

RAO

BULLETIN

1 November 2018

PDF Edition



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

*** ATTACHMENTS ***

- Attachment – Connecticut Vet State Benefits
- Attachment – Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 NOV
- Attachment – 25 Biggest U.S. Retailers 2017 Pay



Overseas Holiday Mail ► 2018 Deadlines

Military postal officials and the U.S. Postal Service have issued their suggested mailing deadlines for holiday packages and letters, for the best chance of getting them to military locations overseas in time for Christmas. To get them there in time for Hanukkah, which starts 2 DEC this year, subtract 23 days from the deadlines. The deadlines for various methods of shipping are the same for most APO/FPO/DPO (diplomatic post office) ZIP codes, with the exception of some mail going to APO/FPO/DPO Zip Code 093, which covers overseas contingency areas.

- USPS Retail Ground mail (the slowest way to go, formerly known as Standard Post): Nov. 6.
- Space Available Mail (SAM): Nov. 27.
- Parcel Airlift Mail (PAL): Dec. 4.
- First-Class and Priority Mail (letters, cards and packages): Dec. 11, except for ZIP 093, which is Dec. 4.
- Priority Mail Express Military Services: Dec. 18. Not available for ZIP 093.

You've got time to plan within your budget. Check with your local office to compare prices of the ways to send your package. U.S. Postal Service offers free priority mail flat-rate boxes, which can be used to ship items — at a flat shipping rate regardless of the weight — to overseas military addresses. The cost of shipping to APO/FPO/DPO addresses is the same as domestic shipping prices. But those who use the largest Priority Mail Flat Rate Box for mail sent to these addresses get a discount of \$1.50, paying a reduced price of \$17.40. The priority mail flat boxes can also be [ordered free online](#). Postage, labels and customs forms can be printed online using [Click-N-Ship](#). [Source: ArmyTimes | Todd South | October 10, 2018 ++]

DoD MSEP ► VA Joins Military Spouse Employment Partnership

Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) announced it is advancing employment opportunities for military spouses by joining the Department of Defense (DOD) [Military Spouse Employment Partnership \(MSEP\)](#). MSEP is a career program connecting military spouses with more than 390 affiliated employers who have committed to recruit, hire, promote and retain military spouses in portable careers. "By developing skills, knowledge, and abilities that can be used in high-demand industry sectors, military spouses — especially those who face frequent relocations — can achieve employment continuity and increased opportunities for upward career mobility," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "BVA is committed to delivering better services to Veterans and their families, and we understand that military spouses offer unique perspectives that can help us deliver on our promise to care for Veterans."

The Board's mission is to conduct hearings and decide appeals properly and in a timely manner. The MSEP is part of the DOD's broader Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) program, which seeks to reduce the 23 percent unemployment rate experienced by military spouses and 25 percent wage gap experienced by military wives. SECO provides education and career guidance to military spouses worldwide and offers free, comprehensive

resources and tools related to career exploration; education; training and licensing; employment readiness; and career connections. SECO also offers free career-coaching services six days a week. To learn more about SECO, visit [Military OneSource](#) or call 800-342-9647 to speak to a SECO career coach. For more information on the MSEP and the 350,327 active job postings for military spouses, visit <https://msejobs.militaryonesource.mil>. [Source: VA News Release | October 29, 2018 ++]

DoD Budget 2020 ► First Cut Under Trump | Limited to \$700B

The Pentagon has officially been told the national security top line for fiscal 2020 will be \$700 billion, representing the first cut to defense spending under the Trump administration. Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan told reporters at the Military Reporters & Editors Conference on 26 OCT that Office of Management and Budget head Mick Mulvaney directly told him the Department of Defense must aim for the \$700 billion figure, first floated by President Donald Trump at a Cabinet meeting last week.

Notably, Shanahan indicated this will not be a one-year blip, but rather part of a flattening of budgets, saying “when you look at the \$700 billion, it’s not just for one year drop down, [or] a phase, it’s a drop and then held constant over the” future years defense program, a five year projection included in every budget. Asked whether this impacts the department’s plan to shift roughly \$50 billion from the Overseas Contingency Operations wartime funding account into the base budget, Shanahan said that no decision has been made. Critics of OCO have argued the DoD pushes items that should be in the base budget into the wartime fund in order to circumvent the sequestration-related budget caps.

The change comes with just weeks left in the DoD’s budget planning process, where the department had been working under the assumption it would have a \$733 billion budget top line. The \$700 billion figure represents a roughly 2.2 percent cut below the FY19 level of \$716 billion, and a 4.5 percent cut below the projected \$733 billion for FY20. However, the new figure still exceeds the \$576 billion budget caps for discretionary defense spending, set under the Budget Control Act for fiscal 2020. In years past, easing those caps have required intense bipartisan negotiations, though if the new number holds, budget hawks and the Pentagon would have less to show for them than last year.

As a result of the last-minute change, Pentagon Comptroller David Norquist is now developing two parallel budget documents, one still working to the \$733 billion figure and one working to the \$700 billion figure, to illustrate for Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis the potential “trade-offs.” “Imagine we’ve been going through this very disciplined process for the whole year to build a budget that’s \$733 billion, and then last week we’re told to build a \$700 billion budget. We are not going to reverse course on all that planning, but we will build two budgets,” Shanahan said.

Under the budget change, expect modernization to take a hit. “The way I would think a about those two budgets and the approach, there are certain things that you can’t change. There are just near-term costs that we’re going to spend in the next year that are on contract, and for all intents and purposes are fixed. Then there are other investments we would make in science and technology and procurement, where we have [options] in terms of timing.” As an example, Shanahan pointed to the number of hypersonic weapon systems in development, noting some of those may be delayed as one way to save investment funding — despite the systems being a priority for the department. “It comes down to a judgment call, how fast do we modernize? And that’s probably the biggest knob that we have to turn,” he said.

Asked whether that means a trade-off between capability and capacity, Shanahan tried to thread the needle, saying, “In this budget, quantity is very important,” before pointing out part of his mission is to improve the systems already in hand. “We’re looking at taking from the assets we already have and getting more,” Shanahan said, noting as a

example that the department is “very committed to getting more F-18s flying.” However, Shanahan indicated that the development of a Space Force and its associated offices will still be part of the budget request.

The news drew a measured reaction from the fiscally conservative think tank FreedomWorks, whose president Adam Brandon said the organization was “cautiously optimistic,” since Congress would still have to approve the request. “There’s a possibility Congress continues to boost defense spending or uses off-budget slush funds like Overseas Contingency Operations to further increase the Pentagon’s budget,” Brandon said. “The greatest existential threat to the United States is still our massive debt. By being responsible now and balancing the budget we can ensure the long-term ability to defend our nation.”

But the hawkishly conservative Heritage Foundation blasted the move as, “political games or lack of leadership” and questioned Trump’s commitment to “making the military great again.” Retired Lt. Gen. Tom Spoehr, director of its Center for National Defense, said this demonstrates “the United States does not possess that same seriousness” in military investments as its enemies, “even as we enter a new era of great-power competition.” Despite defense increases to \$700 billion in FY18 and \$716 billion in FY19, Spoehr said budget caps, an excessive reliance on OCO, “and the department’s acceptance of stagnant budget growth are all preventing the military from regaining the strength it needs to defend the nation.” “Rebuilding our military will take years and require sustained commitment,”

Spoehr said in a statement. "If Pres. Trump is truly devoted to ‘making the military great again,’ he needs to lead on this issue and work with Congress to ensure we maintain that positive trajectory, and ensure our role as the world’s leading superpower for decades to come.” [Source: DefenseNews | Aaron Mehta | October 26, 2018 ++]

Iraq War Update 01 ► Unvarnished History to be Published by Xmas

An unclassified 1,300-page “unvarnished history” of the Iraq War is at the center of a heated debate among Army leaders and historians over who gets credit for what, according to the Wall Street Journal. The infighting has reportedly stalled the publication of the study, which was commissioned in 2013 by then-Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno and remains unpublished. Sources told the Journal that Odierno urged a team of researchers consisting of some of the Army’s “brightest officers” to work expeditiously so that the history could publish while the lessons of the war “were most relevant.” But it seems not everyone is convinced the general’s motives were pure.

A chief concern of those who took issue with the first draft of the history — which was completed in 2016 — is how the authors chose to portray Odierno. According to the Journal, the study “hails President George W. Bush ‘surge’ of reinforcements and the switch to a counterinsurgency strategy overseen by Gen. David Petraeus and Gen. Odierno.” Odierno also apparently circumvented the standard process for “publishing the Army’s official conflicts,” after the Army’s Center of Military said the history would take five to 10 years. Time seemed to be of the essence. “Some of the officials foresaw trouble if the study wasn’t published before Gen. Odierno retired, which he did in August 2015,” the Journal writes.

Furthermore, the study team was originally helmed by Army Col. Joel Rayburn, who served as an advisor to Petraeus in Iraq, according to the Journal. The tangled web of loyalties reportedly prompted one Army historian to draft a memo proposing major revisions to the study and raise the question of whether it was intended to “validate the surge” and thus, as the Journal puts it, “burnish Gen. Odierno’s and Gen. Petraeus’s legacy.” The 2007 surge coincided with a dramatic decline in the sectarian violence that had surged across Iraq the previous year, leading many to conclude that the extra troops and the counterinsurgency strategy Petraeus employed had succeeded in winning a seemingly un-winnable war. That narrative lost some of its luster in the ensuing years as the results proved temporary. But the history commissioned by Odierno has plenty of champions while Rayburn “defended the study’s portrayal of the ‘surge’ as a success,” according to the Journal.

Meanwhile, retired Gen. Dan Allyn, who served as Army vice chief of staff when the history was completed in 2016, told the Journal that the brass sought to distance itself from the study in part because “senior leaders who were in position when these things happened, and they were concerned on how they were portrayed.” Among the many mistakes identified in the study, according to the Journal, are a chronic shortage of boots on the ground, heavily lopsided contributions by the various coalition partners, the consolidating of troops on large forward operating bases from 2004 to the troop surge, and the failure to prevent Iran and Syria from bolstering their favored militant groups in Iraq.

Despite all the drama, however, the Army finally came around. Last week, the current Army chief of staff, Gen. Mark Milley, told the Journal that he had discarded plans to tweak the study and said it will be released in its original form — and with his stamp of approval — hopefully by Christmas. [Source: Task & Purpose | Adam Linehan | October 22, 2018 ++]

DoD GPS USE Policy ► Deployed Servicemember Apps Restricted

Deployed service members will no longer be allowed to use fitness tracking apps or other wearable technology such as Fitbit and iWatches that rely on geolocation, according to a new Pentagon policy. "The rapidly evolving market of devices, applications, and services with geolocation capabilities presents a significant risk to the Department of Defense (DoD) personnel on and off duty, and to our military operations globally," according to an 3 AUG memo written by the Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan.

The discovery that geolocation capabilities can expose locations of bases and important facilities based on where the geo-tracking stops prompted the policy change. Data firm Strava's January release of a heat map revealed the locations and pathways of military installations around the globe due to user data on fitness apps such as Polar Flow. The global map reflected more than 1 billion paths that the Strava app tracked, but patterns and locations of U.S. service members could be garnered from zooming in on sensitive or secured areas.

The new policy does not require a total ban and only affects service members at operational bases or locations. Personnel working at the Pentagon will still be allowed to use the devices. Additionally, it doesn't prohibit service members from having the devices with them when they deploy, if the geolocation services are disabled. With that said, each on-site commander will have final say as to what gadgets they will allow. "These geolocation capabilities can expose personal information, locations, routines, and numbers of DoD personnel," Shanahan wrote, "and potentially create unintended security consequences and increased risk to the joint force and mission." In some cases, the geolocation services will be allowed to be turned on after a security review, according to the new policy. [Source: Together We Served Dispatch | OCT 2018 ++]

INF Russian Treaty ► Post-INF landscape

Unreleased Pentagon documents and Congressional demands for information reveal that Washington has long planned for the day when the **Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty** (INF) with Russia would be ripped up. The report by the Joint Staff and Strategic Command, exclusively obtained by Breaking Defense, make clear that as far back as 2013 — a year before the Obama administration first publicly complained about Russian violations of the treaty — the Defense Department was considering which technologies the US could develop should Washington walk away from the INF.

The report points to four ways the US could quickly develop and field missiles with a range between 300 and 3,400 miles, banned under the 30 year-old treaty. Specifically, it says that there could be:

- Modifications to existing short range or tactical weapon systems to extend range.
- Forward-based, ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs)
- Forward-based, ground-launched intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs)
- Forward-based, ground-launched intermediate-range missiles with trajectory shaping vehicles (TSVs).

[Refer to <https://breakingdefense.com/2018/10/what-weapons-will-the-us-build-after-the-inf> for Breaking Defense's full analysis of these possible new weapons]

“Without INF prohibitions,” the report said, the United States could develop ground-launched systems “capable of using any trajectory (ballistic, shaped, or non-ballistic). This would result in systems with the required timeliness, effects on target, and survivability needed to close the existing capability gap.” The restrictions in the treaty, written in 1987, don’t account for new advances in hypersonic boost-glide missiles. But “without INF, the key benefit would be the ability to field a ground-launched ballistic system, such as an IRBM with a TSV,” the report said. “This type of system could deliver the same or better capability as a boost-glide vehicle, with potentially less technological risk and cost.”

For months, Pentagon officials have publicly signaled they were considering a post-INF landscape. David Trachtenberg, deputy undersecretary of Defense for policy, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last month that, given Russia’s years-long violations, the Trump administration is “focused on preparing the United States for a world without the INF Treaty.” U.S. lawmakers have long taken an interest. The Hill is still waiting for an overdue report from the Pentagon mandated in the 2018 defense authorization bill that would lay out options for developing systems that would fill the capabilities gaps that have grown between the US and Russia and China. In April, the Pentagon’s chief weapons buyer Ellen Lord sent a letter to the heads of the defense committees asking for more time, saying the department was in the “early stages” of assessing cost, requirements and what systems might be best suited to fit the bill. It was unclear, she explained, what “existing missile systems could be modified for such a role.”

Pentagon spokesperson Lt. Col. Michelle Baldanza confirmed to correspondent Paul McLeary on 22 OCT that the department continues to work on “a review of U.S. options for conventional, ground-launched, intermediate-range missile systems, which would enable the United States to defend ourselves and our allies, should Russia fail to return to compliance.” It is not clear if the report was ever delivered to lawmakers. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and U.S. Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison also slammed Russian violations of the pact during an alliance meeting in Brussels last month, with Hutchison warning the US might be forced to “take out a missile” that could hit NATO territory. Following an uproar over her comments, Hutchison later clarified in a Tweet, “I was not talking about preemptively striking Russia,” but Moscow “needs to return to INF Treaty compliance or we will need to match its capabilities to protect US & NATO interests.”

But the focus on Russia is only part of the equation. China’s missile stockpiles have been a giant flashing red light to defense officials for years, and they estimate at least 90 percent of Beijing’s arsenal occupies the treaty’s 300 to 3,400 mile restriction. China, of course, is not a party to the INF Treaty, something which concerns both Washington and Moscow. The Chinese ground-based missile capabilities means the United States has to “pay a power projection tax” in Asia to launch conventional cruise missiles from expensive aircraft, ships and submarines, rather than fire them from ashore from mobile ground-launchers, said Eric Sayers, senior adjunct fellow at the Center for a New American Security and former advisor to the commander of Pacific Command. “This ties limited air and maritime forces down and drags them away from other critical missions like anti-submarine and anti-air warfare.”

The Trump Administration has classified both Russia and China as “revisionist powers” that pose the most significant strategic threat to the United States today. The Trump administration is in the early stages of what promises to be a bruising trade war with China that touches on everything from cars to agricultural products. The Pentagon and White House also recently released an exhaustive Defense Industrial Base report that raises red flags

over Chinese predatory trade practices and its stranglehold over several rare earths markets critical of the US defense industry. On 22 OCT two US warships transited the Taiwan Strait in a clear signal to China that the United States would maintain its presence in the region, despite the rapidly growing — and modernizing — Chinese military. “USS Curtis Wilbur and USS Antietam conducted a routine Taiwan Strait Transit on October 22, in accordance with international law,” Cmdr. Nate Christensen, a spokesman for US Pacific Fleet, told CNN.

Russian violations of the INF treaty have effectively killed the document critics argue, as Russia continues to deny the charges while seeking to include armed US drones as part of the agreement, which the US rejects. Despite those tensions, there is a sense in Washington that the Trump administration scored an own goal in its handling of the announcement. It apparently didn’t alert allies about the final decision. “The overwhelming view of people, not only in the United States and Russia but around the world, will be that it was the United States that killed this treaty,” said Richard Burt, former U.S. chief negotiator of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, on a conference call with reporters. “The handling of this decision is just simply god awful.”

Thomas Countryman, former assistant secretary of State for international security and nonproliferation, told Breaking Defense’s correspondent the failure to even attempt to pull China and Russia into a larger deal was, “absolutely a missed opportunity” and has only handed Moscow “the double-victory it sought: keeping a new system that adds to its military strength, while being able to shame/blame the US for accelerating an arms race.” As far as China is concerned, “It would be stabilizing for global security if a global INF treaty could be achieved. But US withdrawal will simply make even harder what would have been, in any case, an extremely difficult negotiation with China and others.” [Source: Breaking Defense | Paul McLeary | October 22, 2018 ++]

DoD/VA Seamless Transition Update 37 ► Cerner’s EHR Will Be Standard

The U.S. Secretaries of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Defense (DOD) have signaled their commitment to achieving interoperability between the two agencies by implementing a single, seamlessly integrated electronic health record (EHR), according to a joint statement published last week. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie and Defense Secretary James N. Mattis signed a joint statement 26 SEP pledging that their two departments will “align their plans, strategies and structures as they roll out a EHR system that will allow VA and DoD to share patient data seamlessly,” according to a press release about the joint statement. “The Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs are jointly committed to implementing a single, seamlessly integrated electronic health record (EHR) that will accurately and efficiently share health data between our two agencies and ensure health record interoperability with our networks of supporting community healthcare providers,” the joint statement from Wilkie and Mattis states. “It remains a shared vision and mission to provide users with the best possible patient-centered EHR solution and related platforms in support of the lifetime care of our Service members, Veterans, and their families.”

The VA and the DoD are both undertaking massive projects to modernize their EHR systems and both departments plan to standardize on Cerner’s EHR. The hope is that this will provide a more complete longitudinal health record and make the transition from DoD to VA more seamless for active duty, retired personnel and their dependents. Once completed, the project would cover about 18 million people in both the DoD and VA systems. The VA signed its \$10 billion contract with Cerner 17 MAY to replace VA’s 40-year-old legacy health information system—the Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA)—over the next 10 years with the new Cerner system, which is in the pilot phase at DoD. DoD began rolling out its EHR modernization project, called Military Health System (MHS) Genesis, in January 2017 at Fairchild Air Force Base and three other pilot sites in Washington State. The DoD EHR overhaul contract, which was awarded in 2015 to Cerner, Leidos and others, is currently valued at \$4.3 billion. The new EHR system is expected to be deployed at every military medical facility in phases over the next five years.

“There is no precedent for this level of interoperability in healthcare, but one can hope the DoD-VA effort will drive the evolution of meaningful interoperability forward and benefit everyone,” says Dave Levin, M.D., chief medical officer at Sansoro Health and former chief medical information officer (CMIO) for Cleveland Clinic. Levin has been observing the VA-DoD interoperability efforts and has written several blogs pointing out the critical challenges facing the two agencies in these efforts. “There is a long-standing need for the VA and the DoD to be on the same information database for service members and veterans. Cerner is a good product. I am hopeful that Cerner’s commitment to the FHIR (Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources) standard and to process interoperability standards will be revealed to the general community and implemented wholeheartedly, because at the end of the day, it’s not what’s best for VA and DoD, it’s what’s best for veterans and service members as they consume care along their own personal pathways,” says Shane McNamee, M.D., who previously served as the clinical lead for the VA’s Enterprise Health Management Platform (eHMP) effort and also the VHA business lead for the development and deployment of the VA’s Joint Legacy Viewer. He is now the chief medical officer of Cleveland-based software company mdlogix.

In the press release, Wilkie said the joint statement represents “tangible evidence” of VA and DoD’s commitment. “The new EHR system will be interoperable with DoD, while also improving VA’s ability to collaborate and share information with community care providers. This will ease the burden on service members as they transition from military careers and will be supported by multiple medical providers throughout their lives.” Wilkie also said the new EHR system will give health care providers a full picture of patient medical history and will help to identify Veterans proactively who are at higher risk for issues, such as opioid addiction and suicide, so health care providers can intervene earlier and save lives. Specifically, the joint statement pledges that VA and DoD will develop an accountability mechanism to coordinate decision-making and oversight. “The importance, magnitude, and overall financial investment of our EHR modernization efforts demand alignment of plans, strategies and structure across the two departments,” the two agency leaders stated in the joint statement. “To this end, DoD and VA will institute an optimal organizational design that prioritizes accountability and effectiveness, while continuing to advance unity, synergy and efficiencies between our two departments.”

VA and DoD will construct a plan of execution that includes a new organizational structure that optimally coordinates clinical and business workflows, operations, data management and technology solutions and a more detailed implementation timeline. “We are committed to partnering with the VA to support the lifetime care of our service members, Veterans and their families,” Mattis said in the press release. “This modern electronic health record will ensure those who serve our nation have quality health care as they transition from service member to Veteran.”

An Uphill Battle for Interoperability

Interoperability between the VA and DoD has been a long-standing goal for both agencies, and the past two decades has seen the agencies making strides to achieve interoperability between two separate health IT systems. However, progress on this front has been slowed by both operational and technical challenges. Back in April 2016, the DoD and VA signed off on achieving one level of interoperability, after the VA implemented its Joint Legacy Viewer (JLV) the previous fall. The JLV is a web-based integrated system that combines electronic health records from both the DoD and the VA, which enables clinicians from both agencies to access health records. However, as reported by Healthcare Informatics, during a congressional hearing in July 2016, a Government Accountability Office (GAO) official testified that in 2011, DoD and VA announced they would develop one integrated system to replace separate systems, and sidestep many of their previous challenges to achieving interoperability. “However, after two years and at a cost of \$560 million, the departments abandoned that plan, saying a separate system with interoperability between them could be achieved faster and at less overall cost,” Valerie Melvin, director of information management and technology resources issues at the GAO, testified at the time.

Melvin said that the VA has been working with the DoD for the past two decades to advance EHR interoperability between the two systems, however, “while the department has made progress, significant IT challenges contributed” to the GAO designating VA as “high risk.” And, Melvin summarized the GAO’s concerns about the VA’s ongoing

modernization efforts. “With regard to EHR interoperability, we have consistently pointed to the troubled path toward achieving this capability. Since 1998, VA has undertaken a patchwork of initiatives with DoD. These efforts have yielded increasing amounts of standardized health data and made an integrated view of data available to clinicians. Nevertheless, a modernized VA EHR that is fully interoperable with DoD system is still years away,” Melvin said during that hearing two years ago.

Fast forward to June 2017 when then-VA Secretary David Shulkin announced that the department plans to replace VistA by adopting the same EHR platform as DoD. Six months later, Shulkin then said that the contracting process was halted due to concerns about interoperability. According to reports, VA leaders’ concerns centered on whether the Cerner EHR would be fully interoperable with private-sector providers who play a key role in the military health system. VA leaders finally signed the Cerner contract this past May. The Pentagon also has hit some road bumps with its EHR rollout. In January 2018, DoD announced the project would be suspended for eight weeks with the goal to assess the “successes and failures” of the sites where the rollouts had already been deployed. This spring, a Politico report detailed that the first stage of implementations “has been riddled with problems so severe they could have led to patient deaths.” Indeed, some clinicians at one of four pilot centers, Naval Station Bremerton, quit because they were terrified they might hurt patients, or even kill them, the report attested. Media reports this past summer indicated that the Cerner platform was up and running at all four initial DoD pilot sites, with federal officials saying the agency is still troubleshooting the platform at the initial facilities, but the overall adoption’s shown “measurable success.” This month, media reports indicated that DoD is moving onto a second set of site locations for its Cerner EHR rollouts, with three bases in California and one in Idaho.

According to the VA press release issued last week, collaborating with DoD will ensure that VA “understands the challenges encountered as DoD deploys its EHR system called MHS GENESIS; adapts an approach by applying lessons learned to anticipate and mitigate known issues; assesses prospective efficiencies to help deploy faster; and delivers an EHR that is fully interoperable.” While both Levin and McNamee praise the VA-DoD interoperability efforts, they note the substantial challenges the effort faces. In a January blog post, Levin wrote at the heart of this VA-DoD interoperability challenge are two fundamental issues: “an anemic definition of interoperability and the inevitable short comings of a ‘one platform’ strategy.” In response to the joint statement issued last week, Levin provided his observations via email: “DoD and VA will have separate instances of the Cerner EMR. They will not be on the same EMR with a single, shared record but rather on distinct and separate implementations of the same brand of EMR.

The choice of language in the announcement is interesting: they are saying they will create a single EHR [author’s emphasis] through interoperability between these separate EMRs and with the EMRs in the civilian health system, which is essential since a lot care for active duty, Veterans, and dependents is rendered outside the military system. This will depend greatly on the extent and depth of interoperability between the different EMRs.” Levin continued, “My second observation relates to interoperability between the EMRs, or EHR system, and the many other apps and data services within military health IT. For example, there is an emerging class of apps sometimes referred to as ‘wounded warrior’ apps. These are specially designed for this population. They will need to be effectively integrated into this new IT ecosystem or their value will be greatly diminished, if not lost.”

McNamee points out there are different layers of interoperability—data interoperability, or ensuring data flows back and forth (the Joint Legacy Viewer achieved this level of interoperability, he says), semantic interoperability, in which meaningful information is associated with the data, and then standards-based process interoperability. The lack of standards-based process interoperability continues to be a roadblock for all healthcare providers, and this issue has yet to be solved by any one specific EHR vendor, many industry thought leaders note. “The challenges that VA and DoD face are similar to what the rest of healthcare faces in this country,” McNamee says. “There’s more than 10 million patients between these two organizations, meditated across thousands of different sites and the inability to transfer information and process for the VA and the DoD is similar as the rest of the country.” He continues, “If you talk to any informatics or health IT professional about the most challenging thing that they’ve ever had to do in their career it’s to install an EHR into their hospital; it’s incredibly disruptive and, if not done well, it

can negatively impact patient care, reimbursement and morale. VA and DoD are attempting to do this across thousands of healthcare sites, with millions of patients, and hundreds of thousands of healthcare providers, in one project, that's a daunting task, to do that well and do that seamlessly."

[Source: Health Informatics | Heather Landi | October 15, 2018 ++]

Military Base Access Update 02 ► Proposal to Use for U.S. Fuel Exports to Asia

The Trump administration is considering using West Coast military installations or other federal properties to open the way for more U.S. fossil fuel exports to Asia in the name of national security and despite opposition from coastal states. The proposal was described to The Associated Press by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and two Republican lawmakers. "I respect the state of Washington and Oregon and California," Zinke said in an interview with AP. "But also, it's in our interest for national security and our allies to make sure that they have access to affordable energy commodities." Accomplishing that, Zinke said, may require the use of "some of our naval facilities, some of our federal facilities on the West Coast." He only identified one prospect, a mostly abandoned Alaska military base.

The idea generated a quick backlash 15 OCT from some Democrats and environmentalists. It's tantamount to an end-run around West Coast officials who have rejected private-sector efforts to build new coal ports in their states. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat, called the proposal a "harebrained idea," and said President Donald Trump should instead consider that climate change represents a national security threat. Boosting coal and gas exports would advance the administration's agenda to establish U.S. "energy dominance" on the world stage. The potential use of government properties for exports underscores a willingness to intervene in markets to make that happen. The administration in recent months has cited national security as justification for keeping domestic coal-burning power plants online to prevent disruptions of electricity supplies. Zinke said the administration was interested in partnering with private entities in the use of federal facilities designated to help handle exports and cautioned that the idea is still in its early stages. He specified only one site, for natural gas: the former Adak Naval Air Facility in Alaska's Aleutian Islands, which he suggested could receive fuel by barge from the North Slope. The base closed in 1997 and has been largely abandoned. Roughly 300 people live in the town of Adak, the westernmost community in the U.S. Zinke did not name government properties that could serve as potential coal ports or which states they are in.

- Inslee responded to the proposal in a statement that Washington state officials had been left in the dark on any planning by the Trump administration.
- Another Democrat, Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden said the proposal shows the Trump administration was "disregarding the realities around climate change."
- Republican U.S. Sen. Steve Daines of Montana said Zinke was looking at all possibilities for export terminals, including West Coast military installations. Six proposed coal ports in Washington and Oregon have been rejected or shelved due to worries about air and water pollution and rail safety, combined with changing market conditions. "As a Montanan, he's looking for ways here to help these Rocky Mountain states like Montana and Wyoming get access to Asian markets," Daines said.
- Jan Hasselman, an attorney for opponents of coal ports in Washington state, said using federal property for exports would get around some local land use restrictions, but not the need for state and federal clean water permits.

Asian exports have been held up as a lifeline for struggling U.S. coal miners as demand from the domestic power sector has plummeted and utilities switch to cheaper, cleaner fuels. The West Coast offers the most economical route because of its relative proximity to the largest coal-producing region in the U.S.: the Powder River Basin, which straddles the Montana-Wyoming border. Any export site needs access to deep waters to accommodate large ships and enough land to store fuel awaiting shipment. Few such locations can be found on the West Coast, said Joe Aldina, a coal industry analyst with S&P Global Platts Analytics. U.S. coal exports lately have been growing but are expected

to fall over the long-term, particularly in Europe. Aldina expressed skepticism that government intervention could make much difference. "Like everything else the Trump administration has tried to do, it's a long shot whether some of these things will work, and it's questionable whether they will really help the market," he said.

A \$680 million project in Longview, Washington, was denied a key permit last year by state regulators who said it would increase greenhouse gas emissions and cause "significant and unavoidable harm to the environment." That brought a backlash from elected officials in coal-producing states. They argue the rejection of the Longview port, sponsored by Utah-based Lighthouse Resources, violated the commerce clause in the Constitution that says only Congress has the power to regulate international and interstate trade. Montana, Wyoming and four other states joined Lighthouse Resources in a lawsuit challenging the rejection of the company's Millennium Bulk Terminals port, which could handle up to 48.5 million tons (44 million metric tons) of coal a year. Rep. Liz Cheney, a Wyoming Republican, said she's spoken with Zinke and U.S. Energy Secretary Rick Perry about how to break through the bottleneck of port capacity that now exists. "That might be, for example, retired military facilities or other places where we would be able to use those for exports — frankly, to get around some of the unreasonable obstacles that have been thrown up," Cheney said.

Prior to joining Trump's cabinet, Zinke was a Montana congressman and Perry was governor of Texas. Both states are among the top U.S. coal producers. Coal exports to Asia more than doubled in 2017, according to the Energy Information Administration. The rise continued in the first half of 2018 with almost 23 million tons (21 million metric tons) of U.S. coal exported to Asian nations through June. South Korea, Japan and China were among the biggest recipients. [Source: Associated Press | Matthew Brown | October 15, 2018 ++]

Military Base Access Update 03 ► American Bases in Japan

The U.S. military has ordered extra scrutiny for South Koreans who want to visit friends or attend events on American bases in Japan. U.S. Forces Japan recently added the longtime American ally to a list of nations whose citizens must undergo additional screening before they can be escorted onto installations. An updated document that included South Korea was approved in May, but officials had only recently started enforcing it. A copy of the list posted near the entrance to the home of USFJ in western Tokyo featured South Korea alongside about 50 other nations, including North Korea, China, Russia, Iran and Afghanistan. "No personnel will escort a designated third country national onto Yokota Air Base," said a sign posted next to the list, which also includes France. "It is the responsibility of the escort sponsor to verify the individual is not from one of the ... designated countries."

People from designated third countries aren't authorized to enter U.S. bases in Japan without prior coordination of supporting agencies and approval by the installation commander, said Air Force Maj. Genieve White, a USFJ spokeswoman. Each request is looked at on a case-by-case basis and requires written and detailed information of potential guests to adequately coordinate the request, she said, referring to a past Air Force instruction. "We are not banning anyone," White added. "This instruction does not apply to immediate family members of a sponsor or a sponsor's spouse that are citizens of a designated third country." Screening requirements vary depending on the individual and the purpose of their visit, White said. She recommended that sponsors contact security forces 30 days ahead of a planned visit by someone from one of the designated countries. Japanese citizens carrying a passport can be escorted onto U.S. bases in South Korea without additional checks, according to officials at Osan Air Base, home of the 51st Fighter Wing south of Seoul.

It had been common for South Koreans in Japan to visit friends and relatives married to U.S. servicemembers who live in on-base housing. Sunha Park, a South Korean housewife living near Yokota, said she was turned away after trying to visit friends at the base in early October. "I was so surprised," she said. "A month ago, I could be on base right after just taking a photo." Park said she and her friends have been regular guests in American homes and at

Yokota's chapel. "I don't feel good," she said of the change. "It seems that we're treated like criminals. Such an action makes me think 'Have I done something wrong? Has our country's people done something wrong?'"

USFJ did not provide a reason for the new checks on South Koreans. Whatever the reason the U.S. military has now removed South Korea from a list of nations whose citizens must undergo extra scrutiny before they can visit friends or attend events on American bases in Japan. The U-turn, announced 17 OCT at the home of U.S. Forces Japan in western Tokyo, follows complaints that South Koreans had been turned away at Yokota and other installations in Japan. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Seth Robson, Leon Cook & Yoo Kyong Chang | October 15 & 18, 2018| ++]

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

Alpha Research & Technology Inc. -- A U.S. Air Force subcontractor has agreed to pay \$1 million to settle government allegations that it padded its bills. The U.S. attorney's office announced the settlement 15 OCT with Alpha Research & Technology Inc. The government alleged that between 2006 and 2011, the Sacramento-area company submitted inflated subcontracting proposals to Boeing, Raytheon and other firms for Department of Defense work. The government alleged that the proposals included millions of dollars in personal expenses for the company's owners, Donne and DeAnn Smith, including the costs of a lavish home and luxury cars. In making the settlement, Alpha doesn't acknowledge any wrongdoing. [Source: The Associated Press | October 16, 2018 ++]

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Operation Surprise Party -- The young service member has never been the quintessence of fiscal responsibility. Exorbitant purchases or financial commitments on an E-1 or E-2 salary often leaves bank accounts, much like the areas of the brain coordinating these decisions, shockingly vacant. But every so often, this eccentric group of money-blowing babes in the woods manages to surprise even itself by tunneling even farther into the darkest depths of the financial pit of misery. That was the case in mid-OCT when Army officials and South Carolina law enforcement revealed that young soldiers have allegedly been getting duped into funneling cash to prison inmates following text message exchanges featuring nude photos of women the soldiers believed they were conversing with, according to a U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command warrant obtained by the BBC.

Remember, if it seems too good to be true, then it probably is. The Army issued guidance for soldiers on how to avoid such scams as recently as April, but with the memo evidently falling on deaf ears, the service launched an investigation into the matter, known as "Operation Surprise Party." "Surprise" discovered the alleged "sextortion" scheme began in 2015, with prisoners posing on dating applications — primarily one called PlentyofFish — as women in the same age bracket as the targeted soldier. "Once making contact on the dating application, the conversations are transferred to phone-to-phone text messaging," the warrant says. "After several hours to several days of texting, the subject will either send unsolicited nude images of a female to the victim and/or agree to trade sexually explicit images with the victim."

But shortly after swapping nude photos with Andy Dufresne, "Red" and "the sisters," the unsuspecting soldier would allegedly receive a text from another phone number belonging to a completely different prisoner who would then pose as the fictional girl's father. "The 'father' then notifies the victim that the female is under the age of 18," the warrant states. "The father will typically state that he will leave law enforcement out of the equation if the victim agrees to pay for various things like cell phone replacement, counseling, hospital treatments, etc." Targeted service members often cave in to the pressure, the report said, forking over the cash out of fear of repercussions from their command as a panic sets in that they've unknowingly been soliciting child pornography.

Once the soldiers wire the cash, a runner, who authorities have since identified as the operation's "money mule," receives the transfer and deposits the funds into a JPay account, a payment processing system used by inmates. JPay

also oversees distribution of South Carolina’s costly prison tablet services, the report said, so the inmates can directly apply the “sextorted” money to funding the online scheme from inside the prison’s walls. The South Carolina Department of Corrections has petitioned to end inmates' ability to use mobile communication devices inside prisons, BBC reported, a policy change that gained momentum in April after prisoners used contraband cell phones to coordinate a riot that left seven inmates dead. “Operation Surprise Party” has not yet resulted in the filing of any criminal charges, the report said. [Source: ArmyTimes | J.D. Simkins | October 18, 2018 ++]

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Fat Leonard -- A former Navy commander has been sentenced to more than two years in prison after pleading guilty to accepting lavish dinners, drinks and the services of prostitutes in exchange for providing ship schedules to a Malaysian defense contractor at the center of one of the military’s worst corruption scandals. A federal judge in San Diego on Friday also ordered Troy Amundson, 51, of Ramsey, Minnesota, to pay a \$10,000 fine. His lawyers argued that Amundson was not aware the ship schedules were classified, though their client acknowledged that from 2012 to 2013, he took the bribes from Leonard Glenn Francis, nicknamed “Fat Leonard.” Authorities say Francis' company used the information to beat competitors and inflate bills sent to the Navy for services in Asian ports. Twenty-one people have pleaded guilty so far. [Source: The Associated Press | October 20, 2018 ++]

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New Jersey -- A Pennsylvania man has admitted taking bribes in a scheme involving construction projects at two New Jersey military bases. **Kevin Leondi** pleaded guilty 22 OCT to two conspiracy counts. The 57-year-old Stroudsburg man now faces up to 10 years in prison when he's sentenced 30 JAN. Federal prosecutors say Leondi solicited and accepted more than \$150,000 in bribes in the form of cash, the sale of unneeded equipment and work performed at his personal property. Leondi was employed by the Army as a contract specialist and served as liaison with contractors seeking work at Picatinny Arsenal and Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey. Picatinny is a center for research and development of weapons systems and ammunition. Joint Base McGuire includes the installations formerly known separately as McGuire Air Force Base, Fort Dix and Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Station. [Source: The Associated Press | October 23, 2018 ++]

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MCRD Parris Island -- The Marine Corps is known for rules limiting recruits from growing facial hair during boot camp. At its Parris Island training facility in South Carolina, most aspiring Marines are cleanly shaven and get a buzz cut soon after showing up. It’s one reason why a store there carries so many razor blades. A Marine company first sergeant is facing an Article 32 investigative hearing for his alleged involvement in the theft of more than \$1.5 million worth of merchandise taken from a warehouse at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island in South Carolina. First Sgt. **Lascelles Chambers** is under investigation in connection to the federal indictment of three civilian Defense Department employees accused of stealing high-end Gillette razors and razor blades from Parris Island and selling them across state lines.



The case was first reported by the Post and Courier in South Carolina. But the plan's unraveling appeared to have stemmed from use of the Postal Service. In May, boxes stuffed with 720 packs of Gillette Fusion razor blades and razors were sent to New York. The blades sell on Amazon.com for nearly \$25 per pack of eight; the razor itself is about \$10. But the next day, Chambers called the Postal Service and inquired about the status of the parcels. Federal investigators later examined his finances. They found wire transfers from his Navy Federal Credit Union account to one of the employees.

Chambers, who is referred to by his initials in the 10 OCT indictment, allegedly asked Sarah Brutus, a former Parris Island Recruit Store employee, to steal boxes of the razors. Brutus then allegedly introduced the Marine to Orlando Byson and Tommie Harrison Jr., who worked at the store's warehouse. Harrison and Byson stole boxes of razors from their warehouse weekly, evading and disabling security cameras, according to the indictment. They then delivered the stolen goods to Chambers, the document states. Chambers, who's now with the Florida-based 4th Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company, was previously assigned to Headquarters and Service Battalion at Parris Island, where he served as the service company first sergeant from August 2016 to March 2018.

Maj. Roger Hollenbeck, a spokesman for Marine Corps Forces Reserve, declined to confirm specifics about Chambers' case, citing the service's ongoing investigation. Chambers will face an Article 32 hearing, which has not yet been scheduled, he said. "This hearing will determine the Marine Corps' next course of action," Hollenbeck said. While Chambers was at Parris Island, the boxes of razors were allegedly delivered to him in person. Once he moved to his new unit, he directed Harrison to send the razors across state lines by mail, the indictment states. Once Chambers received the razors, he sold the merchandise to people in other states including New York, according to the indictment. The first sergeant is then alleged to have shared some of the money he made with Brutus, Harrison and Byson by sending them wire transfers from his Navy Federal Credit Union account. Five of those wire transfers between Feb. 6 and June 18, which are detailed in the indictment, totaled \$4,970.

Brutus, Harrison and Byson are scheduled to be arraigned at the U.S. District Court in Charleston on 30 OCT, the Post and Courier reported. Since they were indicted with conspiracy to defraud the U.S., they could face up to five years in prison, according to the paper. Byson and Harrison, the two warehouse employees, also face a felony count of theft of government property, the paper added, which could bring the sentence up to 10 years. If convicted of the conspiracy, the defendants will likely be ordered to pay back the retail value of everything they took. Chambers joined the Marine Corps in June 1998. The inspector-instructor has served as a recruiter, substance-abuse control specialist and administrative clerk, according to his personnel records. In 2012, he was named the staff noncommissioned officer in charge for Recruiting Station San Diego. His awards include four Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medals, six Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals and six Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal. Chambers has served in Japan and Bahrain. [Source: Military.com | Gina Harkins | October 25, 2018 ++]

Agent Orange Forgotten Victims Update 01 ► U.S. Prepares for Biggest-Ever Cleanup

U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis on 17 OCT visited a former American air base in southern Vietnam that will soon become the biggest-ever U.S. cleanup site for contamination left by the defoliant Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. Standing near a skull-and-crossbones warning sign meant to keep people away from toxic soil, Mattis was briefed by Vietnamese officials about the massive contamination area. In a possible sign of the sensitivity surrounding Agent Orange in Vietnam, where millions of people are still suffering its effects, reporters were not allowed to attend the outdoor briefing for Mattis at Bien Hoa Air Base. "I came to show the support of the Defense Department for this project and demonstrate that the United States makes good on its promises," Mattis told his Vietnamese

counterpart at a closed-door meeting later in nearby Ho Chi Minh City. Cleanup is expected to start getting under way early next year.

U.S. troops dropped Agent Orange during the Vietnam War to clear thick jungle. But it contributed to severe health problems that, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, can include Parkinson's disease, prostate cancer and Chronic B-cell Leukemia. Of the 4.8 million Vietnamese who were exposed to Agent Orange, some three million are still dealing with its effects, including children born with severe disabilities or other health issues years after their parents were exposed, according to the Hanoi-based Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange.

More than four decades after the Vietnam War ended in 1975, ties between the United States and Vietnam are less seen through the prism of the conflict and more through shared concerns over China. Vietnam has emerged as the most vocal opponent of China's territorial claims in the South China Sea and has been buying U.S. military hardware, including an armed, Hamilton-class Coast Guard cutter. The United States, in turn, accuses China of militarizing the strategic waterway, through which more than \$3 trillion in cargo passes every year, and sees Vietnam as a crucial ally in drawing regional opposition to Beijing's behavior.

But U.S. officials including Mattis - who is on his second trip to Vietnam just this year - hope that addressing America's wartime legacies like Agent Orange can become a vehicle for further strengthening ties. When a U.S. aircraft carrier visited Vietnam in March, for example, one of the places U.S. sailors visited was a Vietnamese shelter for people suffering from the effects of Agent Orange. The United States just completed a five-year, \$110 million program that cleaned soil contaminated by Agent Orange at Danang International Airport, which was one of the main air bases used for storing and spraying the herbicide between 1961 and 1971. But officials from the U.S. Agency for International Development, which is overseeing the project, said the Bien Hoa site will be four times larger than Danang, a massive undertaking that is expected to cost \$390 million, according to a fact sheet distributed to reporters. According to the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS), one soil sample from Bien Hoa had a "toxic equivalency," or TEQ, of more than 1,000 times over the international limit.

A 2011 study conducted by a private consulting firm determined that contaminated soil had spread from hot spots at the base into nearby lakes, ponds, creeks, and drainage ditches, increasing the amount of soil and sediment that will require treatment. "The impacts on the community is very difficult to measure. Dioxin has impacts (on health) at very low concentrations and they're not real consistent," one of the U.S. AID officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity. [Source: Reuters | Phil Stewart | October 17, 2018 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials ► Reported 16 thru 31 OCT 2018 | 21

"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

- **Army Cpl. James I. Jubb**, 21, of Eastport, Md., whose remains were previously identified, was buried Oct. 17 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. 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. [Read about Jubb.](#)
- **Army Lt. Col. Robert G. Nopp**, 31, of Salem, Ore., whose remains were previously identified, was buried Oct. 18 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Nopp was an OV-1C pilot assigned to the 131st Aviation Company. On July 13, 1966, Nopp flew a night surveillance mission from Phu Bai Airfield over Attapu Province, Laos. Flying through heavy thunderstorms, radar and radio contact were lost with the aircraft, which was not uncommon due to the mountainous terrain in that part of Laos. When the aircraft did not return as scheduled, search efforts were initiated, but no crash site was found. [Read about Nopp.](#)
- **Army Master Sgt. Charles H. McDaniel**, 32, of Vernon, Ind., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Oct. 27 in Greenwood, Ind. McDaniel was a medic with the 8th Cavalry Regiment Medical Company supporting the regiment's 3rd Battalion. In November 1950, his unit was engaged with enemy forces of the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces (CPVF) southwest of the village of Unsan, and east of Hwaong-ri, North Korea. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 2, 1950, when he could not be accounted for by his unit. [Read about McDaniel.](#)
- **Army Pfc. Fred W. Ashley**, 22, of Emmett, Idaho, whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Oct. 20 in his hometown. Ashley was a member of Troop C, 2nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Group, on a reconnaissance in the town of Paseka, Czechoslovakia. On May 4, 1945, German soldiers attacked Ashley's platoon. Ashley's unit reported him missing in action. Following the war, when Ashley was not among the American prisoners liberated from German captivity, the War Department amended his status to killed in action. [Read about Ashley.](#)
- **Army Pfc. Kenneth B. Williams**, 38, of Akron, Ohio, whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Oct. 22 in Seville, Ohio. Williams 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. Williams was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing Dec. 2, 1950. [Read about Williams.](#)
- **Army Pfc. Leslie E. Shankles**, 33, of Arcadia, Kan., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Oct. 24 in Fort Scott, Kan. Shankles was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division,

when he was killed Oct. 14, 1944, by enemy fire in the Raffelsbrand sector of the Hürtgen Forest in Germany. Shankles' name is recorded on the Tablets of the Missing at the Netherlands American Cemetery, along with the others missing from World War II. A rosette will now be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for. [Read about Shankles.](#)

- **Army Pvt. John B. Cummings**, 22, of Hartford, Wis., whose remains were previously identified, was buried Oct. 13 in Hazelhurst, Wis. Cummings was a member of Company A, 276th Infantry Regiment, 70th Infantry Division, along the France and Germany border. On Dec. 31, 1944, German troops crossed the Rhine River into France. As darkness fell, two members of Cummings' company passed him in a foxhole near the riverbank. U.S. troops heard German machine gun fire and maneuvered their way back to the foxhole, but were unable to locate Cummings. Despite extensive recovery efforts, Cummings' remains were unable to be located. [Read about Cummings.](#)
- **Army Sgt. James K. Park**, 20, of Beaumont, Texas, whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Oct. 27 in Barry, Texas. Park was a member of Company I, 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division. On Nov. 23, 1944, Park was declared missing in action after being wounded while his unit was engaged in fierce fighting within the Hürtgen Forest in Germany. Soldiers from Park's company attempted to search for him, but were prevented from doing so due to sustained fighting in the area. On Nov. 24, 1945, his status was amended to deceased. [Read about Park.](#)
- **Army Staff Sgt. Marshall F. Kipina**, 21, of Calumet, Mich., whose remains were previously identified, was buried Oct. 18 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Kipina was assigned to the 131st Aviation Company, serving as an observer aboard an OV-1C aircraft, on a night surveillance mission from Phu Bai Airfield over Attapu Province, Laos People's Democratic Republic. Radar and radio contact were lost with the aircraft which did not return as scheduled. Search efforts were initiated, but no crash site was found. [Read about Kipina.](#)
- **Marine Corps Pfc. Michael L. Salerno** was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and Sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded. Salerno died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Salerno.](#)
- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Paul D. Gilman**, 19, of Belen, N.M., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Oct. 26 in his hometown. Gilman was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and Sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded. Salerno died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. [Read about Gilman.](#)
- **Marine Corps Sgt. Dwight W. Randall** was a member of Company C, 2nd Amphibian Tractor Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and Sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, but the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Randall died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Randall.](#)
- **Merchant Marine Wiper Elvis N. Spotts** was a crew member of the SS Cape Isabel, part of a convoy of three ships including the USS Grayson and the SS Cape Fear. On Feb. 22, 1944, the ships were approximately 12 miles off the coast of Tarawa Atoll. The two Merchant Marine vessels were bringing supplies to Betio Island. Spotts was electrocuted during bilge maintenance. He was unable to be revived. Interment services are pending. [Read about Spotts.](#)
- **Mr. George L. Ritter** an employee of Air America Incorporated, was piloting an Air America C-123K from Udorn Airfield, Kingdom of Thailand, headed for Xienhom District, Xaingnabouli Province, Laos. The aircraft was on a routine resupply mission for U.S. Agency for International Development and was last heard from when they were northeast of Sayaboury, Laos. Search and rescue efforts were continued through Dec. 31, 1971, but no sign of the aircraft or the four crewmembers were found. Ritter was subsequently reported missing. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ritter.](#)
- **Naval Reserve Lt. Richard C. Lannom** was the bombardier/navigator aboard an A-6A aircraft on a night strike mission over Quang Ninh Province, North Vietnam on March 1, 1968. The flight path to the target was over islands known to have light anti-aircraft artillery. When the aircraft failed to rendezvous with the carrier, a search and rescue effort was mounted. No evidence of the plane could be found. Lannom and his pilot were subsequently declared missing in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lannom.](#)
- **Navy Buglemaster 2nd Class Lionel W. Lescault** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Lescault. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lescault.](#)

- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Angelo M. Gabriele** was assigned to the battleship USS West Virginia, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The USS West Virginia sustained multiple torpedo hits, but timely counter-flooding measures taken by the crew prevented it from capsizing, and it came to rest on the shallow harbor floor. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 106 crewmen, including Gabriele. Interment services are pending. [Read about Gabriele.](#)
- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Grant C. Cook, Jr.** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Cook. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cook](#)
- **Navy Fireman 2nd Class George C. Ford**, 25, of Lidderdale, Iowa, whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Oct. 20 in Glidden, Iowa. Ford was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. [Read about Ford.](#)
- **Navy Seaman 1st Class John A. Karli** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Karli. Interment services are pending. [Read about Karli.](#)
- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Charles C. Gomez** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Gomez. Interment services are pending. [Read about Gomez.](#)

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

* VA *



VA AED Cabinets ► Naloxone Addition to Reverse Opioid Overdoses

Veteran Affairs, building on a project that began in Boston, aims to add naloxone kits to the automated external defibrillator (AED) cabinets in its buildings across the country. Naloxone, also known as Narcan, can be used to reverse opioid overdoses. After a 2015 incident at the Boston Veteran Affairs building in which it took more than 10 minutes for paramedics to arrive to administer naloxone to an overdose victim, Boston VA patient safety Manager Pam Bellino wanted to find a way to have the overdose reversal drug on hand. "That was the tipping point for us to say, 'We need to get this naloxone immediately available, without locking it up,'" she said, according to an Oct. 3 Kaiser Health News report. Bellino thought the easiest way to make the medication readily available would be to add it to the AED cabinets already in place on the walls of VA cafeterias, gyms, warehouses, clinic waiting rooms, and some rehab housing. Naloxone is not harmful if given to someone who hasn't overdosed, but because it is a prescription drug, the VA had to work with the accrediting agency, The Joint Commission, to approve guidelines for the AED naloxone project. The Joint Commission requires the AED cabinets to be sealed and alarmed so staff can tell if they've been opened. The cabinets also must be checked daily and refilled when the naloxone kits expire.

The Joint Commission did not allow the VA to put the words "Narcan" or "naloxone" on the cabinet doors to let the public know that the kits contained the drug, but the commission did allow the VA to add the letter "N". The AED naloxone project will expand nationwide in December, with VA hospitals across the United States adding the drug to their AED cabinets. "The overwhelming evidence is that it just saves lives," said Dr. Ryan Vega with the VA's Center

for Innovation. "We're hopeful that other health systems take notice and think about doing the same." According to Amy Bohnert, an investigator with the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System, veterans have nearly twice the risk of overdose compared to civilians. She said she's heard criticism that easy access to naloxone allows drug users to feel a false sense of safety, but she disagrees. "Think of this as you would a seat belt or an air bag," she said. "It by no means fixes the problem, but what it does is save a life." Bellino said she hopes that manufacturers of AED will start selling cabinets that meet the new hospital accreditation standards. According to the Boston VA, 132 lives have been saved with all three parts of its naloxone project: training veterans at high risk, equipping police with the drug, and providing naloxone in the AED cabinets. [Source: Occupational Health & Safety | October 12, 2018 ++]

VA Pension Program Update 02 ► Entitlement Regulations Amended

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently amended its regulations governing entitlements to VA pension and Parents' Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, which are need-based programs. "The amended regulations bring consistency to the pension process and ensure benefits are available for Veterans and survivors with financial need," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "They will help maintain the integrity of and provide clarity to our needs-based pension program." VA's pension program provides monthly benefit payments to eligible wartime Veterans and their survivors with financial need. The pension regulations, which were updated Oct. 18, cover the following:

- Establish a clear net-worth limit for income and assets for Veterans to qualify for pension,
- Establish a 36-month look-back period to review asset transfers at less than fair market value that reduce net worth and create pension entitlement,
- Establish up to a five-year penalty period to be calculated based on the portion of the covered assets that would have made net worth excessive, and
- Updates medical expense definitions for consistency with VA internal guidelines.

The changes are intended to ensure VA only pays benefits to those Veterans with a genuine need. For more information on VA's pension program, visit www.benefits.va.gov/PENSION.

[Source: VA News Release | October 30, 2018 ++]

VA Transplant Program Update 04 ► Vet Denied Lung Transplant | Too Old

An Alpine, CA veteran is in a life-or-death battle to get a lung transplant. But the Veterans Administration says he's too old. Two or three times a week, 73-year-old Bill Root walks his dogs on his property in the hills near Alpine. "I walk a little over two miles. I do get winded but the oxygen helps. I have to maintain a certain oxygen level," Root said. The Vietnam veteran has to carry an oxygen tank on his back during his walks because he is dying from pulmonary lung fibrosis. "You're not able to access air, so eventually you just suffocate and that's it," said Root.



He used to smoke cigarettes when he served as a tank commander in Vietnam but doctors can't say for sure exactly what damaged his lungs. "I quit high school at age 17 to join the Marine Corps and I didn't do it in anticipation of some sort of benefit when I was 73," said Root. "I knew it was something that I could do for my country." Now, only a lung transplant can save Root's life. But he can't get one because the VA's transplant center in Seattle has a cutoff age of 70.

Jamie McBride works as a transplant manager for the VA in Texas. He researched Root's case and now he's blowing the whistle on the VA's transplant policy. "This happens to veterans all over the United States," McBride said. "In the case of a lung transplant some facilities say that age 70 is as old as they will accept. Other centers say it should not really depend on chronological age but more on physiological age. How old do they look or how young do they look?" said McBride. Root received a referral to be evaluated at UCSD health in La Jolla, CA. The doctors at UCSD told him he was actually a good candidate for a lung transplant because he's healthy and in good physical shape.

Unfortunately, since UCSD is a private hospital, it does not accept VA health insurance. "This veteran has a local transplant center that has said for his age he looks good and that he would definitely be acceptable as a candidate for transplant consideration," said McBride. The Veterans Administration emailed the following statement to News 8:

VA's patient selection criteria, as determined by VA transplant centers, are in place to ensure a fair and non-discriminatory distribution of organs, as well as optimal outcomes for transplant recipients. Per federal regulations, VA provides eligible Veterans medically necessary care and treatment that meets the standard of care. Mr. Root was deemed not to meet VA transplant center selection criteria, therefore there is no basis for referral or authorization to a non-VA provider.

"My message to them is to get their head out of their ass and get this thing moving, not only for me but for other veterans who are going to be in the same situation," said Root. "This doesn't only apply to lungs. It's also hearts, kidneys and livers," said Root. Our whistle-blower said the VA has made exceptions in the past and under the newly signed VA Mission Act the agency could contract with UCSD to give Root the transplant he desperately needs. "The VA needs to step up and help this gentleman. They need to afford him a contract with opportunity to be considered for transplant regardless of his age," said McBride. "He served his country. He did what he is supposed to do and now it's our time to do the same for him," McBride said. The VA claims specific regulations for the VA Mission Act still have not been written. Root has set up a [Facebook page](#) so people can show support for his efforts to get a lung transplant.

[Source: CBS8.com | David Gotfredson | October 26, 2018 ++]

Agent Orange | C-123 Aircraft Update 16 ► Exposure Presumption Now Official

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is adopting as final an interim final rule published on June 19, 2015, to amend its adjudication regulation governing individuals presumed to have been exposed to certain herbicides. Specifically, VA expanded the regulation to include an additional group consisting of individuals who performed service in the Air Force or Air Force Reserve under circumstances in which they had regular and repeated contact with C-123 aircraft known to have been used to spray an herbicide agent ("Agent Orange") during the Vietnam era.

In addition, the regulation established a presumption that members of this group who later develop an Agent Orange presumptive condition were disabled during the relevant period of service, thus establishing that service as "active military, naval, or air service." The effect of this action is to presume herbicide

exposure for these individuals and to create a presumption that the individuals who are presumed exposed to herbicides during reserve service also meet the statutory definition of “veteran” (hereinafter, “veteran status”) for VA purposes and eligibility for some VA benefits. This rule is effective October 22, 2018. This final rule is applicable to any claim for service connection for an Agent Orange presumptive condition filed by a covered individual that was pending on or after June 19, 2015. [Source: VVA Web Weekly | October 26, 2018 ++]

Right to Die Program ► Denied to Vets Residing in California Veteran Homes

Not long after California enacted a law allowing terminally ill people to obtain life-ending prescriptions, the state Department of Veterans Affairs (known as CalVet) adopted an emergency regulation making it clear that residents of its eight veterans homes would not be allowed to take advantage of the new law’s provisions. The emergency regulation prohibits CalVet staff from providing aid-in-dying drugs or assistance to residents of the agency’s homes, and specifies that any resident who wants to take an aid-in-dying drug, even if it is provided by an outside doctor, must first be “discharged” from the residential facility where they live.

It is cruel and unfair to deny these 2,400 old and disabled veterans the same right afforded other Californians under the 2016 End of Life Option Act. But CalVet officials claimed the harsh regulation was necessary to keep the agency from losing millions in federal funding under the 1997 Assisted Suicide Funding Restriction Act, which prohibits federal funds from being used “to pay for items and services (including assistance) the purpose of which is to cause (or assist in causing) the suicide, euthanasia, or mercy killing of any individual.”

The veterans homes located in Los Angeles and other California cities provide a place to live as well as medical and rehabilitative care to former active-duty military members and their spouses who are over 55 or disabled. Veterans homes are also open to homeless vets in need of care. Though primarily funded by the state’s taxpayers, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs pays for nearly \$68 million of the homes’ \$350-million budget. CalVet can and should find a way to comply with federal rules without forcing residents of its veterans homes to leave in order to seek aid in dying.

The federal prohibition makes it clear that doctors in veterans homes should not provide life-ending prescriptions, and though we disagree with that rule, the government has the right to make it; no hospital, doctor or healthcare employer is under any obligation to participate in the right-to-die program. But nothing in the text of the federal law indicates that it is necessary to evict sick people from their homes if they wish to obtain an outside physician’s prescription for the life-ending drugs and ingest them on their own.

Other states that have legalized so-called medical aid-in-dying have interpreted the federal prohibitions in various ways. Like California, Colorado and Vermont require residents of veteran homes to leave the facilities if they wish to end their lives. But Washington and Oregon allow veterans home residents to stay while they get the lethal prescriptions from outside doctors and even when they take them, though staff is not allowed to assist in any way. Oregon’s Death with Dignity Act has been on the books for more than 20 years, and there have been no challenges under the federal prohibition.

Earlier this month, two veterans groups along with two residents of a veterans home in Yountville sued CalVet, claiming its restriction is punitive. Dying people may not have the strength or means to relocate to a new nursing home or hospice. Many veterans who move into veterans homes choose to do so because of subsidies for those with limited financial means, and most of them remain in the homes for the rest of their lives. The groups argued that CalVet could use accounting barriers to comply with the federal prohibition.

California's End of Life Option Act passed in large part because of the moving story of 29-year-old Brittany Maynard, who was diagnosed with an aggressive and terminal brain cancer. After weighing her end-of-life options, Maynard and her family decided to leave the Bay Area and move to Oregon so that she could access that state's aid-in-dying law. When California lawmakers finally made it legal for physicians to prescribe life-ending drugs the following year, it was with the promise that no dying Californian would be forced to choose between leaving home and suffering in their final days. But CalVet has broken that promise for the men and women living in veterans homes.

CalVet can and should find a way to comply with federal rules without forcing residents of its veterans homes to leave in order to seek aid in dying, as Oregon and Washington have done. Not just to avoid the time and cost of a lawsuit, but because it is the compassionate and correct thing to do.

[Source: Los Angeles Times | Editorial Board | October 24, 2018 ++]

VA Essential Equipment ► Availability Delays

For veterans who need things like wheelchairs, walkers, and artificial limbs, getting them from the Department of Veterans Affairs can be a difficult, lengthy process. According to the agency's own numbers, thousands have waited longer than 30 days for their requests to be fulfilled. Nearly 3.4 million veterans received approximately 21 million prosthetic devices, sensory aids, items, and services from the VA in 2017. The department receives, on average, 657,000 new requests each month for prosthetic items and medical devices.

A VA spokesperson said the agency's goal is to review and fulfill requests as soon as possible, ideally within 30 days. The department now processes them within five days on average nationwide. But the VA reports that about 8,500 equipment requests across its system have waited longer than 30 days. More than 2,500 have been pending for two months or more. The VA says it's improved its processes and cut down on delays. But some patients, still await medical devices and equipment. A VA spokesperson said the agency's goal is to review and fulfill requests as soon as possible, ideally within 30 days. The department now processes them within five days on average nationwide. But the VA reports that about 8,500 equipment requests across its system have waited longer than 30 days. More than 2,500 have been pending for two months or more. The VA says it's improved its processes and cut down on delays. But some patients still await medical devices and equipment.

Fred Downs, a prosthetics consultant with Paralyzed Veterans of America, said lengthy delays in fulfilling about 8,500 medical equipment requests is cause for concern. "I'm not comfortable with that number," he said. "I need to know more facts. What's it composed of? What type of orders?" Downs was the national director of the VA's prosthetic and sensory aids service for 30 years and has also worked with the department's procurement and logistics arm. He said there are legitimate reasons why some cases drag on. Equipment might require special fabrication, multiple fittings, or coordination with outside vendors. But according to Downs, complex cases are one thing while bureaucratic obstacles are another. He said he isn't sure which category the VA delays fall into.

As it turns out, VA isn't either. Downs said the department is still analyzing the data. "The thing that we all worry about are those cases where a veteran needs a wheelchair. It's prescribed. And so the veteran goes home and doesn't hear anything from the VA," he said. "This is where we hear a lot of problems. Like, 'Well what happened to it? He's still sitting home after two, three, four months and it's not there.' What the heck? Somebody's dropped the ball big time." Last year the VA Inspector general found a host of problems with the way some medical centers were handling prosthetics cases. Understaffing, lack of accountability, and issues with logistics and warehousing often played a role.

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said that this year's numbers actually represent a marked improvement. "Across the country, last year, 64,000 prosthetic requests were 30 days old or older. We've now gotten that down to 8,500," he said. Since then, the department has changed some of its processes. They've made it easier to track equipment requests

and are holding medical center directors more accountable for fulfilling them. The agency is now trying to determine how many delayed requests are acceptable. Wilkie said he's proud of the VA's progress so far. "That is certainly a case where we have moved out, and it shows America that the department does have the potential for agility and adaptability," he said. [Source: American Homefront Project | Carson Frame | October 22, 2018 ++]

VA Pension Poachers ► Crooked Financial Planners Target Elderly Vets

The VA is adding more protections to strengthen aging veterans from scammers who target their pensions and push them to apply for benefits they aren't eligible to receive. Known as "pension poachers," the scammers pose as "advisors" who then try to make an easy buck by selling elderly vets unnecessary financial services and products they don't need while convincing them to apply for VA benefits they probably will never see. The regulations that went into effect 18 OCT guarantees the "Aid and Attendance" benefit for pensions will stay out of the hands of crooked financial planners.

Oregon Democrat Sen. Ron Wyden commended the move by the VA. "These changes are long overdue but a welcome step forward in the fight to protect our veterans from greedy scammers," he said in a statement. "It is imperative that veterans who need this benefit have access." The issue was brought to Wyden's attention after a 2012 [undercover investigation](#) by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) identified more than 200 organizations nationwide that advised potential pension claimants to go after unnecessary benefits, and charged the targets as much as \$10,000 along the way.

VA regulations include a provision from Wyden that requires a three-year glance at an applicant's financial history when applying for the pension. In extreme cases, the VA rejected the targeted veterans for the benefit, but only after the poachers tucked away the assets in places that aren't easily assessable money-wise. This type of dishonest business guiding can impact a senior vet's ability to qualify for Medicaid and other government assistance programs.

[Source: Conectingvets.com | Matt Saintsing | October 22, 2018 ++]

VA Claims Processing Update 18 ► Significant Modernization Effort

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently completed a significant modernization effort in which more than 7.8 million paper files were removed from 60 locations in fewer than 22 months, enabling rapid scanning into VA's electronic claims processing system by multiple third-party vendors. This will lead to faster claims decisions for Veterans. "Improving the delivery of benefits and services to Veterans is central to our mission," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This significant effort will not only improve VA's claims process, it will also lead to quicker decisions for Veterans because millions more records will be available electronically." This milestone was part of a long VA effort to improve the Veteran experience and streamline claims processes.

- In 2013, VA began removing paper records from its regional offices to save space and taxpayer money.
- The effort expanded in 2016 when the agency launched the File Bank Extraction initiative. This initiative removed more than 1.7 million paper claims files across 59 VA locations and contributed to reduced claims processing time by establishing more electronic records.
- In Nov. 2017, VA began extracting nearly 6.1 million paper records held within the Records Control Division (RCD) of the Records Management Center (RMC) in St. Louis.

- VA is currently working with the General Services Administration (GSA), which owns the Goodfellow Federal Center complex that houses the RMC, to return the RCD’s leased warehouse space back to GSA. As a result, VA will save nearly \$1.8 million per year.
- The other areas of the RMC remain open and operational.
- The 6.1 million paper records extracted from the RCD are temporarily stored in a secure facility certified by the National Archives and Records Administration where they are inventoried, prioritized and sent to multiple VA vendors for rapid scanning into VA’s Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS).
- Records removed during File Bank Extraction will also be scanned and uploaded to VBMS.

VA continues to take steps to operate in a digital environment and modernize the way it processes compensation and pension claims — moving from a cumbersome, paper-intensive process to an efficient, electronic process — resulting in a faster, more accurate and transparent claims process. For more information about VA benefits, visit <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits>. [Source: VA News Release | October 23, 2018 ++]

VA Debt Update 05 ► DMC Call Wait Times Reduced to Under 5 Minutes

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) Debt Management Center (DMC) reached a recent milestone this July when it reported it had lowered the average wait times for Veterans contacting the call center, from over 21 minutes in fiscal year (FY) 2016 to under five minutes during FY 2018. “The team at the DMC has enhanced services to our Veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “It’s our mission to take care of our Veterans, no matter what their needs are. DMC is in concert with our priority of improving customer service and will continue to gather customer feedback through direct feedback, surveys and outreach in FY19 to further enhance the Veterans’ experience.”

For the past three years, DMC received around 1 million calls annually with an average call wait time of about 21 minutes. In FY 2017, DMC launched a series of internal efficiencies and process improvements to enhance contact center capabilities. Initiatives included enhancing staffing levels to meet demand, enhancing contact center technology, focusing on employee development and engagement, and implementing an automated 12-month payment plan. These Veteran-focused initiatives represent a 79 percent reduction over two years to the average time for waiting and a 40 percent increase of actual calls taken. These are all indicators of successful initiatives providing a better experience for Veterans and VA employees.

The DMC’s inbound contact center serves as the central point for Veterans and their family members to make payment arrangements, or receive guidance regarding the collection process on overpayments which could include debts created from education or pension payments. Debt counselors at the DMC work with callers in a professional and service-oriented manner to help them understand their options to address overpayments with Veterans either through extended repayment plans, the dispute process, compromise process or waiver process

DMC’s contact center provides debt counseling for the Veterans Benefits Administration, and consolidated collection services of non-health care debt for Veterans Health Administration and National Cemetery Administration, enabling these entities to focus resources on accomplishing their core missions. DMC has provided centralized debt collection programs of Veteran benefit overpayments since 1975 and became a fee-for-service Enterprise Center in 1996. Note that veterans do not pay any fees added to their debt. The fee is paid as part of the VA Benefits program by the VA. Themselves. To contact the VA Debt Management Center call 1 (800) 827-0648 or (612) 713-6415 or write Debt Management Center, P.O. Box 11930, St. Paul, MN 55111-0930. [Source: VA News Release | October 23, 2018 ++]

VA Debt Update 06 ► Debt Waiver Request

When you request a waiver, you are requesting that VA's Debt Management Office terminate collection action on a debt. If a waiver is granted in full or part, you will not be required to pay the amount that was waived. Veteran Benefits Administration (VBA) overpayments are governed by the Department of Veterans Affairs under US Code Title 38 – Veterans Benefits. Requests for waiver of repayment are processed in accordance with VA Financial Policy Volume XI. https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/resources/education_resources/school_certifying_officials/payment_info.asp provides additional information.

What are the eligibility requirements for a waiver?

To be eligible for waiver considerations, you must be a Veteran, a payee or beneficiary including a fiduciary, a representative acting on behalf of a debtor such a parent, sibling, or a representative of an estate in the case of a deceased payee.

How do you apply for a waiver?

To apply for a waiver, you must submit the following items:

- Written letter that explains why you are requesting a waiver. The letter should explain why you feel you should not be held responsible for payment of the debt or why collection of the debt would be unfair and create a financial hardship.
- Completed and signed Financial Status Report form
- Mail your waiver and your completed and signed Financial Status Report form to: US Department of Veterans Affairs, Debt Management Center, P.O. Box 1193, St. Paul, MN 55111

Can You request an oral hearing?

You have a right to request an oral hearing in conjunction with your waiver request. If you choose to have an oral hearing to present evidence before your request is considered, state so in your request for a waiver. If you request an oral hearing, you will be notified of the date, time, and location, prior to your waiver request being referred for consideration.

Time limitations associated with the waiver request.

- **Education, Pension and Disability Waiver Request** -- If you are requesting a waiver for an education, pension or disability compensation debt, you must submit your request within 180 days of the date you were originally notified of your debt.
- **Loan Guaranty Waiver Requests** -- For loan guaranty program debts, you have one year from the date you sign the certified mail receipt for the original notification letter.

Note: If DMC receives your request for waiver within 30 days of the day of notification, they will suspend any offset action from your current benefits until a decision regarding your request for waiver is rendered.

What does it mean when your waiver is granted?

If a waiver is granted in full or part, you will not be required to pay the amount that was waived. A waiver cannot be granted if DMC determines there is:

- Fraud
- Misrepresentation
- Bad faith on your part that led to the creation of the debt

How are you notified of your waiver decision?

You will be notified in writing when a decision regarding your request for waiver is rendered.

- **Denied Waiver Request** -- If your request is denied, you will be notified of your appeal rights.
- **Full Waiver Granted** -- If your request is granted in full, no further collection action will be taken.

- **Partial Waiver Granted** -- If a partial waiver is granted, you will be notified of the balance and you will be provided appeal rights.

Note: If a balance exists on your account after waiver action is completed, you will be asked to contact us and make arrangements to pay your debt. If you are drawing VA benefits, action will be taken to begin offsetting those benefits to recoup any balance that was not waived

According to the Department of Education’s (DOE) website, students must repay loans even if they don’t complete their education, can’t find a job related to their program of study, or are unhappy with the education received. However, certain circumstances might lead to loans being forgiven, canceled, or discharged as defined in US Code Title 20. The link at <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation?src=ft> provides information on the types of forgiveness, cancellation and discharge available.

[Source: https://www.va.gov/debtman/Submit_A_Waiver_Request.asp | OCT 2018 ++]

Adoption Expense Reimbursement ► Eligibility

Veterans who lost their ability to reproduce due to a service-connected disability may be eligible for adoption expenses to be reimbursed through VA or to receive coverage for in vitro fertilization (IVF). VA also provides infertility evaluation, management, and treatment services to veterans enrolled in VA health care — regardless of service connection. Veterans interested in infertility services should contact their VA provider or their local VA Women Veterans Program Manager. [Learn about adoption reimbursement](#) and [VA’s infertility services](#). [Source: VFW Action Corps | October 19, 2018 ++]

PTSD Assistance Update 04 ► Telemedicine Outreach for PTSD Program

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched a pilot telehealth program that will give rural Veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) remote access to psychotherapy and related services. The project is part of the focus to improve the availability of mental health care for Veterans who live in rural areas. VA’s Office of Rural Health, (<https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov>) in partnership with VA’s Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (<https://www.queri.research.va.gov>), supports the Telemedicine Outreach for PTSD program to deliver therapy and other care through phone and interactive video contact.

VA researchers worked diligently in recent years to establish the safety and efficacy of PTSD psychotherapy delivered remotely to provide Veterans with the same quality of PTSD care as they would receive in a doctor’s office at a VA medical center. This program will help greater numbers of Veterans who live in rural areas, and will save them time and effort to get to a VA facility that is far from their homes. Dr. John Fortney, a research health scientist at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Seattle, leads the project. “Long travel distances to urban areas can be a major barrier to care for rural Veterans,” Fortney said. “In a prior trial, we were able to use telehealth technologies successfully to engage Veterans in evidence-based, trauma-focused therapy without them having to travel to a distant VA medical center.”

According to the VA, some 702,000 veterans, or 12 percent of the country’s veteran population, used telehealth or telemedicine in FY 2016, accounting for 2.17 million telehealth episodes. Of that group, 45 percent were living in rural communities. Those encounters led to a 31 percent decrease in hospitalizations for veterans over the previous year, as well as a 39 percent reduction in acute psychiatric VA bed days, former VA Secretary Shulkin pointed out in

his order. “What we’re really doing is, we’re removing regulations that have prevented us from doing this,” he said when unveiling the program last year. “We’re removing geography as a barrier so that we can speed up access to Veterans and really honor our commitment to them.”

To date, more than 680 rural Veterans who do not receive specialty PTSD care have enrolled in the study. Veterans who take part in the program receive frequent phone calls from a care manager who helps participants access services provided by off-site psychiatrists and psychologists. The psychotherapy is delivered via interactive video from a VA medical center to a community-based outpatient clinic (CBOC) or to the Veteran’s home. The telephone care manager also monitors the Veteran’s progress and helps him/her overcome barriers to care. The program includes 12 clinics across the nation in Charleston, South Carolina; Iowa City, Iowa; Little Rock, Arkansas; Denver, Colorado; San Diego, California and Seattle, Washington. The results, which will be available in 2020, will lay the groundwork for national implementation of the program.

PTSD rates are estimated to be as high as 40 percent among veterans, and as much as 81.5 percent of post-9/11 veterans suffer from acute or chronic pain. Among the mHealth services available to veterans are a self-guided [mHealth training program](#) introduced in 2016 and, more recently, the online [PTSD Treatment Decision Aid](#). For more information about PTSD, visit <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp>. To learn more about VA research on PTSD, visit www.research.va.gov/topics/ptsd.cfm. [Source: The Rural Connection | Hans Petersen | Fall 2018 ++]

VA Community Care Update 04 ► Three Steps To Access

Veterans may be eligible to receive care from a provider outside of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in their community when VA cannot provide the care that is needed. This type of care is known as “community care,” and is paid for by VA. Although some changes occurred with community care recently, Veterans continue to have access to this type of care. The process starts at your VA medical facility. Follow the steps below to see if you’re eligible:

1. Go to VA

- Schedule an appointment with a VA provider.
- Your VA care team will work with you to see if you are eligible for community care.
- Eligibility is based on your medical needs, care that is available at VA, and other requirements.
- Important: Make sure VA confirms you are eligible and authorized before you proceed to the next step.

2. Make an Appointment

- VA will work with you to find a community provider and make an appointment.
- You can select a community provider, or VA can select one for you.
- Important: The community provider selected must be in VA’s network and be willing to accept payment from VA.

3. Receive Care

- Arrive promptly for your appointment.
- Important: If you need to schedule a follow-up appointment, check with your community provider to make sure VA authorized the care. If VA did not authorize the care, your community provider should contact VA to arrange the care you need.

Note: Go to <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/index.asp#FAQs> to see VA’s list of Frequently Asked Questions if you have questions about the above steps.

Getting Support

- If you have questions about your specific circumstances, please contact your nearest VA medical facility.
- Go to <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/VCP/index.asp> or contact (866) 606-8198 for questions about the Veterans Choice Program
- Call the VA Adverse Credit Helpline at (877) 881-7618 for help to resolve adverse credit reporting and debt collection issues from using the Veterans Choice Program.
- Visit <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/index.asp> for more information,

[Source: The Rural Connection | Office of Rural Health | Fall 2018 ++]

VA Medical Marijuana Update 52 ► Canadian Legalization

One of Korey Rowe’s Army buddies hurled himself out of a sixth-floor window a few months ago. Before that, another died of a heroin overdose. Before that, another shot himself to death. Just this year. “It’s a constant thing,” says the 35-year-old combat veteran from his home in Los Angeles. “It’s on a monthly basis. When we hear from each other, it’s like ‘OK, what is it, wedding or funeral?’ ‘Funeral.’ ‘F---! Who is it this time?’ Every single time. And it’s so disheartening.”

For the amateur filmmaker whose documentation of his buddies’ struggles with mortality evolved into a platform for the advocacy of marijuana legalization, historic changes sweeping Canada mark nothing less than the restoration of drug-policy sanity and a potential model for the United States. “This is a great example, in a lot of different ways, of how we can create a better society by just changing a few factoids on how we think about things,” says Rowe. “It’s so exciting for me to see Canada making this adjustment and moving forward. And I hope it has worldwide implications that also extend to the U.S.”

Not only is Ottawa legalizing retail sales of cannabis nationwide, it also makes marijuana available to its active-duty, off-the-clock military personnel, a concession that many of America’s veterans have pleaded for in the United States for years. Legalization is also expected to provide an \$8 billion boon to Canada’s economy, according to some estimates. However, that nation’s new military regulations, spelled out in a document called DAOD 9004-1, contain a number of restrictions for members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). Troops are prohibited from ingesting marijuana, for instance, within eight hours before reporting for duty, or within 24 hours of work that involves handling weapons, heavy equipment, or of scheduled operational exercises. Nor are they allowed to consume marijuana within 28 days of participating in operations such as high-altitude parachuting, or participating in activities like diving or submarine service. The CAF’s rules on alcohol consumption, however, do not contain similar time constraints.

Canadian military veterans, meanwhile, have been getting reimbursed for doctor-prescribed medical marijuana since 2008. But last year, because of tightening budgets and a reassessment from a commissioned panel, Veterans Affairs Canada cut its daily individual allotment of subsidized Cannabis from 10 grams to 3 grams. No such subsidies are afforded American veterans, who must pay out of pocket for marijuana supplies, and only in states where medical cannabis sales are legal. Regarded as a Schedule 1 drug with no medicinal value, marijuana remains illegal at the federal level in the U.S.

A CAF official who spoke on the condition of anonymity dismissed America’s reasons for prohibition: “We’ve done a lot of research, we’ve looked at what the science has told us, and we’re moving on.” He added that military suicide rates, which have received so much attention in the U.S., were a nonfactor in Canada’s legalization discussions. In August, the Herald-Tribune published [“Warriors Rise Up,”](#) which examined America’s military suicide epidemic. From 2005-2015, more than 75,000 veterans and active-duty personnel took their lives, at a rate more than 20 a day. Roughly 1 in 5 were still in uniform. The overall toll was twice the American civilian suicide rate. The U.S. counts 1.3 million active-duty troops, plus another 850,000 in reserve, and its Department of Veterans Affairs serves more than 9 million veterans.

The CAF, by contrast, has 95,000 troops in uniform, including reservists, while its government supports roughly 649,300 veterans. In 2016, the CAF published an evaluation of suicides recorded from 1995-2015, which were negligible compared with U.S. tallies. In the final year of the study, the CAF lost 18 personnel to suicide. Although those deployed to combat zones were at a higher risk for taking their lives than those who were not, the study's results suggest American and Canadian cultures are worlds apart in terms of scale. "Suicide rates in the CAF did not significantly increase over time," stated the report, "and after age standardization, they were not statistically higher than those in the Canadian population."

Many American veterans, mostly younger survivors of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars who came home suffering from afflictions such as post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, told the Herald-Tribune they turned to marijuana after VA-prescribed drugs such as opioids often turned them into addicts with suicidal ideations. Korey Rowe, who saw action in Iraq and Afghanistan with the Army's 187th Airborne Infantry "Rakkasans" Regiment, addressed the turmoil of PTSD and suicide with a 90-minute documentary called "[Mile Marker](#)," released earlier this year on outlets like iTunes and Amazon Prime. At least two of his subjects — former comrades in arms — were expelled from the military with "bad paper" discharges for smoking marijuana.

Marijuana was erroneously classified as a Schedule 1 drug during the Controlled Substances Act of 1970. Its status in that category has grown more fraudulent over the past 48 years with each new published discovery of its health benefits. Today, more than 2 million Americans are registered medical marijuana patients seeking relief for everything from cancer to seizures. "The most important thing I learned (from researching 'Mile Marker') is that of the 22 veterans who kill themselves every day, most of them were overprescribed psychoactive medications by the VA," says Rowe, a recovering heroin addict who spoke at a "Plants Over Pills" Memorial Day rally in Washington, D.C. "The one thing that seems to work is cannabis. It started with the Joes and spread to the lieutenants and the officers and now even the military is starting to understand it. But nothing much impacts Congress. I don't think anything will impact them until this issue affects them personally."

Congress has the power to deschedule cannabis, but House and Senate Republicans in charge of key committees have refused to allow dozens of bills reach the floor for debate. This year, a Fox News poll found that 59 percent of Americans support full legalization. Sixty-two percent approved in Pew polling, 64 percent in a Gallup poll, and 68 percent in Center for American Progress research. Diagnosed with PTSD, Rowe says marijuana keeps him from succumbing to despair, but he concedes that "I am not in good shape." He hopes to move from LA, where traffic congestion triggers his anxieties, to more rural Vermont, where marijuana is also legal.

"I have a father-in-law who lives in Utah, and people are telling me, 'Come to Utah, come to Utah,' and when I tell them it's illegal there, they say 'Well, we're talking to our legislators and we're gonna get some movement soon and if you move here it'll probably be legal in a couple of years.' But I'm like, no, why should I have to wait two years? I'm tired of this. If there's a law that is morally unjust I'm not going to live in a state where that law is prevalent." Rowe says Canadian legalization should result in a policy reappraisal, not just for veterans, but for federal civil servants and first responders like police officers and firefighters. "This is a good time and place to start a conversation about what people can do when they're off duty without having to be persecuted with drug tests," he says. "This is a very exciting moment." [Source: Herald-Tribune | Billy Cox | October 16, 2018 ++]

VA Cemeteries Update 19 ► \$3 Million Spent on Security Since AUG 2017

After last year's deadly clash between white nationalists and counter-protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, the federal government quietly spent millions of dollars to hire private security guards to stand watch over at least eight Confederate cemeteries, documents from the Department of Veterans Affairs show. The security effort, which runs around the clock at all but one of those VA-operated cemeteries, was aimed at preventing the kind of damage that

befell Confederate memorials across the U.S. in the aftermath of the Charlottesville violence. None of the guarded cemeteries has been vandalized since the security was put in place. Records obtained by The Associated Press through the Freedom of Information Act show that the VA has spent nearly \$3 million on the cemetery security since August 2017. Another \$1.6 million is budgeted for fiscal 2019 to pay for security at all Confederate monuments, which could include other sites. The agency has not determined when the security will cease.

Private security was needed "to ensure the safety of staff, property and visitors paying respect to those interred," Jessica Schiefer, spokeswoman for the VA's National Cemetery Administration, said in a statement. The agency "has a responsibility to protect the federal property it administers and will continue to monitor and assess the need for enhanced security going forward." Most of the protected cemeteries are in the North, in places far removed from the Confederacy. Vast numbers of the buried soldiers were prisoners of war who were held nearby. Many succumbed to smallpox and other diseases. The cemetery monuments are typically simple and solemn, serving more to acknowledge the deceased than to celebrate the slaveholding nation they defended. Government watchdog groups and some members of Congress question if the spending is still necessary. Steve Ellis, executive vice president of the non-partisan Taxpayers for Common Sense, said the cost of security represents the sort of "spending inertia" too common in government. "Unfortunately what happens with the government is once you start spending money on something, you generally continue to spend money on it," Ellis said.

Democratic Rep. Bobby Rush of Chicago, whose district includes one of the protected cemeteries, said in a statement that while he supports the VA's decision to prevent vandalism, officials "must remain vigilant in evaluating" government spending. Monuments to the Confederacy have become especially polarizing since nine black parishioners were gunned down by an avowed white supremacist at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015. The confrontation in Charlottesville on Aug. 11, 2017, reopened the wound. In the weeks that followed, vandals damaged Confederate sites across the country, and cemeteries were not spared. A bronze statue of a rebel soldier was toppled and decapitated on Aug. 22, 2017, at Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery in Columbus, Ohio. Two days later, the VA contracted with the Westmoreland Protection Agency, based in Sunrise, Florida, to provide unarmed security guards at Camp Chase and two other cemeteries — North Alton Confederate Cemetery in Alton, Illinois, and Woodlawn National Cemetery in Elmira, New York. The 30-day contract cost \$91,357, according to the documents.



In this Aug. 22, 2017 photo (left) employees of Dayton National Cemetery, move the vandalized Civil War Confederate soldier statue that stood in Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery in Columbus, Ohio.

In the Sept. 19, 2018 photo (right) a security guard walks the grounds at North Alton Confederate Cemetery in Alton, Ill.

About a week later, someone threw paint on a 117-year-old Confederate memorial at Springfield National Cemetery in Missouri, hours before President Donald Trump was scheduled to speak in Springfield. On Sept. 6, 2017, the VA amended the monthly contract to add Springfield and four additional national Confederate cemeteries: Point Lookout Confederate Cemetery in Scotland, Maryland; Finn's Point National Cemetery in Pennsville Township, New Jersey; Confederate Stockade Cemetery in Sandusky, Ohio; and Confederate Mound at Oak Woods Cemetery in Chicago. Schiefer did not directly answer questions about why the eight cemeteries were chosen but said the National Cemetery Administration "routinely monitors the need for additional protection and security at all of its sites."

Decisions, she said, are based on factors such as historical significance, replacement and repair value, and previous vandalism or threats of vandalism at particular sites. The monthly contract for all eight was renewed in September 2017. All told, the VA spent about \$462,500 on security through Oct. 23, 2017, when it agreed to an annual contract with Westmoreland at a cost of just under \$2.3 million. Westmoreland hired The Whitestone Group, based in Columbus, Ohio, as a subcontractor. The funding came from the VA's budget and did not require an emergency appropriation, Schiefer said.

Contract specifications call for round-the-clock security at seven of the cemeteries, and during daytime hours only at the Chicago cemetery. Spot checks by the AP found guards at the cemeteries in Columbus and Alton, but no one during the day at the Chicago cemetery. Schiefer said the VA does not discuss security procedures. At the Alton cemetery, a lone guard watched over the grounds from his truck. The guard, who works for the Whitestone Group, declined an interview request and would not give his name. The cemetery, near St. Louis, consists mostly of grass and a few stately trees over rolling hills. Its main feature is a 58-foot-tall granite obelisk with plaques naming the 1,354 Confederate dead buried there, including many who died of smallpox while prisoners of war.

Jeff LaRe, executive vice president of The Whitestone Group, said an uptick in vandalism of Confederate monuments this past summer was evidence that cemetery security remains necessary. Protesters in August toppled a century-old statue at the University of North Carolina, and vandals put paint on statues in Salisbury, North Carolina, and Richmond, Virginia. Darrell Maples, a Missouri-based commander for the Sons of Confederate Veterans, agreed. "I don't think it's going to go away anytime soon," Maples said. Whether because of the added security or other reasons, no vandalism has occurred at any of the cemeteries since the August 2017 incident in Springfield, the VA said. Protesters gathered at Confederate Mound in Chicago in April, at the same time the Sons of Confederate Veterans rallied there. But amid a heavy police presence, nothing was damaged. Schiefer said that twice in September 2017, suspicious vehicles were spotted near the statue at the Elmira cemetery but drove away when the guard approached. Curtis Kalin, spokesman for the government watchdog group Citizens Against Government Waste, said the additional security was understandable after the rash of vandalism in 2017. "However, when the threats and vandalism have all but ceased, it might be time to rethink" the spending, Kalin said in a statement. [Source: Associated Press | Jim Salter | October 15, 2018 ++]

VA Motto Update 01 ► Does Not Include Women | Should It be Changed

The words of Abraham Lincoln are usually revered, but not so for some when it comes to the motto for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans groups and Yale Law School students are asking the VA to change its creed, saying it excludes women and ignores their contributions to the military. The VA's mission is to fulfill a promise of America's 16th president "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan." Lincoln made the comments in his second inaugural address in 1865 while talking about reconciliation and reconstruction as the Civil War was coming to an end. Yale students, representing the advocacy groups Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, NYC Veterans Alliance and Service Women's Action Network, petitioned the VA 12 OCT to change the motto. "The VA's motto is outdated," Students with Yale's Veterans Legal Services Clinic wrote in the petition. "By excluding women, it effectively erases the meaningful contributions that women have made to the military, and communicates to women veterans that they are unwelcome outsiders." The students also said the VA has been failing to meet the health care needs of many women veterans and service members.

VA officials have rejected previous requests to change the motto, including one made last year by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. The Service Women's Action Network, which advocates for women military service members and veterans, made its first request nearly a decade ago. VA spokesman Curt Cashour said 15 OCT the agency will review the petition and "respond appropriately." "Lincoln's words serve as a historic tribute to all veterans, including women veterans, whose service and sacrifice inspires us all," the statement said. "They are a

timeless and poignant reminder of the debt America owes all who have worn the uniform.” Supporters of changing the motto cite actions by other military institutions aimed at including women.

- In 2003, the Air Force Academy removed a sign on campus that said “Bring Me Men,” a phrase from an 1894 Sam Walter Foss poem. It replaced the sign with one bearing a new motto, “Integrity First. Service Before Self. Excellence in All We Do.”
- The U.S. Naval Academy in 2004 changed the words to its fight song “Navy Blue & Gold” to make them gender-neutral. And the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 2008 did the same with wording in its alma mater.

Retired Navy Capt. Lory Manning, director of government operations for the Service Women’s Action Network, said many women service members and veterans would be happy if the VA changed the motto to “to care for those who shall have borne the battle” and removed the “for his widow, and his orphan.” “I’m sure Lincoln wouldn’t mind,” Manning said. “We now have over 2 million women vets in this country. It’s time for the VA to signal they’re not just for men anymore.” Not all female veterans, however, feel the same way. Kayda Keleher, a Marine Corps veteran who now works for Veterans of Foreign Wars, wrote last year that changing the motto likely would cost millions of dollars because of the need to update every welcome sign, pamphlet, letterhead and other things containing the current motto. She said the money would be better spent on improving VA services to women. [Source: Associated Press | Dave Collins |

October 15, 2018 ++]

Trump VA Plan Update 05 ► Former VA Secretary Shulkin’s Opinion

Former Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin said 15 OCT that President Donald Trump’s lack of concern over details and signature extemporaneous style enabled him to usher change quickly at the VA during his year in the job. “President Trump doesn’t want to spend a huge amount of time wanting to review the details. He’s someone who reacts according to his belief system,” said Shulkin, who was fired via a Trump tweet in March. “Having a loose management style in the White House was actually something that worked well for me. I came, I presented ideas to the president, and he said, ‘That sounds like a good thing to do for veterans, let’s do it.’”

Shulkin expounded on his time in Washington to a group of aspiring health care leaders at T.H. Chan School of Public Health at Harvard University. He was asked about VA privatization, navigating politics and the differences between the administrations of Trump and former President Barack Obama. Obama appointed Shulkin as the VA’s undersecretary of health in 2015 – a post that he held until Trump named him VA secretary in January 2017. He was the only one of Trump’s appointees to have served under the previous administration. Shulkin described Obama’s administration as a “well-run, oiled machine” with a clear process for how decisions were made. “When we presented issues, we knew how to present the material with very detailed information,” Shulkin said. “The president would be well-briefed when we met with him, and he understood the issues. He was very analytic, thoughtful, and it was usually a pretty extensive discussion before decisions were made. President Obama was known for that style, and that’s how I experienced him as well.”

There was a drastic difference when the presidency shifted to Trump, Shulkin said. “Some people used the word ‘chaos.’ That would probably be a pretty accurate term,” he said. Trump’s hands-off approach, along with lawmakers’ willingness to set aside political divides on veterans issues, allowed him to shepherd 11 bills through Congress with bipartisan support during his 14 months as secretary, Shulkin explained. In that time, Congress approved a major expansion of the GI Bill and a faster firing process for VA employees, among other legislation. Shulkin also made the decision to hire Cerner Corp. for a multibillion-dollar project to overhaul the VA’s electronic health record system. Trump fired Shulkin over Twitter on 26 MAR following months of infighting between him and political appointees

assigned to the VA. After Shulkin was fired, he spoke out, saying the political appointees thought he wasn't leading a fast enough charge toward privatization and sought to undermine him.

He told the students gathered at Harvard on Monday that he entered the public sphere knowing his time might be limited. "I came to Washington with the belief I wasn't going to be there forever. I was going to adhere to my principles and do what I thought was right, and if it cost me my job, so be it," Shulkin said. "And that's what happened. I was very clear on where I stood on things, and it didn't always mix with where the politics were." Shulkin thought he'd be fired after the violent "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Va., in August 2017. Trump didn't immediately condemn the white supremacists who led the rally, and Shulkin told the Washington Post that it was a "dishonor to our country's veterans for the Nazis and the white supremacists to go unchallenged." "I think when there's outrageous behavior, when people violate the principles that most of us in the middle believe in, we have to speak out," Shulkin said Monday. "And that's why when Charlottesville happened, I thought I might get fired. I said, 'I'm OK with that.' I spoke out against the white supremacists and the Nazis and said this shouldn't be tolerated, that we as Americans all have to speak out."

Now, Shulkin thinks the VA is "moving forward in the right direction." He's supportive of the VA Mission Act, a new law that he worked on that aims to expand veterans' private-sector health care options. New VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, who officially took the job in July, is leading its implementation. However, Shulkin remains concerned about experienced people leaving Washington. Following his dismissal, numerous senior VA staff left the agency, including the deputy secretary and chief information officer. "One of the biggest concerns I have about what I see happening in Washington is the hallowing out of experienced people who have said, 'This is getting too hard,'" Shulkin said. "We're losing people with both experience and passion. We need the best and brightest to be in Washington. We need people committed to public service, and it's more important than ever before." Shulkin, who was a physician and health care executive before joining the VA, recently took a job as chief innovation officer at Sanford Health in Sioux Falls, S.D. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | October 15, 2018 ++]

VA Blue Water Claims Update 54 ► **House to Senate | Pass the Bill Already**

As tens of thousands of so-called "Blue Water" Navy veterans wait for Congress to act, 45 House Members are calling on the Senate to advance crucial legislation to expand much-needed care to them. In a letter sent to Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA), Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN) and 44 other House Democrats urged the Senate VA Committee chairman to pass the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, "so that the legislation can be brought to the Senate floor as soon as possible." "It is a very sad reality that every day of delay means there are fewer Blue Water Navy veterans who earned and deserved compensation and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care for their illnesses," the letter reads.

"As veterans' advocates, we have all heard from frustrated veterans who say it sometimes looks to them as if the Congress and the VA are denying benefits just waiting for them to die. Unless Congress passes this bill, it will be hard to argue against that notion." The House unanimously passed the bill in June, which represents "the first time these veterans saw any real progress from their government," says Walz. "However, it's extremely disappointing to see the legislation lose traction in the Senate, presumably because the Trump Administration has come out in strong opposition to the bill, not based on policy, but because it simply does not want to invest the money it would take to do right by these veterans.

The legislation would finally grant a presumption of exposure to Agent Orange for sailors who served in territorial waters off the coast of Vietnam; U.S. service members who served on-the-ground in Vietnam during the war already have that. It would also allow these veterans to receive expedited care and other VA benefits if they're suffering from illnesses connected to their exposure. Some 90,000 Navy Vietnam veterans stand to benefit. The issue gained conflict when VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said he did not support the measure due to, in part, a lack of scientific evidence. The VA argues that since there is no definitive proof that exposure to the dioxin-riddled Agent Orange has led to any

identifiable diseases, there's no reason to provide disability benefits to these vets. They're suffering from cancers and other diseases common for people their age, the VA says.

Another concern the VA has is the cost. Expanding benefits to Blue Water veterans would cost the agency nearly \$7 billion over the next decade. Looking to offset that cost, the bill would increase fees on VA home loans. But VA officials say that would be unfair to the general veteran population. "VA will continue to object and try to find roadblocks," the House members wrote. "It is the Congress' job to say enough is enough."

Agent Orange was used by the U.S. military to clear out forests, denying the enemy cover. But the chemical contains a known cancer-causing agent, dioxin. Sailors at the time and veterans since say the ships would use contaminated water on board and then distill it enough so service members could drink it. "It appears as if exposure to toxins by American service members in theatres of war will always be a reality," says the letter. "As Members of Congress, our task for the future will be to take the lessons learned from the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam so many decades ago, and find ways to forthrightly acknowledge the exposure, determine the service connection and then compensate service members in far less than two generations." [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Matt Saintsing | October 16, 2018 ++]

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

Fairpoint, NY – A veteran from Fairport pleaded guilty to lying about suicides he says he witnessed overseas in order to claim disability benefits and claim tens of thousands of dollars. **Michael Pecka**, 33, filed a claim for VA Disability Benefits in 2011 claiming that he had Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from witnessing the suicide of two fellow soldiers while deployed to Kuwait in 2004-2005 with the Army Reserve. But investigators with the Department of Veterans Affairs determined that Pecka "lied about being present for either suicide, lied about observing either suicide, lied about being involved in the investigation of either suicide, and in the case of one of the soldiers, was not even in the same country at the time he committed suicide," according to the office of U.S. Attorney James P. Kennedy, Jr. Due to the high disability rating that Pecka received because of his PTSD claims, he received more than \$92,000 in tax free disability benefits that he wasn't legally entitled to. Pecka filed the initial claim while he was an inmate in federal prison for an unrelated bank fraud conviction. Investigators said he repeated his false claims about observing the suicides on government forms in 2011 and 2014. He faces five years in prison, a fine of up to \$250,000, or both. Pecka is scheduled to be sentenced on January 24, 2019. [Source: WHAM 13 | October 24, 2018 ++]

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Baltimore, MD – A former U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) official pled guilty 26 OCT to demanding and receiving bribes from three for-profit schools in exchange for enrolling disabled military veterans in those schools and facilitating over \$2 million in payments from the VA using the veterans' federal benefits. **James King**, age 63 pled guilty to an Information alleging one count of honest services and money/property wire fraud, one count of bribery, and one count of falsifying records to obstruct an administrative investigation. The plea was entered before U.S. District Judge John D. Bates of the District of Columbia, who set sentencing for Jan. 15, 2019.

King is the fourth individual to plead guilty as part of this investigation. In April, Albert Poawui and Sombo Kanneh pleaded guilty to bribing and conspiring to bribe King, respectively. In July, Michelle Stevens pleaded guilty to bribing King. "For years, James King and his criminal associates defrauded an important VA program that provides education services to military veterans who served our country," said Assistant Attorney General Benczkowski. "The Justice Department is committed to prosecuting those who seek to illegally enrich themselves at the expense of programs intended to help our brave servicemembers."

- "James King took advantage of his position with the VA by participating in a scam that took money from programs meant to help our disabled military veterans find jobs and enhance their education," said U.S.

Attorney Liu. “This investigation shows that we will do everything we can to ensure that taxpayer money intended for our veterans is put to its proper use, not siphoned off by the people and organizations who are entrusted with helping them.”

- “King tried to use his position to enrich himself at the expense of veterans who have honorably served our country,” said FBI Special Agent in Charge DeSarno. “This guilty plea makes it perfectly clear that such activity by anyone affiliated with the U.S. government will not be tolerated. The FBI will work closely with our partners to continue to aggressively investigate allegations of corruption.”
- “King’s plea is a win for VA and our veterans,” said Special Agent in Charge Lampkins of the VA-OIG Mid-Atlantic Field Office. “It sends a clear message that VA OIG is dedicated to prosecuting those that take advantage of VA programs that are intended to help our veterans and their families.”

According to King’s admissions made in connection with his plea, the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) provides disabled U.S. military veterans with education and employment-related services. VR&E program counselors advise veterans under their supervision which schools to attend and facilitate payments to those schools for veterans’ tuition and necessary supplies. From 2015 through 2017, King, using his position as a VR&E program counselor, demanded and received cash bribes from the owners of Atius Technology Institute (Atius), Eelon Training Academy (Eelon), and a school identified in documents as “School A,” a school purporting to specialize in physical security classes. King facilitated over \$2 million in payments to Atius, over \$83,000 to Eelon, and over \$340,000 to “School A,” all in furtherance of King’s separate agreements with the respective school owners to commit bribery and defraud the VA. King agreed with Poawui and Stevens that they would each pay him, in cash, seven percent of the money they received from the VA in exchange for King steering veterans to their schools and facilitating VA payments. King similarly accepted cash payments from the owner of School A, who is identified as Person A in the Information, in exchange for the same official acts.

In order to maximize the profits from their fraud, all three school owners sent King and other VA officials’ false information about the education being provided to veterans, and King facilitated payments to all three schools knowing this information was false. King also admitted to repeatedly lying to veterans under his supervision in order to convince them to attend Atius, Eelon, or School A. For example, King falsely instructed one veteran that, unless he attended School A, his VR&E program benefits would “lapse.” King insisted that this veteran enroll in School A despite the veteran’s protests that he could not engage in physical security work due to a physical disability, and despite the fact that the veteran had enrolled in the VR&E program to pursue his dream of becoming a baker.

In early 2017, the VA initiated a fact-finding inquiry into Atius based on complaints by students as to the quality of education at the school. In August 2017, after King became aware of the inquiry, he created a falsified site visit report and instructed Poawui to send it to another VA official, all in an effort to obstruct the VA’s inquiry into Atius. In January 2018, after Poawui had begun to cooperate with the government in its investigation, King attempted to convince Poawui to lie to the grand jury about the purpose of the bribe payments. [Source: U.S. Attorneys | District of Columbia | October 26, 2018 ++]

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Lebanon, PA - The United States Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of Pennsylvania announced today that **Jason Ehrhart**, age 48, of Thompsontown, Pennsylvania, and Jason’s former wife, **Laurie Ehrhart**, age 48, of Newport, Pennsylvania, were charged with defrauding a disabled Veteran, the Veteran’s Administration, and the Social Security Administration out of \$316,360. According to United States Attorney David J. Freed, Jason Ehrhart is charged by way of a criminal information with one count of health care fraud. Jason’s former wife, Laurie Ehrhart, is charged in an indictment with one count of health care fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit health care fraud.

According to the charges, a veteran who was a former resident of Perry County, Pennsylvania, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis while serving in the U.S. Army in 1985. The veteran later began receiving disability benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) and was eventually

hospitalized on a permanent basis at the VA hospital in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, on November 8, 2004. On August 8, 2006, the veteran was deemed by the VA to be incompetent to handle his own financial affairs. As a result, on October 2, 2006, Jason Ehrhart successfully applied to serve as the veteran's VA Fiduciary and Legal Custodian. Under the terms of a Fiduciary Agreement, Jason Ehrhart agreed to use all of the veteran's VA disability benefits exclusively for the veteran's benefit. The agreement warned him that the funds were not for his personal use. The Fiduciary Agreement also required Jason Ehrhart to submit an annual accounting to the VA with respect to the amount of money spent on the veteran's behalf.

The charges allege, however, that between October 2006 and August 2016, Jason Ehrhart and Laurie Ehrhart, who was then Jason's wife, misspent \$316,360 of the veteran's VA and Social Security disability benefits on themselves. While Jason Ehrhart served as the veteran's VA Fiduciary and Legal Custodian, all of the veteran's VA benefits, plus most of his Social Security disability checks, were deposited into a checking account Jason opened as a legal custodian account in the veteran's name. Altogether, \$476,260 in federal benefits (\$422,828 in VA disability, \$48,187 in Social Security disability, and \$5,244 in VA clothing allowance) were deposited into the account between January 2009 and August 2016.

The charging documents alleged that, at least \$316,360 of the \$476,260 was misappropriated by Jason and Laurie Ehrhart and converted to their own use. Checks totaling \$218,832 (\$96,202 payable to Jason Ehrhart and \$122,630 payable to Laurie Ehrhart), some of which exceeded \$5,000, \$6,000 and \$7,000, were drawn against the account. Of the \$218,832, \$157,742 was allegedly deposited into Jason and Laurie Ehrhart's joint checking account at the Juniata Valley Bank (JVB) and at least \$23,496 was converted to cash. Thereafter, it is alleged that the funds in the joint JVB account were employed by Jason and Laurie Ehrhart to pay personal expenses. The charging documents further allege that another \$7,174 in checks were made payable to Jason and Laurie Ehrhart's two minor children. Jason Ehrhart allegedly instructed the children to take the checks to the bank, cash them, and surrender the cash to him. Another \$19,890 in checks were allegedly made payable to another couple who were Jason and Laurie Ehrhart's best friends. According to the charges, Jason Ehrhart regularly treated the couple and their children to dinners out and at least two, all-expense paid vacations to Disney World in Florida, purchased two automobiles for the family, and paid for the wife's dental work.

To conceal his embezzlements, it is alleged that Jason Ehrhart submitted eight false annual accountings to the VA in which he falsely claimed he spent \$402,408 on the veteran's behalf between October 2006 and October 2015. According to the charges, the itemized expenditures in the accountings were grossly inflated. For example, Jason Ehrhart claimed he paid the mortgage on the veteran's residence (\$1,631 per month) plus the veteran's share of the mortgage on his mother's residence (\$881) after she died in May 2011. However, the lenders against both properties obtained judgments and they were eventually foreclosed and sold.

According to the charges, Jason Ehrhart also falsely claimed in the annual accountings that he spent thousands on miscellaneous expenditures for the veteran, including storage unit rentals, vehicle maintenance bills, state and local taxes, life and auto insurance, and credit card bills. However, in 2016 the veteran's specially equipped wheelchair van, for which Jason Ehrhart claimed he spent approximately \$32,395 for vehicle maintenance, was found broken down and abandoned along a Perry County roadside. The veteran died at the Lebanon VA Hospital on July 30, 2018. Laurie Ehrhart was arraigned on the charges before U.S. Magistrate Judge Susan E. Schwab 29 OCT and released on her own recognizance. No date has yet been set for Jason Ehrhart's initial appearance on the charges.

The maximum penalty under federal law for this offense is 10 years of imprisonment, a term of supervised release following imprisonment, and a fine. Under the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, the Judge is also required to consider and weigh a number of factors, including the nature, circumstances and seriousness of the offense; the history and characteristics of the defendant; and the need to punish the defendant, protect the public and provide for the defendant's educational, vocational and medical needs. For these reasons, the statutory maximum penalty for the offense is not an accurate indicator of the potential sentence for a specific defendant. [Source: U.S. Attorneys | Middle District of Pennsylvania | October 29, 2018 ++]

VAMC Washington DC Update 11 ► Get the Hospital Off the VA's "Critical" List

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie on 15 OCT named retired Army Col. Michael Heimall, a seasoned military health care system administrator, to take over at the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center. His unstated mission: to get the hospital off the VA's "critical" list. "Michael's proven experience is what we need to continue to stabilize and make further improvements at the medical center," Wilkie said in a statement. The center was once a flagship in the VA system but has been the subject of two scathing VA Inspector General's reports warning that patients were at risk. "I believe our employees, volunteers and veterans will greatly benefit from his strong leadership," Wilkie said of Heimall, who previously served as chief of staff at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, from 2015 to 2017.

Heimall, a fellow at the American College of Healthcare Executives since 2007, received his commission while earning a Bachelor of Arts degree at Norwich University in Vermont. He holds Master of Strategic Studies degree from the Army War College, as well as a Master of Health Administration degree from Baylor University. As director at the D.C. center, he will be in charge of a facility serving more than 121,000 veterans in the D.C. area, on an operating budget of \$610 million. The continuing problems at the hospital were considered a factor in President Donald Trump's decision last March to fire then-VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin. In April 2017, VA Inspector General Michael Missal took the unusual step of issuing a preliminary report on the center to prod the Veterans Health Administration into action.

Missal's report said that storage areas for medical supplies were filthy, management was clueless on what was in the storage areas, medical supply rejects may have been used on patients and more than \$150 million in supplies and equipment had never been inventoried. The IG said that staff at the center at times had to make emergency runs to neighboring hospitals to ask for supplies. The hospital had to borrow bone material for knee replacement surgeries and also ran out of tubes needed for kidney dialysis, forcing staff to go to a private-sector hospital to procure them, the IG's interim report found. In March 2018, Missal issued a full report, titled "Persistent and Pervasive Problems at the Washington, DC, VA Medical Center Placed Patients and Assets at Unnecessary Risk."

Following the first IG report, Shulkin replaced the hospital's director and the medical center has since functioned with a series of acting directors until Heimall's appointment. Last month, the VA's Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning (SAIL) report rated all hospitals in the system. Nine were on the "high risk" list and the D.C. center was listed as "critical." In early August, in his second week on the job, Wilkie visited the center to gauge whether performance had improved. "We had a good visit today," he said later in a statement. "And I appreciated hearing from facility and regional leadership on the important work that has been done to address the Inspector General's concerns, as well as plans for resolving all its remaining recommendations." [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | October 15, 2018 ++]

VAMC Omaha NE Update 05 ► Wrong Number Gives Right Results

Sometimes a wrong number turns out to be exactly the right one. When Lisa Nagengast flew home to Florida on 20 OCT, all seemed well with her brother back in Nebraska. Greg Holeman, 48, was out of the hospital after a risky surgery, and home care had been set up. But then came the troubling phone call from her brother: The incision from his spinal fusion was oozing blood and pus. His left leg had gone numb. And he couldn't find a ride to the hospital, Lisa posted in a Facebook account of what unfolded that day back in Nebraska.

Holeman, an Army veteran living on disability in Columbus, Nebraska, believed he couldn't afford a ride to the hospital, his sister said. He didn't have the cash on hand for a taxi and didn't believe his VA insurance would cover an ambulance, she said. So she called her brother's social worker. At least she thought she did. A young woman answered the phone and listened intently. "I assumed it was the social worker, Pam," Lisa explained on Facebook. "I told her who I was, why I was calling, gave her the whole story, and asked what can we do to get him to the hospital. What Lisa didn't realize was that she'd called the Jimmy John's restaurant in Columbus.

The young woman who answered the phone, Lupe Rodriguez, passed the receiver to her manager, Jason Voss. "She was a little panicky," Voss said of Lisa. "At that point, I figured I should take a minute to think about it — it was obviously not someone making something up. It was an actual situation going on." Voss couldn't leave the restaurant, but he also didn't want to put anyone on the spot. So he called Jimmy John's driver Zach Hillmer to talk it over with him. "There was so much we didn't know, what could happen, how it could fall to us," Voss said.

Hillmer, a veteran himself, called Lisa to find out where her brother lived. Lisa said she became confused. She asked him why another social worker hadn't given him her brother's details. "And he said, 'Umm, this is Jimmy Johns,'" Lisa posted. "I said, 'You mean Jimmy John's like the food place?' Yeah, I had called Jimmy John's restaurant. Most places would have probably said something like, 'Gee, I'm really sorry about your brother, but we can't help you.' But (Zach), the delivery driver at Jimmy John's, picked up my brother and took him to the emergency room to get the medical attention he needed."

That misdial must have been some sort of "divine intervention," Lisa Nagengast said 24 OCT. "It was meant to be." Her brother is back home and doing better, she said. Voss, who was back on his night shift, summed things up. "There is always time for people, especially people in need," he said. "I had the resources, I had drivers, we weren't super busy with deliveries, either. Zach was glad to help someone out." Lisa said the entire episode has been heart-warming. "In today's political climate, everybody's arguing with everybody, and we're not actively listening to what anybody has to say," she said. "To have two complete strangers listen to me and then decide to do something to fix it — it was amazing."

Note:

- (1) In a 24 OCT 2018 statement, the Omaha VA said it urges veterans in need of an ambulance to call one.
- (2) Interim Final Rule: On January 9, 2018, the Department of Veterans Affairs issued a final rule change that amended its policy for payment of Millennium Bill claims. The Millennium Bill authorizes the Veterans Administration (VA) to pay for emergency care provided to veterans in non-VA facilities — including emergency ambulance transportation — provided the veteran has no other health insurance that would cover the costs of such emergency care. These changes were necessitated, in part, by a decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans' Appeals (Staab v. McDonald, 28 Vet. App. 50, 2016). The two major changes being made by the interim final rule are: (1) the expansion of payment eligibility to include veterans who received partial payment or reimbursement from a health plan for their non-VA emergency care and (2) the expansion of payment eligibility for emergency transportation associated with a veteran's receipt of emergency treatment in a non-VA facility.

[Source: World-Herald | Nancy Gaarder | October 24, 2018 ++]

*** Vets ***



Vet Mental Health Update 02 ► CVN Expanding to 25 Clinics by 2020

Hedge fund billionaire Steven Cohen said 17 OCT that his Cohen Veterans Network (CVN) plans to expand to 25 mental health clinics by 2020 for veterans and their family members in an effort to create the "mental and brain health care system of the future." "We've got a two-path approach -- take care of today's problems now and look for better answers in the future," he said in brief remarks at the opening of the 3rd annual Cohen Veterans Care Summit at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center near the White House. Cohen said CVN currently has 10 clinics nationwide and plans to have four more set up by the end of this year. In addition, he said, "we're on target" to have a total of 25 by 2020, operating on the theme "Back to Better."

His clinics have treated 8,000 veterans and family members thus far, and "they tell us we're making their lives better," he said. "Sadly, we're now facing an epidemic of veterans suicides. We have to stop it in its tracks," he added. "I want to do something about this." That's the reason, Cohen said, that he created the Cohen Veterans Network and funded Cohen Veterans Bioscience to conduct research on biological signs and other diagnostics that could lead to innovative treatments for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. The Cohen network of clinics would have had 11 operating this year, but the one in Los Angeles at the University of California abruptly shut down last year. According to a lengthy article by ProPublica, the non-profit investigative journalism organization, in collaboration with Fortune magazine, there were allegations that the Los Angeles clinic was turning away homeless veterans. "We did have to move away from" the Los Angeles clinic, Anthony Guido, vice president for communications at CVN, told Military.com at the summit. "Both sides agreed it was not working the way it was intended."



Hedge fund billionaire Steven Cohen

Cohen, who reportedly has an estimated net worth of \$14 billion, founded CVN in 2015, two years after his firm, SAC Capital Advisors, agreed to pay \$1.8 billion in fines and civil penalties to resolve a criminal indictment for insider trading. It was the largest fine in history for insider trading, according to Preet Bharara, who was then U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York. Cohen was also banned from running a hedge fund for two years. He now heads a new firm, Point72 Asset Management. However, Cohen, who pledged \$275 million of his own funds to found CVN, has recruited an impressive board of directors, including retired Adm. Mike Mullen, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; former Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn.; Mary Winnefeld, co-founder of the S.A.F.E. Project aimed at curbing opioid addiction and wife of retired Adm. James "Sandy" Winnefeld, former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Linda Rosenberg, president and chief executive officer of the National Council for Behavioral Health.

In the summit presentations 15 OCT, Anthony Hassan, president and CEO of CVN, said about 22 percent of the veterans at Cohen clinics were referred by the Department of Veterans Affairs. "We're filling gaps" in the VA's mental health programs for veterans, he said. "It's not about competition" with the VA, he said, but rather about getting the best treatment available for the veteran. Last February, the VA announced it was going into partnership with CVN to

work on curbing the suicide rate among veterans. "VA and CVN have a shared goal to improve veterans' health and access to mental health services to reduce veteran suicides," then-VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin said in a VA release. "With 14 out of the 20 veterans who take their own lives per day not engaging VA care, partnerships such as this help those veterans, as well as their families, receive care where they live," added Shulkin, who was fired by President Donald Trump in March.

Hassan said at the time that the partnership was preventing suicides by getting veterans needed care faster. "We are excited about partnering with VA and advancing the field through innovative clinician training initiatives and public messaging," he said. For a series of videos on the Cohen Veterans Network sites and operations refer to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_QYEuiVJA0&list=PLx1jpnw7W2E2cQKi2GUPqHYoajol0C1f3. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | October 11, 2018 ++]

Vet Fraud & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 OCT 2018

The New York state Attorney General's Office on 27 OCT announced a lawsuit against a New York-based national jewelry retailer that allegedly preyed upon and misled active-duty service members, often selling them pieces marked up 600 to 1,000 percent over wholesale value, including special commemorative items such as the "Mother's Medal of Honor." The scheme was allegedly driven by retailer **Harris Jewelry** using a purported-but-illegal charitable program called "Operation Teddy Bear." The bear program, in which employees would stand outside of stores holding military-dressed teddy bears and touting the charity, was used to lure the service people into its more than 20 stores placed on or near military bases, the suit claims. Once inside, the military men and women were "duped" into high-priced, illegal in-house financing contracts—with terms that were purposely made hard to decipher—for overpriced jewelry, said Attorney General Barbara Underwood in a statement. In one example of Harris Jewelry's pricing, it would purchase the popularly sold "Mother's Medal of Honor" for \$77.70 and then sell it to military customers for \$799 plus warranties and interest, Underwood said. The company has denied the lawsuit's allegations.

The 45-page complaint lodged in state Supreme Court in Jefferson County against Harris Originals of NY Inc. and its 30 or so related entities resulted from a more than two-year investigation conducted with 13 other states, according to Underwood. New York and Tennessee led the multistate investigation, and during its course, Harris Jewelry allegedly brought its own litigation in a failed attempt to use the state courts to challenge the AG Office's investigatory subpoenas issued under cover of anonymity, the complaint noted.

Alleging a relevant period of 2010 to present, the complaint also said that revenue across all Harris stores, located in at least 12 states and including online and phone services, was more than \$30 million for fiscal year 2016-17. Total revenue between 2010 and 2017 exceeded \$275 million, the complaint said. "Harris Jewelry used service members as pawns in a predatory scheme," Underwood said in her statement. "My office will not tolerate companies that seek to take advantage of New Yorkers in order to line their own pockets." But Harris Jewelry, based in Hauppauge, said in its own statement issued late Monday afternoon that it will "vigorously contest the inaccurate and baseless allegations raised" and that it "operates in full compliance with the laws that regulate our industry." "Harris Jewelry stands behind its decades-old business model. The New York attorney general has unfortunately reached the wrong conclusions about our business and the work we do," the company's statement added.

According to Underwood's statement and the complaint—signed by Assistant Attorney General in Charge Deanna Nelson in Watertown and Assistant Attorney General Alicia Lendon—the retailer employed "unfair, abusive, false and deceptive acts and practices, deceptive credit repair services, and illegal lending in the financing of jewelry sales," leading to eight alleged causes of action including civil usury, criminal usury and deceptive business practices. While not naming amounts sought, the complaint asked for enjoinder of the business, disgorgement of moneys received due to illegal financing arrangements, restitution for affected consumers, and voiding and rescission of customer financing contracts, among other things.

The complaint stated Harris Jewelry—which operates one store just miles from Fort Drum in Watertown—“prominently advertises” that company founder Jerome Harris was a World War II Marine veteran. The business carries “a small and variable inventory” of jewelry, including engagement rings, patriotic and military-themed jewelry and special gifts such as the “Mother’s Medal of Honor,” a “Token of Pride Coin,” and the “Forever as One Dog Tag Necklace,” the complaint added. [Source: ALM Media | October 29, 2018 ++]

Vet Health Care 08 ► Vets Still Face Significant Health Risks

Veterans remain more likely to report feeling in great medical condition even while they face an increased risk of serious health problems like cancer, arthritis and emotional distress, according to updated survey results from veterans advocates out 23 OCT. The report, from United Health Foundation and the Military Officers Association of America, has tracked health issues among former military members since 2011, with the goal of highlighting that the “health care needs of people with military service differ in several important ways from civilians.” The results come from more than 1 million responses from veterans and civilians who never served. In 2016, the most recent results, more than 56 percent of veterans reported their health is good or excellent, above the 51 percent of civilian peers who said the same.

But as has been the case in past surveys, that optimism overlooks a host of unhealthy behaviors and significant health threats facing individuals who spent time in uniform. Veterans are more likely to contract arthritis (25 percent compared with 23 percent for civilians), cardiovascular disease (10 percent vs. 7 percent), cancers (11 percent vs. 10 percent) and illnesses that leave them functionally impaired (26 percent vs. 21 percent), according to the study. “Both men and women with military service report significantly higher rates of anxiety, depression, and frequent mental distress than men and women who have not served,” the report states. “Despite significantly higher rates of coverage and access to care to many preventive services, those who have served are less likely to have a dedicated health care provider than those who have not served.”

Researchers did find positive news in the latest health survey update. Rates of both smoking and drinking were down significantly in the latest findings. And more veterans saw an expansion of mental health care options in recent years, giving them more access to help when needed. However, the drinking and smoking rates still outpace those of their civilian peers. Smokeless tobacco use among veterans is more than twice that of individuals who never served. And the report states that insufficient sleep remains “an ongoing concern” for veterans. The report emphasizes that the health of veterans is a national priority, Tracy Malone, president of the United Health Foundation, said in a statement, adding that she is hopeful officials will “use the insights from this report to identify opportunities for collaboration to improve the health of military members, veterans and their families across the country.” The full report is available online at <https://www.americashealthrankings.org>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | October 29, 2018 ++]

PTSD Update 248 ► Wounded Warrior Project Pledge

The Wounded Warrior Project pledged on 23 OCT to raise \$160 million over the next five years that would be funneled to four institutions for two-and-three week courses of intensive treatment for veterans suffering from PTSD and traumatic brain injury. The fundraising was aimed at veterans who “have the courage -- yes, the courage -- when they return home to seek help,” retired Army Lt. Gen. Mike Linnington, chief executive officer of WWP, said in an announcement aboard the Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum on Manhattan’s West Side. “When they return home, they’ve earned our support, and that’s really what today is all about.”

According to plans, WWP's Warrior Care Network would distribute \$65 million to the "Home Base" program at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston; \$45 million to the "Road Home" program at the Rush University Medical Center in Chicago; \$25 million to veterans programs at Emory Healthcare in Atlanta; and \$20 million to "Operation Mend" at UCLA Health in Los Angeles. The total adds up to \$155 million. Rob Louis, a WWP spokesman, said an additional \$5 million would go to pilot projects at Home Base in Boston and to other projects at "Road Home" in Chicago for a projected total of \$160 million.

Louis said the Blue Angels Foundation had already committed \$5 million to the fundraising plan, and the bulk of the \$160 million was expected to come from continuing donations to WWP over the next five years. For the most part, it's the American people" who will be contributing, he said. "We're grateful to be able to help warriors access world-class mental health treatment ... [and] we're humbled by the support of the nation that allows us to commit to this care," Linnington, the former head of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, said in a statement before the intrepid ceremony.

WWP, which maintains that as many as one in three veterans suffer from some form of post- traumatic stress disorder, has invested about \$100 million in mental health treatment over the previous three years. The projected \$160 million would allow for the expansion of services, said retired Army Lt. Col. Mike Richardson, WWP's vice president for Independent Services and Mental Health. Veterans "pay not a penny for this treatment," said Richardson, the former director of the disability evaluation system for Army Medicine. He said about 1,000 veterans had gone through the Wounded Care Network-sponsored program of two to three weeks of intensive care with 70 hours of individualized programs, and another 1,100 were expected to receive treatment from the \$160 million over the next five years. WWP's programs, which became well known through TV ads, had average completion rates of 90 percent, compared to 30-50 percent completion rates in other programs, Richardson said.

On the Intrepid, Army veteran Mike Geiger, who guarded "high-value" prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba and at camps in Iraq as a military policeman, described outbursts of anger that he couldn't control or explain before going through WWP's intensive treatment in Boston. "I didn't know what was going on," Geiger said. It reached the point, he said, where his wife told him, "If I'd known you were going to be this way, I wouldn't have married you." In recovery, he came to accept that "it's okay to fall down," Geiger said, and with resilience training "we get back up." "So I'm not perfect, I have a long way to go," Geiger said. "I learned how to fight in the Army. I'm just finding a different way to fight."

Wounded Warrior Project itself is in a form of recovery from a loss of donor confidence following a series of scandals in 2016 involving expenditures and whistleblower complaints of a toxic work environment in the program. Two top executives at WWP were fired. The watchdog group Charity Navigator initially placed WWP on its "watch list," but Charity Navigator eventually removed WWP from the list and gave it a three-star rating on a scale of four, following independent accounting investigations that questioned the allegations of lavish expenditures. Last April, Linnington said that donations to WWP dropped by \$91 million in fiscal year 2017 in the aftermath of the allegations. But he projected growth for 2018. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | October 23, 2018 ++]

Vet School Rankings ► **Top Ones for 2019**

In the market for a good school where you can use your education benefits? MilitaryTimes surveyed hundreds of colleges across the country and used their answers, combined with federal data, to rank them in the areas of university culture, academic quality and outcomes, policies, student support and costs and financial aid. To help inform your decision check out the rankings of each category by clicking on the following charts and then read about the top three listed in those charts:

- [4-year schools](https://charts.militarytimes.com/chart/9) (<https://charts.militarytimes.com/chart/9>)

- [2-year schools](https://charts.militarytimes.com/chart/10) (https://charts.militarytimes.com/chart/10)
- [Online and nontraditional schools](https://charts.militarytimes.com/chart/11) (https://charts.militarytimes.com/chart/11)
- [Career and technical colleges](https://charts.militarytimes.com/chart/12) (https://charts.militarytimes.com/chart/12)

Four-Year Schools

1. Georgia Southern University

Veterans and service members make up about 8 percent of the student body at Georgia Southern University, the largest proportion of any top 10 school in the four-year category. The school recently consolidated with Armstrong State University, which has for years been a top finisher in our Best for Vets rankings. “We are extremely proud of the programs, services and campus culture we have developed that provide service members, veterans and their families the opportunity to achieve their academic and professional goals,” said Phil Gore, Georgia Southern University’s director of Military and Veterans Affairs. “Being recognized by Military Times as one of the best institutions for military-affiliated students demonstrates the level of commitment we have to providing our military population an optimal educational experience to ensure they complete a postsecondary degree.”

2. University of South Florida

At the University of South Florida, military-connected students are retained, complete courses and graduate at higher rates, on average, than their peers at other schools that provided this information on the survey. They also have a slightly higher GPA than non-military students at the school – 3.21, compared to 3.17. “The university has made it a point, no matter the issue, to work with veterans from the moment they show interest in the school, through their matriculation and even beyond graduation into their future career,” said Air Force veteran and University of South Florida graduate Aimee Carpenter, now an admission and benefits coordinator at the school. “At any point throughout their journey, the Office of Veteran Success is there to help our student veterans and their families in any way they can.”

3. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

At Rutgers, the largest school in the top 10 with more than 69,000 students, the student veteran population has tripled in the last decade, said Ann Treadway, director of the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services. The school has both a veterans center for socializing and an office for processing military education benefits on campus, as well as a virtual veterans center to replicate these services for online students.

Two-Year Schools

1. Central Community College-Nebraska

This multi-campus community college serving a 25-county area in Nebraska topped our list of 2-year schools for the sixth year in a row. “Student veterans face unique challenges as they readjust to civilian life, and we are dedicated and proud to have multiple centers and services available to empower them through the transition,” said Travis Karr, director of veteran and military services. Central recently opened its fourth Veteran and Military Resource Center at its Kearney Learning Center satellite campus, providing comprehensive resources and services for students and embodying “Central Community College’s mission to maximize student and community success,” Karr said.

2. Northwestern Michigan College

At Northwestern Michigan College, the Office of Military and Veteran Services tries to serve as the “new team” for students who recently separated from the military. It’s no wonder, then, that of the five areas we consider for the Best for Vets: Colleges list — culture, student support, cost and financial aid, policies and academic quality — culture was the school’s strongest category. “The men and women who have chosen to serve our country deserve our respect, our gratitude and our support,” said Scott Herzberg, advisor for military and veteran services at Northwestern Michigan College. “They have invested time, energy, and passion with their whole being to do a job few in our nation now do. It’s our turn to serve them, just as they have served us.”

3. Tarrant County College Trinity River Campus

At the Trinity River Campus of Tarrant County College in Fort Worth, Texas, the 1997 book “Inside the Magic Kingdom” is required reading for all news hires, school officials told Military Times. That translates to “aggressively” friendly customer service for students, and the Disney-like atmosphere could be one reason the school earned high marks on our rankings. Like most other schools on the list, Tarrant County College is a signatory of the Veterans Affairs Department’s Principles of Excellence and Eight Keys to Veterans’ Success and has both a veterans center and a veterans office on campus.

Online and Nontraditional Schools

1. Liberty University

Liberty University is the largest school in our online and nontraditional rankings list with nearly 103,000 students. And while Liberty has a physical campus in Lynchburg, Virginia, the overwhelming majority of its 30,000 veteran, service-member and military-dependent students have opted to attend online, according to enrollment figures provided by the school. The university did a better job of retaining both its military and non-military students between 2016 and 2017 than most other online and nontraditional schools that participated in the survey. “In 2017, we were designated as a Purple Heart University — the first one in Virginia — in recognition of our support of military members, including veterans and their families,” said President Jerry Falwell Jr. “We consider it a great honor to serve these men and women who have made sacrifices for our country.”

2. University of Maryland University College

“At UMUC, we know what it means to serve the educational needs of veterans, as well as service members transitioning out of the military, because we have been doing it for more than 70 years,” said retired Army Col. Keith Hauk, associate vice president for veterans initiatives and military operations support at the university. Military students make up more than 45 percent of the student population at the school, which offers classes primarily online, but also in person, including on many military installations in the U.S. and overseas. Aside from being a top-ranked school, UMUC is also the second most popular destination for service members using TA benefits and is among the top 10 most common colleges chosen by GI Bill users, according to federal data.

3. Excelsior College

Excelsior College, headquartered in Albany, New York, had the highest military-student graduation rate of any online and nontraditional school that provided this information in the survey. It also tied for the lowest student loan default rate among schools ranked in this list. “Through flexible, affordable, and career-oriented academic programs and wide-ranging student-centric services and resources offered by our Center for Military and Veteran Education, we are well positioned to assist former service members achieve their educational and career goals,” said Excelsior President James Baldwin. “Their success remains the most significant measure of our success as an institution.”

Career and Technical Colleges

1. ECPI University

ECPI University runs on a year-round schedule, offering five-week terms with both in-classroom, online and hybrid options that offer military and veteran students flexibility and speed in their education, said Bill Brown, executive director of military education at the for-profit school. And in many cases, classes replicate the training programs students went through during their active-duty service. “At ECPI University, we value and honor military experience,” Brown said. “Our academic team works diligently to ensure that all relevant military education and training is translated into academic credit. That military experience carries over not just in credit, but also value to the entire student body.”

2. Savannah Technical College

At Savannah Technical College, one in four students is a veteran, service member or a military dependent, said Jim Krupp, the school’s military outreach coordinator. “We are proud to serve military-affiliated students and continue to look for ways to support them, including unique training programs, scholarships and support services,” he said. “Our

graduates have a 93.1 percent placement rate in their field of study, which shows that employers hire our graduates for their trained workforce.” Though the school’s most recent graduation rate for all students was a mere 25 percent, according to Education Department data, its military students graduated at a much higher rate of 73 percent.

3. Gwinnett Technical College

Gwinnett Technical College, which has about 8,000 students, recently opened a new 25-acre campus in Alpharetta, Georgia, in addition to its main campus in Lawrenceville. The school offers more than 140 associate degree, diploma and certificate programs, as well as hundreds of seminars, workshops and courses that provide specialized training, according to information provided by the school. Student support was the school’s highest-ranked category, followed by cost and financial aid. Tuition costs at Gwinnett are covered by both the military’s tuition assistance benefit and the GI Bill.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | : Natalie Gross | October 22, 2018 ++]

Homeless Vets Update 89 ► New Initiative Offering Them Tiny Houses

When asked how he was doing in a recent interview, Henry Owens didn’t hesitate to answer: “Blessed.” Until recently, the 32-year-old Navy veteran was living on the streets of Kansas City, Missouri, struggling to keep a job and lacking close family members or friends who could lend him a bed to sleep on, or even a couch. “My PTSD just kind of kicked in wholeheartedly,” he said. “I was struggling and dealing with that, and that just kept me in a cycle of not being independent and taking care of myself.” But today, Owens lives in a house in a brand new neighborhood, surrounded by a community of people who understand exactly what he’s been through. The fact that the home is a mere 240 square feet doesn’t faze him. “I have everything I need,” he said.



Henry Owens and his house (left) The nonprofit Veterans Community Project (right) has built a Veterans Village of tiny houses for homeless veterans in Kansas City, Missouri, and is expanding to other cities

Owens is one of 13 formerly homeless veterans who have started new lives on a five-acre lot in Kansas City called Veterans Village, an initiative of the nonprofit Veterans Community Project. Besides tiny houses of 240 or 320 square feet, the organization also provides services to help the former service members get back on their feet. “At least 60 percent of the people that we serve, we’re serving them because of a poor transition from the military,” said Chris Stout, one of four Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who founded the organization.

Stout said their original idea was to purchase an old building and convert it into a shared transitional living space for homeless veterans, similar to other types of shelters. But when someone told Stout about tiny houses — in vogue a la the TV shows “Tiny House Hunters” and “Tiny House Nation” — he was sold. The 240-square-foot homes come furnished with a twin-sized bed, desk, kitchenette, bathroom and “everything you kind of need to live on your own,” said Stout, likening it to a small studio apartment. The 320-square-foot models, designed for veterans with families, can fit a queen-sized bed, sleeper sofa and a triple bunk bed. “It was housing with dignity,” he said. “It gave them their own space, a sense of security.”

That made all the difference for Owens. Before finding out about Veterans Village, he'd tried staying in shelters. More recently, he had been sleeping in a park where his friend, also homeless, was shot and killed, just days after Owens moved into his new home. "It actually saved my life," he said. With 13 more tiny houses currently under construction, Veterans Community Project eventually plans to build a total of 49 homes on the Kansas City property, along with a community center that will house medical, dental and case management services. The nonprofit is also eyeing expansion in the St. Louis, Nashville and Denver areas. And, unknowingly, their efforts were also the likely inspiration for a group of high school students in Texas who recently took on a similar project.

Al Segura, an assistant principal at Summer Creek High School near Houston, said he was scrolling through Facebook on a sleepless night in 2017 and happened across a video of a nonprofit building a tiny-home community for homeless veterans. While Segura can't remember the name of the organization in the video, he remembers it was in Kansas City, and all other signs point to Veterans Community Project. "The thought just came to me, 'Wouldn't it be neat if kids could do that?'" he said. Segura got another high school in the district on board, and after months of planning, the architecture students at both schools recently started work on two tiny homes that they will donate to homeless veterans. "It's really awesome to be able to use what I've learned in the classroom and be able to apply it to the real world and helping real people," said Sarah Dalby, one of the student architects on the project at Kingwood Park High School.

The schools plan to involve students across several departments — art students to help decorate the inside, welding students to make grills for outside, English students to write the veterans' stories and so on. "Right now, it's just two high schools, but we really want to expand that to the rest of the schools in our district, to our city, state and hopefully the country so that we have tiny home communities everywhere," Dalby said. "If we're all doing that everywhere all over the country, the question that we've posed a lot is, 'How many homeless will there be left?'" Each high school is planning to finish its tiny house by the end of the school year. The hope is to then hand them over to a community partner to manage a village of tiny homes like the one that inspired them.

Efforts to help homeless veterans showing progress, VA, HUD leaders say

'Anybody can do this' It's an admirable goal — one Stout of Veterans Community Project is proud to have inspired. "For us, that's what it's all about, right?" he said. "We want everybody to know anybody can do this." As for Owens, he said it's good to see teenagers and others embracing the Veterans Community Project model. "It just shows that VCP is a cornerstone in veteran homelessness," he said. "They have pretty much every avenue covered. We have a case manager we meet with every week. We talk just personal. We talk about transitioning into what we need to be. Projects like this is what's needed."

Now that he's getting the help he always needed after the military, Owens has started his own lawn care business and is finally regaining pride in his service after years of feeling betrayed and frustrated by the way his career ended in 2007. "It was a struggle to say, 'I'm a veteran,'" he said. But now, "being around comrades that kind of understand the difficulties of adjustment to civilian life" has helped change that. "You have neighbors who understand what you've been through, what you're going through and you have that support to get you through," he said. "It's a mind frame of knowing I can make it now." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | October 19, 2018 ++]

GI Bill Update 264 ► Court Ruling Makes Easier Path to Loan Forgiveness

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of student veterans, despite having robust GI Bill education benefits, contend they were deceived into racking up federal loan debt through abusive practices of certain for-profit colleges. On 16 OCT these students, along with thousands of non-veterans, gained an easier path to loan forgiveness from a federal court ruling in Washington D.C. U.S. District Judge Randolph D. Moss dismissed legal arguments from an association of for-profit colleges, which succeeded for more than a year to block Obama administration rules to bring financial relief to defrauded student borrowers and to strengthen federal protections against deceptive school practices.

The Trump administration's Department of Education also had fought the Obama reforms until a month ago when the same judge rejected legal arguments from Education Secretary Betsy DeVos and Trump administration attorneys. In that case, two student-borrowers and a coalition of 19 states and the District of Columbia filed separate lawsuits to invalidate the department's stay order on Obama loan rules, which had been set to take effect in July 2017. Judge Moss called the Trump team's effort to protect for-profit schools, and to avoid billions of dollars in loan forgiveness for borrowers, "arbitrary and capricious."

Together the dual rulings force DeVos, who is still critical of the Obama rules are too expansive, to implement them even as her department prepares more stringent regulations. Given the statutory schedule for rulemaking, the DeVos rules can't take effect before July 2020, the department confirmed. That creates a window for borrowers with loan debt tied to fraudulent or deceptive schools to apply for relief under more liberal rules in effect from the Oct. 16 court decision. The department likely must update information on filing borrower defense claims. Here's a link to what's available now: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/borrower-defense>.

Obama's Education Department designed its rules to better protect student borrowers against misleading and predatory practices by postsecondary institutions; to clarify a process for federal loan forgiveness in cases of institutional misconduct; to allow group actions to replace thousands of individual loan forgiveness claims, and to hold for-profit colleges accountable for harmful practices. The department decided its 20-year-old regulation on so-called "borrower defense claims" needed updating after a deluge of claims from students with federal loans following closure of a mega for-profit enterprise, Corinthian Colleges, in April 2015. The 1995 regulation, officials found, lacked detail on how students should submit and how the department should adjudicate a tsunami of loan relief requests. The old rule also limited eligibility for loan forgiveness to borrowers in default.

Obama officials released their final regulations in November 2016. They were to take effect the following July but the California Association of Postsecondary Schools filed a lawsuit to block them. A supportive DeVos quickly announced that she would block the Obama rules and prepare new ones to reflect concerns of for-profit schools and to protect taxpayers from automatic forgiveness of billions of dollars in federal student loans associated with failed for-profit colleges.

Consumer advocacy groups for students, including veterans, praised Judge Moss's recent rulings. "It's really positive news," said Walter Ochinko, research director for Veterans Education Success (VES), an advocacy group formed to protect veterans and their education benefits from fraud and deceptive practices. The Obama rule went into effect at noon 16 OCT and is to be implemented immediately. "But the devil is in the details," Ochinko said. The judge didn't give the department detailed instructions on how to implement the many provisions. "It's so easy for an administration that doesn't want to implement something not to do it," said Ochinko. "We'll just have to see how it plays out...Advocacy groups will be watching very closely."

He contends the processing of borrower defense claims by the department had "grounded to a halt" during the first half of Trump administration, a slowdown that can't entirely be blamed on having old rules in place. But Tuesday's court ruling creates "a window of opportunity that's going to last until July 2020 to apply for loan forgiveness under terms much more favorable to the student than if the [DeVos alternative] had gone into effect." The Department of Education has been criticized in the past for not doing enough to inform students about borrower defense claims. The number of student veterans who might be eligible isn't known, Ochinko said. The VES data base holds 4,000 complaints of deceptive practices by for-profits schools. "Certainly, many of those veterans will be eligible," he said. "How many have applied [already] I don't know."

As part of the Forever GI Bill law enacted in August 2017, veterans who used Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits at for-profit schools that suddenly closed, leaving them with worthless credits or degrees, have seen those education benefits restored. The new Education Department rules provide additional protections. One key feature of the Obama rules will allow certain borrower defense applicants not only to have loan balances forgiven but be reimbursed for loan amounts already paid. That might be relevant for someone like former Marine Sergeant Jonathan Ngowaki

Ngowaki enrolled in DeVry University in 2010 seeking a business degree. He said he assumed his Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit would cover all costs so he resisted a push from DeVry's financial aid office to complete a financial aid application. Finally, he relented when told it was a requirement for enrollment. Soon, he received a \$5,000 check, which a woman in DeVry's financial aid office said was grant money. "I kept telling her 'I don't need the money,'" he said. By his third semester he got a lender notice, and realized he was \$15,000 in debt with direct federal student loans. The money made life easier but he didn't need it for education costs, Ngowaki said, and ordered the loan arrangement stopped.

Ngowaki's theory is that DeVry wasn't confident, as the Post-9/11 GI Bill began, whether student payments would arrive on schedule. Perhaps to ensure steady cash flow it pushed student veterans into federal loans. DeVry in time helped Ngowaki with some debt, he said, but most of the \$15,000 he repaid himself. Whether and how the new regulations might deliver more loan relief to a veteran like Ngowaki is still unclear, Ochinko said. Many student veterans end up needing loans because they haven't served long enough on active duty to qualify for full Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. The loans become bad investments if for-profit schools close or don't provide promised degrees or transferable credits or if employers don't view the degrees as desirable.

One attorney for student plaintiffs who helped unleash the Obama rules, Adam R. Pulver, said an Obama change resisted by for-profit schools bans them from requiring students to accept arbitration in settling all complaints. "It's been pretty much exclusive to for-profit schools that to enroll you have to sign an agreement to arbitrate all disputes," and the agreements often state that students "can't file a class action lawsuit," said Ochinko. "The problems of for-profit schools would have come to light a lot sooner had people been able to sue."

Another key feature of the Obama rules would require for-profit schools facing financial risk to show a letter of credit and to make cash deposits with the Education Department as they set off various financial responsibility alarms, so taxpayers are not as deeply exposed by loan claims when for-profit schools fail. [Source: The Military Update | Tom Philpott | October 18, 2018 ++]

GI Bill Update 265 ► SIT-REP Bill Could Eliminate Current Payment Problem | Stalled in Senate

Many student veterans have been waiting longer than normal for their GI Bill benefits this semester, as the Veterans Affairs Department works through a backlog of claims affecting thousands of students. Meanwhile, legislation that could have helped these students is stalled in the Senate, and veteran education advocates, along with some members of Congress, are calling for action. "There is significant concern about the delayed Forever GI Bill benefit payments," said Ashlynn Haycock, deputy director of policy and legislation for the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, one of the organizations that helped push the legislation through the House of Representatives last spring. "We all knew there would be a wait, but clearly this extended delay points to the fact that we must get the Senate to move on the SIT-REP Bill ... to protect students and veterans."

The legislation (H.R.4830) which passed the House unanimously in May, would require schools to adopt a policy stating they will not deny access to classes or facilities, impose late fees, or make students pay out-of-pocket because of unpaid balances, as long as the student has provided a certificate of eligibility for VA benefits. This would ensure that no GI Bill users are punished by their schools because of VA processing delays. But since the legislation hasn't passed, some organizations say their members are being charged late fees or barred from registering for next semester's classes.

The bill, which has also garnered the support of Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, was referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs in late May, but there has been no movement on it since. A staffer for Committee Chairman Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA) said their office has reached out to veterans' groups and schools impacted by these policies and is currently working through the legislation. Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), chairman of the

House Committee on Veterans Affairs, said he urges his Senate colleagues to quickly pass the bill and President Trump to sign it into law. “This legislation is critical to protecting our student veterans from situations like the one we (currently) face,” Roe said in an email.

As of 17 OCT, the VA has 120,000 education claims pending, most of which are for Post-9/11 GI Bill payments, a spokesman for the agency said in an email. Approximately 1,200 claims have been pending for 60 days or more. Original claims for first-time GI Bill users are taking an average of 33 days to process, and supplement claims are averaging 23 days, which is higher than the VA’s goal to process these types of claims in 28 and 14 days, respectively. One reason for the backlog is that the VA is still working to get its technology systems up to date with the new Forever GI Bill law, which was supposed to change how housing stipends are calculated for GI Bill users starting 1 AUG.

“VA education benefit claims processing employees are working mandatory overtime, and VA has augmented its processing workforce by 202 people to help reduce processing times,” the spokesman said. “With these measures in place we are processing an average of more than 16,000 claims per day.” He said the VA expects to get the overall number of outstanding education claims under 100,000 in early November. It’s difficult to determine just how common it is for schools to penalize students whose VA payments don’t come in by their deadlines. In a recent Military Times survey of around 500 colleges and universities, the vast majority of colleges said they have special policies for students whose VA or Defense Department education benefits are delayed. In many cases, these policies protect students from incurring late fees or being dropped from classes for nonpayment.

In a letter to schools last week, VA Director of Education Service Robert Worley asked that campuses not penalize students if they have not received tuition and fee payments from the VA. “Late payments are likely due to VA processing delays and certainly are not the fault of the student. We ask for your patience as we work to resolve the ongoing challenges,” he wrote. “If your school is waiting for tuition and fee payments for GI Bill students, we respectfully urge you to continue to work with the students so they may continue their academic pursuits.”

The VA issued a statement on 25 OCT, noting it continues to experience a higher-than-normal pending claims inventory, which in turn is causing processing and payment delays for some GI Bill students. Hardship cases are being expedited. If you are experiencing a financial hardship due to a delay in GI Bill payments, please contact the Education Call Center at 1-888-442-4551 between 7 a.m. - 6 p.m. Central Time, Monday-Friday. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | October 25, 2018 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure | Palomares Spain Update 01 ► Appeal Court Arguments Heard

A federal appeals court heard arguments in the case of U.S. veterans who claim they were denied disability benefits after falling ill to radiation exposure. An 81-year-old Nixa man is a key player in the case. Yale Law School students with the Veterans Legal Services Clinic in Connecticut represent Victor Skaar, a retired U.S. Air Force chief master sergeant. Skaar filed a request with the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims in Washington, challenging the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ refusal to provide disability compensation to veterans exposed to ionizing radiation. “The message is not about this veteran,” Skaar recently told the Headliner News, pointing to himself. “The message is why were 600, 700, 800—up to 1,600 veterans—totally ignored by the VA?” The court will decide whether a class-action lawsuit can be filed against the Veterans Affairs Department for denying disability claims.

Radioactive plutonium was released near Palomares, Spain, in January 1966, after a U.S. B-52 bomber and a refueling aircraft collided and crashed. Four hydrogen bombs accidentally crashed to the ground, but did not explode or detonate. Skaar was one of an estimated 1,600 American servicemen sent in to clean up the aftermath of the accident in Spain, and the radiative remains of the bombs. The job lasted 10 days, Skaar said, in which 5,400 steel barrels of harmful dirt and rock were collected. The legal complaint explains Skaar’s involvement. Skarr, 29 at the time, was a medical disaster control technician in the Air Force. He was part of a team that collected urine samples from the airmen

working at the site of the incident. “He recalls that it was impossible to follow proper laboratory protocols in the team’s haste to respond to the disaster in difficult field conditions,” the complaint reads.

Skaar’s responsibilities also included using measuring radioactivity with an instrument called a PAC-1 on site of the cleanup. “This instrument was the highest technology that the United States had to offer to detect radiation,” Skaar said. The instrument had its issues, however, Skaar said. Designed to detect radiation over flat surfaces like paved asphalt, the (blank) faced accuracy difficulties over Spain’s rugged terrain. Still, it gave Skaar and the rest of the crew the best idea of the level of radiation surrounding them. “This peaked out, pegged if you will, at one million counts per minute,” Skaar said. “There were rocks that would measure—that had been irradiated—punctured with enough energy to be radioactive themselves. It was scary.”

The men’s protection was scary, too. Skaar shared several photos with the Headliner depicting men in white coveralls and surgeon’s masks. Only a handful of the crew, he added, were privileged with respiratory masks. “We did everything we could, given the circumstances, to protect public health, but the statement has been made, and I can’t dispute that, that they were not given adequate—we were not provided adequate treatment to provide 100 percent protection,” Skaar said. Further, the men also did not have time to educate themselves regarding radiation’s dangers. “Sure, they were concerned, but we had to do what we had to do,” Skaar said. “It was, ‘Just watch your hands and make sure you’re trying to not breath that stuff.’”

Over 50 years later, Skaar believes many of his health complications, and possibly other veterans’, are due to the radiation exposure during the cleanup. “Mr. Skaar has battled leukopenia, skin cancer, and prostate cancer since Palomares,” the complaint states. But while the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes certain cancers being links to radiogenic conditions, it does not recognize the cleanup operations at Palomares as a “radiation-risk activity,” thereby stopping veterans from demonstrating the link between diseases and the Palomares cleanup. “No one’s listening to us about it and taking our word for what happened,” Skaar said in a 2017 interview with the Headliner about the veterans who worked the Palomares site. “There’s no question about the fact we were there and no question about the fact we were exposed.”

In 1997, the doctors at the Cancer Institute diagnosed Skaar with leukopenia, which is a low white blood cell count. The doctor “said it was caused by exposure to radiation,” Skaar said. “But the VA would not accept that.” For now, Skaar and the rest of the veterans he’s fighting for are stuck in a waiting period following a Sept. 25 hearing before the U.S. Court of Appeals of Veterans Claims. Skaar further addressed the case, which he hopes will see additional action in the next three to four months. He knows it can go one of two ways.

“Hopefully, it won’t be remanded, because I already told my attorneys I’m not interested in going back to the VA system. The second thing is they may adjudicate, and that’s what we hope,” Skaar said. “I suspect that my particular claim, which brought us to that level, will be denied because of my age. ... That’s okay with me, because I’m not into this thing for any kind of compensation, but I want out of this and what they want to focus on is this class action, and that’s why the court is really asking the VA ... why won’t you accept this small group of veterans?” [Source: Christian County Headliner News | Rance Burger & Sydni Moore| October 17, 2018 ++]

Civil War Vets ► **Julius Kroehl | Submarine Inventor**

The remains of a German-American who invented the first submarine able to dive and resurface by itself were exhumed in a Panamanian cemetery 11 OCT and will be reburied alongside U.S. war veterans near the Panama Canal. Julius Kroehl’s remains were dug up with help from the U.S. Embassy, which said authorities will also seek to confirm the identity of the remains and establish a cause of death. Kroehl built his submarine from parts brought from New York to search for pearls off Panama’s Pacific coast during the 19th century.



In this March 12, 2004 photo (left) provided by the U.S. embassy in Panama, a diver stands by the submarine designed by Julius H. Kroehl, wrecked off San Telmo Island, Panama. Maritime archaeologist James Delgado (right) inspects debris on the grave site of Kroehl before exhuming his body from Amador Cemetery in the Chorrillo neighborhood of Panama City.

Records say he died at age 47 of malaria, but some suspect he was killed by decompression sickness — also known as the bends. Kroehl was buried in 1867, and his grave was only rediscovered in 2005. "I have no words to express the sentiment of emotion, it's a lot of emotion and also some sadness," maritime archaeologist James Delgado said as he held part of the remains in his hand. Delgado spent a good part of his life studying Kroehl and in 2001 discovered the remains of Kroehl's submarine at San Telmo Island, in Panama's Pearl Islands. "For me it is closing a chapter in this indescribable story," said Delgado, who is a senior vice president of SEARCH Inc., an archaeology and cultural resources management company.

Kroehl was buried in what at the time was the foreigners' cemetery. It is now part of a cemetery in Panama City's populous neighborhood of El Chorrillo. The U.S. Embassy said in a statement that Kroehl participated in the U.S. Civil War and for that reason will be re-buried in the Corozal American Cemetery and Memorial. [Source: NavyTimes | October 12, 2018 ++]

WW2 Vets 176 ► Cecil Bolton | A Capable Leader

Cecil Bolton was born in 1908 in Crawfordville, Florida. Despite coming of age for military service in the 1920s, Bolton forwent military service as he sought to make a living like any American wading through the Depression. However, when his nation came under attack, despite being well into his 30s, Bolton didn't hesitate to answer the call. In July of 1942, Bolton joined the United States Army with little idea he would emerge from the war as a national hero.

Perhaps due to a natural maturity for his age, Bolton quickly established himself as a capable leader amongst a sea of 18-year-old recruits. By November of 1944, Bolton found himself a 1st Lieutenant with E Company, 413th Infantry Regiment of the 104th Infantry Division. As the Allies were pushing closer to Germany, the 413th was in the Netherlands near the Mark River. The Germans were continuing to put up a stiff resistance, and on the evening of November 2nd, Bolton and the men of E Company learned that first-hand.

Cecil Bolton had just led his men across the Mark River in the Netherlands in the dark of night when two German machine guns located their position. The enemy fire was remarkably accurate and began to take their toll on the men of E Company. Making matters worse, the area in which they were pinned down began to be rocked by accurate and pre-set artillery fire. Bolton did his best to call in for fire upon the enemy machine guns preventing his advance, but the darkness of the night concealed their position and only the flashes of the muzzles were visible to guide them.

While attempting to get a fix on the enemy, a German shell landed nearby knocking Bolton to the ground. His legs were severely wounded, and when he woke up, he had to crawl to the forward positions. Somehow able to regain the strength to walk, Bolton had a stubborn determination to give violence back to the enemy. He organized a two-man

bazooka team that was taken on a volunteer basis given the risk of action. He then proceeded to wade through freezing waters to reach the enemy undetected.

With the two-man team providing cover fire, Bolton then charged the enemy emplacement alone. With hand grenades thrown with accurate precision, he quickly dispatched the first machine gun alone. He then led the other two men on a blistering assault of the 2nd. An enemy sniper attempted to prevent their advance but quickly found out that this was a group that would not be stopped. With the sniper now KIA, Bolton killed the first gunner with the carbine while the other two men killed the rest.

Having accomplished enough, it would have been understandable for the gallant men to return to friendly lines. However, when they noticed an 88-mm gun wreaking havoc on their friends, they didn't hesitate to act. Once again, they waded through the icy canal to line up a shot with the bazooka. With just the silhouette of the gun to guide them, Bolton directed a perfect shot and took out the gun. On their return, Bolton was again the recipient of enemy fire that struck him in the legs. Now unable to walk at all, Bolton refused to allow himself to be the cause of his men's deaths. He ordered them to return without him over their objections, and they reluctantly left him. Bolton, as it turns out, decided he wasn't quite ready to die. Alone and under fire, he crawled his way back to friendly lines. Upon reaching relative safety, he finally collapsed.

Remarkably, Bolton survived his wounds. For his actions that day under intense fire and at great risk to himself, Cecil Bolton received the nation's highest military honor. While German fire ended his combat experience in World War II, Bolton proved that he still had a little fight left in him. He went on to serve one more time in the Army, this time reaching the rank of Colonel. He eventually passed away at the young age of 56 and is now buried in Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery. Military history will forever record the fact that while the Germans took out his legs, they simply couldn't keep Bolton down.



It is a common theme among Medal of Honor recipients that they had no idea they were earning one during their gallant actions. They simply set out to do their duty as they saw fit, and, before they knew it, they had the nation's highest military honor around their neck. [Source: Together We Served Dispatch | OCT 2018 ++]

Vets/Troops Targeted Online ► **Social-Media Misinformation**

As [The Wall Street Journal](#) published 17 OCT, for over a year VVA has been quietly waging war against foreign elements who seek to target troops and veterans with **disinformation and divisive content**," said John Rowan, president of Vietnam Veterans of America. VVA is requesting that the Department of Defense and Department of

Veterans Affairs lead in the coordination of efforts by the federal government to protect our community from foreign influence and exploitation." VVA has analyzed hundreds of Facebook Pages and Twitter Accounts, scores of deceitful websites, and thousands of individual posts and has have concluded that despite recent purges of hostile actors from, and reforms to, these online platforms — our military community remains a vulnerable target for exploitation and manipulation by foreign entities.

A 2017 Oxford University study, "Junk News on Military Affairs and National Security: Social Media Disinformation Campaigns Against US Military Personnel and Veterans," determined that "the public tends to place trust in military personnel and veterans, making them potentially influential voters and community leaders." The abstract continues, "Given this trust and their role in ensuring national security, these individuals have the potential to become particular targets for influence operations and information campaigns conducted on social media."

As VVA explained in their report for congress and various federal agencies in March 2018, in August of 2017 VVA first discovered an imposter Facebook Page called "Vietnam Vets of America," which had at times used VVA's official logo to deceive people into believing the Page represented a legitimate veterans' organization. The Page built trust among American veterans by producing unique content featuring Vietnam veterans and posting information relevant to the community. The page engaged in creating sensationalized and manipulated news in order to sow division and anger among American veterans.

The imposter "Vietnam Veterans of America" Page used unique tactics to manipulate the "Facebook Live" feature, as they did to run a 58-second local-media clip about vandalism of a Vietnam Veteran Monument for four hours, with the caption "Do you think the criminals must suffer?" imposed over the video. While the short story that a local media organization created was true, it had been altered and repurposed to make a minor local story go viral. By faking a live video, this foreign entity was able to take advantage of Facebook's algorithms, exposing hundreds of thousands of Americans to divisive political propaganda created by entities outside of the United States. This organic content had much greater reach than many of the paid ads that were so infamously promoted by Facebook Pages affiliated with Russia's Internet Research Agency.

In March 2018, VVA discovered two other imposter Pages targeting American Vietnam veterans operated by the same entity. One of these Pages was created in 2015, again using VVA's logo, and with a new website "Vietnam-Veterans.org" which was registered by one "Nikoli Mitov" in Bulgaria. Without specialized skills and resources, our investigation of this entity could go no further.

In the following months VVA has discovered dozens of similar pages that are targeting American veterans with divisive political content. VVA's investigation is ongoing, but they have found over two dozen Pages targeting American veterans which together have over 100 foreign admins, with locations on 6 continents and in 26 different countries outside of the United States. Many of these Pages have paid for and displayed ads which include politically sensitive topics. On these Pages, American veterans are often encouraged to share personal information and photographs of themselves in uniform, which can then be harvested by these foreign entities for further use.

VVA has been providing information from their investigation directly to Facebook's Threat Intel Team, and to date their reporting has resulted in the closure of several Pages which deceptively targeted service members and veterans. As a result, VVA liberated from foreign influence over twenty-million users who followed these Pages — but VVA believes that they only addressed a fraction of the problem.

VVA is thankful to the Threat Intelligence Team at Facebook, and the Site Integrity Team at Twitter, both of whom have taken this problem seriously. But this is not a private-sector problem. This is an issue of national security, and affects the wellbeing of American troops and veterans. That's why VVA is asking for the blame game to end, and for America's government to step up and protect our population from being targeting by foreign elements who seek to do us harm." [Source: VVA Communications Dept | Mokie Porter & Kris Goldsmith | October 17, 2018 ++]

Obit: Harry Ettlinger ► 21 OCT 2018 | Monuments Men Member

Harry Ettlinger died 21 OCT in New Jersey at age 92. He was a member of the Monuments Men — a group responsible for saving dozens of priceless artworks and artifacts stolen by the Nazis during World War II. Harry called the thefts the “greatest plunder ever perpetrated in the history of civilization” in a 2015 interview with McClatchy at <https://www.stripes.com/lifestyle/military-history/wwii-monuments-men-get-their-due-a-congressional-gold-medal-1.374682>

After joining the Army in 1944, he was set to fight in the Battle of the Bulge but was instead reassigned to translate at the Nuremberg Trials due to his fluency in German, according a biography on the Monuments Men Foundation website. Waiting for an assignment, he instead volunteered for the Monuments Men in 1945. He became a translator and right-hand man to one of the chiefs of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Section under the Civil Affairs and Military Government Sections of the Allied armies, the formal title of the group, McClatchy reported.



Harry Ettlinger, one of the World War II "Monuments Men," speaks and dances to the U.S. Army Band's music before the Congressional Gold Medal ceremony at the U.S. Capitol, Oct. 22, 2015.

The group's mission was at the center of the 2014 Hollywood movie “Monuments Men” starring George Clooney and Matt Damon. In the film, English actor Dimitri Leonidas portrays Sam Epstein, a character based on Ettlinger, New Yorker magazine reported in 2014. Ettlinger, a Jew, was born in Germany in 1926. His family escaped the Nazis in 1938 and settled in Newark, N.J. After the war, he went on to a career in aerospace engineering for Singer-Kearfott. In 2015, he and three other surviving Monuments Men members accepted the Congressional Gold Medal for the group during a ceremony at the Capitol building. Ettlinger was preceded in death by his wife, Mimi Goldman, and is survived by his three children, their families and his longtime companion. A service was scheduled for 19 OCT at Bernheim Apter Kreitzman Funeral Chapel in Livingston, N.J., and a burial service in Cedar Knolls, N.J. [Source: Stars & Stripes | October 24, 2018 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 31 OCT 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 | October 31, 2018 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ► As of 31 OCT 2018

The Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is intended to serve as a one-stop resource for retirees and veterans seeking information about events such as retirement appreciation days (RAD), stand downs, veterans town hall meetings, resource fairs, free legal advice, mobile outreach services, airshows, and other beneficial community events. The events included on the schedule are obtained from military, VA, veterans service organizations and other reliable retiree/veterans related websites and resources.

The current Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is available in the following three formats. After connecting to the website, click on the appropriate state, territory or country to check for events scheduled for your area.

- 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.

Please note that events listed on the Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule may be cancelled or rescheduled. Before traveling long distances to attend an event, you should contact the applicable RAO, RSO, event sponsor, etc., to ensure the event will, in fact, be held on the date/time indicated. Also, attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214.

Please report broken links, comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and/or other military retiree/veterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, Milton.Bell126@gmail.com

[Source: Retiree/Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | October 31, 2018 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits ► Connecticut 2018

The state of Connecticut 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 – CT**" 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 benefits refer to <https://portal.ct.gov/dva>.

- Housing Benefits

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/connecticut-state-veterans-benefits.html> | Oct 2018
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*** 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 Burial Benefits Update 47 ► H.R.6734 | Full Military Honors Act of 2018

Currently, "full military honors funerals" are limited to officers and E9s. This bill seeks to extend full military honors to enlisted Medal of Honor winners and enlisted prisoners of war who served honorably. You are encouraged to write your Congressional Representative to urge support of this bill and to your Senators to urge the introduction of a similar bill in the Senate.

Congressmen Mike Bishop (MI-08), Sam Johnson (TX-03), and House Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Tim Walz (MN-01) announced the introduction of the bipartisan Full Military Honors Act of 2018 (H.R. 6734) to allow enlisted Medal of Honor recipients and Prisoners of War (POW) who are eligible for burial at Arlington National Cemetery to receive a full military honors burial, which includes an escort platoon, a military band, and a caisson (horse-drawn casket) if available. Currently, full military honors are reserved for commissioned officers, warrant officers, and senior non-commissioned officers.

"America's POWs and Medal of Honor recipients have sacrificed immeasurably in service to the United States - regardless of their rank. So, I was shocked to find out that earlier this year a former POW from Michigan, Army Pvt. 1st Class Robert Fletcher was denied a full honors burial at Arlington National Cemetery based solely on his enlisted rank," said Rep. Bishop. "This has been an issue for too long, and my legislation will ensure those who have gone above and beyond the call of duty are provided the full military honors they have earned for their end of life ceremonies."

"During my time in the infamous Hanoi Hilton, many of my fellow POWs and I were isolated in cramped cells," said Rep. Johnson. "We spent months in leg irons, years in leg stocks, and endured extreme starvation and torture. My fellow POWs who served honorably demonstrated the utmost patriotism, but not all of them were eligible for full military honors at their burial, simply due to their rank. I believe this is wrong. ANY veteran who served honorably as a Prisoner of War or whose actions earned them the Medal of Honor has already demonstrated

extraordinary dedication to defending Freedom. In return, they deserve to have the country they fought for bestow full military honors if they are eligible to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery. I am grateful for Rep. Mike Bishop's leadership on this issue, and I'm proud to join him in standing up for the service and sacrifice of our Great Nation's veterans."

"Medal of Honor recipients and POWs have earned and deserve nothing less than full military honors," said Rep. Walz. "As a retired enlisted soldier of 24 years, I'm proud to join in introducing the Full Military Honors Act. To help ensure we honor the sacrifices these heroes and their families have made for our country, we must pass it without delay."

Congressman Sam Johnson, a 29-year U.S. Air Force veteran, flew combat missions in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. On the 25th combat mission of his second tour in Vietnam, Johnson was shot down over North Vietnam and held as a POW for nearly seven years in the "Hanoi Hilton." While there, his captors labeled him a "diehard" resistor and moved him into solitary confinement in "Alcatraz," along with ten other POWs including U.S. Senator Jeremiah Denton and Vice-Presidential candidate Jim Stockdale. Congressman Tim Walz, a 24-year veteran of the Army National Guard, is the Ranking Member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and serves on the US-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs. Walz is the highest-ranking enlisted soldier ever to serve in Congress.

The Full Military Honors Act of 2018 is endorsed by the American Legion, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Military Officers Association of America,, National League of POW/ MIA Families, Special Operations Association, Special Forces Association, and American Fallen Warriors Memorial Foundation. [Source: Together We Served Dispatch | OCT 2018 ++]

*** Military ***



Army Drones Update 02 ► Black Hornet

The Black Hornet drone feels like a movie prop. Roughly the size and weight of a sparrow, the robotic scout helicopter has already seen use with British Special Forces. At the 2018 Association of the United States Army exposition in Washington, D.C., Black Hornet-maker FLIR showed off the latest way to carry the drone into combat: a miniature hanger for four drones, roughly the size of a large breadbox. It's called the Vehicle Reconnaissance System Like a description from a lost G.I. Joe catalog, the VRS fits four helicopters into chambers known as cassettes. The box containing cartridges full of robots can be mounted on vehicles, including people-transporting machines and also uncrewed ground vehicles. This is a box full of robots that can go on a robot and launch more robots. It's quite the exhibit of remote warfare.



The FLIR Vehicle Reconnaissance System holds four sparrow-sized drones at once, and can go on both crewed and remotely operated vehicles. Once a cassette flips up and the drone is ready for launch, the controller will look for a GPS signal. If it fails to find a GPS signal, the Black Hornet will stop preparing to fly and retract back into the safety of its little hangar. (Alternatively, a human pilot can set the drone to operate under direct fly-by-video [control and command](#) it directly, without the GPS assist). Using GPS, the drones can fly a way-point path drawn out by a human operator, or be steered directly by the human pilot. With two radio channels, the system can accommodate two drones flying at once, with either one human watching on a split screen or two separate pilots steering the [bird-sized drones](#). The drones have a range of 1.25 miles, can fly for up to 25 minutes, and top out at a speed of around 13 mph. When not flying, the drones can recharge in their heated cassettes, and should the chargers be damaged or for some reason no longer needed, they can be replaced, slotting a new drone and charger into the old bay.

Putting a box of robots on a tank, or a personnel carrier, or even another robot is more about adding a capability than it is about reducing the existing labor needs of the machine in question. Yet that potential gained is great — flying ahead, looking over a hill or around a building or through a dense cluster of trees means a chance to see new information, spot an ambush, catch a foe unawares. It also points to a future where drones are a feature that can be added to other vehicles. With greater automation and image processing, the little human-piloted scout robot could become an ambient surveillance capability, rotating shifts of drones flying preset patrols around the fixed point of the vehicle, landing and recharged to ensure persistence coverage Those steps are years ahead at a minimum. For now, the Black Hornet VRS is a box of robots that can go on a tank or another robot. Click [here](#) to watch a video on its use and at <https://arc-anglerfish-arc2-prod-mco.s3.amazonaws.com/public/MCTXT4BNDBG3I67JV7M7JRI.gif>. [Source: [C4ISRNET](#) | June 15, 2018 ++]

Pilot Laser Protection ► Required Due To China’s Emerging Laser Threats

The U.S. Air Force is planning to spend nearly \$200 million on special glasses and visors to protect pilots’ eyes from dangerous lasers like the ones the Pentagon accuses China of firing into the cockpits of U.S. warplanes. The Pentagon said the equipment is needed to protect aircrews from “emerging laser threats” in a contract announcement late last month. A laser shined into a cockpit can distract and potentially blind a pilot. The new devices “shall provide protection sufficient to prevent permanent eye damage and protection against the temporary effects of laser weapons/devices,” a May contracting document states.

Two companies — Gentex and Teledyne Scientific & Imaging — received \$98.3 million deals to deliver the new eye protection through 2024. The new glasses and visors must work with pilots’ current helmets. The contracts came less than five months after U.S. officials accused China of firing military-grade lasers into cockpits of American aircraft. Two American C-130 pilots reportedly suffered minor eye injuries during one incident. Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White said in May that the United States filed a complaint with China, which denies it was behind the incident over Djibouti. The U.S. and China have separate bases in the African nation. The American base, Camp Lemonnier, is a hub for special operations forces, counterterrorism, and intelligence-gathering missions in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East.

In June, the Pentagon said its pilots were being targeted repeatedly by Chinese lasers as planes flew over disputed islands in the Pacific. Each year, commercial pilots report thousands of incidents involving readily available laser pointers being shined into the cockpit. In the United States, shining a laser at an aircraft is a federal crime. [Source: Defense One | Marcus Weisgerber | October 29, 2018 ++]

Cluster Bombs ► North Korea Reason U.S. Kept Them

The United States reversed its plan to ban cluster munitions last year and kept its dated stockpiles for one reason: North Korea, a top defense official said 26 OCT. "That policy change was driven by the North Korean situation," Deputy Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan said. "When we were going through our readiness exercise, we said, 'How do we prepare for North Korea?' And we looked at the munitions that are required and the munitions that were available," he said in response to questions during the annual Military Reporters & Editors conference outside Washington, D.C. Shanahan said developing a replacement for cluster bombs would take too long when faced with the North Korean threat, so the Pentagon looked to available capability.



In early 2017, North Korea stated it was readying a missile that could reach the United States. A month later, it conducted its first missile test, which was unsuccessful, just days after President Donald Trump moved into the White House. The regime conducted six more missile or nuclear tests in roughly five months' time. The last was a single intercontinental ballistic missile test in November. Shanahan in December signed a directive to stop a 2008 policy approved by then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates stipulating that, by the end of 2018, the Pentagon would "no longer use cluster munitions which, after arming, result in more than one percent unexploded ordnance."

The New York Times reported that the weapons' "dud rate" often approaches 20 percent when deployed in combat situations, making the environment extremely dangerous to friendly forces and civilians. The Times noted the U.S. has roughly 2.2 million cluster munitions in the United States itself and 1.5 million overseas, with the majority in South Korea. The Pentagon was tasked by President George W. Bush's administration to bring cluster bombs' failure rate under one percent or find an alternative. However, Defense Department spokesman Tom Crosson said last year the U.S. military's efforts to develop more reliable, and thus safer, cluster munitions that have a failure rate of one percent or less were unsuccessful, The Associated Press said at the time.

Shanahan confirmed that report 26 OCT. "You're probably familiar with the fact that we've been working on a technology to eliminate the danger of cluster munitions, but the timing of that technology to eliminate the danger, and the need to backfill the shortfall in munitions, did not line up," he said. It was not immediately clear whether the Pentagon is continuing efforts to improve the cluster bombs' reliability, or if the current stockpiles will remain unchanged.

Meanwhile, relations between the U.S. and North Korea have appeared to be on the mend in recent months, with Trump noting his blossoming relationship with Kim Jong Un. "I was really being tough and so was he. And we would go back and forth. And then we fell in love, OK?" Trump said at a campaign rally 29 SEP. "No really. He wrote me

beautiful letters. And they're great letters. And then we fell in love." [Source: Military.com | Oriana Pawlyk | October 26, 2018 ++]

Navy Fleet Size Update 14 ► CBO Questions Ability to Reach 355 Ships

A federal financial watchdog is questioning whether the Pentagon will ever reach its ambitious goal of a 355-ship Navy. This month's report from the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office analyzed the sea service's strategy of extending the life of current ships while buying more new vessels to hit 355 over the next three decades. The Navy's latest shipbuilding plan was submitted to Congress in February, its first since 2017. Currently sitting at 285 battle force ships, the Navy plans to buy 301 new vessels between 2019 and 2048. "If the Navy adheres to the schedule for retiring ships outlined in the 2019 plan, it would not meet its goal of 355 ships at any time over the next 30 years," the report states.

As part of its race to 355, the service announced it also wants to extend the life of its destroyers to 45 years — an extra five to 10 years of service — while boosting the service lives of seven attack submarines from 33 years to 43 years, the report states. Those life extensions could get the Navy to 355 by 2034, the CBO notes, "but would fall short of the Navy's specific goals for some types of ships." When it comes to cost, CBO cautions that reaching 355 ships would require largely unprecedented amounts of funding from Congress. The Navy's most recent estimates state it would cost \$631 billion over 30 years, or an average of \$21 billion annually. That's \$3.3 billion more per year than the Navy's 2017 estimates — and it's still probably not enough. CBO researchers estimate that it likely will cost an average of \$26.7 billion annually to buy all the new ships.

And other expenses — including refueling nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and outfitting new ships with equipment after they are built — would likely drive the funding needed to about \$28.9 billion a year, according to the CBO's estimates. "It excludes other activities typically funded from the Navy's budget account for ship construction that would, in CBO's estimate, add \$2.1 billion to the Navy's average annual shipbuilding costs under the 2019 plan," the report states. To put into perspective how off the Navy's estimates might be, this level of funding would be 80 percent higher than the Navy's average shipbuilding budget over the past three decades, according to CBO. If the Navy received the same average amount of shipbuilding dollars for each of the next 30 years that it has received over the past 30 years, "the service would not be able to afford its 2019 plan," the CBO report states.

CBO's estimate that the 355-ship plan would cost \$26.7 billion annually for new ships alone is nearly double the historical funding average of \$13.6 billion, according to the report. It's also 50 percent more than the average shipbuilding budget of the last six years, "a period of increasing shipbuilding appropriations," the report states. In the Fiscal 2019 defense spending bill, Congress hiked funding to restore readiness in the Navy and Marine Corps, including spending \$24.2 billion on six warships, three fast attack subs, two oilers and a mix of expeditionary sea vessels and a salvage boat. But admirals warned their sailors that the congressional largesse wasn't likely to last longer than a few years, much less 30.

The CBO report also questions whether the Navy is fulling accounting for other expenses needed to run a larger fleet. "Although the cost of extending the ships' service life is relatively small compared with the cost of buying all the new ships the Navy wants, the cost of operating and maintaining a 355-ship fleet over 30 years would be much greater than either the cost of purchasing the new ships or the recent budgets for operating today's fleet," the CBO report states. "Recruiting and training those sailors would require more civilian and military positions ashore; additional ships would lead to larger maintenance budgets; and those extra ships and crews would consume more fuel and supplies." Read the full report at <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files?file=2018-10/54564-FY19Shipbuilding.pdf>. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | October 24, 2018 ++]

Military Toxic Sites ► Cannon AFB NM

Chemicals associated with firefighting foam once used at a U.S. Air Force base in eastern New Mexico have been detected in groundwater on and near the military installation, prompting requests by state officials for more tests and a study to determine the extent of the toxic plume. The New Mexico Environment Department confirmed the contamination 23 OCT, saying officials at Cannon Air Force Base notified state environment, health and agricultural officials about the compounds. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, have been detected. Recent tests show three of 25 private water sites near the base are not safe to drink. The U.S. Air Force Civil Engineer Center has completed testing the sites and two other sites are below Environmental Protection Agency safety threshold, but still need monitoring. Some of the wells supply water to local dairies.

The Air Force is making bottled water available for drinking and cooking for residents who rely on wells that exceed a health advisory level set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Contamination beyond the base ranges from less than half of the federal advisory level to more than 20 times the level, according to sampling done by the Air Force. The concentrations are much higher — more than 370 times the advisory level — for some of the on-base monitoring wells. "This is all in groundwater, so we're concerned about protection and remediation of groundwater in that area. So one of the first steps, of course, would be holding the United States Air Force accountable for that work," said Bruce Yurdin, the department's deputy secretary.

A spokesman for the base did not immediately return a message seeking comment. The base announced in August that it would be sampling to assess the potential for drinking water contamination stemming from past firefighting activities. "We are committed to protecting the health of our airmen and community partners and will conduct a thorough investigation to ensure we know if this contaminant has made it beyond the boundaries of Cannon Air Force Base," Col. Stewart Hammons, 27th Special Operations Wing commander, said in a statement at the time. The chemical compounds have been detected at military bases and other sites around the U.S. EPA testing from 2013 to 2015 found significant amounts of PFAS in public water supplies in 33 states, a finding that helped move PFAS up as a national priority.

In Michigan, the compounds sparked enough concern that Gov. Rick Snyder created a state response team and approved \$23 million in emergency spending. Washington became the first state to ban any firefighting foam with the compounds. Some members of Congress also are pressing for the EPA to act faster to bring more of the country's most hazardous industrial compounds under regulation. New Mexico environment officials say this marks the first major detection of the chemicals in the state and more work needs to be done to determine the scope of the contamination at Cannon and areas bordering the base.

The New Mexico Department of Agriculture has requested that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration immediately determine if any impacts on health exist, and if so, that the federal agency establish a regulatory threshold for PFAS in dairy products. The state Environment Department is overseeing the Air Force's investigation of the contamination at Cannon. Aside from studying the plume, the agency is requiring the Air Force to sample all water wells within a 4-mile (6-kilometer) radius of the southeastern corner of the base. State officials are recommending the use of bottled water for residents and businesses with private domestic wells in that area. [Source: The Associated Press | Susan Montoya Bryan, | October 23, 2018 ++]

Military Snipers ► USCG Outshoots USMC 2nd Year in a Row

For the second year in a row the Army's 75th Ranger Regiment beat out nearly 30 military, civilian and foreign sniper teams at the 2018 International Sniper Competition held aboard Fort Benning, Georgia. The Corps' two-man team

hailing from the Quantico, Virginia, Scout Sniper Instructor School placed 10th overall, just behind the Coast Guard's Special Mission's Training Detachment. It's the second year the Marine team has been bested by the Coast Guard. In 2017, the Corps' snipers fared slightly better taking home the seventh place slot. The last time the Corps won the competition was in 2009 with Sgt. Joshua Huskey and Sgt. Grant Royal from the Corps' Camp Pendleton Sniper School.

The multiday competition that tests a range of sniper skills from long range marksmanship to stalking, isn't the only sniper competition where the Army has recently beaten the Corps. In April, two Army snipers took the top honors at the 2nd Marine Division's Marine Corps Scout Sniper Basic Course. The two Army snipers, Sgt. Clinton Scanlon and Sgt. Bryce Fox, took the high scores in shooting and stalking when they graduated from the Corps' sniper course at Camp Geiger on Marine Corps Air Station New River, North Carolina. It's a bit of a sore spot for the Corps, whose sniper history and lore can be traced back to legends like Vietnam War-era sniper Gunnery Sgt. Carlos Hathcock, who had 93 confirmed kills. Staff Sgts. Brandon Kelley and Jonathan Roque with the 75th Ranger Regiment scored the most points in the 2018 International Sniper Competition. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | October 22, 2018 ++]

Military Coffee Cups ► USAF Spent \$1,280 Apiece to Replace 25 In-Flight Reheating Cups

The Air Force, under fire for throwing down \$1,280 apiece to replace in-flight reheating cups after their handles break, is pledging to use 3-D printing to get that replacement cost down to 50 cents. But Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) is still wondering why these pricey water heaters are necessary in the first place, and plans to keep pushing the Air Force to find cheaper ways to warm up their coffee. The cups, which plug into outlets on cargo planes to reheat liquids such as water or coffee, have a faulty plastic handle that easily breaks when the cups are dropped. And because replacement parts for the cup are no longer made, the Air Force has had to order a whole new cup when the handle breaks.



An airman holds a hot cup inside a KC-10 Extender at Travis Air Force Base, Calif.

In a 2 OCT letter to Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson, Grassley said that 25 replacement cups, each costing roughly \$1,280 each, have been bought this year alone, for a total of roughly \$32,000. The 60th Aerial Port Squadron at Travis Air Force Base in California spent nearly \$56,000 to replace broken cups over the past three years. And the price is rising. Grassley noted that Travis said each cup cost taxpayers \$693 in 2016. "Paying nearly \$700 for a single cup is bad enough, but it's simply beyond reason to continue to pay ever-increasing prices for something as simple as a coffee cup that is so fragile that it needs to be constantly replaced," Grassley said. "This latest example of reckless

spending of taxpayer dollars gives me no confidence that the Air Force is taking real steps to reduce wasteful spending practices.”

In a 17 OCT letter to Grassley, Wilson said that “it is simply irresponsible to spend thousands of dollars on manufactured parts when we have the technology available to produce them ourselves,” once a supplier either stops producing those parts or goes out of business. Wilson said that in July, she ordered a new Air Force Rapid Sustainment Office to be created to find ways to develop and deliver parts at a fraction of the cost of traditional manufacturing methods. This office has recently shown it can 3-D print replacement handles for the reheating cup for about 50 cents each.

Wilson told Grassley that this cup is specially manufactured to plug into aircraft systems, and because it connects to the aircraft, the replacements need to be certified as airworthy by the FAA. This has driven up the cost of buying 391 of these cups since 2016 to \$326,785, Wilson said, or about \$836 apiece. The water heaters are used on 59 KC-10s, 52 C-5s, and 222 C-17s, Wilson said. But with planes aging, and the average KC-10 at 34 years old, it’s harder and harder to find replacement parts for those aircraft, she said. And the price tag for raw materials for those parts is also increasing, Wilson said, with copper and chrome plating costs have increased 180 percent since 2016.

Wilson told Grassley that she and Chief of Staff Gen. Dave Goldfein have ordered the new sustainment office to look for items in the procurement process that it can self-produce, or other overpriced items that it can stop buying without hurting the Air Force’s mission. Grassley was dissatisfied with Wilson’s response, and said he will keep digging. “It leaves me with more questions,” Grassley said. “While I appreciate that the Air Force is working to find innovations that would help save taxpayer dollars, it remains unclear why it cannot find a cheaper alternative to a \$1,280 cup. Government officials have the responsibility to use taxpayer dollars efficiently. Too often, that’s not the case.” [Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | October 22, 2018 ++]

Navy Carrier OPS ► Return to Arctic Circle After 30 Years

Navy carrier aviation is back in the Arctic Circle for the first time in nearly 30 years, the latest sign that the Pentagon is looking to flex its muscles during an era of great power competition. The Harry S. Truman entered the Norwegian Sea on 19 OCT, the first flattop to do so since September 1991, according to a U.S. 6th Fleet press release. The carrier and select escorts from its strike group are preparing to participate in a massive NATO exercise straddling late October and early November, but they arrived Friday in fast-thawing northern waters in the wake of warnings from the Navy’s top officer about rising Russian activities there.

The Truman’s path on Friday was across what strategists call the “GIUK Gap,” waters around Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom considered vital if American warship must rush to Europe to aid allies. It’s also a key route for Russian submarines slipping into the North Atlantic. On Aug. 24, the Navy re-established the 2nd Fleet, a stalwart force during the Cold War, to patrol the Atlantic Ocean, including northern climes. The Truman’s northern voyage echoes Cold War patrols, said Dr. Daniel Goure, a former defense official and senior vice president of the Lexington Institute think tank. Sending the Truman and her escorts there is more than a show of force, Goure said. It’s about reacquainting a new generation of officers and sailors with what could become a maritime battlefield. “I’d wager that the carrier strike group command has never participated in this kind of exercise in that area, and if he has it hasn’t been since he was an ensign,” Goure said.

Goure predicted these deployments likely will become the norm. “It’s not just about training for this kind of warfare but specifically training the location that we may have to fight,” he said. “So you are going to see more large-scale training in the Mediterranean, training in the Arctic and training in the western Pacific.” Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson warned this summer that Chinese ships are regularly underway in the nearby North Atlantic,

and that Russia’s subs have been this active in those waters in a quarter century. “Even five years ago, we wouldn’t have seen anything like this,” he told Voice of America.

The Truman’s arrival in the Arctic this week marks the first carrier to operate in the area since the now-retired America in September 1991. “Despite the arduous weather and sea conditions, these men and women are demonstrating this ship can bring a full spectrum of capabilities to bear anywhere in the world,” Capt. Nick Dienna, the Truman’s commanding officer, said in a Navy release. The Truman strike group will conduct air, surface and underwater exercises in the rough seas, freezing temperatures and relentless winds before joining 30 NATO allies for the massive Trident Juncture maneuvers.

The exercise will take place in Norway and off the NATO ally’s shore, plus the Baltic Sea. It’s slated to involve 14,000 American troops alongside 36,000 personnel from friendly nations. More than 50 aircraft, 65 ships and 10,000 vehicles also will take part in the maneuvers, planners say. In his news release, Carrier Strike Group 8’s commanding officer — Rear Adm. Gene Black — called the exercise “a fantastic opportunity to learn from our Allies on their home turf.” [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz & David B. Larter | October 20, 2018 ++]

U.S. Space Force Update 04 ► Proposal Acceptance Survey

Troops are nearly evenly split over President Donald Trump’s controversial proposal for a new Space Force branch of the military, according to the results of a new Military Times poll of active-duty service members. About 40 percent of troops surveyed in the anonymous survey of active-duty Military Times readers (conducted in September and October) support the idea of a new, sixth military branch focused on space operations, with about half of those strongly supporting the idea. On the other side, nearly 37 percent disapprove of the proposal, with more than half of that group strongly opposing it.

In August, Vice President Mike Pence outlined Pentagon plans to create the new U.S. Space Command by as early as 2020. The service will be headed by a four-star general and an assistant secretary of defense for space that could eventually be elevated to a full service secretary. The idea has been met with skepticism among some lawmakers on Capitol Hill because of the potential cost and potential redundancy with existing Air Force programs. But Trump has repeatedly insisted that the move is needed to better organize the military’s current defense operations in space, especially in light of new satellite technology from adversaries like Russia and China. Details of who would staff the new service, what rank and job structure they would adopt, and how many personnel would be added or shifted to the Space Force have yet to be determined. But that hasn’t stopped the individual services from starting to form strong opinions about the idea.

- Members of the Air Force, which likely stands to lose the most manpower and funding if a new space service is stood up, were the most opposed in the Military Times poll. Nearly 48 percent disapproved of the idea.
- Sailors also had a more negative opinion than a positive one, with 40 percent opposed and 36 percent in favor.
- The Space Force concept had significantly more support among ground forces. About 42 percent of soldiers surveyed and 55 percent of Marines surveyed voiced support for the change.
- The idea is unpopular among military officers — only 27 percent said they approve, against 44 percent who oppose the idea — but enlisted troops appear to be more in favor of it. About 43 percent of them back the new force, versus 34 percent who disapprove of the move.
- A CNN poll conducted shortly after Pence’s August speech on the Space Force showed a majority of the general public opposed to the idea, with 55 percent voicing disapproval for the plan.

By law, Congress must vote to establish the new military service. Administration officials are expected to make that debate a key part of next year's defense budget process, and have said they are already working with supportive lawmakers on the next steps.

Survey methodology

Between Sept. 20 and Oct. 2, Military Times in collaboration with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University conducted a voluntary, confidential online survey of U.S. service members. The survey included 19 questions on service members' opinion(s) related to the current political climate, policy and national security in the United States.

- The survey received 829 responses from active-duty troops. The IVMF used standard methodology to estimate the weights for each individual observation of the survey sample. The margin of error for most questions was roughly 2 percent.
- The survey audience was 89 percent male and 11 percent female, and had an average age of about 31 years old. The respondents identified themselves as 76 percent white, 13 percent Hispanic, 9 percent African American, 5 percent Asian and 6 percent other ethnicities. Respondents were able to select more than one race.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | October 21, 2018 ++]

U.S. Space Force Update 05 ► Trump Plan Is Grounded In Real Needs, But Hazy

With his demand that the Pentagon create a new military service — a Space Force to assure "American dominance in space" — President Donald Trump has injected urgency into a long-meandering debate over the best way to protect U.S. interests in space, both military and commercial. At the same time, his approach has left many struggling to understand the basics, such as what a Space Force would do and how much it might cost. The Pentagon is expected to have enough details filled out by early next year to include a Space Force plan in its 2020 budget request to Congress. Until then, the idea has taken on a life of its own at Trump's political rallies, powered at least in part by his conflating of the nation's civilian space program with the military's separate role of providing space-based navigation and communications satellites.

Analysts say the reality is that building space muscle is more about reordering the way the Pentagon already uses space than about combat. In fits and starts, the military has been trying for decades to reorganize and accelerate technological advances in space. Some blame the Air Force, which has had the lead, for under-investing in space because it prefers spending on warplanes. Details are still in play, but the main idea is this: find more effective ways to defend U.S. interests in space, especially the constellations of satellites that U.S. ground, sea and air forces rely on for navigation, communications and surveillance. These roles make them increasingly tempting military targets even as China and Russia work on ways to disrupt, disable and even destroy American satellites. "This isn't science fiction. This isn't about creating space marines or some expeditionary space force that is going to go out and conquer the universe," says Todd Harrison, director of the aerospace security project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "This is simply a reorganization" of existing space assets so that they can be use more effectively in a unified chain of command with one person in charge.

Still, questions abound as some in the Pentagon talk about someday basing anti-missile weapons in space. Would a Space Force, which has yet to be authorized by Congress, consume an intelligence agency such as the National Reconnaissance Office, responsible for building and operating reconnaissance satellites? What about the Missile Defense Agency, which runs ground-based anti-missile systems that rely on space to defend U.S. territory? Also to be determined is how it would connect, if at all, to the security policy goals of U.S. military allies and to U.S. civilian space entities to realize Trump's declared vision of "gleaming new spaceships" built to "conquer the unknown?"

Just how expensive it might be is a matter of debate. The Air Force has estimated that it might cost \$13 billion in the first five years. Others, including Harrison, say that's an exaggeration. In late August, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said he was awaiting staff work on an estimate to be included in next year's defense budget request. Tom Nichols, an author and professor of national security affairs at the U.S. Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island, said no one should think a Space Force will produce an economic windfall of space contracts. "People who think a 'space force' will create a new economic boom don't realize that our space infrastructure already exists," he wrote in an email, stressing that he was speaking in a private capacity. "Any additional spending will likely be concentrated in research and knowledge-centric areas, not depressed manufacturing states." More to the point, he wrote, new weaponry is not in the offing.

"Put simply: We are not going to start building Klingon battle cruisers or the Moonraker fleet in West Virginia or Ohio." Misconceptions aside, Harrison and many other defense analysts argue that a Space Force is needed. In Harrison's view, it's about consolidating authority and responsibility for national security space in a single chain of command: reorganization, in other words, and building a bigger cadre of space strategy professionals. He argues that the space workforce now is so scattered across the military services and the intelligence agencies that it has not been possible to create a viable career path that will attract the right people. He likens the Space Force proposal to the creation of the Air Force in 1947. It was not built from scratch. It was made a separate military department after having resided in the Army as the Army Air Corps.

Although a Space Force would require its own civilian and military leadership and presumably its own uniforms and additional personnel, other steps to consolidate the space chain of command would be bureaucratic. In fact, one of the main moves already in motion is to recreate U.S. Space Command, which existed from 1985 to 2002, when it was disbanded to establish U.S. Northern Command in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Although Space Command went away, its functions did not. They were absorbed by U.S. Strategic Command, and the Air Force retained its lead role in space through Air Force Space Command. [Source: The Associated Press | Robert Burns | October 21, 2018 ++]

U.S. Space Force Update 06 ► Pentagon Plan | Early Draft

The U.S. Space Force will include uniformed service members drawn from the Air Force, Navy and Army — but it is not expected to include the National Reconnaissance Office mission, according an internal draft of the Pentagon's plan to create a sixth branch of the military. Defense One reviewed a copy of the 13-page document, which will be further developed in coming months before the Pentagon sends it to Congress in February along with its 2020 budget request. This early draft provides a glimpse into a 21st-century approach to creating a new service branch, an endeavor not undertaken since 1947. Among other things, it reveals divergent views among senior Pentagon officials about how to structure it.

For example, the document says the Space Force will not "include the transfer of [the] strategic intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance mission of the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO). Note that in a 14 SEP memo to Secretary Patrick Shanahan, Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson Deputy Defense [recommended including NRO](#) in the Space Force. The draft document calls for Space Force to absorb parts of Air Force Space Command, the Navy's Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command, the Naval Satellite Operations Center, and the Army's 1st Space Brigade.

The document says the installations and facilities where those units are based will remain part of their respective services until the Space Force "reaches an appropriate operating capacity." There are six Air Force Space Command bases: three in Colorado, two in California and one in Florida. The Army's 1st Space Brigade is based in Colorado. The Navy's San Diego-based SPAWAR has facilities around the world. The Naval Satellite Operations Center is at Naval Air Station Point Mugu, California. The existing military services would still "retain organic space capabilities

uniquely designated to support that Service’s or organization’s mission,” the document says. “Additionally, each Service may retain a cadre of space experts that serve as liaisons to advocate for and potentially operate space-related capabilities unique to its respective domain.”

Among the Space Force’s missions: space situational advantage; battle management command and control of space forces; space lift and range operations; space support to nuclear command and control; missile warning; satellite communications and position, navigation and timing. “The Space Force will only be responsible for those missions directly associated with joint space operations,” the document says. Missions that “that are tangentially associated with space” — including nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles, cyber operations and “the overall missile defense missions” — will not be part of the Space Force, at least initially. “Inclusion of these missions into the Space Force may be reevaluated in the future, as necessary,” the document states.

Pentagon officials have stressed their desire not to add layers of bureaucracy. Wilson, in September, said an additional 13,000 people would be needed. The draft Space Force proposal mentions a “lean headquarters model,” but does not list any numbers. However, the plan says that the new branch would have a secretary and chief of staff, who would be a member of the Joint Chiefs. It also talks of creating a Space National Guard and Space Force Reserve. The plan talks of creating a “pilot program” to enable the Space Force “to acquire talent from the civilian market in a rapid manner for a defined period after which the individual would return to civilian life.”

The draft does not include funding estimates, but has placeholders for a budget proposal and a “Defense Space Strategy.” Wilson, in her proposal, said it would likely cost taxpayers an additional \$13 billion over five years to create the Space Force. Defense budget. Analyst Todd Harrison, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, called her take “the highest estimate I think you could possibly come up with.” Earlier this month, Shanahan said Pentagon officials would be figuring out the Space Force budget in October and November. [Source: Defense One | Marcus Weisgerber | October 22, 2018 ++]

Tyndall AFB ► Hurricane Michael Impact

When Hurricane Michael, one of the strongest hurricanes ever to hit the United States, made landfall in Florida, one military base took more than its share of punishment. Every structure on the installation, from military housing to the marina, sustained damage. Many of the buildings were considered “a complete loss,” according to the installation commander. Congress will have a difficult time figuring out how to pay for the repairs.



A damaged airplane hangar is seen on the grounds of Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., after Hurricane Michael passed through the area on 12 OCT

Tyndall AFB, home to the F-22 training program, was forced to evacuate personnel and relocate some equipment before the storm made landfall. The F-22 is the only fifth-generation fighter jet in operational service, and as many as 22 of the installation's 55 jets were left at the base. DoD has yet to say exactly how many were left behind or how

extensively they were damaged. According to DoD officials, the aircraft were left behind for maintenance or safety concerns. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis said he expects all of the aircraft to be repaired. That may be wishful thinking, as the estimated cost of the aircraft left behind at Tyndall is roughly \$7.5 billion.

Congress is currently operating under a two-year budget deal that expires at the end of 2019. If lawmakers can't come up with a new agreement, DoD faces an automatic \$71 billion cut to its budget in 2020. Even if a new budget deal is realized, leaders on the Armed Services Committee say they expect a relatively flat - if not lower - defense budget in the near future. How will Congress cover the cost of the largest expected military pay raise in almost a decade, fix a base that's home to 11,000 airmen and their families, and continue operating in hot and cold combat zones across the world? The two most likely choices aren't pretty.

- **Higher TRICARE Fees** - One of the first places bean counters will look will be at health care fees. Lawmakers may look at generating revenue for DoD by increasing copays and fees for TRICARE to offset the necessary spending. For instance, not only did pharmacy copays go up in 2018, but mail order copays for generics went from zero to \$8. That affected millions of 90-day prescriptions to the tune of \$32 per prescription per year.
- **Military Pay Raise** - By law, the annual military pay raise is tied to the increase in private sector wage growth. For 2020, it's projected to be the largest in a decade. The actual number will be announced at the end of October. To help pay for repairs, Congress or the administration may request a cap in military pay.

MOAA fought for years to eliminate a 13.5 percent wage gap. Reinstating pay caps could renew a practice that inevitably leads to a recruiting and retention problem for the services, something the military certainly doesn't need as the Army missed its recruitment numbers for the first time since 2005. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | James Naughton | October 17, 2018 ++]

Tyndall AFB Update 01 ► Trump Administration Has Vowed To Rebuild

The Trump administration has vowed to rebuild Tyndall Air Base, the hurricane-ravaged home of the Air Force's F-22 Raptor training fleet, though it seems the Air Force faces a long road ahead, and the journey could be fraught with budgetary and political battles. U.S. Vice President Mike Pence visited the post 25 OCT to announce the White House's intent to restore the post, where — according to at least one lawmaker — 17 of the post's 55 F-22s used to train pilots for high-end air superiority missions were damaged when the post was struck by Hurricane Michael earlier this month. "President [Donald] Trump and I are committed to providing the resources necessary to rebuild Tyndall Air Force Base so that it can continue to be a vital and critical part of our national defense," Pence said.

That decision is welcome news to the Air Force and Florida lawmakers like Sen. Marco Rubio who have lobbied the Trump administration to make Tyndall great again. The post not only plays a key role in the air defense of the United States; it impacts \$2.5 billion in the local economy and 20,000 jobs in the surrounding Bay County, Florida, area, according to Gov. Rick Scott. Hurricane Michael, the third-most intense Atlantic hurricane to make landfall in the U.S., hit 10 OCT, forcing the evacuation of the post's 11,000 personnel, destroying facilities and disrupting its operations. The post's 325th Fighter Wing provides training for all F-22A Raptor pilots, and its 601st Air Operations Center provides aerospace warning and control for North American Aerospace Defense Command defensive counter-air activities.

Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson said during Pence's visit that she plans to restore the air operations center's air defense responsibilities (transferred to another post a few hours before the storm), bring its 800 employees back and get it to initial operating capability by Jan. 1, 2019. About 900 people — mostly security forces and civil engineers — have returned to Tyndall on assignment, and airmen and their families are slowly returning to the base to recover property and begin making insurance claims. How long it will take the Air Force to reach its previous

ability to maintain and fly F-22s at Tyndall is a question the service cannot answer, and there is no concrete timeline for the F-22s to return to Tyndall, said Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek. The service is still assessing all the damage to the base and will need time to make repairs to facilities or contract out for new construction.

Meanwhile, the Air Force will reactivate its F-22 simulators next month to restart pilot training, with student pilots making T-38 and F-22 sorties from Eglin Air Force, Florida, about 80 miles down the road. “We can’t fly aircraft out of Tyndall at the moment,” Wilson said. “But by Thanksgiving, we will have F-22s in the skies over the Panhandle.” An argument can be made for reassessing the base’s future. The Air Force this year agreed to look at consolidating its fleet of but stealthy and maneuverable F-22s after the Government Accountability Office found that fleet is too widely dispersed. (The Air Force set the organizational structure for the F-22 in 2010, two years before F-22 production was cancelled, leaving the service with half the inventory it built its plans for.)

“There should be a full analysis of alternatives that compares rebuilding in that specific place against other options,” said Susanna Blume, a former Pentagon official now with the Center for a New American Security. “I don’t know whether or not they will look at it, but I certainly hope they would as a taxpayer. But it may very well be that those political considerations trump the pure analytic answer.” According to a 2017 study by the Defense Department, the Air Force has 32 percent more infrastructure capacity than it needs — just behind the Army, which led the services in excess infrastructure. The study recommended the department proceed with a new base closure round to optimize how its resources are spread across installations.

In a July report, GAO made the case that the Air Force’s current basing construct for F-22s had led to low aircraft availability. F-22 wings have only one or two squadrons connected to them, while most other fighter wings comprise two to three squadrons — usually with a higher number of jets than the average F-22 squadron. For instance, Tyndall’s 325th Fighter Wing houses one F-22 training squadron and one operational F-22 squadron. GAO recommended and the Air Force consolidate its F-22 presence into larger squadrons and wings, which would allow squadrons to have a larger pool of aircraft and spare parts to draw from in a contingency. If that happened, it’s unclear how Tyndall would fare.

Retired Air Force Lt. Gen. David Deptula, the dean of the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, said the estimated cost of rebuilding is \$2.5 billion, but Tyndall must be rebuilt and retain the F-22, in part, because of the post’s closeness to the Gulf Test Range, which accommodates high-altitude supersonic air combat training. The question of F-22 unit sizes ought to be considered separately, he said. “It makes sense to rebuild it,” Deptula said of Tyndall. “Other than its proximity to testing ranges, it makes sense for mission, economic and political purposes.”

In a letter to Wilson last week, Rubio (R-FL) in essence called on the Air Force to fast-track repairs to Tyndall’s damaged F-22s. Referencing Defense Secretary Jim Mattis’s request to Wilson to make 80 percent of all critical aviation platforms ready by fiscal 2019, and Rubio asked her to ensure Tyndall’s F-22s are in the mix. “Additionally, I ask that you waste no time or effort in providing a supplemental funding request to Congress to repair and restore these aircraft to mission capable status as soon as possible,” Rubio said. Rubio, Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson and Republican Rep. Neal Dunn (whose district includes Tyndall), wrote to Air Force leaders 12 OCT to express their commitment to the post’s full recovery, and they wrote to Trump on Oct. 15, asking that he commit to restore the post. “It is imperative that we rapidly repair and restore operations as quickly as possible in order to protect and promote U.S. national security interests,” they wrote.

Nelson, who faces a fierce re-election challenge from Scott, said 14 OCT it was his “judgment as a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee” that Tyndall be rebuilt because “it is located strategically next to the very critical Gulf testing and training range.” On 29 OCT, Dunn hosted U.S. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, who is lobbying House Republicans to succeed Paul Ryan as speaker of the House. McCarthy, R-Calif., said in a statement he would work with Dunn “to get your community the full support to rebuild and come back stronger than ever.”

Hours after Pence's visit, House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Kay Granger (R-TX) announced she was talking to Dunn and would visit Tyndall soon. She is in the running to replace the full committee's retiring chairman. "The Appropriations Committee is ready to do whatever is needed," she said, "to help in the recovery from devastation caused by Hurricane Michael." [Source: DefenseNews | Joe Gould & Valerie Insinna | October 29, 2018 ++]

Ellsworth AFB ► Bird Abatement System

An Air Force base near Rapid City has unveiled a new cannon system designed to prevent costly collisions between bombers and birds. The Ellsworth Air Force Base has implemented a new \$150,000 bird abatement system, which is comprised of a rotating cannon and a 20-gallon propane tank, the Rapid City Journal reported. Igniting a small amount of propane into the cannon produces a shotgun-like sound, which scares birds off. Some of the new units also have speaker systems to blare the distress calls of eight bird species. "Birds are a huge problem for our aircraft operations," James McCurdy, a flight safety officer with the 28th Bomb Wing. "In the middle of our migration season (October, November, April and May), it's not abnormal for us to hit and kill a bird at least once a week. They cost us hundreds of thousands of dollars a year."

Each B-1B bomber costs about \$400 million and is capable of speeds close to 1,000 mph. The base's new system has 24 cannon units that are spread out along the aircraft runway and are operated using computers in the base's flight tower or by remote, handheld devices. McCurdy said the base's past bird-deterrent strategy was "one or two individuals with a shotgun out there with pyrotechnics." He said the new technique is "a more reliable, safer system for the birds and the aircraft" that "cuts down on the workload for the individuals involved." [Source: The Associated Press | October 29, 2018 ++]

Navy Supply Ships ► IG Probes Maintenance Issues

The Navy's failure to oversee maintenance of supply ships operated by contractors has gotten so bad that one "developed a hole in the hull" while it was transporting Marine Corps gear to an exercise and never made it to its destination, according to a Pentagon Inspector General report released last month. The IG's probe lambastes the sea service's Military Sealift Command, or MSC, for failing to properly oversee maintenance of its prepositioned ships — a fleet of vessels strategically placed around the globe and packed with supplies in case a large-scale war suddenly erupts. It is the latest alarm to be sounded over the sorry readiness woes of MSC vessels, ships with an unsexy but vital wartime mission.



An Assault Amphibious Vehicle rolls off the ramp of the maritime prepositioning ship 1st LT Jack Lummus in the Philippines

Between December and August, IG investigators focused on MSC's 20 prepositioned ships that are contractor-operated because they comprise the majority of the 26 prepositioning vessels. They determined that MSC officials fail to ensure these vessels are maintained or provided with preventive maintenance plans. MSC also doesn't verify that the contractors perform preventive maintenance when they say they do, IG found. "As a result, MSC is unable to accurately assess the condition and readiness of the (contractor-operated) ships, which has impeded the combatant commanders' ability to carry out planned operations," the report states.

The MSC Prepositioning Program plops gear and supplies on ships bobbing in oceans across the world to ensure a rapid response due to major war or humanitarian disaster. It serves all four branches and the Defense Logistics Agency, with the services determining the cargo and funding the program. Prepositioned ships can equip and supply 16,000 Marines for a month but Corps officials alerted IG investigators to a pair of instances "where a prepositioning ship was unable to attend planned exercises because of maintenance deficiencies," the report states. MSC spokesman Troy VanLeunen told Navy Times that the ship PFC Dewayne T. Williams developed a two-centimeter by five-centimeter hole in its hull while the ship was departing Diego Garcia for an exercise in April 2017. "The ship received a temporary repair before departing for a regularly scheduled overhaul in June 2017," he said in an email.

By failing to make sure the contractors performed scheduled preventive maintenance to get the most of the ships' lives, the taxpayer might have incurred nearly \$140 million in recent unplanned overhaul and dry dock costs, the IG estimated. "MSC committed \$544.7 million to contractors without assurance that they would execute all the required maintenance on its prepositioning fleet," the IG report states. Marine officials reported that when one ship experienced overhaul delays, it cost the Corps more than \$517,000 to maintain equipment that sat out exposed to the elements, plus another \$177,000 to extend a stevedore contract, the report states.

In other cases, MSC officials failed to train contractors on the system they're supposed to use to report problems, IG determined. One ship's chief engineer told investigators that the maintenance system only listed procedures for six of the 12 life rafts on the ship, "for several years." That crewman also said the Navy provided no maintenance plan for upkeep of the ship's winches. These problems were exacerbated by contracts that "did not state specific requirements for the contractors' training" and use of the reporting system, according to the IG.

MSC officials told IG that their agency had sought funding to fix some of the deficiencies beginning in 2013 and expected to receive a partial financial injection during the fiscal year that begins on Oct. 1, 2019. "MSC also affirmed that it will continue to request additional funding until the effort is completed," the report states. Command spokesman VanLeunen said MSC already began undertaking several of the IG report's recommendations, including hiking management oversight and readiness assessments for the contractor-run ships. Officials implemented an enhanced inspections program and the command is updating contract language that will help ensure mariners on the ships know how to use the maintenance reporting system, he added. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | October 17, 2018 ++]

Tricare ECHO Update 03 ► Benefit Year Changing to Calendar Year

Do you have a family member who gets supplemental services through the TRICARE [Extended Care Health Option](#) (ECHO) program? If so, you need to know that beginning on Jan. 1, 2019, the ECHO benefit cap will apply to covered costs during a calendar year and not a fiscal year October 1 - September 30. The calendar year runs from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31. Due to the shift to calendar year, TRICARE adjusted the benefit cap by \$9,000 to cover the remaining quarter of this year. This includes the months of October through December. This will allow for a total amount of \$45,000, from Oct. 1, 2017 to Dec. 31, 2018. The \$36,000 limit for the costs of all ECHO benefits combined will reset on Jan. 1, 2019. This coverage limit doesn't include ECHO Home Health Care. The benefit cap adjustment this year is for everyone who is in the ECHO program.

ECHO provides services and supplies for active duty family members with special needs. These are services and supplies beyond those offered by your TRICARE program option, such as [TRICARE Prime](#) or [TRICARE Select](#). To be eligible for [ECHO benefits](#), you must sign up for your service's [Exceptional Family Member Program](#) (EFMP). Each service branch has its own EFMP and enrollment process. Also, you have to register for ECHO with your [regional contractor](#). To be eligible for ECHO benefits, you must sign up for your service's Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). Each service branch has its own EFMP and enrollment process. Also, you have to register for ECHO with your regional contractor. If you need help with ECHO benefits or want to see if you qualify, [call your regional contractor](#). You must get prior authorization from your regional contractor for all ECHO services. Also, a TRICARE authorized provider must provide these services. ECHO benefits include:

- Durable equipment
- Rehabilitation
- Respite care
- Special education
- Training
- Transportation in some circumstances

Go to the [ECHO](#) page on the TRICARE website to learn more about eligibility, benefits, costs, and coverage limits. You can also download the [Extended Care Health Option Fact Sheet](#) for information. If you have questions about ECHO limits and the change to calendar year, contact your case manager. [Source: TRICARE Communication | October 17, 2018 ++]

Iran Military ► Land-To-Sea Ballistic Missiles

Iran has extended the range of its land-to-sea ballistic missiles to 700 km (435 miles), a senior Iranian military official said 16 OCT amid rising tensions with the United States over Tehran's missile program. U.S. President Donald Trump pulled out of an international agreement on Iran's nuclear program in May and reimposed sanctions on Tehran, saying the deal was flawed because it did not include curbs on Iran's development of ballistic missiles or its support for proxies in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq.

Iran, which says its missile program is purely defensive, has threatened to disrupt oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz in the Gulf if the United States tries to strangle Iranian oil exports. "We have managed to make land-to-sea ballistic, not cruise, missiles that can hit any vessel or ship from 700 km," Amirali Hajizadeh, head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' air space division, was quoted as saying by Fars news agency. Hajizadeh said the Guards focused on extending the land-to-sea missile's range after Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei asked the military a decade ago about the possibility of "hitting ships" with ballistic projectiles. He did not give details on the previous range of the missiles. In 2008, Iran displayed a ground-to-sea missile that it said could travel about 290 km (180 miles).

On 15 OCT, the U.S. special envoy on Iran, Brian Hook, said that Tehran's ballistic missile program was exacerbating tensions in Yemen, Iraq and Syria. "We are accumulating risk of regional conflict if we do not do more to deter Iran's missile proliferation in the Middle East," Hook said. The Islamic Republic's government has ruled out negotiations with Washington over its military capabilities and dismissed U.S. assertions that its activities in the Middle East are destabilizing.

Hajizadeh said some short-range Iranian missiles had been used over the past two years in Syria's civil war, in which Iranian forces have fought in support of President Bashar al-Assad against rebels and militants. He also said Iranian drones had carried out 700 attacks on Islamic State militant positions in Syria. Iran's Revolutionary Guards

have sent weapons and thousands of soldiers to Syria to help shore up Assad during the more than seven-year-long conflict there. [Source: Reuters | October 16, 2018 ++]

Russia Missile Program ► Putin Claims They Have the Military Edge

President Vladimir Putin hailed new missiles in Russia's military arsenals but emphasized 18 OCT that the country would only use its nuclear weapons in response to an incoming missile attack. He voiced confidence that Russia could resist Western pressure and expressed hope that U.S. President Donald Trump eventually would move to repair fractured ties with Russia. Speaking at an international policy forum in Sochi, Putin noted that Russia's military doctrine doesn't envisage a preventative nuclear strike. He said Moscow only would tap its nuclear arsenal if early warning systems spotted missiles heading toward Russia.

- "Only when we become convinced that there is an incoming attack on the territory of Russia, and that happens within seconds, only after that we would launch a retaliatory strike," he said during a panel discussion at the forum.
- "It would naturally mean a global catastrophe, but I want to emphasize that we can't be those who initiate it because we don't foresee a preventive strike," Putin said. "The aggressor should know that retaliation is inevitable, and he will be destroyed."
- "We would be victims of an aggression and would get to heaven as martyrs," while those who initiated the aggression would "just die and not even have time to repent," he added.



Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks at a meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club in Sochi, Russia, on Oct. 18, 2018 (left) and a Su-30 fighter jet of the Russian air force launches a missile during maneuvers in southern Russia in this image made from footage from a Russian Defense Ministry official web site on Sept. 27, 2018 (right).

The Russian leader also warned that new hypersonic missiles his country developed give it a military edge. "We have run ahead of the competition. No one has precision hypersonic weapons," he said. "Others are planning to start testing them within the next 1½ to 2 years, and we already have them on duty." Russia already has deployed the Kinzhal hypersonic missile. Putin said that another new weapon, the Avangard, is set to enter service in the next few months. Earlier this year, Putin said the Avangard has an intercontinental range and can fly in the atmosphere at a speed 20 times the speed of sound, making it capable of piercing any missile defense system.

His blunt talk 18 OCT comes as Russia-West relations remain frosty over the Ukrainian crisis, the war in Syria and the allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential vote. Putin said he still hoped Trump would be able to improve the ties between their countries. He thinks Trump wants "some sort of stabilization and improvement of U.S.-Russian ties" and said Moscow is ready for that "at any moment." Putin said his meeting with Trump in Helsinki in July was positive and they had a "normal, professional dialogue" even though their exchange brought strong criticism for Trump. He dismissed the dynamic as the result of "the internal political struggle." "Some people think

that playing the Russian card is a very convenient instrument for solving internal political problems," Putin said. "I hope it will go away. I don't know if it happens after the congressional elections, but it might. Or it may happen after the 2020 U.S. presidential election, when he will no longer have to constantly look back at those who engage in anti-Russian rhetoric."

At the same time, the Russian president sharply criticized Washington's reliance on sanctions against Russia and others, saying the instrument of punishment "undermines trust in the dollar as a universal payment instrument and the main reserve currency." "It's a typical mistake made by an empire," Putin said. "An empire always thinks that it's so powerful that it can afford some mistakes and extra costs. But mistakes and costs multiply, and a moment comes when they become overwhelming in both security and economic spheres." Building on his defiance and boasts, Putin said Russia had nothing to fear given its resources, defense capability and "people ready to defend our sovereignty and independence." "Not in every country are people so eager to sacrifice their lives for the Motherland," he said. [Source: The Associated Press | Vladimir Isachenkov | October 18, 2018 ++]

Navy Terminology Update 05 ► Origins

Every profession has its own jargon and the Navy is no exception. For the Navy, it's *bulkhead*, *deck* and *overhead* and not *wall*, *floor*, and *ceiling*. Some nautical terminology has found its way into every day use, and you will find the origins of this and Navy terminology below. More terminology will be added from time to time.

Taken Aback

One of the hazards faced in days of sailing ships has been incorporated into English to describe someone who has been jolted by unpleasant news. We say that person has been "taken aback." The person is at a momentary loss; unable to act or even to speak. A danger faced by sailing ships was for a sudden shift in wind to come up (from a sudden squall), blowing the sails back against the masts, putting the ship in grave danger of having the masts break off and rendering the ship totally helpless. The ship was taken aback.

Three Mile Limit

The original three-mile limit was the recognized distance from a nation's shore over which that nation had jurisdiction. This border of international waters or the "high seas" was established because, at the time this international law was established, three miles was the longest range of any nation's most powerful guns, and therefore, the limit from shore batteries at which they could enforce their laws. (International law and the 1988 Territorial Sea Proclamation established the "high seas" border at the 12-mile limit.)

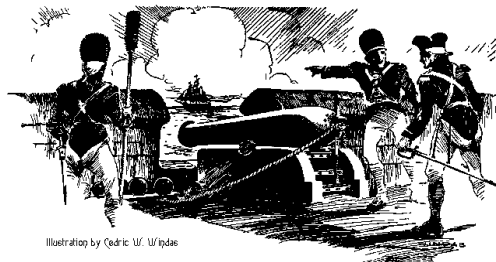


Illustration by Cedric W. W. Lyden

Three Sheets to the Wind

We use the term "three sheets to the wind" to describe someone who has too much to drink. As such, they are often bedraggled with perhaps shirttails out, clothes a mess. The reference is to a sailing ship in disarray, that is with sheets (lines -- not "ropes" -- that adjust the angle at which a sail is set in relation to the wind) flapping loosely in the breeze.

Took the wind out of his sails

Often we use "took the wind out of his sails" to describe getting the best of an opponent in an argument. Originally it described a battle maneuver of sailing ships. One ship would pass close to its adversary and on its windward side. The ship and sails would block the wind from the second vessel, causing it to lose headway. Losing motion meant losing maneuverability and the ability to carry on a fight.

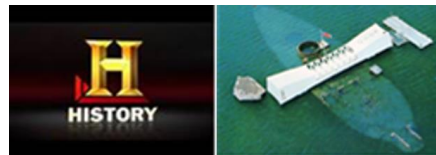
[Source: <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/traditions/html/navyterm.html> | August 2018 ++]

Warships That Will Change The Future ► The USS America (LHA-6)



Can you honestly tell us that there is a better name for an aircraft carrier than the USS America? This incredible physical embodiment of United States military might is able to house over 1,000 crew members as well as the most sophisticated airplanes in the US arsenal, from F-35s to Harrier strike fighters. The ship also comes equipped with V-22 Ospreys to quickly ferry Marines to and from the ship, as well as holding amphibious landing craft in its belly. She is 844 ft long with a beam of 44 ft and a draft of 26ft and can travel at over 22 knots.

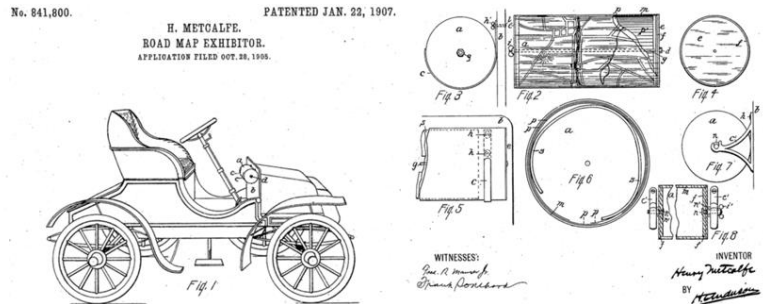
*** Military History ***



Road Map Exhibitor ► 1905 In-Car Navigation Aid Patented by Retired Army Officer

Before satellite navigation, people found their way using paper maps. Which, of course, can be cumbersome — and ill-suited to the confines of any vehicle, let alone an early open-top automobile. In 1905, Henry Metcalfe, a 58-year-old retired U.S. Army ordnance officer and firearms inventor, filed a patent for what he called the “Road Map Exhibitor.” The Exhibitor attached to the dashboard of a vehicle and protected a map from the elements. The driver could uncoil the map from the tube as the journey progressed along the route. Metcalfe noted that the Exhibitor “affords perfect protection to maps within it from dust, dirt and water, while affording easy facility for observing the map at any time when on a journey in any weather.” Metcalfe’s patent describes his invention:

The exhibitor consists of a tube, Fig. 2, made of thin transparent celluloid, inside of which a road map or maps may be coiled the maps being visible through the substance of the tube ... and means for supporting the device on the dash or front board ... of the automobile, as in Figs. 1, 3, 5 and 7. It may of course be used on other vehicles, but it is designed more particularly for automobiles, since touring is largely confined to that class of vehicles. The Exhibitor attached to the dashboard of a vehicle and protected a map from the elements. The driver could uncoil the map from the tube as the journey progressed along the route. Metcalfe noted that the Exhibitor "affords perfect protection to maps within it from dust, dirt and water, while affording easy facility for observing the map at any time when on a journey in any weather."



The Road Map Exhibitor predated later — and equally short-lived — automobile map developments, such as the wrist map of the 1920s and the Italian Iter-Auto, a motorized map-roll, from the 1930s. None of the devices caught on, and conventional maps remained the order of the day. As a soldier, Metcalfe had worked at the Frankford Arsenal, where he patented a number of small-arms inventions and later a neat little pocket notepad. He died in August 1927 at the age of 80. [Source: WIB History | Matthew Moss | October 15, 2018 ++]

WWII Night Witches ► Russia's All Female Bomber Squadron

In the Nazi-occupied Soviet Union, German soldiers had a very real fear of witches. Namely, the "Night Witches," an all-female squadron of bomber pilots who ran thousands of daring bombing raids with little more than wooden planes and the cover of night—and should be as celebrated as their male counterparts.

In June of 1941, the Axis powers pushed into the Soviet Union using the largest invading force in the history of warfare. The infamous Operation Barbarossa saw about four million troops wade into Russia from the west, establishing a line that threatened to overtake Moscow itself. The offensive was one of the most violent and terrible military actions in World War II, with countless atrocities committed against the Russian people. The battle-hardened male soldiers of the Soviet Union held the front lines against the Axis forces, keeping the invasion from overtaking the capital.

From the start of the war, Colonel Marina Raskova, a Soviet pilot who was known as the "Russian Amelia Earhart," began receiving letters from women across Russia wanting to join the war effort in any way they could. Many women served support roles at the time, but it was difficult to make it to the front. Raskova lobbied to find ways for women to take a more active role in the war, and was highly successful in her efforts, leading to women being eligible for the draft and even convincing the military to establish all-female units. In October of 1941, the order came down from Joseph Stalin that Raskova was to establish a trio of all-female air squads. The only one reported to have remained exclusively female was the team of night bombers, the 588th Night Bomber Regiment, where everyone from the pilots, to the commanders, to the mechanics, were women.



The regiment began filling out in 1942, with young women ranging in age from 17 to 26 transferring to the small town of Engels to begin flight training. The future pilots were greeted by Raskova herself with a no-nonsense, military manner. The women were issued size 42 boots, outfitted with ill-fitting military uniforms made for bulkier male soldiers. Their hair was cut short. As one of the pilots would recall in a later interview, "We didn't recognize ourselves in the mirror-we saw boys there."

The women faced significant obstacles even before they began engaging in combat-namely, with the equipment. They had to fly Polikarpov Po-2 aircraft-two-seated, open-cockpit biplanes that were obsolete even by the standards of the day. Made of plywood frames with canvas stretched over them, the craft was light, slow, and provided absolutely no armor. The benefit of the planes was that they had a slower stall speed than the standard German fighters, making them hard to target, and they could take off and land just about anywhere. However, this came as a literal cold comfort to the aviators who had to fly the ships through walls of enemy fire in the dead of night, with the freezing wind whipping around and through the exposed cockpits, often giving the pilots frostbite.

But this did little to discourage the women of the 588th. Starting with an initial bombing run on June 8, 1942, the all-female squadron would harry Nazi forces with overnight bombing runs all the way until the end of the war. At the peak of the regiment's strength, it had as many as 40 two-person crews, flying multiple bombing runs as soon as the sky darkened, taking part in as many as 18 in a single night. The light planes could only carry six bombs at a time, so as soon as one run was complete the pilots would be re-armed and sent back out for another run. Of course, this tightly controlled weight limit also meant the women could not bring parachutes and had to fly at lower, more easily spotted, altitudes.

Using such vulnerable craft to make their bombing runs, the cover of night was crucial to their success and survival. Three planes would leave simultaneously, with two of the airplanes drawing searchlights and gunfire, and the third sticking to the darkness, to drop the bombs. To remain hidden, the pilots would also kill their engines when they got near their target, and simply glide over it, deploying their payload.

As the silenced bombers sailed over the Nazi forces, making a light "whooshing" sound, German soldiers began referring to them as "Nachthexen," or "Night Witches," a name the pilots of the 588th quickly took on with pride. Rumors began to spread among the Germans that the Soviets were giving the women pills and treatments that gave them the night vision of a cat. One of the most famous of the Night Witches, Nadezhda Popova, who herself flew 852 missions, earning her multiple medals and the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, described the situation a bit more accurately in Albert Axell's book *Greatest Russian War Stories: 1941-1945*, saying, "This was nonsense, of course. What we did have were clever, educated, very talented girls."

Unfortunately, not everyone was so impressed with the 588th regiment's fortitude and military prowess. Many in the Soviet military still found the idea of women flying in combat to be laughable, despite their clear ability. Undeterred by the lack of faith from many of their male counterparts, the women embraced their identities, and are said to have painted their lips with navigational pencils and to have drawn flowers on the side of their aircraft. By the

end of the war, the Night Witches had flown somewhere about 30,000 bombing raids, delivering around 23,000 tons of munitions right to Nazi's. The 588th lost 30 pilots during the fighting, and 23 pilots, including Popova, were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. The squadron was never disbanded but was instead converted into the 46th Taman Guards Night Bomber Aviation Regiment, which continued to fight for the Soviet Union.

It was Popova who perhaps best summed up the stubborn resilience and passion of the Night Witches. "When the wind was strong it would toss the plane," she said. "In winter, when you'd look out to see your target better, you got frostbite, our feet froze in our boots. But we carried on flying." The Night Witches didn't have great planes, or superior bombs, or even very much support for their unit, but they nonetheless became one of the most remarkable fighting forces of World War II. No sorcery needed. [Source: Together We Served Dispatch | OCT 2018 ++]

WWII Vets 175 ► Bert Schwarz | Bataan Death March Survivor

Army Air Corps Veteran Bert Schwarz. Bert served as a pilot during World War II. When Charles Lindbergh completed his flight across the Atlantic Ocean, Bert knew that he wanted to be a pilot. After graduating from college, he enrolled in the Army Air Corps' Aviation Cadet Program and went through intensive training to become a pilot. He was assigned to the 27th Bomb Group, and they became the first dive-bomber group in the Air Corps. His unit was sent overseas to the Philippines in November 1941 as part of the Far East Air Force. After Pearl Harbor, the Japanese also bombed the Philippines where Bert was located and wiped out most of the Far East Air Force. Bert then became an infantryman, fighting the Japanese on the Philippines.



The Americans were soon forced to surrender, and Bert was taken prisoner. He and the other prisoners were marched 65 miles uphill with little food or water in what would become to be known as the Bataan Death March. Bert spent the next three years as a Japanese prisoner. He was given little food and was not allowed to wear shoes because the Japanese feared he would escape. At one point, the Japanese asked for volunteer workers, and Bert volunteered. He then worked in Japanese rice paddies for the next two years. Later, the Japanese wanted prisoners to help build an airstrip, and Bert volunteered. He had to mine coral and then spread it on the runway. The Americans soon wiped out this airstrip and then the Japanese forced the prisoners there to get on a ship. The Americans didn't bomb the ship because they knew there were prisoners on it.

The Japanese took advantage of this fact and transferred the prisoners to another ship during the middle of the night. This ship was torpedoed by the Americans because they didn't know that prisoners were aboard. The torpedo strike blew the hatch door off, allowing Bert and others to escape and swim ashore. There they met some friendly Filipinos who let the Americans know they were there. The Navy soon came to Bert's rescue, picking him and the other escaped prisoners up in a submarine and bringing them back to Australia where they were able to receive medical care.

He was sent back to the United States and stayed in the Air Corps for a while longer before he returned to his career in the textile industry. In 1948, Bert was asked to return to Japan to help rebuild their textile industry, and he

did that for ten years. When he returned home he helped start the AmeriCares Foundation, which delivers medicine and relief supplies to devastated areas of the world. Bert passed away in 2003. To listen to a 77 minute interview with Bert go to <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.12376/mv0001001.stream>. [Source: Vantage Point | October 18, 2018 ++]

Venona Project ► Codebreaker Angeline Nanni's Involvement

Angeline Nanni didn't want to be a beautician. But she got her license anyway and shampooed customers at her sisters' Blairsville beauty shop while running the business side. It was there, while World War II raged on, that she heard of a government job opportunity in Washington, D.C. Nanni thought she'd check it out for a year. "I just want to go see what's going on there," Nanni remembered telling her sisters. That decision would change the course of the Indiana County native's life and put her in exclusive company with a group of women who deciphered codes connected to Soviet spy communication during and after World War II. She was part of a secretive effort known as the Venona Project.



U.S. Army Signals Intelligence Service cryptologists cracking codes at Arlington Hall, Virginia, during World War II.

A September article in the Smithsonian magazine by Liza Mundy — following her book "Code Girls " published last year — profiled Nanni in her first public interview as the last living member of The Project. Nanni turned 100 in August. In the Smithsonian article, Mundy described Nanni sitting for a test to see if she would get into the top-secret program in 1945, just after World War II had ended: "On a piece of paper before her were 10 sets of numbers, arranged in five-digit groups. The numbers represented a coded message. Each five-digit group had a secret meaning. Below that row of 50 numbers was another row of 50, arranged in similar groups. The supervisor told them to subtract the entire bottom row from the top row, in sequence. She said something about 'non-carrying.'

"Angie had never heard the word 'non-carrying' before, but as she looked at the streams of digits, something happened in her brain. She intuited that the digit 4, minus the digit 9, equaled 5, because you just borrowed an invisible 1 to go beside the top number. Simple! Angie Nanni raced through, stripping out the superfluous figures to get down to the heart of the message." In an interview with the Tribune-Review, Nanni was humble about her accomplishments, saying that she was simply doing her job alongside plenty of other women, many of whom became lifelong friends.

Nanni recounted life growing up in Creekside in northern Indiana County. The tiny, rural borough — a former mining town north of Indiana — had about 600 residents when she was a child. The population since has fallen to about 300, according to census figures. At age 12, Nanni finished eighth grade. A rule at the time forbid her from going to high school at that age without an adult. Both of her parents worked, so she helped out at her father's Creekside grocery store for a couple of years doing bookkeeping and organizing deliveries. "He used to get me up in the morning to help with the groceries," she recalled.

Nanni eventually graduated from Indiana High School in 1937. She left to work in Harrisburg for a year before returning to Western Pennsylvania, joining her sisters Mary and Virginia at the Blairsville salon. She left for Washington in 1944, when she was in her mid-20s. "I was never good at styling. My sisters were great stylists," Nanni said. Turns out, she was great at something else — the meticulous work of analyzing intercepted sets of numbers and making sense of sensitive information the Soviets sought via spies during the Cold War, according to Mundy's research.

Per Mundy's Smithsonian article, Nanni cracked the practice code in 1945 before any other women taking the test that day — many, if not all, of whom she figured had attended college. She had not. "The supervisor came around and saw that she had finished before anybody else," Mundy wrote. "That's right, Angie! That's right!" she cried. "Then she ran out of the room to tell her superiors they had a new candidate for the Russian code-breaking project." She got the analyst job. "I just loved the work and I just decided, 'Why go back home?'" said Nanni, who still lives in the same apartment building near Dupont Circle from when she moved to Washington. For decades, she had to keep her work a secret from her family back home in Western Pennsylvania. In fact, when family members attended her retirement party in 1980, they had no idea from what job she was retiring. "That was the code that these women lived by," said Nanni's nephew Greg Persichetti of Blairsville. His mother was Mary Nanni Persichetti, her sister.

The Army's Signal Intelligence Service, later the National Security Agency, started the Venona project in 1943. Its work was headquartered at Arlington Hall in Virginia, according to a report from the NSA's Center for Cryptologic History. The group successfully translated about 3,000 encrypted messages, including ones related to the Cambridge Five spy ring in the United Kingdom and major KGB espionage agents such as Klaus Fuchs, Harry Gold, David Greenglass, Theodore Hall, William Perl and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, according to the NSA report. Nanni worked for the project until it ended in 1980. A family member stumbled across her name when information about Venona was declassified in 1995 and asked her about it. "She was stunned — 'How did you know that?'" Persichetti said she asked.

Nanni's nephew Jim DeLuca noticed Mundy's book late last year on the New York Times Bestseller list and ordered a copy. He reached out to the bestselling author to share information about his aunt. He said Mundy later got back in touch with him before reaching out to Nanni. "It's been fun watching her," said DeLuca, a Blairsville native who lives near Baltimore. "She views herself as just doing her job." It was at her retirement party that DeLuca — who at one time lived in the same apartment building as his aunt and sometimes drove her and her friends around — realized the importance of his aunt's job.

The full extent of what Nanni had been doing behind closed doors finally came to light this year as part of Mundy's work, he said. Family members are proud. "This was still her hometown," niece Carol Persichetti, Greg's wife, said of Blairsville and the area. Nanni visits Southwestern Pennsylvania regularly for Christmas and more often over the years for other special occasions. She had two 100th birthday parties — one in Blairsville and another in Washington.

Nanni's 36 years ferreting out spies was fulfilling. Despite the whirlwind of important work, she kept the small-town values she learned growing up in Indiana County and helping run a Blairsville beauty parlor that now is someone's home. "She was destined for something else," Greg Persichetti said. According to declassified records, Venona cryptographers deciphered a number of cover names used by Russian and KGB spies during the Cold War. Some of those include:

- KAPITAN: President Roosevelt

- KABAN: Winston Churchill
- RAS: Gen. Charles de Gaulle
- VIKTOR: Lt. Gen. Pavel M. Fitin, director of Soviet Intelligence
- TYRE, TIR: New York City
- STRANA, COUNTRY: United States of America
- COUNTRYSIDE: Mexico
- ISLAND: Great Britain
- KARFAGEN, CARTHAGE: Washington D.C.
- SIDON: London
- BABYLON: San Francisco
- ARSENAL: U.S. War Department
- BANK: U.S. Department of State
- KhATA: FBI
- ENORMOZ: The Manhattan Project, A-bomb
- PLANT: Soviet Consulate General, NYC
- METRO: Soviet embassy, London
- ANTENNA, LIBERAL: Julius Rosenberg
- WASP: Ruth Rosenberg
- GOOD GIRL: Elizabeth Bentley, American spy for the Soviets
- FROST: Boris Morros, Soviet/FBI double agent
- CHARLES, REST: Soviet atomic bomb spy Klaus Fuchs

Samples of tradecraft terms used by the Soviets and uncovered by Venona workers included:

- Probationers: KGB agents
- Fellow countrymen: American Communist Party member
- Workers, cadre: KGB officers
- Put on ice, put in cold storage: deactivate an agent
- Legend: cover story

[Source: Tribune-Review | Renatta Signorini | October 17, 2018 ++]

They Shall Not Grow Old ► WWI Documentary A Groundbreaking Cinematic Achievement

Peter Jackson is most known for bringing J.R.R. Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings” and “The Hobbit” Middle Earth universe to life in movie franchises that grossed nearly \$6 billion in total box office revenue. But now, the director has turned his attention to preserving the fading memories of World War I by using innovative production techniques to enhance and colorize almost 100 hours of original footage Jackson obtained from the Imperial War Museum in England. “They Shall Not Grow Old” opened on 16 OCT in the U.K. and has been universally praised by critics as a groundbreaking cinematic achievement.

The 99-minute documentary, which takes its name from Laurence Binyon’s poem, “For the Fallen,” features astonishingly sharpened and colorized footage so crisp it can even be viewed in 3D. To enhance the audio experience, Jackson and his team pulled excerpts from nearly 600 hours of World War I veteran interviews. War diaries and letters provided another narrative source, and the team enlisted the help of expert lip-readers to dub in audio of what the featured soldiers are actually saying. “The thing that jumps out at you are the people, you know, the humanity, because

they suddenly become real human beings," Jackson said in an interview with Forces TV. "They're not Charlie Chaplin ... jerky figures anymore."

It's fitting that Jackson, who expertly transformed Tolkien's universe into one of the most successful film franchises ever, would now turn his eye-of-Sauron-like focus to World War I. It was the revered author's experiences during the Great War, after all, that served as his greatest inspiration for creating the internationally-loved novels. As a young officer, Tolkien was sent off to the trenches of France only months after marrying his wife, Edith, in March 1916. "Junior officers were being killed off, a dozen a minute. Parting from my wife then ... it was like a death," Tolkien wrote of his experience. The author would go on to contract trench fever while witnessing the horrors of combat during the Battle of the Somme, one of the war's costliest campaigns. While hospitalized in England, he would turn many of his comrades, as well as his personal acquaintance with the death and destruction of war, into characters and settings in Middle Earth.



A young J.R.R. Tolkien (left) took part in World War I's Battle of the Somme in the trenches of France, an experience that inspired much of his creation of Middle Earth, the universe most known in "The Hobbit" and "Lord of the Rings" novels.

Until now, experiences of the Great War, like those encountered by Tolkien, have been relegated to books or camera footage so grainy or "jerky" that it has had the effect of making it nearly impossible for an audience to identify with. Jackson and his production team have overcome that visual disconnect, and the resulting images and story are enthralling. "They're real people with all the nuances and subtleties of human beings," the director said. "So therefore, it told me that this should be a human story, not a war story."

Shaping the story to revolve around the human beings immersed in the conflict, versus the conflict itself, even yielded a direct connection for Jackson. At one point in the film, a sequence features footage of a mine explosion, one that Jackson told Forces TV his own grandfather witnessed from about 100 yards away on the other side of the exact explosion. "So, I'm actually looking at something that my grandfather saw," he said. "I'm actually seeing what he saw from 100 years ago." That type of personal connection is what the film is designed to elicit, Jackson said, and the director hopes that the inventive editing techniques will allow viewers to attach renewed meaning to the conflict that ended in November 1918.

"Really, the war's not that long ago that most people in Britain, and the old empire — Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa — most of us have got family that were in that war, great grandfathers, great uncles," Jackson said. "And I think it's great if we can just pause for a moment and actually think about them for a bit, because they're part of our family, they're part of us. So, let's have a pause in our modern lives and have a think about what they went through." A trailer of the documentary is available at <https://youtu.be/EHYRfukHToc> [Source: MilitaryTimes | J.D. Simkins | October 16, 2018 ++]

Every Picture Tells A Story ► Forced Landing



Some photographs don't have to be overly dramatic to deliver an emotional blow. This photo (left) of an Eighth Air Force B-24H Liberator in the haze and about to make a forced landing at RAF Eye in Suffolk exemplifies this. It speaks to the fact that the six remaining men aboard (right) are now all alone, encased in a wounded metal machine and about to attempt an uncertain landing with heavy damage. The aircraft had been mauled by enemy fighters over France with severe damage to its tail turret, fuselage and hydraulic system. The tail gunner had been killed instantly, and the two waist gunners had bailed out.

The training for the pilots is now kicking in, the only means by which they can save themselves. There is something about the haze, the church steeple and the distance that speaks to their plight. It looks misty and silent and it seems their trial is near its end—but this is the most dangerous time, and those young American men we can't see inside that shape are scrambling to save their lives. The Ford-built (Willow Run factory) Liberator (42-95025) of the 579th Bomb Squadron of the 392nd Bomb Group, piloted by Lieutenant Harry A. White, crashed at Eye on 15 June 1944. The six men survived.

The following 392 BG intelligence report demonstrates the severity of the damage—something you cannot see in this photo: “On the mission of 15 June 1944 to a bridge at La Frillière, near Tours, A/C #025, piloted by 1st Lt Harry A. White, Jr, was attacked by E/A. The exact time and place of the attack could not be ascertained from Lt White's crew, who had their hands full dealing with battle damage and flying the plane home. From interrogation of the crew in the hospital the next day and from crew reports of A/C nearby in the formation, the attack is estimated to have begun at about 0658 hours in the vicinity of 59 km/37 miles northeast of their target. Five or six Fw 190s, from a group of 20 or more, attacked our formation. Three of these attacked Lt White's plane—one from either side and behind, one from the rear and below. The plane was badly hit by 20-mm shells and machine gun fire. The tail gunner, S/Sgt J. Wehunt, was killed, and the waist gunners, S/Sgts Braccioforte and Weitkemper, bailed out. The tail structure and turret were ruined. Shells and bullets entered the fuselage near the waist windows on both sides. Oxygen bottles exploded, and a 20-mm shell burst on the flight deck, wounding the engineer, T/Sgt Glenn M. Barnes, in the face and neck.

Smoke filled the plane. The hydraulic system was shot out, rendering the bomb-bay doors inoperative, and escaping fluid poured through the plane, freezing to the floor and sides. Bombs were salvoed through the bomb-bay doors. No. 3 engine ran away. Rudders and trim tabs were out, and the plane was flown home (with the 93rd Bomb Group) by main force and the skill of the remaining crew. The intercom was out. S/Sgts Braccioforte and Weitkemper, at the waist guns, presumably bailed out when fire from attacking planes came into their positions. It should be emphasized that in the confusion of the attack their own crew did not see them leave the plane. In fact, when the plane was again brought under control the open bomb-bay and the frozen hydraulic fluid made it impossible for the rest of the crew to investigate conditions in the rear of the plane. They did not know that the waist gunners had bailed out nor that the tail gunner was dead until they crash-landed in England at Eye, home of the 490th Bomb Group.

Neighboring A/C reported seeing the two chutes of S/Sgts Braccioforte and Weitkemper at the time of the attack. Witnesses were the crews of A/C #343 (1st Lt C.L. Bell, pilot) and A/C #544 (2nd Lt H.W. Prouse, pilot).”

In the right photograph, the six men who did make it home, pose with their crash-landed bomber shortly after their safe return. Left to right: 2nd Lt William Forde, navigator; TSgt James Reynolds, Radio Operator; 1st Lt Harry Whyte, Pilot; 2nd Lt John Martin, Co-pilot; TSgt Glenn Barnes, Engineer; 2nd Lt Harry Green, Bombardier. In the background can be seen the damaged tail turret where Wehunt was killed.

Post WWII Photos ► Hiroshima Aerial View One Year Later



Aerial view of Hiroshima, Japan, one year after the atomic bomb blast shows some small amount of reconstruction amid much ruin on July 20, 1946. The slow pace of rebuilding is attributed to a shortage of building equipment and materials. (AP Photo/Charles P. Gorry)

Operation Crazy Horse ► Vietnam | Battlefield Chronicles

Operation Crazy Horse-named after Lakota warrior - took place from May 1966 to June 5, 1966, was a search and destroy mission during the Vietnam War conducted by military forces of the United States, South Vietnam, and the Republic of South Korea in two valleys in Bãnh Dinh Province of South Vietnam. The objective of the operation was to destroy the Viet Cong (VC) 2nd Regiment (approximately 2,000 men) believed to be in the area and thereby prevent an attack on the U.S. Special Forces Vinh Thanh Civilian Irregular Defense Group camp (CIDG). The U.S. forces had the continuing objective of protecting Highway 19 and the base camp of the 1st Cavalry Division at An Khe from harassment by the VC.

In September 1965, the 1st Cavalry Division, newly arrived in South Vietnam, carved out Camp Radcliff, its base, near the town of An Khe to ensure that Highway 19 which reached from the coast of South Vietnam to the Central Highlands city of Pleiku remained under the control of allied forces. Almost immediately the 1st Cavalry began mounting operations against communist forces in the Vinh Thanh Valley, 10 miles northwest of An Khe. Vinh Thanh Valley was small, approximately 12 miles long and less than 3 miles wide, but heavily populated and dominated by the Viet Cong.

Ten miles east of Vinh Thanh Valley was the Suoi Ca Valley. The two valleys were separated by a chain of heavily-forested mountains rising as much as 2,600 over the river valleys. The soldiers dubbed Suoi Ca Valley "Happy Valley"

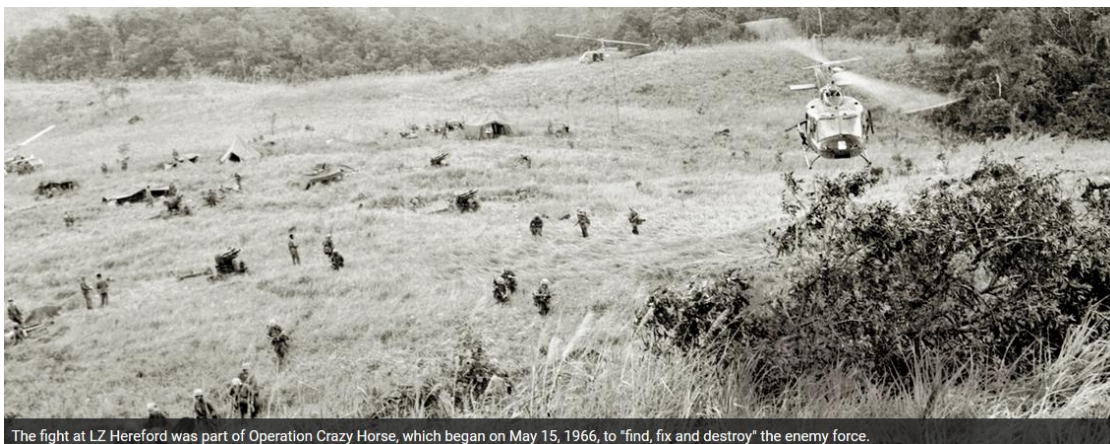
(not to be confused with another American-named "Happy Valley" near the city of Danang). A trail crossing the mountains between the two valleys was named the "Oregon Trail." The U.S. estimated that a regiment of main force VC guerrillas controlled Suoi Ca Valley.

In late 1965, sweeps through the two valleys by the 1st Cavalry failed to find large numbers of VC. They were believed to have fled the valleys, but to have returned after the 1st Cavalry withdrew to its base. In early May 1966, Montagnard irregulars and U.S. Special Forces soldiers in the Vinh Thanh valley reported clashes and increased activity by the Viet Cong in the area and a possible major attack on May 19, the birthday of North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh. 1st Cavalry Division commander Maj. Gen. John Norton ordered Operation Crazy Horse to preempt the attack and attempt to destroy the VC regiment believed to be in the area. Norton was prepared to dedicate up to five battalions of 1st Cavalry troopers to the task.

The Americans began Operation Crazy Horse with heavy harassing artillery fire designed to disrupt a possible attack on the CIDG camp and to prepare for a helicopter landing. The initial helicopter landing was at Landing Zone Hereford on a ridge overlooking the Vinh Thanh valley and Special Forces camp three miles distant. Shortly after landing on May 16, Company E from the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment became engaged with a VC battalion on a ridge near the landing zone. Because of bad weather, little air support was available to the Americans who were surrounded. During a break in the rain Company C 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment was landed and moved to support Company E. After an all-night fight at close quarters, the VC withdrew leaving behind 38 bodies and having killed 28 Americans. Persuaded that they had located the VC regiment, Norton sent in two battalions on May 17 to find and pursue the VC.

The 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment landed at Landing Zone Hereford while the 2/12th Cavalry touched down at Landing Zone Horse, in the mountains east of the Vinh Thanh Valley. The strategy was that the Americans would trap the VC between the two battalions, but, after initial firefights, the Americans searched eastward for several days mostly without success. On May 21, the situation at Landing Zone Hereford had been quiet for several days. It was decided that C Company, 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment would move off the hill to conduct operations in the valley below. Over the protests of the company commander, an under-strength weapons platoon of 20 soldiers was left alone at the landing zone while one company of the 1st Cavalry returned to An Khe and another departed the landing zone by foot on a search and destroy mission.

Less than an hour after the platoon was left alone, the VC attacked with mortars followed by an infantry assault. By the time reinforcements arrived, 15 American soldiers and journalist, Sam Castan, had been killed. The five survivors who had escaped the carnage returned to the hilltop. The VC retired uncontested from the area. Dispatch editor Michael Christy-who commanded the same company (C Company, 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment in 1969)-wrote an article on what happened at LZ Hereford that appeared in Vietnam magazine: <http://www.historynet.com/last-stand-at-lz-hereford.htm>.



The fight at LZ Hereford was part of Operation Crazy Horse, which began on May 15, 1966, to "find, fix and destroy" the enemy force.

On May 24th, in the wake of the VC attack at Landing Zone Hereford, Maj. Gen. Norton changed strategies, called off search and destroy missions temporarily as he no longer wanted his soldiers "to go banging around in the enemy's backyard," and attempted instead to encircle the area where the VC were believed to be, cut off their escape routes, and called in artillery and airstrikes while Americans, South Korean, and South Vietnamese military units attempted to ambush VC units presumed to be fleeing the area.

The peak allied strength devoted to Operation Crazy Horse was four American, one Vietnamese, one South Korean, and one CIDG (Montagnard with Special Forces advisers) battalions. One of the few significant clashes came on May 26 at Landing Zone Monkey where an American company was briefly under siege and a helicopter was shot down. By the end of May, it was apparent that most of the VC had escaped. Operation Crazy Horse was officially terminated on June 5, 1966. Despite the failure by the Americans to engage the VC in large battles of attrition, the U.S. declared Operation Crazy Horse a success. The U.S. estimated that 507 VC had been killed at a loss of 83 Americans, 14 South Koreans, 8 South Vietnamese, and an unrecorded number of Montagnards.

The operation also revealed, however, a limitation of airmobile warfare in heavily forested mountains. With only a few feasible places where helicopters could land, communist soldiers could anticipate likely landing sites and prepare to contest the landing or ambush the Americans as they fanned out from the landing zone. Three months later the 1st Cavalry was back in Binh Dinh again with Operation Thayer to attempt once again to eliminate North Vietnamese and VC influence in the province. [Source: Together We Served Dispatch | OCT 2018 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 01 thru 15 November

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 NOV**". [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | October 2018 ++]

WWII Bomber Nose Art [17] ► Double Trouble



Medal of Honor Citations ► Sherwood H. Hallman | WWII



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

Sherwood H. Hallman

Rank and organization: Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army, 175th Infantry, 29th Infantry Division

Place and date: Brest, Brittany, France, 13 September 1944

Entered service: January 8, 1943 at Spring City, PA

Born: October 29, 1913 in Spring City, PA

Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. On 13 September 1944, in Brittany, France, the 2d Battalion in its attack on the fortified city of Brest was held up by a strongly defended enemy position which had prevented its advance despite repeated attacks extending over a 3-day period. Finally, Company F advanced to within several hundred yards of the enemy position but was again halted by intense fire. Realizing that the position must be neutralized without delay, S/Sgt. Hallman ordered his squad to cover his movements with fire while he advanced alone to a point from which he could make the assault. Without hesitating, S/Sgt. Hallman leaped over a hedgerow into a sunken road, the central point of the German defenses which was known to contain an enemy machinegun position and at least 30 enemy riflemen. Firing his carbine and hurling grenades, S/Sgt. Hallman, unassisted, killed or wounded 4 of the enemy, then ordered the remainder to surrender. Immediately, 12 of the enemy surrendered and the position was shortly secured by the remainder of his company. Seeing the surrender of this position, about 75 of the enemy in the vicinity surrendered, yielding a defensive organization which the battalion with heavy supporting fires had been unable to take. This single heroic act on the part of S/Sgt. Hallman resulted in the immediate advance of the entire battalion for a distance of 2,000 yards to a position from which Fort Keranroux was captured later the same day. S/Sgt. Hallman's fighting determination and intrepidity in battle exemplify the highest tradition of the U.S. Armed Forces.



Hallman entered the service in 1943 and received his training at Fort McClellan, Alabama, at their Infantry Replacement Training Center. He spent five months training stateside. When he arrived in England, as Private First Class Hallman; he was assigned to Company F, a rifle company in the 2nd Battalion of the 175th Infantry Regiment, which was part of the 29th Division. A rifle company was a bad place in which to spend the war. Once it reached the front line it never left. The men were in constant danger. Hallman spent the next year in England training rigorously for the Normandy invasion.

On D-day his regiment spent the day in LSTs bobbing up and down in the Atlantic just off Omaha Beach. They landed there on June 6, 1944. On the next day his company was hit by British dive bombers who thought they were Germans. The attack left five men dead and 19 wounded, including Hallman. He was sent to an English hospital for treatment and just 17 days later returned to his company to resume the fighting in France.

In September, his division was trying to capture the city of Brest, on the tip of the Brittany Peninsula, south and east of Normandy. Brest was a key city, and housed a forward German U-Boat base; submarines that were devastating our supply ships. Despite repeated attacks, the enemy repelled his division for 3 days. A strong enemy position at Fort Keranroux, protecting the city, seemed impenetrable. Sherwood's Battalion came under withering fire from several interlocking enemy positions on September 13 and their advance was halted. Although he normally carried a BAR (Browning automatic rifle – a heavy 30 caliber hand held machine gun), Sherwood exchanged it with one of his men for the lighter M1 Carbine, giving him the mobility he needed. He then commenced attacking the enemy position as noted in the citation above

Hallman came through the attack unscathed. The following day, Sept. 14, he was shot by a sniper and fell mortally wounded. He was awarded a second Purple Heart, as well as the Medal of Honor for his actions on September 13. The Medal of Honor was presented to his wife and 2-year-old son, Sherwood Hallman II, during a ceremony at Fairmount Park Military Police headquarters in Philadelphia on May 31, 1945. The presentation to the family was made by Brigadier General Malcolm F. Lindsey, Commanding General Indiantown Gap Military Cemetery.

Staff Sergeant Sherwood Hallman, age 30 at this death, was buried with full military honors at the Brittany American Cemetery, St. James France. This cemetery is sometimes called the forgotten cemetery, as the American Cemetery above Omaha Beach overshadows it, even though there are 4,410 Americans buried in the St. James Cemetery. The Walter T. Caffrey American Legion Post 602 erected a memorial monument dedicated to Sergeant Hallman at the Spring City Borough Hall on November 18, 1967.

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



TRICARE Open Season ► Period to Enroll In or Change your Health Plan

Do you want to make enrollment changes to your or to a family member's TRICARE health plan for 2019? Your chance is around the corner during TRICARE Open Season. However, if you want to keep your current health plan, you don't need do anything during TRICARE Open Season. Your current coverage will continue automatically as long as you remain eligible.

Open season is an annual period when you can enroll in or change your health care coverage plan for the following year. TRICARE beneficiaries will experience open season for the **first time between Nov. 12 and Dec 10, 2018**. TRICARE Open Season will happen each year from the Monday of the second full week in November to the Monday of the second full week in December. Enrollment choices made during this period will take effect on 1 JAN. During TRICARE Open Season, you may enroll in or change your [TRICARE Prime](#) or [TRICARE Select](#) health plan.

- TRICARE Prime -- A managed care option available in the U.S. With it you have an assigned primary care manager who provides most of your care
- TRICARE Select -- A fee for service option in the U.S. (replaced TRICARE Standard & TRICARE Select in 2018) which allows you to get care from any TRICARE-authorized provider. Enrollment is required to participate. TRICARE Select is a self-managed, preferred provider network plan.

If you remain eligible and make no changes during TRICARE Open Season, then you'll stay in the same plan for 2019. You may also change your type of enrollment during open season, for example switching from individual to family coverage. Outside of the TRICARE Open Season period, you may still enroll in or change between TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select plans within 90 days after you or a family member experience a [Qualifying Life Event](#) (QLE). A QLE is a certain change in your life, which may mean different TRICARE options are available to you. If you want to change your coverage to TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select, and you're eligible, a QLE allows you to do that. Whether during TRICARE Open Season or following a QLE, you have three ways to make an enrollment choice:

- **Online:** Go to the [Beneficiary Web Enrollment website](#) (stateside only)
- **By phone:** Call your [regional contractor](#)
- **By mail:** Mail your [enrollment form](#) to your regional contractor

TRICARE Open Season doesn't apply to the premium-based plans listed below. These plans offer continuous open enrollment throughout the year:

- [TRICARE Retired Reserve](#)
- [TRICARE Reserve Select](#)
- [TRICARE Young Adult](#)
- [Continued Health Care Benefit Program](#)

Also, TRICARE Open Season doesn't apply to [TRICARE For Life](#) (TFL). TFL (i.e. Medicare-wraparound coverage for TRICARE-eligible beneficiaries who have both Medicare Part A and B which doesn't require enrollment). Sign up on the [TRICARE website](#) for updates about TRICARE Open Season. Look for more information this fall at www.tricare.mil/openseason. This is your benefit. Take command of your health and prepare for TRICARE Open Season. [Source: Health.mil | October 18, 2018 ++]

Bile Duct Cancer Update 01 ► **VA Tasked to Research Vet Prevalence & Treatment**

The Cholangiocarcinoma Foundation at <https://cholangiocarcinoma.org/vietnam-veterans> has published the following facts about Vietnam Vets and Cholangiocarcinoma (i.e. Bile Duct Cancer):

- Vietnam Veterans were **exposed to two different risk factors** regarding developing Cholangiocarcinoma due to their service in Vietnam. **Exposure to liver flukes and dioxin** which is in Agent Orange.
- Although, exposure to the liver fluke in Vietnam is mainly through **eating, raw, undercooked salted, or fermented fish**, there are cases which have been contracted through cross contamination.
- The **VA has approved claims** for liver fluke exposure and herbicide exposure.
- In some cases the VA will state the Agent Orange Studies by the National Academy of Sciences as reasons not to recognize this cancer. However, research will show due to the rarity and other factors regarding this cancer, **Agent Orange Studies are flawed**.
- In many cases the VA will deny service connection because the veteran did not show symptoms in the service or within a year after discharge. However, veterans did not have to have symptoms in the service or within a year after discharge for this to be service connected. In the majority of cases, **this cancer is asymptomatic and in most cases takes 30 to 40 years to develop**.

At <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/infectious-diseases/cholangiocarcinoma.asp> a page has been created by the Department of Veterans Affairs to inform Vietnam Veterans and others who served in areas where liver flukes are prevalent, so they can be aware of the symptoms of Cholangiocarcinoma. Although, the VA acknowledges the risk of the veterans being exposed to liver flukes, they state, they do not have sufficient studies to say whether Vietnam Veterans are getting this cancer at a higher rate than other groups of people. However, not having studies does not negate the fact that Vietnam Veterans were exposed to one definitive risk factor (liver flukes) and another possible risk factor (dioxin). Cases brought to the VA for approval for service connection in regard to both liver fluke and herbicide exposure have been granted and approved. In approving these cases, it demonstrates the VA recognizes the connection. Therefore, it should be recognized in all cases.

As far as current studies go, The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is responsible for compiling data to determine what illnesses Vietnam Veterans are getting due to Agent Orange (Dioxin would be included in this). In speaking with the Staff Director who is in charge of the study, he conveyed that due to the fact Cholangiocarcinoma is such a rare cancer, it is not possible for them to study it in relation to Agent Orange exposure. For these types of situations with a rare cancer, it takes something other than reviewing scientific information to determine if Vietnam Veteran are getting this cancer at a higher rate than other groups of people.

Also, NAS is not able to study the connection of the liver fluke in relation to Vietnam Veterans, since it has only been approved for them to study herbicide exposure. One of the measures included in the new Energy & Water, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction and Veteran's Affairs Appropriations Act signed into law October 23, 2018 requires the VA to start conducting research on the prevalence of this cancer in vets and efforts to combat it.

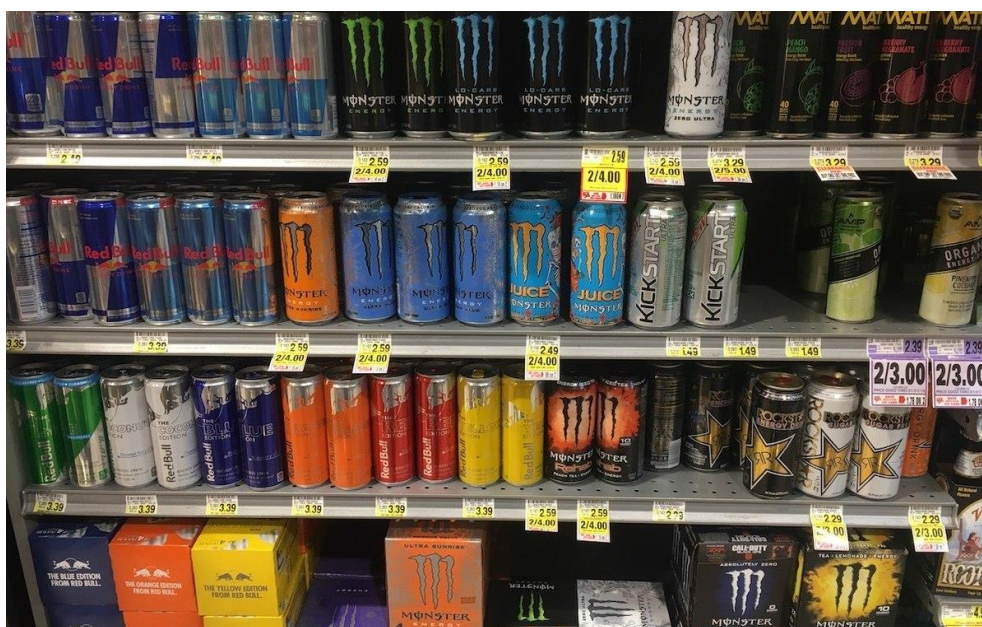
Cholangiocarcinoma, also known as bile duct cancer, is an extremely rare cancer caused by exposure to parasites in undercooked fish in Vietnam. It is a form of cancer that is composed of mutated epithelial cells (or cells showing characteristics of epithelial differentiation) that originate in the bile ducts which drain bile from the liver into the small intestine. It is a relatively rare neoplasm that is classified as an adenocarcinoma (a cancer that forms glands or secretes significant amounts of mucins). It has an annual incidence rate of 1–2 cases per 100,000 in the Western world, but rates of cholangiocarcinoma have been rising worldwide over the past few decades.

Vets concerned about having bile duct cancer should talk to their health care providers. Symptoms of bile duct cancer include jaundice (yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes), pain in the abdomen, dark urine, light or

'clay' colored stool, fever, itchy skin, nausea and vomiting, and unexplained weight loss. Your health care provider uses medical history, physical examination, and may employ a variety of blood tests and medical imaging (Xrays, CT, MRI scans, and/or ultrasound) and consultation with specialists to diagnose bile duct cancer. He can arrange for examination of your stool to check for ongoing liver fluke infection. If the infection occurred years ago, the test may not show the presence of liver flukes. Currently, there is no test of previous (resolved) liver fluke infection available for clinical use in the United States.

Cholangiocarcinoma is considered to be an incurable and rapidly lethal cancer unless both the primary tumor and any metastases can be fully removed by surgery. No potentially curative treatment exists except surgery, but most people have advanced stage disease at presentation and are inoperable at the time of diagnosis. People with cholangiocarcinoma are generally managed – though not cured – with chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and other palliative care measures. These are also used as additional therapies after surgery in cases where resection has apparently been successful (or nearly so). [Source: USVCP & Cholangiocarcinoma Foundation | October 26, 2018 ++]

PTSD Sleep Impact Update 01 ► Energy Drinks Found to be Contributing Factor



Getting adequate sleep is increasingly rare among the active duty military population, as frequent deviations from the body's natural circadian rhythms due to a demanding operational tempo pit personnel in an ongoing struggle against the ever-persistent sandman. To combat the sleep deprivation unique to this demographic, service members often turn to energy drinks, a prominent component of combat deployments that has become as paramount to mission success as any piece of protective gear or weaponry. The prevalence of energy drink use in these settings is extraordinary. The life blood is virtually everywhere — and tends to cost nothing — resulting in an environment in which nearly half of deployed troops down at least one readily available crack can per day.

But while consuming these drinks may not hurt service members in their wallets, excessive use may very well be contributing to long-term mental and physical ailments, a recent study in the Military Medicine journal observed. The authors of the study surveyed over 600 male infantry soldiers during a post-deployment period after the brigade combat team returned from a 12-month combat deployment to Afghanistan. Questions were designed to examine the

association of energy drink use with sleep deprivation or insomnia, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol abuse, aggressive behaviors and fatigue.

What the authors found was that over the course of the month leading up to the survey, more than 75 percent of soldiers consumed energy drinks. More surprising, however, was that 16 percent “of soldiers in this study reported continuing to consume two or more energy drinks per day in the post-deployment period,” the authors wrote. High energy drink use, which was classified as consuming two or more drinks per day, was significantly associated with those survey **respondents who reported mental health problems, anger-related behaviors and fatigue**, the authors found. Those consuming less than one energy drink per week reported these symptoms at a significantly lower rate. Also of note is that energy drink use in this Army infantry sample was five times higher than previous studies that analyzed consuming patterns of airmen and the general population’s youth.

Troubling patterns like this come as no surprise with the understanding of energy drink availability during deployments, a setting where drinks like Rip Its are practically the beverage of choice. Like other energy drinks, a Rip It, often referred to overseas as “crack,” provides the immediate jolt service members look for to spike physical and cognitive performance. More than a few pallets of Rip Its have mysteriously been acquired over the years by troops — “gear adrift...” — outside chow halls in Iraq and Afghanistan, oversupplying service members to the point in which many engage in excessively caffeinated drinking competitions.

As with any substance that increases health risk, “it is important that [service members] understand the risks associated with overuse,” the authors say. “The message that moderation is critical needs to be conveyed.” While moderation may be key, educating troops about consuming in excess is a daunting task. The energy drink industry pulls in approximately \$21 billion annually in the U.S. alone, and with much of the industry’s advertisements targeting young men in particular, the military population is “especially prone,” the authors note. [Source: MilitaryTimes | J.D. Simkins | October 26, 2018 ++]

FLU Prevention Update 07 ► Facts You Need to Know

We are rapidly approaching the holiday season, and carving pumpkins turns into carving turkeys and decking the halls, we all need to be reminded and aware of the uninvited guest: Influenza. There are a few important things you need to remember about the flu:

1. The “flu” or influenza is caused by the Human Influenza A, B and C Viruses
2. Symptoms typically appear 1-4 days after exposure
3. Symptoms include fevers of over 100 degrees, cough, nasal stuffiness, weakness, congestion, muscle aches, general fatigue, sore throat, chills and sweats
4. Symptoms often last for at least a week or two, sometimes longer
5. You are contagious for about a day before you have symptoms and for about a week after your symptoms start
6. You get the flu by breathing. Tiny droplets are inhaled and spread the virus.

If you bring yourself to the doctor within 24-48 hours of the onset of symptoms, antivirals can be prescribed and may significantly decrease the duration of your illness. It is critical that you pay attention to your symptoms and react quickly to minimize the impact of your illness. The best way to attempt to prevent the flu is by receiving a flu vaccination. That, combined with consistent hand washing and limiting contact with individuals known to have the flu, will limit the spread of the virus. Flu vaccinations are completely covered by insurance and many major chains are incentivizing customers to stop in and receive the vaccine while they shop.

It is critical to get the Flu vaccine before the flu is spreading throughout your area. The earlier in the season that vaccination occurs, the more likely you are to receive maximum protection. The CDC recommendation is that

vaccinations be received in October. This year, many communities are reporting cases of the flu already, and some have even reported deaths attributed to the flu. It takes two weeks from the time of vaccination for the antibodies to develop against the flu. While many are skeptical of vaccination, the flu vaccine does not “cause” the flu. It does, however, give the body the best protection against a virus that does, in fact, kill. Here are 10 common myths about the flu.

1. MYTH: You can catch the flu from the vaccine -- The vaccine is made from an inactivated virus that can't transmit infection. So people who get sick after receiving a flu vaccination were going to get sick anyway. It takes a week or two to get protection from the vaccine. But people assume that because they got sick after getting the vaccine, the shot caused their illness.

2. MYTH: Healthy people don't need to be vaccinated -- While it's especially important for people who have a chronic illness to get the flu shot, anyone — even healthy folks — can benefit from being vaccinated. Current CDC guidelines recommend yearly vaccination against influenza for everyone older than 6 months of age, including pregnant women.

3. MYTH: Getting the flu vaccination is all you need to do to protect yourself from the flu -- There are a number of steps you can take to protect yourself during flu season besides vaccination. Avoid contact with people who have the flu, wash your hands frequently, and consider taking anti-viral medications if you were exposed to the flu before being vaccinated.

4. MYTH: The flu is just a bad cold -- Influenza may cause bad cold symptoms, like sore throat, runny nose, sneezing, hoarseness, and cough. But in the United States alone, 36,000 people die and more than 200,000 are hospitalized each year because of the flu. During the 2017/18 flu season, flu activity has significantly increased throughout the majority of the country with the A(H3N2) viruses predominating so far, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). A(H3N2) virus-predominant influenza seasons have been associated with more hospitalizations and deaths in people age 65 years and older as well as young children. It's not too late to get a flu shot. Even if it doesn't prevent you from getting the flu, it can decrease the chance of severe symptoms.

5. MYTH: You can't spread the flu if you're feeling well -- Actually, 20% to 30% of people carrying the influenza virus have no symptoms.

6. MYTH: You don't need to get a flu shot every year -- The influenza virus changes (mutates) each year. So getting vaccinated each year is important to make sure you have immunity to the strains most likely to cause an outbreak.

7. MYTH: You can catch the flu from going out in cold weather without a coat, with wet hair or by sitting near a drafty window -- The only way to catch the flu is by being exposed to the influenza virus. Flu season coincides with the cold weather. So people often associate the flu with a cold, drafty environment. But, they are not related.

8. MYTH: Feed a cold, starve a fever -- If you have the flu (or a cold) and a fever, you need more fluids. There's little reason to increase or decrease how much you eat. Though you may have no appetite, "starving" yourself will accomplish little. And poor nutrition will not help you get better.

9. MYTH: Chicken soup will speed your recovery from the flu -- Hot liquids can soothe a sore throat and provide much needed fluids. But chicken soup has no other specific qualities that can help fight the flu.

10. MYTH: If you have a high fever with the flu that lasts more than a day or two, antibiotics may be necessary -- Antibiotics work well against bacteria, but they aren't effective for a viral infection like the flu. Then again, some people develop a bacterial infection as a complication of the flu, so it may be a good idea to get checked out if your symptoms drag on or worsen.

The flu is a good example of how medical myths can get in the way of good medical care. When it's flu season, take the necessary steps to stay healthy. That includes separating fact from myth. [Source: Military Connection | Kris Baydalla-Galasso | October 26, 2018 ++]

West Nile Virus Update 02 ► Prevention | Limit Exposure to Mosquitoes



Summer has come to an end, but mosquito-borne illnesses are still a risk. Whether you're enjoying the outdoors at home or traveling abroad, knowing where West Nile Virus can be found and taking steps to prevent mosquito bites can help reduce your risk. "We want to keep our service members and their families safe from infection," said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Alexandra Singer, an internal medicine provider and the chief of Preventive Health for the Defense Health Agency Occupational & Environmental Health Branch. "For West Nile Virus, the **best way to reduce your risk of illness is by protecting yourself from mosquito bites.**"

West Nile Virus is a mosquito-borne infectious disease that first appeared almost 20 years ago, according to the National Institutes of Health. While most infected people show either no symptoms or mild symptoms, 1 in 150 people will develop a severe illness which can turn fatal if it causes inflammation of the brain or the tissue that surrounds the brain and spinal cord.

The Army Public Health Center said approximately 4 out of 5 people infected with the virus show no symptoms at all, and up to 20 percent develop mild symptoms, such as a fever, headache, and body aches. Severe symptoms include a high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, tremors, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness, and paralysis. "If you become ill with symptoms such as headache, fever, muscle weakness, and disorientation, and you think you may have been exposed to West Nile Virus, the best course of action is to seek medical attention as soon as possible," Singer warned. Symptoms usually develop three days to two weeks after being bitten by a mosquito, and can last for a few days or several weeks depending on the severity, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

Singer said mosquito activity peaks from summer to early fall. Although most cases are transmitted by mosquitoes, the virus can also spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants, and from mother to child during pregnancy or breastfeeding, according to the CDC. "Giving providers as many details as possible about recent whereabouts and possible exposure to mosquitoes can help them decide whether any testing is needed," said Singer. "If the suspicion of West Nile Virus infection is high, blood is drawn to test for antibodies." The CDC warns that if running this test within a week of exposure to the virus, results may return as a false negative, requiring repeat testing.

There are some ways in which West Nile Virus can be similar to malaria: But the one huge difference between the two is the fact that you cannot be vaccinated against the West Nile Virus. This means that it can be very dangerous and even fatal if you were to pick it up and it wasn't diagnosed in time for treatment. Here are some of the most common symptoms that you could experience individually or in combination as a result of West Nile Virus:

1. Headache – Constant and nagging. One of the first symptom you could experience. Keep hydrated

2. Fever – Your body’s first-line defense against any form of disease or infection. Bring it Down
3. Appetite Loss - One of the most characteristics symptoms that there’s something wrong with your body
4. Rash - Could be anywhere on the body, and it can vary in terms of severity. Not very common symptom but it could happen.
5. Nausea - Could happen on its own and it could be constant nausea or it could instead come in waves. Will always accompany West Nile Virus.
6. Flu-like Symptoms – Long term fever or night sweats, a stuffed nose, constantly aching throat and coughing. Will happen in most cases.
7. Swelling in the Lymph Nodes - Might be moderate to severe. Don’t press lymph nodes too hard as this could make them drain infection directly into the bloodstream.
8. Asymptomatic.in approximately 20% of cases - Virus manifests itself with very little to absolutely no symptoms.
9. Excessive Sweating - May or may not accompany a fever; it can be a symptom all by itself.
10. Stiff neck - Considered a sign of serious infection from West Nile Virus
11. Stupor - Disorientation is very common in serious cases where inflammation of the brain occurs.
12. Tremors - Severe West Nile cases can lead to convulsions, shaking tremors, or seizures.
13. Vision Loss - Serious West Nile Virus can, in rare cases, cause acute vision loss if the swelling around the brain puts pressure on the optic nerves of the eye and enters the optic nerve itself.
14. Paralysis - Very rare but possible.
15. Meningitis - Infection which travels directly to the brain. This is not just a symptom of severe West Nile Virus infection, but also a complete sub-type of West Nile Virus infection. Happens in very, very few percent of cases

“There continue to be developments in trying to establish some therapeutics as well as vaccine for the West Nile Virus infection,” said Dr. Limone C. Collins Jr., chief of vaccine safety and evaluation for the DHA Immunization Healthcare Branch, adding that research is still in its early stages. “A worldwide effort to mitigate this epidemic has been underway.” According to the World Health Organization, West Nile Virus is most commonly found in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, North America, and West Asia. The virus first appeared in the United States in 1999 and has since been detected in all 48 contiguous states, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, Singer noted.

The Army Public Health Center recommends limiting mosquito contact by applying insect repellent to exposed skin, spraying clothing and supplies with permethrin, making sure windows and doors have screens, and wearing clothes that minimize skin exposure. Emptying containers – such as buckets, wading pools, and bird baths – to get rid of shallow, standing water where mosquito larva thrive can also help reduce risk for infection, said Singer. “Knowledge is power,” said Singer. “Remaining informed and aware of any infectious disease threats or outbreaks in your environment will go a long way toward helping you reduce your risk of infection.” [Source: Health.mil | Military Health System Communications Office | October 24, 2016 ++]

Health Care Cost Update 01 ► Anticipated | Retired Couple Age 65 to 85

One of the scariest unknowns of retirement is how much you’ll be expected to pay for health care. Now, Health View Services has tried to clarify the picture by projecting how much a retired couple would pay for care from age 65 to 85. Using an average 4.22 percent retirement health expenses inflation rate, Health View Services estimates you will pay the following annual amount for Medicare Parts B and D, supplemental Insurance, dental insurance and out-of-pocket costs:

- Age 65: \$979 monthly, \$11,752 annually
- Age 70: \$1,266 monthly, \$15,196 annually

- Age 75: \$1,662 monthly, \$19,942 annually
- Age 80: \$2,115 monthly, \$25,385 annually
- Age 85: \$2,664 monthly, \$31,966 annually

If the amounts look especially stiff in later years, it's important to note that the projections are made in future dollars. But no matter how you calculate it, health costs are likely to be a major financial burden during retirement. If those health care numbers are enough to make you sick, fear not: There are ways to trim these costs.

One method for cutting costs is to contribute in the years before you retire to a health savings account (HSA), which is available to those with a high-deductible health insurance plan. HSA limits are set to rise in 2019 to \$3,500 for individuals and \$7,000 for families. Plus, you can make an additional \$1,000 contribution if you are age 55 or older. As has been pointed out in the past, HSAs offer one of the best tax breaks you'll ever get, because:

- The money is deductible from your income in the year of the contribution.
- Gains on your contributions grow in the account tax-free.
- Withdrawals are tax-free when they are used to pay for qualified medical expenses.

Another way to save is to use a website to purchase your prescription medications. A roundup of these sites is offered at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/free-tools-that-help-you-save-on-prescription-drugs> in "7 Websites That Will Slash Your Prescription Drug Costs." Dental costs can add to the burden of keeping your body in tip-top shape. If you are looking for a way to cut the cost of caring for your choppers, check out "5 Ways to Slash Dental Care Costs" at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/5-easy-ways-cut-the-cost-dental-care-half>. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | October 24, 2018 ++]

Trump Drug Price Plan Update 01 ► Price Transparency | Lacks Enforcement Mechanism

Everyone — well, maybe everyone but pharmaceutical manufacturers — thinks that drug prices in the United States are way too high. The big question is how to bring them down. On the campaign trail, Donald Trump vigorously advocated for Medicare price negotiations. But so far, his biggest policy proposal, which arrived 22 OCT, merely suggests that the government require pharmaceutical companies to show list prices in their TV advertisements. For some reason, it does not require such pricing information for radio, newspaper or magazine advertisements.

Who could be against such price transparency? Indeed, few doctors and patients have any idea about the true prices of medical services, drugs, devices, imaging procedures or anything else. Providing price information is widely viewed as a good thing. But let's not confuse a positive step toward price transparency with an effective policy to reduce drug prices. Putting list prices on TV ads will not lower drug prices. And it may have some troublesome side effects. It also lacks an enforcement mechanism, such as steep fines. How is showing drugs' list prices supposed to work? Part of the Trump administration's theory seems to be that by shaming drug companies they might lower their prices. But nothing seems to shame them. Indeed, after all the uproar over \$600 EpiPens, EpiPens are, well, still \$600.

Perhaps the administration wants to encourage competition and give patients more information to shop for lower-priced drugs and generics. But for many expensive prescription drugs, there are no generics or competing brand-name drugs due to patent protection. And even in cases where there is competition, patients typically do not decide which brand of a drug they are prescribed; doctors and pharmacy benefit managers do. It is always dangerous — and a bit worrisome — to agree with the drug companies, but two arguments they raise against President Trump's policy have validity.

- First, list prices for drugs are misleading and possibly useless. The actual price that Americans pay is almost always much lower. For instance, a friend of mine with metastatic prostate cancer was prescribed Johnson & Johnson's Zytiga, with a list price of about \$12,500 per month. Shopping around the Internet, patients can

find the drug for about \$10,500 per month, and with insurance, many pay as little as \$2,500 per month. But because my friend has generous insurance for this particular class of drugs, he only pays \$50 per month (though J&J; will still make more than \$10,000 per month, because the insurance company picks up the tab and raises premiums to do so). Just putting the list price out there is likely to confuse people about what they will actually pay.

- Second, drug companies argue, high list prices on TV might deter people from seeking treatment they need. These concerns are not entirely theoretical, as data show that some patients do not fill prescriptions when their chemotherapy drugs have high prices and high co-pays.

The pharmaceutical industry’s solution, however, may be even sillier — and more disingenuous — than the administration’s. It wants to flash a website on TV ads so patients can find out more about drug prices online. But how many people will take the time to go to those websites? And can we trust that pricing information online won’t be confusing to the ordinary American? Wasn’t it Trump who once remarked on how confusing the health-care system was?

If lowering drug prices is the goal, we need to understand the problem to devise an effective solution. The problem is that through patents and FDA marketing exclusivity, the government grants monopolies to drug companies. And the companies use that monopoly power to sell drugs at exorbitant prices. Although the specific policies differ in detail, every other developed country negotiates drug prices with a threat that if there is no agreement, companies won’t be allowed to sell their products. If we want lower drug prices, we’ll need similar policies.

A good place to start is the proposal from Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-TX), which has attracted 100 co-sponsors, which would require the Health and Human Services secretary to negotiate prices of prescription drugs paid for by Medicare Part D. If negotiations reach a stalemate, the secretary would have to issue licenses to other companies to make cheaper generics. The bill could be enhanced by expanding it to national drug price negotiations, covering the 160 million Americans who have private insurance.

As Winston Churchill once said: “You can always count on Americans to do the right thing — after they have tried everything else.” It seems as if we will try the Trump administration’s hollow — maybe even counterproductive — policies to lower drug prices, such as listing them in TV ads, before we finally get around to real reform on drug prices. [Source: Washington Post | Ezekiel Emanuel | October 18, 2018 ++]

Hearing Aids Update 04 ► Obtainment Through RACHAP program

Many factors may cause hearing loss during your lifetime. Military service is one of those factors. Weapons, explosions, and artillery are loud and have the long-term capability to affect your hearing, but so are jet engines, heavy military vehicles, and many types of equipment. Few who served are immune from the potential for hearing loss. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Veterans are 30 percent more likely to have significant hearing impairment than non-veterans, and veterans who served from September 2001 to March 2010, during Operations Enduring Freedom or Iraqi Freedom, were four times more likely than non-veterans to have significant hearing impairment.

Where can you get help? The Retiree-At-Cost Hearing Aid Program (RACHAP) may be able to assist. RACHAP is a program that allows hearing aids to be purchased at cost at many military medical treatment facilities. All MTFs do not support this program; here is a list of the MTFs that do by state and by country:

CONUS

- Alaska—Fort Wainwright
- California—Travis Air Force Base

- Connecticut—Naval Hospital Groton
- Florida (2 locations)—Eglin Air Force Base; or Naval Hospital Jacksonville
- Hawaii (2 locations)—Fort Shafter; or Schofield Barracks
- Kansas—Fort Riley
- Kentucky—Fort Campbell
- Louisiana—Fort Polk
- Maryland (2 locations)—Walter Reed National Military Medical Center; or Andrews Air Force Base
- Missouri—Fort Leonard Wood
- Nevada—Nellis Air Force Base
- New Hampshire—Naval Health Clinic Portsmouth
- Ohio—Wright-Patterson Air Force Base
- Oklahoma—Fort Sill
- Rhode Island—Naval Health Clinic Newport
- South Carolina (2 locations)—Naval Hospital Beaufort/Parris Island; or Fort Jackson
- Texas (2 locations)—Fort Bliss; or Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland
- Washington (2 locations)—Naval Hospital Bremerton; or Joint Base Lewis-McChord

OCONUS

- Germany—Bavaria Medical Activity
- Guam—Naval Hospital Guam
- Italy (3 locations)—Aviano Air Base; Naval Hospital Naples; or Naval Hospital Sigonella
- Japan (3 locations)—Naval Hospital Okinawa; Naval Hospital Yokosuka; or Yokota Air Base
- South Korea—US Army Garrison Yongsan
- Spain—Naval Hospital Rota

RACHAP is a MTF hearing aid program that allows eligible beneficiaries to purchase hearing aids at cost and receive fittings and related medically necessary services. The extent of RACHAP implementation and scope of RACHAP services are based on MTF capability, capacity, and access to care standards. RACHAP eligible beneficiaries may purchase hearing aids at the government contract price through manufacturers; fitting and related medically necessary services are available within the direct care system. The program is not a TRICARE private sector care benefit.

RACHAP is only available through direct care; MTFs are not authorized to reimburse the purchase of hearing aids through the private sector, prescriptions, or audiograms from a network provider outside of RACHAP. Hearing aids purchased under RACHAP will be paid for by the beneficiary. Hearing is vital to your ability to communicate, your overall health, and your quality of life. But you should be realistic if you are starting to have hearing loss. Most hearing loss is permanent and may get worse over time; it can create social and other problems. The retail cost of hearing aids can run from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand. The RACHAP program may be a convenient benefit for you and may be a significant cost saving over the private sector. [Source: Army Echoes | Ronald Wolf | OCT 2018 ++]

Shingles Update 09 ► Have You Had Your 2nd Shot

Shingles is a painful rash that usually develops on one side of the body, often the face or torso. It is caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox. After a person recovers from chickenpox, the virus becomes dormant in the body and can stay dormant for decades. During a shingles outbreak, a rash consisting of blisters forms; it usually fades away in 2 to 4 weeks. The problem with shingles is the nerve pain that may last for months after the rash goes away.

The pain can be deep and intense, and most over-the-counter pain killers have little effect. Over time the nerve pain will diminish, but that process can be slow and especially frustrating.

Shingles vaccine is recommended for everyone over 60 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), but approved by the Food and Drug Administration for those over 50. A newer vaccine, Shingrix, is now available and is considered to be more effective and longer lasting. The CDC recommends Shingrix for shingles and related complications. Usually, two doses of Shingrix are needed with injections 2 to 6 months apart for adults aged 50 years or older. You should consider being vaccinated with Shingrix even if you have already been vaccinated with the current Zostavax vaccine

Studies have shown that the effectiveness of Zostavax wanes over time. If you have previously had a Zostavax vaccine injection, discuss with your physician whether you should and how soon you can receive a Shingrix vaccination. You should wait at least 8 weeks after a patient received Zostavax to administer Shingrix. One thing: check at your health care facility about availability of Shingrix. Demand is high, and some temporary shortages have been reported. Most people who develop shingles have only one outbreak during their lifetime, but you can have shingles more than once. [Source: Army Echoes | Ronald Wolfe | OCT 2018 ++]

Medicare Premiums | 2019 ► What You Will Pay Monthly

On October 12, 2018, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released the 2019 premiums, deductibles, and coinsurance amounts for the Medicare Part A and Part B programs. After staying the same last year, Medicare and TRICARE for Life beneficiaries will see their Part B premium increase slightly this year. The Part B standard premium is set to increase \$1.50 per month, from \$134 to \$135.50. For the past two years, some Medicare beneficiaries have been paying lower premiums and have been protected by a provision called the “hold harmless” rule. Medicare estimates only 2 million beneficiaries will have their premiums shielded this year.

Let's recall why this was originally put into place. Adjustments are made annually to both the Social Security benefit and the Medicare premiums an individual pays. These adjustments are indexed to different inflation measures. The Social Security COLA is based on the CPI-W index, which measures inflation. By contrast, the Medicare premium is based on how much the Medicare program itself grows through its spending on medical services. These different adjustment measures have resulted in Medicare premiums that typically increase at a rate greater than Social Security COLAs.

For instance, from 2000 to 2018, Social Security COLAs increased an average of 2.2 percent annually, which resulted in a cumulative benefit increase of approximately 50 percent. This was considerably less than the average 6.1 percent annual increase in standard Medicare Part B premiums, whose premium growth was a whopping 195 percent over the same period, according to a Congressional Research Service report released last month. The bottom line? A greater percentage of total Social Security benefits were being deducted to pay for Medicare premiums. Congress has acted several times to protect beneficiaries from the impact of large Medicare Part B premium increases. The hold-harmless provision was made permanent, and prevents certain Social Security beneficiaries' monthly benefit amounts from decreasing from one year to the next due to an increase in their Medicare Part B premiums.

The new premiums for 2019:

- Part B premium: \$135.50 (was \$134)
- Part B deductible: \$185 (was \$183)
- Part A deductible (inpatient) \$1,364 (was \$1,340)

Premiums for higher-income beneficiaries (\$85,000 and above) are:

- Individuals with annual incomes between \$85,000 and \$107,000 and married couples with annual incomes between \$170,000 and \$214,000 will pay a monthly premium of \$189.60.
- Individuals with annual incomes between \$107,000 and \$133,500 and married couples with annual incomes between \$214,000 and \$267,000 will pay a monthly premium of \$270.90.
- Individuals with annual incomes between \$133,500 and \$160,000 and married couples with annual incomes between \$267,000 and \$320,000 will pay a monthly premium of \$352.20.
- Individuals with annual incomes between \$160,000 and less than \$500,000 and married couples with annual incomes above \$320,000 and less than \$750,000 will pay a monthly premium of \$433.40.
- Individuals with annual incomes above \$500,000 and married couples with annual incomes above \$750,000 will pay a monthly premium of \$460.50.

Remember, the Social Security Administration uses the income reported two years ago to determine beneficiaries Part B premiums. For example, the income reported on your 2017 tax return would be used to determine whether you would pay a higher monthly premium in 2019. So here is an important tip: if you have a reduction in income and change rate groupings noted above, you can have your income basis updated (due to a qualifying event such as retirement) before the tax returns catch up later. For more information, see [this article](#). You can access more information from Medicare for 2019 at <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/fact-sheets/2019-medicare-parts-b-premiums-and-deductibles>. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Kathryn Beasley | October 17, 2018 ++]

Mental Health Assessment Update 01 ► Social Media Impact

A new study says that face-to-face contact may buffer people from mental illness in a way that Facebook and other social media won't. An Oregon Health & Science University study said that a large group of veterans were found to experience mental health issues 50 percent less if they spent more time around loved ones over those who mostly socialized online. The science about whether social media is making us more anxious or depressed is mixed. Some doctors say there is a clear link between increased rates of youth mental illness and social media culture.

Six hundred post-9/11 veterans filled out an online survey, and a large number had post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and other psychiatric disorders. Many who are active on social media are also more social offline, found study author Alan Teo, associate professor of psychiatry in the OHSU School of Medicine and a researcher at the Veterans Affairs Portland Health Care System. But the survey found that even people who are less social overall still benefit more from face-to-face contact. He focused on veterans because of his work at the VA hospital, which shares a location with OHSU's facilities. Veterans also use Facebook and social media a lot when deployed to keep up with friends and family.

Teo said that is a clear benefit to those in the military. But he wondered if it still served them well when they came home. While he did not find that social media hurt the veterans when they returned, he did find that it didn't necessarily help them. Their risk of mental illness stayed pretty much the same. But people who prioritized in-person socialization showed much less mental illness -- and in some cases seemed more resilient to evading mental health problems. "It's a complex ecosystem of socialization we live in nowadays, and let's just remember that we still need to spend as much time as we can connecting in person with our loved ones," Teo said. The research provides a base point for more research focused on whether the trend holds for different demographics, Teo said. "The data say I should be trying to think about sending out messages to my friends on Facebook to get together, to meet up in person," Teo said. [Source: The Oregonian | October 18, 2018 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs Update 11 ► Trump Wants TV Ads to Disclose Prices

President Trump wants to force drug companies to disclose their prices in TV ads — and that’s going to hit five companies much harder than any others: Pfizer, AbbVie, Eli Lilly, Amgen, and Allergan. Just a few dozen drug companies run any TV ads at all, and those five companies alone were responsible for more than half of the drug ads customers saw on TV in the last 12 months, according to a STAT analysis of data provided by analytics company iSpot.tv. Pfizer, for example, ran 37 unique ads in the last 12 months — racking up an advertising bill of over \$600 million, according to iSpot’s estimate.

The list sheds light on the ultimate impact of the proposed policy, which Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar unveiled 15 OCT and which would affect any drug covered by Medicare or Medicaid that cost more than \$35 per month. No one knows how much the change will cost large companies that run lots of ads. Overall, HHS maintains, the change will cost next to nothing, but it concedes that “relatively large entities are likely to experience proportionally higher costs.” HHS estimates that even in the most expensive year of implementation, the change will only cost each company, on average, \$2,900. Drug companies, at least so far, haven’t said much about how big a burden the policy would be — if anything, their reactions have focused far more on First Amendment issues they might raise in future litigation. But it’s clear the change would be painful. The more ads a company runs, the more time and money spent revising those ads. Each ad would need to be updated every time the list price for that drug changes. Companies also often run multiple ads for each drug they’re marketing.

Pfizer, for example, ran nine different ads in the last 12 months for its drug for nerve pain, Lyrica, according to iSpot, which analyzes ad spend based on data from smart TVs. And that tally doesn’t take into account the shorter 15- and 30-second spots companies cut from their longer ads. And the costs don’t stop there. If a drug company is scared off from taking a price hike that it’ll ultimately be forced to include in an ad, that’s lost profit. Price hikes contributed to a huge chunk of sales growth for the top-selling drugs — many of which are also the drugs most frequently advertised, STAT recently reported. Leerink analyst Geoffrey Porges found, for example, that price hikes for Lyrica, Pfizer’s most advertised drug, contributed 90 percent of the drug’s increased sales from 2014 to 2017.

Pfizer, AbbVie, Eli Lilly, and Amgen didn’t comment for this article. But PhRMA, which counts all five companies as members, is already proposing a voluntary alternative that would give patients some information about drug prices, without requiring ads be updated each time a price changes. A statement from Allergan highlighted its work with PhRMA on that voluntarily initiative. Below, STAT walks through how many ads each of the companies is running — and an estimate of how much each is spending.

1. Pfizer -- Pfizer has continually topped the list for biggest TV ad spender, according to multiple data sets analyzed by STAT. It currently advertises for seven drugs. Pfizer has spent the most promoting Lyrica. The company ran nine unique ads for the drug in the last 12 months, spending over \$200 million according to iSpot, which estimates how much a company spends on its ads based on when and where an ad runs. But Lyrica isn’t the only drug Pfizer is throwing lots of ad money at. The company runs multiple ads for five other drugs: an arthritis product known as Xeljanz; a blood thinner called Eliquis that is co-marketed with Bristol-Myers Squibb; a breast cancer treatment, Ibrance; an eczema drug, Eucrisa; and a pneumonia vaccine, Prevnar 13. The company also ran one ad for Viagra.

2. AbbVie -- AbbVie only runs TV ads for its blockbuster Humira. But it has a spate of ads to promote the drug, including different ads for different indications. Humira is approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat arthritis, Crohn’s disease, and psoriasis. In total, the company has run 18 different ads for Humira in the last 12 months, costing an estimated \$288 million, according to iSpot.

3. Eli Lilly -- In the last 12 months, Eli Lilly has run 14 ads for three different drugs: the diabetes treatments Trulicity and Jardiance, the latter of which is co-marketed with Boehringer Ingelheim, and the psoriasis drug Taltz. iSpot estimates the company spent \$276 million on those ads.

4. Amgen -- Amgen ran 16 unique ads in the last 12 months. The majority of those ads promote the rheumatoid arthritis drug Enbrel, the cholesterol drug Repatha, and a chemotherapy treatment called Neulasta. However, the company also ran two ads for Prolia, which can treat osteoporosis. Despite the high tally of unique ads, Amgen spent \$145 million on them — less than Pfizer, AbbVie and Lilly, according to iSpot's estimates.

5. Allergan -- Like Amgen, Allergan's spending is dwarfed by some of its competitors, but it runs some of the most ads. Allergan ran 15 ads in the last 12 months for five different drugs — a list that iSpot estimates cost the company nearly \$160 million. The company's most-publicized drugs were Botox and Linzess, which treats irritable bowel syndrome and is co-marketed with Ironwood Pharmaceuticals.

Secretary Azar suggested the policy change would help bring down drug prices. The former drug company executive has come under criticism for promoting policies that focus on other parts of the pharmaceutical supply chain while leaving his former employers unscathed. "President Trump is taking historic action to bring patients more transparency through consumer advertising," Azar in a speech ridiculed the pharmaceutical industry for trying to preempt his policy announcement with a pledge of their own Monday morning. "It is no coincidence that the industry announced a new initiative today that will help make new cost and price information available," Azar said. "We appreciate their effort. But placing information on a website is not the same as putting it right in an ad, and it's taken them five months since the President's blueprint to start skating to where the puck is going.

He dramatically raised his right eyebrow in apparent skepticism. His speech came at a meeting of the National Academy of Medicine, and was met with a round of applause from hundreds of scientists. The policy, which was included in President Trump's wide-ranging "blueprint" to bring down drug prices in May, has come under fire from drug companies and policy experts, who point out that a drug's list price may bear little resemblance to what an individual patient pays. It's unclear if requiring companies to include price information in advertisements will impact how much patients pay for drugs. The cost to a patient is determined by many other factors, such as their insurance, and could be anywhere from \$0 to an amount greater than the drug's list price.

This spring, the Food and Drug Administration launched a working group to study the idea. On a call with reporters, senior HHS officials said that FDA was involved in the process of developing this rule, but that HHS decided that the authority to implement the rule rested at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. A senior HHS official demurred when asked how much this would actually reduce drug prices. "While I can't tell you that this particular provision on its own will have any numerical percent impact, I think you can see consistently across all of the actions we're taking across the department...we're starting to see an effect on drug prices," the HHS official said.

Now that it has been published as a proposed rule, the agency will be taking comments for up to 60 days, after which it will publish a final rule, which could go into effect as soon as a month later. The policy is sure to rankle the pharmaceutical industry. Its main trade group tried to preempt the proposal Monday morning by announcing that dozens of companies had voluntarily agreed to include in television advertisements links to websites with information about a drug's cost. Each company will determine exactly what information to include on those websites. [Source: STAT | Ike Swetlitz & Nicholas Florko | October 15 & 17, 2018 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs Update 12 ► Insulin Makers Deceptive Drug Pricing

Minnesota's attorney general on 16 OCT filed a lawsuit accusing drug manufacturers **Sanofi SA, Novo Nordisk** and **Eli Lilly and Co** of deceptively raising prices for insulin. In a lawsuit filed in federal court in Trenton, New Jersey, Minnesota Attorney General Lori Swanson took aim at the companies after the list price for some insulin products more than tripled since 2002. The lawsuit alleged that companies fraudulently set artificially high list price for their products while offering rebates to pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) in exchange for them covering the drug on

behalf of health plans. PBMs negotiate drug prices for employers and health plans and typically demand hefty discounts off list price from drugmakers in exchange including the medicines on their preferred formularies.

The lawsuit contended that the list prices the drug companies set were so far from those net prices that they did not accurately approximate the true cost of insulin and were deceptive and misleading. The practice made insulin less affordable for diabetes patients in high deductible health plans, the uninsured and senior citizens covered by the government Medicare healthcare program, the suit contended. "Many people can't afford the price hikes but can't afford to stop taking the medication either," Swanson said in a statement. Danish drugmaker Novo Nordisk in a statement said it was "committed to ethics and compliance in how we support patients." French drugmaker Sanofi and Indianapolis-based Lilly in separate statements said they believed the case was without merit.

The lawsuit comes amid continued concerns about rising U.S. drug costs, particularly for insulin, a hormone needed by many people with diabetes to control blood sugar levels. Swanson's lawsuit marked the first by a state to target pricing practices of insulin manufacturers. The case was filed in New Jersey, where a similar proposed class action lawsuit is pending. Two other states, Washington and New Mexico, have been conducting similar investigations, according to Novo Nordisk. Novo's insulin products include Levemir, whose cost according to Swanson has risen from \$120.64 per vial in 2012 to \$293.75 in 2018. There have been similar price hikes for Lilly's HumaLog and Sanofi's Lantus, the lawsuit said.

The lawsuit seeks an injunction preventing the companies from disseminating misleading list prices for insulin products. It also seeks damages for Minnesota residents who paid out-of-pocket for their insulin. The case is *State of Minnesota v. Sanofi-Aventis U.S. LLC, et al*, U.S. District Court, District of New Jersey, No. 18-cv-14999. [Source: The New York Times | Reuters | October 16, 2018 ++]

Women's Health ► Taking Care of Yourself

Preventive services are your best defense against preventable diseases. The top two causes of death for women are heart disease and cancer, with diabetes ranking seventh, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Prevention is the best medicine," said Navy Cmdr. Jennifer Wallinger, NH Jacksonville director for public health. "As women, we need to take time to get our health screenings and care for ourselves."

- **Heart disease:** Heart disease is the number one cause of death in U.S. women. Key risk factors include high blood pressure, high LDL cholesterol, and smoking. Other risk factors include diabetes, overweight and obesity, poor diet, physical inactivity, and excessive alcohol use. Know your blood pressure, talk to your primary care manager about diabetes testing, quit smoking, talk to your primary care manager about cholesterol and triglyceride tests, make healthy food choices, limit alcohol, and find healthy ways to cope with stress.
- **Cervical cancer:** Prevent cervical cancer – with the right test at the right time. Starting at age 21, get a Pap test every three years. After turning 30, you have a choice: Get a Pap test every three years; or get a combined Pap and human papillomavirus (HPV) test every five years. Talk with your PCM about options.



- **Breast cancer:** Mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early, when it's easier to treat and before it's big enough to feel. Starting at age 40, talk with your PCM about when to start and how often to get a mammogram. You have the choice to get an annual mammogram at age 40 and older. It's easy to schedule, with no need to see your PCM.
- **Colorectal cancer:** Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in U.S. women. If you're age 50 or older, get screened now for colorectal cancer. Screening can find growths so they can be removed before turning into cancer. Screening can also find cancer at an early stage, when treatment often leads to a cure. If you have risk factors, you might need to be tested earlier or more often. Talk to your PCM.
- **Diabetes:** If you have diabetes, see your health care team every three to six months for an A1C test. This checks your long-term control of blood sugar. Make an appointment with your PCM today. You can discuss strategies to manage diabetes at home, work, school, and while traveling. You can also talk with our diabetes nurse or nutrition clinic.
- **Chlamydia:** Most people who have chlamydia don't know it, since there's often no symptoms. It's the most common sexually transmitted infection in the U.S. Women younger than 25 (and older women with risk factors) need chlamydia testing every year.

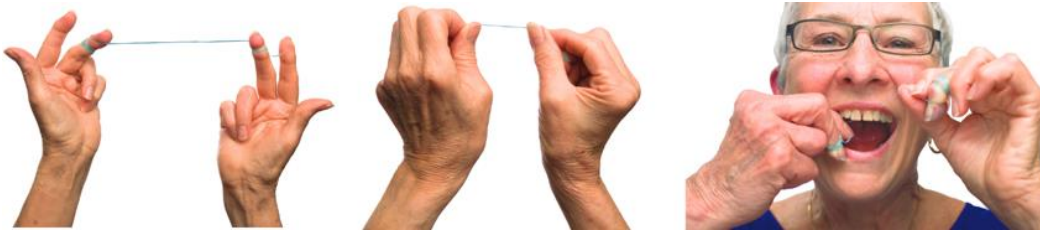
Dealing with high stress, depression, difficulty sleeping, or other non-physical health concerns are just as important to stay healthy. Proper sleep, physical activity, and nutrition are key components of preventive health and day-to-day wellness. Women need a mix of cardio and resistance or weight-bearing exercise at least three to five times a week to help prevent osteoporosis, heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. Exercise also promotes good self-image, which is important to a woman's mental health. Eating healthy is critical to women's health. A balanced diet of lean proteins, healthy fats, smart carbs, and fiber are essential elements to a proper diet. [Source: Health.mil | Yan Kennon, Naval Hospital Jacksonville | October 16, 2018 ++]

Caregiver Flossing ► Tips That May Make Flossing Patients Easier

If you regularly help someone with oral health care, following are some practical suggestions to provide guidance or direct care, as well as tips that may make the job easier. Oral health is important for people of all ages. A healthy mouth helps people enjoy their food, chew better, eat well, and avoid pain and tooth loss. With good oral hygiene and regular visits to the dentist, older adults can maintain their oral health into their later years.

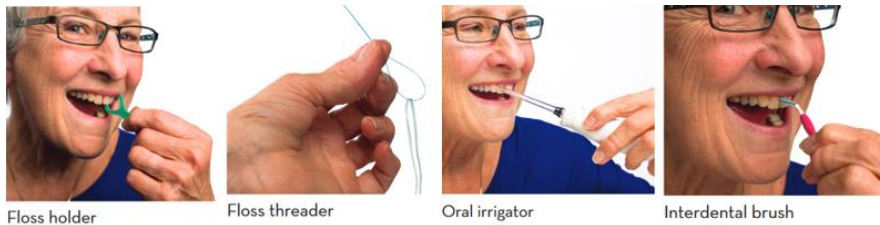
Flossing removes dental plaque between teeth where a toothbrush can't reach. If not removed, dental plaque can build up and cause tooth decay and gum disease. If the person you care for can floss, here are the steps he or she should follow:

- Use a string of floss about two feet long. Wrap that piece around the middle finger of each hand.
- Grip the floss between the thumb and index finger of each hand.
- Ease the floss gently between the teeth until it reaches the gumline. (Don't 'snap' or force the floss into place — this could harm the gums.)
- Curve the floss like the letter "C" around each tooth, keeping in contact with the side of the tooth. Slide the floss up and down under the gum.
- Do this for both sides of every tooth, one side at a time. Adjust the floss a little as you move from tooth to tooth so the floss is clean for each one.
- Be sure to floss all teeth, including the backs of the last teeth on each side.
- Use flossing tools if needed



Flossing Tools

- Floss holders hold floss securely in place.
- Floss threaders help thread floss in tight spaces such as around a fixed bridge.
- Oral irrigators (also called dental water jets or water flossers) help clean between teeth and around dental implants and bridges.
- Interdental brushes are tiny brushes specially designed to clean between teeth



Floss holder

Floss threader

Oral irrigator

Interdental brush

If the person you care for cannot floss, you will need to floss his or her teeth. Here are some suggestions that might be helpful:

- Find a comfortable position for both of you. One of the easiest ways to floss someone else’s teeth is to have him or her lie down on a bed while you kneel or sit alongside.
- Make sure you have floss, flossing tools, and disposable gloves.
- Follow the step-by-step flossing instructions (noted above) and use the flossing tools if needed.

[Source: National Institute on Aging | Oral Health | October 8, 2018 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 472 ► ECHO - Open Season Differences - Cost Compare Tool

Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) -- Do you have a family member who gets supplemental services through the TRICARE Extended Care Health Option, known as ECHO? Beginning January 1, 2019, the ECHO benefit cap will now apply to covered costs during a calendar year, January 1st to December 31st, and not fiscal year. Visit www.TRICARE.mil/Plans/SpecialPrograms/ECHO/CostsLimits for details. Due to the change, TRICARE adjusted the benefit cap by \$9,000 to cover the remaining quarter of this year. This includes the months of October through December. This will allow for a total amount of \$45,000, from October 1, 2017 to December 31, 2018. The \$36,000 limit for the costs of all ECHO benefits combined will reset on January 1, 2019. This coverage limit doesn’t include ECHO Home Health Care. The benefit cap adjustment this year is for everyone who is in the ECHO program.

ECHO provides services and supplies for active duty family members with special needs. These are services and supplies beyond those offered by your TRICARE program option. To be eligible for ECHO benefits, you must sign up for your service’s Exceptional Family Member Program. Each service branch has its own enrollment process. Also, you have to register for ECHO with your regional contractor. If you need help with ECHO benefits or want to see if you qualify, call your regional contractor. You must get prior authorization from your regional contractor for all ECHO services. Also, a TRICARE authorized provider must provide these services. To learn more about eligibility, benefits, costs, and coverage limits visit www.TRICARE.mil/echo

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Open Season Differences -- TRICARE would like to make you aware of the differences between TRICARE Open Season and Federal Benefits Open Season. Both take place from November 12th to December 10th.

TRICARE Open Season: Affects your health care coverage. You can enroll or switch enrollment between TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select plans during this time. If you are using a TRICARE health plan and you don't want to make changes, take no action during TRICARE Open Season. If you want to make changes to your health plan, you must do it during TRICARE Open Season. Afterwards, you must have a Qualifying Life Event to make any changes in health care coverage.

Federal Benefits Open Season affects dental and vision coverage in the following ways:

- If you are in the TRICARE Retiree Dental Program and you want to keep dental coverage, you **MUST** enroll during Federal Benefits Open Season. There is no automatic enrollment into the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program, known as FEDVIP.
- If you are eligible for dental and vision coverage, you can enroll in a FEDVIP plan during Federal Benefits Open Season. Afterwards, you must have a FEDVIP Qualifying Life Event to enroll.

For more information, visit TRICARE.mil/openseason. Be sure to sign up for our email updates located at the bottom of the page to never miss news on open season. You can tailor your subscription for open season only.

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Cost Compare Tool -- To help you make informed choices, you can view and compare costs between TRICARE plans using the TRICARE Compare Cost Tool. The compare plans feature is especially helpful if you're thinking about changing your health care plan during the upcoming TRICARE Open Season. Not only are you able to compare TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select costs, you can see the costs for individuals and families. During TRICARE Open Season, you can enroll in TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select, switch between the two plans, and switch from individual to family coverage. With the new TRICARE Compare Cost Tool, you can see TRICARE costs, including copayments, enrollment fees, and payment options. TRICARE cost changes vary and may change annually. Take command of your health by learning about your health plan costs. Feel free to download the TRICARE Costs and Fees Sheet found at TRICARE.mil/publications. As 2019 approaches, find the latest costs and fees for TRICARE plans at www.TRICARE.mil/costs.

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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> | October 17, 2018 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 473 ► Women's Health Month - Understanding EOB's - Open Season

Women's Health Month -- October is Women's Health Month. The Military Health System encourages women to make themselves a priority, and to be aware of the issues that affect their health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the top four causes of death in females are heart disease, cancer, chronic lower respiratory disease, and stroke. Prevention is the best medicine. Early detection and timely treatment can save lives. TRICARE covers Health Promotion and Disease Prevention exams for the purpose of a well-woman exam annually for women under age 65. There is no cost and no referral required. Well-woman exams include breast and pelvic exams, Pap tests, and HPV DNA testing. Well-woman exams also cover screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, and more. Sleep, physical activity, and good food habits are also key factors of preventive health. Mental health is just as important as physical health, TRICARE also offers mental health services. It's never too early or too late to work

toward improving your health. This October and every day of the year, take command of your health and make choices to find your balance. Visit TRICARE.mil/WellWoman for more information on women's health.

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Understanding EOB's -- Do you need help understanding your Explanation of benefits, or EOB? Once your medical claim is processed, both you and your provider will receive an itemized statement with a breakdown of cost-shares and deductibles. This is an EOB. A TRICARE EOB is not a bill. It's only an itemized statement that shows what action TRICARE has taken on your claims. Your EOB will include the date you received the medical service, along with the amount billed, covered, and paid. It will show any balance you owe your provider. It will also tell you how much has been credited toward your annual deductible and catastrophic cap. You should carefully review your EOB to make sure the information is correct. After reviewing your EOB, you can appeal certain decisions about your claim within 90 days of the EOB notice. Visit TRICARE.mil/EOB to learn more.

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Open Season -- TRICARE Open Season overlaps with the Federal Benefits Open Season, from November 12th to December 10th. During the Federal Benefits Open Season, you can enroll in the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program, known as FEDVIP. During Tricare Open Season, you can enroll in or change your TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select plan. The action you should take during TRICARE Open Season and Federal Benefits Open Season depends on your beneficiary category.

For example,

- If you're an active duty family member, you can change your TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select health plan during TRICARE Open Season. You can also enroll in a FEDVIP vision plan during Federal Benefits Open Season. You do not qualify to purchase a FEDVIP dental plan.
- For Reserve component members and family members enrolled in TRICARE Reserve Select, TRICARE Open Season does not apply to you. However, you can enroll in a FEDVIP vision plan during Federal Benefits Open Season. You do not qualify to purchase a FEDVIP dental plan.
- For retired service members and families enrolled in TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select, you can change health plans during TRICARE Open Season. You can also enroll in a FEDVIP vision and dental plan during the Federal Benefits Open Season.

For more information on TRICARE Open Season and Federal Benefits Open Season and who it applies to, visit TRICARE.mil/openseason.

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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> | October 25, 2018 ++]

* Finances *



Health Insurance ► Should Congress Limit Company Profits?

The question of limiting the profits of health insurance companies is sparking renewed national debate. The nation's biggest health insurers have reported robust growth in recent years, due in large part to Medicare. All of the "big five" insurers, United Health Care, Anthem, Aetna, Cigna and Humana have seen increases in enrollment growth and revenues, with profits rising. At the same time, a growing number of Medicare beneficiaries report that Medicare premiums, deductibles and out-of-pocket costs are consuming an increased share of their Social Security benefits. In Senior Citizens League's 2018 Senior Survey, 77% of survey participants said they support establishing a cap on the maximum amount of profit that private insurers may earn.

Survey participants support requiring excess profits to be put towards lowering premiums and out-of-pocket costs. It's not clear however, that this solution is working as intended for younger adults who shop for their coverage. Health insurers that operate Medicaid managed care plans for example, must spend at least 85% of their revenues on medical care as opposed to distributing it as dividends to shareholders or multimillion dollar salaries for CEOs. Similar limits, called the "medical loss ratio" were imposed during the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, for plans sold on the federal health exchange to people under the age of 65.

A recent investigative report by Marshall Allen for ProPublica, an independent nonprofit newsroom, reports that the medical loss ratio sounds good in theory, but can contribute to rising healthcare costs due to "perverse incentives." Allen explores how a hospital charged \$70,000 for partial hip replacement surgery, more than three times the Medicare rate for surgery saying: "If the insurance company has accurately built high costs into the premium, it can make more money. Here's how: Let's say administrative expenses eat up about 17 percent of each premium dollar and around 3 percent is profit. Making a 3 percent profit is better if the company spends more. It's as if a mom told her son he could have 3 percent of a bowl of ice cream. A clever child would say, 'Make it a bigger bowl.'"

Clearly, how these limits on health insurers' profits are designed have a big impact on how effective they are in bringing down costs — or not. A considerable amount of greater administrative oversight on the part of Medicare and Congress would also be required, to ensure that insurers and providers aren't gaming the system. This situation suggests that the medical loss ratio system, as we know it today, still needs a lot more work before it can save the money that it was intended to. [Source: TSCL Advisor | Mary Johnson | October 12, 2018 ++]

Social Security Taxation Update 10 ► 2019 COLA Impact

Social Security recipients will [enjoy a 2.8 percent increase in their benefits](#) — the largest in seven years — in 2019. But for some recipients, this latest annual increase could end up costing them benefits. Retirees who do not currently pay federal income taxes on their Social Security benefits may owe taxes due to the increase, which is technically known as a cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA. Retirees who already pay taxes on their benefits may owe more taxes due to the COLA. It depends on how the COLA impacts what the Social Security Administration calls your "[combined income](#)," a figure that reflects multiple sources of retirement income.

How Social Security benefits are taxed

The extent to which your Social Security benefits are taxable is based on your combined income. This figure comprises: Your adjusted gross income, any nontaxable interest, and one-half of your Social Security benefits. In other words, if you add up those three amounts, you will have your combined income. According to the Social Security Administration, you may owe taxes on up to 50 percent of your Social Security benefits if:

- You file a federal tax return as an individual and your combined income is between \$25,000 and \$34,000.
- You file a joint return and your combined income is between \$32,000 and \$44,000.

You may owe taxes on up to 85 percent of your Social Security benefits if:

- You file an individual return and your combined income is more than \$34,000.
- You file a joint return and your combined income is more than \$44,000.

According to a national survey released by the nonprofit Senior Citizens League earlier this year, about 56 percent of all Social Security households pay taxes on part of their benefits.

How to minimize taxes on your Social Security benefits

Retirees who can reduce their combined income can lower the rate at which Uncle Sam taxes their Social Security benefits — or avoid taxation of their benefits entirely. This could be as simple as withdrawing slightly less money from taxable investment accounts next year to compensate for the 2.8 percent increase in your Social Security benefits. Other methods reducing combined income are detailed in “[5 Ways to Avoid Paying Taxes on Your Social Security Benefits.](#)”

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | October 26, 2018 ++]

Army Emergency Relief ► Dealing With Financial Emergencies & Scholarship Needs

For 75 years, Army Emergency Relief (AER) has been a trusted resource to help Soldiers, both active and retired, who are dealing with financial emergencies. In 2017, AER provided more than \$15 Million to Retired Soldiers, assisting with rent, mortgages, home repairs, vehicle replacement, utilities, and the list goes on. In the last ten years, AER has awarded over 41,000 scholarships totaling more than \$84,000,000 to spouses and children of active duty and Retired Soldiers. AER provided over \$3 million in grants to Army National Guard and Army Reserve Soldiers after the hurricanes in the Caribbean and Texas and the wildfires in California

Requests for AER assistance are processed at any of the 76 AER Sections located on Army installations around the world. If you are not located near an Army installation with an AER Section, AER assistance can be obtained at the nearest Air Force, Navy/Marine Corps, or Coast Guard Installation through their Military Aid Society Office. In the absence of a local Military Aid Society, AER assistance is available by calling the American Red Cross at 1-877-272-7337, and then selecting option 1 for financial assistance.

AER’s Spouse Education Assistance Program is a need-based scholarship program established to assist Spouses of Army Soldiers in obtaining their undergraduate degrees. Applicants must apply each year and may receive assistance for up to four academic years of full-time study or eight academic years of part-time study if they meet the eligibility criteria explained below. The award amounts vary each year based on the number of applicants, total approved scholarship budget, the applicant’s Expected Family Contribution (EFC) reported on the Student Aid Report (SAR) from the FAFSA, and the average Cost of Attendance to attend a college or university in the United States as provided by the College Board. For the 2017-2018 academic year, the Spouse awards ranged from \$350 to \$2,810.

The normal scholarship application window is from 1 January through 2 April for the upcoming academic year. However, for Spouses, we have implemented a new rolling application cycle beginning with the 2018-2019 academic year; Spouses may now apply any time after 1 January for the upcoming academic year. For instructions click on:

- [2018-2019 Spouse Education Assistance Program Eligibility Requirements, Guidelines, and Time Table.pdf](#)
- [2018-2019 FAFSA Instructions for Spouses.pdf](#)

AER’s MG James Ursano Scholarship Program is a need-based scholarship program established to assist children of Army Soldiers in obtaining their first undergraduate degree. Applicants must reapply each year and may receive assistance for up to four academic years as long as they meet the eligibility criteria explained in the document below. The award amounts vary each year based on the number of applicants, total approved scholarship budget, the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) from the Student Aid Report (SAR) from the FAFSA, and the average Cost of Attendance

to attend a college or university in the United States as provided by the College Board. For 2017-2018, the MG James Ursano awards ranged from \$670 to \$4,290. Applications for 2018-2019 are now closed. Applications for 2019-2020 will be accepted from 1 JAN 2019 until 3pm EDT on 2 April. To refer last year's scholarship instructions click on:

- [2018-2019 MG James Ursano Scholarship Program Eligibility Requirements, Guidelines, and Time Table.pdf](#)
- [2018-2019 FAFSA Instructions for Dependent Children.pdf](#)

Should you need further guidance on finding the nearest location to seek assistance, click on [Find Your Closest AER Location](#). You may also review the “How We Help” information below to understand our categories of assistance. If you have further questions about applying for AER assistance, please contact HQ AER at 1-866-878-6378. [Source: <https://www.aerhq.org> | OCT 2018 ++]

Pay ► How Much the 25 Biggest U.S. Retailers Paid Workers/CEOs in 2017

The spotlight shines anew on wages in the retail industry with two recent developments. Amazon announced it would raise its minimum wage to \$15, and new federal law requires publicly traded companies to begin reporting the ratio of CEO compensation to the median pay of company employees. Nearly 16 million people work in the retail trade industry, where the median pay for sales workers is \$11.24 an hour, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. The federal minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour, but many companies already pay at least a bit more for starting wages.

For a look at what major U.S. retailers pay their workers in typical jobs, according to pay reports compiled by the job sites Glassdoor and Indeed refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled “**25 Biggest U.S. Retailer’s 2017 Pay**”. Where available, they have also included how much the CEOs at those companies are compensated — including salary, bonuses and other incentives — and, with the help of a Bloomberg online tracker, how that compensation compares with the median pay for workers. The top retailers are ordered by their 2017 sales volume, moving highest to lowest, based on a ranking by the National Retail Federation. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Jim Gold | October 15, 2018 ++]

Remember When ► Nostalgia (8)

Remember the good old days, when things were cheap? Sometimes those low, low prices look a little better in hindsight than they probably appeared at the time. Take prices for consumer goods in the 1950s, for example. From today's vantage point, they seem incredibly low. But before you get too nostalgic for the days of poodle skirts and hula hoops, remember to factor in inflation. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator, \$1 in 1950 had the same buying power as \$10.38 in 2018. That means the prices weren't quite as low as they seem today. Even so, some things you could purchase in the mid-20th century truly were bargains compared with what you'd pay today. Following are examples of 15 things you could buy back in the day for less than \$1.

1. **A lunch counter meal** -- In the 1950s, many Americans dined out at lunch counters. F.W. Woolworth variety stores were known for serving reasonably priced lunch counter meals to shoppers. Although the menus were limited, the price always was right. If you only had \$1 to spend in 1950, you could buy a deluxe ham sandwich for 40 cents and still have enough left over to buy a 39-cent banana split for desert.

2. **A bag of groceries** -- In the 1950s, a frugal consumer could actually buy a small bag of groceries for less than \$1. Just one buck would cover the cost of:

- A frozen chicken pie (19 cents)

- Six grapefruit (25 cents)
- A half-pound of frozen green beans (24 cents)
- A can of tomato soup (10 cents)
- A loaf of bread (12 cents)

3. **A candy bar** -- Satisfying your sweet tooth was much cheaper in days past. Today, you can pay \$1 or more for one candy bar. But in the mid-1950s, you could choose from a wide variety of sugary treats — Butterfinger, 3 Musketeers, Payday — and pay only a nickel. It's hard to believe today but, back then, \$1 would buy 20 full-sized candy bars.

3. **Comic books** -- Before 1961, comic books typically sold for just a dime. They were aimed at children, and priced accordingly. Today's median price of \$3.99 per issue has pushed comics out of the reach of many kids.

4. **A movie ticket** -- With the average price of a movie ticket in the neighborhood of \$9, it's easy to get nostalgic about being able to see a film for less than \$1 in the 1950s. Yahoo Finance reports that in 1950 the average price for a ticket was 46 cents. Using the BLS inflation calculator, that's roughly equal to \$4.76 in today's buying power. By 1960, a movie ticket price was 75 cents, or about \$6.40 in today's buying power.

5. **A paperback book** -- In the 1950s, you could find racks of cheap paperback books in the magazine sections of variety stores, pharmacies, train stations and bus depots. Paperbacks were mass marketed in the U.S. beginning in 1939 under the Pocket Books brand. They sold for 25 cents each, about one-tenth the price of hardcover books at the time. By the mid-1960s, you could buy a paperback for about 50 cents. Today, a mass-market paperback on Amazon sells in the \$6 to \$9 range.

6. **A bottle of aspirin** -- Still a go-to remedy for headaches, a bottle of aspirin cost just 54 cents in 1950, according to 247WallSt.com. Today, it typically will cost you between \$1 and \$7, depending on the brand you choose.

7. **A cup of coffee** -- Americans today are paying much more for coffee than they did in the 1950s, when coffee typically sold for just a nickel per cup. Perhaps the cheap price is why Americans developed a caffeine habit that lingers to this day. According to U.S. News & World Report, Americans paid \$2.70 per cup on average in 2015.

8. **A newspaper** -- Newspapers generally cost a dime when purchased Monday through Saturday in the 1950s. A big, fat Sunday paper typically sold for a quarter. Today, with soaring costs of everything including the paper it's printed on, newspaper prices at the newsstand are much higher. Single weekday copies can cost \$1 or more, depending on where you live.

9. **A necktie** -- Although necktie widths, colors and patterns have changed over the years, the tie remains a staple of men's dress and business attire. The Sears catalog advertised men's ties for as little as 97 cents each in the 1950s. Today, the store's lowest regular price is \$9.99. That seems like a big increase, but when you factor in inflation, it's roughly same cost today.

10. **A pack of cigarettes** -- Back in the day, it definitely was less expensive to be a smoker. In 1954, cigarettes typically sold for 23 cents per pack, according to 247WallSt.com. In 2017, Time reported that the average cost of a pack of cigarettes in the U.S. was \$6.16. The federal government reports that about 15.5 percent of U.S. adults were smokers in 2016; in the 1950s the figure stood at 44 percent.

11. **A McDonald's cheeseburger** -- Entrepreneur Ray Kroc opened his first McDonald's fast-food restaurant in Des Plaines, Illinois, in 1955, offering cheeseburgers for just 19 cents each. Although the profit margin was thin, Kroc became successful by selling large volumes. The sales on his first day were \$366.12, which adds up to a lot of those 19-cent burgers. Today, McDonald's original cheeseburger costs \$1, while a meatier Quarter Pounder With Cheese will run you \$3.79.

12. **Drain cleaner** -- People have struggled with clogged drains ever since homes got indoor bathrooms and kitchens. Before calling a plumber, many folks reach for a drain cleaner to dissolve the blockage. In the 1950s, a 12-ounce container of Drano cost 22 cents. Today, a 32-ounce container costs \$3.89 at Target.

13. **A box of tissues** -- When people in the 1950s reached for a tissue, it cost a lot less than today. You could buy a 300-count box of Kleenex tissues then for just 27 cents. Today, Walmart will sell you a 360-count package of Kleenex tissues for \$4.48.

14. **A bottle of Coke** -- Coca-Cola was a popular brand of soft drink back in the day. In 1950, it became the first commercial product to appear on the cover of Time magazine. At that time, a bottle of Coke sold for a nickel. Today, you easily can spend \$1 or more to quench your thirst with a Coke.

15. **A gallon of gasoline** -- In the good old days, gasoline was cheap and plentiful. American cars were fuel-guzzlers. There was little concern about conserving gasoline or preventing air pollution. In 1950, a gallon of gas cost just 18 cents, while today's national average hovers at around \$2.90.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Emmet Pierce | October 19, 2018 ++]

Social Security Fund Depletion Update 14 ► \$128,400 Taxable Earnings Limit

In the debate over Social Security's long-term finances, some argue that the program is unsustainable because it is paying out more in benefits than it takes in. They say that benefits, including cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs), should be reduced to bring the program back into balance. Others say that the program is unsustainable because revenues need to be increased. With new sources of revenues, Social Security would be better able to pay program obligations, provide a modest boost to COLAs, or increase benefits for people who are the most vulnerable to poverty.

Under current law, employers must withhold a 6.2% Social Security tax from workers' earnings, an amount that they match for a total of 12.4%. That money is used to pay benefits to today's retirees. The majority of U.S. workers pay Social Security taxes on every dollar earned. But that's not the case for the roughly 12 million employees with the highest salaries in the country. Unlike the Medicare payroll tax, which applies to all earnings, Social Security payroll taxes apply only to the first \$128,400 in earnings. Employees earning more than \$128,400 (the "taxable maximum") and their employers pay no Social Security taxes on earnings in excess of that amount. The Congressional Budget Office has forecast that the earnings of people who make more than the taxable maximum is growing faster than the earnings of those who earn far less. That means even though revenues will rise in the short term, the Social Security Trust Fund will receive a declining share of payroll taxes in terms of the gross domestic product over the next 30 years as incomes of the highest-paid employees climb.

What sort of money is at stake? TSCL took a sampling of the 20 top CEOs of our nation's top 80 corporations and downloaded each company's public 2018 proxy information that contains the executive summary compensation table as required by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Our analysis uses only the actual salary and performance pay, both of which are subject to payroll taxes up to the limit. We did not include the value of stock awards, which often far exceeds the CEO earnings. Here's what was learned...

- Of the 20 CEOs, annual income not taxed for Social Security totaled \$121,545,322 and averaged \$6,077,266 per CEO.
- If all that income was taxable, the value in revenues based on the 12.4% Social Security tax would be \$15,071,619, an average of \$753,581 per CEO.
- The total revenues in the sample could support 897 retirees with an average monthly benefit of \$1,400 for an entire year. Or, the revenues could be used to provide a modest boost to the COLA of 448,560 retirees in the first year, by tying the annual inflation adjustment to the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E). The average CEO's revenues would cover the entire benefit of 45 retirees with an average benefit of \$16,800 for a year, or, boost the COLA of 22,428 retirees with average benefits in the first year.

The following chart illustrates 5 examples:

<u>Company & CEO</u>	<u>Annual income Not Taxed for SS</u>	<u>Value if taxed for SS @ 12.4%</u>	<u># of Retirees Whose COLAs It Could Boost</u>
Apple: Tim Cook	\$12,256,292	\$1,519,780	45,232
Comcast: Brian Roberts	\$12,099,650	\$1,500,357	44,653
Boeing: D.A. Mullenburg	\$10,012,639	\$1,241,567	36,951
B of A: Thomas Montage	\$8,200,767	\$1,016,895	30,265
Allstate: T.J. Wilson	\$7,872,210	\$ 976,154	29,052

TSCL's example just looked at the salaries and performance pay of 20 CEOs. According to the Social Security Administration there are 12 million people who earn above the taxable maximum in 2018. TSCL strongly supports legislation that would lift the taxable maximum to pay for a more fair COLA. [Source: TSCL Advisor | October 12, 2018 ++]

Cryptocurrency Investment Scam ► How it Works

As the popularity of cryptocurrency investing increases, so does the frequency with which scammers target would-be investors. Recently, BBB Scam Tracker has received multiple reports from consumers who have been targeted by scammers claiming to be "cryptocurrency management investment funds" or "binary options brokers." These con artists are looking to take victims' money with no real intention of working as their investment broker.

How the Scam Works

- You are contacted, often through social media, by a person or company claiming to help people invest in cryptocurrency. They offer returns that seem too good to be true. You show interest, so the "investor" directs you to a website that looks professional and encourages you to sign up with their company. After registering, they ask you to transfer money by wiring funds or depositing cryptocurrency into their online wallet.
- Once they receive your "investment," the scammer becomes difficult to contact or disappears completely. You receive no return and your investment funds are gone for good.

How to Avoid Cryptocurrency Scams

- **Do your research.** Make sure you have more than a surface understanding of how cryptocurrency works before you begin purchasing and investing. To learn more, check out [BBB.org/Crypto](https://www.bbb.org/cryptocurrency).
- **Research investment companies and brokers thoroughly.** Make sure any company you are considering doing business with is legitimate. FINRA, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, offers a free service called BrokerCheck (brokercheck.finra.org/) to help you find a licensed broker or agency. You can also look up the business at [BBB.org](https://www.bbb.org) to read about previous customers' experiences.
- **Understand the risks.** All investments can be risky and cryptocurrency is no exception. Never invest funds you can't afford to lose. Read FINRA's "The Reality of Investment Risk" ([finra.org/investors/reality-investment-risk](https://www.finra.org/investors/reality-investment-risk)) for additional information.

For More Information

To learn more about how cryptocurrency works, check out [BBB.org/Crypto](https://www.bbb.org/cryptocurrency), a resource developed by BBB and FINRA. To look up a business, go to [BBB.org](https://www.bbb.org). To learn more about scams, go to [BBB.org/ScamTips](https://www.bbb.org/scam-tips). If you've been targeted by this scam, help others avoid the same problem by reporting your experience at [BBB.org/ScamTracker](https://www.bbb.org/scam-tracker).

[Source: BBB Scam Alert | October 19, 2018 ++]

Hijacked Webcam Scam ► Don't Pay Them

Add another one to the list of scams soldiers should be looking out for. Apparently now internet grifters are pretending to have hacked your computer's camera and taken videos of you or your family, and they're threatening to release them unless you pay up. [Army Criminal Investigation Command](#) is warning soldiers and families to beware of this "hijacked webcam" scam, according to an 18 OCT release from the Army.

"This is a scam. Do not send any payment to the blackmailer even if you receive an email specifically addressed to you," CID Special Agent Daniel Andrews, with the Computer Crime Investigative Unit, said in the release. "Sometimes the email includes one or more of your real usernames and seems to directly target you." The cybercriminals are trying to capitalize on fear of public embarrassment, he said, but also taking advantage of the fact that we don't always remember what we were doing within view of our home computers. Scammers will include usernames in their messages, and sometimes, might have a current or former password as "proof" that they've been able to hack into your computer.

CID recommends covering webcams (perhaps with a piece of black tape), as well as keeping software updated, using a firewall and changing passwords with another device. "Some other basic security practices are to invest in strong security software, be careful of opening links or attachments sent via email or through social media networks, use and enable two-factor authentication, and backup your data in the event you need to restore your device to its original settings," the release said. If you believe a threat is genuine, you can report it to CID through the [Internet Crime Complaint Center](#). [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | October 24, 2018 ++]

Mega Million Scams ► Record Breaking Jackpot is Gone, But Not the Scams

When big-time lottery winners or large jackpots are in the news, scammers take advantage of the media frenzy. With the coverage of the record-breaking Mega Millions jackpot, BBB is seeing reports on [BBB.org/ScamTracker](#) of scams posing as the lottery.

How the Scam Works

- You receive an email, letter, or phone call with the best of news! You are the latest lottery or sweepstakes winner. There is just one small catch. To receive the millions you've just won, you'll need to first pay taxes or other related fees.
- Sadly, no matter how many "fees" you pay, it's never enough. There are always more unexpected charges that come up as they try to deliver the funds. Many people have lost thousands to this scam because they put their trust in a con artist's promise that they are now millionaires.

How to Avoid Lottery Scams

- **Never pay for a "free prize."** You should never have to pay money, open new bank accounts, or wire funds to receive something you've won.
- **Verify the source.** If you did enter a lottery and you are contacted by someone saying you've won, double-check with the source. Either visit the retailer who sold you the ticket or confirm the winning numbers on your state's official lottery website.
- **It's impossible to win a contest you didn't enter.** If you haven't entered sweepstakes or lotteries and you are contacted by someone saying you are a prize winner, don't believe it!

For More Information

To learn more about lottery scams and how they work, see www.BBB.org/LotteryScamStudy for BBB's study on sweepstakes, lottery, and prize scams. To learn more about scams, go to BBB.org/ScamTips. If you've been targeted by this scam, help others avoid the same problem by reporting your experience at BBB.org/ScamTracker. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | October 28 2018 ++]

Tax Burden for Massachusetts Retired Vets ► As of OCT 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. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you retire in Massachusetts:

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 6.25% (food; prescription drugs; fuel costs; gas, oil, electricity; clothing costing up to \$175, are exempt).

Gasoline Tax: 44.54 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 50.54 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$3.51/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Flat rate of 5.1% of federal adjusted gross income

Personal Exemptions: Single - \$4,400; Married - \$8,800; Dependents - \$1,000

Standard Deduction: None

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security, civil service, and state/local government pensions are exempt. Pension income from other state or local governments that do not tax pension income from Massachusetts public employees is exempt from Massachusetts taxable income.

Massachusetts income tax treatment of certain pension or retirement income prevents any state from taxing income from certain pensions and deferred compensation plans paid to individuals who are not residents of that state. Massachusetts already exempts much of the pension income paid to non-residents covered by P.L. 104-95, but the state exempts from taxation of some previously taxable pension income.

Effective Jan. 1, 2016, the tax rate has been lowered to 5.1% – on both earned income (salaries, wages, tips, commissions) and unearned (interest, dividends and capital gains). Certain capital gains are taxed at 12%. An individual first calculates gross income, which is income from whatever source derived including (but not limited to) the compensation for services, wages, pensions, business income, rents, royalties, dividends, interest, capital gains, alimony, annuities, etc. Certain business and personal deductions, as well as exemptions, may reduce gross income to arrive at that income subject to tax. For more information, refer to <https://mcoonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Tax-Tips-for-Seniors-and-Retirees.pdf> for Tax Tips for Seniors and Retirees.

Retired Military Pay: Not taxed.

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.

Property Taxes

Massachusetts does not provide for a general homestead exemption but does have a Homestead Act. The Homestead Act permits a homeowner who occupies a house as his/her principal residence to shield up to \$500,000 in equity in that house from creditors. By simply filing a Declaration of Homestead with the appropriate Registry of Deeds, a homeowner may be able to protect his/her residence from the claim of a future creditor. The Homestead Act permits only one spouse to file for the equity protection if each has an ownership interest in the home. The protection offered to the disabled and the elderly is even more comprehensive because it allows a husband and wife who own their own home to each file for the \$500,000 equity protection. [For details refer to http://www.sec.state.ma.us/rod/rodhom/homidx.htm](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/rod/rodhom/homidx.htm).

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax and a limited estate tax on estates valued at \$1,000,000 or more.

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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A guide for new residents is available at <http://www.mass.gov/dor/individuals/taxpayer-help-and-resources/tax-guides/guide-for-new-residents>. For additional information regarding your state income tax liability, visit the Massachusetts Department of Revenue website which can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-department-of-revenue> or call (617) 887-6367 / (800) 392-6089 (toll-free in Massachusetts) M-F 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#MASSACHUSETTS> | OCT 2018 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 31 OCT 2018

- **USS Cole Attacker Trial.** An appeals court has rejected arguments that led to an indefinite stay of proceedings at the Guantanamo Bay naval base against a Saudi charged in the deadly 2000 bombing of the guided-missile destroyer Cole. In February, the judge put proceedings on hold after members of the defense team quit over alleged violations of attorney-client privilege. A ruling that came on the 18th anniversary of the attack said they should not have quit and should have returned as ordered. A defense attorney who did not quit, Navy Lt. Alaric Piette, said he expects pretrial hearings to resume.
- **Excess Lighthouses.** The U.S. government is trying to unload five lighthouses in the Florida Keys. The government will try to turn their operation over to a non-profit group or government agency. If that fails, the

General Services Administration will try to sell them at auction. The 150-year-old lighthouses are built offshore, making their maintenance costly and labor intensive.

- **Prostrate Exam.** Check out <https://youtu.be/y45VXgHvz4> to see how easy it is. If you're over or approaching the age of 50 you might also want to pay attention to this Colonoscopy Song at <https://biggeekdad.com/2012/04/colonoscopy-song> if you haven't been tested for colon polyps and cancer. It is doubtful your Urologist would recommend this traditional Chinese Prostate Treatment at <https://biggeekdad.com/2012/04/chinese-prostate-treatment> but if you consider yourself a real man you might give it a try. Always remember the the Colorectal Surgeon gets you in the end.
- **Obit.** Raye Montague, a trailblazing black woman from Arkansas who revolutionized the way the Navy designed ships, died 10 OCT at 83. Montague developed a computer program that created rough drafts of ship specifications. She told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette in 2012 that the program allowed the Navy to cut the time it took to build a ship's draft design from two years to 18 hours and 26 minutes. She fought discrimination throughout her career. When a co-worker wouldn't show her how to operate a computer, she taught herself.
- **Illegal Immigrants.** President Trump has warned three Central American countries that if they allow anyone to pass through their country to enter the U.S. illegally that America will cease all foreign aid payments to them. In two tweets late 16 OCT, Trump said that Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador have been put on alert that "all payments made to them will STOP (END)!" if the countries allow people passage on their way to the U.S.-Mexico border with the intention to enter the country illegally. In a follow-up tweet, Trump said that "anybody entering the United States illegally will be arrested and detained" before being deported to their country of origin.
- **VA Mission Act.** As part of the VA Mission Act, Congress told the Veterans Affairs Department to consolidate its various private-sector care programs into one. But a new report by the Government Accountability Office revealed VA hasn't done a great job interacting with private sector providers up to this point. Some are paid within days, while others don't see reimbursement for months, even after they've supplied all the documentation VA wants.
- **Car Depreciation.** A recent AAA analysis found that depreciation is the biggest cost associated with owning and operating a car. Specifically, depreciation will cost you an average of \$3,000 per year over the course of the first five years that you own a new car. The best way to avoid this loss is to buy a used car.
- **Free Meal.** In honor of Veteran's Day McCormick & Schmick's Seafood and Steaks for over a decade offers a free meal to Veterans and Gold Star honorees (parents and spouse) to enjoy a free entrée on Sunday, November 11th. They are probably the most high end restaurant to do this each year. For details, locations, menu, and to make a reservation see <http://www.mccormickandschmicks.com/featured-promotion/veterans-day.aspx>. They have probably at least one restaurant in every major metro area in the USA.
- **Congressional Election.** At <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2018/10/19/here-are-the-172-veterans-running-for-congress-in-november> you can see the 17 veterans running for Congress in NOV 2018. This list in alphabetical order by state and district includes all candidates with military experience who won a primary election and will appear on the fall ballot. It reflects their party, gender, branch, service era, combat deploys, and notes reflecting their campaigning and credentials.
- **Israel War of Independence.** In 1948 a group of former WWII pilots, mostly from America, volunteered to fight for Israel in their war of independence. They were members of Machel – volunteers from abroad. Listen and watch this 7 minute clip at <http://newsletter.biggeekdad.com/t/i-l-nnjduy-bhukrhuhd-p/> in which former members of the group recount their experiences and emotions over their involvement in saving Israel.
- **A Higher Call.** The first time German fighter pilot Franz Stigler met B-17 pilot Charlie Brown was during World War Two when he spared the American pilot's life by not shooting down his crippled plane. The second time these two pilots met was in 1990 when they reunited to share their story together. To listen to their stories of this event go to https://youtu.be/_8EkmyoG83Q.

- **Parking.** How would you deal with the situation your spouse is in at <http://newsletter.biggeekdad.com/t/i-l-nydulc-bhukrhuhd-r>.
- **War With China.** The former commander of the U.S. Army in Europe says it's likely the United States will be at war with China in 15 years. Retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges said at a Warsaw security forum on 24 OCT that European allies will have to do more to ensure their own defenses against Russia as Americans focus more on the Pacific.
- **Malware.** An Interior Department watchdog recommended the U.S. Geological Survey ratchet up internet security protocols after discovering its networks had been infected with Russian malware from pornography sites. The agency's inspector general traced the malicious software to a single unnamed USGS employee, who reportedly used a government-issued computer to visit some 9,000 adult video sites, according to a report published 17 OCT.
- **\$55M Crane.** The Navy has awarded a contract of nearly \$55 million for a 140-ton crane at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. The contract with Konecranes Nuclear Equipment and Services is part of the Navy's plan to extend the life of up to seven Los Angeles-class attack submarines at the shipyard. The crane will allow workers to safely refuel the submarines with new reactor cores.
- **Potpourri.** Have a little time on your hands. If so you will most likely enjoy the video series at <https://www.facebook.com/senatorsanders/videos/985927688258861/UzpfSTeYmzM0MDE1NjA6MTAyMTM3MDEwNTE1ODAINjY/>. Some very unusual stuff.
- **Iceland.** A national crisis hit Iceland this week when a force of 7,000 American sailors and Marines invaded the country's capital city of Reykjavik with an unquenchable thirst for frosty suds and swiftly drained much of the city's beer supply.
- **State Governor Salary.** The 5 lowest and highest paying states are: ME \$70,000, CO \$90,000, AZ \$95,000, OR \$98,600, KS \$99,636 → IL \$177,412, CA \$177,467, NY \$170,050, TN \$187,500, PA \$190,823.
- **Military Retirement Option.** With less than three months to go before the year-end deadline, only one in six service members of the 1.6 million active-duty and reserve troops who are eligible to make the choice to opt in to the new military retirement system have done so, falling far short of prior expectations and raising questions about why the response has been so low.
- **Unknown Soldier Burial.** Go to <https://youtu.be/2-EhKeiNKCw> to view the the funeral procession and caisson bearing casket attended by General Pershing and President Harding in 1921.

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

Thought for the Week:

“At the end of the day, you are solely responsible for your success and your failure. And the sooner you realize that, you accept that, and integrate that into your work ethic, you will start being successful. As long as you blame others for the reason you aren't where you want to be, you will always be a failure.” — **Erin Cummings**

ISIS Update 02 ► Ohio Recruit Arrested

A 19-year-old Ohio man has been arrested and charged with attempting to provide material support for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Justice Department said Thursday. **Naser Almadaoji**, a U.S. citizen born in Iraq, was arrested 24 OCT and accused of attempting to travel to Kazakhstan and then Afghanistan, where he planned to

fight for ISIS-aligned forces in the region, according to a Justice Department press release. “Naser Almadaoji allegedly attempted to seek terrorist training in weapons and tactics and discussed a willingness to conduct terrorist ‘projects’ in the United States on behalf of foreign terrorist groups,” Assistant Attorney General John Demers said in the release.

“Protecting America from terrorist activity, including conduct like this, remains the highest priority of the Department of Justice.” The arrest on terror-related charges is the third in just over a week, according to assistant FBI Director Michael Garrity, who added in the release that "the threat posed by terrorism remains extremely serious." Almadaoji traveled to Egypt and Jordan in February of this year, after which he reportedly began conversing online with someone he believed to be an ISIS recruiter. He eventually sent the unnamed person a video of himself pledging allegiance to ISIS.

The online attempts followed a failed attempt to join a terrorist organization while abroad, the release states. “I don’t wanna say here why I was in Egypt but him [an Egyptian associate] and I planned something and it didn’t work at [sic] well," Almadaoji reportedly told the unnamed individual he believed to be an ISIS contact. If convicted, Almadaoji could be sentenced to up to 20 years in federal prison. A defense attorney representing the 19-year-old told local news affiliate WHIO 7 that he and his client plan to "vigorously defend his case," while not specifically indicating a plea. [Source: The Hill | John Bowden | October 25, 2018 ++]

911 Terrorists Update 02 ► Mounir el-Motassadeq Released From His German Jail 15 OCT



Mounir el-Motassadeq was collected from his German jail cell, where he had spent almost 15 years, on 15 OCT, ready for deportation to Morocco. His jail term for complicity in 3,000 counts of murder in the September 11, 2001 attacks and for membership of a terrorist organization was set to expire this November. It seems a world away, but tracing 9/11 today takes us to Steindamm, a busy road in the center of Hamburg. On a blustery afternoon late this September, few people linger. The shops sell vegetables, kaftans, and flights to Mecca and Turkey. At number 103, a Vietnamese restaurant serves Pho soups and spring rolls. Many tables are empty, while a few customers eat a late lunch. So far, so typical. But for a while, when number 103 housed a mosque, it was a notorious address. It was here that Mohammed Atta and his group of friends had prayed. The men of 9/11.

Hamburg authorities closed down that mosque eight years ago, saying it was a ‘hub for radicalization’ For it was here, in this cosmopolitan city, that Atta and the men around him put into action the Al-Qaeda terror plan. One of those men was Mounir el-Motassadeq. He was arrested two months after the planes hit the towers. He was the first to be indicted in connection with the 9/11 attacks. It took more than five years of trials and appeals for Germany to convict him. Authorities sentenced him to 15 years for being an accessory in the murders of 246 people aboard the 9/11 planes and membership of a terrorist organization. He handled bank transfers for members of the Hamburg cell and to have helped cover up their whereabouts. He also signed ringleader Atta's will. Motassadeq never denied being friends with the hijackers. But he says he never knew about the 9/11 plans – and was never involved. His support for Atta and the cell, he claimed, was nothing more than favors for friends.

One of his former lawyers told DW that the case continued to haunt him. But he said this was not only due to the more than 3,000 who died on 9/11 — rather because he remained convinced that Motassadeq is innocent. It was in the early 1990s when Mounir el-Motassadeq moved from Morocco to Germany, and ended up studying electrical engineering at university in Hamburg. There he made friends with a group of other Muslim students, which coalesced around the ring-leader Atta. People who knew Motassadeq told DW he was "a nice young man," "friendly," "polite" and "reserved." Still serving his sentence in Hamburg's high-security Fuhlsbüttel prison, he did not respond to DW's requests for an interview. But Irish author Anthony Summers interviewed Motassadeq for his and Robbyn Swan's book "The Eleventh Day. The Full Story of 9/11 and Osama Bin Laden." It was a finalist for the 2012 Pulitzer Prize. Summers has given DW access to that 2009 prison interview. It has not been published until now.

In the transcript, Motassadeq is funny, joking with Summers and his translator that it was "fate" that he had come to Germany to study, and laughing at his first impression of Germany being cold — as he'd arrived in the winter. Several sources have suggested Motassadeq was "devout," even "deeply religious" when he first moved to Germany. But he told Summers he didn't see himself as "particularly strict." "He hasn't changed, he's still the same" Yet without his faith, he said, "someone like me would have killed themselves." He didn't deny spending time in a military training camp in Afghanistan in May 2000: "I am a Muslim and I also believe that a man has to do military service. Like the military service that everyone has to do here," he said, referring to German military service, still compulsory at the time. For people to go to a jihadi training camp, Motassadeq explained, was not against the law, and he wasn't the only one who went. But he was adamant that he'd had nothing to do with 9/11. "I didn't even know they had gone to America," he says, referring to Atta and other Hamburg hijackers.

When he heard about the attacks, he said, "First I couldn't believe it. It was a shock, how could that happen? It just wasn't possible." And then, seeing his friends' pictures on television, "was another, even bigger shock." While he stressed there could be no justification for killing innocent people, he said he was unsure whether his former friends were really responsible for what they did. "I cannot understand it. I don't know if they really, knowingly, did it out of conviction, or if someone was behind them. This is a question that needs to be answered." He said his experience made him doubt everything, even whether Atta and the others did it. "Because I know what has happened to me. The judges and prosecutors turned it all around, I know, I saw it, I experienced it, I am still experiencing it. I know how they can make truth into untruth and use tricks to bring an innocent man into prison."

Almost 10 years after that prison interview, it seems he remains unrepentant. A motion for early release filed by his lawyers in 2014 was denied on the grounds that he was still "too dangerous." He had not, the authorities argued, publicly distanced himself from the attacks. "He hasn't changed, he's still the same," Daniel Zerbin told DW. The criminal sciences professor has contacts within local security agencies — and has undertaken one of the most detailed academic studies of the Hamburg cell. But now, with his prison sentence almost up, German authorities have decided to release Motassadeq — several weeks early — and deport him to Morocco. They're banning him from returning to Germany until April 2064 — when he'll be 90 years old. "This measure will allow us to arrest him immediately should he set foot on German soil again," Frauke Köhler, a spokeswoman for the Federal Prosecutors Office, told DW. But no-one expects Motassadeq will try to return. It's thought his wife and their three children are in Morocco with his extended family.

Experts are divided on the danger he might pose when released: some maintain that today's generation of jihadis will greet his release with little more than a shrug, given that he was a minor figure in the Hamburg cell. But some fear Motassadeq may prove a useful propaganda tool for Al Qaeda and other radical outfits. Phil Gurski, a former strategic analyst in the Canadian intelligence community, told DW that he thinks even if Motassadeq lies low, he could still serve as a "very high-profile propaganda figure." "Al-Qaeda can point to him as someone who fought the good fight and in the end because of his good faith and his strong belief in what Al-Qaeda was trying to accomplish, he didn't break, he didn't give in to authorities, he didn't betray the other people in his cell." It's anyone's guess what will happen to him in Morocco. Gurski is convinced that the authorities there will keep close tabs on Motassadeq and most likely pass on any information to the Americans. "I'd be very surprised if the US had no interest in him," he said. And academic Zerbin doesn't want to rule out that the Trump administration might even attempt to spirit him

away to America: "Anything is possible." But back in Morocco, one of Motassadeq's brothers was more sanguine about his fate: "God has protected him for 15 years in prison and he will continue to protect him, because he is innocent." [Source: Deutsche Welle News | Naomi Conrad & Nina Werkhäuser | October 15, 2018 ++]

Russia's Aircraft Carrier ► Admiral Kuznetsov (063) Damaged

Russia's only aircraft carrier was damaged in a dock accident 28 OCT that left one person missing and four injured, officials said. A floating dock sank early morning in Murmansk, dropping a crane on the deck of the Admiral Kuznetsov carrier, the United Shipbuilding Corporation said. The corporation's chief, Alexei Rakhmanov, said the 70-ton crane left a hole of 215 square feet, but added that it didn't damage any of the ship's vital systems. The accident happened as the ship was leaving the dock following repairs. Rakhmanov said it may have been caused by a sharp power surge that led to pumps' failure. Four workers were injured and one is still missing, Murmansk governor Marina Kovtun said on state-owned Rossiya 24 television channel.

Rakhmanov said that accident wouldn't lead to a significant extension of the carrier's refurbishment. Following the repairs, the carrier is to be fitted with modern control systems and new weapons. Rakhmanov acknowledged, however, that the loss of the huge, 80,000-ton dock would disrupt the planned modernization of other Russian navy ships. The dock is the only structure of that capacity that Russia has, and it wasn't immediately clear whether it could be lifted.

The Admiral Kuznetsov carrier was launched in 1985 and has repeatedly been plagued by technical problems. While the ship with its turbines belching black smoke looks outdated compared with the U.S. nuclear-powered carriers, it allows the Kremlin to project power far away from Russia's shores. Two years ago, the Admiral Kuznetsov was deployed to the eastern Mediterranean as part of Russia's campaign in Syria, launching the first carrier-mounted attacks in Russia's navy history. [Source: The Associated Press | October 30, 2018 ++]

GTMO Detainees Update 05 ► Two Refused to Leave, Now They Can't

Two detainees at the Guantanamo prison who were cleared for release during the Obama administration refused to cooperate with authorities arranging their departures and now can't leave even if they wanted to because the Trump administration has ceased most prisoner releases. The prison's commander, Rear Adm. John Ring, disclosed the unusual standoff in remarks to reporters visiting the detention center this week.

Guantanamo today has 40 prisoners, five cleared during the Obama administration. But a combination of military bureaucracy and their refusal to cooperate have left them there, at an annual cost of \$11.1 million per prisoner based on 2015 operating costs. All five are held in a prison complex for low-value detainees with about 20 long-held prisoners. There, captives mostly live in four communal cell blocks where they can share meals and prayers, have art and horticulture classes and play video games. "Two of them had an opportunity to get on an airplane and chose not to go. So how bad could it be here?" Ring told reporters.

The State Department had arranged repatriation for an Algerian and Moroccan and resettlement of a Yemeni in an undisclosed Arab country in 2016 as the Obama administration drew to a close. Instead, they found themselves trapped as a Pentagon bureaucracy and a requirement by Congress of 30 days notice in advance of a transfer prevented their release before President Donald Trump took over. When Trump became president, the State Department closed the office that negotiated repatriation and resettlement deals for Guantanamo detainees and has not pursued release for those cleared in the previous administration. The other two -- Tunisian Ridah bin Salah al Yazidi, 53, and Muideen Adeen al Sattar, 44, a stateless Rohingya -- refused to cooperate with U.S. efforts to send them to other nations.

"It's not accurate to say they had a chance to get on an airplane and declined," Lee Wolosky, a New York attorney who negotiated transfer deals as Obama's last special envoy for the closure of the prison, said 24 OCT. He refused to elaborate. But two Obama-era officials who were aware of the efforts to get them released cast the cases of Yazidi and Sattar as more complicated. Both spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to discuss the sensitive diplomatic discussions that sent cleared captives to be resettled in 30 far-flung nations from Uruguay to Kazakhstan.

The officials said some of the prisoners didn't cooperate with release efforts because they're mentally ill. One of the two men refused to leave his prison block to discuss options for departing prison life with Pentagon, State Department or foreign envoys seeking to assist in their release, they said. Another who didn't want to go refused to give enough information to U.S. officials so the International Red Cross could arrange a travel document, said the prison's cultural adviser, who goes by Zaki. Ring, who heads prison operations, was asked how it was possible that a captive could veto the wishes of a White House administration that they be sent away. Neither the Pentagon nor the Department of Defense ordered the prison to send guards to force either captive out of his cell and onto a plane, Ring said, "So we didn't."

Troops brought Yazidi to Guantanamo on Jan. 11, 2002, the day the prison opened, and Sattar arrived a month later. Both were cleared for resettlement or repatriation in 2009, the first year of the Obama administration, but for years refused to meet with their attorneys. Lawyers familiar with the cases of the two men said Yazidi appeared to be unable to imagine life outside the prison and no country had agreed to take in the nationless Sattar for what has traditionally been a two-year stay that could lead to asylum or permanent resettlement.

In the George W. Bush administration, the Pentagon released about 540 captives, most to their homelands. The Obama administration sent away about 200 more captives to a combination of repatriations and resettlements, leaving the prison with 41 captives when Trump took office. The Trump administration authorized just one release: The May transfer of admitted al-Qaida terrorist Ahmed al Darbi, to the Saudi rehabilitation center to serve out a war crimes sentence until 2027. Guantanamo's 40 remaining prisoners include one convicted war criminal, a Yemeni who worked as Osama bin Laden's media aide and is serving a life sentence; eight men in pretrial proceedings, including the five alleged 9/11 plotters who are charged in a death penalty case; 26 "forever prisoners" who face no criminal charges but are held as detainees while the war in Afghanistan continues; and the five men whom U.S. government parole-style boards approved to go before Trump took office.

No new detainee has arrived since the Bush administration, but Ring said 23 OCT his prison staffed by 1,800 troops and civilians could absorb another 40 captives for a total of 80 prisoners without adding more guards or other personnel. Meanwhile, the prison's chief medical officer said there is currently one hunger striker at the prison, using the Pentagon approved language that he was a "non-religious faster." Separately, Ring said another low-value detainee was in "disciplinary status," prison language for being segregated in a cell for all but two hours a day and allowed only two books beside his Quran to pass the time. The prisoner had thrown some sort of liquid at a guard, a once common occurrence at the prison by protesting detainees who collected their feces, urine, and other bodily fluids in a cup and hurled it. Nobody was hurt in the episode, Ring said. He showcased two new features on the brief prison visit for reporters from the U.S., France and Germany:

- A garden inside a \$744,000 soccer field for cooperative captives, called Super-Rec, showed prisoners in a horticulture class had managed to grow cotton balls, which an Army captain said they planned to use on art projects the world can no longer see.
- A padded cell in the mental health wing of a new \$9 million health care facility at the Camp 5 maximum-security prison for low-value detainees. A psychiatrist told reporters that "ramped up," at-risk patient/prisoners could voluntarily spend 10-20 minutes in the all-white padded cell, which had been stripped of toilet, bunk and sink -- a sort of mental-health time-out.

[Source: Miami Herald | Carol Rosenberg | October 19, 2018 ++]

Afghan Taliban Update 01 ► Five Freed GTMO Detainees Join Taliban

Five members of the Afghan Taliban who were freed May 2014 from the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay in exchange for captured American Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl have joined the insurgent group's political office in Qatar, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said 28 OCT. They will now be among Taliban representatives negotiating for peace in Afghanistan, a sign some negotiators in Kabul say indicates the Taliban's desire for a peace pact.



A look at the 5 Taliban figures exchanged for Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl

Others fear the five, all of whom were close to the insurgent group's founder and hard-line leader Mullah Mohammed Omar, bring with them the same ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam that characterized the group's five-year rule that ended in 2001 with the U.S.-led invasion. "The Taliban are bringing back their old generation, which means the Taliban have not changed their thinking or their leadership," said Haroun Mir, political analyst in the Afghan capital. "What we are more worried about is if tomorrow the Taliban say 'we are ready to negotiate,' who will represent Kabul? That is the big challenge because the government is so divided, not just ideologically but on ethnic lines."

Efforts to find a peaceful end to Afghanistan's protracted war have accelerated since Washington appointed Afghan-American Zalmay Khalilzad as envoy to find a peaceful end to America's longest war, which has already cost the U.S. more than \$900 billion. But Mohammed Ismail Qasimyar, a member of a government peace council, warned Washington against negotiating peace terms with the Taliban, saying Khalilzad's only job is to set the stage for direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, something the insurgents have so far refused, calling the government a U.S. puppet. Taliban officials reported meeting with Khalilzad in Qatar earlier this month, calling the exchange preliminary but pivotal. Washington neither confirmed nor denied the meeting, but Khalilzad was in Qatar at the time.

A Taliban official familiar with the discussions told The Associated Press that talks ended with an agreement to meet again. Key among the Taliban's requests was recognition of their Qatar office, said the official, who spoke on condition he not be identified because he was not authorized to speak to the media. In an unexpected development, Pakistan also bowed to a long-standing Afghan Taliban demand that it release its senior leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who had been in jail in Pakistan since 2010. At the time, Baradar was reportedly jailed after bypassing Pakistan to open independent peace talks with Hamid Karzai, who was then Afghanistan's president.

Baradar's release followed Khalilzad's first visit to Pakistan since being appointed Washington's peace envoy. Baradar issued an audio message after his release to the Taliban. The Pashto-language message, heard by an Associated Press reporter, seemed to indicate he was preparing for a role in the insurgent movement moving forward. Hakim Mujahed, a former Taliban member who is now also a member of the Afghan government peace council, said

the presence of the five former Guantanamo prisoners in the Taliban's Qatar office is indicative of the Taliban's resolve to find a peace deal. He said the stature of the five within the insurgent movement will make a peace deal palatable to the rank and file, many of whom have resisted talks believing a military victory was within their grasp.

"These people are respected among all the Taliban," said Mujahed. "Their word carries weight with the Taliban leadership and the mujahedeen." But there are some among the five who have a disturbing past.

- Human Rights Watch accused Mohammed Fazl, the former Taliban army chief arrested in 2002, of overseeing the deaths of thousands of minority Shiites in 2000. The massacre outraged the world and followed the killing the year before of an estimated 2,000 young ethnic Pashtuns in northern Afghanistan by Taliban rivals.
- Khairullah Khairkhwa, a former governor of Herat province, who was close to both Taliban founder Mullah Omar and al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden. Khairkhwa also had a friendship with former president Hamid Karzai.
- The others include Abdul Haq Wasiq, deputy intelligence minister, Mullah Norullah Nori, once described as the most significant Taliban leader held at Guantanamo Bay because of his particularly close relationship with Mullah Omar, who fought U.S.-led coalition forces in northern Afghanistan's Mazar-e-Sharif and Mohammad Nabi Omari, a Taliban communications officer.

All five are from southern Afghanistan, the Taliban's heartland. The five Taliban were released in 2014 in exchange for Bergdahl during the administration of President Barack Obama after drawn out negotiations. Bergdahl, who had been held in Taliban custody since 2009 when he wandered off a U.S. army base, was given a dishonorable discharge last year and fined \$1,000 on charges of desertion and misbehavior. [Source: The Associated Press | Kathy Gannon | October 30, 2018 ++]

Syria Update 01 ► Russia Alleges U.S. Attempted Drone Attack on Their Syrian Base

Russia's deputy defense minister claimed 25 OCT that a U.S. military aircraft took control of 13 drones over Syria and attempted to have them attack a Russian military base there, but the drones were downed before they could reach their target. Alexander Fomin said the drones were heading toward Hemeimeem air base in Latakia province when a U.S. Boeing P-8 Poseidon flying over the Mediterranean "took control" of them. He didn't say who the drones belonged to or when the alleged incident happened. Fomin, speaking at a security conference in Beijing in remarks carried by Russian news agencies, said the drones were destroyed before they could reach the base. There was no U.S. comment on the claim.



Fomin's remarks make explicit what Russia only had insinuated in January, when the incident took place. "Any suggestion that U.S. or coalition forces played a role in an attack on a Russian base is without any basis in fact and is utterly irresponsible," a Pentagon spokesman said after the attack, according to a U.S.-backed media outlet. The drone incident didn't lead to any casualties, but an earlier attack on the base killed two Russian servicemen. "Taken together,

the drone and mortar attacks appear to represent the most concerted assault on the Russian headquarters in Syria since the military intervention in September 2015.

Fomin's comments marked the first time Moscow has directly accused the United States of coordinating an attack on Russian assets in Syria. Asked about Fomin's statement, Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said the information was "very troubling." He added that he "doesn't exclude" that Putin could raise the issue when he meets with U.S. President Donald Trump in Paris when they both attend 11 NOV events marking 100 years since Armistice Day.

Russia has waged a military campaign in support of Syrian President Bashar Assad since September 2015, helping turn the tide of the country's civil war in his favor. The Hemeimeem base has served as the main hub for Russian operations in Syria. It has come under repeated drone attacks launched by the rebels this year. U.S. and Russian officials have maintained "deconfliction channels" to avoid conflict between their various forces operating in the Syrian theater. They also have demonstrated a willingness to downplay incidents. When U.S. forces repelled an attack on an American outpost reportedly assaulted by Russian mercenaries, the Kremlin minimized the number of casualties — U.S. estimates put the total in the hundreds — and American officials took a moderate tone when discussing possible Russian government involvement. [Source: The Associated Press & Washington Examiner | October 25, 2018 ++]

Syria Update 02 ► DoD Pushing Back Hard Against Russian Drone Attack Claims

U.S. Defense Department officials are pushing back hard against Russian claims that they were involved in a drone attack on a Russian air base in Syria earlier this year. Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin said 25 OCT that 13 drones were heading toward Khmeimim air base in Syria's coastal Latakia province when a U.S. Navy P-8 Poseidon flying over the Mediterranean took "manual control" of them and began searching for "holes through which they started penetrating." "Then they were destroyed," Fomin said. American officials flatly denied the accusation. "Any suggestion that U.S. or coalition forces played a role in an attack on a Russian base is without any basis in fact and is utterly irresponsible," a Pentagon spokesperson said in a statement to Military Times.



A Russian officer walks next to drones that attacked a Russian airbase in Syria and were captured and displayed at a briefing in the Russian Defense Ministry in Moscow in early January.

Rob Lee, a former U.S. Marine Corps officer and doctoral candidate who focuses on Russian defense policy at King's College London, said the allegations are dubious. "It is sometimes hard to tell which claims Russian officials believe and which are merely rhetoric," he said. "Sometimes it is easier just to blame the Americans than acknowledge

that they were not prepared to stop unsophisticated, off-the-shelf UAVs — which was particularly embarrassing because of how much they publicized the effectiveness of their air defense systems.” While U.S. research toward drone swarms is definitely underway, the allegation that the U.S. attacked a Russian air base with the technology, risking an escalation with a peer adversary seems unlikely.

Russia has reported numerous rudimentary drone attacks by militants in Syria since the January incident. In September, Russia Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov told Kommersant, a Moscow-based newspaper, that a Russian airstrike targeted “warehouses of terrorists with unmanned aerial vehicles.” He added that 47 drones were destroyed around Khmeimim air base in the previous month. “Of course, they improved their defenses after the January attack, and began focusing on stopping UAVs,” Lee said.

One reason the deputy defense minister gave for accusing the U.S. of controlling the drones was that the swarm supposedly switched to manual guidance after encountering Russia’s electronic countermeasures. This indicated that “Only a technologically advanced country has access to such tools; they cannot be made in the Syrian desert,” the deputy defense minister said. In January, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that while the drones looked primitive, they contained high-tech elements allowing precision satellite guidance and the release of munitions.

Lee is unconvinced. If the allegations against the U.S. military were truthful, it would be counter-intuitive for Russia to publicize that their base defenses were penetrated by American drones and they took no retaliatory action in response. “After the firefight between pro-regime forces, including contractors from the Russian private military company Wagner, and U.S. forces in February, they were very quick to emphasize that the Russian government had no role in [the attack] to prevent any kind of escalation,” Lee said. Khmeimim air base was purpose-built for the Russian air force in 2015. The airstrip is capable of landing large transport planes, as well as bombers, fighters and helicopters. Putin announced this summer that an agreement was reached with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to allow Russian forces to remain at Khmeimim for another 40 years. As to whether the U.S. is even capable of sophisticated drone swarm attacks at this point, that remains unclear.

While the Navy’s P-8A Poseidon can communicate with drones, it has not been publicly shown to be able to command a fleet of them. Still, the Pentagon has long been interested in developing a drone swarm capability. The Defense Department’s research arm plans to demonstrate the ability to launch and recover swarms of drones from a C-130 transport aircraft sometime in 2019. Marine Corps units are also now using an electronic warfare countermeasure for enemy drone swarms. Additionally, the capability to command drones from a manned aircraft has been proven, although at less than half the number of drones allegedly used in the January attack and within a controlled testing environment.

Earlier this month, Airbus announced that it managed to link five Airbus-built Do-DT25 target drones to the control of a mission commander inside a separate aircraft. “Flown in a test zone of Germany’s Baltic Sea area, the [manned-unmanned teaming] trial flights served multiple purposes, including validating such elements as connectivity, human-machine interface and the concept of teaming intelligence through mission group management,” Airbus announced on its company blog 2 OCT. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Kyle Rempfer | October 29, 2018 ++]

Korean War End Update 02 ► Panmunjom Demilitarization Effort

The two Koreas have completed removing land mines planted at their shared border village as part of efforts to disarm the area located inside the world’s most heavily fortified border, South Korean officials said 22 OCT. The announcement came following a meeting among military officers from the Koreas and the U.S.-led U.N. Command at the border’s Panmunjom village earlier Monday. It’s the second such trilateral meeting to examine efforts to demilitarize Panmunjom, the most well-known place inside the 155-mile-long Demilitarized Zone that bisect the two Koreas.

Disarming the village was among a set of tension-reduction agreements signed by the Koreas' defense chiefs on the sidelines of their leaders' summit in Pyongyang last month. As the next disarmament steps at Panmunjom, the two Koreas and the U.N. Command agreed on withdrawing weapons and guard posts there by 25 OCT. The three sides will then spend two days jointly verifying those measures, Seoul's Defense Ministry said in a statement. The Koreans eventually aim to have 35 unarmed personnel from each side guard the village. Officially, the entire DMZ area, including Panmunjom, is jointly overseen by North Korea and the U.N. Command, a legacy of the Korean War, which ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty. North Korea and China signed the armistice on one side, while the U.N. Command signed on the other side. South Korea wasn't a signatory to the agreement.

Panmunjom is where the armistice was signed. Numerous incidents of bloodshed and violence have taken place there since the war's end, and rival soldiers face each other only feet away from each other. As part of the September deals, the two Koreas are separately clearing mines from another front-line area, where they plan their first-ever joint searches for the remains of soldiers killed during the Korean War. The Koreans also plan to establish buffer zones along their land and sea boundaries, and a no-fly zone above the border.

Also on 22 OCT, officials from the Koreas met at their recently launched liaison office at the North Korean border town of Kaesong for talks on how to cooperate in forestry sectors. General-level officers from the Koreas are to meet for bilateral talks at Panmunjom on 26 OCT to discuss more details about how to implement the tension-reduction deals, according to the South Korean Defense Ministry. Seoul's liberal government is pushing for greater engagement with North Korea, but U.S. officials say such moves should be in tandem with global efforts to denuclearize North Korea. The Pentagon announced 19 OCT it is suspending another major military exercise with South Korea in an effort to support denuclearization talks with North Korea, raising concerns as to how long forces on the peninsula can forgo major training opportunities before readiness is hurt. [Source: The Associated Press | Hyung-Jin Kim | October 22, 2018 ++]

F-16 Mishap ► Belgian Air Force Mechanic Opens Fire by Mistake

A mechanic with the Belgian air force was servicing an aircraft when he accidentally opened fire on another F-16 jet fighter sitting on the tarmac, destroying it, local media reported this week. The incident occurred on Belgium's Florennes air force base 11 OCT, according to multiple media reports. Scramble, a Dutch aviation magazine, posted pictures of what appears to be the burned out aircraft Friday. The Belgian air force confirmed the aircraft was burned to a husk, but did not confirm how the fire was started. Scramble reported that the accident was caused by the negligent discharge of the six-barrel 20 mm Vulcan M61A-1 cannon on another F-16. "Apparently, the cannon was loaded," Scramble wrote under the caption for one of the photographs.



“This aircraft had just been refueled and prepared together with another F-16 for an upcoming afternoon sortie. After impact of the 20mm bullets, [it] exploded instantly and damaged two other F-16s,” according to Scramble. “Thankfully nobody got killed, only one technician incurred hearing impairment.” The Belgian air force’s official Twitter account confirmed that a fire did indeed break out on the base during maintenance Thursday, burning one plane and causing damage to another. The Belgian air force did not list the cause as that of cannon fire. The Belgian Aviation Safety Directorate has started an investigation into the incident, base officials said in an interview with national public broadcaster VRT. “You can’t help thinking of what a disaster this could have been,” said Belgian air force Col. Didier Polome in an interview with VRT, according to Reuters. The Belgian air force has some 54 F-16s left now, according to Scramble. The Belgian armed forces confirmed in a statement that two mechanics were treated for hearing loss caused by the blast. [Source: AirForceTimes| Kyle Rempfer | October 15, 2018 ++]

Federal Deficit FY 2018 ► Largest Since 2012 | \$779B

The U.S. government closed the 2018 fiscal year \$779 billion in the red, its highest deficit in six years, as Republican-led tax cuts pinched revenues and expenses rose on a growing national debt, according to data released on Monday by the Treasury Department. New government spending also expanded the federal deficit for the 12 months through September, the first full annual budget on the watch of U.S. President Donald Trump. It was the largest deficit since 2012. The data also showed a \$119 billion budget surplus in September, which was larger than expected and a record for the month. A senior Treasury official said the monthly surplus was smaller when adjusted for calendar shifts. Economists generally view the corporate and individual tax cuts passed by the Republican-controlled U.S. Congress late last year and an increase in government spending agreed in early February as likely to balloon the nation’s deficit. Trump and his fellow Republicans have touted the tax cuts as a boost to growth and jobs. “America’s booming economy will create increased government revenues – an important step toward long-term fiscal sustainability,” Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney said in a statement accompanying the data.

The deficit in the 12 months through September was \$113 billion - or 17 percent - bigger than in the same period a year earlier. Adjusting for calendar effects, the gap was even larger, the Treasury official said. The Bipartisan Policy Center called the report “a wake up call” for policymakers to turn things around. “The fact that our government is closing in on trillion-dollar deficits in the midst of an economic expansion should be a serious issue for voters and candidates,” William Hoagland, its senior vice president, said of next month’s U.S. congressional elections. Much of the widening of the deficit came from more spending on interest payments on the national debt. Borrowing has increased over the past year, partially to make up for slower growth in tax revenues because of the tax cuts, while military spending has also risen. Adding debt servicing costs, the U.S. Federal Reserve is raising interest rates roughly once per quarter in the face of a hot labor market and some signs of inflation. Some Fed officials have warned that rising U.S. deficits could hamper any U.S. fiscal response to a downturn. Trump has in turn criticized the Fed’s monetary tightening, saying last week that the central bank had “gone crazy.” [Source: Business News | Jason Lange & Jonathan Spicer | October 15, 2018 ++]

Social Security Number Update 02 ► Digital Update Needed

The paper Social Security card has been a staple of American life for nearly a century, but researchers say this bedrock of federal identification is due for a digital update in the face of clever cybercriminals. “Modernizing the [Social Security number] gives the U.S. an opportunity to fix one of the internet’s most pressing problems: authentication,” according to an October report from McAfee and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. The report comes as cybercriminals have preyed on the nine-digit number. Anywhere between 60 to 80 percent of Social Security

numbers had been reported stolen by 2015, and there have been more large-scale breaches since, according to the study. Addressing the need to secure an identifier that was never designed to participate in digital commerce would help “to create the trusted foundation for innovation in improved authentication of identity.” “The United States needs to move the Social Security card into the 21st century,” the report said, recommending the solution be a “smart card” that includes an embedded chip like the one now ubiquitous on credit and debit cards. The chip would supply a proxy number, while the actual Social Security number would be encrypted in a digital “vault.” This way, if the proxy number was compromised, it wouldn’t immediately provide access to all the records tied to the SSN and a new proxy could be generated without having to assign a new SSN. McAfee and CSIS argued that smart cards would be the best path for modernization because there is already extensive experience with using chip-and-PIN cards on a mass scale, they could be slowly introduced, and they would be easier to implement. A digital smart card could have similar benefits as two-factor authentication or other types of biometrics that “make life harder for cybercriminals,” according to the report. [Source: Fifth Dominion | Justin Lynch | October 11, 2018 ++]

Newspaper Shut Downs ► The United States Has Lost Almost 1,800 Since 2004

More than one in five newspapers shut down in the last 15 years, leaving half of the country’s 3,143 counties with only one newspaper—typically a small weekly—to cover dozens of communities, according to new research from the University of North Carolina’s Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media. “The United States has lost almost 1,800 papers since 2004, including more than 60 dailies and 1,700 weeklies,” says “The Expanding News Desert,” a year-long study released this month. “Roughly half of the remaining 7,112 in the country—1,283 dailies and 5,829 weeklies—are located in small and rural communities. The vast majority—around 5,500—have a circulation of less than 15,000.”

The loss of local journalism ripples throughout a community, leading to less independent governmental oversight and lower levels of civic engagement. A 2011 report from the Federal Communications Commission found that local newspapers are adept at breaking down the major issues confronting communities and giving residents the information needed to solve problems. Another study released this summer found that local governments ended up spending more to borrow money after a newspaper closure, while government inefficiencies increase. The authors concluded that their research suggests “that local newspapers are important for the health of local capital markets.”

But in many communities, the economic support for newsgathering has dwindled. The UNC report notes that many areas lack the “digital or print revenue” to pay for the kind of public service journalism that newspapers provided. “Therefore, the fate of communities and the vitality of local news—whether delivered over the internet, the airwaves or in print—are intrinsically linked.”

Researchers at UNC have been tracking and quantifying the loss of newspapers across the country since 2016. Initially, that research was based on analysis of two industry databases that track newspapers, but the new report adds three layers of verification to determine the status of more than 9,000 newspapers, including information obtained from press associations and interviews with staff members at individual newspapers. The project, spearheaded by Penelope Muse Abernathy, the Knight Chair in Journalism and Digital Media Economics at UNC, includes an interactive map that allows users to examine the country’s media landscape down to the county level.

News deserts are most likely to pop up in areas that are already struggling. “The people with the least access to local news are often the most vulnerable—the poorest, least educated and most isolated,” the report says. And surviving newspapers are, in most cases, shells of their former selves. Faced with budget shortages, most publications have dramatically scaled back staffing levels, leading to cutbacks in coverage of neighborhoods, rural areas and government. More than half of all newspapers have changed ownership in the past decade, and the largest 25 newspaper chains now own a third of all newspapers, including two-thirds of the country’s 1,200 dailies. Those arrangements typically leave management decisions, including budget oversight, to people who do not reside or work

in the newspapers' coverage areas. "The consolidation in the industry places decisions about the future of individual papers, as well as the communities where they are located, into the hands of owners with no direct stake in the outcome," the report says.

Entrepreneurs and media startups are experimenting with ways to replace the lost coverage traditionally provided by newspapers, but those models are largely centered around large metropolitan areas, the report notes. Researchers outline a handful of lessons for publications hoping to buck the trend and survive in the changing media landscape, including investing in human capital (journalists and sales departments), diversifying revenue sources to rely less on print advertising, and having a strategy in place for transforming at least a third of their business model every five years. "Their leaders establish five-year financial goals (for costs, revenue and profitability), and then identify and prioritize initiatives most likely to lead to long-term profitability and success, even if that means lower profit today," they write.

Ensuring that local journalism survives is crucial for communities and for "trust in democracy at all levels," the report says. "Through the stories they publish, local newspapers help us 'understand how we are related to people we may not know we are related to.' They also educate us, providing us with information to guide important decisions that will affect the quality of our own lives, as well as those of future generations. An entire community—even non-voters—benefits when voters make informed decisions about local candidates and policies." [Source: GovExec Route Fifty | Kate Elizabeth Queram | October 20, 2018 ++]

Car Blunders ► 7 That Could Cost Drivers this Winter

Fail to take these simple — but often overlooked — car preparation steps and you will regret it once the snow begins to fly. As the last days of fall fade, it's time to prepare your car for colder, more hazardous weather. Getting a jump-start on this task can help ensure that your vehicle is in tip-top shape before winter winds howl and snow and ice start to accumulate on roadways. However, if you fail to take these seven simple — but often overlooked — steps, you might regret it once the snow begins to fly.

1. Not having your mechanic inspect hoses, belts and fluids

Winter temperatures can be pretty brutal on your car. If you have a cracked hose or a worn belt, the frigid air just might be the final blow. The last thing you want is to be stranded on the roadside when a blizzard is raging or the temperature is south of zero. Do yourself a favor and have your favorite mechanic look over your car on a pleasant fall day. You'll thank yourself come January.

2. Failing to repair paint blemishes

If you live in a northern clime, you know that Old Man Winter can apply a coat of rust to your shiny ride. If you hope to keep him at bay, it's crucial that you repair little scratches before winter begins. According to the Your Mechanic website <https://www.yourmechanic.com/article/how-to-repair-scratches-on-a-car>. Paint blemishes, if they are left unrepaired, can not only make your car appear worn and old but can rust, corrode, or spread. That means more costly repairs that must be done by specialized body shops. Fixing these imperfections can be easier than you think. Auto parts stores sell touch-up paint that you can use to keep rust at bay. Your Mechanic says you can find the car's paint code on the information label on the driver's door pillar.

3. Skipping a coat of wax

Road salt is an inevitable part of keeping roads safe for drivers throughout the winter months. But that salt can wreak havoc on your car's exterior. A good coat of wax can help protect your car.

4. Leaving the wrong floor mats in place

Floor mats aren't typically on the radar for most drivers planning to prepare their cars for colder weather. Yet, installing the right mats can help ensure the interior of your vehicle makes it through snowboots season unscathed.

The Wirecutter website <http://thewirecutter.com/reviews/the-best-car-floor-mats-and-liners> notes that the right floor mat “better protects your car’s carpets from water, snow, muck, and other messy things that can get tracked into the vehicle or spilled onto the floor.” <https://www.autoaccessoriesgarage.com/Floor-Mats-Liners> has some helpful tips for choosing the right floor mats for your car.

5. Forgetting to replace the wiper blades

A heavy snowfall is no time to suddenly remember that you meant to change your wiper blades back in September.

It’s easy to procrastinate on this task, and millions of drivers do just that. But worn wiper blades can smear snow and ice, putting your ability to see the road — and ultimately, your life — at risk. Many auto experts suggest changing your wiper blades both in the spring and the fall. And this is one repair that almost everyone can do on their own. Just stop by an auto parts store and tell the clerk the make and model of your car. Once you have the right pair of replacement blades, it takes just a few seconds to snap them into place.

6. Not checking your tires

Winter is the season when your tires need to be at their best. So, have them checked now, long before bad weather suddenly appears, to ensure they have the proper tread. If the tires are in good shape, make sure they are properly inflated. And that goes for all your tires, including the spare. Remember that cold weather causes tires to lose air more quickly. So, check your pressure at least monthly.

7. Driving without an emergency kit

Ah, fall — you can sit on your deck with cup of hot cider and watch the golden leaves glisten in the autumn sun. While enjoying this reverie, remember that it won’t last. Colder days lie just ahead. So, take a moment or two to jot down a few notes about items that you might need in the event of a winter emergency. Then, purchase the items over the next several weeks and store them in your car. The National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence recommends keeping the following items on hand:

- Extra gloves
- Boots and blankets
- Flares
- A small shovel and a container of sand or kitty litter
- Tire chains
- A flashlight and extra batteries
- A cellphone and an extra car charger
- “High-energy” snacks in your glove box

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Melissa Neiman | October 23, 2018 ++]

USAF Captain SoCalGas Lawsuit ► \$46 Million Settlement Reached

An Air Force captain Jason Lo, who nearly died after he was struck by a SoCalGas truck and dragged 430 feet in Hawthorne last year, has reached a \$46 million settlement with the utility, his attorneys said Monday. The agreement was announced after jurors awarded Jason Lo a nearly \$41.9 million verdict in his negligence lawsuit against SoCalGas and driver Dominick Consolazio, and they were set to award punitive damages, according to Panish Shea & Boyle LLP.

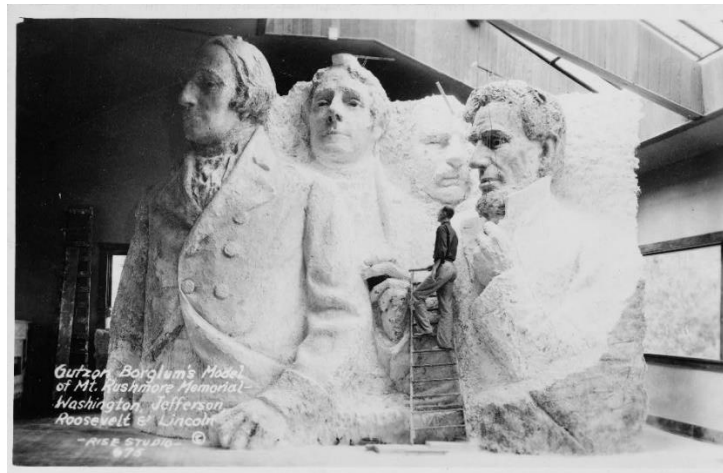
Consolazio suffered a seizure when he struck Lo as the captain waited for a red light on his motorcycle on Rosecrans Avenue at Hindry Avenue on the morning of Feb. 13, 2017. Lo became wedged underneath the front end of the pickup truck, which came to a stop at the intersection for 23 seconds, according to the lawsuit. When Consolazio regained consciousness, he dragged Lo 430 feet as he attempted to flee the accident and get on the freeway. Witnesses

got out of their cars to try to stop Consolazio before he was arrested by police. He later pleaded no contest to felony hit-and-run causing injury and was sentenced to five years' probation and community service hours, according to court records.

The lawsuit filed in March 2017 alleged Consolazio and SoCalGas should have known he was unfit to work as a driver because he suffered from epilepsy and continued to have seizures despite taking medication, including one six weeks before the collision. Supervisors also knew Consolazio went on disability leave for six months and had his driver's license suspended following a severe seizure in 2012 not long after he worked 79 hours of overtime for the company in one week. Lo lost 40 percent of his blood and spent nearly a month in the hospital after the crash, nearly losing his leg and his life and undergoing multiple surgeries. He is disfigured and still at risk of amputation.

The trial in downtown Los Angeles lasted nearly a month and featured the playing of security-video that captured the incident. In a statement, attorney Brian Panish said "the winner in this case is the civil justice system, which again proved that disputes can be resolved by 12 members of the community." "The Lo family will live with this tragedy for the rest of their lives," Panish continued. "The settlement reached by the parties after the jury's substantial verdict will enable this young couple to move forward, build a family and get Captain Lo the medical care he will need in the future." SoCalGas issued a statement 22 OCT saying it "took responsibility very early in the litigation process and admitted liability for our driver's actions because they occurred during the course and scope of his employment." "We respect the jury's role in deciding the verdict and extend our sincere condolences to Mr. Lo and his family for the injuries and hardship they have endured," the statement said. [Source: Los Angeles Daily News | Megan Barnes | October 25, 2018 ++]

Interesting Photos ► Mount Rushmore Prototype



The original prototype for Mount Rushmore, 1923.

Have You Heard? ► Presumption | Best Last Kiss | Poker Pair

Presumption

The wedding ceremony came to the point where the minister asked if anyone had anything to say concerning the union of the bride and groom. The moment of utter silence was broken when a beautiful young woman carrying a child

stood up. She starts walking slowly towards the minister. The congregation was aghast - you could almost hear a pin drop. The groom's jaw dropped as he stared in disbelief at the approaching young woman and child. Chaos ensued. The bride threw the bouquet into the air and burst out crying. Then the groom's mother fainted. The best men started giving each other looks and wondering how to save the situation. The minister asked the woman, "Can you tell us why you came forward? What do you have to say?" There was absolute silence in the church. The woman replied, "We can't hear you in the back."

And that illustrates what happens when people are considered guilty until proven innocent.

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The Old Rancher

The banker saw his old friend Tom, an eighty year old rancher, in town. Tom had lost his wife a year or so before and rumor had it that he was marrying a 'mail order' bride. Being a good friend, the banker asked Tom if the rumor was true. Tom assured him that it was. The banker then asked Tom the age of his new bride to be. Tom proudly said, 'She'll be twenty-one in November.'

Now the banker, being the wise man that he was, could see that the sexual appetite of a young woman could not be satisfied by an eighty-year-old. Wanting his old friend's remaining years to be happy the banker tactfully suggested that Tom should consider getting a hired hand to help him out on the ranch, knowing nature would take its own course. Tom thought this was a good idea and said he would look for one that afternoon..

About four months later, the banker ran into Tom in town again.. 'How's the new wife?', asked the banker. Tom proudly said, 'Good - she's pregnant.' The banker, happy that his sage advice had worked out, continued, 'And how's the hired hand?' Without hesitating, Tom said, 'She's pregnant too.'

Don't ever underestimate us old Guys.

-o-o-O-o-o-

Poker Pair

Dolly Parton and Queen Elizabeth went to the Pearly Gates on the same day. They both met with an angel to find out if they would be admitted to Heaven. The angel said: "Unfortunately, there's only one space available in Heaven today so I must decide which one of you will be admitted."

The angel asked Dolly if there was some particular reason why she should go to Heaven. Dolly took off her top and said: "Look at these, they're the most perfect breasts God ever created and I'm sure it will please God to be able to see them every day, for eternity."

The angel thanked Dolly, and asked Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the same question.

The Queen walked over to a toilet, pulled the lever and flushed it without saying a word.

The Angel immediately said: "Okay, your Majesty, you may go into Heaven."

Dolly was outraged and asked, "What was that all about? I showed you two of God's own perfect creations and you turned me down. She simply flushed a commode and she got admitted to Heaven! Would you explain that to me?"

"Sorry, Dolly," said the Angel, "but even in Heaven, a royal flush beats a pair."

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Note: Never go shark fishing with a friend who suddenly starts referring to you as "old chum."



You know, there are some things that you just never think of like Mt. Rushmore from the Canadian side.

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RAO Bulletin Editor/Publisher:

Lt. James (EMO) Tichacek, USN (Ret) Tel: (858) 842-1111 Email: raoemo@sbcglobal.net
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RAO Baguio Director:

SSgt Terrance (Terry) Parker, USAF (Ret), PSC 517 Box 4107, FPO AP 96517-1000, Tel: Smart 0921824728 or Globe 09454073380, Email: rao.dir.baguio@gmail.com

RAO Baguio Office: Mountain Lodge, 27 Leonard Wood Road, Baguio City, 2600 Philippines
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