production. "If we're going to have a continuing resolution for three months or six months out of the 12-month year, how are they going to manage that," she said. "It becomes a real problem when you're trying to create a relationship of trust to allow a company to do capital investment to provide for the needs of the warfighter." [Source: Defense One | Marcus Weisgerber | September 21, 2017 ++]

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## **DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 30 SEP 2017**

**Atlanta GA** -- A defense contractor was found guilty 20 SEP of knowingly transmitting malicious code with the intent of causing damage to an Army computer, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of North Carolina said in a statement Thursday. **Mittesh Das**, a 48-year-old resident of Atlanta, unloaded the computer virus in November 2014 — days before the company he was contracted under was supposed to hand over operations to a different firm. The code affected a national-level computer program the Army Reserve uses to handle pay and personnel actions for nearly 200,000 reservists, according to the statement. Five of the servers associated with the program were located at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

The Army projected the total labor cost to remove the computer virus and restore the corrupted information as roughly \$2.6 million. "Cyber-sabotage is not a 'prank.' It is a very serious crime with real victims and real costs. In this case, the crime cost taxpayers \$2.6 million," said John Stuart Bruce, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of North Carolina. Das was indicted on April 5, 2016, for the offense that occurred in 2014. In December 2014, the Army Times reported on incidents of delayed payments to Army reservists. The delay — which averaged about 17 days — was attributed to a glitch in the Regional Level Application Software, said Lt. Col. William Ritter, a spokesman for the Reserve. That software's functions included processing pay and orders, as well as transfers, awards and promotions, Ritter added.

The Justice Department was pleased with the outcome of the indictment, said Director Daniel Andrews of the Computer Crime Investigative Unit, U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command. "Let this be a warning to anyone who thinks they can commit a crime in cyberspace and not get caught. We have highly trained and specialized investigators who will work around the clock to uncover the truth and preserve Army readiness," Andrews said in the statement. [Source: ArmyTimes | Kyle Rempfe | September 23, 2017 ++]

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

**Hampton Roads VA** -- A Navy sailor has been indicted on six charges of maliciously conveying false information by calling in a series of bomb threats to various ships and bases across Hampton Roads in early August, according to federal court documents. Petty Officer 3rd Class **Allante Martanaze Arrington**, 24, is a boatswain's mate who has been assigned for more than three years to the USS Oak Hill, a dock landing ship homeported at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek in Virginia Beach, according to a Navy biography. The Oak Hill, which has been in the Caribbean since early September helping with hurricane relief, was on the receiving end of at least one of those threats, the indictment says.

Arrington, of Ohio, enlisted in 2014. He appeared in his working uniform 22 SEP for an initial appearance in U.S. District Court and was released on his own recognizance. With conviction, each count carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. An arraignment was scheduled for 27 SEP. Naval Criminal Investigative Service spokesman Ed Buice would not say how Arrington came to investigators' attention. The threats rolled out in quick

succession 2 AUG. They caused a series of lock-downs and evacuations that affected ships and pier operations for hours as emergency responders and NCIS investigators fanned across Little Creek and Naval Station Norfolk.

According to the indictment, filed Wednesday, the threats began about 6 a.m. Arrington is accused of using a cellphone to call the Navy Region Mid-Atlantic's emergency line and saying "three bombs will go off on base at 9:30." He's accused of calling it again at about 6:40 a.m., and -- about 11 a.m. -- calling the quarterdeck at Little Creek with a more specific threat of a bomb on the dock landing ship Gunston Hall. Additional calls followed. The indictment accuses Arrington of phoning Little Creek's Rockwell Gym about 1 p.m. to report a bomb on board the Oak Hill, and calling the dock landing ship Whidbey Island's stateroom about 3:49 p.m. with a similar threat. The threats didn't end Aug. 2. The indictment further charges that Arrington again called Rockwell Gym about 9:56 a.m. Aug. 17 and claimed there was a bomb in a parking lot for the Whidbey Island.

Those incidents followed two others from earlier that week in which sailors at Naval Station Norfolk reported seeing a diver in the water near Pier 7. In another incident later that day at Little Creek, a Navy spokesman said a caller threatened the Oak Hill before hanging up. The indictment did not address at least two other threats reported Aug. 2: 9:55 a.m. to Joint Expeditionary Base Fort Story's Admiral Joel T. Boone Branch Medical Clinic and 10:55 a.m. against the base's Personnel Support Detachment. The Navy later said none of the bomb threats was credible. [Source: The Virginian-Pilot | Courtney Mabeus| September 23, 2017 ++]

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**Pentagon/DEA** -- If you contract to the tune of \$64 million for a counternarcotics plane and it never flies, should you keep your job? That's what Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) wondered in a 20 SEP letter to Defense Secretary James Mattis blasting the Defense Department and the Drug Enforcement Administration for their seven years of work on a "**hangar queen**," as the senator called it. The ATR-42-500 aircraft was adopted for the joint-agency Global Discovery Program aimed at curbing the opium trade in war-torn Afghanistan. But it became the subject of probes for waste by inspectors general for both the Justice and Defense departments.

"Aside from a small number of routine transport missions, it has been up on jacks in a hangar and never flew a single counter-narcotics mission in Afghanistan as intended," Grassley wrote. In line with the secretary's call to "take aggressive steps to end waste in the department," the Judiciary Committee chairman said in routine language that he wants Mattis to conduct a review to determine who in the department is responsible, and take "appropriate measures of accountability, including potential disciplinary action." In a more pointed, handwritten post-script, Grassley wrote, "Common sense dictates that if an admiral can be fired or the captain of a vessel can be dismissed because their ship rams another (if that action is taken because of dereliction of duty), then these people connected with this farcical plane need to be fired. If heads don't roll, nothing changes."

The problems with the ATR-42-500 laid out by the watchdogs began after 2008, when the Defense Department was brought in to modify the DEA's plane with surveillance equipment at a time when the U.S. effort in Afghanistan was flagging. In a report released this month by the Pentagon IG, the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats was accused of not tracking costs, using inexperienced managers and of changing too many personnel. "Despite the [deputy assistant secretary's office] knowing in late 2013 that DEA personnel were significantly reducing their presence in Afghanistan in 2014," the report said, that official "stated that she decided not to cancel the program because she believed the ATR 42-500 aircraft was near completion. As a result, the DASD CN&GT wasted at least \$64.8 million."

Justice's IG had released a similarly critical report in March 2016, after performing an audit of the DEA's contracting memoranda and finding violations of the Federal Acquisition Regulation, cost overruns and missed deadlines, based on whistleblower complaints. It reported that the plane never flew (it is now to be auctioned off). A Defense spokeswoman confirmed the department had received the letter and said officials would respond directly to Grassley. The Pentagon Counternarcotics and Global Threats office agreed with the IG's recommendations for



lessons learned from the mishap. But Grassley asserted in his letter that “not a single official took any responsibility.” [Source: GovExec.com | Charles S. Clark | September 25, 2017 ++]

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

**Afghanistan** -- U.S. officials are not sure that \$702 million spent on ammunition for Afghan forces from 2015 to 2016 was used for its intended purpose, according to a recent Defense Department inspector general’s report. “Without consistent, timely, and accurate reporting from the ministries, CSTC-A [Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan] cannot account for all ammunition consumed by the ANDSF [Afghan National Defense and Security Forces],” the report reads. The main mission of the CSTC-A is to train Afghan institutions on effective management, oversight functions and rule of law. The unit’s function is to train Afghan ministries on how to run cost effective and efficient management systems. But, according to the recent IG report, the unit failed in its own oversight functions and further refused to enforce punishments on Afghan government organizations that failed to live up to commitments made to the U.S. government.

However, the unit claimed it was hampered by understaffing and security limitations, which prohibited the group from conducting physical inspections to validate ammunition reports below the corps and zone level in Afghanistan, according to the report. “CSTC-A did not provide effective oversight of ammunition that was procured by the DoD and provided to the ANDSF,” the report reads. Moreover, the CSTC-A failed in its responsibility to oversee commitment letters from various Afghan ministries. Commitment letters from the Afghan government are intended to ensure equipment and services provided to the Afghan government from the U.S. are used for their intended purpose.

According to the IG report, “CSTC-A only enforced one penalty” on the Afghan government for its failure to abide by commitments despite that the unit found Afghan ministries failed to meet commitments on 36 of 55 assessments. Officials at the CSTC-A refused to carry out punishments because they were worried that it would impact Afghan readiness, according to the IG report. This appears to be a common theme in Afghanistan where corrupt ministries continue to plunder U.S. aid with near impunity. U.S. officials have been hesitant to enforce strong conditions-based aid in fear of its potential impacts on the battlefield.

John Sopko, the inspector general overseeing Afghan reconstruction, told a crowd at a think-tank event in Washington last week that conditions were so weak you could drive a Mack truck through them. He further called on U.S. officials to strengthen conditions-based aid. The Afghan government has had difficulty managing the large quantities of arms and ammunition supplied to its security forces by the U.S. Large stockpiles of those supplies have gone unaccounted for in the past either through corruption or battlefield loss.

According to an assessment by a UN monitoring team, their findings “suggested that significant quantities of arms and ammunition from Afghan military stockpiles in fact remained unaccounted for,” according to the report. Large quantities of sophisticated foreign weaponry to include night vision devices, laser sights and optics have wound up in the hands of Taliban and ISIS fighters, according to the UN team report. Incidents “had reportedly grown and could no longer be explained solely by individual incidents of theft or battlefield capture,” the UN assessment reads. The U.S. has spent more than \$70 billion dollars since 2002 rebuilding Afghan forces, Sopko told audience members last week, and is set to spend over \$3.7 billion in the coming year on the fledgling force, according to a Defense Department budget request for Afghanistan.

The recent IG report highlights an endemic problem in Afghanistan, that much of the aid provided to rebuild Afghan forces largely goes unaccounted for, only to end up in the hands of enemy forces. Because the CSTC-A failed in its oversight mission the U.S. lacks accurate ammunition consumption data, meaning “future ammunition requirements may not be valid,” according to the IG report. After 16 years of war the U.S. is still unable to accurately track and forecast the needs of Afghan forces, as corruption issues still largely go unaddressed. [Source: NavyTimes | Shawn Snow | September 26, 2017 ++]

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## Gold Star Parents & Families Day ► 24 SEP 2017



### BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, A PROCLAMATION

As we solemnly observe Gold Star Mother's and Family's Day, we honor and extend our deepest gratitude to the families of military service members who gave their last full measure of devotion to our country. Gold Star families have paid the ultimate price for our Nation's freedom with the life of their loved ones. Our grateful Nation grieves with them in their loss, but also shares their pride in the selfless service of their sons and daughters.

Our country is built on the sacrifices of men and women who have willingly raised their hand to defend our Nation and its security. As members of our Armed Forces take an oath to protect our freedoms and liberty, they understand the gravity of their commitment to defend our way of life. And when that commitment results in the ultimate sacrifice, we come together as a Nation to walk beside the devoted families left behind and help them shoulder the vast absence they forever bear. Their loved ones did not die in vain. They gave of themselves to protect and defend the freedoms we all enjoy. Despite their grief, these families bravely move forward with dignity and grace.

Despite having endured unfathomable loss, many Gold Star families have turned their sorrow into action and community outreach to help others navigate this difficult journey. Their compassion, courage, determination, and strength inspire us all.

When the last rifle volley is fired, the final note of Taps echoes and fades away, and the carefully-folded National Colors are presented, it is our sacred duty to stand with these patriotic families to ensure they receive the care, compassion, and respect they have earned. On this day of remembrance, we pay tribute to those brave men and women in uniform who died protecting our great Nation, and we stand with the families who nurtured and loved them. Gold Star families have our sympathy, but more importantly, they have our respect and our gratitude.

The Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 115 of June 23, 1936 (49 Stat. 1895 as amended), has designated the last Sunday in September as "Gold Star Mother's Day."

NOW, THEREFORE, I, DONALD J. TRUMP, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim September 24, 2017, as Gold Star Mother's and Family's Day. I call upon all Government officials to display the flag of the United States over Government buildings on this special day. I also encourage the American people to display the flag and hold appropriate ceremonies as a public expression of our Nation's gratitude and respect for our Gold Star Mothers and Families.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord two thousand seventeen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-second.

DONALD J. TRUMP

[Source: The White House | Office of the Press Secretary | September 23, 2017 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Update 94** ▶ **Staff Sgt. John E. Lillich**

National Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Recognition Day was observed Friday, Sept. 15, and is a sobering reminder that freedom truly isn't free. Former Army Staff Sgt. John "Jack" E. Lillich, a 94-year-old World War II Veteran who spent time in Germany as a POW in 1945, can tell you about the price of freedom. "We were attacked the night of New Year's Eve in 1944," said Lillich. "The fight was going well. We were really making out like a bandit—until a Tiger tank appeared." Lillich recalled the fearsome Tiger tank saying it was as big as the sizable foyer where he told his story. At the time, Germany's Tiger tank was one of the most ferocious weapons used on the battlefield.



**Army Veteran and POW Jack Lillich**

"I was one of the bazooka specialists and one of my friends, Al Weimold, supplied three rockets as we waited for this tank," said Lillich. "I took my first shot at it and I missed terribly. My next shot hit exactly where I intended, right between the body of the tank and its turret." Thinking the tank was destroyed, Lillich went back to his previous location to double check. "I thought I wiped it up except it didn't go that easily," said Lillich. "I remember looking down the tank's barrel and we both fired at the same time—then it felt like my hand was on fire. Al and I decided to get the hell out of there." The tank's shell destroyed the corner of the building where Lillich was taking cover. Wounded, Lillich dropped the bazooka and joined up with Weimold. The two led a few soldiers behind a railroad station trying to put as much distance between them and the tank as possible. Not long after, the men were captured by a platoon of German soldiers.

Lillich and his men were then crammed into a train car with almost 100 total prisoners and transported for two or three days to a camp in Hammelburg, Germany. He stayed in this temporary camp until ordered by the Germans to march 80 miles to another camp in Nuremberg. He stayed for a few days before beginning another 80-mile march to Moosburg, Germany's largest POW camp. During their journey, prisoners slept in barns, empty school houses and even curled up in the snow on occasion. "We were starving," said Lillich. "They kept us there for a few days so they

could get their act together before we started marching to another camp in Moosburg. Each of these marches took approximately a month.” A typical meal for captives in Lillich’s group consisted of “make believe coffee,” a small roll and occasionally an egg.

On the trek from Nuremberg to Moosburg, Lillich and the men kept seeing more and more American planes fly by and that gave them hope. The German soldiers also told their captives that the war would be over soon and urged the prisoners to not consider escaping. It was April 1945, and the war was quickly coming to an end. “We were only in Moosburg for a few days when our camp was liberated,” he said. “As it turned out, we were liberated by my outfit—the 62nd Armored Infantry. They were called ‘The Liberators’ because of how many camps they liberated.”

During his five months in captivity, Lillich lost more than 80 pounds and weighed less than 100 pounds when he was examined by American medical personnel. He lost so much weight that when Lillich ran into a man named Parker, a guy in his unit who had been a year behind him in high school, Parker didn’t recognize him. Lillich left the Army shortly after leaving Europe and pursued a career in dispute resolution, teaching the subject at Purdue University. “I had a great time in the Army – with the exception of my time in captivity – it was a lot of fun,” he said Lillich currently resides in James Island, South Carolina, and receives his health care at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. [Source: Vantage Point | September 15, 2017 ++]

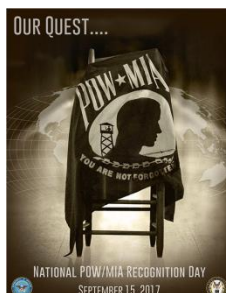
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## **POW/MIA Recoveries ► Reported 16 thru 30 SEP 2017 | Forty-Six**

“Keeping the Promise“, “Fulfill their Trust“ and “No one left behind“ are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II 73,025, Korean War 7730, Vietnam War 1604, 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 missing or unaccounted for personnel to date refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil> and click on ‘Our Missing’. For a listing and details of those accounted for in 2017 refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Year/2017> 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 names, photos, and details of the

below listed MIA/POW's which have been recovered, identified, and/or scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin are listed on the following sites:

- <https://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly>
- <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases>
- <http://www.thepatriotspage.com/Recovered.htm>
- <http://www.pow-miafamilies.org>
- <https://www.pownetwork.org/bios/b/b012.htm>
- <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces>

**Look for:**

- Air Force Chief Master Sgt. **Donald J. Hall** assigned to Detachment 5, 38th Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Squadron.
- Air Force Col. **Martin R. Scott**, 34, of Jenks, Okla., assigned to the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing in 1966.
- Army Air Forces 1st Lt. **Francis J. Pitonyak**, 25, of Detroit MI assigned to the 36th Fighter Group, 8th Fighter squadron based at Wards Airdome near Port Moresby, Territory of Papua in 1943.
- Army Air Forces 1st Lt. **Homer A. Spence** assigned to the 96th Fighter Squadron, 82nd Fighter Group in 1944.
- Army Air Forces 1st Lt. **Robert L. Mains** assigned to 714th Bombardment Sqd, 448th Bombardment Group, 2nd Bombardment Division.
- Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. **Clarence L. Dragoo** assigned to 716th Bomber Sqd, 449th Bombardment Group
- Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. **Donald E. Underwood** assigned to 38th Bombardment Sqd, (Heavy), 30th Bombardment Group.
- Army Air Forces Sgt. **Charles H. Daman** assigned to the 714th Bombardment Squadron, 448th Bombardment Group, 2nd Bombardment Division in 1945.
- Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. **Roy F. Davis** was a member of the 13th Bombardment Squadron, 3rd Bombardment Group.
- Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. **Thomas M. McGraw**, 26, of Lakewood, Ohio, assigned to the 716th Bomber Squadron, 449th Bombardment Group in 1945.
- Army Air Forces Tech Sgt. **John S. Bailey** assigned to the 38th Bombardment Squadron, (Heavy), 30th Bombardment Group, stationed at Hawkins Field, Helen Island, Tarawa Atoll, Gilbert Islands in 1944.
- Army Cpl. **Clarence R. Skates**, 19, of Los Angeles CA.
- Army Cpl. **Daniel F. Kelly**, 18, of Pittsburgh, Pa., assigned to C Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division in 1950.
- Army Cpl. **Donald L. Baer** assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division in 1950.
- Army Cpl. **William R. Sadewasser**, 24, of Wellsville, N.Y., assigned to Headquarters Battery, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division in 1950.
- Army Maj. **Stephen T. Uurtamo** assigned to Headquarters Battery, 82nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division in 1950.
- Army Pfc. **Billy R. Ball** was a member of Headquarters Detachment Philippines Department.
- Army Pfc. **Charlie H. Hill**, 31, of Williamsburg, Ky assigned to Battery D, 15th Anti-aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Self-propelled Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950
- Army Pfc. **Gerald F. Wipfli**, 23, of Nekoosa, Wis., assigned to Company I, 3rd Battalion, 112th Infantry in 1944
- Army Pfc. **James J. Leonard** assigned to Co. E, 2nd Bn, 8th Cavalry Rgt, 1st Cavalry Division.
- Army Pvt. **Shirley E. Bailey** assigned to Company G, 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division in 1944
- Army Sgt. 1st Class **Elmore B. Goodwin** assigned to Co. G, 2nd Bn, 24th Inf Rgt, 25th Inf Division.



- Army Pfc. **Leroy W. Bryant** assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division in 1951.
- Marine Corps Cpl. **Raymond C. Snapp**, 24, of Bonita, Texas.
- Marine Corps Pfc. **Ray James**, 21, of Sylvarena MS, assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division on the island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll in 1943.
- Marine Corps Pvt. **John M. Tillman** assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division in 1943
- Marine Corps Reserve 2nd Lt. **Elwood R. Bailey** assigned to Marine Fighting Squadron 223 (VMF-223), Marine Aircraft Group 23, (MAG-23) in 1942.
- Marine Corps Reserve Pvt. **Alberic M. Blanchette**, 19, of Caribou, Maine.
- Marine Corps Reserve Pvt. **Charles A. Drew** assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division in 1943.
- Marine Corps Reserve Pvt. **Donald S. Spayd**, 19, of Los Angeles CA.
- Marine Corps Pfc. **Harold V. Thomas** assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division.
- Marine Corps Pvt. **George F. Patrick** assigned to Company D, 1st Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division.
- Marine Corps Reserve Assistant Cook **Frank L. Masoni** assigned to HQ Company 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Division.
- Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. **Manuel Menendez** assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Division
- Marine Corps Sgt. **William D. Ball** assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment 2nd Marine Division.
- Navy Capt. **James R. Bauder**, 35, assigned to Fighter Squadron Twenty One, USS Coral Sea.
- Navy Fireman 1st Class **Charles R. Casto**, 20, of East Liverpool, Ohio.
- Navy Fireman 1st Class **Charles R. Ogle**, 24, of Clinton, Custer County OK.
- Navy Fireman 1st Class **Gerald H. Pirtle** assigned to the USS Oklahoma in 1941.
- Navy Fireman 1st Class **Walter B. Rogers**, 22, of Bison, S.D., assigned to the USS Oklahoma in 1941.
- Navy Fireman 2nd Class **John D. Wheeler** assigned to the USS Oklahoma in 1941.
- Navy Reserve Chief Water Tender **Paul R. Wright** assigned to the USS Oklahoma in 1941.
- Navy Seaman 1st Class **John E. Savidge** assigned to the USS Oklahoma in 1941.
- Navy Seaman 1st Class **Milton R. Surratt**, 21, of Greenville, S.C. assigned to the USS Oklahoma in 1941.
- Navy Seaman 2nd Class **Frank Wood** assigned to the USS Oklahoma in 1941.
- Navy Seaman 2nd Class **George J. Wilcox** assigned to the USS Oklahoma in 1941.
- Navy Water Tender 2nd Class Porter L. Rich assigned to the USS Oklahoma in 1941.

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

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## VA Vet Choice Update 60 ► Emergency Funding May Not Be Enough

Weeks after a veterans' health initiative received \$2.1 billion in emergency funding, the Trump administration says the private-sector Veterans Choice health care program may need additional money as early as December to avoid a disruption of care for hundreds of thousands of veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs said in a statement 26 SEP that it hoped to move quickly on a proposed long-term legislative fix that would give veterans even wider access to private doctors. The proposal, under review by the White House Office of Management and Budget, would seek money to keep Choice running for much of next year as VA implements wider changes.

On Capitol Hill, the House Veterans Affairs Committee was already anticipating that the emergency funding approved in August may not last the full six months, according to spokespeople for both Republican and Democratic members on the panel. They cited the VA's past problems in estimating Choice program cost. That committee and the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee said they were closely monitoring the situation. "It's disheartening," said Carlos Fuentes, legislative director of Veterans of Foreign Wars, citing his group's continuing conversations with VA about Choice funding. "Imagine if a veteran has to cease chemotherapy treatment during Christmas." Garry Augustine, executive director of Disabled American Veterans' Washington headquarters, said recent discussions with VA also gave him little confidence. "It's always a concern," Augustine said. "Legislative action needs to be done sooner rather than later."

In its statement to The Associated Press, VA said it could not say for certain when Choice funds would be depleted, but acknowledged that it could be as early as December or as late as March. Earlier this year, the VA began limiting referrals to outside doctors as money began to run low and veterans reported delays in care. The VA proposal for a long-term fix is expected to be released in the coming weeks. "We have a long agenda, a lot more to do," VA Secretary David Shulkin told veterans last week at an event near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. "This fall, our major legislative focus is getting the Choice program working right."

The latest funding woes come amid political disagreement over the future direction of VA and its troubled Choice program, which was passed by Congress in 2014 in response to a wait-time scandal at the Phoenix VA medical center that spread nationwide. Some veterans died while waiting months for appointments as VA employees manipulated records to hide delays. The controversy spurred Congress to establish Choice as a pilot program designed to relieve pressure at VA hospitals. Choice currently allows veterans to receive outside care if they must wait 30 days or more for an appointment or drive more than 40 miles to a VA facility. But the program has encountered long delays of its own.

In a sign of a political divide, the left-leaning VoteVets ran a \$400,000 ad campaign earlier this month in 13 states that warned viewers, "Don't let Trump privatize my VA." The American Federation of Government Employees has been staging rallies to bring attention to VA job vacancies left unfilled. The VA said it remains committed to filling VA positions even as it finalizes plans to revamp Choice. VA said it had about 34,000 vacancies, which they attributed in part to a shortage of health professionals. Legislative proposals to fix VA have run the gamut, including one backed by the conservative Concerned Veterans for America that would give veterans almost complete freedom to see an outside doctor. Another plan could create a presidential commission to review closing some VA medical centers.

"Congress can either double-down on the failed VA policies of the past or they can go in a different direction and empower veterans with more choice over their health care," said Dan Caldwell, policy director of Concerned Veterans for America. During the presidential campaign, Trump repeatedly pledged to fix the VA by bringing accountability and expanding access to private doctors, criticizing the department as "the most corrupt." At an Ohio event in July, Trump promised to triple the number of veterans "seeing the doctor of their choice." More than 30 percent of VA appointments are made in the private sector.



Carrie Farmer, senior policy researcher for the RAND Corp., said the Choice debate raises broader questions about the role of government-run health care in treating veterans. To many former troops, the VA health system is a "medical home" where patients feel more understood by doctors specially trained to treat battlefield injury, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Significantly expanding Choice could upend that government role as caretaker, she said. "The big question is ultimately who will be responsible for our veterans' care?" Farmer said. [Source: Associated Press | Hope Yen | September 27, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Secretary Update 60 ► Travel Transparency Site Announced**

"In response to the growing scandal of Cabinet officials using pricey private aircraft for business trips, Veterans Affairs officials announced 29 SEP they will post details of all official travel by department Secretary David Shulkin online to provide transparency about his travels. 'Veterans and taxpayers have a right to know about my official travel as secretary, and posting this information online for all to see will do just that...,' Shulkin said." The department will regularly update a page that includes any travels by private and government aircraft, as well as itineraries of official international and domestic trips. 'Under this administration, VA is committed to becoming the most transparent organization in government, and I'm pleased to take another step in that direction with this move,' Shulkin said in a statement." Shulkin has also posted wait times at VA facilities, lists of disciplinary actions against employees and other data." On Friday, the information was online at the VA's new 'Secretary's Travel' page" <https://www.va.gov/opa/secvatravel>. [Source: Military.com | Leo Shane III | September 29, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Suicide Prevention Update 44 ► Lawmakers Told What is Needed**

Ending veterans suicide will require more mental health professionals, more research into prevention options, and more public awareness from all of America, the secretary of Veterans Affairs warned lawmakers on 27 SEP. "Every day I think about the number of Americans who are dying because we aren't addressing the problem well enough," David Shulkin said during a suicide prevention hearing before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

VA officials estimate 20 veterans a day nationwide commit suicide. Of that figure, 14 are individuals with no regular connection to VA health services. The VA secretary noted that problem is even more pronounced among female veterans: In the last 15 years, suicide rates among those who used VA services dropped nearly 3 percent, but rose nearly 82 percent among those not in the system. That's the impetus behind the latest VA suicide prevention campaign, **#BeThere**, being rolled out in weeks to come. Ads featuring actor Tom Hanks encouraging all Americans to be available to veterans in need will air on a variety of platforms, with links to existing VA resources.

But Shulkin acknowledged that's just one more step in an ongoing, complicated effort to provide better mental health care to the 21-million-plus veterans across the country. "We have to figure out a way to hire more mental health professionals for VA," he said. "Right now, we're not getting enough." Earlier this year department officials announced plans to hire 1,000 new mental health specialists in 2017. As of 1 SEP, 649 had been hired, a pace that Shulkin said barely keeps them on pace with departures over the last several months. "We are not succeeding," he said. Speeding up that process will require new hiring authorities, an idea lawmakers said they would be willing to entertain. He also criticized cuts in recent years to VA's recruiting and retention budget, an account Shulkin said was already underfunded. The department has faced criticism in recent months for thousands of vacant positions, and lawmakers included new hiring rules for a host of management posts in recent legislation.

Before Shulkin's testimony, mental health experts spoke about recent advances in suicide prevention research and offered concerns that VA is not keeping up with the latest best practices uncovered by that work. Shulkin said VA published more than 75 papers on suicide causes and prevention in the last year, but are still looking at avenues for additional information on combating the problem. He also praised congressional focus on the issue. September is national suicide prevention month, and before the Senate hearing the VA secretary signed a suicide prevention declaration with committee chairman Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA) and ranking member Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT). All three called the move an effort to bring more attention to the issue. Shulkin has repeatedly labeled the issue his top clinical priority as secretary.

But he has also been quick to note that suicide is "an American public health crisis" that will require more than just VA research and attention to overcome. The department's Veterans Crisis Line operates around the clock for veterans in need of emergency intervention. To contact the Veteran Crisis Line, callers can dial 1-800-273-8255 and select option 1 for a VA staffer. Veterans, troops or their families members can also text 838255 or visit [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net) for assistance. [Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane III | September 27, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Opioid Therapy Update 06 ► Choice Users Face Higher Abuse Risk**

Veterans using the VA's Choice program allowing private-sector health care face a "significant risk" of opioid abuse in the treatment of chronic pain, according to the VA's Inspector general. Policies in place at the Department of Veterans Affairs to reduce the number of opioid prescriptions do not necessarily apply to private-sector doctors, the IG said. In a report titled "**Opioid Prescribing to High-Risk Veterans Receiving VA Purchased Care**," the IG said there is an overall lack of communication between the VA and private-sector doctors on what drugs should be prescribed.

"Veterans receiving opioid prescriptions from VA-referred clinical settings may be at greater risk for overdose and other harm because medication information is not being consistently shared," VA Inspector General Michael Missal in a statement. "That has to change," he said. "Health-care providers serving veterans should be following consistent guidelines for prescribing opioids and sharing information that ensures quality care for high-risk veterans."

The report highlighted the main problem: "Under Choice, prescriptions for veterans who are authorized care through Choice are required to be filled at a VA pharmacy," but "a veteran can choose to fill the prescription outside the VA and pay for the prescriptions with his or her own funds." The report said, "With the expansion of community partnerships, a significant risk exists for patients who are prescribed opioid prescriptions outside of VA. "Patients suffering from chronic pain and mental health illness who receive opioid prescriptions from non-VA clinical settings where opioid prescribing and monitoring guidelines conflict with the guidelines in place within VA may be especially at risk," the report said.

The report noted that "access to an up-to-date list of medications and a relevant past medical history is important for any provider when caring for a patient, but particularly with high-risk veterans such as those with chronic pain and mental health illness." "However, this information is not consistently included in the authorization and consult documentation for VA purchased care" through the Choice program, the IG's report said. The report recommended the VA make sure all referrals to private care include a list of the medications and medical history of the patient until an electronic record-sharing system can be implemented. The VA should also require private doctors to submit opioid prescriptions directly to VA pharmacies for dispensing and also for the purpose of making a record of what was prescribed, the report said.

The IG's report reflects the growing concerns over the nationwide opioid epidemic that has hit the veterans community particularly hard. Overdose deaths involving prescription opioids have quadrupled since 1999. In 2014,

more than 14,000 people died from overdoses involving prescription opioids and "overdose deaths among veterans remain elevated when compared to the civilian population," the report said. According to a 2011 study by the VA, veterans are twice as likely to die from overdoses as civilians. "Considering the unique experience of veterans, it is not surprising that so many veterans suffer from some form of chronic pain," the report said. In 2013, the VA told Congress that "more than 50 percent of veterans receiving care at Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities were affected by chronic pain." The problems for the veteran with chronic pain can also be complicated by PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), depression, traumatic brain injury, and substance use disorder, the report said.

The report also included case summaries, including that of a veteran described only as "Patient 1," a male in his forties with a past medical history of PTSD, chronic low back pain, obstructive sleep apnea, obesity, and depression. "During the 4 years prior to his death, he had been hospitalized twice for suicidal ideation and a reported suicide attempt," the report said. Patient 1 was referred from the VA to a private pain management doctor who offered him spinal injections to alleviate pain and also prescribed oral opioids. During the course of his treatment, the non-VA provider prescribed a 30-day supply of morphine tablets, 30 milligrams each, to be taken twice daily as needed for pain. The prescription was filled at a VA pharmacy and the patient was found dead several days later. "The cause of death listed on the death certificate is suicide caused by toxic levels of sertraline, morphine, and gabapentin," the report said. "There is no evidence in the medical record that any of his VA providers were aware of the new opioid prescriptions."

In 2015, more than 33,000 people died of opioid overdose, with an additional 20,000 dying from other drugs, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention figures. Deaths from drug overdoses rose sharply in the first nine months of 2016, according to an interim report of the President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis. The rate of overdose deaths increased every three months last year, reaching a record 19.9 per 100,000 people in the third quarter, up from 16.7 for the same three months in 2015, the interim report said. [Source: Military.com || Richard Sisk | August 9, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Opioid Therapy Update 07 ► Cleveland VAMC Roundtable Discussion**

The U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs joined President Trump's opioid task force at the Cleveland VA Medical Center on 14 SEP. They were in town to hear from VA doctors on their best practices for pain management and opioid use. Guidelines for prescribing opioids, alternative medicine for dealing with pain, and a continuum of care for opioid addiction – these are among the best practices the VA has been using nationally since 2013. The Cleveland VA began even earlier. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David Shulkin said Cleveland is showing strong results. "Just four percent of the patient population they serve are using and being prescribed opioids, which is well, well below what you would find across the country," Shulkin said.

At a roundtable discussion that included President Trump's advisor, Kellyanne Conway, the VA shared some of its practices to address pain, including the use of alternative treatments such as acupuncture, yoga and meditation. "In not all cases must pain management mean pain medicine," Conway said. "There are opioids and there are other modalities. And we saw that first hand here. To read about it is one thing. To intuit as a lay person is quite another. But to see it in practice is quite remarkable and something I will take back to the White House and really never forget." The opioid task force will issue its report on November first. The group's chairman, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, said he expects the president to declare the opioid epidemic a national emergency "in the very near future."

[Source: WKSU 98.7 | Annie Wu /September 15, 2017 ++]

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## VA Flu Shots Update 05 ► No Cost Shots at Walgreens

Flu Season is here! Veterans protect yourselves and get a NO COST flu shot! The cold and flu season is upon us and the Department of Veterans Affairs has once again teamed up with Walgreens Pharmacies nationwide to allow all veterans who are currently enrolled in the VA healthcare system to be able walk into any of the over 8000 Walgreens nationally (and the Duane Reade pharmacies in the New York metropolitan area) to receive a vaccination at no cost. Vaccinations will be available through March 31, 2018.

Veterans wishing to receive the no cost vaccination simply need to present a Veterans Identification Card and a photo ID, at any participating Walgreens to receive the vaccination. The Group ID is: VAFLU In addition, after the Walgreens pharmacist administers the vaccine Walgreens will transmit that information securely to VA where it becomes part of the patient's electronic medical record. VA is committed to keeping Veteran patients healthy, and during this flu season, vaccination is the best way to prevent the spread of flu. No matter where you live, visit your local VA clinic or Walgreens to get a no cost flu shot.

To find your local VA, visit [www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp](http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp). To locate a Walgreens store near you, call 800-WALGREENS (800-925-4733), or go to [www.com/findastore](http://www.com/findastore). To learn more about the partnership visit <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/immunization.asp> or call 1-877-771-8537. To get more information on flu and flu vaccine, visit [www.publichealth.va.gov/flu](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/flu) or [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu). [Source: eBenefits Online Application | September 26, 2017 ++]

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## VA Emergency Room Care Update 01 ► Dealing With Bills

When Kevin Asberry visited the Emergency Room last year, he didn't expect to be barraged with bills. Asberry's health coverage is covered by the Veterans Health Administration. The VA takes care of certain medical bills for Asberry's four years in the U.S. Air Force. In April 2016, Asberry started having severe stomach pain stemming from pancreatitis. He went to St. David's North Austin Medical Center's emergency room. Doctors treated him for pain and discharged him within one night. Three weeks later, the pain got worse. He went again to North Austin Medical Center. This visit lasted three days.

Asberry showed his VA card, as usual, and assumed everything was paid. Then, he got a bill in the mail. "It's been placed on me for payment," said Asberry. Asberry was at a loss. His first bill came May 30, 2016, for \$1,356. Another bill arrived three days later for \$630. By June 27, Asberry's debt totaled \$3,871.20. "There's a lot that needs to be addressed," said Asberry. He said he called the hospital and the VA after each new bill. Each time, he says he received promises to look into the issue. The same bills kept coming: June 27, July 26, August 15, and August 16.

Then, on August 19, Asberry got a new bill for \$5,457.49. He feared his total debt was now \$9,328.69. "If you're telling me that I served my country and you've covered me, then cover me," said Asberry. Finally, the VA sent Asberry a letter saying they've paid the bill. It read, "consider it payment in full" and added "the provider may not bill you... for any services that were authorized and paid by VA." The bills didn't stop. Asberry received three more letters demanding payment. One even said, "contact your closest VA." Then, in Nov. 2016, North Austin Medical Center issued a letter, saying "balance forgiven." "I hoped so," said Asberry.

Hope faded quickly. The New Year brought a new round of bills. This time from a collection agency. An unpaid debt of \$1,418 was placed on Asberry's credit report. The charge said it was from Longhorn Emergency Medical Associates, PA. St. David's website, the owners of North Austin Medical Center, lists Longhorn Emergency Medical Associates as "Emergency Room Physicians." Kevin blamed VA and almost gave up until an Emergency

Room Billing series aired on KVUE’s sister station in Minnesota. “I was experiencing the same thing here in Austin,” said Asberry.

When KVUE Defenders picked up the case, they quickly learned the VA did pay. Asberry’s case was unique. One day after they started asking questions, more than a year after Kevin Asberry started asking questions, both finally got a response from the hospital. The inquiry made staff realize they made a mistake on the first round of billing. “The bill for the second visit was handled correctly, and it is paid in full. Unfortunately, for the first visit, the VA was not billed as it should have been. As soon as we were made aware of this issue, we submitted the bill to the VA. We apologize to Mr. Asberry, and thank him and KVUE for bringing this to our attention so that we may resolve the situation,” said Natalie Pack, CFO, St. David’s North Austin Medical Center.

It wasn’t resolved completely. The KVUE Defenders learned the hospital debt was cleared, but two physician groups were not paid: Longhorn Emergency Medical Services and Surgical Associates of Austin. “I hope we address all of my issues,” said Asberry. KVUE kept pressing the hospital for answers about the billing error. After 22 emails, KVUE confirmed the bill to Longhorn Emergency Medical Services is no longer owed. Surgical Associates of Austin refused to speak with us about the billing, but did reach out directly to Asberry. Both the VA and St. David’s North Austin Medical Center declined interview requests.

If you’re a veteran with VA health coverage and have an emergency outside Austin’s VA hours, advance approval is not required for private hospital emergency room visit. However, you must notify the VA within 72 hours. Go to [https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/docs/pubfiles/factsheets/FactSheet\\_20-02.pdf](https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/docs/pubfiles/factsheets/FactSheet_20-02.pdf) for a guide on VA coverage of emergency care visits.

[Source: KVUE ABC | Erica Proffer | September 25, 2017 ++]

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## **VA My Health eVet Website Update 02 ► Are You Enrolled?**

Hurricane season takes place from June to November each year. With dangerous storms predicted in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, it’s important to take care of your health care needs to help ease stress during a potential emergency. My Health eVet provides Veterans with online access to their medication refills, VA health records, Secure Messaging and other valuable tools even when the brick and mortar buildings are inaccessible. If the weather forces you to evacuate to another area, your VA medical records travel with you in your My Health eVet account. Here are a few ways My Health eVet can help in an emergency:

- Have instant access to your medical records,
- Print a list of your current medications, including names and dosage
- Refill VA prescriptions
- Reschedule your VA appointments via Secure Messaging
- Contact your health care team via Secure Messaging

To access the above features, it’s important that you upgrade your account to Premium level. You can start the upgrade process at <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/web/myhealthvet/upgrading-your-my-healthvet-account-through-in-person-or-online-authentication>. A Premium account ensures you have access to your medical information and health care teams. During times of emergency, such as natural disasters, you should stay in a safe location and follow the guidance of local government officials. If your medical needs are urgent, please contact 911 or your VA facility. Your safety is always VA’s number one concern.

[Source: VAntage Point | September 26, 2017++]

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## **VA Caregiver Program Update 46 ► No Charge Online Course**

The Department of Veterans Affairs partnered with PsychArmor Institute to provide a free online course to break down VA's Caregiver Program. The course takes approximately 10 minutes and includes information about how VA is organized, who is eligible for the Caregiver Program, how to enroll in it, what documents are needed and where to apply. The course also offers tips and guidance on what actions to take after enrollment is complete, and what resources are available to help veterans and their caregivers. To take the online course go to <https://psycharmor.org/courses/understanding-va-caregivers>. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | September 22, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Benefits Delivery at Discharge Update 01 ► 1 OCT Changes**

Servicemembers will have less time to claim disability compensation before leaving the military but should get benefits faster under changes being made by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Starting 1 OCT troops who want to resolve disability claims before leaving the military must enroll in the "Benefits Delivery at Discharge" program 90 days from separation rather than the current 60 days, the VA announced this month. Quick Start, a program launched in 2008 that allows troops with 59 or fewer days left to begin their claims process, will also end, the VA office at Yongsan Garrison, South Korea, told Stars and Stripes this week. "The VA's goal is to process disability claims for those leaving active duty so they have a decision on their claim the day after they leave," manager Thomas Gwaltney said.

Late-filed claims mean veterans will be waiting an average of 90 days after separation to get a decision on benefits, he said. "Many claims are not complete when servicemembers leave active duty," Gwaltney said. "Submitting disability claims between 90 and 180 days before separation will ensure claims can be fully developed." Troops enrolling in the benefits program will need to be at their duty station for 45 days after enrolling to make sure they can attend medical exams, said Yongsan VA representative Steve Tucker.

Those who miss the deadline can still file claims through the VA's "eBenefits" program after they leave the military, but might have to wait 18 months for a resolution, he said. A smarter option is to file a claim while still in uniform, Tucker said. "By filing here and getting their exams done they can ensure they receive their disability claim right after separating," he said. More information on the program can be found at: <http://bit.ly/2w78XAn> [Source: Stars & Stripes | Marcus Fichtl | September 13, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Health Care Access Update 56 ► As Good or Better Than Private Sector**

VA health care is as good or in some cases better than that offered by the private sector on key measures including wait times, according to a study commissioned by the American Legion. The report, issued 19 SEP and titled "A System Worth Saving," concludes that the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system "continues to perform as well as, and often better than, the rest of the U.S. health-care system on key quality measures," including patient safety, satisfaction and care coordination. "Wait times at most VA hospitals and clinics are typically the same or shorter than those faced by patients seeking treatment from non-VA doctors," the report says.





The 17-page report was co-authored by Phillip Longman, a senior editor at the Washington Monthly and adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins University, and Suzanne Gordon, a health care journalist and assistant adjunct professor at the University of California at San Francisco School of Nursing. The report comes at a time when the Trump administration, Congress and the VA are considering a long-term overhaul of the Veterans Choice Program, which allows veterans to seek VA-funded care through private providers. In July, Congress approved a \$3.9 billion bill to extend the Veterans Choice Program on private care for six months. Funding for Choice had been due to run out in mid-August, according to the VA. The Choice program, established after a 2014 scandal over extended wait times for care at VA medical facilities, allows veterans who face a more than 30-day wait for an appointment, or who must travel more than 40 miles to a VA facility, to instead seek VA-funded care through private providers.

In a memorandum last week to VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin, the VA's Office of Inspector General warned that the Choice program continues to be plagued by problems with duplicate payments, overpayments, and a failure to offset payments against outside insurance coverage. "These deficiencies must be addressed in the process of awarding additional contracts to any [contract payment processors] that may be selected for the future iteration of the Choice Program currently under consideration by Congress," the IG's Office said. Since the Choice program's inception, the American Legion and other Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) have cautioned against attempts to use it as a smokescreen to privatize the VA.

Legion-commissioned report says, "Although there are opportunities for VA to improve its performance by entering into partnerships with other health-care providers, no evidence supports the claim that privatizing VA or substantially outsourcing its services would bring veterans better care." The report continues, "In evaluating the quality of VA care, one should first remember to ask an all-important question: "Compared to what?" On wait times, "The entire American health-care system faces acute shortages of doctors, especially primary care physicians and mental health professionals. This means that even fully insured patients seeking care outside VA often face long wait times to see doctors," the report states.

The report cites numerous studies, including one by industry consulting firm Merritt Hawkins showing the wait time to get a first appointment with a private-sector doctor averaged 24 days in 15 metropolitan areas. "By contrast, the latest available data shows that one in five VA patients is seen on the same day he or she makes an appointment," the report says. "Even though roughly 16 percent of VA primary care facilities are operating at over 100 percent of capacity, for the system as a whole, the average wait time to see a VA primary care doctor is five days, and nine days for appointments with VA specialists," it states. **"The familiar narrative about wait times at**



**VA being worse than in the rest of the system is just demonstrably untrue,"** the report says. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | September 20, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Medical Marijuana Update 35** ► **AL Asks Secretary's Direct Involvement**

The American Legion is calling on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to clear roadblocks threatening completion of a groundbreaking clinical study on the use of medical marijuana to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in U.S. military veterans. The federally-approved study is being administrated by Dr. Sue Sisley, site principal investigator with the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), at the Scottsdale Institute outside of Phoenix, Arizona. The project is one of nine medical marijuana studies funded by historic grants from Colorado's Health Department.

Scientists have almost completed research with 22 veterans and now need to screen 6,000 to 8,000 vets to enroll an additional 54 qualifying PTSD patients in order to move the study forward, The Cannabist reported at the end of August. However, Sisley and her colleagues say the Phoenix VA Health Care System obstructing patient recruitment efforts putting the future of the study in serious jeopardy. On 19 SEP Denise Rohan, the Legion's national commander, sent a letter to VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin, calling for his "direct involvement" in ensuring "this critical research is fully enabled." Despite federal approval, "the Phoenix VA has not allowed Dr. Sisley to communicate with their staff or veterans receiving PTSD care at the Phoenix facility to recruit for her clinical research," said Joe Plenzler, the Legion's media liaison. "Without the direct involvement of the VA, this important research is in jeopardy of not recruiting enough patients to complete the trial."

Sisley welcomed the Legion's latest letter. For months she has been warning that without some level of cooperation from the Phoenix VA the clinical study will be unable recruit qualified participants. In August, she was also unsuccessful in her attempts to speak in person to Secretary Shulkin at the American Legion's national convention in Nevada. "The American Legion is one of the most powerful/respected veterans' organizations in the country," said Dr. Sisley said in a written statement to The Cananbist, "Having their endorsement of our cannabis clinical trials is a wonderful gift. We hope this will resonate with the Phoenix VA hospital and they will finally agree to start cooperating with the FDA-approved study and sharing information with appropriate veterans who many want to volunteer."

In her letter to Shulkin, Rohan emphasizes the VA's "statutory" medical research mission, as well as its involvement in many historic medical breakthroughs and discoveries. The letter reads in part:

*The research being conducted by the Scottsdale Institute is the first cannabis based research of its kind in The United States and could potentially produce scientific evidence that will enhance, improve and save the lives of veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Many veterans have approached us to tell us that access to cannabis has materially improved their health and well-being. While their stories are very compelling, we need clinical evidence to have a fact-based discussion on the future of cannabis policy.*

This is not the first time the Legion has appealed to the VA on the issue of veterans and medical marijuana, but it is their most direct appeal in a year-long campaign to convince the department to support and enable scientific research on the medicinal value of cannabis. Last April, the Legion sent a letter to the White House, requesting that President Donald Trump reschedule marijuana to permit research into its medical efficacy for treating vets suffering from traumatic brain injury and PTSD. "We're bringing the conversation up to a national level now," Plenzler told The Cannabist. "The VA has done a lot of great research over the years. We're counting on them to continue to back research to improve the lives of our veterans." [Source: The Cannabist | Bruce Kennedy | September 21, 2017 ++], 2017 ++]

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## VA Compensation & Benefits ► Problem Solving Program Q&A -- 5

### Question #5:

*My children's father was a Vietnam veteran in country 1970 with exposure to agent orange. All of my children have dental deformities (too many teeth) and pointed ,skin problems, daughter has third nipple, fatty pads on legs with diagnosis of lupus which is not in my family history. Their father passed away in 1997 at age 47 from "natural causes." Can I submit a state of claim if I think their health and mental issues are related to agent orange?*

**A1:** Children who have spina bifida or certain other birth defects and are biological children of Veterans with qualifying service in the Republic of South Vietnam or Republic of Korea may be eligible for various VA benefits, to include monthly monetary compensation, health care and vocational training depending on the child's degree of disability. The monetary compensation may be paid at one of three disability levels, based on the severity of the disability. A male or female Veteran's child may be eligible if:

- The Veteran parent served in the Republic of South Vietnam during the period from January 9, 1962 through May 7, 1975, OR
- The Veteran parent served in or near the Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ) during the period from September 1, 1967 through August 31, 1971 and was exposed to herbicides (service between April 1, 1968 and August 31, 1971 in or near the DMZ presumes exposure to herbicides.), AND
- The child was conceived after the date on which the Veteran parent served in either the Republic of South Vietnam or the Republic of Korea, AND
- The child has been diagnosed with a form of Spina Bifida other than Spina Bifida Occulta.

**NOTE:** VA has no requirements regarding the character of the parent's discharge or the length of his or her service.

### Evidence Requirements Include:

- Service records prove that the biological Veteran parent has qualifying Vietnam or specific Korean service dates and duty assignments, AND
- Evidence shows a biological relationship between the child and the Veteran parent with qualifying Vietnam or specific Korean service, AND
- A birth certificate determines date of conception, AND
- Medical evidence reflects a diagnosis of spina bifida or a covered birth defect.

### How to Apply:

- Complete VA Form 21-0304 "Application for Benefits for Certain Children with Disabilities born of Vietnam and Certain Korea Service Veterans" and mail to the VA Regional Office in Denver, CO, OR
- Work with an accredited representative or agent, OR
- Go to a VA regional office and have a VA employee assist you. (AP) 3/24/2016

**A2:** Unfortunately, only children who have spina bifida or certain other birth defects and are biological children of Veterans with qualifying service in Vietnam or Korea may be eligible for a range of VA benefits, starting with compensation, a monthly monetary allowance based on the child's degree of disability. - See more by going to website:

<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/children-birth-defects.asp#sthash.XdQni3pH.dpuf> (RJ) 3/24/2016

**A3:** Think I would go see a Veterans Service Officer in your city for help. Take your husbands DD214 with you. (BD) 3/24/2016

**A4:** The only disease the VA recognizes for children is Spinal Bifida. The only suggestion I can give is check with a VSO and see if anything is available. (PD) 3/24/2016

**A5:** You should call 1-800-827-1000 ext 110. You will have to have the fathers DD 214, as proof he was in Vietnam and exposed. He may have to be examined and give authorizations for the claim. Make the call. (HC) 4/5/2016

**A6:** Thanks for your husband's service. Yes, you can file for compensation for the children. You're required to have supportive info on your husband i.e. DD214 medical records. Call 1-800-827-1000 ext 110 they will advise and get you started. (HC) 4/19/2016

**A7:** No, the VA will only pay for skilled nursing homes. (TAD) 5/31/2016

**A8:** If the illness is not one on the VA's Agent Orange Presumptive List you cannot file a claim, go to their Agent Orange Site for the list. (JK) 6/26/2016

**A9:** All veterans who served "in country" in Vietnam are presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange. A DD214 is all the proof you should need for that. As for claiming the health issues of your children, I would suggest reading the latest federal regulations covering this issue for yourself. You can find it online. Also, did you file a claim for your benefits as a surviving spouse of an Agent Orange veteran? You would need his DD214 and his medical records to determine if any health issues he had at the time of his passing are linked to Agent Orange now. Good luck and don't give up. Eventually the VA will help if you can document an association to Agent Orange. (CSR) 7/26/2016

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### ***Problem Solving Program (PSP)***

Have a question about the VA? Need help with benefit questions? Need answers to your compensation questions? Use the Problem Solving Program (PSP) to get answers. Submit your question at <http://www.veteranprograms.com/compensation.html> and allow an experienced veteran(s) or VSO to answer your question. Use the PSP as often as you like. Your question will be sent to over 125,000+ [registered](#) USVCP veterans, government employees, veteran organizations, and military supporters.

[Source: USVCP | <http://www.veteranprograms.com/id2460.html> | September 30, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 30 SEP 2017**



**Syracuse, NY** — A former nurse for the Veteran's Administration is accused of stealing thousands of dollars in benefits prosecutors say she wasn't entitled to. The U.S. Attorney's Office says **Linda Sue Parnell**, 62, of Syracuse was arraigned 18 SEP on an indictment that charged her with four counts of wire fraud and one count of theft of government money. After her arraignment, Parnell was released pending a trial. Prosecutors say Parnell is accused of submitting false claims for reimbursement from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Workers' Compensation Programs for more than five years. The indictment against Parnell alleges she submitted fraudulent claims that she

traveled to the YMCA of Greater Syracuse for physical rehabilitation. Prosecutors claim Parnell made no such trips and received \$72,000 in benefits she was not entitled to. If convicted, Parnell faces up to 20 years in prison for each count of wire fraud and up to 10 years in prison for the theft of government money charge. A convicted could also come with a fine up to \$250,000 and a term of supervised release, the U.S. Attorney's Office said. [Source: CNYCentral | September 19, 2017 ++]

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**Albuquerque, NMA** Las Cruces woman has been sentenced to four months in prison for her conviction on theft of government property and forgery charges stemming from a scheme to defraud the Department of Veteran Affairs. Federal prosecutors said 55-year-old **Donah Davison** will also be required to pay more than \$147,000 in restitution as part of the sentence handed down 19 SEP. Davison was charged in November in a multi-count indictment. Most of the counts stemmed from allegations that she deposited surviving-spouse benefit checks to which she wasn't entitled. Prosecutors say Davison admitted that when her mother died in 1997, she failed to inform the VA and continued to collect and deposit the checks into her own bank account after signing her mother's signature on the back of the checks. [Source: Associated Press | September 20, 2017 ++]

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**San Antonio, TX** — A retired Army master sergeant captured on camera mowing his lawn after telling doctors he could no longer walk. A federal jury convicted Cole of four counts of health care fraud and two counts of making false statements this summer. He was sentenced to 27 months in prison Thursday and must pay back the federal government more than \$434,000. Cole will also be placed on supervised release for three years following his prison sentence. **Mack Cole Jr.**, 54, must surrender to federal authorities by 6 DEC.. Cole told VA doctors that a National Guard training accident in 2004 left him without "any ability to walk." However, undercover video evidence captured by federal investigators showed Cole mowing the front yard of his Cibolo home, walking up and down the driveway, and bending over to toss away debris.

Cole's attorney told the court 21 SEP his client takes 25 different medications for the lower back injury and has painkilling devices permanently installed in his body. The attorney argued that not granting Cole probation would cause a "nightmare" for the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Prosecutors argued that Cole repeatedly lied about the extent of his injuries and never presented himself as someone who could walk up and down his driveway. "There's a finite amount of money to treat injured veterans. When someone unjustifiably and unjustly reaches into that pot and scrapes out \$450,000, it's a diminished pot," said Assistant United States Attorney Bud Paulissen.

Two other disabled veterans in wheelchairs attended sentencing in support of the government and its case against Cole, after seeing a Defenders story on Cole in late July, Paulissen told the court. "When I saw him bend down to pick up, move trash away, so he could mow his lawn, I can't even scratch my own nose or blow my own nose," said retired Air Force Sergeant Lori Henson as she left court. Cole, who at times was animated as he sat in a motorized wheelchair, told Chief United States District Court Judge Orlando Garcia the case against him was inflated. "I didn't ask to be in this chair," he said. "I didn't want this to be my life!"

"(You) should have walked in here and apologized," said Garcia, before sentencing Cole. While leaving court, Cole called the sentence a "miscarriage of justice." Cole's wife told him to shut up as they made their way to the parking lot. Cole had faced up to 50 years in prison.

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**Spokane, WA** — After federal prosecutors rested their case 19 SEP, the wife of a former Spokane County sheriff's deputy testified that she was unaware that her husband was receiving about \$5,000 a month in disability payments that the government claims he wasn't entitled to receive. **Donald B. Henderson Jr.**, of Spokane, faces four criminal charges that he defrauded both the Social Security and Veteran Benefits administrations of more than \$650,000 after he claimed he suffers from an eye condition that leaves him legally blind. He worked a few years in the early 1990s for the sheriff's office and began receiving 100 percent disability payments in 2002.

Also indicted in the case was his wife, Tamara Henderson, who remains on administrative leave from her job of 15 years as an industry-operations investigator for the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. She had been charged with failing to report the theft of the disability payments to her husband, but federal prosecutors dismissed the case just before the trial that started 11 SEP. On 19 SEP, she broke down several times as she described the debilitating migraine headaches that her husband has endured since she met him in the U.S. Army in 1985. “I’d say he’d have a real bad one every two weeks,” she said. “He would work all week and he would just collapse on the weekends.” Henderson suffered a traumatic brain injury during a motorcycle crash in 1984 while he was serving in the Army. As a result of the reoccurring migraine headaches, his vision fluctuates to the point that he eventually lost his license to drive in 2001.

The wife said the family hasn’t taken a vacation since 1998 because Henderson doesn’t know when the next episode will occur. It left him unable to keep his dream job as a deputy and later an investigator for the Washington State Gambling Commission, she said. The wife, and two of the Henderson’s children, said Henderson hides from the light, presses his fingers into his eyes to help focus to read, and is someone who suffered addictions and depression from the medications doctors prescribed to deal with his pain. “He doesn’t want to be bedridden. He wants to help his family,” Tamara Henderson said. “I just don’t know how bad it’s going to get or what it leads to.”

But prosecutors pointed out that Donald Henderson wrote nothing about the migraine headaches, or fluctuating vision, when he filled out paperwork in 2002 to receive disability payments. In that application, it claims that he suffers from a thinning of the cornea – which the government does not dispute – that leaves him with permanent vision problems that would render him legally blind. “He’s telling these doctors he can only see a couple feet in front of him,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephanie Lister said in court. “He says he can’t garden, he can’t shoot ... but there are videos of him doing those very things.” Witnesses testified that Donald Henderson not only rode a motorcycle, he popped wheelies down the street. He took several trips with a friend riding ATV, until he crashed twice and sold his machine. Federal investigators sent in an undercover agent who went shooting with Henderson. He was able to see where the agent’s bullets hit a target and then shot it himself. “He didn’t report good days. He stole the money from the” Social Security Administration, Lister said.

Asked about the ATV riding, Tamara Henderson said she was fearful for her husband, who she said only went out seven or eight times. “He planned to go more often, but several weekends he had to cancel because he wasn’t feeling up to it,” she said. “I did worry but I knew he would be off-road and not be putting anyone else in danger.” Assistant U.S. Attorney Patrick Cashman asked the wife about the family finances. “Do you know the total you receive a month” from federal disability payments? “More than \$1,000. Close to \$5,000?” Cashman said. “I don’t know,” Tamara Henderson said. The family received federal money to help pay for a child’s education; to update the home to make it easier to Donald Henderson to get around; and Cashman said the Veterans Administration helped pay for the family’s Ford Focus. “I just may not remember that,” Tamara Henderson said. “I didn’t know (Ford Focus) was paid for by the VA.”

Donald Henderson received a medal for marksmanship in the Army and the family often went shooting together, she said. The couple also went to several movies. “I’m not sure what he could see or couldn’t see when we went,” she said. Deputy Federal Defender Colin Prince asked U.S. District Court Judge Rosanna Malouf Peterson to dismiss the case because he said the government failed to show that Henderson committed the crimes. “He’s being blamed for not coming forward and explaining that his traumatic brain injury is causing these problems,” Prince said. “If the (Social Security Administration) determines that they made an erroneous determination, they can take that up in administrative court. But it’s not a crime.” [Source: The Spokesman-Review | Thomas Clouse | September 19, 2017 ++]

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**Suffolk, VA** -- A Suffolk man pleaded guilty Tuesday to conspiring to defraud the Department of Veterans' Affairs' GI Bill program. **Kent Chillous**, 55, faces a potential maximum penalty of 20 years in prison when he is sentenced on 11 JAN, according to a press release from the U.S. Attorney's Office. However, federal defendants typically get a lesser sentence than the maximum. Chillous is a U.S. Navy veteran who attended the Hampton Roads Skills Center using Post-9/11 GI Bill funds, according to the press release. The school purported to be a welding training school offering vocational skills to its students, many of whom were veterans using GI Bill funds. However, the school did not provide regular instruction for any of its course offerings, either in a classroom setting or practical, hands-on setting, the press release stated. "Moreover, the majority of students were not even physically present at HRSC during most of the hours their courses were purportedly held," the press release continued. "Indeed, some students never once entered the HRSC building at any point during their period of enrollment."

According to court documents, Chillous was enrolled as an HRSC student between June 2016 and July 2017, during which time he did not receive welding instruction and was rarely, if ever, physically present at the school. However, on the basis of his enrollment, the VA paid him a regular housing stipend and paid HRSC for his tuition. Additionally, a few months after his enrollment at the school, Chillous and the school's owner struck a deal for Chillous to recruit veterans to enroll in HRSC, to boost the GI Bill revenue coming into the school. Chillous was paid a recruitment fee of approximately 8 percent of the tuition HRSC would receive from the VA on behalf of each veteran he successfully enrolled. Over the next 10 months, Kent successfully recruited approximately 20 Post-9/11 GI Bill-eligible veterans to enroll at HRSC. Chillous pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit wire fraud.

[Source: Suffolk News-Herald | September 27, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Whistleblowers Update 53** ► **Amazing How Little Has Changed**

Nursing home residents at the Bedford Veterans Affairs Medical Center can go many hours without food or languish in bed wearing only soiled sheets. The oldest buildings on the campus 25 miles north of Boston contain asbestos, exposing workers to potentially deadly fibers. At the William Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center in South Carolina, one doctor didn't know how to give a spinal injection, and hospital leaders misled accreditors to win approval for their pain program. And at the Fayetteville VA Medical Center in North Carolina, operations had to be rescheduled because anesthetists didn't give patients enough medicine to fall asleep. Some anesthetists didn't know how to properly insert a breathing tube.

All of these alleged lapses in patient care and dangerous conditions were identified by Veterans Administration employees, who have been turning against their employer in record numbers since a patient care scandal at the Phoenix VA in 2014 led to the resignation of the agency's top official in Washington. Last year, VA employees filed nearly 2,000 complaints with the Office of Special Counsel, the federal agency that investigates employee concerns — more than the next four most-complained-about departments combined. VA employee complaints doubled from 2013 to 2016 and now account for at least one-third of the agency's caseload even though they represent only about 18 percent of federal workers. "To put it in perspective," wrote Carolyn Lerner, the special counsel, in her 2018 budget request for an extra \$2.4 million to handle all the complaints, "OSC anticipates receiving more cases in [fiscal] 2017 from VA alone than the total number of cases we received from all agencies just over a decade ago."

Many say the surge in VA whistle-blowing reflects the national fallout from the Phoenix scandal, where employees were caught falsifying records to make it appear that patients were getting timely care. The VA's own investigation eventually showed that 35 veterans had died awaiting care. VA Secretary Eric Shinseki resigned as it became clear that the delays in Phoenix were common at many of the VA's 152 hospitals nationwide. And President Trump and Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin have encouraged more VA whistle-blowers to come forward,

creating a new Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection to address VA employees' concerns and protect them from retaliation.

- “In the past, VA whistle-blowers far too often faced retaliation for exposing problems,” said Curtis Cashour, spokesman for Shulkin, in an e-mailed statement. “This is obviously a factor affecting the number of VA-related Office of Special Counsel complaints.”
- “Our goal is to rebuild trust among employees and supervisors so that problems can be solved at the lowest level possible,” he added.

Congress, too, is lavishing attention on issues raised by the VA whistle-blowers. On Monday, a congressional committee will hold a hearing in New Hampshire to explore allegations brought by 11 whistle-blowers who worked at the Manchester VA Medical center. Their charges of substandard care — from flies in the operating room and stained surgical instruments, to veterans being permanently disabled through neglect — were described by the Globe Spotlight Team in July. “We know that far too many veterans face unacceptable hurdles when accessing VA care, and whistle-blowers play an important role in identifying areas where change is needed,” said US Representative Ann Kuster of New Hampshire, the ranking Democrat on the committee that will hold Monday’s hearing, in a prepared statement. But VA whistle-blowers remain skeptical that all the attention will translate into better health care for veterans in New Hampshire or anywhere else.

Five witnesses are scheduled to testify before the House Veterans’ Affairs Oversight and Investigations subcommittee, but only one of them is a whistle-blower — Dr. Edward Kois, who identified more than 80 patients with debilitating but possibly preventable spine injuries from his work in the Manchester VA’s pain clinic. Three others are VA officials and the fifth leads a veterans’ advisory committee. Stewart Levenson, one of the whistle-blowers, who recently retired as Manchester’s chief of medicine, was surprised that more whistle-blowers were not invited to speak. But he said their allegations have been so widely reported “you’d have to be living in a bubble not to know the issues.” “Everyone is interested in hearing the VA’s explanations,” he said. “So far I haven’t heard satisfactory ones.”

Since the Globe story was published in July, whistle-blowers from New England and the rest of the country have come forward to report poor care or mismanagement that threatens the health of veterans at other VA facilities including ones in Maine, Rhode Island, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah. And at least one new whistle-blower has filed allegations against the Manchester VA, alleging that he has faced retaliation. Gary Von George, who was the business office manager and a 33-year VA employee, said he was transferred out of his department after he complained about wasteful practices that jeopardized patient care. He alleges that the VA has potentially wasted millions of dollars by sending veterans to private dentists for excessive services, such as a full set of dental implants for a 90-year-old veteran. He called the expenditures “Cadillac dentistry.”

Whistle-blowers at other hospitals who contacted the Globe said they, too, have faced ostracism at work or been forced out altogether for raising health and safety issues. Take the case of Jeffrey Katz, an anesthesiologist, who joined the VA in 2015 after the Phoenix scandal. He was inspired by his father, a World War II veteran. He became chief of the pain service at the William Jennings Bryan Dorn VA Medical Center in Columbia, S.C., a facility that had been identified as having one of the longest wait times of any VA in the country. In the two years he worked there, he said, he reduced wait times, helped the pain program win reaccreditation, and set safety and quality control standards. But, he said, he also identified a doctor who was incorrectly performing sensitive spine, back, and joint injections. And he discovered that officials had won accreditation for the pain program by promising they could provide housing for patients who lived too far from the hospital to participate in a daily pain program. The hospital had no such housing available, Katz said.

Instead of being thanked for trying to improve the facility, he said, he was warned to stop finding problems. When he refused, he was removed from his position. Even though a special panel of doctors urged officials to reinstate him, he said, he was fired. “Corrupt facility leaders can readily harass and fire capable, highly qualified physicians who are whistle-blowers, as happened at the South Carolina center,” wrote Katz, an affiliate professor of



neurology at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine. Cashour, Shulkin’s spokesman, said he couldn’t comment on Katz’s or other whistle-blowers’ specific allegations without their written consent. But he said that if any of them feel they have been retaliated against, they should contact the new Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection. “Whistle-blower retaliation is not tolerated at VA, period,” he wrote.

Ronald Barrette, a former surgeon at the Fayetteville VA Medical Center in North Carolina, said he was “targeted” and then fired four days before the end of his two-year probationary period after raising a number of concerns in 2013, including issues with the hospital’s anesthetists, who are not medical doctors. Patients, he alleged, sometimes received inadequate anesthesia for surgery, and on one occasion, the anesthetist left a sedated patient early to feed her dogs, so she was not present when the patient’s blood pressure plummeted dangerously. Barrette, then acting chief of surgery, said he repeatedly reported his concerns to his boss, who did nothing. Instead, administrators began second-guessing his work.

Robert Digregorio, an electrician at the Bedford VA, said he has “been through hell” since he complained about asbestos, which is embedded in the walls, ceilings, and floors of many buildings of the suburban campus. “I’ve had a target on my back since I started this,” said Digregorio, who said his confidential medical information was disclosed to his supervisors. His complaints to the Office of Special Counsel prompted the VA to investigate, but the agency found that employees’ health was not being endangered, and officials were working to remove it. Digregorio vowed to keep fighting and has filed several new complaints with other federal agencies.

Some whistle-blowers who raised concerns about the nursing home care at the Bedford VA were so afraid of retaliation that they declined to talk to the Globe. However, an independent report on the nursing home supported some of their allegations of substandard care: Outside reviewers from the Long Term Care Institute in April saw one veteran lying in a bed covered only by a urine- and feces-stained sheet. They witnessed another veteran struggling to eat, using his hands to shove food in his mouth after trying unsuccessfully to maneuver food onto a spoon. VA Secretary Shulkin immediately removed the Manchester hospital’s top three administrators after the Spotlight report and directed both attention and resources to the facility.

The acting medical center director, Alfred A. Montoya Jr., said he’s listening to the whistle-blowers — and everyone else in the Manchester community — and has already launched a number of initiatives that will help Manchester become what it should be: a first-class medical facility for veterans. With the infusion of \$5 million, said Montoya, he’s begun recruiting for key positions and has reached agreements with area hospitals to take Manchester patients when his hospital cannot. He’s also created a new office to cut down the wait for care, which has stretched on for months in a program known as Vets Choice. Montoya said veterans now wait no more than three days to get an appointment scheduled. “Manchester did not get like this overnight,” he said. “It was a process that led to the conditions at the Manchester VA. Similarly, it’s going to be a process to help the Manchester VA improve and provide the high-level quality of care our veterans deserve.”

But most of the whistle-blowers say that conditions at New Hampshire’s only veterans hospital have actually gotten worse in recent months, in part because allies of the dismissed administrators are still running the hospital. “Dr. Shulkin promised the doctors he would give them more control and more say in decision-making at the facility,” said Andrea Amodeo-Vickery, a lawyer who represents 12 current and former Manchester VA whistle-blowers. Instead, she said, administrators continue to ignore the doctors. “They’re not focusing on patient care. They’re not asking for providers’ input. They’re running it as if it were a robotic factory and not a place with people.” And the whistle-blowers point out that, despite his recent dismissal from Manchester, Dr. James Schlosser was recently a finalist for a new position at the hospital — head of the Office of Community Care. “It amazes me how little has changed,” said Levenson.

[Source: Boston Globe | Andrea Estes | September 16, 2017 ++]

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## VAMC Manchester NH Update 04 ► Congressional Hearing on Patient Care

Members of Congress on 18 SEP grilled the leaders of the Manchester VA Medical Center, asking why it took media reports and a congressional hearing to expose conditions that severely threaten the health and safety of veterans at the hospital. “I am very concerned about leadership failures and deficiencies that have existed in Manchester and have been allowed to compound for too many years,” said Representative Jack Bergman, a retired Marine Corps general and chairman of the House Veterans’ Affairs Oversight and Investigations subcommittee. “But it’s also very clear there was no sense of urgency within the [Veterans Affairs New England office] to address these problems,” said Bergman, a Michigan Republican.

Bergman’s committee came to New Hampshire after the Globe Spotlight Team revealed a host of patient safety concerns at the state’s only veterans hospital, including flies in one operating room and neglect of spinal patients that may have led to permanent injury. After that report, Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin immediately removed the hospital’s top three officials and launched a “top to bottom” review. Many of the 12 hospital staff members who raised the issues said hospital leadership had ignored their concerns and drove some to leave in disgust.

Dr. Ed Kois, one of the whistle-blowers, testified that the hospital’s chief of medicine, Dr. Stewart Levenson, who retired this year, was criticized and ostracized by Department of Veterans Affairs leaders for raising patient safety concerns. The doctors had been raising safety concerns at the hospital for at least a year before the Globe story was published. “I know for a fact that Stewart Levenson sacrificed his career at the VA, giving negative feedback to the [regional VA leaders] only to be treated like he was some kind of village idiot,” said Kois, who identified more than 80 Manchester patients who suffered spine injuries that might have been prevented with better care.

At the hearing, members of the congressional panel focused on Dr. Michael Mayo-Smith, who oversees all of New England’s VA hospitals, asking him when he learned about the problems with patient care in Manchester. Mayo-Smith said he was unaware of some of the issues raised in the Globe report, even though several whistle-blowers, including Levenson, said they had brought their concerns directly to him. He discussed at length the fly problem, reciting various efforts hospital officials had undertaken to get rid of the flies, so far unsuccessfully. But he said that he was unaware of other issues raised by the Spotlight report. “We appreciate what the whistle-blowers brought us,” said Mayo-Smith. He and other officials said they have a plan to improve the quality of care at the medical center and to address management issues.

Outside the hearing room, Levenson, who retired in July, said Mayo-Smith was “very disingenuous” to welcome revelations from whistle-blowers when he repeatedly failed to respond to their concerns. The head of the New Hampshire American Legion asked Shulkin to remove Mayo-Smith from a task force looking into how to improve the operations of the Manchester VA. “He is the direct supervisor of the personnel who were released from the VAMC in Manchester,” wrote Dave Meaney Sr., commander of the New Hampshire American Legion. “In no case do we cast any aspersions on Dr. Mayo-Smith, but we feel that the mere perception of impropriety is not welcomed or should be entertained in the formation of this task force.”

Bergman said he sympathized with the frustration many of the doctors felt that VA leaders were not listening to them. “The whistle-blowers tried to go through proper channels, but as we have seen happen over and over again at the VHA, their complaints were either ignored or were not addressed,” said Bergman. Even with its problems, the VA rated the Manchester facility four stars out of a possible five. “I have to question a rating system that gives out such a high scores while these and many other issues . . . were occurring during the same period of time,” Bergman said. “It should not take a news report or a congressional hearing for you to respond to veterans’ and employees’ concerns,” Bergman said to Mayo-Smith. “As [New England] director your job is to lead proactively not reactively.”

Representative Annie Kuster of New Hampshire, the ranking Democrat on the committee, added that Shulkin “made the right decision” when he removed the hospital director, chief of staff, and head of nursing services at

Manchester after the Globe article. “VA leadership who knew about the reports of substandard care and failed to act should be held accountable,” she added. Acting Manchester VA director Alfred Montoya and Dr. Carolyn Clancy, deputy undersecretary for health for organizational excellence, also appeared before the panel. They praised the whistle-blowers and insisted the agency would not retaliate against them for raising concerns.

But Dr. Kois, in his testimony, said the whistle-blowers at Manchester were so fearful of retaliation that they met in secret. “The way I deal with it — I’m sitting here talking to you,” he said, describing the group of Manchester employees who came forward over several months, “almost like a secret society.” Kois also said the problems in Manchester are part of something much bigger. “Unless we get a handle on really what’s happening in the VA system, this is going to continue,” Kois said. “We have really dedicated people who work in the system, but we have a bureaucracy that is so top heavy and so slow to react, it’s problematic.”

David J. Kenney, chairman of the New Hampshire State Veterans Advisory Committee, testified that the revelations by the Globe were “appalling. I’m pleased the deficiencies have been uncovered. The need for whistle-blowers implies an underlying lack of accountability. If the system worked the way it should, there would be no need for whistle-blowers.” [Source: The Boston Globe | Andrea Estes | September 18, 2017 ++]

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## **VAMC San Juan PR Update 01 ► Hurricane Maria Impact**

After Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico, nearly two days passed before Veterans Affairs Emergency Manager Cosme Torres-Sabater had a chance to get outside and assess the damage the country. “It’s like a nuclear device exploded in the center of Puerto Rico,” the 15-year VA employee said on 22 SEP. “The trees have no leaves. Houses have no roofs. There is floating debris everywhere.” His normal trip home to the suburbs of San Juan on Friday took more than six hours, weaving along damaged highways and flooded local roads. Luckily, his family and neighborhood were safe. So too is the San Juan VA Medical Center, which experienced only minor flooding in the cafeteria and a few hallways during the Category 4 storm even though the building sits less than four miles from the island’s northern coast.

While 150-mile-an-hour winds and more than 20 inches of rain pummeled the city, the 300-plus patients and 400-plus employees who rode out the storm inside remained unharmed, if not unaffected. Now the challenge ahead for the medical center is to return to normal operations on an island that is months away from restoring electricity, phone service and other basic infrastructure needs to all of its residents. VA officials in the United States have maintained regular contact with local facility officials throughout this storm and the previous one — Hurricane Irma, which passed by Puerto Rico but severely damaged other islands in the region.

The San Juan center is the hub for medical care for more than 93,000 veterans spread throughout the Caribbean. When Hurricane Irma earlier in September forced the closure of outpatient clinics in nearby St. Croix and St. Thomas, 91 patients were transferred to the Puerto Rico site to ensure their health and safety. Torres-Sabater said that served as a warm up for the Hurricane Maria response. VA officials brought in supplies and prepped staff in advance of the storm, the strongest to hit the island in more than 80 years. “Even with all of the challenges to our community, our VA employees wanted to report to work,” he said. “They take a lot of pride in supporting our veterans. So they’re happy to be here, and working through challenges in their neighborhoods to get here.”

Mary Kay Rutan, spokeswoman for VA health services covering the Caribbean and Florida, said that enthusiasm has spread to the U.S. mainland as well. As soon as the storm subsided, volunteers from other VA centers began asking what they can do to help. The department is preparing a deployable employee pool to travel to the island in coming days. “Puerto Rico is a unique challenge for us, because unlike the rest of the country, we can’t just drive in there and deliver supplies once the storm is over,” she said. “So we’re working with our federal partners, making sure we have sufficient fuel and water and food. “It’s going to take a long time for that community to recover.”

As of the morning, of 22 SEP VA officials were still assessing when the region's 10 community care clinics will reopen. That will depend on how much damage those buildings suffered, and whether the surrounding infrastructure can allow travel to the facilities. Benefits offices on the island also remain closed. Rutan said emergency services at the main medical center have reopened, and officials are providing walk-in care for veterans with mental health needs as well. Torres-Sabater said the hospital is also working with local officials to provide additional medical care to non-veterans in some circumstances. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | September 23, 2017 ++]

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## VAMC Spokane WA Update 02 ► Missing Computer

Veterans Affairs officials in Spokane are notifying 3,275 veterans that their health information may be compromised because of a missing laptop computer. An equipment inventory failed to find a vendor-issued laptop from the Mann-Grandstaff VAMC Lab. It was used to interface with a hematology analyzer between April 2013 and May 2016. An extensive search of the VA grounds did not locate the laptop. In a news release outlining the issue, VA officials said they were uncertain what information was stored on the laptop. As a precaution, VA officials said they are alerting every veteran who may have had a blood sample processed on the analyzer. At risk would be the names, dates of birth, and social security numbers of the veterans. The VA said it would notify affected veterans with a letter about the situation and information regarding a year of free credit monitoring by Experian. [Source: The Spokesman-Review | September 19, 2017 ++]

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## VAMC Washington DC Update 06 ► Former Director ReFired

On 20 SEP, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it has fired former Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center Director **Brian Hawkins** for his failure to provide effective leadership to the D.C. Medical Center. The department undertook this action using authorities provided by the VA Accountability Act, which the president signed into law in June. Hawkins was notified in late August that he was being proposed for removal. "We at VA will use the authorities available to ensure our Veterans get the highest quality service and care possible," said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. "This is the right decision for Veterans in D.C., and employees at the medical center, and underscores our commitment to hold employees accountable if they fail to do their jobs or live up to VA's values." VA initiated the latest action after the VA Office of Inspector General issued a new report finding that Hawkins violated VA policy by sending sensitive VA information from his work email to unsecured private email accounts. [Source: Veteran Resources | Donnie La Curan | September 20, 2017 ++]

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## VAMC Huntington WV Update 02 ► 90-Year Old Vet Volunteer

In the 1980s, Veteran **Rick Bohnke** began coming to the Huntington VA Medical Center for his care. About a decade later, he signed up as a VA volunteer and for the first 10 or so years he drove for the Volunteer Transportation Network, helping to take patients to and from their medical appointments. Nowadays you can find him popping popcorn or working at the volunteer coffee desk on the ground floor. Turning 90 last May, Bohnke has remained an active, highly visible Veteran both at the medical center and in the community. He serves on the Veterans Honor Guard at funerals. He is also a skilled photographer who is often seen capturing meaningful shots of VA events and community programs. When asked why he volunteers at VA, Bohnke says, "I wanted to keep myself occupied, and I couldn't think of anything better than to help my fellow Veterans."



When Rick Bohnke entered the Army Air Corps in 1945, he didn't go the traditional route through boot camp. Bohnke was a senior in high school when he enlisted in what is now known as the U.S. Air Force. Because of his typing and clerical skills, he was immediately sent to Camp Atterbury in Indianapolis to help process the soldiers returning from World War II. Some weeks later, Bohnke returned home to receive his diploma, and then was sent away again, this time for basic training. From there he served in various clerical roles until the middle of 1956; during two breaks in his service he went to college.

On three occasions, Bohnke served on the USS Admiral Elberle. His most memorable time on the ship was riding out a horrible typhoon when it left Okinawa, Japan. In fact, Bohnke said the captain knew the typhoon was coming and headed straight out into it. "I went up to the bridge and the bow was going down in the water like a submarine," Bohnke said. "I was too scared to be afraid." After finishing his military service, Bohnke came home to Huntington, West Virginia

One of Bohnke's proudest achievements was serving as the longtime chairman of the Veterans Committee for Civic Improvement. When he took over in the late 1970s, the committee was on the verge of folding. His goal was to revive the committee and bring the local Veterans service organizations together collaboratively for first the Memorial Day program and later for the community's annual Veterans Day parade and program at the Veterans Memorial Arch. By the late 1990s the Arch, which was dedicated in 1928, had suffered from the ravages of time. Bohnke played an instrumental role in saving the Arch, raising \$75,000 for its renovation and preserving it as a beautiful, unique memorial to heroism and military service. In 1999, Bohnke helped bury a time capsule in front of the Arch. The time capsule is slated to be opened in 2050.

[Source: VAntage Point | September 21, 2017 ++]

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## **VAMC Memphis TN Update 03 ► "Mafia-style" Leadership Accusations**

One of the top leaders at the Memphis VA is facing accusations that he bullied employees and was part of a "mafia-style" leadership team, new internal documents show. The accusations are similar to ones the executive faced while serving at the VA hospital in Marion, Ill., which along with the Memphis hospital is among the most troubled in the



VA system. Despite the new accusations, Memphis VA director David Dunning says he has full confidence in **Frank Kehus**, the associate director and chief operations officer at the hospital. "Mr. Kehus' demonstrated performance at the Memphis VA reflects the highest level of professionalism and puts veterans first," Dunning said in a statement..

The new documents obtained by the USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee show that as recently as this month, employees raised the concerns about Kehus to the Washington, D.C., office of VA Secretary David Shulkin and Dunning. One employee wrote to Shulkin this month that workers felt they were harassed by their managers and told Kehus about the issues. They said they didn't think that Kehus cared about their concerns. "Well it is clear to me that (Kehus) has not and will not make any changes for me as a disabled veteran employee who suffers from PTSD," the employee wrote to the VA secretary. Kehus did not respond to questions provided via email through the Memphis VA communications office.

At the Marion VA, the accusations were made by employees during interviews conducted by the VA's National Center for Patient Safety after that office received a "significant number of phone calls and emails" about the culture over a two-year period, according to an NCPS memo from May. At the time, Kehus served as associate chief of staff in Marion. The accusations became public when that May memo by NCPS Program Manager Rodney Williams was later released by U.S. Rep. Mike Bost, R-Illinois, who represents the area that includes the Marion VA. After his stint in Marion, the VA temporarily assigned Kehus to Memphis as associate medical center director. He assumed the Memphis position permanently the same day Dunning started as the new permanent director at the Memphis VA Medical Center. Kehus' 30-year career at the VA has included one other stop in Memphis from 1988-2000.

Multiple people interviewed by NCPS mentioned Kehus and other top officials at the Marion hospital by name, claiming they were "more interested in bonuses for themselves and 'blaming' the employees rather than supporting the mission," the memo says. Kehus was also accused of openly bullying other employees. "It is unified bullying," one staff member said, according to the NCPS memo. "Right now people in management automatically support one another regardless of the actual circumstances that are taking place." In the memo, Williams issued recommendations for improvement and noted that follow-up calls after a visit in November 2016 showed that "none of the concerns have (been) addressed since (my) visit."

Despite what Williams reported, Dunning said he is proud to have Kehus on his team. "Since my arrival, I have assembled a strong and stable management team, including Mr. Kehus, and I have full confidence in my team's leadership abilities," Dunning said in a statement. Both Memphis and Marion are under close watch by acting VA Undersecretary of Health Poonam Allai. The hospitals are among four the VA is requiring weekly updates to Allai. Memphis and Marion are both places where patients died waiting for care or shortly after receiving medical care, and have both been sites where whistleblowers say they were retaliated against for disclosing problems.

Williams in the memo said that more than two dozen employees requested to be interviewed by NCPS in 2016 and 2017. In Memphis, Sean Higgins, who made more than three dozen disclosures of poor care, worker concerns and other issues over his three-year career at that facility. He was fired earlier this year, a day before President Donald Trump signed legislation protecting whistleblowers. Kehus was in an interim position when Higgins was suspended for two weeks earlier this year, accused of using foul language to a supervisor. Kehus signed off on the suspension, records show. Higgins claims his termination was orchestrated. He has appealed his termination with the Merit Systems Protection Board, an administrative court within the VA. [Source: USA Today Network | Jake Lowary | September 20, 2017 ++]

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## VAMC Memphis TN Update 04 ► New Accountability Law Utilized

An employee at the Memphis VA charged over the weekend with a felony was suspended by the hospital, the VA announced 21 SEP. The suspension and recommendation for termination comes as VA Secretary David Shulkin has made now two personnel moves citing the new accountability law that allows the VA to more easily fire employees "when they fail to live up to the high standards taxpayers expect from us," Shulkin said in a news release. **Linda Turner**, who worked in the hospital's finance department, was charged with two counts of aggravated assault and criminal impersonation on 17 SEP, Shelby County arrest records show, and the VA proposed her termination 20 SEP.

The law was passed earlier this year by President Donald Trump amid several cases where Shulkin said the VA lacked the authority to promptly deal with problem employees. Shulkin used another case in Memphis when lobbying for the law's passage earlier this year. Brittney Lowe, an interior designer at the hospital, was allowed to return to work and collect donated leave while serving a 60-day jail sentence for multiple convictions of driving under the influence. Memphis VA officials disputed whether Lowe was paid, but later distributed notifications to the hospital staff that said donated leave could not be used if incarcerated.

Turner was not listed as an inmate on the Shelby County Jail site Thursday morning. Arrest records show that Turner is accused of pulling a handgun at the corner of Poplar and Fourth streets, and pointing it at a grandmother and her 2-year-old granddaughter during an argument. She also told the woman and her granddaughter, "I am the police," the arrest warrant states. "This behavior is not in line with the norms and values of the VA, and as a result the employee has been suspended from all duties," VA Press Secretary Curt Cashour said in a news release. "VA has initiated the process for removal from employment," Cashour said.

The move is the second in two days where a new accountability law passed earlier this summer has been put into effect. On Wednesday, Shulkin announced that the director of the Washington, D.C. VA, Brian Hawkins, had been terminated after numerous reports of dirty surgical rooms, a supply shortage, and forwarding sensitive information to a private email account. [Source: USA Today Network | Jake Lowary | September 21, 2017 ++]

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## AFRH Update 08 ► Chief Operating Officer Fired

Defense officials on 14 SEP fired the chief operating officer of the Armed Forces Retirement Home, citing his unwillingness to follow their directions to shore up the finances of the agency's two homes, which care for about 1,000 former enlisted members. **Timothy Kangas** was not willing to move forward with Defense Department plans to focus on new sources of income for the home's campuses in Washington, D.C., and Gulfport, Mississippi, said David Tillotson III, DoD's assistant deputy chief management officer, during a press call Thursday. Officials are in

the process of hiring another leader, he said — one with experience in running military retirement communities in a nonprofit setting, which means they generate income to supplement operations.



**AFRH in Washington D.C.**

However, Tillotson said, “the current chief operating officer has not indicated that he’s on board with going in this new direction. In fact, he’s been a little bit reticent to make some of those changes, and as a result, we’re going to go ahead and make a leadership change.” Defense officials “appreciate his service,” Tillotson said. “Dr. Kangas as the current chief operating officer has done some very good things in his 18 months of tenure, but I do think we’ve come to a point where if we’re going to drive forward with the new operating model we probably need to pursue new leadership.” Kangas served for nine years as a combat medic in the Michigan Army National Guard, with the 107th Engineering Battalion, according to his AFRH biography. He also served with a State Department provincial reconstruction team in Iraq. He holds a doctorate in Public Administration and Public Affairs from Western Michigan University, per his bio. He took over the top post at AFRH in April 2016.

Tillotson will hold a town hall meeting with residents at the Washington campus Friday morning, with the Gulfport residents participating through video teleconference. “My biggest concern overall is to make sure that we continue to provide service to the current resident population,” Tillotson said. “These are veterans that served their country honorably for many years. I want to make sure that we’re in a position to continue to provide them support as we move forward. I do think looking at new operating models doesn’t undercut that intent.”

The new sources of income are yet to be determined, Tillotson said. One option that has been considered is revising the fee structure for residents, which is based on a percentage of resident income and type of care received. Whether or not any of the new sources of revenue will come out of the residents’ pockets has yet to be determined. “We’re looking at all sources of revenue. That’s an issue we’ll take up with the new chief operating officer. We’re not going to lose track of the fact that we have a significant number of residents that are not going to be able to, under any condition, pay full price for their residence,” Tillotson said. “Part of the mission of the Armed Forces Retirement Home is to provide support for those residents. We are not losing track of that mission.”

One revenue source that is being evaluated is the golf course on the Washington, D.C., property. Changes could include how many people use the nine-hole course, and who is eligible to use it. “The current administration looked at the golf course as a cost issue, and opted to scale back,” Tillotson said. “We did research, and it’s an asset. Can we change the nature of how we conduct the business of the golf course and generate revenue that supports the retirement home? A number of retirement communities across the country use this model, looking at assets such as facilities that could be rented as meeting rooms that could be used to increase income, he said. Another example is doing everything possible to make sure Armed Forces Retirement Home gets reimbursed for medical care for residents from insurance plans and other sources, Tillotson said. In a memo earlier this year, then-Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work directed the DCMO to explore agreements with DoD and the Veterans Affairs Department for reimbursement for medical care to veterans normally provided for veterans by those departments.

Defense officials have been examining every aspect of the homes' operations, in the wake of a serious cash flow problem that resulted in nearly depleting the AFRH trust fund. The retirement home's trust fund balance has declined from \$186 million in 2010 to \$46 million in 2015, according to AFRH budget justification documents for fiscal year 2017. In fiscal 2015, the AFRH had \$63 million in expenses against \$48 in revenue. The AFRH has been operating at a deficit of about \$20 million a year, Tillotson said, with taxpayers making up the difference.

Officials have been looking at every aspect of the home, including operations, and have determined that the problem is not with operating costs. Those costs "are not grossly out of line," Tillotson said. "While we can do things to be more efficient, that's not going to solve the problem. The path forward is a business model focusing on new sources of income." Most service members' connection with these homes begins and ends with a 50-cent-a-month mandatory deduction from their paycheck. In February, Work directed that the oversight of the Armed Forces Retirement Home be moved from the personnel and readiness division of DoD to the deputy chief management officer. [Source: MilitaryTimes | September 14, 2017 ++]

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## **Vietnam Veterans Memorial Update 20 ► Volunteers Sought**

When the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated in Washington, D.C. in 1982, a promise was made to never forget those who served and sacrificed their lives in the Vietnam War. Etched in its black granite walls are the names of 58,318 service members who were killed or remain missing. The Wall honors their courage, sacrifice, and devotion to duty and country. Since its inception, The Wall has become a sacred place for loved ones and visitors to pay their respects. By separating the war from the warrior, The Wall began a process of national healing.

This year marks the 35th Anniversary of The Wall. In commemoration of the Anniversary, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) is honored to host the 2017 Reading of the Names of the more than 58,000 service members inscribed on The Wall in Washington, D.C. The Reading of the Names will take place at The Wall for 65 hours over a four-day period beginning with an opening ceremony on Tuesday, Nov. 7 at 3:00 p.m. Volunteers will read names for approximately eight hours from 4 p.m. on November 7 to 12 a.m. on Nov. 8. Participants will then read the names for 19 hours daily from 5 a.m. until 12 a.m. on November 8, 9, and 10. Volunteer readers can sign up for a specific name on The Wall or for a timeslot in which they are available to read.

VVMF is asking the public to join them in this monumental event, as a reader or as a spectator, in honor of their sacrifice. Registration is now open for 2017's reading times at <http://www.vvmf.org/ROTN>. One of the best ways to honor our fallen is to say their names and share their story. Behind every name on The Wall is a person, a life cut short, and a family changed forever. By saying their names, we are saying we will never forget them.

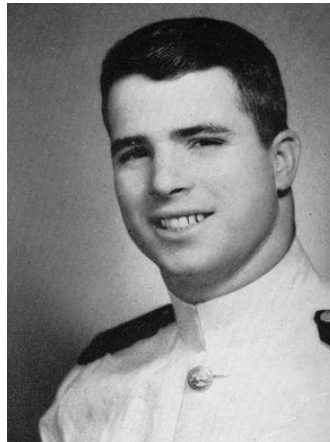
Remember Pfc. Dan Bullock, the 15-year-old Marine who forged his birth certificate to join the U.S. military and became the youngest American service member to die in the war. Remember Navy chaplain Lt. Vincent Capodanno, who was administering comfort and last rites to Marines when he went to aid a wounded corpsman and was killed by enemy fire. Say the name of Army nurse 1st Lt. Sharon Lane, one of eight women to die in Vietnam, and the only one to die from hostile fire. These brave men and women left behind friends, brothers, sisters, and parents. They had the same hopes and dreams as the rest of us. It is only fitting that we come together at the place our nation has set aside to remember them.

It has been 35 years since The Wall was dedicated, but it remains just as important that we never forget. Never forget their names. Never forget their faces. Never forget what they gave for their country. It's important that we educate current and future generations about the Vietnam War and its impact, legacies, and lessons learned. Join VVMF in keeping the promise that The Wall was built on - the promise to never forget. [Source: Together We Served Newsletter | Mike Christy | September 2017 ++]

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## **McCain Fights Back** ► CBS's 60 Minutes 24 SEP Interview | New Insight

Sen. John McCain gave new insight into his grim struggle with an aggressive form of brain cancer in an interview that aired Sunday on CBS's 60 Minutes. "They said that it's very serious, that the prognosis is very, very serious," the 81-year-old McCain (R-AZ) said during the segment titled "The Fighter." "Some say 3 percent, some say 14 percent. You know, it's a very poor prognosis," he continued. "So I just said, 'I understand. Now we're gonna do what we can, get the best doctors we can find and do the best we can.'" "And, at the same time, celebrate, with gratitude, a life well-lived."



**John McCain at the Naval Academy**

McCain, a former naval aviator who was shot down over North Vietnam in 1967 and held as a prisoner of war until 1973, also revealed that he wants his memorial service held at his alma mater in Annapolis, Md. "I want, when I leave, that the ceremony is at the Naval Academy," he said. "And we just have a couple of people that stand up and say, 'This guy, he served his country.'" McCain on 14 JUL underwent an emergency craniotomy to address a blood clot that was later revealed to be associated with glioblastoma, a deadly kind of brain cancer.

He returned to Capitol Hill after Labor Day and is keeping his regular Senate work schedule as he continues chemotherapy and radiation treatment. "I am more energetic, and more engaged, as a result of this because I know that I've got to do everything I can to serve this country while I can," said McCain, the chairman of the influential Senate Armed Services Committee and the 2008 Republican presidential nominee. Since the diagnosis, McCain on 28 JUL voted to kill the GOP's "skinny repeal" legislation, part of Republican efforts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, or "Obamacare." On Friday, McCain announced that he also intends to vote against the latest GOP health-care bill authored by Sens. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Bill Cassidy of Louisiana.

The votes have put further strain on his already notoriously bad relationship with President Donald Trump, who has made undoing "Obamacare" a top priority. In the TV interview, McCain said that Trump still has never apologized to him for ridiculing in 2015 McCain's P.O.W. experience. But McCain said he has moved on and that none of his votes are intended to get back at Trump for the insult. McCain added that he'd be happy to have a conversation with Trump but acknowledged that they each had a "different upbringing" and "different life experiences." McCain's father and grandfather were U.S. Navy admirals. "He is in the business of making money and he has been successful both on television as well as Miss America and others," McCain said of Trump. "I was raised in a military family. I was raised in the concept and belief that duty, honor, country is the lodestar for the behavior that we have to exhibit every single day."

McCain also detailed to 60 Minutes correspondent Lesley Stahl how his doctors informed him of the life-threatening health issue, which was discovered during a routine health exam. It was a Friday, and McCain was about two-thirds of the way to his cabin near Sedona when he got a call from his doctor saying he had to turn around and come back for the surgery. "And I said, 'Hey, today is Friday. I'll just come in on Monday.' And she said, 'No, you have to come now. It's very serious,'" McCain recalled. McCain also suggested that his doctors initially danced around the diagnosis. "I kept saying to them, 'Tell it to me straight,'" he said. "... I said, 'I can take it. Just tell me.'" McCain was asked whether he has felt "panic" since the diagnosis. He said he had not. "I have feelings, sometimes of fear, of what happens," McCain said. "But as soon as I get that, I say, 'Wait a minute. Wait a minute. You've been around a long time, old man. You've had a great life. You've had a great experience.'" To view the interview go to (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/john-mccain-fights-back-60-minutes>) [Source: The Republic | Dan Nowicki | September 24, 2017 ++]

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## **Vet Toxic Exposure | AFB PFCs Update 01 ► \$2B Clean Up Estimate**

The Enlisted Association (YTRA) has been tracking a developing story out of Oscoda Township, Michigan at the old Wurtsmith Air Force Base, which closed in the 1990's during the first round of BRAC. Democratic Senators said earlier this month that it may cost up to \$2 billion to clean up toxic firefighting chemicals that have leaked from more than 400 U.S. military installations, mostly those affiliated with the Air Force or Navy. The Senate's Fiscal Year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (FY '18 NDAA) requested a study of PFOS and PFOA (PFCs), which were key ingredients in a foam that was used for decades to douse aircraft fires at military bases, civilian airports, fire stations and defense industrial factories.

In the last year people around the country have realized that the chemicals contaminated groundwater at many of those sites. US citizens all over the country, many not affiliated with the US military, have learned that the chemical concentrations in their drinking water exceed recommendations from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The chemicals have been linked to cancer, thyroid problems and immune system disorders, although scientists aren't sure exactly how they interact in the human body.

In a bit of good news, The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) says it will update the 2001 public health assessment for Wurtsmith. ATSDR is an independent agency under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) which operates jointly with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

The 2001 assessment found that it was "unknown" whether trichloroethylene (TCE), a cancer-causing industrial solvent found at astonishing levels in base drinking water in the late 1970s at Wurtsmith, "persisted at high enough levels for long enough durations to actually pose a public health hazard." In the intervening years the science has progressed enough so that it is extremely likely that a causal connection between chronic exposure and health problems can be established. The report will be ready for public review this spring, ATSDR said. The hope is that the updated report prods the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to extend disability benefits and treatment to former service members without forcing them to somehow show medical evidence that links their disability claim to TCE exposure.

For that to happen, though, the ATSDR must conclude TCE exposure likely harmed people at Wurtsmith. That has to occur before the VA would consider amending its benefits policy. At that point it is extremely likely that Congress would need to appropriate additional funds for the victims, like it did with Camp Lejeune toxic exposure victims. TCE levels at Wurtsmith in 1977 were found to be as high as 5,173 parts-per-billion (ppb), which is more than 1,000 times the EPA's current limit of 5-ppb for TCE in drinking water. TCE levels in LeJeune drinking water reached 1,400-ppb in the 1980s, prompting Congressional action for servicemembers and their families who were exposed to it.



Hopefully this turns out well for all the victims of toxic exposure at Wurtsmith, especially TREA: The Enlisted Association's friends at the Veteran & Civilian Clean Water Alliance, who have been fighting to recognize both TCE and PFC exposure all over the country. If you or anyone you know is a veteran who has been exposed to these or other chemicals due to your service, the TREA recommends you click on <https://www.facebook.com/groups/296949220676070/?ref=bookmarks> and join their Facebook group. They are dedicated to getting you the resources that you need and deserve. [Source: TREA Washington Update | September 26, 2017 ++]

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## **Vietnam Vets [26] ► Sanzaro-Mike | Delayed Purple Heart**

There is a quality common among combat veterans, a quiet, unassuming nature that belies experiences few can match, let alone understand. **Mike Sanzaro**, a veteran of more than 300 combat patrols during the height of the Vietnam War, is soft-spoken and matter-of-fact, a man who speaks about extraordinary events in the way some would recount a trip to the grocery. Perhaps that's why it took the urging of Department of Veterans Affairs doctors for Sanzaro to request a Purple Heart that had been due him for more than 40 years.

In 1969, Sanzaro was a young man who spent his free time flipping through old issues of Leatherneck magazine. It was a lifelong dream, he said, to join the Marines – even though he had a comfortable life with a steady job as a movie theater manager and a girlfriend he planned to marry. It didn't take much for a Marine Corps recruiter to lure him away from all of that. "We can guarantee you a rifle," Sanzaro was told. "He lied to me. I got a machine gun instead." He went to boot camp in San Diego in July 1969 and soon found himself in Vietnam, working as an ammunition carrier for a seasoned machine gunner. When recounting the early days of his tour, Sanzaro mentioned that he single-handedly saved the lives of his entire squad.

His squad was on a routine patrol through the jungles about 15 miles west of Da Nang, when they were ambushed from the left. His squad leader formed them into a fighting line and ordered them to advance on the enemy position. "We just walked slowly toward the enemy," Sanzaro said. They laid down fire and received plenty in return. "You can hear those bullets go right by your head. I'll never forget that feeling." As they fought, a group had circled around to the Marines' left flank. The Viet Cong guerrillas – distinguished, Sanzaro said, from North Vietnamese Army troops by their poor accuracy – began firing right down their line. "It was the worst situation you can think of," Sanzaro said. "So, I just ran toward them." With bayonet affixed, he charged the bushes and cleared the ambush with a grenade and a full magazine's worth of rounds. He had saved the lives of the men behind him, at great personal risk.

Afterward, no one said anything and Sanzaro believed he did nothing special. "I'm being paid \$214 a month to do that. So that's what I did," he said. One of the sergeants whose life Sanzaro saved felt differently, and wrote him up for an award. It materialized more than a year later, as a Navy Achievement Medal awarded to him as he was preparing to exit the Marine Corps. He almost didn't get that chance. If the events of Jan. 10, 1971 – nearly a year after that ambush – had gone slightly differently, Sanzaro's life could've ended in a cornfield deep in the heart of Vietnam. At that point, he was a hardened lance corporal and veteran of hundreds of combat patrols. He and a squad of eight other Marines from Company G, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, were on patrol near Fire Base LZ Baldy.

On that day, they spent most of the day trekking through the jungles "taking a few sniper rounds here and there." But it was mostly quiet until the point man triggered a booby trap. Their patrol was a small one, too small for a corpsman to be attached. So, the non-wounded (Sanzaro included) began to tend to the wounded as the radioman called for a medevac. "As I was patching up this guy, I looked over and I could see a couple of trip wires," Sanzaro said. They had walked into a kill zone of a half-dozen booby traps, marked with piles of rocks and other small, telltale signs. Sanzaro ordered the squad to freeze as he picked his way to an old cornfield so that he could throw a



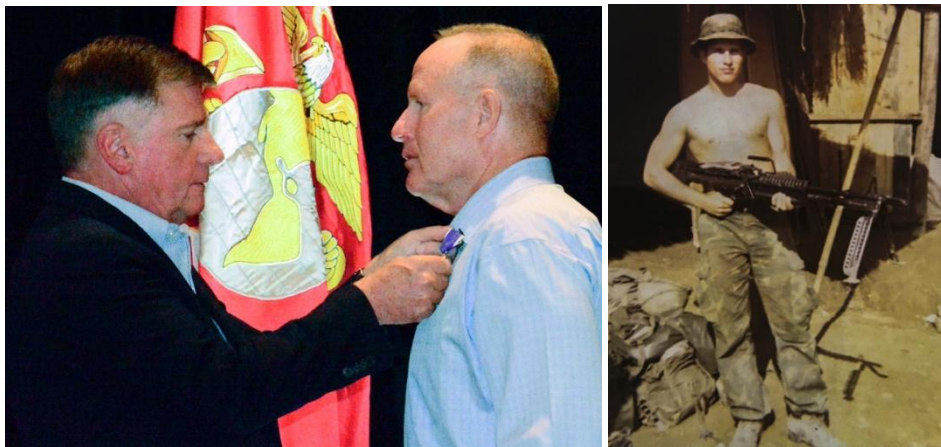
smoke grenade to signal to the medevac pilot where it was safe to land. “I knew they never booby-trapped areas where they grew food,” Sanzaro said.

A chopper drew near, prompting him and another Marine to grab the wounded man and carry him to the field. It wasn't a medevac chopper, though. Instead, it was a command chopper, carrying Maj. Cornelius Ram, Capt. Douglas Ford and Capt. Robert Tilley. They landed to provide medical assistance as best they could. “As they're walking, the point man's feet fell off,” Sanzaro said. Badly shattered, they flopped toward the ground. “Even though he had a shot of morphine in him he gave out a bloodcurdling scream.” Sanzaro squatted down to ease the stress on the man's legs. That's when Ram stepped on a land mine, estimated to be an 81 mm mortar fashioned into a booby trap.

“The next thing I knew, some Marine had rolled me over and was trying to wake me up,” Sanzaro said. “My entire helmet was split wide open. I thought, ‘I'm the luckiest son of a bitch in the world.’ Had that guy's feet not fallen that split second, if I had not squatted down, that shrapnel from the booby trap would've cut me right in half.” Ram was killed in the explosion. Ford was hit in the neck by shrapnel and died in Sanzaro's arms as he attempted to get him to his command chopper. Sanzaro and the other Marines managed to get the previously wounded Marines to the now-waiting chopper. Afterward, he took point for the remainder of the patrol and got his men back to the base. “It was just my job,” he said. “I never expected anybody to pat me on the back.” Nobody did.

He served the remainder of his tour in Vietnam and went home to southern California. He went back to his job, and picked up where he left off with his girlfriend. It was an easy transition in that regard, he said, but it was difficult in others. “Everyone still talked about dates and all kinds of stuff like that. And here I am, I've experienced war and death ... my mind-set was just totally different than everybody else I had left. It was kind of weird fitting back in. But I did.” He missed the Marine Corps, and just a few years later rejoined, this time as an officer. He graduated The Basic School in 1977 and stayed on for five relatively quiet years.

He had put the war behind him — until March 10, 2010, when he suffered a heart attack. Doctors at the VA told him the heart attack was caused by exposure to Agent Orange. It also triggered dormant feelings of anxiety, anger and severe nightmares – all telltale signs of post-traumatic stress disorder. “All the sudden Vietnam hit me like a ton of bricks,” Sanzaro said. “I was back for 40 years when it hit me.” Eventually he sought help from the VA. He was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury and two decades-old cracks in his neck. The doctors determined that, like his resurgent PTSD, the injuries had remained hidden for more than 40 years. They told him he rated a Purple Heart. The problem was, with four decades having gone by and no medical records of the event, he would have to find a witness. Sanzaro decided not to pursue the medal he deserved.



His daughter, Melissa Oldham, felt otherwise and tracked down Tilley, now a retired colonel. Tilley provided not only a statement but the official after-action report from 1971. Even that paperwork wasn't enough. The regulations required two witnesses. “My daughter had tried, but she could not find anyone else. I thought the application for a

Purple Heart was a dead issue,” he said. That’s when two officers from Sanzaro’s TBS class got involved. Retired Col. John Rankin and retired Lt. Col. Paul LeBlanc joined the search. They found a member of Sanzaro’s squad, and after a couple of letters, the man provided the Navy Personnel Records office with a statement. Rankin said Sanzaro’s story isn’t uncommon. Plenty of servicemembers have gone unrecognized for their efforts. “You don’t go out there and strive to earn a Purple Heart. It’s the circumstance that you’re dealt with that create the recognition,” Rankin said.

On June 28, 2017, Sanzaro received word that he would finally be awarded his Purple Heart. It was to be pinned to his chest by retired Lt. Gen. Terry Robling in a ceremony in San Diego on 23 SEP, in front of other members of Sanzaro’s TBS class. Sanzaro, now 66, said he was “totally overwhelmed” by the support he received from LeBlanc, Tilley and Rankin. Overwhelmed, but not surprised. They were just doing their jobs – much like Sanzaro did many decades ago – as Marines. “A fellow Marine asks you for something, you step up to the plate,” Rankin said. “You don’t ask a lot of questions. You see somebody that needs some assistance, you do what you’ve been trained to do.” [Source: Stars And Stripes | Michael S. Darnell | September 22, 2017 ++]

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### **New Mexico Vet Cemetery Update 01 ► Gallup Receives Grant**

Gallup is getting its own veterans cemetery after a multi-million-dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. U.S. Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich along with Rep. Ben Ray Lujan said 22 SEP that the grant of \$6.7 million will fund construction. The closest veterans’ cemetery is in Santa Fe, some 200 miles away. Lawmakers say a national veterans’ cemetery in Gallup will provide more convenient access to 19,000 vets and their families. The grant will cover 443 pre-placed crypts, 140 in-ground cremation gravesites, 400 columbarium niches, a memorial wall and walkway and other aspects of the cemetery. It’s unclear when construction begins. [Source: Associated Press | September 22, 2017 ++]

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### **National Order of the Legion of Honor ► Awarded to 10 WWII Vets**

Ten California men who fought overseas with U.S. forces have been awarded the French government’s highest honor for their World War II service. The veterans were each presented the National Order of the Legion of Honor medal during a ceremony 20 SEP at Los Angeles National Cemetery. Among them was 94-year-old Sterling D. Ditchey, an Army Air Corps 1st lieutenant who flew 70 combat missions in Europe as a B-25 bombardier and Ninety-five-year-old Ignacio Sanchez was part of 35 combat missions as a B-17 turret gunner. Instituted by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802, the Legion of Honor recognizes exceptional service to France. [Source: Associated Press | 20 Sep 2017 ++]



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## Veterans' Financial Shape ► Comparison to Civilians'

While veterans are faring slightly better financially than civilians, they still struggle with credit card debt and are 40% more likely to be underwater on their home and 28% more likely to have made a late mortgage payment in the past year, according to a new study by the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority Foundation. The study, the nation's first comprehensive comparative analysis of the financial health of American veterans relative to non-veterans, was authored by William Skimmyhorn, Ph.D., Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army and a professor in the Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis, Department of Social Sciences, at West Point.

His analysis is based on data from the FINRA Foundation's 2015 National Financial Capability Study (NFCS), which includes data on more than 3,000 veterans and 23,000 non-veterans. Researchers supported by the FINRA Foundation found that veterans are 22% less likely to be unemployed than civilians and slightly (2%) more likely to be covered by health insurance. That said, besides underwater mortgages, veterans are 9% more likely to carry a balance and to be charged a late payment fee on their credit cards.

"These findings provide an in-depth look at the primary areas where veterans appear to be faring better and worse than civilians," said Gerri Walsh, president of the FINRA Foundation and FINRA's Senior Vice President of Investor Education, in a statement. "We believe this research will help inform the development of policies aimed at addressing these differences and advance our nation's understanding of financial capability in America."

The research also found that, relative to non-veterans, veterans are:\

- 5% more likely to be satisfied with their financial condition;
- 4% more likely to have an emergency savings fund; and
- 4% less likely to have difficulty covering their monthly expenses.

In addition, within the veteran population, there are critical differences in financial attitudes and behaviors.

- Air Force veterans are 19% less likely to report having difficulty covering their expenses than Army veterans;
- Veterans who left the military 10 or more years ago are 43% less likely to report an unexpected drop in income than those who left the military in the last year; and
- Veterans who retired from the military are 14% less likely to report difficulty covering their expenses than those who did not retire from the military.

There are approximately 22 million military U.S. veterans in America, representing more than 8% of the U.S. population. More information about the study is available at The Financial Welfare of Veteran Households website <https://www.saveandinvest.org/about-us/military-research>. [Source: ThinkAdvisor | September 18, 2017 ++]

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## Vet Suicide Update 17 ► VA Releases Findings by State

On 15 SEP the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released findings from its analysis of Veteran suicide data for 50 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. The release is part of VA's comprehensive examination of more than 55 million records, from 1979 to 2014, which will be used to develop and evaluate suicide prevention programs across every state. The new data include Veteran suicide rates and overall suicide rates by state, age group, and gender and list the most common suicide methods. Analysis of this information will help VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention gain insight into high-risk populations and share that information with community-based health care providers and partners, continuing to expand the network of support for Veterans. Among VA findings:

- Findings show there is variability across the nation in the rates and numbers of deaths by suicide among Veterans. Overall, the Veteran rates mirror those of the general population in the geographic region, with the highest rates in Western states. While we see higher rates of suicide in some states with smaller populations, most Veteran suicides are still in the heaviest populated areas.
- The suicide rate among middle-age and older adult Veterans remains high. In 2014, approximately 65 percent of all Veterans who died by suicide were age 50 or older.
- After adjusting for differences in age and sex, risk for suicide was 22 percent higher among Veterans when compared to U.S. non-Veteran adults. After adjusting for differences in age, risk for suicide was 19 percent higher among male Veterans when compared to U.S. non-Veteran adult men. After adjusting for differences in age, risk for suicide was 2.5 times higher among female Veterans when compared to U.S. non-Veteran adult women.

“These findings are deeply concerning, which is why I made suicide prevention my top clinical priority,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “I am committed to reducing Veteran suicides through support and education. We know that of the 20 suicides a day that we reported last year, 14 are not under VA care. This is a national public health issue that requires a concerted, national approach.” Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, can call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call **800-273-8255** and press 1, chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/Chat), or text to 838255.

For a full copy of the report go to <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/Suicide-Data-Sheets-VA-States.pdf>. For more information on VA’s suicide prevention campaign, visit **Be There** at <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/BeThere.aspx>. [Source: VA News Release | September 15, 2017 ++]

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## **Vet Suicide Update 18 ► Female Vet Rate 250% Higher Than Non-Vet**

According to newly released statistics from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), a female veteran is 2.5 times more likely to commit suicide than a non-veteran American adult woman. This U.S. veteran suicide statistics report analyzed suicide data for all 50 states, looking at the cross-sections of age and gender as well as the most common suicide methods. Among the top findings of the report:

- The highest rate of veteran suicides occur in Western states—most happen in the heaviest populated areas in the country.
- 65 percent of all veterans who committed suicide were 50 years or older.
- The female veteran suicide rate is 250 percent higher than that for non-veteran females.

“Every Veteran suicide is a tragic outcome,” The VA said in one of the facts sheets of the report. “Regardless of the numbers, one Veteran suicide is too many. VA is leading national efforts to understand suicide risk factors, develop evidence-based intervention strategies, and provocatively identify and care for Veterans who are in crisis or at a risk for suicide.” Other key findings in the report:

- In 2014, an average of 20 veterans died by suicide every day.
- In 2014, about 67 percent of all veteran deaths by suicide were the result of firearm injuries.
- Behind firearm injuries, poison is the second most common method.
- From 2001 to 2014, the suicide rate among all veterans increased by 31.1 percent.

With the shocking statistics of female veteran deaths by suicide, the VA has made efforts to cater to female veterans by developing the Women Veterans Call Center, a free resource to call or chat anonymously with online. The center receives on average 80 calls per day and makes 1,000 daily calls to women veterans. The call center is available Monday through Friday 8am-10pm ET and Saturdays 8am-6:30pm ET at **855-829-6636**. “We can all play



a role in preventing suicide and it doesn't require a grand gesture of complicated task," the VA said on its suicide prevention website. "Your actions can help someone going through a tough time to feel less alone." [Source: The Daily Dot | Brianna Stone | September 19, 2017 ++]

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## Obit: William Ely ► 19 Sep 2017

The oldest living West Point graduate passed away four months after returning to the academy to participate in its alumni review, nearly 85 years after he graduated. Retired Lt. Gen. William Ely, who was the only remaining grad from the Class of 1933, died on 19 SEP at his home in Delray Beach, Florida, according to a West Point Association of Graduates spokeswoman. Ely, who was 105, will be interred at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C., said Kim McDermott, the association's director of communications. He will be buried with his wife, Helen, who died in 2014.



Lt. Gen. Robert Caslen, superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy, joins retired Lt. Gen. William Ely, Ely's son Bill, and Command Sgt. Maj. Timothy Guden during a wreath-laying ceremony on May 23 in West Point, N.Y.

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

The construction of the entrance channel paved the way for the Navy to build Naval Air Station Midway, roughly halfway between North America and Asia. Less than a year after the air station's commissioning, the U.S. Navy would defeat Japanese forces at Midway in what many consider the pivotal naval battle of World War II. Ely's decorations include the Legion of Merit with one oak leaf cluster, the Silver Star and the Bronze Star, according to the Defense Department. He was honored during West Point's alumni review on 23 MAY, where he laid a wreath at the academy's Thayer Statue near the parade field in a ceremony leading up to graduation. Ely told Army Times

before the ceremony that it was going to be a “once-in-a-lifetime event.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Charlsy Panzino | September 21, 2017 ++]

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## **Veteran Scams Update 03 ► Ongoing Ones**

### **Military Family/VA/Medicare Records Update**

The scammers are contacting veterans claiming to be from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and claim to be reaching out to veterans to update their records with the VA.

- The scammers claim it is a new policy of the VA to reach out to veterans via telephone, thus, making the VA a more user-friendly organization. The goal of the scam is to get a veterans’ social security number.
- The scammers gradually work at getting a veterans social security number, credit information or both by first asking “soft questions.” The scammers first gather “soft information” by verifying the veterans current address, military branch, and working status.
- After gathering the “soft information,” the scammers will ask for a veterans’ social security number or credit card information or both.
- If the first attempt fails, the scammers attempt to build rapport with the veteran by getting them comfortable. The phrase used by the scammers for this is: “Get them to laugh”, and they will lay down.”

Keep in mind, any veteran receiving a call from these scammers must remember, the VA most likely already has all of the information the scammers are seeking with the exception of credit card information.

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### **Trading Cash for Benefits Scam**

Another active scam involves scammers attempting to convince veterans to trade their VA benefits for fast cash, often at a fraction of the value of the true VA benefits’ value. VA officials have stated in no uncertain terms that such a deal is always bad for the veteran and must be avoided in any form.

Any veteran or military family receiving such an offer should report the offer to Operation Protect Veterans by calling 855-800-9023 to verify legitimacy and help prevent the growth of this scam. The hotline has been set up and managed by AARP.

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### **Hurricane Harvey Scam**

The newest “hot scam” preys on the benevolent nature of veterans and military families by asking them to donate money to the victims of Hurricane Harvey.

- The phony charities designed to take your money are highly sophisticated and the scammers are highly trained to scam you and others out of millions of dollars.
- Their use of technology is cutting edge. For instance, the scammers are using telephonic screen technology to make it look as if they are actually calling from the phony organization they set up as viewed on the receivers caller ID.
- The scammers are also using similar names of legitimate organizations as to confuse the veteran they are calling. Scammers state they are from “UFO” for example, confusing a veteran into thinking he/she may have heard USO, which most veterans are familiar with. Or, as reported by thousands of veterans, the scammers may use “Red Kross,” tricking veterans into believing they are working with the more familiar Red Cross organization.
- Some of the scammers are using “ghost websites” that look and operate like legitimate websites of familiar organizations. The bogus websites mimic the characteristics of legitimate organizations, however, one main element that may suggest the site is bogus is the URL ending. Even if the name is familiar (i.e., Veterans of Foreign Wars) check the URL destination where the funds are to be sent. The name may be misappropriated. If the designated name ends in “.com, .net, .ws, .biz” rather than “.org,” you may not



want to send funds to the organization. Always check with your local office to verify organization before sending funds.

A veteran should investigate the organization asking for money before donating any cash. To avoid such scams never donate by e-mail, send cash electronically or send funds to an organization name with which you are not familiar. AARP has set up a hotline to help veterans with these scam artists. Any veteran involved in any kind of suspected scam is invited to report it at 877-908-3360. Also, before sending funds check with Better Business Bureau (<http://www.give.org/charity-reviews/national>) or Charity Navigator (<https://www.charitynavigator.org>) to verify legitimacy of organization.

[Source: <http://www.armedforceslocator.com> | September 1, 2017 ++]

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## WWII VETS 144 ► Marvin Strombo | Japanese Flag Returner

Marvin Strombo was behind Japanese enemy lines on a Pacific island during World War II when he realized the other five men in his squadron had moved on without him. The young U.S. Marine, part of an elite scout-sniper platoon fighting a 1944 battle on Saipan, nervously scanned the terrain. He spotted a body on the ground, a dead Japanese soldier lying on his left side. The young man looked peaceful, as if asleep, and something white poked out from his jacket. Strombo knelt and pulled out a silk flag, all the space around the bright red emperor's sun filled with elegant calligraphy. He hesitated, then took the flag and scrambled to reunite with his squadron as they entered the Japanese-held town of Garapan.



More than 70 years later, Strombo is returning the Japanese flag to his fallen enemy's family. The 93-year-old arrived 11 AUG in Tokyo, the first stop in a 10,000-mile (16,000-kilometer) journey into the remote mountainside to bring the keepsake back to the man's home village — back to a brother and two sisters who could never say goodbye. "I realized there were no bullets or shrapnel wounds, so I knew he was killed by the blast of a mortar," Strombo recalled in Portland, Oregon, this week before boarding a flight to Japan. Then, quietly: "I think that soldier wanted me to find him for some reason."

The flags were a good-luck charm that linked Japanese soldiers to their loved ones and their call for duty. Some were signed by hundreds of classmates, neighbors and relatives. Allied troops frequently took them from the bodies of their enemies as souvenirs. They have a deep significance because most Japanese families never learned how their loved ones died and never received remains. For Strombo, the flag hung in a glass-fronted gun cabinet in his home in Montana for years, a topic of conversation for visitors and a curiosity for his four children. He never spoke

about his role in the battles of Saipan, Tarawa and Tinian, which chipped away at Japan's control of islands in the Pacific and paved the way for U.S. victory.

He wrote letters to find out more about the flag but eventually put it aside. He knew no Japanese and, in an era before the internet, making any headway was difficult. Then, in 2012, the son of his former commanding officer contacted him about a book he was writing on the platoon. Through him, Strombo reached out to the Obon Society, a nonprofit in Oregon that helps U.S. veterans and their descendants return Japanese flags to the families of fallen soldiers. Within a week, researchers found it belonged to Yasue Sadao by reading the script on the flag. They traced the corporal to a tea-growing village of about 2,400 people in the mountains roughly 200 miles (340 kilometers) west of Tokyo. The calligraphy turned out to be the signatures of 180 friends and neighbors who saw Yasue off to war in Higashi Shirakawa, including 42 of his relatives. Seven of the original signatories are still alive, including Yasue's 89-year-old brother and two sisters.

When researchers contacted Yasue's brother by phone, he asked if the person who had his brother's flag was the same one who found it so many years ago, said Rex Ziak, who co-founded the Obon Society with his Japanese wife, Keiko. "There was just silence on the line and then he asked, 'Do you imagine he knows how my brother died and where he died?'" Ziak recounted. "And that's when we realized that this person is very much alive in that family and this mystery of what happened to him is very much alive." Strombo is the only person who can provide those answers. He can roughly show where he found Yasue's body on the outskirts of Garapan and can tell the siblings that their brother likely died of a concussion from a mortar round. "I knew he was young because I could see his profile as I bent over him. He was laying on his back, kind of on his left side," he said.

The Obon Society has returned about 125 flags and gets about five inquiries a day from aging soldiers who regret their actions and want to return the flags before they die. The group believes thousands of similar flags are likely hidden in attics across the U.S. that could give answers to countless other families. Strombo will be the first World War II veteran to return a flag in person to a Japanese family through the Obon Society. The trip is a journey of forgiveness and closure as he finishes the final chapter of his life. Only two other men in his platoon of 40 are still alive and he knows the humid islands where he fought for weeks are now a footnote in the war's larger history. "It got so I kind of wanted to meet the family, you know," he said, his voice growing raspy. "I know it means so much to them." [Source: The Associated Press | Gillian Flaccus | August 11, 2017 ++]

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## **AFL Q&A 06 ► Korea Agent Orange VA Coverage**

**Q.** *I have been told that I may qualify for some disability because of the use of agent orange while I was stationed in South Korea in 1967-68. What do I need to do to find out?*

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**A1:** Veterans who served in a unit in or near the Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ) anytime between April 1, 1968 and August 31, 1971 and who have a disease VA recognizes as associated with Agent Orange exposure are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides. These Veterans do not have to show they were exposed to Agent Orange to be eligible for disability compensation for these diseases. VA and the Department of Defense must determine the Veteran's unit operated in the DMZ area and the Veteran was physically there. (AP) 12/2/16

**A2:** Camp Casey and other Camps on the DMZ are presumptive sites for exposure to Agent Orange. But, you have to have a disability that is a presumptive to exposure to Agent Orange. Go to the Agent Orange Review and see what disabilities qualify and if you have one of them then file for it. But, also look at the small print some conditions have a caveat to them. Such as peripheral neuropathy must have been diagnosed within one year of last exposure to Agent Orange. (CP) 12/19/16

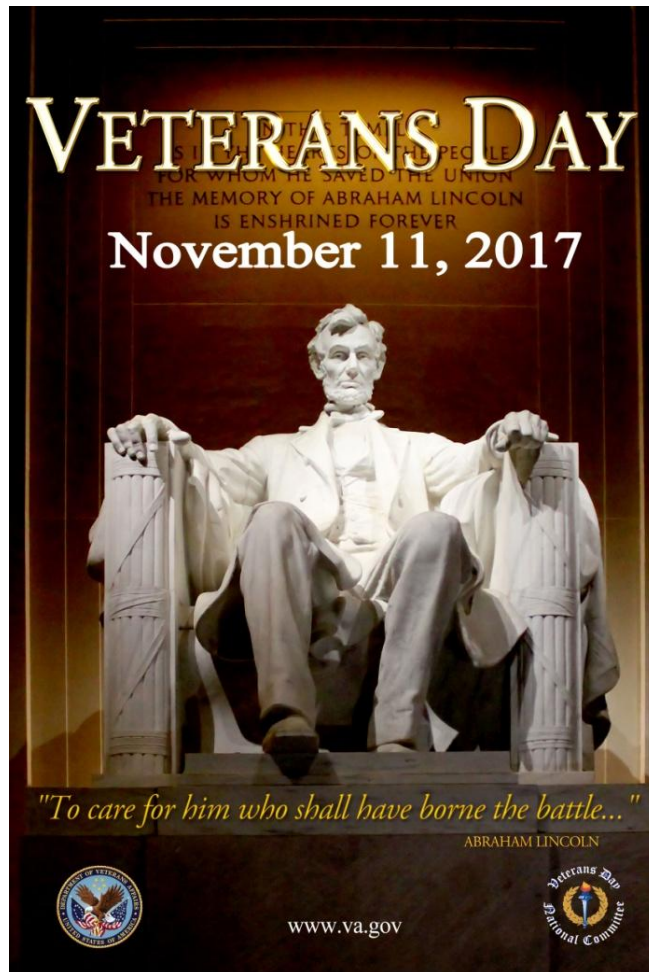
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If you have a question you want answered you can submit it at <http://www.armedforceslocator.com/ask-a-question.html>. Armed Forces Locator was developed to help active duty, servicemembers, veterans, Reservists, National Guard members and ROTC members 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> | September 30, 2017 ++]

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## Veterans Day Poster 2017 ► Selection Made

The Veterans Day National Committee announced its selection for the 2017 National Veterans Day Poster from more than 100 submissions. The winning poster was designed by Air Force veteran Robert Dubois, a retired high school teacher in Oregon. Their selection appears below:



[Source: VFW Action corps Weekly | September 22, 2017 ++]

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## Agent Orange | A Toxic Legacy ► Vets Still Battling Aftermath 42-Years Later

It was 1966. Bob Westfall was just 19, a kid really, too young to vote but old enough to fight for his country. He wasn't much different than most of the young men who were either drafted or enlisted for an unpopular war halfway across the world. How bad could it be to leave a hardscrabble life on the poor side of the tracks in Newburgh, N.Y. for an adventure paid for by Uncle Sam? A lot worse than he could have imagined. "I suppose if you got out of it alive, you did ok," says Westfall, now at age 70. More than 58,000 of the 2.6 million Americans sent to the Southeast Asian country didn't make it, their names now inscribed on The Wall at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Westfall spent 23 months there, mainly in A Shau Valley in the northernmost part of South Vietnam, a key infiltration route for North Vietnamese forces and site of some of the most fierce battles of the war. To read of his experiences and exposure to Agent Orange plus others refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Agent Orange | A Toxic Legacy**". [Source: Evergreen Wellness | Michelle Bearden | September 20, 2017 ++]

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## Retiree Appreciation Days ► Scheduled As of 30 SEP 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\vet 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, mouse over or click on the event under Event Location. Please report comments, changes, corrections, new RADs and other military retiree\vet 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 | September 30, 2017 ++]

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## Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 30 SEP 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 the Hiring Our Heroes website <http://www.hiringourheroes.org/hiringourheroes/events>. Listings of 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 below 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 | September 30, 2017 ++]

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## Vet State Benefits & Discounts ► Missouri 2017

The state of Missouri provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Veteran State Benefits –MO**” for an overview of the below those benefits. The below are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each refer to <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/mississippi.html> & <http://www.vab.ms.gov/benefits.pdf>.

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/mississippi-state-veterans-benefits.html>  
September 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.

### **NDAA 2018 Update 14 ► TRICARE Fee Increases | Grandfather Clause**

The House and Senate have passed their respective versions of the FY 2018 Defense Authorization bill. A conference committee will be appointed to resolve the differences between the two bills. The Senate bill provides for substantial TRICARE fee increases by repealing the so-called grandfather clause that would exclude retirees that retired before January 1, 2018 from scheduled TRICARE fee increases. The Senate bill also increases pharmacy co-pays, provides for a smaller active duty pay increase (2.1% vice 2.4%) and makes further cuts to Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH).

The Fleet Reserve Organization (FRA) is opposed to the elimination of the grandfather clause by the under the Senate's bill and is asking veterans to contact their representatives reuesting they oppose it also. Towards this they have provided a preformatted editable message at that can be sent to veteran's representatives. Go to [http://capwiz.com/fra/issues/alert/?alertid=78770626&queueid=\[capwiz:queue\\_id\]](http://capwiz.com/fra/issues/alert/?alertid=78770626&queueid=[capwiz:queue_id]) to access the message and forward it. Restoration of the grandfather clause in Section 707 of the bill would help keep TRICARE affordable for current retirees living on fixed incomes. [Source: FRA Making Waves | September 27, 2017 ++]

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### **Transgender Troops Update 09 ► Senate Bill to Block Ban**

A bipartisan group of senators on 15 SEP introduced new legislation to block military leaders from dismissing any transgender troops and to speed up a Pentagon review into accessions of new transgender recruits. The effort — which includes Republicans John McCain of Arizona and Susan Collins of Maine with Democrats Jack Reed of Rhode Island and Kirsten Gillibrand of New York — comes after supporters unsuccessfully tried to attach the proposal to the annual defense authorization bill this week. “Despite being denied a vote on my bipartisan amendment to defend our transgender service members, we are not giving up in this fight,” Gillibrand said in a statement. “Thousands of brave transgender Americans love our country enough to risk their lives for it, fight for it, and even die for it, and Congress should honor them and let them serve. “Doing otherwise would only harm our readiness at a time when our military is deployed around the world in defense of our country.”

The move comes after President Donald Trump last month signed a directive banning any new transgender recruits from joining the military and instructing Defense Secretary Jim Mattis decide whether to retain or dismiss transgender individuals already serving. Trump has labeled transgender troops a potential readiness threat, because of medical concerns and costs related to their gender transitions. Critics of the president point to studies from the



Defense Department last year disputing the costs and potential effects on morale. The RAND Corporation has previously estimated the cost of health care services for transgender troops at close to \$8 million a year, a small fraction of the \$600 billion-plus Pentagon budget.

McCain, who serves as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said in a statement that with new legislation, Trump’s proposals are unnecessary and do not improve military readiness. “When less than one percent of Americans are volunteering to join the military, we should welcome all those who are willing and able to serve our country,” he said. Under Trump’s memo, Mattis has until March 2018 to decide the fate of current transgender troops and issue exceptions to a ban on funding for transgender-related medical procedures. The legislation introduced Friday would speed up that review to the end of this year, and prohibit the Pentagon from dismissing any troops “solely on the basis of the member’s gender identity.” It would also express a sense of Congress that all Americans who meet fitness standards should be eligible to serve in the ranks.

The proposal is similar to an amendment Gillibrand had hoped to attach this week to the authorization bill, passed annually for the last five decades. But debate on the measure — and several other controversial proposals — were scuttled when Republican and Democratic leaders could not reach an agreement on the bill. Instead, senators will vote on a version of the authorization measure mostly identical to the draft that passed out of McCain’s committee without opposition in July. Getting a vote on the new stand-alone measure appears even more difficult than the amendment route, given Senate Republican leadership’s opposition to the idea. But backers say the new legislation is important to show support for the transgender troops already serving.

“With the introduction of this legislation, an important line in the sand has been drawn against Trump’s discriminatory and unconstitutional ban on military service by transgender individuals,” Ian Thompson, legislative representative at the American Civil Liberties Union, said in a statement. “Transgender servicemembers ... have repeatedly proven that they have the courage and capacity to serve in our nation’s armed forces. It is time for Congress and the courts to stand up for them.” ACLU is one of several rights groups to bring lawsuits against the Trump administration over the military service changes. Outside rights groups have estimated that up to 15,000 transgender individuals are already serving in the ranks, while Defense Department estimates have put the figure at around half that total. But only a few hundred have contacted military officials with requests for medical treatments since last fall, when military officials announced they would allow transgender individuals to serve openly. [Source: NavyTimes | Leo Shane III | September 15, 2017 ++]

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## **Veterans' Treatment Court Update 24** ► **S. 946 | Help Justice-Involved Vets**

The veterans' treatment court model was established to remove veterans from the regular criminal justice process and to provide an opportunity for the veteran to address conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse disorder that may have led to their involvement in the justice system. In a veterans' treatment court, the presiding judge works with the veteran and a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Justice Outreach specialist to establish a structured rehabilitation program and treatment plan that is tailored to the specific needs of the individual veteran.

S. 946, the **Veterans Treatment Court Improvement Act of 2017**, requires the VA to hire additional Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialists to ensure veterans have greater access to effective and tailored treatment. The bill authorizes \$5.5 million for each fiscal year beginning in FY 2017 through 2027 to hire 50 additional VJO Specialists. Funding priority would be given to VA facilities that work with newly established or existing but understaffed veterans' treatment courts. The legislation requires annual reporting on the implementation of the bill as well as its effect on the VJO program and a mandate for the Government Accountability Office to review and report on the implementation of the bill and the overall effectiveness of the VJO program for justice-involved veterans.

DAV Resolution No. 105 notes that veterans' treatment courts evolved from a proven national model of diversionary drug and mental health courts to address the specific challenges many wartime veterans face post service and calls for the continued growth of veterans' treatment courts. Readers are encouraged to write or send a message to their Senators requesting they be advised of their senator's voting intention on this legislation. In support of this endeavor the DAV Action Network contains a preformatted editable message at <https://www.votervoicenet.com/BroadcastLinks/Ho00rRx0nyRv6oaU7qRemw> to request your senator's support and passage of this bill. [Source: DAV : September 15, 2017 ++]

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## **Vet Orthotic/Prosthetic Care ► Wounded Warrior Workforce Enhancement Act**

U.S. Rep. Matt Cartwright has introduced bipartisan legislation that would improve orthotics and prosthetics care for service members and veterans. The Wounded Warrior Workforce Enhancement Act would support colleges and universities seeking to establish degree programs to train specialists in orthotics and prosthetics. In the past decade, Cartwright said the skill set to provide this state-of-the-art care has become increasingly complex. Unfortunately, there are only around 7,100 prosthetists and orthotists nationwide, with one in five either past retirement already or eligible to retire in the next five years.

Current degree programs are not widespread enough to meet this demand for new practitioners and should these degree-granting programs continue at their current rate, they will only be able to replace around two-thirds of the clinicians who retire in the next 20 years. The Wounded Warrior Workforce Enhancement Act authorizes a competitive grant program to help colleges and universities develop master's degree programs focusing on orthotics and prosthetics. Each institution receiving one of these grants will require students to rotate through facilities run by the Departments of Veterans Affairs or Defense, or that hold VA contracts. This bill also requires the VA to establish a Center of Excellence in Prosthetic and Orthotic Education to provide evidence-based research on the knowledge, skills, and training that clinical professionals need to care for veterans. [Source: ROA Smart Brief | Wilkes-Barre PA Times Leader | September 15, 2017 ++]

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## **Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 45 ► S.319/H.R.1279 | Senate Passage**

Congress moved closer 18 SEP to approving help for tens of thousands of veterans exposed to toxic "burn pits" in Iraq and Afghanistan. "It's very exciting," Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) told KARE 11. "Today the bill is passing." The military used jet fuel in open-air burn pits to try to dispose of everything from plastics to medical waste. The resulting smoke and fumes are suspected of causing serious illnesses and death. Klobuchar co-sponsored a bipartisan measure that authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to create a special medical center of excellence to study – and treat – the health effects. "We need to better understand and address the relationship between burn pit exposure and the health needs of our brave men and women in uniform, and this bill will help accomplish that," Klobuchar said.

Senate passage of the bill is welcome news for veterans like Jeremy Wolfsteller. He served in Iraq and experienced the burn pits first hand. "We didn't want to breathe in this black, dark smoke," he said. "It was an awful experience. It's something I don't wish upon anyone." The American Legion has warned that without quick action to investigate the health impact of toxins released from burn pits, they could be this generation's Agent Orange. "We don't want to see a delay like the Vietnam veterans had," Wolfsteller said.

Health effects from exposure to chemicals found in burn pits may include cancer, neurological effects, reproductive effects, respiratory toxicity, and cardiovascular toxicity. Studies suggest that troops who worked in

these areas are subject to higher rates of asthma, emphysema, and rare lung disorders. “We don’t want to see a delay like the Vietnam veterans had,” Wolfsteller said. The “Helping Veterans Exposed to Burn Pits Act” passed the Senate as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018. The bipartisan bill still needs approval in the House. [Source: 13 WMAZ | Christopher Hrapsky & Steven Eckert | September 19, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Medical Care Copayments** ► **H.R.1100/S.116 | Preventive Health Services**

Representative Lee Zeldin (NY) and Senator Tammy Duckworth (IL) introduced the **Veterans Preventive Health Coverage Fairness Act** (H.R. 1100 and S. 1161), legislation that would eliminate requirements for veterans to make copayments for medical care and medications related to preventive health services delivered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This legislation would place VA in parity with the Department of Defense, as well as meeting the Affordable Care Act's standard relative to copayments for preventive health services for private sector health plans.

For veterans required to make copayments, VA charges \$15 for basic care and \$50 for specialty care visits and between \$5-\$11 for medication. With the passage of this legislation, veterans would continue to benefit from VA preventive health care and wellness services, but without the cost sharing. The VA health care system has been a leader in quality care and promoting the benefits of preventative services for veterans-many who are life-long patients. With its medically complex patient population, coordinating a comprehensive array of preventive and wellness services has helped VA contain costs and improve health outcomes for veterans. However, VA has been out of step in requiring copayments for health maintenance and preventive care services.

The United States Preventive Services Task Force, Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, and the Health Resources and Services Administration have made suggestions for preventative services including vaccines and women's preventive health care - such as mammograms, screenings for cervical cancer, prenatal care, and other services that show significant benefit in disease prevention. These services are now routinely provided free of charge in private sector care plans. These bills are consistent with DAV Resolution No. 115, which calls for the elimination or reduction of medical and medication co-pays, and DAV Resolution No. 128, calling for support of comprehensive health care services in VA. Veterans, through their patriotism, devotion, and sacrifices, have already paid the price for their health care, and as a grateful nation, our government should fully honor its moral obligation to care for veterans and generously provide them benefits and health care entirely without charge.

Readers are urged to use DAV's prepared editable messages to contact their elected officials and ask that they cosponsor and pass this important legislation -H.R.1100 & S.1161. To do so go log in to DAV Commander’s Action Network [https://www.votervoicenet/BroadcastLinks/L\\_zy7CcXduxcpZffVp-J-Q](https://www.votervoicenet/BroadcastLinks/L_zy7CcXduxcpZffVp-J-Q) and send your message. You do not have to be DAV member to do so. [Source: DAV Commander's Message | September 23, 2017 ++]

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## **VA Mental Health Care Update 34** ► **H.R.918 Projected Cost**

The stresses of military combat may contribute to behaviors or mental conditions which could result in a veteran being discharged from their military service under “other-than honorable” conditions. An estimated 22,000 veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Military Sexual Trauma, and other mental stress have received other than-honorable discharges since 2009. Under current law, these veterans may not be eligible to receive federal benefits, including mental health care and VA home loans.

The **Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Health Care Act H.R.918** , introduced by Rep. Mike Coffman (R-CO), would require VA to provide an initial mental health assessment and any subsequent mental health services required to meet urgent mental health care needs to former servicemembers who would otherwise be ineligible for such services because they were discharged from military service under other-than-honorable conditions. The former servicemember would be eligible for such services if they have applied for a character of service determination, participated in military combat or were the victim of military sexual assault.

H.R. 918 would also require VA to carry out a study on the effect of combat on suicide rates and serious mental health issues among veterans. VA's 2016 report on veteran suicide found that 20 veterans take their lives every single day. The report also uncovered decreased rates of suicide for veterans receiving health care from VA. CBO estimates that implementing the mental health provision of this bill would cost \$15 million over the 2017-2022 period, assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts.

Under its Home Loan program, VA guarantees mortgages made to veterans who were honorably discharged. Those guarantees enable veterans to get better loan terms, such as lower interest rates or smaller down payments. The loan guarantee provides lenders a payment of up to 25 percent of the outstanding balances (subject to some limitations on the original loan amounts) in the event that a veteran defaults on a guaranteed loan. Section 3 of H.R.918 would decrease some of the fees that VA charges veterans for providing those guarantees. Those fees lower the subsidy cost of the guarantees by partially offsetting the costs of subsequent defaults. The subsidy cost of VA loan guarantees are paid from mandatory appropriations. Hence, by increasing the subsidy cost, lowering those fees would increase direct spending.

Under current law, the up-front fee varies on the basis of the size of the down payment and whether the veteran has previously used the loan-guarantee benefit. Borrowers who are members of the reserve component pay an additional fee of 0.25 percent of the loan amount. Veterans who receive compensation for service-connected disabilities are exempt from paying the fee. The fees that would be affected by section 3 are currently set as follows:

- 2.15 percent of the loan amount for loans with no down payment on the first use of the guarantee benefit;
- 3.30 percent of the loan amount for loans with no down payment on subsequent uses of the guarantee benefit;
- 1.50 percent of the loan amount for loans with a 5 percent down payment, and
- 0.75 percent of the loan amount for loans with a 10 percent down payment.

Those fees are scheduled to decline on October 1, 2027, to 1.40 percent, 1.25 percent, 0.75 percent, and 0.50 percent, respectively. Under section 3 of the bill, that scheduled fee reduction would occur two years earlier, on September 30, 2025. Reducing the fees from their current level would decrease collections by VA, thereby increasing the subsidy cost of the loan guarantees. Based on data from VA regarding the number and initial principal value of the loans it guarantees each year, CBO estimates that enacting section 3 would increase direct spending by \$688 million over the 2026-2027 period. [Source: House Committee on Veteran Affairs & CBO | September 2017 ++]

**\* Military \***



## Holiday Troop Mail Update 02 ► 2017 Military Shipping Deadlines

It's not even Halloween yet, but it doesn't hurt to start your planning for those end-of-year holiday cards and packages going to or from military locations overseas. Military postal officials and the U.S. Postal Service have released some suggested deadlines to make sure those goodies reach their destinations in time for Christmas. To get them there in time for Hanukkah, which starts on 12 DEC this year, subtract 13 days from the deadlines. The deadlines for various methods of shipping are the same for all the APO/FPO/DPO (diplomatic post office) ZIP codes, with the exception of some mail going to APO/FPO/DPO ZIP 093, which covers overseas contingency areas. The deadlines are:

- USPS Retail Ground Mail (formerly known as Standard Post): **Nov. 6.**
- Space Available Mail (SAM): **Nov. 27.**
- Parcel Airlift Mail (PAL): **Dec. 4.**
- First Class and Priority Mail (letters, cards and packages): **Dec. 11** except for contingency ZIP 093, which is **Dec. 4.**
- Priority Mail Express Military Service: **Dec. 16** (note: not available for ZIP 093).
- Domestic mail (not APO/FPO) to sailors on ships in port or on shore duty in the U.S.: First Class by **Dec. 19**, Priority Mail by **Dec. 20**, Priority Express Mail by **Dec. 22.**

You can get information about shipping to military locations overseas, including information about free shipping supplies, at the [U.S. Postal Service Military and Diplomatic Mail web page](#). Those who ship Priority Mail Large Flat-Rate Boxes to an APO/FPO address receive a \$2 discount. [Source: NavyTimes | Karen Jowers | September 27, 2017 ++]

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## Air Force Readiness Update 02 ► Stressed Out, Stretched Thin and Tired

The Air Force is stressed out, stretched thin and tired, says Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth Wright. The service's top enlisted airman has started to work on small initiatives that could help the enlisted force during these difficult and challenging days. But there isn't one big solution that's going to fix the problem immediately, he said. "A bunch of singles — that's how I kind of describe it," Wright said in an Aug. 23 interview with Air Force Times. "Don't look for us to step up to the plate and hit a home run every time. But we'll just continue to hit ... those singles that give folks a little bit more time back, allow us to be a little bit more efficient, and have a little bit more purpose to what we do."

The slate of solutions Wright and his team are considering could involve changes to the way airmen deploy and receive mental health care, and the delayed implementation of performance reports for junior enlisted. The Air Force is even taking another look at whether to bring back warrant officers, Wright said. At the beginning of August, Wright asked the Air Force's manpower and readiness department to conduct a study into whether having a cadre of warrant officers would make the service more lethal and efficient. That research was expected to be done in six months. "If so, I'd be OK with implementing that program," Wright said. "I'm still agnostic [on warrant officers]. I know a lot of people ask for them. But if the research proves that, in today's Air Force, if we had warrant officers in cyber, if our enlisted pilots someday become warrant officers, in space, in contracting? I can see a couple of areas where it might be beneficial to us."

Wright said as he travels to bases and talks to airmen about their concerns, he's been impressed by how smart, motivated and professional they are, adding that they "are doing some amazing things." But they're also struggling

with undermanning, underfunding, a lack of resources, high operations tempos and too many extra duties, he said. That has led to feelings of frustration and stress. To try to relieve some of their burdens, the Air Force is trying to cut down on the amount of additional duties and computer-based training required of airmen. But more is needed, Wright said. “I don’t think we can take away mission, right?” he said. “We can’t ask the world to calm down and not be so unstable. Absent that, the best thing we can do to make our force more efficient and more effective and lethal is, with some of these additional requirements that we’ve levied upon them over the years, let’s slowly take them away, right?”

**EPR changes** -- The Air Force is also considering doing away with the EPRs that airmen first class typically receive at 20 months of service, he said. That’s the first time airmen receive an EPR, but in Wright’s estimation, they don’t amount to much. “Essentially, they go in a file and we don’t ever use them again,” he said. “They’re not up for promotion, they can’t be used for senior airmen below-the-zone consideration, they really can’t be used for any specific purpose. And so the question becomes, why write them?” Instead, the Air Force is considering having airmen receive their first EPR at 30 months. They will still need to get feedback from their supervisors, he said. This change could go into effect early next spring, he said, though the Air Force is still conducting research to understand all its possible effects.

**Pace of deployments** -- Wright is worried about the strain frequent deployments place on airmen, and how such pressures could prompt more of them to leave. When crucial personnel leave, that increases the pressure on those who remain, he said. “We can’t really have a true impact on the deploy-to-dwell ratio unless [we] maintain trained and experienced individuals in those career fields,” Wright said. “If we keep them at a one-to-one ratio — six months [deployed], six months home — that starts to wear on them personally, mentally, [and] it starts to wear on their families.” The pace is especially concerning to Wright, given the number of suicides.

The Air Force already has lost 62 airmen this year, he said, and is on pace to match the roughly 100 suicides suffered annually in recent years. Air Force Special Operations Command — which has struggled with the strain of frequent deployments — is improving the mental health and resiliency of its airmen with U.S. Special Operation Command’s Preservation of the Force and Families Program, Wright said. Mental health professionals, chaplains and their assistants, medics, and social workers are embedded directly with units. That way, an airman facing troubles has someone who can help already there in his squadron, doing PT and other everyday activities alongside him. It also removes the burden and, perhaps, the stigma, of having to go to a hospital or mental health clinic for help. Air Combat Command and some intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance units have also enacted this program, he said.

Wright is hoping to expand that concept with a new program, called **Task Force True North**. In August, the Air Force finished putting program managers in place at the four test sites: Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota; Beale Air Force Base, California; Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska; and Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri. By next spring, each base will have a team of 16 licensed clinical social workers and four mental health providers embedded with units and interacting with airmen on a day-to-day basis. After testing the concept for 12 to 18 months, the Air Force will decide whether it should be expanded, he said. Wright hopes this embedding will normalize the process of seeking help for mental health issues. But it’s incumbent on Air Force leaders to ensure they don’t perpetuate any stigma, he said.

Over the next year and a half, Wright’s office will roll out the new Enlisted Professional Military Education for the 21st Century. It creates a requirement for “professional development units,” which are designed to “capture diverse education, training and life experiences.” College classes, professional certifications, planning and participating in Air Force, joint and coalition exercises, and deploying and leading teams in combatant command areas of responsibility will all count toward the PDU requirement.

Other changes to EPME include making Airman Leadership School, the Non-Commissioned Officer Academy, and the Senior NCO Academy entirely in-residence, greatly broadening airmen’s opportunity to attend academies,



and eliminating time-in-service milestones for distance learning eligibility. [Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | September 17, 2017 ++]

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## **Air Force Readiness Update 03 ► Too Small for What's Being Asked of Them**

As the Air Force marks its 70th birthday, it's facing a series of challenges unlike any other in its history. It continues to fight two active wars. Meanwhile, tensions with Russia and North Korea are heightening, forcing the service to focus more of its attention on Europe and Asia. At the same time, it's about as small as it was when it became an independent service in 1947. The ongoing problems of sequestration and budget cuts, pilot shortages and other manning shortfalls are making it tougher for the service to meet its multiple missions around the world.

If the budget problems continue in fiscal 2018, that's going to create a new set of problems, said Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson. "We are a service that is too small for what's being asked of us," Wilson said in an Aug. 31 editorial board meeting with Air Force Times. "We have readiness issues at home already, and if we were to have to continue next year, either on a continuing resolution that [keeps Air Force funding] flat from last year or, even worse, under a sequester ... it would be devastating, and [it would take] years to recover from it."

A long-term budget impasse, coupled with ongoing pilot retention and readiness issues, would probably cost the entire Air Force the equivalent of four months of flying time, she said. Pilots who are either flying missions supporting combat operations or gearing up for combat, would continue to fly, but virtually all other flights — including the intense training to prepare for air-to-air combat against a near-peer adversary — would be grounded. That would be disastrous and possibly cost airmen their lives, she said. "The threats around the world are not abating, and our readiness, particularly for what we call the high-end fight, would diminish significantly," Wilson said. "It's really not a question of whether we'll go [when called]. It's a question [of] how many people come back."

A budget shortfall would handcuff the Air Force's effort to rebuild its manning levels. Besides trying to stem the loss of pilots, the Air Force is also rebuilding its ranks of maintenance, ISR, cyber and nuclear airmen. "We put together a pretty good budget proposal that will increase our [active duty] end strength to 324,000," Wilson said. "If the budget doesn't come through, we'll have a problem." In the meantime, Wilson said, the Air Force is trying to figure out better ways to manage its manning levels at the individual unit level. One problem, for example, is that when a squadron needs two more F-22 maintainers, it has to request a manning study, she said. But the Air Force is so far behind, that process is likely to take a year and a half.

The Air Force may move to a system similar to that of the other services, where units can request changes to manning levels within a 30- or 60-day window. "We've got to come up with a better way of assessing manpower needs. Everybody else has a much more fixed [way to determine] this is what a battalion of Rangers needs, and this is what a carrier task force" needs, Wilson said.

**High operations tempo** -- The relentless operations tempos and deployment needs have increased the strain on airmen and their families, Wilson said. For example, pilots flying tankers — which have been in heavy demand due to operations in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan — are operating on a 1:1 dwell-deploy ratio, meaning someone who is deployed for six months usually gets only six months at home before being deployed again. When those pilots come home, she said, they're kept busy with training and don't get much time to actually relax. "Even when they're home, they're not really home," Wilson said.

To try to ease the deployment burden on pilots, Wilson said the Air Force is trying to increase the number of new pilots it trains each year, from about 1,200 to 1,400. And to convince more pilots to remain in uniform, the Air Force is increasing retention bonuses and other financial incentives, doing away with unnecessary training and bureaucratic requirements that eat up time, and bringing on about 1,000 people to support squadrons so pilots don't have to take on administrative tasks. Beginning Oct. 1, airmen will, in almost all cases, deploy in groups of at least

three, Wilson said. This will ensure that young airmen who have never deployed have someone to train with who can show them the ropes, Wilson said. What’s more, she said, it’s a bad idea to have airmen deploy on their own and then return home with no one to talk to who went through the same experiences. “They come back and they kind of decompress on their own,” Wilson said. “It’s not a good practice. From 1 October on, we won’t do that anymore.”

**Acquisition milestone** -- The Air Force is inching toward receiving its newest tanker, the KC-46A Pegasus, from Boeing, though the manufacturer has encountered problems along the way. Wilson said the Air Force has kept its requirements firm, and Boeing must fulfill the contract, adding that she thinks Boeing is highly motivated to do everything they can to meet the dates. “We should know, and Boeing probably should know, pretty soon whether they’re on track or not,” she said. The Air Force also recently awarded a contract to Boeing to provide two airplanes — which had been built for a Russian airline that went bankrupt — to be the next Air Force One aircraft.

President Trump earlier this year blasted the projected cost for the Air Force One replacement, and ordered the Air Force to get the cost down. Wilson said the Air Force will eventually release a total cost number for the acquisition, but has agreed not to release the cost of the air frames now for competition reasons. “We got a good price,” she said. “We have that obligation no matter what the program is, and every dollar that we spend was earned by somebody, and we need to make sure that we get good value for money on everything that we buy.” [Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | September 17, 2017 ++]

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## **USAF Tanker/Transport Fleet ► Inadequate Against Sophisticated Enemy**

The Air Force needs more tankers and transports because a sophisticated enemy like Russia or China can shoot them down, the chief of Air Mobility Command said. The current fleet size is based on war plans that only considered how much fuel, supplies, equipment, and troops the air fleet needed to move from A to B, Gen. Carlton Everhart told reporters. The assumption was that no enemy could challenge our control of the skies, which made sense against the Taliban or the Islamic State. But now, as nation-state adversaries increase their anti-aircraft firepower, planners are for the first time factoring in wartime “attrition” – i.e. downed planes and dead crews – for tankers and transports.

That will almost certainly increase the number of those planes the military needs, Everhart said. It will also drive investments in defensive systems, he said, from lasers that can shoot down incoming anti-aircraft missiles to a mysterious “cloaking device” that might make even huge aircraft like tankers and transports harder to detect on radar. “Right now (with) mobility assets, we don’t do attrition. Don’t ask me why,” Everhart said at a roundtable with reporters. (There’s actually a long history here – see below). “I can’t figure that out: why was attrition never built into models? Now it’s going to be – and that’s gonna change the equation.” The current objective for tankers, for example, is 479 aircraft, he said. “Based off the scenarios I’ve seen, I think it’s a floor.”



**Air Force C-17 transports ready to deliver forces to Iraq.**

How many more planes do we need? “I don’t know,” Everhart told a few reporters lingering after the round table. “If you want to build in attrition, is it 10 percent, is it 2 percent, is it 5 percent, is it 3 percent?” “The aircraft that we have right now meet those plans (i.e. the current plans without attrition factored in). We do have some risk in some areas and in other areas we’re better, but for the floors, we’re pretty good with those numbers: the 275 to 300 C-130s, the 479 tankers. We’re okay,” Everhart said. “When you start building in the attrition piece of it, I don’t know what that is.”

“It’s all got to be modeled out,” Everhart went on, “and it depends on what AOR it’s going to” – that is, the Area Of Responsibility. Each theater has a unique geography and a unique adversary, be it Europe against Russia, the Pacific against North Korea or China, or the Mideast against Iran. The war plans need to calculate losses to enemy fighters, especially advanced stealth aircraft like China’s J-31, and to anti-aircraft missiles like the Russian S-400 and Chinese HQ-9. They need to adjust planned flight paths to avoid the high-threat airspace known as Anti-Access/Area Denial (AD/AD) zones. They even need to factor in non-physical effects such as cyber attacks disrupting US command, control, and logistics networks. “Somewhere we’ve got to set a baseline,” Everhart said. “I don’t know what that baseline is right now. What we’ll probably do is take an average of all the modeling.”

Preliminary work is underway, but Transportation Command, OSD’s Cost Analysis & Program Assessment (CAPE) office and other agencies won’t issue the formal planning assumptions until 2018. So the new war plans won’t be done until 2020, Everhart said, in time for the 2021 budget. Why haven’t we done this before? Since most US forces have to cross an ocean just to get to a fight, US war planning has traditionally emphasized nitty-gritty logistics over high-flown strategy. That kind of planning culture is not a bad thing in itself. Germany’s failure to capture Paris in 1914 or Moscow in 1941 was in part the product of generals drawing grand maneuvers on the map that their troops couldn’t get enough fuel, food, bullets or clothing to execute on the ground. By contrast, US logistics were so lavish they sometimes went overboard, accumulating “iron mountains” of supplies in Mideastern deserts and building fast-food restaurants on forward bases.

Since 1945, however, US logisticians haven’t faced an enemy who could sink their ships or shoot down their planes. That’s allowed planners to focus on efficiency – maximum supply for minimum cost – and neglect survivability. Tanker aircraft are actually just modified civilian airliners, providing vital fuel to exquisitely designed 5th Generation stealth fighters. Even purpose-built military transports like the C-17 are easy to detect on radar and very lightly defended. Those are both things Everhart wants to change. “You all laughed at me when I talked about a laser,” Everhart told the roundtable, “but I’ve got to put defensive systems on that airplane.” Would this be a relatively low-power laser that can dazzle the sensors on an incoming missile, like a souped-up DIRCM (Directional Infra-Red Counter-Measure), or a more powerful weapon that could actually shoot the missile down? “It could be all of the above,” he said.

As for making tankers and transports harder to detect on radar, that runs into some fundamental problems of physics. An aircraft needs to be designed for stealth from the ground up, with every feature designed to minimize radar return, which drives the distinctive, sleep shapes of B-2 bombers and F-35 fighters. By contrast, said Everhart, “I’ve got big airplanes with big, fat wings that you can see a long way.” Making them stealthier requires a very different approach, he said, some kind of “cloaking device” that diffuses the radar energy.

Is that even possible outside of Star Trek? “We quickly get into the classified world, but I think there’s capabilities out there,” Everhart said. “I just need to get a testbed.” He’s been talking to industry about possible technologies both at AFA and at earlier industry days. To get new technology and additional aircraft, though, Air Mobility Command ultimately has to go ask for more money. “Yes we do,” Everhart said with a rueful chuckle. “Welcome to my world. I fight that battle every day.” [Source: Breaking Defense | Sydney J. Freedberg Jr. | September 21, 2017 ++]

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## Navy Readiness Update 03 ► Overburdened Navy Must Just Say 'NO'

How will the new Navy Secretary get people to understand the fleet is being worked too hard? “Because we’ll start every conversation with 17 dead sailors,” Richard Spencer told reporters 20 SEP in his first media roundtable as SecNav. The 10 deaths aboard the USS McCain last month and the seven aboard the USS Fitzgerald in June have many causes, which Spencer addressed in a Senate hearing yesterday. But the fundamental problem is a collision between a shrinking fleet, growing operational demands, and erratic funding for training and maintenance.

“When I said yesterday that the Navy has a problem and we’re going to fix it, (that means) we’re going to have to come to...some sort of balance between supply and demand,” said Spencer. “The COCOMs (Combatant Commanders) are going to have to understand it, and the Hill is going to have to understand it.” The Navy has been operating according to a “false math... that we couldn’t afford,” the secretary said. “We have been punching way above our weight and possibly robbing Peter to pay Paul to get our missions done, and now the bills are coming home.” Longstanding Navy culture will have to change, Spencer said, to make it acceptable to say “no, we can’t” when an already over tasked or undertrained unit is given a new mission. “You truly have an organization, as you all well know, that is biased to action and the word ‘no’ is just not in the lexicon,” Spencer said. “We have to find a balance... because the pure blind answer, yes, without assessing the risk is non sustainable.”

The accidents only make the problem worse by taking two ships out of circulation. The Fitzgerald will be in repairs for over a year. The McCain’s assessment is still ongoing but the damage looks to be less extensive. Repairing the two destroyers will cost an estimated \$600 million, money which Spencer noted is not in the Navy budget. The service will have to ask Congress for supplemental funds, and “it’s going to have to be sooner rather than later,” Spencer said, almost certainly before the 2019 budget request in the spring. In the medium term, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has prioritized plus-ups to readiness funding for all four services – in many cases deferring modernization. The goal is to catch up on the years of cancelled training and deferred maintenance that resulted from the 2011 Budget Control Act capping defense spending even as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq dragged on and new threats arose from China and Russia.

The long-term solution is a larger Navy. The fleet has shrunk from its 1987 high of 594 ships to 278 today, even while the number of ships deployed outside US home waters at any given time has stayed roughly constant at about 100. That means ships and sailors must deploy more often and for longer, putting more strain on humans and machines alike with less time for recovery and repair. That’s a particularly acute problem in the Japan-based 7th Fleet to which both McCain and Fitzgerald belonged. Unless the demand for ships drops – which is unlikely – then the supply of ships must rise.

As a candidate, Donald Trump called for a 350-ship Navy. The official Force Structure Assessment from the Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. John Richardson, calls for 355. But warships take years to build, and US shipyards will take at least 18 years to build enough ships – assuming they can get the money. Unfortunately, in the near term, much-needed repairs and readiness funding competes directly with shipbuilding. It’s a zero-sum game as long as the Budget Control Act caps limit the total Navy topline. “We are going to have to have some topline relief to move the 355-ship goal forward,” he said. That means amending or eliminating the Budget Control Act. While it’s worth seeking efficiencies within the Navy Department, he said, including potentially returning retired Perry class frigates to service, that won’t save enough money to buy a 355-ship fleet. “There are things that we can do in a more improved manner, I think, when it comes to overall acquisition and resource applicability, but it certainly isn’t going to fund the gap,” Spencer said. “At the end of the day we need to have a straight line of sight to the resources.”

Is it even worth holding up 355 as a target when it’ll take decades to achieve, at best? Perhaps there might be some more modest, achievable number to target instead? “I don’t think there’s a more reasonable (number),” Spencer said. “350-355 is a goal we have” that helps anchor the discussion: “If we don’t put a stick in the ground, it can be moved around even easier. So I think we should put a stick out there.” [Source: Breaking Defense | Sydney J. Freedberg Jr. | September 20, 2017 ++]

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## Short Range Training Ammo ► New SRTA for .50 Caliber Guns

General Dynamics maintains that its new short-range .50 caliber ammunition will give troops a lot more opportunities to safely train with the Ma Deuce heavy machine gun. The new .50 Caliber round is the latest in GD’s Short Range Training Ammunition line, Ruben Regalado of General Dynamics Ordnance and Tactical Systems, said at Modern Day Marine 2017. It can be used on an unmodified weapon and has a maximum range of less than 700 meters, compared to that standard .50 caliber round’s maximum range of about 8,000 meters, Regalado said. The effective range on the .50 caliber SRTA round is 200 meters.

The reduced range will allow units to take their .50 caliber machine guns to a larger variety of ranges to work on tactics, techniques and procedures as well as engaging short-range targets in an urban environment, Regalado said. The bullet itself is made of a mix of copper and polymer that reduces wear and tear on range complexes, Regalado said. “It’s a short range round of a frangible composition ... it turns to powder” when it hits steel or other hard targets,” he said.

GD also produces 5.56mm and 7.62mm SRTA, which has been in the big Army system for about five years, Regalado said. Both the Army and Special Operations Command have expressed interest in testing the new .50 caliber version, he said. “The development is done; now we are just seeing where it is going to fit,” Regalado said. [Source: Kit Up | Matthew Cox | September 21, 2017 ++]

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## Interim Combat Service Rifle ► Army M4 Replacement Program Cancelled

The Army's program to replace the M4 carbine with a larger, harder-hitting rifle is dead, canceled after just under two months. But now that the Interim Combat Service Rifle is dead, what's next? The Interim Combat Service Rifle was proposed as a means of countering the new generation of cheap, highly effective body armors likely to be worn by America's enemies . Countries such as Russia are now issuing body armors that can allegedly stop a .30-06 armor piercing bullet. Experts inside and outside the Army believed that the Army's current issue 5.56-millimeter bullet would not be able to penetrate new armor, and that a larger, heavier bullet that transfers more energy to the target is necessary. Like everything else in the domain of military weapons, it's an arms race between measure and countermeasure.

### 6.5MM CARBINE WEAPON OVERVIEW



- Closed bolt, forward feed
- Gas piston
- Rising chamber mechanism
- Rate of fire: 600 rounds/minute

Characteristic	6.5mm CT Carbine	5.56mm M4
Weapon Empty Weight	8.3 lb	7.74 lb
Magazine: Capacity & Loaded Wt	20 rds 1.0 lb	30 rds 1.0 lb
Barrel Length (rifled bore)	14.7 "	12.7 "
Weapon Length (collapsed)	32 "	29.8 "
Weapon Height	7.3 "	7.2 "

6.5mm Carbine Weapon, currently under development.



The Army is working on an intermediate caliber round and rifle combination that would fall between 5.56 mm and 7.62 mm, giving soldiers greater range than their current weapon and greater power and penetration. Army officials have noted that the rifle-in-progress will replace the M4 and M16 family of weapons. But the Interim Combat Service Rifle was expected to fill that firepower gap while the more long-term program progressed

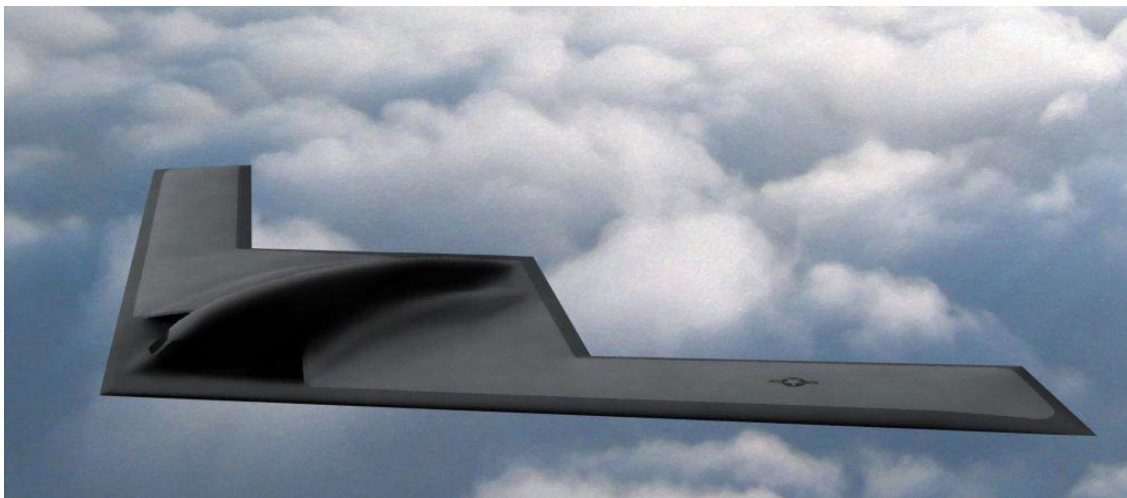
Critics of the ICSR program felt that the Army was jumping the gun and that the threat did not necessitate an entirely new rifle. Plus, using a new rifle in the larger 7.62-millimeter caliber would be heavier, require heavier ammunition, and hold less ammunition than a M4 carbine—three less-than-desirable attributes for infantrymen. The Army had also already said the technology behind its new XM1158 ADVAP armor-piercing round could be adapted to 5.56-millimeter caliber, which made a new rifle in a new caliber pointless.

What happened to cancel the ICSR? The blog Soldier Systems Daily claims that Army Chief of Staff Mark Milley had a "squirrel!" moment watching Textron's new LSAT rifle concept in action. LSAT uses new "cased telescope" technology in which a bullet is totally enclosed in a polymer casing and surrounded by gunpowder. This allows the LSAT round to be shorter and weigh less than traditional bullets with brass casings. LSAT is offered in a new 6.5-millimeter round but is also available in more traditional 5.56 and 7.62-millimeter models. LSAT is not part of the ICSR competition. It is not known if the LSAT will eventually become standard U.S. Army issue, but it is known that the decision to start the ICSR program was hasty and in all likelihood unnecessary. While the Army should adopt a new weapon and caliber if absolutely necessary, that doesn't seem to be the case—yet. [Source: www.popularmechanics.com | Kyle Mizokami || September 21, 2017 ++]

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## **B-21 Stealth Bomber ► Cost Monitoring**

In what may be a hint of things to come, the head of the Air Force Rapid Capabilities Office says his office is keeping a close eye on the B-21 bomber's stealth costs. While he didn't indicate there were any cost overruns or scheduler problems, the fact that RCO Director Randall Walden mentioned this for the first time in public would seem to indicate a heightened level of interest. Almost everything about the B-21 Raider is classified, except for its price, so mention of anything is worth noting. The Air Force plans to buy more than 100 of the long range strike aircraft and to pay Northrop \$550 million a copy. The first 21 aircraft will comprise five batches of Low Rate Initial Production aircraft.



**B-21 Raider artist rendering**

If we put a few pieces together, Walden may be focused on stealth because Northrop Grumman, the plane's builder, is constructing a new 45,900 square foot "coatings facility" at its facility at Air Force Plant 42 in Palmdale, Calif. And, as Walden noted during a panel yesterday, stealth is one of the program's most likely risk areas. Clark confirmed that the plant is part of the B-21 program and that the facility would be key to stealth coatings for the plane. Development of a stand-alone plant for coatings, presumably for stealth, highlights the importance of security to the program. Bottom line on the B-21 program seems to be summed up by Walden's comment that, "Based on what I've seen so far, it's actually a pretty good deal for us and the taxpayers."

At the end of the panel, Clark did ask him a larger strategic question about his office, one that is being copied by all three other services and lauded as a model to help fix what ails the Pentagon in acquisition: very slow development, risk aversion and those darn cost overruns. His office is meant to be nimble and to gently push the envelope of technology to field weapons the Air Force really needs and field them, as its name declares, rapidly. But it's managing the B-21 program, the X-37B spaceplane and other significant efforts. Bill LaPlante, former head of Air Force acquisition, said last week when proposing a separate RCO for space that it was necessary because you didn't want to overburden Walden's office. Walden's reply: what matters are the people and the culture of the organization, not necessarily the size of its mission or its programs. Fair enough, so far. [Breaking Defense | Colin Clark | September 19, 2017 ++]

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## **Navy Seventh Fleet ► Loss of Confidence Firings**

Two top officers from the Japan-based 7th Fleet were fired 18 SEP due to a loss of confidence in their ability to command, the second and third high-level firings in the fleet since the at-sea disasters this summer on the destroyers Fitzgerald and John S. McCain. Task Force 70 commander Rear Adm. Charles Williams, and Destroyer Squadron 15 commander Capt. Jeffrey Bennett, were both relieved by newly installed 7th Fleet commanding officer, Vice Adm. Phil Sawyer, according to a 7th Fleet release. The Fitz and McCain both fall under the destroyer squadron, and Task Force 70 has tactical control over ships deploying or transiting in 7th Fleet's waters. Seventh Fleet officials would not confirm whether the firings were related to the Fitz and McCain disasters.

Sawyer took the helm of the troubled 7th Fleet late last month after his predecessor, Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin, was fired in the wake of the McCain's collision with an oil tanker near Singapore that led to the deaths of 10 sailors. In June, seven Fitz sailors drowned after a merchant vessel struck its starboard side off Japan. Bennett assumed command of the destroyer squadron in September 2016, while Williams took control of Task Force 70 in July 2016. The Navy has undertaken a fleet-wide review of its training, manning and readiness standards in the wake of the two disasters. Seventh Fleet has come in to particular focus due to a high operational tempo that watchdog groups warn is forcing those ships and crews to forego the kinds of training and maintenance enjoyed by vessels home-ported in the United States. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | September 18, 2017 ++]

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## **MAVNI Program Update 01 ► Terminated Enlistment Contracts**

The Army has ended enlistment contracts for hundreds of foreign-born recruits, risking deportation for some, the Washington Post reported 15 SEP, citing several affected recruits and former officials familiar with their situation. The contracts were ended so recruiters could focus on individuals who could potentially move more quickly through the time-intensive enlistment process, recruits and experts told the newspaper. Many of the recruits were part of a previous push to attract skilled immigrants in fields such as medicine and language into the military in exchange for fast-tracked citizenship, the Washington Post reported.

The **Military Accessions Vital to National Interest**, or MAVNI, program began in 2009 and aimed to recruit “certain legal aliens whose skills are considered to be vital to the national interest,” according to the Defense Department website. The Pentagon on 14 SEP pushed back against the Post’s story, saying Army recruiters had no incentive to remove recruits who joined via the MAVNI program. Instead, the law requires the Army to discharge a recruit who has not shipped to initial military training within two years, said Lt. Col. Paul Haverstick, a Defense Department spokesman, in a statement. “Unfortunately, some MAVNI pilot program recruits have been unable to complete the increased security screening required by the Department of Defense to ship to training within two years of enlistment,” Haverstick said.

MAVNI recruits in the delayed entry program are not discharged prior to the end of the two-year period unless they request it, are unable to complete the required security screening requirements within the statutory timeline, or are found unsuitable for military service during the course of the screening, Haverstick said. The Army has about 1,600 recruits contracted through the MAVNI program who were currently working to complete the security screening, Haverstick said.

The Defense Department, under then-Secretary Ash Carter, suspended the MAVNI program last September after an internal investigation into the security vulnerabilities in the program, according to DoD. While DoD is not accepting new applicants, it is continuing to process existing MAVNI recruits who are waiting to report for initial training, Haverstick said. Hundreds of recruits in the enlistment process could be affected, Margaret Stock, a retired Army officer and immigration lawyer who spearheaded MAVNI told the Washington Post. A recruiter told Stock that there is pressure from the Army Reserve to meet recruiting numbers before the end of the fiscal year. “It’s a dumpster fire ruining people’s lives. The magnitude of incompetence is beyond belief,” Stock told the Washington Post. “We have a war going on. We need these people.”

MAVNI faced problems earlier this summer as well. In June, a Defense Department memo cited possible security concerns with foreign-born recruits. The internal memo sent to Defense Secretary Jim Mattis noted that 1,000 recruits awaiting active-duty training were at risk for deportation. The memo cited problems with MAVNI, such as the diversion of “already constrained Army fiscal and manpower resources.” Extra resources are often devoted to the background investigations of recruits with knowledge of highly sought after languages, such as Mandarin Chinese and Pashto, but who were also born in areas that garner extra scrutiny during the investigative process. Since its implementation, the MAVNI program has resulted in the recruitment of nearly 11,000 recruits. [Source: ArmyTimes | Kyle Rempfer | September 16, 2017 ++]

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## **Korea Evacuation Messages ► Hoax**

Several U.S. servicemembers or their family members received fake messages saying an evacuation order had been issued for the Korean Peninsula, but the hoax was reported within an hour of when people started to receive them, a military spokesman said. The command stressed the claim was false, saying “USFK did NOT issue this message” and warning recipients not to click on any links or open attachments included in them. The false alarms were delivered 21 SEP via text message and Facebook, the military said in notices distributed on social media. Anybody affected should report messages to U.S. Army counterintelligence on these hotlines: 0503-323-3299 or 010-3100-0171.

The report comes at a sensitive time on the divided peninsula as jitters are high as North Korea has shown rapid progress in its nuclear weapons program. The false messages referred to what is known as a noncombatant evacuation operation, or NEO, which would affect family members of the 28,500 U.S. servicemembers stationed in South Korea and non-emergency essential Defense Department civilian employees. The military conducts biannual NEO exercises to rehearse a possible evacuation, but none has ever been ordered since the 1950-53 Korean War ended. The messages were received by “a handful of servicemembers and families,” said USFK spokesman Col.

Chad Carroll. Cyber personnel were investigating the incident, which was reported quickly via the chain of command and social media, he said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Kim Gamel | September 21, 2017 ++]

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## Overseas Troops ► Cpl. Sunsette Winsler



A military working dog handler assigned to 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, poses at Camp Beuhring, Kuwait. "I knew I was going to be a Marine when I was 12 years old," she said, despite what her mom imagined. "I didn't tell [her] for about two months," after enlisting. Winsler and her military dog, Bella, have been together "since day one," she said. "I got to train with Bella for six weeks, certify her, bring her to the fleet and stay on her. I am her first handler and she's my first dog. I have to rely on her for my life and she has to rely on me for everything else."

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## USS Ponce (AFSB-1) Update 01 ► Former LPD-15 Returns Home For Last Time

A ship that was given a five-year reprieve from retirement in order to test out a new concept for the Navy finally returned home today for the last time. The USS Ponce, born an Austin-class amphibious transport dock and remade into an afloat forward staging base in 2012, pulled into homeport in Norfolk, Virginia, 27 SEP, ending a five-year deployment to the Middle East. The ship is set to be retired after 46 years in service later this year.

The Ponce, one of the oldest ships in the entire Navy fleet, had a full career before being tapped for a new mission. She was tasked with patrolling off the shore of Beirut, Lebanon in early 1984, months after a terrorist bombing of a Marine barracks in Beirut in October 1983 killed 241 U.S. troops and 58 French peacekeepers. The ship supported Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm from the Mediterranean during a 1991 deployment, and in 2003 was tasked with carrying Marines from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina to support the invasion of Iraq.

In late 2011, at the age of 40, the ship returned to port to be decommissioned. But plans changed when U.S. Central Command asked for an interim afloat forward staging base, a new class of seabasing ship that had yet to enter service. The ship's mission would be to conduct mine countermeasures, said Jim Strock, an independent consultant who previously directed the Marine Corps' Seabasing Integration Division. "What the Ponce did, it filled an immediate compelling operational need that was in the Straits of Hormuz to ensure freedom of navigation in that area of the world," Strock told Military.com. "Iran was rattling its saber back in 2012. The United States said, 'we've got a handful of minesweepers over there, but we need a platform that will support aviation capabilities.'"

The Navy spent between \$60 and \$70 million to modify the Ponce for the mission, Strock said. It was equipped with Navy MH-53 minesweeping helicopters and a hybrid civilian-military crew and deployed to the Middle East in 2012. But while there, planners realized the ship could be instrumental for experimentation as well, testing out new concepts and equipment to inform development of new seabasing platforms that were soon to enter the fleet. "The Ponce was a test bench," Strock said. "It turned into a laboratory; it gave us other ways to explore sea-based capabilities on an effectively non-traditional platform.

They were able to leverage that platform and capture lessons learned." Perhaps most notably, the Ponce gave the Navy a platform from which to test a prototype laser weapons system, known as LaWS, designed to defend against small vessels, aircraft, and unmanned aerial vehicles. LaWS was deployed aboard the Ponce in August 2014 for testing; it would remain aboard the ship for the duration of its time in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the Navy was beginning to acquire purpose-built seabasing vessels, beginning with the Expeditionary Transfer Dock Montford Point in 2013. The Lewis B. Puller, the Navy's first Expeditionary Mobile Base, was commissioned in August in Bahrain as a replacement for the Ponce in the Middle East.

Currently, there are five ESB/ESDs delivered to the Navy or under construction; more are called for in the Navy's future force structure assessment. Mission sets for the ships envisioned by the Marine Corps and the Navy include special operations, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and other missions typically undertaken by traditional amphibious ships. And the Ponce played a role in developing the concept, Strock said. "It was a success story," he said. "It demonstrated very quick innovation and adaptation by the Navy and the [special operations forces] community to repurpose a platform to meet a compelling operational need." [Source: Military.com | Hope Hodge Seck | September 27, 2017 ++]

**\* Military History \***



### **Angels of Bataan ► Courage To Live**

They called themselves the Battling Belles of Bataan, but to the GIs fighting a desperate and doomed battle for the Philippines in 1941 and 1942, and later to their fellow civilian internees, they were, simply, angels. The Angels of Bataan and Corregidor, as they're best known, were a group of 88 Army nurses and 12 Navy nurses stationed in the Philippines in early December 1941. "They were trailblazers for women in the military, for the Army Nurse Corps," said nurse and ANC historian Lt. Col. Nancy Cantrell. "They set the example for the rest of the services. Their story told the world ... that women are tough, they can serve in combat and they can survive."

The nurses hadn't received any military or survival training and held only relative rank. Most were the equivalent of second lieutenants, albeit with far lower pay, and were universally addressed as "Miss." The majority had volunteered for the assignment, according to Elizabeth Norman, a professor of nursing history at New York University and author of "We Band of Angels: The Untold Story of American Nurses Trapped on Bataan by the Japanese." Manila was considered the "pearl of the Orient," and they expected to meet men and have fun. Duty was light and they sunbathed, played golf and tennis, and danced under the stars. As late as Nov. 18, 1941, newly



arrived 2nd Lt. Marcia Gates wrote her mother that she had already bought two new evening gowns and was growing spoiled because local Filipinos took care of all the laundry, cooking and housework. (Gates' niece, author Melissa Bowerstock, compiled her family's letters from this period in a book about her aunt.)

Less than three weeks later, on Dec. 8 (Dec. 7, Hawaii time), the nurses awoke to the news that Pearl Harbor had been attacked, and they were stunned. Fearing the Philippines would be the next Japanese target, commanders issued the nurses steel helmets and gas masks. At 8:19 a.m., Japanese bombs began to fall. The attack was devastating, destroying all but one of the U.S. airplanes in the Philippines and leaving thousands dead or wounded. "The hospital was bedlam – amputations, dressings, intravenouses, blood transfusions, shock, death," 2nd Lt. Ruth Straub wrote in her diary. She "worked all night, hopped over banisters and slid under the hospital during raids." Her fiancé, she would learn a week later, was killed in the attack.

Gen. Douglas MacArthur ordered a retreat to the inhospitable jungles of the Bataan Peninsula and the supposedly impregnable island of Corregidor at its tip. There, they would make a stand and wait for reinforcements. The reinforcements never arrived. A makeshift hospital ship, manned by one of the Army nurses, managed to sneak out, but the most gravely wounded couldn't be moved and were left behind in Manila with 11 Navy nurses. Meanwhile, between Christmas and New Year's Eve, the Army nurses crossed the bay under heavy fire, becoming, Norman wrote, "the first group of American military nurses sent onto the battlefield for duty." They were already the first women in U.S. military history to wear fatigues and combat boots.

Hospital 1 on Bataan initially consisted of 29 bamboo and grass sheds, and doctors and nurses could barely keep up with the casualties from the unrelenting air raids and fierce, often hand-to-hand, combat. In one 24-hour period – Jan. 16, 1942 – they performed 187 major surgeries, according to Norman. Hospital 2 was farther inland, and in the open air. There was no protection from the mosquitoes, so malaria and dengue fever were endemic, affecting everyone from the wounded to healthy soldiers to the nurses themselves, while ever-present flies contaminated food and water with dysentery and other parasites. Food, contaminated or not, was scarce. Infantrymen were fighting on 1,000 calories a day by late February – a quarter of the nutrition they needed to stay in fighting shape. They ate the cavalry horses, water buffalo, even monkeys, while the sick and exhausted nurses forced themselves to work. One senior nurse, bedridden from malaria, even set up a cot in the middle of her ward and continued directing her staff, Norman wrote.

Two of the nurses were injured with shrapnel when the Japanese bombed Hospital 1 for the second time, and quickly went back to work. Watching women endure the same danger and hunger seemed to inspire the troops to continue the fight, Norman wrote, but by April, the enemy was only miles from the hospitals. On April 8, 1942, Lt. Gen. Jonathan "Skinny" Wainwright, new commander of the U.S. Army in the Philippines, ordered the nurses to the relative safety of Corregidor. They didn't want to leave helpless, sick and wounded men to fend for themselves. They were nurses and their sacred duty was to stay with their 8,800 patients, but orders were orders. They escaped by dodging sniper fire, mines and explosions in whatever buses and boats were available.

The Japanese then used the hospital patients as human shields. They also force-marched the ambulatory soldiers (wounded or not) some 60 miles through the rugged terrain and heat during the infamous Bataan Death March. Anyone who fell behind was killed; historians estimate that nearly 20,000 Americans and Filipinos perished. The nurses felt they had abandoned their patients, and Norman said it haunted them for the rest of their lives. Their new hospital was underground in the dank, hot, airless Malinta Tunnel. It continuously shook from bombs and artillery fire, Gates later said. "The ... tunnels were jammed with wounded. Every other patient they brought in was someone we'd known personally. That was hard to take." And once again, food and medical supplies quickly ran low.

Japanese soldiers were infamous for raping the women they conquered and Wainwright, who publically hailed the nurses' bravery, wanted them off the island. He managed to have 22 Army nurses and one Navy nurse sent to Australia by PBV plane and submarine, but there wasn't time to evacuate the remaining 56. A second plane hit an underwater rock during a refueling stop and left 10 nurses stranded on the island of Mindanao. They were eventually captured as well.

The Japanese infantry assaulted Corregidor's beaches in wave after punishing wave. Wainwright finally surrendered May 6, because "fighting in the ... tunnels, jammed with wounded, would be mass murder," 2nd Lt. Eunice Young remembered in a passage quoted by Bowersock. The next morning, "in the middle of a difficult operation, I heard a scuffling noise and glanced up. In the door stood a Japanese soldier with his bayonet fixed .... My heart popped into my mouth." Expecting to die, the nurses wrote their names on a bed sheet, but the Japanese, Young went on, were shocked at their presence and had no idea what to do with "captured women in uniform."

While Japanese soldiers stole the nurses' valuables, by all accounts, none were molested or killed. Eventually, they moved the nurses to the civilian internment camp of Santo Tomas in Manila, where the 11 Navy nurses had been held since March. The Navy nurses later moved north to the Los Banos internment camp. It was "fairly pleasant" at first, 2nd Lt. Rita Palmer told her hometown newspaper, the Hampton Union, in 1945. She had been injured by shrapnel on Bataan and was one of the nurses stranded on Mindanao. In the beginning, the food supply was adequate when supplemented by meat, eggs and produce that internees purchased from local Filipinos. To fill the time, interned golf and tennis pros offered lessons, while college professors held courses on everything from music to Spanish. Palmer earned a year's worth of college credit.

The Army nurses worked in the prison hospital an average of four hours a day, something Young said "wasn't our rightful job. As Army nurses we should have been with our men in the military camps. We fumed about that." Still, nursing became their salvation, Norman wrote. It gave them a support system, something to do, something to focus on, a reason to get up in the morning. "They were a tough bunch," Cantrell added. "They had a mission. They were surviving for the boys ... and each other. That does give you a bit of added strength."

The nurses learned to make sutures from hemp, 2nd Lt. Ruby G. Bradley wrote in an article for the Army's Office of Medical History. She was captured north of Manila at Camp John Hay in December 1941, and was sent to Santo Tomas in September 1943. She later served in the Korean War, becoming a colonel and the most decorated woman in U.S. military history at that time. Nurses sterilized surgical instruments by baking them in ovens or boiling them over Bunsen burners. Men in camp banged scrap metal into bedpans, Norman added, and interned chemists turned rubber from the rubber trees in camp into a paste to hold bandages.

The nurses saw everything from childbirth to heart attacks, and Gates was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent a mastectomy while in camp. There were diphtheria, chicken pox and tuberculosis outbreaks as well. But as Japan started to lose the war, the prisoners received less food and fewer privileges. Starting in 1944, the biggest problems were symptoms of malnutrition and starvation, especially beriberi, which leads to swollen, painful limbs and is caused by thiamine deficiency. The nurses were sick and starving too, and could do little for their patients but make them comfortable and watch as they starved to death – as many as five a day by early 1945, when they were forced to live on just 700 calories a day. "As the Americans drew nearer still, less food was given to the people," Palmer said. "The large flock of pigeons that had nested in the eaves gradually disappeared." Gates later said she ate dogs and cats, and once crawled around the floor to find a single grain of rice. She lost 23 pounds.

The nurses knew they were dying, Norman said. "They knew the camp was on a death watch and it was only a matter of time. They would make these cynical jokes about it, but none of those nurses ever expressed a fear to me about their own deaths, ever, either in battle or in camp." "It appeared to take more courage to live than to die," Bradley wrote. Fortunately, Allied troops arrived in time to save them from starvation and execution, which the Japanese were rumored to be planning. Just after dark on the night of Feb. 3, the nurses heard gunfire in the streets of Manila, and the 1st Cavalry Division and 44th Tank Battalion barreled through the gates. The internees went wild, screaming and crying with joy, singing "God Bless America," Gates remembered. "We could hardly talk to the men. Everyone was weeping with joy and we were almost unable to believe that it had finally happened." The Navy nurses at Los Banos were liberated 22 FEB.

A number of the soldiers, who had pushed through enemy lines to liberate Santo Tomas, were wounded. Six eventually died, and more were injured as the Allies fought to keep control of Santo Tomas over the next few days.

The nurses, weak with hunger and seriously ill (Palmer had just been hospitalized with dysentery and malaria), rushed to care for American soldiers for the first time in nearly three years. They stayed on duty until the Army sent a fresh unit of nurses to relieve them. Then they got to go home, via a long, circuitous route of island hopping, hospitals, physicals, press interviews, ticker tape parades and ceremonies. The nurses were all promoted and awarded the Bronze Star, and Palmer and another nurse received Purple Hearts. Their 100 percent survival record, Norman explained, is unmatched to this day. They were famous heroines and perfect recruiting tools for the Army Nurse Corps, but they weren't sure why. "We never did anything heroic," Young wrote in the Saturday Evening Post. "We were captured at our posts, like thousands of soldiers."



And then they were largely forgotten. Only a few received long-term treatment in military or veterans hospitals. Most simply went home to their parents. Some got married, and some, like Bradley, went back to work as Army nurses. "The government never bothered to follow up with them about the impact of this on fertility, on cancer rates, on heart disease," Norman said. She learned that many died fairly young, and that they all had chronic gastrointestinal and dental problems, as well as emotional and post-traumatic stress symptoms. Gates' relatives, for example, said she was never the same. She tried to commit suicide in the early 1950s, and died from breast cancer in 1970 at the age of 55.

Still, the nurses didn't regret their wartime service. Although Palmer admitted in the 1990s that she "had not successfully come to terms with everything that happened in those years," she said she "learned some valuable lessons, a great deal about human nature under extreme conditions and the recognition that little is gained and nothing resolved by war." Whatever the Angels of Bataan and Corregidor may have thought of their service, Cantrell said, "These women are my heroes. They are our heroes as nurses. I think that some of the things we do today ... are because of women like them." [Source: The American Legion | Elizabeth M. Collins | August 22, 2017 ++]

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## **Obit: Stanislav Petrov** ► 19 May 2017 | Averted Cold War Nuclear Disaster

A Soviet officer whose cool head and quick thinking saved the world from nuclear war died last MAY at age 77. Stanislav Petrov was on duty in a secret command centre outside Moscow on 26 September 1983 when a radar

screen showed that five Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missiles had been launched by the US towards the Soviet Union. Red Army protocol would have been to order a retaliatory strike, but Petrov – then a 44-year-old lieutenant colonel – ignored the warning, relying on a “gut instinct” that told him it was a false alert. “The siren howled, but I just sat there for a few seconds, staring at the big, back-lit, red screen with the word ‘launch’ on it,” he told the BBC’s Russian Service in 2013. “All I had to do was to reach for the phone; to raise the direct line to our top commanders.”

Instead of triggering a third world war, Petrov called in a malfunction in the early warning system. But even as he did so, he later admitted, he was not entirely sure he was doing the right thing. “Twenty-three minutes later I realized that nothing had happened. If there had been a real strike, then I would already know about it. It was such a relief,” he said. It later emerged that the false alarm was the result of a satellite mistaking the reflection of the sun’s rays off the tops of clouds for a missile launch. “We are wiser than the computers,” Petrov said in a 2010 interview with the German magazine Der Spiegel. “We created them.”

The incident occurred at the height of the cold war, just three weeks after the Soviet army had shot down a Korean passenger jet, killing all 269 people on board. Ronald Reagan had recently called the Soviet Union the “evil empire,” and Yuri Andropov, the ailing Soviet leader, was convinced the Americans were plotting a surprise nuclear attack. Petrov was never honored by the Soviet authorities for his role in saving the world from thermonuclear conflict. He was, however, reprimanded by his authorities for failing to describe the incident correctly in the logbook that night. His story did not become widely known until 1998, when Gen Yury Votintsev, the retired commander of Soviet missile defence, published his memoirs. In the following years, Petrov achieved worldwide recognition for his actions.

He was honoured by the Association of World Citizens at the UN headquarters in 2006 as “the man who averted a nuclear war”. In 2013, he was awarded the prestigious Dresden peace prize. He was also the subject of a 2013 documentary film entitled The Man who Saved the World. The son of a second world war fighter pilot, Petrov was born in Vladivostok on 9 September 1939. He later studied at a Soviet air force college in Kiev. He died on 19 May in Fryazino, a Moscow suburb, where he lived alone on a state pension, but his death was only reported on Monday. No cause of death has been announced. He is survived by a son and a daughter. [Source: The Guardian | Marc Bennetts | September 18, 2017 ++]

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## **WWII Comfort Women ► Memorial Number 12 Dedicated in San Francisco**

Now 89, former World War II “comfort woman” Yongsoo Lee clutched a microphone in one hand 22 SEP in a park outside San Francisco’s Chinatown, thrust her other clinched fist in the air, and made a vow. Lee, abducted from her Korean homeland at 15 and forced into working in brothels servicing Japanese soldiers, was speaking at the dedication of the latest of dozens of statues put up around the world, commemorating the ordeal of thousands of women like her in territory held by the Japanese army before and during World War II.

Japan has not gone far enough in apologizing, and the statues memorializing those the Japanese army called “comfort women” for their soldiers will keep going up, Lee, her frame bent in traditional green and pink Korean robes, told the scores at Friday’s unveiling ceremony. “And at the end, we will have a memorial in Tokyo. So they can say, ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry’ when they pass by,” said Lee, who came from South Korea for Friday’s ceremony, as she has for at least four other such dedications in the United States alone.

Historians say tens of thousands of women, and perhaps hundreds of thousands, were seized in Asian territories under Japanese military control and made to work in military brothels. The issue has remained an open rift between Japan and other Asian nations. Surviving comfort-women and their supporters rejected a 2015 statement from Japan expressing “apologies and remorse,” saying it did not go far enough in acknowledging what they say was the

Japanese government's responsibility. "If Japan does not like" the continued focus on comfort women, Lee told the crowd, through a translator, "Japan must apologize."

On Friday, the South Korean and Japanese foreign ministers, meeting in New York, agreed to work together to resolve their countries' lingering differences over the episode, according to Japan's Kyodo news agency. No more than a few dozen of the comfort women remain alive, said retired San Francisco Judge Lillian Sing, who was a leader in the effort by California's Korean, Chinese and Filipino communities to commission and put up the statue, in a park on the edge of San Francisco's Chinatown. "What these grandmas did was change the way the world looked at sex -trafficking," Sing told the state and local dignitaries and others in the audience. [Source: Associated Press | Ellen Knickmeyer | September 22, 2017 ++]

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## USS Cole Attack ► “Before there was 9/11, there was 10/12.”

“Before there was 9/11, there was 10/12.” Retired U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Bob Overturf, a 1987 graduate of Bowling Green High School, said those words are a reference to the Oct. 12, 2000, attack on the USS Cole by al-Qaida suicide bombers off the coast of Yemen. Overturf was part of the crew of nearly 300 and survived the blast that claimed the lives of 17 sailors. “The U.S. had intelligence information that a U.S. Navy ship was being targeted by (Osama) bin Laden,” Overturf said.



Experts in a speed boat examine the hull of the USS Cole at the Yemeni port of Aden on Oct. 15, 2000. A powerful explosion ripped a hole in the U.S. Navy destroyer in the Yemeni port, killing 17 sailors and injuring some 30 others.

Overturf lives in Virginia but returned to Bowling Green recently for a family visit and agreed to two interviews with the Daily News. He credits ship Cmdr. Kirk S. Lippold with preventing more loss of life. “It was Cmdr. Lippold’s action that saved a lot of lives, his attitude and preventative actions when we pulled into Yemen because he took a lot of precautions ‘just in case’ based on that intel,” Overturf said. The blast blew a 40- by 60-foot gash in the side of the ship. Overturf said he had been in the area of the ship that sustained the blow just two minutes before the attack. He was 70 feet away when the explosion tore through the ship. Battered and injured, the crew members spent the next day and a half working to save the ship. “We had to fight for the next 36 hours to save our ship and save all we could on board the ship,” he said.



There were no waiting ambulances or firefighters to assist, only the shaken crew of the Cole. “It took another 36 to 48 hours for another Navy ship to get to us. But even still we had to fight for the next 18 days to keep that ship afloat, to dig the bodies out of steel, to survive. No one can really comprehend what such hot temperatures in that part of the world can do when you’ve got tons of food and bodies rotting. “You can’t do anything about it. We’re trying to save the ship and keep it afloat to get us out of there. With the heat, the smell became overpowering. Days and days and days later, other ships said they could smell us two miles away.

The first three days into it, the embassy brings food and water and we all get dysentery from it. There is no calling in a sick day. You just have to work with poop in your pants. It could not have been any more humiliating, degrading or disgusting. It was a very long 18 days. “By the end of those 18 days we had all kinds of people coming on board. After 18 days the Cole was taken out and lifted onto the motor vessel the Blue Marlin, which is a gigantic lift vessel. It’s like a tow truck at sea for other ships. The crew were offloaded onto the USS Iwo Jima,” he said.

Intelligence indicated after the attack that bin Laden wasn’t satisfied with the death toll of the Cole bombing, and Cole sailors were removed from Cole onto the Iwo Jima by small boats under the cover of darkness, he said. The Cole’s crew was then evacuated at night to a secret air base in the middle of a desert in another country and from there flown, once again at night, to Germany. The military announced publicly the crew would be taken to a certain airstrip in Germany but instead they were flown to another, all in an effort to thwart another attack on the Cole’s crew. Overturf played a critical role in saving the Cole and for his efforts he was awarded the Navy Commendation Medal by the Secretary of the Navy.

Shortly thereafter, they returned to the United States for 30 days’ leave. “We reformed as a crew in an office building until we were slowly disbanded to other ships or commands,” he said. That call was a “mistake” because the surviving shipmates lost their sense of family and the support system they developed to help one another through their shared trauma, he said. Four months later, and haunted by the images brought on by post-traumatic stress disorder, Overturf was assigned to the USS Barry. “I had no business being on that ship,” he said. “I had active hallucinations. I was a complete basket case with PTSD. I was completely out of my mind. I resented being reassigned off of the Cole, and I acted extremely disrespectfully to the captain and crew of the Barry. But they understood, and they embraced me and they took me in and got me through it, and I probably owed my life to them.”

Overturf signed with the Navy while he was still a junior at Bowling Green High School. He was looking to become part of something larger than himself. “I wanted something more. I didn’t want to stay here and be like everybody else,” he said. Seven days after he walked his high school graduation line, he left for basic training in Orlando, Fla. His original plan was to be a rescue swimmer. But his sinus passages disqualified him from that service. So instead the Navy sent him to the Navy Electronic Technician School, where he had to confront math. “It turned out to be the best thing,” he said. “I had always been a terrible, terrible student, specifically in math,” he said. “As a result I had low self-esteem in academics. When I got to Navy Electronic Technician School, the first thing we had to do was learn different types of algebra. The pressure was immense and the fear was incredible. I learned how to study for the first time. “I found out that I had a brain.”

Once he completed training, instead of working in his field, the Navy sent him orders to be a security guard at the Naval Security Guard School in Lakehurst, N.J. He was taught police investigations, emergency vehicle operations, self-defense, hand-to-hand combat and weapons training and was then sent to his first permanent duty station in Gaeta, Italy, where he served as a naval police officer for two and half years at the home port of the Navy’s Sixth Fleet. “Most of my times there I worked as a military policeman and protective detail for the commander of the Sixth Fleet. I also did anti-terrorism counter-surveillance,” he said.

Still a fresh-faced teen barely out of high school, other officers with more experience treated him as an equal. “Because I understood and appreciated that they gave me the ability to prove myself, I made sure not to mess that up,” he said. “It opened up opportunities for me to do some really important things like work with the commander of the Sixth Fleet or do counter-surveillance activities for the Naval Criminal Investigative Services. One night he



might be out looking for drunken sailors in bars, and the next he might be investigating burglaries or providing protective detail for the admiral of the Sixth Fleet. It was during this first assignment that Overturf encountered death. “Because of the terrain and the roads we dealt with a lot of traffic accidents and a lot of death,” he said. “I was that guy many times at 10 o’clock at night or two o’clock in the morning knocking on the door to tell them their wife or husband had just been killed.”

One incident that had the most profound effect on him in the military surprisingly occurred in Italy and not on the USS Cole. “There was an incident in which a military member was with his family and he collapsed from a heart attack. I was the first responder and I was doing CPR on him until we could get him to the clinic. His 6-year-old daughter was at my side screaming and begging me to save her daddy and I couldn’t do it. “It broke my heart.”

Overturf served two tours in Italy and served a one-year tour with the multinational forces in Iraq as a strategic planner under Gen. David Petraeus. “I worked with the people who developed the plan to roll U.S. forces out of Iraq. I spent my first four months in IZ,” he said referring to the International Zone in central Baghdad. “Every day and every night we would take mortar and rocket fire. There’s only so many times you can be woken up in the middle of the night to run and jump in a concrete bunker before you get pissed off and tired of it and you just don’t care.” At that point, you just stay in bed and learn to live with the new normal, he said.

After serving in Iraq, Overturf attended the Naval War College, where he earned his master’s degree in national strategy and policy. One of his classmates was former White House press secretary Sean Spicer. In 2012, he graduated and went to Washington, D.C., where he worked at the Naval Sea Systems Command. One year into his service at the Washington Navy Yard, on Sept. 16, 2013, a lone gunman opened fire in Building 197. Overturf had just bought breakfast in the cafeteria and sat down at his desk when he saw the worried faces of some civilian employees and started asking questions. Then he heard the gunshots. He and his former Cole shipmate Cmdr. Jason Grabelle ushered people out of the building to safety. That day, the gunman killed 12 people before he was killed.

Now enjoying retirement after 27 years of service to the country, Overturf lives with his grown daughter and offers encouragement for others new to the military. “Believe in yourself. You’re capable of far more than you think you know. Don’t let the day to day drag you down. Set your sights on the future and never stop working to improve yourself.” [Source: The Bowling Green Daily News | Deborah Highland | September 17, 2017 ++]

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## **Canada's American Civil War Monument ► 40k Participants Honored**

While Civil War memorials may not be the most popular things lately, the world’s newest monument to the American Civil War has just opened in Canada at the Lost Villages Museum in Long Sault, Ont. The granite obelisk is Canada’s only monument to the 1860s conflict, and honors more than 40,000 Civil War soldiers who hailed from what would become modern-day Canada. “At the time, there were as many in the (Canadian) military as volunteered to fight in the Civil War,” said Bob McLachlan, president of the Grays and Blues of Montreal, a Quebec-based Civil War re-enactment group involved with the monument’s creation.

Approximately 7,000 Canadians are believed to have died in the war. This means that, to this day, the Civil War killed more Canadians than any other conflict except the two world wars. For context, 26,000 Canadian troops fought in the Korean War and more than 500 were killed. In the 12 years of Canada’s deployment to Afghanistan, a total of 40,000 served and 159 have been killed. The monument, a black obelisk, honours Canadians who took up arms on both sides of the war, which pitted the United States against the Confederate States of America, a breakaway region of 11 southern states. It was unveiled Saturday at a historical village outside Cornwall, Ont.

Although Canada would not exist as an independent country until 1867, its various colonial governments followed Britain’s example of staying officially neutral during the war. However, American ranks soon swelled with Canadians already living in U.S. territory, or supporters who trekked south to enlist. The volunteers included O

Canada composer Calixa Lavallée, who was wounded at the Battle of Antietam. John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of U.S. president Abraham Lincoln, was cornered and killed by a cavalry regiment led by Canadian Edward Doherty. When Confederate general Robert E. Lee surrendered to his Union counterpart Ulysses S. Grant, one of the witnesses was a Quebec-born blacksmith in Grant's personal guard. One of the most well-known Canadian Civil War veterans is Sarah Edmonds, a New Brunswick woman who disguised herself as a man in order to join Union forces and then became a spy behind Confederate lines.



**Final monument design by GBM and Martel & Sons Inc. features a 12ft high black granite obelisk, on a 2ft gray granite base. Includes 2ft x 7ft black granite side walls.**

The conflict also saw 29 Canadian soldiers awarded the Medal of Honor, the United State's highest military decoration. One citation credits 18-year-old Frank Bois with staying cool while Confederate shellfire tore apart his ship, the USS Cincinnati. Then, after noticing that all the ship's flagpoles had been shot away, Bois quickly lashed up a new flag "to enable this proud ship to go down with her colors." The majority of Canadians in civil war uniform fought for the North. The Grays and Blues of Montreal estimates that of the 40,000 Canadians in Civil War uniform, only 4,000 fought for the Confederacy. However, Canadian public opinion at the time was surprisingly supportive for the South, which had seceded in large part to protect the institution of slavery.

Although the British Empire had spearheaded global efforts to abolish African slavery, Canada nevertheless identified with the South as a fellow agrarian country facing an invasion from the United States — a situation Canada had twice endured in the previous century. In the book *Blood and Daring*, a history of Canada in the Civil War, historian John Boyko surveyed 84 Canadian newspapers and 43 were pro-South, 33 were pro-North and eight were neutral. "A report of the Confederate victory in the war's first battle elicited a spontaneous cheer in Canada's legislature," wrote Boyko.

The monument was a collaboration between the Grays and Blues of Montreal and the Lost Villages Historical Society, a group that preserves the history of pioneer villages flooded by the 1950s widening of the Saint Lawrence River to form the Seaway. An accompanying GoFundMe page raised \$43,780 for the effort (<https://www.gofundme.com/honour-canadians>)

In the United States, Confederate monuments have recently become hubs for controversy, either as rallying points for white supremacists, or as targets for vandalism by radical leftists. However, the Saturday unveiling in

Cornwall was devoid of what Bob McLachlan called “yahoos.” “We don’t have any far-right maniacs, racists or anti-Semites, we’re just town folks who are interested in history,” the Grays and Blues president told Postmedia. The American Civil War is not the only major U.S. conflict whose massive Canadian contribution has largely been forgotten. The Canadian Military Journal notes that 40,000 Canadians enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces at the time of the Vietnam War. [Source: National Post | Tristen Hopper | September 17, 2017 ++]

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## **Hanoi Jane** ► Jane Fonda’s 1972 Trip to North Vietnam

On a hot, sticky May afternoon in 1970, a crowd of several thousand students and protesters took over the University of Maryland mall. Many were there to protest the Vietnam War. Others were hoping to catch a glimpse of a famous Hollywood actress. Her name was Jane Fonda. As the war raged, the one-time blonde bombshell cut her naturally brown hair short, trading sex appeal for liberal activism and rebranding herself as a political crusader against the war. On campus, she was pushing her movement to turn U.S. soldiers into pacifists. “The Army builds a tolerance for violence,” she shouted at the crowd. “I find that intolerable.”

The Washington Post spent that day with Fonda, following her and a dozen or so students to Fort Meade in Maryland, where they planned to hand out antiwar leaflets to soldiers. She was arrested before she got the chance, just as she had been at Fort Lewis, Wash., Fort Hood, Tex., and Fort Bragg, N.C. Fonda told The Post she’d made talking to GIs her full-time job. For the next several years, Fonda would continue as one of the most prominent public faces in the antiwar movement. But it wasn’t until she traveled to Hanoi in July 1972 that she really enraged critics and fundamentally altered how the world viewed her for decades to come.



**Actress Jane Fonda sits on an anti-aircraft gun during a 1972 trip to North Vietnam. The image haunts her to this day.**

Fonda’s transformation from actress to activist began several years earlier. She was active in the Black Panthers and marched for the rights of American Indians, soldiers and working mothers. But she was advised by other activists to focus her political energies, deciding to go all-in as an impassioned voice for the antiwar movement. She and actor Donald Sutherland started an “anti-USO” troupe to counter Bob Hope’s famous shows for the troops.

They called it FTA, which they said stood for Free the Army, but it was also a not-so-subtle nod to the expression “f— the Army.”

By July 1972, when Fonda accepted an invitation to visit North Vietnam, America had been at war overseas and with itself for years. She went to tour the country’s dike system, which was rumored to have been intentionally bombed by American forces — something the U.S. government to this day forcefully denies. During her two-week stay, Fonda concluded that America was unjustly bombing farmland and areas far flung from military targets. North Vietnamese press reported — and Fonda later confirmed — that she made several radio announcements over the Voice of Vietnam radio to implore U.S. pilots to stop the bombings. “I appealed to them to please consider what you are doing. I don’t think they know,” Fonda said in a news conference when she returned home. “The people who are speaking out against the war are the patriots.” She said the radio addresses were the only way to get access to American soldiers, because she was barred from meeting them at their bases in South Vietnam.

In Hanoi, Fonda also met with seven American POWs and later said they asked her to tell their friends and family to support presidential candidate George McGovern; they feared they’d never be freed during a Richard Nixon administration. Rumors spread and still persist that she betrayed them by accepting secret notes and then turning them over to the North Vietnamese. The POWs who were there have denied that this ever occurred. But the action that still enrages veterans most was that photograph of her with North Vietnamese troops on an antiaircraft gun that would have been used to shoot down American planes. This, probably more than anything, earned her the nickname “Hanoi Jane.”

After Fonda returned from her trip, the State Department spoke out against her. “It is always distressing to find American citizens who benefit from the protection and assistance of this government lending their voice in any way to governments such as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam — distressing indeed,” said State Department spokesman Charles W. Bray, according to a July 1972 Reuters story. Some lawmakers called her actions treason. Congress held hearings. The Veterans of Foreign Wars passed a resolution calling for her to be prosecuted as a traitor. Perhaps most dramatically, in March 1973, the Maryland state legislature held a hearing to have Fonda and her films barred from the state. Del. William Burkhead, a Democrat from Anne Arundel, said, “I wouldn’t want to kill her, but I wouldn’t mind if you cut her tongue off,” according to a Post story.

Fonda wasn’t deterred. She continued openly to question the accounts of the U.S. government and American POWs, who told devastating stories of the torture they endured at the hands of the North Vietnamese. “These men were bombing and strafing and napalming the country,” she said, according to an Associated Press report in April 1973, which quoted an interview she gave to KNBC-TV in Los Angeles. “If a prisoner tried to escape, it is quite understandable that he would probably be beaten and tortured.” Over the years, as Fonda reinvented herself as a fitness maven and again a movie star, she apologized many times for the antiaircraft gun photo. But she maintains she was not a traitor by speaking out against the war or trying to turn soldiers against it, because she still believes the U.S. government was lying to them.

In her 2005 memoir, “My Life So Far,” Fonda wrote of the infamous photo this way: Here is my best, honest recollection of what took place. Someone (I don’t remember who) leads me toward the gun, and I sit down, still laughing, still applauding. It all has nothing to do with where I am sitting. I hardly even think about where I am sitting. The cameras flash. I get up, and as I start to walk back to the car with the translator, the implication of what has just happened hits me. Oh, my God. It’s going to look like I was trying to shoot down U.S. planes! I plead with him, You have to be sure those photographs are not published. Please, you can’t let them be published. I am assured it will be taken care of. I don’t know what else to do. It is possible that the Vietnamese had it all planned. I will never know. If they did, can I really blame them? The buck stops here. If I was used, I allowed it to happen. It was my mistake, and I have paid and continue to pay a heavy price for it.

Still, for some veterans, no apology from Fonda will ever change their views of her as an adversary of America and the troops during wartime. In 2015, about 50 veterans stood outside the Weinberg Center for the Arts in Frederick, Md., to protest Fonda’s appearance there. They held signs that read “Forgive? Maybe. Forget? Never.”



and booed people attending the event, according to the Frederick News-Post. Fonda told the audience that their protests saddened her. "It hurts me," she said, "and it will to my grave that I made a huge, huge mistake that made a lot of people think I was against the soldiers." [Source: The Washington Post | Colby Itkowitz | September 18, 2017 ++]

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## **Holocaust Denial ► Illegal in Belgium**

A court in Brussels has ordered a former Belgian lawmaker to visit five Nazi concentration camps and write about his experiences as punishment for publicly denying the Holocaust, a crime in Belgium. **Laurent Louis**, a far-right politician and self-proclaimed "anti-Zionist," was convicted of Holocaust denial in 2015 after he wrote blog posts publicly doubting whether Jews were killed en masse in Nazi gas chambers during the Second World War. He received a roughly \$20,000 fine and a six-month suspended prison sentence. But recently, the Brussels Court of Appeal put the prison sentence on hold and instead ordered him to take one trip per year for the next five years to Nazi death camps, including the infamous Auschwitz camp in Poland, Agence France Press reported. Following each visit he must write at least 50 lines describing what he saw in the camps and "the feelings he experienced," according to AFP. He is required to submit the texts to the court and post them on his personal Facebook account, where he has some 50,000 followers.

More than a dozen countries in Europe have passed laws banning Nazism and outlawing various degrees of Holocaust denial. Promoting the Holocaust, minimizing its impact or denying it outright are illegal under a 1995 Belgian law and punishable by fines and prison time. Louis, a 37-year-old who served in Belgium's parliament from 2010 to 2014, cheered the sentence as a "total victory" in a series of Facebook posts but offered his apologies to "those who were hurt by my words." "All that I have left to do is do the reports from the death camps. No doubt the court recognized my talents as a writer," wrote Louis, who recently self-published a book on his political views. "More seriously, I will abide by the court's ruling and go and repent every year in a death camp," he continued. "In addition to being very instructive and very powerful on the human level, this will be an opportunity also to denounce current genocides."

During his roughly four years in Belgium's Chamber of Representatives, Louis seemed to take pride in being a political insurgent. He was voted in as a member of the country's center-right conservative party but was kicked out after just a few months amid tension with its leadership. He briefly joined the country's Islamic party but was booted there after trying to proclaim himself party president. He went on to found the far-right *Debout Les Belges!* (Belgians, Rise Up!) movement. In 2014, Louis accused then-prime minister Elio Di Rupo of being a pedophile in a speech in parliament. He was later convicted of slander and received an eight-month suspended prison sentence.

He has a long track record of inflammatory and conspiratorial remarks about Jews and Israel. He argued on Facebook and in Parliament that Zionists had bankrolled the extermination of Jews by the Nazis, saying "the Holocaust was set up and financed by the pioneers of Zionism." He once trampled an Israeli flag during a demonstration in support of Syrian President Bashar Assad. And he is fond of giving the "quenelle," a gesture similar to the Nazi salute that is popular among neo-Nazis in France. Members of Parliament and outside organizations have repeatedly condemned Louis as anti-Semitic, and advocacy groups have filed a complaints saying his remarks were an incitement to violence.

The Belgian League Against anti-Semitism was among the plaintiffs in Louis's trial. When he was convicted of Holocaust denial in 2015, the judge ruled that he made multiple statements downplaying the atrocities committed by Nazis in World War II and criticized his conduct in the courtroom. "During his trial, Mr. Louis seemed to think he was in parliament rather than in a court of law," the judge said, according to the Times of Israel. "He expressed little regret toward the people he offended and offers little evidence in the way of correcting his ways."

Louis's sentence is unusual but not unheard-of. In 2013, a court in Hungary ordered a Holocaust denier to visit Auschwitz, the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Budapest or Israel's Yad Vashem and write about the trip. The man was convicted of carrying a sign in public that read "the Holocaust never happened" in Hebrew. It was the first punishment issued under Hungary's Holocaust denial law, which took effect in 2010, according to the Jerusalem Post. Such a prosecution is virtually unfathomable in the United States, where Holocaust denial and other forms of controversial speech enjoy sweeping protections under the First Amendment.

But a judge handed down a sentence not unlike Louis's earlier this year to five teenage boys who spray painted a historic black school in Ashburn, Virginia, with swastikas and racist graffiti. Rather than give the boys jail time or community service, the judge ordered them to read books by black, Jewish and Afghan authors, write a research paper on hate speech and visit the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. [Source: The Washington Post | Derek Hawkins | September 25, 2017 ++]

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### **Abandoned Military Bases [08] ► Balaklava Submarine Base**



**Under Joseph Stalin's regime, a submarine base was secretly built in the sleepy town of Balaklava in case a need arose for a retaliatory nuclear strike. The base was protected from incimate weather and enemy ships, as it is not visible from the open sea. This base is near Sevastoppl, a Russian naval base still used today by their Black Sea Fleet.**

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### **Insanely Daring Air Raids ► No. 7 | The 1943 Mosquito Raid Of Berlin**

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.

On Saturday the 30th January 1943, the Nazi Germany were celebrating the tenth anniversary of Hitler's rise to power. As their traditions, the Germans gathered at the central broadcasting station to listen to the speeches of Reichsmarschall Hermann Göering and Joseph Goebbels, the Third Reich's Propaganda Minister. While this was



supposed to be a special event, the Royal Air Force were inbound at low level in their de Havilland Mosquito's with other ideas about that.



With German forces occupying virtually the whole of Europe, the British were determined to prevent the concentration of defenses in Berlin. The operation started in the morning when three Mosquito B Mk. IVs from 105 Squadron carried out a low-level attack on the Haus des Rundfunks, headquarters of the German State broadcasting company when Goering was due to address the public. Goering could not take the lectern for an hour after the attack and was reported to have been “boiling with rage and humiliation.”

The second attack followed five hours later when three Mosquitoes from 139 (Jamaica) Squadron flew to Berlin and interrupted a speech by Goebbels. Although not quite as disruptive as the earlier one, this attack also took place at the exact time Goebbels was to start speaking, 16.00. During this raid, only one aircraft was lost – Mosquito DZ367 GB-J, of 105 Sqn was shot down near Altengrabow leading to the death of the Squadron Leader D.F. Darling and his navigator, Flying Officer William Wright.

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## **Military History Anniversaries ► 01 thru 15 OCT**

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 OCT**. [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | September 2017 ++]

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## **MOH Awards Update 07 ► Capt. Gary Michael Rose | Upgraded DSC**

If he hadn't wanted to avoid the Marine Corps so badly, retired Capt. Gary Michael "Mike" Rose might never have been on the secret 1970 operation that earned him the military's highest award for valor. On Sept. 11, 1970, a few minutes into the helicopter ride from his southeastern Vietnam base, then-Spc. Rose knew that they weren't in Vietnam anymore. “You get on a helicopter and you fly for 45 minutes, an hour west — when you know by helicopter the border's only five minutes away — you know you're in Laos,” Rose told Army Times in an 28 Aug. phone interview. “It doesn't take a genius to figure that out.” What followed was Operation Tailwind, a four-day battle in support of the Royal Lao Army, creating a diversion aimed at North Vietnamese Army troops. But Rose didn't know that at the time, he said, because the mission was classified, and it would remain that way until the late '90s. Most of what he knows about those days, he added, he learned after 1998, when a joint report by CNN and Time magazine — which was later discredited — discussed the operation publicly for the first time. Now, almost 50

years after the battle and nearly a decade since his unit's actions were brought out of the dark, the White House announced 20 SEP that Rose would receive the Medal of Honor in an 23 OCT ceremony.



*Sgt. Gary M. Rose during a deployment to Thailand, April 1969.*

Southern California native Rose, then 20, walked into an Army recruiter's office in early 1967, he said, with a particular goal. The draft board had been pulling numbers left and right in the Los Angeles area, sending pretty much all of those young men to the sea services, he recalled. "I was in the North Hollywood draft board region," he said. "I knew that they were drafting into the Marine Corps and the Navy, and those were not my two choices." His father had been drafted into the Marines during World War II, he said, and "he suggested that you don't want to be a draftee in the Marine Corps." Rather than roll the dice, Rose decided to volunteer for the Army and head off to Fort Ord, California, to learn how to be a grunt. Thanks to high aptitude test scores, jump school and Special Forces training followed, and by October 1968, he was a Special Forces medic.

He re-enlisted for the chance to pick where he wanted to go, settling on supporting the 46th Special Forces Company in Thailand, where they were training local soldiers and border police. "I thought, 'Thailand, that sounds like a pretty good, exotic place to go.' Which, in my mind now, as I look back, was really good experience," he said. "It made me better prepared for when I went to Vietnam." After a year, he called up his assignment coordinator — a woman known as Mrs. Alexander — and told her he was ready for Vietnam. She placed him with the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam – Studies and Observations Group, 5th Special Forces Group, based in Kontum. Rose earned his first Purple Heart and a Bronze Star with "V" device during a June 1970 mission, but in general spent his time tending to local Vietnamese and providing back-up for others' missions.

In mid-September, he got a second mission briefing. "In those days — and I'm sure it's true today — you're only told what you need to know to be able to prepare and go out and do your job on that mission," he said. "So I was told that we were going to an area to create a diversion for another operation that was going on." What he did realize, though, was that it was going to be ugly. "I noted that all the guys that I was going with, including [allied fighters from the indigenous Vietnamese] Montagnards, were loading up with a lot more ammunition than they normally did," he said. "I'm fairly intelligent, and I deduced that if you normally go in with 200 rounds and you're going in with four, something's probably going to be up." Once they crossed the border, he said, he can vividly remember the popcorn-popping sound of rounds hitting the helicopter.

According to the battle narrative, Rose and a company-sized element were dropped 70 kilometers into NVA-controlled Laos. Casualties came quickly. "One of the wounded was trapped outside the company defensive perimeter," the narrative reads. "Sgt. Rose, engaging the enemy, rushed to get the wounded Soldier. Sgt. Rose rendered expert medical treatment and stabilized the wounded Soldier, and carried the man through the heavy gunfire back to the company defensive area." The company pushed deeper into Laos, and Rose treated each casualty along the way. "The fire becoming so intense, Sgt. Rose had to crawl from position to position to treat the wounded," according to the narrative. "As he moved, Sgt. Rose gave words of encouragement and directed the fires of the inexperienced and terrified Vietnamese and Montagnard troops."

He was first wounded on Sept. 12, day two. A rocket-propelled grenade exploded as he was dragging a wounded soldier, spraying shrapnel into his back and leg and crippling his foot. He used a stick as a crutch for the next two days. "I suspect what was going through my head was trying to take care of the wounded," Rose said. "We were just busy. I had two that were split from the hip to the knee, down to the femur. I made sure they were breathing, no shock, then stop the bleeding." At one point, a medevac tried to land to take away the wounded, but enemy fire was so intense that it had to back off. But it quickly succumbed to damage, crashing a few miles away, where the crew were safely recovered. "I wasn't frantic," Rose said. "By the time I got there, I'd been three years in the Army, and I'd been trained, trained, trained, trained." With over half of the company wounded, Rose lashed together bamboo to make litters. "Despite his own painful and debilitating wounds, Sgt. Rose never took time to eat, rest, or care for his own wounds while caring for his fellow Soldiers," the narrative said.

On the last night, with the company surrounded, Rose dug trenches and moved from casualty to casualty to treat wounds. The next morning, they learned that 500 North Vietnamese were closing in on their position, and helicopters were on the way to extract them. "The NVA, close on the heels of the company at the landing zone, causing even more casualties among the allied personnel," the narrative reads. "Sgt. Rose moved under the intense enemy fire of the assaulting NVA, completely exposing himself, to retrieve the allied dead and wounded, and return them to the company defensive perimeter." He boarded the last helicopter out, but before settling in for the trip home, treated the wounds of the helicopter's Marine door gunner, who had taken fire during the extraction. Minutes later, the helicopter crashed, smoking and leaking fuel. "Sgt. Rose, knowing the helicopter could explode at any moment, worked quickly while ignoring his own injuries, to pull wounded and unconscious men from the wreckage, saving lives," according to the narrative. "Moving the wounded and unconscious men a safe distance away from the smoldering wreckage, Sgt. Rose continued to professionally administer medical treatment to the injured personnel."

A second helicopter came to retrieve them, but Rose doesn't remember getting on it, he said. "When you sit down and you start talking about these things, you cause people to have little memories, vignettes, little visions," Rose said. "The one thing that we're all agreed upon is that starting with the crash, none of us were operating on all cylinders. It's such a blur." All told, according to the battle narrative, only three men died during the four-day onslaught. Rose's memory picks up again back at Doc To, he said, where he grabbed a shower and a change of clothes before seeing a surgeon to get the shrapnel removed from his foot. Then he had some chow and a couple beers, took a picture for posterity, and debriefed with the group's intelligence shop before sacking out. "I got up the next morning, put my uniform on and went back to the dispensary," he said. Soon after, he was meant to go to the field, but his platoon leader held him back. "I said, 'Why, sir?'" Rose recalled. "And he said, because you're being put in for an award and we don't want you in the field right now." He didn't know at the time, but he had been nominated for the Medal of Honor. It was downgraded to the Distinguished Service Cross, which he received in January 1971.

Three months later, he was back home and at the Army's Spanish language school in Washington, D.C., preparing for a tour with 8th Special Forces Group in Panama. It was at that point, he said, that he decided to go to Officer Candidate School, because extending his contract with the Army would allow him to bring his new wife, Margaret, with him to Central America. Rose became an artillery officer in December 1972, where he spent the last 15 of his 20 years in the Army. After retiring in 1987, he moved on to the manufacturing industry, where he wrote manuals and designed training programs, settling in Huntsville, Alabama. In the meantime, his time in Laos, which had been dubbed Operation Tailwind, became front page news. In 1998, a joint venture by CNN and Time described the mission as a raid on a Laotian village to kill American defectors holed up there, and alleged U.S. troops used sarin gas on civilians. The Defense Department pushed back on the claims and CNN retracted the story. But in the aftermath, soldiers who had been a part of the now-declassified mission began pushing for recognition of their brothers' heroism.

In 2013, he said, Rose got a call from retired Col. Eugene McCarley, who'd been company commander back in 1971. He said a guy named Neil Thorne, who worked with veterans of the MACV-SOG, wanted to put in a packet to

upgrade his DSC. “He worked on it for over four years,” Rose said. “Every time he would call for information, I would give it to him.” Last year, then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter approved the award, and Rep. Mo Brooks, R-South Carolina, and then-Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Alabama, wrote Rose’s name into the National Defense Authorization Act, waiving the requirement that the Medal of Honor be awarded within five years of the designated action. It was the same piece of legislation that opened the door to the Medal of Honor for former Spc. Jim McCloughan, who received his award on July 31, more than 48 years after the fact.

Late last year, Jim McCloughan was close enough to taste it. After then-President Obama signed a provision included in the annual defense authorization bill, McCloughan was cleared to receive the Medal of Honor. On 3 AUG Rose finally got his own call. Rose picked up the phone that afternoon to a voice that asked him to hold for the president of the United States. “Margaret tells me I immediately came to attention, my feet at a 40-degree angle, my fist curled to my palm. My thumbs went along the seam of my trousers,” he said. ”And she said the only thing that was missing was a uniform and being in a formation some place.” Rose has asked that not only his fellow MACV-SOG veterans be included in his ceremony, but that the White House reaches out to the Marines and Air Force personnel who supported the mission, particularly the A-1E Skyraider and AH-1 Cobra pilots who were there.

“To me, this medal is a collective medal, and it honors all those men who fought. A lot of them were injured and killed in that operation,” he said. “It represents the fact that North Vietnamese Army troops were tied up along the Ho Chi Minh Trail because of what we were doing in Laos and Cambodia.” “I’m confident, without those 50,000 troops down in the south, that the names on that [Vietnam memorial] wall – instead of being 58,000 might be 100,000 or more,” he added. [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | September 20, 2017 ++]

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## Medal of Honor Citations ► Fox, John R | WWII



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

***John R. Fox***

**Rank and organization:** First Lieutenant, U.S. Army, 598th Field Artillery Battalion, 366th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Infantry Division

**Place and date:** Sommocolonia, Italy, December 26, 1944

**Entered service:** 1940 in Cincinnati, Ohio

**Born:** May 18, 1915 Cincinnati, Ohio

***Citation***

For extraordinary heroism against an armed enemy in the vicinity of Sommocolonia, Italy on 26 December 1944, while serving as a member of Cannon Company, 366th Infantry Regiment, 92d Infantry Division. During the preceding few weeks, Lieutenant Fox served with the 598th Field Artillery Battalion as a forward observer. On Christmas night, enemy soldiers gradually infiltrated the town of Sommocolonia in civilian clothes, and by early morning the town was largely in hostile hands. Commencing with a heavy barrage of enemy artillery at 0400 hours on 26 December 1944, an organized attack by uniformed German units began. Being greatly outnumbered, most of the United States Infantry forces were forced to withdraw from the town, but Lieutenant Fox and some other members of his observer party voluntarily remained on the second floor of a house to direct defensive artillery fire. At 0800 hours, Lieutenant Fox reported that the Germans were in the streets and attacking in strength. He then called for defensive artillery fire to slow the enemy advance. As the Germans continued to press the attack towards the area that Lieutenant Fox occupied, he adjusted the artillery fire closer to his position. Finally he was warned that the next adjustment would bring the deadly artillery right on top of his position. After acknowledging the danger, Lieutenant Fox insisted that the last adjustment be fired as this was the only way to defeat the attacking soldiers. Later, when a counterattack retook the position from the Germans, Lieutenant Fox's body was found with the bodies of approximately 100 German soldiers. Lieutenant Fox's gallant and courageous actions, at the supreme sacrifice of his own life, contributed greatly to delaying the enemy advance until other infantry and artillery units could reorganize to repel the attack. His extraordinary valorous actions were in keeping with the most cherished traditions of military service, and reflect the utmost credit on him, his unit, and the United States Army.



Fox attended Wilberforce University, participating in ROTC under Aaron R. Fisher and graduating with a commission as a second lieutenant in 1940. He was assigned to the 92nd Infantry Division (colored), known as the Buffalo Soldiers, a segregated African-American division that fought in World War II. First Lieutenant John R. Fox was a member of the 366th Infantry Regiment when he sacrificed his life to defeat an enemy attack and save the lives of others. In December 1944, Fox was part of a small forward observer party that volunteered to stay behind in the Italian village of Sommocolonia, in the Serchio River Valley. American forces had been forced to withdraw from the village after it had been overrun by the Germans. From his position on the second floor of a house, Fox directed defensive artillery fire.

Wehrmacht soldiers were attacking in strength, greatly outnumbering the handful of Americans. Fox radioed the artillery to bring its fire closer to his position. As the attack continued, he ordered the fire directed onto his own position. The soldier who received the message was stunned, as there was little chance that Fox would survive it.

Fox simply replied, "Fire it." Fox's sacrifice gained time for the U.S. forces to organize a counterattack and retake the village. When they did so, they found Fox's body as well as about one hundred dead German soldiers.

Lt. Fox is buried in Colebrook Cemetery, Whitman, Massachusetts. After the war, the citizens of Sommolonia, Italy erected a monument to nine men who were killed during the artillery barrage – eight Italian soldiers, and Lieutenant Fox. In 2005, the toy company Hasbro introduced a 12-inch action figure "commemorating Lt. John R. Fox as part of its G.I. Joe Medal-of-Honor series.

In the early 1990s it was determined that African-American soldiers had been denied consideration for the Medal of Honor because of their race. After a review, seven African-American soldiers, including 1st Lieutenant Fox, had their medals upgraded in January 1997 to the Medal of Honor.

[Source: <http://www.history.army.mil/moh/wwII-a-f.html> | September 2017 ++]

### \* Health Care \*



## TRICARE 2018 Transition ► Action You Need to Take

You may be wondering what action you need to take, if any, to ensure you continue [TRICARE coverage in 2018](#). If you're currently enrolled in or eligible for TRICARE coverage on Dec. 31, 2017, you'll transition to your respective TRICARE plan on Jan. 1, 2018. If you want to enroll in a TRICARE plan or change coverage after Jan. 1, 2018, you'll need to take action to enroll in the plan of your choice. All beneficiaries should take action by making sure their information is current in the [Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System](#) (DEERS). If you've experienced any changes (for example, marriage, birth, divorce and death), update DEERS as soon as possible to ensure continuous TRICARE coverage.

### *Automatic Transition for Current Enrollees*

Beneficiaries enrolled in [TRICARE Prime](#), either stateside or overseas, as of Dec. 31, 2017 will remain enrolled in TRICARE Prime on Jan. 1, 2018. If you have TRICARE Standard or TRICARE Extra as of Dec. 31, 2017, you'll transition to [TRICARE Select](#). TRICARE Select replaces TRICARE Standard and TRICARE Extra on Jan. 1, 2018.

If you're enrolled in any [TRICARE premium-based plan](#) on Dec. 31, 2017, you'll remain enrolled in your plan on Jan. 1, 2018 as long as you continue to make your premium payments. These premium-based plans include:

- TRICARE Young Adult
- TRICARE Reserve Select
- TRICARE Retired Reserve

On Jan. 1, 2018, TRICARE will transition its stateside [regional contractors from three to two](#). Beneficiaries who pay [premiums or enrollment fees](#) by electronic funds transfer or recurring debit/credit card payment will be contacted to update their payment information. If you currently pay through a Defense Finance and Accounting Service allotment, your payments will automatically transfer. If your current TRICARE health plan coverage doesn't automatically transition, [contact the TRICARE contractor](#) for your region. There are no changes to the TRICARE For Life (TFL) benefit. TFL beneficiaries will not have to take any action.



### ***Automatic Enrollment of New Enrollees***

New active duty service members are [automatically enrolled in TRICARE Prime](#) or [TRICARE Prime Remote](#) if they live in remote areas in the U.S. Stateside active duty family members (ADFM) who become eligible for TRICARE on or after Jan. 1, 2018 will also be automatically enrolled in TRICARE Prime if they live in a [Prime Service Area](#). If family members live outside a Prime Service Area, they'll be automatically enrolled in [TRICARE Select](#). ADFMs who are automatically enrolled in TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select have up to 90 days after the eligibility date to change health plans. TRICARE Overseas Program (TOP) ADFMs will be automatically enrolled in TRICARE Select. They will also have 90 days to change their enrollment to TOP Prime or Prime Remote if they are command sponsored.

### ***Enroll by Nov. 20, 2017 for Coverage Beginning Jan. 1, 2018***

By Nov. 20, 2017, beneficiaries should complete any and all enrollment actions. During December 2017, there will be an enrollment freeze for TRICARE Prime enrollments, and a delay for primary care manager changes. You'll still be able to receive care during the enrollment freeze. If you have a problem accessing care, [contact your regional contractor](#).

For all other stateside beneficiaries, you'll also need to complete any and all enrollment actions by Nov. 20, 2017 to ensure continued health coverage in 2018. As long as your regional contractor receives your completed enrollment application by the [20th of the month](#), your coverage will begin on the first day of the next month. The 20th of the month rule doesn't apply to beneficiaries overseas, and will go away for everyone starting in 2018. Enrolling is easy. You can enroll in certain TRICARE plans over the phone, email or mail. Check out how to enroll or purchase a plan at <https://tricare.mil/Plans/Enroll> Visit the TRICARE Changes page (<https://tricare.mil/Plans/Eligibility/DEERS>) to stay informed with the latest information. You can also [sign up for email alerts](#) to get an email anytime new updates are available. Staying informed will help you take command of your health and prepare for changes in 2018. [Source: TRICARE Communications | September 20, 2017 ++]

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## **TRICARE Changes Update 02 ► New Rules Could Raise Copays**

Military families will see more consistency in their out-of-pocket costs as the reformed Tricare benefit takes effect 1 JAN, but some family advocates question whether those costs will go up. Part of the confusion comes from the plan to “grandfather” troops and working-age retirees into the new fee system, allowing them to keep the current payment plan. Grandfathering usually allows a lower payment rate to continue for a changing fee system, but in this instance, according to a chart provided by the Defense Health Agency, those already enrolled will pay more in co-pays than those entering service 1 JAN or later. Some examples:

- A family member of a service member now in uniform would pay \$27 for a primary care outpatient visit to a network provider. A family member of a service member who joins up Jan. 1 or later would pay \$15.
- Specialty care visits would mean a \$34 co-pay for those grandfathered in. New family members would pay \$25.
- Working-age retirees would pay \$35 for an in-network primary care visit. Future retirees (entering service Jan. 1 or later) will pay \$25.

The co-payments for the grandfathered group are an average of what the beneficiaries now pay, DHA spokesman Kevin Dwyer said, while the co-payments for those coming in to the military next year were set by law in the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act. The revelations triggered “disbelief” from the National Military Family Association, executive director Joyce Raezer said, that those in service would pay more in co-pays than incoming service members. “That was not the expectation,” said Raezer, who also noted that her specialty-visit co-pay under her new Tricare plan would go up. NFMA is not opposed to co-pays, she said, but the advocacy group is concerned

military families may face rising medical costs. There is a proposal being considered in the Senate to remove the grandfathering requirement. If so, everyone would pay the same out-of-pocket costs.

### 'TRICARES NEW LOOK'

As of 1 JAN, Tricare Standard and Tricare Extra will be replaced by a single plan dubbed **Tricare Select**. It's a preferred provider organization, or PPO, plan that doesn't require a referral and allows patients to choose any Tricare-authorized provider for services covered by Tricare. Tricare Prime enrollees, as before, have no co-pays. The Tricare for Life health care plan for retirees age 65 and older is not affected by these reforms. All current beneficiaries will be automatically enrolled in their respective plans. Rather than paying a percentage of the total cost of care as they do under Tricare Standard and Extra, Tricare Select patients will pay a fixed dollar amount, said Navy Vice Adm. Raquel Bono, the DHA director, in a media conference call. Tricare Select beneficiaries also will receive access to no-cost preventive services from network providers, as are now available to those in Tricare Prime.

The "simplicity and predictability" of the setup will help patients and providers, Bono said. Officials set the new figure by taking a simple average of what beneficiaries pay now, she said. Families who are currently in Tricare Prime will be automatically re-enrolled in Prime on 1 JAN; those who are in Tricare Standard or Extra will be automatically enrolled in Standard. But there will be flexibility that first year, Bono said, with people allowed "to move in and out of those plans as they develop an understanding of what works best for them."

### 'A LOT OF UNANSWERED QUESTIONS'

NMFA's Raezer said not all the reform details have been made clear. One major concern is obstetric care, "because there's a whole pricing arrangement" for that service, she said. "There are a lot of unanswered questions," she said. Another concern comes from how and when beneficiaries can change their plans. Bono said the new system will include an annual open enrollment period, with the first one coming from November to December 2018 to set up coverage beginning Jan. 1, 2019. Outside that window, beneficiaries can't change plans unless there's a "qualifying life event," which would cover marriage, divorce, the birth of a child and other similar happenings.

Family advocates have pushed for a broader definition of a qualifying life event, such as pregnancy, Raezer said. "Military families have told us there are reasons why people make a choice, sometimes suddenly, to leave military treatment facilities and seek care elsewhere," she said. "Right now, they are. There are folks who say 'I am willing to accept the higher costs that come with Tricare Standard to get an appointment when I need it, get a doctor who's listening to me, get the care I need.'" Raezer said this annual enrollment shouldn't be compared to civilian federal government health care, where beneficiaries make choices between the plans.

"That's not Tricare. ... Basically, for our folks, the choice is, do I want all my care in a military hospital or clinic, or don't I?" she said. Circumstances also often change for military families, said Karen Ruedisueli, deputy director of government relations for NMFA. Our families might be perfectly happy with their Tricare Prime MTF care at one installation, move to the next installation and assume they'll get the same level of access and quality, and find a completely different scenario there." [Source: ArmyTimes | Karen Jowers | September 29, 2017 ++]

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## Long Term Care w/TFL ► Overview

Like Medicare Supplemental Insurance, TRICARE for Life (TFL), formerly CHAMPUS, picks up where Medicare leaves off. TFL will pay the co-insurance and deductibles but does not pay for the monthly Medicare Part B premium. TFL serves as the secondary payer to minimize military retiree, seniors' out-of-pocket expenses by covering Medicare's co-insurance and deductibles. Care is provided by a network of both military and civilian health professionals. Participants manage their TRICARE enrollment through the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System known as DEERS, which can be done on their website. To enroll in TRICARE for Life, a veteran must

confirm that their Medicare Part B status is current in DEERS. Their record will then show they are “eligible for TRICARE for Life.” Following is an overview of TFL's benefits which are relevant to caring for an aging individual.

- **Assisted Living / Senior Living** -- TFL does not pay for long term care or custodial care as defined by assistance with activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing, feeding or supervision of the cognitively impaired. This type of care is not covered by TRICARE for Life regardless of the participant’s place of residence be that at home or in assisted living.
- **Skilled Nursing Homes** -- TFL will pay for skilled nursing care to an extent. Like Medicare, there must be a medical condition that was treated in a hospital for three consecutive days, and the senior must be admitted to a skilled nursing facility within 30 days following discharge from the hospital. Medicare has a 100-day limit on skilled nursing and TFL will be the primary payer after that 100-day limit, but will not cover the full amount. Make note, pre-authorization is required. Co-payment from the insurance holder in the amount up to \$250 / day should be expected.
- **Home Health Care** -- For persons confined to their homes, who are unable to visit a medical facility without extensive assistance, TFL will cover home health visits for medical purposes but not to provide personal care.
- **Adult Day Care** -- TFL does not pay for either medical care or supervision in adult day care centers.
- **Hospice** -- TFL covers hospice care but it is offered as an alternative to further medical treatment.

#### **TRICARE for Life Qualifications:**

- **Age** -- Veterans or their family members must be at least 65 years of age to be eligible for TRICARE for Life. However, there is an exception for younger individuals if they are enrolled in Medicare already as a result of a disability.
- **Disabilities / Health Requirements** -- A senior veteran’s disability status, service-connected or otherwise does not affect their eligibility for TRICARE for Life.
- **Family Status** -- Family or marital status does not play a role in TRICARE for Life eligibility. One exception is surviving spouses that have re-married, which means they are no longer eligible. Divorce or death of the new spouse does not enable them to re-gain their eligibility as it does with the CHAMPVA for Life program.
- **Financial Requirements** -- Applicants and / or their surviving spouses with any level of financial resources and income are eligible for TRICARE for Life.
- **Veteran Status** -- One cannot have been dishonorably discharged.
- **Other Requirements** -- Military retirees and / or their spouses must be enrolled in Medicare Part A, which is Medicare’s hospital insurance, and Medicare Part B, which is Medicare’s medical insurance, to be eligible for TRICARE for Life.

[Source: PayingforSeniorCare.com | Jun 2017 ++]

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## **Alzheimer's** ► **Fall Prevention**

A simple thing can change your life—like tripping on a rug or slipping on a wet floor. If you fall, you could break a bone, like thousands of older men and women do each year. For older people, a break can be the start of more serious problems, such as a trip to the hospital, injury, or even disability. If you or an older person you know has

fallen, you're not alone. More than one in three people age 65 years or older falls each year. The risk of falling—and fall-related problems—rises with age.

### **Many Older Adults Fear Falling**

The fear of falling becomes more common as people age, even among those who haven't fallen. It may lead older people to avoid activities such as walking, shopping, or taking part in social activities. But don't let a fear of falling keep you from being active. Overcoming this fear can help you stay active, maintain your physical health, and prevent future falls. Doing things like getting together with friends, gardening, walking, or going to the local senior center helps you stay healthy. The good news is, there are simple ways to prevent most falls.

- Many things can cause a fall. Your eyesight, hearing, and reflexes might not be as sharp as they were when you were younger. Diabetes, heart disease, or problems with your thyroid, nerves, feet, or blood vessels can affect your balance. Some medicines can cause you to feel dizzy or sleepy, making you more likely to fall. Other causes include safety hazards in the home or community environment.
- Scientists have linked several personal risk factors to falling, including muscle weakness, problems with balance and gait, and blood pressure that drops too much when you get up from lying down or sitting (called postural hypotension). Foot problems that cause pain and unsafe footwear, like backless shoes or high heels, can also increase your risk of falling.
- Confusion can sometimes lead to falls. For example, if you wake up in an unfamiliar environment, you might feel unsure of where you are. If you feel confused, wait for your mind to clear or until someone comes to help you before trying to get up and walk around.
- Some medications can increase a person's risk of falling because they cause side effects like dizziness or confusion. The more medications you take, the more likely you are to fall.

### **Take the Right Steps to Prevent Falls**

If you take care of your overall health, you may be able to lower your chances of falling. Most of the time, falls and accidents don't "just happen." Here are a few tips to help you avoid falls and broken bones:

- Stay physically active. Plan an exercise program that is right for you. Regular exercise improves muscles and makes you stronger. It also helps keep your joints, tendons, and ligaments flexible. Mild weight-bearing activities, such as walking or climbing stairs, may slow bone loss from osteoporosis.
- Have your eyes and hearing tested. Even small changes in sight and hearing may cause you to fall. When you get new eyeglasses or contact lenses, take time to get used to them. Always wear your glasses or contacts when you need them. If you have a hearing aid, be sure it fits well and wear it.
- Find out about the side effects of any medicine you take. If a drug makes you sleepy or dizzy, tell your doctor or pharmacist.
- Get enough sleep. If you are sleepy, you are more likely to fall.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink. Even a small amount of alcohol can affect your balance and reflexes. Studies show that the rate of hip fractures in older adults increases with alcohol use.
- Stand up slowly. Getting up too quickly can cause your blood pressure to drop. That can make you feel wobbly. Get your blood pressure checked when lying and standing.
- Use an assistive device if you need help feeling steady when you walk. Appropriate use of canes and walkers can prevent falls. If your doctor tells you to use a cane or walker, make sure it is the right size for you and the wheels roll smoothly. This is important when you're walking in areas you don't know well or where the walkways are uneven. A physical or occupational therapist can help you decide which devices might be helpful and teach you how to use them safely.
- Be very careful when walking on wet or icy surfaces. They can be very slippery! Try to have sand or salt spread on icy areas by your front or back door.

- Wear non-skid, rubber-soled, low-heeled shoes, or lace-up shoes with non-skid soles that fully support your feet. It is important that the soles are not too thin or too thick. Don't walk on stairs or floors in socks or in shoes and slippers with smooth soles.

Always tell your doctor if you have fallen since your last checkup, even if you aren't hurt when you fall. A fall can alert your doctor to a new medical problem or problems with your medications or eyesight that can be corrected. Your doctor may suggest physical therapy, a walking aid, or other steps to help prevent future falls.

### **What to Do If You Fall**

Whether you are at home or somewhere else, a sudden fall can be startling and upsetting. If you do fall, stay as calm as possible. Take several deep breaths to try to relax. Remain still on the floor or ground for a few moments. This will help you get over the shock of falling. Decide if you are hurt before getting up. Getting up too quickly or in the wrong way could make an injury worse. If you think you can get up safely without help, roll over onto your side. Rest again while your body and blood pressure adjust. Slowly get up on your hands and knees, and crawl to a sturdy chair. Put your hands on the chair seat and slide one foot forward so that it is flat on the floor. Keep the other leg bent so the knee is on the floor. From this kneeling position, slowly rise and turn your body to sit in the chair.

If you are hurt or cannot get up on your own, ask someone for help or call 911. If you are alone, try to get into a comfortable position and wait for help to arrive. Carrying a mobile or portable phone with you as you move about your house could make it easier to call someone if you need assistance. An emergency response system, which lets you push a button on a special necklace or bracelet to call for help, is another option.

### **Keep Your Bones Strong to Prevent Falls**

Falls are a common reason for trips to the emergency room and for hospital stays among older adults. Many of these hospital visits are for fall-related fractures. You can help prevent fractures by keeping your bones strong. Having healthy bones won't prevent a fall, but if you fall, it might prevent breaking a hip or other bone, which may lead to a hospital or nursing home stay, disability, or even death. Getting enough calcium and vitamin D can help keep your bones strong. So can physical activity. Try to get at least 150 minutes per week of physical activity.

Other ways to maintain bone health include quitting smoking and limiting alcohol use, which can decrease bone mass and increase the chance of fractures. Also, try to maintain a healthy weight. Being underweight increases the risk of bone loss and broken bones. Osteoporosis is a disease that makes bones weak and more likely to break. For people with osteoporosis, even a minor fall may be dangerous. Talk to your doctor about osteoporosis. Go to <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/fall-proofing-your-home> to learn how to fall-proof your home.

[Source: MOAA News Exchange | September 12, 2017 ++]

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## **Marathon Running ► How to Get there Without Injury**

From a 5K to a full marathon, new and experienced runners alike have one thing on their minds: crossing the finish line. To get there without injury, it's important to set goals, use the right shoes, and practice good health habits. "Training for a running event takes the right mindset," said Lindsay Buckalew, chief of health promotion for Air Force Space Command. "Intent, or just the right mentality, is a huge motivating factor." Setting realistic goals can help maintain focus and motivation throughout the training process. Runners may decide to jump right into a training regimen, but a sudden increase in pace, intensity, or distance can lead to injuries, said Buckalew. No one is immune to injuries, even the most experienced of runners. Seeing a doctor, or even a sports medicine specialist, before starting a training plan is also recommended, he added. This is especially important for those with a pre-existing condition or prior injury.

Army Maj. Tyson Baynes, a physician assistant and deputy for the Army Traumatic Brain Injury Program, said runners should make a training plan that gradually builds mileage by no more than 10 percent each week. While a 5K may not require weeks of preparation, a full marathon should involve at least 20 to 24 weeks of running and cross training, Baynes added. If people haven't been active in a while, or at all, they should ease into training. "Know your limitations," said Baynes. "We get in this mindset that more is better, but sometimes more is not better because it can lead to overuse injuries that impede training efforts and reduce race day performance."

A plan that allows the gradual building of endurance, such as running for one minute and walking for a minute, can help prevent injuries, said Baynes. Even with shorter distances, runners are encouraged not to do more than three alternate days of running per week, 30 minutes per session, and 10 miles per week total as part of overall recommendations for injury prevention, said Buckalew. Contrary to popular belief, training for a running event takes more than running. Cross training through various avenues, such as yoga, cycling, or swimming, helps build strength. Building various muscle groups will help runners in the long haul, said Baynes, who recommends cross training once or twice a week. These activities help prevent overuse injuries from working the same muscle groups day after day.

Running doesn't require a lot of specialized equipment, but having the right shoes can make a difference when logging miles, said Buckalew. Shoes should be replaced every 250 to 500 miles, or at least twice a year depending on how often they're used. Some runners prefer to get fitted at a running or sporting goods store where knowledgeable staff can provide advice on form and shoes, he added.

Experienced runner and Navy Cmdr. Leslie Kindling ran track in high school and college, and started participating in road races as a graduate student. With races ranging from 1 mile to 100 miles under her belt, she's learned one crucial lesson: Listen to your body. "This is the only body you get, so treat it well now so it'll treat you well later," said Kindling, an aerospace and operational physiologist for the Navy. Soreness lasting more than two days, or pain that can be pinpointed to a specific location, can be warning signs for overuse injuries. "If it hurts two days in a row, you need to stop and figure out why, and then fix it."

Muscles need time to rebuild after use, just as the body needs good nutrition and adequate sleep to recover. Staying hydrated, getting adequate sleep, and eating a nutritious diet helps the body reach its full potential during training, said Buckalew. "If people enjoy their running without injury and experience success early on in the training plan, they'll be able to achieve more as they try to meet their goals," said Buckalew, urging runners to relax and enjoy the challenge. "If you can decide you want to do this, there are resources out there to help you on your way to success." [Source: Health.mil | September 20, 2017 ++]

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## History Of Medicine ► An Early Mastectomy





The operator excises the breast with the "tenaculum helveticum." His assistant has a case of lancets etc. attached to his belt. A set of cautery irons is smoldering on a stand on the left. The patient is seated, held by two men: She appears to be fainting. On the right, a man in a tall hat points toward her: He is possibly meant to be a physician. (Drawing 1600-1699)

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## **Kidney Disease Update 06** ▶ **Air Pollution May Harm Your Kidneys**

A new study says air pollution may harm your kidneys. "Even levels below the limit set by the [Environmental Protection Agency] were harmful to the kidneys. This suggests that there is no safe level of air pollution," said study leader Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly, director of clinical epidemiology at the VA Saint Louis Health Care System. He and his colleagues analyzed data from nearly 2.5 million U.S. military veterans who were followed for roughly 8.5 years. They found that as exposure to particulate matter air pollution increased, so did the risk of poorer kidney function, kidney disease and kidney failure.

Particle pollution refers to a complex mix of extremely small particles, such as soot, dirt and smoke, and liquid droplets found in the air, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It's already known that inhaling these particles can affect the heart and lungs. Pollution levels considered safe can still shorten lifespans, study shows. The results suggest that each year in the United States, almost 45,000 new cases of chronic kidney disease and more than 2,400 new cases of kidney failure are associated with particle pollution exceeding the EPA recommended limit. The study found the strongest link between air pollution and kidney damage in southern California and large swaths of the Midwest, the Northeast, and the South, according to Al-Aly.

However, the researchers can only point to an association between air pollution and kidney disease, not a specific causal relationship. The results were published online 21 SEP in the Journal of the American Society of Nephrology. The findings may help explain the large variation in kidney disease rates worldwide, Al-Aly said in a journal news release. Previous research has linked air pollution with shorter life expectancy, the researchers said in background notes. [Source: CS News Healthday | Robert Preidt | September 21, 2017 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 415** ▶ **Secondhand Smoke | Hurricane Season | Assisted Living**

**Secondhand Smoke** -- You don't have to be a routine smoker to feel the harmful health effects that cigarette smoke produces. Keeping the windows open in the car or house doesn't eliminate the risk, either. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that secondhand smoke exposure causes more than 41,000 deaths from heart disease and lung cancer among non-smoking adults each year. Young children are most affected by secondhand smoke. This is especially true for children that live in a household where one or both parents smoke cigarettes at home. Common symptoms seen in children who are exposed to secondhand smoke include ear infections, severe asthma attacks and respiratory problems. Keep in mind that there's no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. The best way to protect yourself is to not allow smoking in your home, car or anywhere you and your family live, work and play. Talk with friends and family members who are thinking about quitting. Your support can make the difference in their attempts to quit.

When you're ready to quit smoking, TRICARE has your tobacco cessation benefits covered. TRICARE covers tobacco cessation counseling, nicotine replacement therapies and prescription drugs. Quit Tobacco – UCanQuit2 also has tools and information to help you quit smoking today, including SmokefreeMIL text message support, Live Chat with a cessation coach and the Ready2Quit quit plan. Visit [www.TRICARE.mil/ucanquit2](http://www.TRICARE.mil/ucanquit2) for more information.

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**Hurricane Season** -- It's hurricane season. Power outages and flooding from massive storms like this year's Harvey and Irma not only cause property damage but also threaten the food and water supply. Emptied grocery store shelves in the days leading up to big storms are proof people prepare by buying bottled water and nonperishable foods. You should also get a food thermometer. If the power goes out, you can check the temperature of foods in the refrigerator to determine if they're still safe to eat. A safe temperature is 40 degrees Fahrenheit or lower. Also, refrigerator food is no longer safe to eat if the power's been out four hours or more, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Before the power goes out, move food you're not planning to eat right away from the refrigerator to the freezer. Food in a full, unopened freezer is safe for about 48 hours, according to the CDC, and it's safe for about 24 hours in a half-full freezer.

Even nonperishable food can be unsafe to eat when it comes into contact with floodwater. This includes home canned goods as well as food in containers with screw caps, snap lids, crimped or twist caps, or flip tops. Canned goods that are bulging, open, rusty, punctured, or dented are also unsafe. Undamaged, all-metal cans and retort pouches, such as shelf-stable juices, can be saved after floodwater exposure by removing the labels, washing, and then sanitizing with a bleach solution or by boiling. For more information about hurricanes, flooding, and foods, visit [www.usda.gov/disaster](http://www.usda.gov/disaster). Water that's unsafe to drink is also unsafe for washing dishes, brushing teeth, washing and preparing food, and making ice and baby formula. For more information on food and drinking water safety after disasters, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

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**Assisted Living Options Under TRICARE** -- As you or a loved one ages, you may find that getting to doctors' offices is more difficult or more frequent. TRICARE offers several options to help you get the care you need.

- Skilled nursing care is covered by TRICARE in the U.S. and U.S. Territories within skilled nursing facilities if you have a hospital stay of three or more days. Remember, you're an outpatient until the doctor formally admits you into the hospital. You become inpatient on the day you're formally admitted to a hospital with a doctor's order. The day of discharge also doesn't count as an inpatient day.
- If you can stay home, but still need assistance, you may decide home health care is best for you. Home health care is provided by nurses, nurses' aides, or therapists who come into your home to help you with medication or other services. Physical, speech and occupational therapists can visit to help you function better. Medical social service workers can visit to make sure you receive proper care. Coverage is the same as Medicare for these services.
- Hospice care is care for those who are terminally ill. It emphasizes supportive services such as pain control and home care. When you choose hospice care, you've decided that you no longer want care to cure your terminal illness or your doctor has determined that efforts to cure your illness aren't working.

TRICARE and Medicare don't cover assisted living facilities or long term care. Remember, long term care is care that you need if you can no longer perform everyday tasks by yourself due to a chronic illness, injury, disability or the aging process. Plan ahead and research long-term care insurance, like the Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program before you need it.

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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> | September 15, 2017 ++]

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## TRICARE Podcast 417 ► Preventing Suicide | Fraud | Turning 65

**Helping To Prevent Suicides** -- When we focus on our health, it's easy to pay attention to physical health versus mental well-being. Ignoring mental health concerns like anxiety and depression can lead to worsening symptoms and more serious issues. For some people, these issues may include an increased risk of suicide. But everyone has a role to play in suicide prevention. Whether you're a friend, family member or the person in crisis, learn how to recognize the signs of a mental health crisis. After this recognition, it's important to act quickly to stop the escalation of the crisis. Although everyone feels ups and downs in life, sometimes we need help to get through challenging times. Signs that you may need to see a mental health provider include:

- Anxiety or agitation
- Anger or rage
- Difficulty sleeping or
- Thoughts or feelings about death or dying

If you or a loved one is thinking or talking about death, suicide or other self-destructive behavior, seek immediate care. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency. You never need prior authorization to get emergency help. Also, you don't need a referral or prior authorization for most outpatient mental health and substance use disorder care. This includes therapy and counseling. More information on mental health care, visit [www.tricare.mil/mentalhealth](http://www.tricare.mil/mentalhealth). Take command of your health by paying attention to your mental health, which is essential to your overall health. Strive for mental and physical wellness. Learn more about how your TRICARE coverage can help support your mind and body at TRICARE.mil. And to learn more about suicide prevention, view the TRICARE monthly tips at [www.TRICARE.mil/healthwellness](http://www.TRICARE.mil/healthwellness).

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**Fraud** -- Don't wait for fraud against TRICARE beneficiaries to be in the news. Always protect your personal information! Never share your uniformed service identification card, or personal or family information with someone you don't know. Protecting your personal information is vital to your privacy.

Fraudsters often target TRICARE beneficiaries. Sometimes they conduct fake surveys so they can collect your personal information. Or they may call saying they know you have TRICARE and that you qualify for a free or low cost knee brace or walker. Then they bill TRICARE for services or supplies you don't need and never receive. TRICARE also won't call you or email you asking for personally identifiable information, like your uniformed service ID number, Social Security number, or Defense Department benefits number. This information should only be given to a trusted person or office, like your doctor, a TRICARE claims officer or regional contractor. For more information about fraud, visit [www.health.mil/fraud](http://www.health.mil/fraud).

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**Turning 65** -- Retirement is something we all work hard for. It's the time in our lives we can relax and enjoy the benefits we worked so hard for. TRICARE For Life is one of those benefits. TRICARE For Life is Medicare-wraparound coverage for TRICARE-eligible beneficiaries who have Medicare Part A and B.

There are a couple of things you need to do ensure your transition to TRICARE For Life is smooth. As with all TRICARE Plans, the first thing you must do is ensure DEERS is up-to-date. You'll receive a post card from DMDC, the Defense Manpower Data Center, four months before your 65th birthday. This postcard is your reminder to ensure your eligibility information is current.

Next, the Medicare initial enrollment period is seven months. If you miss your initial enrollment period, your next chance to sign up for Medicare Part B is during the general enrollment period which is from January 1st through March 31st. Your coverage will begin July 1st, and your monthly premium for Part B may go up 10 percent for each 12-month period that you could have had Part B, but didn't sign up for it. Also, there will be a lapse in your

TRICARE coverage until Part B is effective. For more information about TRICARE For Life, visit [www.TRICARE.mil/TFL](http://www.TRICARE.mil/TFL). You can get information about Medicare Parts A and B on [www.Medicare.gov](http://www.Medicare.gov).

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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> | September 29, 2017 ++]

**\* Financial \***



## Health Care Inflation Update 01 ► 4.3% Increase Anticipated for 2018

U.S. employers are bracing for higher health care expenses in 2018 as spending on new drugs to treat diseases such as cancer, multiple sclerosis and hepatitis C is expected to rise more than 7 percent, according to consultancy firm Mercer. Between 40 and 50 new specialty drugs are set to hit the market each year in the next five years, which could increase costs by \$25 billion annually, Mercer said. The survey's preliminary findings suggest that spending on specialty drugs had risen by about 15 percent compared with prices that were factored into 2017 health plans. These types of drugs continue to push up overall costs of prescription drugs. "It's not so much that the cost of any one drug is going up, but that new drugs are being introduced," Beth Umland, Mercer's research director for health and benefits, told Reuters.

There are presently 2,320 drugs in active development, the consultancy said. Last month, Novartis AG <NOVN.S> won U.S. approval for the first of a new type of potent gene-modifying immunotherapy for leukemia, a \$475,000 treatment that marks the start of a potential new treatment paradigm for some cancers. "With so many new specialty drugs in the pipeline and few well-known brand-name drugs going off-patent in the near future, the drug cost problem will certainly get worse before it gets better," Mercer's U.S. health reform leader Tracy Watts said.

Companies anticipate average per-employee health costs to increase by 4.3 percent in 2018, the highest rate since 2011. Early responses from the survey suggest that 46 percent of employers would take steps to cut costs with new strategies such as high-deductible health plans - which shift the burden of initial medical costs to patients, but have lower monthly premiums. These plans are becoming increasingly popular among employers as they try to keep a lid on medical costs. However, this trend has contributed to higher out-of-pocket spending on healthcare for employees. The average per-employee cost growth is estimated to rise 6 percent, if companies make no changes to their medical plans, according to the survey.

[Source: Reuters | Divya Grover| September 18, 2017 ++]

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## VA Home Loan Update 50 ► Crackdown on Predatory Lending Schemes

Federal officials plan to crack down on what they view as predatory lending schemes — reminiscent of the toxic practices seen during the housing boom — targeted at thousands of veterans nationwide who have U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs home loans.

The alleged abuses involve serial refinancings that generate hefty fees for lenders and loan brokers but leave borrowers in worse financial shape than they were before the transaction. Lenders are accused of dangling teaser interest rates, “cash out” windfalls and lower monthly payments, sometimes purportedly using shady marketing materials that resemble official information from the Department of Defense. Not infrequently, say officials, borrowers end up in negative equity positions, owing more on their loan balance than their house is worth.

Officials at the Government National Mortgage Association, better known as Ginnie Mae, say some veterans are being flooded with misleading refi offers and are signing up without assessing the costs and benefits. Some properties are being refinanced multiple times a year, thanks to “poaching” by lenders who aggressively solicit competitors’ recent borrowers to refi them again and roll the fees into a new loan balance, officials say.

The costs to the veterans can far outweigh the relatively modest reductions in monthly payments. In an analysis of questionable refinancings, Ginnie Mae found “many” examples where the borrowers were persuaded to switch from a long-term fixed interest rate to a lower-rate short-term adjustable but saw the principal amount owed to the lender jump by thousands of dollars. In an average fixed-rate to adjustable-rate refi, according to data provided for this column, borrowers added \$12,000 to their debt in order to reduce their monthly payment by \$165. Just to break even on that deal would take more than six years, according to Ginnie Mae, and could push unsuspecting borrowers into negative equity.

A typical pitch for one of these loans was received recently by a veteran and his wife who live in Silver Spring, Md. Along with a fake “check” made out to the veteran in the amount of \$30,000 — all he had to do to get the cash was sign up for a refi — were come-ons like this:

- A new 2.25 percent interest rate.
- No out-of-pocket expenses.
- A refund of his escrow money.
- Up to two months with zero mortgage payments.
- “Call now and lock in your rate before rates go any higher,” urged the lender. In small print on the back of the check were a couple of key disclosures: The homeowners would have to switch from their current 3.75 percent fixed rate to a “3/1” adjustable rate that could increase 36 months after closing and rise to as high as 7.25 percent during the life of the loan. There was nothing about fees or the fact that opting for the refi could add to the family’s debt load.

VA home loans are backed by the Department of Veterans Affairs and often have no down payment. Lenders who originate them receive guarantees of a portion of the loan amount against loss in the event of a default. Ginnie Mae bundles VA and Federal Housing Administration loans into mortgage bonds, which are then purchased by investors who receive guarantees of timely payments.

In an interview, Michael R. Bright, acting Ginnie Mae president, said some of the abuses he is seeing hark back to 2005 and 2006 — heyday years of the boom before the bust. “We’re seeing borrowers refinance three times in less than six months and (their) loan balances going up.” Homeowners also are dumping fixed-rate loans for riskier adjustables. “That was the play back then” during the boom, he said. Now it’s back. Bright declined to name mortgage lenders who are most aggressively involved in abusive refis, but he said violators of agency rules face financial penalties and loss of eligibility to participate in bond offerings — essentially closing down their funding

source. Depending on the abuses documented, cases may also be referred to other agencies, such as the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which can levy large fines and pursue lenders in federal courts.

The VA has joined Ginnie Mae to create a task force that is now compiling information. In a statement, the VA said lenders whose “improper charges or fees” lead to foreclosures face penalties including reimbursements to the government and individual veterans. Bottom line for VA borrowers: Look skeptically at all refi promotions. Run the numbers to see whether refinancing will leave you better off — or deeper in debt. [Source: Chicago Tribune | Kenneth R. Harney | September 26, 2017++]

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## **Military Star Credit Card ► Commissary Acceptance**

Commissary customers soon will be able to use their Military Star credit card to pay for their groceries, as officials roll out acceptance of the card over the next month and a half. The Military Star card is a credit card accepted at all the military exchanges, with 1.5 million cardholders. On 3 OCT a pilot test starts at the Fort Lee, Virginia, commissary. On 9 OCT, five more commissaries will join the pilot: Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts; Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania; Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia; Naval Air Station Key West, Florida; and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Virginia. Twenty more stores, including some overseas, join on 16 OCT.

The fiscal 2017 National Defense Authorization Act required the commissaries to start accepting the card. Extending this acceptance “offers greater customer convenience while lowering overhead expenses and strengthening commissary, military exchange and quality of life benefits,” said Defense Commissary Agency spokesman Kevin Robinson, in a response to questions about the rollout of the card. “In focus groups conducted by a third party, military shoppers have expressed a desire for a single non-cash tender type that can be used across the installation,” he said.

The current interest rate on the Military Star card is 11.24 percent. Unlike interest paid to other card companies, any money paid by cardholders in interest charges for the Military Star card (incurred when cardholders don’t pay off their balance each month) goes back to morale, welfare and recreation programs on military installations. Robinson said he has no information about whether part of the profits from interest charges will be shared with the commissary agency. Defense officials have been taking steps to reduce the amount of taxpayer dollars — about \$1.4 billion a year — used to fund commissaries. In addition to debit cards, cash, personal checks, travelers checks, money orders and other types of payments such as government food assistance, commissaries accept other credit cards like American Express, Discover, MasterCard and Visa.

Shoppers who use the Military Star card at the commissary will accumulate rewards point just as they do at exchanges, Robinson said, but they won’t able to redeem Military Star rewards cards at commissaries. As always, consumer advocates advise shopping around for the best interest rate and other terms on any credit card. And just like other cards, if you don’t pay these off each month, you’ll pay the interest charges. For more about the Star card refer to <http://www.militarytimes.com/pay-benefits/2017/09/23/military-star-card-5-things-to-know>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | September 23, 2017 ++]

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## **Forced Arbitration Update 01 ► Essentially Nullifies Servicemembers' SCRA Rights**

In mid-SEP The Enlisted Association's (TREA) Legislative Director Larry Madison and Deputy Legislative Director Mike Saunders attended a meeting with Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI), Ranking Member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, to discuss the issue of forced arbitration and how its use by so many companies essentially nullifies the



rights granted to Active Duty personnel and members of the Guard and Reserve by the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA).

SCRA provides certain protections from civil actions against reservists & members of the guard who are called to Active Duty or given orders to deploy. It restricts or limits actions against these personnel in the areas of financial management, such as rental agreements, security deposits, evictions, installment contracts, credit card interest rates, mortgages, civil judicial proceedings, income tax payments, and more.

However, more and more, forced arbitration clauses are buried in the fine print of nonnegotiable financial agreements utilized by most major banks; they are not utilized by community banks or credit unions. These clauses apply to everything from credit cards and checking accounts to prepaid cards and payday loans, effecting tens of millions of consumers. With the use of forced arbitration, banks block lawsuits, including all class actions, from proceeding in court. Because forced arbitration is private, there is no public record, no meaningful appellate process, and no requirement that arbitrators enforce state and federal laws.

Forced arbitration is routinely used by major banks and in effect, it strips servicemembers of their rights under federal law, actively circumventing protections enacted to ensure servicemembers financial well-being while on active duty. This issue was first recognized by the Department of Defense in 2006, which concluded that "Service members should maintain full legal recourse against unscrupulous lenders. Loan contracts to Service members should not include mandatory arbitration clauses or onerous notice provisions, and should not require the Service member to waive his or her right of recourse, such as the right to participate in a plaintiff class. Waiver isn't a matter of 'choice' in take-it-or-leave-it contracts of adhesion."

This situation came before the federal Consumer Financial Protection Board (CFPB) and the board ruled in favor of DoD's 2006 recommendations for servicemembers and the need to ensure their ability to enforce their rights under federal law. The final rule does two simple things:

- a. Restores targeted, private enforcement power to Americans against law-breaking banks, eliminating the need for industry-wide government regulations and burdensome compliance costs.
- b. Maintains the right of banks to force individuals into arbitration, but for the first time imposes new transparency requirements on arbitrations to better inform the banking public.

The final rule will codify Senator Lindsey Graham's Servicemember Civil Relief Act (SCRA) Rights Protection Act. However, there is a bill in Congress to overturn the CFPB's ruling. Unfortunately, the House of Representatives passed the bill. The action is now in the Senate and we are making every effort to convince senators to uphold the CFPB ruling. TREA has been helping to coordinate efforts within The Military Coalition to rally the opposition of over 30 military and veterans associations to oppose the legislation.

You should also be aware that everyone in the nation is covered by these forced arbitration clauses in the same way that servicemembers are when they enter into many, if not most, financial arrangements. However, there is no law that is supposed to exempt them from the terms of forced arbitration. [Source: TREA Washington Update | September 26, 2017 ++]

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## **Student Loans Update 05 ► Total Debt \$1.4 Trillion | \$34K per student**

Americans don't do enough homework about college costs and how to cover them. The result is \$1.4 trillion in student loan debt, the fastest-growing type of household debt. It now accounts for about a third of non-housing-related debt. And there are many more grim statistics where those came from, raising tough questions for families. While a college education can help ensure — but not guarantee — career success, the rising student loan debt load takes a toll on millennials' ability to achieve financial goals in a timely fashion. "For some millennials, the American Dream seems to be more of a nightmare as many struggle to achieve life goals like getting married,

buying homes and starting families,” says Paul Golden, a spokesman for the National Endowment for Financial Education.

Older generations also are juggling student loan payments, left over from either their own time in school or that of their children. According to a recent report from the credit reporting bureau Experian, 13 percent of U.S. consumers have one or more student loans on their credit file, with average total debt of more than \$34,000 per person. It also finds that one-third of student loan borrowers are not currently repaying all of their loans. Furthermore, the National Association of Realtors reports:

- 61% of student debtors have had difficulty contributing to retirement accounts
- 32% are able to save for retirement, but at a reduced amount.

If student loan borrowers were free of that debt, most would be putting that money toward long-term savings, investments, or a home purchase.

### **The newest debtors.**

Soon, the first payments will come due for the college Class of 2017; graduates typically get a six-month grace period before they have to start paying off student loans. The nonprofit Institute for College Access and Success, which just finished tallying the debt loads among last year’s graduating class. New Hampshire residents had the most student loan debt at graduation in 2016, averaging \$36,367. Close behind were Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Delaware and Minnesota. Higher-debt states were mostly in the Northeast and Midwest. Go to [https://ticas.org/sites/default/files/pub\\_files/classof2016.pdf](https://ticas.org/sites/default/files/pub_files/classof2016.pdf) to see the complete report.

Lower student-loan-debt states were primarily in the West. Report co-author Debbie Cochrane says the main takeaway is this: “We need to make college more affordable and reduce burdensome debt, while giving students and policymakers the information they need to make wise decisions and investments.” That means parents and students need to be smart consumers when choosing where to study and how to pay for college. Questions for families to consider include:

- Can you save more for higher education?
- Can you resist taking on so much debt?
- Can you explore less expensive schools?

College and university tuitions are continuing to rise at a much steeper pace than inflation overall. With wage gains still mostly lackluster, many Americans may decide that they have to make up the difference by taking on more debt. Others may skip college altogether because the cost is just too high. [Source: Money TalksNews | Mark Hamrick | September 25, 2017 ++]

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## **Homeowners Insurance Update 07 ► Do You Know What is Covered?**

Homeowners insurance pays off in some disasters, but it has surprising gaps. Don't wait until you're wading through your living room to find out what they are. A recent spate of bad news — hurricanes in Texas, Florida and the Caribbean, earthquakes in Mexico — offers a sobering reminder that disaster can strike at any time. In some places, the main threat is wildfires, elsewhere it's tornadoes. Meanwhile, earthquakes are a constant preoccupation in parts of the country. Now is a good time to make sure you have coverage if your home is damaged or lost in one of these disasters. Before we cover individual disasters, it's wise to know some homeowners insurance basics. They include:

- **Read your policy.** Or review it with an agent or broker to learn what is covered and the limits. Consider filling coverage gaps with additional insurance, an umbrella policy for added liability coverage, for example.

- **Cut costs.** Get the coverage you need affordably with such strategies as discounts, comparison shopping and higher deductibles. Eight ways to cut costs of homeowners insurance can be found at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/year-end-review-9-tips-cut-homeowners-insurance-costs>
- **Inventory your possessions.** You'll save money and time making a claim by having a video record of your home's contents. Six tips for making a home inventory right now can be found at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/why-you-need-make-home-inventory-right-now>.
- **Cover liability.** If someone is hurt in your home or by someone in your family, including pets, your homeowners policy's liability coverage pays damages and court costs. Most homeowners insurance policies have a minimum \$100,000 liability limit, according to the Insurance Information Institute. "Increasingly, it is recommended that homeowners consider purchasing at least \$300,000 to \$500,000 worth of coverage of liability protection," the institute says.

Here's a summary of what home insurance policies do and don't cover, along with steps to take to protect yourself at a price you can afford.

### **Wildfires: Are you covered?**

Your homeowners policy probably doesn't cover many disasters, including mudslides, sinkholes, war, pollution, mold, sewer backup, landslides, earthquakes and floods. But it does protect against fire, including wildfire, says the National Fire Protection Association's Firewise site. Do you have enough coverage? The Insurance Information Institute, an insurance industry nonprofit, advises buying enough to:

- **Replace your home's structure.** To tell if your coverage is adequate, ask one or two local builders to estimate the price of replacing your home. If you own an older home, the institute adds, you may not be able to buy a replacement-cost policy. Instead, you may have to buy a modified replacement-cost policy.
- **Replace your stuff.** A homeowners policy typically covers the replacement value of possessions inside the home — your furniture, tools, appliances, clothes and valuables — but with limits. You may need additional coverage to fully insure expensive jewelry, art or collectibles.
- **Cover loss of use.** You could spend thousands of dollars on shelter and meals while your home is being repaired. Get a policy with a generous allowance for loss of use.

### **Hurricanes: Are you covered?**

Hurricane season — which runs from June 1 to Nov. 30 — brings risks from high wind, rain and flooding in storm-prone regions. Your homeowners policy may cover some wind damage. Read it or review it with a professional to find the limits and specifics. Wind damage coverage often has a separate, higher deductible. For example, if your home is worth \$250,000 and the hurricane deductible is 3 percent, you'd pay \$7,500 out-of-pocket before your insurance kicks in. Water damage is trickier. Homeowners policies typically cover water damage only in limited instances. For flood protection, you need to get separate insurance.

### **Floods: Are you covered?**

Standard homeowners and renters policies do not protect you in the event of flood damage, according to the Insurance Information Institute. However, you can purchase flood insurance coverage through the [National Flood Insurance Program](#). Keep in mind the following:

- Flood insurance has a 30-day waiting period before coverage begins.
- You'll need separate policies for the home's structure and its contents.
- The maximum coverage is \$250,000 for a structure and \$100,000 for contents.

Other tips for protecting your home from flood damage include:

- **Find out whether you're required to get flood insurance.** You can check the risk of your property flooding by looking it up in FEMA's [Flood Insurance Risk Maps](#). If you live in a flood plain you will be required to buy flood insurance. The federally backed insurance rate for a given property should be the same with every agent and company providing flood policies.

- **Consider optional flood insurance.** You may want flood insurance even if it's not required. After all, more than 20 percent of claims for flood damage compensation come from properties outside high-risk flood areas, [FloodSmart.gov says](#).
- **Look into renters flood insurance.** Your landlord's insurance for your rental home won't cover the loss of your possessions. [FloodSmart.gov also explains](#) flood insurance for renters.
- **Correct the flood map.** If you think the flood map has an error, [ask FEMA for a letter of map change](#).
- **Check building ordinance coverage.** [CNBC points out](#) that your homeowners policy may pay to rebuild your home after a storm but not cover the cost of meeting upgraded building requirements. When you shop, look for policies with building ordinance coverage or purchase a separate rider.

### Earthquakes: Are you covered?

Earthquake country is bigger than many realize, as the National Geographic map shows at <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/07/140717-usgs-earthquake-maps-disaster-risk-science>

Homeowners insurance doesn't cover earthquake damage. You'll need a separate policy or endorsement on your homeowners policy. Unfortunately, this insurance usually has high deductibles and expensive premiums. Bloomberg says: The average earthquake policy in California in 2013 was \$676 a year, according to the California Department of Insurance, and policies often have a deductible of 10 percent or 15 percent.

If your home suffers \$400,000 in damage, you'd cover the first \$40,000 to \$60,000 out of pocket, for instance. What's more, your quake insurance would not cover flooding from an earthquake-caused tsunami. You would need separate flood insurance for that. Here are some tips for preparing for earthquakes:

- **Investigate renters insurance for earthquakes.** A standard renters insurance policy won't include earthquake coverage for your possessions or help with living expenses while your rental home is repaired. Your landlord's insurance won't help, either. Ask an insurance broker about earthquake policies for renters.
- **Learn more.** The National Association of Insurance Commissioners' publication "[A Consumers' Guide to Earthquake Insurance](#)" covers the subject in more detail.
- **Bolt your home to the foundation.** Whether you get quake insurance or not, retrofitting your home to keep it from sliding off the foundation can minimize damage. HouseLogic explains how to do it at <https://www.houselogic.com/organize-maintain/home-maintenance-tips/earthquake-strengthening-your-foundation>.

Looking for more information? The Federal Emergency Management Agency's brochure, "[Reduce Your Risk From Natural Disasters](#)," has low-cost measures to take against quakes, floods, hurricanes and wildfires. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Marilyn Lewis | September 21, 2017 ++]

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## Equifax Phone Phishing Scam ► Data Breach Followup

Only scammers could find a way to make such bad news worse. Earlier this month, credit reporting agency Equifax announced that a data breach compromised the personal information of 143 million people. Now, scammers are capitalizing on it with phone phishing cons.

### How the Scam Works:

- You answer the phone, and it's a robo call claiming to be from Equifax. The credit reporting agency is allegedly "calling to verify your account information." If you stay on the line to speak to a representative, the scammer will try to trick you into sharing personal information.
- If you get such a call, be sure to hang up. These calls are scams. Even if your information was compromised in the breach, Equifax will not call you to confirm it. Sharing your personal information with these scammers can lead to identity theft.

### How to Avoid a Phone Scam:

- Just hang up: If you receive a scam robo call, don't press anything. Pressing a button or speaking with a representative may lead to more robocalls.
- Don't trust Caller ID. Scammers spoof their numbers so they appear to be calling from a trusted company or government organization.
- Check BBB Tips: Many phishing scams follow similar patterns. Check [bbb.org/phishingscam](http://bbb.org/phishingscam) for more advice.

For more information about the Equifax breach, visit Equifax's website, [www.equifaxsecurity2017.com](http://www.equifaxsecurity2017.com) or see the Federal Trade Commission's alert <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2017/09/equifax-data-breach-what-do>. For advice about credit freezes and fraud alerts, see BBB's tip which can be found at <https://www.bbb.org/council/news-events/news-releases/2017/09/bbb-tip-credit-freezes-and-fraud-alerts>. 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 | September 22, 2017 ++]

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## Tax Burden for Vermont Retired Vets ► As of SEP 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 Vermont.

### Sales Taxes

**State Sales Tax:** 6% (medical items, food, equipment and fuel, residential fuel and electricity, clothing and shoes with a purchase price of \$110 or less, prescription and non-prescription drugs are exempt); Local jurisdictions may add an additional 1%. Tax is 9% of prepared foods and restaurant meals and lodging. 10% on alcoholic beverages served in restaurants.

**Gasoline Tax:** 48.86 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 56.40 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Cigarette Tax:** \$3.08/pack of 20

### Personal Income Taxes

**Tax Rate Range:** Low – 3.55%; High – 8.95% (Tax. Go to [www.state.vt.us/tax/individual.shtml](http://www.state.vt.us/tax/individual.shtml) for details.)

**Income Brackets:** \*\*Lowest – \$37,950; Highest – \$416,100

**Number of Brackets:** 5

**Personal Exemptions:** Single – \$4,050; Married – \$8,100; Dependent – \$4,050

**Standard Deduction:** Single - \$6,350; Couple - \$12,700

**Medical/Dental Deduction:** Federal amount

**Federal Income Tax Deduction:** None

**Retirement Income Taxes:** No exemptions, except for Railroad Retirement benefits. Out-of-state government pensions are fully taxed.

**Retired Military pay:** Follows federal tax rules.

**Military Disability Retired Pay:** Retirees who entered the military before Sept. 24, 1975, and members receiving

disability retirements based on combat injuries or who could receive disability payments from the VA are covered by laws giving disability broad exemption from federal income tax. Most military retired pay based on service-related disabilities also is free from federal income tax, but there is no guarantee of total protection.

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

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

**Vermont Tax Guidelines for Military Personnel:** Go to

<http://www.state.vt.us/tax/pdf.word.excel/individual/MILITARY%20PERSONNEL.pdf>

### **Property Taxes**

Real estate taxes have two components; school property tax and municipal property tax. Both taxes are billed and collected by the town or city where the real estate is located.

A statewide education tax is imposed on all nonresidential and homestead property at the following rates: (1) the tax rate for nonresidential property is approximately \$1.44 per \$100.00; and (2) the tax rate for homestead property is approximately \$0.92 multiplied by the district spending adjustment for the municipality, per \$100.00, of equalized education property value. The homestead property tax rate for each municipality which is a member of a school district is calculated under subsection “e” of state statute section 5405. For rates by town, go to <http://www.state.vt.us/tax/pvredtaxrates.shtml>.

A Homestead Declaration is no longer required to be filed each year. The declaration filed in 2010 and 2011 remains on record until the homestead is sold or there is a change in the use of the homestead.

The Municipal Property Tax is based on the town’s grand list and is used to fund the town’s services. The rate varies in each town depending on the funds needed to operate municipal services. Eligible Vermont residents can make a claim for a rebate of their school and municipal property taxes if household income does not exceed a certain level. Generally, household incomes of \$97,000 or more do not receive an adjustment. Maximum property tax adjustment for 2010 is \$8,000. The rebate refunds the difference between a percentage of the claimant’s household income and the eligible taxes. Eligible taxes are combined school and municipal property taxes less the education property tax payment. There is a property tax exemption for veterans. The first \$10,000 (may be increased to up to \$40,000 by a vote of the town) of appraisal value of the established residence of a qualifying veteran, his or her surviving spouse or child is exempt if: (a) the residence is owned in fee simple by one or jointly by a combination of them, and, a written application for the exemption is filed before May 1 of each year. For more information, refer to <http://www.state.vt.us/tax/pvrmilitary.shtml>

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

Although Vermont does not have an inheritance tax, it has an estate tax. Vermont Estate Tax Return must be filed if the decedent had Vermont income and filed U.S. Estate Tax Return. Federal estate tax returns are required when an estate exceeds specified gross estate values. In 2009, estates valued at more than \$2.75 million will have to pay a tax.

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For further information, visit the [Vermont Department of Taxes](http://www.state.vt.us/tax/index.shtml) site [www.state.vt.us/tax/index.shtml](http://www.state.vt.us/tax/index.shtml) or call 802-828-2865.

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





## Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 30 SEP 20 17

- **Gasoline Spill.** Less than 20 percent of a 461,000-gallon (1.7-million-liter) gasoline spill in Texas during Hurricane Harvey was recovered by the company responsible, while the rest evaporated or soaked into the ground, a U.S. Coast Guard official said 14 SEP.
- **Cambodia MIAs.** Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen said 14 SEP he will retaliate against a U.S. halt on the issuing of most visas to senior foreign ministry officials and their families by suspending missions by U.S. military-led teams searching for the remains of Americans missing in action from the Vietnam War.
- **2018 COLA.** The August CPI is 239.448, 1.9 percent above the FY 2016 COLA baseline. The CPI for September 2017, the final month of the fiscal year, is scheduled to be released on October 13, 2017. The final COLA is determined by comparing the average CPI of the final three months of the fiscal year to the same quarter of the prior year. MOAA predicts a final cost of living adjustment of approximately 1.8 percent. This would mean you could see an \$18 increase for every \$1000 of retired pay received.
- **Guantánamo.** They smile, they pose, they adorn their prison camp uniforms with familiar items from home. Since 2009, the Pentagon has permitted the International Committee of the Red Cross to photograph Guantánamo's captives -- not for public consumption but to connect with family after years apart. While the Red Cross, in keeping with its confidential work, does not release these images to the public, the prisoners' lawyers and families do. The Miami Herald has amassed this unusual collection at <http://media.miamiherald.com/static/media/projects/2014/portraits-of-guantanamo> to show portraits of these men posing on their own terms behind the razor wire at the U.S. Navy base prison in southeast Cuba.
- **Premium Gasoline.** The pricier petrol is almost certainly unnecessary. Even if your owner's manual recommends premium gas, "the car will typically run on regular without issue and won't damage the engine in any way," according to Jason Kavanaugh and Peter Gareffa of Edmunds.com. They note that drivers used to buy premium now and then to "clean" their engines. But every formulation of today's fuels has additives in place — no cleaning necessary.
- **VA Fraud.** 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, according to a Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General report.
- **Electromagnetic Railgun.** Military's most powerful cannon. shoots a projectile 100 miles at Mach 7. Check it out at <https://youtu.be/i737rM6FxD>.
- **College Rankings.** The 2018 US News & World Report rankings are in! West Point ranks as the #1 Public College and the #4 Undergraduate Engineering Program, and also "leapfrogs" Annapolis to rank as the #12 Best National Liberal Arts College in the annual rankings. Visit [www.usnews.com/colleges](http://www.usnews.com/colleges) for a complete list of rankings and ranking methodology.
- **DoD Handbook.** To access DoD's 183 page 2017 Wounded, Ill, and/or Injured Compensation and Benefits Handbook go to <http://warriorcare.dodlive.mil/files/2017/01/DoD-Compensation-Benefits-Handbook-UPDATED-January-2017.pdf>.
- **Nostalgia.** Go to <https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/QoDXTAajEzY?rel=0> and check out 'Here Today and Gone Tomorrow'.

- **More Nostalgia.** Go to <https://safeshare.tv/x/FEDEwZHZXu> and check out 'Lost in the Fifties - Another Time, Another Place'.
- **Drones.** A drone crashed into a UH-60 Black Hawk over Staten Island 21 SEP, marking the first time a civilian drone has ever collided with a military aircraft, an Army official said.
- **Airline Overbooking.** Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFNstNKgEDI> to find out why airlines consistently overbook flight's.
- **EPA.** The Environmental Protection Agency employs about half as many criminal investigators (147) as it did a more than a decade ago, according to newly released documents, corresponding to a dramatic drop-off in the number of new criminal cases against those who violate environmental laws and regulations.
- **God Bless America.** Check out <https://youtu.be/6OTGw03rTGs> for John Wayne's comment on this phrase.
- **Civil War Pensioner.** Irene Triplett, 87, still continues to receive a monthly check for \$73.13 from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Triplett is the sole surviving person to be receiving a Civil War pension from the VA.
- **Flight Pay.** Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson announced 25 AUG the service is increasing what used to be called flight pay for the first time since 1999. US airlines hired 4,000 pilots last year, many of them former military pilots. Wilson said officers will now get \$1,000 a month, up from \$850 and enlisted will get \$600 up from \$400 a month. It looks as if the pay is going up because the Air Force just isn't retaining as many pilots as it had expected to.
- **Alarm Clocks.** Having trouble waking up every morning. Perhaps you could use the methods shown in <https://youtu.be/ZHk5JIZnxN0> and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXexg25Y9\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXexg25Y9_I).
- **Death to Pennies.** Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5UT04p5f7U> to hear why it is time to kill the penny.
- **National Anthem.** Go to <https://twitter.com/i/videos/tweet/789970623871279104> to see a new twist on its presentation.
- **United Nations.** Noting that the human rights situation in the Philippines remains serious, 39 countries expressed concern over the rising number of drug-related killings in the country and called on the government to end and probe these deaths.
- **DPRK.** China has ordered North Korean companies operating within its borders to shut down as Beijing tightens the screws on Pyongyang amid fresh UN sanctions.

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## **Air Force One Update 02 ► Trump Deletes Air-Refueling Capability**

Gen. Joe Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, told the Senate Armed Services Committee today that the White House had decided not to include aerial refueling as a capability for the next Air Force One fleet. Why? To save money. President Donald Trump has apparently made the decision, reflected by this decision and the purchase of two little-used 747s from by a now-bankrupt Russian airline, that the ability of the commander in chief to survive and, if necessary, wage war doesn't justify unconstrained expenditure. The Air Force 2018 budget shows the successor to the VC-25 fleet will require nearly \$3.2 billion between 2018 and 2022. Should Trump win reelection, he could fly in the one of the first planes to be refitted with the secure communication systems, special engines, defensive measures and other adaptations to the planes that make the plane much more than just a modified 747. Sen. Tom Cotton made it clear to Dunford during this morning's hearing that the White House decision may not stand, saying "we may need to revisit that decision." Of course, the White House may be counting on this, giving them the ability to say they had done everything possible to save money on the Air Force One replacement, but Congress forced their hand. It's an old fiscal trick. [Source: Breaking Defense | Colin Clark | September 26, 2017 ++]

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## National Anthem Update 05 ► AL, VFW & IAVA on NFL Protests

Top veterans organizations jumped into the fray 25 SEP over National Football League players who have been sitting or kneeling during the national anthem in protest, in a debate taking on significance as it intensifies. The leaders of Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion lashed out at the players for “disrespecting” the national anthem after more about 250 athletes on Sunday refused to stand and pay respects when the anthem was being played. “There is a time and place for civil debate, and wearing team jerseys and using sporting events to disrespect our country doesn’t wash with millions of military veterans who have and continue to wear real uniforms on real battlefields around the globe,” said Keith Harman, a Vietnam veteran who heads the 1.7 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. “I stand for our flag and anthem, and I kneel for our fallen. That’s what patriots do.”

But not everyone believes the players’ actions were disrespectful to veterans. In contrast, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of American issued a statement urging tolerance for differing perspectives that have emerged over the issue. “We have seen that IAVA's Post-9/11 veterans have opinions all across the spectrum on this issue,” the statement said. “Our members' opinions, just like our members themselves, are very diverse. We hope all their voices are heard and respected as much as those of any professional athlete or politician.”

The debate began more than a year ago as a race issue when Colin Kaepernick, then quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, refused to stand during the anthem as a protest over police treatment of minorities. Already charged, the issue exploded this weekend over questions of whether highly paid athletes should use their positions to highlight social issues and whether those actions during the national anthem were construed as anti-patriotic. What had begun as an act by one joined by a handful of players turned into a league-wide protest Sunday after President Donald Trump began a series of tweets calling the protesting players “sons of bitches” who should get off the field, urging coaches to fire them, and calling on Americans to boycott the NFL. “We have great people representing our country, especially our soldiers, our first responders, and they should be treated with respect,” Trump insisted.

The issue made its way to the heart of patriotism and respect for U.S. forces fighting the longest wars in the country’s history. Social media exploded with many cheering Pittsburgh Steelers player Alejandro Villanueva, a decorated Army veteran, who was the only member of his team to take the field for the national anthem, standing with his helmet by his side and his hand over his heart. The rest of the team stayed in the tunnel after they could not agree on one unified action in response to Trump’s comments, Coach Mike Tomlin told reporters after the game. “These are divisive times,” he said. “By no means, no way, shape or form was there any disrespect intended for our troops, the people that serve this country,” Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger said. “We have nothing but the utmost respect for them, obviously.”

Off the field, veterans, servicemembers and their families debated. Many said they would boycott football. “I am a Gold Star mother,” wrote commenter Rose Warnsing on the Stars and Stripes Facebook page. “I refuse to watch or spend any of my money supporting a bunch of prima donna millionaires that dance on my son’s grave. My son, along with thousands upon thousands, have truly sacrificed all so these boys could play a game in the greatest country of them all. I support the right to protest but not their disrespect for the country my son gave his all for.”

American Legion Cmdr. Denise Rohan called the players “misguided and ungrateful” for failing to show respect for the national anthem. “There are many ways to protest but the national anthem should be our moment to stand together as one UNITED States of America,” she said. But others responded saying the protests were misunderstood. “All of us that deployed, the ones that came home and the ones that did not -- all fought so that the ones back home could have freedom, liberty, and justice,” wrote Brandy Castilleja, who later said she served in the Army for 17 years as a combat medic, deploying twice to Mosul and once to Baghdad, Iraq, before leaving the

service this year. “They are not protesting against troops,” she said. “They are trying to bring to light the severe injustice that is going on in this country.”

White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders on Monday defended Trump’s statements, saying the president was not speaking against anything but rather trying to unify the nation around patriotism and appreciation for the military. “I think that it’s always appropriate for the president of the United States to defend our flag, to defend our national anthem,” she said.

Some sports aficionados have pointed out that the NFL tradition of players coming onto the field ahead of the national anthem for every game just began in 2009. Before that, except for the Super Bowl and the occasional special event, most teams stayed in the locker room until after the ceremonials were completed. But the issue of connecting the troops to the flag and the anthem harkens to a longer-standing tradition in the military, where servicemembers are required to stop and salute when the flag is raised or lowered each day and when the anthem is played. To many of them, that is entwined in their patriotism. “That flag is more than just a symbol of our nation, it means all that’s right about our country,” said Veterans of Foreign Wars spokesman Joe Davis. “And the disrespect that anyone, not just sports people, show toward the flag, which goes hand in hand with the national anthem, is something other veterans don’t tolerate.”

The majority of those who participated in an unofficial poll posted by Stars and Stripes 25 SEP agreed. Of the 528 people who had answered in the first few hours, 63 percent said they saw the anthem protests as disrespectful to servicemembers and veterans while 20 percent saw it as an expression of free speech and 13 percent said it was simply a political act. The rest chose none of the above. Henry Muller, a 27-year Navy veteran, said the whole issue raised for him a question about the hypocrisy of many who have taken umbrage at the protest. “A better poll would be how everyone feels about the people standing in line for beer during the anthem at the games,” he wrote. “Or people sitting on their couches instead of standing for the anthem at home watching the games. “Does that also offend?” he asked. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Dianna Cahn | September 25, 2017 ++]

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## **National Anthem Update 06** ► U.S. Code | Conduct Required When Played

Title 36, Subtitle I, Part A section 301 United States Code – National Anthem

(a) Designation.— The composition consisting of the words and music known as the Star-Spangled Banner is the national anthem.

(b) Conduct During Playing.— During a rendition of the national anthem—

· (1) when the flag is displayed—

(A) individuals in uniform should give the military salute at the first note of the anthem and maintain that position until the last note;

(B) members of the Armed Forces and veterans who are present but not in uniform may render the military salute in the manner provided for individuals in uniform; and

(C) all other persons present should face the flag and stand at attention with their right hand over the heart, and men not in uniform, if applicable, should remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart; and

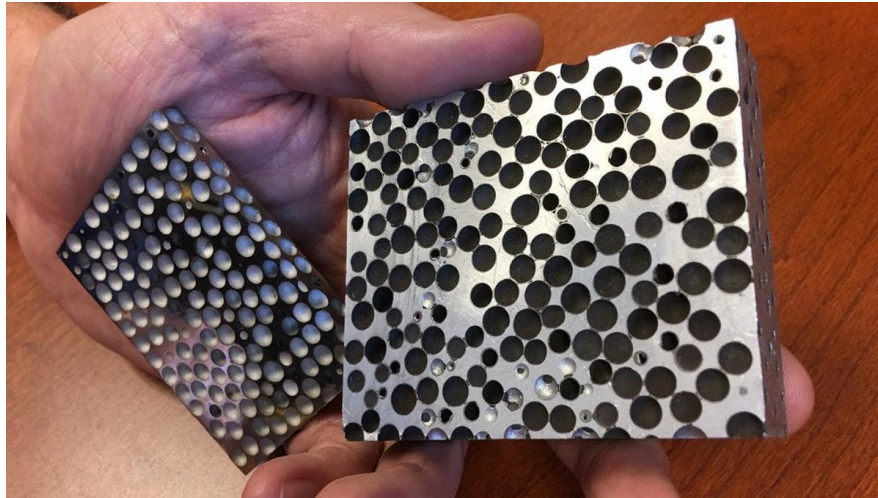
· (2) when the flag is not displayed, all present should face toward the music and act in the same manner they would if the flag were displayed.

[Source: Title 36, Subtitle 1, Part A section 301 of the US Code | September 2017 ++]

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## Metal Foam Armor ► New Material Will Stop Bullets

Foam might not seem a likely way to stop a bullet, but a North Carolina researcher has developed a composite metal foam that shatters bullets on contact. Afsaneh Rabiei, an engineer at North Carolina State University, began researching how to improve metal foam, or metal with gas-filled pores. Rabiei was told that while metal foams may be good for blasts, they don't protect against ballistics. She created a new material that combined metal foam with a metal matrix composite to perform better against ballistics. "It works like a heavy-duty bubble wrap," Rabiei told Army Times. "The bubbles inside can squeeze down and provide protection." The composite material creates a stronger defense and allows multiple uses of the material.



The spheres inside the composite metal foam absorb the energy of a bullet

Dr. Marc Portanova, from the Army's Aviation Applied Technology Directorate, learned about Rabiei's creation and recognized its potential. Portanova said that when the military develops armor, it compares the armor's performance against that of steel. A 7.62mm rifle round will go through 3 inches of steel, so a catcher material is put behind the steel, he said. "When the bullet hits the ceramic, it stops and absorbs the energy," Portanova said. "The problem is you can only shoot it once because then it's cracked." Composite metal foam, however, has a bunch of hollow spheres inside. When struck with a bullet, the spheres are crushed, similar to bubble wrap. Because of its resilience, you can hit it numerous times, Portanova said.

Researchers at the directorate have helped make the material lighter and also stop bigger threats. "This material will probably find a home on a ground vehicle before aviation," Portanova said. "It would only be slightly more expensive and will weight half or one-third of what they're hanging on the side of a Humvee." Rabiei said her passion is to help troops going to Iraq and Afghanistan. "When I got funding, I used it all to explore this for armor," she said. "If I see one person walk out of a deadly situation because of my material, I think I have left my mark." [Source: ArmyTimes | Charlsy Panzino | September 19, 2017 ++]

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## Continuing Resolution Update 02 ► BCA & 2018 NDAA On Collision Course

The congressional budget process is headed for "a complete meltdown" in December, and the most likely outcome is a year-long Continuing Resolution, the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee believes. The government is already on a three-month CR until December, which is bad enough, said a visibly frustrated Rep.

Adam Smith, but a full-year CR would be “borderline legislative malpractice, particularly for the Department of Defense.”

Traditionally used as short-term stopgaps, CRs effectively set government on autopilot at last year’s spending levels, with minimal ability to start, stop, or modify programs to reflect changing needs. The situation is so dire it’s generating bipartisanship. Rep. Smith agreed with HASC chairman Mac Thornberry and Senate Armed Services chairman John McCain that years of CRs and Budget Control Act caps have “undeniably” contributed to training cutbacks, maintenance shortfalls, and ultimately fatal accidents like those that have killed 42 servicemembers just this summer.

What’s the budget train wreck, according to Smith? The strong Republican majority in the House has passed a defense bill that goes \$72 billion over the maximum allowed by the 2011 Budget Control Act. That would trigger the automatic cuts called sequestration unless the BCA is amended, as it has been in the past. But the slim GOP majority in the Senate needs Democratic votes to amend the BCA, and the Dems won’t deal unless non-defense spending rises as much as defense – which is anathema to Republican hardliners in the House. Unless House Speaker Paul Ryan is willing to wage civil war within his caucus, the result will be deadlock. Deadlock on the regular appropriations process means the only alternatives are passing a Continuing Resolution or shutting the government down – indefinitely.

“Do you understand just how fricking stupid that is?” Smith asked, having stopped at one point in his talk to remind himself not to swear on camera. “It is mind boggling....There is no coming back from this.... What are they going to do in December?” More and more defense expenses are being labeled as emergency, off-budget “Overseas Contingency Operations” (OCO) funds for the wars in Afghanistan (above) and Iraq.

Smith did admit one last alternative: shifting all the extra money from the regular defense budget to the off-budget war funds – Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) – which are exempt from the Budget Control Act caps. There’s even precedent, because Smith’s own chairman, Mac Thornberry, already moved billions into OCO in the HASC’s own bill earlier this year. But such a fiscal sleight of hand would be bad governance and “hypocritical,” Smith said.

Admittedly, Smith isn’t a member of the House leadership or the House Appropriations Committee, which will negotiate the final numbers with the Senate. He’s the top Democrat on the HASC, which authorizes spending but can’t actually write anyone a check (i.e. appropriate). Smith is a veteran of 20 years on the usually bipartisan Armed Services Committee, however. He’s also one of the most candid – not to mention snarky – members of Congress on budget matters. Smith’s remarks this morning were blunt and depressing even for him.

“Here’s how bad it is — and I can’t believe people haven’t written more about this,” Smith said. “We are headed towards a complete meltdown at the end of this year.” “I always search for optimism in the world but... it’s really worse than it looks when it comes to the budget,” Smith said. People praise last week’s unexpected bargain – which blindsided Ryan and other GOP leaders – by saying “oh we got a three-month deal and the Democrats talked to Trump and isn’t that great,” Smith said in a mocking voice. In fact, he said, all that deal means is “we have been driving towards the edge of a cliff and last week we decided to slow down to 30 miles an hour from 50.”

Smith had thought, he said, that “Congress would not be so stupid as to pass appropriations bills that exceeded the budget caps without also changing the Budget Control Act so those excesses wouldn’t automatically be cut back. I underestimated the stupidity of Congress.” “It isn’t stupidity,” he corrected himself at once. “I wish it was stupidity. On a certain level, stupidity can be fixed.” Instead, “it was craven politics,” Smith said. “The reason Republicans passed the defense bill that exceeded the budget caps by \$72 billion and didn’t change the Budget Control Act (is that) they wanted to be able to say as Republicans, ‘we’re tough on defense, we’re spending money on defense,’ and they also wanted to be able to say, ‘we are fiscally responsible, we are sticking to the budget caps.’”

The problem is that if you raise defense, you have to break the caps, and if you don’t break the caps, you can’t raise defense. “It has to add up,” Smith fumed. (He’s nearly as scathing about his fellow Democrats, who want to



raise non-defense spending without paying for it). With the current Continuing Resolution expiring 8 DEC, we're headed for a collision between the defense budget and the budget caps with no clear way out. "They don't have the first fricking clue what they're going to do," Smith said of the GOP leaders. "They just keep hoping to get through the day" – but there are only 86 days left before the CR expires and we hit the wall.

Even if Congress and the White House do find a way to once again bypass the Budget Control Act – even if they repeal the BCA altogether – that's just beginning to crawl out of the fiscal pit we've dug for ourselves, Smith said. "Budget caps or no budget caps, we're \$20 trillion dollars in debt. We are running a deficit of \$700 billion, and it is projected to go up, not down," he said. "Getting rid of budget caps does not make money magically appear." The inverse of the untamed and growing debt is an untamed and growing appetite for defense spending. If you added all the stated needs and official priorities together, Smith estimated, "you'd have to have an \$800 billion a year defense budget to make that work."

Smith argues against spending to replace the aging nuclear-tipped Air-Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM). Smith personally thinks we can get a lot more bang for our current defense buck, especially if we close some military bases and cancel some nuclear weapons (both highly controversial), although there are no easy cuts. But no one really knows the full cost of our current strategy, to the extent we have one. One briefer from the Pentagon's influential and secretive Office of Net Assessment told Smith that "we do not have the money to fund the strategy that we put in place in 2012," the congressman recalled. "And I said, 'how much would you need?'.... He had no idea."

The same inability – or unwillingness – to count the costs afflicts every area of federal spending, from defense to entitlements to domestic programs, said Smith, who argues for raising taxes. "We've been able to fool ourselves into running campaigns where we basically lie to the American people" by making promises that can't possibly add up, he said. "There is nothing Congress that can vote for that won't be hated by the American public, because anything that we vote for cannot balance the budget, cut taxes, and increase spending. It won't because it's impossible."

In the long term, this refusal to face facts undermines the economy. In the shorter term, Smith said, as training, maintenance, and basic safety get shortchanged, "the men and women who serve in the military are going to be suffering." [Source: Breaking Defense | Sydney J. Freedber | September 13, 2017 ++]

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## **Agent Orange Forgotten Victims ► Vietnamese People**

Phan Thanh Hung Duc, 20, lies immobile and silent, his midsection covered haphazardly by a white shirt with an ornate Cambodian temple design. His mouth is agape and his chest thrusts upward, his hands and feet locked in gnarled deformity. He appears to be frozen in agony. He is one of the thousands of Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange. Pham Thi Phuong Khanh, 21, is another such patient. She quietly pulls a towel over her face as a visitor to the Peace Village ward in Tu Du Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City, starts to take a picture of her enlarged, hydrocephalic head. Like Mr. Hung Duc, Ms. Khanh is believed to be a victim of Operation Ranch Hand, the United States military's effort during the Vietnam War to deprive the enemy of cover and food by spraying defoliants. Perhaps Ms. Khanh does not want strangers to stare at her. Perhaps she feels ashamed. But if she does feel shame, why is it that those who should do not?

The history of Agent Orange and its effects on the Vietnamese people, as well as American soldiers, should shame Americans. Fifty years ago, in 1967, the United States sprayed 5.1 million gallons of herbicides with the toxic chemical dioxin across Vietnam, a single-year record for the decade-long campaign to defoliate the countryside. It was done without regard to dioxin's effect on human beings or its virulent and long afterlife. Agent Orange was simply one of several herbicides used, but it has become the most infamous.



**Phan Thanh Hung Duc, 20, a patient at the Tu Du Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, last October.**

Chemical companies making Agent Orange opted for maximum return despite in-house memos that a safer product could be made for a slight reduction in profits. American soldiers were among the unintended victims of this decision: Unwarned, they used the empty 55-gallon drums for makeshift showers. Over the years, there have been both American and Vietnamese plaintiffs in Agent Orange court cases in the United States. Possibly the only one that could be considered a victory for the plaintiffs was an out-of-court settlement of \$180 million in the 1980s for about 50,000 American veterans. Many more never benefited from the case because their illnesses did not show up for years.

These American veterans have fought for decades to get medical treatment and compensation for birth defects and ailments presumed to be Agent Orange-related diseases. Records from Agent Orange lawsuits indicate that both the military and the chemical companies involved were well aware, early on, of the dangers of dioxin, so much so that our government terminated the program three years before the war's end. Our government has acknowledged some of its responsibility to its veterans. In 2010, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki added three Agent Orange-related diseases to the V.A.'s compensation list, and Congress allocated \$13.3 billion to cover the costs. An enterprising Senate aide slipped in \$12 million for Agent Orange relief in Vietnam, only a small portion of which was for health. These disparities in funding are unconscionable, as is the American government's illogical refusal to acknowledge that Agent Orange has caused the same damage to the Vietnamese as it has to Americans.

Pham Van Truc is another Vietnamese victim of Agent Orange. With his crippled, birdlike limbs and patches of scaly skin, he had as his only blessing, it seemed, exceptionally devoted parents who cared for him, night and day, all 20 years of his life and who were devastated when he died in March. His mother, Nguyen Thi May, 66, had pleaded for a solution to just one of Mr. Truc's afflictions, such as testicles that had not descended or the attendant pain unrelieved by ineffective medicines. In regards to cases like this, our government's one concession to responsibility for the ravages of Agent Orange is environmental remediation. Over \$100 million has been allocated to clean up the Da Nang airport, one of 28 "hot spots" for defoliant contamination in Vietnam. By contrast, only \$20 million has been allocated for victims.

The most common American bureaucratic excuse for this disparity is that a definitive connection between Agent Orange and the illnesses has not yet been made. But the evidence is overwhelming: Vietnamese soldiers, from both sides, with perfectly healthy children before going to fight, came home and sired offspring with deformities and horrific illnesses; villages repeatedly sprayed have exceptionally high birth-deformity rates; and our own Department of Veterans Affairs now lists 14 illnesses presumed to be related to Agent Orange.

The reason for official American reluctance is not lack of scientific evidence. The problem is the distance between American policy makers and the Vietnamese people. Vietnamese victims are too far removed from the American public, and too reminiscent of an unpopular war. Agent Orange victims are also among the most visually disturbing consequences of the Vietnam War. Few who look at photographer Philip Jones Griffiths's powerful book

of photographs “Agent Orange: ‘Collateral Damage’ in Vietnam” have the stomach to do so twice. It is easier to keep one’s distance, to not look at all.

The reason for American reluctance to look or act is not even about money, as one might suspect. A solution for the Vietnamese would cost what one congressional aide wryly referred to as “decimal dust,” or, by one estimate, \$35 million a year for 10 years. Given a Vietnamese Red Cross estimate of three million victims, the amount of aid is approximately \$12 a year per victim and a decade of help — merely one-fifth the time that has elapsed since Operation Ranch Hand reached its apex in 1967. Such funding would provide prostheses, wheelchairs and orthopedic surgery; speech therapy and rehabilitation; basic feeding, bathing and sleeping equipment; an enhanced case management system and medical staff training; and stipends to families providing full-time care.

That \$350 million is an inconsequential amount compared to what it cost to produce, transport and deploy the herbicides in the first place. But the legacy of Agent Orange is not about science or economics. It’s about human decency. Americans created Agent Orange here in a laboratory, shipped it overseas and dumped it with abandon, where it continues to shatter thousands of people’s lives. Denying the reality of the need can only take an unacceptable toll here in the United States. [Source: New York Times | Vietnam '67 Viet Thanh Nguyen And Richard Hughes | September 15,2017 ++]



Planes spraying Agent Orange 20 miles southeast of Saigon in 1970.

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## **Teacher of The Year ► Martha Cothren | A Lesson in Freedom**

In September of 2005, on the first day of school, Martha Cothren, a Social studies teacher at Robinson High School in Little Rock, did something not to be forgotten. On the first day of school, with the permission of the school superintendent, the principal and the building supervisor, she removed all of the desks in her classroom. When the first period kids entered the room they discovered that there were no desks. ‘Cothren, where are our desks?’ She replied, ‘You can’t have a desk until you tell me how you earn the right to sit at a desk.’ They thought, ‘Well, maybe it’s our grades.’ ‘No,’ she said. ‘Maybe it’s our behavior.’ She told them, ‘No, it’s not even your behavior.’

And so, they came and went, the first period, second period, third period. Still no desks in the classroom. Kids called their parents to tell them what was happening and by early afternoon television news crews had started gathering at the school to report about this crazy teacher who had taken all the desks out of her room. The final period of the day came and as the puzzled students found seats on the floor of the desk-less classroom. Martha

Cothren said, "Throughout the day, no one has been able to tell me just what he or she has done to earn the right to sit at the desks that are ordinarily found in this classroom. Now I am going to tell you.

At this point, Martha Cothren went over to the door of her classroom and opened it. Twenty-seven (27) U.S. Veterans, all in uniform, walked into that classroom, each one carrying a school desk. The Vets began placing the school desks in rows, and then they would walk over and stand alongside the wall. By the time the last soldier had set the final desk in place those kids started to understand, perhaps for the first time in their lives, just how the right to sit at those desks had been earned.

Martha said, 'You didn't earn the right to sit at these desks. These heroes did it for you. They placed the desks here for you. They went halfway around the world, giving up their education and interrupting their careers and families so you could have the freedom you have. Now, it's up to you to sit in them. It is your responsibility to learn, to be good students, to be good citizens. They paid the price so that you could have the freedom to get an education. Don't ever forget it.'

This teacher was awarded the Veterans of Foreign Wars Teacher of the Year for the State of Arkansas in 2006. She is the daughter of a WWII POW. Let us always remember the men and women of our military and the rights they have won for us. Keep in mind that a veteran is someone who, at one point in their life, wrote a blank check made payable to the USA for any amount, up to and including their life. By the way, this is a true story which was told by former Governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee in his 2 March 2007 address to the Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington, DC. [Source: <http://www.snopes.com/glurge/nodesks.asp> | September 16, 2017 ++]

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## **Opioid Addiction Update 01 ► 600 People A Week Die in U.S.**

The United States is grappling with one of its worst-ever drug crises. More than six hundred people a week die from opioid-related overdoses, and some experts say the death toll may not peak for years. Meanwhile, millions more Americans suffer from opioid addiction. The crisis has reached such a scale that, beyond the risks it poses to public health, it is becoming a drag on the economy and a threat to national security. Analysts say the problem started with the overprescription of legal pain medications, like oxycodone, but note that it has intensified in recent years with an influx of cheap heroin and synthetic opioids, like fentanyl, supplied by foreign-based drug cartels.

In recent years, the U.S. government has ramped up efforts to cut both the foreign and domestic supply of opioids, limiting the number of prescriptions in the United States while providing counternarcotics assistance to countries including Mexico and China. Meanwhile, federal and state officials have attempted to reduce demand by focusing less on punishing drug users and more on treating them. Other countries where opioid use has also spiked, such as Canada and Australia, are experimenting with different policies.

**What drugs are contributing to the crisis?** Opioids, a class of drugs derived from the opium poppy plant, can be divided into two broad categories: legally manufactured medications and illicit narcotics. Opioid medications, including oxycodone, hydrocodone, and morphine, are commonly prescribed to treat pain, while methadone is primarily used in addiction treatment centers to reduce patients' dependence on opioids. Opioids gained popularity among doctors in the 1990s for treating patients who had undergone surgery or cancer treatment, but in the last fifteen years physicians have increasingly prescribed them for chronic conditions, such as back or joint pain, despite concerns about their safety and effectiveness.

Heroin has for decades been the most commonly used illegal opioid. Over the last several years the heroin supply in the United States has soared, and the drug can now be obtained for a third of the price it was in the early 1990s. People in the last few years have increasingly turned to synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, which is especially lethal. Some law enforcement officials have labeled the drug "manufactured death" because it is cheaper and up to

fifty times more potent than heroin. Fentanyl-related deaths are largely caused by the drug's illegal use, though it can also be prescribed as a painkiller. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that heroin and fentanyl are most often used in combination with other drugs, such as cocaine, or alcohol, which increases the risk of overdose.

**What is the scale of the epidemic?** Overdose deaths involving opioids have quadrupled since 1999. In 2015, the most recent year for which data is available, opioid overdoses killed more than thirty-three thousand people, or nearly five times the number of U.S. military service members killed in the post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many health experts attribute the rising death toll to what they say has been years of overprescribing by physicians. Doctors began prescribing more opioids amid a growing concern that pain was going undertreated, and also because pharmaceutical companies began marketing them more aggressively while claiming they posed little risk. Health-care providers have reported feeling pressure to prescribe opioid medications rather than alternatives, such as physical therapy or acupuncture, because patients request them and other treatments are often more costly or less accessible.

Opioid-related deaths have grown in lockstep with the volume of opioids prescribed. A spike in the use of illegal opioids in the United States followed the rise in prescriptions, as many users turn to heroin and other illegal drugs once they can no longer obtain enough of their prescribed drug to keep pace with what may be a developing addiction. “We didn’t develop an opioid epidemic until there was a huge surplus of opioids, which started with pharmaceutical drugs distributed legally,” says New York Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan.

**What are the demographics of the opioid crisis?** The vast majority of those who overdose on opioids are non-Hispanic white Americans, who make up more than 80 percent of the annual total. Non-Hispanic black Americans and Hispanic Americans each account for about 10 percent of cases. Economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton have argued that the rise in what they call “deaths of despair,” which include drug overdoses, particularly among white Americans without college degrees, are primarily the result of wages stagnating over the last four decades and a decline in available jobs. U.S. military veterans, many of whom suffer from chronic pain as a result of their service, account for a disproportionately high number of opioid-related deaths. Veterans are twice as likely as the general population to die from an opioid overdose, according to a study commissioned by the National Institutes of Health.

**What have been the socioeconomic consequences?** The opioid epidemic is having devastating consequences on public health, causing high rates of hepatitis C, HIV, and other diseases, mainly due to shared syringes. Meanwhile, mothers may pass an opioid dependency on to their children if they use while pregnant. Incidences of neonatal abstinence syndrome almost quadrupled from 2000 to 2012. The opioid crisis may also have contributed to an uptick in the number of children in foster care.

Opioids have also begun to take a toll on the economy. Testifying before the U.S. Senate, Federal Reserve chief Janet Yellen linked the opioid epidemic to declining labor-force participation among “prime-age workers.” Princeton University economist Alan Krueger says it could account for 20 percent of the decline in participation among men and 25 percent among women from 1999 to 2015. As one example of this, a boiler manufacturing company in Ohio, the state with the second-largest number of opioid-related deaths, reported that at least a quarter of its job applicants failed drug tests. The firm says the workforce shortage costs it roughly \$800,000 in orders a year, which end up going to foreign competitors.

**Where are the heroin and fentanyl coming from?** The opioid crisis has also become a national security concern. Most of the heroin coming into the United States is cultivated on poppy farms in Mexico, with eight cartels controlling production and operating distribution hubs in major U.S. cities. Mexican cartels, which the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has called the “greatest criminal drug threat to the United States,” typically smuggle narcotics across the U.S. southwest border in passenger vehicles or tractor trailers. Large quantities of heroin are also produced in South American countries, particularly Colombia, and trafficked to the United States by air and sea. Although most of the world’s heroin comes from Afghanistan, only a small portion of the U.S. supply is produced there.



Most fentanyl coming to the United States is produced in China, U.S. officials say, and commonly transited through Mexico. Chinese authorities “have struggled to adequately regulate thousands of chemical and pharmaceutical facilities operating legally and illegally in the country,” says a 2017 report [PDF] issued by a congressionally mandated commission.

**What has the United States done to restrict foreign narcotics?** Over the past decade, the United States has provided Mexico with nearly \$3 billion in counternarcotics aid, including for police and judicial reforms, in a program known as the Merida Initiative. The initiative, which U.S. officials say led to the capture of some top cartel leaders, including Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman, has continued under the administration of President Donald J. Trump, though funding has declined in recent years. Through a similar partnership with Colombia, the United States has provided almost \$10 billion since 2000; it effectively drew to a close following the end to civil conflict there in 2016.

The DEA, the leading U.S. agency involved in counternarcotics, has also coordinated efforts with China, which has designated more than one hundred synthetic drugs as controlled substances. Beijing banned production of four fentanyl variations in 2017, although some analysts fear these moves will only spur clandestine labs to create new alternatives. Recent U.S. administrations have also increased the number of border patrol agents to approximately twenty thousand. Heroin seizures and trafficking arrests more than doubled [PDF] between 2010 and 2015, mostly near the southwestern border. In his first weeks in office, President Trump issued executive orders directing the construction of a southern border wall and additional increases to the number of border patrol agents. Some analysts say a wall would do little to curb drug flows, however, as most illicit drugs are smuggled through ports of entry.

**What are some efforts to restrict domestic supply?** Federal agencies, state governments, insurance providers, and physicians all influence the supply of opioid medications. Federal regulators have introduced new limits on opioid prescriptions, reducing the total nationwide by 18 percent from their 2010 peak to 2015, according to the CDC. The agency issued guidelines in March 2016 advising physicians not to prescribe opioids as a first-line therapy. The DEA reduced production quotas for pharmaceutical manufacturers by at least 25 percent that year for opioids categorized as Schedule II drugs, or ones that are currently accepted for medical use but carry high risk of misuse; these include oxycodone, fentanyl, and morphine. The agency has proposed additional cuts for 2018.

U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced in August 2017 that the Justice Department will hire a dozen attorneys to investigate health-care providers suspected of dispensing prescription opioids for nonmedical use. Additionally, lawmakers in more than fifteen states have passed or are considering legislation limiting opioid prescriptions since the start of 2016. States including Mississippi, Ohio, and Oklahoma, as well as dozens of cities, are suing pharmaceutical companies, alleging they overstated the benefits of prescription opioids and concealed the risks.

**What is the United States doing to reduce demand?** Previous federal antidrug campaigns relied on incarceration to deter drug use and trafficking but have been widely criticized for failing to keep people from cycling in and out of prison and for disproportionately targeting African Americans. In recent years, federal and state officials have shifted toward prevention and treatment. President Barack Obama reduced prison sentences for hundreds of nonviolent drug offenders during his tenure. However, he failed to secure legislation that would have eliminated mandatory minimum sentences for federal drug crimes. His administration also established hundreds of new drug courts, which proponents say are a more effective alternative to incarceration. Drug courts, the first of which was launched in 1989, under the George H.W. Bush administration, provide nonviolent offenders an alternative to the criminal-justice system that involves monitoring and rehabilitation services rather than prison time.

In 2016, President Obama signed legislation authorizing more than \$1 billion in funding, largely in the form of state grants, to expand opioid treatment and prevention programs, as well as make the drug naloxone, which can counteract opioid overdoses in emergencies, more readily available. Meanwhile, some city and local governments have launched what are known as harm-reduction programs, which focus on limiting virus transmission and



overdoses through the promotion of safer drug use. Critics of such programs argue that decriminalization would lead to higher rates of drug use.

In August 2017, President Trump directed administration officials to use “all appropriate emergency and other authorities” to respond to the epidemic, a move that will free up emergency aid for federal and state health officials to increase access to treatment. Meanwhile, a presidential commission has recommended other policies [PDF] to combat the crisis. Many working on the issue believe the government should direct more resources toward educating the public about risks. “I don’t think we’ve done enough in terms of informing people about the dangers—about the nexus between opioid medication and heroin and illicit drugs,” says Brennan. “If we did the kind of information campaign that was so successful with tobacco, I think we could see terrific results.”

### **How are other countries dealing with opioid addiction?**

The Netherlands. The Netherlands permits the sale and use of small amounts of cannabis to steer users away from so-called hard drugs [PDF], such as cocaine and heroin, and has implemented harm-reduction policies. In the 1990s the country began offering heroin at no cost, and the rate of high-risk or so-called problem use has halved from 2002 to some fourteen thousand in 2012 [PDF], according to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. Proponents of decriminalization point to the Netherlands for evidence that these policies work, though critics claim they have not curbed organized crime.

Canada. Amid a growing opioid crisis of its own, Canada has authorized the opening of supervised consumption sites and partnered with China to curb fentanyl flows into the country, but the health ministry says “huge gaps” remain in the government’s ability to track and respond to the problem. A government report on opioid-related deaths in 2016—there were some 2,500—was the first attempt at a nationwide tally. Meanwhile, British Columbia and Alberta, two of Canada’s most populous provinces, have declared a public health emergency and crisis, respectively, boosting funding for addiction treatment and increasing access to naloxone.

Australia. Heroin use in Australia declined following an abrupt shortage of the drug in 2000, but the country has seen a sharp increase in the use of prescription opioids, now the cause of more than two-thirds of opioid-related deaths there. In 2012, the health ministry announced it would launch a nationwide electronic system already being used in Tasmania to monitor opioid prescriptions, but it has not yet been rolled out. The government is expected to ban over-the-counter painkillers containing codeine starting in 2018, noting that the move is a “very broad-brush approach” to the issue.

[Source: Council on Foreign Relation | Claire Felter | September 14, 2017 ++]

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## **U.S. Embassy Cuba ► Closure Under Evaluation | Health Incidents**

The Trump administration is considering closing the recently reopened US Embassy in Havana following a string of unexplained incidents harming the health of American diplomats in Cuba, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on 17 SEP.. “We have it under evaluation,” Tillerson said. “It’s a very serious issue with respect to the harm that certain individuals have suffered. We’ve brought some of those people home. It’s under review.” Tillerson’s comments were the strongest indication to date that the US might mount a major diplomatic response, potentially jeopardizing the historic restart of relations between the US and Cuba. The two former foes reopened embassies in Washington and Havana in 2015 after roughly a half-century of estrangement.

Of the 21 medically confirmed US victims, some have permanent hearing loss or concussions while others have suffered nausea, headaches and ear-ringing. Some are struggling with concentration or common word recall, the Associated Press has reported. Some victims felt vibrations or heard loud sounds mysteriously audible in only parts of rooms, leading investigators to consider a potential “sonic attack”. Others heard nothing but later developed

symptoms. Tillerson once called the events “health attacks” but the state department has since used the term “incidents” while emphasizing the US still does not know what has occurred. Cuba has denied any involvement or responsibility but stressed it is eager to help the US resolve the matter.

The US has said the number of Americans affected could grow as more cases are potentially detected. The last reported incident was on 21 AUG, according to a US official briefed on the matter but not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and requested anonymity. Tillerson spoke on CBS’ Face the Nation as world leaders and top diplomats descended on New York for annual United Nations General Assembly meetings. Donald Trump will give his first speech on the major global platform this week. Cuba is also represented at the UN, but it is not expected Trump will meet with any Cuban leaders or officials during his visit.

The US has not identified either a culprit or a device. Investigators have explored the possibility of sonic waves, an electromagnetic weapon, or an advanced spying operation gone awry, US officials briefed on the probe told the AP. The US has not ruled out that a third country or a rogue faction of Cuba’s security services might be involved. Lawmakers have been raising alarm over the incidents, with some calling for the embassy to be closed. On Friday, five Republican senators wrote to Tillerson urging him to not only shutter the embassy, but also kick all Cuban diplomats out of the US – a move that would have dramatic diplomatic implications “Cuba’s neglect of its duty to protect our diplomats and their families cannot go unchallenged,” said the lawmakers, who included Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, a prominent Cuban-American, and the No2 Senate Republican, John Cornyn of Texas.

The incidents have frightened Havana’s tight-knit diplomatic community, raising concerns about the potential scope. At least one other country, France, has tested embassy staff for potential sonic-induced injuries, the AP has reported. [

Source: Associated Press | September 17, 2017 ++]

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## Where There's a Will, There's a Way ► 01



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## DPRK Nuclear Weapons Update 17 ► Pacific Ocean Test | Logical, Terrifying

Detonating a nuclear-tipped missile over the Pacific Ocean would be a logical final step by North Korea to prove the success of its weapons program but would be extremely provocative and carry huge risks, arms control experts said on 22 SEP. North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho suggested leader Kim Jong Un was considering testing “an unprecedented scale hydrogen bomb” over the Pacific in response to U.S. President Donald Trump’s threat at the United Nations to “totally destroy” the country.

- “It may mean North Korea will fire a warhead-tipped (intermediate range) Hwasong-12 or Hwasong-14 intercontinental ballistic missile and blow it up a few hundred kilometers above the Pacific Ocean,” said Yang Uk, a senior researcher at the Korea Defence and Security Forum in Seoul.
- “They may be bluffing, but there is a need for them to test their combined missile-bomb capability. They could have already prepared the plan and are now trying to use Trump’s remarks as an excuse to make it happen,” said Yang.

Such an atmospheric test would be the first globally since China detonated a device in 1980, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency. Tests of nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles are rarer still. The United States’ only test of an operational ballistic missile with a live warhead was fired from submarine far out in the Pacific Ocean in 1962. China was widely condemned for a similar test with a missile that exploded over its Lop Nur test site in the country’s west in 1966.

North Korea’s six nuclear tests to date have all been underground, the most recent earlier this month by far its largest. “We have to assume they *could* do it, but it is exceedingly provocative,” said Vipin Narang, an associate professor of political science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “To put a live nuclear warhead on a missile that’s only been tested a handful of times, overflying potentially populated centers. If it...doesn’t go exactly as planned...it could be a world changing event.” North Korea has fired two ballistic missiles over Japan’s north Hokkaido region in the past month as part of a series of tests that experts say have illustrated unexpectedly rapid advances. “They said Pacific Ocean, which pretty much means firing a missile over Japan,” said Melissa Hanham, a senior research associate at the U.S.-based Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, California. “They want to shut us all up for doubting they could build it.”

While a missile would be the most ideal means of delivery, it is also possible to put a bomb on a ship and detonate on the surface of the ocean or in the sea, the experts said. Either way, **the radioactive fallout could be significant**, as well as the diplomatic backlash from around the world. North Korea’s recent missile launches over Japan especially drew stern rebukes from Tokyo and the international community. Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga called Pyongyang’s remarks and behavior “completely unacceptable”. Narang said a test high enough over the ocean would limit the radioactive fallout but risks included damage from an electro-magnetic pulse, something Pyongyang has hinted it might employ on an attack on the United States or its allies. “If it doesn’t go exactly as planned and the detonation occurs at a lower altitude we could see some EMP-like effects for anything in the area. A lot of dead fish too.”

Pyongyang has launched dozens of missiles this year as it spurs a program aimed at mastering a nuclear-tipped missile that can strike the United States, in addition to its 3 SEP nuclear test. If Kim’s threat materializes, it will be a “tipping point” for China, and may prompt many other countries to demand an “end to the regime,” said David Albright, founder of the non-profit Institute for Science and International Security in Washington. “No one has tested above ground for decades and the radioactive fallout could be terrifying to many,” Albright said.

Other experts said such an atmospheric nuclear test is unlikely for now due to its substantial technical and diplomatic risks. Joshua Pollack, editor of the Washington-based Nonproliferation Review, said it would be an “end-to-end demo of everything.” “But I would be surprised if this were their very next move. They have yet to test an ICBM at full range into the Pacific,” said Pollack. “That will probably come first.” [Source: Reuters | Hyonhee Shin & Linda Sieg | September 22, 2017 ++]

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## **DPRK~US War Update 01 ► War of Words Escalates**

The war of words between the U.S. and North Korea escalated 25 SEP, as North Korean state media announced that a parliamentary committee had sent an open letter to the parliaments of other countries warning that recent comments by U.S. President Donald Trump had raised the chances of nuclear war. The letter was sent 24 SEP by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly, according to the Korean Central News Agency.

At the United Nations General Assembly on 23 SEP, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho has warned that his country's targeting of the U.S. mainland with its rockets was inevitable after a running war of words between Trump and North Korea supreme leader Kim Jong Un. Ri called Trump "a mentally deranged person full of megalomania and complacency" who is trying to turn the United Nations into a "gangsters' nest." "President Evil' is holding the seat of the U.S. President," Ri said, warning that his country was "finally only a few steps away from the final gate of completion of the state nuclear force."

National leaders and senior representatives have fought a war of words over North Korea's missile and nuclear development programs this month, amid increasingly bellicose rhetoric on the subject at the latest United Nations General Assembly session. Trump had earlier implied the U.S. could launch military attacks against North Korea, prompting a harsh condemnation from Ri. Kim, who did not attend the session, also denounced Trump in a statement issued from Pyongyang. Ri said sanctions would have no effect on Pyongyang's resolve to develop its nuclear weapons, with the ultimate goal being "balance of power with the U.S." He said Trump's actions constituted "an irreversible mistake of making our rockets' visit to the entire U.S. mainland inevitable all the more."



**Kim Jong Un, left, and Donald Trump have been trading increasingly strong insults and threats over recent weeks**

In a statement released 21 SEP, and reported by the state-run Korean Central News Agency, Kim said his country would carefully "consider ... a corresponding, highest level of hardline countermeasure in history" against the U.S. This was the first time a government statement has been issued under Kim's name. In the statement, Kim claimed that Trump has "denied the existence of, and insulted, me and my country ... and made ... declaration of a war..." "On behalf of [our] dignity and honor...and of my own, I will make the man holding the prerogative of the supreme command in the U.S. pay dearly [for his rude, absurd remarks]," it continued. Referring to the "hardline countermeasure" mentioned in Kim's statement, Ri told the press in New York on 21 SEP that it may allude to a hydrogen bomb test over the Pacific Ocean.

What sparked the ire of North Korea's leadership was the content of a speech Trump made at the UN on 19 SEP. "The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea," Trump told the leaders, ministers and envoys of 193 countries gathered



in New York for the annual General Assembly meeting. Trump was unreserved in his contempt for Kim, who he referred to as "rocket man ... on a suicide mission for himself and his regime." A day earlier, U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis said his country had military options for dealing with North Korea that wouldn't put South Korea's capital of Seoul at risk. "Yes, there are. But I will not go into details," Mattis told reporters at the Pentagon.

On 20 SEP, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe took the rostrum in the UN General Assembly, where he devoted most of his 16 minute speech to criticizing North Korea and restating Japan's cooperation with the U.S. over the issue. Abe pointed out the fact that North Korea's ballistic missiles successively flew over Japan in August and September. "The gravity of this threat is unprecedented. It is indisputably a matter of urgency," he said. Abe also appealed for unity in the international community to increase pressure on North Korea.

South Korea, which seemed to come into line with Japan and the U.S. in stepping up pressure on North Korea, decided on 21 SEP to provide financial assistance worth \$8 million to North Korea through UN agencies. The country will provide \$3.5 million to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and \$4.5 million to the World Food Programme, according to South Korea's Ministry of Unification. This appears to have given Washington the impression that South Korea's stance toward the North is not fixed, at a time when the U.N. Security Council is strengthening economic sanctions against Pyongyang, and as missile and nuclear tests continue.

Japan, the U.S. and South Korea held a summit in New York on 21 SEP, where they confirmed that they would continue to cooperate closely over the North Korea issues. At the summit, Trump and Abe told South Korean President Moon Jae-in of their concerns about the decision on humanitarian support for North Korea with this timing and asked him to act cautiously. Trump said at the start of the summit that he would cut off sources of funds for North Korea, and announced that the U.S. would impose new economic sanctions on overseas companies, banks and individuals that do business with North Korea. A new executive order has since given the U.S. Treasury Department to impose sanctions on organizations and individuals dealing with Pyongyang.

Moon, South Korea's president, told U.N. General Assembly that sanctions were needed to bring Pyongyang to the negotiating table, but that Seoul was not seeking to destroy North Korea. "All of our endeavors are to prevent war from breaking out and maintain peace," Moon said in his speech on 21 SEP. After Moon's speech, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov condemned Pyongyang's missile and nuclear "adventures" but warned "military hysteria is not just an impasse, it's a disaster." Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged North Korea not to go further in a "dangerous direction" with its nuclear program. "There is still hope for peace and we must not give up. Negotiation is the only way out ... Parties should meet each other half way, by addressing each other's legitimate concerns," Wang said.

Military tensions around the Korean Peninsula have risen. Hours before North Korean Foreign Minister Ri's remarks, a squadron of U.S. Air Force B-1B Lancer bombers and a fighter escort flew in international airspace over waters east of North Korea in a show of force. It was the farthest north of the demilitarized zone separating North and South Korea that any U.S. fighter jet or bomber has flown in the 21st century, the Pentagon said. The South Korean military plans to conduct joint drills with a U.S. carrier strike group in October. The U.S. forces are expected to successively dispatch B-1 bombers and the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan to areas near the Korean Peninsula. The aim would be to hold in check additional provocative acts North Korea might carry out around 10 OCT, the anniversary of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea.

Meanwhile, the Chinese and Russian navies commenced joint military exercises in the Sea of Japan, near the Korean Peninsula, and the Sea of Okhotsk on 18 SEP. The exercises were expected to continue until 26 SEP. China and Russia remain opposed to U.S. military operations against North Korea. U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said 24 SEP "all options are on the table" when it comes to dealing with the threat of nuclear weapons from North Korea. "The president doesn't want to be in a nuclear war and we will do everything we can to make sure that doesn't occur," Mnuchin said on ABC's "This Week." "On the other hand, the president will protect the American people and our allies." [Source: Nikkei Asian Review | Ariana King & Kazuki Kagaya | September 25, 2017 ++]

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## Garage Door Billboards ► Making Yours Stand Out (10)



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## Have You Heard? ► Marriage Lesson | Importance of Walking

Three friends married women from different parts of the world.....

The first man married a Filipino. He told her that she was to do the dishes and house cleaning.

It took a couple of days, but on the third day, he came home to see a clean house and dishes washed and put away.

The second man married a Thai. He gave his wife orders that she was to do all the cleaning, dishes and the cooking.

The first day he didn't see any results, but the next day he saw it was better. By the third day, he saw his house was clean, the dishes were done, and there was a huge dinner on the table.

The third man married an Italian girl. He ordered her to keep the house cleaned, dishes washed, lawn mowed, laundry washed, and hot meals on the table for every meal.

He said the first day he didn't see anything, the second day he didn't see anything either but by the third day, some of the swelling had gone down and he could see a little out of his left eye and his arm was healed enough so he could fix himself a sandwich and load the dishwasher. He still has some difficulty when he urinates.

-o-o-O-o-o-

### Importance of Walking

- Walking can add minutes to your life. This enables you at 85 years old to spend an additional 5 months in a nursing home at \$7000 per month.
- My grandpa started walking five miles a day when he was 60. Now he's 97 years old and we don't know where he is.
- I like long walks, especially when they are taken by people who annoy me.
- The only reason I would take up walking is so that I could hear heavy breathing again.
- I have to walk early in the morning before my brain figures out what I'm doing.
- I joined a health club last year and spent about 400 bucks. Haven't lost a pound. Apparently you have to go there.
- Every time I hear the dirty word 'exercise' I wash my mouth out with chocolate.
- The advantage of exercising every day is so when you die they'll say, 'Well, she looks good doesn't she?'



- If you are going to try cross-country skiing start with a small country.
- I know I got a lot of exercise the last few years just getting over the hill.
- Every time I start thinking too much about how I look I just find a Happy Hour to walk to and by the time I leave I look just fine.


We all get heavier as we get older because there's a lot more information in our heads. That's my story and I'm sticking to it

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<b>Glen Coffee</b>	<b>Colin Kaepernick</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Born in 1987.</li> <li>- Played for the San Francisco 49ers.</li> <li>- Drafted in the 3rd round of the NFL Draft.</li> <li>- Gave up millions of dollars and an NFL career to serve his country.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Born in 1987.</li> <li>- Plays for the San Francisco 49ers.</li> <li>- Drafted in the 3rd round of the NFL Draft.</li> <li>- Refused to stand for the National Anthem because the American flag "oppresses black people."</li> <li>- Makes \$19,000,000 per year.</li> </ul>
<b>Who's the real hero?</b>	

The taxpayers are sending congressmen on expensive trips abroad. It might be worth it except they keep coming back.

-Will Rogers



OTHER 99%



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Lt. James (EMO) Tichacek, USN (Ret) Tel: (858) 842-1111 Email: [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net)

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***RAO Baguio Director:***

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

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