

RAO

BULLETIN

1 April 2018

PDF Edition



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Space Force ► Trump's Comment Raises Issue Again

A day after U.S. President Donald Trump proposed the creation of a separate military 'space force,' top Air Force leaders who previously opposed such an idea downplayed the apparent disconnect. Saying his National Security

Strategy “recognizes that space is a war-fighting domain, just like the land, air and sea,” Trump said at a Marine Corps base in San Diego, California, on 13 MAR that he’s considering “a space force” that would be the equivalent of the Air Force, Army and Navy. “You know, I was saying it the other day — because we are doing a tremendous amount of work in space — I said: ‘Maybe we need a new force,’ ” Trump said. “We’ll call it ‘Space Force.’ And I was not really serious. Then I said: ‘What a great idea.’ Maybe we’ll have to do that. That could happen. That could be the big breaking story.”

The remarks put the Air Force in an awkward spot. The White House, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Air Force leaders lobbied against the idea last year when it was proposed in the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act that a Space Corps be carved out of the Air Force. Ultimately the bill passed with language requiring the Pentagon to order an independent study on the issue, due by the end of this year. Opponents argue the measure would create unneeded bureaucracy, while proponents argue the Air Force’s lack of focus on its space mission has allowed Russia and China to pose a threat to America’s vital satellites. Two lead proponents — House Armed Services Strategic Forces Subcommittee Chairman Mike Rogers (R-AL) and ranking member Jim Cooper (D-TN) — have both vowed to continue to the fight.

Asked on 14 MAR outside a House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee hearing whether there is a disconnect within the administration and whether the Air Force is taking Trump’s remarks seriously, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein said: “We’re taking it very seriously, and I’m looking forward to this conversation. “I think the president stating openly that space is a war-fighting domain is exactly in line with what we’ve been thinking about, so this is really helpful to have a president and vice president really focused on space, like we are.” At Wednesday’s hearing on the Air Force’s 2019 budget request, panel Chairwoman Rep. Kay Granger (R-TX) reminded Goldfein and Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson of their opposition and asked them to explain. “I want to know your understanding of the current policy is, how you interpret the president’s remarks,” Granger said, asking that they “please reiterate your reasons for opposing this idea.”

Wilson directed lawmakers toward the 2019 defense budget request and left the part about her opposition unanswered. “As the president said yesterday, the new National Defense Strategy for space recognizes that space is a war-fighting domain,” Wilson said. “We appreciate the president and the vice president’s leadership on space. Nowhere is the president’s leadership more clear than the president’s budget.” Later in the hearing, Wilson touted the service’s “bold move” for space: Its 2019 budget request includes an 18 percent increase for space across the five-year defense plan, versus the previous year’s request.

The Air Force plans to emphasize investments in situational awareness, command and control, and “the ability to create effects to protect our assets in orbit,” she said. Goldfein said in the hearing that he’d been responsible for coordinating space assets for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, just as he did under then-Gen. Mattis, at U.S. Central Command years ago. “As the president stated openly, its a joint war-fighting domain; that’s where we’ve been focused,” Goldfein told the panel. “So I’m really looking forward to the conversation.” [Source: DefenseNews | Jow Gould | March 14, 2018 ++]

DoD/VA VLER Update 13 ► Combined Health Record System Deal Status

Last year, then-Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin took center stage during a White House press briefing to [announce](#) a groundbreaking electronic health records contract to fix years of interoperability failures between VA and military health records. With Shulkin’s dismissal 29 MAR, that deal—pegged at upwards of \$16 billion—**is in a precarious position**. The secretary had expected to finalize a contract with the tech firm Cerner in the coming weeks to bring VA onto the same commercial health records platform as the Pentagon, an effort that came after [VA wasted billions](#) in a years-long effort to improve record sharing between the agencies.

Shulkin's dismissal comes after appropriators allocated \$782 million in the coming fiscal year to support the rollout of the new electronic health records system. The contract was delayed after disagreements over the interoperability of the system, as VA wants seamless health records transfers for soldiers who transition to veterans. Shulkin's replacement nominee, Adm. Ronny L. Jackson who has served as the White House physician since 2013, positions are unknown on key issues, such as the electronic health records deal or a controversy regarding privatizing health care services at VA, though they are likely to come out during the Senate confirmation process.

In the interim, House lawmakers—some of whom forged strong partnerships with Shulkin—are approaching Jackson cautiously. “I am in the process of reaching out to Dr. Jackson and I look forward to building a strong relationship with him also,” said Phil Roe (R-TN), Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, in a statement. “At the end of the day, cabinet secretaries serve at the pleasure of the president,” Roe added, saying that he “hate[s] to see Shulkin go” but respects Trump’s decision. On 29 MAR Cerner referred questions from *Nextgov* about the contract to VA. A VA official said the agency would not comment on “ongoing contract negotiations,” suggesting a deal is not yet solidified. The White House, which advised Shulkin on his decision to sole-source a contract to Cerner, did not respond to requests for comment. [Source *Next.gov* | Eric Katz | March 29, 2018 ++]

Military Enlistment Update 18 ► **Dependent's Military Health Record Impact**

The military medical system doesn't provide parents disclaimers detailing how behavioral health visits could affect their child's future military service. By seeking counseling for their two teenage daughters as their family coped with multiple moves and multiple deployments to Afghanistan, an Army major and his wife unwittingly prevented both girls from following their father, their grandfather and their great-grandfather into military service. Rudy and Mia De La Rosa thought they were providing emotional support for daughters Juliet and Samantha. Neither the parents nor the daughters knew there were notations like “suicidal gesture” or “self-mutilation” in their counseling files. And neither knew Army and Air Force medical providers would have access to those records — and anything else in dependent medical records — if their daughters ever enlisted.

This sets them apart from their civilian counterparts, who don't come into the military with a previous electronic health record. It sets them apart from military dependents entering the Navy and the Marine Corps, which don't merge dependent and service member records. And it puts the actions of the Army and Air Force in their cases, and those involving other dependents, at odds with the ethical judgment of some medical experts. And despite multiple clean bills of health from civilian and DoD behavioral health providers, both girls have been denied waivers to enter the military. “If I had known then what I know now, I never would have taken my kids to [Army] behavioral health,” Rudy De La Rosa, an Army major stationed in South Korea, said. “We could have taken a lot of different routes to protect their futures and get them the help and guidance they needed.”

This practice of merging dependent health records with new service member health records began in 2004 after those records were transferred into electronic formats. Now, it's potentially preventing thousands of military dependents who came of age during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a time when everyone in the military community was encouraging all members of the military community to seek help for mental health concerns, from putting on a uniform. For the post-9/11 generation of military children seeking to follow in their parents' footsteps to serve as adults in the Army and Air Force, the disclosure of their once-private health records is making them feel like the military as an institution has misled them and violated their trust.

Once a dependent enters the Army or Air Force, their previous dependent medical records are merged with their new service member medical treatment record. The Navy doesn't merge medical records of dependents with new medical records of sailors or Marines, according to a spokeswoman. Neither recruiters nor officials at the military entrance processing stations, or MEPS, have automatic access to medical records of any recruits, including prior dependents. Recruits are asked at the stations about medical issues that could disqualify them from service; if they

indicate any, they're asked to provide an explanation, along with doctor and/or hospital names. Recruits sign authorizations specifying access to those records.

If a recruit from a civilian family mistakenly or knowingly fails to disclose something potentially disqualifying, the military might never find out about it. Not so for military dependents. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, or HIPAA, which protects the privacy of medical records, doesn't prevent the merging of records of prior military dependents for treatment purposes, Downey said, because the records are housed by the same provider: the Military Health System. Army spokesman Michael Brady explained that the Army's followed the same practice as the Air Force since 2004, when a new electronic records system allowed a former military dependent's record to be merged into that individual's service record. The Navy Bureau of Medicine, which handles Navy and Marine Corps medical records, doesn't merge the records, spokeswoman Mariah Felipe said.

"The [Military Health System] adheres to the principle a person has one complete health record, although it may have both active duty and non-active duty components," said Kevin Dwyer, a spokesman for the Defense Health Agency. It's DoD policy since 2010 that a health record be "created, used, maintained, shared, stored and dispositioned to ensure the maintenance of a complete and accurate health record for all beneficiaries," he said. "There is no reason under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), or any other policy, [that] a clinician or administrator with access to a person's health record should not have access to the whole record. This means when a former beneficiary joins a uniformed service, clinicians may have access to the [non-active duty] components pre-dating the period of active service." [Source: ArmyTimes | Karen Jowers | March 30, 2018 ++]

Chemical Weapons Update 02 ► Disposal Over Budget & Behind Schedule

A highly automated, multibillion-dollar plant in Colorado that destroys U.S. chemical weapons is over budget, behind schedule and bedeviled by troubles that could worsen the danger to workers. But when the Army said this month it wants to spend millions extra installing more traditional technology to help the beleaguered plant and reduce worker risk, public reaction was more resignation than anger. "Yes, the process has been too slow and too expensive, but this is the price paid to protect the workers and neighbors of this site," said Marco Kaltofen, a nuclear and civil engineering researcher at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts who has worked on chemical weapons destruction and testing methods. Defense contractor Bechtel Inc. spent 12 years designing, building and testing the plant at the Pueblo Chemical Depot to disassemble and neutralize 780,000 decades-old shells filled with liquid mustard agent stored at the site. Mustard agent — first used in World War I — can maim or kill, blistering skin, scarring eyes and inflaming airways.



This Jan. 21, 2010, file photo, shows 105mm shells containing mustard agent that are stored in a bunker at the Army's Pueblo Chemical Storage facility in Pueblo, Colo.

The heavily guarded depot spreads across 36 square miles (93 square kilometers) of rolling, brushy terrain about 15 miles (24 kilometers) from the city of Pueblo. The plant destroying the weapons is a collection of nondescript industrial buildings and tanks connected by a web of pipelines. The plant is expected to cost \$4.1 billion, including design, construction, operation and disassembly when the work is done, according to the Defense Department inspector general's office, an internal watchdog. Other costs are expected to push the total price for the operation to \$4.5 billion, Army officials said. The U.S. is obligated to destroy all its chemical weapons under international treaty. The Army has already eradicated much of its stockpile by incineration, which is cheaper per weapon than neutralization.

But faced with state and local concerns about air pollution, the military agreed to destroy the Colorado weapons with water to neutralize the mustard agent and microbes to digest and convert the remaining chemicals. The outcome is a dry "salt cake" that can be disposed of at a hazardous waste dump. The plant started operating in September 2016 and has destroyed 43,000 shells. But it has endured two long shutdowns because of problems: a leak in a storage tank, a tear in a spill-containment liner at another tank, rust inside shells and vibration in pipes. Most operations have been halted since September, after operators discovered more rust and other solids in the mustard agent than plant designers anticipated. The rust clogs pipes and strainers, and officials worry it will make it difficult for the plant's robotic equipment to open the shells cleanly. Workers have to don protective suits and enter toxic areas to fix the equipment, increasing their risk of exposure. "The primary issue is worker safety," said Greg Mohrman, the project site manager.

The Army announced this month it wants to install two closed detonation chambers, costing about \$30 million each, to destroy 97,000 shells considered most likely to have excess rust and solids. The shells wouldn't have to be opened before they're placed in the chambers. The chambers would heat the shells to about 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit (540 Celsius) to detonate or burn them and the mustard agent. Gases would be captured, burned and filtered. That has revived Colorado's concerns about air pollution, but residents and officials have mostly refrained from criticizing the plan while they wait for details. Some have questioned why the plant designers didn't anticipate how serious the rust problem would be. "My perspective is that they probably do have a legitimate problem, but it's one they should have anticipated," said Ross Vincent, a member of a citizens advisory group for the Pueblo plant. "They've known for many years that some of the rounds are going to contain that stuff."

The Army still must conduct an environmental study, get state and county permits and figure out how to pay for the chambers. Army officials have asked the Colorado health department general questions about permits but have not applied for them, department spokeswoman Jeannine Natterman said. Pueblo County officials didn't return calls. The Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky is preparing to destroy a smaller but more deadly chemical weapons stockpile — it contains nerve agents as well as mustard agent. Blue Grass will use a different type of neutralization on some weapons and will destroy others in a closed detonation chamber. The Blue Grass plant — also over budget and behind schedule — is undergoing testing but isn't yet operating. The inspector general reported last month the Colorado plant will likely wind up \$513 million over budget and the Kentucky plant \$357 million, but the predictions generated little public attention. [Source: The Associated Press | Dan Elliott | March 29, 2018 ++]

DoD Disability Severance Update 05 ► Refund on Improper Taxation

More than 133,000 veterans may qualify for a refund of federal taxes they paid on disability severance pay dating back to 1991 — taxes that shouldn't have been collected in the first place. Within the next month, Defense Department officials will send notification letters to veterans that they may be eligible for the refund, said Army Lt. Col. David Dulaney, executive director of the Armed Forces Tax Council. Eligible veterans will have a year after they receive the notice to file a claim for the refund. These refunds, which are the result of a law passed in 2016,

apply to veterans who received this pay dating back to Jan. 17, 1991, with taxes withheld, and who also qualified for disability from the Veterans Affairs Department.

The **2016 Combat Injured Veterans Tax Fairness Act** went into effect in 2017. The law requires DoD to identify the veterans whose benefits were previously improperly taxed; and the notification letter will include information about the amount of disability severance payments that were improperly taxed, and instructions for filing an amended tax return to receive the refund. Of the 300,000 veterans who received the disability severance payment, DoD has identified 133,000 who may qualify for refunds, Dulaney said.

Under federal law, any service member who suffers a combat-related injury and is separated from the military receives a one-time, lump-sum disability severance payment based on their rank and years of service. Although the payout was supposed to be tax-free, DoD routinely took taxes out of the severance pay, according to advocacy groups. The 2016 law mandated that DoD stop improperly taxing the pay. The notification letters will provide information to veterans on how they can apply for the refund. Defense officials have been working with Internal Revenue Service officials to clarify the process, Dulaney said. The amount of tax refund will vary by veteran, as the amount of the disability severance varies based on rank and years of service. But it's worth the time to file the claim, Dulaney said. [Source: ArmyTimes | Karen Jowers | January 30, 2018 ++]

Commissary Prices Update 10 ► Online Availability

Remember back when the commissary website used to list all the sale items at each stateside store and their exact prices? A super handy way to milk the most savings out of a commissary run, it was also the only way to easily tell when items were marked down. The system did not use sale tags until 2011, so unless you happened to know the regular price off the top of your head, there was no way to tell at a glance in the store whether or not things were cheap. The list was the only tool. But the section has been down since a DeCA site redesign last year. In a recent erroneous news release officials were reportedly getting ready to launch an even better one. Instead of just a super long, alphabetical list of items and prices, the new section would supposedly let customers look up the price of any item in any store, the release said.

However, on 29 MAR officials with DeCA reported that their announcement about the new tool was wrong and patrons, they said, will not be able to look up "any item" as they originally announced. Instead, the new tool will be the same as the old, not nearly as cool as what they originally said tool. You'll only be able to see sale items. As for when this will be available, officials didn't release a roll out date for that, instead saying "the next few months." [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | March 26 & 29, 2018 ++]

TRDP Update 18 ► To Replaced FEDVIP in 2019

In 2019, the [Tricare Retiree Dental Plan](#) (TRDP) is going away. Those covered under that plan who wish to keep coverage will be required to sign up for the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP), which is the same program used by civil service members and retirees. The new dental plan will offer coverage options from 10 insurers, with each providing at least two different levels of coverage: standard and high. The high level typically offers a greater range of services and lower co-pay amounts than the standard version, but comes with a higher monthly cost.

Under both the current TRDP and the upcoming FEDVIP, monthly premiums are based on location. The premiums for both TRDP and FEDVIP are similar, so users may not experience a price jump, depending on the plan

they choose. For example, someone getting family coverage in Zone E, which is made up of 27 states, pays \$115 each month under the current TRDP, while the same person using FEDVIP would pay between \$60 and \$175 each month, depending on the insurance plan they choose. Compared to TRDP, the new plans will offer a greater choice of dentists and more coverage options that retirees can tailor to their specific needs.

New Vision Insurance Plan

Even bigger news is that in 2019 most retirees and active-duty family members will be newly eligible to enroll in the FEDVIP vision insurance program. Vision coverage is currently not part of the Tricare program. While beneficiaries now receive one free standard eye exam each year or every other year, depending on their plan and whether they are diabetic, exams for contacts are not covered, nor are glasses or contacts themselves. But under the FEDVIP vision program, you will not only have a covered eye exam but, depending on your choice of coverage, you may be able to get glasses, contacts or both for free or a very deep discount. Tricare will continue its current eye exam coverage system for those who do not enroll in the new vision plan. Currently, there are four different insurers available in the FEDVIP vision program. Monthly family premiums range from \$19 to \$43. Like the FEDVIP dental program, you will be able to choose from a greater number of eye care providers than are currently a part of the Tricare networks, and tailor your coverage to fit your individual needs.

Enrollment Information

If you are currently enrolled in TRDP, you will have to enroll in a FEDVIP dental plan during open season or you will lose your dental insurance in 2019. If you want to enroll in the FEDVIP vision plan, you must also do it during open season. This year's open season runs from Nov. 12, 2018, through Dec. 10, 2018. You can make changes to your insurance each year during open season or when you experience a "[qualifying life event](#)" such as a job change, move or birth of a child. While the enrollment period may seem like a long way off, if you are thinking about enrolling in either of these programs, it is probably a good idea to check them out ahead of time. The large number of plans and options can be pretty confusing. If you plan on getting major dental work done, doing your homework can possibly save you a bunch of money. The new plan may be a lot cheaper than the current one, or vice versa. Also, if you have kids who need braces, some insurance plans under FEDVIP require you to be enrolled for 12 months before insurance will pay for orthodontic care.

For More Information -- Check out the [BENEFEDS/Tricare website](#) for details on switching over or enrolling in the new plans. You can also check out the [Office of Personnel Management's Dental & Vision insurance page](#) for plan costs and coverage.

[Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | March 19, 2018 ++]

Transgender Troops Update 15 ► Barred From Serving With Limited Exceptions

A new policy memo from President Donald Trump concerning transgender service members may allow some to serve, but keep in place tight restrictions for many. The White House memo, released late 23 MAR, highlights recommendations from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis that individuals with a history or diagnosis of gender dysphoria be barred from serving, saying these people "may require substantial medical treatment, including medications and surgery." With limited exceptions that are not spelled out in the memo, these people will be disqualified from military service, according to the policy. "On the advice of ... experts, the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Homeland Security [Kirstjen Nielsen] have concluded that the accession or retention of individuals with a history or diagnosis of gender dysphoria -- those who may require substantial medical treatment, including through medical drugs or surgery -- presents considerable risk to military effectiveness and lethality," the White House said in a released statement.

The new policy, the statement continued, would allow the military to apply health standards equally to all who serve. Earlier on the 23rd, Mattis' full memo was made public in a filing by the U.S. Department of Justice in U.S. District Court in Seattle. In the three-page memo, Mattis also recommends that transgender persons who "require or have undergone" gender transition be disqualified. Those with a history or diagnosis of gender dysphoria should be allowed to serve, he said, only if they have been "stable" in their biological sex for 36 months prior to entering the military or if they receive a diagnosis while currently serving but do not require a change of gender and remain deployable. Currently serving troops who have been diagnosed since policies created to enable transgender service were introduced under Carter may continue to serve in their preferred gender and receive appropriate treatment, Mattis said.

Gender dysphoria is defined as a conflict between an individual's biological or assigned gender and the gender with which they identify. In his memo, Mattis called those with gender dysphoria a "subset" of transgender people who experience "discomfort" with their born sex, "resulting in significant distress or difficulty functioning." "I firmly believe that compelling behavioral health reasons require the Department to proceed with caution before compounding the significant challenges inherent in treating gender dysphoria with the unique, highly stressful circumstances of military training and combat operations," Mattis wrote.

The White House memo comes about eight months after Trump first announced, in a series of tweets, that he intended to ban transgender people from serving in the military "in any capacity." Those tweets caught the Pentagon off-guard; only a year before, then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter had announced a new policy allowing transgender individuals to serve openly. He ordered each of the military services to develop guidance and policies governing transgender personnel, including gender transition procedures and medical treatment. Mattis' findings come to light as a result of the court system entering the fray in the wake of Trump's tweets. Four courts have now filed injunctions prohibiting new Pentagon policies on transgender personnel as four separate lawsuits against Trump move through the system. The U.S. District Court in Seattle, which is adjudicating one of the lawsuits, had ordered the White House to turn over meeting documentation having to do with experts brought in to consult as Pentagon brass and the White House crafted the military transgender policy.

It's not clear how many of the estimated between 3,000 and 15,000 serving troops who identify as transgender would be considered to have a gender dysphoria diagnosis, but the policy is expected to bar most troops. "The Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of Homeland Security, with respect to the U.S. Coast Guard, may exercise their authority to implement any appropriate policies concerning military service by transgender individuals," Trump's memo concludes. The specific mention of the Coast Guard is notable. Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Paul Zukunft was the first of the military service chiefs to publicly state support for transgender troops in uniform. In August 2017, days after Trump's tweets, Zukunft told an audience at the Center for Strategic and International Studies that his office had reached out to all the openly serving transgender Coast Guardsmen to say the service did not plan to "break faith" with them.

In a December interview, Zukunft told Military.com he had determined that a tweet did not constitute an executive order, and thus felt empowered to make his statement. At the time, Zukunft said a lot of progress had been made on the topic and the services were now moving forward "in lockstep" to craft policy on transgender troops. The Palm Center, a think tank on LGBT issues in the armed forces, denounced Trump's policy Friday night in a brief statement. "Today's announcement fulfills President Trump's July 2017 tweet calling for the reinstatement of the transgender military ban," Palm Center Director Aaron Belkin wrote. "In service to the ideological goals of the Trump-Pence base, the Pentagon has distorted the science on transgender health to prop up irrational and legally untenable discrimination that will erode military readiness. There is no evidence to support a policy that bars from military service patriotic Americans who are medically fit and able to deploy. Our troops and our nation deserve better." [Source: Military.com | Hope Hodge Seck | March 23, 2018 ++]

Tricare Prime Allotment Update 04 ► 45,000 Households Pending Prime Disenrollment

As many as 45,000 Tricare households or beneficiaries could be disenrolled from coverage because their payment information was not updated when the agency changed regional contractors early this year. Affected users are retirees who use Tricare Prime and do not pay their annual fee through paycheck allotment and those who use the purchased Tricare Reserve Select, Retired Reserve and Young Adult plans. Other Tricare users, including Tricare for Life beneficiaries and active-duty families, are not impacted.

Tricare had previously been managed by three contractors in three regions: United Healthcare in the West, Health Net in the North, and Humana in the South. On Jan. 1, the system's South and North regions combined into Tricare East; the contractors changed to Health Net Federal Services in the West and Humana over the entire East region. As a result of the changes, purchased plan users and some Tricare Prime retirees in the former North and West regions were required to update their annual or monthly payment information or face disenrollment. Letters from Health Net dated 18 NOV and from Humana dated 28 NOV told those users that they had until 20 and 24 DEC respectively, to submit their payment information to the new contractors. At about the same time, Tricare announced that all enrollment updates had to be made by 20 NOV, in preparation for an update blackout period scheduled for 1 to 23 DEC,

Now, Tricare officials say they are missing payment information for as many as 45,000 of those accounts across the two regions. Because of the December enrollment blackout, some of those users may have updated their information when instructed, only to have it lost during the transition, officials said. "It's possible that if they updated during the blackout period it may not have processed correctly, and they should check their payment information," said Kevin Dwyer, a Tricare spokesman. "It's a good idea for beneficiaries who live in the former Tricare North or West regions who pay their Tricare enrollment fees or premiums through electronic funds transfer, or via debit or credit card, to check their bank or credit card statement to make sure their Tricare fees for January and February have been paid," he said. "If not, they should contact their new regional contractor to provide payment information."

Tricare officials said both Humana and Health Net are sending new letters to those who have not updated their accounts. As many as 20,000 people in Tricare East already updated their information after a new letter went out from Humana to 41,000 households early this month, Dwyer said. If payment is not received before the last paid-through date, which in many cases was 1 JAN, coverage will be canceled within 150 days. That means thousands of Tricare users will be dropped from the coverage books by the end of May -- 150 days from 1 JAN -- if the information is not updated. "If payment isn't received by the new contractor within 150 days from the last paid-through date, the beneficiary will lose Tricare coverage," Dwyer said in a statement.

Because more than one beneficiary may be in each plan, information is not readily available on how many actual Tricare users may be without coverage if the payment updates are not made. About 20,000 accounts receive disenrollment letters each month as a matter of regular business due to rejected credit cards or other problems, Tricare officials. They said that up to half of the current problems could be a result of the those issues. "Bottom line, notices for delinquent accounts is a recurring, fairly high volume, task," Dwyer said. To check if their payment option has been updated, beneficiaries in the East should contact Humana, while those in the West should contact Health Net.

All users who pay by credit or debit card must update their information by postal mail or fax. Humana users who pay through electronic funds transfer can update their information online, while HealthNet users must use a mail or fax form for that process as well. Those in the new West region can access the [HealthNet forms here](#), while those in the East region can access the [Humana system here](#).

Officials with military support organizations that represent Tricare beneficiaries said the system needs to work to make sure no one is dropped in the wake of the 1 JAN changes, including purchased plan users and Prime retirees. "We don't need to be disenrolling people from their earned benefits," said Kathy Beasley, a director of health affairs

at the Military Officers Association of America. "We do need to do everything possible to bring people to change their payment options, but the last thing we need to be doing in the midst of this is threatening them and disenrolling from their care."

Frank Yoakum, who directs the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS), said the failure to update is likely due to a lack of communication for Guard and reservists. Those members see their units only a few days a month, and are often not dialed into changes within the military community. If units didn't give specific briefings about the need to update, or provided the briefings after the changes, troops may not know they are happening. "I really think there's a contributory thing between Tricare not getting the information out and the units doing the right thing," he said. [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | March 22, 2018 ++]

Exchange/DeCA Merger ► Proposed to Make DOD Operations More Efficient

The three military exchange services and the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) would be merged into a single resale enterprise under a proposal backed by John H. Gibson II, the Defense Department's new chief management officer, who has been tasked to make DOD business operations more efficient. Gibson and a team tasked with reviewing military community services — base stores, recreation services, family support services and base schools — have drafted a memorandum, apparently for signature by Deputy Defense Secretary Patrick M. Shanahan, that would order extensive streamlining.

If and when signed, the memo would have the Department of Defense under President Donald Trump reconsider, and likely reverse, an Obama administration decision of two years ago not to consolidate DeCA with Army and Air Force Exchange Service and the exchange services run by the Navy and Marine Corps. "Because of their different approaches to fulfilling their specific missions and delivering their respective benefits, the creation of a single resale entity through consolidation is not recommended," DOD officials wrote in a May 2016 report to Congress on prospects for operating commissaries without cost to taxpayers. "It is more appropriate to focus on the short-term goal of achieving greater efficiency in the operation of commissaries and exchanges, and to defer consideration of the feasibility of any merger until these issues have been effectively addressed."

This administration, however, isn't waiting. The departments of Army, Navy and Air Force were given only a few days in mid-March to share their views on the consolidation for resale operations presented in the draft memorandum. Sources said the services are concerned about the timing of a complex consolidation, given current challenges transforming DeCA into an exchange-like profitable enterprise, using variable pricing of items by region and introducing higher-margin DeCA brands. Brokers and manufacturers supporting base stores say the changes are aggravating an already sharp decline in commissary sales. Exchange store operators see their own patron traffic as linked to base grocery stores, so as commissary sales fall so too do sales at exchanges, gas stations and other on-base retailers. Declining exchange sales mean lower profits, or "dividends," which the services rely on to fund on-base MWR or morale, welfare and recreation activities.

A Defense Department spokesman said no official could be made available to discuss the draft memo or concepts it embraces for store system consolidation for at least a few more weeks. Officials wouldn't even provide written answers to questions, suggesting the time wasn't right. Gibson became DOD's chief management officer 1 FEB. He told the Senate Budget Committee the department had formed nine project teams to draft recommendations to reform business operations to achieve near-term efficiencies. Stacey Kiley, a Senior Executive Service employee who served on the Defense Resale Business Optimization Board, has led the team tasked with reviewing community services. The draft memo explains that, after receiving team briefings, the department's Reform Management Group, which Gibson leads, "acknowledged that the defense resale enterprise, in particular, has been studied too much" without recommendations being implemented. As a result, military stores now suffer from "the same industry, generation and demographic trends negatively impacting private sector grocery and retail companies."

The team proposes that phased consolidation of DeCA and exchange services offers “the greatest potential to achieve the economies and efficiencies necessary for the survivability of the defense resale enterprise.” The draft memo acknowledges that current law prohibits consolidating the commissary system with the exchanges so legislative relief would be sought “as soon as practicable.” Meanwhile, the team is to “assemble a cross-functional task force” no later than May 1, 2018, and to identify by April 15 a director to manage its work. This task force is to conduct “due diligence, assess the business case and develop integration plans” for DeCA and exchange services by Oct. 31.

The task force is to brief the Reform Management Group “upon business case completion.” If it confirms the team’s approach, “consolidation shall be executed immediately by the task force director” who will serve “as the new organization’s Executive Director, exercising authority, direction and control, until the permanent position is advertised and filled.” In other words, said one critic who reviewed the memo, the person leading the task force becomes director of the organization it proposes to create — if the task force makes the appropriate business case to justify it. “This thing is toxic. It’s putting the cart before the horse,” the official said.

Even if the business case for consolidating systems is not confirmed, military resale “will benefit from the standardization of its back-office processes and systems,” the draft memo says. “Therefore, in parallel with its other work, the task force shall begin standardizing those processes,” beginning with financial management and accounting processes. To ensure proper focus on standardization, the draft memo says on the date it is signed, store systems are to freeze work on modernizing information technology and suspend executive hiring. “The success of this reform requires complete faith and active support of our decisions,” the memo concludes. “Therefore, all must know and believe that our intentions are to make these community services better for our members and their families, improve our support to commanders, be exceptional stewards of our appropriated funds and exhibit fiduciary responsibility” over resale profits. One exchange official grumbled that this last paragraph was particularly odd, a warning perhaps not to make familiar arguments to Congress, patrons or other stakeholders for protecting the status quo.

Consolidation of commissaries and exchange services has been studied for decades, with 11 major reports produced just since 1989. Congress finally agreed in 2016 to give DOD officials sweeping new authorities to transform commissaries into more business-like operations and to reduce DeCA’s reliance on taxpayer funding, which last year and this still stood at \$1.3 billion annually. In the first year of transformation, however, commissary sales continued a five-year decline. Even if, arguably, rate of decline has slowed, it remains a dangerous trend that had put the entire military resale system in jeopardy. Congressional committees that oversee military resale are monitoring sales closely. Two congressional staffers said they haven’t seen DOD’s new ideas on consolidating systems but noted any merging would require changes to law.

They added that Congress allowed commissary reforms only on condition that savings to patrons be maintained and that revenues from exchange operations to support on-base morale, welfare and recreation activities not be reduced. Those are priorities set in law, they added. That means that while Congress encourages efficient on-base store operations, current law requires that reforms be rolled back if the value of the shopping benefit can’t be preserved for patrons or if exchange profits, so critical to on-base quality of life, fall victim to the changes. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Tom Philpott | March 15, 2018 ++]

SBP DIC Offset Update 50 ► Offset Status as of MAR 2018

There are 2 types of SBP/DIC beneficiaries. First are widows and widowers of service members who served a full career in the military and paid into SBP as a retirement. The second groups' sponsors died while on active duty and qualify for SBP by statute. As we continue to push to get the SBP/DIC offset abolished and we often get small

improvements rather than a total abolition; the program gets more difficult to understand. But here goes. Following is where the program currently stands:

Retirees -- If the retiree dies of a full or partial service connected disability or had been 100% service connected disabled for 10 or more years, regardless of what caused his death, the survivor would indeed be entitled to DIC. There is a dollar per dollar offset of SBP payments for DIC payments. Many people have asked if it would really be worthwhile to file for DIC if their servicemember spouse dies and they are already receiving or going to receive SBP. The answer now is almost always yes. This is because we have been working for years to end the SBP/DIC offset; just as we have worked to end the military retired pay/VA disability pay offset. We have not yet had the same degree of success but we have made some progress.

The DIC payment became a flat payment regardless of rank in 1993. It is presently a tax free monthly payment of \$1,283.11. Every year it receives a COLA adjustment. If the SBP is 55% of the retired pay the offset will probably completely offset the SBP. Only the very highest ranks in the officers or enlisted ranks would receive more. However, there is the advantage of it being tax free while SBP is taxable. Then if the DIC completely wipes out the SBP payment a beneficiary would be qualified to have all the monthly SBP payments returned to him or her. That could be a large lump sum. (It would be taxable.) Additionally, to partially correct the offset, Congress passed a SSIA (Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance) payment bill. It started in 2008 at only \$50 a month and through additional increases and modifications has reached \$310 a month. Last year the SSIA was made permanent and a COLA was added.

Died on Active Duty -- In this case, the survivor is entitled to the present SSIA payment of \$310 a month + COLA which is nontaxable. (No return of premiums since they did not make any). In addition - if there are minor children in the family, they too will qualify for DIC. Presently a surviving spouse with children under the age of 18 will also receive \$317.87 a month per child + a 2 year transition for the parent of \$250 a month. The benefit for the child runs out when he/she turns 23. If a child is permanently disabled they may continue to be eligible into adulthood. Call our DC office at (703)-684-1981 to go over these detailed requirements.

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We are still working to end the SBP/DIC offset completely. In the House H.R. 846 has 237 co-sponsors while the Senate's S. 339 has 38 co-sponsors. So you can see there is wide bipartisan support. But it is very unlikely that we will get the bills passed this year. If not, we will have to start again next year. We are not giving up on this issue. Finally, there are also 2 special programs A&A (Aid and Attendance) which presently pays an additional \$317.87 a month and Homebound which pays an additional \$148.91 a month which a parent might be eligible for if he/she is suffering from certain disabilities.

To sum this up; even if you are eligible for SBP if your servicemember's death was in the line of duty OR service connected you may qualify for DIC. It's definitely worth filing for. Anyone who would like to discuss the matter further or has questions can contact the Executive Director of the Legislative Affairs Office (LAO), Deirdre Parke Holleman at 1-800-554-8732 or dholleman@treadc.org. [Source: TREA Washington Update | 28 March 2018 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 MAR 2018

Ft. Stewart, GA —A junior 3rd Infantry Division soldier who was busted last year in a far-reaching drug sting at Fort Stewart, Georgia, has been sentenced to 10 years in prison and a dishonorable discharge, according to an Army release. Army and local civilian authorities busted the operation last April after a three-month investigation. [A photo of one soldier](#), posed with a tray of white powder and stacks of cash, was leaked to U.S. Army Moments ahead of the bust.



Pfc. Mario Figueroa-Flores was convicted on four counts of cocaine trafficking in a 9 FEB court-martial, the release said. **Figueroa-Flores** was one of multiple soldiers apprehended in the sting, Fort Stewart spokesman Kevin Larson told Army Times, though he could not provide exact numbers. “Other soldiers involved were dealt with at the brigade level in actions less than court-martial. [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | March 15, 2018 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries ► **Reported 16 thru 31 MAR 2018 | Twenty-Three**

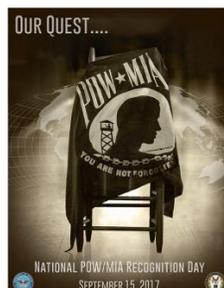
“Keeping the Promise“, “Fulfill their Trust“ and “No one left behind“ are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War 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’. Refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Year/2018> for a listing and details of those accounted for in 2018. 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**, 29, of Stroud, Okla., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 26 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Hall was a member of Detachment 5, 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron. On Feb. 6, 1967, Hall and three other service members were flying an HH-3E helicopter on a rescue and recovery mission over northern Vietnam. Hall's helicopter was hit by enemy ground fire after rescuing a downed pilot, resulting in an internal explosion and crash. Hall was subsequently reported missing in action. [Read about Hall.](#)
- **Air Force Col. Edgar F. Davis**, 32, of Goldsboro, N.C., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried April 6 in his hometown. Davis was an RF-4C Phantom navigator, assigned to the 11th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, 432nd Tactical Reconnaissance Wing. On Sept. 17, 1968, Davis was on a night photo-reconnaissance mission over Laos when he and his pilot were shot down by anti-aircraft artillery fire. While the pilot ejected and was rescued, no contact was received from Davis. After search and rescue efforts were suspended after failing to locate Davis or the wreckage, Davis was declared missing in action. [Read about Davis.](#)
- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Frank A. Fazekas**, 22, of Trenton, N.J., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 28 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Fazekas was assigned to the 22nd Fighter Squadron, 36th Fighter Group. On May 27, 1944, Fazekas was returning from a mission over northern France when his P-47 Thunderbolt aircraft came under enemy fire, causing him to crash in a field north of the French village of Buyssechre. His remains were not recovered and the Army reported him deceased on May 27, 1944. [Read about Fazekas.](#)
- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. William H. Harth, Jr.**, 22, of Columbia, S.C., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried April 6 in his hometown. Harth was a bombardier assigned to the 329th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy), 93rd Bombardment Group (Heavy), which was known as "The Traveling Circus." On Aug. 1, 1943, Harth's B-24D aircraft, nicknamed "Hell's Angels," participated in a historic mission, code-named Operation TIDAL WAVE-- the first large-scale, low-altitude attack by U.S. heavy bomber aircraft on Ploesti, Romania. As Harth's aircraft approached the target, it was hit by German antiaircraft fire. Harth was killed when the aircraft crashed. [Read about Harth.](#)
- **Army Air Forces Capt. George Van Vleet** was a member of the 38th Bombardment Squadron, (Heavy), 30th Bombardment Group, stationed at Hawkins Field, Helen Island, Tarawa Atoll, Gilbert Islands. On Jan. 21, 1944, Van Vleet was a passenger on a B-24J bomber when the aircraft crashed shortly after take-off. Interment services are pending. [Read about Van Vleet.](#)
- **Army Cpl. Dow F. Worden**, 20, of Boardman, Ore., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 27 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Hall was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. In September 1951, Worden's unit was operating in the vicinity of Hill 1024 in South Korea, near Heartbreak Ridge, when they were attacked by Chinese forces. After moving east to nearby Hill 867, American forces withdrew after suffering a large barrage of enemy mortar fire. Worden could not be accounted for after the battle and was declared missing in action on Sept. 28, 1951. His name did not appear on any prisoner of war lists and no returning POWs indicated any knowledge of his whereabouts, prompting the Army to declare him deceased in December 1953. [Read about Worden.](#)
- **Army Cpl. James I. Jubb** was a member of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. In August 1950, his unit sustained heavy losses while fighting against Korean forces in

the vicinity of the Naktong River, South Korea. Jubb was declared missing in action on Aug. 10, 1950, when he could not be accounted for by his unit. Interment services are pending. [Read about Jubb.](#)

- **Army Cpl. Roy J. Hopper**, 21, of Miami, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried April 6 in Dayton, Ohio. Hopper was assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment. He was reported killed in action on July 31, 1950, after his battalion engaged in a fighting withdrawal against North Korean forces in Chinju, South Korea. Following the battle, the enemy had control of the battlefield, preventing a search for his remains. [Read about Hopper.](#)
- **Army Cpl. Thomas H. Mullins**, 18, of Harriman, Tenn., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 29 in St. Petersburg, Fla. Mullins was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. In November 1950, his unit engaged with Chinese forces near Unsan, North Korea. Approximately 600 men were killed, captured or missing. Mullins was declared missing in action on Nov. 2, 1950. He was later reported to have died while being held in POW Camp 5, Pyokdong, North Korea. [Read about Mullins.](#)
- **Army Cpl. William C. McDowell**, 20, of Stuttgart, Arkansas, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried April 4 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. McDowell was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. McDowell was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 2, 1950. [Read about McDowell.](#)
- **Army Pvt. Rudolph Johnson**, 20, of Malvern, Ark., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 23 in Little Rock, Ark. Johnson was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 365th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Infantry Division — the only African-American combat infantry division in Europe. In February 1945, during Operation Fourth Term, Johnson's regiment fought for days against strong German counterattacks to secure positions along the Lama di Sotto ridge, part of the Gothic Line in northern Italy. Johnson was reported missing in action as of Feb. 6, 1945. His status was changed to killed in action on Feb. 21, 1945. [Read about Johnson.](#)
- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Harry E. Harkness**, 22, of Lansing, Mich., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 17 in his hometown. Harkness was assigned to Company L, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. In November 1950, Harkness' unit was participating in combat actions against Chinese forces in the vicinity of Unsan, North Korea. Harkness was reported missing in action as of Nov. 2, 1950, when he could not be accounted for by his unit. During a post-war operation known as "Operation Big Switch," prisoners of war were returned and Americans who had been held reported that Harkness had been captured and held at POW Camp 5, where he died in early 1951. [Read about Harkness.](#)
- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Pete W. Simon**, 34, of Grindstone, Pa., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 31 in Northfield, Ohio. Simon was a member of Company G, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. In September 1950, his unit participated in a defense of the Pusan Perimeter, a large defensive line west and north of Pusan, South Korea. Simon was reported to have been killed in action on Sept. 5, 1950, but his remains could not be located following the battle. [Read about Simon.](#)
- **Army Sgt. Julius E. McKinney** was a member of Heavy Mortar Company, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. McKinney was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 2, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about McKinney.](#)
- **Army Staff Sgt. David Rosenkrantz** was assigned to Company H, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division. In September 1944, his unit participated in Operation Market Garden, a ploy by

Allied planners to break German defensive lines on the western front by capturing a highway route through the Netherlands. On Sept. 28, 1944, Rosenkrantz' platoon occupied Heuvelhof, a farm located south of the town of Grosbeek, when German tanks and infantry attacked. The paratroopers hid among sparse trees and buildings. Rosenkrantz was killed by enemy gunfire when he rose from his position. Due to the proximity of the enemy, his remains could not be recovered at the time. Interment services are pending. [Read about Rosenkrantz.](#)

- **Marine Corps Pfc. Lyle E. Charpiloz**, 19, of Silverton, Ore., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried on April 7 in Salem, Ore. Charpiloz was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Charpiloz's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Charpiloz was killed on the first day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. His remains were initially buried in a battlefield cemetery on the island. [Read about Charpiloz.](#)
- **Marine Corps Pvt. George F. Patrick**, 22, of Dallas, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 17 in his hometown. Patrick was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. Patrick's unit was one of those tasked with securing the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll. Encountering fierce resistance by the Japanese, almost 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and another 1,000 were wounded in the battle. Patrick was killed on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943, and initially buried in a battlefield cemetery. [Read about Patrick.](#)
- **Marine Corps Pvt. John M. Tillman**, 21, of Reno, Nev., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried April 6, in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. Tillman was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. Tillman's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll on Nov. 20, 1943, against stiff Japanese resistance. Tillman was killed on the first day of the battle. [Read about Tillman.](#)
- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Manuel Menendez**, 20, of Elizabeth, N.J., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried March 22 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Menendez was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Division. Menendez' unit was one of those tasked with securing the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll. Encountering fierce resistance by the Japanese, almost 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and another 1,000 were wounded in the battle. Menendez was killed on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943, and was initially buried in a battlefield cemetery. [Read about Menendez.](#)
- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Jarvis G. Outland** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Outland was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Outland.](#)
- **Navy Radioman 3rd Class Jack R. Goldwater** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Goldwater was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Goldwater.](#)
- **Navy Reserve Aviation Ordnanceman 2nd Class Ora H. Sharninghouse, Jr.**, 22, of McComb, Ohio, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried April 7 in Findlay, Ohio. Sharninghouse was a member of the Navy Torpedo Squadron Eighteen (VT-18), USS Intrepid. On Sept. 8, 1944, during a bombing mission against Japanese positions on Babelthuap Island, Palau, their 2,000-pound bomb hit an ammunition dump. The resulting explosion tore the tail from the aircraft, causing it to crash off-shore. Sharninghouse was reported missing in action. [Read about Sharninghouse.](#)
- **Navy Water Tender 2nd Class Porter L. Rich** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Rich was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Rich.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | March 31, 2018 ++]



VA Service Connection Update 01 ► Events That Warrant It

You've probably wondered from time-to-time what type of disability warrants compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). It's probably crossed your mind if any of your service-related accidents, or injuries, could possibly qualify for VA compensation, especially, if you have an ongoing ailment that requires medical attention. For instance, injuries sustained during PT oftentimes get worse over time, and require constant medical attention over time. Perhaps you twisted an ankle during PT, and the minor injury caused you to end up on quarters for a few days, and the injury was documented in your service medical records, it's possible you could qualify for VA compensation today. Especially, if the injury has resulted in an arthritic ankle.

If you have ever thought for a moment what kind of injuries or military events could justify service-connected compensation today? Well, we have a list of some of the disabilities that veterans receive VA disability compensation. The list is not complete, and is only a list that consists of events and disabilities as shared by the veteran (USVCP given permission by the veteran to list events and disabilities. Service-connected disabilities confirmed via VA documentation). See list below.

- A veteran fell from a service pole as he worked on repairing wires. The fall broke both the veterans' ankles. Veteran fell 40 feet during the accident. Veteran reported to base psychologist because he thought he was going to die during and after the trauma. Currently, the veteran has nightmares about falling, he can no longer climb poles of any kind, and he is afraid of heights (Acrophobia). Veteran is service-connected for osteoporosis in both ankles and PTSD.
- A Veteran suffers from flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, and depression. Veteran reported that she was raped by her drill sergeant in basic training. Veteran service-connected for MST.
- A veteran is suffering from nightmares, anxiety, depression, and startle reflex from an incident that happened on his ship while in the Navy in Vietnam. The ship was attacked by Vietcong troops while he was asleep on board. Veteran hid under his bunk during attack. Several crew members were injured. Veteran reported that he believed he was going to die. Veteran is service-connected for PTSD and anxiety.
- A veteran suffers from nightmares, fear of guns (hoplophobia), depression, and exaggerated startled reflex. Veteran's gun backfired during M-16 training in basic training. The incident scared veteran badly around his face and neck. Veteran is service-connected for anxiety.
- Veteran suffers from diarrhea, severe bloating, and abdominal discomfort. Veteran was struck with a bout of food poisoning while serving in Iraq. Veteran lost 25 pounds, and was hospitalized for two weeks with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) resulting from food poisoning. Veteran is service-connected for IBS.
- Veteran suffers from nightmares, night sweats, startle response, anxiety, and depression. Veteran was on duty, and was performing maintenance on his jeep when the jeep blew up. Veteran sustained second degree burns on his face, neck, and arms. Veteran is service-connected for PTSD, scars, and various skin conditions.

- Veteran suffers from nightmares, flashbacks, avoidance of ships, avoidance of engines, irritability, and trouble sleeping. Veteran was in the boiler room on his ship when the boiler room caught fire. Veteran was almost killed in the fire. Veteran is service-connected for PTSD, pleurisy, TBI, and scars.
- Veteran suffers from nightmares, fear of heights (acrophobia), and emotional distress from things that remind veteran of the accident. Veteran fell from his dorm room window as he was cleaning the outside the window. Veteran is service-connected for PTSD.
- Veteran suffers from depression, fear of water, nightmares, anxiety, emotional distress, and avoids places that remind the veteran of his accident. Veteran almost drowned in installation swimming pool as he trained for PT. Veteran was caught in the pool drainage pipe and was unable to free himself from the drain. He was pulled out of pool unconscious. Veteran is service-connected for PTSD.
- Veteran suffers from nightmares, flashbacks, exaggerated startled response, depression, anxiety, and trouble concentrating. Veteran was fueling up a base jeep and the vehicle blew up. Veteran reported that he was certain he was going to die. Veteran service-connected for PTSD and TBI.
- Veteran suffers from anxiety, depression, anger, fear of weather, and flashbacks. Veteran reported he almost died from a hurricane that hit his base. Veteran had to hide under his bed from the hurricane and was afraid to come out of his dorm room. Installation mental health team had to meet with veteran to get him from under his bed. Veteran service-connected for depression and anxiety.
- Veteran suffers from joint pain, a herniated disc, sciatica, and radiculopathy. Veteran spent four years jumping out of C-130 aircraft. During active military service veteran was given pain medication for back pain. Over the year, veteran's back pain resulted in herniated discs which required hospitalization. Veteran is service connected for degenerative disc disease, and sciatica.

[Source: USVCP | Laura Martinez | March 7, 2018 ++]

VA RAMP Update 01 ► Program Progress Report Discouraging

A new program designed to help clear the Department of Veterans Affairs' massive backlog of disability claims appeals has so far received little interest from veterans, despite promises it could trim years off their wait times. Less than 3 percent of veterans invited into the program — about 330 individuals — have opted into the **Rapid Appeals Modernization Program**, launched in November and billed as an “more efficient” review process that could provide final decisions within a month. The program was included as part of sweeping appeals reform legislation passed by Congress last year and was intended to help start to draw down some of the 340,000 cases languishing in the current case processing system. VA officials have promised full implementation of the reforms package by February 2019, but have also been optimistic they'll see significant progress before the end of the year.

Lawmakers said the RAMP results thus far are raising concerns about reaching those goals. “Unless more veterans participate in RAMP, it is hard to see how VA will collect enough data to develop an effective plan to successfully implement appeals reform,” said Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. VA officials promised more focus on public awareness of the program in coming months. But David McLenachen, director of the Veterans Benefits Administration's appeals management office, said he is still encouraged by the results thus far. “We need to get that rate up,” he said during testimony before the committee on Tuesday. “But there is every indication that veterans opting in are getting fast decisions and a good outcome.”

The RAMP process allows veterans to fast-track decisions on their disability appeals if they agree to finalize evidence adjudicators can consider and withdraw their pending cases. Because many veterans have been waiting

years for an answer on their disability cases, officials think some of the reluctance to opt-in to the new program may be fear of restarting a lengthy wait. McLenachen said cases processed so far have averaged 37 days, compared to the 1,500-plus average for cases going through the traditional appeals process. Veterans in the new program have been successful in 61 percent of cases so far, compared to 25 percent for the traditional process. He warned against drawing too many predictive assumptions based on the small number of cases processed so far, but said it does indicate the potential benefit of the new program for many veterans. It has also drawn positive reviews from veterans service organizations as well. Officials from Disabled American Veterans labeled it “a great testing environment for the new (VA) appeals system.”

At the 30 JAN oversight hearing, Veterans Affairs Deputy Secretary Thomas Bowman said he is confident department officials will be able to stick to the February 2019 timeline for that new system. He promised monthly updates to the committee and a six-month briefing with lawmakers to ensure the work is continuing on schedule. But officials from the Government Accountability Office have issued a handful of improvements to their project management to ensure better progress tracking, changes that VA officials have said they will incorporate in their work. And lawmakers on the committee said they need better progress benchmarks from VA to ensure that work is continuing on schedule. “I’m watching the clock tick rapidly,” said Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL). “Where we’re at now is not necessarily where we need to be.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Leo Shane III | January 30, 2018 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 MAR 2018

A former soldier in Hawaii who pleaded guilty to faking combat injuries and trauma to receive veteran’s benefits has been sentenced to a year and a half in prison. Prosecutors say 32-year-old Maui resident **Cody Joslin** was in the Army for nine months but never served in a combat zone or overseas. Prosecutors say he submitted paperwork to the U.S. Department of Veteran’s Affairs claiming he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and tinnitus from combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. Prosecutors say Joslin fabricated stories about witnessing combat-related deaths and purchased fake military certifications online from a veteran who had been convicted of selling counterfeit U.S. documents. At his sentencing 28 MAR, a judge also ordered Joslin to pay more than \$48,000 restitution for the disability benefits he wasn’t entitled to. [Source: Associated Press | March 29, 2018 ++]

VA Background Checks ► IG Reveals 6,200 Workers Have Not Received One

The Veterans Affairs Department is not following requirements to screen all of its medical professional staff, leading VA to employ 6,200 workers who have not received any background check. An additional 10,400 employees, or one in eight workers hired by the Veterans Health Administration between 2012 and 2016, did not have their investigations conducted in a timely matter, according to an audit by the VA’s inspector general. Its findings were based on a sample of various VHA medical facilities. By failing to properly to investigate its employees, the IG said, VA was risking putting unqualified or otherwise problematic employees in charge of veterans health care.

“Due to the lack of governance and oversight of the personnel suitability program, VA cannot reliably attest to the suitability of its largest workforce, exposing veterans and employees to individuals who have not been properly vetted,” the IG said. “Unless controls are implemented and data are improved, VA and the public lack assurance that VHA has a properly investigated workforce appropriate for providing health care to our nation’s veterans.” Most VA medical professionals, such as physicians, nurses, pharmacists and lab technicians, are required to undergo the lowest-level “tier one” investigation to verify their suitability for the job. The Office of Personnel Management

conducts the review and sends its findings back to VA to determine if any “derogatory information” should disqualify employees from their position. Investigation results are then expected to be retained both at VA and OPM.

The IG found, however, that VHA was not initiating the investigations in about 6 percent of cases. Agency adjudicators were also not reviewing in a timely manner the investigations that were conducted, which federal regulations require to happen within 90 days. Some employees whose background checks were never initiated had been working at the department for several years, the IG found, despite the requirement for the reviews to begin within 14 days. At the Long Beach Medical Center in California, for example, adjudicators took an average of three years to complete the investigations that it did conduct. Conducting the reviews in a timely manner is particularly important, the IG said, because VA can much more easily dismiss employees who have problematic backgrounds during their initial probationary period.

The auditors put the onus to ensure a proper background check process primarily on the VA's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Operations, Security and Preparedness (OSP), but also faulted VHA for failing to provide meaningful oversight, as it has been required to do since June of 2016. Current VA Secretary David Shulkin, who has been faulted in multiple recent IG reports and is reportedly in President Trump’s crosshairs, served as head of VHA during that period. Just three of the 18 facilities the IG audited conducted the mandatory quarterly reviews of their new employee background investigation programs.

OSP and VHA agreed to provide better monitoring and oversight of background checks for new employees. VHA facilities will provide corrective action plans and OSP will create performance metrics to ensure compliance. Both offices will evaluate their human capital allocations, which the IG said were severely lacking and contributed to the slow or non-existent investigations. OSP also agreed to better collect and track documents and data related to the reviews, which it had failed to consistently store. [Source: GovExec.com | Eric Katz | March 27, 2018 ++]

VA Golden Age Games 2018 ► To Be Held AUG 3-8 in Albuquerque NM

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will begin accepting applications on April 2, 2018, from veterans interested in competing in the 2018 National Veterans Golden Age Games in Albuquerque, New Mexico, August 3-8, 2018. Veterans ages 55 and older who are eligible for VA health care benefits may complete applications online through May 2, 2018 at www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov. “The Golden Age Games empower our nation’s senior veterans to lead active, healthy lives,” said VA Secretary David Shulkin. “After more than a week of competition, many participants have boasted of an overall improvement to their quality of life and a rejuvenation to stay active and fit.”

Nearly 800 athletes are expected to compete in the national multi-sport competition for senior Veterans. The event encourages participants to make physical activity a central part of their lives, and supports VA’s comprehensive recreation and rehabilitation therapy programs. Competitive events include air rifle, badminton, basketball, boccia, bowling, cycling, blind disc golf, golf, horseshoes, nine ball, pickleball, powerwalk, shuffleboard, swimming, table tennis and track and field. Exhibition events include air pistol, archery and floorball. The games encourage participants to continue in local senior events in their home communities, and every other year serve as a qualifying event for competition in the National Senior Games. The New Mexico VA Health Care System, which provides care for more than 59,000 Veterans throughout New Mexico and Southern Colorado, will host this year’s games. For more information, visit www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov. Follow VA Adaptive Sports on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram @Sports4Vets. [Source: USVCP Staff | March 26, 2018 ++]

VA Medical Research ► Dog Testing Restrictions Under Spending Bill

New rules to prevent the Department of Veterans Affairs from conducting medical experiments on dogs was tucked into a massive spending package that Congress formulated to avoid a government shutdown this week. The measure would prohibit the use of dogs in VA research unless the objectives of a study can be met only by using them. Even in that instance, the study must be directly approved by the VA secretary. It also requires the VA secretary to report to Congress, detailing studies using dogs and why there were no alternatives. The inclusion of the restrictions on dog testing was a win for the White Coat Waste Project, a nonprofit that frames animal rights as a conservative issue by linking it to the waste of taxpayer dollars. The group has targeted the VA since last March for its use of dogs in medical research.

"We believe this legislation will defund most, if not all, of the VA's wasteful and painful experimentation on dogs that's widely opposed by veterans, taxpayers and Congress itself," said Justin Goodman, vice president of White Coat Waste Project. He described it as "bold action toward ending wasteful government spending on taxpayer-funded canine abuse." Last week, the VA announced a third party would be initiating a "rapid, in-depth" review of its research projects using dogs.

In response to criticisms about its use of dogs last year, the VA defended the projects, contending they were strictly controlled and monitored. The agency also touted innovations that have come from its research team, including the cardiac pacemaker. "We understand that this is a sensitive issue," VA Secretary David Shulkin said last week. "We look forward to a time when research involving canines is no longer necessary to advance the health of our veterans and are taking action to hasten that day, but until then, the agency has a duty to do everything in its power to develop new treatments to preserve and restore our veterans' health."

Last year, Sherman Gillums -- a veteran and advocate in Washington who now helps lead AMVETS -- spoke out against efforts to prevent VA research using dogs, stating concerns that stopping the research could potentially limit future medical advancements for veterans. Gillums has since changed his position. In a commentary in the Washington Times earlier this month, he wrote there are methods to create innovations other than "harming defenseless dogs and puppies." Gillums, and AMVETS as an organization, applauded the measure being included in Congress' spending bill. "We'd like to see the VA follow the lead of other government agencies by embracing technologies that obviate the need to put would-be pets and service animals through painful experimentations, many of which haven't delivered a significant breakthrough or clinical benefits to humans in decades," Gillums said.

The measure included in the spending package was led by Reps. Dave Brat (R-VA) and Dina Titus (D-NV) who introduced legislation last year to prevent taxpayer money from being spent on VA experiments using dogs. "Our nation's veterans deserve better than to have the VA spend taxpayers' money on painful, ineffective experiments on dogs while other important programs for veterans are neglected," Titus said 22 MAR in a statement. [Source: Stars and Stripes | Nikki Wentling | March 23, 2018 ++]

VA Mental Health Care Update 38 ► Bad Paper Discharge Access Approved

The \$1.3 trillion spending package that passed the U.S. House of Representatives on 22 MAR and signed into law 23 MAR by President Trump includes a new provision that would give more veterans access to mental health care. Bills had been introduced in both the House and Senate over the past year to provide veterans who have an "other than honorable" discharge access to care they were previously denied. Lawmakers drafted a compromise that made it into the omnibus spending bill this week. "It is critical that our men and women in uniform know they can reach

out to the [Department of Veterans Affairs] for help when they come home from a combat deployment," said Rep. Mike Coffman, a Colorado Republican and Marine Corps combat veteran who had sponsored one of the bills.

"We particularly need to watch out for those suffering from 'invisible' wounds that may lead to behavioral and other mental health conditions," Coffman said in a statement 22 MAR. Coffman, however, voted against the overall spending bill even though language from his mental health care legislation was included. Currently, individuals who have other-than-honorable discharges, known as "bad paper," are not eligible for veteran benefits beyond some emergency mental health services. The provision would require the VA to provide initial mental health assessments and services as deemed necessary, including for those at risk of suicide or of harming others, regardless of whether the individual has a bad paper discharge. However, veterans who received a dishonorable or a bad-conduct discharge stemming from a court-martial would still be ineligible to access the services. Coffman last year spearheaded the effort, resurrecting the legislation after a similar bill introduced in the House in 2016 didn't pass. It gained bipartisan support, with 40 co-sponsors.

High Ground Veterans Advocacy, a grass-roots organization training veterans to become leaders and activists in their local communities, has advocated for the measure. "These reforms would remove the current VA requirement that veterans with OTH discharges be in a state of 'urgent' or emergency before being able to get help, and marks the first time that Congress is willing to back [VA Secretary David] Shulkin's initiative to provide aid to veterans previously locked out of the health care system designed for them," said High Ground founder and Chairman Kristofer Goldsmith on Thursday. Last March, Shulkin testified to the House Committee on Veterans Affairs that the department intended to give veterans with bad paper more mental health care privileges. "We are going to go and start providing mental health care to those with other-than-honorable discharges," he said at the time.

Goldsmith said, "These reforms would create a more transparent and user-friendly process, and requires the Department of Defense to coordinate their efforts to ensure that veterans with OTH discharges aren't simply abandoned after being kicked out of the military. "It's important to note that these reforms are focused on veterans who were administratively discharged without the due process rights of a court-martial, which is the vast majority of veterans with bad paper -- both from the Post-9/11 generation and all of those from earlier service periods," he said in a statement. [Source: Military.com | Oriana Pawlyk | March 22, 2018 ++]

VA Reforms Update 07 ► In Jeopardy | Removed From Spending Bill

A deal collapsed 21 MAR to include multiple Department of Veterans Affairs reforms in a spending bill that Congress formulated to prevent a government shutdown. Earlier in the week, the bill was set to contain a measure to overhaul the VA Choice program, which veterans use to access private-sector medical care. A deal reached between key House and Senate lawmakers on VA oversight also included an expansion of benefits for veteran caregivers, as well as a plan to initiate a systematic review of VA infrastructure, with the intention of disposing of aging and underused facilities nationwide. When Congress unveiled its \$1.3 trillion, 2,232-page bill Wednesday evening, the VA reforms had been omitted.

- Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA) and Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT), leaders on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, predicted earlier in the day that the reforms would not be included in the final version of the spending bill.
- Tiffany Haverly, a spokeswoman for Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, said Roe's team worked to push for the VA reforms up until the bill was released.

House Democrats were opposed to the deal. Griffin Anderson, a spokesman for Democrats on the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, said they were against a measure to expand caregiver benefits because it didn't provide a clear way to fund those changes. Benefits such as monthly stipends, respite care and counseling are now

only available to caregivers of veterans injured after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which veterans and advocates say creates an unfair discrepancy. Changes to eligibility have been stalled for years in Congress because of the high cost of expanding benefits to more families. For Democrats, expanding the benefits is a top priority, but not without funding, Anderson said. "Yes the program would be authorized, but there would not be any money to fund this expansion," he wrote in an email.

Democrats also worried a measure to create an asset-review commission tasked with making decisions on VA facilities would severely limit Congress' authority to oversee VA infrastructure. They argued the measure didn't include funding to pay for infrastructure improvements. Arguably the most pressing measure -- and most debated -- is the proposed change to the Choice program. House Democrats believe the Choice overhaul included in the deal isn't enough of a revamp from the current program, Anderson said. The Choice program was created in 2014 in response to the VA wait-time scandal to ease demand on VA services by sending veterans into the private sector.

Negotiations of potential changes to the program have created disagreements and delays in Congress and highlighted divisions between VA leadership and White House insiders. The option of more choices in health care for veterans was a promise that President Donald Trump offered during his election campaign. The crux of the dispute is how far veterans' health care should be pushed into the private sector. Everyone involved in negotiations seems to agree the next iteration of the program should do away with the rules that allow veterans to go into the private sector only when they live more than 40 miles driving distance from a VA facility or have to wait longer than 30 days for an appointment. But House Democrats think the Senate's proposal -- the one intended for inclusion in the spending bill -- "makes virtually zero changes to eligibility from the current, arbitrary 30-day, 40 mile rule," Anderson said.

Roe wrote a letter 22 MAR to House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) urging her to support the VA reforms. The measures also had the backing of eight large veterans organizations, all of which signed onto a letter to congressional leaders 19 MAR encouraging the deal. They described the moment as a "historic opportunity" to pass multiple VA reforms at once. On Wednesday afternoon, when it appeared the deal was falling apart, Carlos Fuentes, legislative director for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, said his organization was disappointed the VA reforms wouldn't make the cut. The possibility of delaying the measures until summer or fall would be "unacceptable," he added. Isakson said he wants to try again to pass the measures when lawmakers return from break in April. It's uncertain, though, when the issues could be taken up again. The reforms were each previously introduced in Congress as separate bills, but all of them have been deadlocked in recent months.

The spending bill would have provided a fast-track for their approval. "I would've liked to get it in there," Isakson said. "But the effort we've gone to has gotten everybody educated on the great job we've done to address three major concerns in the VA, so I think we'll get it done. Obviously, I'd love for it to be in the omnibus and be over, but it's a step forward in terms of what we're going to do with it." The massive spending bill was delayed this week, held back by several hot-button initiatives vying to be tacked on as policy riders. Lawmakers had to act by the end of Friday (23 MAR) to avoid a partial government shutdown. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | March 22, 2018 ++]

VA Agent Orange Healthcare ► Expansion Limited by Cost, Science and Politics

VA Secretary David Shulkin suggests he favors expansion of Agent Orange-related health care and disability compensation to new categories of ailing veterans but that factors like cost, medical science and politics still stand in the way. Shulkin told the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on 21 MAR that he made recommendations to White House budget officials last year on whether to add up to four more conditions -- bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, Parkinson-like tremors and hypertension (high blood pressure) -- to the VA list of 14 illnesses presumed caused by exposure to herbicides used during the Vietnam War.

“I have transmitted my recommendations to the [White House’s] Office of Management and Budget. I did that by Nov. 1st”, Shulkin said. “And we are in the process right now of going through this data. In fact, we met with [OMB officials] on 19 MAR. They asked for some additional data to be able to work through the process and be able to get financial estimates for this. So, we are committed to working with OMB to get this resolved in the very near future.” Shulkin didn’t say which of the four conditions, if any, he wants added to the presumptive list, if and when cleared by the White House.

At the same hearing, the VA chief was asked his position on Blue Water Navy veterans of the Vietnam War who also suffer from illnesses on the VA presumptive list but aren’t eligible to use it to facilitate claims for care and compensation. They “have waited too long for this,” Shulkin agreed, but then suggested the solution for these veterans is blocked by medical evidence or swings on the will of the Congress. “I would like to try to find a way where we can resolve that issue for them, rather than make them continue to wait,” Shulkin said. “I do not believe there will be scientific data [to] give us a clear answer, like we do have on the Agent Orange presumptive” list for veterans who had served in-country. “For the Blue Water Navy...epidemiologic studies just aren’t available from everything I can see. So, we’re going to have sit down and do what we think is right for these veterans.”

Vietnam veterans who served even a day in country who have illnesses on the presumptive list can qualify for VA medical care and disability compensation without having to show other evidence that their ailments are service connected. Shulkin said VA “recently” received the last report of the National Academy of Medicine (NAM), which found a stronger scientific association than earlier studies between certain ailments and herbicide exposure. In fact, however, VA has had the that report, Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 2014, for two years. It was written by a committee of medical experts that reviewed medical and scientific literature on select ailments and herbicide exposure published from Oct. 1, 2012, through Sept. 30, 2014. Released in March 2016, the report found evidence to support raising the strength of association between herbicide exposure and bladder cancer and hypothyroidism. The report upgrades the link from “inadequate or insufficient” evidence to “limited or suggestive” evidence of an association.

In years past VA decided that for some ailments, such as Parkinson’s and ischemic heart disease, “limited or suggestive evidence” was enough to add these illnesses to the Agent Orange presumptive list. For others, including hypertension, a more common disease of aging, VA deemed it wasn’t enough. This last NAM report, however, looked again at cardiovascular conditions and herbicide exposure. It didn’t upgrade the link to heart ailments but it did affirm limited or suggestive evidence that hypertension is linked to herbicide exposure. It also studied whether Parkinson’s-like symptoms should fall into the same limited or suggestive category as Parkinson’s disease itself. The 2016 report found “no rational basis” to continue to exclude Parkinson-like symptoms from the same risk category. Parkinson’s disease itself was added to presumptive list in 2010.

VA secretaries under both the Obama and Trump administration reacted more slowly on the last NAM perhaps, by law, they could. Congress in 2015 let a portion of the Agent Orange law expire, language that required the VA Secretary to decide on new presumptive conditions within 180 days of accepting a NAM report. The impact was immediate. Though a senior VA official tasked with reviewing this last NAM report said then-VA Secretary Bob McDonald would make his decisions within three months, it didn’t happen. McDonald left it to his successor. Shulkin waited more months and, in July 2017, vowed to decide by 1 NOV. OMB blocked an announcement, however, presumably over projected costs. Cost has been a factor too in Congress not passing legislation to extend VA benefits to Blue Water Navy veterans diagnosed with illnesses on the presumptive list. Budget analysts a few years ago estimated a cost of \$1.1 billion over 10 years.

Also, NAM did conduct a review of medical and scientific evidence regarding Blue Water Veterans’ possible exposure to herbicides and concluded in a May 2011 report that "there was not enough information...to determine whether Blue Water Navy personnel were or were not exposed to Agent Orange." Blue Water Veterans remain being ineligible to use the Agent Orange presumptive list. A lone exception is granted for veterans with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Vietnam veterans with this ailment may be granted service-connection without showing

inland waterway service or that they set foot in country. In every session of Congress, going back years, Blue Water Navy bills have been introduced. They would, if passed, “include as part of the Republic of Vietnam its territorial seas for purposes of the presumption of service connection for diseases associated with exposure [to] herbicide agents while in Vietnam.”

The current House version of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act (H.R.299), introduced in January 2017 by Rep. David Valado (R-GA) has 327 co-sponsors. Yet prospects of passage remain dim. Valado reminded Shulkin at a mid-March hearing of the House Veterans Affairs Committee that, six months ago, Shulkin said he was seeking more recommendations from “subject matter experts” on the issue and would be ready to update Congress in the coming months. Valado asked, “Have you come to a decision on Blue Water Navy veterans?” “I am aligned with you that these veterans have waited too long,” Shulkin said, “and this is a responsibility that this country has. And, as our veterans get older, it’s unfair...I believe it is imperative upon us to resolve this issue. “I also believe,” Shulkin continued, “that there will not be strong scientific data to help resolve this,” in other words to justify benefit expansion. “This is going to be an obligation that we feel as a country, that these veterans shouldn’t be waiting any longer. And I am on the side of trying to find a way to resolve this for the Blue Water Navy veterans.”

Shulkin said his staff is “working hard to look at offsets” which means cuts to other parts of the VA budget to pay for Blue Water Navy benefits, or to find “other ways to be able to do that. And it is a high priority for us.” Reminded by Valado that “with these types of cancers, time is of the essence,” Shulkin replied, “Absolutely.” The Senate version of Blue Water legislation, S.422, was introduced 16 FEBN 2017 by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), has 49 co-sponsors and, so far, equally dim prospects of passage. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Tom Philpott | March 22, 2018 ++]

GI Bill Update 251 ► Delayed Spring Semester Payments

The VA has reported that GI Bill payments for the spring semester are experiencing "longer than usual processing times". Many veterans whose spring term began in January are reporting that they still have not received any GI Bill payments for their schooling as they begin their midterm breaks. For its part, the VA apologizes for the delay and says the delays are due to high claim volume during spring enrollment season and installation of computer system upgrades. They also say that claims are being processed in the order in which they were received. The Post-9/11 GI Bill normally consists of three different payments: tuition & fee reimbursement directly to the school, and a monthly housing allowance and book stipend which are paid directly to the veteran. Many veterans who rely on the regular payment of their monthly housing allowance in order to make their rent or mortgage payments are facing financial difficulties due to the delay. The VA says that anyone experiencing a hardship due to the delay should contact the customer service center at 888-442-4551 or via the online portal. Depending on the circumstances, VA may be able to expedite any delayed payments. [Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | March 18, 2018 ++]

GI Bill Update 252 ► Private/Foreign School Limit Increase

If you're going to a private or foreign school and using the Post-9/11 GI Bill you know that your tuition reimbursement is currently limited to \$22,805.34 each year. Effective Aug. 1, 2018 this amount will go up to \$23,671.94 for the 2018 - 2019 academic year. An academic year is defined by the VA as Aug.1 – Jul. 31. While the Post-9/11 GI Bill will pay your full tuition & fees if you are going to a state school, the law was changed in 2011 to limit private schools to an annual maximum amount. This was done as a reaction to the large amount of money some private schools were getting from the VA for educating veterans.

The Monthly Housing Allowance also changes on 1 AUG based on the 2018 military BAH rates. If the BAH increased for your area on 1 JAN, you will see an increase in your September payment for classes taken in August. If the BAH decreased for your area, your Monthly Housing Allowance will not decrease unless you change schools or have more than a six-month break in training. [See Military.com's Monthly Housing Allowance page for details.](#) If you're attending a private or foreign school and have tuition and fees higher than the academic year cap, you must make up any tuition reimbursement shortfall through personal funds or financial aid.

Schools in the US can choose to participate in the [Yellow Ribbon program](#) which can waive a portion of the difference in the tuition GI Bill recipients are charged and the amount covered by the Post-9/11 GI Bill. You should verify a school's participation in the Yellow Ribbon program before enrolling. The amount of tuition & fees covered by the GI Bill is determined by your [Post-9/11-GI Bill entitlement percentage](#) which is based on the active duty service after Sep. 10, 2001. For example, if you served 24 months active duty after Sep. 10, 2001 your GI Bill percentage is 80 percent. If you're going to a state school that has tuition of \$10,000 a semester, the GI Bill would pay you 80 percent of the tuition and fees or \$8,000. Likewise, if you are going to a private or foreign school and entitled to the same 80 percent rate you would get \$18,937.55, or 80 percent of \$23,671.94.

Veterans who have served more than 36 months active duty receive 100 percent of the entitlement percentage. Active duty time for the Post-9/11 GI Bill can also include Title 10 mobilizations for reservists & guard members. [The Post-9/11 GI Bill also pays a \\$1,000 annual books and supplies stipend.](#) [Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | March 19, 2018 ++]

VA Special Monthly Compensation Update 02 ► Non-Economic Loss Compensation

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) program may provide tax free benefits in addition to, or instead of, disability compensation if there is loss (or loss of use of) a limb, sight, speech, hearing, mobility, sexual organ or functioning, or for certain other disabilities. There may be eligibility for SMC if the veteran is unable to leave the house or bed without help or is in need of regular help from another person in performing the basic tasks of everyday life, such as eating, bathing, dressing, toileting and transferring.

SMC compensates for non-economic losses, such as personal inconvenience and loss of use of a body part, or body system. SMC is one of the most complex VA programs. There are about 60 levels of SMC divided into nine letter categories (here are approximately 60 levels of SMC divided into 9 letter categories which consist of: "K," "L," "M," "N," "O," "P," "R," "S," and "T." Some of the letter categories also have "half" levels, which are displayed as "½" symbol after the letter. If you are awarded SMC, the VA will inform you which of these categories of SMC you qualify for. If you get SMC, the VA will tell you which of these categories you qualify for. The two most common SMC letters are:

- **K:** Anatomical loss of either one hand, one foot, both buttocks, one or more creative organs used for reproduction due to trauma while in the service (or as a residual of service-connected disabilities), one eye, voice due to disease or deafness of both ears.
- **S:** Veteran has a 100 percent service-connected disability; a qualifying, additional service-connected disability (or disabilities) that is separate from the first disability and is independently rated at 60 percent; or is approved for VA disability compensation. Or, disabilities must directly cause the veteran to be confined to home. Also, it must be certain that a veteran's disability or disabilities and confinement will continue for the rest of his or her life.

Because VA's Special Monthly Compensation program is one of the most confusing and intricate programs that the VA offers, it is important that you seek assistance from an accredited veterans service officer. Find an American Legion service officer: www.legion.org/serviceofficers. To view the rate tables effective December 1, 2017 refer to

https://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/resources_comp02.asp. [Source: American Legion | VSO Cajun Comeau | March 2018 ++]

Dependents' Educational Assistance Update 04 ► The Forgotten Benefit

Under this seldom used education program, family members of troops killed in action or those with 100% service-connected disabilities are able to obtain up to 45 months of education benefits in the form of a monthly stipend. The DEA program provides education and training compensation to eligible dependents of veterans who are permanently and totally disabled due to a service-related condition or of veterans who died while on active duty or as a result of a service-related condition. The amount allocated to a dependent can be up to a maximum of \$1,021.00 a month for full-time students per rates as determined in October 2015.

The money from this program is intended to be used as supplemental income for dependents seeking degrees, certificate programs, apprenticeships, or on-the-job training. The DEA program is separate from the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. Dependents of service members who died in the line of duty or served adequate time to be able to transfer their G.I. Bill benefits can also be eligible for the DEA program, but only for up to 81 months of total full-time benefits. However, both programs may not be used concurrently.

Dependent children planning to apply for this benefit must fall between the ages of 18 and 26. As a dependent child, he/she will have up to age 26 to use the benefits. Spouses must use it within 10 years from the date VA finds one eligible or from the date of death of the Veteran. The bill appears to be flexible in that children of fallen or disabled service members can be married, the money can be used for colleges or job training programs, and there are rates that vary and can apply to part-time or full-time schooling — unlike with the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. In order to apply, dependents must complete VA Form 22-5490 [<https://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/vba-22-5490-are.pdf>] and submit it to the VA for consideration. [Source: USVCP | Laura Martinez | March 14, 2018 ++]

VA Secretary Update 67 ► Our Veterans Need Shulkin

“Amid the flurry of contradictory media reports citing various unnamed sources, it’s a challenge deciphering the truth from the ‘Fake’ news. What remains constant, however, is VA Secretary David Shulkin’s firm stance to protect the VA from those who would like to see it handed over to the for profit, private sector health system,” said VVA National President John Rowan. “Secretary Shulkin understands that veterans would be lost in the private sector, and he knows that President Trump’s commitment to caring for our nation’s veterans is paramount. We want to see Secretary Shulkin finish the revitalization of the VA that was ordered by President Trump.”

“Furthermore, some of the recent negative news stories have been misleading. While the issues identified by the VA Inspector General’s report on the D.C. Medical Center were real, they are old news,” noted Rowan. “Secretary Shulkin fired VA Medical Center Director Brian Hawkins in September 2017 for failure to provide effective leadership at the D.C. Medical Center. He utilized the VA Accountability Act, signed into law by President Trump in June 2017, making effective use of this much-needed legislation.” In a House hearing on 15 MAR, Secretary Shulkin told the Appropriations Subcommittee that he is not in favor of privatization. “You can’t take the 9.1 million veterans getting care in the VA system — 60 percent of whom carry a mental health issue — and release them into the general public. It simply couldn’t work by turning on a switch and privatizing the system,” Shulkin said.

“The President is very, very committed to improving services for veterans,” noted Shulkin, praising him for his support of the proposed \$200 billion budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Shulkin told the Appropriations Subcommittee that while there is no pressure to privatize the VA from the White House, there is pressure to fix the VA, and the way to fix the VA is by investing in it where it needs to be improved and also by working with the private sector. “We have no issue with the VA getting assistance from the outside when relevant and necessary, but veterans prefer to get their comprehensive care at the VA,” said Rowan, noting that many do not realize the VA already makes excellent use of outside medical resources.

Most VA Medical Centers are affiliated with a medical school, which provides many of the specialized medical personnel that veterans need. “My aortic valve replacement last year at the Manhattan VAMC was done by the chief thoracic surgeon and his surgical team from NYU Medical Center. But my aftercare was provided by the skilled and caring staff at the VAMC, many of whom were veterans,” noted Rowan [Source: VVA Press Release | March 16, 2018 ++]

VA Secretary Update 68 ► Despite Backing Shulkin To Be Replaced

A key Republican senator told President Donald Trump over the weekend of 17 MAR that he had “full confidence” in Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin, as Senate Republicans fret that Shulkin’s rumored replacement would be impossible to confirm. Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA), chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee, said he made the case for keeping Shulkin during a discussion with the president about legislation on veterans care. Trump has been mulling firing Shulkin after reports that Shulkin used taxpayer money on a trip to Europe, and potentially replacing him with a Fox News personality, Pete Hegseth, according to The Washington Post. Republicans do not want that to happen.

Shulkin has done “a great job” as secretary, Isakson said in an interview on 19 MAR. “Yes, there have been a few difficult times, but that’s because we’re making progress. I’ve talked to the president about my confidence in Shulkin. Hegseth would be enormously difficult to confirm if he were Shulkin’s replacement, according to two Republican aides. Republicans control just 51 seats in the Senate, and Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) is recovering from cancer treatment. The aides said GOP senators oppose Hegseth for his criticism of their work. Hegseth has attacked Isakson in the past as a “so-called Republican” and a “Swamp-creature” for working with Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) on veterans legislation. Isakson declined to give his thoughts on Hegseth on Monday, and said he was “not aware” of any serious plan to replace Shulkin, whom he called a “good man” who has “gotten his hands dirty” on veterans issues.

Secretary Shulkin said 16 MAR that he had no intention of leaving his job even as the White House hinted at the possibility of “personnel changes” to lead the beleaguered agency. Speaking at a budget hearing, Shulkin expressed regret for “distractions” that have shifted attention from his efforts to fix veterans’ health care and pledged to put the government’s second largest department back on track. Shulkin, the lone Obama administration holdover in Trump’s Cabinet, praised the congressional oversight committees for largely standing behind him to fix the Department of Veterans Affairs, compared to critics he said were “more interested in politics.” “With all of the distractions that are happening in Washington and all the distractions in VA, the events that have happened should remind us all about why it’s so important that we’re doing what we’re doing today to get this budget right and get VA on track,” he told a House appropriations subcommittee. “I came here for one reason and that is to improve the lives of veterans.”

Unfortunately, despite all the support that Shulkin was receiving from veteran groups, the President announced on twitter 28 SEP *‘I am pleased to announce that I intend to nominate highly respected Admiral Ronny L. Jackson, MD, as the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs.’* [Source: Politico | Burgess Everett | March 19, 2018 ++]

VA Secretary Update 69 ► Only As Good As Their President... And Their Congress

As the House Democrats showed when they quashed VA community care expansion in the recent budget bill, a VA secretary can make proposals, engage stakeholders, and build consensus, only to have the whole plan blown up by politics as usual. That’s pretty much been a theme of VA Secretary Shulkin’s tenure. While he has remained largely bipartisan during his time at the VA, he’s faced conflicting pressures from the White House, lawmakers, and veterans service organizations on the Hill, as Task & Purpose previously [reported](#). “I don’t see Dr. Shulkin as an ideologue, I see him between a rock and a hard place,” Rep. Mark Takano, a California Democrat on the House Veterans Affairs Committee, [told](#) T&P 20 MAR. “He’s under tremendous pressure from those on the right to privatize and then he has to deal with Congress and veterans service organizations who, for the most part, are not into privatization. As a result, he’s been very squishy on the issue.”

But a Veterans Affairs secretary also ultimately serves at the request of the elected president and his agenda, Dan Caldwell, the executive director for Concerned Veterans For America, told T&P. “I do think it matters who the VA secretary is, but it ultimately matters more who’s president and what their veterans agenda is,” Caldwell added. “The VA secretary can be an incredibly powerful position, but the White House has a say here, and that’s with any administration. It just depends on how the White House decides to insert themselves or not insert themselves.”

The question, though, is how even a well-intending VA secretary can operate for the good of all veterans when he deals with so many political actors, all of whose calculations of “what’s good for the veteran” can differ dramatically. Can a secretary whose priorities necessarily zigzag with every election, budget fight, or late-night tweet *really* serve the veteran? Yes and no. It largely depends on a leader — and a department — being able to keep their eyes on the ultimate goal, no matter the obstacles that may obscure it. On that front, Shulkin has done well, Rep. Tim Walz of Minnesota, the ranking Democrat on the House Veterans Affairs Committee told T&P. “Now, when you ask a VA employee who they work for, they say ‘for the veteran,’” he said. “They used to say whoever their supervisor was, and that’s the wrong answer.” [Source: Task & Purpose | James Clark | March 27, 2018 ++]

VA Secretary Update 70 ► Trump's Surprise Nomination Raises Questions

President Donald Trump’s sudden firing of Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin and surprise nomination of the White House’s top physician to take his place has raised concerns among lawmakers and veterans groups who worry it will disrupt ongoing efforts to reform the massive federal bureaucracy. Shulkin, who was approved by a 100-0 vote in the Senate about 14 months ago, became the second top VA executive forced out of office in less than four years. Veterans groups and a series of prominent lawmakers had petitioned Trump to keep Shulkin in place in recent weeks, arguing his tenure was mostly characterized by significant, meaningful reforms.

But Trump in a series of tweets on 29 MAR, Trump announced he intended to nominate presidential physician Rear Adm. Ronny Jackson to replace Shulkin, and to move Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Robert Wilkie into the interim leadership post while the transition occurs. Jackson, a 23-year sailor and a respected military physician, is largely an unknown in the veterans community. None of his official biography mentions work with the department, or in veterans issues. He is an Iraq War veteran how deployed as an emergency medicine physician with the Surgical Shock Trauma Platoon in Taqaddum, Iraq, in 2005. He served as the White House doctor for former presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, directing health care for not only the commander-in-chief but their senior staff and Cabinet officials.

He'll now take over the second-largest federal department, with a staff of more than 360,000 employees who handle health care needs of more than 9 million veterans. Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., said after the announcement that he looks forward "to meeting Admiral Jackson and learning more about him." Committee ranking member Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) expressed similar unfamiliarity with Jackson's background, saying he hopes to find out "if he is up for the job." Both men are currently working with House and administration officials on an ambitious VA health care overhaul, one that has been entangled in debates of privatization of department responsibilities and how much VA funding should be shifted to private-care options for veterans. Shulkin was seen as a central figure in those discussions, although his positions on the issue lead in part to his dismissal.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) promised serious scrutiny for the new nominee on those issues. "This firing threatens the VA's vital mission to provide first-rate health care, employment services, and essential benefits that we owe to our nation's heroes, regardless of who is president," he said in a statement. "It threatens to deepen and spread chaos and dysfunction prevalent in this administration to veterans' services that should be enhanced, not diminished." House Veterans' Affairs Committee ranking member Tim Walz (D-MN) in a statement said he didn't know much of Jackson's background, "but I know he has a lot of work to do following the chaos and dysfunction President Trump has created at the VA."

Veterans groups also expressed skepticism. "The VA has a broad mission and the secretary must be someone who is imminently qualified to lead the nation's second largest cabinet agency," said Carl Blake, executive director of Paralyzed Veterans of America. "In particular, reforming VA's health care system to better serve the needs of veterans and their families is of great importance. We encourage the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs to take these concerns very seriously as it considers Admiral Jackson's nomination." But Sarah Verardo, executive director of conservative-backed Independence Fund, said the move can help move the department out of its current controversies and refocus leaders on reform efforts. "Obviously, as the White House physician, Admiral Jackson has the president's trust, which will be vital in bridging the final barriers to getting real VA health care choice enacted into law," she said. "Who is or is not the secretary is not important when this president has laid out such a clear and compelling vision for the VA. What matters is the president has a secretary with whom he can work effectively to achieve that vision."

No timeline has been set for confirmation hearings for Jackson. The process typically takes several months, but that could be extended or sped up based on Congress' shortened legislative schedule this year due to the November mid-term elections. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 28, 2018 ++]

VA Vet Choice Update 73 ► Program Impact on Maine Hospitals

A 4-year-old program that allows veterans to receive health care services closer to home is working well in Maine for the veterans, but not as well for hospitals. Maine hospital officials say the VA Choice Program is being undermined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' inability to promptly reimburse them for the care they deliver. Rep. Bruce Poliquin, a Republican from Maine's 2nd District, said he is committed to clearing the bottleneck of more than \$10 million in VA back payments to Maine hospitals. "When you have a rural hospital that contracts with the VA to provide services for veterans, those hospitals need to get paid, and paid on time," Poliquin said.

The VA is supposed to pay Maine's hospitals that participate in the VA Choice program within 90 days. The program is an option that allows veterans to receive medical care closer to home instead of driving to the Togus facility in Augusta. But Maine hospital representatives say the VA is up to two years behind with the payments, and for some smaller medical facilities operating on tight margins, the back payments are potentially crucial to the facility's solvency. "Twenty-six of the 36 hospitals in this state are struggling financially," Rod Boula, CEO at

Calais Regional Hospital, said. “Three hospitals have closed in Maine since 2013. We don’t want to be the fourth, fifth or sixth. We don’t want to be closed at all. We want to remain open.”

Poliquin said he became aware of the slow reimbursement process for the VA claims at Calais Regional Hospital last year. As the months rolled by and the payments were still not received, the congressman said he demanded a meeting with Health Net Federal Services, a third party intermediary that coordinates care for veterans. “Last October I had had enough,” Poliquin said. “I got in the car with two of my staffers, and we drove out to the headquarters of Health Net. We walked in unannounced, and I demanded to see the president of Health Net, and I was not going to leave until I met with him. We shut the door and we were in there for one hour. And I told him I was not going to leave ‘until you commit to me that we’re going to get Calais hospital paid, so they can meet payroll.” Poliquin said the company responded and within a week of his visit, repayment arrangements were made with Calais Regional Hospital.

But slow VA payments continue and Poliquin said he helped to found the Congressional Rural Hospitals Caucus to help address this issue. Lisa Harvey McPherson, representing Eastern Maine Health Systems, said that three years ago hospitals in her organization were owed about \$12 million in VA payments. Those were paid but, she said the problem has resurfaced. “What we realize now is this is cyclical in nature,” McPherson said. “We’ve pretty much cleared up those claims from 2013, 2014, 2015. But yet today in 2018, we’re working on claims from 2016-2017. We are fundamentally challenged to fix this.” Poliquin said he is hopeful the new priority he and others in Congress are placing on the VA will result in a new and more timely payment process. In January, VA Secretary David J. Shulkin issued a statement promising that improving the timeliness of payments to community providers remains a critical element of the VA’s overall goals. [Source: Bangor Daily News | A.J. Higgins | March 26, 2018 ++]

VAMC Buffalo NY Update 03 ► Inappropriate Action Led to Patient's Death

Two Buffalo Veterans Affairs Medical Center employees left their jobs after they were implicated in the botched decision not to try to revive a patient suffering cardiac arrest, a spokeswoman for the facility said 14MAR. A report from the Department of Affairs Inspector General released earlier this week said staffers at the hospital should have tried to resuscitate that patient when he fell gravely ill in late 2016. The Inspector General also criticized the hospital for not immediately removing the staffers from patient-care duties while it investigated the incident. But Evangeline Conley, spokeswoman for the hospital, said the employees were disciplined. "In response to this report, two employees have been proposed for removal and both no longer work for VA," Conley said. "Another employee has received the appropriate level of discipline, and more disciplinary actions are possible." Conley declined to provide further details, such as the titles of those disciplined, for privacy reasons.

The report, which the center received in November and which was released to The Buffalo News this week, offers a scathing review of the actions of several Buffalo VA employees at a time of crisis for the patient, who died after failing to get the proper treatment. A registered nurse and respiratory therapist "acted outside their scopes of practice and violated Veterans Health Administration and facility policy when they announced that the patient was dead, which influenced others not to take appropriate action," the report said. The registered nurse did not want to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation out of fear that the patient was so frail that the procedure could crush his chest, the report said.

Another registered nurse should have, but didn't, monitor the patient's heart rhythms. That nurse also abandoned the desk where she was supposed to monitor the vital signs of other patients, "thereby temporarily placing other monitored patients at risk," the report said. The incident prompted the Inspector General's office to issue several recommendations. The hospital's top officer should review the incident and confer with the Office of Human Resources and the VA general counsel to determine if actions should be taken in response to it, set up mock drills to

make sure employees react appropriately to health emergencies, and conduct a review to identify any "issues undermining teamwork," the report said. The Buffalo VA hospital said in the report that it would adopt the recommendations, and Conley, the hospital spokeswoman, stressed that the facility is taking the report seriously.

VA Secretary David Shulkin "has made it clear that he will hold employees accountable when the facts demonstrate that they have failed to live up to the high standards veterans and taxpayers expect, and that's exactly what we will do in this case," she said.

The report enraged members of Congress who serve the Buffalo area. Sen. Kirsten E. Gillibrand, a New York Democrat who sits on the Armed Services Committee, called on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee to hold a hearing on the matter. "Providing the highest standard of care for our veterans is a solemn promise that should never be broken," Gillibrand said. Rep. Brian Higgins, a Buffalo Democrat, said he plans to write to Shulkin about the incident. He also noted that the problems at the Buffalo VA are by no means unique. "These problems are, unfortunately, defining the entire VA system in Buffalo and nationally," he said. Part of the problem, Higgins said, is that VA hospitals are overcrowded and outdated. He suggested upgrading them, using funds that could be saved if the United States pulled its forces out of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Rep. Tom Reed, a Corning Republican, called the Inspector General's report "very concerning." But he said he was heartened that Michael J. Swartz recently took over as interim health care system director at the Buffalo VA facility. Reed came to know Swartz when he ran the VA facilities in Bath and Canandaigua, and called Swartz after seeing the Inspector General's report earlier this week. "He's already taking steps to improve the system," Reed said. "I know Mike, I know his commitment to veterans. I'm confident he will do what's necessary."

Rep. Chris Collins, in a letter to Shulkin, also praised Swartz. "While he is working to change the culture at the facility and ensure that our service men and women are treated properly, there is a systemic problem across the entire VA healthcare system," said Collins, who asked Shulkin's office to oversee the implementation of the Inspector General's recommendations in Buffalo and at other VA facilities around the country. [Source: The Buffalo News | Jerry Zremski | March 14, 2018 ++]

VA HCS Palo Alto CA Update 01 ► Data Breach Reported

If you are receiving care at the Palo Alto, CA Veterans Affairs Health Care System you may want to keep an eye on your credit report and personal information. A military.com staffer recently received a letter from the VA Palo Alto Health Care System director saying his personal information may have been compromised by the VA. The notification said that the Palo Alto Health Care System sent out letters to veterans that had one veteran's name but another's address on the envelopes. These mailings consisted of postcards inside envelopes that were invites to a research study. It wasn't immediately clear if there was any personal or medical information on the postcards, or what exactly the study was for. However, the VA recommends any veterans who may have been affected by this data breach to be especially vigilant and careful with any communications purported to be from the VA that ask for personal information. The VA Palo Alto Health Care System consists of three inpatient facilities located at Palo Alto, Menlo Park, and Livermore plus seven outpatient clinics in San Jose, Fremont, Capitola, Monterey, Stockton, Modesto, and Sonora. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | March 29, 2018 ++]

*** Vets ***



Military Parades Update 03 ► MOAA Survey Results | Costly Distraction

A majority of members of the Military Officers Association of America do not support President Trump's plan to hold a military parade, a new MOAA survey shows. MOAA was wrapping up its survey just as a 8 MAR Pentagon memo released new planning details for the parade. About 62 percent of respondents said they would not support the parade - under any circumstance. The most common reason? About 52 percent said it was a "costly distraction." MOAA's survey was based on a call to action to the membership via email. Results became available 13 MAR from a survey conducted earlier this month. MOAA received 7,525 responses.

Of those surveyed, about 27 percent said they supported a parade, conditionally. Based on reasons provided in the survey, about 13 percent would support a parade that served as "a national display of military might and dedicated servicemembers;" 9 percent would support a parade if it were tied to a significant victory; and 5 percent would support a parade to commemorate World War I and Veterans Day. Veterans Day originated as "Armistice Day" Nov. 11, 1919, the first anniversary of the end of World War I. About 10 percent did not select from the reasons offered.

The Pentagon memo released last week details a parade planned on Veterans Day, in Washington, D.C. The parade will integrate with Washington's Veterans Day Parade, and its main goal will be to showcase military service through the years. There will be no tanks, but there will be wheeled vehicles ("consideration must be given to minimize damage to local infrastructure," the memo notes). An official announcement has not been made at the time of this story release. "This parade would cost a lot of money and our debt is getting out of hand," wrote one retired Navy captain in their survey response. Budget analysts have estimated the parade would cost between \$10 million and \$30 million. The captain continued in his survey response, "veterans are well respected now - especially this all volunteer force. I think the 1-2% of our population that are in uniform are doing an awfully good job for the other 98% of us. They deserve our utmost respect, but big parades should be reserved for significant events. The government needs to do a cost/benefit analysis on things like this before embarking on annual parades."

Not everyone who responded agreed. "The military is a forgotten force," wrote one respondent. "Americans go about their everyday activities and do not think about the selfless service and the power that our military consists of and portrays. A parade such as this will increase the pool of candidates interested in joining the military, and thus increase the quality point index of servicemen and -women, thus increasing readiness and effectiveness. Fantastic idea!" A retired Air Force colonel also supported the parade, emphasizing its ability to reach the American public. "The military is not made of weapons but of the men and women trained in their use and willing to put their lives on the line to use them in defense of our nations values," he wrote.

But when MOAA asked members to rate the best strategies for improving public perception of the military, parades were ranked lowest of all options provided. Airshows ranked the highest, followed by news coverage of military operations, and ceremonial military units. Advertisements and military bands ranked slightly lower (although were still considered slightly more than "somewhat useful"). Parades ranked slightly below "somewhat useful" in influencing Americans' perceptions of the military. A number of MOAA members requested President Trump make better use of the parade money. As one respondent put it, "Money would be better spent on veterans' issues like homelessness, addiction, mental health, etc."

MOAA, the nation's largest and most influential association of military officers representing 350,000 members, sought membership input to provide an unvarnished perspective from our wide range of members from the currently serving, to the retirees, to the veterans. The high number of responses speaks to the interest level of those whose opinions ought to matter. [Source: MOAA | Tony Lombardo | March 15, 2018 ++]



National Vietnam War Veterans Day ► Annually On 29 March

The Veterans Affairs Department estimates we are losing more than 500 veterans per day who served during the Vietnam War years. We must act now to do what should have been done 50 years ago. Across the nation, Americans are uniting to thank and honor these veterans and their families for their service and sacrifice. Spearheading this effort is the United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration office. Of special significance, President Trump last year signed into law the Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act of 2017, establishing National Vietnam War Veterans Day that will, henceforth, be celebrated every March 29. This March 29 will be the first anniversary of the new law.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington — “the Wall” — plays a significant role in our nation’s honoring of our Vietnam veterans on that special day. The Wall is an arresting reminder to its more than 5 million annual visitors of the service and sacrifice of the more than 58,000 Americans whose names are on that black granite memorial. There is something haunting and yet cleansing about that special place. Senior members of the Defense Department and VA participate in a wreath-laying ceremony on that day at that hallowed site. The commemoration office also coordinates with governors of all U.S. states, commonwealths and territories, and the mayor of the District of Columbia, to host similar events on or around this day; as of 19 MAR, 47 states had committed to do so.

The commemoration was authorized by Congress, under DoD auspices, and launched at the Wall in 2012. The goal is to thank and honor America’s 6.6 million living veterans of the 9 million who served on active duty in the U.S. armed forces from Nov. 1, 1955, to May 15, 1975 — regardless of location — and the families of all who served. Nearly 3 million served “in country” and another 6 million served elsewhere. All were called to serve. None could self-determine where they were stationed, and each deserves our thanks. Those who served in country experienced unique hardships that only come with service in a combat zone, which every veteran understands and honors. While we recognize all, those who served in country deserve our special appreciation.

Inspired by thousands of local, state and national organizations that have partnered with the commemoration, Americans have already publicly and individually thanked and honored nearly 2 million of these veterans and their families in hometowns across the nation. Those who have joined in the hometown-centric Commemorative Partner Program (more than 11,000 organizations) have committed to conducting two events per year, in their local

communities, that recognize and honor our veterans and their families. These partners have held more than 12,000 events to date. There are no costs associated with becoming a commemorative partner, and organizations are heartily invite to join the mix of dedicated local and national businesses, corporations, veterans and military organizations, associations, educational institutions, community groups, towns, cities, states and many others that have committed to assist the nation in this noble effort.

The commemoration providings Vietnam Veteran lapel pins to commemorative partners for dignified public presentations, during commemorative events, to living U.S. veterans who served during the Vietnam War period. Each veteran who served during the dates above is eligible to receive one lapel pin. Vietnam veterans can locate upcoming commemorative events [here](#); zoom in to locate your state and city or town, and click a blue pin to reveal details of an upcoming event, including contact information. If there are no blue pins in your area, check back frequently as new events are added every week. Veterans who need help finding a commemorative event can email the commission at whs.pentagon.wso.mbx.vnwar50th-cpp-events-application@mail.mil



Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pin Front) (left)

Now is the time for all Americans to fully embrace the brave men and women who returned home from Vietnam and other locations around the world, often to shame and disgrace — or served in uniform during that period and failed to get the respect due them — by publicly thanking them with honor and dignity, as well as recognizing the sacrifices of their families. Visit www.vietnamwar50th.com or email them for more information about the Commemoration and the Commemorative Partner Program, respectively. Join the nation ... thank a Vietnam veteran! [Source: MilitaryTimes | Army Maj. Gen. Jim Jackson (ret.) | March 25, 2018 ++]

Bataan Death March Update 07 ► 29th Annual Included 100 Year Old Vet

Dawn had yet to break, but thousands of people had already gathered at White Sands Missile Range 25 MAR for the 29th annual Bataan Memorial Death March. This year's march saw the largest number of participants -- nearly 8,500 -- an 18 percent increase over last year. Some wore military uniforms carrying 35-pound rucksacks while others chose colorful red, white and blue tutus. For retired Col. Beverly "Ben" Skardon, he selected an orange shirt -- in honor of his alma mater Clemson University -- and a white fedora. At 100 years old, this would be the 11th memorial march in 12 years for Skardon, a Bataan Death March survivor. His participation makes him not only the oldest marcher but the only survivor to ever walk in the event. "(Participating in the march) means a lot to me personally because that march and the men hang heavy on me. I've never forgotten it," Skardon said. "While I walk, it seems to me, my memory flashes back, and I get emotional."

The march requires participants to make their way through 14.2 or 26.2 miles of the high desert terrain of White Sands Missile Range. It's nothing compared to the Bataan Death March, the infamous 1942 World War II march, in which 68,000-plus civilians and Filipino and American prisoners of war were cruelly forced to walk at the hands of their Japanese captors through Philippines jungle with little food or water. Some captives were executed; others died from disease and illness -- either during the march or while kept as prisoners afterward. About 1,800 of those forced to walk were New Mexicans who served with the 200th Coastal Artillery and 515th Coast Artillery at Bataan. They were members of the New Mexico National Guard.



Ret'd Col. Beverly "Ben" Skardon in the 2017 March

Skardon was not a New Mexican, but has become familiar with the Land of Enchantment in recent years through his participation in the memorial march. He joined the military after graduating from Clemson College in 1938 where he entered as a second lieutenant. During World War II and prior to the death march, Skardon had already received two Silver Stars, three Bronze Stars and a Purple Heart for his commitment in commanding a battalion of Filipino Army recruits. But on April 9, 1942, Skardon became one of the many POWs forced to march about 70 miles over five days before being shoved in to train carts and shipped to prison camps. They were starved and beaten and many died. Skardon, too, was close to death. He was severely ill with malaria and beriberi and said he survived thanks only to his fellow Clemson grads Henry Leitner and Otis Morgan, who spoon fed him, carried him to get bathed and cleaned his eyes from infection.

"I do (the march) as a tribute and honor to my Clemson friends. Two and a half years in the prison camp and we became like brothers," Skardon said. "They are at the foremost of my mind." Skardon was released in 1945. He was 27 years old and weighed 90 pounds. "It's a whole era out of my life," Skardon said of his time as a POW. "When I start talking about it I get graphic (images) in front of me." Following his return and his recovery, Skardon continued to serve in the military until 1962, when he retired as a colonel.

Skardon joined 8,470 other marchers as he walked -- a drove a small portion -- through eight miles of the course, but it was not all without preparation. Skardon said he started training in November outside of his home in Clemson, S.C., where he would walk with his four-wheeled walker up and down the sidewalk. As of Wednesday, he said he was walking about 3 miles a day. Before bed, Skardon said he would also do about 50 to 60 leg lifts on each leg, as well as some calisthenics, which he said might include him going from a sitting position to a standing one. "The main thing is to get on that trail and go as far as I can," Skardon said. As for how he got started marching in the first place, Ken Scar, communication strategist at Clemson University, said it was just "something he spontaneously decided to do the first time he attended and has done it ever since."

Rallying behind Skardon on Sunday were 70 members of Ben's Brigade -- a group of friends, family and admirers of Skardon who walk with him. Hooper Skardon, Skardon's nephew, has been walking in the brigade for 10 years. "He's just a great guy. He's special," Hooper said of Skardon. "He's feisty and he's a true Southern gentleman." Hooper -- who is a retired Army sergeant during the Vietnam War -- was one of four family members that came to march on Sunday, including Skardon's granddaughter and two grandsons. When asked what it means to him to have so many people support his uncle, Hooper simply said, "it means everything." Other members of the brigade joined because they were inspired by Skardon's story.

Joseph T. Cormie said he heard about Skardon when he saw a "60 Minutes" special. From that day on, Cormie said he has dedicated himself to the group, even designing the bright orange Ben's Brigade T-shirts the group donned. Cormie, of upstate New York, said he went so far as to paint his beard orange to be part of the experience,

adding that it "makes his heart happy" to be honoring veterans by participating in the memorial march. "I'm inspired by the 100-year-old Ben Skardon. He's here walking however much he walks and I'm just amazed," Cormie said. "I'm very, very inspired. Especially by (Skardon's) story; his story and all the World War II survivors."

On Saturday (24 MAR), Skardon received the Filipino World War II Veterans Congressional Gold Medal -- the highest expression of national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions that Congress can give -- during a presentation at the Post Theater at White Sands Missile Range. While Skardon said he had mixed feelings about the honor, he said he is "delighted the Filipino soldiers (he) commanded are receiving recognition for their service during that time." Sunday's opening ceremonies began at 6:35 a.m., at the Bataan Ceremony Field at White Sands Missile Range, on the east side of the Organ Mountains. "Remember this is more than a marathon. So why are you here? Who are you marching for?" asked Col. Dave Brown, WSMR garrison commander, as he welcomed the crowd. "You being here is important because it helps us remember the past and you are helping us to tell the Army story each and every year."

The ceremony also recognized the seven Bataan survivors in attendance -- Skardon, Harold Bergbower, James Bollich, Valdemar DeHerrera, Paul Ketchum, Oscar Leonard and William Overmeyer. "Everybody has their own motivation for why they're here on this journey here today, but I think it's important to remember what this is truly all about and that's about those survivors and those that aren't here with us any longer," said WSMR Brigadier Gen. Eric L. Sanchez, during the opening ceremony. The ceremony also recognized the 28 Bataan survivors who have died since the last march, including Julio Barela, a Dona Ana farmer who died on 12 FEB at the age of 101.

The participants were corralled in sections before the race started about 7 a.m. Led by military wounded veterans, thousands poured on to the blocked off roads of WSMR before heading into the desert terrain. Marathoners also had the opportunity, at the start of the race, to shake the hands of the Bataan survivors who attended. "So when things are getting tough out there on the course, you want to give cause you've got blisters or whatever is going on. Think about what these gentlemen sitting here today went through," Sanchez said, as a nod to the survivors as well as those who lost their lives. "When you're done you'll have some blisters you'll have to deal with but not anything near what they had to deal with. "Hopefully that gives you the motivation to continue today," Sanchez said. [Source: Las Cruces Sun-News | Ali Linan | March 26, 2018 ++]

Illinois Veterans Homes Update 07 ► Quincy Legionella Eradication Efforts

Mike Hoffman, who has been tasked with improving safety at the Quincy Illinois Veterans Home said things have been moving ahead rapidly in the past two weeks. "I've been pleased and impressed with the efforts of staff and the leadership of the various agencies and the progress they're making in what I consider a short period of time," Hoffman describes the "extraordinary work" that's being done at the Veterans Home to safeguard residents from Legionella bacteria. There were 12 deaths and more than 50 illnesses connected to Legionella at the home since 2015. Another death occurred in 2017 and four new cases of the illness, which can develop into pneumonia, have been diagnosed since the start of 2018.



Hoffman said in the past few weeks, the home has installed 760 new faucet fixtures or Pall filters that can capture Legionella bacteria. "We have never detected Legionella after the water comes through a filter," Hoffman said. Tests also are run on unfiltered water, and if the bacteria is found, the Veterans Home staff has the ability to inject additional chemicals into the water line entering that specific building. Those treatments are on top of the home's \$6.39 million water purification system that adds two chemicals to water that Quincy's Water Department treats with another recommended chemical. Treated water is then heated within each building on the Veterans Home grounds to 165 degrees, killing any bacteria that might have survived the other levels of disinfection. "These protocols go beyond what you'll find at any other facility I'm aware of," Hoffman said.

Hoffman, who formerly directed Central Management Services for the state, was appointed a senior adviser to Gov. Bruce Rauner on 2 MAR. A retired Marine officer, Hoffman was tasked with overseeing Legionella eradication efforts and coordinating with the various state, federal and local agencies involved with the home. Rauner spent a week in January at the Veterans Home, living and eating with residents. During a news conference before he left, Rauner pledged to seek funding for upgrades at the home, including new buildings to meet the needs of a new generation of veterans. "We'll find the money" to erect new buildings and replace aging water lines, Rauner said during his January visit.

Members of a task force appointed by Rauner have been working toward the purchase of the former Sycamore Health Care building near the 210-acre Veterans Home campus. If the former nursing home building is bought, it would provide new options if the Veterans Home staff needs to move some residents from buildings that need to be demolished or retrofitted in the future. But there are no short-term plans for use of the building or closure of sites at the Veterans Home. State officials also are expected to seek proposals from design firms to come up with a master plan for new facilities at the home. Hoffman said the Veterans Home of the future will need to deal with a different array of health concerns. "With the younger veterans we are talking about some polytrauma cases" due to the improvised explosive device injuries seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, Hoffman said.

Wounded veterans from the past few decades also have survived more serious injuries thanks to rapid medical response. Hoffman said any newly constructed residential buildings would need to take into consideration the mobility challenges faced by veterans who have lost limbs. "There also are mental health issues, post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injuries" and any new facilities would need to be designed with those issues in mind, Hoffman said. "It would be premature to say how we would lay that out" until a master plan is in place, Hoffman said.

Designers would need to look at the facilities, infrastructure including roads, utilities and plumbing and ways to minimize disruption for the residents. Health care officials have said protecting the Veterans Home residents in place has been the best option. Caregivers said transferring residents to distant locations would cause stress that would threaten their health. The Quincy Illinois Veterans Home currently has about 360 residents. About two-thirds of those residents are 80 or older. [Source: Herald-Whig | Doug Wilson | March 7, 2018 ++]

Veterans Advantage Update 01 ► Amtrak Elimination 26 MAR Inexcusable

Amtrak's recent move to eliminate special discount programs — including those for veterans — is raising the ire of Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT). In a letter sent this week to Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson, Blumenthal said getting rid of the veterans' benefits is "inexcusable." "I urge you to cease these efforts and reaffirm that veterans will always be welcomed and encouraged to use the nation's railroad with a discount program that recognizes and rewards their service to our country," he wrote. A spokeswoman for Amtrak said that the 10 percent discount for active-duty military personnel remains in place, but she did not respond to requests for comment on Blumenthal's

letter or to questions regarding plans to end a discount program for veterans and their families offered through the membership-based program, Veterans Advantage.

Scott Higgins, who co-founded the program with his wife Lin, said that Amtrak officials informed him the program would end 26 MAR. Members of Veterans Advantage received a 15 percent discount on Amtrak tickets. "We were really stunned," Scott Higgins said. "We're struggling to understand why they are doing this." Lin Higgins said that Amtrak has offered the discounts for 17 years, and she is hopeful that the passenger railroad system will reconsider. Under its new CEO, Amtrak has quietly moved to change the way it does business. As part of that, it has done away with traditional discount programs that offered benefits to groups including students and AAA members. Amtrak also reduced the discount for disabled customers to 10 percent from 15 percent and raised the age requirement for seniors to 65 in order to receive a discount.

The railroad system will instead offer travelers discounts through fare sales and "flash" discount promotions. Amtrak also this week changed its refund policy adding a 25 percent cancellation fee on Acela business class and reserved coach tickets that are canceled 24 hours or more after booking and prior to departure. The new policy went into effect 20 MAR. [Source: The Washington Post | Lori Aratani | March 23, 2018 ++]

Vet Deportations Update 17 ► Afghan Vet Miguel Perez Jr. Denied Citizenship

An Army veteran with a green card who faces deportation because of a 2008 drug conviction has been denied U.S. citizenship. The 15 MAR decision by immigration officials means Miguel Perez Jr. can be deported to Mexico at any time. The 39-year-old Perez petitioned immigration officials to be granted citizenship retroactive to when he joined the military in 2001. Perez served two tours in Afghanistan. He says he mistakenly thought he became a U.S. citizen when he took an oath to protect the nation. Perez was taken into custody by Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers after he served half of a 15-year prison sentence for a nonviolent drug charge. He is being held in a Wisconsin detention center where he awaits deportation. [Source: VA News Release | March 12, 2018 ++]

Vet Deportations Update 18 ► Afghan 2 Tour Green Card Vet Deported

A green card veteran who served two tours of duty in Afghanistan, then later served time in prison on a felony drug conviction, began a journey back to his birthplace 23 MAR. Immigration officials removed him from a Kankakee detention center and transferred him to Chicago O'Hare International Airport, his lawyer said. **Miguel Perez Jr.**, 39, told the Tribune the night before in a call from the detention center that all of his electronic devices had been shut off. His family, he said, had not been notified about his imminent deportation. "I'm not leaving. They're taking me," he said. "They're not going to teach me to never give up, and then I give up," he added, referring to his military training.

The move to send Perez back to his native Mexico, where he has not lived since he was 8, could mark the end of what has been a 16-month effort by Perez and his advocates to let him stay in the United States. Supporters were holding out hope for an eleventh-hour reprieve, though it was seen as highly unlikely. Among those supporters is U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, a Democrat from Illinois, who made a long-shot bid to keep him in the country by using a little-known legal maneuver known as a private bill, which is intended to help specific individuals. The bill is still sitting in committee. Last week, Perez's petition for citizenship retroactive to when he joined the military in 2001 was denied by immigration officials. Perez was flown out of Illinois Friday, without saying goodbye to his family and without much more than a toothbrush.

At a late morning news conference at the Lincoln United Methodist Church in Pilsen, Perez's attorney Chris Bergin said he'd been told by officials at the Kankakee detention center that Perez was on a list to be deported and had already been moved from the facility. "About now, I'd say he's approaching O'Hare Airport," Bergin said, standing with another half-dozen of Perez's supporters, including his parents. The group angrily decried the decision to deport Perez so quickly after his request for citizenship had been rejected, but pledged to fight until he is returned to his family. In Spanish, Perez's parents, Miguel Sr. and Esperanza Montes Perez, said they were heartbroken, but that they would keep fighting for their son's return. "My son fought in a war (in) which he defended people who are now throwing him out like garbage," Montes Perez said.

At the news conference, activists released a copy of a letter from Duckworth to Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen, asking her to personally review Perez's case. "Beyond the injustice that ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) has laid on Perez ... in his deportation, I would find it shocking to learn that he will potentially be leaving with nothing but the clothes on his back," Duckworth wrote. "This is a deplorable way to treat a veteran who risked his life in combat for our nation." Perez said Thursday night that, in addition to what he was wearing, he had a toothbrush, toothpaste and a pair of thermal underwear.

Perez is one of many legal permanent residents who have served in the U.S. military, then have had to confront the possibility of deportation to their native countries after committing a crime. His deportation caps a series of attempts to keep him in the U.S. In addition to the retroactive application for citizenship, he petitioned Gov. Bruce Rauner for clemency and appealed to the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for relief under the United Nations Convention Against Torture, a protection that resembles asylum. Perez and human rights advocates believe his life will be in danger when sent back to Mexico. Drug cartels often try to recruit deported veterans for their combat experience. Both requests for relief were denied.

Raised in Chicago since age 8, he enlisted before 9/11 and served until 2004. He was deployed to Afghanistan and served with the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group, where he participated in numerous classified missions, Duckworth said. After his military service, Perez sought treatment at the Veterans Affairs hospital near Maywood, where doctors diagnosed him with post-traumatic stress disorder. He was supposed to return for more tests to determine whether he also had a traumatic brain injury. In the meantime, he reconnected with a childhood friend who provided free drugs and alcohol. On Nov. 26, 2008, while with that friend, Perez handed a laptop case containing cocaine to an undercover officer. Perez pleaded guilty to the drug charge and served half of a 15-year prison sentence.

While Perez was convicted of delivering less than 100 grams of cocaine, prosecutors have said he was arrested for delivering much more and received a reduced sentence after a plea deal. Prosecutors also pointed out that Perez was given a general discharge from the military after a drug infraction. Perez said he discovered the citizenship oversight when he was summoned to immigration court shortly before his September 2016 release from Hill Correctional Center in Galesburg. Instead of heading home to Chicago from prison, Perez was placed in the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and transferred to a Wisconsin detention center for immigrants awaiting deportation. He was then moved to the Kankakee center. "Not for 30 seconds was I illegal in this country," he said. "I went to war for this country out of love for this country." "I was given birth in Mexico and life in the U.S," he said. [Source: Chicago Tribune | Manya Brachear Pashman & William Lee | March 23, 2018 ++]

Vet Deportations Update 19 ► 2nd Deported Vet Granted U.S. Citizenship

A deported U.S. Army veteran has been granted U.S. citizenship, a move made possible by California Gov. Jerry Brown's pardon of a criminal offense last year. Lawyers for Hector Barajas said the government informed them 29 MAR their client should attend a naturalization ceremony on 13 APR in San Diego. U.S. Citizenship and

Immigration Services confirmed the decision. Barajas, 40, is founder and director of Deported Veterans Support House, which provides housing and other services in Tijuana, Mexico. He said that he believes his advocacy contributed to his victory and that he planned to commute to Tijuana from the Los Angeles area for at least a year to continue his work. He also plans to find a job and go to school in Los Angeles, while supporting his 11-year-old daughter and her mother.

“I still can’t believe it,” Barajas said by phone from Tijuana. “I’m just excited I’ll be able to be home with my family.” Barajas was convicted in 2002 of shooting at an occupied vehicle and served two years in prison. Brown removed a major obstacle to citizenship by pardoning him last year, noting his distinguished military service and advocacy work. “I always say we make choices that have consequences,” Barajas said of his conviction. “I’m not proud of it. Somebody could have been seriously hurt.” Barajas came to the United States from Mexico when he was 7 years old and, after graduating high school, served in the U.S. Army from 1995 to 2001, when he was honorably discharged, according to a federal lawsuit filed in December seeking citizenship.

He was a member of the 82nd Airborne Division and received several military accolades. After completing his prison sentence, he was deported in 2004 to Mexico, lacking fluency in Spanish and struggling to find work, according to the lawsuit. He returned to the United States and was deported again in 2010 after police stopped him for a traffic infraction. Some military members are entitled to seek citizenship. The American Civil Liberties Union said Barajas is the second deported veteran pardoned by Brown to be allowed to return to the United States. Marine veteran Marco Chavez was pardoned for cruelty to animals and allowed to return in December. [Source: The Associated Press | Elliot Spagat | March 30, 2018 ++]

Bladensburg WWI Vet Memorial Update 04 ► Supreme Court Appeal Pending

A federal appeals court is standing by a ruling that calls for the removal or destruction of a large cross-shaped monument on public land that has towered over a busy Maryland intersection for nearly 100 years. In a closely divided vote, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit refused to reconsider an earlier decision that found government funding for the 40-foot-tall memorial in Prince George’s County an unconstitutional endorsement of religion. The 8-to-6 vote drew passionate dissents from several judges and could end up before the Supreme Court, which has not provided clear guidance about displays of religion on government land.

Supporters of the Peace Cross, who say it is a secular tribute to local men killed in World War I, vowed to appeal. “We cannot allow it to be the final word,” said Hiram Sasser, deputy chief counsel for First Liberty, a religious-freedom organization representing the American Legion. “If this decision stands, other memorials — including those in nearby Arlington Cemetery — will be targeted for destruction as well.” To supporters, like The American Legion and First Liberty that is representing them, the 100 years thing is important. From a dissent:

Forty-nine names appear on the plaque at the base of the Great War memorial in Prince George’s County. Aggregate figures do not do justice to individual soldiers. Each name marks the tragedy of a life lost before its time. Each death marks a worthy sacrifice.

We honor those Americans who died serving their country in different ways. Families respect their fallen sons and daughters in pictures, prayers, and memory. Their country honors them in ceremony, as at Memorial Day, but more often with quietude.

The dead cannot speak for themselves. But may the living hear their silence. We should take care not to traverse too casually the line that separates us from our ancestors and that will soon enough separate us from our descendants. The present has many good ways of imprinting its values and sensibilities upon society. But to roil needlessly the dead with the controversies of the living does not pay their deeds or their time respect.

This memorial and this cross have stood for almost one full century. Life and change flow by the small park in the form of impatient cars and trucks. That is disturbance enough. Veterans Memorial Park may not be Arlington National Cemetery, but it is the next thing to it. I would let the cross remain and let those honored rest in peace.

The case essentially pits Supreme Court decisions against each other. In holding the cross violates the constitution, the court found: In seeking rehearing of this case en banc, Petitioner Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission, a state entity (the “Commission”), again asks this Court to hold that Maryland’s ownership and maintenance of the Bladensburg Cross—a 40-foot tall Latin cross erected at an intersection in Prince George’s County—does not have the “principal or primary effect” of advancing the Christian faith. Appellee’s Pet. for Reh’g En Banc at 12. Rather, according to the Commission, this Court should conclude that the Bladensburg Cross has lost its predominantly sectarian meaning, to the extent that it ever had any such meaning, and now stands as a symbol of the soldiers who died on the field of battle in World War I.

But the Latin cross has for centuries been widely recognized as “the pre-eminent symbol of Christianity.” Nothing in the First Amendment empowers the judiciary to conclude that the freestanding Latin cross has been divested of this predominately sectarian meaning.

Our holding that the State’s ongoing ownership and maintenance of the Bladensburg Cross violated the Establishment Clause recognizes that to hold otherwise would require this Court to accept the Commission’s conclusion that the Latin cross does not have the “principal or primary effect” of advancing the Christian faith. To give the judiciary the power to prescribe and proscribe the meaning of an unadorned, traditionally religious symbol like the Latin cross would infringe on intensely personal and sacred questions of religious meaning and belief. Such governmental prescription of religious belief would serve only to “degrade religion”—one of the principal outcomes the Framers of the Religion Clauses sought to forestall. *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421, 431 (1962).

However, in so finding, they seem to have dismissed a case called *Van Orden*, in which the Supreme Court looked at “historicity” among other things to place the monument in context. From a dissent:

The panel, in a 2-1 decision, will now have the monument removed or destroyed because, as it concludes, its presence on public land amounts to a violation of the Establishment Clause, although no Supreme Court case has ever held that the Establishment Clause prohibits such monuments. Indeed, it has held to the contrary—that “the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment allows the display” of monuments like the one here. Van Orden, 545 U.S. at 681 (emphasis added) (plurality opinion) (holding that the Establishment Clause allows a large granite monument inscribed with the Ten Commandments to stand on the grounds of the Texas State Capitol); id. at 700–01, 703–04 (Breyer, J., concurring in the judgment). The panel opinion seeks to distinguish Van Orden on the ground that the cross as a symbol “differs from other religious monuments, such as the Ten Commandments” because the Ten Commandments is “well known as being tied to our Nation’s history and government” and because, unlike the monument at issue in Van Orden, the monument here is “conspicuously displayed at a busy intersection.” The panel further rationalizes that when crosses are ordinarily used to commemorate fallen soldiers, such as in Arlington National Cemetery, they “are much smaller than the 40-foot tall monolith at issue here.” The opinion, however, fails to recognize that there are similarly sized monuments incorporating crosses in the Arlington National Cemetery — indeed, also elsewhere nearby. The panel opinion directs the district court, which had held that the Establishment Clause was not violated by the monument, to consider on remand whether the arms of the cross should be “remov[ed]” or the cross entirely “raz[ed],” or other “arrangements [could be made] that would not offend the Constitution.”

...It strains established judicial analysis to conclude that Van Orden does not allow the monument in this case to stand as a secular memorial to the lives of soldiers lost during war in service of the Nation. The panel decision not only wrongly distinguishes Van Orden, but, in doing so, also offends the monument's commemoration of those soldiers' sacrifice. Moreover, it puts at risk hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of similar monuments.

The Establishment Clause was never intended to be so interpreted, and the Supreme Court has never so interpreted it.

The dissent notes the very reason that Liberty First and The American Legion are appealing. As First Liberty noted:

No Supreme Court case has ever held that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits monuments like the Bladensburg Memorial. It has said the very opposite. Supreme Court precedent shows that the First Amendment allows the display of such monuments. We're preparing to fight this case to the very end. We must do everything we can to overturn the Fourth Circuit's opinion. We cannot sit idly on the sidelines and let this become an ugly national purge of our nation's sacred and historic monuments.

[Source: The American Legion's Burn Pit | Mothax | March 5, 2018 ++]

Desert Storm Memorial Update 07 ► Public Comment Invited thru 13 APR

The National Desert Storm War Memorial Association, in cooperation with the National Park Service, is looking for comments from the public on a potential design of a memorial for Operation Desert Storm. The memorial, which Congress has authorized to be built by 2021, will honor the soldiers who served and the 383 who died in operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. “As a Marine Corps veteran of Operation Desert Storm, I came to the startling realization six years ago that ODS was becoming a footnote in history, an insignificant speed bump as recollected by many,” wrote Scott Stump, CEO and president of NDSWMA, in an op-ed published by the Military Times in 2016. “We also had more than 600,000 Americans answer the call to serve, all of whom were ready to lay down their lives if required to do so. The service and sacrifice of this generation should never be forgotten.”

The initial design reflects the “unique environmental and battle conditions” of the war with a curved Kuwaiti limestone wall that shields visitors from their urban surroundings and mimics the successful “left-hook” maneuver that coalition forces used, according to the NDSWMA website <http://www.ndswm.org>. Through wall carvings and statues, it will also serve to educate people about the historical events of Desert Storm, identify the 34 coalition countries, and memorialize the names of all the Americans who sacrificed their lives in the war, according to the website for the association, which is led by Honorary Board Chairman and former President George H.W. Bush, and a board of directors made up of Desert Storm veterans.

The proposed design varies for each of the three locations being considered, according to Stump. All are close to the National Mall, and the first two are near the Lincoln Memorial. The three locations are: the end of Constitution Avenue near 23rd Street NW; the Constitution Avenue Belvedere, near Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway NW; and Walt Whitman Park on E Street NW. The association prefers the location at Constitution and 23rd for its proximity to the other war memorials and to the Lincoln Memorial, as both speak of liberation, according to Stump. “We feel that it’s very important to have a memorial that’s very easily accessed by pedestrians who are visiting the other war memorials, or commemorative memorials, in West Potomac Park,” Stump told the Military Times. The location is also close to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, an important connection as many of the military’s leaders in 1991 were veterans of the Vietnam War, said Stump. “In many ways this is the antithesis to Vietnam. This is their victory, their vindication as well,” he said. The public is invited to submit comments through the National Park

Service website <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=427&projectID=62216&documentID=86414>.
The comment period closes on April 13. [Source: ArmyTimes | Nicole Bauke | March 21, 2018 ++]

Vet Fraud & Abuse ► Reported 15 thru 31 MAR 2017

New Albany, IN -- Four southern Indiana residents are accused of pocketing more than \$125,000 through fundraisers touted as benefiting veterans and their families. All four were indicted on fraud charges alleging that they solicited funds from individuals and businesses in Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. They allegedly pocketed more than \$125,000 in cash, gift cards, merchandise and other donations to the Wounded Warrior Fund, Inc. and the Wounded Warrior Foundation, Inc. Prosecutors say many of the 1,000 donors were led to believe they were donating to the [Wounded Warrior Project](#) .



Logo of the Clark County Sheriff's Office, which worked with the U.S. Secret Service to expose a fundraising scam that played on the sympathies of about 1,000 donors.

Indicted were Clarksville residents 44-year-old James D. Linville and 38-year-old Joanie Watson and Henryville residents 42-year-old Thomas A. Johnson and 40-year-old Amy L. Bennett. Watson's attorney says she's cooperating with investigators. Johnson's attorney declined comment. A message seeking comment was left for Linville's attorney. Bennett has no attorney. According to Stars and Stripes, the case was investigated by the Clark County Sheriff's Office and the U.S. Secret Service field office in Louisville, Ky. [Source: The Associated Press | March 17, 2018 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure | Atlantic NC ► Contaminated Drinking Water

The tiny Eastern North Carolina community of Atlantic has joined a growing list of military areas across the country affected by contaminated drinking water. The Navy is providing bottled water after two private groundwater wells in Atlantic, an unincorporated area in Carteret County with a population of less than 600, tested positive for elevated levels of cancer-causing chemicals. Atlantic sits on the Core Sound, just west of the Outer Banks. The chemicals, perfluorooctane sulfonate, or PFOS, and perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA, are used to make products more stain-resistant, waterproof and nonstick, and they appear in common household products such as cookware, carpets, food packaging and clothes, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. They are also found in firefighting foam used by the Department of Defense beginning in the 1970s.

The Navy tested more than 250 wells near Marine Corps Outlying Landing Field Atlantic, a World War II-era field that is now used for helicopter training. The landing field supports training operations for Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point. "We are doing further testing on the airfield to see if we can detect anything on the airfield.

What we want to do is find out if there's any on the airfield or if we can find a link. Are we causing it?" said Mike Barton, a Cherry Point spokesman. "It's going to take a lot more study to determine whether the detection in the community is linked to the airfield. ... It's a hunt. It's an investigation."



Storm water is held in a testing basin before being discharged to Slocum Creek at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C., on July 31, 2015.

North Carolina is also dealing with air and water pollution from GenX, an unregulated chemical that the company Chemours produced commercially in the Fayetteville area as a replacement for the toxic PFOA. The company spilled the chemical into the Cape Fear River for years, according to the state. The river provides drinking water for residents from Fayetteville to Wilmington. In 2016, the EPA set stricter limits on the amount of the chemicals allowed in drinking water, citing adverse health effects such as low birth weight, accelerated puberty, cancer and liver, immune and thyroid effects from exposure to PFOS and PFOA, according to the EPA. The Defense Department identified 393 installations with a known or suspected release of PFOS or PFOA in a Dec. 31, 2016 document. That number included six sites in North Carolina: Fort Bragg, Cherry Point, Charlotte Air National Guard Base, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base and Stanly County Airport. The Department of Defense spent more than \$800,000 by the end of 2016 to investigate the problems at North Carolina installations, according to the document.

But it is a nationwide issue. The Navy is doing testing and cleanup at Whidbey Island Naval Air Station near Seattle, at former Warminster Naval Air Warfare Center and former Naval Air Station Willow Grove just north of Philadelphia, near Naval Auxillary Landing Field Fentress in southeastern Virginia near the North Carolina border and at possibly dozens or more other facilities across the country. "As of August 31, 2017, the military departments have sampled in excess of 2,600 groundwater wells for PFOS/PFOA on 90 installations where they suspect or know there is a release of PFOS/PFOA. Of these 2,600 groundwater wells, 1,621 have groundwater sampling results of PFOS/PFOA exceeding the EPA lifetime health advisory," said Heather Babb, a Department of Defense spokesman, in an emailed statement. The Defense Department spent nearly \$200 million by the end of 2016 on "environmental restoration funding to address PFOS/PFOA releases," Babb said. Total costs could exceed \$2 billion, according to reports.

The Navy's policy is to provide bottled water immediately. An estimated 750,000 people at Camp Lejeune were exposed to toxic drinking water from 1957 to 1987, leading to congressional legislation in 2012 and millions in payments to families affected by any of 15 illnesses spelled out in the legislation including a variety of cancers. Retired Marine Jerry Ensminger's 9-year-old daughter Janey died in 1985 of leukemia. She was born while he was stationed at Camp Lejeune. Ensminger, a White Lake resident, fought for more than a decade to get answers about his daughter's illness. Ensminger said this week of the pollution in Atlantic: "It's one more indication of the Department of Defense's disregard for human health and the environment. Prior to the PFOS and PFOA with this foam, it was the degreasers and fuel. They don't care. Eventually, the American people, especially with a country that is depending on an all-volunteer force, are going to get wise to this. "They need to use more care while they have their sons and daughters and husbands and wives and loved ones in their service."

In Atlantic, the Navy is only in the first stages of what could be a years-long investigation and cleanup, particularly if the source is found on the base. The Navy has held three public hearings and offered free well testing through the beginning of March. No more public testing of wells is scheduled at this point. [Source: | McClatchy Washington Bureau | Brian Murphy | March 17, 2018]

Retiree Appreciation Days ► Scheduled As of 1 APR 2018

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 2018 is available at:

== HTML: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html

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

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

This schedule has been expanded to include dates for retiree\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.

(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 & Army Echoes | Milton Bell | March 31, 2018 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 1 APR 2018

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 | March 31, 2018 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits & Discounts ► South Dakota 2018

The state of South Dakota provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these plus discounts listed on the Military and Veterans Discount Center (MCVDC) website, refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Vet State Benefits & Discounts – SD**” for an overview of the below benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below refer to <http://va.sc.gov> & <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/south-carolina.html> .

- Veteran Housing Programs
- Veteran and Active Duty Financial Assistance Benefits
- Veteran Employment Benefits
- Veteran Dependent Education Benefits
- Veteran Recreation Benefits
- Other State Sponsored Veteran Benefits
- Discounts

[Source: <https://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/south-dakota-state-veterans-benefits.html> | MAR 2018 ++]

* Vet Legislation *



Note: To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 115th Congress. Bills are listed in reverse numerical order for House and then Senate. Bills are normally initially assigned to a congressional committee to consider and amend before sending them on to the House or Senate as a whole.

VA Home Loan Update 61 ► S.2155 | Refinancing Legislation

A new banking-reform bill that dials back regulations put in place after the 2008 financial crisis includes language that targets predatory lenders offering VA-backed home loan refinancing. The Senate voted 67-31 on 14 MAR to pass the Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and Consumer Protection Act (S.2155). The House has passed a separate bank-reform bill; per The Associated Press, the next likely step is a compromise bill that would be voted on by both chambers. Should the VA-related language in the Senate bill survive, it would prohibit lenders from offering VA-backed refinance loans within six months of a veterans' initial loan. Lenders also would need to provide borrowers with a "net tangible benefits test" that outlines the full financial scope of the refinanced loan, so borrowers have a complete picture of what they're saving over time.

All fees associated with refinanced VA loans would need to be recouped within 36 months, and loans that weren't at least 50 basis points lower than the initial loan's fixed rate wouldn't be eligible for VA backing. The language comes from a bipartisan lending bill co-authored by Sens. Thom Tillis (R-NC) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and introduced in mid-January — in part, at least, to combat "churn" issues that have caused concern among loan officials regarding rapid VA-backed refinancing. The Senate hasn't acted on the measure since its initial committee assignment. Despite sponsoring the VA-related bill, Warren was one of the 31 "nay" votes, all Democrats, on the overall bank-reform legislation. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Kevin Lilley | March 19, 2018 ++]

Generic Drug Pricing Update 04 ► S.2476 | Targets Pay-For-Delay Big Pharma Tactic

U.S. Senator Tina Smith's first standalone piece of legislation—the Expanding Access to Low Cost Generic Drugs Act—takes aim at a big pharma tactic that keeps affordable generic drugs out of the hands of families and seniors. Sen. Smith's bill, which she introduced 28 FEB and is similar to a policy endorsed by the Trump Administration, gets at the heart of a major concern facing families and seniors right now: prescription drug prices. We're at the point now where around 25 percent of Americans who take prescription drugs report difficulty affording them. And while generic drugs are often a much less expensive alternative to name-brand drugs, giant drug companies actually pay money to keep those generics off the market—an anti-competitive tactic called "pay for delay." The Expanding Access Act would take major steps towards eliminating this practice.

"Since becoming Senator, I've traveled around Minnesota to talk with families, seniors, and communities," said Sen. Smith, a member of the Senate Health Committee. "In these conversations, the topic of high prescription drug prices almost always comes up. The amount of money that Minnesotans pay for medications is out of control—and not to mention unsustainable. My first bill addresses an anti-competitive loophole that big pharmaceutical companies exploit in order to force Americans into buying overpriced drugs. It's a commonsense measure that's similar to a policy supported by the Trump Administration, and I'm going to fight to make it bipartisan—because really, unless you're the CEO of a big drug company, you shouldn't be opposed to this idea."

Right now, when a drug manufacturer is first to apply to bring a generic drug to market, they get half a year of exclusive rights to sell that generic drug. However, big pharmaceutical companies will often fight to keep their monopoly by paying that generic manufacturer to not sell the more affordable version of the drug. Sen. Smith's bill gives the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the ability to act as a stronger federal watchdog over these agreements, and would bring affordable generic drugs to families and consumers more quickly. It does this by enabling the FDA to take away the 180-day generic drug exclusivity period from any generic company that enters into anti-competitive pay-for-delay settlements with brand-name drug manufacturers. To read the text of the bill

refer to <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/s2476/text>. [Source: CBS Minnesota | Susan-Elizabeth Littlefield | March 25, 2018 ++]

VA Vet Choice Update 72 ► H.R.2683 | Protecting Veterans Credit Act

An effort gained momentum in Congress on 21 MAR to protect veterans' credit scores when the Department of Veterans Affairs is slow to reimburse private-sector doctors for their medical care. The House Financial Services Committee advanced legislation that would provide a one-year grace period before veterans' credit reports could be negatively affected because of slow VA payments. Thousands of veterans who use the Veterans Choice program, which allows them to seek outside health care that is paid for by the VA, have complained their medical bills are sent to debt collectors and their credit reports damaged when private-sector providers do not receive timely reimbursements, lawmakers said. Issues with the payments to non-VA medical providers have plagued the VA since the Choice program was created in 2014.

“What is happening when veterans go outside of the VA network and get health care, the VA is not paying that third-party provider in a timely fashion,” said Rep. John Delaney (D-MD). “This is causing our veterans to get impairments on their credit reports as if they were delinquent on these medical bills.” Delaney and Rep. Randy Hultgren (R-IL) introduced the **Protecting Veterans Credit Act** (H.R.2683) on 21 MAR, which has 31 cosponsors and is supported by several large veterans organizations. It advanced unanimously out of committee to the House floor. It's uncertain when it could be scheduled for a vote. Last July, 40 House lawmakers signed a letter to VA Secretary David Shulkin about the negative credit reporting. Between 2014 and May 2017, the VA received more than 57,000 calls from veterans seeking help after the VA's delayed payments affected their credit reports, the letter stated.

The damage can affect veterans' ability to secure credit for purchases such as car leases and mortgages. “There is nothing to convince me that major improvements have been made,” Hultgren said 19 MAR, adding veterans “don't deserve to be subject to the punitive consequences of bureaucratic billing processes gone wrong.” None of the finance committee members spoke against the legislation. Several of them said their offices have received high numbers of phone calls from veterans who were being targeted by debt collectors because of the lapses in payments. “This is one of the major issues we've received so many calls about,” said Rep. Joyce Beatty, D-Ohio. “I'll be proud to go home and tell them that Congress heard them.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | March 21, 2018 ++]

GI Bill Update 253 ► H.R.4508 Prosper Act | Congress Should Do Better

Congress is now considering legislation that would reauthorize the Higher Education Act of 1965. The veterans' community has not historically engaged with this legislation, which is now in the process of being reauthorized for the ninth time in the last 53 years by H.R. 4508, the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Higher Education Reform (PROSPER) Act. The bill was introduced 1 DEC 2017 by Rep. Foxx, Virginia [R-NC-5] There are several aspects of the legislation that TREA: The Enlisted Association supports, namely:

- The bill encourages accreditors to focus more time and resources on schools that are struggling, as opposed to forcing them to spend equal time among schools that have no problems as well as problem schools.
- Restricts a school's ability to hide poor student outcomes.
- Increases program funding, along with incentives for schools that successfully graduate or improve graduation potential for Pell Grant recipients.

- Expands the Pell Grant Program with a bonus of up to \$300 for low-income students who take at least 30 credits during a full school year.

Unfortunately, H.R. 4508 fails to protect student veterans in a number of remarkable ways. For years TREA has fought against the predatory and fraudulent practices of largely for-profit institutions that cheat student veterans who use the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill, the Montgomery G.I. Bill, and survivor benefits like the Fry Scholarship. H.R. 4508 would enable "bad actor" schools to use deceptive recruitment practices that emphasize enrollment numbers rather than positive student outcomes.

In TREA's opinion, the most egregious example of this is the fact that the bill eliminates the 90-10 rule—a requirement that for-profit schools receive no more than 90 percent of its revenue from the federal government. This imposes a market test, which means that if the "free market" will supply a school with at least ten percent of its total funding, the other 90 percent of its revenue can come from federal funding sources. The 90-10 rule is built into the GI Bill to help assure the financial soundness of colleges and universities by curbing abuse within these programs. Unfortunately, military educational benefits currently count in the 10 percent part of the formula, so that bad actor schools already target veterans as a way to skirt this rule. Doing away with the 90-10 rule would mean that schools can exist entirely on federal funding without having to adequately compete in the marketplace for non-federal funds. This is bad for student veterans, and bad for the American taxpayer. If a school can't get 10 percent of its funding from sources other than federal funding, it probably should not be in business.

The PROSPER Act repeals the gainful employment rule, which protects students from poor quality educational programs that are overpriced and lead to low-paying jobs. Making sure that schools actually provide their students with the means to attain high-paying jobs that provide veterans, and our country, a positive return on their investment is a common-sense position. The bill also eliminates the existing borrower defense to repayment regulation and puts in place new rules that make it more difficult for students defrauded by their educational institution to have their loans discharged. Repealing the borrower defense regulation is a big deal, even in the veterans' community, because studies have shown that roughly 25 percent of all student veterans take out loans while advancing their education.

That is why reducing access to education by increasing the cost of college for service-affiliated students and discouraging them from continued service when they enter the workforce is such a problem. H.R. 4508 eliminates the subsidized Stafford Loan, which does not accumulate interest while a borrower is in school. This would increase the size of the average student loan burden by 44% - by the time that student, veteran or not, graduates. Repayment also becomes more difficult under H.R. 4508 as borrowers and their families would be placed on a more stringent income-driven repayment plan, and for low-income borrowers with average debt loads, loan repayment could become lifelong burden.

Finally, H.R. 4508 proposes to eliminate the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), which enables borrowers to enter public service careers and give back to their communities by working in areas of high need for low pay. After 10 years of creditable service to the country the loans are forgiven. The US Naval Institute (USNI) News reports that almost 6,800 active duty military personnel are enrolled in the PSLF program, and the program's elimination will likely have a substantial impact on efforts to recruit veterans into advanced degree programs and continued service in military jobs. In summary, this legislation:

- Makes it harder to enter public service.
- Makes student loans bigger.
- Reduces repayment options that allow graduates to raise families and save for retirement.
- Makes it harder to prevent bad actor schools from defrauding student veterans or to repair the damage that is done when schools defraud student veterans.

These are not the type of policy prescriptions that TREA can support. They call on Congress to do better, and not to serve the interests of the for-profit school industry over student veterans. The Senate has no official companion

legislation at the moment, but they are working behind the scenes. TREA is fighting to prevent this legislation from becoming law and will report back with any updates. [Source: TREA Washington Update | March 21, 2018 ++]

Vet Legislative Wins 2018 ► March | H.R.506, 1725, 3122, & S.324

In the second half of March the House and Senate passed four pieces of veteran legislation supported by the VFW –

- **[H.R. 506](#), the *Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act of 2017*.** The legislation would close an existing loophole which allows individuals and businesses to target veterans seeking to file disability compensation, pension, and aid and attendance claims, and charge them exorbitant fees for little to no actual assistance. H.R. 506 now moves to the Senate.
- **[S. 324](#), the *State Veterans Home Adult Day Health Care Improvement Act of 2017*.** The legislation would require VA to enter into agreements with state veterans homes to provide adult day care options for veterans. S. 324 now moves to the White House for the president's signature. Also this week, the president signed into law two pieces of legislation that were passed by Congress earlier this month —
- **[H.R.3122](#), the *Veterans Care Financial Protection Act of 2017*.** The bill legislation is designed to protect individuals who are eligible for increased pension under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on the basis of need of regular aid and attendance from dishonest, predatory, or otherwise unlawful practices, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. The president on 9 MAR signed it into law.
- **[H.R.1725](#), the *Quicker Veterans Benefits Delivery Act of 2017*.** This legislation requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), within 180 days of its enactment, to submit a report on the progress of the VA's Acceptable Clinical Evidence initiative in reducing the necessity for in-person disability examinations. The president on 9 MAR signed it into law.

[Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | March 16, 2018 ++]

VA Burial Benefits Update 44 ► S.2248 | Tribal Cemetery Headstones

A federal bill seeks to extend an aspect of burial benefits for Native American veterans provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Senate Bill 2248 proposes that the distribution of headstones upon request be provided to spouses and dependent children of veterans interred in tribal veterans cemeteries operated or funded by the VA's National Cemetery Administration. There are 11 tribal veterans cemeteries — located in Arizona, California, Maine, Montana, Oklahoma and South Dakota — that are eligible for programs administered by the VA's National Cemetery Administration. The two cemeteries in Arizona are the San Carlos Apache Tribal Veterans Cemetery in San Carlos and the Monte Calvario Cemetery in Tucson.

The bill, sponsored by U.S. Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) was passed by the Senate this month. It moved to the House of Representatives on 5 MAR for consideration there. We owe a solemn debt to these men and women who have sacrificed so much for our country, and I applaud Sen. Tester's leadership to correct this disparity," Udall said in a press release from his office. The Navajo Nation has a community veterans cemetery in Fort Defiance, Arizona, and several cemeteries in communities on the reservation designate areas for the burial of veterans. Sen. Tom Udall Ned Adriance, a spokesman for Udall, said the federal proposal does not address any benefits for community cemeteries specifically or for interment in burial sites on family land. Adriance added the VA website indicates that the VA will furnish, on request, a government headstone or marker for any deceased eligible veteran in any cemetery, regardless of location. [Source: Farmington Daily Times | Noel Lyn Smith | March 19, 2018 ++]



Navy Hospital Ships ► Retirement for 1 of 2 Proposed

In a Transportation Command hearing on 8 MAR, lawmakers criticized the Navy’s plan to retire one of its two hospital ships, either the Mercy or the Comfort, in the 2019 fiscal year budget proposal. The pressure on the Navy to pass a budget has required making tough decisions about which services it can continue to support, according to Air Force Gen. Darren McDew, commander of the U.S. Transportation Command. “I’m a big fan of hospital ships, because I love the fact that we can help injured and ill members,” said McDew. “But I’ll tell you, for every one hospital ship we’re short, we’re going to have a requirement for 479 air-refueling tankers.” Lawmakers pushed back on the proposal, citing hospital ships as an important source for domestic and international humanitarian aid during times of mass casualty.



USNS Mercy (left) and Comfort (right)

“United States Navy Hospital Ship Comfort deployed to the Gulf Coast of Mississippi in 2005 to respond to Katrina,” said Rep. Trent Kelly, of Mississippi. “In 12 days, the medical crew there provided care and medical treatment that was sorely needed by the residents in my state, and the emergency workers in Mississippi and Louisiana.” Rep. Austin Scott of Georgia also called the decision a “strategic mistake” that lessens U.S. soft power around the world, and instead called for more ships to be built. “I was recently in Djibouti and noticed that the Chinese actually had a hospital ship in port over there, and they’re delivering services,” said Scott. “For the U.S. to pull back on that soft power side, I think it’s just a — I think it’s a strategic mistake for us.

According to Kelly, there is also a national security requirement for two ships to respond to mass casualties. “If the requirement is two, we have to have two or either we have to be screaming loudly,” said Kelly. “We have an obligation to our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, and also the civilians across this world...Because there will come a time when we need that and we need to always be ready.” [Source: NavyTimes | Nicole Bauke | March 16, 2018 ++]

Military Chaplains Update 01 ► Secular Humanist's Application Denied

Sen. Roger Wicker said 21 MAR that the Navy has finally denied the application of a man who sought to become a "secular humanist" chaplain for the service. The application of Jason Heap, who was backed by the Humanist Society, was first rejected by the Navy in 2014, but a Navy chaplain advisory board recently recommended approving it. The possibility of an atheist chaplain set off an outcry from both sides of Capitol Hill, and 45 House members and 22 senators sent letters of opposition this month to Navy leaders. "The Navy's leadership has done the right thing," said Wicker (R-MD), who chairs the Senate Armed Services seapower subcommittee. "The appointment of an atheist to an undeniably religious position is fundamentally incompatible with atheism's secularism. This decision preserves the distinct religious role that our chaplains carry out." The service already has the authority to create programs to support atheists and humanists, senators said.

The Navy Chaplain Corps is manned by officers who promote religious and spiritual well-being among sailors and Marines. It represents a variety of religions including Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. House lawmakers said the reconsideration of Heap's application raised concerns that the Navy was trying to expand the Chaplain Corps beyond its intended focus of serving religious sailors by including philosophical beliefs. "Allowing Mr. Heap to act as a chaplain would thus open the door to a host of chaplains representing many other philosophical worldviews, complicating the chaplaincy application process and over time eroding the distinct religious function of the corps to the detriment of service members," they wrote in a 8 MAR letter. Secular humanism rejects religious dogma and believes that people can find morality through science and reason.

In 2014, Heap filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Va., against the Navy and the Pentagon over the denial of his application to the Chaplain Corps. He could not be immediately reached for comment. The wrangling became a flashpoint between conservatives who support the historical role of religion in military life and liberal groups that believe military culture should be more secular and not force religious beliefs on non-believers. [Source: Washington Examiner | Travis J. Tritten | March 21, 2018 ++]

USS Indianapolis (CA-35) Update 02 ► Definitive Survivor Number Determined

More than seven decades after being sunk by a Japanese submarine, the U.S. Navy has a final crew accounting of heavy cruiser USS Indianapolis (CA-35). Since being sunk on July 30, 1945, in the Philippine Sea, the number of people onboard Indianapolis had been reported as either 1,195 or 1,196, and the survivors had officially been listed as 316 but at times had been reported as 317. The exact number of sailors who died and a precise accounting of survivors had been hard to determine because Indianapolis' crew paperwork went down with the ship. Now, following last summer's discovery of Indianapolis' final resting place on the seafloor, a pair of historians have a definitive answer and a likely explanation for the long-debated discrepancy, apparently caused by the whereabouts of Petty Officer Second Class Clarence W. Donnor, who had briefly been on Indianapolis before it set sail.

"To an outside observer, this small casualty discrepancy might seem insignificant. To survivors, descendants, friends, and the Navy, it is not. As historians and friends of the USS Indianapolis family, we are committed to commemorating the sacrifices of those who served by telling their story accurately—the good and the bad. This entire event shows the inherent difficulties in accounting for casualties in the fog of war and in verifying those figures years after the fact—particularly with an episode as chaotic as the loss of the Indianapolis. We can now confirm, 73 years later, that the Navy's number of survivors in 1945 was correct at 316, and that the final crew list for that tragic voyage has been corrected to show 1,195 men were on board and 879 lives were lost," Richard Hulver, a historian at the Naval History and Heritage Command, and documentary filmmaker Sara Vladic, who has also written about Indianapolis, wrote in a paper they published earlier this week in Proceedings Today.

The work to definitively determine the number of sailors onboard and the number of survivors was spurred by last summer's discovery of the Indianapolis wreckage more than 18,000 feet below the Pacific Ocean's surface. Paul Allen, a Microsoft co-founder and billionaire philanthropist, led the search and was assisted by historians from the Naval History and Heritage Command. Allen has recently discovered an other World War II Navy wrecks, including Atlanta-class cruiser USS Juneau (CL-52), which sank near the Solomon Islands with the five Sullivan brothers aboard, and carrier USS Lexington (CV-2) at the bottom of the Coral Sea.

Hulver and Vladic reviewed thousands of documents, including survivor lists at the two Navy hospitals that treated the Indianapolis crew after their rescue, and couldn't find Donnor's name. Vladic, who has researched Indianapolis for 17 years and interviewed 107 of the survivors during this time, had not come across anyone mentioning Donnor being onboard when the ship sank. Donnor had been on Indianapolis, but apparently within hours of reporting to the ship he learned he'd been accepted into an officer training program. With new orders to report to Fort Schuyler, NY, Hulver and Vladic wrote that Donnor's Pacific deployment was canceled. Donnor continued serving in the Navy until his discharge in July 1946.

"As Donnor began planning to make his way across the United States, the crew of the Indianapolis finalized preparations for their fateful voyage back to war," Hulver and Vladic wrote. His arrival onboard had been recorded, but Hulver and Vladic suspect his hasty departure was not noted since it occurred while the ship's crew concentrated on their secret mission of delivering components of atomic bomb "Little Boy" to the island of Tinian in the Pacific. After the sinking, Donnor's parents received a Navy telegram at their Big Rapids, Mich., home informing them their son was missing in action. The Donnor's, Hulver and Vladic wrote, knew this couldn't be true since they had talked with their son after 30 JUL, as he was stateside entering an officer training program.

Donnor's mother, Ruth Donnor, wrote a letter to the Navy informing them of their mistake. A formal investigation was started immediately to verify Donnor's parents' claim and ultimately issued an apology for the mistake, Hulver and Vladic wrote. But with the original crew documents lost at sea, when the Navy reconstructed these files, Hulver and Vladic found Donnor remained on the crew list but was listed as surviving the sinking, instead of removing him from the crew list altogether. While the Navy almost immediately knew Donnor had lived, the initial clerical error remained in the historical Navy lists with no explanation, and what became the official numbers were flawed. Knowledge of Donnor's survival crept into updated lists as early as 1963. [Source: USNI News | Ben Werne | March 23, 2018 ++]

Military Spouse Deportation Update 03 ► Sailor Faces Deployment & Wife's Deportation

As summer nears in San Diego, Ship's Serviceman 2nd Class Juan Quiroz and his family are readying for the rigors of another at-sea deployment. But unlike his shipmates, Quiroz has a unique worry piled on top of the standard-issue stress. He wonders if his wife, Irais, will still be here when he comes home. Irais has made a life here illegally, and has since 2004, when she was smuggled across the border in the back of a truck during a journey she calls "the worst 10 days." A week before that successful attempt, she had been caught trying to cross, fingerprinted, and sent back to Mexico. After running her fingerprints last fall, an immigration attorney told the family that Irais had an active deportation order. Any encounter with authorities could send her away from Quiroz and their two boys.

It could happen while Quiroz is underway later this year with the amphibious assault ship Essex. The attorney said nothing could be done to naturalize Irais until the removal order is addressed, and "the fear kicked in right away," the 30-year-old Quiroz recalled. Both Quiroz and Irais, who asked that her last name not be used, said they were slow to getting her legal for fear she would be deported if they failed. Better to live in the shadows together, as a family, than apart in the open. "I know I broke the law when I crossed the border without papers," Irais said. "But since then, I've been living here for years. We got married, my husband joined the military. We pay taxes. We tried

to do everything right.” Officials with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services did not respond to requests for comment by Military Times’s deadline.



The Quiroz Family

Quiroz also said attorneys told him his wife could be banned from the United States for a decade if she’s caught and deported. “She’s hanging by a thread,” he said. “Being here in San Diego, by the border, it’s frightening.” While Quiroz gets ready for deployment, he also takes steps to minimize the chances his wife will be snagged by authorities. They stay close to home, and away from anywhere near the border. “I work on cars a lot,” Quiroz said. “I always make sure the simple things like headlights and blinkers work, so she won’t draw the attention of law enforcement.” Quietly, they plan for the unthinkable as well.

Irais originally hails from outside Mexico City, but can’t imagine being so far away from her 15-year-old and 5-year-old boys. “We don’t want to think about that, but we need to have a plan,” she said. “To live in Mexico City, I don’t think so. Probably just in Tijuana, because it’s closer to San Diego.” “My children can’t be without their mother,” Quiroz said. “But at least we can cross the border to see her.” Their little one remains unaware of what hangs in the balance, Quiroz said, but their teen is as worried and preoccupied as his mom and dad. “We’re a family of faith, so we have a lot of faith that it won’t happen,” he said. “But at the same time, we just try to prepare for the worst.”

Quiroz said he was moved to share his family’s story after reading other reports in Military Times about fellow service members facing similar issues. “It’s a delicate situation,” he said. “I don’t want to expose it like that. But military members are coming out. I talked to my wife about it, and we should share our story.” Quiroz said he initially planned to just do four years in uniform before becoming a police officer, but his wife made a Navy career possible. “The reason I’m in the military is because of my wife,” he said. “She’s supported me through good and bad, all the long underways, the long deployments, she’s always been the rock, taking care of our house and children.” “For me, it’s an honor to know my husband is in the Navy, defending this country and fighting for this country,” Irais said.

Quiroz doesn’t know what he’ll do if Irais is deported while he is gone. “She sacrifices as a military spouse,” Quiroz said. “I love this country, she loves this country, it’s done so much for us. By the grace of God, something happens. Something comes of this.” “Our Fear” Quiroz’s parents brought him to Los Angeles from Sonora, Mexico, when he was just three months old. He became a U.S. citizen at 20 and met Irais while they worked at Jack in the Box. “Her eyes just caught my attention,” he said. “She was very sweet, very talkative and we had a good conversation back then, and still.” He also liked that she wasn’t a stereotypical beautiful California girl, with all the affectations that entails. “She was beautiful and she talked to me,” he said. “That’s how it all started.” “He was always smiling,” Irais recalled. “He was very nice.” They married in 2006.

After learning of his wife’s deportation order, Quiroz said he was told he needs to speak with the Customs and Border Patrol director in San Diego about getting the removal order lifted. But while his next underway looms, Quiroz wonders what happens to his wife if he steps up and they say no. “If they deny it, then that gives them the green light to come and get her,” he said. “That’s been our fear.” Their 15-year-old, Bryan, is worried about his mom, even as he goes about living an American youth filled with basketball, school and church. “To see daddy gone

for so long, and mom stuck here not knowing what's going on, it's really hard," said Alex Avila, a senior pastor at the family's church, Fuente de Vida. The 5-year-old drum-playing Jayden never leaves his mom's side, he said. "He's really attached to mom," Avila said. "He doesn't want to go with anyone else but mom."

Irais leads children's programs in the church, Avila said, and the pastor is preparing to help them get through deployment and potential deportation. She always saddens when Quiroz is gone, he said. "As a minister, you can only do so much," Avila said. "Every time he departs, she goes into this really sad phase. Even though she's there, you can see it on her face that there's a part of her missing."

Quiroz's is not the only military family attempting to navigate America's labyrinthine immigration system, according to Martin Lester, an immigration attorney with the American Immigration Lawyers Association's Military Assistance Program. The free program helps troops who have immigration issues regarding citizenship, facilitating family immigration and other problems. "Quite often, it's situations...in which a spouse or family member could be subject to deportation," Lester said. "While every case is different, we certainly hear this kind of concern quite frequently." The program often receives referrals from military legal offices, he said. "If a service member contacts their command's JAG office or legal service office, those officers are not typically set up for immigration issues," Lester said.

Attorneys across the country can help troops figure out which agency issued a removal order, mitigating factors and what can be done, he said. "Oftentimes, one of our first tasks is unraveling what exactly happened and determining whether or not it is something that is easy to fix," Lester said. While immigration officials are generally more sympathetic to military families, "the simple fact that they are now a spouse of a U.S. active-duty service member doesn't just make that deportation order go away," Lester said. People in the country illegally with deportation orders have at times been able to remain because the feds choose not to enforce it, he said.

While the Obama administration never ignored such orders, Lester said the federal position appears to be changing under President Trump. Orders of supervision allow those here illegally to remain, but they are becoming harder to obtain and easier to lift under the current administration, he said. "It's become not unusual to see people who have been on orders of supervision for a long time receiving notice that when your order is up, it's not going to be renewed and you need to be prepared to be removed," Lester said. Between a multitude of agencies and the vagaries of immigration law, sailors like Quiroz are left to find their way through "an incredibly complicated system," Lester said. "Nothing is automatic when you're dealing with immigration," he said. "This system is complex and easy to maneuver in the wrong direction." [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | March 22, 2018 ++]

Military Spouse Deportation Update 04 ► Defense Secretary Looking Into Problem

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said he would need to look into reports of military spouses facing deportation and whether or not there may be additional protections for them. In February Mattis told reporters that he had reached an agreement with the Department of Homeland Security to ensure that active duty forces, Reserve, Guard and honorably discharged veterans who are under the government's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program would be protected from deportation — barring any standing court order or serious felony conviction. The DACA program has not been renewed by Congress, and President Donald Trump has expressed his desire to terminate the program.

"It still stands what I said, absent any kind of criminal conviction, any active duty, active reservist, delayed entry program" under DACA is still protected, Mattis said 27 MAR during an impromptu 30-minute press briefing with Pentagon reporters. But on whether those protections would be extended to spouses, he did not know. "I'll have to check on that and get back to you," Mattis said. In the past month, Military Times has been contacted by numerous

military families, both active duty and veteran, whose undocumented spouses or dependents are facing possible deportation. Some service members spoke about the stress of deploying when they feared that immigration would deport their spouses while they were away. Others spoke of spouses who had already been forced to leave, where the family now lives outside the U.S. Most of all, they want to know whether the protections outlined by Mattis could be extended to their families. It was not clear when Mattis would check on the issue. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Tara Copp | March 27, 2018 ++]

Military Discounts ► Some You May Not Be Aware of

To celebrate and show their gratitude to the nation’s servicemembers and veterans, many companies and organizations offer discounts and freebies throughout the year. Visit the websites listed below to ensure eligibility. Plenty of other organizations and companies offer discounts for members of the military, so be sure to always inquire about deals at the time of purchase. Here are six military deals to check out:

- 1. Custom Banners** -- Are you looking for the perfect way to welcome home your loved one? [Build A Sign](#) offers free, 100-percent-customizable banners for families celebrating the homecoming of their deployed servicemember. This is the perfect way to show your loved one how much you have missed them.
- 2. Amusement Parks** -- Many amusement parks across the country offer discounts for military families. Places like [Busch Gardens](#), [Sea World](#), and [Sesame Place](#) provide military members one free admission a year. Learn more at [wavesofhonor.com](#). Find additional attractions and vacation ideas for your family — all with military discounts — in [“Kid-Friendly Vacations.”](#)
- 3. Cellphone Discounts** -- Most major cellphone providers — including AT&T, Boost Mobile, Sprint, U.S. Cellular, and Verizon — offer military discounts on wireless plans to current and former servicemembers. To find the best deal for your family, do some shopping and focus on the plan that is right for you.
- 4. Athletic Apparel and Shoes** -- Nike offers a 10-percent discount to servicemembers. Registration is quick and easy. All you need is a valid military ID card. To find how you can get your discount, visit [nike.com](#).
- 5. Wedding Dresses** -- [Brides Across America](#) is a nonprofit that is committed to gifting weddings and wedding gowns to military and first-responder brides. Founded in 2008, the organization has gifted over 20,000 dresses. Their “Operation Wedding Gown Event” is held twice a year: in July (around Independence Day) and in November (around Veterans Day). Check out more deals for your big day in [“Discounts on Wedding Packages.”](#)
- 6. Event Tickets** -- The [Veteran Tickets Foundation](#) offers free tickets to currently serving military members of all branches of service and veterans. The foundation’s goal is to support troops by providing positive family and life experiences. Tickets are provided for events, concerts, performing arts, and educational and family activities across the nation. To receive your free tickets, sign up at [vettix.org](#).

[Source: MOAA Newsletter | March 22, 2018 ++]

Army Uniforms ► Pinks and Greens

Spring is here, and the Army is inching closer to making a final decision on bringing back the World War II-era pinks and greens service uniform. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley likes the designs so far, according to Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey, so the next step is to put together a plan to produce and issue the business-appropriate attire. “I have to give the secretary and the chief options,” Dailey told Army Times on 27 MAR. The

base prototypes for the uniforms are largely decided, he said. From the first prototypes unveiled last fall, the time at PEO (Program Executive Office) Soldier have added a belt — to more closely resemble the version of the uniform worn by Gen. Douglas MacArthur — as well as creating an almost identical male and female version, complete with long tie.



Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey and four soldiers in "pinks and greens" prototypes display the uniforms on Capitol Hill in February.

The sticking point for women has been whether to add chest pockets to the jacket. Some women find the pockets unflattering, Dailey said, while others don't mind them, so the design team has gone back and forth. "The team actually came up with the idea of, why don't we give you the pockets that come with the uniform and you have them sewn on?" he said. That way, women could have them positioned where they're most flattering, or not use them at all. "A pocket on these types of uniforms aren't functional pockets anyway," he added.

For now, Dailey and the team are working on a plan to get the cost of the uniform itself to a reasonable level, while trying to save money on manufacturing and distribution. "The boss has given me some guidance on cost, and very clear guidance, without reducing quality," he said, though he would not share that price ceiling. PEO Soldier is considering issuing the uniform to soldiers, rather than putting the cost in the enlisted clothing allowance and requiring soldiers to go out and buy it themselves. "So if we issue it instead of giving money to soldiers through their clothing allowance — actually, soldiers would prefer that anyway," Dailey said. "And it could be cheaper, because I could give higher continuous production rates to manufacturers."

Or, they could use a clothing sales system Dailey last saw on a deployment to Iraq, where rather than the logistics system bringing replacement uniforms halfway across the world, soldiers were able to log into a website and, using a credit loaded into the system, have what they needed shipped to them. That would similarly save the Army money in having to store new pinks and greens and feed them into post exchanges. "The cheapest way to do logistics ... to reduce stockage — because that's overheard, that's warehouses, people — is to time your sales with production," he said. "So if you can ship it straight from production to the customer, you have taken out all of the center of logistics."

Meanwhile, the team is prototyping ideas for optional clothing adds, including two jackets: one short, green "Ike" jacket, and a brown leather option. Despite a harsh budget environment, Dailey said he believes the return on investment of a new uniform would justify the required expense, even after searching out every cost-saving option. "It does have value," he said. "It's got value in the perception of the American soldier, recruiting — I honestly

believe that. But that perceived value cannot exceed monetary value.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | March 29, 2018 ++]

Navy Red Hill Fuel Tanks ► Upgrade Estimate \$500 Million to \$2 Billion

The Navy has estimated that the least expensive method of double-walling its fuel tanks that in 2014 spilled 27,000 gallons (102,000 liters) of fuel could cost between \$500 million and \$2 billion. The costs are part of an agreement entered into by the Navy, Defense Logistics Agency, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and state Department of Health to upgrade the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported Monday. The facility, with 20 giant underground tanks that cumulatively hold 250 million gallons (946 million liters) of fuel, is deemed by the military to be an essential facility for operations. In December, the Navy submitted a tank upgrade study that examines three single-wall options and includes improved repair and restoration as the most basic option, as well as two double-wall designs and one tank-within-a-tank design.



Lt. Cmdr. Andrew Lovgren, fuel director at Naval Supply Systems Command Fleet Logistics Center Pearl Harbor, briefs members of the Honolulu Board of Water Supply during a Feb. 19, 2016, visit to Red Hill Underground Fuel Storage Facility near Pearl Harbor.

The most expensive tank-within-a-tank option, with carbon steel and full interior and exterior coating, is estimated at between \$2 billion and \$5 billion. The cheapest single-wall option is projected by the Navy to cost between \$180 million and \$450 million, the Star-Advertiser reported. At a Red Hill public information meeting last week, Waiānae resident Kapua Keliikoa-Kamai said, “If we can spend billions of dollars in a war in somebody else’s country, we need to spend billions of dollars for national defense here in my home.” Keliikoa-Kamai favors secondary containment — double-walling the tanks — in five years. The Sierra Club of Hawaii has a similar stance. The consent agreement requires that whatever upgrade is selected needs to be completed by September 2037.

The Navy last month also completed a Red Hill study that looks at 12 potential relocation sites for what it said would be an “extraordinary project” to duplicate in 40 tanks the same 250 million gallon capacity that exists now. The replacement facility would need to be hardened to the same level as Red Hill — which is buried 100 feet underground — to withstand missile or electronic attack, the Navy report said. That would mean similarly burying the new tanks 100 feet (30 meters) below ground or installing them at a shallower depth and covering them with the equivalent thickness of concrete. [Source: Associated Press | 20 March 2018 ++]

Navy Carrier Program ► Multi-Ship Purchase Approach

The U.S. Navy is exploring whether it can achieve significant savings in parts and labor by buying its next two aircraft carriers together instead of individually, the service's top weapons buyer said. The Navy intends to deploy 12 aircraft carriers, up from the 11 today, as a key part of its planned expansion to 355 ships. In a request for proposals on Monday, the Navy asked shipbuilder Huntington Ingalls Industries Inc. "to further define the cost savings achievable" if it makes a block purchase of the third and fourth carriers in the new Ford class. A two-ship commitment would provide a major boost in revenue for Huntington Ingalls and its subcontractors, including General Atomics, which makes the aircraft launch and recovery system.

The proposal is a vote of confidence in the carrier program despite its history so far of major cost increases and delays. The first carrier in the class, the USS Gerald R. Ford, has become the costliest warship ever -- with a budget now capped by Congress at \$12.9 billion -- and it was delivered at least 32 months later than originally scheduled. Huntington Ingalls also was falling short last year of a Navy goal to reduce the hours of labor on the second ship by 18 percent compared with the first. For the Navy to commit to two carriers at once, the contractors working on it must demonstrate significant savings, such as in hours of labor or reductions in costs from suppliers, James Geurts, the Navy's top weapons buyer told reporters. "Is there a more affordable way to buy those two?" he asked.

Mike Petters, chief executive officer of Newport News, Virginia-based Huntington Ingalls, said in an email that "we believe the most effective way to reduce cost of aircraft carriers is to take a multi-ship purchase approach and build them every three to four years. Buying two ships at once stabilizes the Newport News Shipbuilding workforce and their national supplier base, allows us to buy materials in quantity, and phase work more efficiently." Members of Congress have backed the administration's move toward maintaining a 12-carrier fleet, as new ships are added and older ones are retired, but details about timing of funding, construction and delivery have yet to be worked out. More than 100 lawmakers -- led by the delegation from Virginia, where the carriers are built -- wrote Defense Secretary Jim Mattis in December urging a dual-buy procurement.

The Navy's fiscal year 2019 budget includes a request to fund the third Ford-class carrier, the USS Eisenhower, and plans fiscal 2023 as the first year of full funding for what would be the fourth, a ship still to be named that would replace the USS Carl Vinson when it's retired. Congress must approve the request. [Source: Bloomberg | Anthony Capaccio | March 19, 2018 ++]

USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) Update 11 ► Negligent Homicide Charges Recommended

The Japan Coast Guard announced 15 MAR a recommendation of negligent homicide charges for the officers steering both the Fitzgerald and the ACX Crystal during last June's fatal collision, according to Stars and Stripes. The recommendation comes after an investigation found that both the Crystal's second officer and the Fitzgerald's officer of the deck were responsible for the incident, which resulted in the deaths of seven Fitzgerald sailors off the coast of Yokosuka. The official charge is "Causing Death and Injury through Negligence in the Pursuit of Social Activities and Endangering Traffic through Negligence in the Pursuit of Social Activities," according to the Stripes report. This accident, along with the destroyer McCain's fatal collision off the coast of Singapore in August of last year, "resulted from complete breakdowns in standard Navy procedures and poor decision-making by officers and sailors on the bridge of the two warships," a November report stated.

Japan Coast Guard spokesman Yoshihito Nakamura told Stripes that the Fitzgerald crew was at fault because the Crystal was traveling in accordance with Preventing Collisions at Sea regulations, although he blamed the Crystal for not taking any action in avoiding the incident. U.S. Forces Japan told Military Times, however, that "the sailors involved in the collision were performing their official duties at the time." "Pursuant to the Status of Forces

Agreement between the U.S. and Japan, the U.S. has the primary right to exercise jurisdiction for offenses arising out of any act or omission done in the performance of official duties,” said Capt. Tyler Hopkins, U.S. Forces Japan spokesman. [Source: NavyTimes | Nicole Bauke | March 19, 2018 ++]

USS Juneau (CL-52) ► Sullivan Brother's Ship Located

The USS Juneau (CL-52) was struck by two Japanese torpedoes during the Battle of Guadalcanal in November 1942, the second of which is believed to have struck the weapons magazine, sparking a massive explosion that ripped the Atlanta-class light cruiser in half, sinking it in only 30 seconds and killing hundreds instantly. A total of 687 men from the Atlanta-class light cruiser died in the attack, including all five Sullivan brothers, whose name has since been given to two Navy warships, most recently the guided missile destroyer The Sullivans (DDG-68). The first, which served during World War II and the Korean War, is now a museum ship in Buffalo, New York



The prop of the USS Juneau (left) resting on the seafloor.

After sinking, Juneau’s watery resting place remained unknown until on St. Patrick’s Day 17 MAR, when the crew of the Research Vessel Petrel, led by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, located the wreck nearly 4,200 meters — or a distance of 2.6 miles — beneath the surface in the South Pacific. Despite its rapid destruction, more than 100 of Juneau’s crew reportedly survived the attack. But because of the speed in which the ship went under, and with the ever-present threat of additional Japanese attacks, American rescue efforts would not get underway until eight days later. By then, only 10 survivors remained.

The five Sullivan brothers — Joseph, Francis, Albert, Madison and George — defied the Navy’s policy of separating siblings, insisting that they serve together aboard the same ship. Their tragic end would cement their legendary status in naval history and would go on to serve as a rallying cry for the United States during throughout WWII. “The story of the USS Juneau crew and Sullivan brothers epitomize the service and sacrifice of our nation’s greatest generation,” Vice Adm. Rich Brown, commander of Naval Surface Forces, told the editors of Paul Allen’s website.

The death of the Sullivan brothers was a major touchstone for Americans at home during the early days of U.S. involvement in World War II. “News of the deaths of all five brothers became a rallying point for the war effort, with posters and speeches honoring their sacrifice. Extensive newspaper and radio coverage of the incident made the loss of the brothers a national story, producing ‘a wave of humility and sympathy,’ and condolences poured in on the Sullivan family in Waterloo, Iowa,” according to Navy History and Heritage Command.

Just over two weeks earlier, the R/V Petrel made another astonishing discovery when it located the sunken aircraft carrier USS Lexington (CV-2), along with its aircraft, 500 miles off the coast of Australia. And in August,

an Allen-led R/V Petrel expedition discovered the wreck of the USS Indianapolis, which remains the Navy's single worst loss at sea, about 5,500 meters below the surface. Nearly 900 crew were killed after the Indianapolis was struck by Japanese torpedoes — many by sharks. Of the 1,196 sailors and Marines on board, only 316 came out of the water. "As Americans, all of us owe a debt of gratitude to everyone who served and who continue to serve our country for their courage, persistence and sacrifice," Allen wrote on his website following the discovery of the Lexington. Juneau was commissioned less than a year before she was sent to Davy Jones' locker. [Source: NavyTimes | J.D. Simkins | March 19, 2018 ++]

Reasons To Love USMC ► Five

Hard to boil it down to five reasons why we love the Marine Corps, what with all the amazing things they do. How handsome and good looking they all are, to how ferocious they are in battle. It's going to be a tough go to select the five qualities that truly define why we love the Marine Corps.



"First to Fight." A group of U.S. Marines appear in a Marine Corps Recruiting Publicity Bureau photo in 1918.

- 1. Marines win battles.** Ever heard of a place called the Chosin Reservoir? Or how about an island named Iwo Jima, maybe this place called Fallujah? In the entire history of the United States Marine Corps, the only time they've surrendered was during WWII when there were only a few hundred Marines versus extremely overwhelming numbers of Japanese, with naval support. Even then they fought for several days inflicting high casualties against the invaders. Marines win battles, and if they don't, they make the enemy pay in blood for each piece of ground gained.
- 2. Marines look damn good.** Every single member of the other services can't deny that Marine dress blues are the best looking dress uniforms. Despite the numerous crayon and glue insults, every other branch knows it's game over for them at the bar if Marines show up in their dress blues. (Damn we look good).
- 3. With the exception of corpsman, Marines are self-sustaining.** They have their own air support, they have their own armor, and they have their own infantry. There isn't much the Marine Corps can't do on its own. Truth be told, they wouldn't really have it any other way. By the way, the corpsman, they are ours now and you can't have them back, we've adopted them.
- 4. They were founded in a bar!** Marines like to fight, Marines like to drink. It's only reasonable that the guy who wanted a bunch of mean and nasty fighters to fight the redcoats aboard ship would go to the world famous Tun Tavern in Philadelphia to recruit some of the meanest, nastiest, beer drinkingest, rough and tumble men ever assembled.

5. Marines have this sense of arrogant, cocky pride about them. Their only flaw, if we had to pick one is that Marines don't actually know how good they really are. Everything that is asked of them gets done. An old unofficial saying in the Marine Corps "Improvise, Adapt, Overcome" proves that it doesn't matter where or how you fight Marines, they'll find a way to win, because in the wise words of Dj Khaled, "All we do is win."

[Source: American Grit | John Fannin | March 16, 2018 ++]

USS Colorado (SSN-778) Update 01 ► Christened 17 MAR

The U.S. Navy's newest attack submarine, the USS Colorado, joined the fleet 17 MAR in a ceremony at Connecticut's Naval Submarine Base. Navy Secretary Richard Spencer says the submarine is a "marvel of technology and innovation." U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet, a Colorado Democrat, said the people of Colorado are remarkably proud this submarine will silently protect the nation's interests.



Pre-Commissioning Unit Colorado (SSN 788) sits pierside (left) prior to commissioning March 15, 2018, Battleship BB-45 1921 (left center), Cruiser 1905 (right center), and Frigate 1856 (right)

Annie Mabus, the daughter of former Navy Secretary Ray Mabus, gave the order to bring the ship to life before the crew boarded the vessel at the end of the ceremony, which is a Navy tradition. The 377-foot-long sub weighs about 7,800 tons submerged. It can fight submarines and surface ships, conduct surveillance and deliver Special Operations troops. It has two large tubes that can launch six Tomahawk missiles each. It's the first attack submarine where sailors use an Xbox gaming system controller to maneuver the photonics masts, which replaced periscopes, according to Cmdr. Reed Koepp, the Colorado's commanding officer. Other submarines have joysticks. Cmdr. Koepp leads 130 men. Women serve on submarines but they haven't been assigned to the Colorado. One-fifth of submarine crews are integrated.

It took submarine supply businesses nationwide and thousands of shipyard employees in Connecticut, Rhode Island and Virginia to build the Colorado, the 15th member of the Virginia class of submarines. Attack submarines are built in a partnership between General Dynamics Electric Boat in Connecticut and Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia. They cost about \$2.7 billion apiece. Joseph Walsh, who oversees the Virginia-class program at Electric Boat, said building the Colorado over the past five years was an incredibly complex task that required a team effort between the shipbuilders, crew and the Navy. It's the fourth U.S. Navy ship named Colorado. Navy officials, politicians, shipbuilders, local community leaders and guests of the crew attended the ceremony. [Source: The Associated Press | March 18, 2018 ++]

Marine Corps Mascot ► Chesty XV in Training

A new Marine recruit will be stepping his little paws on the famous yellow footprints on his way to becoming the Corps' newest mascot. English bulldog recruit Chesty XV starts training next week to replace the retiring Chesty XIV, according to Marine officials. But don't expect drill instructors in this pup's face: He'll shadow Chesty XIV as part of his training before he is ready to participate in official Marine ceremonies. "He will remain as 'recruit' until

he gets promoted before he officially takes over as the Marine Corps mascot next year,” Marine spokeswoman Capt. Colleen McFadden told Marine Corps Times.



The Corps' new mascot Chesty XV (right) meets Chesty XIV (left). Chesty XIV will retire next year.

Chesty XIV is currently the official mascot of the Marine Corps, named after legendary five-time Navy Cross recipient Lt. Gen. Chesty Puller. Chesty XIV has been in service since 2013 and will retire before next year’s parade season, according to McFadden. He last reported to the Marine Barracks Washington where he participates in drill ceremonies and parades with the Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon. The Corps expects Chesty XV to participate in his first parade event on or about 6 JUL. When asked by reporters if he was a good dog, McFadden replied, “He is a great puppy and new recruit. The Barracks was very excited to welcome him aboard today.” [Source: The Pocono Record | Bill Cameron | March 9, 2018 ++]

USCGC Alert (WMEC-630) ► Equipment Casualties Terminate Patrol

A series of equipment casualties on the 49-year-old Coast Guard cutter Alert forced an early end to its counter-narcotics patrol, underlining the needs behind the Coast Guard’s ongoing fleet recapitalization. The Alert, one of 14 remaining 210’x34’x10’6” Reliance-class medium endurance cutters, returned to its homeport at Astoria, Ore., 16 MAR after a 39-day deployment in the Eastern Pacific, according to Coast Guard officials. The Alert had departed 5 FEB and almost immediately began suffering engineering malfunctions — some 35 in all, over just the first 19 days at sea.



Problems cropped up in the Alert's radar, propulsion and fuel systems. The topper was a crankcase explosion in one of the Alco 16V-251 diesel mains, resulting from a seized oil pump. That required a week-long layover in Panama while the crew inspected the engine, and ultimately a decision to end the patrol early, said Coast Guard officials. "We left on patrol with great hopes and a crew at top performance, thoroughly trained and operationally tested, but one of our main engines broke, sending us home before we got into any operations, which was very disappointing for everyone," said Cmdr. Tobias Reid, the Alert's commanding officer, in a prepared statement. "Our engineers did an outstanding job responding to the casualty and put a huge amount of effort into repairing the engine on station, but it requires an extensive overhaul that can only be completed at home."

Commissioned in August 1969, the Alert was the last of the Reliance class to come down the ways, and today is one of three in the class stationed in Oregon and Washington. From 1986 to 1997 the entire class underwent midlife overhauls at around \$20 million per vessel. They are scheduled now for replacement by new 360'x54'x17' offshore patrol cutters beginning in fiscal year 2021. "The offshore patrol cutter will be the backbone of Coast Guard offshore presence and the manifestation of our at-sea authorities," said Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Paul Zukunft, who is winding up a four-year term when he pushed for more sustained funding of the recapitalization program. "It is essential to stopping smugglers at sea, for interdicting undocumented migrants, rescuing mariners, enforcing fisheries laws, responding to disasters and protecting our ports."

Coast Guard officials have candidly described the troubles with operating aging vessels in the news media and before Congress. One of those recent cases involved the 399'x83'x31' heavy icebreaker Polar Star, built in 1976, whose crew overcame major challenges – including a shaft seal leak and engine failure – on their last resupply mission to the National Science Foundation bases in Antarctica. The Navy and Coast recently issued a long-anticipated request for proposals to build the first of three planned heavy icebreakers, but in the meantime the Polar Star must keep going into the 2020s. [Source: Workboat | Kirk Moore | March 21, 2018 ++]

Military Retirement Locations Update 02 ► Top 2 | RP & PN

Overseas retirement is a consideration for many military retirees and service-connected veterans due to generally lower costs of living and exciting cultural explorations. For U.S. military veterans, retiring abroad is even more advantageous, monetarily speaking. For instance, most veterans usually have guaranteed pensions on top of Social Security benefits, which make a retired veteran relatively wealthier than other Americans, and extraordinarily wealthier compared to citizens of developing countries, according to many demographic pundits. Retirement location is important for veterans for many different reasons. However, in terms of living well off retirement pay and/or compensation benefits, some places stand out more than others. According to demographic and economic statistics, here are the top 2 places for veterans to seriously consider:

1. Philippines -- Already a popular ex-pat retirement destination, the Philippines has an extraordinarily large veteran community. According to the Veteran Journal, the Philippines has an estimated 2,000+ ex-Air Force members alone, making it the most popular place for many veteran retirees. Navy veterans also have a large presence in the Philippines. Aside from its scenic landscape and low cost of living, the Philippines is the only foreign country where the Veterans Administration (VA) operates a stand alone ambulatory care facility.

2. Panama -- Panama is another common destination for military retirees. Its proximity to the United States, cleanliness, and first-world amenities are all benefits for veterans and regular retirees alike. Furthermore, Panama offers outstanding retirement benefits. Combined with the benefits, the use of U.S. dollars, and the use of English language, Panama is a top location for many military retirees.

[Source: USVCP Staff | March 26, 2018 ++]

Warships That Will Change The Future ► HDMS Absalon L16



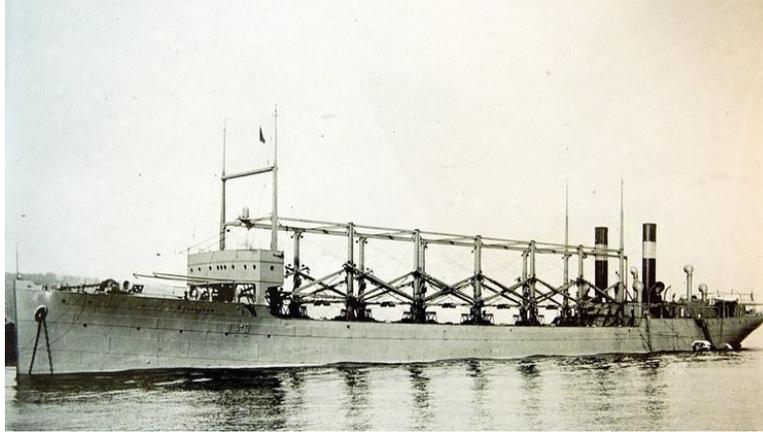
The 6300 Ton 451 foot HDMS Absalon comes from Denmark (who knew they needed a warship), has been around since 2007 and can be proud of an onboard hanger which can hold up to two helicopters. Another fun fact is that it's one of the largest Danish ships to belong to the Royal Danish Navy. The warship was laid down in 2003 and was launched at the end of 2005. Its home port is Frederikshavn, a Danish town in Northern Denmark on the northeast coast of the Jutland peninsula.

* **Military History** *



USS Cyclops ► 100 years later, the question remains - What Happened to Her?

There should have been a clue: a distress call on the radio, a shard of wooden lifeboat, even a sailor's cap. How could 309 men and their ship, a naval vessel bigger than a football field, just vanish? One hundred years ago on 13 March, the USS Cyclops was due to steam up the Chesapeake Bay and dock in Baltimore at what is now Port Covington. The ship still hasn't shown up. Its eerie absence is an enduring mystery, fueling fantastical theories of the Bermuda Triangle, giant squids and German spies. Truth is, no one knows what became of the Cyclops or its crew — sailors such as Thomas Lee of West Baltimore; Adam Siewierski of Canton; and Dr. Burt Asper, who practiced at Sheppard Pratt.



USS Cyclops

Memories of the Proteus-class collier — it hauled coal — have faded. The only known monument to the ship is a plaque that hangs in France. And yet, in this era of high-tech discovery — when explorers have found a World War II cruiser sunk in the Philippine Sea and an aircraft carrier lost in the Coral Sea, when forensic anthropologists conclude that bones found on a Pacific island likely belonged to the missing aviatrix Amelia Earhart — the old hope returns that the Cyclops might be found. “In terms of loss of life and size of ship, it’s probably the last great mystery left unresolved,” said James Delgado, the renowned underwater explorer.

Built in Philadelphia, steel-hulled and immense, the Cyclops splashed in as the Navy’s biggest, fastest fuel ship. About 540 feet long, 65 feet wide, the ship could haul 12,500 tons of coal and steam 15 knots. Its winches could send 800-pound bags of anthracite along cables. Huge clamshell buckets could lift two tons of coal in a single mouthful. “A monster collier,” newspapers called it. “A floating coal mine.” Launched May 1910, the ship was designed to refuel the Navy fleet — work both grueling and dangerous. The coal in the cargo hold was prone to catching fire. Cables snapped. Bucketfuls tumbled to the deck. The sailors steamed out of Norfolk, Va., and down the Atlantic Coast to U.S. bases in Cuba, Haiti and Puerto Rico.

With U.S. entry into World War I in April 1917, the Cyclops, outfitted with 50-caliber guns, delivered doctors and medical supplies from the Johns Hopkins Hospital to Saint-Nazaire, France. Months later, the ship arrived at Brazil to load 10,000 tons of manganese ore. Denser and heavier than coal, the ore for steelmaking was unfamiliar cargo for the crew. The heavily laden vessel voyaged to Barbados, resupplied for nine days at sea, then steamed off for the steelyards of Baltimore. It was March 4, 1918. The Cyclops was never seen again. It wasn’t like it was lost in a glorious battle. It just kind of fell off the face of the Earth. — Marvin Barrash, the great-nephew of a ship fireman. The search was exhaustive: Navy cruisers scoured the trade routes, scouted the beaches, inspected remote bays. Crews radioed the lost ship day after day, but nothing — no reply, no debris, not even an oil slick. Out in the West Indies, the ship had vanished.

In June 1918, then-Assistant Navy Secretary Franklin D. Roosevelt announced the ship and its 309 men were presumed lost at sea. It was the greatest loss of life unrelated to combat in U.S. Naval history. “There has been no more baffling mystery in the annals of the Navy than the disappearance last March of the U.S.S. Cyclops,” Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels wrote. “There has not been a trace of the vessel, and long-continued and vigilant search of the entire region proved utterly futile.” Speculation swirled. Could the heavy ore have ruptured the hull, sinking the ship instantly? Did the unfamiliar cargo leak fumes that poisoned the crew? U-boat torpedoes could have sunk the ship, but where was the debris? Rough seas could have swamped it, but there was no storm, and no distress call. German raiders could have captured the ship, taken the crew hostage and steamed home with their prize, but the Cyclops lacked fuel for a transatlantic voyage.

Wilder theories emerged of sea monsters, mutinies and meteorites. The loss of the Cyclops — along with the later disappearance of five Navy torpedo bombers known as “Flight 19” — gave rise to the ship-swallowing lore of the Bermuda Triangle, a myth roundly debunked today. Still, there were no answers for the families of the Baltimore sailors — seamen such as Charles Holmes, who left behind a wife and infant son on Presbury Street; Edward Dresbach, who wrote cheerful letters to his mother on Harlem Avenue; and Beverly Jones and Herbert Price, two city boys just 17 years old.

Today, only scattered reminders speak of them. At Baltimore’s Loudon Park Cemetery, one gravestone reads: “T. Vernon Lee, lost on the U.S.S. Cyclops.” In Baltimore’s War Memorial, their names are inscribed in marble with those of other Marylanders killed during WWI. And in Halethorpe, an American Legion post bears the name and photo of one sailor, Dewey Lowman. Little is known about the 19-year-old from Arbutus, a fireman aboard the Cyclops. “People have asked me over the years; I can’t really tell them much,” said Edgar Lowman, of Halethorpe, his 86-year-old nephew. Fifteen Marylanders disappeared with the ship, most of them young men without wives or children.

The loss became a discomfiting episode for the Navy, says Marvin Barrash of Kent Island, the great-nephew of another ship fireman. “The whole existence of the ship has been swept under a rug,” he said. “It wasn’t like it was lost in a glorious battle. It just kind of fell off the face of the Earth.” Barrash spent more than a decade researching the Cyclops, amassing Navy records, ship logs, dispatches, photos, even a sooty bag of manganese ore. In 2010, he published a 700-page history of the ship. Now, he’s working with the office of U.S. Rep. Andy Harris to erect the Cyclops’ first monument. “As a Navy veteran, I feel I have a duty to honor the crew members on the USS Cyclops who never returned home to Baltimore, and the families they left behind,” the Baltimore County Republican said in a statement.

Barrash believes a cascade of failures doomed the Cyclops. One of two engines broke. The ship was unbalanced by the heavy ore. At night, with the deck battened down and crew asleep, a big wave rolled the Cyclops. The huge collier, Barrash figures, eludes explorers because it sank into the Puerto Rico Trench, the deepest part of the Atlantic. The trench cleaves the ocean floor across nearly 1,000 miles. “I just want her to be found,” Barrash said. “I want the 309 to be at rest, as well as the families. It’s something everybody needs: some resolution.”

Underwater explorers have dived for the prized wreck for decades, but a succession of recent, splashy discoveries brings renewed hope to the hunt. Today’s crews employ devices that can detect the magnetic field of a washing machine buried in sea mud. Their sonar can sweep the depths like a flashlight. Year after year, the number of shipwrecks still lost dwindles. “The short list keeps getting shorter these days as technology steps in,” said Delgado, the explorer. “Things can be found. It’s just a question of time and money.”

Delgado and researchers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced two years ago that they had found the Baltimore-built tug USS Conestoga, missing since 1921, outside San Francisco Bay. A research crew led by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen said last August that it had found the USS Indianapolis, a Navy cruiser torpedoed in the Pacific late in World War II. Last week, Allen’s crew said they had found another vessel beneath the Coral Sea: the World War II aircraft carrier USS Lexington.

These deep-pocketed, well-equipped research crews haven’t yet taken on the hunt for the Cyclops — at least, not publicly. But solo explorers sometimes write Barrash, believing they have found the ship. A Navy diver thought he located it off Virginia’s coast in the late 1960s. Bad weather forced him up, and crews never found the wreck again. Excitement grew over a wreck upside down off Florida’s coast, but it turned out to be a German fuel ship from World War II. A treasure hunter in the Dominican Republic sent Barrash photos last year of a newly discovered shipwreck. The Cyclops was found, this diver declared. Barrash noticed the doorknobs bore markings from Glasgow and the dishes showed European crowns. Out there, somewhere, the great collier remains. [Source: Baltimore Sun | Tim Prudente | March 13, 2018 ++]

Profile In Courage ► Staff Sgt. Edward Carter Jr.

A career Army noncommissioned officer, Edward Carter Jr. was born May 26, 1916, in Los Angeles, California. He was the son of missionary parents who went to the Far East and finally settled in Shanghai, China. Edward ran away from this home when he was a young teen to begin a military exodus. However, it was not to be an ordinary journey as his material and spiritual paths intertwined.



His first tour was short-lived, yet not too short to prevent the 15-year-old Carter from rising to the rank of Lieutenant in the Chinese Army. When he was discovered to still be a child, Edward was promptly discharged and returned to his parents. It was also long enough for Carter to believe he was visited by a spirit in the Chinese Army and informed him would be a great warrior but would not die in war. Now having a spiritual military destiny, as soon as he was old enough, Edward enrolled in a Shanghai military school. There he received extensive combat training and learned at least four languages, including Mandarin Chinese, Hindi, and German. Next, he fought in the Spanish Civil War as a corporal in the socialist Abraham Lincoln Brigade. It was an American volunteer unit opposing General Franco's fascist troops. In 1938, they were forced to flee into France. This led to his return to the United States.

Here he met and married his wife Mildred in Los Angeles in 1940. It wasn't long though before destiny called again. He enlisted in the U.S. Army September 6, 1941, shortly before World War II and quickly rose to Staff Sergeant. In 1942, just months after he enlisted, however, the Army opened a counterintelligence file with his name on it. On May 18, 1943, an unidentified intelligence officer at Fort Benning, Georgia "deemed it advisable" to put Sergeant Carter under surveillance and start an investigation. The officer did so because Carter had been a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Allegedly, "while not necessarily communist," he had been "exposed to communism." The report further alleged, "Subject... capable of having connections with subversive activities due to... early years (until 1938) in the Orient" and had a speaking knowledge of Chinese. Every commander Carter had thereafter secretly reported what he read, where he went and what clubs he joined.

In 1944 he was shipped to Europe and ended up assigned to supply duties. When Gen. Dwight Eisenhower ran short of combat-arms replacements in December 1944, he instituted the volunteer Ground Force Replacement Command for rear-echelon Soldiers of all races. By February 1945, a total of 4,562 black Soldiers were serving in units up to company size attached to previously all-white infantry and armored divisions. At the height of his career he was even close to Gen. George S. Patton, serving as one of the general's guards. Patton had no room for prejudice in the ranks. They had a strong bond with the fact they both believed they had been visited by a spirit who foretold accomplishments on the battlefield.

After months of volunteering, Carter's platoon made it into combat, yet he had to accept a demotion to Private. This was because his superiors would not allow a black to command white troops. He eventually served in the

"Mystery Division" of blacks in Patton's Third Army. (The Mystery Division performed missions requiring uniforms without identifying unit insignia.) In March 1945, the tank on which Carter, then 28, and other infantrymen were riding came under heavy small arms and anti-armor fire. Unit members thought the fire had come from a large warehouse on the outskirts of town. This resulted in him volunteering to lead three other Soldiers on a patrol against the German position. They advanced toward the structure and took cover where they located and assessed the approximate enemy strength. They left this cover to cross 150 yards or so of open fields to the warehouse.

One American Soldier was soon killed and Carter sent the two survivors back to hold the position covering his advance. There, another comrade was killed and the other seriously wounded by the German defenders. Carter inched his way to a place of safety behind a ridge 30 yards away and endured an exchange of gunfire with the warehouse. Along the way, his deadly fire knocked out two enemy machine gun nests and a mortar crew. He paid a price though, as a machine gun burst put three bullets through his left arm. Continuing, he was knocked to the ground by another wound to his left leg. Then, after taking "wound tablets" a drink from his canteen was interrupted with another wound through his left hand. Three shrapnel wounds followed and were credited for the pain he endured the rest of his life.

After enduring Carter's close proximity and periodic fire, German officers in the warehouse finally sent eight Soldiers to flush him out and finish him off. He lay still for two hours until the patrol approached him, thinking the blood-soaked American Soldier was dead. Suddenly, Carter, seriously wounded, opened fire with his .45-caliber submachine gun. He shot six of the enemy dead and took the other two prisoners. Using them as a human shield, the Sergeant made his way back to the American tanks. As another act of courage, Carter refused to be evacuated until he could report all he had observed and extract needed information about the enemy's emplacement from his German-speaking prisoners.

After recovering from his wounds in less than a month, he was restored to his staff Sergeant rank and finished the war training troops. At this point, October 1945, he had been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, Bronze Star, Purple Heart, American Defense Service Medal, Combat Infantry Badge and numerous other citations and honors. Shortly thereafter in 1946, Secretary of War Robert Patterson noted an irregularity in the lack of black recognition and promised to investigate. At the conclusion of the war, Carter found himself stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, and politely known as a Negro or colored. A lot of the battlefield camaraderie had faded, however, black Soldiers were becoming increasing common and were blending more into the ranks.

When Carter attempted to reenlist, the Army barred his enlistment and drummed him out of uniform without explanation on September 30, 1949. He received an Honorable Discharge dated October 1949, probably the darkest "honor" of his life. It is unclear when it became known they had banished the decorated warrior as a suspected communist. It was very clear the Army denied him the life of soldiering he dearly loved. He moved into a life as a family man and steadily worked in the vehicle tire business the rest of his life. In 1962, although he smoked, he and his doctors attributed the discovery of lung cancer to shrapnel still in his neck. He died peacefully of lung cancer in the UCLA Medical Center, a Los Angeles hospital, on January 30, 1963, at 47 years of age.

Sergeant Carter was laid to rest at the National Cemetery within the Veterans Hospital grounds in West Los Angeles near where he died. In 1992 Secretary of the Army John Shannon commissioned an independent study to identify unrecognized African American heroes from World War II. In May 1996 the study was completed under the title, *The Exclusion of Black Soldiers from the Medal of Honor in World War II*. Staff Sergeant Edward Allen Carter Jr. of Los Angeles, California was identified and recommended for honors. January 10, 1997, Sergeant Carter was exhumed from the national cemetery and honored the next day in Los Angeles. On January 13, President Clinton presented Carter's posthumous Medal of Honor to his son, Edward Allen Carter III in Washington, D.C.

A horse-drawn caisson and full military honors on January 14, 1997, ended his physical destiny following his birth in 1916 and passing away in 1963. Edward Carter, the consummate Soldier, was now finally at rest in the Arlington National Cemetery as befitted his material exodus. His spiritual exodus was also about to end. In 1998

Allene Carter, his daughter-in-law, received 57 pages of declassified Army documents in response to Freedom of Information Act requests. The documents showed the Army could not find a shred of disloyalty by Carter.

In an emotional ceremony in the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes, the day before Veterans Day 1999, the Carter family again met with President Clinton. Assisting the Commander-in-Chief was Gen. John Keane, Army Vice Chief of Staff. Gen. Keane presented the Carter family with a set of corrected military records and belated posthumous awards for Staff Sergeant Edward A. Carter Jr. of the Army Good Conduct Medal, Army of Occupation Medal and American Campaign Medal. The Army admitted declassified Army intelligence records showed that any suspicions against the hero had no basis in fact. [Source: Together We Served Newsletter | March 2018 ++]

USS Indianapolis (CA-35) Update 02 ► Definitive Survivor Number Determined

More than seven decades after being sunk by a Japanese submarine, the U.S. Navy has a final crew accounting of heavy cruiser USS Indianapolis (CA-35). Since being sunk on July 30, 1945, in the Philippine Sea, the number of people onboard Indianapolis had been reported as either 1,195 or 1,196, and the survivors had officially been listed as 316 but at times had been reported as 317. The exact number of sailors who died and a precise accounting of survivors had been hard to determine because Indianapolis' crew paperwork went down with the ship. Now, following last summer's discovery of Indianapolis' final resting place on the seafloor, a pair of historians have a definitive answer and a likely explanation for the long-debated discrepancy, apparently caused by the whereabouts of Petty Officer Second Class Clarence W. Donnor, who had briefly been on Indianapolis before it set sail.

“To an outside observer, this small casualty discrepancy might seem insignificant. To survivors, descendants, friends, and the Navy, it is not. As historians and friends of the USS Indianapolis family, we are committed to commemorating the sacrifices of those who served by telling their story accurately—the good and the bad. This entire event shows the inherent difficulties in accounting for casualties in the fog of war and in verifying those figures years after the fact—particularly with an episode as chaotic as the loss of the Indianapolis. We can now confirm, 73 years later, that the Navy's number of survivors in 1945 was correct at 316, and that the final crew list for that tragic voyage has been corrected to show 1,195 men were on board and 879 lives were lost,” Richard Hulver, a historian at the Naval History and Heritage Command, and documentary filmmaker Sara Vladic, who has also written about Indianapolis, wrote in a paper they published earlier this week in Proceedings Today.

The work to definitively determine the number of sailors onboard and the number of survivors was spurred by last summer's discovery of the Indianapolis wreckage more than 18,000 feet below the Pacific Ocean's surface. Paul Allen, a Microsoft co-founder and billionaire philanthropist, led the search and was assisted by historians from the Naval History and Heritage Command. Allen has recently discovered an other World War II Navy wrecks, including Atlanta-class cruiser USS Juneau (CL-52), which sank near the Solomon Islands with the five Sullivan brothers aboard, and carrier USS Lexington (CV-2) at the bottom of the Coral Sea.

Hulver and Vladic reviewed thousands of documents, including survivor lists at the two Navy hospitals that treated the Indianapolis crew after their rescue, and couldn't find Donnor's name. Vladic, who has researched Indianapolis for 17 years and interviewed 107 of the survivors during this time, had not come across anyone mentioning Donnor being onboard when the ship sank. Donnor had been on Indianapolis, but apparently within hours of reporting to the ship he learned he'd been accepted into an officer training program. With new orders to report to Fort Schuyler, NY, Hulver and Vladic wrote that Donnor's Pacific deployment was canceled. Donnor continued serving in the Navy until his discharge in July 1946.

“As Donnor began planning to make his way across the United States, the crew of the Indianapolis finalized preparations for their fateful voyage back to war,” Hulver and Vladic wrote. His arrival onboard had been recorded, but Hulver and Vladic suspect his hasty departure was not noted since it occurred while the ship's crew concentrated

on their secret mission of delivering components of atomic bomb “Little Boy” to the island of Tinian in the Pacific. After the sinking, Donnor’s parents received a Navy telegram at their Big Rapids, Mich., home informing them their son was missing in action. The Donnor’s, Hulver and Vladic wrote, knew this couldn’t be true since they had talked with their son after 30 JUL, as he was stateside entering an officer training program.

Donner’s mother, Ruth Donnor, wrote a letter to the Navy informing them of their mistake. A formal investigation was started immediately to verify Donnor’s parents’ claim and ultimately issued an apology for the mistake, Hulver and Vladic wrote. But with the original crew documents lost at sea, when the Navy reconstructed these files, Hulver and Vladic found Donnor remained on the crew list but was listed as surviving the sinking, instead of removing him from the crew list altogether. While the Navy almost immediately knew Donnor had lived, the initial clerical error remained in the historical Navy lists with no explanation, and what became the official numbers were flawed. Knowledge of Donnor’s survival crept into updated lists as early as 1963. [Source: USNI News | Ben Werne | March 23, 2018 ++]

Korean Expedition 1871 ► U.S.-Korean Relations Started With Conflict

Sometimes good relationships get off to a bad start. The United States and South Korea are a case in point. Today, Seoul is a valued American ally. But U.S.-Korean relations started with conflict rather than cooperation when on June 10, 1871, the U.S. Navy expedition sent to open relations with Korea instead waged the **Battle of Ganghwa**. The backdrop for the hostilities was the American desire to establish trade relations with Korea. Like its neighbor Japan, Korea in the mid-nineteenth century was hostile to foreign influences, so much so that it earned the nickname of "the Hermit Kingdom." Japan agreed to sign a commercial treaty with the United States only at the point of a gun after a fleet headed by Commodore Matthew Perry appeared in Tokyo Bay in 1854.

American merchants hoped that a similar treaty could be struck with Korea. But the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 ended U.S. interest in Asia for a time. After Gen. Robert Lee's surrender at Appomattox in 1865, that American merchants again turned their eyes to the region and began developing an expedition to Korea that was launched out of Nagasaki, Japan in May 1871 with an "armada" of five U.S. warships and 1,230 men under the command of Admiral John Rogers. Also aboard the ships were a group of diplomats who were there to create trade with the country, as well as establish good will. They also wanted to investigate what happened to the General Sherman (a merchant ship that mysteriously disappeared) and create some sort of treaty so the Koreans could help out with any shipwrecks that occurred.

The merchant ship General Sherman had arrived in Korea in 1866 to meet with Korean officials to initiate trade. Although the ship was armed, it was primarily a merchant ship and was carrying cotton, tin, and glass. There was no military presence onboard, and the crew was made up of Asian sailors, American traders, and a missionary. On arrival, the Koreans refused to trade, but they would give the crew provisions before sending them on their way. They were also told to wait for further instructions. However, the ship left anyway and at their next stop, they were again told to stay put and wait.

] Shortly thereafter the ship was ordered to leave immediately, or the entire crew would be killed. What happened next is debated. It is thought a scuffle occurred when some of the men tried to go ashore instead of leaving. Shots were fired on both sides. The ship eventually left but ran aground later and was then set on fire by the Koreans. The crew, while attempting to escape, were beaten to death. Possibly trying to avoid the blame, the Koreans would not speak of the General Sherman incident and the matter of what happened to the ship was dropped.

On June 1st, the American armada entered the Ganghwa Straits on the west coast of Korea. Their goal was to steam up the Han River, which led to the capital city of Hanyang (modern day Seoul). However, Gojon, the Korean king, had barred foreign ships from entering the Han. So when the American ships passed by, the Korean garrison

onshore fired. Their outdated weapons did no damage, but that didn't matter to Admiral Rogers. He gave the Koreans ten days to apologize for what he regarded as an unprovoked assault. The Koreans refused to comply. So Admiral Rogers made good on his threat. On June 10, the U.S. ships attacked the Choji Garrison located on the Salee River on the island of Ganghwa-do. It was a mismatch from the start. The garrison was lightly defended, poorly equipped, and badly outnumbered.

The U.S. soldiers bombarded the Citadel and then ground troops charged, quickly taking over. The Koreans, with a loss of proper firearms, ended up throwing rocks at their attackers. U.S. Marines and sailors then went on to overrun several other Korean posts on the island, including Deokjin Fort, which was abandoned. When the smoke cleared at the end of the day, the Americans controlled Ganghwa-do at the cost of three dead. The Koreans weren't so fortunate. They lost more than two-hundred-and-forty men. The total fighting only lasted about 15 minutes. The wounded included 10 Americans. Twenty Koreans were captured. Five forts were impacted in total. The American victory marked the first time that the stars and stripes were raised over Asian territory by force.

The U.S. again tried to work with the Koreans to make diplomatic progress by attempting to use their Korean prisoners as bargaining tools. However, the Korean leaders did not want the captured men. They believed any man who allowed himself to be captured was a coward, so they did not want such a man back. Fifteen Americans - nine sailors and six marines - earned Medals of Honor for their bravery during the campaign, making them the first Medal of Honor recipients to be honored for fighting on foreign soil. With no hope of forward diplomatic movement with the Koreans, the Americans remained stationed off-shore until July 3 and then left Korea for China. The Americans hoped that their victory would persuade the Koreans to negotiate. It did not. Instead, they sent reinforcements in large numbers and armed with modern weapons. Recognizing that the odds had shifted, the U.S. fleet pulled up anchor and set sail for China on July 3, 1871.

The United States would not get a treaty with Korea until 1882. That agreement came about in good part because the Korean king was hoping that U.S. support could help him preserve Korea's independence from China. The 1882 treaty established "permanent relations of amity and friendship" between the peoples of Korea and the United States. That amity with South Korea continues to this day. But most Americans don't know that as the historian Robert Kagan put it, "the self-proclaimed disinterested and peace-loving Americans had introduced themselves to Korea by killing its people." Naturally, the animosity between Korea and the U.S grew after this incident. The Koreans vehemently refused to work with the American diplomats. There would be no negotiations on their part. They were even less welcoming to Western visitors and all foreigners, isolating the country from everything outside.

Even so, the Koreans did not attack any other foreign ships. The period of isolation did not last very long. A few years later Korea began to trade with nearby neighbor Japan followed by Europe and finally the United States. It wasn't until 1950 when the Americans and its allies returned to fight another war in Korea. This time the Korean people welcomed the United Nations forces with open arms. [Source: Together We Served Newsletter | March 2018 ++]

Battle of Lima Site 85 ► Monument Unveiled to Honor Those who Perished

A monument was unveiled at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 12 MAR to mark the 50th anniversary of 12 airmen who died defending Lima Site 85, a classified outpost in Laos that was overrun by North Vietnamese fighters in 1968. One of those airmen, Chief Master Sgt. Richard Etchberger, posthumously received the Medal of Honor in 2010, after the mission was finally declassified. He was initially awarded the Air Force Cross because of the political sensitivity surrounding missions in Laos at the time, according to the Library of Congress. The families of those who died at the outpost were invited to Maxwell AFB for the ceremony held by the Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute, according to the Air Force.

“There were 12 families that were honored today,” said Cory Etchberger, son of Richard Etchberger, according to an Air Force account of the ceremony. “What we really tried to do was make sure that the families, who sacrificed so much, were recognized today, and I think we were successful at that.” Cory was only 9 years old when his father passed away. The Pentagon told him that his father died in a helicopter accident in Southeast Asia. The official account omitted the fact that the elder Etchberger had actually died after staving off an assault by North Vietnamese commandos on a forgotten jungle mountain (Lima Site 85), and was credited with saving the lives of three other airmen.

“The site was established on top of a 5,800-foot mountain to provide radar vectors to F-105 fighters so that they could position over the targets in and around the key cities of Hanoi and Houaphanh during monsoon season, when visual bombing was not possible,” said retired Col. Joe Panza, who piloted one of the helicopters that rescued survivors of the attack on Lima Site. From November 1967 to March 1968, the wayward outpost directed 507 strike missions in North Vietnam and Laos, 27 percent of all the airstrikes in those areas, according to an archived article on Air Force Times. That success came at a cost, according to Col. Gerald Clayton, who had handpicked the air commandos to man the outpost, and was there himself. “The North Vietnamese realized when we were bombing them through overcast skies that they must be coming from somewhere,” Clayton said. “It was just a matter of time.”

Over the final three months of the outpost’s existence, the airmen survived multiple attacks. North Vietnamese bi-planes, called AN-2 Colts, conducted rocket attacks and gun runs against the outpost that killed some of the local Laotian guerrillas paid by the CIA to protect the airmen. But because the outpost was positioned on a steep 5,800-foot cliff, enemy fighters had a difficult time mounting a formidable assault. By March 1968, though, the North Vietnamese had managed to encircle the site. “Eventually, [Etchberger] and his team could look through their binoculars and see that their mountain was surrounded by thousands of North Vietnamese troops,” former President Barack Obama said during the Medal of Honor award ceremony in 2010.



Maxwell AFB monument (left) unveiled, the cliff (center) that partially defended Lima Site 85, and the mountaintop area (right) that included radar shelters with antennas and interior equipment, a helicopter landing zone, a CIA airstrip and a command post.

“[Etchberger] and his crew at that point had a decision to make — ask to be evacuated or continue the mission for another day. They believed that no one could possibly scale the mountain’s steep cliffs. And they believed in their work. So they stayed. They continued their mission,” Obama said. Plans were drawn up to eventually rescue the 19 Americans, but an early morning assault on 11 MAR ruined those plans, and proved the enemy could scale those cliffs. Only seven Americans survived past 3 a.m. First-hand accounts recall Etchberger fighting off the enemy while tending to the wounded in the final stretch. Clayton said he saw Etchberger load wounded Americans into the rescue slings of hovering helicopters, refusing to leave until all others were loaded.

”Etchberger single-handedly held off the enemy with an M-16, while simultaneously directing air strikes into the area and calling for air rescue,” his Medal of Honor citation reads. “With the arrival of the rescue aircraft, Chief Etchberger, without hesitation, repeatedly and deliberately risked his own life, exposing himself to heavy enemy fire in order to place three surviving wounded comrades into rescue slings hanging from the hovering helicopter waiting to airlift them to safety.” After finally boarding himself, Etchberger was struck by an armor-piercing round that ripped through the floor of the helicopter. He bled to death en route to an air base in Thailand. Etchberger was

originally nominated for the Medal of Honor in 1968, but President Lyndon Johnson didn't approve it, because the U.S. government wasn't supposed to have troops in Laos. [Source: AirForceTimes | Kyle Rempfer | March 14, 2018 ++]

WWI Sgt. Gerald York ► MOH Awardees' Education Legacy

Until he was old enough to buy and trade his own comic books, Gerald York thought his grandfather was just an ordinary man. Alvin C. York — Tennessee's most famed war hero and among the most recognized Americans from World War I — was "always jovial, always fun." Today, his name is known worldwide and is emblazoned across the state. York's story starts and ends deep in the hills of northeast Tennessee, where his family farm still exists and his grave draws the interest of history buffs. It's not far from the two-lane highway that leads to the state park — both carry his name. This year, his war story will be told often as the centennial of the end of World War I comes later this year, and the anniversary of the battle that earned Sgt. Alvin York his fame.

His story, in a nutshell: In October 1918, York charged a hill alone, killed 25 deeply entrenched but fatigued German soldiers and captured 132 others. Now, his grandson, Gerald York, 70, will travel back to northeastern France this October for the 100th anniversary of the battle of Chatel-Chéhéry, the tiny town where his grandfather remains a celebrity. Almost everything there, too, has some association with York's narrative. His family, though, remembers a much more ordinary man, not necessarily an icon of bravery and heroism. His legacy, for those who knew him best, wasn't forged on the field of battle. Instead it is near his hometown in the walls of the only state-funded and managed public high school — it, too, carries York's name — in Fentress County, one of the most rural and poor counties in the state.

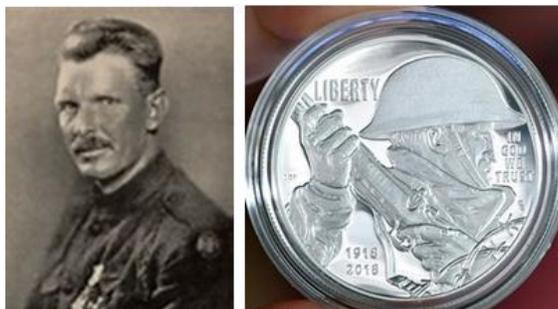
"He said the greatest battle he had was not in France, but was in Fentress County building a high school," Gerald York said. "People did not want a high school. They thought, why did their kids need education. They farmed. They needed them to farm." That storyline is echoed among many who have lived in Fentress County, where the opioid epidemic rages and unemployment still ranks higher than most Tennessee counties. "There's nothing much here if you're not a teacher, a doctor or work at a bank," said Phil Brannon, superintendent of York Institute for three decades, the high school York established after his tour in Europe. "He realized what the mountain people were missing out on," Brannon said.

Alvin York established York Institute in Jamestown in 1926, and later turned it over to the state in 1937. With barely a third-grade education himself, York was self-taught, and got the school running almost entirely on his own, Gerald York said. "He bought the buses. He paid the drivers. He bought the gas," York said. "He paid the teachers, all with money he raised." His fundraising took him just about everywhere, including up and down the East Coast, Brannon said. But those in his hometown eventually put up resistance to York and his leadership, questioning how he could run a school without an education himself. Amid the turmoil, he turned the school over to the state after local residents created a "movement" to oust York, his grandson said. "There are probably still some hard feelings in the area over that," York said.

The school still operates today on a portion of the 400 acres that made up the campus. An elementary school also carrying his name stands on 40 acres that came along as part of the land deal. York's great-niece, Janet Patton, who runs an old country store bearing York's name, also wonders what the state of education would have been without his success. "I don't even know if we'd even had a high school if he hadn't done it," she said.

York rarely talked about his time in France during World War I. Everyone else knew what he had done. He received a Medal of Honor for his actions in France. There was a ticker tape parade for him in New York. A movie starring Gary Cooper came out in 1941, which won two Oscars. Just this year, the U.S. Treasury minted a new \$1 coin featuring York's chiseled jawline and heavy mustache. He didn't talk about his combat experience until his

dying days, Gerald York said. York didn't know anything about his grandfather's heroism until he was a boy searching for new comics in Nashville, shopping with a two-party check his grandfather had given him instead of the usual \$1 bill. The shop owner said he wouldn't take it until he looked at it and saw the signature, instantly knowing who it belonged to. "He said, 'I'll take that check then,'" York said.



The story his grandfather was so known for wasn't something York learned until fifth grade, when his teacher asked him to read the encyclopedia passage on his grandfather to his classmates. "I guess that's the first time I realized that other than me and my family, that other folks knew my grandfather," he said. York followed in his grandfather's footsteps, serving 31 years in the military, which began at the urging of those who knew his grandfather's name. Now retired, York has become the face of the family, and the living legacy of his grandfather. He travels, maintains the family farm and helps run the Sgt. York Patriotic Foundation. Another hundred years from now, it's hard to say what the legacy will be. But many hope York Institute will remain part of it. "York Institute is a living example of veterans. It's what they represent," Brannon said. [Source: The (Nashville) Tennessean | Jake Lowary | March 25, 2018 ++]

Military History ► **Gunboats in Hell: Battle at Iwo Jima**

February 17, 1945, had dawned clear and bright off IWO JIMA. At 10:45 that morning, Lieutenant (junior grade) Rufus G. Herring, aboard LCI(G)-449, peered through binoculars at the tiny island, still some distance away. Iwo's rocky coastline, deep gorges, and high ridges no doubt bristled with Japanese machine guns and rocket launchers, with masses of soldiers dug in at field pieces. The Marines had their work cut out for them. But before they could get to work, Herring's flotilla of gunboats had a job to do. Herring worried most about Suribachi. The dark gray mountain towered 550 feet, heavy artillery and menace engineered into the natural fortress of a long-dormant volcano on Iwo's southern tip. He found the sight of it breathtaking, like one of Hiroshige's woodblock prints. He knew that from the crest the Japanese had just as detailed a view of his force, and, beyond the gunboats, the waiting fleet of American battleships, destroyers, and cruisers. Only a line of U.S. Navy destroyers was nearer the shore. To read what ensued next go to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Gunboats in Hell: Battle at Iwo Jima**".

USS Vesuvius ► **Custom-Built Dynamite Gun Cruiser**

On June 13, 1898, the cruiser USS Vesuvius crept within one mile of the Cuban coastline and began launching explosives from her monstrous compressed-air cannons — quietly, as far as the Spanish soldiers ashore in their fort knew until the shells landed. The nighttime shore bombardment targeting Santiago was Vesuvius' first combat mission. She still remains one of the strangest warships of the modern era. A custom-built "dynamite gun cruiser," Vesuvius had a unique arrangement of three 15-inch pneumatic cannons capable of launching 550 or 200-pound

shells with a jolt of compressed air. Fascinating from an engineering perspective, Vesuvius' cannons penetrated into her hull at an angle — effectively making the cruiser a giant, floating triple gun.



The U.S. Navy built the 246-foot-long, 945-ton Vesuvius as an experiment to solve a technical problem with artillery bursting charges, according to a U.S. Army Research and Development Command — or RDECOM — history of military explosives. Dynamite, patented by Alfred Nobel in 1867, was prone to blowing up inside their shells during launch at high velocities, restricting U.S. naval weapons development, as the Navy at the time still largely used black-powder propellants, the RDECOM history noted. European navies used smokeless powders that posed less of a danger of exceeding the pressure limit of a barrel, which could trigger a shell's explosives. The Vesuvius' pneumatic-powered cannons did not have to worry about excessive pressure, and the seven-foot-long, dart-shaped shells contained a relatively more stable gelatinous dynamite mixture which ignited on impact with the ground by an electric battery. For an example of the vessel's cannons at a fixed 16-degree angle, see these photos above and below Vesuvius' deck. To increase or decrease the range, the crew modified the air pressure.

She was also relatively small for a cruiser given the unique armament. However, her firing range was poor at a maximum of one mile with the larger, 500-pound shells — double that for the lighter shells. The attack on Santiago took place at night given that the Spanish's forts cannons could out-range her. But the damage was reportedly significant if you believe accounts at the time. "Frightful destruction has been wrought within the Spanish forts by the explosion of the dynamite shells," chemist Wm. App Jones wrote in an August 1898 edition of Merck's Report. He then quoted a naval officer who thought the chances of survival in actual combat were slim — given the hull full of dynamite. "As the captain of the Vesuvius recently remarked with grim humor, 'Once struck by an enemy's shell, no funeral rites will be necessary for the men on board this boat.'"

Dangerous as serving on Vesuvius remained, the one upside is that her cannons were quiet at a distance. Otherwise, and during the day, she was of little use and was practically defenseless versus surface ships that could outfight and outmaneuver her with their traversing turrets and considerably heavier armor. As a result, and especially because of the cruiser's short range, the Navy pulled her pneumatic cannons out and converted her into a vessel for testing torpedoes — but one of those torpedoes turned around and struck her during a 1915 experiment. She didn't sink, thanks to damage control efforts by the crew, but the Navy went on to scrap her in 1922. [Source: The National Interest | Robert Beckhusen | March 15, 2018 ++]

WWI German Spring Offensive ► Lessons Learned

One hundred years ago this month, all hell broke loose in France. On March 21, 1918, the German army on the Western Front unleashed a series of massive attacks on the exhausted British and French armies. German General Erich Ludendorff thought he could win World War I with one final blow. He planned to punch holes between the French and British armies. Then he would drive through their trenches to the English Channel, isolating and destroying the British army. The Germans thought they had no choice but to gamble.

The British naval blockade of Germany after three years had reduced Germany to near famine. More than 200,000 American reinforcement troops were arriving each month in France. (Nearly 2 million would land altogether.) American farms and factories were sending over huge shipments of food and munitions to the Allies. Yet for a brief moment, the war had suddenly swung in Germany's favor by March 1918. The German army had just knocked Russia and its new Bolshevik government out of the war. The victory on the Eastern Front freed up nearly 1 million German and Austrian soldiers, who were transferred west. Germany had refined new rolling artillery barrages. Its dreaded "Stormtroopers" had mastered dispersed advances. The result was a brief window of advantage before the American juggernaut changed the war's arithmetic.

The Spring Offensive almost worked. Within days, the British army had suffered some 50,000 casualties. Altogether, about a half-million French, British and American troops were killed or wounded during the entire offensive. But within a month, the Germans were sputtering. They could get neither supplies nor reinforcements to the English Channel. Germany had greedily left 1 million soldiers behind in the east to occupy and annex huge sections of conquered Eastern Europe and western Russia. The British and French had learned new ways of strategic retreat. By summer of 1918, the Germans were exhausted. In August, the Allies began their own (even bigger) offensive and finally crushed the retreating Germans, ending the war in November 1918.

What were the lessons of the failed German offensive?

- 1. The fortunes of war can change in days.** In late March 1918, the Germans thought the war was won. Three months later, they knew it was lost. Often, the worst moments of war come right before the end, as the last-gasp battles of Waterloo, the Bulge and Okinawa remind us. In 2016, an ascendant Islamic State bragged that it had formed a vast new Islamic caliphate. By the end of 2017, ISIS had been bombed to smithereens and routed.
- 2. Long-term strategy matters.** Without a strategic vision, short-term tactical success means nothing. The advancing Germans had no real idea of what to do next -- even if they reached the English Channel. There was never any chance that the British would quit. The British had survived worse at the earlier battles of the Somme and Passchendaele. In our time, America has never quite determined its strategic aims in the nearly 17-year-old Afghan war. Is it to crush the Taliban? To build a democracy in Afghanistan? To rid the country of terrorist havens? To stop the opium trade? To make Afghanistan economically and militarily self-sufficient? To simply not lose? All that and more have been mentioned as American goals.
- 3. Alliances are critical.** What did it matter that Germany had finally defeated Russia if at nearly the same time it had provoked an even stronger new enemy in America? The key to denuclearizing North Korea is creating a frontline partnership of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the U.S. -- and to flip either China or Russia to our side to ensure that sanctions strangle Pyongyang.
- 4. War is decided as much by economics as by soldiers.** Germany unleashed a lethal army against the Allies, but its soldiers did not even have enough food or munitions to sustain the offensive after a few weeks. Germany had neither the food nor the factory capacity to conduct war against the combined might of Britain, France and the United States. In many ways, 1918 Germany was like today's Russia -- formidable on the battlefield, but only for a short duration and without the economic ability to finish what it starts.

5. Leaders usually ignore history. A little more than 20 years after the Spring Offensive, Hitler's Third Reich fought America, Britain, France and Russia; unleashed its armies in a two-front war in Europe; was blockaded; and lost another world war.

The final battles of World War I will have their 100 anniversaries this year. But the lessons of how Germany almost won and then suddenly lost are ageless. [Source: Jewish World Review | Victor Davis Hanson | March 15, 2018 ++]

Major Pauline Cushman ► Actress Turned Union Spy

Major Pauline Cushman lived a life full of adventure and travel. She spent the majority of her life pursuing a career as an actress. In 1863, during the Civil War, she was presented with the greatest acting role of her life. She became a spy for the Union. She was born as Harriett Wood in New Orleans on June 10, 1833. Her family moved to Michigan when she was a young girl. Cushman never enjoyed living in the mid-West and desired to live in the big city. When she was just 17 years old, she left her family and moved to New York City to pursue a career in theater.

She quickly found acting jobs in the city and took the stage name Pauline Cushman. After a few years there, she met a musician named Charles Dickinson. The two married in February 1853 and later moved to Cleveland, Ohio. They had two children, Charles and Ida, before Charles Dickinson enlisted in the 41st Ohio Infantry in 1861. However, he only spent about 9 months in the Army before being discharged. He returned home extremely sick, suffering from dysentery. Cushman struggled to care for both him and their two young children and moved in with Dickinson's father. Dickinson's health continued to rapidly decline. He died 6 months later in December 1862.

To the protest of her late husband's family, Cushman returned to acting following her husband's death. She left her children in the care of the family in Cleveland and traveled to Louisville, Kentucky. Kentucky was a hotbed of dissent during the war. Internal division within the state between Unionists and Confederate supporters was tense and often broke out in violence. Within that tension, Cushman stumbled upon the opportunity of a lifetime. One evening, after a stage performance, a group of Confederate supporters approached Cushman. They offered her \$350 to make a toast to Confederate President Jefferson Davis in lieu of President Lincoln during her next performance. She accepted the proposal and took the money, but reported the bribe to Union authorities. To her surprise, the Union authorities told her to oblige the group and make the toast. They believed that doing so would allow Cushman to get closer to the inner circles of the Confederate dissenters.



The following evening, Cushman made the toast during her performance. Though the action cost her job at the theater, it earned the trust of the Confederate group. Impressed by her apparent loyalty to the Confederate President, the group quickly introduced Cushman to the inner circles. Her career as a Union spy had officially begun. Cushman traveled to Tennessee acting as a supporter for the Confederacy. Overtime, she began to fraternize with Confederate military leaders. When she did, she would steal information and secrets about the Confederate Army and pass them to the Union. Her contacts in the Union Army warned her of the risks and tried to convince her not to physically steal any documents. Instead, she was encouraged to only study information and pass it on based on memory alone. Cushman ignored these precautions.

In the spring of 1863, Cushman stole a map that contained the whereabouts of the Army of Tennessee and stuffed it into her boot. While attempting to cross into Union lines, some Confederate soldiers grew suspicious of her travels and stopped her. They discovered the map in her boot, arrested her, and took her to Confederate General Braxton Bragg's headquarters where Bragg had her tried as a spy. The trial found Cushman guilty and sentenced her to death by hanging. However, Cushman experienced a string of luck in the days following the verdict. While awaiting execution she fell ill. Though falling ill may not normally be considered lucky, this illness saved Cushman's life. Her sudden illness forced the Confederates to delay the execution. As they waited for her to recover, the Union Army began to advance towards Confederate positions where they held Cushman. The Confederate Army decided to withdraw from the area, leaving Cushman behind with a local doctor.

When the Union lines reached Cushman, they rescued her just days before her scheduled execution. Cushman made a full recovery from her illness and returned North. Her bravery and service to the Union was widely recognized. She received public attention and recognition from General Garfield (future U.S. President) and President Lincoln, who awarded her the honorary rank of Brevet Major. It was the adventure of a lifetime, and Cushman spent many years telling her story. She traveled throughout the East, entertaining the fascinated public with her tales. Unfortunately, as time went by so did the people's interest in the stories of the Civil War. The Reconstruction era proved hard for Cushman to find willing listeners, as the public grew weary of hearing about the war that had ravaged the country.

Cushman decided to move to the West, hoping that her stories would resonate better there. But there too, she struggled to hold the public's interest. She moved to San Francisco for a short time where she married August Fichtner in December 1872. Fichtner died within the year, and Cushman became a widow once more. In 1879, Cushman married Jeremiah Fryer in Arizona. The couple ran a hotel for about ten years, but Cushman struggled with the lifestyle. The two separated in 1890 after the death of their adopted daughter. Cushman then moved back to San Francisco to try acting again. She found little success there and finally accepted that her days of acting were over.

Cushman's health began to rapidly decline in the following years. She suffered from severe arthritis and developed an addiction to doctor-prescribed morphine. She died on December 1, 1893 at the age of 60. Though she was alone at the time, she was not forgotten. The Grand Army Republic learned of her death and held a large funeral with military honors for her. She now lies in the Officer's Circle at the Presidio in the San Francisco National Cemetery. Her grave marker simply reads "Pauline C. Fryer—Union Spy."

Last year, the Veterans Legacy Program partnered with San Francisco State University to conduct research on Veterans buried at local national cemeteries. The students and faculty there created a series of short films about the stories that they discovered at Golden Gate and San Francisco national Cemeteries. Pauline Cushman's remarkable story is one of them. You can watch San Francisco State University's short film about Cushman at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8l4OtenN34Y>. [Source: VAntage Point | Kenneth Holliday | March 16, 2018 ++]

WWII Vets 159 ► Edward Mims | POW Turret Gunner

On April 11, 1944, Staff Sgt. Edward Mims and five other men from the 566th Bombardment Squadron of the 8th Army Air Force narrowly escaped their B-24 Liberator just moments before it burst into flames over Nazi Germany. Before he jumped, the fire headed upwards towards Mims, then just 20 years old, the top turret gunner in the bomber, and burned his exposed face and hands. But he was lucky: less than a minute after bailing out, the plane exploded. Four men who had stayed with the plane, and one whose parachute failed, died instantly.

After escaping the B-24, Mims was taken to a hospital in Frankfurt for two weeks, bandaged and treated, and then sent to Stalag 17b, a prison camp in Krems, Austria. He would remain there for 390 days, the last 25 of which were spent on a forced 268-mile march, facing starvation, frostbite, and the constant threat of being shot on the spot. “There were a lot of days and nights where I didn’t know if I would get home,” said Mims. “[As] someone from the United States who had all the freedom in the world, and then all of a sudden be slapped in the prison camp was really a shocker.”



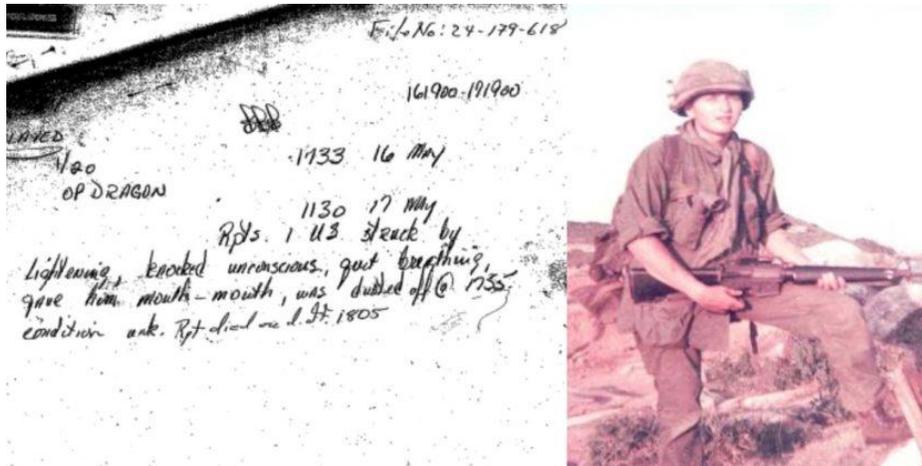
Seventy-four years later, on 23 FEB, Mims was honored and awarded a Purple Heart for the wounds he sustained in the B-24. The Purple Heart was seven years in the making, and required digging up documents and witness accounts to prove that Mims sustained his wounds from enemy fire — his military records were lost in a fire in St. Louis in 1973, according to a press release. “No proof, no Purple Heart,” said Eugene Parent, a veteran and friend of the Mims family, who volunteered to do the research and advocacy for them. “I just felt I really needed to do something for someone who [went] overseas.” He finally resorted to sending a letter to then-President Obama in 2016. After going a year without hearing anything, he sent another, now to President Trump.

A month later, a UPS truck arrived with a big manila envelope. Inside were the orders issuing Mims the Purple Heart. “I called Mrs. Mims that same morning,” said Parent. “We both cried.” The Mimses said they are grateful for the award because they hope younger generations are still interested in hearing these stories and can appreciate their “God-given freedoms.” “It brought back memories, sometimes that’s good, sometimes that’s bad, y’know,” said Edward Mims. “You’ve got to live with them, regardless of what the experiences were. Sometimes facing them takes care of that better than trying to hide it.”

Sandi Mims and Parent kept the award a secret from Mims until the presentation, which was held in the Eisenhower Recreation Center in The Villages, the Florida retirement community where both the Mimses and Parent and his wife live. It was the perfect location, according to Parent, as it displays military artifacts and features an upper level balcony decorated as if filled with people in uniform. Col. Jason Wolter and Command Sgt. Maj. Martin Convoy, the Fort Stewart-Hunter Army Airfield garrison command team, presented Mims the Purple Heart. “We consider it a gift from our country and our president,” said Sandi Mims. [Source: ArmyTimes | Nicole Bauke | March 15, 2018 ++]

Vietnam Vets [28] ► John Bennett | Left Battlefield in Body Bag

In May 1968, John Bennett woke up in an unfamiliar place. A body bag. The Fairfield, Adams County, resident, then an Army medic, had been struck by lightning while serving in Vietnam and was declared dead. He came to between 18 and 24 hours later, in a morgue. Phillip Kissinger, a Manchester Township resident who was a chaplain for Bennett's platoon, believes he wrote the letter Bennett's family received erroneously informing them of his death. On Thursday (8 MAR) after nearly 50 years, the two got together at Kissinger's home in Manchester Township.



Bennett said he was struck by lightning that May day and was declared “killed in action.” His “body” was taken by helicopter to the morgue. The then-20-year-old regained consciousness, and, using his knife, he cut himself out of the bag. He found himself among other body bags and stretchers, he said. “What went through my mind is, ‘How did this happen, and how did I miss this?’” Bennett recalled. Bennett said he was trained to keep an eye on everything during the war, but he didn’t remember this. In a state of confusion, Bennett remembered sitting there for a long time. He said it could have been 30 minutes before someone came in and found him confused among the bodies.

“They came from behind me, and I heard somebody say ‘Whoa, what’s your problem son?’” Bennett said. Bennett recalled telling the man “You tell me,” and the man returned with a body tag which said he was dead. “Written on my body was ‘Killed in action — struck by lightning,’” he said. “Really I was in shock — literally,” Bennett said. Bennett would later find that a death certificate had been issued. In the chaos of the Vietnam War, Bennett’s battalion was never notified that Bennett was, in fact, alive. Now 70, Bennett said it was a few more days before he reunited with his battalion. “Until I walked in, they had assumed that I had been killed and I was gone,” he said. His battalion was preparing to name a bunker after their fallen comrade. “I said, I guess you get out of building a bunker,” Bennett recalled. When he finally did get back to his battalion, he rejoined the fight.

Kissinger, now 87, believes he wrote a letter to Bennett’s parents informing them of his death, and both men believe Kissinger participated in Bennett’s memorial service. That letter reached his parents, but another letter correcting it was never sent out. “My sister cried all night,” Bennett said of his family receiving the letter. Bennett couldn’t reach his family for weeks. He was eventually able to get a message to his father by radio. By then, he said, “it was a month later, and they wondered why they didn’t have a body.” His wife, who was eight months’ pregnant at the time, never received a letter about his death, Bennett said. “I think there was that much confusion over there that no one knew where I was,” he said. After the war, Bennett — whose nickname in high school was “Lightning”

because of how fast he ran on track — became an electrician. The coincidence wasn't lost on him. "Of all things in the world to become — an electrician," Bennett said.

Kissinger did not know what happened to Bennett until recently. He said that the battalion was made up of four units, and he was at the headquarters while Bennett was on the front lines. Information sharing between the units was not always the best, he said. "Hard telling what information went back, and if it did it never got back to me," he said. Additionally, he said he was re-assigned to a different battalion not long after Bennett's "death." Not long ago, a friend of Kissinger put him in contact with Bennett. It wasn't until late January that Kissinger found out about what had happened. "I just called him last week, and I could not believe his whole story," Kissinger said last month. Bennett wrote a book about being struck by lightning in 2009, and Kissinger has been reading it.

Kissinger moved back to the York County area a few years ago after living in Idaho. He was a pastor for churches in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Tennessee and North Carolina. The York native now lives in Manchester Township with his wife, Gloria. The two were supposed to reunite at the Round the Clock Diner on 7 FEB, but an ice storm that day delayed the meeting for more than a month. On 8 MAR, the two met at Kissinger's home before lunch. They wore their old uniforms. Kissinger said he threw out all of his old records a few years ago, so he is uncertain if he was the one who sent the letter to Bennett's family. He also couldn't recall if they had interacted with each other much in Vietnam because Kissinger dealt with so many people. "This is the first time in 50 years we've seen each other," Kissinger said..

Bennett said he has more than 30 aneurysms in his brain, and that he could die any day. He said he's thrilled to still be alive. "I live life to its fullest," he said. Living life to his fullest is just what he did while reconnecting with Kissinger. The two noted how great it was to see one another. Bennett remarked about how good Kissinger looked for his age. "Thanks Doc," Kissinger said Bennett detailed his experience in his book "Killed in Action-Struck By Lightning: A Vietnam Combat Medic's Story" which was published in 2009. [Source: The York, Pa., Dispatch | Christopher Dornblaser | March 14, 2018 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 01 thru 15 APR

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 April**." [Source: This Day in History <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history> | March 2018 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ► Gibson~Eric G. | WWII



The President of the United States in the name of The Congress

*takes pleasure in presenting the
Medal of Honor (posthumously)
to*

ERIC G. GIBSON

Rank and organization: Technician Fifth Grade, U.S. Army, 3d Infantry Division

Place and date: Near Isola Bella, Italy, 28 January 1944

Entered service: Feb 1941 in Chicago, Ill.

Born: October 3, 1919 Sweden, Europe

Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty. On 28 January 1944, near Isola Bella, Italy, Tech. 5th Grade Gibson, company cook, led a squad of replacements through their initial baptism of fire, destroyed four enemy positions, killed 5 and captured 2 German soldiers, and secured the left flank of his company during an attack on a strongpoint. Placing himself 50 yards in front of his new men, Gibson advanced down the wide stream ditch known as the Fossa Femminamorta, keeping pace with the advance of his company. An enemy soldier allowed Tech. 5th Grade Gibson to come within 20 yards of his concealed position and then opened fire on him with a machine pistol. Despite the stream of automatic fire which barely missed him, Gibson charged the position, firing his submachine gun every few steps. Reaching the position, Gibson fired pointblank at his opponent, killing him. An artillery concentration fell in and around the ditch; the concussion from one shell knocked him flat. As he got to his feet Gibson was fired on by two soldiers armed with a machine pistol and a rifle from a position only 75 yards distant. Gibson immediately raced toward the foe. Halfway to the position a machinegun opened fire on him. Bullets came within inches of his body, yet Gibson never paused in his forward movement. He killed one and captured the other soldier. Shortly after, when he was fired upon by a heavy machinegun 200 yards down the ditch, Gibson crawled back to his squad and ordered it to lay down a base of fire while he flanked the emplacement. Despite all warning, Gibson crawled 125 yards through an artillery concentration and the cross fire of 2 machineguns which showered dirt over his body, threw 2 hand grenades into the emplacement and charged it with his submachine gun, killing 2 of the enemy and capturing a third. Before leading his men around a bend in the stream ditch, Gibson went forward alone to reconnoiter. Hearing an exchange of machine pistol and submachine gun fire, Gibson's squad went forward to find that its leader had run 35 yards toward an outpost, killed the machine pistol man, and had himself been killed while firing at the Germans.



Gibson, aged 24 at his death, was buried in Nora Cemetery, Lot 141, Fourth Edition, Grave 1, Rice Lake, Wisconsin. His parents had moved to Rice Lake while Gibson was serving in Europe.

[Source: <https://history.army.mil/moh/wwII-g-1.html> | March 2018 ++]

WWII Bomber Nose Art ► (03) Do It

Back in the day when America was in the "Big War" WWII, planes were flown by young boys. Politically correct was "go to war to break things and kill the enemy. Apparently no one worried about nose art on the bombers. Most of the "men," or soon to become men, were in their late teens or early twenties. Testosterone levels were high and the names and accompanying pictures on the assigned aircraft helped to boost morale. With no TV or other means, Moms or girlfriends back home would never know or see it! These planes would probably would not be allowed to leave the ground today.



* Health Care *



Transient Global Amnesia ► Temporary Memory Loss

Transient global amnesia (TGA) is a sudden, temporary episode of memory loss that can't be attributed to a more common neurological condition, such as epilepsy or stroke. During an episode of transient global amnesia, your recall of recent events simply vanishes, so you can't remember where you are or how you got there. In addition, you may not remember anything about what's happening in the here and now. Consequently, you may keep repeating the same questions because you don't remember the answers you've just been given. You may also draw a blank when asked to remember things that happened a day, a month or even a year ago. With transient global amnesia, you do

remember who you are, and recognize the people you know well. But that doesn't make your memory loss less disturbing. Fortunately, transient global amnesia is rare, seemingly harmless and unlikely to happen again. Episodes are usually short-lived, and afterward your memory is fine.

Symptoms

Transient global amnesia is identified by its main symptom, which is the inability to form new memories and to recall the recent past. Once that symptom is confirmed, ruling out other possible causes of amnesia is important.

Necessary symptoms for diagnosis

Health care professionals base a diagnosis of transient global amnesia on the following signs and symptoms:

- Sudden onset of memory loss, verified by a witness
- Retention of personal identity despite memory loss
- Normal cognition, such as the ability to recognize and name familiar objects and follow simple directions
- Absence of signs indicating damage to a particular area of the brain, such as limb paralysis, involuntary movement or impaired word recognition

Additional symptoms and history on which a diagnosis for transient global amnesia is based:

- Duration of no more than 24 hours and generally shorter
- Gradual return of memory
- No evidence of seizures during the period of amnesia
- No history of active epilepsy

Along with these signs and symptoms, a common feature of transient global amnesia includes repetitive questioning, usually of the same question — for example, "What am I doing here?" or "How did we get here?"

When to see a doctor

Seek immediate medical attention for anyone who quickly goes from normal awareness of present reality to confusion about what just happened. If the person experiencing memory loss is too disoriented to call an ambulance, call one yourself. Although transient global amnesia isn't harmful, there's no easy way to distinguish the condition from the life-threatening illnesses that can also cause sudden memory loss. In fact, sudden amnesia is much more likely to be caused by a stroke or a seizure than by transient global amnesia. A medical evaluation is the only way to determine the cause of sudden memory loss.

Causes

The underlying cause of transient global amnesia is unknown. There appears to be a link between transient global amnesia and a history of migraines, though the underlying factors that contribute to both conditions aren't fully understood. Some commonly reported events that may trigger transient global amnesia include:

- Sudden immersion in cold or hot water
- Strenuous physical activity
- Sexual intercourse
- Medical procedures, such as angiography or endoscopy
- Mild head trauma
- Acute emotional distress, as might be provoked by bad news, conflict or overwork

Risk factors

Interestingly, high blood pressure and high cholesterol — which are closely linked to strokes — are not risk factors for transient global amnesia. Your sex doesn't seem to affect your risk, either. The clearest risk factors are:

- **Age.** People age 50 and older have a higher risk of transient global amnesia than do younger people.
- **History of migraines.** If you have migraines, your risk of transient global amnesia is significantly higher than that of someone without migraines.

Complications

Transient global amnesia has no direct complications, but it can cause emotional distress. If you have an episode, the gap in your memory can be unsettling, and you're likely to worry about a recurrence. Also, a symptom as dramatic as memory loss often indicates a serious underlying disease. Transient global amnesia is an exception, but it can be hard to let go of the fear that you have a tumor or had a stroke. If you need reassurance, ask your doctor to go over the results of your neurological exam and diagnostic tests with you. A counselor or psychotherapist can help you deal with persistent anxiety. Importantly, transient global amnesia is not a risk factor for stroke.

Prevention

Because the cause of transient global amnesia is unknown and the rate of recurrence is low, no standard approaches for preventing the condition exist. If your episode of transient global amnesia followed a particular activity, such as a strenuous workout or a swim in a chilly lake, talk with your doctor about limiting or avoiding the activity that seemed to trigger your memory loss.

[Source: MAYO Clinic | <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions> | March 15, 2018 ++]

Vaping ► Dangers of ‘CBD’ Vape Oils

The Army [released](#) a public health warning on 29 JAN about potentially dangerous side effects of vaping. The warning advised soldiers not to use electronic cigarettes or vaporizer pens containing cannabidiol, also known as CBD oil. The Army said CBD vape oils likely also contain [synthetic cannabinoids](#), concentrated tetrahydrocannabinol, known as THC, and other hazardous substances. The release said the Army has treated 60 patients for symptoms associated with these types of vape oils. The symptoms ranged from headache, nausea, vomiting and palpitations to dizziness, disorientation and seizures. The Army warned the problem could spread rapidly, especially because many vape oils do not disclose that they contain hazardous substances like synthetic cannabinoids. In November, the Army published an [article](#) on the dangers of e-cigarettes, specifically the risk of their lithium batteries exploding. The article reported that the Army had six Class C e-cigarette incidents between fiscal years 2015 and 2017. Last [April](#), the Navy banned e-cigarettes and vaping devices on ships after it also experienced several incidents of battery explosion. [Source: ArmyTimes | Victoria Leoni | January 30, 2018 ++]

Health Care Cost ► Military vs. Civilian | 2018

Retirees and surviving spouses and their families have experienced significant cost-share increases for their TRICARE benefits over the past couple military budgets. Increases in pharmacy costs, copayments, catastrophic caps, and annual deductibles and a new enrollment fee for TRICARE Select users continue to erode the overall benefit. MOAA perseveres as an advocate leader in ongoing efforts against insidious and disproportional cost-sharing increases to this hard-earned service benefit.

Many military retirees have limited knowledge on what their civilian counterparts pay for comparable employer-provided health care coverage. While a comparison of military retiree to employer-provided health care might be akin to equating avocados to kumquats, a well-informed constituency is fundamental to defending and defeating future battles with Pentagon and Capitol Hill influencers against TRICARE fee increases. In 2017, the average employer-provided family health care plan cost \$18,764, a 3.4-percent increase from 2016. Family coverage premiums have increased 19 percent since 2012 and 55 percent since 2007. Employees covered under these plans typically pay 31 percent of the overall premium, or \$5,817 a year, according to a [Kaiser Family Foundation survey](#).

While not diminishing the avocado to kumquat argument, let’s compare TRICARE retiree coverage costs with the national average employer-provided family coverage:

2018	TRICARE Prime	TRICARE Select	Employer-Provided*
Premium (annual)	\$578	\$0	\$5,817
Deductible	\$0	\$300	\$2,650
Catastrophic Cap	\$3,000	\$3,000	Variable
Min.-Max Out of Pocket	\$578-\$3,000	\$300-\$3,000	\$5,817-\$8,467

*Kaiser Family Foundation and Health Research & Educational Trust 2017 Annual Survey of Employer Health Benefits

Health care costs are projected to increase at 5.6 percent a year until 2025, driven by inflation in the cost of medical services and products and an aging U.S. population, according to the [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services](#). Although the current outlook is that we will have a respite on new health care fee increases in the FY 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, TRICARE fee battles will remain on our radar screens for the foreseeable future.

Our civilian counterparts pay significantly higher premiums and deductibles for similar health care benefits. MOAA effectively conveys our shared belief that military retirees, families, and survivors earned their relatively low-cost health care benefits through long years of service and sacrifice. Attempts at comparisons are inevitable when discussing national budget outlays, which makes it crucial to understand and appreciate the “playing field conditions,” in order to set, meet, and achieve your advocacy goals. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | March 29, 2018 ++]

Biostatic Project ► **Slowing Life To Save Life | DARPA**

When troops are wounded, time is precious. That’s why the fast-ticking minutes that follow such an event are called the “golden hour.” Get the right care within the right time and you survive. Wrong care or an evac takes too long — you’re dead. While major efforts across the government push to advance medical technology in the field and speed up the vehicles that carry troops to top treatment, one new effort is trying something even more ambitious — slowing life to save life. Researchers at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) recently launched a five-year project dubbed “Biostatic.” The program will “leverage molecular biology to develop innovative ways of controlling the speed at which living systems operate.” By doing that they hope to extend the “golden hour” before it’s too late.

“At the molecular level, life is a set of continuous biochemical reactions, and a defining characteristic of these reactions is that they need a catalyst to occur at all,” said Tristan McClure-Begley, the Biostasis program manager. Those catalysts, McClure-Begley said, are proteins and “large molecular machines” that transform chemical and kinetic energy into biological processes. “Our goal with Biostasis is to control those molecular machines and get them to all slow their roll at about the same rate so that we can slow down the entire system gracefully and avoid adverse consequences when the intervention is reversed or wears off.” The program starts small, first by aiming at slowing certain processes within cells, then slowing whole cells and later tissue processes, then onto the entire organism, he said.

But the goal isn't simply to slow processes down but to do it without damaging the processes when they return to normal speed. "Our treatments need to hit every cellular process at close to the same rate, and with the same potency and efficacy," McClure-Begley said. "We can't focus treatments to interrupt just a subset of known critical processes." The wrong kind of slow down, in the wrong sequence or at different rates, could kill a cell. To avoid those problems, DARPA wants to put their efforts on the protein level. And they're looking to nature for some clues. Certain creatures such as tardigrades and wood frogs can go into a state known as "cryptobiosis," where it seems like all their metabolic processes have stopped but they're still alive, according to the DARPA release. Tardigrades, which are microscopic invertebrates, can use this adaptation to survive freezing, extreme radiation and near-total dehydration. Wood frogs use the same method to survive freezing solid for multiple days.

"Nature is a source of inspiration," McClure-Begley said. "If we can figure out the best ways to bolster other biological systems and make them less likely to enter a runaway downward spiral after being damaged, then we will have made a significant addition to the biology toolbox." The Biostasis program's goals are to build "proof-of-concept" technologies and testing them in simple living systems. The work will include federal health and regulatory agencies to then develop a pathway for future human medical use. [Source: ArmyTimes | Todd South | March 26, 2018 ++]

Eyeglasses ► **Obtaining at Minimum Cost**

Sometimes it's hard to see what's right in front of you. When you reach the limits of your arm stretching you should get glasses. Those who wear glasses need to regularly get their eyes checked and get new glasses, or at least new lenses, every couple of years. Following are some cheap options:

- 1. Start with cheap reading glasses --** If you just need reading glasses, buy a bunch at a dollar store. Then, distribute them all over your home in places where you'll want them — like on your nightstand, next to your favorite armchair and in the kitchen. Don't forget your purse or car, too.
- 2. Check vision coverage and get a prescription --** When it comes to "real" glasses and contact lenses, first check out any insurance coverage you might have. Then, get your prescription. Under federal law, an eye doctor must give you a copy of your prescription if you get a fitting for glasses or contacts. The Federal Trade Commission explains: *"The doctor can't require you to pay an extra fee, buy eyeglasses or contact lenses, or sign a waiver or form."*
- 3. Look for deals online --** The best deals on eyeglasses are often found online. Some online retailers allow you to upload a photo of yourself, and then add frames you're considering to the picture so, you can see how you'd look in a particular pair of glasses. In addition, some sites allow you to select more than one set of frames to be sent to you without obligation. If you don't like them, you can send them back at no cost. Other sites offer free returns within a certain time period in case the glasses you ordered don't work out. Put all these advantages together, and online shopping isn't just cheaper — it's more convenient than going to a store.
- 4. Know where to shop --** Online retailers that specialize in prescription eyewear include:
 - [Coastal](#), which sells eyeglasses for as little as \$19 as well as contact lenses and sunglasses. Coastal also offers free shipping to anywhere in the U.S. and free returns within 30 days.
 - [Warby Parker](#), which sells eyeglasses and sunglasses. Warby Parker also offers a Home Try-On program and has stores in some states. The try-on program lets you test out five frames for five days for free before buying.

If you really want to shop in a physical store, check out the optical departments of warehouse clubs like Costco and Sam's Club. Members may also be entitled to extra discounts on eyewear. At Sam's Club, for example, a \$100 Sam's Plus membership gets you \$50 off your first pair of glasses if you also buy a year's supply of contact lenses.

The most important piece of advice: Shop around. Don't follow the old-fashioned method of going to a place that provides both eye examinations and glasses. You may end up facing a high-pressure salesperson while your eyes are still dilated.

Note: If you are a military retiree you are entitled to order eyewear annually regardless of military branch if you have a TRICARE health plan and authorized use of a Military Treatment Facility (MTF). This can be done at an MTF, or if over 50 miles from MTF, through **NOSTRA's** (Naval Ophthalmic Support and Training Activity) website. Retirees that have alternate health care plans that are not authorized care at an MTF must order eyewear through **NOSTRA's** website <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nostra/order/Pages/Retiree.aspx> and fill out the DD771 providing all information marked in yellow. For NOSTA customer service call (757) 887-7600 option 1.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Geof Wheelwright | March 26, 2018 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 441 ► **Health Care Plans | Retirement**

Health Care Plans -- If you have health coverage with TRICARE, you're able to choose from a variety of plans, which provide you options in where and how you seek medical and dental services. Two major health programs include TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select. Both require enrollment and each offer the quality care you deserve.

TRICARE Prime is a managed care option and a health maintenance organization, or HMO-like program. It generally features the use of military hospitals and clinics and reduces out-of-pocket costs for authorized care provided outside military hospitals and clinics by TRICARE network providers. TRICARE Prime is mandatory for active duty service members and is an option for their family members and certain TRICARE-eligible beneficiaries located in Prime Service Areas in the U.S. In geographical areas where TRICARE Prime is not offered, TRICARE Prime Remote for Active Duty Family Members may be available as an enrollment option for eligible active duty family members. In overseas locations,

TRICARE Overseas Program, or TOP, Prime and TOP Prime Remote are available to ADSMs and their command-sponsored family members. The US Family Health Plan is an additional TRICARE Prime option available through networks of community-based, not-for-profit health care systems in six areas of the U.S. Under a TRICARE Prime option, your health care is managed by an assigned primary care manager and provided by a military or civilian network provider. Non-active duty enrolled beneficiaries will select or be assigned a PCM.

TRICARE Select is a self-managed, preferred-provider option for certain eligible beneficiaries not enrolled in TRICARE Prime. TRICARE Select allows beneficiaries to choose their own TRICARE-authorized provider and manage their own health care. Beneficiaries may receive enhanced TRICARE Select benefits from any TRICARE-authorized provider without a referral. You'll have lower out-of-pocket costs if care is provided by a TRICARE-authorized network provider. Also, some services require prior authorization. Under a TRICARE Select option, you pay a fixed fee for care for most services from a network provider instead of paying a percentage of the allowable charge. In overseas locations, TOP Select is available to eligible active duty family members not enrolled in TOP Prime and to retirees and their family members. Where the TRICARE network hasn't been established in an overseas location, TRICARE Select beneficiaries who receive medically necessary covered services from a non-network, TRICARE-authorized provider shall be subject to cost-sharing amounts applicable to out-of-network care.

Take command of your health by making informed decisions about your TRICARE benefit. Learn more about your options at TRICARE.mil. Also, be sure to check out the latest TRICARE Health Matters Newsletters at www.tricare.mil/publications for articles about the recent TRICARE changes.

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Retirement -- Retiring from active duty, whether a medical retirement or a regular retirement, is a significant life event. You should know before you retire which TRICARE programs best suit you and your family's needs. Once you retire, you'll only have 90 days from your retirement date to enroll in a TRICARE plan to continue TRICARE coverage. Otherwise you'll have no TRICARE purchased care coverage and will only have access to care at military hospitals and clinics on a space-available basis.

If you retire from active duty and are under age 65, you can choose either TRICARE Prime, where available, or TRICARE Select which is available worldwide. You should decide before you retire which one best suits your and your family's needs. Visit TRICARE.mil/plans for more information about Prime and Select.

If you or a family member are, or become, entitled to premium-free Medicare Part A after your retirement, you or they will lose TRICARE coverage unless enrolled in Medicare Part B. With Medicare parts A and B, you or they will have coverage under TRICARE For Life (TFL).

For more information on how to enroll in a TRICARE plan, visit www.TRICARE.mil/enroll.

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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> | March 15, 2018 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 442 ► **TRDP | Understanding Disenrollment**

TRICARE Retiree Dental Program -- Do you have TRICARE Retiree Dental Program coverage now? If so, then you need to know that this program will end on December 31st, 2018. Not to worry — Anyone who's enrolled this year or who's eligible for the plan can choose a dental plan from among 10 dental carriers in the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program or FEDVIP. You can begin reviewing program options now at opm.gov/fedvip. And you'll be able to enroll in FEDVIP during the 2018 Federal Benefits Open Season, which runs from November 12th to December 10th. Coverage begins on January 1st, 2019.

Previously, FEDVIP wasn't available to Defense Department beneficiaries, but it will now be available to those who would have been eligible for the TRICARE Retiree Dental Program. As an added bonus, they'll also be able to enroll in FEDVIP vision coverage, along with most active duty family members. To enroll in FEDVIP Vision, you must be enrolled in a TRICARE health plan.

For more information, visit the FEDVIP website at www.tricare.benefeds.com and sign up for email notifications. You'll get an email when new information is available and key dates approach.

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Understanding Disenrollment-- As part of the changes to TRICARE, there are new rules affecting disenrollment. If you're eligible for TRICARE and enrolled in a health plan, there are three ways you can be disenrolled:

- If you no longer wish to continue TRICARE coverage, you can voluntarily disenroll.
- If you fail to pay enrollment or premium fees.
- Or, if you or your sponsor lose TRICARE eligibility.

You may elect to disenroll from any TRICARE plan at any time. During calendar year 2018, you'll have a full-year grace period to enroll or re-enroll in TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select at any time, as long as you remain eligible. Special rules will apply in 2018 for beneficiaries who are eligible for TRICARE, but aren't enrolled in a

plan. In 2019 and beyond, once you voluntarily disenroll from TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select, you can only re-enroll if you experience a Qualifying Life Event or QLE or during the next open season.

If you disenroll or are disenrolled from a premium-based plan like TRICARE Reserve Select, you must wait 12 months and requalify for TRICARE if you want to purchase coverage again. If you disenroll from the Continued Health Care Benefit Program, you can't enroll in another TRICARE plan unless you become eligible for TRICARE again. At www.TRICARE.mil/resources/forms/disenrollment specific procedures and disenrollment forms are available. And in cases of disenrollment due to loss of sponsor eligibility, you may be eligible for temporary coverage through the Transitional Assistance Management Program or the CHCBP. For more information, visit www.TRICARE.mil/tamp or www.TRICARE.mil/chcbp.

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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> | March 23, 2018 ++]

* Finances *



Bad Money Habits ► How To Break 10 of Them

Developing good habits helps us focus on the things that need our attention most. But as you work to get your financial life on track, you'll probably find some old, counterproductive habits undermining your progress. Some of them worked once, but now they're holding you back. Others have always been bad. Dropping bad money habits makes it easier to power up your financial life. Following are 10 bad habits, and tips for ending them.

1. Carrying a credit card balance -- Carrying a balance on a credit card is like walking down the street with a hole in your wallet and letting money leak out. Here's why: Suppose you are paying down a \$5,000 balance on a card charging 15 percent interest. If you only pay the minimum amount each month, it'll take decades and cost you at least \$7,000 in interest. Think what you would love to do with that \$7,000. **Build a better habit:** One approach to erasing the card balance is to devote every spare penny to getting rid of it. If you have other pressing debts, make a plan for dealing with all of them. Here's how to kill your debt and write its obituary. Keep the balance from building again by making it a new habit to pay off the entire bill every month — no exceptions ever.

2. Failing to fund a retirement plan -- There are compelling excuses for putting off saving for retirement. But none of those excuses will matter if you reach retirement age with little saved. And, if you don't take advantage of your employer's matching contributions, you're passing up free money every month. **Build a better habit:** Imagine yourself at age 70 or 80. Picture concrete details — how you'll look, your surroundings, how you're spending time and who is with you. The more real your future self is to you, the more likely you are to care for her or him today. Start paying close attention to your retirement savings. If you can't bring your plan's monthly contribution up to your goal immediately, increase it by 1 percent a month. Once a year, check the performance of your investments and rebalance your portfolio.

3. Not shopping for monthly services -- Hopefully, you comparison shopped before signing up for insurance policies. And we trust you did the same thing with phone, internet and cable services. But you might be missing savings if you're not checking prices again every year. **Build a better habit:** Put some energy into improving your financial life. Once a year, spend 30 to 60 minutes price shopping for monthly services. To make it easy, keep a list with each company's name, your account number and your monthly payment amount. If it seems you'll never get to it yourself, consider contacting Billcutterz, a service that negotiates on your behalf to get discounts on your monthly bills. Here's a post on how it works.

4. Paying for cable and landline phone -- Cable prices are going nowhere but up. Free and cheaper alternatives make experimenting worthwhile. But will you get out of your rut and try something new? **Build a better habit:** Before trying a change, just observe yourself and your habits. Record your viewing habits for a week or two to see how and if you're using the services. Ditto for your landline. If you're able, drop the landline and use mobile phones only. If that seems too radical, refrain from using the service for one month — or even just a week — while you check out alternatives. Some possibilities:

- Drop the premium cable tiers; learn to love basic.
- Find out if you'll pay less by bundling internet and phone services with one company.
- Get an all-inclusive mobile plan with unlimited text, data and phone.
- Switch to Skype, Vonage or another cheap or free internet phone service. Don't fear the new technology. It's easy to use.
- Cut the cable and substitute sources like YouTube, Hulu, Netflix, Redbox and DVDs from the public library.

5. Ignoring coupons and deal sites -- If you aren't using coupons and checking daily deal sites, you're spending too much. However, you still need to exercise discipline when bargain shopping so you don't sabotage your good intentions with impulse buys. **Build a better habit:** Tackle bad habits in small bites. Try just one deal or coupon site. Money Talks News' deals page, for example, has new sales and coupons every day relating to clothes, shoes, electronics, tools and more. Try one of these:

- Explore grocery store apps that deliver coupons and personalized savings to your computer or smartphone.
- Look for printed coupons on grocery store receipts.
- Stop by manufacturers' websites and look for coupons.

6. Playing investing too safe -- Safe investing is important. But there's safe, and then there's too safe. Keeping all your money in no-risk accounts means inflation will rob you of spending power slowly but surely. **Build a new habit:** Don't break all your bad habits at once. Pick one and focus. For instance, make managing your investments a priority. Learn your investing style by taking an online risk-tolerance quiz. Next, read up on the basics of investing. Then — taking your age and risk tolerance into account — take another look at your investments. Money Talks News founder Stacy Johnson offers some tips in "[Ask Stacy — How Do I Invest in a Mutual Fund?](#)"

7. Getting hooked on lattes -- That \$4 latte is killing your budget. One such latte a day each workday adds up to \$20 a week — \$1,040 a year. If you tip a dollar each time, you're spending \$1,300 a year. There's surely something you would rather do with that \$1,000. **Build a better habit:** Substitute new habits you enjoy for the old ones. A latte is a way of treating yourself, so find treats that don't bust your budget.

8. Living without an emergency fund -- If you don't have an emergency fund, your life is a high-wire act with no safety net. Emergencies are inevitable. Life is full of them. **Build a better habit:** Make a commitment to change. Write down your pledge and put it where you'll see it. This will allow it to reinforce your resolve. Keep the change at the forefront of your mind and tell yourself continually, "I can do this." Commit and watch your savings build. If necessary, take on a few hours of extra work each week, whether it's overtime at work or watching neighbors' dogs. For more tips, check out "[9 Ways to Build an Emergency Fund When Money's Tight.](#)"

9. Buying retail -- Paying retail markup is like setting a match to a pile of cash. Smart buyers find ways to avoid doing that. According to Edmunds.com, a new car's value drops 8 percent the minute it leaves the dealer's lot. At the end of the first year, it's worth 19 percent less. After two years, it's worth 31 percent less. One caution: There are things you should never buy used, including pet food, blenders, hats, mattresses, underwear, swimsuits, vacuum cleaners, stuffed animals, tires and software. **Build a better habit:** If you feel pressured to keep up with your friends or neighbors, ask yourself what that's costing you. Stay out of malls and brand-name stores except when researching products. Read up on prices online so you know a good price when you see it. Shop at wholesale clubs and bulk stores, garage sales, consignment stores, thrift stores, online auction sites and classified ads. You'll find especially good deals on used cars, refurbished electronics, jewelry, furniture, housewares, clothes, tools, books and sports equipment. And check out this post: "[From DVDs to Baby Shoes: 43 Things You Should Never Buy.](#)"

10. Using shopping as entertainment -- Perhaps you know people with compulsive shopping habits. Maybe you are one of them. Spending creates a high that's addictive and can severely damage your budget and the financial security of your family. **Build a better habit:** Try a spending fast. Remove your name from catalog lists, stay out of stores and hang out with friends whose idea of fun doesn't include shopping. Check out "[18 Ways to Slam the Brakes on Impulse Buys.](#)" for more tips.

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But if none of these habit busters works and you're still struggling with your shopping habit, you may need help. [Debtors Anonymous](#) is a free, nonprofit 12-step organization based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Marilyn Lewis | March 15, 2018++]

Scam Stats for 2017 ► FTC Report

1. Impostor scams were again the top fraud in 2017, according to the Federal Trade Commission, which has detailed the 2.7 million complaints the agency received from consumers last year.
2. Although the total number of complaints decreased from nearly 3 million in 2016, consumers reported losing \$905 million, an increase of \$63 million from 2016.
3. In terms of age, younger people were fleeced more often but, when successfully scammed, older people lost more money.
4. Among those ages 20 to 29, 40 percent reported losing money to fraud; the rate for those 70 and above was 18 percent. But when the thieves were successful, the typical amount of loss depended greatly on one's age. The older you were, the more you lost.
5. For those 20-29, the median loss was \$400. The comparable figures were \$621 for those 70 to 79 and \$1,092 for those 80 and above.
6. Some 348,000 people reported about impostors, with 19 percent saying they suffered a financial loss. After impostors, the top categories in order of number of reports were phone and mobile services (150,000); prizes, sweepstakes and lotteries (143,000); shop-at-home and catalog sales (126,000); internet services (45,000); foreign money offers and counterfeit checks (32,000); travel, vacation and time-shares (22,000); business and job opportunities (19,000); advance payments for credit (18,000); and health care (10,000).
7. The top states per capita for fraud reports were Florida, Georgia and Nevada.
8. Total reports fell but amount lost rose to \$905 million.
9. You can find out the FTC's [fraud report](#) in detail at its website.

[Source: AARP | Kent Allen | March 8, 2018 ++]

Home Selling Costs ► Hidden | \$18,342 On Average in 2018

You stand to make a pretty penny selling a home these days. The median price for existing homes reached \$241,700 in February, marking 72 consecutive months of year-over-year price increases, [says](#) the National Association of Realtors. Just don't expect to keep all the money when you unload your home. Selling costs will eat up a big chunk of it — \$18,342, on average, according to a [recent analysis](#) from Zillow. These selling costs are common but often overlooked by sellers. They include expenses associated with preparing a home for sale — for example, painting, staging, carpet cleaning and yard work — as well as real estate agent commissions and transfer or sales taxes.

Folks in the U.S. who hire professional help spend an average of \$4,985 preparing their property for sale, according to the analysis. Once the house sells, they spend an average of \$13,357 on commissions and taxes. Like property prices themselves, though, these costs associated with selling a home can vary widely across the U.S. Within the 35 largest metropolitan areas, selling costs are highest in three California cities. Selling expenses total:

1. \$81,507 in San Jose, California
2. \$63,087 in San Francisco
3. \$44,251 in Los Angeles

Looking at the 35 largest metros, selling expenses are lowest in Midwestern cities. They total:

1. \$12,986 in Cleveland
2. \$13,010 in St. Louis
3. \$13,424 in Indianapolis

Keep in mind that these figures are all averages, though. This means you can walk away from a home sale with more money after selling costs if you do your homework. For example, sellers who make shrewd choices about the home improvement projects they pursue before selling can increase their profit. And sellers who learn how to negotiate discounts on closing costs like real estate commissions likely will spend less than average on selling expenses. To learn more, check out:

- [“How to Save Thousands When Selling Your Home”](#)
- [“Selling Your Home — Here’s How to Create Maximum Curb Appeal”](#)
- [“The Home Remodeling Projects With the Best Payback”](#)

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | March 29, 2018 ++]

FICO Credit Score Update 12 ► What's Considered Excellent Credit?

While there are several companies that offer credit scores, the most widely used credit score is called a FICO score and comes from the company that invented credit scoring, Fair Isaac. You can go to their website and they'll tell you all about credit scores, including what qualifies for everything from a “poor” to an “excellent” score. A score of 850 is as high as you can get, with scores ranging from zero to 850. Here's the breakdown:

- Excellent credit is 750+
- Good: 700-749
- Fair: 650-699
- Poor: 550-649

Those are the general breakdowns, although they're subjective: Some lenders may have different criteria. But essentially if you want to have excellent credit, you'll need a FICO credit score of 750-plus. You can read all about this at myfico.com.

Here's how FICO credit scores [are calculated](#):

- **35 percent of your credit score is determined by how good you are at paying bills.** That means paying on time, every time, for long periods of time. This is called your "payment history."
- **30 percent of your credit score is determined by how much you owe.** This is called utilization. Let's say you've got a \$10,000 credit limit on your credit card, and you've got a \$3,000 balance. You have utilized 30 percent of your available credit. Therefore, you've got a 30 percent credit utilization ratio. The lower you keep that ratio, the better.
- **15 percent of your credit score is determined by the length of your credit history.** I've been borrowing money for many, many years. I've never paid a bill late. Therefore, my credit history is long and it's good.
- **20 percent of your credit score is determined by two factors — the mix of credit you have (10 percent) and new credit for which you apply (10 percent).** What they like to see is the successful use of different kinds of credit. For example, credit card debt is a form of what is known as "revolving debt." By contrast, mortgage and car loans are called "installment loans." A mix of such different types of credit helps your score.

If you want to improve your credit score, the first thing to do is pull your credit report from AnnualCreditReport.com. You are entitled to one free credit report from each of the big three agencies every year. So, every few months, you can pull one from a different agency and see what your credit looks like. Why are you pulling your credit report? To make sure there are no mistakes in it. A lot of credit reports have mistakes, and those can impact your score. You can pull your credit report for free, check for mistakes, and typically dispute them right on the credit bureau's website. It's the first thing you want to do to clean up your credit. Then, make sure you pay your bills on time, for long periods of time. Do that, and you're going to build your credit history and score. Aim for that 750. And by the way, if you have a 750, you don't need a perfect 850. Once you get over the threshold into "excellent," there's no prize for making your score perfect. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Stacy Johnson | March 23, 2018 ++]

Retirement Costs ► Don't Get Blindsided | 7 Unexpected Ones

When you retire, what will be your major expenses? If you love to travel, then that might take up a good portion of your budget. Food, groceries and utilities will probably take their fair share of your money as well. But what are you missing? Here are seven retirement costs that people often forget to figure into their financial calculations.

1. Health insurance -- You'll have Medicare in retirement, so no problem here, right? Not exactly.

- First, if you retire early, you'll need to buy your own health care coverage for a few years. Unless you qualify because of a disability, Medicare isn't available until you're 65.
- Next, Medicare doesn't mean totally free health care. Most people don't pay a premium for Medicare Part A — that's your hospitalization coverage — but there is a \$1,340 deductible as well as some possible co-insurance costs. Medicare Part B, which covers outpatient care, has a standard \$134 premium and a \$183 deductible, after which you pay a share of doctor, outpatient therapy and medical equipment costs. There are additional premiums and costs for Medicare Part D. That's for your prescription drug coverage.
- Finally, since there are some gaps in what original Medicare will cover, you may opt to go with a Medicare Advantage plan, also known as Medicare Part C. These plans bundle all your original Medicare services with additional coverage for things such as dental or chiropractic care. Those additional services usually come at an additional cost. You could also buy a Medicare supplemental, or Medigap, policy to pay for

some uncovered services. Check out: "[How a Medicare-Covered Hospital Stay Could Cost You Thousands.](#)"

2. Medical and long-term care costs -- Even if you have Medicare, there are certain expenses you'll have to pay out of pocket. Unless you have a Medicare Advantage or Medigap plan offering these benefits, expect to pay out of pocket for dental care, dentures, eye exams for glasses, foot care, hearing aids and any care received while you're traveling out of the country. However, long-term care is the largest expense not covered by Medicare. You'll spend an average of \$3,628 a month to live in an assisted living facility or \$7,698 a month for a private nursing home room, according to 2016 government estimates. Unless you had the foresight to purchase a long-term care insurance policy — not cheap in and of itself — you'll need to cover that cost of care yourself. Not even Medicare Advantage is going to pay for that. Check out: "[Should I Buy Long-Term Care Insurance?](#)"

3. Home renovations -- Between long-term care costing so much and seniors' active lifestyles, it's not surprising that AARP found 90 percent of those age 65 and older want to stay in their homes throughout retirement. Known as aging in place, this practice brings its own set of costs. Doorways may need to be widened, a bedroom brought to the main floor and the bathroom renovated to accommodate the limited mobility that often comes with advanced age. AARP also recommends installing nonslip flooring, an accessible entryway without steps and lever door handles.

4. Social Security and other income -- If your budget is tight even after claiming Social Security, you may want to keep working or take a part-time job. However, if you've started claiming those retirement benefits early, your outside income could end up taking a bite out of your benefit checks. Until you reach your full retirement age (FRA), which is around 66 for most folks, the government limits how much extra money you can make without consequences. For 2018, the threshold is \$17,040 if you're age 62-65 and already claiming Social Security; if you earn more than \$17,040, the government will ding your benefits \$1 for every \$2 you make over the limit. If you will be turning 66 in 2018, you can earn up to \$45,360 in the months before your birthday, and the government will impose a \$1 penalty for every \$3 you earn above that. Once you reach FRA, you can earn as much as you like and get 100 percent of your benefit check.

The Social Security Administration wants you to know that you don't "lose" those withheld benefits. After reaching FRA, your monthly benefits will be increased permanently to account for the withheld benefits. Money Talks News founder Stacy Johnson advises folks to wait until FRA, or even until age 70, to claim Social Security so they can earn as much as they want and receive their full benefits. Even if you're not still working, you will get less than your full retirement benefit if you start before FRA; for those who wait past FRA, up to 70, actually get increased monthly benefits.

On another topic, if you're receiving income from a traditional retirement plan such as an IRA, you also may face a tax bite. After age 70½, the government starts requiring minimum distributions from those plans. That extra money could push you into a higher tax bracket. In a 2017 survey by investment firm Capital Group, 34 percent of retired boomers said they were paying more in taxes than they expected.

5. Needy adult children -- Beware the dreaded boomerang kids. Much has been written about adult children returning home to roost, but that shouldn't be your only concern. No, you have to worry about children who might ask you to co-sign loans and then bail on the payments, leaving you to hold the bill. Or they may need your money to pay their rent, student loans, phone bills or any of dozens of other possible expenses. How likely are you to support your adult children financially? A 2017 poll from CreditCards.com found 74 percent of parents said they had helped their adult children with money for bills or other spending expenses. Check out: "[Still Supporting Adult Kids? 5 Steps to Set Them Free.](#)"

6. Inflation -- This isn't something you can pencil into your budget as a line item, but inflation can't be ignored. It's tempting to do so, though, since the U.S. has spent the past decade in a low-inflation environment and the next few years shouldn't be much different. Hopefully, however, you won't only be retired for the next few years. You have to plan for what the next 10, 20 or 30 years will bring. Heaven forbid we return to the age of double-digit

inflation rates, which were last seen in the early 1980s, but that's always a possibility. Rising inflation has the potential to erode your money's purchasing power and push up the cost of everything you buy — from food to rent to travel.

7. A long life -- In 1950, the average lifespan in the U.S. was only 68.2 years, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's significantly better than the 47-year average lifespan people had in 1900, but still not enough to give most people much time in retirement. It's a different story nowadays. Babies born in 2015 should live to an average age of 78.8 years. Meanwhile, a 75-year-old in 2015 could reasonably expect to make it another 12 years to 87, by the government's estimates. A long life means extended opportunities to enjoy friends, family and hobbies, but it also compounds all the expenses detailed above. Most notably, it gives inflation more time to eat away at the value of retirement savings and means more years covering health care expenses. There is no way to eliminate most of these expenses in retirement, but there is no reason to get blindsided. Work these costs into your financial plan so you'll be ready for whatever may come.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews| Natalie Gross | March 14, 2018 ++]

VA Home Loan Update 60 ► New Construction Rules

One often-asked question about the VA home loan process skips over the “home” part entirely: Can veterans use the benefit to buy land? The short answer: No. The long answer is more complicated. VA-backed loans are designed solely to help a veteran purchase a primary residence, so if there's no residence, there's no loan. But an eligible veteran can apply for what VA calls a “construction/permanent home loan” that includes money to purchase the land in addition to funding the new home's construction. VA outlines the process in its Lenders Handbook, but here are the highlights:

- Payments on these loans begin only after construction is finished. Per the handbook, builders have up to a year to complete the home.
- As with other VA-backed loans, the new construction must be the veteran's permanent residence.
- Builders must pay construction-related fees, including but not limited to inspection and title update costs.
- If the construction is not completed, VA will back only a portion of the loan. Calculating that value involves multiple factors, including money already paid out to the builder and the value of the construction already completed.

Two points for borrowers to take away: First, the land and the home are a package deal if VA is expected to play any part in the loan. Veterans may have other options for land-only purchases depending on their state; Texas offers the Veterans Land Loan Program through its Veterans Land Board, for instance. Second, just because VA will back a loan doesn't mean a lender will offer it. Many well-known lenders don't traffic in these types of loans for a variety of reasons, including construction-related risks. One option for borrowers would be alternate financing for the construction phase of the home, then a VA-backed refinancing once the residence is complete. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Kevin Lilley | February 26, 2018 ++]

VA Home Loan Update 62 ► Entitlement Restoral

If you're seeking another VA-backed [home loan](#), you're far from alone: The program is no stranger to [repeat business](#). But before taking a second stab at the process (and all that comes with it, including increased [funding fees](#)), be sure that you've restored your entitlement, which determines how much you can borrow. Click [here](#) to

learn more about loan limits, county-by-county exceptions, and how a \$36,000 base entitlement can, thanks to bonus entitlements and other number-crunching, be enough to cover a VA-backed loan in excess of \$400,000. Before delving into that math, be sure you've got that entitlement ready to go. It can be re-established via four methods, per VA guidance:

1. Disposal and repayment. This is the most straightforward method: Sell the old house and pay off the loan, and your entitlement is restored. This also applies in cases where the property is destroyed.

2. Refinance. The entitlement used in the financing of a property can be re-used for the refinancing of that property. The new loan must pay off the old loan.

3. One-time restoration. Beneficiaries can reclaim their entitlement once if they've paid off the VA-backed loan, even if they do not sell the property. After using this option, future VA loans must come with the disposal of any property financed via VA-backed loans. The borrower also must continue to meet VA loan requirements, including residency rules; in other words, you'll need to be a full-time resident of the new home.

4. Substitution of entitlement. If your loan is transferred to another qualified VA loan beneficiary, their entitlement takes over. This is a different situation than a [VA joint loan](#), which can be between two or more service members and can involve combining entitlements.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Kevin Lilley | March 20, 2018 ++]

Cell Phone Porting Scam ► How It works

There's a new scam in town. Con artists are using something called a porting scam (or sometimes port-out scam) to gain access to victims' personal and financial accounts and logins.

How the Scam Works

- Porting scams start with scammers stealing your phone number and service. How is that even possible? First, they get your name, phone number, and as much personal information as they can get their hands on. Next, they call your phone company claiming to be you. They tell the company that your phone was stolen and request the phone number be ported to another device and provider.
- If the cell company complies, scammers gain control of your number. They begin accessing accounts that require authorization via text message. Accounts can include email providers, social networks, invoicing software, and even online banking. Once they've bypassed that security, scammers can easily steal your identity and/or your money.

How to Avoid Porting Scams

- **Set up two-factor authentication.** In many cases, you can set up additional verification measures that would prevent a stranger from successfully porting your phone number
- **Contact your provider if your phone suddenly stops working.** If you can't make or receive phone calls or text messages, don't assume there is something wrong with your phone. Use a land line or a friend's phone to report the problem immediately to your cellular service provider.
- **Be alert to any signs of phishing.** Be wary of any suspicious alerts from your personal or financial accounts or unsolicited requests for two-factor authorization.
- **Be cautious when sharing personal information.** Only share your full name, phone number and other personal information with people and companies that you know and trust.

For more information

Learn more about how this scam works in [this BBB article](#) about cell phone porting. If you've fallen victim to this type of scam, you can help others avoid being scammed by filing a report BBB.org/ScamTracker. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | March 9, 2018 ++]

Job Hunt Scam 3 ► New Twist | Fake Interviews

Con artists are always finding ways to make their scams more convincing. This time, it's a new twist on job scams. Scammers are starting to conduct fake interviews, to make job seekers more likely to fall for their cons.

How the Scam Works

- You apply for a job online. It appears to be from a legitimate business, but the position has too-good-to-be-true perks, such as all remote work, flexible hours, and excellent pay.
- Previously, scammers would "hire" you as soon as you responded to the job ad. But con artists are now adding a layer of authenticity by conducting fake job interviews over Skype or Google Hangouts. The idea is to gain your confidence by speaking face-to-face. The interviewer and the questions may seem very professional.
- After the interview, things get suspicious. The scammer will send you a check to spend on your first assignment or for buying supplies. The catch? You'll need to transfer some of that money back to the company or to a field representative. The check is fake and any money you transfer will be lost for good. In other versions, scammers ask for money or personal information under the guise of purchasing training, or running a background check, or setting up direct deposit.

How to Spot a Job Scam

- **Be wary if a job sounds too good to be true.** It probably is, especially if it offers amazing pay and flexible hours for a job that requires no special training.
- **Research companies and jobs before agreeing to an interview.** Make sure the company is legitimate and the job is really posted on their website.
- **Watch out for the overpayment scam.** No real job will ever overpay you and then ask you to send funds somewhere else.

To find out more about employment scams, [check out this BBB Tip](#). If you've fallen victim to this type of scam, you can help others avoid being scammed by filing a report with BBB.org/ScamTracker. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | March 23, 2018 ++]

Western Union Settlement Scam ► Again

Many scam victims who transferred money via Western Union are now eligible to file for a refund, thanks to a recent Federal Trade Commission settlement with the company. But con artists are using this as an opportunity to scam victims again!

How the Scam Works

- If you lost money to a scammer who had you pay using Western Union between January 1, 2004, and January 19, 2017, you are eligible to file a claim to get your money back. That much is true. What's not true is that you can file a claim by email, need to hire a lawyer, or can pay to speed up your case. This misinformation is being spread by scammers.

- Targets of this scam report receiving emails instructing them to file for a refund by replying to the message. Scammers ask for information about their Western Union transaction, along with their name, address, and other personal information. Responding to these messages opens victims up to the risk of identity theft. If you get this email, be sure to hit "delete."

Tips to avoid this scam

- Don't pay anybody to help get your money back. It's free to file your claim and get your refund. Instructions otherwise are a scam.
- You can do it yourself. You do not need to hire a lawyer to help. Also, you cannot pay to speed up your case.
- If you have not applied for a refund, do not open or reply to emails about the settlement. To submit a claim, go to www.ftc.com/WU for more information. The deadline is May 31, 2018.
- If you have already applied for a refund, you can verify any communication by contacting Gilardi & Co., the claims administrator, at 1-844-319-2124.

To read more about the settlement and the types of scams involved, check out this article on BBB.org. To learn whether you qualify for the settlement, go to www.ftc.com/WU for more information. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | March 30, 2018 ++]

Tax Burden for Colorado Retired Vets ► As of MAR 2018

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 **Colorado**

Sales Tax

State Sales Tax: 2.9% (food and prescription drugs exempt); many cities and counties have their own rates which are added to the state rate. Total could be as high as 9.9%.

Gasoline Tax: 40.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 44.9 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: 84 cents/pack of 20

Marijuana Tax: 2.9% medical and retail marijuana sales tax, as well as 85% of the 10% retail marijuana special sales tax generated at the county level. (<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/revenue/colorado-marijuana-tax-data>).

For more specific sales tax rates refer to <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/tax/sales-tax-rates>

Personal Income Taxes

All taxpayers: 4.63% of Federal taxable income which is a reduction from the 1999 rate of 4.75% and the 1998 (and prior) rate of 5%..

Personal Exemptions/Credits: Federal amounts are automatically adopted.

Standard Deduction: None

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Colorado has a pension/annuity subtraction where, depending on the age of the recipient, the first \$20,000/\$24,000 is not taxed. As a result, taxpayers 55-64 years old can exclude a total of

\$20,000 for Social Security and qualified retirement income. Those 65 and over can exclude up to \$24,000. All out-of-state government pensions qualify for the pension exemption. The total exclusion may not be more than indicated from all exempt sources. However, Social Security/Railroad Retirement income not taxed by the federal government is not added back to adjusted gross income for state income tax purposes.

Retired Military Pay: Same as above.

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. For information on the Military Spouses Residency Relief Act refer to <https://www.colorado.gov/tax>

Property Taxes

The county assessor determines the value of property using a market, cost or income approach. For 2013 property taxes on real estate are assessed at 7.96% of the property's actual value. You can determine your property tax bill by multiplying the assessed value by the local tax rate. Other property, including personal property is assessed at 29% of actual value.

A homestead exemption is available for qualifying seniors and the surviving spouse of a senior who previously qualified. Seniors must be at least age 65. It allows 50% (up to a maximum reduction of \$200,000) in actual value of a primary residence to be exempt. The state pays the tax on the exempted value. The person must have owned and lived in the home for at least 10 years. [Click for details.](#) This exemption has now been extended to qualifying disabled veterans. [Click for details.](#)

Full-year Colorado residents age 65 or older, disabled, or a surviving spouse age 58 or older, may qualify for the Property Tax/Rent/Heat Rebate and/or the Property Tax Deferral. Qualified applicants can receive a rebate of up to \$600 of the property tax and \$192 of their heating expenses paid during the year, either directly or as part of their rent payments. For more property tax information, [click here.](#)

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax and the Colorado estate tax does not apply to decedents whose date of death is on or after January 1, 2005.

Other State Tax Rates

To compare the above sales, income, and property tax rates to those accessed in other states go to:

- Sales Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/sales-tax-by-state>.
- Personal Income Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/income-tax-by-state>.
- Property Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/property-tax-by-state>.

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Go to <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/tax/individual-income-tax-instructions-and-forms> for tax instructions and forms. For further information visit the Colorado Department of Revenue site <https://colorado.gov/revenue> or call 303-866 2371. [Source: www.retirementliving.com | March 2018 ++]



Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 31 MAR 2018

- **Born With A Silver Spoon.** Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3eyc-atEiU> and listen to former football coach and TV sports announcer Lou Holtz's inspirational speech about life in the U.S.A.
- **In Air Plane Repair.** Check out <https://youtu.be/8oAzdbd0J2A> and watch Gladys Ingle in the 1920's change planes in mid-air, and replace aircraft wheel without wearing a parachute.
- **China Trade.** Regardless of you politics check out <https://youtu.be/wIdcMr5xP7A> what Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said in a speech on the Senate floor about Trump and his China trade policy.
- **VA Benefit Appeals.** Go to <https://www.vets.gov/?next=%2Ftrack-claims%2Fyour-claims> to track the progress of your appeal.
- **Admissions.** At <http://www.admissionsfilm.com/gift-of-peace-free-screening.php> is an interesting perspective on life after death as a result of modern day conflicts.
- **Electric car.** Go to <https://youtu.be/IaJ12zf-eWY> and see what you think of the new Sondors three-wheel car (classified as a motorcycle because of its design), seats 3 comfortably, and will go 0-60 mph in 5.8 seconds. It will soon be available online (no dealerships) for delivery to your house for \$10,000.
- **China's Space Station.** China's first space station, Tiangong-1, abandoned and out of control, is expected to drop out of orbit around this weekend (possibly on April Fools day), with pieces of it likely to survive the fiery re-entry and crash somewhere on Earth.
- **Cavity Tips.** Drink sugary or acidic drinks quickly to limit exposure to teeth, and drink them through a straw to minimize contact with the teeth. Teeth should be brushed twice a day in circular motions with fluoride toothpaste and the mouth **should not be rinsed** after brushing. By not rinsing or consuming anything for 20-30 minutes after brushing, fluoride is able to stay on the teeth for protection.
- **Life Span Calculator.** Go to <http://media.nmfn.com/tnetwork/lifespan/#13> if you would like to see what your expected life span will be.
- **Opening Locked Car Doors.** Lost or forgot your keys. To open locked car doors with a key lock spray the bottom of a toilet plunger with WD-40 and plunge the key slot on the door a few times. Door will then open. Good reason not to leave valuables in your care that can be seen from through the windows.
- **1955 - 62 Years Ago.** Comments made in the year 1955! I'll tell you one thing, if things keep going the way they are, it's going to be impossible to buy a week's groceries for \$10.00.
- **Low Paying Jobs.** Go to <https://youtu.be/yRHIA-wDFJE> to see where all the low paying jobs have gone.
- **Flag half-staffing.** For flags that cannot be lowered to half-staff, attaching a black ribbon to the top of the flag is an acceptable alternative. A 2 1/2 inch by 5 foot black nylon w/grommet ribbon is available from the American Legion.



[Source: Various | March 31, 2018 ++]

Military Force Authorization ► Congress Not Doing Its Job

Fifteen years after the start of the Iraq war, Sen. Tammy Duckworth is worried that Congress didn't learn anything from the controversial conflict. "We just added Niger as a combat zone for combat pay. We're talking about troops in Syria permanently," said Duckworth (D-IL), who lost both legs while serving as an Army National Guard helicopter pilot in Iraq in 2004. "That to me is a very dangerous position to be in. I don't feel like overall Congress has learned a lesson, and I think most people would just rather keep their head down and not have a vote."



Sen. Tammy Duckworth

Duckworth and fellow Iraq war veteran Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) spoke to reporters on the anniversary of the start of that conflict 20 MAR to again push for a new authorization for the use of military force for a host of current overseas military missions. The justifications for military intervention in the Middle East, Africa and other conflict zones still rely on the war powers granted by Congress in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. For years, Duckworth and Gallego (along with other Democrats and Republicans) have argued in favor of an updated, more limited military force authorization measure, but a compromise remains elusive.

Earlier in the day, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker (R-TN) said his panel will mark up a new authorization proposal on 19 APR. "When we go into new countries, when we take on new groups, the Senate would have the ability to weigh in on those issues," he said during a floor speech. "So I just would like to say to the body and those who are looking in, we are not shying away from this debate." But Duckworth and Gallego said lawmakers largely have avoided those difficult conversations on military roles and responsibilities, allowing the White House to make those decisions largely unchecked. "We're seeing a military that is expected to engage long-term on multiple fronts. We're seeing a military that has not been funded in terms of readiness," Duckworth said. "And we're adding what we're expecting them to do. We're talking about Africa. We're talking about Korea. If we want to have the military engage in a 15-year commitment on three fronts ... let's have that conversation."

Gallego said he believes that after nearly 18 years of continuous military operations overseas, lawmakers have “a better understanding of how military adventurism can go wrong,” and the strain that puts on military families. “But we’re not doing anything about it,” he said. “It’s the best of both worlds. We don’t have to take a tough vote, and the military gets to do what they want because they operate under this old authorization. Democrats are just as responsible for this as Republicans.”

Both lawmakers said they were encouraged by increased debate in the House last year pushing for a new war authorization, but said the work is still moving too slow. They’re hopeful that as more young combat veterans enter Congress (42 current lawmakers served in the Iraq and Afghanistan War era) those issues will take more prominence. “There is an understanding on both sides of the aisle that Congress is failing,” Duckworth said. “(Our troops) keep redeploying and redeploying and redeploying. Now they’re in Afghanistan, now they’re in Iraq, now they’re in Africa, now they’re in Syria. “They keep showing up and we’re not doing our jobs. We’re too afraid to have this discussion, and turning it all over to the executive branch. We did it under President Obama and we’re doing it under the present administration. And that’s not acceptable.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 22, 2018 ++]

United Nations ► U.S. Funding Reduction

The United States will no longer shoulder more than a quarter of the multibillion-dollar costs of the United Nations’ peacekeeping operations, Washington’s envoy said 29 MAR. “Peacekeeping is a shared responsibility,” U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley said at a Security Council debate on peacekeeping reform. “All of us have a role to play, and all of us must step up.” The U.S. is the biggest contributor, assessed about 28.5 percent of this year’s \$7.3 billion peacekeeping budget. Citing a 25 percent cap in a U.S. law, Haley said it will be the limit “moving forward.” The U.S. Mission to the U.N. later said her remarks apply to the current peacekeeping budget year. The second-largest contributor, China, is assessed a bit over 10 percent.

The U.N. now runs 15 peacekeeping missions worldwide. U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration has complained before about the cost and pressed to cut this year’s budget. It is \$570 million below last year’s, a smaller decrease than the U.S. wanted. “We’re only getting started,” Haley said when the cut was approved in June. It followed a \$400 million trim the prior year, before Trump’s administration. Haley said that the U.S. will work to make sure cuts in its portion are done “in a fair and sensible manner that protects U.N. peacekeeping.” The General Assembly sets the budget and respective contributions by vote. Spokesmen for Assembly President Miroslav Lajcak and U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres declined to comment on Haley’s remarks, noting that the 193 U.N. member states will decide the budget.

Drawing over 105,000 troops, police and other personnel from countries around the world, the peacekeeping missions operate in places from Haiti to parts of India and Pakistan. Most are in African countries. The biggest is in Congo, where the Security Council agreed just 28 MAR to keep the 16,000-troop force in place for another year. Some missions have been credited with helping to protect civilians and restore stability, but others have been criticized for corruption and ineffectiveness. In Mali, where 13,000 peacekeepers have been deployed since 2013, residents in a northern region still “don’t feel safe and secure,” Malian women’s rights activist Fatimata Toure told the Security Council on Wednesday. She said violence remains pervasive in her section of a country that plunged into turmoil after a March 2012 coup created a security vacuum. “We have still not felt (the peacekeeping mission) deliver on its protection-of-civilians mandate,” though it has helped in some other ways, Toure said. “We feel, as civilians, that we’ve been abandoned, left to our fate.”

Peacekeeping also has been clouded by allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation. An Associated Press investigative series last year uncovered roughly 2,000 claims of such conduct by peacekeepers and other U.N.

personnel around the world during a 12-year period. Maintaining peace has become increasingly deadly work. Some 59 peacekeepers were killed through “malicious acts” last year, compared to 34 in 2016, Guterres said 29 MAR. A U.N. report in January blamed many of the deaths on inaction in the field and “a deficit of leadership” from the world body’s headquarters to remote locations.

Guterres said that the U.N. is improving peacekeepers’ training, has appointed a victims’ rights advocate for victims of sexual abuse and is reviewing all peacekeeping operations. Still, he said, more needs to be done to strengthen peacekeeping forces and ensure they are deployed in tandem with political efforts, not instead of them. They also shouldn’t be overloaded with unrealistic expectations, he said. “Lives and credibility are being lost,” he said. “A peacekeeping operation is not an army or a counterterrorist force or a humanitarian agency.” Representatives from many countries also stressed a need for more focused, better prepared peacekeeping missions and more robust political peace processes. The U.N., its member states and countries that host peacekeeping missions all “need to shoulder our responsibilities,” said Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, whose country arranged the debate as this month’s Security Council president. [Source: The Associated Press | Jennifer Peltz | March29, 2018 ++]

Contradictions ► Have You Ever wondered?

- Only in This Stupid Worlddo drugstores make the sick walk all the way to the back of the store to get their prescriptions while healthy people can buy cigarettes at the front.
- Only in This Stupid World.....do people order double cheeseburgers, large fries, and a diet Coke.
- Only in This Stupid World.....do banks leave vault doors open and then chain the pens to the counters..
- Only in This Stupid Worlddo we leave cars worth thousands of dollars in the driveway and put our useless junk in the garage.
- Only in This Stupid Worlddo we buy hot dogs in packages of ten and buns in packages of eight..
- Only in This Stupid Worlddo they have drive-up ATM machines with Braille lettering.

EVER WONDER ...

- Why the sun lightens our hair, but darkens our skin?
- Why don't you ever see the headline 'Psychic Wins Lottery'?
- Why is 'abbreviated' such a long word?
- Why is it that Doctors call what they do 'practice'?
- Why is lemon juice made with artificial flavor, and dishwashing liquid made with real lemons?
- Why is the man who invests all your money called a broker?
- Why is the time of day with the slowest traffic called rush hour?
- Why isn't there mouse-flavored cat food?
- Why didn't Noah swat those two mosquitoes?
- Why do they sterilize the needle for lethal injections?
- You know that indestructible black box that is used on airplanes? Why don't they make the whole plane out of that stuff?!
- Why don't sheep shrink when it rains?
- Why are they called apartments when they are all stuck together?
- If con is the opposite of pro, is Congress the opposite of progress
- If flying is so safe, why do they call the airport the terminal?

Retirement Trends ► How They Differ From Your Parents

It happens to all of us — one day, you're in high school or college and dreaming of a limitless future. The next, you're signing up for AARP and nervously wondering if your nest egg will remain uncracked long enough to sustain life throughout your suddenly imminent golden years. Although the concept of retirement remains largely unchanged, how you live out those years has shifted dramatically. Following are seven key ways in which your post-work life is likely to differ sharply from that of your parents.

1. You're more likely to delay your retirement date -- A growing number of Americans appear to have reached the same conclusion: Dreams of sipping colorful drinks on a deserted beach are just going to have to wait a while.

In a quarter-century, the percentage of workers expecting to retire after the age of 65 more than tripled, from 11 percent in 1991 to 37 percent in 2016, according to the [Employee Benefit Research Institute](#). However, don't get too discouraged by these numbers. Recently, American workers have become a bit more optimistic about their ability to retire early. The percentage of workers who plan on postponing retirement has dropped from 22 percent in 2013 to 13 percent in 2016. Even more interestingly, the percentage of workers who *actually* retire after age 65 — as opposed to simply expecting to do so — remains more modest, rising from 8 percent in 1991 to 15 percent in 2016. And studies have shown that a substantial percentage of those who plan to work after age 65 will do so because they enjoy their jobs.

2. You're more likely to live downtown than in the suburbs -- The stereotype suggests that retirees want a quiet home in the country, undisturbed by the noise of modern life. The reality is quite different. In fact, retirees are flocking to urban centers to live out their golden years. [AARP cites](#) a report from TenantCloud, a property management software service, revealing that about one-third of all urban applications are for renters who are older than 60.

3. You're more likely to head outdoors for fun -- Americans of all ages increasingly look to the great outdoors and nature when planning activities. Activities such as camping biking and birdwatching are growing in popularity among all age groups, according to the Physical Activity Council's [2018 Participation Report](#). Older adults are particularly drawn to anything that gets them out among wildlife, including fishing and wildlife walks. Two activities long associated with retirement — golf and shuffleboard — are conspicuously absent from the list. That is more evidence that today's retirement is not your parents' retirement.

4. You're more likely to be healthier -- Good news for aging folks who worry about their bodies suddenly falling apart: Today's retirees can expect to enjoy much better health than retirees of earlier generations. From 1998 and 2012, the percentage of adults ages 80 and older in fair or poor health dropped significantly, from 43 percent to 34 percent, according to an [Urban Institute Report](#). Alas, tomorrow's retirees might not fare quite so well. Between 1992 and 2010, the percentage of adults ages 51 to 54 who reported fair or poor health jumped from 17 percent to 22 percent. The source of this bad news? An increase in the rate of people diagnosed with diabetes, largely a result of our high-fat, junk-food diets and rising obesity rates.

5. You're more likely to live abroad -- For generations, retirees have used their free time to travel. Now, a growing number of such folks are choosing one-way adventures, with no plans of returning home. The percentage of Americans retiring abroad leaped 17 percent between 2010 and 2015, according to an [Associated Press report](#). A little under 400,000 retirees are now expatriates, and that number is expected to grow. Some countries are more attractive destinations than others. In fact, one country — Costa Rica— is especially desirable for its cheap, modern health care, as [we reported earlier this year](#).

6. You're less likely to downsize -- As workers near retirement, they traditionally have expected to downsize to more modest –and less costly — digs. However, that rule appears to be more myth than reality for millions. A joint [Merrill Lynch-Age Wave survey](#) found that half of retirees did not downsize in their last move, with 30 percent actually “upsizing” into a larger home. The reason? These retirees want the room for family members to visit or stay.

7. You're less likely to leave an inheritance -- Better not show this one to your kids: An [HSBC survey](#) of workers in 15 countries and territories — including the U.S. — finds that 23 percent of today’s workers prefer to spend all of their savings rather than to leave the cash to children. In fact, just 9 percent intend to save as much as possible and pass the money on.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | March 20, 2018 ++]

Brick Street Construction ► **How Its Done in the Netherlands**



The Silent Generation ► **So Our Children and Their Children Will Understand**

Born in the 1930's and early 40's, we exist as a very special age cohort. We are the Silent Generation. Some of you are probably not old enough to have live through all of this, but it does not hurt to realize this era

We are the smallest number of children born since the early 1900's. We are the "last ones."

We are the last generation, climbing out of the depression , who can remember the winds of war and the impact of a world at war which rattled the structure of our daily lives for years.

We are the last to remember ration books for everything from gas to sugar to shoes to stoves.

We saved tin foil and poured fat into tin cans.

We saw cars up on blocks because tires weren't available.

We can remember milk being delivered to our house early in the morning and placed in the "milk box" on the porch.

We are the last to see the gold stars in the front windows of our grieving Neighbors whose sons died in the War. We saw the 'boys' home from the war, build their Cape Cod style houses, pouring the cellar, tar-papering it over and living there until they could afford the time and money to build it out.

We remember trying to buy a new car after the war. The new cars were coming through with wooden bumpers.

We are the last generation who spent childhood without television; instead, we imagined what we heard on the radio.

As we all like to brag, with no TV, we spent our childhood "playing outside". We did play outside, and we did play on our own.

- There was no little league.
- There was no city playground for kids.
- The lack of television in our early years meant, for most of us, that we had little real understanding of what the world was like.
- On Saturday afternoons, the movies, gave us newsreels of the war sandwiched in between westerns and cartoons.
- Telephones were one to a house, often shared (party Lines) and hung on the wall.
- Computers were called calculators, they only added and were hand cranked; typewriters were driven by pounding fingers, throwing the carriage, and changing the ribbon.
- The 'internet' and 'GOOGLE' were words that did not exist.
- Newspapers and magazines were written for adults and the news was broadcast on our table radio in the evening by Gabriel Heatter.
- We are the last group who had to find out for ourselves.

As we grew up, the country was exploding with growth.

- The G.I. Bill gave returning veterans the means to get an education and spurred colleges to grow.
- VA loans fanned a housing boom.
- Pent up demand coupled with new installment payment plans put factories to work.
- New highways would bring jobs and mobility.
- The veterans joined civic clubs and became active in politics.
- The radio network expanded from 3 stations to thousands of stations.
- Our parents were suddenly free from the confines of the depression and the war, and they threw themselves into exploring opportunities they had never imagined.
- We weren't neglected, but we weren't today's all-consuming family focus.
- They were glad we played by ourselves until the street lights came on.
- They were busy discovering the post war world.
- We entered a world of overflowing plenty and opportunity; a world where we were welcomed.
- We enjoyed a luxury; we felt secure in our future.

Of course, just as today, not all Americans shared in this experience.

- Polio was still acrippler.
- Depression poverty was deep rooted.

- The Korean War was a dark presage in the early 50's and by mid-decade school children were ducking under desks for Air-Raid training.
- Russia built the "Iron Curtain" and China became Red China.
- Eisenhower sent the first 'advisers' to Vietnam.
- Castro set up camp in Cuba and Khrushchev came to power.

We are the last generation to experience an interlude when there were no threats to our homeland. We came of age in the 40s and early 50s. The war was over and the cold war, terrorism, Martin Luther King, civil rights, technological upheaval, "global warming", and perpetual economic insecurity had yet to haunt life with insistent unease. Only our generation can remember both a time of apocalyptic war and a time when our world was secure and full of bright promise and plenty. We have lived through both. We grew up at the best possible time, a time when the world was getting better. not worse.

We are the Silent Generation - "The Last Ones". More than 99 % of us are either retired or deceased, and we feel privileged to have "lived in the best of times"!

[Source: Valkyrie Riders Cruiser Club | June 14, 2016 ++]

Home Warranties ► Don't Expect More than They Deliver

If you've bought a home recently, you might have purchased or received a home warranty. However, consumers frequently expect more from these plans than they deliver. Home warranties aren't insurance policies. Instead, they are service contracts. Like a service contract that covers repairs to your computer, a home warranty is a company's agreement to pay for fixing — and, if necessary, replacing — specified home components. By comparison, a home insurance policy covers losses if your home and its contents are damaged or lost to theft, fire or other causes.

A basic home warranty costs about \$350 to \$500 a year or more. A warranty typically covers kitchen appliances, plumbing, water heater, heating and electrical system components, sump pump, whirlpool tub, and ceiling and exhaust fans, [Angie's List says](#). "Enhanced" plans, purchased for another \$100 to \$300, provide added coverage for such things as a washer and dryer, air conditioning system, refrigerator and garage door opener. Optional coverage can be added, including for pools and septic systems. If someone gives you a home warranty, accept it — at least while it's free. But understand that, even with someone else paying the premiums, you'll likely pay a service fee — typically \$50 or \$75 — each time you need a repair, according to Angie's List.

Before buying a home warranty, learn what coverage you may already have. For example, if you're buying a newly built home, know that the home's appliances and systems typically have one-year warranties and that most states require builders to warranty the home's structural elements for up to 10 years. Also, when you buy new furnishings and appliances, use a credit card that extends the product's warranty. That can add as much as an extra year of protection.

Sellers may offer a year of coverage as an incentive to home shoppers. Real estate agents sometimes give home warranties to clients as a thank you gift for purchasing a home. Some buyers of older homes find that a warranty gives them confidence. Other homeowners decide they're better off setting aside savings to cover home repairs and replacements. One way to think about your needs is to compare the age of each covered item with its average life span. To do so, use the chart at the [National Association of Certified Home Inspectors website](#). With expensive components near or past their life expectancy, a home warranty might be a good idea. Components that have pre-existing problems, however, typically are excluded from protection.

Be sure to vet any company before purchasing a home warranty. Good resources include:

- [Better Business Bureau](#)
- **Your state attorney general's office:** Find yours from the [National Association of Attorneys General](#).
- **Your state insurance commissioner:** Locate yours with the [National Association of Insurance Commissioners map](#). Although home warranties aren't insurance policies, many states require companies offering warranties to register or be licensed by the state's department of insurance.

Pros and cons of home warranties include:

- Buyers who purchase a previously owned home inherit used appliances and home systems with wear and tear. A home warranty can help cover the cost if things break down. For example, if fire destroys your boiler, it might cost more than \$10,000 to replace. A home warranty might cover at least a portion of the cost.
- For many homeowners, there is a wide gap between what the customer expects and what the plans deliver. Before buying a home warranty, read the contract and understand exactly what it does and does not cover. For example, some contracts will not provide coverage if:
 - You didn't maintain the appliance.
 - The appliance was installed incorrectly.
 - The appliance had too much wear and tear.

If you haven't read the agreement carefully, be prepared for surprises. Don't assume:

- **Your policy will replace a faulty component.** The warranty company might insist on repairing it instead.
- **You can call your favorite service provider.** Home warranties usually require you to use a contracted servicer.
- **The warranty will cover the entire cost.** In some cases, the warranty will cover just a fraction of the repair cost.

So, find out what's covered and what the warranty provides. There may be exclusions and limitations. Perhaps the refrigerator is covered, but the ice maker is excluded. Claims might be rejected because of pre-existing problems or insufficient maintenance. Learn who will perform the repair work. Also, find out if you can cancel the policy, and whether there is a period — such as 30 days — when you can get a “free look” at the program. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | March 20, 2018 ++]

Vinegar Update 02 ► Multiple Uses | Appliance Aid and Clothing & Accessories

Aid for Appliances

1. **A cleaner brew** -- Run a cup of vinegar and a cup of water through your coffeemaker every couple of weeks, then run a full pot of water through to rinse well.
2. **Lime away** -- If your teakettle has lime or mineral deposits, boil 3 cups of vinegar and let stand overnight. Rinse well.
3. **Dishwasher cleanse** -- Once a month, run a cup of vinegar through your (empty) dishwasher.
4. **Cleaning the cleaner** -- Run 2 cups of vinegar through your washing machine once a month — full cycle, no clothing and no soap.
5. **Microwave miracle** -- Is the appliance's inside dotted with bits of food that smell? Put some vinegar and water into a mug or bowl and boil it for a while. Carefully remove the container and use a wet cloth to remove now-softened food bits.

- 6. Refresh the can opener** -- Is the electric can opener's wheel blade dark and disgusting? Put a vinegar-saturated toothbrush up against it, turn on the appliance, and let the wheel clean itself.
- 7. Scrub the fridge** -- Use a 50/50 mix of vinegar and water to wipe down the inside of your refrigerator. Don't forget the interiors of bins.

Clothing & Accessories

- 1. Fabric softener hack** -- Add a cup of vinegar to the rinse cycle to soften clothing, kill bacteria and reduce static.
- 2. Replace color bleach** -- Adding a half-cup of vinegar to the wash cycle will brighten clothing's colors.
- 3. Gum-b-gone** -- Did your child get bubble gum on his shirt? Saturate the mistake with warm vinegar.
- 4. De-salt your shoes** -- Has de-icer gotten onto shoes or boots? Rub with a 50/50 water and vinegar solution. Use an old toothbrush for suede footwear.
- 5. De-stain shirts** -- Do you have sweat tracks on your shirts? Rub vinegar on them, then launder as usual.
- 6. De-stain other stuff** -- Spot-treat stains on cotton items with vinegar just before laundering. Among other things, this will work on beer, juice, tea, coffee, soft drinks, ketchup, blood and — parents and frat boys take note — vomit. Treat and launder as quickly as possible. If it's a really gruesome stain, soak overnight in a 3-to-1 mix of vinegar and water.
- 7. Socks appeal** -- If your sports socks have turned dingy, soak them overnight in a solution of 1 cup vinegar boiled with 6 cups of water, and then launder as usual.
- 8. Remove yellowing** -- If white garments or other items have yellowed, mix 1 part vinegar to 12 parts water and soak the clothing overnight. Then, wash.
- 9. Get rid of "thrift shop smell"** -- Sometimes stuff from the secondhand store or rummage sale has an odd smell. Launder with a cup of vinegar in the wash (not rinse) cycle.
- 10. Stop the bleed** -- Soak brightly colored clothing in undiluted vinegar for about 15 minutes, then launder as usual. This should keep them from dyeing everything else.
- 11. Spot-treat suede** -- Got a grease spot on a suede garment? Use a 50/50 water and vinegar solution and an old toothbrush. If that doesn't work, try undiluted vinegar.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Donna Freedman | March 7, 2018 ++]

Have You Heard? ► Driver's License (2) | Mayonnaise

A mother is driving her little girl to her friend's house for a play date.

'Mommy,' the little girl asks, 'how old are you?'

'Honey, you are not supposed to ask a lady her age,' the mother replied. 'It's not polite.'

'OK', the little girl says, 'How much do you weigh?'

'Now really,' the mother says, 'those are personal questions and are really none of your business.'

Undaunted, the little girl asks, 'Why did you and Daddy get a divorce?'

'That's enough questions, young lady! Honestly!'

The exasperated mother walks away as the two friends begin to play.

'My Mom won't tell me anything about her,' the little girl says to her friend.

'Well,' says the friend, 'all you need to do is look at her driver's license. It's like a report card, it has everything on it.'

Later that night the little girl says to her mother, 'I know how old you are. You are 32.'

The mother is surprised and asks, 'How did you find that out?'

'I also know that you weigh 130 pounds.'

The mother is past surprised and shocked now. 'How in Heaven's name did you find that out?'

'And,' the little girl says triumphantly, 'I know why you and daddy got a divorce.'

'Oh really?' the mother asks. 'Why?'

'Because you got an F in sex.'

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MAYONNAISE

Most people don't know that back in 1912, Hellmann's mayonnaise was manufactured in England. In fact, the Titanic was carrying 12,000 jars of the condiment scheduled for delivery in Vera Cruz, Mexico, which was to be the next port of call for the great ship after its stop in New York.

This would have been the largest single shipment of mayonnaise ever delivered to Mexico. But as we know, the great ship did not make it to New York. The ship hit an iceberg and sank, and the cargo was forever lost.

The people of Mexico, who were crazy about mayonnaise, and were eagerly awaiting its delivery, were disconsolate at the loss. Their anguish was so great, that they declared a National Day of Mourning, which they still observe to this day.

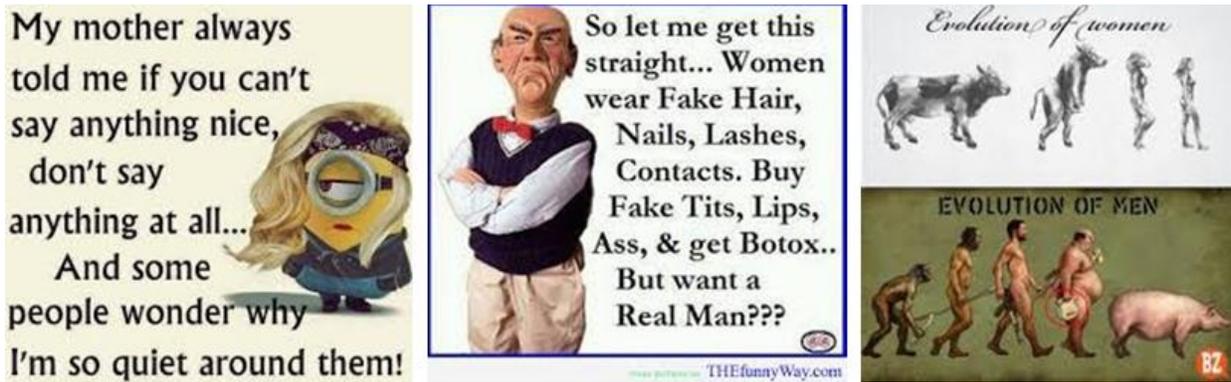
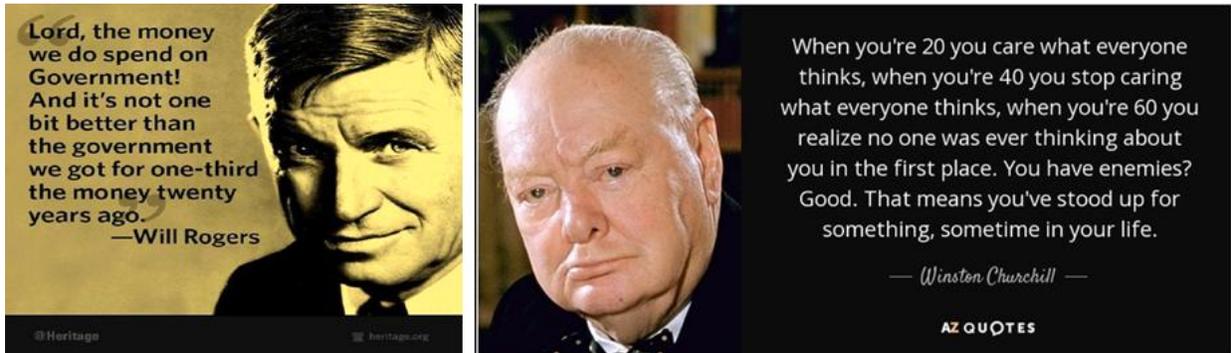
The National Day of Mourning occurs each year on May 5th and is known, of course, as **Sinko de Mayo**.

Not that the "Sinko de Mayo" really needs any serious debunking, but for completeness' sake we note that the final destination of the Titanic was in fact New York (not Vera Cruz, Mexico), the great ship was carrying no jars of mayonnaise among its cargo, and Hellman's brand mayonnaise was not sold or manufactured in England until fifty years after the Titanic's ill-fated voyage.

Where There's a Will, There's a Way ► 13



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Notes:

1. The Bulletin is provided as a website accessed document vice direct access. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 19,860 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others were deleted from the active mailing list.

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

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