

RAO

BULLETIN

15 December 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.
3. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin to other vets or veteran organizations.

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U.S. Space Force Update 08 ► Trump Draft Plan | Independent Military Branch

President Donald Trump plans to go ahead with asking Congress to establish a Space Force as an independent branch of the military, according to a draft presidential directive obtained by POLITICO — committing to the biggest restructuring of the U.S. military in seven decades despite bipartisan skepticism on Capitol Hill. The draft, produced after months of internal review, outlines much-awaited details for what would be the first new military service since

1947. It indicates that Trump, who has championed the standalone Space Force, is still interested in pursuing an entirely new branch, despite criticism of the proposal on Capitol Hill and even initial opposition within the Pentagon. The White House directive provides no estimate of what the Space Force would cost, although previous estimates have ranged from less than \$5 billion to as high as \$13 billion over five years.

Under the proposal, the Department of the Space Force would be headed by a civilian secretary — just like the Army, Navy and Air Force — and either a four-star general or admiral. The latter person would also serve as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, according to the draft directive dated 19 NOV. "Under this proposal, the Space Force will organize, train and equip national security space forces of the United States to ensure unfettered access to and freedom to operate in space, and to provide vital capabilities ... in peacetime and across the spectrum of conflict," the draft directive says. The Space Force's priorities, the draft says, would include "protecting the nation's interests in space and the peaceful use of space for all responsible actors"; "detering aggression and defending the nation, U.S. allies and U.S. interests from hostile acts in and from space"; and "projecting power in, from and to space in support of the nation's interests."

The White House and Pentagon did not respond to requests for comment on the draft, which is still awaiting final review. The new branch would draw troops from across the military (including the National Guard and Reserves) that are dedicated to a broad range of military tasks, including intelligence, weapons acquisition and cyber operations. It would also be responsible for overseeing the acquisition of all space technologies and weapons, including a new Space Development Agency. The president also intends to carry out plans already underway at the direction of Congress to establish a U.S. Space Command, according to the draft. The command would absorb all space-related responsibilities now carried out by U.S. Strategic Command and would train space forces from all the military branches until a Space Force is established.

The Space Force's exact authorities for operating in combat still need to be fleshed out, according to the draft. It calls on the National Space Council and National Security Council to carry out an "accelerated review of proposed space operational authorities," a task the White House space body that Trump reestablished last year discussed as its public meeting in October. The Space Force would not include any elements of NASA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or other civilian agencies with a role in space. Nor would it subsume the National Reconnaissance Office, which builds and operates spy satellites for both the military and spy agencies and under the proposal remains independent, the directive says.

However, the draft directive does order closer cooperation between the Pentagon and intelligence agencies in space operations, calling on the secretary of Defense and director of national intelligence to complete a report within 180 days laying out new ways to collaborate. The White House document is effectively a summary of a fuller legislative proposal that the Pentagon is preparing for Congress that will be delivered to the Office of Management and Budget this week. The House and Senate, which have the constitutional authority to raise armies, will ultimately have to agree to the new branch — and provide the funding. The directive says the Pentagon will propose a budget as part of its fiscal year 2020 spending request early next year. But in a sign that the administration anticipates pushback from Congress, it maintains that the forthcoming legislative proposal "provide the discretionary authority to ensure a lean model" for the Space Force's headquarters and bureaucracy.

A senior defense official involved in the deliberations said that the proposal is designed to be scaled up or down in size, depending on what option the administration feels could clear Congress, and that a Pentagon working group is still assessing various options short of a full-blown military branch. Those include a smaller Space Corps that would fall under the Air Force. Rep. Adam Smith (D-Wash.), who is expected to chair the Armed Services Committee beginning in January, opposes a separate Space Force, saying it would bring unnecessary costs and overhead. He has expressed openness to other approaches to beefing up the military space mission. "What was achievable last month is not achievable today," the official said, referring to Democratic ascendancy in the House. [Source: POLITICO | Jacqueline Klimas | November 29, 2018 ++]

Transgender Troops Update 20 ► Trump Asks Court to Allow Temporary Ban Enforcement

The Trump administration is asking the Supreme Court to allow enforcement of a ban on transgender people serving in the military while it fights legal challenges to the new policy. Solicitor General Noel Francisco filed two requests to Justice Elena Kagan and one request to Chief Justice John Roberts on 13 DEC asking the court to stay injunctions that three lower courts put in place. The moves by those courts are preventing the administration from enforcing its transgender ban.

The request come a couple of weeks after Francisco asked the Supreme Court to bypass an appeals court and review the rulings. He is now asking the court to put on hold rulings from courts in the Central District of California, Western District of Washington and District of Columbia. “It is with great reluctance that we seek such emergency relief in this court,” he wrote Thursday in the almost-identical filings. “Unfortunately this case is part of a growing trend in which federal district courts, at the behest of particular plaintiffs, have issued nationwide injunctions, typically on a preliminary basis, against major policy initiatives.” Francisco said such injunctions that were previously rare have become routine under Trump. “In less than two years, federal courts have issued 25 of them, blocking a wide range of significant policies involving national security, national defense, immigration and domestic issues,” he wrote.

Defense Secretary James Mattis announced the ban earlier this year. Francisco said the government seeks a stay only if the court refuses to review the lower court rulings before the 9th Circuit and the Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit weigh in. If the court agrees to review the rulings, Francisco said a stay isn’t needed because the justices are likely to issue their decision by the end of June. “Because such a decision would potentially allow the military to begin implementing the Mattis policy in the reasonably near future, the government does not seek interim relief in the event the court grants certiorari before judgment,” he wrote. Francisco said the court should at a minimum block the nationwide scope of the rulings.

It takes four justices to agree to hear a case and five justices to grant a stay request. Though Francisco submitted these requests to individual justices, they often get referred to the full court for review. Francisco said Mattis announced the ban after an extensive review of military service by transgender individuals. “In arriving at that new policy, Secretary Mattis and a panel of senior military leaders and other experts determined that the prior policy, adopted by Secretary Mattis’s predecessor, posed too great a risk to military effectiveness and lethality,” he said. [Source: The Hill | Lydia Wheeler | December 13, 2018 ++]

Missile Defense Update 01 ► Missile in Space Shoot Down Test Successful

The U.S. Navy and Missile Defense Agency continued a hot streak 11 DEC when they successfully shot down an intermediate-range ballistic missile target in space from its Hawaii-based Aegis Ashore facility. The test marked the second consecutive successful intercept for the SM-3 Block IIA missile in development. The intercept followed an October success, which shook off two hard-luck consecutive failures — one caused by a sailor error and a second caused by a misfired third-stage rocket motor. Both tests were on course for a successful intercept when the respective mishaps occurred, officials told Defense News.

The missile, which was launched from Hawaii, fired on a track from a sensor that was a significant distance from the Aegis Ashore Missile Defense Test Complex at the Pacific Missile Rang Facility at Kauai, said Mark Wright, spokesman for the Missile Defense Agency. Aegis Ashore never had a native track on the missile, Wright confirmed, meaning the missile that was shot from that facility successfully locked onto a target, which was entirely tracked by a non-native sensor relaying its tracking data, a key capability under development by the MDA.

The SM-3 Block IIA is a co-development between the U.S. and Japan, and it is expected to be equipped on both the U.S. Aegis Ashore stations in Romania and Poland and the future Aegis Ashore stations in Japan — making it a keystone to America’s short- and intermediate-range missile defense strategies. The European Aegis Ashore sites have been the source of significant tension between Russia and the U.S., with Russian President Vladimir Putin regularly criticizing the platform and accusing the U.S. of attempting to upset the strategic balance.



The U.S. Navy and Missile Defense Agency conducted a successful intercept of an intermediate-range ballistic missile with an SM-3 Block IIA fired from an Aegis Ashore facility in Hawaii

In a release, the MDA said the missile was fired by a U.S. Air Force C-17 “thousands of miles southwest of the Aegis Ashore test site that launched the SM-3 Block IIA interceptor.” “The engagement leveraged a ground, air and space-based sensor/command and control architecture linked by the Ballistic Missile Defense System’s Command and Control, Battle Management, and Communications (C2BMC) suite,” the release said. In a statement, the head of the MDA said the test proved the technology going into the missile defense capabilities in Europe are on course.

“Today’s successful flight test demonstrated the effectiveness of the European Phased Adaptive Approach Phase 3 architecture,” said Lt. Gen. Sam Greaves. “It also was of great significance to the future of multi-domain missile defense operations and supports a critical initial production acquisition milestone for the SM-3 Block IIA missile program. “This system is designed to defend the United States, its deployed forces, allies, and friends from a real and growing ballistic missile threat. I offer my congratulations to all members of the team, military, civilian, contractors and allies who helped make this possible.” This is the third successful intercept out of five intercept tests for the SM-3 Block IIA. [Source: DefenseNews | David B. Larter | December 11, 2018 ++]

US-Russia INF Treaty ► U.S. Gives 60-Day Notice of Suspension

The United States on 4 DEC formally accused Russia of violating a major arms control treaty, taking the first step to leaving the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty — which could lead to the eventual placement of ground-based cruise missiles in Europe. Speaking at NATO headquarters, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said: “The United States today declares it has found Russia in material breach of the treaty and will suspend our obligations as a remedy, effective in 60 days, unless Russia returns to full and verifiable compliance.” The decision to “suspend” is key, signaling that the U.S. has not yet made the full decision to withdraw from the agreement. Regardless of this 60-day window, the Trump administration can announce it is withdrawing at any time, but must include a six-month notice period to officially exit the treaty, per the language of the agreement.

The Russian Foreign Ministry denied the allegations, with ministerial spokeswoman Maria Zakharova telling reporters in Moscow on 4 DEC that “Russia strictly complies with the provisions of the treaty, and the American side is aware of that.” The move is not wholly unexpected, as news leaked that U.S. President Donald Trump planned to withdraw from the treaty in October. But the timing had been unclear until Pompeo’s speech. The INF Treaty, signed between the U.S. and Russia in 1987, bans all land-based cruise missiles with a range between 500 and 5,500 kilometers. While the Obama administration had accused Moscow of violating the agreement by deploying such systems, Pentagon officials have been more vocal under the Trump administration about their concerns.

To the administration, Russia is violating the agreement while the U.S. is holding to its standards, harming America’s defensive posture. With those concerns in mind, since coming to office, Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis has been publicly ambivalent about the value of the treaty. Officials at the 1 DEC Reagan National Defense Forum were clearly laying the groundwork for the administration’s argument. Speaking to Defense News, Andrea Thompson, undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, said Russia has been warned for five years now that the U.S. believes it is violating the treaty, and the country should not be surprised the White House has taken action. “We’ve told Russia again and again, ‘The ball is in your court. We’ve shown you intelligence, we’ve shown you information, we’ve come to the table,’ and they have yet to come back into compliance,” she said. “When it comes to arms control, it’s important to maintain the standards and discipline of that,” Thompson added. “Arms control regimes only work if you abide by them, which the United States has.”

The issue is trickier for allies in Europe, who have benefited most directly from the removal of ground-based cruise missiles. British Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson told reporters over the weekend that “we want the INF treaty to continue and to be a successful treaty,” while also repeating the U.S. line several times in response to questions. “It isn’t reasonable to expect the United States to be the only nation that’s upholding a treaty that’s been signed by two people. The people who are in the wrong are the Russians, and that is why Russia needs to get back in line,” Williamson said. “The next few weeks are so incredibly critical. It’s where as much pressure from every European nation needs to be placed on Russia, for Russia to abide by its treaty obligations,” he added. “Because I don’t think anyone would want to see the treaty end, but the treaty doesn’t exist when you have one nation ignoring its obligations as part of the treaty.”

The fate of the INF Treaty has been discussed among the nonproliferation and arms control community since the news leaked in October, with some raising concerns about what the withdrawal means for other arms control agreements, including the potential for negotiation around the New START nuclear reduction treaty. And some experts who agree Russia has violated the treaty believe the Trump administration’s handling of the issue plays into the hands of Russian propaganda. But in Congress, the idea of leaving the INF Treaty has largely been met along partisan lines in Congress, with Republicans backing the move as a sign of force against Russia, and Democrats raising the alarm that leaving the treaty represents a step toward a nuclear arms race — a divide summed up neatly by the two lead defense authorizers on Capitol Hill.

“For too long, [Russian President] Vladimir Putin has openly flaunted the INF Treaty, and President Trump is right to put him on notice. The United States will no longer tolerate Russian deception at the expense of national security and the security of our allies,” said Sen Jim Inhofe (R-OK), the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. “Secretary Pompeo has put Putin on the clock — 60 days to change course and comply with the treaty, or else the United States will withdraw. A treaty with only one side complying is unsustainable. Can Putin be trusted to uphold Russia’s international commitments? I won’t hold my breath.”

His expected counterpart on the House Armed Services Committee, Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA) hit a different tone, saying: “The Trump administration is unilaterally taking action on the INF Treaty without meaningful consultation and coordination with our NATO allies. Setting us on a precipitous course toward withdrawal from this treaty undermines the NATO alliance and trans-Atlantic security, while playing directly into President Putin’s plans to divide us.”

Undersecretary Thompson believes that at least one major arms control treaty — the Open Skies agreement, which allows certain overflights of U.S. and Russian military assets by each nation — will survive even if the INF Treaty goes down. “Open Skies, this year, Russia was in violation of the Open Skies treaty as well. There [were] decisions made later, in the past couple of months, so we are now back on track with Open Skies,” Thompson said. “So expect 2019 to be more successful than 2018.” [Source: DefenseNews | Aaron Mehta | December 5, 2018 ++]

US-Russia INF Treaty Update 01 ► Putin Response to Suspension Notice

Russian President Vladimir Putin on 5 DEC warned the United States that if it walks out of a key arms treaty and starts developing the type of missiles banned by it, Russia will do the same. Putin’s remarks to Russian news agencies on Wednesday came a day after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced at a NATO meeting that Washington will suspend its obligations under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in 60 days, citing Russian “cheating.” The U.S. has shared intelligence evidence with its NATO allies that it says shows that Russia’s new SSC-8 ground-fired cruise missile could give Moscow the ability to launch a nuclear strike in Europe with little or no notice. Russia has denied the accusations.

Putin on Wednesday accused the United States of making up excuses for pulling out of the pact, saying that the U.S. first made up its mind to walk out of it and only then “started to look for the reasons why they should do it.” “It seems that our American partners believe that the situation has changed so much that the U.S. has to have this type of weapons,” he said in televised remarks. “What would be our response? A very simple one: in that case, we will do the same.” Speaking at a briefing of foreign military attaches earlier, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, chief of staff of the Russian military, warned of a Russian response and said that it would be the countries that host U.S. intermediate-range missiles that would become immediate targets for Russia.



If the U.S. "were to destroy" the arms control treaty "we will not leave it without a response," deputy chief of General Staff of Russia Valery Gerasimov, left, said Dec. 5 in Moscow, Russia

U.S. ally Germany, which has been keen to preserve the treaty, called on Russia to try to save it while it still has the time. "The INF treaty is of great significance for security in Europe," government spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer said in Berlin on Wednesday. "The German government welcomes the fact that the American government is giving its preservation another chance," she added, referring to the 60-day deadline. She also noted that the issue came up in a meeting between Chancellor Angela Merkel and Trump in Argentina on Saturday. "It is now up to Russia to avert the end of the treaty," Demmer said. [Source: The Associated Press | Natalya Vasilyeva | December 5, 2018 ++]

DoD Transgender Lawsuits Update 11 ► Doe v. Trump DEC 10 Hearing

The Trump administration's effort to ban transgender personnel from military service will face major tests in the coming months, culminating in a potential Supreme Court decision that could decide whether the Pentagon's decision process was constitutional, according to organizations representing the troops. On Dec. 10, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit will hear government appeals in *Doe v. Trump*, in which the courts decided that the Pentagon had to comply with previous DoD policy allowing transgender recruits to enlist by Jan. 1, 2018.

More important may be a January Supreme Court deadline. Attorneys representing the transgender plaintiffs have until 24 DEC to file their response to the White House's request last week that the Supreme Court take up the transgender military service ban, effectively jumping past all of the lower court proceedings that are still in play. The Supreme Court would have to decide by 18 JAN whether it will weigh in during this term. If the court does hear the case, it could set national policy on transgender military service.

However, the 10 DEC case also has important implications for the military. While the 1 JAN enlistment deadline has already been decided, the court will now be asked to weigh in on whether President Donald Trump's July 2017 tweets and subsequent order to Defense Secretary Jim Mattis in August 2017, which were later reflected in the Pentagon's March 2018 policy memo on transgender service, should be subject to the military deference doctrine in the courts. Military deference doctrine refers to the the courts' general deference to the military's decision-making process on national security matters. However, the courts maintain a right to review and weigh into constitutional questions, such as whether a military policy discriminates on the basis of gender or sexual preference.

Plaintiffs attorneys involved in the cases briefed reporters 29 NOV on the condition they not be named. The attorneys said the military's decisions on transgender service "were based on bias, not military judgment," and were driven directly by the president's tweets. Since the ban was first announced, every service chief has stated publicly that having transgender personnel in the ranks does not negatively affect military readiness. If the court finds the March 2018 memo is separate and should be subject to military deference, the attorneys said they worry it will expand the number of issues the military can shield from legal challenge.

As *Doe v. Trump* has progressed, government lawyers have argued it is Mattis' 2018 memo that should be under consideration, not the tweets nor Trump's direct August 2017 order to the Pentagon. In the latest filing available to the public, government lawyers have asked the court to quickly separate the two, so the March 2018 memo can be fully implemented. Further delay, they said, would harm military readiness. In their request to the Supreme Court to hear the cases, government attorneys argued that Mattis' decision reflected an "extensive process of consultation" and that a ruling against the administration and Pentagon would undermine "an issue of imperative public importance: the authority of the U.S. military to determine who may serve in the Nation's armed forces."

Amanda Johnston, a spokeswoman for GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders said the government has provided no proof that transgender service negatively impacts military readiness. In addition, transgender service members have enlisted since 1 JAN, and hundreds are currently serving openly, with no apparent impact, she said. "Every single day that goes by with transgender service members serving undermines their case," Johnston said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Tara Copp | December 3, 2018 ++]

Navy Ship Workloads ► 7th Fleet 100-Hour Workweeks Impact on Readiness

While the Navy has made progress revamping its surface fleet in the aftermath of two fatal warship collisions last year, some sailors based in Japan continue to log 100-hour weeks, often going without much sleep, a government watchdog reported 12 DEC. Manning shortages, maintenance and training neglect -- plus a bruising operational tempo — all came under public scrutiny last summer after two destroyer collisions in the Western Pacific killed 17

sailors assigned to 7th Fleet. Navy reports also cited fatigue and crew shortages as factors in the twin tragedies involving the destroyers Fitzgerald and John S. McCain and a pair of commercial vessels.

Testifying on Capitol Hill, Government Accountability Office analyst John Pendleton said a team of investigators he led in November to interview 7th Fleet personnel saw improvements to the forward-deployed Navy's systemic problems. But the ongoing reforms are overworking sailors, too. "Sailors consistently told us that ship workload has not decreased, and it is still extremely challenging to complete all required workload while getting enough sleep," Pendleton said in a statement delivered to lawmakers at a hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee's seapower and readiness and management subcommittees. "It's simply not putting enough sailors on the ships to cover the new workload," Pendleton said. "They told us they're still working very hard, sometimes a 100-hour week or more."

Manning remains a problem when it comes to placing the right number of sailors on a ship and ensuring those sailors are qualified for a given job, known in the sea service as "fit and fill." "The Navy's methods for tracking fit and fill do not account for sailor experience and may be inaccurately capturing the actual presence of sailors onboard and available for duty on its ship," Pendleton wrote in an updated GAO report on Navy readiness released Wednesday. The GAO warned in a May 2017 report that the Navy's process for determining manpower requirements failed to fully account for a ship's workload: "The Navy was using outdated standards to calculate the size of ship crews that may have been leading to overburdened crews working long hours."

GAO's updated report cautioned that until manpower requirements are reassessed across the fleet, the Navy risks undersized crews filled with overworked sailors, a mix that could produce "potential negative effects on readiness and safety." "Navy officials told us that manning challenges will continue through at least fiscal year 2021 as the Navy increases its end strength and trains its new sailors to gain the proper mix of skills to operate and maintain the fleet," the report states.

Pendleton also reported areas of improvement for the surface fleet. Roughly 41 percent of Japan-based cruiser and destroyer training certifications were expired as of September 2017. That plummeted to 9 percent in November, with less than 3 percent of expired certifications dogging ships in operational status, Pendleton told senators. "What I found was encouraging," he said. "Things have improved markedly. However, this is keeping the sailors very busy." The 7th Fleet also is doing a better job at ensuring vessels have updated certifications before heading to sea. Navy leaders instituted controls that limit the number of training waivers issued to let crews leave port, he said. A year ago, officials were providing waivers for those training requirements "at an alarming rate," Pendleton said, and that "lack of training had contributed to these deadly collisions."

Navy Secretary Richard Spencer, Vice Chief of Naval Operations Bill Moran and Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Robert Neller joined Pendleton at the hearing which again laid bare the multiple challenges facing today's Navy and Marine Corps. They must rebuild readiness after nearly 20 years of relentless post-9/11 operational tempo, while also preparing for conventional war, maintaining the current global order and developing weapons systems of the future. Rising rivals like China and Russia "have had to do nothing other than recapitalize their forces," Neller said. Several senators expressed skepticism regarding a directive by Defense Secretary James Mattis this fall that fighter jets reach 80 percent readiness in the next year. Spencer called it "a stretch goal," but "it's a stretch goal we will take."

When Sen. Mazie Hirono, a Democrat from Hawaii, expressed concern about "innovative accounting techniques" getting the services to that 80 percent goal, Spencer reassured her that "it's not going to be done by pencil-whipping." During the hearing, both military leaders and lawmakers warned of dire consequences should Congress and the White House relaunch the so-called "sequestration" cuts to defense funding. If a spending deal isn't hammered out by the fall, automatic funding caps put in place in 2011 would return, a development Spencer said would be "devastating, in many ways," crippling the readiness recovery efforts underway. "It would be more than just Blue Angels not doing air shows," Neller warned.

While sequestration didn't help, the GAO's Pendleton said the Navy also suffered "a demand and supply problem." "The Army...they were able to bring more folks home, and retrain," he said. "For the Navy and Air Force...demand didn't really slow down. They had to continue to find ways to meet the demand with a shrinking fleet."

The long wait for maintenance among the Navy's submarines was also discussed at the hearing. To the chagrin of South Dakota Republican Sen. Mike Rounds, VCNO Moran reported three fast-attack submarines couldn't dive today because they're still awaiting maintenance. One of them, the Boise, has been out of commission for four years waiting for repairs, GAO recently reported. Moran bemoaned the maintenance backlog as "the age-old problem of what we talked about in the last two years of this hearing." He pointed to aging ballistic missile subs taking priority in the public shipyards, followed by aircraft carriers "which had been ridden very hard." Moran said the Navy is enlisting the private sector to mend boats faster. "We want no more Boises," Moran said. "The numbers are coming down significantly. The standing in line is coming down significantly." [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | December 12, 2018 ++]

Camp Lejeune ► Hurricane Florence Damage | \$3.6 billion +

The top Marine told lawmakers 12 DEC that the price tag to replace some of the buildings aboard Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, damaged by Hurricane Florence was roughly \$3.6 billion. Roughly 31 buildings prioritized by the Corps fall under the massive price tag, but Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Robert B. Neller said there were more buildings damaged in the storm. "If you were to take the buildings that we would consider to be not worth the cost of repair, but that they would need to be rebuilt, that total bill comes to about \$3.6 billion," Neller told senators. "We don't believe it is cost effective to repair buildings that are 35 to 50 years old," Neller added.



Hurricane Florence struck Camp Lejeune in mid-September, and set a record storm surges of 9–13 feet and dumped 20–30 inches of rain over several days, according to the National Weather Service. The storm battered Lejeune causing roof and exterior damage to a number of buildings. A lot of the buildings at Camp Lejeune are very old," Neller told lawmakers. With water and roof damage to facilities across the base mold also set in, Neller explained. In November, the Marines posted an administrative message informing Marines looking for base housing at the Lejeune to look elsewhere. The base reported that about 70 percent of homes had been damaged during the hurricane. The storm also was blamed for an 84,000 gallon sewage spill on the base. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | December 12, 2018 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 01 thru 15 DEC 2018

Anham FZCO, Va. -- A grand jury charged three businessmen from Virginia with scheming to defraud the U.S. government by routing supplies for a multibillion-dollar contract through Iran, according to an indictment unsealed 30 NOV. The indictment alleges that the three men conspired to shave costs off the construction of two warehouses at Bagram Air Field (largest U.S. military base in Afghanistan) by shipping steel through Iran, a country currently under sanctions by the U.S. government. All three contractors pleaded not guilty to charges of major fraud, conspiracy, international money laundering and other violations.

The three men indicted were Abul Huda Farouki, of McLean, Va., a former CEO of the company Anham FZCO and donor to prominent U.S. politicians such as the Clintons; his younger brother, Mazen Farouki, of Boyce, Va., who headed Anham's Afghanistan affiliate; and businessman Salah Maarouf, of Fairfax, Va., who ran a company that bought services for Anham. Anham bid for a \$8 billion contract in 2011 to build warehouses at Bagram Air Field to store food for troops, according to the indictment. The company won the contract with promises to build two warehouses by December 2011. But as the deadline approached, the warehouses were nowhere close to being finished, government prosecutors allege. The first warehouse was just a concrete slab in the ground, and construction on the second warehouse had not even begun.

The company had troubles shipping steel to Bagram through Pakistan in late 2011 when Pakistan temporarily shut its borders to U.S. supplies after an American airstrike mistakenly killed 24 Pakistani soldiers, according to a report by the Wall Street Journal. Emails cited in the indictment quoted executives at Anham and its affiliated companies discussing whether they should ship their steel by air. The emails suggest that Mazen told his older brother Huda to ship the steel through Iran. One message read: "Mazen suggested to Huda that we transport through Iran. He is working on this."

In early 2012, Anham sent 45 containers of steel along with trucks and ceiling panels to Iran's seaport at Bandar Abbas, and then shipped them overland to Afghanistan, according to U.S. officials. These materials were delayed going through Iran, however. In February 2012, with the steel still in Iran, employees of Anham staged an elaborate ruse at Bagram, according to the indictment. For three days, employees shipped in equipment such as a construction crane and built a row of columns intended to look like the frame of a warehouse. After taking photographs of the site, employees dissembled the temporary construction.

An investigation by the Wall Street Journal into the steel shipments prompted a response by the U.S. government, which is seeking a money judgment equal to the money it says it lost. "This company and these defendants entered into a trusted relationship with the U.S. government, which awarded them billions of dollars to provide services to American and Coalition troops in a war zone," said John F. Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, whose office investigated the claims. "The indictment also alleges conspiracy and major fraud. These are serious crimes."

A statement online by Anham denied all charges and said the company made "good faith efforts to meet aggressive construction timelines in one of the most difficult environments in the world." Emails in the indictment suggest Anham employees warned others in the company multiple times about the illegality of their actions, with one email telling the defendants that shipping through Iran would endanger the company's relationship with their bank. Another email spoke of the dangers of conspiring to violate Iran sanctions in more explicit terms: "how many times do we need to request to remove the mentioning of a specific country in all emails. STOP that mentioning please IMMEDIATELY." [Source: The Associated Press | J.P. Lawrence | December 1, 2018 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Langley AFB, Va. -- A former secretary at Langley Air Force Base has pleaded guilty to bilking the government out of nearly \$1.5 million over 17 years. **Michelle Holt**, a civilian secretary in the communications support squadron at Air Combat Command, pleaded guilty in federal court 12 DEC to charges that she engaged in a long-running effort

to boost her pay by faking the amount of overtime she worked. The Virginian-Pilot reports that a statement of facts shows that between 2001 and 2018, Holt falsely claimed 42,847 overtime hours that she did not work — an astonishing 48.5 hours a week. The statement said she also falsified holiday and sick pay. In 2017, for example, Holt’s salary was \$51,324. But she took home \$119,585 in overtime pay. Holt faces up to 15 years in prison when she is sentenced in March, although prosecutors have promised to ask the judge to give Holt credit for cooperating with them. Holt’s lawyer said Holt spent the money on “life and paying daily bills.” [Source: The Virginian-Pilot via AP | December 13, 2018 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials ► Reported 01 thru 15 DEC 2018 | Twenty-One

“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 Air Forces 1st Lt. Ottaway B. Cornwell** was a member of the 4th Fighter Squadron, 52nd Fighter Group, Twelfth (XII) Air Force. On Jan. 27, 1944, the Supermarine Spitfire aircraft he was piloting was shot down over Pierrefeu-du-Var, France, during a dog fight with a German Messerschmitt. After Allied forces liberated the area, they were unable to locate Cornwell's remains. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cornwell.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Capt. Lawrence E. Dickson** was a pilot with the 100th Fighter Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group, in the European Theater. On Dec. 23, 1944, Dickson departed Ramitelli Air Base, Italy on an aerial reconnaissance mission and sustained an engine failure during his return flight. According to witnesses, Dickson's plane had rolled over with the canopy jettisoned. He was not observed ejecting from the plane. Dickson's remains were not recovered and he was subsequently declared missing in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Dickson.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. DeMaret M. Kirtley** was a member of Battery A, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team, 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. Kirtley was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, when he could not be accounted for after the withdrawal. Interment services are pending. [Read about Kirtley.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Joseph Akers** was a member of Company C, 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, participating in intense fighting in the Hürtgen Forest. On Nov. 14, 1944, he was reported as missing in action after fierce combat in the Raffelsbrand sector of the Hürtgen Forest, near the village of Simonskall, in Germany. On Nov. 15, 1945, the War Department declared him deceased. Interment services are pending. [Read about Akers.](#)

-- **Army Master Sgt. Carl H. Lindquist** was a member of Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st 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. Lindquist was reported missing in action on Nov. 29, 1950, when he could not be accounted for after the withdrawal. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lindquist.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. John A. Taylor** was a member of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. On Aug. 11, his regiment encountered a Korean People's Army unit near the village of Haman. Taylor's company was ordered to move southwest, where they were ambushed and forced to disperse. After several days of checking adjoining units, aid stations and field hospitals, Taylor was reported as killed in action on Aug. 12, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Taylor.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Floyd A. Fulmer** was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. On Nov. 14, 1944, he was reported as missing in action after fierce combat in the Raffelsbrand sector of the Hürtgen Forest, near the village of Simonskall, in Germany. On Nov. 15, 1945, the War Department declared him deceased. Interment services are pending. [Read about Fulmer.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Harry W. Wilder** was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. On Nov. 25, 1944, his company was deployed as direct fire support for American infantrymen attacking the town of Grosschau. Two tank destroyers and six tanks, including the M10 tank destroyer Akers was on, were destroyed in the fighting. He was killed during the battle, though his status was initially listed as missing in action. On Dec. 21, 1944, his status was amended to killed in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Wilder.](#)

-- **Marine Corps 2nd Lt. Harry H. Gaver, 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 Gaver. Interment services are pending. [Read about Gaver.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Sgt. Johnson McAfee** was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force. In late November 1950, his unit was engaged in heavy fighting against units of the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces in North Korea. McAfee was reported to have been killed in action in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir. His remains were buried at the base of "Fox Hill," in the Toktong Pass, but they could not be recovered following the war. Interment services are pending. [Read about McAfee.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Sgt. Meredith F. Keirn** was a light machine gun section leader for Company F, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division. In late November 1950, he was reported to have been killed while defending a hill overlooking the Toktong Pass, a critical main supply route between the villages of Hagaru-ri and Yudam-ni, North Korea. His remains were reportedly buried at the base of "Fox Hill," in the Toktong Pass, but they could not be recovered following the war. Interment services are pending. [Read about Keirn.](#)

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Charles H. Harris** 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 Harris. Interment services are pending. [Read about Harris.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Leonard R. Geller** 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 Geller. Interment services are pending. [Read about Geller.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Willard I. Lawson** 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 Lawson. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lawson.](#)

-- **Navy Gunner's Mate 3rd Class Marvin B. Adkins** 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 Adkins. Interment services are pending. [Read about Adkins.](#)

-- **Navy Radioman 3rd Class Jack R. Goldwater** 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 Goldwater. Interment services are pending. [Read about Goldwater.](#)

-- **Navy Reserve Musician 1st Class Henri C. Mason** 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 Mason. Interment services are pending. [Read about Mason.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Kenneth H. Sampson** 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 Sampson. Interment services are pending. [Read about Sampson.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Walter C. Foley** 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 Foley. Interment services are pending. [Read about Foley.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class George A. Thompson** 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 Thompson. Interment services are pending. [Read about Thompson.](#)

-- **Navy Shopfitter 3rd Class John M. Donald** 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 Donald. Interment services are pending. [Read about Donald.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | December 15, 2018 ++]

* VA *



VA Virtual Care ► Remote Care Offerings to Dramatically Expand



In coming months, when veterans are trying to decide whether to go to a Veterans Affairs hospital or a private doctor for their check-up, they may opt for a trip to Walmart instead. Department officials on 6 DEC announced a series of new telehealth partnerships designed to dramatically expand their current remote care offerings, to include online exam rooms in Walmarts, American Legion posts and Veterans of Foreign War hangouts centered in rural areas across the country. At the same time, officials from T-Mobile announced they'll make use of VA's video health apps free of charge for mobile customers around the country, potentially eliminating a cost barrier to veterans who want to access the department's telemedicine offerings.

"This totally changes the VA's footprint for delivering care," said Deborah Scher, executive adviser to the secretary for strategic partnerships at VA. "It changes (veterans') ability to access care in a way that can better their lives." The announcements came at a telehealth conference here which brought together top veterans policy leaders, technology experts and medical officials to brainstorm ways for the VA to more aggressively pursue remote care initiatives in coming years. More than 725,000 veterans took part in some type of remote care appointment in fiscal 2018, either in VA facilities or their own homes. Of that group, 45 percent were located in rural areas where travel to a VA hospital can total more than 100 miles round trip. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said while those figures point to success with the effort so far, his administration needs to push the idea even further.

"Virtual care is the future of medicine," he told the conference crowd. "It is our most powerful emerging tool. Ultimately it will improve and ease access for millions of Americans." The partnership with Walmart will be a pilot program to put telemedicine stations specifically for veteran customers at stores in rural areas (exact locations have yet to be announced.) Patients will be able to check in to a private room and video conference with VA medical specials across the country, covering both basic checkups and specialty appointments like dermatology consults or mental health care support. "Ninety percent of Americans live within 10 miles of a Walmart," Scher said. "Ninety percent of veterans don't live within 10 miles of a VA medical center."

The American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars sites will be similar. Philips Healthcare has agreed to supply its telemedicine technology to at least 10 sites that are in similarly remote areas. The first one has already been set up Eureka, Montana, in a VFW post 100 miles from the closest VA hospital. "We can get this set up within a couple of days," said Joe Robinson, senior vice president for Philips' North America Health Systems. "And they can do a heck of a lot with these set-ups. The connection is fast. The camera resolution is high enough to make some diagnoses." Robinson added that placing the mobile medicine sites within the veterans groups' posts brings another level of familiarity and comfort to many veterans who may not understand all of the new technology.

VA officials have not laid out a timeline for when the pilot programs may expand to more locations. Mike Katz, executive vice president of T-Mobile for business, said the free access to VA telehealth will begin immediately, but officials will work in coming months to make veteran customers aware of the new benefit. He's hopeful that other wireless carriers will follow suit, to expand the availability of the services and to help broaden awareness of veterans'

health options. “The need for this is extraordinarily high,” he said. “The demand is extraordinarily high. So hopefully these changes whittle away at the friction in the way of veterans using these services.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | December 7, 2018 ++]

VA Hospital Quality of Care Update 06 ► Often Better Than Near-by Alternatives

U.S. Veterans Administration (VA) hospitals may provide better quality care than other hospitals in many American communities, a U.S. study suggests. Researchers looked at 121 regional health care markets with at least one VA hospital and one non-VA facility. Altogether they assessed 135 VA hospitals and 2,988 non-VA hospitals using Hospital Compare (<https://www.medicare.gov/hospitalcompare/search.html?>), a public database that ranks hospitals on quality measures like mortality rates for common diseases and preventable complications. Across all regions, the VA was consistently better than non-VA facilities on almost every quality measure, the research team reports in *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

VA hospitals provided the best care in most regions for at least nine of 15 quality measures, and above-average care for 14 measures. “Assuming the measures are calculated in a fair and comparable way, our findings suggest that, for these measures, VA quality is at least as good as non-VA quality and often better,” said study co-author Dr. William Weeks of the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice in Lebanon, New Hampshire. While earlier nationwide studies found the VA stacks up well against other hospitals, the current analysis might help patients decide where to seek care in the communities where they live, Weeks said by email. “The hope is that veterans might use publicly available resources like the Hospital Compare data that we used to make informed choices about where to get care,” Weeks added.

More often than not, the VA had the best quality care in local hospital markets for chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD). The VA was the best or above average in most markets for treating heart attacks, heart failure and pneumonia, the study found. The VA also ranked best in local markets at least half the time for measures including death rates among patients with serious complications after surgery; collapsed lung due to medical treatment; broken hip from a fall after surgery; and bloodstream infections after surgery. The findings suggest that outsourcing veterans’ care to non-VA hospitals solely for patient convenience should be reconsidered, particularly in regions where nearby hospitals don’t achieve quality scores that are better than the VA, the authors conclude.

Limitations of the study include the use of regional hospital markets defined not by Hospital Compare, but by the Dartmouth Atlas of Health Care. Another drawback is that VA and non-VA hospitals may have reported data to Hospital Compare using different methods, the researchers note. Hospital Compare is also an imperfect tool for examining hospital quality, said Dr. Ryan Merkow of the Feinberg School of Medicine Northwestern University in Chicago. “This study reports how VA and Non-VA hospitals that are located in the same regional market compare, based on Hospital Compare data which has significant limitations,” Merkow, who wasn’t involved in the study, said by email. “No conclusions can be made about care outside of the measures reported,” Merkow added.

There is, however, a body of evidence dating back more than a decade that has generally found VA hospitals provide higher quality care than non-VA facilities, said Dr. Anupam Jena of Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. “Part of this may be that non-VA care costs patients money to use whereas that is not true of the VA, and we know that cost of care can be a barrier to access,” Jena, who wasn’t involved in the study, said by email. “Part of this may also come from the early adoption of electronic health records by the VA and the fact that it truly integrates both hospital, outpatient, and pharmacy care,” Jena added. [Source: Reuters | Lisa Rapaport | December 10, 2018 ++]

VA Blue Water Claims Update 57 ► Senate Fails to Take Action

Hopes for a deal this year to extend disability benefits to thousands of “blue water” Navy veterans who claim toxic exposure while serving in the Vietnam War were all but ended 10 DEC after supporters could not get unanimous support in the Senate for a potential fix. The measure, passed by the House overwhelmingly earlier this year, would require Veterans Affairs officials to automatically assume about 90,000 veterans who served in ships off the coast of Vietnam were exposed to Agent Orange for benefits purposes. That move would bring that group in line with hundreds of thousands of other Vietnam veterans who served on the ground there or on ships traveling upon inland rivers. VA officials have objected to the plan, saying the available scientific evidence does not support extending the benefits.

Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Johnny Isakso (R-GA) and other supporters had hoped to bring the issue directly to the chamber floor for a quick passage, but that parliamentary move was blocked by Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY) who cited VA’s cost concerns about the measure. “VA’s analysis shows the costs could be nearly five times what Congress assumed it was when the House of Representatives passed it,” he said. “So there’s clearly more work to do just on figuring out the spending.” Under current department rules, the blue water veterans can receive medical care for their illnesses through VA, but must prove toxic exposure while on duty to receive compensation for the ailments. Advocates have argued that VA officials are systematically denying those claims despite cases of rare cancers and respiratory symptoms already linked to Agent Orange because not enough study was done decades ago to support the toxic exposure connections.

The veterans affected can’t afford more legislative delays. “The only thing standing in the way of this bill to help our Vietnam veterans is the U.S. Senate, and that is shameful,” said Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). “We have just days before this Congress is finished and our blue water Navy veterans are waiting for us. Their families are waiting for us. Some of them are dying waiting for us.” Senate leaders could bring the bill up under regular order, but given the short schedule remaining — only a few days are left in the current congressional session — and their reluctance to make the issue a priority so far, that prospect is unlikely.

If the measure is not approved by the Senate by the end of the year, supporters will have to start over with the legislative effort again next year, a process that at best will likely take months. Veterans groups called that a heartbreaking reality. “If we can afford to send veterans to war, it’s unacceptable that we can’t afford to take care of them when they return home wounded, ill or injured,” said B.J. Lawrence, national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. “(Enzi’s) obstruction forsakes our nation’s promise to take care of those who were injured or made ill due to their military service.”

Mike Little, executive director for the Sea Service Family Foundation and a longtime advocate on the blue water benefits issue, said senators should be “ashamed” they could not finalize a deal. “Blue water Navy should be the easiest legislation passed by Congress,” he said. “The science is there, the facts are there, the advocacy is there. Nobody is lobbying against it except money hawks and the VA scientists who, on some levels, still disagree with the dangers of Agent Orange.” The legislation carries a price tag of about \$1.1 billion over 10 years, but VA officials have insisted the total is closer to \$5.5 billion. The costs would be offset with a new fee on some VA home loans, a cost-savings measure some lawmakers have opposed.

Congressional supporters also expressed similar disappointment that a deal could not be reached. House Veterans’ Affairs Committee ranking member Tim Walz (D-MN) blasted Enzi and several other silent opposers for being hypocritical about the costs, given the major tax package passed by the Republican-controlled Congress last year. “It is especially troubling to see this bill blocked when there is so much work left to do on toxic exposures as a whole, to include those exposed to burn pits and radiologically exposed veterans,” he said.

His Senate counterpart, Montana Democrat Jon Tester, said the “this 11th-hour attempt to block the bill is a thumb in the eye to millions of veterans and service members,” Isakson expressed frustration that existing research on the issue doesn’t seem to be enough for VA and some of his colleagues. “This thing has been studied as long as it needs

to be studied,” he said. “You’re putting off a decision we’re going to have to make in the future.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | December 10, 2018 ++]

VA Blue Water Claims Update 58 ► **VFW Call to Action**

VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence met 13 DEC with Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY), who earlier this week blocked the passage of H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018, because he believes it costs too much. “If we can afford to send our military to war, it’s unacceptable that we cannot afford to take care of them when they return home wounded, ill or injured,” said Lawrence, who called the meeting very productive. “I met with Senator Enzi to make it clear that VFW members expect the Blue Water Navy to pass before the end of the year. The senator assured me that he wants to provide Blue Water Navy veterans the benefits they have earned and is working with his colleagues, including Senate VA Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson, to get this bill passed. I told him the VFW will work with him to make it happen, but we will hold him accountable if it does not,” he said. “We also met with key staff for Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT) to let them know that the VFW wants the Senate to pass H.R. 299 now!”

The VFW is asking all members and advocates to join in their Call to Action to get the Blue Water Navy Bill passed into law. **Contact your senators [here](#)**. [Source: VFW Action Corps | December 14, 2018 ++]

VA Benefits Denials Update 01 ► **Supreme Court to Hear Deference Case**

The Supreme Court on 10 DEC agreed to take a case challenging how much courts should defer to a federal agency’s interpretation of an ambiguous regulation. The case originated when James Kisor, a Vietnam veteran, sought review in 2006 of the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) 1983 decision to deny him disability benefits. The VA previously determined that Kisor provided insufficient evidence to prove he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. Kisor showed the VA materials that existed in 1983 that weren’t part of his file. The VA granted him relief but made June 2006 the effective date of his benefits, instead of 1983. The agency said the additional documents did not qualify as “relevant” to receive back benefits. He appealed, challenging the VA’s interpretation of the term “relevant.” On appeal, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit affirmed the VA’s Appeals Board finding that the documents were not relevant because they would not have determined the outcome. The appeals court relied on the agency’s interpretation. In appealing to the Supreme Court, Kisor is asking justices to overrule two past cases that direct courts to defer to an agency’s reasonable interpretation of its own regulation. [Source: The Hill | Lydia Wheeler | December 10, 2018 ++]

VASRD Update 01 ► **Hematologic & Lymphatic Systems Revision**

Effective 9 DEC, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) updated portions of the [VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities](#) (VASRD). These federal regulations used by the Veterans Benefits Administration help claims processors evaluate the severity of disabilities and assign disability ratings. One diagnostic code was removed, nine were added, and several were restructured. The complete list of updates to the rating schedule are now available [online](#). Claims pending prior to 9 DEC, will be considered under both the old and new rating criteria, and whichever criteria is more favorable to the Veteran will be applied. Claims filed on or after 9 DEC will be rated under the new rating schedule.

By updating the rating schedule for conditions related to the hematologic and lymphatic systems, VA claims processors can make more consistent decisions with greater ease and ensure Veterans understand these decisions. VA remains committed to improving its service to Veterans continuously and staying at the forefront of modern medicine as it has for decades. VA has issued several VASRD updates since September 2017, including updates for dental and oral conditions, conditions related to the endocrine system, gynecological conditions and disorders of the breast diseases of the eye and skin conditions. (VASRD or Rating Schedule) that evaluates the hematologic and lymphatic systems.

This rating schedule is primarily a guide in the evaluation of disability resulting from all types of diseases and injuries encountered as a result of or incident to military service. The percentage ratings represent as far as can practicably be determined the average impairment in earning capacity resulting from such diseases and injuries and their residual conditions in civil occupations. Generally, the degrees of disability specified are considered adequate to compensate for considerable loss of working time from exacerbations or illnesses proportionate to the severity of the several grades of disability. For the application of this schedule, accurate and fully descriptive medical examinations are required, with emphasis upon the limitation of activity imposed by the disabling condition. Over a period of many years, a veteran's disability claim may require reratings in accordance with changes in laws, medical knowledge and his or her physical or mental condition. It is thus essential, both in the examination and in the evaluation of disability, that each disability be viewed in relation to its history. [Source: VA News Release | December 10, 2018 ++]

VA Secretary Q & A Update 01 ► Community Town Hall Event | SEP 2018

In late September 2018, Secretary Wilkie hosted a State of VA community town hall event which allowed Veterans to ask questions. VA reviewed those questions and found several consistent themes which are listed and answered below. A video of Wilke's State of the VA Community Town Hall can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/TewZj4gYWZY>:

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Q: Why can't I get Dental?

A: All Veterans are not eligible for dental services per Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) §§1710(c), 1712 and Title 38 Code of Federal Regulation (C.F.R.) 17.160 – 17.166. Eligibility includes, Prisoners of War, Veterans rated 100% service-connected disability, or Veterans who received dental injuries due combat or service trauma. To see the full list of eligibility factors, take a look at Dental Benefits for Veterans. The good news is if you are not eligible, Veterans enrolled in VA health care can purchase dental insurance at a reduced cost through the VA Dental Insurance Program (VADIP).

Q: What is the status of granting benefits to Blue Water Navy Veterans?

A: With the HR 299 passing the House of Representatives and the Senate hearings on the same bill there have been a lot of questions regarding the VA's position about securing benefits for Blue Water Navy Veterans. Dr. Paul Lawrence, Undersecretary of Benefits for the Department of Veterans Affairs, testified that "no credible scientific evidence supports extending Agent Orange-related benefits to shipboard personnel who never went ashore in Vietnam or patrolled its rivers." Without such evidence, he said, "it would be wrong, and would create a disastrous precedent, to award VA benefits." Currently, Blue Water Veterans are not presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides. The Department of Veterans Affairs can only provide benefits as approved by law.

However, certain Veterans who stepped foot in Vietnam or served on its inland waterways anytime between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides when claiming service-

connection for diseases related to Agent Orange exposure. Veterans in these circumstances can find the ship(s) on which they served in the list as well.

Q: Will the VA expand its list of Agent Orange presumptive conditions?

A: Currently, VA recognizes 14 presumptive conditions associated with exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides. VA has recognized certain cancers and other health problems as presumptive diseases associated with exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides during military service. The Department of Veterans Affairs can only provide benefits as approved by federal law or regulatory guidance and presumes that certain diseases are a result of exposure to these herbicides. This “presumptive policy” simplifies the process for receiving compensation for these diseases since VA foregoes the normal requirements of proving that an illness began during or was worsened by your military service.

However, in November 2017 the Department of Veterans Affairs started to review the National Academy of Medicine (NAM)’s latest report regarding Veterans and Agent Orange and is conducting a legal and regulatory review of these potential presumptive conditions for awarding disability compensation to eligible veterans. A Veteran who believes he or she has a disease caused by Agent Orange exposure that is not one of the conditions listed below must show an actual connection between the disease and herbicide exposure during military service.

Q: When will the VA allow promote the use of Marijuana for pain and PTSD. How can I get into a Marijuana study?

A: Several states in the U.S. have approved the use of marijuana for medical and/or recreational use. Veterans should know that federal law classifies marijuana – including all derivative products – as a Schedule One controlled substance. This makes it illegal in the eyes of the federal government. The Department of Veterans Affairs is required to follow all federal laws including those regarding marijuana. As long as the Food and Drug Administration classifies marijuana as Schedule One, VA health care providers may not recommend it or assist Veterans to obtain it.

To comply with laws, such as the Controlled Substances Act (Title 21 United States Code (U.S.C.) 801 et. al.), VA health care providers are prohibited from completing forms or registering Veterans for participation in a State-approved marijuana program. However, Veterans that are in state medical marijuana studies should consult their VA provider to discuss how marijuana may impact other aspects of their overall care, such as how marijuana may interact with other medications. View the full directive: Access to VHA Clinical Programs for Veterans Participating in State-Approved Marijuana Programs.

Q: How can I find out which (outside) providers can provide me healthcare though VA Community Care programs (Choice)?

A: If you are requesting Care in the Community (formerly known as the Choice Program), please contact your local VA medical facility to coordinate your care. They will be able to provide you help with your healthcare needs and offer community care options. If you are unaware of whom you should contact, visit the VA Facility Locator to find your closest VA site of care at: <https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp>.

Q: How do I know if I am eligible for Community Care Programs through the VA?

A: Veterans may be eligible to receive care through the VA Community Care Program (formally known as the Choice Program), if a Veteran faces an excessive burden in traveling to the nearest VA medical facility (such as geographic challenges, environmental factors, or a health problem that makes it hard for you to travel), lives more than 40 miles (driving distance) from the nearest VA medical facility, or can’t make an appointment for the Veteran at the nearest VA medical facility within 30 days of the clinically indicated date. If you are having issues please visit <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/VCP/index.asp#new> or call the Choice Program Support Line: 866-606-8198.

Q: My provider has not been paid by the VA for Community (Choice) Care and it is impacting my credit score; who can I reach out to?

A: VA Adverse Credit Helpline: 877-881-7618 VA will help you resolve adverse credit reporting and debt collection issues as a result of using the Veterans Choice Program.

[Source: Vantage Point | Beth Lamb| November 30, 2018 ++]

VA Caregiver Program Update 51 ► VA Seeks Input On Caregiver Benefits

The VA is looking for feedback on how to better its caregiver assistance program, including comment on who should qualify and the best way to define "necessary care" for veterans, after a law passed early this year ordered the program expanded to more users. Their caregiver support program currently offers family caregivers of certain disabled veterans assistance in the form of training on how to provide care, respite care, counseling, travel to attend caregiver training, a monthly cash stipend and more. Right now the program is only open to family members caring for post-9/11 veterans who have a serious injury like traumatic brain injury (TBI), psychological trauma, or other mental disorder which was the result of military service.

The caregiver program was ordered expanded by the VA Mission Act, which became law this year, and is set to occur in two phases. First, the program will expand family caregiver benefits to those caring for veterans with a serious injury like TBI, psychological trauma, or other mental disorder which was the result of military service and happened before May 7, 1975. That phase will kick-in after the VA certifies to Congress that it has updated its computer systems to be able to handle the processing of new caregiver benefits. The second expansion phase, set to start two years after phase one, will add to the program eligibility the family of veterans of any era.

But the Mission Act did not just expand which veterans qualify for the benefit -- it also expanded the types of injuries that must exist for the caregiver program to be used. Under the old rules for a family member to be eligible as a caregiver, the veteran had to be:

- Unable to perform one or more of the activities of daily living.
- In need of supervision or protection due to their neurological or other impairment or injury.
- In need of care due to other serious injury.

The new law added to the list of qualifying veteran conditions residual injuries as well as the need for "extensive instruction or supervision" for a veteran to complete their daily activities. For example, a veteran who suffered a TBI but also suffered an eye injury that makes it impossible for him to drive would now qualify as in need of a family caregiver. Or if a veteran has a cognitive impairment and can't be trusted around a stove, he or she would qualify for caregiver services under the new rules. The Mission Act also adds financial and legal services as qualifying caregiver services. For example, if an injured veteran is unable to manage their money and a family member has to pay the bills, sign paperwork or do other similar tasks, that person could possibly qualify as a family caregiver.

But to develop how those expansions should be applied, the VA must create new policies. And they are looking to the public, including current caregivers, to weigh-in. The posting, which can be found in the Federal Register at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2018-11-27/pdf/2018-25763.pdf> or Federal Register/ Vol. 83, No. 228 / Tuesday, November 27, 2018 / Notices Page 60966 thru 60968) contains an extensive list of questions the VA wants help answering as they develop those new rules. Unfortunately, the comment period was only open through 12 DEC. However, because of the short notice (15 days) there is always the possibility the comment period could be extended. Written comments were to be submitted through [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov); by mail or hand delivery to the Director, Office of Regulation Policy and Management (00REG), Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue NW, Room 1063B, Washington, DC 20420; or by fax to (202) 273-9026.

If extended, your comment should indicate it is submitted in response to "Notice of Request for Information on the Department of Veterans Affairs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC)." More information about the VA Caregiver Support Program and a link to submit comments is available at www.caregiver.va.gov. [Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | November 30, 2018 ++]

VA Vocational Rehabilitation Update 06 ► Tele-Counseling Now Available

On 30 NOV, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program (VR&E) announced the ability for Veterans nationwide to meet with more than 1,000 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) via "Tele-counseling," or virtual communication. Tele-counseling, which is accessible on any device with a webcam and microphone, increases VA's responsiveness to Veterans' needs, reduces travel costs and time for both Veterans and VRCs, and improves Veterans' access to necessary VR&E services. "We strive to provide Veterans with access to personalized, interactive face-to-face care and services regardless of where they live," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "VR&E's Tele-counseling service is another example of how VA continually modernizes in support of Veterans' needs."

Tele-counseling allows Veterans to meet with VRCs virtually through [VA Video Connect](#) without having to download specialized software or obtain unique usernames and passwords. Access to a scheduled counseling session is obtained through a unique link sent directly to the Veteran and is valid for that counseling session only. Veterans participating in most VR&E rehabilitation plans of service may use Tele-counseling and are encouraged to speak with their VRCs about it. Participation is voluntary and not required. VR&E's updated Tele-counseling application was developed through a partnership with [Veterans Health Administration's \(VHA\) VA Telehealth Services](#). VR&E recently tested the ability to use Tele-counseling during initial evaluation appointments at six regional benefits offices. This test was conducted to identify how using Tele-counseling can reduce time Veterans wait for an appointment. Best practices were identified and incorporated into the rollout of the updated Tele-counseling application.

Since 2014, over 56,000 Veterans have either completed a rehabilitation plan, are employed, or have achieved a greater independence in living through VR&E assistance. The VR&E Program currently has more than 122,000 participants. For more information about VR&E, visit <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab>. [Source: VA News Release | November 30, 2018 ++]

VA Nursing Homes Update 12 ► Stratton VAMC Home Robotic Cat Use

Providing care for patients with dementia is challenging. Medication doesn't always ease their agitation and restlessness. Artificial intelligence is helping. Most afternoons, you'll find 81-year-old Tom Clark snoozing with his pet cat, Aspen, on his lap. However, this cat doesn't need to be fed or let outside. Aspen, the name of a cat he once had, isn't real – but he just loves it. Aspen is a robotic cat with artificial intelligence built in -- designed to do normal cat stuff like stretch, purr and roll on its back. "Sometimes, they'll even ignore you the way a cat might, typically," explained Psychologist Dr. Caitlin Holly.



She started using these robotic pets about two months ago with dementia patients at the Stratton VA Medical Center Nursing Home in New York. "The idea is that it's a non-pharmacological intervention that can help with anxiety, it can help with agitation, restlessness," noted Holly. While researchers are still gathering data on the benefits of these artificial intelligence animals, the experience at the VA supports the early findings. Clark had been a little more agitated and restless, but the cat calmed him right down. While some may wonder why not just give him a stuffed animal, Tom's wife, Virginia, explained the difference. "It doesn't purr. It doesn't meow. This one, the eyes go, the head turns, it stretches," she said.

All those actions happen in response to how much people interact with their pet. "I don't know if he knows it's not real, but it calms him down," she said. He doesn't have to share Aspen - it's only for him. These robotic pets cost about \$100 each. So far, the VA has one dog and three cats and they're looking to add to their menagerie. While all the patients prescribed a pet are diagnosed with dementia, not all of the dementia patients here are candidates for a robotic pet. "If a veteran really had a close connection with a particular animal, if their family member thinks they would benefit -- some of it is based on what we notice them struggling with," noted Holly. As for Tom, a little bit of purring and cat "lap-time" eases those struggles. [Source: News 13 WYNT-TV | Benita Zahn | November December 7, 2018 ++]

GI Bill Update 270 ► VA's Long, Slow Housing Stipend Fix

For student veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill to pay for school, the last week of NOV was riddled with chaos and confusion, as the Veterans Affairs Department announced a new plan to implement portions of the Forever GI Bill law after blowing through an August deadline now long past. Lawmakers called for action and investigations. VA officials appeared to say one thing — then the opposite. But amid all the pandemonium, there's been an overlooked silver lining. After reports of severe payment delays for thousands of student veterans expecting housing stipends this fall, those planning to use the education benefit for the spring semester should get their money on time — even if those payments aren't yet 100 percent accurate.

Additionally, starting in January, students who should have received a higher payment due to a cost-of-living increase in the fall will get a check for the difference, and VA spokesman Curt Cashour told Military Times the department will not hold veterans accountable for any overpayments. For the next year, the VA will pay student housing stipends as if the relevant portion of the Forever GI Bill had not yet gone into effect. That law was set to change the way student housing stipends are calculated by bringing new students' payments in line with what the Defense Department pays E-5s with dependents and paying all students a rate based on where they take classes and not the location of their school's main campus. Though the original start date was Aug. 1, the VA has now given itself a controversial new deadline: Dec. 1, 2019.

"Redesigning the way (the Veterans Benefits Administration) calculates Post-9/11 GI Bill housing rates during a busy academic season was like flying a plane while building it, and that was unfair and frustrating to veterans and taxpayers," Sec. Robert Wilkie said in a Nov. 28 statement. "That's why we are resetting our implementation of the law for the next year to ensure we get the technology and formula right to put veterans first." The bill's implementation proved to be more challenging than expected because of the VA's outdated technology systems, which aggravated the department's normal workload processing student claims for the fall semester. By September, the number of pending claims had grown three times larger than usual, and the VA issued mandatory overtime to work through the backlog.

As VA Undersecretary for Benefits Paul Lawrence told House lawmakers in a hearing following Wilkie's announcement, it's unlikely students who don't attend classes on a main campus will feel ripped off. Currently, not even the VA knows what students would've been getting had the IT updates worked as they should. And until those updates are made, students will be paid under the same process as previous years. It's also unclear at this time how

many GI Bill students attend the majority of their classes at a branch campus or somewhere other than their school's headquarters. But for those who do, they'll get what they're owed once the VA has the IT capabilities to implement the bill, Wilkie said late last week. This contradicted what multiple sources, including Cashour, had said previously — that the VA did not intend to retroactively fix location-based payments once the department was technologically able — which was a large reason for the alarm bells in Congress and elsewhere.

As of now, that fix won't happen until next December, although a bipartisan pair of senators is trying to push for retroactive reimbursements sooner through new legislation. The Fix Immediately Outstanding Underpayments for Student Veterans Act, introduced 4 DEC by Sen. Doug Jones (D-AL) and Cory Gardner (R-CO) “directs the secretary to make underpaid students whole within 60 days of enactment, and it also authorizes additional appropriations and staff to carry out that mission,” according to a spokeswoman in Jones' office. The VA is committed to retroactively fixing students' underpayments once the technology updates are made next year, according to Wilkie's latest statement, which Cashour confirmed. It's unclear how — or whether — the VA would be able to comply with an abbreviated timeline. VA Director of Media Relations Susan Carter said the department has not taken a position on the bill. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | December 5, 2018 ++]

GI Bill Update 271 ► ECA School Closures Impact 15k+ Vets

One of the nation's largest for-profit college chains announced 5 DEC that it was abruptly closing in dozens of locations nationwide, after its accrediting agency suspended approval. Birmingham, Alabama-based Education Corp. of America said it was closing schools operating as Virginia College, Brightwood College, Brightwood Career Institute, Ecotech Institute and Golf Academy of America in more than 70 locations in 21 states. The company said in October that it had more than 20,000 students, although more recent documents indicate the number may be closer to 15,000. ECA schools enrolled about 4,000 students using the Post-9/11 GI Bill in fiscal 2017, the latest year for which federal data is available. A Military Times analysis of Department of Veterans Affairs data shows more than \$41 million went to pay for the education of veterans at these schools.

The company, backed by investors including private equity firm Willis Stein & Partners of Chicago, is the latest in a series of for-profit colleges to close after allegations that they were loading students up with debt while not providing them with marketable skills. In some cases, students told local news outlets that operations ceased immediately, while in other cases students said they were told to return for meetings later. ECA spokeswoman Diane Worthington said that at most locations, 7 DEC would be the last day of classes, and students would get academic credit for this term. One ECA institution, New England College of Business, is not closing. The company mostly offers professional certificates in subjects like cosmetology, culinary arts and medical and dental assisting.

In a letter to students, ECA CEO Stuart Reed said the company's impending loss of accreditation, along with added requirements from the U.S. Department of Education, made the company unable to raise more money to operate the schools while it sought to reorganize. “It is with extreme regret that this series of recent circumstances has forced us to discontinue the operation of our schools,” Reed wrote. In October, the company sued the U.S. Education Department seeking to maintain its federal funding, which was in jeopardy over its dire financial situation. A judge later dismissed the suit.

Court documents filed by the company said its lagging revenue left it unable to make payments on its debt or rental fees, and that it faced eviction at several campuses. ECA estimated it owed \$66 million at the time. Even before then, ECA was planning to shutter 26 campuses to cut costs. Another federal judge in Georgia later granted a bankruptcy-like receivership meant to protect the company from creditors. ECA largely blamed falling enrollment on an upswing in the economy, which left fewer adults heading to school for job skills, and on increased federal regulation of the for-profit college industry.

The sudden closure drew criticism from the U.S. Education Department, which said it had been working with the company to arrange a shut-down that gave students time to transfer. “Instead of taking the next few months to close in an orderly fashion, ECA took the easy way out and left 19,000 students scrambling to find a way to finish the education program they started,” Liz Hill, an Education Department spokeswoman, said in a statement. Like the recently shuttered Corinthian Colleges and ITT Technical Institute chains, Education Corporation of America was overseen by the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, one of the watchdog groups the federal government appoints to ensure colleges offer a quality education.

The council, known as ACICS, wrote a 4 DEC letter to Reed saying it was suspending accreditation immediately at all the institutions, citing “rapidly deteriorating financial conditions,” a failure to make required payments to the council and a wide variety of academic concerns. ACICS was shut down by the Obama administration over allegations of lax oversight, but was later reinstated on 21 NOV by Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, who found it was “substantially in compliance” with federal standards. Virginia Rep. Bobby Scott, the top Democrat on the House Education and the Workforce Committee, urged DeVos to rethink her decision on ACICS after the Wednesday closure. “We have repeatedly warned about the risks low-quality, for-profit education companies and irresponsible accreditors pose to students and taxpayers across the country,” Scott said in a statement. “Today’s announcement is another painful reminder of those risks.” Corinthian and ITT Tech educated thousands of student veterans when they closed in 2015 and 2016, respectively, and became the impetus for a provision in the Forever GI Bill law passed last year that restores GI Bill benefits to victims of abrupt school closures.

In many cases, students and teachers were in class when they got the news about the ECA closures. Melissa Zavala, who was studying to be a medical assistant at a San Antonio, Texas, campus of Brightwood, told KSAT-TV students were taken to an auditorium. “The director was there and she was like, ‘I have bad news. The school is closing down,’” Zavala said. “Everyone was like, ‘What about our student loans? We’re almost done.’” Zavala said campus officials couldn’t provide additional information and told them to look online for other colleges they could attend. “They took our money, they shut the school down and that’s it for us,” Zavala said.

Toby Merrill, who directs the Project on Predatory Student Lending at Harvard Law School, said students can ask the U.S. Department of Education to cancel loans if a school closes. However, that opportunity doesn’t apply if a student transfers credits or if a school hires a successor to offer students classes to complete their programs. [Source: The Associated Press | Jeff Amy & Collin Binkley | December 7, 2018 ++]

GI Bill Update 272 ► Housing Stipend Non-Payment | Credit Bureau Repercussions

Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) on 6 DEC urged the Department of Veterans Affairs and major credit reporting agencies to intervene on behalf of student veterans who could experience long-term financial repercussions from not receiving their monthly housing stipends on time this semester. Citing information technology failures, the VA missed a deadline in August to implement part of the new “Forever” GI Bill, which Congress approved last year. The issue resulted in thousands of veterans not receiving their housing stipends or facing delays. Housing stipends are used by GI Bill recipients to pay for their rent, bills, food and other living expenses.

Duckworth, an Iraq War veteran, asked Equifax, Experian and TransUnion — national credit bureaus — to prevent the situation from damaging veterans’ credit scores. If they didn’t, she warned it could cause those veterans a lifetime of hardship. “I think it’s going to hurt veterans for a long time,” Duckworth said. “If they’ve been kicked out of housing or made late payments, then this will affect their ability to get credit and perhaps buy a house or a car or start a business well into the future.” The exact number of veterans affected by the delays is still unknown. The VA reported a backlog of 183,000 pending education claims in early October, and the most recent publicly available data showed the workload was 80,500 claims as of Nov. 30 – 22 percent more than the same week last year.

The VA received calls from about 1,000 veterans who experienced hardships because of the delays and had a few credible complaints from veterans facing eviction, said Robert Worley, the VA official who, until recently, led the implementation of the new GI Bill. Navy veteran Robert Epps was one of those 1,000 hardship cases. Epps, his wife and their two children live in Washington state, where he's working toward an electrical engineering degree. The couple has a third child on the way. Epps was relying on the monthly housing stipends to make ends meet, but by early October, he hadn't received any money. To avoid eviction, he used up his savings and was forced to borrow money from family members. After contacting his senator, Patty Murray (D-WA) as well as the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the VA, Epps eventually got paid. Now, he's worried the aftermath of the delays will carry into next semester. "I still have a bunch of...late fees to deal with," Epps wrote in an email. "Between this stress and the birth of my son, I'm all but certain on a path to have to repeat these classes."

Duckworth is calling on the VA to pay any penalties veterans incurred because of the delayed payments, such as Epps' late fees. In a letter to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie on 6 DEC, she also asked that he work with the three credit reporting agencies to fix any negative credit ratings for those veterans. Moreover, she wants the veterans to receive what they're still due – with interest. "Any monies they owe veterans, they should pay with interest," Duckworth said. VA officials said last week that they plan to distribute retroactive payments in January to veterans harmed by the delays.

Some veterans will have to wait until after December 2019 to get all they're legally owed. Part of the new GI Bill changed how veterans' housing allowances are calculated — they're now supposed to be based on where veterans take classes, rather than defaulting to their school's main campus. The change was supposed to be made by 1 AUG 2018, but IT problems set back implementation to 1 DEC 2019. After mass confusion last week about whether those students would be retroactively paid, Wilkie said the agency would pay them after December 2019. Some Democrats, including Duckworth, still seek more clarity on the issue. "The continued ambiguity surrounding veterans' retroactive payments undermines veterans' faith and confidence in the VA," Duckworth wrote to Wilkie.

On 6 DEC, she described the problems as a "failure of the VA, and a failure of government." If the VA fails to fully pay veterans what they're due, the VA risks losing their trust, Duckworth said. In Epps' case, he's already going into next semester lacking trust in the agency. "I'm now left with no confidence in the system," Epps said. "Will this happen again with the next semester?" [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | December 6, 2018 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 01 thru 15 DEC 2018

OMAHA, Neb. – A man convicted in Omaha of embezzling government funds has been ordered to make restitution to two federal agencies. Federal prosecutors say 62-year-old **Michael Basile** was sentenced 6 DEC in U.S. District Court in Omaha to five years of probation and 150 hours of community service. He also was told to pay the Department of Veterans Affairs more than \$62,000 and the Railroad Retirement Board more than \$108,000. The prosecutors say Basile did contract work from June 2014 through September 2017 and had his payments made to a family member in order to conceal the income from the VA and the retirement board. He was receiving disability payments from both agencies at the time and was required to report any income. [Source: The Associated Press | December 11, 2018 ++]

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Denver, CO – **Erick Lee Tombre**, age 46, of Denver, a registered nurse in the State of Colorado, pled guilty 12 DEC for acquiring and attempting to obtain controlled substances, including hydromorphone, by deception and subterfuge. The guilty plea was tendered before Senior U.S. District Court Judge Robert E. Blackburn. He is free on bond, and will be sentenced on April 2, 2018. According to the stipulated facts contained in the plea agreement, Tombre, who obtained his license as a registered nurse in the State of Colorado in April 2012, started work at the

Denver Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in January 2014. As a nurse, the defendant had access to an automated system that dispensed controlled substances. The system requires an individual to log-in to withdraw drugs and documents all transactions. Drugs are to be withdrawn only for patient administration based on a doctor's orders.

Tombre's diversion was initially uncovered by a VAMC controlled substance transaction audit in February 2017. That audit showed unusual and unaccounted for controlled substance withdrawals, including for example, the defendant's withdrawal of hydromorphone for the same patient three times in one hour, documenting only one of the three doses as being administered to the patient. The audit also determined that Tombre withdrew more than twice the amount of fentanyl than the next highest health care provider in his unit. He had the highest withdrawal of any provider for hydromorphone 2 mg syringes.

During the investigation, Tombre admitted that he had diverted controlled substances for "a couple of years" and most frequently took and used hydromorphone but also took and used fentanyl. He stated he would steal the drugs by drawing up into a syringe the "waste" remaining after patient administration. He would "waste", or discard, saline instead of the drug and keep the extra drug he diverted. Tombre stated that on an average shift he would waste saline and take home one or two half-full syringes. The investigation revealed no evidence of patient harm. Tombre faces not more than 4 years imprisonment, and a fine of up to \$250,000. This case was investigated by the VA Office of Inspector General, and was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Anna Edgar. [Source: DOJ, District of Colorado | U.S. Attorney's Office | December 12, 2018 ++]

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Providence, RI -- A Providence VA Medical Center nurse pled guilty in federal court today to charges that he fraudulently obtained and tampered with morphine and other opioid prescriptions at the VA Medical Center. Appearing before U.S. District Court Chief Judge William E. Smith, **Jared Scott**, 35, of West Warwick, admitted that on several occasions in October and November 2017, he accessed vials of liquid opioids designated for patient use. Scott admitted to removing the vials from a locked storage cart for his own personal use, and leaving behind vials filled with saline. Scott pled guilty as charged in an indictment returned on June 28, 2018, with tampering with a consumer product and acquiring a controlled substance by deception and subterfuge. Scott is scheduled to be sentenced on April 5, 2019. Tampering with a consumer product is punishable by statutory penalties of up to 10 years in federal prison, 3 years supervised release, and a fine of \$250,000. Obtaining a controlled substance by misrepresentation, fraud, deception and subterfuge is punishable by statutory penalties of up to 4 years in federal prison, 1 year supervised release, and a fine of \$250,000. [Source: DOJ, District of RI | U.S. Attorney's Office | December 7, 2018 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Jackson, MS -- **Tierun Bush** of Jackson serve 36 months in federal prison for stealing a U.S. military veteran's identity and using it to get over \$133,603 in benefits. Senior U.S. District Judge Tom S. Lee also ordered Bush at his sentencing 13 DEC to pay full restitution to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Bush, 56, was found guilty of aggravated identity theft and theft of government funds and property, U.S. Attorney Mike Hurst announced. From 2005 to 2018, Bush used the name, Social Security number and other identifiers of the military veteran to fraudulently receive narcotics, medical care, medical equipment, and financial assistance for the cost of housing from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Bush, who is not a military veteran, was a long-time patient at the G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery VA Medical Center in Jackson under the name of the victim whose identity he stole. When first approached by agents from Veterans Affairs, Bush provided the name of the victim as his own but quickly confessed when he was told they had already interviewed the victim, who lives out of state. By fraudulently using the identity of a veteran, Bush was able to obtain goods and services from government valued at over \$133,603.93, which he will be required to pay in restitution as a part of his sentence. [Source: Clarion Ledger | December 13, 2018 ++]

VA HCS Bay Pines FL Update 02 ► Mold Outbreak

An outbreak of mold at the C.W. Bill Young VA Medical Center shows the Veterans Administration isn't doing enough to deal a "chronic, recurrent problem," says an allergist who has treated people who complained about health problems from the mold. "The main problem is that the 'remediations' have not successfully corrected the high humidity environment," Stephen J. Klemawesch, founder of Allergy Associates, said in a statement to the Tampa Bay Times. "Until this is done, mold will continue to grow." What's more, U.S. Rep. Charlie Crist said "the situation falls far short" of the world-class care military veterans deserve. "The idea that staff and patients were working and receiving treatment in space containing mold is deeply troubling," Crist, the St. Petersburg Democrat, said in a statement to the Times.

Employees in the social work unit have long complained about mold in Building T-203 at the sprawling Bay Pines campus. The building was evacuated last month and 60 employees were moved after an air quality test of the building found elevated levels of mold known to cause health problems in those with compromised immune systems. But the problems go beyond Building T-203, a manufactured structure prone to water intrusion. Eleven other rooms were affected by mold, in some cases forcing patients and personnel to be moved, Bay Pines officials said. Bay Pines spokeswoman Melanie Thomas declined to say how many were moved from the additional rooms nor would she comment on Klemawesch's contention that the center isn't doing enough to deal with humidity levels.

The two most likely culprits are leaks and poor heating and cooling system engineering, "with a mismatch of compressors/air handlers," Klemawesch said, responding to questions from the Times. Thomas said the 12 rooms with mold represent only a tiny portion of the 5,245 rooms on the medical campus. Remediation is planned for two areas — a designated office space in building 100 and a patient room in building 71-101. Both have been closed. "In both cases, the space's occupants have been moved and relocated to new spaces for the time being," Thomas said.

In addition, the Bay Pines VA Healthcare System conducted a mold assessment Oct. 22 in the Building 23 Dental Clinic. "Although the results of the report determined that there were no elevated levels of mold, there was water staining on ceiling tiles and visible mold growth in one of the rooms," Thomas said. "Remediation has been completed in some areas and continues in others." She called the process standard of practice for the VA, involving a team of experts and a third party Certified Industrial Hygienist. "We are also pending an award of a remediation contract for mold to provide more support to our efforts, she said. U.S. Rep. Crist said he, too, is closely monitoring the center's progress. [Source: Tampa Bay Times | Howard Altman | December 10, 2018 ++]

VA HCS Central AR Update 01 ► Robotic Surgical System Now Available



The Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System has installed a new FDA-approved Da Vinci Xi robotic surgical system that brings precision, minimal invasive procedures and speedy recovery to Veteran patients. The newest FDA-approved version of Intuitive Surgical's robotic system was installed in an operating room at John L. McClellan Memorial Veterans Hospital and tested in a simulated environment. The system will be used on a patient for the first

time in early December. General and urologic surgery will be the focus at first. “This is a major step for Arkansas Veteran surgical patients,” said Dr. James W. Smith, chief of Surgical Service. “we are able to perform surgeries that result in smaller incisions, finer dissection, less blood loss and less pain, all allowing the Veteran to go home quicker.”

The Da Vinci robot is 100 percent controlled by a trained surgeon and translates the surgeon’s hand movements into smaller, precise, movements of tiny wristed instruments that can bend and rotate better than a human hand. Several VA medical centers across the country are already using the system and now Arkansas Veterans will be able to take advantage of the technology. “Our Veterans deserve the very best in care, service and technology,” said Dr. Margie Scott, medical center director. “This brings a whole new level of modern care to our Veterans that is state-of-the-art and life-changing.” [Source: Vantage Point | | November 30, 2018 ++]

*** Vets ***



Vet Fraud & Abuse ► **Reported 01 thru 15 DEC 2018**

Armed Forces Foundation – **Patricia Driscoll**, former Armed Forces Foundation executive director, was found guilty of fraud and tax evasion 29 NOV by a federal jury, according to a Department of Justice spokesman. After four days of jury deliberation that followed five weeks of testimony in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., Driscoll was found guilty on two counts of wire fraud, one count of first-degree fraud and two counts of tax evasion.



Federal prosecutors, according to the indictment, alleged Driscoll lied to donors by stating that 94 to 96 percent of all donations went to military members and their families; that she falsely directed the foundation's books to characterize that that money went to veterans and their families when it went to her; and that she filed false tax returns that did not include commissions from fundraising and other benefits she received in addition to her salary. Sentencing is scheduled for mid-March, and Driscoll will remain free on a personal recognizance until sentencing. The statutory maximum sentence for the crimes is 35 years in prison, but sentences rarely come close to the statutory maximums. [Source: ESPN | Bob Pockrass | November 29, 2018 ++]

Rolling Thunder Update 01 ► Memorial Day 2019 to be Final Washington Event

Rolling Thunder’s annual roaring parade through the streets of the nation’s capital is coming to an end. Group organizers said this year’s planned motorcycle ride in May, expected to draw more than 1 million riders and spectators to the National Mall, will be the last time the large-scale demonstration is held, citing cost concerns. The event has become a [fixture of Memorial Day commemorations](#) in Washington, D.C. for more than 30 years, drawing attention to military members still missing in action. But the noisy, attention-getting demonstration also has become a victim of its own success.

Pete Zaleski, vice president of Rolling Thunder Inc., said costs for security and clean-up of the event have swelled to more than \$200,000, an expense the group cannot continue to sustain. “It really has exploded to beyond what we can support,” he told Military Times. “These costs didn’t exist 10 years ago.” Zaleski said the size of the crowd both participating and watching have prompted additional security concerns at the Pentagon, where the annual ride typically starts. That has prompted several new costs and conflicts with local officials. “We still have 90 chapters in 33 states, and we’re going to help them coordinate their own rides on a smaller scale,” Zaleski said. “The group is not going under, and our message is not going away. We’re just not going to be doing it in Washington anymore.”

Still, the loss of one of the most public and recognizable national Memorial Day commemorations drew disappointment from members of the veterans community. “These demonstrations and Rolling Thunder’s unbelievable work over the past 32-plus years has made a tremendous impact, keeping the search going for our missing and prisoners of war,” said Joe Chennelly, national executive director of AMVETS. “We as an organization are grateful.” Chennelly called the group’s work “too important to our veterans, and really to all Americans, to simply let it stop.” His organization is looking at ways to support the Rolling Thunder chapters moving forward.

Zaleski said he hopes the announcement of the end of the tradition will bring even more attention to the event’s message. “When word gets out that this is the last one, it’s going to draw even more people,” he said. “The next ride ought to be huge.” The final ride is scheduled for May 26, 2019. More information is available on the Rolling Thunder web site <http://www.rollingthunder1.com>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | December 13, 2018 ++]

Cohen Veterans Network Update 01 ► Tampa Clinic to Open MAR 2019

A controversial billionaire wants to bring a mental health clinic to Tampa that will treat veterans and their families at little or no cost. The clinic, part of the Cohen Veterans Network (<https://www.cohenveteransnetwork.org>), is funded by hedge fund tycoon Steven A. Cohen. Backed by his \$275 million commitment, the idea is to fill gaps in the Department of Veterans Affairs mental and behavioral health care programs, including providing services to veterans with less than honorable discharges who can only obtain VA care under certain circumstances, as well as their family members, who are not covered by the VA. Tampa would be the 12th such clinic in the non-profit organization.



Steven A. Cohen

Expected to open in March in east Hillsborough and treat about 500 patients in its first year, the clinic will initially be funded with about \$8 million in seed money. Clinic leaders are expected to raise half of the operating costs by the six-year mark. The concept has the backing of veterans service organizations like AMVETS and the support of the Department of Veterans Affairs, which entered into a partnership with the network in February. But the plan also causes trepidation for a former clinic director who questions the network's mission. Marvin Southard, who was CEO of the network's first clinic set up at the University of Southern California in 2016, said the network was avoiding treatment for the most challenging patients for commercial reasons. "Both USC and NYU had problems with the Cohen program," Southard said.

"We have a mental health crisis," says Anthony Hassan, the Cohen Veterans Network CEO and president. "We are here to fill in the gaps in care." Hassan is intimately familiar with both Tampa and the needs of the local veteran community. A licensed clinical social worker, he is a retired Air Force major who ran the mental health clinic at MacDill Air Force Base from 2001 to 2006. He said offering high-quality mental health care for free or at low cost will result in fewer suicides, healthier families and young people getting help they need early before mental and behavioral health problems become a chronic, life-altering condition. The clinics provide the same methods of mental health treatment as the VA, he said.

Since opening the first clinic in 2016, the network has treated more than 8,600 patients. Hassan says nearly half are non-veteran family members who are not eligible for VA treatment. That's an important factor for military families who share the burden of service yet have no coverage by VA and limited coverage by the military's Tricare insurance program, which only covers spouses and children of active duty service members or retirees. In addition, until recently, the VA did not cover veterans who received anything other than an honorable discharge. Now it does, but only if they have served more than 100 days and been in combat, deployed to a combat zone, in areas of hostilities or were a victim of military sexual trauma. The Cohen Veterans Network has no such restrictions, Hassan said. "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," David Shulkin, VA Secretary at the time, said when the partnership with the Cohen network was announced.

Southard, the former USC clinic director, said he thinks "that what is required in a veteran-heavy locality like Tampa is a true convener organization or person who could bring the veterans service community together as collaborators rather than as competitors. I had hoped that the Cohen project could have served that role, but in Los Angeles, at least, they were inclined to do the opposite." Tracy Neal-Walden, clinic director for the network operation that opened in Silver Springs, Maryland a little more than a year ago, said she has not experienced that problem. "I continue to be pleased and proud they made this decision and the quality of work my team is doing," said Neal-Walden, who retired last year as an Air Force colonel who ran the flying branch's mental health care programs

The network has also earned the plaudits of people like Joe Chenelly, National Executive Director of AMVETS, who said the network "is on the same page as VA and AMVETS regarding the end goal: delivering timely, quality care to our nation's heroes." But the network was the subject of a scathing February story in ProPublica, which raised questions about its intent, including whether it is an effort to privatize VA healthcare. It also delved into how Cohen's hedge fund pleaded guilty to insider trading.

U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-Trinity), vice chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, is taking a wait-and-see attitude toward the network. Though a sponsor of the Mission Act legislation that opens up opportunities for veterans to receive VA-funded care outside the system, "Bilirakis does not support privatizing or replacing the VA in any way," said Summer Robertson, his spokesperson. "Any entity serving the veteran community ... should be held accountable for meeting the highest standard of care," Robertson told the Times in an email. "If the Cohen Network helps meet an unmet need by providing mental health services in the Tampa area, that could potentially be a good option for some veterans."

Hassan, the network's CEO, dismisses the notion that the clinics are an effort to privatize VA care or that there is a profit motive. The Tampa office, like all others, will work with the VA and local veteran service organizations to

find patients who are falling through the gaps, he said. The network, he said, provides all costs for clinic buildout and the first three years at full cost. By the sixth year, the clinic will have to raise half its operating costs. This can be accomplished through philanthropy, government grants or insurance reimbursements, including from VA, Tricare, Medicare and private insurers. To date, the network has not reached out to any local legislators, veterans services organizations or local charitable organizations for help, Hassan said. But the plans are to do so. [Source: Tampa Bay Times | Howard Altman | December 11, 2018 ++]

Vet Employment Update 09 ► Jobless Rate 3.1% for NOV 2018

The veterans jobless rate ticked up slightly to 3.1 percent in November but remained in the range of historic lows for veterans of all eras, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Their report for November, released 7 DEC, showed that the unemployment rate for veterans of all eras increased from 2.9 percent in October to 3.1 percent in November. October's 2.9 percent marked only the second time since 2000 that the jobless rate for all veterans fell below 3 percent. The lowest recorded rate for all veterans was 2.7 percent in October 2017, according to BLS.

- For post-9/11 veterans, classified as "Gulf War-era II" veterans by BLS, the unemployment rate in November was 3.4 percent, up from 3.1 percent in October, still well below the double-digit unemployment figures for post-9/11 veterans recorded in 2010, when the nation was pulling out of the 2008 recession.
- For Gulf War-era I veterans of Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the unemployment rate in November was 2.6 percent, down from 2.7 percent in October, BLS said.
- For World War II, Korea and Vietnam veterans, the unemployment rate in November was 2.2 percent, down from 3.0 percent in October.
- For the nation as a whole, the unemployment rate remained at 3.7 percent for the third consecutive month." The number of unemployed persons was little changed at 6.0 million. Over the year, the unemployment rate and the number of unemployed persons declined by 0.4 percent and 641,000, respectively," BLS wrote in the report.
- Among the major worker groups, the unemployment rates for adult men (3.3 percent), adult women (3.4 percent), teenagers (12.0 percent), Whites (3.4 percent), Blacks (5.9 percent), Asians (2.7 percent), and Hispanics (4.5 percent) showed little or no change in November, according to BLS.

In a statement accompanying the report, William J. Wiatrowski, acting BLS commissioner, said health care employment grew by 32,000 jobs over the month and has expanded by 328,000 over the year. He said manufacturing employment rose by 27,000 jobs in November, with job gains of 6,000 in chemicals and 3,000 in primary metals. Over the past 12 months, manufacturing has added 288,000 jobs, Wiatrowski added. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | December 10, 2018 ++]

Vet Weight ► Study Shows Only One in Seven are Not Overweight or Obese

The number of disabled veterans is rising. And so, too, is their weight. A new study, based on a survey of more than 33,000 post-9/11 service members and veterans, found that 51.7 percent of wounded warriors have a body mass index that qualifies them as obese — up from 48.6 percent two years ago. Of those, 6.2 percent are morbidly obese. Even more grim? The percentage of vets who are overweight in 2018 is nearly seven times greater than the percentage of those who are not, according to the study released 4 DEC by Wounded Warrior Project and the nonprofit's research partner, Westat.



Fewer than half of survey participants, 42 percent, said they exercised at least three times a week, and those who maintained healthy eating habits were also in the minority. Many listed lack of time, fear of injury and discomfort in social situations as reasons for not working out more. But the report’s authors also link struggles with depression, sleep, stress and the military-to-civilian transition as factors that could be impacting weight gain in the wounded warrior population. “I think with any type of uncertainty and/or change, there is a heightened sense of stress,” said Melanie Mousseau, metrics director for Wounded Warrior Project. “With stress comes a myriad of other challenges.”

In the study, veterans said the most challenging parts of transitioning out included missing the camaraderie of the military, problems adapting to the civilian workforce and difficulty navigating the red tape at the Defense and Veterans Affairs Departments during the transition process. “I only feel comfortable in combat,” one veteran wrote. “I do not feel comfortable in civilian life or trust it.” And another put it this way: “After leaving a structured environment like the military, it’s difficult to be around people without a standard.” More than 90 percent of the veterans and service members who responded to the Wounded Warrior Project survey between March and May 2018 were enlisted, and 45 percent deployed three or more times during their career. Sixty-two percent had received a disability rating of 80 percent or higher, and the vast majority of respondents reported that they suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, trouble sleeping, and back, neck or shoulder pain.

While the rate of obesity reported in the study is notably higher than that of the general adult population in the U.S., according to the National Center for Health Statistics, obesity among this group is “compounded by a unique set of issues and circumstances,” Mousseau said. Diana Thomas, a professor at West Point, said contributing factors to obesity are complex. She pointed to research that has shown a relationship between stress and weight gain, as well as a study which found higher weight gain in people who were once fit. “Transition to civilian life will no longer have weigh-ins or structured PT. So it is possible that a change in lifestyle leads to a change in structured habits,” she said in an email. “One thing we know is that during physical activity, there is a phenomena called compensation. Basically, we eat more. If this is not reversed when PT stops, then it will lead to weight gain.”

When asked about strategies for combating obesity, especially for a population of veterans dealing with physical and mental limitations, Thomas suggested walking and swimming, which are “low impact exercises.” And for veterans who struggle to work out because of uneasiness in social situations, she recommends finding a structured workout time with a personal trainer. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | December 4, 2018 ++]

Vet Eating Habits ► Study Shows Vets Not Eating Veggies

An apple a day may keep the doctor away, but veterans don’t seem to be buying the advice. A comprehensive Wounded Warrior Project survey of more than 33,000 veterans and service members, released 4 DEC, shows a vast majority of vets aren’t eating the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables each day — and could be missing out on key health benefits as a result. “It’s widely recognized that a healthy eating plan is critical for good health and

for mitigating the effects of chronic disease,” said Melanie Mousseau, metrics director for the Wounded Warrior Project.

The Department of Agriculture puts the recommended daily fruit intake at 2 cups for men over age 19 and women between 19 and 30. Women who are 31 or older only need 1.5 cups per day to maintain a healthy diet. Men between 19 and 50 should also be eating 3 cups of vegetables each day. Older men and women between 19 and 50 should eat 2.5 cups, and the recommended amount for women over 50 is 2 cups daily.

Among veterans who responded to the Wounded Warrior Project survey between March and May 2018 — 90 percent of whom reported having more than three service-connected injuries or health problems — more than 28 percent said they ate no fruit in a typical day. Around 44 percent said they had only one serving, which is still under the recommended amount for all adult age groups. Vegetable counts were slightly better; only about 61 percent of survey respondents were under the USDA’s suggested daily intake, compared to nearly 73 percent of delinquent fruit eaters. According to the USDA, its recommended portions are appropriate for individuals who get less than 30 minutes per day of moderate physical activity, which includes many of the veterans surveyed who expressed difficulty exercising because of physical or other limitations.

The study also showed that when given the choice between a carrot stick or a bag of chips, veterans are more likely to go for the chips. For example, 8.3 percent reported eating four or more snacks per day, compared to 2.5 and 3.9 percent who said they ate the same amount of servings in fruits and vegetables, respectively. Though the survey did not ask participants to specify what types of snacks they are eating, Mousseau said it’s safe to assume many are processed foods or higher in calories than broccoli or a banana.

In fairness to veterans, many American adults aren’t eating enough fruits and veggies either. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported last year that just 1 in 10 adults are eating the recommended amount. But healthy eating is an “important,” yet “overlooked,” component of maintaining good physical and mental health, and should be even more of a priority for veterans who struggle with pain and chronic conditions, Mousseau said. “(It’s) more important than (for) the average person to make sure they are filling their body with the proper nutrition,” she said.

The 2018 Wounded Warrior Project report is based on the organization’s ninth annual survey — the first to include questions about respondents’ eating habits. About six percent of respondents were still serving on active duty at the time of the survey, though the overwhelming majority had transitioned out of the military. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | December 4, 2018 ++]

Iran Victims Lawsuit ► \$10B | Accountability For Attacks Against US Troops in Iraq

More than 500 U.S. military deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan have been directly linked to Iran, and now injured veterans and Gold Star families will have their day in court. They read in simple, repetitive sentences with a date, location, name, age and cause of death. It is a seemingly endless list of those killed and maimed in Iraq by weapons supplied by Iran and used in attacks on the U.S. military.

- On April 4, 2004, in Baghdad, Army Spc. Robert Arsiaga, 25, was killed in a combined attack in which members of the Mahdi Army hit his unit with rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire.
- On Sept. 8, 2009, in Tikrit, Army Spc. Zachary Myers, 21, was killed when an EFP detonated near his vehicle.
- On Nov. 14, 2011, in Baghdad, Army Spc. David Emanuel Hickman, 23, was killed when an EFP detonated near his vehicle.

These are only a sample of the deaths. There are more than 100 pages in the federal court documents, full of details of wounds, surgeries and trauma. Their words carry legalistic accounts of 90 attacks that caused internal bleeding, collapsed lungs, severed heads, missing hands, arms and legs, brain injuries, third-degree burns on necks, faces and hands, suffering that persists in the victims and reverberates beyond those struck in the blasts, cascading waves of pain into the lives of wives, husbands, parents and children.

Those attacks are the subject of a three-day trial in federal court that began 3 DEC. It is a trial in which a small New Jersey law firm and a lawyer out of Arkansas are trying to hold the Islamic Republic of Iran accountable to the tune of \$10 billion for weapons, materials, training and other support that led directly to the death or mutilation of more than 1,000 U.S. troops from 2004 to 2011. But this will not be similar to trials most are familiar with, where two sides argue to a jury. Iran has no attorney defending it in court, and there is no jury. The plaintiffs' attorneys in this instance argued their case straight to U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly. At some point following the trial, she will make her ruling, as to whether the work that's been put into this case since its 2016 filing has met the legal standard to hold Iran accountable.



If the victims prevail, it will set them on a path to be eligible for compensation from a fund that collects money related to terror activities from banks involved in related schemes, negotiations between states and fund seizures. And stating that case will involve at least 19 witnesses, including experts on Iran, explosives, orthopedic surgery, TBI, PTSD, military operations, and victims themselves. And to bolster that testimony, attorneys have already or will introduce at trial 174 exhibits that include U.S. documents linking Iran to its support for terror groups, radical Islamist leadership rosters, U.S. military reports on the attacks and forensic reports of their aftermath.

Though this court case has been working its way to this trial for two years, it is arriving at a time when President Donald Trump has restarted sanctions against the Iranian regime. It comes a week after journalists were shown displays of weapons ranging from assault rifles to ballistic missiles that have been captured or retrieved from Iranian-backed groups in Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen and Afghanistan.

There is a variety of ways in which the attorneys allege that Iran supported insurgent groups within Iraq, but one measure contributed the most damage and is also one way experts say is easily traceable to the regime. Most, but not all, were the result of a special kind of weapon and explosive device fitted with an explosively formed penetrator (EFP). The weapon became the way insurgents and terrorists in Iraq could strike at otherwise protected U.S. forces. But they were not the kinds of weapons that could be built in a ramshackle garage. They required more sophisticated engineering knowledge than what was being seen in the often deadly, but less effective, homemade improvised explosive devices that littered the landscape after the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

“If an EFP was used in attacks, we can reliably trace these back to Iran,” said Peter Raven-Hansen, law professor at George Washington University. He said that by laying out the evidence in court, the attorneys hope to factually confirm what the U.S. military has long known, but something he doesn't think the public has been aware of, which is Iran's role in the systematic killing and maiming of U.S. troops.

The lawsuit is seeking \$10 billion in damages from Iran. But if or when any of the victims or their families could receive any compensation is a long time away. There are nearly 6,000 victims of state-sponsored terrorism believed to be eligible for compensation recouped from a fund set up for numerous cases. Other cases filed by the Osen law firm, attorney Tab Turner and others have attacked large-scale financial institutions for their involvement in moving money from Iran through U.S. banks, which they allege was then funneled to Iranian proxies who carried out attacks.

One such case being pursued by Osen remains active in federal court in New York since its 2014 filing. The lawsuit specifically alleges that HSBC, Standard Chartered Bank, Barclays, Commerzbank, Credit Suisse, Bank Saderat and Royal Bank of Scotland, N.V. conspired with Iran and its banks to illegally transfer billions of dollars through U.S. banks, circumventing regulators and law enforcement detection of the transactions.

Attorneys allege that hundreds of millions of dollars in those transactions were funneled to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force, a military wing that conducts operations outside Iran, and terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah who carried out attacks that killed and maimed U.S. troops and civilians in Iraq. That case has the advantage that nine banks so far have admitted to the conspiracies, most in “deferred prosecution agreements.” In many of those agreements the banks have agreed to pay the U.S. government fines and forfeit billions of dollars for the violations. In 2012, HSBC admitted to its role and agreed to forfeit \$1.25 billion; Credit Suisse agreed to forfeit \$536 million; Commerzbank AG agreed to pay \$1.45 billion; Standard Chartered Bank reached a \$340 million settlement; and Barclay’s forfeited \$298 million in connection with its violations.

The actions behind those forfeitures involve Iran, Sudan and Cuba, which are other nations covered by the Anti-Terrorism Act. The act restricts money dealings with state sponsors of terror and terrorist groups. By taking the deferred prosecutions and admitting to the charges, the banks avoided further prosecutions and additional penalties. A Chicago-based firm, MM-Law, filed a suit against Iran and Sudan for the 1998 embassy bombings in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, which killed 224 people. Both firms have tried and are in the process of trying multiple cases involving terrorism victims.

That case showed that Iran, through Hezbollah, gave training and assistance to Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaida members to conduct the attacks. Plaintiffs asked for \$35 billion. In 2014, a federal judge ruled in favor of the plaintiffs and awarded nearly \$8.5 billion. Attorneys with the MM-Law firm helped with the creation of the U.S. Victims of State-Sponsored Terrorism Fund, which has paid out \$1.1 billion to victims to date and another distribution of that same amount is planned in the coming year. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Todd South| December 2, 2018 ++]

Iran Victims Lawsuit Update 01 ► Trial Day One

Army Pfc. Robert Bartlett drove the lead Humvee in a three-vehicle convoy down Route Pluto in Baghdad, Iraq. He and the other three soldiers in the truck were one sector away from finishing their days’ worth of presence patrols and reconnaissance. He snaked the truck through the concrete barriers that dotted the neighborhoods. It was May 2005; he’d joined shortly after the 2003 Iraq invasion. The Arizona native had become a soldier at age 30 but had completed cavalry scout training and sniper training before his first deployment. On 3 DEC, as he recounted the events of that day in federal court in Washington, Bartlett explained that though he was older than many of the soldiers who outranked him, he looked at his superiors in the truck and the rest of the unit like little brothers. He’d do anything to protect them, he testified. But neither he nor those in the truck — or even at some of the highest levels of the U.S. military — had a firm grasp on the dangers they faced or their origin.

The three-day federal trial that began 3 DEC pits both a New Jersey and Arkansas law firm against the Islamic Republic of Iran, alleging that the regime funneled funds, personnel and training in a long-running and deeply organized plot to exact as much damage as possible on U.S. and coalition troops in Iraq — all to keep the country destabilized and further their political and military aims. The attorneys began laying out evidence that involves long-term planning, millions of dollars, and taking a shotgun approach by backing factions that often fought each other but who could all be counted on to attack the U.S. They did so without objection. Iran didn’t send any attorneys. If successful, the more than 200 plaintiffs in this case could be considered eligible to receive confiscated or forfeited funds being gathered in an account for victims of terrorist acts.

Past cases involving embassy bombings and other attacks have been litigated, and the fund has paid out more than \$1 billion. This is not the only case involving Iran or other entities such as the terrorist group Hezbollah and other state sponsors of terrorism such as Sudan and Cuba. There could be as many as 6,000 eligible victims, according to officials. But this case focuses on 90 separate attacks and the victims and their families who've suffered death, dismemberment and lifelong trauma as a result of Iran's campaign. They want \$10 billion.



Lead attorney Gary Osen (left) questions former Army Pfc. Robert Bartlett in federal court about his experience during an attack that severely wounded him, other soldiers and killed his friend Staff Sgt. William Brooks in May 2005. (center) Bartlett as he recounted in federal court the explosively formed penetrator bomb used. (right) Attorney Osen speaks to three-star Army Lt. Gen. Michael Oates who led units on multiple tours in Iraq and later served as director of the organization focused on defeating the IED threat.

Retired Army Col. Kevin Farrell recounted some of the bigger picture that 1st Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment faced during the year they spent in Iraq. Farrell walked through the motor pool and saw shredded vehicles, but many carried a similar marking — a cleanly cut, 4-inch diameter hole. “We weren’t sure what it was,” the colonel said. They knew what improvised explosive devices were — that was common knowledge by the time they’d deployed. But this was different. There was nothing “improvised” about these weapons. His staff pushed the intelligence up the chain. They got a lukewarm response. “A bomb is a bomb, what’s the difference?” higher command said.

In milliseconds on a Baghdad road, Bartlett and his team found out. The blast seared through the driver’s side where the door meets the roof. A blazing hot ball of copper split into Bartlett, ripping across his face and jaw, and rocketing across the front of the cab, slicing off the top of Staff Sgt. William Brooks’ head, killing the truck commander and friend instantly. The other half of the metal projectile blew Ed Grier out of the rear driver’s side seat and onto the highway. But it kept going, taking Cpl. Todd Bishop’s legs with it.

The gunner had been resting on the low-slung cargo strap. Out of shock, he tried to stand. Adrenaline pounding, he didn’t know that little was left to help him do that. He tumbled down. Simultaneously, Bartlett reached back with a burnt, broken hand and pulled Bishop toward him, shoving him toward the front of the cab and pulling his legs straight. Grier had recovered and was pounding open the warped, driver’s door to get to the pair. Smoke filled the cabin. Those still living could smell burnt flesh, hair and diesel fuel. Huddling in their own private hell, Bishop put his arms around Bartlett. “I threw my arms around him, we were gonna die together,” Bartlett said. The four soldiers in that vehicle and potentially 1,000 others killed or wounded as a result of Iran’s influence were hit with a variety of lethal means. But the centerpiece of the majority of the attacks was the more sophisticated explosively formed penetrator, or EFP.

The roots of that simple but deadly weapon and its use against U.S. forces in Iraq can in some ways be traced back to decades before, when, after the Iranian revolution, Iran formed the Iranian Republican Guard Corps-Quds Force with the explicit mission of pushing Iran’s aims outside of the country. In a short time, they found their first willing disciples when they sent an estimated 1,500 of their Quds Force trainers to Lebanon to help form and direct the fledgling militant groups into one unit, “Hezbollah,” testified Matthew Levitt, director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and author of “Hezbollah: the global footprint of Lebanon’s Party of God.”

They were quick learners. Between 1983 and 1996, the terrorist group could claim credit for more than 600 dead in just the major attacks they’d carried out in their country, South America and Saudi Arabia, including the 1983 Marine barracks bombing that killed 241 U.S. service members. And Hezbollah marched on, as it continues to conduct assassinations and other attacks in places as wide-ranging as Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Thailand. At

nearly the same time as Iran was feeding funding, training and weapons to Hezbollah, it began supporting other aims just across its border. From 1980 to 1988, during the Iran-Iraq War, Iran supported the Badr Corps, a Shia group loyal to Iran within Iraq.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in some ways came at a time tailor-made for Iran and its terrorist proxies such as Hezbollah and other groups already inside Iraq. Early versions of the EFP began showing up in Hezbollah attacks against Israeli adversaries in Lebanon and elsewhere in the late 1990s. By 2003, Hezbollah had improved the technology, through funding and training from Iran. Shortly after the U.S.-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, the Badr Corps came out from the shadows and rebranded itself the Badr Organization, Levitt testified.

Another wrinkle that proved an Achilles heel for U.S. forces was an underestimation of the explosives threat they would face post-invasion. The entire U.S. Army invasion force brought with it just three companies of explosives ordnance disposal soldiers. That's 66 people. Each company had a single robot for neutralizing bombs, but they didn't bring them along for the invasion, retired Army Col. Leo Bradley, an EOD expert who commanded multiple such units over his career, testified. In the first year of the war, the 52nd Ordnance Corps would report 17,025 EOD responses, the bulk of those small arms and munitions left over from Saddam's stockpiles. For example, out of 18 million pieces of weapons, ordnance and ammunition destroyed, only 1,478 were IEDs, Bradley said. Within a few short years, just one of the four main zones of Iraq would see 1,000 IED attacks a month.

And with each new bombing season, the attacks would become more coordinated and the equipment more sophisticated. From simple artillery shells with low power radio-controlled detonators, to pressure plates, then cell phone triggers to command wire controls and onto passive infrared, the bombs and bombers were getting better. The U.S. responded, first with soldiers welding "hillbilly armor" to their thin-skinned Humvees, then with uparmored Humvees, and finally to Mine Resistant, Ambush Protected armored vehicles with V-shaped hulls. The Iranian designed and supplied EFP would thwart those efforts. Backing those efforts was the Ramadan Corps, a unit within the Badr Organization whose specific mission was to smuggle arms and fighters into and out of Iraq, mostly through the porous Iranian border. This was happening largely under the eye of Iraqi military and police accomplices, sympathetic to or bribed by Iranian agents. And as this ever-more complicated web threaded its way into the core of Iraqi politics early in the war, the coalition forces, especially the U.S. component, was focused in the other direction.

Retired Army Lt. Gen. Michael Oates commanded units with the 10th Mountain Division and 101st Airborne Division on tours in Iraq, retiring after a stint with the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization, or JIEDDO. Oates testified that following the de-Baathification priority, which removed Baath Party associates from nearly all government and leadership positions, a Sunni-led uprising pulled the military and political focus to quelling that violence and those problems. The Baath Party had been Saddam's party when he was in power and was predominately Sunni. That allowed space for Shia militant groups such as the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al Sadr, to grow. That army splintered, providing more anti-U.S. groups to form and receive funding, proliferating the use of EFPs, IEDs and other attack methods being drilled into groups by both Hezbollah, Badr, and other groups loyal to Iran's aims, Levitt testified.

It was those sophisticated, devious methods of killing and maiming U.S. and coalition troops like Bartlett and his friends. Sitting on the witness stand, the product of nearly five years' worth of surgeries and rehabilitation at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Bartlett's external scars can't be missed. He described the pain of the blast. "It was like a molten hot sledge hammer hit me in the face," he said. Permanent nerve damage keeps that pain fresh. "It's like my face is on fire all of the time," he said. His internal wounds may never heal. The "big brother" role is one he took seriously — and still does. "It's survivor's guilt," he said, recalling how Brooks, the staff sergeant who died in the blast, had a wife and two children. He was single.

Bartlett's tour ended that May day, while the unit's went on for the rest of the year. Other friends were lost. "I feel guilty that I wasn't there to bring them home safe," he said. Gary Osen, the lead plaintiffs' attorney, asked two simple questions at the end of his examination of Oates, the retired three-star. "Did the U.S. ever develop a successful

countermeasure for the EFP?” Osen asked. “No,” Oates said. “Did Iran ever suffer any consequences for its support and development of EFPs?” Osen asked. “No,” Oates said.

The first question continues to be pursued by researchers and tacticians at various levels. This trial is one attempt to answer the second question. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Todd Smith | December 3, 2018 ++]

Iran Victims Lawsuit Update 02 ► Trial Completed

Throughout the trial, which ended 6 DEC, U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly saw evidence that included expert analysis of the forensic characteristics of the attacks and detailed reports connecting Iranian entities that funneled weapons, training and advancements to Shia groups in Iraq to attack U.S. troops. She also heard wrenching testimony from victims of the attacks, families and troops who suffered directly, including Staff Sgt. Robert Canine.

On May 17, 2009, Canine was in an uparmored Humvee when an EFP blasted through the front passenger floorboard, cutting through both of his lower legs. One was immediately amputated; the other was later taken off by surgeons at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Canine testified in the trial about the pain, surgeries, physical rehab, sleeplessness, trauma and host of other problems he’s faced over the decade since. He spoke with Military Times after his testimony about the lawsuit. Yes, he said, the lawsuit would help him financially. But he admits at first he was skeptical when contacted three years ago about his eligibility to be a plaintiff in the suit.

Dealing with his injuries daily, he wasn’t sure that recounting those experiences would be worth it, especially if winning a lawsuit was a long shot and getting any compensation might be years or even decades away, which was what has happened in other such terrorism-related cases. And it would involve separate lawsuits. This one against Iran is unlikely to do more than set the stage for more evidence against financiers of the attacks. But two things solidified his resolve. First was the Wikileaks report in which he was able to see detailed references to Iranian involvement in his attack. He and his fellow soldiers were briefed on the EFPs and the Iran links before their deployment. But, seeing it in black and white helped cement the evidence.

Then he learned about the banks. In 2012, HSBC admitted to its role and agreed to forfeit \$1.25 billion; Credit Suisse agreed to forfeit \$536 million; Commerzbank AG agreed to pay \$1.45 billion; Standard Chartered Bank reached a \$340 million settlement; and Barclay’s forfeited \$298 million in connection with its violations. Federal prosecutors had emails in which bank officials instructed Iranian counterparts on how to scrub documents so as to avoid tracing the money flow back to Iran. “Had the banks stopped the payment, we could have put more of a clamp down on these attacks,” Canine said. “Had the banks stopped, I probably wouldn’t have gotten blown up, and I’d still be in the Army.” After he was contacted, he reached out to other soldiers who had been injured by EFPs. Some of them joined in as plaintiffs as well. “I want the banks to pay as much as possible,” Canine said.



First Lt. Rusty Mason (left) , who witnessed his fellow soldiers killed by an explosively formed penetrator bomb blast in Iraq, and Kelli Hake (right), whose husband, Staff Sgt. Christopher Hake, was killed in Iraq in 2008, testifies in a federal trial against Iran for its role in attacks against U.S. troops in Iraq.

In February 2008, Army Staff Sgt. Christopher Hake wrote a letter to his infant son. The neatly scripted, single-page message told little Gage how special the boy was to this first-time father, how the night he left on this second Iraq deployment was the hardest he'd face, how he'd kept picking up the boy, kissing him, putting him back down and then picking him up again. "I never wanted to let you go," Hake wrote. But the 26-year-old staff sergeant had a mission. He had to go. As he closed the letter, he made promises to his son. "I will be with you again. I will teach you to ride your first bike, build your first sand box, watch you play sports and see you have kids also," Hake wrote. "I am always with you. Dadda," he signed off. Those words were read this week in federal court by Kelli Hake, Christopher's wife.

On the day that Staff Sgt. Christopher Hake and his fellow soldiers were killed, Kelli Hake, back at Fort Stewart, Georgia, waited for a phone call her husband had promised on Easter Sunday. At first, she didn't worry. Maybe he got busy. She checked the news online before going to bed that night. An article said that the 4,000th U.S. service member had been killed. It just didn't seem possible that it could be Chris, she thought. At about 6 a.m., she heard a knock on her door. Two soldiers in dress uniform stood outside her front window. It still didn't register. She opened the door. "Are you Mrs. Christopher Hake?" they asked. She said yes. "Then it hit me why they were there," she said. "I shut the door, because I didn't want to hear what they had to tell me." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Todd South | December 6, 2018 ++]

Stolen Valor Update 113 ► Fake News | Facebook Trolls Targeting Vets

It started when Kristofer Goldsmith came across a Facebook page that looked a lot like his employer's. But the fake Vietnam Veterans of America was posting bad information, putting new dates on old news stories and twisting facts in an apparent attempt to stir up fear among readers. That led Goldsmith to embark on a 15-month cyber investigation into social media trolls targeting the military community from Ukraine, Bulgaria, the Philippines and more than two-dozen other countries. "This is something that is really dangerous, and the fake news that the White House needs to be concentrated on is the fake news that foreign entities are pushing into the veterans community to tear America apart," said Goldsmith, an Army veteran.



He recently wrote about his findings for WIRED magazine, articulating details about his "amateur investigation" that has since led VVA to push the government and social media sites for help with this problem. Goldsmith points to a recent study by Oxford University, which found that the public's general trust in service members and veterans make this group particular targets for online trolls. He said the misinformation could be harming veterans' health. For example, one post he saw made it look as though an old story about Congress considering cuts to disability benefits was about a new effort, even though it was published over the holiday season when Congress was out of session. "You're talking about agitating PTSD, giving people another reason to be anxious," Goldsmith said. "We'd like for the (Veterans Affairs Department) to start to educate veterans on cyber hygiene," he said. "The VA provides information about health ... We would like to see the VA engage in education campaigns that are similar to that, so basically preventative medicine."

He said VVA plans to continue raising awareness about this issue with the next Congress and has already gotten other veterans organizations on board. And meanwhile, veterans should be mindful of the content they're sharing from potentially harmful sources. "The first thing that they need to do is when they're following a page of any kind — it doesn't even have to be specifically related to veterans — if they're posting things like, 'Share this photo if you think that veterans should come before refugees,' you should just go to that page and click the little information tab," Goldsmith said. "A lot of the pages that they follow and share from that are sharing politically divisive messages are not of American origin." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | November 20, 2018 ++]

Toxic Exposure | Pease AFB NH ► Vet Forum Meets Calling for Action

Veterans and families who lived and worked at the former Pease Air Force Base want the government to begin collecting data about their disease rates and possible ties to chemical exposures on the installation. At a forum in an aircraft hangar 7 DEC, dozens of people stood at a microphone and told an Air National Guard colonel about their health problems and their experiences at the base. Veterans recalled routine, unprotected interactions with chemicals now known or suspected to be toxic, according to New Hampshire Public Radio. They said they'd wash their hands in jet fuel, pour used hydraulic fluid directly into storm drains, and douse each other in firefighting foams to celebrate retirements.

Those foams are now known to contain PFAS chemicals, which are suspected to cause cancer and myriad other health conditions. High levels of PFAS turned up in the drinking water at Pease in 2014. The Air Force is now working with the state and city of Portsmouth to clean up that water supply. And the base, which is now Pease International Tradeport, had already been deemed a federal Superfund site. But former mechanic Tony Lebel says it's not enough. "Once they identify the problem, they start taking care of the problem," he said. "The problem is, what about the people that were already there? The people from the '60s, '70s, '80s and even further back?"

Lebel and others recalled babies born with birth defects on the base during that time, and routine water tests, the results of which were never shared with residents. Other stories came from the family members of men who died of cancer and other diseases that may be caused by chemical exposure, long after their time at the base. Bonnie Peterman told Pease leadership her husband Wayne died of cancer two months after his diagnosis, years after working at Pease. "He was 67 years old," she said. "We'd been married 16 months. It was heartbreaking to both of us because we truly had hoped for a longer time." Asked if she knew her husband's occupation when he worked at the base, Peterman said, "I really don't. I have some papers." She spelled and repeated his name for officials' records: "Wayne Perreault, the love of my life."

Officials believe Pease is the first base in the country to look beyond the emerging problem of PFAS chemical contamination and to try to tackle a broader range of possible exposures through epidemiology and community outreach. Those at the forum said they'd like to see a registry of former base residents, with details about where they worked, the chemicals they encountered and their current health conditions. They hope it could show possible causes and let doctors and other state and federal agencies provide more resources for treatment and testing. [Source: New Hampshire Public Radio via AP | Annie Ropiek | December 10, 2018 ++]

WWII Vets 179 ► Joe Vass | 91 Year Old USN/USMC Vet

The U.S. Marines were dancing boisterously in their dress blue uniforms to Kool & the Gang's "Celebration" at the Marine Corps Birthday Ball a few weeks ago in Virginia Beach. But one man in the center of the dance circle commanded the most attention — Joe Vass, just shy of his 91st birthday, with plenty of energy to spare. "Not bad for an old man," he said after sharing video of his dance performance. Joe Vass does not stand still, whether at work or at play. He's entering his eighth year at the Virginia Division of Capitol Police, where he serves as inventory and supply officer, the person police officers ask for help with uniforms and equipment. He just observed his 68th anniversary with his wife, Barbara, known as Bobbie, in September.



"I'm thankful for my wife, and I'm thankful for my job," he said. Vass also is thankful for a life in public service, more than 75 years after his first military foray, at age 15, for the Virginia Protective Force during World War II. He was attending Thomas Jefferson High School in Richmond, where he had grown up on Grayland Avenue under the primary care of his grandmother after his parents split. A high school trumpet player, he figures he bugled taps at more than 100 military funerals, while learning to handle a Thompson submachine gun for the U.S. Army force formed in 1941.

At 16, Vass joined the U.S. Navy after his mother told the recruiter he was 17, and saw service during the war as a gun-range finder on three destroyers, including one torpedoed by a German U-boat. After he left the Navy in 1947, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps the next year. That earned him a trip to Korea, where he was assigned to a demolition team that detected and disarmed mines North Korean soldiers buried during the war there. "The next day, I was on my hands and knees digging in the ground with a bayonet for mines," he said in a jovial interview at his Capitol Police office in the Washington Building on Capitol Square. While in Korea, Vass was wounded by a grenade that exploded as he tried to kick it out of his foxhole, but he found a way — off the record — to avoid transfer to a hospital ship that would have taken him out of action with his unit as a potential invasion of China loomed under then-Gen. Douglas MacArthur. "I didn't want to be left out of the invasion," he said, even though President Harry Truman made sure that MacArthur didn't get his way.

Vass has served as a security police staff sergeant in the U.S. Air Force and patrolled in his own boat for the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary while he was working as police chief in Poquoson. He worked briefly for the Henrico County Division of Police after leaving the Marines in 1955 and then in a Marine Reserve unit. Vass assembled a small police force in Boykins, a town in Southampton County, and later ran his own security firm in Williamsburg. After giving up his business, he volunteered in the Virginia Defense Force and eventually became security chief for the Virginia National Guard's 224th Aviation Regiment in Sandston. He worked there until his state retirement in 2011. He worked for a short time as private security at state parking decks in downtown Richmond, but soon found an opportunity at Capitol Police, which needed a supply officer. Vass never had a supply officer when he ran police departments in Poquoson or Boykins, "so I had to buy everything."

Now, he works 28 hours per week, commuting between the Capitol and his home in New Kent County in his red Mustang. "It's the best job I ever had," he said. That's saying something for a guy whose first job was selling food on a Chesapeake & Ohio train between Richmond and North Carolina, thanks to his grandfather, who worked for the railroad. "I've never been on unemployment," he said. "I've always found something." His state office glitters with Marine Corps memorabilia, reflecting his devotion to the service. He's commandant of the Marine Corps League Detachment in Virginia. Vass also is a founder and treasurer of the Capitol Lodge, #79, of the Fraternal Order of Police. The lodge was founded this year, 400 years after Capitol Police began as an arm of the House of Burgesses, and is open to state law officers.

Capitol Police Chief Anthony "Steve" Pike nominated him for the Governor's Star Award this year. Vass didn't win, but his boss said in the application, "Yes, he is a star for the Capitol Police, but he has been a star for his country since well before many of us were born." Vass is just happy to be busy with a job he loves. "I'm thankful to serve my country and Capitol Police," he said. "I consider Capitol Police my home. I'd put the uniform on tomorrow if (the chief) needed me to do it." [Source: Richmond Times-Dispatch | Michael Martz | December 3, 2018 ++]

Obit: George H. Bush ► 30 NOV 2018 | WWII Aviator

Former President Bush passed away on Nov. 30, 2018 at the age of 94. He will be buried alongside his wife of 73 years, Barbara Bush, and his daughter Robin at the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Texas. Bush was born in 1924 in Milton, Massachusetts. After the Dec. 7, 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the Naval Reserves to become a naval aviator and join the war effort. Bush received his wings just before turning 19 – making him the youngest commissioned pilot. He soon became a combat pilot serving with the Torpedo Squadron Fifty-One aboard the USS San Jacinto in the North Pacific. The squadron is credited with sinking 17 enemy ships during World War II. In 1944, his TBM Avenger aircraft was hit by Japanese fire. Despite the severity of the damage, Bush was able to drop the aircraft's bombs on the target before flying out over water and ejecting with his fellow crew members. After safely parachuting into the water, they were later found by an American submarine, the USS Finback. Serving as a lookout with other rescued pilots, he spent 30 days at sea with the Finback's crew. Bush flew 58 combat missions and is credited with 126 carrier landings and more 1,200 flight hours. In December 1944, he was assigned to Norfolk Naval Base in Norfolk, Virginia, where he trained new combat pilots. Bush was honorably discharged from the Navy in September 1945.



After the war, he received an undergraduate degree in economics from Yale University. He became an executive in the oil industry before beginning his political career. He was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives for Texas's seventh district in 1966 and was reelected for a second term in 1968. Bush also served as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, chairman of the Republican Party, director of the CIA and vice president to President Reagan. He was elected as the 41st President of the United States in 1989. While president, Bush worked to improve U.S. relations with the Soviet Union; led the nation through the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi forces and signed the North American Free Trade Agreement. For his military service, Former President Bush received the Distinguished Flying Cross and three Air Medals. A Presidential Unit Citation was also awarded to the USS San Jacinto. The USS

George H.W. Bush was named for the former president in 2009. In 2011, he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama.

We honor his service. [Source: VAntage Point | December 1, 2018 ++]

Obit: Albert Madden ► 26 NOV 2018 | Oldest Army Bugler

Albert Madden played taps countless times at military funerals during the past century. On Friday afternoon 30 NOV, the solemn melody was played for him during a funeral with full military honors and a three-volley salute at Massachusetts National Cemetery. Madden, 100, a U.S. Army veteran of World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, died at his Hyannis home on 26 NOV. "I think he would have been proud of the ceremony," said his son, David Madden, of East Sandwich. "The military played a very big role in his life."



In a 2010 file photo, World War II veteran Albert J. Madden plays taps during a Veterans Day ceremony at the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne, Mass.

In addition to his service to the country, the elder Madden leaves behind a musical legacy that began as a child playing the bugle, trumpet and coronet and lasted a lifetime. He played throughout the world as a member of the Army's 9th Infantry Division Band, and back home with the Barnstable Town Band. While he could certainly play the pop tunes of the big band era and beyond, it was his rendition of taps at veterans observances, memorials and funerals for which he will be most remembered. At 92 years old he was invited by the Pentagon to play taps on arguably the melancholy bugle call's biggest stage: Arlington National Cemetery. "I'll be the oldest bugler, using the oldest horn, to ever play taps at the Arlington cemetery," he told a Times reporter in 2010. He even played the horn at his own 100th birthday earlier this year, according to his son.

World War II veteran John Kelley, 92, of Dennis, braved the late-November chill to bid farewell to Madden. "He was a very dedicated man," Kelley said. "He played at every single veteran's memorial event on Cape Cod." The honor of playing taps at Madden's funeral went to longtime friend Daniel LePage, of Dennis, who drove him to the engagement at Arlington eight years ago. Like Madden, LePage played the tune live during the ceremony, a tradition that has become less common in recent years, with many services now featuring recorded versions. Madden, realizing in his later years that playing taps was becoming a lost art, would don his military uniform and play at veterans' funerals upon request, his son said.

Madden's daughter-in-law Debra addressed the nearly 50 mourners who gathered for the committal ceremony. "As we speak, he is probably conducting a band of angels," she said. "Let's not mourn his death, let's celebrate his

life. One hundred years is a lot to celebrate." [Source: |Cape Cod Times, Hyannis, Mass. | Geoff Spillane | December 1, 2018 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► **Scheduled As of 15 DEC 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 | December 15, 2018 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ► **As of 15 DEC 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 | December 15, 2018 ++]

Veteran State Benefits ► Georgia 2018

The state of Georgia 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 – GA**” for an overview of the below those benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the following refer to <http://veterans.georgia.gov>.

- Housing
- Financial
- Employment
- Recreation
- Education
- Other

[Source: <https://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/georgia-state-veterans-benefits.html> | Nov 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 Blue Water Claims Update 56 ► H.R.299 | CBO Revised Report on Costs

On May 15, 2018, the Congressional Budget Office transmitted an estimate of the budgetary effects of H.R. 299, a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam, and for other purposes, as ordered reported by the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs on May 8, 2018. Among other things, the act would provide disability compensation to more of the veterans who served in the territorial seas of Vietnam during the Vietnam War under the assumption that they had been exposed to Agent Orange, a blend of herbicides used by the Department of Defense to remove dense tropical foliage. CBO estimated that those provisions would increase direct spending by about \$900 million over the 2019-2028 period.

The bill that was passed by the House amended the earlier version to expand the nautical area in which veterans would be presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange. That change would increase CBO’s estimate of the costs of the legislation by about \$250 million to account for the additional veterans that would be affected. Since the original estimate was prepared in May, CBO has obtained new information that would affect future estimates of similar legislation. In total, we expect that accounting for this new information would increase the estimate of the legislation’s effect on direct spending by at least \$1 billion over 10 years.

First, CBO now expects that more veterans would be affected by enactment of the bill than previously estimated. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) already presumes that veterans who served aboard certain U.S. Navy ships on the dates they were near the coast of Vietnam were exposed to Agent Orange. Using information about the crew size of those listed ships, CBO estimated that about two-thirds of veterans who served in the geographic area covered by the bill would obtain compensation under current law. Thus, in its estimate for H.R. 299, CBO projected that only one-third of veterans in the covered population would be newly eligible for disability compensation under that bill. CBO has since learned from additional discussions with VA that there is considerably more uncertainty than they originally anticipated about the number of veterans that, under current law, VA would presume to have been exposed because of service aboard those vessels. Specifically, there is a greater likelihood that less than two-thirds of veterans who served in the geographic area covered by the bill would obtain compensation under current law.

To account for that uncertainty CBO would, in future estimates expect that half of affected beneficiaries would obtain benefits under current law, and thus would not be affected by enactment of H.R. 299. That estimate is in the middle of the range of possible outcomes. Using that updated estimate would mean that fewer veterans would be expected to receive benefits under current law and more would get benefits as a result of H.R. 299. The increase in the number of affected veterans would result in additional retroactive payments to veterans whose disability claims previously have been denied by VA and also would increase the number of recurring disability payments. In addition, on the basis of new information from VA, CBO also would increase its estimate of the number of surviving spouses of deceased veterans who would receive compensation because the cause of those veterans' deaths would be presumed to have been caused by exposure to Agent Orange.

Finally, CBO would estimate that spending subject to appropriation would increase for additional personnel to process disability claims. Such spending would allow VA to handle new claims more quickly. Although H.R. 299 would not require VA to hire more personnel to process these additional claims, the department has indicated that it would need to do so in order to avoid a lengthy backlog. CBO will incorporate this new information into its future estimates of the budgetary effects of such legislation.

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This important bill to end the injustice of denying Vietnam, Korean DMZ, and Thailand veterans who suffer from life-threatening health conditions related to exposure to Agent Orange the care and benefits they deserve continues to be stalled in the Senate. The VFW needs your help to make sure this bill is passed before the end of the year. Readers are requested to Contact their senators to demand that the Senate passes H.R. 299. This can easily be done by going to <http://capwiz.com/vfw/issues/alert/?alertid=80552661> and utilize VFW's preformatted email/letter message or by calling (202) 224-3121 and asking to be transferred to your senators' office so you can voice your support. [Source: Congressional Budget Office & VFW Action Corps Weekly | November 29-30, 2018 ++]

Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 59 ► H.R.5671 | Burn Pits Accountability Act

Congressional members from both sides of the aisle came together on Capitol Hill on 12 DEC to urge lawmakers to fast-track a benefits package that would provide assistance to veterans who became ill after their exposure to burn pits. Reps. Brian Mast (R-FL) and Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI) joined advocacy group Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) at the Capitol Triangle, where they made the case for pushing forward help for the tens of thousands of veterans who have become gravely ill due to contact with the crude method of waste disposal used during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

“Too many of our post 9/11 veterans, after facing prolonged exposure to toxic burn pits, are suffering from debilitating and deadly illnesses,” Gabbard said during the press conference near the Capitol Building. “This is still not being addressed, even after how we have seen our Vietnam veterans suffered from Agent Orange exposure.”

“The result of our government failing to acknowledge and address their illnesses. We can’t allow another generation of veterans to suffer in the same way and be cast aside.” Gabbard also said that they are pushing for approval of the Burn Pits Accountability Act, which would ensure the evaluation of the exposure of U.S. service members to open burn pits and toxic airborne chemicals. Her efforts championing this cause have led to bi-partisan support by 147 co-sponsors on the Hill and 25 military and veteran organizations.

Mast, who is one of the co-sponsors, also expressed the need for the bill to go forward. “The bottom line is this,” he said. “All of our veterans are reliable. That’s one of the easiest things we can say about anyone that puts the uniform on. When we call upon them, they are there...but that’s not the reliability they see out of our governmental affairs.”

The recent headaches with delayed GI bill payments were also mentioned at Wednesday’s press conference. Both Gabbard and Mast said that the issue, which left hundreds of vets with delayed or incorrect payments due to the VA’s aging computer systems, needed to be addressed by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie immediately, charging it has hindered the financial security of those veterans who were affected by the snafu. “The VA’s response around the late and incorrect GI Bill payments has been slow, insufficient, and incomplete,” Melissa Bryant, Chief Policy Officer for IAVA, said in a statement. [Source: Fox News | Perry Chiaramonte | December 12, 2018 ++]

*** Military ***



USMAP ► Army Journeyman Apprenticeship Credentialing Program Moves Forward

The Army’s push to facilitate credentialing that soldiers can use once they transition off of active duty has taken another step forward, with the offer of a journeyman apprenticeship that can be completed with the training and job description you already have. Through the United Services Military Apprenticeship Program, soldiers can pick one of more than 100 job titles that fit their military occupational specialty’s description, according to a 29 NOV release from Training and Doctrine Command. “Soldiers can self-enroll, at no extra cost or use of benefits,” the release said. [More than 100 MOSs](#) can participate, though, unfortunately, no credentials are available for the Army’s largest: the 11B infantryman. Senior infantry sergeants, however, can earn a computer operator or office manager certificate. A supply specialist, for example, can earn computer operator, household manager, housekeeper, retail store manager and purchasing agent credentials.

The USMAP site <https://usmap.netc.navy.mil/usmapss/static/index.htm> lays out a four-step process for selecting a trade, enrolling, logging hours and then completing the apprenticeship. And if you’ve already been in the Army for a while, it’s just a matter of filling in the blanks. Advanced individual training will serve as official instruction, and time served once you’re assigned to a unit counts as on-the-job hours. So, all you have to do is fill in your AIT graduation information and time spent in your MOS. Newly enlisted recruits who are preparing to report to basic can also sign up. TRADOC spokesman Maj. Thomas Campbell told Army Times, and complete their apprenticeships once they’ve completed initial entry training and reported to their first units. The apprenticeship program is part of a military and Department of Labor partnership to help service members get the paperwork they need to show civilian employers that their military jobs translate into the civilian workforce.

Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey has pushed in recent years to stand up a widespread credentialing program that would not only cover things soldiers learned on active duty, but allow them to earn non-MOS related certificates paid for similarly to the Tuition Assistance program. The hope is that putting that kind of faith in soldiers will translate to higher retention rates, but will also assure high employment rates when soldiers do decide to leave. “The misperception is that if you give people credentials, they’ll leave. That’s absolutely not true,” Dailey told Army Times in 2017. “Monetary incentive is not the primary reason people stay with organizations. It’s obviously not the one in the Army. We don’t give a whole lot of monetary incentive.”

In September, Fort Hood, Texas, launched a credentialing pilot that includes dozens of certificates, including emergency medical technicians, information technology and personal training specialties, with up to \$4,000 a year to cover the costs. The program is scheduled to go Army-wide in late 2019. [Source: Military.com | Matthew Cox | November 13, 2018 ++]

BAH Update 05 ► 2019 Rates Released

The Pentagon on 14 DEC released the new 2019 Basic Allowance for Housing rates that will take effect in January, which show that service members on average will see a 2.5 percent uptick in housing allowance. Troops can check the new BAH rate for their local zip code [here](#) on the Defense Department’s website. The new BAH rates are intended to cover 95 percent of estimated housing costs, so individual service members will have to cover about 5 percent with out-of-pocket cash. That will likely range between \$66 and \$149 monthly depending on rank and dependency status.

Individual rate protection will remain in effect, meaning that service members will see an increase if their locality shows a rise in BAH, but if BAH drops (due to declining rental rates in their region) the individual service members will see their BAH hold steady at last year’s rate. Only service members moving into that area for the first time this year would receive the lower rate. This ensures members who have made long-term commitments in the form of a lease or mortgage are not penalized if the area’s housing costs decrease. The new BAH rates will also affect veterans using the GI Bill, which calculates the benefits housing stipend based on the rate that would be provided to an E-5 with dependents. [Source: Air Force Times | Military Times staff | December 14, 2018 ++]

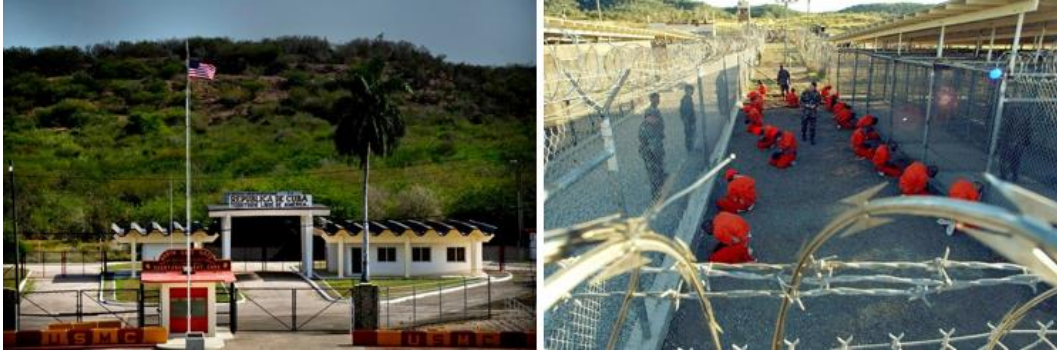
Guantanamo Bay Navy Base Update 03 ► 5 Things to Know on its 115th Birthday

The naval base at Guantanamo Bay is quietly commemorating its 115th anniversary. On Dec. 10, 1903, the United States established its first overseas military base on 45 square miles of Cuban territory. Today, the base at Guantanamo Bay is infamously associated with images of Muslim detainees wearing orange jumpsuits —alleged terrorists detained after the Sept. 11 World Trade Center attacks. But there’s much more to this naval base than its use as an offshore prison, as I documented in my book, “Guantánamo: A Working-Class History between Empire and Revolution.” Here are five things you probably don’t know about Guantanamo Bay provided by Jana Lipman with Tulane University.

1. The U.S. won it as a spoil of war -- The United States intervened in Cuba’s decades-long battle for independence from Spain in 1898, waging a six-week military campaign that Secretary of State John Hay memorably described as a “splendid little war.” The Spanish quickly surrendered, signing the Treaty of Paris and then handing over Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam to the United States. To achieve full independence, the U.S. required the Cuban government to amend its new Constitution to allow the U.S. to “sell or lease” territory for a naval base. The

Cubans did so grudgingly. Unlike most leases, this one has no end date. The U.S. military may use the site indefinitely.

The base in Guantanamo Bay has been a reminder of American imperialism in the Caribbean ever since. Cuba wants the land returned. In his historic meeting with Barack Obama in 2016, President Raúl Castro cited the base as a key obstacle in improving U.S.-Cuban relations. The U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay has been a thorn in Cuba's side for 115 years and counting. (Ramon Espinosa/AP)



The U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay (left) has been a thorn in Cuba's side for 115 years and counting. Detainees in orange jumpsuits sit in a holding area (right) under the watch of U.S. military police at the temporary Camp X-Ray, which was later closed and replaced by Camp Delta, inside Guantanamo Bay naval base

2. The Cuban revolution took place nearby -- When Lipman tells people he studies Guantanamo, they immediately imagine the military base. Lipman has never set foot there. His research is about the eastern Cuban city of Guantánamo, located some 15 miles inland from Guantanamo Bay. Guantánamo, home to about 200,000 people, is an 18-hour bus ride from Havana in an eastern Cuban region called Oriente — a stronghold of the Cuban Revolution. Starting in December 1956, brothers Fidel and Raúl Castro and a small group of guerrillas began a military campaign in Oriente that would ultimately overthrow Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. Cuban base workers at Guantanamo Bay aided the Castros' insurgency by raising money on the base and pilfering supplies like gasoline. Evidence suggests that some U.S. military personnel secretly funneled arms to the guerrillas. The sons of three American servicemen even ran off to join the uprising in 1957. The Cuban base workers generally escaped punishment, but at least one U.S. sailor faced a court martial for supporting the Castros' revolution.

3. Jamaicans and Filipinos are the main workforce -- Approximately 6,000 people live on the Guantanamo Bay naval base today, including American military personnel, their families and civilian staff. Historically, most of the staff at Guantanamo Bay were Cubans from the city of Guantánamo. The base offered steady jobs at wages far higher than those on local sugar plantations. But in 1964 Fidel Castro cut off the base's Cuban water supply in a diplomatic conflict with the United States. President Lyndon Johnson ordered most Cuban workers fired to make the base more self-sufficient. Jamaican and later Filipino guest laborers were brought in to take their place. Today, these guest workers live in trailers and old barracks on the base and do everything from construction and food services to laundry. Many are paid less than the U.S. minimum wage.

4. Guantanamo Bay is a mostly Constitution-free zone -- The 1898 Guantanamo Bay lease agreement created a paradox over who has legal authority on the base by stipulating that Cuba retains "ultimate sovereignty" over the territory while the U.S. has "complete jurisdiction." Local Guantánamo journalist Lino Lemes wrote about the practical implications of this legal contradiction in the 1940s and 1950s. He observed that the working conditions of Cubans employed at Guantanamo Bay complied with neither Cuban nor American labor laws. In 1954, U.S. officers on the base jailed a Cuban employee for two weeks without trial for allegedly stealing a couple hundred dollars in cigarettes from the naval exchange where he worked. Leaders of the base workers' union said that his detention violated due process. "We could not conceive that in a naval establishment of the most powerful nation in the world, champion of democracy, things like this could happen," they wrote.

More recently, in the 1990s, the Coast Guard intercepted thousands of Haitians fleeing post-coup political unrest in boats and brought them to Guantanamo Bay. Most were denied asylum and sent home. But 205 HIV-positive refugees were detained at Guantanamo Bay for months. Though they had been granted asylum, immigration officials would not admit them into the United States because of their health status. Human rights lawyers and law students took on their case, charging that the base was a “legal black hole.” A federal judge agreed, writing in 1993 that the base had become “an HIV prison camp.” He ordered all the Haitian asylum-seekers released and the Guantanamo Bay detention center closed. The Haitians were admitted to the United States, but the unused facilities remained. And the base’s nebulous legal status – and therefore the question of whether the Constitution applies there – remained unresolved.

5. Dozens of people are still detained at Guantanamo Bay -- This set the stage for the Bush administration to transform Guantanamo Bay into a prison for alleged enemy combatants after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The U.S. has held 780 men from more than 35 countries at the base. Conditions there have included imprisonment in cages, sensory deprivation and forced feedings – treatment that many believe amounts to torture. Arguing that this was “contrary” to American values, President Barack Obama signed an executive order to close the detention center in 2009 during his first days in office. Nearly 200 prisoners were released to their home countries or resettled elsewhere. But 40 people are still detained there. The vast majority were never charged with a crime. President Donald Trump has since ordered the Guantanamo Bay military prison to remain open indefinitely. The naval base in Guantanamo Bay will likely have many more anniversaries. Whether anyone celebrates is another matter.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Jana Lipman | December 11, 2018 ++]

Military Justice ► **USN’s Bread & Water Punishment Gone**

Life as a junior-enlisted sailor onboard ship is hard. Cramped quarters, low pay, the brass deciding your fate and how you live each and every day. But come 2019, junior sailors in the fleet will have one less worry chasing them down the p-way: no more bread and water! Once 1 JAN 1 hits, legislation signed into law by former President Barack Obama in late 2016 and amended in March by the current commander in chief, Donald Trump, bars skippers from sentencing enlisted shipmates to three days in the ship’s brig to subsist solely on bread and water rations.

Bread and water had for decades been an arcane disciplinary tool at the disposal of commanding officers at sea. The non-judicial punishment potentially affected sailors — and embarked Marines — on the three lowest rungs of the enlisted pay scale. “It’s an effective punishment, because it sucks,” Zachary Spilman, a military attorney and Marine Corps Reserve judge advocate, told Navy Times last year. Beyond banning the bread and water sanction, the Military Justice Act of 2016 makes some of the most substantive changes to the UCMJ in decades, including updating the ways the armed forces can use the criminal justice system to tackle sexual crimes, cyber-stalking, public corruption, credit card theft and bestiality and other forms of cruelty to animals.

The law is designed to better protect witnesses, whistleblowers and victims from defendants. It forces the military to put a dozen troops on a panel hearing evidence in a capital criminal case, the same standard for juries in civilian federal courts. The reforms prescribe minimum qualifications for legal counsels. The law also bars attorneys who have acted as investigating officers, military judges or court members from later serving as trial or defense lawyers in the same matters.

Officials said last year that they don’t track how often the bread and water punishment is meted out but records obtained by Navy Times revealed the ex-skipper of the Japan-based guided-missile cruiser Shiloh was dishing out the diet to some of his sailors. In fact, Capt. Adam Aycock sentenced so many sailors to the punishment that the warship earned the nickname “USS Bread and Water” along the Yokosuka waterfront. “If SN Timmy shows up for

work 20 min [sic] late or gets into...what anyone would call a minor incident they are sent to the brig and get the Command Bread and Water special,” one sailor wrote in an August 2015 command climate survey.

On July 6, 2015, less than two weeks after reporting to the Shiloh, Aycock handed down what records indicate was his first bread and water sentence to a sailor who allegedly broke curfew. At least six other Shiloh sailors received bread and water under Aycock for offenses ranging from curfew violations to underage drinking, plus a shipmate who allegedly lied about his mother living “in a dangerous area,” according to the records obtained through a federal Freedom of Information Act request. Several sailors wrote in the surveys that the infractions could have been corrected by enlisted leadership without the bread and water penalty. Scrapping the antiquated punishment was championed by retired Adm. James Stavridis, the former NATO Supreme Allied Commander. In an email to Navy Times, he said it was “about time” the military junked the penalty. “In my time as a CO, I never used bread and water,” he said. “Even two decades ago, it seemed a really anachronistic, dumb sort of sanction.”

When bread and water entered the command disciplinary toolkit remains unclear, but retired Cmdr. David Winkler of the Naval Historical Foundation told Navy Times last year that it likely was enacted in the mid-19th century. Back then, the sea service was phasing out flogging and might have wanted a replacement, he said. Winkler recalled checking on a sailor confined on bread and water at the Philadelphia Navy Yard when he was assigned to the ammunition ship Suribachi in the 1980s. He showed up just as the guards prepared the sailor’s chow. “It was raisin bread,” Winkler recalled. “The Marine guards were there with tweezers, pulling out the raisins before they served it to the poor prisoner.”

Winkler said bread and water was a popular punishment onboard America’s first flattop, the Langley, which was converted from a collier into an aircraft carrier in 1920. “Going through the logs of the USS Langley back in the 20s, they had a brig and the captain meted the punishment out all the time,” he said. Winkler said the brig was below the galley, and friends of confined sailors would pass food down through the portholes. “They were in amazement that those sailors were gaining weight while on bread and water,” he said. Like many sailors and officers, Winkler loves the sea service’s traditions but he agreed the Navy should sail its criminal justice system into the 21st century. “The other services don’t have such a thing,” he said. “For the sake of conformity throughout the military establishment, it’s probably time to go.” [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | December 11, 2018 ++]

Peresvet Laser System ► New Russian Weapon Designed to Instantly Obliterate Targets

A new Russian laser weapon designed to instantly obliterate targets entered military service over the weekend, the Russian defense ministry revealed. Russia's Peresvet laser system, named after the medieval warrior monk Alexander Peresvet, entered experimental combat duty on 1 DEC, the Russian defense ministry's official Krasnaya Zvezda newspaper reported 5 DEC. The military began taking possession of the first shipments last year as part of Russia's ongoing military modernization program, according to The Moscow Times, and there is speculation the lasers could shoot down incoming missiles and airplanes.

Russian President Vladimir Putin first announced the existence of this new laser weapon in March during his State of the Nation address, during which he briefly introduced the "Combat Laser Complex." "We have achieved significant progress in laser weapons," he boasted, "It is not just a concept or a plan any more. It is not even in the early production stages. Since last year, our troops have been armed with laser weapons." "We are one step ahead our rivals," Putin added without providing any evidence.

Deputy Defense Minister Yuri Borisov offered a bit more information in an interview with Russian state media outlet TASS, explaining that the device could destroy targets "within fractions of a second." "We can talk a lot about laser weapons and movies were made about them a long time ago and fantastic books have been written, and everyone knows about this," he introduced. "But, the fact that these systems have started entering service is indeed a today's

reality." The Russian defense ministry posted videos the weapon back in July (<https://youtu.be/ghDvDFb3IM0> & <https://youtu.be/PIUsAOfVtPg> before it had officially entered service.



Russia's Peresvet laser



China's LW-30

Not much is publicly known about the Peresvet combat laser system, as Sputnik, a Russian media outlet controlled by the government, noted. What exactly it does has been the subject of much speculation. "It is expected to be an air-defense system that can track and shoot down hostile aircraft and missiles," Sputnik explained, adding, "Some suggest it will be tasked with 'blinding' sophisticated enemy systems, making them inoperable." Other countries, like the US and China, are also developing directed energy platforms. China unveiled the LW-30, a vehicle-based laser weapon built to quickly eliminate a variety of aerial targets, at Airshow China 2018 in Zhuhai last month. Experts speculated that the weapon designed by China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation (CASIC) could be deployed to the South China Sea. [Source: Business Insider | Ryan Pickrell | December 5, 2018 ++]

Military Retirement System Update 31 ► Time To Decide On New system



With the deadline 15 days away for certain service members to opt in to the new [Blended Retirement System](#) (BRS), Defense officials are making a push to remind service members they have a choice to make and they need to make it soon. About 19 percent of the 1.6 million people eligible have chosen the new system, according to Defense officials. While DoD has no target or goal for the number of people to enroll in the BRS, they want to make sure everyone is informed of the choice available — and that the deadline is 31 DEC, said Jeri Busch, DoD's director of military compensation policy, during a Wednesday press call. Among other things, they have been sending notifications through the Defense Finance and Accounting Service's Smartdocs email system to every service member who is eligible and hasn't made an opt-in decision; and they're including reminders on Leave and Earnings statements, she said.

About 1.6 million active-duty and reserve troops are eligible to opt into the [new retirement system](#), which promises a smaller pension check for those who complete a 20-year career but offers cash payments into a personal retirement account that service members can keep regardless of how long they stay in the military, as well as other benefits such as continuation pay at 12 years. Traditionally, only about 20 percent of service members stay long enough for the traditional retirement.

All troops entering the military starting in 2018 are automatically enrolled into the new Blended Retirement System. But those with fewer than 12 years of service as of the end of 2017 can make the choice in 2018 to either stay with the legacy system or switch to the new BRS. They must actively choose and opt in to BRS either in MyPay (Army, Air Force and Navy) or Marine Online. "For some, this can be a difficult decision, that requires weighing both options, and considering personal and professional goals," said Busch. "We're certain there are individuals out there who may not have made their decision yet ... or as we all tend to do, may just be procrastinating," she said. For those, there are a number of credible resources and tools that are available for free, she said, to include certified, qualified personal financial managers on installations or available through Military OneSource.

Officials said 307,213 service members had made the decision to opt in as of 26 NOV, including 243,715 active duty and 53,498 Guard and Reserve members. DoD's position is still that there is no target or goal for the number of service people to opt in to the new BRS. Instead, their goal is to make sure troops have the resources to help this highly personal decision, Busch said. The 31 DEC deadline is set in law, and DoD doesn't have the authority to extend that deadline. Officials are also prepared to handle any last-minute surge in the online enrollment systems that could happen, Busch said. The DoD MyPay system, for Army, Navy and Air Force, as well as the separate Marine Corps system, MarineOnline, have been fully tested, including stress-tested, she said.

The Army, Navy and Air Force don't require their service members to take any steps if they're going to stay with the legacy retirement system. If they do nothing, service members will automatically remain enrolled in the traditional retirement system. But in order to choose the BRS, they must actively take the steps to opt in and fill out paperwork stating that intent.

The Marine Corps is the only service that requires its members to register their decisions regardless of whether they opt in to the BRS or stay with the legacy system. Of those eligible, nearly 37 percent of Marines had opted in to the BRS as of 30 SEP, a higher percentage than the other services. And more than half of the eligible Marine Corps members had made their decision as of 30 SEP.

But officials don't attribute the Marine Corps participation rate to the requirement to register their decision, regardless of the choice, Busch said. "We think it's more the fact that the Marine Corps, as is their culture [is] very much engaged from a leadership perspective, all the way down to the squad level, to make sure their members are aware of all the information about BRS, and are taking action," she said. Consequently, DoD will continue to engage with the leadership within all the service branches as the deadline approaches, she said. The following resources are available for those still making their BRS decision:

- BRS Website: <https://militarypay.defense.gov/BlendedRetirement>
- BRS Comparison Calculator: <https://militarypay.defense.gov/Calculators/BRS>
- Installation Personal Financial Managers: These trained professionals can provide free financial counseling to service members and their families, and have received training on the BRS. Ask the family center or finance office where the personal financial managers are located, and make an appointment. Contact information is also available on [MilitaryOneSource](#). (Scroll down to the installation program directory.)
- MilitaryOneSource: Provides free financial support 24/7, which is especially helpful for Reserve and National Guard members and those stationed in remote areas. Call 1-800-342-9647.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | November 28, 2018 ++]

Sgt Ikaika Kang Sentencing ► 25 Years for ISIS Support

A soldier based in Hawaii was sentenced 5 DEC to 25 years in prison for trying to help the Islamic State group. Sgt. 1st Class Ikaika Kang, 35, pleaded guilty in August to four counts of attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization. He provided classified military documents, a drone and other help, he said. "Your honor, I know what I did was wrong," Kang said before Senior U.S. District Judge Susan Oki Mollway imposed a sentence that includes 20 years of supervised release. "When I'm released I won't do it again." The sentence is part of a plea agreement. If convicted at a trial, Kang, 35, could have faced life in prison.

He provided the support to undercover agents Kang believed were part of the Islamic State group, which is also known as ISIS. "The conduct that you committed was extremely serious," Mollway said. "It had the potential to be disastrous." More than six years ago, Kang became sympathetic to the group and to terrorism, Mollway said, and that by 2016 he talked about wanting to join and commit violence. Kang watched hours of videos daily of violence, including beheadings, shootings, suicide bombings and child soldiers, Mollway said. Kang provided voluminous, digital documents that had sensitive information including the U.S. military's weapons file, details about a sensitive mobile airspace management system, various military manuals and documents containing personal information about U.S. service members, prosecutors said.



Trained as an air traffic controller with a secret security clearance, Kang also provided documents including call signs, mission procedures and radio frequencies, prosecutors said. "You had a distinguished career in the United States Army. And you had access and training that would have been valuable to the people associated with ISIS," Mollway said. At one of the meetings with agents Kang believed were part of the Islamic State, he swore loyalty to the group in Arabic and English and kissed an Islamic State flag given to him by a purported Islamic State sheikh, prosecutors said. He then said he wanted to get his rifle and fight — "just go to downtown Honolulu and Waikiki strip and start shooting," prosecutors said in a news release in August.

Soon after Kang's arrest, defense attorney Birney Bervar said his client may suffer from service-related mental health issues that the government was aware of but neglected to treat. Several letters of support filed in court allude to mental health concerns. An older sister wrote that Kang grew up in an abusive home and that the violence increased when their mother started using crystal methamphetamine. The sister, who cried as she watched the sentencing hearing, declined to comment afterward.

Letters by former Army colleagues described how Kang seemed easily influenced. Kang would stare at a wall for hours and would say, "I'm just listening to the sound of the blood running through my veins," wrote retired Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Maia, who was Kang's supervisor when they were stationed at Fort Rucker, Alabama. Maia described another incident when Kang got agitated by seeing a cat that he said "was talking to him and trying to take his soul." Attorney Bervar requested Kang be sent to a detention facility where he can receive mental health help. Kang is still in the Army, but he isn't being paid while in civilian confinement. Bervar said he expects the Army will soon move to discharge him. [Source: The Associated Press | Jennifer Sinco Kelleher | December 4, 2018 ++]

Navy Amphibs Update 01 ► Enhanced Defense Option w/USMC

The Corps already has fired its rocket artillery from a Navy ship. Now the Corps is experimenting with strapping light armored vehicles, or LAVs, to the flight deck to counter small boat and other threats. In September, Marines with the 31st Marine Expeditionary, or MEU, embarked aboard the amphibious assault ship Wasp parked LAVs on the flight deck for a ship defense drill in the South China Sea that was designed to mimic the MEU's voyage through dangerous waters. While the use of the Corps' LAVs aboard the amphib ship was innovative, it opens a slew of questions about the security and capabilities of large U.S. Navy and transport ships operating in dangerous waters across the globe that may have to rely on aging Marine assets to counter some surface threats.

Marine Maj. Gen. David W. Coffman, director of Expeditionary Warfare for the Chief of Naval Operations, while speaking at the Hudson Institute in November about the Future of Navy Expeditionary Warfare, said the Corps was looking at ways to make Navy and transport ships more lethal by integrating Marine Corps assets. "Can you get creative on it? I think you could. I can tell you I watched a MEU commander strap an LAV to the front of a flight deck because it had better sensors than the ship did to find small boats," Coffman said to audience members at the Hudson Institute in Washington 9 NOV.



A spokesman for the 31st MEU, Capt. George McArthur, said this fall's drill aboard the Wasp didn't involve sensors in the technical sense, but the use of optics. "The drill brought together the capabilities of the ship and Marines with precision weapons and equipment including M41A4 SABER system optics, used for observation," McArthur said. The Saber system is part of upgraded optics and target acquisition capabilities for the Corps' anti-tank guided missile system known as the BGM-71 TOW. "Weapons Company assets improved the integrated defensive posture aboard the Wasp — specifically, the LAV-25s' tactical sights provided ballistic solutions for the M242 chain guns and coaxial M-240C medium machine guns to engage simulated targets on the ocean surface more effectively, with greater precision," he said.

September's defense exercise aboard the Wasp involved scout snipers, gun-truck Humvees, TOW systems and LAVs. "This was the first time that an LAV-25 platoon with the 31st MEU performed this level of integrated targeting and live-fire from the flight deck of a ship such as the Wasp with combined arms," McArthur said. In Oct. 2017, the Corps successfully tested the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System on the deck of the amphibious transport dock Anchorage. The rocket artillery system destroyed a land-based target 70 km away. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow & Todd South | December 3, 2018 ++]

U.S. Naval Academy Update 04 ► Rising Sea Level Plans | None to Move

The sea level in Annapolis is predicted to rise between 0.6 and 3.6 feet (.18 to 1.1 meters) by 2050, a U.S. Naval Academy oceanography professor said 3 DEC in a briefing about an advisory council helping the riverside academy make decisions on flood-related matters. Professor Gina Henderson told the academy's Board of Visitors that a road on the academy's grounds has been closed 38 times so far this year because of flooding, the most it has been closed

since the academy has kept track. The board, which includes members of Congress, acts like a board of trustees at a civilian college. "This nuisance flooding is only increasing, and it does affect operations here on the Yard," Henderson said.



Henderson, who is the co-chairwoman of the academy's Sea Level Rise Advisory Council, said the panel has been working to leverage expertise at the academy to help prepare for future flooding from sea-level rise. The council was formed in 2015 to help plan. "The goal of this council is to develop a sea-level adaptation plan for the superintendent on matters pertaining to flooding due to sea level rise and/or to extreme weather events in Annapolis," she said. Vice Adm. Ted Carter, the academy's superintendent, said the academy will need to be prepared to respond to rising waters in multiple ways. "What we have to be prepared for is: There's going to be some amount of sea-level rise," he said.

Carter said projections on sea-level rise already have affected plans to raise a seawall, which is now 5.4 feet (1.6 meters) above sea level. Work on the Farragut Seawall, which is expected to begin in 2020, will raise it more than 2.6 feet (0.8 meters) with plans to raise it again at the appropriate time. He described it as "the first of many projects" in which the academy will need to take future sea-level rise into account. Carter said the academy basically has three options in contending with rising sea levels: Block the water from entering the campus, create pumps or dikes to move the water out, or abandon parts of the campus. He pointed out that the expense of flood mitigation projects will be a factor going forward.

"We won't be able to build a wall around the whole place. Can we build a series of levees around the Naval Academy to protect it better from this? So, this is the thought that's going to have to come together here in the next, I would say, 10 to 20 years," Carter said, adding that academy officials will need to determine what can be done "because we're not planning to move." [Source: The Associated Press | Brian Witte | December 3, 2018 ++]

Aircraft Carriers Update 01 ► Could Go The Way Of The Dinosaur

President Trump is worried that the newest class of American supercarriers may have a fatally flawed system for launching aircraft, and has ruminated publicly about why the new electromagnetic catapults have replaced the old-fashioned steam version. But deep thinkers believe the most tangible symbol of America's military dominance could face a much bigger problem: U.S. aircraft carriers may soon be rendered obsolete by short-sighted decisions and new long-range weapons.

No other nation in the world has more than two modern aircraft carriers. The United States has 11, and is proceeding at flank speed on an ambitious multibillion-dollar program to gradually replace its Cold War-era Nimitz class carriers, with the new Gerald R. Ford class, the biggest and most expensive warship in human history, price tag \$13 billion. The Navy's plan is to go from building one new carrier every five years, to one new carrier every three

years until a fleet of 12 can be sustained by 2030. But historians suggest the Navy might take a lesson from World War II, in which another behemoth, the Japanese battleship Yamato, fell victim to U.S. airpower.

Armed with more than 150 guns and clad in massive armor, the Yamato was the mightiest warship of its day, and was considered virtually impregnable to the guns of any ship in the world. But intercepted en route to defend Okinawa, the dreadnaught-class ship exploded and sank after wave after wave of attacks from American dive bombers and torpedo bombers. While the U.S. decommissioned its last battleship in 1992, that day in 1945 marked the end of the age of battleships armed with big guns. The question now is whether today's aircraft carriers are doomed to dinosaurs status, similarly falling victim to new technologies, such as highly maneuverable hypersonic missiles or swarms of drones.

"The idea that you would have a platform that was invented in 1912 as a concept that could last 150 years ... just strikes me as a historian as odd," argues retired Navy Capt. Jerry Hendrix, now vice president with the Telemus Group, a national-security consultancy firm. "We are building carriers now that will last 50 years and so therefore you're making a 150-year bet that no one will figure out how to make this go away." Hendrix irked Navy leaders in 2013 when he wrote a seminal paper arguing that the aircraft carrier — the centerpiece of American naval operations for over 70 years — was in danger of becoming too vulnerable to be relevant in future conflicts.

At the November El Pomar National Security conference in Colorado Springs, sponsored by the Heritage Foundation, Hendrix said the fate of the aircraft carrier has only become more tenuous, in part because of decisions by the Navy to replace longer-range bombers such as the A-6 and F-14, which could fly as far as 1,200 nautical miles, with shorter range F-18s and F-35s, which need aerial refueling to fly much beyond 600 nautical miles. "We have fundamentally the wrong aircraft on our aircraft carrier flight decks right now," Hendrix argues. "We've gone from a flight deck that could do about 1,000-nautical-mile strike distance during the Cold War unrefueled, to a flight deck that can do right around 500 nautical miles. And when you have an enemy who has built an A2 anti-access area-denial complex that essentially can push your carrier back beyond a thousand miles, if your flight deck that can only reach out 500 miles, it's not in the game anymore."

Sinking a U.S. aircraft carrier today is nearly impossible because of the bubble of defenses that surround it, including its onboard aircraft and an armada of escort ships bristling with missiles and anti-submarine defenses. The problem, says Hendrix, is that too many warships are not in a position to conduct offensive operations. "If you look at the number of missiles that are on some of our surface ships and you find out how many of them are dedicated to trying to defend the carrier versus how many of them are dedicated toward projecting power, you realize that we've gotten critically out of balance."

But the technology that poses the biggest peril to the supremacy of the supercarrier is the hypersonic glide vehicle, essentially a maneuverable warhead that travels at Mach 5 or faster, or about a mile a second, making them extremely difficult to shoot down. Both Russia and China are developing hypersonic weapons, and the Pentagon is racing to develop defenses. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced in a speech in March he already has a hypersonic weapon, code-named Avangard, although he only showed crude animation to back up the claim. China has developed the DF-21D, an anti-ship ballistic missile touted as a "carrier killer," but the U.S. Navy insists the threat to carriers, while real, is often hyped.

In a 2014 defense of aircraft carriers Rear Adm. Michael Manazir, former Nimitz commander, and at the time the Navy's director of air warfare, wrote a spirited treatise arguing the modern carrier carries "more firepower than any combat system in the nation's arsenal," and "remains the most effective instrument for shaping the national military strategy." Aircraft carriers, he said, have always evolved to meet new advances in weaponry. "Threats to the aircraft carrier have existed — torpedoes, mines, kamikaze, long-range bombers, cruise missiles, and now the ballistic missile — since the first one was built in the early 20th century," Manazir wrote. "The history of warfare is replete with new technologies begetting new capabilities, begetting new threats, begetting new tactics, and so on."

For now the Navy has no plans to scuttle what it commanders, the ultimate manifestation of Naval power and the nation's premier power projection platform. "No other weapons system in existence or on the drawing board can deploy and redeploy with the responsiveness, the endurance, the multi-dimensional might, and the inherent battlespace awareness and command and control capabilities of a full sized, nuclear-powered aircraft carrier battle group and its air wing," said Capt. Greg Hicks, the Navy's chief spokesman. The Navy says stand-off weapons and carrier-based aerial refueling aircraft, including new types of drones will compensate for the shorter range aircraft. The carrier and its escort ships have the ability to conduct full-scale military operations over nearly 70 percent of the earth's surface in nearly any environmental condition," argues Hicks, who says the bottom line is that U.S. aircraft carriers will remain "Lethal, agile, resilient and survivable," for the foreseeable future. [Source: Washington Examiner | Jamie McIntyre | December 04, 2018 ++]

Military Immigrant Enlistment Update 05 ► **Pentagon to Comply with Court Order**

The Pentagon will begin sending a backlog of thousands of green-card holders to recruit training, suspending a policy adopted by the Trump administration last year that required more-stringent background checks for some immigrants wanting to serve, according to two defense officials and an internal memo. The policy adopted in October 2017 called for each green-card holder to submit to and complete a full background check, and respond to all concerns before they could go to boot camp. That was in addition to standard requirements for green-card applicants, such as biometrics screening. The change put thousands of people in limbo, as their screening languished on average for nearly a year and specific jobs within the military promised to them slipped away.

The new directive says that each armed service must comply immediately with a preliminary injunction issued last month in the District Court for the Northern District of California. In it, Judge Jon Tigar agreed with an argument from the American Civil Liberties Union that the Pentagon had not satisfactorily explained why new screening is necessary and said the policy should be disregarded. A Pentagon official, speaking on the condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue, said the services will begin sending the recruits to training this week. They will be placed in available slots, and the services will have to consider factors such as their needs and prospective recruits' preferences.

The injunction eases pressure on a group of prospective troops that the Pentagon has long recruited, pitching self-betterment and, in some cases, a chance at U.S. citizenship. About 18,000 U.S. troops were green-card holders at the beginning of the Trump administration, Pentagon officials have said. Some military officials have raised concerns internally that the growing backlog of green-card holders could present problems for a military always in need of new troops. The directive, which was obtained by The Washington Post, was issued two days after a reporter began asking military officials last week about the glut of potential recruits waiting to train and whether it was complying with the injunction.

In the Navy, officials overseeing the issue called it "untenable" in a recent document reviewed by The Post and warned that the situation brings "increasing risk of mission failure." The document said the average wait time for a green-card holder to join the U.S. military had grown to 354 days as opposed to 168 for U.S. citizens, raising the possibility that the Navy would miss its recruiting goals. If the Pentagon ordered the services to comply with the court injunction, the Navy should ship lawful permanent residents to the "maximum extent possible" to fill about 1,154 open slots in recruit training in December and January, officials added. A military official, also speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the Navy has more than 2,870 green-card holders under contract and waiting to go to recruit training.

A Marine Corps spokesman, Gunnery Sgt. Justin Kronenberg, said his service had 1,062 additional green-card holders awaiting recruit training. Information provided by the Air Force showed that it has about 470 more waiting to go. Like the other services, the Marines were awaiting additional guidance from the Pentagon last week. "The

Marine Corps Recruiting Command has kept full pace with (Defense Department) policy updates and is in compliance with all guidance regarding Lawful Permanent Resident accessions," Kronenberg said. "We've maintained maximum transparency concerning the process with our LPR applicants to ensure they and their families are informed and their questions are answered." The Marine Corps sent 1,044 green-card holders to recruit training in 2016 and 1,169 in 2017, but the number dropped to 808 in the most recent fiscal year ending in September.

The Air Force sent 567 green-card holders to recruit training in 2016 and 590 in 2017, according to data provided by the service. But that number dropped to 44 in the fiscal year ending in September. About 470 green-card holders are under contract and waiting to attend training. The Army sent 4,600 green-card holders to recruit training in 2016, and 3,600 in 2017, according to data provided by the Pentagon. That number plummeted to 513 in 2018, as the Army missed its recruiting goal in 2018 for the first time since 2005 by about 6,500 soldiers, despite spending more than \$200 million on bonuses. The service declined to say how many green-card holders are in its system waiting to ship to training, citing the open litigation.

The green-card holders originate from many countries with which the United States has friendly relations, with lawful permanent residents from the Philippines making up the largest number. In the Navy, about 656 of the group waiting to go to boot camp are from there. China, Jamaica, Nigeria and Mexico are among the other nations with significant numbers, according to data provided to The Post. The Pentagon has grappled with frequent Chinese efforts to steal U.S. secrets and is concerned about Islamic extremism in Nigeria, but it also has lauded the past efforts by green-card holders from those nations to join the military and earn their citizenship. [Source: The Washington Post | Dan Lamothe | December 3, 2018 ++]

Sapper Steel Battalion ► Ceremonially Unit Flag Burning

Every year, the Sapper Steel Battalion ceremonially burns its unit flag in honor of a Korean War battalion commander. This year, they got to do it on hallowed ground, near the Kunu-Ri battlefield. Soldiers from 2nd Engineer Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division happened to be on a nine-month rotation to South Korea during this year's festivities, when the unit sets fire to its own flag in a re-enactment of the actions by Lt. Col. Alarich Zacherle, who burned his battalion's flag rather than have it taken as a trophy by overrunning Chinese forces. "To think that Lt. Col. Zacherle made that ultimate decision 68 years ago to burn his colors rather than allow them to be captured".



Lt. Col. Michael Loftus, the battalion's current commander, said in a 3 DEC press release from the 2nd Infantry Division. "I can't imagine what it would take to have the presence of mind to make that decision today in a similar situation." In 1950, the Sapper Steel Battalion was part of the 2nd Infantry Division, fighting and defending a U.N.

position at Kunu-ri, allowing other American forces to flee. Before his battalion departed, Zacharle ordered all of their equipment — including their colors — destroyed. “What this ceremony demonstrates to us and these soldiers is that just because you face difficult odds, you still have a chance to gain honor and win,” Sgt. 1st Class Jonathan Stevenson, the battalion operations sergeant, said in the release. “We continued to fight and still fought until the end of this war and fought in other wars afterwards.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | December 3, 2018 ++]

Iranian Navy Update 03 ► Most Advanced Homemade Destroyer, Sahand, Joins Fleet

Iran on 1 DEC launched a domestically-built destroyer in the Persian Gulf capable of traveling some five months without refueling, state TV reported. The 1,300-ton vessel named Sahand after a mountain in northern Iran took six years to build, according to the report. Iranian TV showed a ceremony marking the inauguration with a three-gun salute at the southern port of Bandar Abbas, at the mouth of the strategic Strait of Hormuz, the passageway for nearly a third of all oil traded by sea. The Sahand has a helicopter landing pad, is 96 meters (105 yards) long and can cruise at 25 knots. It is equipped with surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles as well as anti-aircraft batteries and sophisticated radar and radar evading capabilities, the report said.



Tehran says its homemade destroyer, Sahand, boasts a radar-evading hull and can travel twice as far without refueling as the previous class of destroyers.

Since 1992, Iran has been working to build a self-sufficient military, reportedly producing its own jet fighters, tanks, missiles and light submarines as well as torpedoes. Iran added the first domestically made destroyer to its fleet in 2010 in the Persian Gulf. Reportedly Iran has five other destroyers. On 29 NOV, Iran's navy announced the acquisition of two mini-submarines designed for operation in shallow waters such as the Persian Gulf, including one new sub and an overhauled one. The announcements are likely intended to boost Iran's military image amid rising tensions with the United States, which in November re-imposed all sanctions that had been lifted under the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers. The Trump administration pulled America out of the deal in May. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Seth Robson | November 15, 2018 ++]

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang ► Alert Five thru A-Gear

Every profession has its own jargon and the Navy is no exception. Since days of yore the military in general, and sailors in particular, have often had a rather pithy (dare say 'tasteless?') manner of speech. That may be changing somewhat in these politically correct times, but to Bowdlerize the sailor's language represented here would be to deny its rich history. The traditions and origins remain. While it attempted to present things with a bit of humor, if you are easily offended this may not be for you. You have been warned.

Note: 'RN' denotes Royal Navy usage. Similarly, RCN = Royal Canadian Navy, RAN = Royal Australian Navy, RM = Royal Marines, RNZN = Royal New Zealand Navy, UK = general usage in militaries of the former British Empire

Alert Five - Aircraft on five-minute alert. This generally requires that the aircrew be seated in the aircraft at all times. There may also be aircraft/aircrews on alert fifteen, etc.

Alpha Mike Foxtrot - Acronym for "Adios, Motherfucker". Polite form: "Adios, My Friend." Also seen as initials, 'AMF.'

Amateur Night – The day after payday, when nothing seems to go right, especially shipboard evolutions.

Amp Tramp - (RCN) Ship's electrician.

Anchor-faced - (RN) Anyone who is enthusiastic about the Navy.

Anchor Clanker - (1) Boatswain's Mate. (2) (RN) Ordinary seaman. See DECK APE.

Anchor Pool – The betting pool on the hour and minute the ship will drop anchor or tie up.

Andrew (the) - (UK) Nickname for the Royal Navy. Refers to pressgang leader Andrew Miller who, it was said, owned the Royal Navy.

Angled Deck - The landing area of a modern carrier, which is offset 10 degrees to port from the ship's centerline to provide for safe BOLTERS. Aka 'angle deck', 'the angle.'

Angle of Attack – The angle measured between the relative wind and the chord line of an airfoil. Essentially, the angle between the air movement (*not* the horizon!) and the aircraft's wing. Has a tremendous import in the handling and behavior of the aircraft. Abbreviated AOA. Aka 'Alpha', from the engineering notation for AOA. Primarily an aviation term, although it is applicable to other fluid environments such as a ship's propeller in water.

Angles and Dangles – Operating a submarine at steep angles of ascent and descent, and to perform rapid turns (a submarine in a tight turn will bank in the same fashion as an aircraft).

Anti-Smash Light - The rotating or flashing anti-collision beacon on an aircraft.

AOW - Auxiliaryman Of (the) Watch. Also called 'The Aux'.

ARAB - (UK) Arrogant Regular Army Bastard.

Arresting Gear, A-Gear - Mechanism used to rapidly bring an aircraft to a halt aboard ship or ashore. In field use (ashore), A-gear may be a device as simple as lengths of chain connected to a CROSS-DECK PENDANT (q.v.), though this type of installation is becoming less common. The chain device is usually referred to as 'overrun gear', as it acts to stop an aircraft which is about to run off of the end of the prepared runway surface. Other types of arresting gear, ashore and afloat, involve complicated braking mechanisms.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | December 15, 2018 ++]

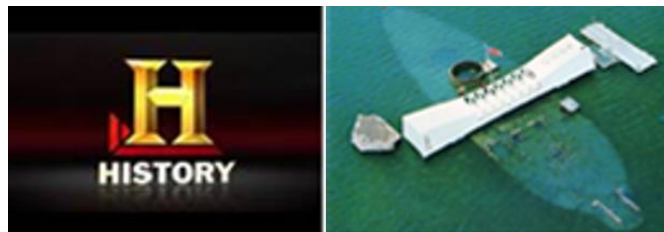
Warships That Will Change The Future ► CNS Kunming (DDG-72)



This beautiful looking boat, shown here doing its flank speed trials, is the newest class in the Chinese Navy's collection of missile destroyers, and it is currently causing quite a headache to the rest of the navies patrolling the South China Sea. This ship has the advantage of looking like a tiny little boat on enemy radar, but has ability to launch a large variety of anti-ship missiles, cruise missiles, surface to air missiles, and torpedoes – and all at the same time! CNS Kunming was commissioned in 2014 and is the first in a class of twelve, potentially more. The Chinese Navy milked every last drop from this 7,000 tonne hull, managing to squeeze in 64 VLS cells.

Some article about this ship class dubbed it as 'Carrier Killer Destroyer' which is a vast overstatement. Their main role, as seen by their large APARS, is area air-defense. Their anti-surface armament is indeed more capable than those carried aboard US destroyers due to doctrinal differences, with the US relying more on carrier aircraft to conduct strike missions. However, that's not enough to warrant a "Carrier-Killer" label. The Type 052D supposedly carries the YJ-18 missile in some of its VLS cells. From insider accounts, the YJ-18 has very similar performance to the Russian Kalibr missile. Thus, we can consider the Type 052Ds as not too shabby in the anti-surface department but it's definitely not their main role.

*** Military History ***



Pearl Harbor DEC 7, 1941 ► Photos of the Attack

December 7, 1941, at 7:48 a.m. local time, 353 Imperial Japanese aircrafts bombed eight U.S. Navy ships docked at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Some 2,403 Americans were killed, 1,178 more were wounded and 960 were declared missing. As an event, it ignited U.S. involvement in the ongoing Second World War. Every year since, Americans

from Washington, D.C. to Hawaii have honored those that died and remember the day that will “live in infamy,” to quote then-President Franklin Roosevelt.

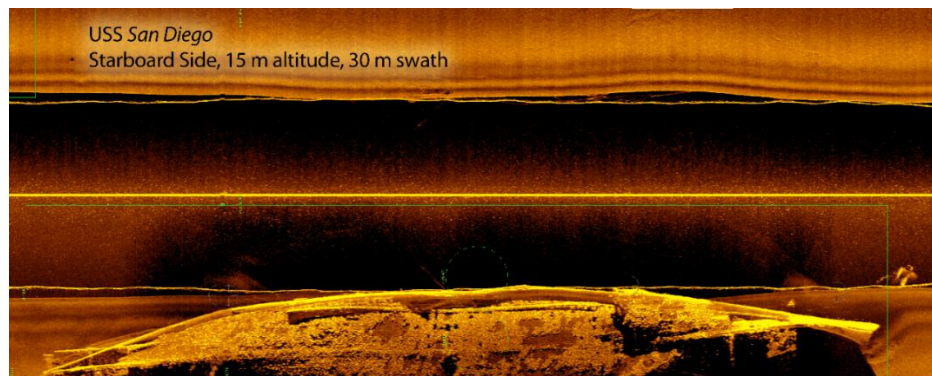
“Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan,” Roosevelt said in an address to Congress the day after the attack. He later added, “No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.”

The attack was a surprise. Many U.S. servicemen were still in their pajamas or eating breakfast when the bombing started. All eight ships lined up on what was called “Battleship Row” were critically damaged or destroyed altogether. The USS Arizona exploded after a bomb hit its forward magazine (ammunition room), killing all 1,100 servicemen on board. Eleven other ships were sunk over the course of the attack and 188 planes destroyed. In addition to Pearl Harbor, Japan also attacked U.S.-held bases in the Philippines, Guam and Wake Island over a seven-hour period. Because there never was a formal declaration of war from Japan, the country was later charged with war crimes during the Tokyo Trial in 1946.

In 1962 the USS Arizona Memorial opened on the site where the battleship exploded. It is visited by more than 2 million people annually. The sunken remains were officially declared a National Landmark in 1989. To view some of some of the most iconic photos taken on the day of the attack refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled **“Pearl Harbor DEC 7, 1941 Photos”**. They are provided by the Library of Congress, National Archives and the U.S. Navy archives. These photos provide an intimate look at one of the worst attacks the U.S. has ever seen, and make it clear why we remember all the U.S. servicemen who lost their lives every National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day. [Source: NCOAdvocate | December 7, 2018 ++]

USS San Diego (ACR-6) Update 02 ► Investigation Concludes Sunk by Mine

A hundred years ago, a mysterious explosion hit the only major U.S. warship to sink during World War I. Now the Navy believes it has the answer to what doomed the armored cruiser San Diego: An underwater mine set by a German submarine cruising in waters just miles from New York City. That’s the conclusion of an investigation by scientists, archaeologists and historians convened by the U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command. Last summer, the researchers sent an unmanned underwater vessel to inspect the site off New York’s Long Island. Their analysis ruled out a torpedo and sabotage, two other possible scenarios.



Sidescan sonar image of the wreck site of USS San Diego collected by Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit 2 in June 2017 as part of a training operation. The ship rests upside down on the seabed, and the starboard side is shown, with the bow to the right of the image.

The San Diego was sailing to New York on July 19, 1918, when an external explosion near the engine room shook the armored cruiser. Water rushed into the hull. Within minutes, the 500-foot warship began to capsize. Weighed

down with 2,900 tons of coal for a planned voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, the vessel sank in less than a half hour. Six crew members died. "The explosion felt like a dull heavy thud," Capt. Harley Hannibal Christy, commander of the San Diego, wrote in a naval inquiry commissioned shortly after the warship sank. He had been standing on the bridge of the ship, on a clear day with light winds. German naval records recovered after the war revealed that U-boat 156 had sailed just off the coast of New York, planting explosives. "We believe that U-156 sunk San Diego," said Alexis Catsambis, an underwater archaeologist with the Navy. He presented the findings this week in Washington at the annual meeting of the American Geophysical Union.

Today, the shipwreck of San Diego is a rusting but well-preserved sanctuary for fish and lobsters. The researchers used information from the underwater vessel to create high-resolution 3D maps of the wreck. They modeled impact and flooding scenarios to analyze how the ship might have been attacked. The flooding patterns weren't consistent with an explosion set inside the vessel. And the hole didn't look like a torpedo strike. "Torpedoes of the time carried more explosives than mines — and would have shown more immediate damage," said Arthur Trembanis, at University of Delaware marine scientist who collaborated on the study. The mine was anchored at optimal depth to tear open a warship, said Ken Nahshon, a research engineer at the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Maryland, who also assisted the investigation.

The underwater explosive hit an unguarded lower part of the ship, where the hull was only about a half inch thick, said Nahshon. Had it struck the warship's armored band, the 5-inch thick steel plating would have minimized the impact. After the blast, the commander directed the ship's gunners to "open fire on anything resembling a periscope." Between 30 and 40 rounds were fired, in case an enemy submarine was nearby. The captain was aware German U-boats may have operating in the area. As the ship began to sink, Christy ordered the crew to pile into life rafts and dinghies. A passing whaleboat and two steamships helped rescue most of the San Diego's 1,100 sailors. [Source: The Associated Press | Christina Larson | December 13, 2018 ++]

Operation Bodenplatte ► WWII | Luftwaffe's Last Hope



Operation Bodenplatte was designed to cripple Allied air power in support of the Ardennes Offensive, or the Battle of the Bulge (December 16th, 1944-January 25th 1945), but bad winter weather pushed back the operation until the first available date, January 1st. By the time the weather had improved enough for an effective, mass aerial strike like Operation Bodenplatte, the Ardennes Offensive had been stalled by the Western Allies. So this Luftwaffe assault was changed to support Operation Northwind. Operation Northwind was planned by the Germans as another push on the ground to regain momentum and try, once again, to split the bulk of the British and American forces in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Northern France.

The Luftwaffe hadn't been inactive in December 1944, however. They ran what operations they could to support the Ardennes Offensive. Between December 17th and December 27th, over 600 fighters were lost and over 300 pilots

killed. For the second half of 1944, the Luftwaffe had been growing increasingly desperate. Not only had the British been building the Spitfire Mk. IX since 1942 (the first plane to diminish the vast superiority of the German Focke-Wulf Fw 190, which had been outclassing the Ally's air forces and planes like the Spitfire Mk. V), but the Germans had been losing huge numbers of their skilled pilots while entirely running out of safe training areas for new pilots. By December of 1944, poorly trained and untested pilots were filling the ranks of the Luftwaffe.

As the winter skies lightened on January 1st 1945, more than 900 German aircraft, most of them Fw 190s and Bf 109s, swept across vulnerable and unsuspecting Allied airfields, creating havoc among the Allied planes ready for the day's mission. A total of 495 Allied aircraft were damaged or destroyed in the attacks. Most of the targeted airfields remained out of action for up to two weeks. Fortunately, very few Allied pilots were lost.

Due to Allied fighter counter-attacks, and surprisingly numerous Allied anti-aircraft guns - intended to prevent V-1 attacks - the Luftwaffe lost 280 aircraft, 271 of which were fighters or fighter-bombers, with a further 69 aircraft damaged. But more important: 213 German pilots were lost of which forty-five were regarded as experienced pilots and 21 were valuable formation leaders with skills that had taken years to acquire. For Luftwaffe, the lost pilots were irreplaceable. The operation was a heroic venture that broke Luftwaffe's back and brought the end of the unified aerial defense of the Reich. For Luftwaffe, Bodenplatte was a total disaster.

The Luftwaffe were now irreparably weakened as the Allied continued with not just the widespread fight bomber attacks, in support of the Army, but the heavy bombers' assault on German cities. These continued at the same intensity that they had reached in 1944 – in the remaining months of the war 470,000 tons of bombs would fall on Germany, more than twice the tonnage that had fallen in the whole of 1943. [Source: <https://www.warhistoryonline.com> | Colin Fraser | Apr 6, 2018 ++]

WWII Axis Powers ► Worst Decisions After War Declared

Looking back at WWII there have been four decisions made that, in the end, did not work out to the Axis advantage. Of course, you can argue that starting the war in the first place was the biggest mistake made. But, for the sake of the argument, let us look at four mistakes that were made after the war was started.

Nazi Alliance with Fascist Italy

Having allied themselves with Italy, although ideologically similar, was something that the Nazis should not have done. Time and again the Nazis were forced to come to the aid of Italy after the fascists launched an ill-conceived invasion or bit off more than they could chew. Getting the German forces involved in North Africa, a costly commitment, was bad enough, but the forced German invasion of Greece could not have come at a worse time.

In March of 1941 Mussolini, the Fascist dictator of Italy, was still angry with Hitler after he failed to inform the Italians beforehand of his plans to invade France and the Low Countries. This made Mussolini decide he was going to surprise Hitler and invade Greece without telling him. The Italian advance quickly bogged down and after a few weeks, the Greeks had fought them back to their starting point. The British came to the aid of the Greeks and landed forces in what Churchill called the soft underbelly of Europe. This loss of face for the Axis powers could not be accepted by Hitler, who ordered his generals to come up with a plan to secure his, now vulnerable, southern flank. This meant that the Invasion of the Soviet Union, which was supposed to start in early spring, had to be postponed to June 22nd. As it turned out, this delay proved fatal.

Nazi Invasion of Russia

Even though it was inconceivable that Nazis would not invade the Soviet Union, so was the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact which they signed on August 13, 1939. This non-aggression pact allowed Nazi Germany to invade Poland without having to worry about a possible war with the USSR. It even went so far that Poland was divided between

the two and the part that the Soviets took in September 1939 has never been returned to Poland. It also gave the Soviets free reign in expanding their influence in the Eastern European countries and they lost no time in subjecting them to their rule.

The fact that the two sworn ideological enemies were willing to sign a non-aggression pact shook the world and allowed Nazi Germany the time to focus its attention on Western Europe without having to fear a war on two fronts. Germany made the most of this freedom and, in quick succession, defeated Denmark, Norway, The Netherlands, Belgium, and France. Only their planned invasion of the United Kingdom was thwarted by the 'Few of the Royal Air Force,' the first setback for the Nazis. Deteriorating weather caused the invasion of Britain to be postponed indefinitely, and Hitler once more turned to the East where, according to his book *Mein Kampf*, he believed the "Lebensraum" (living space) was which the Germans needed above all other things. However, this living space was occupied by the Russians. Russia had now moved its western borders hundreds of kilometers closer to Nazi Germany because of the pact.

Unable to knock Britain out of the war first and thus faced with a war on two fronts, which he had vowed to avoid at all costs, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. Hitler was confident the Soviet Union would be defeated in mere weeks, and he is quoted as having said: "We have only to kick in the door, and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down." However, most of the first month, if not six weeks, was spent fighting a way through countries now occupied by the Soviet Union. These countries might otherwise have been ensnared into the Axis camp, had it not been for the pact. The extra territory gave the Soviets the ability to trade space for time and, with the extra delay caused by the invasion of Greece, meant that Nazi Germany could not complete its conquest during the remaining period of good weather. The autumn rains rolled in and turned most of Russia in a quagmire of mud which made all movement virtually impossible. Then Winter arrived early, with extreme cold for which the Germans were not equipped.

The Attack on Pearl Harbor

In a history like the German attack on the Soviet Union, the Japanese wanted an empire of their own to secure the future prosperity of a country which they thought did not have enough natural resources to sustain the population. The Germans called it "Lebensraum," the Japanese called it the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere." It amounted to the same thing. Having occupied vast portions of China and some countries in East Asia the next step was to expand its empire east into the Pacific Ocean. Their eye was on the prosperous and natural resources that were under the control of the British and Dutch empires and the American-governed Philippines. However, attacking these would cause the United States to join the war on the side of the allies.

America, on the other hand, had kept an eye on Japanese conquests and brutality and, short of war, did what they could to restrict them. In July 1941 they embargoed the export of oil to Japan which then calculated that, without acquiring the oil in the Dutch East Indies, they only had enough fuel for two years. They reasoned that now there would be no other option than going to war. Realizing that they could not defeat the USA in direct battle, they chose to deliver a crushing blow to the American fleet based at Pearl Harbor. This would give them time to complete their desired conquests and present the Americans with a "fait accompli." They reasoned the Americans would not be willing to enter a protracted war with Japan, and they would be able to make peace, keeping their vital conquests and handing back the less desirable places.

Fate, or bad Japanese intelligence, intervened on the Allied side on December 7, 1941, and the vital American Aircraft carriers were not in port when the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor. This meant the Americans were able to fight back causing the Japanese Admiral in charge of the attack to say (supposedly) "I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve."

No Alliance Between the Nazis, Spain, and Turkey

One look at the map of Europe will show the strategic importance of both Spain and Turkey. However, these two were two of the few countries on the European mainland that remained neutral during the Second World War. Even though Spain remained neutral during the First World War, it was expected they would come in on the side of the

Axis after all the help Hitler had given General Franco in the Spanish Civil War. However, despite pleading and perhaps even begging, Franco remained adamant. He would not join the Axis and would not even allow the Germans to pass through his country (as the Swedes did).

Not being able to pass through Spain meant that Great Britain was secure in using its military base in Gibraltar. Not only did this effectively seal off the entrance to the Mediterranean from the Atlantic Ocean for the German Navy, but it also gave the British a location from which it could support Malta and Egypt. Possession of Malta meant the British could interdict shipping from Italy to North Africa. Possession of Egypt meant it could stop the Axis from linking up with their forces fighting in the Caucasus (Soviet Union) and taking the much-needed oil fields in the Middle East. Turkey fought on the side of the Axis in the First World War yet declined to join them in the Second. This, again, meant the Germans could not link up with their forces in the Caucasus making the capture of Egypt paramount. In February 1945, Turkey joined the Allies and declared war on a virtually defeated Nazi Germany.

[Source: TWS Dispatches Newsletter | November 2018 ++]

Fort Donaldson ► **Civil War Battlefield Chronicles | Union Attack**

After the successful siege of Fort Henry by Federal troops on February 6, 1862, the Confederate forces hurried back to the neighboring Fort Donelson which was located a few miles away. The Federals sought control over the waterways of Cumberland and Tennessee, knowing full well the advantage that it would afford them in the Western Theater of the Civil War. The chief agitator of the move to conquer the forts was Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant who had sent several telegrams to his superior officer, Maj. Gen. Henry Wager Halleck. In his messages, he urged Halleck to deliver his consent to besiege the forts along the Cumberland and Tennessee waterways, all without favorable response.

Despite being a very successful commander in the Civil War, Halleck had little faith in Grant, fearing him to be very irrational in his thinking. Once Grant's requests were backed up by Flag Officer A.H. Foote, the petitions made by Grant were accepted. Grant wasted no time in producing results by capturing Fort Henry five days after he was given the order to proceed with the assault and sustaining only 40 casualties. The next line of action was therefore to obtain control of the other Confederate Fort Donaldson that overlooked the waterways.

Taking a few days off to prepare a strategic assault, Grant reported his intent to take Fort Donelson on February 8th whereas Halleck's initial orders were to take Fort Henry and return. More formidable than Fort Henry, Grant expected to fight a greater battle at Fort Donelson if he was going gain control and drive out the Confederate soldiers occupying it. This was the last major obstacle preventing the control of the rivers that led into Tennessee and Missouri and Grant was poised to besiege and overcome it.



Fort Donelson stood near the Tennessee-Kentucky border as a bastion-type fortification with two batteries and at 100 ft. above sea level, the fort allowed its defenders the ability to engage in plunging fire thus covering a longer distance of fire as well giving trajectory angles against attacking gunboats. In this regard, Fort Donelson was superior to Fort Henry as well as having a better location. It was named after Brig. Gen. Daniel Smith Donelson of the Confederate Army who gave approval for its construction as well as Fort Henry. The fort boasted a 10-inch

columbiad, still in frequent use at the time for heavy direct and projectile shooting at low and high trajectories. Also, in the artillery were two 32-pound Carronades, nine 32-pounders, and a rifled gun.

When Confederate Gen. Albert Sydney Johnston learned of the fall of Fort Henry into Federal hands, he immediately sent reinforcements of 12,000 men to solidify the defenses at Fort Donelson. However, fearing that the fall of the second fort was only a matter of time, Johnston moved his army to the Tennessee capital of Nashville. Prior to the arrival of the reinforcements, the combined forces of the survivors of Fort Henry and the army present at Fort Donelson numbered a total of 6,000 men under the command of Brig. Gen. Bushrod R. Johnson. The arriving reinforcements were under the command of Brig. Gen. John B. Floyd, a man who was more of a politician than a soldier. Many historians have criticized Johnson's choice of Floyd as commanding officer at the fort from among his array of senior Officers.

Floyd lived up to his reputation by subsequently relegating his military duties to Brigadier Generals Simon B. Buckner and Gideon J. Pillow. In Grant's account of the battle, he described Floyd as unfit for the command to which he was entrusted. Hostilities commenced on 12 FEB with the Confederate forces still setting up entrenchments around the fort. Union Brig. Gen. John A. McClernard began the battle in a skirmish with Lt. Col. Nathan Bedford Forrest's Cavalry. Arriving later that day, Grant established his headquarters at the Widow Crisp's house. The Federals slogged at the earthworks of the Confederates for days, engaging in artillery duels and frequent skirmishes.

On one such occasion, on 14 FEB Flag Officer Foote leading a naval assault of the Flag-ship St. Louis with three ironclads undertook heavy attack which left the flag-ship wrecked along with one of the ironclads and two boats. This resulted in the deaths of 55 Federals, some of whom were Officers. Ironically, Foote was injured on his foot. For the Confederates, after unsuccessfully trying for several days to deal a significant blow that would indicate a victory for them, it was only a matter of time before they ran out of supplies and ammunition. Meanwhile, the Federals spent a few nights out in the winter cold without food, neither army dared to light fires for fear of sharpshooters.

After a council of war meeting organized on the morning of 15 FEB, Brig. Gen. Pillow lead a failed attempt to retreat from the fort. Although they successfully assaulted the Federal lines for hours until about 1:00 PM and had the upper hand to escape, Pillow then ordered the Confederates to return to the fort to regroup and gather supplies before leaving. This decision proved costly as it undermined the gained grounds of the morning's efforts. When the Confederate Army was stacked up and ready to move out, a determined Brig. Gen. Charles F. Smith and Brig. Gen. Lew Wallace's brigades drove them back into their entrenchments, dashing all hopes of a successful evacuation of the troops.

That night, Floyd, Pillow and Buckner and some other senior Officers met to determine their next course of action against the Federals. Buckner believed the only action left to take was to surrender to the Union, something Floyd swore that he would never do, as was Pillow. Floyd thereafter relieved himself of command, passing his duties on to Pillow who did the same. Buckner, being next in the line of command assumed the responsibility of the fort stating that he would rather share the fate of the garrison than abandon them in flight. And so, the stage was set. That night Floyd sent a telegram to Gen. Johnston stating his lack of faith in his army's ability to withstand the Federal forces. He escaped at the break of dawn of 16 FEB.

The Confederate's total dead in the battle numbered close to 1,000 with over 12,000 captured. Casualties of the Union Army were over 2,000 men with several of their water vessels and batteries destroyed. Pillow and his units fled via steamboats and Forrest escaped by land. A few hours later, Buckner sent a letter to Grant proposing terms of a truce. However, Grant replied stating that truce would only be agreed upon with terms of an unconditional surrender which Buckner reluctantly agreed to. White flags were raised, and Grant had succeeded in gaining a strategic victory for the Union, one which merited him the nickname "Unconditional Surrender" and saw his appointment as Maj. Gen. by U.S. President Abraham Lincoln under recommendation from Halleck.

The site of the battle has been preserved by the National Park Service as Fort Donelson National Battlefield. The Civil War Trust (a division of the American Battlefield Trust) and its partners have acquired and preserved 368 acres

of the battlefield, most of which has been conveyed to the park service and incorporated into the park. [Source: TWS Battlefield Chronicles | November 2018 ++]

First Battle of Iron Bottom Bay ► Guadalcanal November 9 thru 13, 1942

By October 1942, Japan and the United States had worn each other down in the South Pacific. United States Marines held Guadalcanal's vital Henderson Field but were ringed in by Japanese soldiers. Both armies were devastated by malaria and supply shortages. At sea, the picture was equally grim. Japan had just lost 74 planes at Santa Cruz, but the United States had lost the aircraft carrier Hornet, and her sole remaining flattop, Enterprise, was badly damaged. American planes ruled 'The Slot' and Ironbottom Sound off Guadalcanal by day, but Japanese ships dominated them by night. Both sides were stalemated, gasping for breath.

In his spartan sea cabin aboard the super battleship Musashi at Guam, Japan's Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander of the Combined Fleet, spewed out a stream of orders intended to allow the fleet to regain the initiative with typical daring. Since Yamamoto had only one available carrier, Junyo, he turned to his crack battle-cruiser force. The plan was simple enough: A convoy of troops, backed up by his battleships Hiei and Kirishima, would steam down The Slot to Guadalcanal. The troops would land and reinforce the army there, while the warships would shell Henderson Field, smashing the air base and its planes. To see how his plans unfolded refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled "**First Battle of Iron Bottom Bay**". [Source: <http://www.historynet.com/battle-of-guadalcanal-first-naval-battle-in-the-ironbottom-sound.htm> | November 2018 ++]

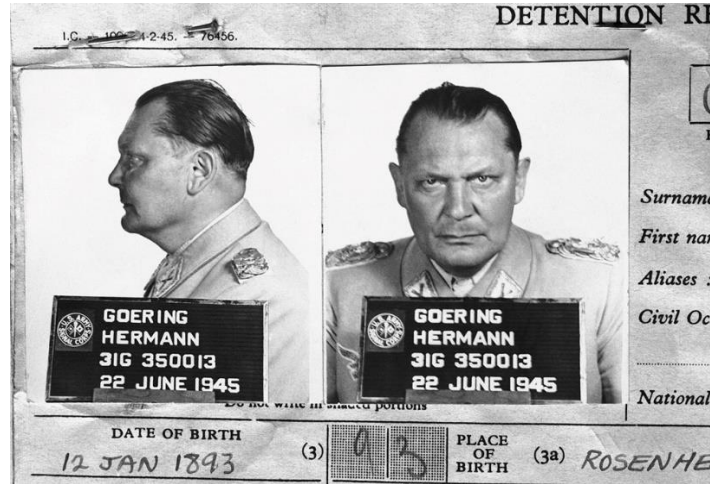
Every Picture Tells A Story ► Trainees



There's something about this photo that has always drawn me in. Perhaps it was the earnest and cheerful good looks of the five young men crammed into the forward compartment and cockpit of this Avro Anson trainer—young men who are clearly competent and proud of what they are doing. It's difficult to find information on the image, but I found one post on Pinterest that claimed the pilot (in hat) was Harold Craven Billerwell of the Royal Australian Air Force and the date was August of 1945. If this is the case, then this is a shot of the one Avro Anson operated by 99 Squadron

of the RAAF, a heavy bomber squadron raised late in the war for service against the Japanese. The squadron was stood up at the beginning of February 1945 at Leyburn in Queensland and equipped by March with B-24 Liberators. The squadron owned a Tiger Moth and an Anson, for liaison purposes most likely. The unit was transferred to Jondaryan, Queensland in June of 1945, but the war was over soon after and the squadron flew mostly transport duty until stood down in June of 1946. Some of that transport duty was repatriating Australian service people after the war

Post WWII Photos ► **Hermann Goering Mugshot**



Hermann Goering, once the leader of the formidable Luftwaffe and second in command of the German Reich under Hitler, appears in a mugshot on file with the Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects in Paris, France, on November 5, 1945. Goering surrendered to U.S. soldiers in Bavaria , on May 9, 1945, and was eventually taken to Nuremburg to face trial for War Crimes. (AP Photo)

WWII Bomber Nose Art [20] ► **The Hag of Harderwyk**



Military History Anniversaries ► 16 thru 31 DEC

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 DEC**. [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | December 2018 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations ► Owen F. Hammerberg | WWII



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

OWEN FRANCIS PATRICK HAMMERBERG

Rank and organization: Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class United States Navy

Place and date: Pearl Harbor, Hawaii February 17, 1945

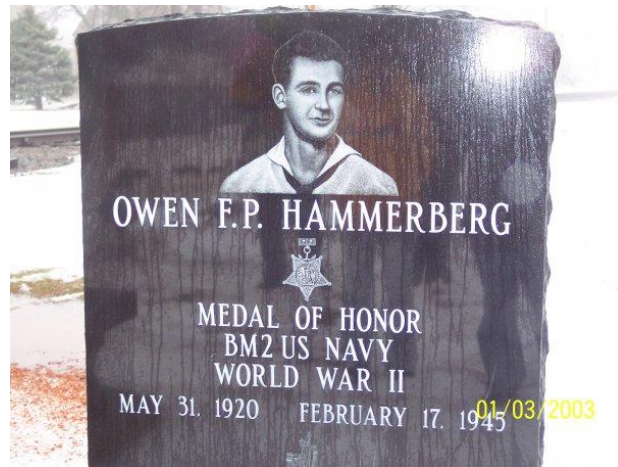
Entered service: June 16, 1941 Flint Michigan

Born: May 31, 1920 in Daggett, Michigan

Citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as a diver engaged in rescue operations at West Loch, Pearl Harbor, 17 February 1945. Aware of the danger when 2 fellow divers were hopelessly trapped in a cave-in of steel wreckage while tunneling with jet nozzles under an LST sunk in 40 feet of water and 20 feet of mud. Hammerberg unhesitatingly went overboard in a valiant attempt to effect their rescue despite the certain hazard of additional cave-ins and the risk of fouling his lifeline on jagged pieces of steel imbedded in the shifting mud. Washing a passage through the original excavation, he reached the first of the trapped men, freed him from the wreckage and, working desperately in pitch-black darkness, finally effected his release from fouled lines, thereby enabling him to reach the surface. Wearied but undaunted after several hours of arduous labor, Hammerberg resolved to continue his struggle to wash through the oozing submarine, subterranean mud in a determined effort to save the second diver. Venturing still farther under the buried hulk, he held tenaciously to his purpose, reaching a place immediately above the other man just as another cave-in occurred and a heavy piece of steel pinned him crosswise over his shipmate in a position which protected the man beneath from further injury while placing the full brunt of terrific pressure on himself. Although he succumbed in agony 18 hours after he had gone to the aid of his fellow divers, Hammerberg, by his cool judgment, unflinching professional skill and consistent disregard

of all personal danger in the face of tremendous odds, had contributed effectively to the saving of his 2 comrades. His heroic spirit of self-sacrifice throughout enhanced and sustained the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country.



Born at Daggett Hammerberg his family subsequently moved to Flint Michigan when he was young. He enlisted in the United States Navy and served in battleship USS Idaho (BB-42) and mine sweeper USS Advent (AM-83). In 1941, he underwent instruction at the Deep Sea Diving School, Washington, D.C., and was assigned duty with the Salvage Unit under Service Force, Pacific Fleet. He lost his life during rescue operations at Pearl Harbor February 17, 1945 for which he was posthumously awarded the MOH. In 1955, the destroyer escort USS Hammerberg (DE-1015) was named for him. A street in Flint and a playground in Detroit are also named Hammerberg in his honor. He was buried at age 24 in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, Southfield, Michigan

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

*** Health Care ***



Alcohol Use Update 01 ► VA Study Findings On Health Impact

A new study finds that consuming alcoholic beverages daily—even at low levels that meet U.S. guidelines for safe drinking—appears to be “detrimental” to health. The researchers found that downing one to two drinks at least four days per week was linked to a 20 percent increase in the risk of premature death, compared with drinking three times a week or less. The finding was consistent across the group of more than 400,000 people studied. They ranged in age from 18 to 85, and many were Veterans. Dr. Sarah Hartz, a psychiatrist at the VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System, led the study. It appeared in November 2018 in the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*. She’s not

too surprised by the findings, noting that two large international studies published this year reached similar conclusions.

“There has been mounting evidence that finds light drinking isn’t good for your health,” says Hartz, who is also an assistant professor at Washington University in St. Louis. The study results don’t necessarily prove cause and effect. People who tend to drink more may indeed end up having shorter lives—but not necessarily because of more alcohol consumption. It could be, for example, that those people have harder lives all around, with more stress, which takes a toll on health and longevity. But the researchers did control for a range of demographic factors and health diagnoses to try to tease out the direct effects of alcohol. Another limitation of the study is that it relied on in-person self-reports of alcohol use. Researchers believe this method may lead to under-reporting, compared with anonymous surveys.

But relative to some past studies that found health benefits from light-to-moderate drinking, the new study looked at a much larger population. This allowed Hartz’s team to better distinguish between groups of drinkers, in terms of quantity and frequency of alcohol consumption. “We’re seeing things that we didn’t before because we have access to such large data sets,” she says. “In the past, we couldn’t distinguish between these drinking amounts. The larger the data set, the more statistical power you have and the easier it is to make conclusions.”

The researchers reviewed two data sets of self-reported alcohol use and mortality follow-up. One set included more than 340,000 people from the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). The other contained nearly 94,000 VA outpatient medical records. Health and survival were tracked between seven and 10 years. According to the findings, people who drank four or more times a week, even when limiting it to only a drink or two, had about a 20 percent greater risk of dying during the study period.

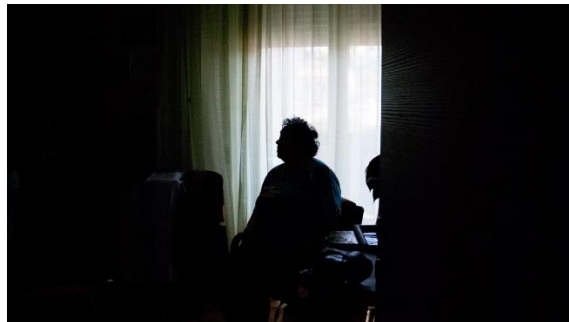
As part of the study, Hartz and her team specifically evaluated deaths due to heart disease and cancer. For heart disease, they found a benefit to drinking, specifically that one to two drinks per day about four days a week seemed to protect against death from heart disease. But drinking every day eliminated those benefits. In terms of death from cancer, any drinking was “detrimental,” she says. Current CDC guidelines call for alcohol to be used “in moderation—up to two drinks a day for men and up to one drink a day for women.” The guidelines don’t recommend that people who do not drink should start doing so for any reason. [Source: Vantage Point | Michael Richman | December 4, 2018 ++]

Nursing Homes Update 15 ► Florida’s AHCA Inaction on Patient’s Neglect

An 84-year-old U.S. Army veteran’s pressing medical needs were blatantly ignored by a Jacksonville, Florida, nursing home staff last year — and he died shortly after. York Spratling first checked into Consulate Health Care in December 2016 while suffering from diabetes, his nephew, Derwin Spratling, told the Naples Daily News. The veteran’s health was declining. Walking and feeding himself was a struggle, making living on his own impossibly unrealistic. Less than three months after being admitted to Consulate Health, Spratling’s condition took a terrible turn for the worse, and on Feb. 24, 2017, he was carried out of the nursing home on a stretcher and rushed to the emergency room.

The ER trip, however, wasn’t the product of diabetic concerns. Shortly after Spratling’s admission to the hospital, the doctor came into the waiting room to talk to family who had gathered. There, Derwin Spratling received the shocking news: His uncle needed surgery to remove dead tissue from his genitals, which had been infected with gangrene. The doctor said “he had never seen anything like that before, especially in this day and age,” Derwin Spratling told the Naples Daily News. “It really freaked us out.” “Who was taking care of this man?” Spratling’s sister, Lula Price-Brown, asked. “His private area, nobody washed that.” After the procedure to remove the rotten

flesh, Spratling’s condition worsened exponentially. “It didn’t just happen overnight, but it was quicker than you could imagine,” Derwin said. Soon after, York Spratling was dead.



An elderly woman sits alone in a nursing home room. Patient neglect or error was cited as a cause of death for 54 nursing home patients in Florida between 2013 and 2017. U.S. Army veteran, York Spratling, 84, was one of them.

State investigators from Florida’s Agency for Health Care Administration, or AHCA, which oversees nursing home regulations, began looking into Spratling’s case in the aftermath of what appeared to be gross mismanagement of a nursing home patient. The AHCA had already cited the Consulate Health Care nursing home three times in the year leading up to the 84-year-old’s death, with each report pointing to inadequate staffing and an inability to provide even the most basic care for patients, such as bathing or hygiene. Months before Spratling’s death, an unnamed patient at the same nursing home submitted an alarming complaint to AHCA inspectors, noting, “I have not had a shower in I don’t know how long,” according to the report. When questioned about Spratling’s case, meanwhile, nursing home staff reportedly told state investigators that the stench emanating from his infection was so bad that it could be smelled from the doorway of his room. But despite the easily discernible health risk, staff members didn’t document or notify a doctor about the infection until a full five days after first noticing the odor, the report said.

Spratling’s condition was "way past obvious," Derwin Spratling said. “This is so past obvious that it’s mind-blowing.” “Everything was about to fall off, it was so rotten,” York Spratling’s brother, Obie, affirmed, as part of an in-depth Naples Daily News investigation into a rash of nursing home malpractice cases throughout Florida. Following his death, a subsequent report conducted by the Florida Department of Children and Families ruled that Spratling had indeed died due to “inadequate supervision and medical neglect.” The AHCA, however, reportedly took no action against the facility despite the report’s pointed contents, thus allowing the nursing home’s conditions of patient squalor to persist.

Patient complaints have continued since Spratling’s death, with “neglect and inadequate staffing” principal among them. Eight months after York Spratling was rushed to the emergency room with rotting flesh, another patient told AHCA inspectors, “I wallow around in this bed in my own piss.” To date, little has been done to rectify the dearth of adequate, humane treatment. In the state of Florida between 2013 and 2017, 43 cases were opened looking into the deaths of 54 nursing residents, the report said. Each case cited medical negligence or error as the cause of death. Of those cases, however, the nursing homes in question avoided all repercussions — fines or other penalties — in 32 of them. [Source: MilitaryTimes | J.D. Simkins | December 14, 2018 ++]

FEDVIP Update 02 ► Military Community Given An Extra 3-Months to Enroll

Government officials are giving those in the military community who are eligible for new benefits under the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) an extra three months to enroll. Originally the deadline to enroll was 10 DEC, but officials with the Office of Personnel Management have recognized there’s a need for more time, especially for many retirees who have been getting their dental insurance coverage through the Tricare

Retiree Dental Program, said Kathy Beasley, a retired Navy captain who is director of government relations for health affairs for the Military Officers Association of America. She said officials informed her of the “belated enrollment phase” during a meeting 13 DEC.

TRDP coverage ends 31 DEC. If they still want to be covered under a government dental plan, retirees must enroll themselves and their family members in FEDVIP. Coverage begins 1 JAN. As of 13 DEC, there were 639,000 military retirees who had enrolled in FEDVIP dental plans. FEDVIP is available to military retirees whether or not they were enrolled in TRDP. Beasley said officials at the Office of Personnel Management didn’t specify a deadline date for those in the military community to enroll in FEDVIP, other than it’s an extra three months. Further information was not available from the Office of Personnel Management.

- **FEDVIP dental insurance plans:** Military retirees and their family members enrolled in Tricare Prime, Tricare Select, or using Tricare for Life are now eligible for these programs. There are at least 10 choices available to potential enrollees through FEDVIP. Premium costs vary by geographic area, and among the different insurance carriers. But within each national plan available throughout the country and internationally, the other features and benefits of that national dental carrier will stay the same from one area to another. Visit www.benefeds.com.
- **FEDVIP vision insurance plans.** Most active-duty family members, retirees and reservists and their family members are now eligible for this new vision benefit under FEDVIP that provides extra coverage beyond what they’re getting under Tricare plans. The FEDVIP vision coverage is effective Jan. 1. As of Dec. 13, eligible Tricare beneficiaries enrolled in 300,000 FEDVIP vision plans. Visit www.benefeds.com.

Defense health officials have also extended the deadline to 31 DEC for switching between Tricare Prime and Tricare Select. 1 JAN, you’ll only be able to change plans or enroll in a plan during the annual open season, or following a qualifying life event, such as marriage, birth, adoption, divorce or retiring. Visit <https://tricare.mil/bwe>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | December 14, 2018 ++]

Holiday Stress ► Managing It



Army Chaplain (Capt.) Andrew Braswell

Having family over for a meal, decorating the house and finding the perfect gifts are typical of the holiday season. To some these activities are times to be enjoyed with family and friends; to others they represent dreaded tasks that add more stress to their daily lives. During this very stressful time of year, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center providers have a variety of treatment options to provide effective and individualized care to help beneficiaries handle stress.

According to the Department of Defense's Consortium for Health and Military Performance (CHAMP), stress is unavoidable and can be helpful or harmful. "It is normal to experience stress in life. However, sometimes the stressors can become overwhelming, leading to a physical reaction to stress," explained Army Maj. Kathleen Young, WRNMMC Psychiatry Continuity Service (PCS) chief. "This physical reaction, known as the 'fight or flight' response, allows for humans to respond quickly to potential 'life-threatening' situations. Prolonged periods of stress keep the body wired, which can take a toll on one's health and cause anxiety, depression and cardiovascular disease, to name a few. Learning how to recognize the stress response and using healthier coping mechanisms can improve your overall health," Young explained.

To take control of the holiday season and reduce holiday stress level, Young and Dr. Georica Gholson, PCS clinical psychologist, recommend the following tips:

- Set realistic financial goals for gift giving.
- Practice forgiveness. Acknowledge past feelings, and let go of the past.
- Try to remember that holidays don't have to be perfect.
- Get organized. Engage your family in helping you, so that tasks can be managed with help.
- Practice Mindfulness. Spend a few minutes alone, practice deep breathing, stop and enjoy your life. Utilize your five senses to keep yourself grounded to the present.
- If you are deployed or away from your family during the holiday season, seek out the USO or other service organizations. Most have resources available to stay connected.
- Set boundaries in discussing specific distressing topics.
- If the chance of family conflict is high, it may be worthwhile to consider a hotel stay.

Spirituality

Army Chaplain (Capt.) Andrew Braswell, chaplain clinician/senior pastor Protestant Chapel congregation at WRNMMC, explained how faith helps in dealing with holiday stress. "Spirituality helps people see there is something greater than themselves. It helps put things in perspective and gives people hope." He added that during the holidays, people sometimes will feel drawn to religious activities including worship services, family practices, personal devotional reading, prayer and meditation.

"Holidays are especially difficult because everything is supposed to be joyous, good and wonderful, but when you are in the hospital your mind is plagued with feeling of pain and distress," added Navy Chaplain (Cmdr.) Harvey Macklin, WRNMMC Bioethics chaplain. "During this time people call out for assurance and care especially when family or loved ones are unable to be here for them. It is common to receive extra calls from people who are just lonely, emotionally down or angry. This is our time to remind them that this truly is a season of love and compassion." To support these needs, the WRNMMC chaplains offers a variety of religious services for Christmas, Hanukkah and Islamic worshippers.

Resiliency

"The cause of stress varies, from missing loved ones who have died and are no longer here to celebrate with us, to the overwhelming feelings of the need to purchase gifts for others versus maybe paying a bill," explained Asia Phillips, program manager for Resiliency and Psychological Health Service at WRNMMC. "Even the stress of having to work during the holiday and not being able to take time off to spend with loved ones can cause strain during this time," she said.

"For many, stress is like drowning; all you want to do is breathe but it is the one thing that escapes you. It forces you to panic and attempt to over reach what is possible in the moment," added Macklin. "In a low moment in my life I was given a great mantra 'This moment, this step, this day.' I cannot tell you how many times I have held tight to these words, forcing myself to not over reach my situation."

The Department of Defense also provides numerous on-line support for service members, including: Military OneSource or (800-342-9647); CHAMP; the Military Crisis Line (800-273-8255 or text 838255) and several smart

phone applications that allow individuals manage their anxiety, cope with stress and overcome their bouts of depression.

[Source: Health.mil | Mark Oswell, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center | December 13, 2018 ++]

Holiday Stress Update 01 ► Coping With PTSD

The winter holiday season is regarded by many as a wonderful time of the year. However, the holidays can be a painful reminder of past times when life seemed better. Large groups of family and friends are often part of the holiday festivities, but this and other things may be stressful for someone with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Groups may tire a person out or make him or her feel overwhelmed. People may feel pressure to join family activities when they're not up for it, or believe they must act happy when they're not. People with PTSD may already find it difficult to get enough sleep or to relax and these added pressures can worsen those symptoms.

Someone with PTSD may be very sensitive to losses around the holiday. Veterans and military families, in particular, tend to remember at the holidays those who did not make it home from war. They may not know how to celebrate the holidays knowing those fallen heroes are no longer present. There may also be recent losses: the death of a loved one, an emotional divorce, or separation from one's children. All of these circumstances may cause someone to feel melancholy about memories of holidays past. Family and friends might ask the Veteran questions about his or her life or about PTSD. The person with PTSD may not feel comfortable answering these questions, but it is important that he or she keep in mind that their family may feel some of the same pressures, and may only be asking because they have a genuine concern for their wellbeing.

The holiday gathering may also be one of the few times family or friends are able to physically see the person with PTSD, and they may feel it is more appropriate they ask such questions in person rather than over the phone or online because they may think that is too impersonal. In either case, the person with PTSD has the power and right to not answer any questions. A polite way of handling these types of situations is by taking a few slow, deep breaths and calmly responding to someone, "I think it is nice of you to show you care by asking, but I'd rather not talk about that right now," or "thanks for your concern, but I'm not comfortable answering questions about that." Then take the opportunity to redirect the conversation. Ask that family member about work, their children, or their favorite sports team, and steer the conversation to safer ground. Both people with and without PTSD can cope with holiday stress by following these tips:

- Talk with your family about how you feel. Your family can help you. This does not mean you have to tell them everything, but let them know you're feeling stressed.
- Be honest about your stress level and let your friends and family know your plans ahead of time, especially if you are planning to take some time during the season to relax and de-stress by spending time away from home, work or people that bring stress into your life.
- Set limits. Don't join activities for longer than you can handle. You can choose when you want to be a part of the group.
- Take breaks. Go for walks, or set aside a place where you can be alone for a while. This can keep you from feeling overwhelmed.
- Get plenty of rest. You may already have difficulty sleeping, but do your best to maintain your usual bedtime or wake-up. Naps should be taken sparingly, as they may further disrupt your nighttime sleeping patterns.
- Keep up with exercise routines. If you normally do yoga, go jogging, or lift weights, try to keep up those healthy routines. These activities are all healthy ways to relieve stress.

- Fake it ‘til you make it. Sometimes people who are feeling depressed find that if they go through the motions, they just might catch themselves having fun. While the pain from the past hasn’t gone away, this is a chance to begin making new positive memories one step at a time.

One of the best tips to remember when coping with holiday stress is not drinking too much alcohol. Many people have a few drinks, thinking it will relax them, but instead, alcohol causes many people to have less control over their emotions and behavior. As a result, your symptoms may be worse or you may end up having problems with your family. For those who are in recovery from alcohol, the suggestion from family or friends to “have just one” can be a big challenge. Carrying a glass of ginger ale or cola with you can help sidestep those offers without you having to share your personal matters with everyone.

As always, the Veterans Crisis Line will be available throughout the winter holiday season including Christmas and New Year’s. The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text. Veterans and their loved ones can call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online, or send a text message to 838255 to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Support for deaf and hard of hearing individuals is available. Insert the number into your phone contacts because although you may not need to ever call them, you may find yourself in a case where you’re calling to help someone else. [Source: Vantage Point | Jessica Grogan | December 14, 2018 ++]

Tricare Ambulance Services Update 02 ► 2019 Expansion

TRICARE expanded ambulance services will cover both treat-and-release and joint response starting in 2019. =

- Treat-and-release: This is when an ambulance treats you, but doesn’t take you to the hospital.
- Joint response: This is when an ambulance crew needs the help of a paramedic or intermediate EMT to give you advanced life support services.

Ambulances can be network or non-network providers. In an emergency, sometimes a non-network ambulance may treat or transport you. If a non-network provider bills you for treat-and-release or joint response, they can charge up to 115 percent of the TRICARE-allowable charge. Active duty service members aren’t liable for payment for treat-and-release or joint response services. Overall, TRICARE covers the following Ambulance services:

- Emergency transfers to or from a beneficiary's home, accident scene, or other location to a hospital, and transfers between hospitals.
- Ambulance transfers from a hospital-based emergency room to a hospital more capable of provided the required care.
- Transfers between a hospital or skilled nursing facility and another hospital-based or freestanding outpatient therapeutic or diagnostic department/facility.
- Air ambulance or boat ambulance transport when the pickup point is not accessible by a land vehicle, or when great distance or other obstacles are involved in transporting the patient to the nearest hospital with appropriate facilities. The patient’s medical condition must require a speedy admission or indicate they are not able to be transferred by other means.
- Ambulance services even if no transportation is provided.
- Joint response situations, when an ambulance provides basic life support (BLS) services while a paramedic from a different company provides advanced life support (ALS) services

Payment of services and supplies provided by ambulance personnel at an accident scene may be allowed when the patient's condition warrants transfer to an inpatient acute setting and medical services and/or supplies are provided

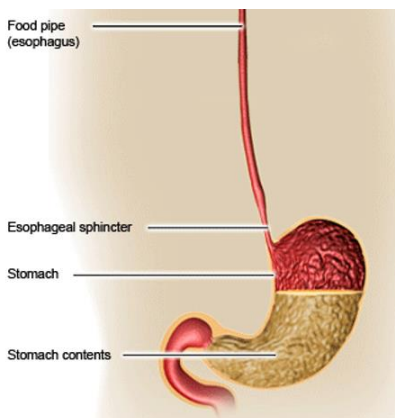
solely to stabilize the patient's condition while awaiting the arrival of a more urgent means of transfer; e.g., air ambulance services. **TRICARE doesn't cover:**

- Ambulance service used instead of taxi service when the patient's condition would have permitted use of regular private transportation.
- Transport or transfer of a patient to be closer to home, family, friends or personal physician.
- Medicabs or ambicabs that transport patients to and from medical appointments

[Source: TRICARE Communications | December 13, 2018 ++]

Heartburn & GERD ► Frequent Heartburn Considered GERD

Many people have heartburn every now and again after eating a large meal, and will be familiar with the unpleasant burning feeling in their chest, just behind their breastbone. Occasional acid reflux is normal too. Up to 20 out of 100 people living in Western countries regularly have problems like heartburn or regurgitation. Although both of these can be unpleasant, they don't usually lead to other health problems. But if you have very frequent or severe heartburn and often have acid reflux, you may have what is known as “gastro-esophageal reflux disease,” or GERD for short. The word "gastro-esophageal" means that the stomach and food pipe (esophagus) are affected.



The passage between the food pipe and stomach is closed most of the time. It only opens when the mixture of chewed food and saliva reaches it. It closes again once the food has entered the stomach. This ensures that the contents of the stomach don't flow back. If the stomach is stretched a lot – for instance after a large meal – the sphincter (circular muscle) at the entrance to the stomach might temporarily loosen. Gas or stomach contents might leak up into the food pipe as a result. The sphincter may also sometimes open for no apparent reason. The digestive fluid in the stomach contents irritates the lining of the food pipe, and that is felt as heartburn. If stomach juices stay on the lining of the food pipe for some time, the food pipe might become inflamed and painful.

Symptoms

In some people, stomach contents regularly leak into their food pipe, or a relatively large amount leaks out. It is considered to be GERD if this causes frequent or severe heartburn or acid reflux that affects your quality of life, or if your food pipe has become inflamed. Heartburn is felt as a burning pain that spreads from the upper stomach, or from the area behind the breastbone, up into the throat. As well as acid reflux and heartburn, GERD is sometimes associated with problems swallowing. Other possible symptoms include a burning sensation in your throat, a bad taste in your mouth, and stomach noises. People who have GERD often feel very full. They may also feel nauseous and like they need to vomit. Other possible symptoms include a dry cough, asthma, toothache, and a husky or hoarse

voice. These occur if the stomach juices get into the windpipe and irritate the airways, or get into the mouth and attack the teeth.

Causes and risk factors

The food pipe becomes narrower just before it reaches the stomach. This narrow part is normally kept shut by the muscles in the food pipe and diaphragm. But this doesn't work properly in GERD. It is often not clear why. In some people it is caused by a hiatal hernia (also known as a hiatus hernia). The diaphragm is a sheet of muscle that separates the chest and abdominal cavities from each other. The food pipe passes through a small hole in the diaphragm and enters the stomach just below it. In people who have a hiatal hernia, the upper part of the stomach pushes up through the hole in the diaphragm and into the chest cavity. As a result, the diaphragm can no longer help to close the entrance to the stomach.

There is some debate about whether being overweight, smoking and drinking alcohol can affect the sphincter or the risk of reflux and heartburn. Many of those affected say that their symptoms are triggered or made worse by stress – or by certain foods or drinks. The symptoms may also get worse after physical activities or through certain positions, such as bending forward or lying down. Sometimes reflux symptoms and heartburn are caused by a problem with the food pipe. For instance, the food pipe might not move rising stomach juices back down into the stomach fast enough, or it might react very sensitively. The symptoms can also be made worse by medications such as birth control pills and certain drugs against high blood pressure.

GERD is usually a chronic condition and is typically characterized by recurrent attacks. In other words, you may have a symptom-free phase for a while, followed by a phase with more severe symptoms, followed by another symptom-free phase, and so on. The food pipe doesn't always become inflamed. In up to 2 out of 3 people with reflux symptoms, the membranes lining the food pipe are normal.

Effects

A lot of people who have reflux and heartburn worry about the possible health consequences. But it usually doesn't get worse. Sometimes reflux can lead to changes in the mucous membranes lining the lower end of the food pipe. This is known as “Barrett's esophagus.” It is estimated that 5 out of 100 people who have reflux will develop this condition after some time. Barrett's esophagus is associated with a somewhat higher risk of esophageal (food pipe) cancer. It is estimated that esophageal cancer will develop within the next ten years in at most 1 out of 1,000 people who don't have Barrett's esophagus, but in 10 out of 1,000 people who do have Barrett's esophagus. Another possible complication is esophageal stricture, which is where the food pipe becomes narrower. This happens if the food pipe is very inflamed and that leads to scarring. The scar tissue can make the entrance to the food pipe narrower and sometimes make it noticeably harder to swallow.

Diagnosis

GERD can usually be diagnosed based on typical symptoms. It is therefore important to describe your symptoms to your doctor in as much detail as possible, and tell him or her when and how often they occur. If someone is thought to have GERD, doctors sometimes suggest that they have a “trial treatment” known as a PPI test to see if they respond. The test involves taking proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) for about two weeks. If the medication relieves the symptoms, then it is very likely that GERD is causing them. People with severe heartburn or GERD can often relieve their symptoms by changing some of their lifestyle habits. For instance, they might try to avoid certain types of food, or drink less alcohol. This is not always easy to do, but it can be worth the effort. There are also medications that can relieve the symptoms. If this doesn't provide enough relief, surgery might be considered. Treatment options for GERD: <https://www.informedhealth.org/treatment-options-for-gerd.2100.en.html?part=behandlung-so>.

Reflux and heartburn can be very distressing. The symptoms can affect your sleep and prevent you from enjoying food and drinks as much as you used to. GERD can affect your general wellbeing and everyday life. Some people stop participating in social activities and call in sick a lot. Although treatment isn't always pleasant and might take some time to work, a lot of people find that they feel better afterwards and that their GERD is no longer such a problem.

TRICARE Health Matters ► Items Of Interest

Your Health Matters, your Education Center at [express-scripts.com/TRICARE](https://www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE), has items of interest to help you manage your health and prescription benefit. This information is frequently updated to help ensure we're providing you with the most current information around your pharmacy benefit. Visit https://www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE/news/healthmatters.shtml?utm_source=email&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=tribenedem to learn more about what matters most — your health.

- **Understanding and Managing Diabetes with Your TRICARE® Pharmacy Benefit** -- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates more than 30 million Americans have diabetes and more than 84 million have prediabetes. Learn more about how your TRICARE pharmacy benefit can help you manage your diabetes. [Learn more.](#)
- **Protect Yourself this Flu Season** -- Flu season is here, and we want you to stay healthy. Your TRICARE® pharmacy benefit covers the flu shot – which is the most effective way to prevent infection – at no cost. [Learn more.](#)
- **Designate a Caregiver to Help You Manage Your Prescriptions** -- If someone helps you manage your prescription drugs, you should consider designating them as a caregiver for your TRICARE pharmacy benefit. [Learn more.](#)
- **Track Your Prescriptions Online or Through Your Phone** -- Get peace of mind knowing your order is on its way! [Learn more.](#)
- **Coordinating Your Pharmacy Benefits When You Have TRICARE® and Other Health Insurance** -- It's important to understand how your TRICARE pharmacy benefit works with your other insurance to maximize your pharmacy benefit – and even save you money! [Learn more.](#)
- **Your TRICARE® Pharmacy Benefit Travels With You** -- If you are planning to travel, it's important to remember some important facts about your prescription medication. [Learn more.](#)
- **Deployed Prescription Program – Delivering Medication When and Where You Need It** -- Preparing for deployment can be a stressful time. There are many important arrangements to make before your assignment starts. When you enroll in TRICARE Pharmacy's Deployment Prescription Program (DPP), you won't have to worry about getting your medication and refills while you're deployed. You can count on your maintenance medication being delivered to you on time – when and where you need it. [Learn more.](#)
- **Paying for your Prescriptions** -- With healthcare costs rising, it's important to examine your pharmacy benefit plan to ensure you're taking advantage of budget-friendly options available to you. With TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery, Express Scripts offers you several payment plans so you can choose the best one that provides you with the greatest flexibility and security in paying for your medications. [Learn more.](#)
- **Emergency Preparedness for Prescription Medications** -- It is important to prepare your family for emergencies and disasters, both big and small. Emergencies can happen anywhere at any time. [Learn more.](#)
- **Protect Yourself from Identity Theft and Fraud** -- It's always important to protect your personal information from identity theft and fraud. When taking prescription medications it's just as important to fight against medical identity theft and fraud by taking the following steps to keep yourself protected. [Learn more.](#)
- **Get Your Explanation of Benefits Online to Stay on Top of Your Pharmacy Benefit** -- As a TRICARE® beneficiary, it is quick and easy to stay on top of your pharmacy benefit and your prescription activity by regularly reviewing your pharmacy Explanation of Benefits (EOB) statements online. [Learn more.](#)

- **Make the Most of Your TRICARE Pharmacy Benefit** -- As a TRICARE beneficiary, it's important to understand your pharmacy benefit and your options to get the medications you need safely and securely. Find out how you can maximize your pharmacy benefit. [Learn more.](#)
- **TRICARE Pharmacy Copayments Change February 1, 2018** -- Starting February 1, 2018, the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) requires TRICARE to change its prescription copayments. TRICARE pharmacy copayment changes impact all beneficiaries except Active Duty Service Members, dependent survivors of Active Duty Service Members, and medically retired service members and their dependents. [Learn more.](#)
- **Happy, Healthy Holidays** -- In the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, it's easy to neglect our health and well-being. At the end of the holidays, many of us are exhausted, under the weather and may have eaten too many sweets, adding a few extra pounds to the scale. The holidays are also a tough time for people managing depression, and the stress of the season can often increase symptoms of depression. It's important to make time for yourself. Here are some tips for staying healthy – mentally and physically – during the season. [Learn more](#) (PDF file).
- **Automatic Prescription Refills Require Your Consent** -- Starting September 1, 2017, upon renewal of your maintenance medication, the automatic refill program requires your consent. By providing consent, you have more control over what medications are enrolled in the program. This program enhancement will be phased in through December 1, 2017 and requires you to take action to stay enrolled. For each prescription enrolled in the automatic refill program, you need to take action once your last remaining refill is processed. Your prescription will no longer be re-enrolled, unless Express Scripts hears back from you. [Learn more.](#)
- **Safe Prescription Opioid Use** -- Over the recent years, addiction and abuse of pain medications has become a national epidemic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [reports](#) that more than 1,000 patients are treated daily in emergency departments for misusing prescription opioids, more than 40 people die every day from overdoses involving prescription opioids, and nearly half of all opioid overdose deaths involve a prescription opioid. To reverse the epidemic, it's important to know how to prevent addiction and abuse before it starts. [Learn more.](#)
- **Tips for Expectant Mothers** -- Pregnancy and childbirth are some of the most wonderful experiences in a woman's life, yet these experiences can also be some of the most stressful as well. When a baby is on the way, diapers and strollers may preoccupy your thoughts. Nevertheless, it's critical to focus on your health – and specifically how to manage prescription and over-the-counter medications during this time in your life. [Learn more.](#)
- **Prescription Medications Delivered Right to You** -- TRICARE® Pharmacy Home Delivery provides a convenient way to get your medication. In fact, getting your maintenance medication is as easy as picking up your mail. Maintenance medications are those you take on a regular, ongoing basis for chronic, long-term conditions such as those used to control blood pressure. [Learn more.](#)
- **Express Scripts Website and Mobile Application Enhancements** -- The Express Scripts mobile application (app) and website allows you to transfer your maintenance drugs filled at a military pharmacy to TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery. [Learn more.](#)
- **Back to School Tips for Handling Prescription Medications** -- Many of us will soon be getting our children ready for the upcoming school year. If your child is one of the 6.5 million children in the U.S. being treated for a chronic medical condition such as asthma or diabetes, your planning involves more than new backpacks and glue sticks. [Learn more.](#)
- **Ask Your Doctor about Electronic Prior Authorization** -- Electronic Prior Authorization (or ePA) is a simple process your doctor's office can use to submit prior authorization requests. If your prescription requires a prior authorization, ask your doctor to submit it electronically. [Learn more.](#)
- **Manage Your TRICARE® Pharmacy Benefit Online** -- It's easy to stay connected to the TRICARE® Pharmacy Program. With useful online resources, you can be sure you're getting the most out of your pharmacy benefit. [Learn more.](#)
- **Specialty Medication Care Management Program** -- Some health conditions are treated using specialty medications. These are usually high cost, self-administered, injectable or oral medications that treat serious,

chronic conditions like cancer, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis and hepatitis C. TRICARE® beneficiaries can have these prescription drugs mailed directly to their homes and receive additional care through TRICARE's free Specialty Medication Care Management Program. [Learn more.](#)

- **Your Retail Pharmacy Network** -- Express Scripts understands that beneficiaries have different pharmacy needs, so we aim to provide a robust retail pharmacy network to balance choice, access and cost. This need is why Express Scripts works with so many retail and community pharmacies to make it convenient for you to obtain short-term medications. [Learn more.](#)
- **Want to see medication and patient names in your emails?** -- Receiving email notifications about your prescriptions can be convenient. But it can be confusing when the name of your medication is not listed. We've heard your feedback and made the option available for you to receive more detailed information in your notification emails, such as medication names and the name of the patient. [Learn more.](#)
- **Decoding Prescriptions: Understanding key pharmacy terms and abbreviations** -- Pharmacy terminology can be confusing. To make the most of your TRICARE® pharmacy benefit, it is essential to understand some key pharmacy terms. The following is a list of some of the most common terms you may encounter. [Learn more.](#)
- **Ask Your Provider to E-Prescribe** -- Looking for the most convenient method for getting your prescriptions? With electronic prescribing (e-prescribing), you can continue to get your prescriptions safely and quickly, eliminating the need for handwritten prescriptions. [Learn more](#)
- **Know Your Order's Status** -- After placing any kind of online order, we all want to check the status of that order. When it comes to your TRICARE® Pharmacy Home Delivery order it's even more important to be able to know where the order is and when it will arrive at your home. [Learn more.](#)
- **Keeping your Prescriptions Safe in Extreme Temperatures** -- Extreme temperatures can have negative effects on your medications. Because of this, beneficiaries may be concerned about getting their prescriptions through the mail. Express Scripts takes extensive measures to ensure medications requiring extra protection are mailed out of the TRICARE® Home Delivery Pharmacy to withstand extreme temperatures. [Learn more](#)

[Source: Express Scripps Federal Pharmacy Services Family Health Matters Newsletter https://www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE/news/healthmatters.shtml?utm_source=email&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=tribenedem | December 7, 2018 ++]

Medicare Fraud Update 132 ► \$500M Opioid Scheme

Six doctors were charged in an unsealed indictment 6 DEC with cheating Medicare and Medicaid out of almost \$500 million and fueling the nation's opioid epidemic by illegally prescribing more than 13 million doses of prescription pain medication. The dollars and drugs involved make the alleged health care fraud conspiracy one of the largest in Michigan history, and one of the largest nationwide. The scheme was focused within three pain clinics in Macomb County. They are The Pain Center USA in Warren and Eastpointe, and Interventional Pain Center in Warren. The three clinics were owned and operated by Dr. Rajendra Bothra, 77, of Bloomfield Hills, a surgeon, humanitarian and politician. In 1999, Bothra was presented with the highest civilian honor bestowed in India, known as the Padmashri.

Bothra's clinics "sought to bill insurance companies for the maximum number of services and procedures possible with no regard to the patients' needs," prosecutors alleged. "The damage that opioid distribution has done to our community and to the United States as a whole has been devastating," U.S. Attorney Matthew Schneider said in a statement Thursday. "Healthcare professionals who prey on patients who are addicted to opioids in order to line their pockets is particularly egregious." The other doctors charged are:

- Dr. Eric Backos, 65, of Bloomfield Hills.
- Dr. Ganiu Edu, 50, of Southfield.
- Dr. David Lewis, 41, of Detroit.

- Dr. Ronald Kufner, 68, of Ada.
- Dr. Christopher Russo, 50, of Birmingham.



Bothra

Edu

Backos

Lewis

Kufner

The doctors all worked in various capacities at Bothra's clinics and lured patients there by prescribing opioids, the indictment alleges. After arriving at the clinics, patients received the pain medications and were forced to undergo treatments that included injections, according to the government. Bothra and Lewis were arraigned in federal court 6 DEC. The disheveled doctors were arrested early Thursday and brought to court in handcuffs and ankle chains. Bothra, his hair ruffled, sat next to Lewis on a courtroom bench while waiting to be arraigned. Lewis, dressed in a green T-shirt and black jeans with the pockets turned inside out, ignored Bothra, who sat silently. Coincidentally, the doctors, charged in an opioid case, sat next to two men who were charged Thursday with distributing a lethal dose of fentanyl.

Bothra is being held without bond pending a detention hearing 7 DEC in federal court. His lawyer declined comment. Lewis was released on \$10,000 unsecured bond, barred from prescribing drugs and billing Medicaid or Medicare. His attorney also declined comment. Russo and Edu also were released on \$10,000 unsecured bond. The 56-count indictment charges the six doctors with health-care fraud conspiracy, a 10-year felony, multiple counts of aiding and abetting health-care fraud and drug crimes. The scheme started in January 2013 and continued until last month and involved charging Medicare, Medicaid and Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan for medically unnecessary services and equipment, the indictment alleges.

The conspiracy cost Medicare more than \$182.5 million, \$272.6 million to Medicaid and \$9.2 million to Blue Cross/Blue Shield, according to the indictment. The doctors also were responsible for prescribing 13,217,987 doses of opioids, including OxyContin, Vicodin, hydrocodone and Percocet, the government alleges. "Physicians who engage in the illegal and negligent prescribing of controlled substances in order to unjustly enrich themselves of taxpayer dollars will be held accountable" said Lamont Pugh III, special agent in charge, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Inspector General.

The allegations outlined in the complaint are "terrifying," said Monique Stanton, president and CEO of CARE of Southeastern Michigan, a Macomb County-based group that provides substance abuse treatment. "It is imperative that those medical officials who abuse their powers for financial reasons are held accountable — we are in a life-and-death situation in this epidemic," Stanton wrote in an email Thursday. "Physicians see people at their most (vulnerable), especially those suffering from severe pain, so this is a major breach of trust to see them take advantage patients in this way."

The alleged conspiracy is the third totaling more than \$100 million in recent years in Metro Detroit. Dr. Frank Patino of Woodhaven was charged in June and accused of orchestrating a \$112 million health-care fraud. Prosecutors, court records and social-media posts portray Patino as a conniving crook with lies as big as his biceps, an alligator-wrestling, steroid-buying, frequently shirtless fraudster who spent ill-gotten gains on mixed martial arts fighters and a vanity diet program. Patino is jailed while awaiting trial. The Patino case is linked to an investigation involving a \$200 million scheme and businessman Mashiyat Rashid of West Bloomfield Township. The Rashid scheme distributed 6.6 million doses of controlled substances, federal authorities said. During the Rashid investigation, federal agents have seized more than \$21 million worth of cash and real estate and want Rashid's mansion forfeited

to the government. Rashid struck a plea deal with prosecutors in October. [Source: The Detroit News | Robert Snell | December 6, 2018 ++]

Medicare Fraud Update 133 ► Rich and On The Run

More than a dozen doctors and medical professionals charged with federal crimes in the Michigan area have fled the country in recent years amid a federal crackdown on illegal opioid use and health care fraud. Prosecutors used the fugitive status of 16 medical professionals who have fled since 2011 to keep Dr. Rajendra Bothra jailed 12 DEC while he awaits trial in a nearly \$500 million conspiracy, one of the largest health care fraud cases in U.S. history. U.S. Magistrate Judge Mona Majzoub cited the Bloomfield Hills doctor's lies, ties to India and riches, including overseas bank accounts filled with \$3 million, before refusing to release Bothra on bond. "I believe there is clear evidence that this defendant poses a risk of flight," Majzoub said, triggering loud sobs from Bothra's daughter, who was adopted from Mother Teresa's orphanage in India.

The medical professionals who have fled for overseas destinations including Jordan, Pakistan and Egypt in recent years have two things in common: foreign ties and big bank accounts that have financed flights from justice. In Bothra's case, he has eight siblings in India and amassed a \$35 million fortune and vast-real estate holdings, including a \$1.99 million island estate. Federal court records shed light on some of the fugitives who used fake names, overseas bank accounts and illegal border crossings during daring escapes that left behind prosecutors, frustrated judges and severed GPS tethers. "If history shows us anything, defendants similar to Dr. Bothra don't stick around to have a court determine their fate," Assistant U.S. Attorney Brandy McMillion told the judge. "This is, in large part, because of the charges they face and the significant penalties that come with those charges if convicted."

The federal court system in southeast Michigan historically has had among the highest rates in the nation for the number of federal criminal defendants released on bond. But the court system ranks below the national average for the number of defendants who fail to appear in court. Last year, 15 people, or 1.2 percent of the more than 1,200 defendants on bond in the Eastern District of Michigan, failed to appear, according to court statistics. When defendants flee, the U.S. Marshals Service launches investigations that can become complicated when people hide in countries that lack diplomatic ties with the U.S. "We just don't forget about them," Deputy U.S. Marshal Robert Watson said. "We continue to monitor them and have mechanisms in place if they come back into the U.S. or move to extraditable countries."

Bothra is facing health care fraud and drug charges that could send him to federal prison for more than 20 years — a potential death sentence for the 77-year-old, who owns Pain Center USA in Warren and Eastpointe, and Interventional Pain Center in Warren. Bothra and five other doctors are accused of cheating Medicare, Medicaid and Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan by billing \$464 million during what prosecutors say was a scheme that ran from 2013 until last month. During that time, the doctors forced patients to undergo painful medical procedures in exchange for illegally receiving more than 13 million doses of prescription pain medication, including OxyContin, Vicodin, hydrocodone and Percocet, the government alleges.

"The volume of patients and severity of damage ... to these patients is beyond comprehension," Majzoub, the magistrate judge, said 12 DEC. Yet, Bothra almost was released on bond. His hearing spanned two days and was delayed as lawyers studied whether the doctor could be released on a surety bond that would be forfeited to the government if Bothra bolted from the U.S. Majzoub scrapped the idea Wednesday after learning a surety bond was not possible without a conviction. Most of Bothra's bank accounts and money have been frozen, his lawyer Thomas Cranmer argued late Wednesday. But not all. He has access to one retirement account — court records indicate it is worth \$7.6 million — his lawyer said. Bothra's defense mounted another bid for bond late Wednesday, offering to ensure the retirement fund is used for "solely legitimate purposes."

Doctors and medical professionals with clean criminal records and deep ties to the region are more likely to be good candidates for bond, but a review of cases shows prosecutors also focus on a defendant's overseas ties and ability to finance an escape. "If I had no money and go, 'here's an idea, why don't I flee to someplace that doesn't extradite, like in the Middle East or, maybe, Pakistan?' That isn't much of a plan," said Wayne Pratt, chief of the health care fraud unit at the U.S. Attorney's Office in Detroit. "But if you're from that country and have substantial assets in that country or someplace else that you can transfer there, it makes it much more of a plan and an option." Dabbagh

The list of fugitive doctors includes Mamoun Dabbagh, a Southfield psychiatrist known as the "Stripper Doc," who witnesses said visited topless bars while wearing a fanny pack that contained his prescription pad. Investigators say Dabbagh bought a rare 19th century harp with cash generated from a lucrative drug ring that traded prescription pills for sex with adult entertainers. Circumstances surrounding his fugitive status were not publicly available. He was charged with illegally distributing prescription drugs in April 2016 and set to plead guilty the next month.



Left to right Dr. Rajendra Bothra, Dr. Mamoun Dabbagh, and Dr. Basil Qandil

Some flee while charges are pending, according to court records and interviews. Some flee after pleading guilty. And some flee while free on bond and awaiting the start of a prison sentence. Dearborn Heights Dr. Basil Qandil, 36, disappeared four years ago after being convicted of 34 counts of illegal drug distribution, health care fraud and money laundering. Evidence presented during his two-week trial showed Qandil prescribed more than 3.7 million doses of drugs, including Oxycodone and Vicodin. The drugs later were sold on the street or used by addicted patients. During the fraud, Qandil transferred more than \$1.5 million to a bank account in Amman, Jordan.

After being charged in January 2013, Qandil was released on \$100,000 unsecured bond. Prosecutors appealed. U.S. District Judge Denise Page Hood allowed Qandil to remain free on bond but ordered him to wear a GPS tether and surrender his U.S. and Jordanian passports, among other conditions. But in May 2013, Qandil's lawyer convinced U.S. District Judge Arthur Tarnow to remove the tether after arguing Qandil was a model, nonviolent defendant and not a flight risk. "Judge, he's driving an old van. That's his only method of getting around. He can't afford airline tickets or to do anything to get out of the country," defense lawyer Loren Dickstein said during a court hearing. "Quite frankly, he's not interested in leaving the country." Cutting off a tether "would require about 10 seconds, and give him a 15-minute to a couple-hour head start," Tarnow said. "A tether is not necessary."

Fifteen months later, after being convicted and while awaiting a possible 20-year prison sentence, Qandil failed to appear for a meeting with a court official in August 2014. A federal agent visited Qandil's home. It was empty. A neighbor reported earlier seeing Qandil load property into the same old van, an Oldsmobile Silhouette, and leaving with relatives. The next month, investigators learned Qandil had crossed into Mexico and flown from Juarez to Madrid, Spain, with his wife, father and four children. Investigators learned he used a Jordanian passport with a phony name, according to DEA Special Agent Joseph Robertson.

Another defendant defied bond conditions before disappearing. The Justice Department hailed Muhammad Zafar's arrest in June 2015 as part of the nation's largest crackdown on Medicare fraud. Zafar, 43, of Brownstown Township owned home health care agencies and was accused of participating in a \$7.9 million conspiracy. He was brought into

court to face multiple charges, including three 20-year felonies, ordered to surrender his passport and released on \$10,000 unsecured bond. Zafar, however, never surrendered the passport before fleeing to Pakistan, according to court records.

GPS tethers, which help court officials track the whereabouts of defendants, are not foolproof. Southfield psychologist Sanyani Edwards, 39, was a "major player" in a \$6 million medical scheme, prosecutors said. He was convicted of health care fraud and drug conspiracy charges in July 2013 but allowed to remain free on bond. On the day Edwards was supposed to be sentenced to prison, he fled. "In fact, he cut the tether off of his leg....," Assistant U.S. Attorney John Neal told Tarnow. "Isn't that a felony?" the judge asked. "It is, your honor," Neal said. Edwards spent two years hiding in Georgia with a fake name before being caught and brought back to Detroit to face the judge. "I hope he enjoyed it because ... you are not going to get your wish getting probation or time served, Mr. Edwards," the judge said during the fugitive's sentencing.

Edwards was sentenced to more than five years in prison. Before being locked up, Edwards asked to be incarcerated at the federal prison in Milan, unless the judge could suggest a better place. "There is a hotel across the street," the judge joked. "Sold," Edwards said. Edwards didn't get his wish. He is incarcerated at a medium-security prison in Pennsylvania and is scheduled to be released in January 2020. [Source: The Detroit News | Robert Snell | December 12, 2018 ++]

TRICARE West Region e-Updates ► DEC 2018

In case you missed it the following TRICARE West Regions e-Updates for DEC are available:

- 1. Open enrollment season for TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select beneficiaries ends Dec. 10, 2018.** Don't miss your opportunity to [enroll in or change your health care plan for 2019](#). If you wish to keep your coverage as is, then no action is required and your current enrollment selections will carry over to 2019. As of Jan. 1, 2019, you will only be able to make changes during a qualifying life event (QLE) or upon the 2019 open enrollment season.
- 2. TRICARE Retiree Dental Program (TRDP) ends Dec. 31, 2018.** If you were enrolled in, or were eligible for TRDP, [you will need to enroll in a dental and/or vision plan through the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Plan \(FEDVIP\)](#). You will not be automatically enrolled in FEDVIP, and will need to enroll in order to receive dental and/or vision coverage for 2019. *Note, the Active Duty Dental Program and the TRICARE Dental Program are not impacted.* To enroll in a FEDVIP plan, your selections must be chosen during TRICARE's open enrollment season, which ends on Dec. 10.
- 3. New enhancements to the Nurse Advice Line.** The military health system (MHS) Nurse Advice Line has been extended throughout Europe, the Pacific, and Latin American regions in addition to the continental United States. Additionally, beneficiaries can now access the [MHS Nurse Advice Line through a new website, MHSNurseAdviceLine.com](#). Get your health care questions or concerns answered via phone call, web chat or secure video chat.
- 4. ECHO benefit changes from fiscal year to calendar year.** Beginning Jan. 1, 2019, those who are receiving services through the [TRICARE Extended Care Health Option \(ECHO\) program](#) need to be aware of an important change. The ECHO benefit cap will now apply to covered costs during a calendar year instead of a fiscal year. The calendar year runs from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31.
- 5. TRICARE costs for 2019 are now online.** New TRICARE [costs for 2019 are now available at www.tricare.mil](#). The Health Net Federal Services TRICARE West region website, [www.tricare-west.com](#), will be updated with the new copayments, cost-shares and catastrophic cap amounts soon.

6. Keep DEERS up to date. Have you experienced a qualifying life event (QLE)? Changes in marital status, birth of a child, change of address etc., could impact your [eligibility, TRICARE communication contact information, and other information in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System \(DEERS\)](#). Be sure to check your personal information in DEERS periodically to make sure the most updated data is reflected.

7. Reminder – Use self-service tools on the web. At www.tricare-west.com you can save time, and a call, by using self-service tools. Many of these tools allow you to [easily and securely conduct your TRICARE transactions anytime you need it](#). Whether you need to change your primary care manager, view your payment history or check authorization status, you can do so by simply logging in to your secure portal and taking advantage of several time-saving tools 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

8. Review authorization letters and explanation of benefits (EOBs) online through your secure inbox. Though Health Net Federal Services, LLC (HNFS) [no longer mails authorization letters or EOBs via postal mail](#), you can still access these documents through your secure inbox at www.tricare-west.com. By logging in, you can view these documents, or even make changes to existing authorizations. Additionally, you can set your preferences so you can receive text or email notifications when your authorization has processed.

9. There are two easy ways to learn about your health. One, register for group [teleclasses](#). January classes are [Preparing to Quit Tobacco](#) and [The Basics of Depression Management](#), and February class topics are heart health and diabetes management. Two, learn at your own pace with [online programs](#). Topics include: readiness for making change, self-care, tobacco cessation, and weight management.

10. Choose Wisely with *Choosing Wisely*®. Learn how to get the most value for your health. Choosing Wisely offers guidance on many topics you can discuss with your doctor to help get the best care for you and your health.

[Source: TRICARE West Region | HNFS | December 7, 2018 ++]

Physical Activity Guidelines ► 2018 Edition Released

The second edition (2018) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans updates the first (2008) edition in providing evidence-based recommendations for adults and youth ages 3 through 17 to safely get the physical activity they need. Highlights of the guidelines include:

- Children ages 3 through 5 should be active throughout the day to enhance growth and development. Adults caring for children this age should encourage active play (light, moderate, or vigorous intensity) and aim for at least 3 hours per day.
- Each day, youth ages 6 through 17 need at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity to attain the most health benefits from physical activity. Most activity can be aerobic, like walking, running, or anything that makes their heart beat faster. They also need activities that make their muscles and bones strong, like climbing on playground equipment, playing basketball, or jumping rope.
- Adults should aim for at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, like brisk walking or fast dancing, each week. They also need muscle-strengthening activity, such as lifting weights or doing push-ups, at least 2 days each week.

Physical activity has many health benefits independent of other healthy behaviors such as good nutrition. The first key guideline for adults is to move more and sit less. This recommendation is based on new evidence that shows a strong relationship between increased sedentary behavior and increased risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and all-cause mortality. All physical activity, especially moderate-to-vigorous activity, can help offset these risks. Americans can benefit from small amounts of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity throughout the day. The first edition of the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans stated that only 10-minute bouts of physical activity

counted toward meeting the guidelines. The new edition removes this requirement to encourage Americans to move more frequently throughout the day as they work toward meeting the guidelines.

New evidence shows that physical activity has immediate health benefits. For example, physical activity can reduce anxiety and blood pressure and improve quality of sleep and insulin sensitivity. Meeting the new recommendations consistently over time can lead to long-term health benefits. The newly established benefits below appear are followed by an asterisk.

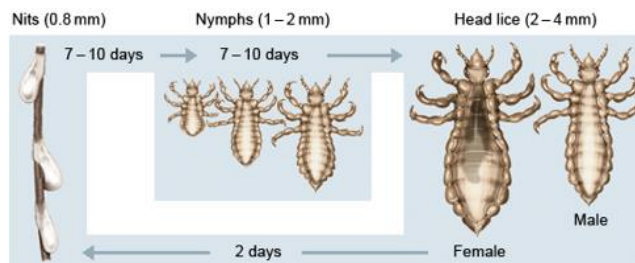
- For youth, physical activity can help improve cognition,* bone health, fitness, and heart health and reduce the risk of depression.
- For adults, physical activity helps prevent eight types of cancer (bladder,* breast, colon, endometrium*, esophagus,* kidney,* stomach,* and lung*); reduces the risk of dementia* (including Alzheimer's disease*), all-cause mortality, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and depression; and improves bone health, physical function, and quality of life.
- For older adults, physical activity also lowers the risk of falls and injuries from falls.*
- For pregnant women, physical activity reduces the risk of postpartum depression.*
- For all groups, physical activity reduces the risk of excessive weight gain* and helps people maintain a healthy weight.

New evidence shows that physical activity can also help manage more health conditions that Americans already have. For example, physical activity can decrease pain for those with osteoarthritis; reduce disease progression for hypertension and type 2 diabetes; reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression; and improve cognition for those with dementia, multiple sclerosis, ADHD, and Parkinson's disease.

Probably the most important message from the 2018 guidelines is that the greatest health benefits accrue by moving from no, to even small amounts of, physical activity, especially if that activity is of moderate (e.g., brisk walking) or vigorous (e.g., jogging and running) intensity. Multiple studies demonstrate that the steepest reduction in disease risk, such as for coronary heart disease, occurs at the lowest levels of physical activity. Patients need to understand that even small amounts of physical activity are beneficial and that reductions in the risk of disease and disability occur by simply getting moving.

The evidence demonstrates that adults obtain the maximal benefits of physical activity by regularly performing 150 to 300 minutes per week of moderate-intensity or 75 to 150 minutes per week of vigorous-intensity activity or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity. These levels of activity are possible for most healthy people. [Source: Consumer Health Digest #18-47 | Stephen Barrett | December 2, 2018 ++]

Head Lice ► Itchy But Not Harmful



The life cycle of head lice

Head lice often cause itching, but they are not harmful to your health. There are various treatments that are effective against head lice: insecticide-based products and oil-based treatments that suffocate the lice. They differ in terms of

how they are used, how they work, and their pros and cons. In Germany, most of these treatments are available from the pharmacy free of charge for children under the age of 12 if they have a prescription. If you aren't sure, you can ask a doctor or pharmacist. Special lice combs can be used to check whether there are still any lice or nits (lice eggs) in the hair after the treatment. The teeth on a lice comb are less than 0.3 millimeters apart, to catch as many lice as possible. You can also use special nit combs to remove the nits. Nit combs are even finer than lice combs.

Head lice don't usually survive being combed out. But to make sure, you can clean the comb in 60-degree (Celsius) water after combing. Combing out allows you to check for lice and can help get rid of some of the lice, but it's not a sure way to remove all of them. The best way to comb out lice is as follows:

- First wet the hair or wash it. To avoid pulling the hair while combing it, you can also use conditioner.
- Start combing right at the roots of the hair and then carefully pull the comb all the way through to the ends, strand by strand.
- Wipe the comb on a paper towel or cloth after each strand so it's easier to see any lice.

Insecticide-based treatments

Insecticides have been effectively used to treat head lice for decades. But because they have been used so much, lice have become resistant to them in some European countries. More recent studies have shown that insecticides are now far less effective in France, Great Britain, Denmark and the Czech Republic. There is no research on whether resistance has developed in Germany, too. The following treatments are considered to be effective. Each is applied differently, so it's important to read the package insert.

- Allethrin (trade name: Jacutin Pedicul Spray)
- Permethrin (trade name: e.g. InfectoPedicul, Ambush, Nix)
- Pyrethrins (trade name: e.g. Goldgeist, R&C Shampoo)

Silicone-based treatments (dimeticone or dimethicone)

Many parents would prefer to treat the lice without the use of insecticides. This fact, combined with increasing resistance, have led to the development of products that work without any poisons. Most of these products contain dimeticone, a silicone oil. Dimeticone is also found in many cosmetics and used in food production. Products containing dimeticone kill head lice and their eggs by coating them in a thick layer of oil that suffocates them. The advantage of these products is that the lice can't become resistant to them, and that they are not toxic. Several studies have tested lice treatments containing dimeticone. They show that more than 70 out of 100 children no longer have head lice after the treatment. There is no research comparing the different products to find out which is the most effective one.

Plant-based treatments and home remedies

Plant-based products contain plant oils. The different products work in different ways. Some aim to suffocate the lice, others act like a kind of neurotoxin (nerve poison). Because there is not enough research on these plant-based treatments, it's not possible to say anything about their effectiveness or possible side effects. The same is true for home remedies like vinegar, cooking oil or mayonnaise.

What are the side effects?

All head lice products can irritate the skin or cause itching for a while. Particularly products containing alcohol can cause a burning sensation. One disadvantage of sprays is that they may cause an allergic reaction if inhaled. If a child has asthma or another respiratory disease, it's a good idea to use a liquid product that can be put on with a comb, for instance. Regardless of which product you choose, it's important to follow the instructions in the package insert so that the product can work. Some treatments aren't recommended for very young children or pregnant women. You can ask a doctor if you're not sure.

Most of the treatments need to be applied again after 7 to 10 days because the lice eggs (nits) can survive the treatment. The second treatment ensures that lice that hatch during the week after the first treatment are killed too. The treatment is very likely to kill the lice. But it's still important to use a lice or nit comb every three days for about

two weeks after the treatment, to check whether all the lice are really gone. Some children may need a second treatment, possibly with a different product. For the treatment to be able to work, it's important to apply enough of the product to the scalp and hair, spread it evenly, leave it on long enough, and use it on dry hair (wet hair can dilute the active ingredient). Because some products easily catch fire, the hair must be kept away from candles and other flames while using them. Head lice products should be kept away from your eyes, nose and mouth. If there is contact, it's best to rinse them out with water right away.

[Source: Informedhealth.org: Newsletter | December 12, 2018 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs Update 17 ► GOP Balks at Trump Drug Pricing Plan

Republican opposition is building to a proposal from President Trump to lower drug prices in Medicare. The rare break between Trump and Republican allies follows an aggressive step from the president in October that would tie certain Medicare drug prices to lower prices in other countries, a departure from the traditional GOP position.

- On 27 NOV A coalition of conservative groups, including Americans for Tax Reform and FreedomWorks, wrote a letter calling for the proposal to be withdrawn. And
- On 29 NOV, House GOP lawmakers questioned Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar about the move and aired their concerns in a private meeting.
- Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-UT) is talking to other GOP senators about writing a letter to the administration sharing their concerns about the proposal.
- A spokesperson for Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), who will take over the committee's gavel from Hatch in January, likewise told The Hill the Iowa senator has concerns Trump's proposal would impose "price controls."

Trump has long railed against drug companies and called for lowering prices. His controversial proposal on Medicare drug prices is his most sweeping move yet. Trump administration officials argue the current Medicare payment system for drugs administered in doctors' offices essentially lets drug companies charge whatever they want. They insist that system needs to change. But critics worry the move is essentially importing price controls from other countries, which is anathema to free-market minded Republicans, who are pushing back. "I understand that we do want to get drug prices down but I think that any proposal that would lead to government price-fixing in that space is a pathway we don't want to follow," Rep. Larry Bucshon (R-Ind.), the first GOP lawmaker to publicly criticize the proposal, told The Hill.

Bucshon is a member of the GOP Doctors Caucus, the group of lawmakers who met with Azar on 29 NOV and questioned him on the proposal. "I would say that the Doc Caucus has concerns but we're happy that they came and explained the program in more detail and what their proposal is," Bucshon said. For now, the administration is not backing down and insists it is willing to fight back against the powerful pharmaceutical industry, which is working to kill the proposal. Asked if the administration intends to stand by the proposal, an HHS spokesperson said: "[We] absolutely intend to proceed."

The department said Azar "welcomed" the opportunity to meet with GOP lawmakers on 29 NOV and "dispel some of the myths about the rule put forward by the industry that wishes to continue charging American patients more for their products." However, having Grassley, the incoming chairman of the Finance Committee, opposed to the proposal will be a problem for the Trump administration. "Portions of the Administration's proposal raise concerns about the possibility of importing price controls from other countries," a Grassley spokesperson said, adding that while other countries are not paying their fair share for drugs, "the creation of price controls is not the solution." Grassley is often willing to oppose pharmaceutical companies, and supports ideas like importing drugs from Canada. But Trump's Medicare proposal goes too far for him.

Not all congressional Republicans oppose Trump’s move. Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN), chairman of the Senate Health Committee, gave the proposal an important boost in October when he said he was “encouraged” by the plan. Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) proposed a similar idea in May and said last month he was “pleased” with Trump’s move. It’s also a strange situation for Democrats, who find themselves more aligned with Trump on this proposal than many congressional Republicans are. Some Democrats offered mild praise of the move in October when it was announced, but added that more needs to be done. Democrats, though, are closely watching to see if the proposal, still in the early stages, gains momentum. The party has seen such efforts falter in the past. A somewhat similar proposal under President Obama in 2016 was ultimately withdrawn in the face of industry and congressional opposition.

Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC), who is up for reelection in 2020, warned on 28 NOV at an event hosted by The Hill that Trump’s move could harm innovation by pharmaceutical companies. “The recovery period for all the money you put into a drug to begin with gets stretched out and therefore all these things you’d like to work on and research have to wait,” Tillis said. A spokesman for Tillis added that while the senator has “significant reservations” about the proposal, he agrees drug prices need to be lower and encourages stakeholders to comment on the move.

For now the administration is listening to those concerns. Azar has been “meeting and talking with many members of Congress across the aisle to discuss” the proposal, the HHS spokesperson said. But the administration is also digging in. When he unveiled the proposal in October, Azar tried to show his determination to push it forward even in the face of opposition. “Nobody should question the president’s resolve to get drug prices down,” he said. [Source: The Hill | Peter Sullivan | December 2, 2018 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs Update 18 ► Monopoly Drug Pricing

Debates on economic policy are often far removed from reality. Nowhere is this truer than in the case of prescription drug prices. In the United States, we pay high drug prices because the government gives pharmaceutical companies patent monopolies, where it threatens to arrest anyone that sells a drug in competition with the patent holder. As a result, drugs often sell for prices that are several thousand percent above their free market price. Incredibly, in debates on drug prices, these monopoly prices are routinely described as being the result of the free market, turning reality completely on its head. The people who want to lower drug prices are then said to be trying to interfere with the free market, which we are all supposed to think is a bad thing to do.

This is one of the reasons why a new bill to lower drug prices by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA) is so brilliant. The Prescription Drug Price Relief Act is planned to be introduced at the start of the new Congress to significantly reduce prescription drug prices for Americans. This bill would require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to make sure that Americans don’t pay more for prescription drugs than the median price in five major countries: Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Japan. If pharmaceutical manufacturers refuse to lower drug prices below that level, the federal government would approve cheaper generic versions of those drugs, regardless of any patents or market exclusivities in place.

The bill is actually lowering drug prices by using the power of the market, making it clear that the proponents of high drug prices are the ones who want the government to interfere with the market to keep drug company profits high. The bill would effectively end the patent monopoly for any drug where the price in the United States is above the median of the prices charged in the next seven largest wealthy countries. This is likely to mean a reduction in the price of most brand drugs by around 40 percent. And savings for certain brand name prescription drugs could be even greater.

The reason is that, while other countries also grant patent monopolies and related protections to drugs, they don’t allow the manufacturers to exploit these monopolies to the same extent as in the United States. They have some sort

of price negotiation with drug companies, which is intended to place a limit on the price that can be charged when people's health or life is at stake. In effect, the Sanders-Khanna bill imports the price negotiation process put in place by these other countries. Drug companies will have a strong incentive to set their price below the median of the seven benchmark countries. If they charge a higher price, they effectively lose their patent monopoly. They could still make some money off of licensing fees charged to generic producers, but this would be a small fraction of what they would make from having a patent monopoly.

Another nice feature of the Sanders-Khanna bill is that it would lower drug prices for everyone, not just Medicare patients. There have been a number of bills introduced in recent years that have been designed to reduce the cost of drugs for people in Medicare. While lower drug prices for people enrolled in Medicare would be good, we should be looking to reduce our drug prices across the board. There is no reason people in the United States should be paying so much more than everyone else. The industry's response will be to whine that if they charged lower drug prices they won't be able to finance the development of new drugs. There is a grain of truth to this, but only a grain. The industry will collect roughly \$440 billion (2.2 percent of GDP) in revenue this year from sales in the United States alone. It spends around \$70 billion on research. This is less than one-sixth of the money it pulls in.

Certainly, if we did bring spending down to the levels in other wealthy countries it would lead to somewhat less research, but the question is the size of the falloff in research. After all, by giving another \$1.5 trillion to corporations over the next decade, the Trump tax cut will almost certainly lead to some additional investment, but the question is how much. The evidence to date with the tax cut is that we are seeing very little payoff in the form of higher investment. Similarly, the additional revenue from unchecked patent monopolies is likely to translate into little by way of additional research into developing new drugs.

Ultimately we should be looking to more modern and efficient mechanisms than patent monopolies for financing drug research. The government already spends almost \$40 billion a year on biomedical research through the National Institutes of Health. If we paid for the research up front, then all new drugs could be sold at their free market price from day one, saving us close to \$400 billion a year. In that world, prescriptions would be \$20 or \$30 a piece, not hundreds or thousands of dollars. But for now, the Sanders-Khanna bill is a huge step forward in making drugs affordable. And, it does it by using the market forces, a prospect that is very scary to the pharmaceutical industry. [Source: Truthout | Dean Baker | December 3, 2018 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 478 ► Cost Resources - Updating DEERS - TRICARE Retiree Dental

Cost Resources – TRICARE Open Season is underway. If you want to enroll in or change between TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select health plans, you had until December 10th. As of that deadline, 627,352 military retirees had enrolled in FEDVIP dental plans, according to the Defense Health Agency. That doesn't include the number of family members they enrolled along with them. **For this initial year ONLY the deadline date has been extended to 31 DEC.** Active duty service members are required to have TRICARE Prime health coverage. Active duty family members, retirees, and eligible retiree family members can choose to have either TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select coverage. Before you choose a plan, make sure you know what's covered and what it costs. To help you understand your potential health care costs, here are a few key TRICARE terms you should know.

- TRICARE beneficiaries fall into one of two groups: Group A or Group B. Each group has different enrollment fees, deductibles, and out-of-pocket costs. You're in **Group A** if your initial enlistment or appointment or that of your uniformed services sponsor began before January 1st, 2018. You're in **Group B** if your initial enlistment or appointment or that of your uniformed services sponsor began on or after January 1st, 2018.
- An **enrollment fee** is the yearly amount you pay to enroll in TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select.

- A **deductible** is a fixed amount you pay for covered services each calendar year before TRICARE pays anything.
- A **cost-share** is a percentage of the total cost of a covered health care service that you pay after you pay the applicable deductible amount.
- A **copayment** is the fixed amount those with TRICARE Prime, who aren't active duty, and TRICARE Select, for certain services, pay for a covered health care service or drug.
- The **catastrophic cap** is the most you or your family will pay out of pocket for covered health care services each calendar year. When met, TRICARE pays your copayment or cost-share for covered health care services for the rest of the calendar year.
- **Point-of-service** is an option under TRICARE Prime where you pay extra when getting non-emergency care from any TRICARE-authorized provider without a referral. The point-of-service option isn't available to ADSMs.
- The **TRICARE-allowable charge** is the maximum amount a participating TRICARE provider can be paid for a covered service. Learn more about TRICARE provider types.

Visit TRICARE.mil/costs for more information.

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Updating DEERS -- Outside of TRICARE Open Season, you'll have to experience a Qualifying Life Event, such as getting married or having a baby, to make changes to your health plan. Make sure to always keep your information updated in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, known as DEERS. You can make any changes to your personal information in person, by phone, online, or by mail. To add or remove family members, visit a local ID card office. Find an office near you at dmdc.osd.mil/rsi.

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Ending of TRICARE Retiree Dental Program -- The TRICARE Retiree Dental Program, or TRDP, provided by Delta Dental, ends on December 31st, 2018. If you were enrolled in TRDP this year or were eligible for the plan, you may choose a dental and/or vision plan through the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program, known as FEDVIP. FEDVIP is offered by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. The Active Duty Dental Program and the TRICARE Dental Program aren't impacted by this change.

If you would like dental and/or vision coverage next year, you must select and enroll in a FEDVIP plan during the Federal Benefits Open Season. The Federal Benefits Open Season, which runs this year through March 31 2019 for the military community, is your annual opportunity to sign up for FEDVIP. Your new coverage is effective upon signup. Note that the dental coverage changes only impact those enrolled in the TRDP. FEDVIP offers flexible coverage options for you and your family. There are four vision plans and 10 dental plans to choose from. You may choose to enroll in a dental plan, a vision plan, a dental plan and a vision plan or, neither. For more information, 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> | November 29, 2018 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 479 ► **TRI/Fed Benefits Open Season | Enrollment Options | Later Options**

TRICARE Open Season & Federal Benefits Open Season - TRICARE Open Season & Federal Benefits Open Season – Open season closes on December 31, 2018 this year and December 10th is future years. If you want to make changes to your TRICARE health plan, or enroll in the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program,

you must act now! Your coverage will start on January 1st, 2019. TRICARE Open Season is for enrollment in a TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select health plan. If you and your family are enrolled in a TRICARE health plan and don't want to make changes, you don't have to take action. TRICARE Open Season doesn't apply to TRICARE For Life or the premium-based plans. Outside of TRICARE Open Season, you won't be able to make changes to your plan unless you experience a TRICARE Qualifying Life Event, or QLE. Learn more by going to www.TRICARE.mil/openseason.

Federal Benefits Open Season closes on 31 MAR 2019 for the military community and 31 DEC 2018 for all others. This is for retiree dental coverage or vision coverage through the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program, or FEDVIP. The TRICARE Retiree Dental Program, known as TRDP, ends at the ends 31 DEC 2018. If you have TRDP, provided by Delta Dental, and want dental coverage in 2019, you'll need to choose a FEDVIP dental plan. Active duty family members may enroll in a FEDVIP vision plan, if enrolled in a TRICARE health plan. After the Federal Benefits Open Season, you may only make changes to your existing FEDVIP plan if you experience a FEDVIP QLE. The FEDVIP QLEs may be different from the TRICARE QLEs.

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Open Season Enrollment - TRICARE Open Season is for enrollment in a TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select health plan. There are three ways to enroll in TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select: online, by phone, or by mail.

- To enroll online through the Beneficiary Web Enrollment website, visit www.TRICARE.mil/bwe for instructions.
- To enroll by phone, find phone numbers at www.TRICARE.mil/regions to call your TRICARE Regional Contractor.
- Lastly, to enroll by mail, mail your enrollment form to your regional contractor. Go to www.TRICARE.mil/forms to download a form.

Federal Benefits Open Season is for vision coverage and retiree dental coverage. Coverage is offered through the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program, or FEDVIP. To see if you're eligible to enroll in a FEDVIP dental plan and/or a FEDVIP vision plan, you can visit www.TRICARE.mil/openseason. There are four steps to enroll in FEDVIP online. Visit www.benefeds.com to get started.

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Enrollment Options After Open Season - Join TRICARE on December 13th for the Enrollment Options After TRICARE Open Season webinar. The webinar will discuss what your enrollment options are after open season, such as having a Qualifying Life Event, or QLE. Starting January 1st, 2019, you can only enroll in or change enrollment to TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select following a QLE or during the next annual TRICARE Open Season. This doesn't apply to TRICARE For Life or any of the premium-based plans: TRICARE Reserve Select, TRICARE Retired Reserve, TRICARE Young Adult, and the Continued Health Care Benefits Program. These plans offer continuous open enrollment throughout the year.

A QLE is a certain change in your life that opens a 90-day period for you to make eligible enrollment changes. Examples of QLEs are marriage, birth of a child, and retirement from active duty. A QLE for one family member means all family members may make enrollment changes during the QLE period. To learn more about QLEs, visit www.TRICARE.mil/lifeevents. To register for the Enrollment Options After TRICARE Open Season webinar, visit www.militaryonesource.mil/training-resources/webinars or www.TRICARE.mil/news.

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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> | December 6, 2018 ++]

* Finances *



Freebies Update 01 ► 28 Things You Can Get for Free

Bargains and deals are great, but free stuff is even better. If you just can't pass up a free sample at Costco or a free bookmark on a bookstore check-out counter, you know what I'm talking about. The best freebies require almost zero work or commitment, and they're actually things you want, perhaps even enough to pay money for. If a particular free item isn't quite right for you, there's almost certainly someone you know who'd find a use for it. Want more free stuff? If you can wait until your birthday, you can really load up. Here's [our list of 23 restaurant chains that offer free food](#) (sometimes an entire meal, other times, just an entree or dessert) on your birthday.

But the items below don't require it to be your cake day — they're waiting for you anytime. Note that some offers require you to sign up for their promotional emails, but if you that bothers you, create a new email address just for such offers, or unsubscribe from the mailing lists once your freebie arrives. A very few require a small purchase, but they seemed good enough to include anyway. For each item, read the offer instructions carefully, as deals could change without warning, or a product could run out. Many offers are limited to U.S. residents only. Now, on to the free stuff!

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- 1. Candy** -- If you love mints, but wouldn't mind a new twist, try a [free peppermint puff](#). It's a nickel-sized, striped candy with a sugary shell surrounding a light, air-filled candy puff. Best of all, trying one doesn't cost a mint.
- 2. Coffee** -- Many freebies don't give you any choice: Beggars can't be choosers, after all. But here, you can [select two hot beverage samples from five options](#) from five options, including coffee with ginseng and hot cocoa. Drink up!
- 3. Hair mask** -- Sure, you use shampoo and conditioner on your hair regularly, but add a weekly hair mask treatment to your routine for extra nourishment and repair. Start off with a free sample of [Whole Blends Honey Treasures Repairing Rinse-Out Hair Mask](#). But don't wait too long — the offer ends Jan. 7, 2019, or when samples run out.
- 4. Consumer Action Handbook** -- Shopping can be fun, but we've all had those moments when we feel ripped off by a seller. Download a free copy of the government-issued [Consumer Action Handbook](#), and browse it for all kinds of tips on your consumer rights, including how to file a complaint about an unsatisfactory purchase.
- 5. Chocolate perks** -- Chocolate lovers know Godiva's fantastically rich and creamy chocolates. Sign up for the free [Godiva Rewards Club](#) and the sweet perks will include free standard shipping for one online order, early access to exclusive sales, sneak peeks at new collections and a free birthday gift. Best of all, you'll get a free chocolate every month.
- 6. Procter & Gamble items** -- Procter & Gamble (P&G) makes everything from beauty products to cleaning solutions. If you sign up to be a [BzzAgent](#) and give honest feedback on the company's products, freebies will come your way.
- 7. Facial care** -- Join [L'Oreal's Worth It Rewards Club](#) and earn points on qualifying purchases — and an inside track on freebies. At press time, you can sign up for a free sample of a grape seed sugar scrub as well as a pure-clay yuzu lemon mask.

- 8. Advil coupons** -- You probably have a bottle of Advil around the house and use the medication for everything from dental pain to headaches. [Sign up at the medication's offer page](#) and select the coupon you want — I was able to print a \$3 coupon for the easy-open arthritis cap Advil within seconds of signing up.
- 9. Betty Crocker freebies and coupons** -- Sign up to be a [Betty Crocker member](#), and the baking-product line will send you a free calendar in the fall, plus exclusive access to coupons and a weekly email newsletter that periodically offers the chance to sign up for free samples.
- 10. McDonald's deals** -- Fast food is pretty fast as it is, so you may not have felt a huge desire to download the [McDonald's app](#) simply to order ahead of time. But downloading the app brings deals, including buy one, get one free offers.
- 11. Emergen-C sample** -- You might already have heard of Emergen-C, a powdered drink mix and vitamin supplement that some folks swear by to help ward off colds. [Sign up online](#), and a free sample packet will come your way, maybe before the next germs find you.
- 12. Toilet paper roll extender** -- You may have noticed that bathroom tissue rolls are getting fatter and fatter these days. The bigger rolls may last longer, but there's a problem: They may not fit in your home's standard-size bath-tissue holder. So Charmin, the top name in the TP biz, will send you a [free extender](#) that allows most holders to fit the bigger rolls. This deal might just bowl you over.
- 13. Nasal strips** -- Breathe-Right nasal strips help hold your nostrils open so you can breathe more deeply, and they can also help prevent snoring. You've likely seen pro athletes wearing them — they kind of look like butterfly bandages worn on the nose. Try them yourself with this [free online offer](#).. Sweet dreams!
- 14. Spices** -- Sign up for [Penzeys Spices' Voice of Cooking newsletter](#), and you'll get plenty of offers, deals and, yes, even opportunities to get free spices and seasonings. Spice up your email box!
- 15. Credit report** -- Don't be fooled by sites trying to charge you for a copy of your own credit report. You're entitled to a yearly free report from the big three companies, Experian, Equifax and TransUnion. [Annual Credit Report.com](#) will help you get all three. It's the site that the [Consumer Financial Protection Bureau links to](#), so you know it's not a scam.
- 16. Sweetener** -- Sign up for two free single-serve samples of [Truvia Natural Sweetener](#) and a \$1 coupon, or forgo the free packets and choose a \$2 coupon instead. How sweet it is!
- 17. Face moisturizer** -- Soften up with a free [sample of Olay Whips](#), non-greasy face moisturizer. To get the sample, you must join the free Club Olay, and will receive offers and news from Oil of Olay.
- 18. Ice cream** -- We all scream for ice cream. Download [Baskin-Robbins' free mobile app](#), and you'll get a free regular-sized scoop of one of the chain's famed 31 flavors (they really have many more than 31). Daiquiri ice over here, please.
- 19. Coffee drink** -- Free java, no jive. Sign up for [Dunkin' Donuts DD Perks program](#), and you'll get a free drink when you sign up, another on your birthday, and another every time you accumulate 200 rewards points.
- 20. Pet food** -- TV host and celebrity chef Rachael Ray is in the pet-food business now, too, and you can [get a free sample](#) for your furry friend. When we tried, three of the four free sample offerings from Ray's Nutrish brand, including both dog foods, were unavailable, but we were able to request a sample of Nutrish Peak Woodland Catch Recipe for cats, with chicken, trout and salmon. Purr-fect!
- 21. Bumper sticker** -- Wear your patriotism on your sleeve, and on your car. The Military Times online magazine offers five different free ["Support Our Troops" stickers](#). Choose from either a Military Times sticker or a car window cling representing the Army, Navy, Marine Corps or Air Force.

22. Pancakes -- Sign up for [IHOP's Pancake Revolution club](#), and you'll get free pancakes for signing up, every year on your birthday, and annually on the anniversary of your signing up. You'll also get special offers and deals that'll make you flip.

23. Personal pizza -- Slice, slice baby. Sign up for [Chuck E. Cheese's More Cheese Rewards Club](#) and enjoy a free personal one-topping pizza on your next visit. Plus, you'll earn rewards to use on food, drink and games.

24. Kind snacks for being kind -- Kind bars will send a free snack to anyone you nominate for doing a kind act. You find the good-hearted person and [send them an e-card through Kind's website](#), and the company will send the goodies. (Maybe you can then do a kind act for that person, so they'll nominate you right back.)

25. Smoke alarms for those in need -- We all should have smoke alarms in our house to alert residents in case of fire. But for those who can't afford one, the [Red Cross will provide and install](#) a limited number of free smoke alarms to those in need. The Red Cross will also install a limited number of specialized bedside alarms for individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

26. Arby's sandwich -- Sign up for [regular email offers from Arby's](#), and the roast-beef sandwich chain will send you a coupon for a free signature sandwich (though you do have to purchase any soft drink to get the freebie). They'll also send you meaty birthday deals.

27. Admission to the national parks -- America's national parks are a treasure. Many are free year-round, but others charge an admission fee. [Save this handy schedule](#) showing the days when all the national parks are free to everyone.

28. Streaming movies and shows -- There are plenty of streaming services, like Netflix and Hulu, if you're willing to pay up for your programs. But [SonyCrackle](#), a subsidiary of Sony Pictures Entertainment, is free to watch, though you will have to sit through ads. You can flip through the offered titles before you sign up to see if it's your kind of entertainment.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Gael F. Cooper | November 30, 2018++]

Social Security ► Bits and Pieces 02

Millions of Americans currently receive Social Security benefits, and millions more are counting on it to help fund their retirement. While much has been written about when to collect benefits, how to maximize benefits and whether to work while receiving benefits, the topic is still something of a mystery to many people. Here are some facts about Social Security that you may not know.

1. More than 1 in 6 Americans receive Social Security benefits.

Around 63 million people received Social Security payments in 2018. That means more than 1 in 6 U.S. residents were beneficiaries of the program. Among those age 65 and older, nearly 90 percent receive Social Security benefits.

2. Social Security is really two insurance programs.

Social Security provides monthly benefits designed to replace, in part, the loss of income due to retirement, disability or death. We may talk about Social Security like it's one program, but the payroll taxes American workers pay to finance it are deposited into two separate trust funds: one, the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Trust Fund, pays retirement and survivors benefits, and the other, the Federal Disability Insurance Trust Fund, pays disability benefits. Together, these programs are referred to as Social Security.

The Social Security Administration also oversees another program called Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, which is paid to low-income households. While SSI is administered by the SSA, it's not a Social Security program in that general tax fund dollars pay for benefits rather than money from Social Security taxes or the trust funds.

3. You're not intended to live solely on Social Security.

Lots of people try to live off Social Security benefits alone. More than 20 percent of senior couples and nearly 45 percent of retired singles rely on Social Security for 90 percent or more of their income. However, the government never intended people to do that. Instead, Social Security is meant to supplement a pension and personal savings, and your benefits will only replace about 40 percent of average earnings.

4. Spouses can get benefits even if they didn't work.

In order to receive Social Security benefits, you have to pay into the system, but there is an exception to that rule. If your husband or wife is eligible for benefits, you can receive spousal benefits in retirement even if you've never personally worked and paid Social Security taxes.

5. You don't get two benefits when a spouse dies.

Because Social Security provides survivor benefits, some retirees think they will get double benefits when their spouse dies. They assume they will receive both their personal Social Security benefits as well as the survivor benefits. Sorry, it doesn't work like that. The government uses a formula that will essentially give you the greater of either your benefit amount or your spouse's.

6. Kids and parents can receive benefits, too.

It's not just spouses who can receive benefits off a person's Social Security record. If a worker who is a parent dies, retires or becomes disabled, unmarried children can receive benefits: those younger than age 18; those 18 to 19 years old and in high school full-time; and certain older disabled children. The goal is to provide the necessities of life and help make it possible for those children to complete high school.

Meanwhile, seniors age 62 or older who can show that a child of theirs was providing at least one-half of their financial support may be able to receive parent's benefits should that worker die.

7. Your ex-spouse may be entitled to some of your Social Security benefits.

Surprise! You may have put your ex out of your life, but you still might end up supporting him or her in retirement. OK, it's not really as bad as it sounds. If you were married for at least 10 years and your ex-spouse hasn't remarried, he or she is eligible for spousal benefits off your work record. But that in no way affects the amount of your benefits or the amount your current spouse can receive if you've remarried. There are two issues to deal with here: Spousal (including ex-spousal) benefits & Survivor's benefits

- Let's consider spousal benefits first. If you have remarried, you are not eligible for ex-spousal benefits unless your current marriage ends from divorce or death. You are, however, potentially eligible for spousal benefits on your current husband/wife's record, depending on the size of your benefits relative to your current spouses benefits. A critical fact is the size that your benefits would have been had you and your current spouse claimed at full retirement age (FRA) — not what you currently receive.

Example: Suppose your FRA benefit is \$1,000 monthly. If your spouse's benefit exceeds twice that amount, or \$2,000, then you qualify for a spousal supplement to your own benefits. If his/her benefit is less than \$2,000, you do not qualify for any supplemental payment.

If you do qualify for a supplemental spousal benefit, how much you will receive is based on a somewhat complicated calculation, which you can learn more about here. One further point: Since your current marriage has lasted more than 10 years, should it end in divorce, you qualify for ex-spousal benefits under both ex-husbands' records.

- Next, let's talk about survivor's benefits. If your current spouse dies, you are definitely eligible for a survivor's benefit on his/her record. You would simply switch from your benefit to his higher benefit. Whether you qualify for survivor's benefits on your ex-spouses' record depends on your age when you remarried. If you remarried prior to turning 60, you are not eligible. However, if you remarried after turning

60, then you are indeed eligible for survivor's benefits on your ex-spouse's record, even if your current spouse is alive.

8. Widows and widowers can get remarried and still collect survivor benefits.

Ex-spouses can only receive spousal benefits so long as they remain unmarried. Once they tie the knot with someone new, their claim on your benefits ends. However, it's different for widows and widowers. They can get remarried after age 60 and still claim survivor benefits from their first husband or wife's record so long as that marriage lasted at least 10 years.

If a widow(er) remarries before the age of 60, Social Security benefits become tied to his/her present spouse's Social Security record, rather than the record of the deceased spouse. If you had waited until 60 to remarry, then you could have chosen between taking survivors benefits on your first spouse's record or spousal benefits on your present spouse's record. There is a significant difference between these two situations because a widow(er)'s benefit is calculated on the basis of the deceased spouse's full benefit, and the spousal benefit is calculated on the basis of half of a spouse's benefit. To illustrate, suppose the benefit at full retirement age (FRA) that either spouse can claim is \$1,000. In both cases, the actual amount received by the spouse will depend on when he/she claims a benefit. If a widow(er) waits until FRA to claim his/her benefit, then he/she will receive \$1,000. If a spouse waits until FRA to claim a benefit, he/she will receive \$500.

In either case, claiming a benefit before FRA will reduce these amounts, but there is a difference here as well. A widow(er) can claim at 60, but a spouse must wait until 62 — and even then, his/her husband has to claim his benefit first. Using the numbers above, a widow(er) who claims at 60 will receive \$715. A spouse who claims at 62 will receive between \$321 and \$350, depending on his/her birth year. (The reason for this range of possible spousal benefits is that the FRA increases for people born after 1954 and moves up from 66 to 67 in a series of steps. Younger people will get the smaller benefit.)

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Jeff Miller | December 6, 2018 ++]

Vet State Income Tax Update 02 ► North Dakota Tax Exemption Proposed

Gov. Doug Burgum wants to exempt military pay and pensions from North Dakota income taxes, arguing in part that retaining veterans could help the state fill thousands of open jobs. Legislators have ignored similar pleas in the past, but supporters say the economic benefits of keeping veterans in the state would more than make up for lost revenue. North Dakota has more than 13,000 unfilled advertised jobs, though Burgum believes the number of all open jobs is at least twice that. "It is a way to honor them for their service," the first-term Republican governor told The Associated Press on Wednesday. "But it's also a way to incent people to stay in our communities, stay in our state at a time when they've got the skills that we need to fill all the jobs that we've got available in our state."

North Dakota is one of only eight states that fully taxes military retirement pay. "We're on the wrong end of the bell curve on that one," Burgum said. "We're lagging instead of leading." In his budget address last week, Burgum proposed that the pensions of retired military veterans should be exempt from state income taxes. A separate bill from Fargo Republican Rep. Shannon Roers Jones would go a step further by also prohibiting the state from collecting income tax from military members on active duty, in the Guard or in the reserves. The bill would include exemptions for surviving spouses but would not cover civilian employees of the military. Burgum said he also would support that bill.

Lonnie Wangen, the state's veterans affairs commissioner, said retirees who stay in the state often lend their skills to their new jobs in the civilian sector. "They start working another job and pay more taxes," Wangen said. Their spouses also often work and their children may attend one of the state's universities, he said. Still, he said, income

tax forgiveness alone probably won't be the reason retirees would stay in North Dakota. "North Dakota's income tax isn't killing anybody," Wangen said. "This really is a big picture thing."

The state Tax Department estimates the idea would mean about \$3 million in lost revenue, based on about 6,000 retired veterans drawing a pension in North Dakota. The tax agency said there are about 5,100 active duty military, armed forces reserves and National Guard members who would qualify for the pay exemption, at a cost of about \$2.8 million every two years. A soldier with a base pay of \$35,000 a year would pay about \$270 in state income tax. Nine states have no income tax for anyone, and several have exemptions for the military members currently serving. Burgum said he doesn't consider it lost revenue for the state. "The benefits start to accrue if we can get people to choose to stay in North Dakota versus move out of North Dakota," he said.

Military members generally may retire after 20 years, leaving many of them in their late 30s or early 40s with "a lot of career potential ahead," said Roers Jones. Wally Keller, 59, of Bismarck, spent 39 years in the Army and National Guard and said forgiving the state income tax for military members would show "respect and thanks" to those who have served. "None of us joined to get a tax break — it never crossed our minds," he said. "But it would be nice to see this." Republican Sen. Dwight Cook of Mandan, the chairman of the Senate's Finance and Taxation Committee, served six years in the state's Air National Guard and said he never had a problem with paying state income tax. He also has voted against previous attempts to exempt state income tax for active duty or retirees. He's having second thoughts now, with the state's workforce problem. "We could use retired vets as a source of labor, so this is an issue that has some merit now," he said. [Source: The Associated Press | James Macpherson | December 13, 2018 ++]

Alternative Minimum Tax ► **Tax Cuts and Jobs Act Impact on AMT**

The AMT has been around for several decades, and the objective of it is to make sure the "rich" pay their fair share. At its core, the AMT is very close to a flat tax. There are two tax brackets: 26 percent and 28 percent. And while the AMT is designed to make sure the "rich" pay, a lot of upper-middle class members pay also. While many "preference items" get added back to your income when calculating AMT, they become subject to AMT because of two main reasons. The first is exemptions. Under the AMT regime, exemptions aren't allowed. The second reason is state and local income taxes. Like exemptions, state and local income taxes aren't deductible when calculating AMT.

The good news is the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) reduces the likelihood you will have to pay the AMT. This is due to a couple of reason. Under the TCJA, there are no exemptions, so the lack of exemptions for calculating AMT is irrelevant. Similarly, state and local tax deductions are limited to \$10,000. The limitation reduces the likelihood an individual in a high-tax state will get hit with an AMT tax bill. Additionally, miscellaneous itemized deductions subject to the 2-percent floor no longer are deductible. They were also a preference item, which needed to be added back when calculating AMT. But perhaps the biggest reason those who paid AMT in the past won't have to in the future is the increase - by around 30 percent - in the AMT exemption amount. For married taxpayers, the AMT exemption increases from \$84,500 to \$109,400. For single and head of household taxpayers, the AMT exemption increases from \$54,300 to \$70,330.

That doesn't mean you can ignore the AMT like some tax-preparation software will allow you to do. There still are a few areas where you need to pay attention. If you receive stock options as part of your compensation package, there might still be an AMT concern. Another reason to pay attention is if you have municipal bonds in your portfolio. Normally, interest on municipal bonds is tax-free. The one exception is under the AMT rules. The interest on private-activity municipal bonds, like those used to fund stadiums for use by professional sports teams, must be added back to income when calculating AMT. Finally, if you have investments in oil and gas partnerships, you might have AMT issues. Overall, far fewer taxpayers will be subject to AMT due to the TCJA. But you do need to pay attention if your income is a little out of the "mainstream." [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Curtis Sheldon | December 10, 2018 ++]

Vet Student Loans Update 06 ► 42,000 Vets Eligible for Tax Free Forgiveness

Until recently, if you were 100 percent disabled or had a finding by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) of Individual Unemployability (IU) you could get your student loans forgiven, but with one expensive caveat: it was considered taxable income by the IRS. That meant an unexpected tax bill for wounded warriors who were often unprepared to pay such a large amount of money. That's no longer the case, and it could have huge implications for you and your family. Today, any student loans forgiven due to disability or IU are no longer considered taxable income at the federal level. This means Uncle Sam won't be sending you a tax bill come April. Most importantly, this is the case regardless of how old you are or how long ago you took out student loans. VA and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) are working together to make it easier for you to apply to have your loans forgiven. So here are five things you need to know before applying:

1. You may be shielded from state taxes as well -- Forty out of the fifty states won't tax you if you have your student loans discharged due to disability. The states that haven't yet followed the federal government are: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Georgia, Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Pennsylvania and Virginia. If you live in one of these states, consult a tax professional before you follow the advice below.

2. Over 42,000 veterans may qualify -- VA and ED estimate that there are more than 42,000 veterans with severe disabilities, holding a total of more than \$1 billion in outstanding student loans, who may be eligible for student loan forgiveness. Sadly, more than 25,000 of those veterans were in default with \$168 million in outstanding loans. Defaulting on your loans hurts your credit score and can cause a lot of financial trouble. If you or a veteran you know are facing student loan default, you can apply to have your loans forgiven and receive free help from the nonprofit group [Veterans Education Success](https://veteranseducationsuccess.org) (VES) to support you through the process. They can be contacted at <https://veteranseducationsuccess.org/contact>.

3. Better watch out for scam artists -- VA and ED have teamed up to notify veterans who have student loans and may be eligible to have them forgiven. ED will send letters to qualifying veterans to apply for federal tax-free forgiveness of their student loans. To see what these letters will look like go to https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/bcfp_nelnet-dept-ed_tdp-sample-letter.pdf. The letters will state they are from ED and Nelnet, the company administering the IU student loan forgiveness process. If you get a letter from someone that's not ED and Nelnet, beware, it's probably a scam.

ED and Nelnet manage a website, www.disabilitydischarge.com, to provide resources and more information. Even though it is a .com and not a .gov website, this is the official website to you help you and is a trusted source of information. This is a free service, and you do not have to pay any fees for the application. Ignore any companies claiming they can help get your student loans forgiven for a fee, as they are scams. Be sure to notify VES if you come across one these scam artists trying to take advantage of veterans.

4. How to apply -- Apply online at www.disabilitydischarge.com. If you received the letter, you do not have to submit documentation of your service-connected disability, since ED already has this information from VA. You can call Nelnet seven days a week at 1-888-303-7818 from 08-2000 Eastern Time or email disabilityinformation@nelnet.net for any questions or to get the process started. ED will work with VA to conduct a new match of veterans with severe disabilities with the student loan database to identify more borrowers who may be eligible. Veterans will receive notices on a staggered basis each quarter, but you don't have to wait. Considering the potential tax bill you can avoid paying Uncle Sam, it may be worth applying without the letter from ED. If you haven't received a letter, you can start the application today, but you will have to provide evidence of your service-connected disability.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Mike Saunders | December 12, 2018 ++]

Malware Update 02 ► Iranian SamSam Alert

Days after indicting Iranian hackers accused of masterminding the spread of malware, the U.S. government is warning critical infrastructure firms such as hospitals, scientific institutions and local governments, to protect themselves from the SamSam virus. Hackers using the SamSam 3 DEC joint alert sent out by the Department of Homeland Security and FBI. Victims are located predominantly in the United States, according to the alert. The hackers' ultimate goal is to turn a successful intrusion into financial gain through ransomware.



The FBI believes the hackers use remote desktop protocols purchased from the dark web. With the protocols, the hackers are able to “infect victims with minimal detection.” “From there, the ransomware ‘fun and games’ begin for the authors,” wrote Malwarebytes, a threat intelligence firm, in an analysis of the SamSam virus. “For everyone else, it’s chaos.” The FBI’s alert read. “SamSam actors leave ransom notes on encrypted computers. These instructions direct victims to establish contact through a Tor hidden service site,” “After paying the ransom in Bitcoin and establishing contact, victims usually receive links to download cryptographic keys and tools to decrypt their network.” To learn more about it refer to <https://blog.malwarebytes.com/cybercrime/2018/05/samsam-ransomware-need-know>.

The joint alert suggested using strong passwords, two-factor authentication and updating computers as a defense against the SamSam malware. The alert comes a week after the Department of Justice indicted two Iranian nationals for allegedly authoring the SamSam ransomware in a scheme to collect over \$6 million. More than 200 victims have been infected by the SamSam ransomware including hospitals, municipalities, and public institutions at a total cost of \$30 million, according to a 28 NOV indictment from the Department of Justice. The alleged hackers, Mohammad Mansouri and Faramarz Savandi, are not likely to be extradited to the United States because of the strained relations with Iran. Still, U.S. officials have said that indicting hackers who have a slim chance of facing trial in the U.S. can still impose costs by limiting their travel and hindering their finances. [Source: Fifth Domain | Justin Lynch | December 4, 2018 ++]

Debt Collection Update 13 ► Can Debt Collectors Take Your Disability Income?

Many disabled persons have credit card debt they can't pay, often incurred before they were disabled. What can disabled persons do about telephone calls and letters from collectors? What happens if you are sued? The Executive Director of HELPS, a nationwide nonprofit law firm that protects seniors and disabled persons from unwanted collector contact, has provided answers to some of the pressing financial questions regularly heard about from disabled persons.

1. How safe is disability income from collectors? The most important thing to know is that Social Security in all its forms, including SSD, is protected by federal law from debt collectors. Almost all states have laws that protect

private disability as well. Even if a creditor files a lawsuit and obtains a judgment, they can't take your disability income.

2. What about money in your bank account? Federal banking regulations automatically protect two months' worth of federal benefits electronically deposited into a checking account no matter the source of the funds in the account at the time of garnishment. For example, if you receive SSD of \$1,000 per month, your bank will automatically protect \$2,000. Sums in excess of the two-month amount of disability, including a lump sum Social Security award, are protected by federal law when kept in a segregated account.

3. How can I stop collectors from calling and sending demand letters? Sometimes disabled persons file bankruptcy simply to stop collector calls. Because your disability income is protected, bankruptcy is generally not necessary. There are far easier or less expensive ways to stop collector calls than by filing an unnecessary bankruptcy. The federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act provides that when you send what is called a "cease and desist letter," collectors must stop all contact by phone or mail. An example of this letter can be found on the HELPS website at <http://www.helpsishere.org/ceaseletter.pdf>.

4. What if I owe past-due income taxes or student loans? Although it's uncommon, it is possible for the IRS to garnish 15% of SSD income for past-due taxes. However, most persons receiving disability income will qualify for what is called Currently Not Collectible status with the IRS. This means you won't have to pay any taxes at all. Also, state tax collectors cannot legally garnish Social Security income. Finally, permanently disabled persons can discharge federal student loan debt, as explained on the Federal Student Aid website.

5. Will someone else be responsible for my credit card debt I don't pay? Only the cardholder is responsible. Your credit card debt will not transfer to anyone else after you die. However, this only holds so long as you don't have credit cards co-signed with your spouse or another family member.

6. What about debt settlement or debt management? Sometimes disabled persons make payments to non-profit debt management or for-profit debt settlement companies. These companies will normally not tell disabled persons that their income is protected and can't be taken from them. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) advises caution in dealing with these companies.

7. Should I sell assets to pay off old debt? Every state has exemption laws that protect assets. It's too expensive, complicated, and unproductive for a consumer judgment creditor to take steps to seize a person's assets - even non-exempt ones. It is not necessary to sell assets to pay old debt. If you do decide to sell some of your assets, you can use the proceeds for your basic needs.

8. Will the debt ever go away? Every state has a "statute of limitations" that provides the time limit for a collector to file a lawsuit to collect a debt. In most states, this varies from 3-6 years for credit card debt, whereas a judgment is generally in effect for ten years and can be renewed. However, as previously explained, disability income is protected. A judgment holder can't do anything to collect.

9. What about future credit? Even a person with an excellent credit rating who has minimal disability income may have difficulty obtaining credit. Income is as important a factor as credit rating in determining if credit is granted. A credit grantor might determine that there is no income available to make payments and deny credit. Secured credit cards are available.

10. What happens if I want to earn extra money? What can I do to keep that money safe? If you decide to earn some extra money, you don't have to use that money to pay old debt. Remember, federal banking regulations help protect that money even if a creditor were to sue and get a judgment. Twice the amount of Social Security electronically deposited into your bank account is protected from garnishment, so money from a part-time job is safe as long as the total in the account is less than twice the amount of the monthly Social Security deposit. Federal law also protects a net \$217.50 per week in wages from garnishment, or around \$945 a month, and even more in a few states. Be aware of income rules that can disqualify you for disability.

Conclusion

Everyone wants to repay debt if they are able. However, sometimes it is simply not possible. Laws have been passed to protect disability income for a reason. Society wants disabled persons with limited income to have that income available for their needs. In addition, there are means to stop unwanted collector contact. [Source: www.moneytips.com | Eric Olsen, ExDir HELPS | December 4, 2018 ++]

Tax Deductions Update 03 ► Eliminations for 2018 thru 2025 Tax Years

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) eliminates miscellaneous itemized deductions subject to the 2-percent floor. That will affect several things you might be used to deducting. The TCJA is slated to expire in 2025, and at least in theory, these deductions will come back.

- **Tax Preparation** -- Tax preparation fees or tax advice are no longer deductible. However, if your tax bill is itemized and you have tax preparation fees that are business-related, such as those for your rental property or completing Schedule C, you can deduct those business-related tax preparation fees.
- **Investment Fees and Expenses** -- As with tax preparation, investment fees and expenses are no longer deductible. Of note, though, commissions paid when purchasing securities still add to the basis of the security and reduce your profit when the security is sold. So in effect, they are deductible.
- **Military Uniform Items** -- Only certain uniform items, such as rank, corps devices, and swords, were deductible. They no longer are.
- **Unreimbursed Travel Expenses** -- Reservists and guardmembers who travel more than 100 miles for drill or other reserve-related travel and have unreimbursed expenses continue to be able to account for them as an adjustment to income and they are deductible. Active duty servicemembers report unreimbursed travel expenses, if any, as a miscellaneous itemized deduction, and therefore they are not deductible.
- **Job-Hunting Expenses** -- When you separate from military service, you'll probably have job-hunting expenses. Job-hunting expenses such as printing, postage, résumé preparation fees, and travel no longer are deductible.
- **Work-Related Education** -- Education expenses to maintain or improve your skills are no longer deductible. Often, retiring military officers would get a certification that relates to their present work and take a deduction for those expenses. As mentioned, you can't do that anymore.
- **Other Work-Related Items** -- Other deductions that no longer will be available include home office expenses if you are an employee, professional fees, and depreciation on computers or cellphones used for your employer's benefit.
- **Haircuts and gym memberships** -- The Courts have ruled these expenses are inherently personal in nature even if your job requires you to maintain short hair and meet physical fitness standards.

Some miscellaneous itemized deductions are not subject to the 2-percent floor, and they still are deductible. Most of these are pretty uncommon, but here are a few that could apply:

- Gambling losses up to the amount of gambling winnings.
- Casualty and theft losses on income-producing property.
- Impairment-related work expenses

[Source: MOAA Newsletter | Curtis Sheldon | December 3, 2018 ++]

Social Security Q & A ► 181201 thru 181215

(Q) How long does a Social Security Disability/SSI claim take?

A: It has been my experience in our area of South Louisiana that a determination on your initial application takes about 90 days, although sometimes longer. Hearings usually take about 14 months to come up after the Request for Hearing is filed. Average processing time for the Alexandria hearing office is 403 days with 37% fully or partially favorable. The New Orleans hearing office average processing time is 522 days with 44% fully or partially favorable. These statistics is from the website, <http://www.disabilityjudges.com/state/louisiana>.

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(Q) When can my Disability/SSI payments start?

A: Disability preventing a claimant from working whether in Social Security Disability or adult SSI claims in order to qualify must have lasted 12 months or be expected to last 12 months from the alleged onset date. Past benefits generally can only be paid from the onset date of disability for up to 12 months prior to the date of the current application with a 5 month waiting period from the onset date of the disability. SSI benefits are payable only from the current application. The reopening of past applications is sometimes a possibility that can be considered by a skilled Social Security disability attorney or representative which could mean more money in your pocket.

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(Q) Can I work and still get Social Security Disability benefits?

A: Social Security defines “work” as Substantial Gainful Activity. Part-time work and work below a certain dollar amount may not be SGA. Therefore some claimants may be working below SGA and still be eligible for benefit. SGA is an actual dollar amount that Social Security publishes every year, for example for 2018 it is \$1180, See: <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/OACT/COLA/sgadet.html>. However, SGA can sometimes be adjusted if your wages are subsidized, thought of as wages that you are not really working to earn. Also, certain medical and vocational expenses may be deductible from your total wages.

[Source: Louisiana Social Security Lawyer | Hallman Woods | November 30, 2018 ++]

Online Shopper Scam Update 02 ► Con Artists Use Phony Tracking Numbers

When you are shopping online this holiday season, make sure to buy only from trustworthy websites. Scammers are using phony tracking numbers to fool shoppers into thinking their package is on the way, according to recent BBB Scam Tracker reports.

How the Scam Works:

- You are shopping online and find a site with amazing deals, often 50% cheaper than prices on established websites. The website and the products look legitimate, so you decide to take a chance and make a purchase. After checkout, you get a confirmation email that contains a tracking number from UPS, FedEx, or another shipping service.
- What happens next depends on the scam. In some versions, the tracking number provided is completely fake. In other variations, the number is real and appears to work at first... until "your" item is delivered somewhere else. Either way, the outcome is the same. Providing a phony tracking number allows scammers to stall and shift blame for the missing package to the shipping service. In reality, your purchase never existed in the first place.

- You may even get shipping notices without purchasing from a new website. The notice may say the shipper is having difficulty delivering a gift package to you. The email may contain a link that asks for personally identifying information, or that downloads malware onto your computer. This scam is particularly prevalent at the holidays when more packages are being shipped. Scammers are hoping you are busy or distracted and will click without thinking.

Protect Yourself from an Online Shopping Scam:

- Before buying online, confirm the site has real contact information. Make sure the seller has a working phone number and address on the website, so you can contact them in case of problems.
- Don't click on links in unsolicited email. Look at the email carefully and confirm that you actually ordered before taking any action. Instead of clicking on a link, go to the shipper's website and manually key in the tracking number to confirm it's real.
- If the price seems too good to be true, there's probably something wrong. Be wary if the item is selling for significantly lower than what you've seen elsewhere.
- Review BBB online shopping tips. Many online purchase scams use similar tactics. See www.BBB.org/ShoppingOnline for more advice.

For More Information

For more resources on shipping fraud, see FedEx's website and UPS's online resource center. To learn more about scams, go to www.BBB.org/ScamTips. If you've been targeted by this scam, help others avoid the same problem by reporting your experience at www.BBB.org/ScamTracker. NOTE: FedEx Corporation and United Parcel Service are BBB Accredited Businesses. [Source: Better Business Bureau | November 30, 2018 ++]

Two-Factor Authentication Scam ► Thieves Use Con to Hack Your Account

Two-factor authentication is a security measure many companies use to help keep your accounts safer. But scammers have devised ways to impersonate those alerts and steal log in information. Since Cyber Monday is coming up and millions of consumers are shopping online, BBB expects scammers to be out in full force.

How the Scam Works

- You get an email or text message saying there has been suspicious activity in your account, and you need to take action to confirm your identity. You set up two-factor authentication, an extra security measure that requires you to confirm logins from new devices, so the message doesn't seem suspicious.
- From there, this scam has two versions. In one, the alert urges you to reply with the authentication code you are about to receive. If you do so, scammers will use this code to gain access to your account. In another twist, the fake "suspicious activity" alert asks you to click a link to confirm your identity. When you do, malware may download to your computer giving thieves access to your personal information, keystroke history, and more.

How to Avoid Two-Factor Authentication Scams

- Never reply to a text message with your authentication code. A legitimate company will never ask you to text them a code they just sent you.
- Keep an eye out for suspicious account activity. If you didn't try to log into an account, you should not have received an email or text message about it. Someone may have gotten hold of your username and password. Change your password immediately.
- Don't click on links in unsolicited emails. If you receive an unexpected email, even if it is from a company you know and trust, take a closer look. Many scammers use stolen logos from familiar stores and banks to create emails that seem real.

For More Information

Read more holiday shopping tips at www.BBB.org/HolidayHelper. To learn more about this kind of scam, read the article go.bbb.org/phishing. To learn more about other kinds of 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 | November 23, 2018 ++]

L.O.L Surprise Toy Scam ► Cheating Parents out of Money

Every year, there's always one "must-have" toy on most kids' holiday wish list. The toy sells out fast, and becomes expensive and hard to find. This year's hot pick is the L.O.L. Surprise! dolls and dollhouse. Scammers are using the toy's popularity to trick parents out of their money.

How the Scam Works

- You are looking for L.O.L. Surprise! toys, but they are sold out at every store you visit. So you decide to look online. A quick search takes you to a page that miraculously has the toy in stock. The site may look professional and have original images of the product. It may even offer the product at discounted prices, claiming a "last-minute deal" or "flash sale."
- Unfortunately, many such offers are fake. People order the toy online, but it never arrives. When they try to follow up with the company, they find that the website lacks working contact information or has disappeared.

BBB Scam Tracker has recently seen an upswing in reports of L.O.L. Surprise! toy scams. Consumers report paying for the product, but never receiving it. One consumer wrote, "I ordered an LOL Bigger Surprise on a website and paid online. I received an email with no tracking number for the order, tried to find a number to call them, but there was no number. I tried to reply to the email receipt and was informed the email did not go through. Now the website doesn't exist when you click on it!"

Tips to Avoid Toy Scams

- Only buy toys from reputable stores and websites. The best way to avoid getting scammed when purchasing toys is to buy them directly from a seller you know and trust.
- Don't be fooled by extra-low prices. Unreasonably low prices are a red flag for a scam on many products. Avoid making a purchase from a retailer you aren't familiar with just because the price sounds too good to be true – it probably is!
- Research before you buy. If a company seems legitimate but you aren't familiar with it, be extra careful with your personal information. Before offering up your name, address, and credit card information, make sure the company has a working customer service number.

For More Information

See www.BBB.org/ShoppingOnline for more online shopping tips. For more about avoiding scams this holiday season, check out www.BBB.org/Holiday-Tips. If you've spot a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to BBB Scam Tracker. Your report can help others avoid falling victim. If you see a questionable ad, report it to <https://www.bbb.org/ad-truth> so they can investigate.

[Source: BBB Scam Alert | December 14, 2018 ++]

Tax Burden for Maryland Retired Vets ► Corrected As of DEC 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 Maryland:

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 6.0% (food, prescription and non-prescription drugs exempt)

Gasoline Tax: 51.9 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 58.65 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$2.00/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 2%; High – 5.75%; Maryland's 23 counties and Baltimore City may levy an income tax ranging from 1.25% to 3.15% of taxable income.

Income Brackets: Seven. Lowest – \$1,000; Highest – \$300,000

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$3,200; Married – \$6,400; Dependents – \$3,200. The exemption amount has the following phase out schedule: If AGI is above \$100,000 but below \$125,000, the exemption is \$1,600; if AGI is above \$125,000 but below \$150,000, the exemption is \$800; if AGI is above \$150,000, there is no exemption. For more information go to http://forms.marylandtaxes.com/12_forms/resident_booklet.pdf.

Additional Exemptions: If you or your spouse is 65 or older or blind, you are entitled to an extra \$1,000 personal exemption, in addition to the regular personal exemption that you may be entitled to. If you have a federal adjusted gross income of up to \$100,000 (up to \$150,000 if filing jointly) you are entitled to a \$3,200 exemption on the Maryland return for each exemption you are qualified to claim on the federal return.

Standard Deduction: 15% of income with a minimum of \$1,500 and a cap of \$2,000 for single filers, married filing separately filers and dependent filers earning more than \$13,333. The standard deduction is a minimum of \$3,000 and capped at \$4,000 for married filing jointly filers, head of household filers and qualifying widowers earning more than \$26,667.

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount. If you purchase a long-term care insurance contract for yourself or certain members of your family, you may be eligible for a credit of up to \$500 for each insured. To qualify for the credit, the insured must be all of the following: a spouse, parent, stepparent, child, or stepchild; a Maryland resident; not covered by long-term care insurance before July 1, 2000; not claimed the credit for the insured by another taxpayer this year; and not claimed the credit for the insured by anyone in any other tax year.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security and Railroad Retirement income are not taxed.

Retired Military Pay: If you receive or the spouse of a military retiree receives military retirement income, you will be able to subtract up to \$10,000, with an increase to the first \$15,000 for individuals who are at least 55 years old on the last day of the taxable year, of your military retirement income from your federal adjusted gross income before determining your Maryland tax. The retirement income must have been received as a result of any of the following military service:

- Induction into the U.S. Armed forces for training and service under the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 or a subsequent Act of similar nature
- Membership in a reserve component of the U.S. armed forces
- Membership in an active component of the U.S. armed forces
- Membership in the Maryland National Guard

The benefit also applies to persons separated from active duty employment with the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or the Coast and Geodetic Survey.

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

Real property is valued at its full cash value. Property [tax rates](#) vary widely. No restrictions or limitations on property taxes are imposed by the state, meaning cities and counties can set tax rates at the level they deem necessary to fund governmental services. These rates can increase, decrease or remain the same from year to year.

[Homeowner's Property Tax Credit Program](#) allows credits against the homeowner's property tax bill if the property taxes exceed a fixed percentage of the person's gross income. In other words, it sets a limit on the amount of property taxes any homeowner must pay based upon his or her income. This plan has been in existence since 1975 when it was known as the "circuit breaker" plan for elderly homeowners. The plan was called circuit breaker because it shut off the property tax bill at a certain point just like an electric circuit breaker shuts off the current when the circuit becomes overloaded. The Maryland General Assembly has improved the plan through the years so that now this program is available to all homeowners regardless of their age, and the credits are given where needed based upon the person's income.

A Property Tax Deferral Program allows property owners 65 or over to defer the increase in their property tax bill. Local governments must approve the program. The deferred taxes become a lien on the property and must be repaid when the property is transferred.

A Renters' Tax Credit Program provides up to \$1,000 a year for those age 60 and over or 100% disabled if they qualify on the basis of income.

For details on property taxes call 410-767-1184.

Property Tax Exemption - Disabled Veterans and Surviving Spouses

Armed Services veterans with a permanent and total service connected disability rated 100% by the Veterans Administration may receive a complete exemption from real property taxes on the dwelling house and surrounding yard. These veterans also may apply at any time and do not have to meet the September 1 filing deadline. Certain unremarried surviving spouses may also be eligible for this exemption. Surviving spouses of military personnel killed in the line of duty may apply for an exemption. To learn more call your local Maryland assessment office. To find your local office and contact information visit the State Department of Assessments and Taxation website at <https://dat.maryland.gov/realproperty/Pages/Maryland-Assessment-Offices.aspx>, Go to <https://dat.maryland.gov/SDAT%20Forms/Disabled-Veteran.pdf> to download an Application for property tax exemption

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

Maryland collects an inheritance tax. Property passing to a spouse, child, parent, grandparent, or sibling is exempt from taxation. Property passing to other individuals is subject to a 10% tax rate. A return is required for every estate whose federal gross estate, plus adjusted taxable gifts, plus property for which a Maryland qualified terminal interest property (QTIP) election which previously made on a Maryland estate tax return filed for the estate of the decedent's predeceased spouse, equals or exceeds the Maryland estate tax exemption amount for the year of the decedent's death, and the decedent at the date of death was a Maryland resident or a non-resident but owned real or tangible personal property having a taxable situs in Maryland. The filing requirement varies depending on the year of the decedent's death, and the federal exemption amount is \$4,000,000 for 2018.

Refer to https://taxes.marylandtaxes.gov/Individual_Taxes/Individual_Tax_Types/Estate_and_Inheritance_Tax for more information on inheritance taxes.

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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For further information on Maryland taxes in general, visit the [Maryland Comptroller of the Treasury](http://www.marylandtreasury.com) site. You can also call 410-260-7980. [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#MARYLAND> DEC 2018 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest ► 01 thru 15 DEC 2018

- **December.** The month of December this year will have 5 Saturdays 5 Sundays and 5 Mondays. It only happens once every 823 years.
- **Afghan Bombings.** The United States dropped more bombs and other munitions in Afghanistan during the first ten months of 2018 than in any other full year since documentation began, new Air Force data shows. Despite the uptick in airstrikes, the Taliban hold more territory than at any time since the war began in 2001.

	JAN.	FEB.	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG.	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.	TOTAL
2006	25	37	57	117	113	263	344	415	316	346	333	278	2,644
2007	282	163	381	276	275	448	491	875	719	415	451	422	5,198
2008	236	358	388	243	427	984	752	630	375	338	210	110	5,051
2009	163	203	362	461	454	438	381	445	254	541	238	207	4,147
2010	156	154	175	197	300	457	325	416	739	1,043	866	272	5,100
2011	405	341	337	339	426	610	695	516	597	663	308	174	5,411
2012	170	116	229	252	406	521	504	588	385	414	297	202	4,084
2013	193	297	250	284	368	337	256	158	232	189	118	76	2,758
2014	92	114	95	115	164	272	205	437	441	217	87	126	2,365
2015	40	30	47	31	41	109	79	156	111	203	69	31	947
2016	127	115	58	62	89	94	160	108	162	205	92	65	1,337
2017	54	200	203	460	328	389	350	503	414	653	352	455	4,361
2018	378	469	339	562	591	572	746	715	814	769			5,982

- **Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.** A massive 7.0 earthquake rocked the base and nearby Anchorage, the state’s most populated city, at 8:30 a.m. Alaskan Standard Time on 30 NOV. There are reports on social media of widespread power outages, evacuations and impacts on stores, homes and other buildings. Employees working in the air traffic tower at the Anchorage Airport were reportedly evacuated while the tower was being inspected for damage.
- **Silent Night.** Christmas is a time of celebration for many people and their families but for many people it can also be a depressing and lonely time of year. If you know someone that might be in need of a little

Christmas joy be sure to reach out to them to try to brighten their holiday season. To put you in the mood check out the musical videos at https://youtu.be/Krj_9gOdy8k, <https://youtu.be/g4fvMgNfNOI>, <https://youtu.be/CO6OZIY-lyw>, & <https://biggeekdad.com/2014/12/silent-night-kelly-clarkson>.

- **Reused Rocket.** A SpaceX rocket carrying 64 small satellites lifted off from California on 3 DEC, marking the first time the same Falcon 9 rocket has been used in three space missions.
- **Norfolk 4.** The city of Norfolk has agreed to pay \$4.9 million to four former sailors who were wrongly convicted of a woman's rape and murder based on intimidating police interrogations.



- **MHS Opioid Use.** Nearly 1 in 4 active-duty service members had at least one prescription for an opioid at some point in 2017, according to Defense Department research. Also, about 1 in 4 retirees had at least one opioid prescription.
- **Home Loans.** Home mortgage loans backed by the U.S. Veterans Administration have increased 42 percent in the last five years in California, with loan traffic in the Inland Empire outpacing the state's growth, according to Veterans United financial company that provides these deals.
- **Marriage.** Honeymoon long over? Hang in there. A new UC Berkeley study shows those prickly disagreements that can mark the early and middle years of marriage mellow with age as conflicts give way to humor and acceptance.
- **Yokoto Air Base.** A Japanese court has awarded \$842,000 to people living near the home of U.S. Forces Japan as compensation for aircraft noise, according to the leader of a residents group.
- **Cannon AFB NM.** The New Mexico Environment Department has issued a notice of violation to the U.S. Air Force for failing to properly address groundwater contamination at a base near Clovis. That has prompted requests by state officials for more tests and a study to determine the extent of the toxic plume. They say failure to comply with the violation notice could result in an administrative compliance order that can assess civil penalties up to \$15,000 per day for each violation.
- **Economy.** The U.S. trade deficit rose to a 10-year high in October, the Commerce Department said Thursday, despite a raft of tariffs that President Trump has instituted with the stated purpose of narrowing the gap. U.S. Household Net Worth Rose by \$2.07 Trillion in 3rd Quarter
- **Vet Unemployment.** The unemployment rate for veterans of all service periods was 3.1 percent in November, compared to a 3.4 percent unemployment rate for nonveterans. Post-9/11 veterans also posted a 3.4 percent unemployment rate, on par with their civilian counterparts. This rate rose slightly from 3.1 percent over the previous month, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- **Bells of Balangiga.** On 11 DEC after 106 years the Bells were returned to the Philippines. Philippine station RTVM has prepared a video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLNi0l4cBqw> which gives their history and why they were returned.
- **U.S. Military Aircraft Fleet.** CBO projects that the annual cost (in 2018 dollars) of replacing the aircraft in the current fleet, essentially one-for-one, would average \$15 billion in the 2020s, \$23 billion in the 2030s, and then fall back to \$15 billion in the 2040s. In comparison, appropriations for procuring new aircraft averaged about \$12 billion per year between 1980 and 2017 in 2018 dollars.
- **Navy Shipbuilding Plan.** The Navy's 2019 plan calls for expanding the fleet to 355 battle force ships by 2034. CBO Estimates that those new ships would cost \$801 billion (in 2018 dollars) over 30 years, or an average of \$26.7 billion per year. CBO did not include operation and support costs for a 355-ship fleet or the cost of extending the service life of the destroyers and submarines.
- **Warrant Officer.** For the first time since 1975, the Navy has elevated six petty officers to the rank of warrant officer-1, part of an ongoing effort to beef up its offensive cyberwarfare punch.

- **Xmas Grinch.** To see a new twist on an old Christmas song you might enjoy "You're A Mean One, Mr. Grinch" at <https://biggeekdad.com/2018/11/the-mean-mr-grinch>.
- **Hometown Battlefield.** At https://www.youtube.com/embed/Wq0X0bwMprQ?feature=player_embedded is a video song written by J.P. Comer which most veteran will appreciate.
- **He Took my Place.** Gary Lima served during the Cyprus conflict in 1974, Gary was pulled at the last minute from a helicopter mission. He was told to choose his replacement, a young corporal who lost his life that night. At <https://soundcloud.com/operationsong-tm/he-took-my-place> you can listen to the song he wrote which expresses his feelings about this.
- **Pain Disability Claim.** On April 3, 2018, the Federal Circuit revived a U.S. Army veteran's claim for VA disability benefits stemming from knee pain, ruling that pain alone can be considered a disability. Apparently, the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims misinterpreted a disability benefit statute when it ruled that Melba Saunders' knee pain could not, in the absence of a specific diagnosis or other identified disease or injury, be considered the basis for benefits, a three-judge panel ruled in a precedential decision. According to the court's decision, "We conclude that pain is an impairment because it diminishes the body's ability to function, and that pain need not be diagnosed as connected to a current underlying condition to function as an impairment."

[Source: Various | November 30, 2018 ++]

Climate Collusion ► Global Cooling, oops Warming, oops Changing

The report begins darkly, "There are ominous signs that the earth's weather patterns have begun to change dramatically and that these changes portend a drastic decline in food production with serious political implications for just about every nation on earth." It includes troubling predictions for the great wheat producing regions of the northern Great Plains and Canada. The report states that farmers in England have begun to see about a two week change in their growing seasons. This change has already resulted in "the loss in over-all grain production of up to 100,000 tons annually." The facts, both terrifying and unassailable. Then of course, the obligatory examples of violent weather changes. "Last April, in the most devastating outbreak of tornadoes ever recorded, 148 twisters killed more than 300 people..." The evidence is there for all but the willfully blind, to plainly see.

So began the Newsweek article, written in April of 1975 that became the centerpiece for the public debate about the coming Ice Age. Global cooling had begun. The report was complete with charts and graphs assembled by the top climatologists to prove the hypothesis. With one or two protracted dips, the earth had been gradually warming since the end of the last Ice Age. We were overdue for a cooling period. So the consensus among the experts that we were well into the cooling trend made perfect sense. And if it continued, as they predicted it would, humanity was headed for a rendezvous with catastrophe. The future, filled with famines and bone chilling cold, looked grim.

The Newsweek report was generously sprinkled with quotes from experts and luminaries in the science community. A report from the National Academy of Science warned that a major climatic change would force social and economic adjustments on a worldwide scale. The piece also cited research done by Dr. Murray Mitchell of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. It concluded that recorded ground temperatures in the Northern Hemisphere had declined by half a degree Fahrenheit between the years 1945 and 1968. Certainly not statistically insignificant.

NOAA scientists also released a report that concluded that the amount of sunshine reaching the earth had declined by 1.3% between the years 1964 and 1972. University of Wisconsin researcher Reid Bryson volunteered that average temperatures during the last Ice Age were only about 7 degrees colder than those during the earth's warmest period. By his estimates, we were already one sixth of the way down the path to the next Ice Age. While there was a

consensus among the experts about the cooling trend, some believed that we were on the way to an all out Ice Age. While others thought it would be similar to the Little Ice Age that lasted for several centuries. The one that enveloped Europe and much of North America, reaching its low point in about 1600. Baby boomers may remember a film that was shown in many Science classes on the subject. It featured a snowbank only a few hundred kilometers north of Montreal that didn't completely melt one summer. We were witnesses to history. We were told that this is how a glacier is born.

Of course, the experts and climatologists needed more taxpayer money to study the phenomenon, including its causes and possible solutions. Given the gravity of the situation, Congress eagerly complied. One of the solutions considered was to dramatically reduce the size of the polar ice caps. Covering large sections with black ashes would cause critical sections to melt faster. Apparently there was little concern about what that might do to sea levels in coastal communities. If much of Florida was submerged, well that was a price they were willing to pay. Surprisingly, there was little discussion about simply building larger SUV's and burning more fossil fuel. Perhaps the most chilling statement was the first sentence of the last paragraph in the Newsweek piece. "Climatologists are pessimistic that political leaders will take any positive actions to compensate for the climactic changes or even to allay the effects." In other words, if our fate was left to the political classes, we were doomed.

A few years later, some of those same scientists discovered flaws in their data. Global temperatures had stabilized. Worse, they may now be turning upward. The planet may actually be warming! Political figures from around the world began to unite behind the banner of Global Warming. We had to save the planet! It was all so wonderful. Humanity was coming together to force Americans to lower our standard of living. Then the data started to show a pause in the so called warming. Scientists, fearing losses of both credibility and grant money, adjusted their data accordingly. Then they jettisoned the term Global Warming, substituting the amorphous Climate Change. That covered almost anything. But significant chunks of the American body politic had grown suspicious. Thankfully, a profligate Congress kept the funding spigots wide open.

So, here we are today. The planet is clearly either warming or cooling. Government grants flow freely to reinforce the undeniable fact that the climate is changing...or pausing. Climatologists understand that you get more attention and taxpayer money if you loudly predict disaster. It's also helpful to stick with the pack. And be sure to shout down and shame anyone who challenges your theories or data. It is said that history does not repeat itself. But, it certainly does rhyme. [Source: Townhall | Gil Gutknecht | November 28, 2018 ++]

Naval Hospital Jacksonville ► Malpractice Lawsuit | Needle Left in spine

A Jacksonville law firm filed a medical malpractice lawsuit against Naval Hospital Jacksonville, claiming the facility covered up a medical mistake by leaving three centimeters of a broken needle inside the spine of a mother delivering a baby there 15 years ago. Attorney Sean Cronin of Cronin & Maxwell filed the suit in U.S. District Court of Florida on 18 DEC. The needle, which the mother just learned about last year, is still lodged in her spine.

During the procedure, the hospital opted for spinal anesthesia to block the pain rather than general anesthesia, which would have knocked her out. The few-minute procedure turned into a roughly 40-minute ordeal when between one-third to one-half of the needle broke and became lodged in Bright's spine, Cronin said. Bright was never told about the mistake and the hospital covered it up, the suit claims. Medical records make no mention of the needle breaking off and remaining embedded in the woman's spine, but it does say that the anesthesia did not take. Cronin said that spinal needles are about 7 to 9 centimeters in length and that what is lodged in her spine is 3 centimeters, or about 1 inch. He said anyone performing anesthesia could clearly tell that a large portion of the needle was missing.

"They knew what they did," Cronin said. "They thought they would get in trouble so they elected not to tell the family and not to tell anyone in the chain of command because they did not want to get in trouble." As a result,

Cronin said, Bright suffered years of leg and back problems. Bright underwent a CAT scan last year to further address her leg and back problems. That is when the more than an inch-long needle was discovered in her L4 vertebra. Cronin said his client has since then consulted with multiple neurosurgeons about having the needle removed but has been told the risk for even more permanent damage -- such as paralysis -- is too high. He said the window to remove the needle was in the days after the delivery of her child in 2003.

The 42-year-old mother of six has trouble sitting or exercising because the needle inflames the nerves when she moves. The pain has worsened over time, Cronin said. "It is a cowardly, unethical cover-up," he said. Cronin, a Navy veteran, has sued Naval Hospital Jacksonville on many occasions over the past 20 years. "This is the most outrageous case of medical malpractice I've ever seen. There was a golden window of opportunity to surgically remove the needle. By failing to tell Mrs. Bright about it or record it in her medical records, the medical staff sentenced her to a lifetime of pain. Surgery now is too risky because it could destabilize her spine, worsen the nerve damage or paralyze her."

Bright's husband, Charles Bright, had been stationed at Naval Hospital Jacksonville as a corpsman. He has since retired as a chief with 100 percent disability. The couple now live in Illinois. "From our perspective, this is a double failure," said Cronin, who has a son who was born at the Naval Hospital. "... And frankly this is shocking and outrageous, and we expect better of our Navy brothers and sisters working at this hospital. This should never have happened and there is absolutely no excuse for this."

The lawsuit claims the medical staff improperly inserted the anesthesia needle into Bright's spine. It was supposed to enter her spinal canal where the medication is administered. Instead, the needle was forcefully pushed too far through the spinal canal and became deeply embedded into Bright's lower back, where it broke off and has since been trapped. Cronin claims that needles of that type have a black ring around the top that is used to verify that the entire needle is intact after the needle is pulled out of the body. "We're deeply committed to providing the best care to every patient entrusted to us," the hospital said in a statement issued late Tuesday. "Due to patient confidentiality and privacy laws, we're prohibited from providing any additional comments." [Source: The Florida Times-Union | Eileen Kelley | December 12, 2018 ++]

China's Territorial Claims Update 06 ► Beijing South China Sea Conference

At a conference held in Beijing on 8 DEC, Chinese government and military officials discussed issues in the South China Sea and the current state of relations between the U.S. and China. Chinese media reports that the situation in the South China Sea is expected grow more intense over the coming year, with one senior military official also declaring that China should be prepared to attack United States naval vessels, should the U.S. violate Chinese "territorial waters." Dai Xu (戴旭), who is President of the Institute of Marine Safety and Cooperation, as well as a PLA Air Force Colonel Commandant, was quoted by the tabloid Global Times saying the following.

"If the U.S. warships break into Chinese waters again, I suggest that two warships should be sent: one to stop it, and another one to ram it... In our territorial waters, we won't allow US warships to create disturbance."

Referring to the increasingly regular Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) being carried out by the United States in the South China Sea, Dai said he couldn't understand why people in China were afraid of using military force to counter U.S. FONOP activity. Most recently, the U.S. sent two naval vessels through the Taiwan Strait four days after the Taiwanese elections held in November, which caused alarm among officials in Beijing . Speaking about Taiwan, Dai even seemed to express anticipation for increasing tension in the South China Sea, emphasizing that China should not fear conflict. He suggested that some manner of provocation in the South China Sea might push China towards military action targeting Taiwan. "It would boost the speed of our unification of

Taiwan... Let's just be prepared and wait. Once a strategic opportunity emerges, we should be ready to take over Taiwan."

Another speaker, Huang Jing, from the Beijing Language and Culture University, claimed that U.S. foreign policy was no longer capable of competing with Beijing's in attracting support from other countries in the region. Huang is a Chinese-American Professor, and an alleged spy for the Chinese Communist Party, who was deported from Singapore in 2017 for passing privileged information to Singaporean officials to "covertly advance the agenda of a foreign power," while working at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. Huang says that Beijing's policy remains "firm but flexible" in the region, and also expressed his belief that ASEAN countries were increasingly supportive of Beijing's claims to the South China Sea. Huang also reportedly made the statement "Japan attacked the Pearl Harbor after it took control of the South China Sea." [Source: Taiwan News | Duncan Deaeth | December 12, 2018 ++]

ISIS Update 03 ► Defeat in Iraq

Iraq began removing cement walls from areas surrounding the capital's most fortified enclave 10 DEC, opening parts of the so-called Green Zone to traffic in a symbolic move coinciding with nationwide celebrations marking the anniversary of the country's costly victory over the Islamic State group. The partial reopening of parts of the high security area is meant to portray increased confidence in the country's overall security situation and is also being billed as an act of transparency following protests against corruption and poor public services. The enclave on the west bank of the Tigris became home to foreign embassies and key government buildings after the U.S.-led invasion of 2003 and has since then been surrounded by blast walls and barbed wire, inaccessible to most Iraqis.

The partial reopening of some side streets — initially just for five hours a day — has been repeatedly delayed and then timed to coincide with the one year anniversary of Iraq's victory over ISIS. The group has lost virtually all the territory it once held but still carries out sporadic attacks to hang on to its last enclave in Syria near the Iraqi border. The government declared victory last December after a grueling three-year war in which tens of thousands of people were killed and hundreds of thousands displaced. Entire towns and neighborhoods were reduced to rubble in the fighting. The government declared Monday a national holiday, and a moment of silence was held at midday. Checkpoints in the capital were decorated with Iraqi flags and balloons, as security forces patrolled the streets playing patriotic music.

"That victory and the relative stability in security is a golden opportunity for the government to rebuild the country and to meet the needs of its people," said Sameer al-Obaidi, who led an initiative in the capital's Sunni-dominated northern Azamiyah neighborhood to distribute flowers to security forces at checkpoints. "It is important to treat all Iraqis equally so that they feel that their sacrifices are appreciated," al-Obaidi added. The celebrations come as political infighting has hindered the formation of the government and setting next year's budget, amid a deteriorating economic situation as the country grapples with the legacy of the extremist group's brutal rule.

More than 1.8 million Iraqis remain displaced across the country, and a staggering 8 million require some form of humanitarian aid, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council. Those with suspected links to ISIS have been rejected by their communities, while thousands of children fathered by ISIS militants — including those born to enslaved Yazidi women — are still unrecognized by the state. Nearly two-thirds of displaced people say they are unwilling or unable to return home in the next year, with more than half saying their homes were damaged or destroyed, according to the aid group. "If this is what 'victory' looks like, then there is little to celebrate for millions of Iraqis still haunted by the crimes of the IS and the long war to eliminate it," said Norwegian Refugee Council Secretary General Jan Egeland. "They have largely been forgotten by their own government and the international community."

But the government was in a celebratory mood. Addressing a group of Iraqi military officers, Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi said it was a "proud day for all of us when our brave country defeated the enemies of life, dignity, freedom and peace." He commended the security forces as well as Iraq's top Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who issued a fatwa, or religious edict, mobilizing volunteers after the armed forces collapsed in the face of the ISIS onslaught in 2014. Tens of thousands of volunteers joined an array of state-sanctioned militias, many of them backed by Iran. "That fatwa will be a bright spot in the history of this country and the people, from whom the decisive response started, laying the foundations of the victory," Abdul-Mahdi said.

He called on Iraqis to renounce their differences and to come together for a better future. "This war has restored Iraq's dignity," said Baghdad resident Qassim al-Fatlawi. "All Iraqis took part in this fight, those who couldn't take up arms fought with words and donations," added al-Fatlawi, 29, who organized fundraising initiatives for the paramilitaries. Popular songs praising the paramilitaries, also known as the Popular Mobilization Forces, blared out from his small cosmetic accessories shop in a narrow alley in Baghdad's Shiite-dominated Karrada area, today adorned with rows of Iraqi flags. He said he planned to put out a large tray of free sweets for customers later in the day.

The Islamic State group, which traces its roots back to the insurgency that followed the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, swept into Iraq from neighboring Syria in the summer of 2014. It carved out a self-styled caliphate across a third of both countries, imposing a harsh form of Islamic rule and massacring its opponents. The group abducted thousands of women and girls from the Yazidi religious minority and forced them into sexual slavery. Iraqi forces aided by a U.S.-led coalition eventually drove the group from all the territory it once held in Iraq, including in the climactic battle for Mosul, the country's second-largest city. ISIS is still currently fighting to hold on to a small pocket of territory in Syria, near the Iraqi border. [Source: The Associated Press | Sinan Salaheddin | December 10, 2018 ++]

ISIS Update 04 ► Iraq Army U.S. Artillery Support on Hajin, Syria

By most official accounts, the bulk of the close fighting with ISIS militants in Iraq has been led by the Iraqis themselves. But one place where U.S. troops get a piece of combat beyond training their partners is in providing fire support. And nowhere is that more relevant than in artillery. Soldiers with Bravo Battery, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, part of Task Force Rifles, have been lobbing 155mm rounds across the Iraqi border at a steady pace for about three months now. They're sharing the firing line with their Iraqi artillery counterparts and French Army soldiers, said Col. Jonathan Byrom, task force commander and deputy director of Joint Operations Command-Iraq.



Troopers from the Field Artillery Support Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, (left) support Iraqi army operations with artillery fires from their M777A2 Howitzers and French soldiers fire a French Caesar in support of Operation Roundup, in Al Quim, Iraq (right).

He would not disclose how many rounds the units had fired in support of the months-long mission to take out Islamic State remnants holed up in the small Syria-Iraq border town of Hajin. But he said the fire missions were fairly intense. "More intense than others I've seen in the past," Byrom told reporters during a videoconference call from

Iraq on 11 DEC. “And they’re directly contributing to the protection of the Iraqi border.” Hajin is seen as one of the last holdouts for ISIS fighters and some leadership, which is why some officials have pointed to the three-month long battle that is still ongoing. These missions mirror in some ways the intense artillery fire support that Marines provided for coalition fights in Raqqa, Syria, in 2017.

During a five-month period, a single Marine artillery battalion fired more rounds than any such battalion since the Vietnam War. “They fired more rounds in five months in Raqqa, Syria, than any other Marine artillery battalion, or any Marine or Army battalion, since the Vietnam war,” Army Command Sgt. Major. John Wayne Troxell, then the senior enlisted adviser to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told Military Times in a January media discussion. The battalion fired 35,000 artillery rounds on ISIS targets, Troxell said. As a reference point, for the entirety of Operation Desert Storm, all Marine and Army units combined fired an estimated 60,000 artillery rounds. A little more than half of that was fired during the 2003 Iraq invasion.

Byrom was asked if units were also using missile systems such as the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System. He sidestepped that direct question and referenced only the Army’s use of M777, the towed howitzer. The French soldiers are using an artillery system that’s decades-old for them but which has inspired a new piece of firepower for U.S. artillery officials. The French fire the CAESAR, a mobile 155mm howitzer mounted on a six-wheeled truck. It’s a self-propelled artillery piece that’s been in their arsenal since the 1990s. The U.S. Army has stuck with towed artillery systems and armored self-propelled artillery such as the Paladin system, also a 155mm. [Source: ArmyTimes | Todd South | December 11, 2018 ++]

Armaments Production ► U.S. Firms At The Top Of The Global Arms Trade

US companies hold more than half of the world market share for military equipment, according to a recent study by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI. The U.S. Company Lockheed Martin remains the undisputed leader among the world's 100 largest defense companies. No other company in the industry made a larger profit in 2017. With sales amounting to \$44 billion (€27.8 billion), Lockheed Martin leads the SIPRI ranking by a wide margin. Germany's largest defense group, Düsseldorf-based Rheinmetall AG, doesn't even account for a 10th of this sum. With sales of \$3.4 billion, Rheinmetall ranks 25th.

The success of front-runner Lockheed Martin is based primarily on the large equipment requirements of the US armed forces, for which the group manufactures various weapon systems. These include the F-35 Lightning combat aircraft and the C-130 Hercules transport aircraft. Boeing is the world's second-largest arms manufacturer. In July, President Donald Trump awarded Boeing the contract to build two new Air Force One aircraft for the president's travels. Trump bargained the price down to \$3.9 billion and did away with the previous light blue and white design. The most reliable customer for the American armaments industry is the US Army, which is constantly in the market for new weapons and is able to afford extremely expensive systems such as aircraft carriers.

The arms race with countries such as Russia and China also fuels business: Lockheed Martin is currently developing an expensive "hypersonic missile" that can bypass conventional radar systems. Russia and China already have long-range missiles of this kind that fly at multiple speeds of sound. The arms race now also includes space, which Trump wants to dominate with a future "space force." In the coming year, the US intends to invest the record sum of \$716 billion in armaments.

Apart from the US, only a few European companies can compete in the top positions, including the Airbus Group, in which Germany also has a stake. Airbus produces the breakdown-prone transport aircraft A400M for several European armies. Great Britain remains the largest weapons manufacturer in western Europe, followed by France. The British mega-group BAE Systems, which has more than 83,000 employees, is the only European manufacturer

to make it into the top 5 in the world. BAE Systems is involved in the construction of the European fighter aircraft Eurofighter Typhoon, which is also sold to countries such as Saudi Arabia.

In 2017, Russian defense companies, which are benefiting from Putin's modernization program for the army, made strong gains. State-owned Almaz-Antey, Russia's largest armaments company, has for the first time made it into SIPRI's top 10. Turkey is also arming itself: President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's strategy of becoming less dependent on arms imports has boosted Turkish arms manufacturers' profits by 24 percent. According to the Stockholm researchers, three Chinese companies should also be among the top players. However, since they publish little reliable information on their arms sales, they have not been included in the list.

Among the world's 100 largest arms manufacturers are four German firms, including Rheinmetall, Thyssenkrupp and Krauss-Maffei Wegmann, which manufacture submarines, ships, tanks and armored vehicles for the German armed forces. They also sell them abroad. All three companies increased their profits in 2017. New on the list is the fourth German firm, Hensoldt, based near Munich, which manufactures radars and sensors for electronic warfare. All in all, however, arms sales have little significance for German foreign trade, as they account for less than 1 percent of total German exports. [Source: www.dw.com | Nina Werkhäuser | December 9, 2018 ++]

International Space Station Update 01 ► New Crewmember to Board

An Army helicopter pilot and astronaut is scheduled strap into a Soyuz rocket 3 DEC for the trip from Kazakhstan to the International Space Station, according to a release from Army Space and Missile Defense Command. Lt. Col. Ann McClain and her team will spend six months at the ISS as part of a crew with a slate of 250 research projects, the release said. "The Army astronauts have a very proud legacy in the astronaut program," McClain said. "I can tell you that just like everywhere else in the Army, the biggest attributes that we can bring to the table are leadership and team skills, and those traits that I learned in the Army as both a follower and as a leader working in austere environments with small groups in high gain tasks where lives are at risk, those traits have absolutely transferred over into my time at NASA, and I think that is the best thing that we can bring to NASA."

McClain flew more than 800 combat hours in Iraq before becoming an astronaut candidate in 2013, according to her NASA bio. While aboard the ISS, she'll be part of a new experiment called "Tissues on Chips," using miniature models of human organs to replicate their functions. The hope is that these mini-organs can be used in drug trials, to predict whether they'll harm a person's organs systems. [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | November 30, 2018 ++]

Islamic Drone Use ► Nigeria

Islamic extremists in Nigeria have begun using drones, the country's president says, opening a worrying new front in the region's nearly decade-long fight against Boko Haram and an offshoot linked to the Islamic State. President Muhammadu Buhari announced the development during a meeting on 29 NOV of countries that contribute troops to a multinational force combatting the extremists. This appears to be the first confirmed use of drones by an extremist group in Africa, according to the World of Drones project run by the Washington-based New America think tank. Its section on non-state actors notes that Libyan rebels are reported to have used drones for surveillance in that chaotic North African nation.

Deadly attacks against Nigeria's military are on the rise, with 39 soldiers killed inb November and another 43 wounded. The extremists' use of drones for surveillance in the country's northeast has proven to be a "critical factor"

in the resurgence of attacks, the president said. Nigeria's military has its own, armed drones, as the United States and others and others increasingly use them in West Africa's fight against groups linked to al-Qaida and IS. Extremist organizations have been quickly adopting the use of drones. The Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq last year was found to have a formal drone unit, and Houthi rebels in Yemen have used a drone to strike a Saudi warship, according to the New America project.

The assassination attempt against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in August, when two drones loaded with explosives exploded during his speech, set off another round of global fears about the threat of drones in enemy hands. "Unfortunately, greater commercial accessibility to (unmanned aerial vehicle) technology will make UAVs more attractive as a delivery method for terrorist attacks," U.S. Air Force Maj. Bryan Card wrote this year. [Source: The Associated Press | Cara Anna | November 30, 2018 ++]

PVA Airline Safety Lawsuit ► Restroom Accessibility for Disabled Vets

The Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) is suing the Department of Transportation (DOT), in hopes of triggering a rollback of regulations that are creating what deems as unsafe environments for disabled airline travelers. Filing a petition of mandamus before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit in Denver on 28 NOV attorneys for PVA argued that the Transportation Department's decision to relax rules that regulate restroom accessibility on airliners is both illegal and harmful. "Veterans with disabilities detailed the need to intentionally dehydrate themselves before a flight, use catheters while in flight, wear protective undergarments, and take other extreme measures to assuage the stress and embarrassment many travelers with disabilities face when unable to access an airplane restroom during a flight," PVA stated in a press release on the organization's web site.

Under the change, airlines could equip new aircraft with restrooms that are 24 inches wide -- significantly smaller than currently found. The Transportation Department approved the move in disregard of recommendations by the airlines, disability groups and other organizations that airplane restrooms be designed to accommodate persons in wheelchairs. "Disabled veterans have already sacrificed so much for our country. The DOT should make compliance a top priority, ensuring these veterans and all people with disabilities can travel with dignity," said PVA executive director Car Blake. Democracy Forward, a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group, is representing PVA in court. [Source: Armed Forces News | December 7, 2018 ++]

Interesting Ideas ► Candle Lighter | Tape Tip | Nail Holder



To prevent burning your fingers when lighting a hard to reach candle wick, use a dry piece of spaghetti to light the candle (left), tape peel spot saver tip (center), and nail holder tip (right)

One Word Essays ► Contemplation



Have You Heard? ► Pilots | When Your 78 | Last Nickel

Pilots Go to Heaven

Three pilots “flew west” on Christmas Eve and were met by Saint Peter at the pearly gates. 'In honor of the season' Saint Peter said, 'You must each possess something that symbolizes Christmas to get into heaven.'

The Army helicopter pilot thumbed through his pockets and pulled out a lighter. He flicked it on. 'It's a candle', he said. 'It did make light and you may pass through the pearly gates' Saint Peter said.

The Air Force pilot reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He shook them and said, 'They're bells.' Saint Peter said, 'they do have a ring to them, you may pass through the pearly gates'.

The Navy jock started searching desperately through his flight suit pockets and finally pulled out a pair of women's panties. St. Peter looked at the man with a raised eyebrow and asked, 'And just what do those symbolize?' He replied, 'These are Carols.'

And So The Christmas Season Begins.....

-o-o-O-o-o-

When Your 78

I was standing at the bar at the Legion one night minding my own business when this FAT ugly chick came up behind me, grabbed my behind and said, "You're kinda cute, you gotta phone number?". I said, "Yeah, you gotta pen?" She said, "Yeah, I got a pen", I said, "You better get back in it before the farmer misses you." Cost me 6 stitches...but, when you're 78.....who cares?

I went to the drug store and told the lady clerk "Give me 3 packets of condoms, please." She asked, "Do you need a paper bag with that, sir?" I said "Nah... She's purty good lookin'" When you're 78.....who cares?

I was talking to a young woman in the Legion last night. She said, "If you lost a few pounds, had a shave and got your hair cut, you'd look all right." I said, "If I did that, I'd be talking to your friends over there instead of you." Cost me a fat lip, but... When you're 78 who cares?

I was telling a woman in the Club about my ability to guess what day a woman was born just by feeling her breasts. "Really" she said, "Go on then... try." After about thirty seconds of fondling she began to lose patience and said, "Come on, what day was I born?" I said, "Yesterday." Cost me a kick in the nuts, but... When you're 78.....who cares?

I got caught taking a pee in the swimming pool today. The lifeguard shouted at me so loud, I nearly fell in. When you're 78.....who cares?

I went to our Legion last night and saw a BIG woman dancing on a table. I said, "Good legs." The girl giggled and said, "Do you really think so?" I said, "Definitely! Most tables would have collapsed by now." Cost me 6 more stitches, but... When you're 78.....who cares?

-o-o-O-o-o-

The Last Nickel

A father walks into a restaurant with his young son. He gives the young boy 3 nickels to play with to keep him occupied. Suddenly the boy starts choking, going blue in the face. The father realizes the boy has swallowed the nickels and starts slapping him on the back. The boy coughs up 2 of the nickels, but keeps choking. Looking at his son, the father is panicking, shouting for help.

A well dressed, attractive, and serious looking woman, in a blue business suit is sitting at a coffee bar reading a newspaper and sipping a cup of coffee. At the sound of the commotion, she looks up, puts her coffee cup down, neatly folds the newspaper and places it on the counter, gets up from her seat and makes her way, unhurried, across the restaurant. Reaching the boy, the woman carefully drops his pants, takes hold of the boy's privates and starts to squeeze and twist, gently at first and then ever so firmly. After a few seconds the boy convulses violently and coughs up the last nickel, which the woman deftly catches in her free hand. Releasing her grip on the boy, the woman hands the nickel to the father and walks back to her seat in the coffee bar without saying a word.

As soon as he is sure that his son has suffered no ill effects, the father rushes over to the woman and starts thanking her saying, 'I've never seen anybody do anything like that before, it was fantastic! Are you a doctor?' "No," the woman replied, "Divorce Attorney."



The Military's Phallus Fixation





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Notes:

1. The Bulletin is provided as a website accessed document vice direct access. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 19,800 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others were deleted from the active mailing list.
2. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines, whether or not they live there, can request to be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of notices on Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, and TRICARE in the RP.
3. New subscribers and those who submit a change of address should receive a message that verifies their addition or address change being entered in the mailing list. If you do not receive a message within 3 days it indicates that either I never received your request, I made an error in processing your request, or your server will not allow me to send to the email addree you provided. Anyone who cannot reach me by email can call (858) 842-1111 to ask questions or confirm info needed to add them to the directory.

4. If you have another email addree at work or home and would like to receive Bulletin notices there also, just provide the appropriate addree to raoemo@sbcglobal.net.

5. Past Bulletin articles as well as an index of all previously published article titles are available on request to raoemo@sbcglobal.net. Bear in mind that the articles listed on this 200 page plus index were valid at the time they were written and may have since been updated or become outdated.

6. The Bulletin is normally published on the 1st and 15th of each month. To aid in continued receipt of Bulletin availability notices, recommend enter the email addree raoemo@sbcglobal.net into your address book. If you do not receive a Bulletin check either www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html (PDF Edition), www.veteransresources.org (PDF & HTML Editions), <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> (PDF & HTML Editions), or <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions) before sending me an email asking if one was published. If you can access the Bulletin at any of the aforementioned sites it indicates that something is preventing you from receiving my email. Either your server considers it to be spam or I have somehow incorrectly entered or removed your addree from the mailing list. Send me an email so I can verify your entry on the validated mailing list. If you are unable to access the Bulletin at any of these sites let me know.

7. Articles within the Bulletin are editorialized information obtained from over 100 sources. At the end of each article is provided the primary source from which it was obtained. The ++ indicates that that the information was reformatted from the original source and/or editorialized from more than one source. Because of the number of articles contained in each Bulletin there is no why that I can attest to their validity other than they have all been taken from previously reliable sources. My staff consist of only one person (myself) and it is a 7/10-12 endeavor to prepare and publish. Readers who question the validity of content are encouraged to go to the source provided to have their questions answered. I am always open to comments but, as a policy, shy away from anything political. Too controversial and time consuming.

8. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin to other vets or veteran organizations.

== To subscribe first add the RAO email addree raoemo@sbcglobal.net to your address book and/or white list. Then send to this addree your full name plus either the post/branch/chapter number of the fraternal military/government organization you are currently affiliated with (if any) "AND/OR" the city and state/country you reside in so your addree can be properly positioned in the directory for future recovery. Subscription is open at no cost to all veterans, dependents, military/veteran support organizations, and media.

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RAO Bulletin Editor/Publisher:

Lt. James (EMO) Tichacek, USN (Ret) Tel: (858) 842-1111 Email: raoemo@sbcglobal.net
Bulletin Web Access: <http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html>, <http://www.veteransresources.org>, <http://frabr245.org>, and <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> [PDF & HTML Editions w/ATTACHMENTS]

RAO Baguio Director:

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
FPO Mail Pickup: TUE & THUR 09-1100 --- Outgoing Mail Closeout: THUR 1100

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