

# RAO

# BULLETIN

# 1 MAY 2019



## PDF Edition

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1. The page number on which an article can be found is provided to the left of each article's title
2. Numbers contained within brackets [ ] indicate the number of articles written on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net).
3. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin to other vets or veteran organizations.

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- Attachment – Massachusetts Vet State Benefits
- Attachment – Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 MAY (Updated)
- Attachment – WW2 Operation Vengeance



**Transgender Troops Update 23 ► Medical Association Blasts Military's Transgender Policy**

A Trump administration regulation set to go into effect 12 APR bars transgender people from the military unless they "correct those deficiencies," a description the American Medical Association said 11 APR is unfair and defies science. The AMA told The Associated Press the policy and its wording mischaracterizes transgender people as having a "deficiency." It said it also objects to the Defense Department classifying the need to transition to another gender among "administratively disqualifying conditions" that include those the Pentagon has labeled as "congenital or developmental defects." The new regulation strips transgender troops of rights they only recently secured under the Obama administration to serve openly and receive care if they choose to transition to another gender.

The Defense Department said its use of the words "deficiencies" is military lingo for when an individual fails to meet standards to maintain a lethal force. It is not a reference to gender dysphoria, a condition of extreme distress from not identifying with one's biological gender, Lt. Col. Carla Gleason said. The department says transgender people can serve if they remain in their biological sex. "The only thing deficient is any medical science behind this decision," American Medical Association President Dr. Barbara L. McAneny said. Decorated Army helicopter pilot Lindsey Muller was a plaintiff in one of four lawsuits that tried to block the policy from taking effect. But the final legal injunction was lifted in March, though new legal challenges are expected. Muller said she and other transgender troops feel demoralized. "Under our ethical standards, we can't say anything derogatory against the administration, while we are being presented in a disparaging and derogatory light," said Muller, 37, who is based in Fort Carson, Colorado. Mountains west of Fort Carson, Colo.

Troops like Muller, who began openly identifying as a woman in 2016, are worried they will be discharged. The administration says it will not boot current service members who transitioned before the Pentagon issued its directive, though the government has also said it retains the right to eliminate that protection. Muller said the policy will cost the armed forces far more in terms of losing experienced personnel like herself and training replacements than any costs associated with specialized health care for trans service members. She plans to retire from the military next year after serving 20 years.

Under the new policy, a service member can be discharged based on a diagnosis of gender dysphoria if he or she is "unable or unwilling to adhere to all applicable standards, including the standards associated with his or her biological sex, or seeks transition to another gender." Gender Dysphoria is described by the American Psychiatric Association as "a conflict between a person's physical or assigned gender and the gender with which he/she/they identify." It does allow people to enlist with a diagnosis of gender dysphoria who have doctor certification they have remained stable in their biological sex for 36 months. People who have medically transitioned their sex are disqualified from service.

It said the discharge should come after an individual "has been formally counseled on his or her failure to adhere to such standards and has been given an opportunity to correct those deficiencies." The policy calls for troops diagnosed with gender dysphoria to be medically evaluated before discharging them to see if they qualify as having a disability. Otherwise gender dysphoria can be considered a "condition that interferes with military service" like sleep walking, bed wetting, motion sickness, and personality disorders.

"They can dress it up in whatever words they want, but when you carefully look at this it's total disrespect for these human beings by saying a core piece of them is not acceptable," former acting U.S. Army Surgeon General Gale Pollock said. Pollock signed a statement with three former U.S. surgeons general and two former military surgeons general, saying they are "troubled by the Defense Department's characterization of the need to undergo gender transition as a 'deficiency,' and by the addition of gender dysphoria to official lists of 'congenital or developmental defects' that include bed-wetting and 'disturbances of perception, thinking, emotional control, or behavior.'"

An estimated 14,700 troops identify as transgender. Military chiefs testified before Congress last year that they found no problems with transgender troops on morale or unit cohesion. Many have received medals since the armed forces welcomed them in 2016. Transgender troops say the regulation mirrors the "don't ask, don't tell" policy that prohibited gay men and women from serving openly in the armed forces before Congress repealed it in 2010. [Source: The Associated Press | Julie Watson & David Crary | April 14, 2019 ++]

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## **Feres Doctrine Update 13 ► Congressional Hearing on DoD Malpractice Rules Change**

House lawmakers will hear directly from the victims of military medical mistakes next week in a hearing looking at whether Congress should consider changing the rules regarding malpractice cases against the Department of Defense.

Among those scheduled to testify at the hearing on 30 APR are Sgt. 1st Class **Richard Stayskal**, a Green Beret fighting stage four lung cancer because of Army doctors errors, and the widow of Air Force Staff Sgt. **Dean Patrick Witt**, who was left in a vegetative state after a botched appendectomy surgery. Natalie Khawam, an attorney for Stayskal, said the 37-year-old father of two is in considerable pain daily but will appear before the House Armed Services Committee to “show that there needs to be accountability for these doctors.”

At issue is a 1950 Supreme Court decision called the Feres doctrine which lower courts have cited repeatedly to block troops from claiming medical malpractice damages for actions related to their military service. Defense advocates have argued that changing the precedent would prompt a flood of frivolous lawsuits against the military. But critics of the doctrine say the ruling has been applied far beyond issues of troops facing war-related injuries or on-duty accidents, and deprived military families of compensation for negligence and carelessness.

In Stayskal’s case, Army doctors overlooked a tumor in lungs in early 2017, allowing it to grow rapidly in ensuing months. By the time his cancer was properly diagnosed, doctors told him they could not treat the illness, and gave him only a few months to live. Khawam, who runs the Whistleblower Law Firm, said his family has been unable to sue for damages and to censure the military doctors involved because of the Feres doctrine. The same mistakes in a civilian hospital would face no such legal obstacles. “ISIS couldn’t kill this guy, but our medical system is,” Khawam said.

In Witt’s case, a nurse inserted a breathing tube into his esophagus instead of his airway, depriving his brain of oxygen. The nurse surrendered her medical license, but the family was blocked from receiving any damages because of the Feres doctrine. Military officials did not return requests for comment on the malpractice accusations.

Lawmakers in both the House and Senate have said they want a fix to that complete shutdown of legal cases against problematic military physicians. Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) and chairwoman of the House Armed Services personnel subcommittee, has said the issue is one of her top legislative priorities for this year. Also scheduled to testify at the hearing are former Air Force Judge Advocate Rebecca Lipe and Dwight Stirling, chief executive officer of the Center for Law and Military Policy. The hearing is scheduled to begin at 2 p.m. on 30 APR and will be streamed online at the committee’s web site. <https://armedservices.house.gov>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 22, 2019 ++]

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## **Cyber Defense Update 03 ► Cyberattack on Japan Could be Regarded as an “Armed Attack”**

Top American and Japanese officials said 19 APR that a cyberattack on Japan could be regarded as an “armed attack” requiring a response by the United States under a joint security treaty binding the two allies. “The United States and Japan affirmed that international law applies in cyberspace and that a cyberattack could, in certain circumstances, constitute an armed attack under Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty,” said U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo during a news conference in Washington, D.C. Pompeo had met with his Japanese counterpart, Foreign Minister Taro Kono, along with U.S. acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan and Japan Defense Minister Takeshi Iwaya, as part of the U.S.-Japan 2+2 Ministerial Meeting. “We stressed the need to work together to protect classified information, maintain technological superiority, and preserve our shared defense and economic advantages from theft and exploitation,” Pompeo said.

The United States is obligated under Article 5 to help Japan defend its territories in the case of an armed attack. The issue of mutual defense has been in the forefront in recent years as China and Japan routinely clash over sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands, a group of uninhabited isles in the East China Sea west of Okinawa. In 2013, China announced it was instituting an air defense identification zone over part of the East China Sea, including the Diaoyu Islands, which is China’s name for the Senkakus. Japan and the United States have ignored the designation.

Japanese officials had been recently pressing the United States to broaden the scope of Article 5 to include cyberattacks, according to Japanese media reports earlier this year. Iwaya told reporters that the inclusion of

cyberattacks was “significant from the perspective of deterrence.” “Not just China, but different countries are pursuing superiority in technologies that back up the capability in new domains such as space and cyber and electromagnetic spectrum,” Iwaya said. “So, during this 2+2 meeting, we agreed that it is quite important to cooperate in the cross-domain capability building. And this alignment in our direction will be the foundation of our alliance going forward, specifically in the cyberspace.”

The officials said they had not yet begun discussing a possible increase in how much money Japan spends to support U.S. military personnel stationed in the country. Shanahan said the discussions had instead focused on how the two nations could “operationalize” their forces. “The defense minister talked about some of the basic building blocks, but our multiple conversations – and this isn’t the first conversation – is how do we really develop capability in the cyber and space domain, because it’s an area where we’re not limited by geography. And the capabilities industrially and militarily are very complementary.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Wyatt Olson | April 19, 2019 ++]

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### **Nuclear Weapons Update 03 ► Trump Stops U.S. Stockpile Size Disclosures**

The Trump administration has halted, without explanation, the recent U.S. government practice of disclosing the current size of the nuclear weapons stockpile. The decision was revealed in a recent Department of Energy letter to the Federation of American Scientists, a private group that studies nuclear weapons issues and advocates for government openness on national security issues. The Obama administration, in May 2010, had declassified for the first time the full history of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile from its beginning in 1945. It revealed that the warhead total stood at 5,113 as of Sept. 30, 2009, approximately the number that private experts had estimated and about 84 percent below the official peak number of 31,255 warheads in 1967.

As recently as last year, the Trump administration had disclosed that the stockpile consisted of 3,822 nuclear warheads as of Sept. 30, 2017, down 196 warheads from the year before. The 2017 figure was made public in response to a request by the scientists group, which asked for a 2018 update last October.

"After careful consideration ... it was determined that the requested information cannot be declassified at this time," the Energy Department wrote in a 5 APR letter responding to the federation's request. The department provided no explanation for the decision, which it said was made by the Formerly Restricted Data Declassification Working Group, consisting of officials from the departments of Defense and Energy. "Formerly Restricted Data" is a category of classification that pertains to information such as nuclear stockpile quantities, warhead yields and locations. The Russian government does not disclose its nuclear stockpile total. The Federation of American Scientists estimates Russia has about 4,350.

Nuclear warheads are attached to bombs and missiles, such as those carried by strategic bomber aircraft, ballistic missile submarines and land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, which form the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Hans M. Kristensen, director of the federation's Nuclear Information Project, wrote in an analysis 17 APR that the decision against disclosing the 2018 nuclear stockpile number was "unnecessary and counterproductive." In his view there is no national security rationale for keeping the number secret.

"The decision walks back nearly a decade of U.S. nuclear weapons transparency policy — in fact, longer if including stockpile transparency initiatives in the late-1990s," Kristensen wrote. "With this decision," he added, "the Trump administration surrenders any pressure on other nuclear-armed states to be more transparent about the size of their nuclear weapon stockpiles. This is curious since the Trump administration had repeatedly complained about secrecy in the Russian and Chinese arsenals. Instead, it now appears to endorse their secrecy." The Pentagon did not respond Wednesday to a request for comment. [Source: The Associated Press | Robert Burns | April 17, 2019 ++]

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## Commissary Alcohol Sales Update 02 ► No Decision on Which Stores Will Sell Next

Commissary officials will likely change, expand and test the assortments of beer and wine in the first 12 stores that currently sell it, before making any decisions about which stores will see the libations next. But while there might be more of a selection, that doesn't mean the amounts will dramatically increase. As one industry source put it, there's only so much shelf space available in commissary stores, and they're not going to take out baby food and diapers to make room for beer and wine. No decisions have yet been made about which stores will sell the libations next, according to Rick Brink, a spokesman for the Defense Commissary Agency.

So far, the commissary introduction of beer and wine isn't bringing a massive increase in sales. Cumulative beer and wine sales for the 12 commissaries from the start on July 23, through April 6 were \$717,005, according to Brink. That includes \$329,419 worth of beer and \$387,586 worth of wine. The dollar value of wine sales is increasingly outpacing beer sales. The number of transactions is not available. The selections have been purposely kept small at the 12 stores, and are being culled and changed, said one industry source. Beer and wine sales are expected to be rolled out slowly to other stores, he said, as officials evaluate the initial sales, and remain sensitive to the needs of customers, and the military services' desires to deglamorize alcohol. As commissaries have started selling beer and wine, they were implementing measures that promote the responsible use of alcohol.

One industry source said the Fort Myer, Va., store has the best sales of all 12 stores. Although its selection is the smallest, its placement near the meat section is key, he said. "It's all about where you put it, and how you stage it." Distilled spirits are not included in this effort. Commissary prices for beer and wine are comparable to the prices in military exchanges, which also have bigger selections. These sales began as the result of a memo signed April 27, 2018 by Robert Wilkie, who was then under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness. He said the move would increase customer satisfaction and convenience, and move the commissaries more in line with commercial grocery store practices.

Until then, commissaries hadn't been allowed to sell beer and wine, aside from some limited tests in the past. Retail sales of beer and wine were limited to the military exchanges, and there has been concern that selling it in commissaries could shift sales from the exchanges, and reduce the amount of money contributed in dividends to morale, welfare and recreation programs. So far, the sales haven't matched the 2015 predictions of the Boston Consulting Group. Its "Military Resale Study" estimated that if the commissaries introduced beer and wine, the overall amount of beer and wine bought in commissaries and exchanges combined would increase by 46 percent. But for these stores, the sales are flat, increasing the overall take by 0.9 percent, factoring in just those 12 commissaries and the exchanges at those installations, according to one source. The stores selling beer and wine now are:

- California -- Twentynine Palms, Port Hueneme,
- Missouri -- Fort Leonard Wood
- Nevada -- Nellis Air Force Base
- New Jersey -- Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Station (part of Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst)
- New Mexico -- White Sands Missile Range
- South Carolina -- Shaw Air Force Base
- Tennessee -- Arnold Air Force Base
- Texas -- Fort Sam Houston (part of Joint Base San Antonio)
- Virginia -- Fort Myer (part of Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall), Little Creek (part of Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story), and Quantico Marine Corps Base

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | April 16 2019| ++]

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## Commissary/Exchange Merger Update 04 ► Scrutiny of Merger Proposal Requested

Military and veterans' organizations have asked Congress to increase oversight of a Pentagon proposal to merge the commissary and exchange systems, asking for a review by government auditors and congressional hearings. The Military Coalition, a group of 27 organizations that represent 5.5 million active-duty personnel, veterans and family members, asked House and Senate Armed Services committees leaders in March to pay attention to the proposal, which would consolidate the three exchange systems and some Defense Commissary Agency functions.

Earlier this year, a task force drafted a business case analysis supporting that the Army and Air Force Exchange System, Navy Exchange and Marine Corps Exchange consolidate to streamline store operations. It also recommended that certain store functions of commissaries could be managed by the same organization, with certain grocery functions remaining separate. The report concluded that the merger would cost \$500 million in implementation, but would save an estimated \$700 million to \$1.3 billion in the first five years. Under the plan, the commissary and exchange stores would look the same to the consumer, but back office and other functions would be joined under a single umbrella organization.

Military Coalition members said they aren't opposed to the idea but urged caution in implementing changes to what they described as a "fragile military community ecosystem that may impact other important programs." "We are very concerned that proposals to merge the various elements of the defense resale system may pose a threat to its continued viability and request further study and oversight by Congress," stated The Military Coalition letter, signed by the organizations' chiefs. The group wants the Government Accountability Office to review the proposal and called for hearings so that interested parties could "express their concerns." The Defense Department can merge the exchange systems without congressional approval. To combine them with portions of the commissary system, however, would require new legislation.

The task force's business case has been approved by Lisa Hershman, DoD's acting chief management officer but must also be approved by Acting Deputy Secretary of Defense David Norquist and, if the commissary provisions are included, Congress. By law, even if Norquist approves the exchange consolidation, the Pentagon cannot implement a merger until 1 OCT.

The military services have had mixed reviews over the proposal. The Army and Air Force concurred with the task force findings. The Navy, which initially balked at the plan, reluctantly concurred, adding that its leadership thinks the task force overstated the estimated amount of savings and length of time for the consolidation. The military and veterans groups said that if the services' concerns are accurate, the system "may be unable to provide the services (low cost groceries and support for MWR programs) relied on by service members, their families and survivors."

In developing its business case analysis, the task force aimed to find efficiencies in the system while preserving profits generated by exchanges to continue supporting Morale, Welfare and Recreational activities. Members also sought to protect commissary savings, which are estimated to be nearly 24% for shoppers compared with commercial supermarkets. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | April 11, 2019 ++]

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## DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 30 APR 2019

**Honolulu, HI** -- A Kauai woman who worked as a travel clerk for the Navy has been sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison for defrauding the U.S. government of nearly \$365,000 in 333 fraudulent transactions.. The U.S. attorney's office says **Rowenalynn Yorkman** was sentenced last week. As part of Yorkman's job she tracked and reviewed personnel travel claims. Prosecutors say she used a co-worker's account to enter false information and create fraudulent voucher amendments for expenses travelers didn't incur. She then approved the voucher amendments for

payment into her own bank account. Yorkman must pay back the nearly \$365,000 stolen and serve an additional three years of supervised release. [Source: The Associated Press| April 14, 2019 ++]

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**Camp Bullis, TX** -- Prosecutors say a soldier who stole tons of used brass shell casings from a South Texas reserve unit and sold the items to a recycler must serve nearly three years in federal prison. Army Reserve Sgt. 1st Class Darryle **Robert Bankhead** was sentenced 22 APR in San Antonio to 33 months and must repay nearly \$118,000. Bankhead in December pleaded guilty to conspiracy to steal government property. Investigators say Bankhead, during 2017 and 2018, stole expended brass shell casings from Camp Bullis in San Antonio and forged documents authorizing the sale. Prosecutors say Bankhead told reserve officials that he planned to recycle the brass at another military facility, but instead used a commercial recycler and kept the cash. One transaction involved about 2½ tons (1.81 metric tons) of stolen shell brass. [Source: The Associated Press | April 23, 2019 ++]

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## Selective Service System Update 29 ► The Case for Keeping Military Draft Registration

A federal judge in Texas ruled last month that exempting women from the Selective Service violates the Constitution's equal protection principles. However, the controversy over whether women should be required to register for Selective Service overlooks a more critical issue, namely, whether we even still need to continue draft registration, or Selective Service, 46 years after the end of conscription and the creation of the all-volunteer force (AVF), during which time we have never used it. When the AVF was created, it had three components.

- First, it established a comparatively small active-duty force because, unlike in the draft era, which had existed for over 30 years, the military would now have to pay market wages to recruit and retain qualified women and men volunteers, thus forcing the cost per person in the military to rise dramatically. (In FY2019 the average cost per service member was approximately \$125,000 per year. Even adjusting for inflation, this is 64 percent higher than it was 20 years ago.)
- Second, an operational reserve component that was trained, equipped, and ready enough that it could be activated quickly to effectively supplement the smaller active force.
- Third, a Selective Service System that could be activated in case the combination of active and reserve units could not handle a military conflict in an efficient and effective manner, without putting too much strain on the existing force of volunteers. This Selective Service System was intended to provide a draft-ready list of potential soldiers in case the AVF needed to be augmented by drafting young people into involuntary service.



Rep. Alexander Pirnie, R-N.Y., reaches into the bowl to draw the first date in the draft lottery held at Selective Service Headquarters in Washington on Dec. 2, 1969, for the war in Vietnam. Looking on, from left: Col. W.P. Averill, Gen. Lewis Hershey, and Col. Daniel Omer.

From the beginning of the AVF, the Selective Service System was criticized for being unnecessary and wasteful. President Ford actually cancelled it in 1975. However, President Carter re-instituted it in 1980 when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. But in the 1980 campaign, Ronald Reagan pledged he would cancel it again because it was an unnecessary and wasteful program.

In Lawrence J. Korb's first year serving as an assistant secretary of defense for President Reagan, he was given the task of developing the case for the president to renege on his campaign promise. At a Cabinet meeting on December 1981, almost all of the president's advisers, particularly the head of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Attorney General (AG) urged the president to keep his campaign promise and abolish the Selective Service System. OMB was concerned about wasting money (about \$20 million a year) and the AG did not want to devote scarce resources prosecuting those men who failed or refused to register. The secretary of state, Alexander Haig, argued that we should abolish the AVF and re-institute the draft.

Korb made the argument for keeping the Selective Service System in case we needed it not only to deal with a conflict with the Soviet Union, but more likely a long-running regional war that caused a strain on the comparatively small volunteer force. To the surprise of many, President Reagan decided to keep Selective Service. Although we maintained Selective Service through the Cold War and the downsizing of our military, we did not use it when we should have — during the nearly 20 years of conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq — and the consequences for the military and the nation have been disastrous. We were unable to keep sufficient forces in Afghanistan after our 2001 invasion because of the invasion of Iraq, and, as a result, the Taliban were able to regroup.

The mindless, needless, senseless invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 was initially supported by most of the so-called foreign policy blob. However, when it became clear that the invasion was carried out under false pretenses and without sufficient troops or an effective strategy, support among the American people for the invasion dropped precipitously. Consequently, the ability to recruit and retain quality people — especially for the Army and Marines — decreased markedly. As such, to meet their recruiting and retention goals, they lowered their standards for enlistment, giving tens of thousands of moral waivers, even for felonies.

Among them was Bowe Bergdahl, who had been thrown out of the Coast Guard for mental health problems, and Chelsea Manning, who was deployed to Iraq after flunking basic training. Bergdahl walked off his military outpost in Afghanistan, was captured by the Taliban and was only returned in exchange for five Taliban detainees held at Guantanamo. During her time in Iraq, Manning provided troves of classified documents to WikiLeaks. Moreover, there were not enough ground forces to allow the men and women to receive sufficient time at home between deployments. (Troops should spend at least two days at home for every day in a combat zone. Most were lucky to get one.) Finally, the service of thousands of soldiers and Marines was extended involuntarily by invoking "Stop Loss," in effect a back-door draft.

These problems could and should have been solved by activating Selective Service no later than 2002 when it became clear that Bush was intent on invading Iraq, even as it was still engaged in Afghanistan. Supporters of that war knew that if Selective Service was activated the American people would have skin in the game and would therefore ask a lot more questions. Today, it is difficult to imagine a situation in which the public would support drafting young people without significantly more scrutiny of the goals of engagement.

This — rather than those who should or should not register — is the real issue. If we did not activate Selective Service when we were involved in two significant and protracted conflicts, when will we do so? And if we did, how useful would a mass database of potential soldiers be when our military is increasingly reliant on highly specialized skills? Given these foreseeable drawbacks, why spend tens of billions of dollars maintaining this system that now has a base of 80 million men between the ages of 18 to 25? And why did the administration of George W. Bush allow the members of the AVF to bear such an unfair burden that will impact them negatively for the rest of their lives? President Reagan is rolling over in his grave. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Larry Korb | April 22, 2019 ++]

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## **Background Investigations ► Responsibility Shift From OPM to DOD's DCSA**

The Department of Defense will have full responsibility for conducting background investigations of federal employees and contractors, under an executive order signed by President Donald Trump 24 APR. The Trump administration has long telegraphed the transfer, as background investigations for DoD personnel were already assigned to the Pentagon under the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal 2018, and officials maintained that transferring the whole process to one agency would be more efficient.

“Implementing that legislative mandate while retaining the benefit of economies of scale in addressing the federal government's background investigations workload, avoiding unnecessary risk, promoting the ongoing alignment of efforts with respect to vetting federal employees and contractors, and facilitating needed reforms in this critical area requires that the primary responsibility for conducting background investigations government-wide be transferred from the Office of Personnel Management to the Department of Defense,” Trump wrote in the executive order. The order also mandates that the Defense Security Service, which began the process of taking over security clearance IT systems from the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) in March, change its name to the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA).

According to the order, the change requires that “no later than 24 JUN, the DCSA shall serve as the primary entity for conducting effective, efficient and secure background investigations for the federal government for determining whether covered individuals are or continue to be eligible for access to classified information or eligible to hold a sensitive position.”

The federal government has long struggled with a security clearance investigation backlog, which was listed on the Government Accountability Office's list of systems most susceptible to fraud, waste and abuse. The Trump administration has previously listed the transfer of background investigation services away from the Office of Personnel Management's National Background Investigation Bureau to the DoD as the beginning of breaking apart OPM entirely into other agencies. The move has drawn criticism from federal employee groups as an attempt to politicize the civil service.

Trump's executive order also places the responsibility for background investigation IT systems in the hands of the secretary of defense, who will be required to oversee work to “design, develop, deploy, operate, secure, defend, and continuously update and modernize” such systems. DoD and OPM leadership will also be responsible for coordinating the transition of operations, including the designation of background investigation personnel to the Pentagon. [Source: FederalTimes | Jessie Bur | April 24, 2019 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials ► Reported 16 thru 30 APR 2019 | Ten**

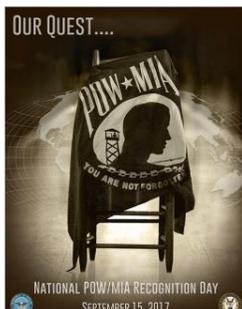
“Keeping the Promise“, “Fulfill their Trust” and “No one left behind” are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century as of FEB 2019 are: World War II 73,025 of which over 41,000 are presumed to be lost at sea, Korean War 7665, Vietnam War 1589 (i.e. VN-1,246, Laos-288, Cambodia-48, & Peoples Republic of China territorial waters-7), Cold War 111, 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 <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Year/2019> for a listing and details of those accounted for in 2019. 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 Pfc. Raymond H. Middlekauff**, of Baltimore, Md. In late 1944, Middlekauff was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, which was engaged against German forces near the town of Grosschau in Germany's Hürtgen Forest. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 4, 1944. Interment services are pending. [Read about Middlekauff here.](#)

-- **Army Capt. Rufus J. Hyman**, 23, of Memphis, Tenn., was an infantry officer with Company A, 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, which was engaged against the North Korean People's Army in the vicinity of Kwonbin-ni, South Korea. He was declared missing in action on July 30, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hyman here.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Carlos E. Ferguson**, 20, of Dawson, W.Va., will be buried May 18 in nearby Grassy Meadows. Ferguson, whose identification was announced in February, was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, engaged against North Korean and Chinese forces near Kangye, South Korea, from May 16-20, 1951. Ferguson was reported missing in action on May 18, 1951. [Read about Ferguson here.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Dale W. Ross** was a member of Company E, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, who was reported missing in action on Jan. 14, 1943, following a patrol on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. A search was conducted but his remains were not found. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Ross here.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Dewey W. Harris** was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, who was reported missing in action on Nov. 14, 1944, after fierce combat in the Hürtgen Forest, near the

German village. Due to ongoing combat operations and extensive land mines throughout the forest, American forces were unable to search for him. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Harris here.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. John W. Hayes** was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 335th Infantry Regiment, 84th Infantry Division, who was killed in action on Jan. 4, 1945, when a German tank round struck his foxhole near Mâgôster, Belgium. Following the war, American graves registration teams had no record of Hayes' remains being recovered or buried. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Hayes here.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Harold K. Costill** was assigned to the battleship USS West Virginia, which sustained multiple torpedo hits as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack resulted in the deaths of 106 crewmen, including Costill. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Costill here.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Ray H. Myers** was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which capsized after sustaining multiple torpedo hits as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Myers. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Myers here.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Ernest R. West**, 22, of Runnells, Iowa, was stationed aboard the battleship USS Oklahoma when it sustained multiple torpedo hits and capsized as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including West. Interment services are pending. [Read about West here.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Richard J. Thomson**, 19, of League City, Texas, was stationed aboard the battleship USS Oklahoma when it sustained multiple torpedo hits and capsized as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmembers, including Thomson. Interment services are pending. [Read about Thomson here.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | April 30, 2019 ++]

\* VA \*



## **VA Appeals Status Tracker** ► **How to check the Status of Your Claim**

Knowing what stage of the appeals process your claim is in can help you avoid missing deadlines and better understand how the VA claims and appeals process works. Generally, there are eight steps that disability claims follow:

- 1) Claim Received. Your claim is moved to this stage once it has been received by VA.
- 2) Under Review. A Veterans Service Representative is reviewing your claim to determine if there is a need for additional evidence. This includes the results of your Compensation and Pension Exam, which VA will schedule.
- 3) Gathering of Evidence. If the Veterans Service Representative deems that your claim requires additional evidence, he or she will request it from the appropriate sources.
- 4) Review of Evidence. All evidence is received and is under review.
- 5) Preparation for Decision. At this stage, the Veterans Service Representative has recommended a decision and is preparing documents detailing that decision.

- 6) Pending Decision Approval. The Veterans Service Representative's decision is reviewed, and a decision is made.
- 7) Preparation for Notification. Your decision is being prepared for mailing.
- 8) Complete. The award or decision is sent to you via U.S. mail, along with the details surrounding this decision.

VA allows veterans to track the progress of their claims throughout the claim stream in three ways:

- By visiting a local VA regional office;
- By calling VA's national toll-free phone number at 800-827-1000;
- Or by logging into gov and using VA's appeals tracker.

### **Online VA Appeals Status Tool**

VA has created its online appeal status tracker in an attempt to improve transparency and allow veterans easier access to their appeal's status. VA describes this tool as easy to use and provides accessible information to veterans. To use this tool, veterans can sign into vets.gov using:

- DS Logon, which is the same logon as your eBenefits account;
- My HealtheVet account;
- ID me account.

If you do not yet have a login, create an ID me account at <https://api.id.me/en/registration/new>. Once you are logged in, select the "Check your claim and appeal status" option to access the appeals tracker tool. The main page entitled "Your Compensation Appeals and Claims" will show the type of claim that is under appeal (e.g. Appeal of Compensation Decision), the date you received the claim decision, the appeal's status (e.g. a Decision Review Officer is reviewing your appeal), the issues on appeal (e.g. increased rating), and a "View Status" option that will lead you to detailed information about your appeal.

On the "View Status" page, veterans can view the current status of their appeal followed by a description of what happens during the next step of the process (e.g. The Board will make a decision). On this screen, you may also select "See past events" which displays a timeline of events that have already occurred throughout your appeal process. Below this timeline, you will see the "Current Status" of your appeal. If your appeal stage requires action, an alert box will be highlighted in yellow under this portion of the webpage. This section will describe what action must be taken in order to continue on with your appeal and the date by which it must be completed. For example, if a veteran recently received a Statement of the Case, this section will instruct the veteran to submit a VA Form 9 within 60 days of receiving it and provide the deadline.

The "What happens next?" feature will display a projected wait time for reaching the next step in the appeal process. Using the same example as mentioned above, the "What happens next?" section will show an estimate of when your case will be transferred to The Board if you do not submit new evidence with your VA Form 9. In this case, a timeline of two events will be provided because veterans are able to submit new evidence in support of their claim at this stage. If you did submit new evidence, you will subsequently receive another Statement of the Case, called a Supplemental Statement of the Case, and a new projected timeframe.

Once your appeal has been certified to the Board, you will be able to see a progress bar beneath "What happens next?" showing where your appeal is on the Board's docket. This progress bar shows the total number of appeals on the docket, and the number of appeals ahead of you. Although you are able to see the progress of your docket number, no time estimate is provided here as the Board is not required to adhere to any deadlines.

At the top of the page, there is a tab entitled "Issues" where you are able to see what issues are currently on appeal and previous issues that have been closed whether they were granted, denied, or withdrawn. If you need assistance during any point of the appeal process, do not hesitate to contact a VA-accredited claims agent, Veteran Service Organization, or VA-accredited attorney. [Source: Chisholm Chisholm & Kilpatrick LTD | July 5, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Disability Review ► Frequently Requested to Check Severity of Disabilities**

A thorough review of disability examinations is often requested by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to check on the severity of a previously rated service-connected disability. VA staff use review exams, and any other relevant evidence, to assess the current severity of a disability and, if possible, reduce the initial rating assigned. VA regulations point out specific timelines for “examination checks,” but, it is not a hard and fast rule, and, oftentimes, ignored by VA personnel. But, rest assured, it will happen at some point. By law, VA should and will request a review exam under the following circumstances:

- VA needs to assess the severity of a disability;
- Additional or more relevant evidence indicates there has been an important and significant (or material) change in a disability; or
- Because of law, VA personnel are required to conduct a periodic review.

### **The Examination Process**

Oftentimes, a contracted medical professional or VA medical professional will conduct the disability review exam. The medical examiners and staff will not answer specific questions about benefits, pension program or compensation. Nor, will they consult with a veteran about the disability compensation process. Acting as a stoic conduit within strict bureaucratic protocol, the medical examiners methodically go through a set of procedures to assess disability conditions. Typically, the examination is conducted in a medically approved facility, with the veteran and medical staff member. In very rare cases, VA personnel may decide that an examination by telephone would be the most appropriate route.

The medical examiner will often conduct the following procedures:

- Ask a veteran questions related to the disability in question;
- Perform a physical exam related to the disability;
- If multiple disability conditions are to be examined the medical examiner will conduct one examine at-a-time;
- Send the veteran for lab work, which may include: blood work, X-rays, MRI, etc.;
- While conducting exam, the medical examiner will pay very close attention to how the veteran reacts to certain procedures;
- At the conclusion of the exam, sometimes the medical examiner is required to go over the veterans medical file with him/her;
- In some instances, if the veteran is accompanied by someone familiar with the disability the veteran is having examined, the medical examiner may ask that person questions related to the disability being examined.

It is important to understand that the medical examiner is not involved in making a rating decision about the disability. The medical examiners’ job is simply to conduct the examination based upon certain set of criteria established by VA. However, the words the examiner uses in describing the examination review, may ultimately affect the thinking of the VA rater and how a disability is to be perceived. The medical examiner may select words and sentence structures that may be perceived in a way that a reduction in compensation benefits is necessary, or that an increase is appropriate or no change at all is necessary.

Based on a thorough review of the disability examined, VA raters may issue a new or updated medical decision and contact the veteran by mail. After the decision has been made, VA will do 1 of 3 possible outcomes:

- The veteran’s disability rating will remain unchanged;
- It was concluded that the disability has worsened and an increase in compensation benefits may be approved. If not approved for an increase it will be annotated in a veteran’s disability file that an increase was not warranted, but the worsening of the disability condition has been recorded and recognized;

- The disability has improved significantly enough that a reduction in compensation benefits may be appropriate at this time.

If a veteran misses a review exam, it may negatively affect the outcome of any potential increase in compensation benefits. The veteran should always call their VA Regional Office (VARO) to reschedule their appointment as soon as reasonably possible once they realize they won't make it to the scheduled review exam. Harsh, but true, if a veteran misses an exam without details as to why, VA may be required by law to propose an immediate reduction in the disability that was to be examined or an immediate termination of compensation benefits for that specific disability.

It's very important that a veteran review exam results as soon as possible. All too often, what is written by the medical examiner differs quite a bit from what the veteran witnessed. For instance, some veterans have reported that the medical examiner indicated that a certain instrument was used during the exam, and the veteran was sure no such instrument was ever used. Checking the accuracy of the medical exam is crucial. Some veterans use the [Post Examination Assessment Form](#) immediately after medical examinations conducted by VA medical staff. In doing so, the veteran has an opportunity to record exam results as he/she remembers them, and the form provides a structured format the way VA personnel like to work with.

Lastly, it is vital to the outcome of any medical examination conducted by VA personnel that the veteran comb over all details of correspondence sent to them related to the medical examination. Addressing any and all issues related to the medical examination is a must. If VA is asking for information, it is very important that a veteran respond to the question as soon as humanly possible. Some veterans may require the help of a certified VSO in interpreting information sent to them by VA personnel. Understanding what a veteran receives from VA is of utmost importance.

[Source: USVCP | June 2018 ++]

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## **VA Women Vet Programs Update 38 ► Text Messaging Call Center | 855-829-6636**

Finding information about VA services for women veterans is now only a text message away thanks to a new feature implemented by the Department of Veteran Affairs. The Women Veterans Call Center is staffed by representatives and available Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. ET and from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. ET on Saturdays. Through the call center, women veterans are linked with female VA employees who can answer questions about topics from benefits, gender-specific care, and even clinic locations nearest you. Even those not enrolled in VA or VA health care can use this number. "By offering new methods of communication, such as texting, we can reach more women veterans and support their health care needs more quickly," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. You don't need to provide any personal information such as your social security number or address through the text messaging feature. The number for the VA's Women Veterans Call Center is 855-829-6636.

[Source: ConnectingVets.com | Kaylah Jackson | April 24, 2019 ++]

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## **VA EHR Update 15 ► Senators Move to Ramp Up Oversight of VA's \$16B Project**

Lawmakers have made it clear that the Department of Veterans Affairs' \$16 billion electronic health records project would be under close scrutiny. This week, two senators took steps to ramp up that oversight of the beleaguered IT initiative. U.S. Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) introduced this week bipartisan legislation (PDF) to establish a third-party oversight committee to help monitor the implementation of the new EHR system. The 11-member EHR advisory committee would be made up of medical professionals, IT and interoperability specialists

and veterans currently receiving care from the VA but would operate separately from the departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense, according to a press release.

The VA signed a \$10 billion deal with Cerner last May to move from the VA's customized Vista platform to an off-the-shelf EHR to align the country's largest health system with the Department of Defense, which has already begun integrating Cerner's MHS Genesis system. "The new electronic health record system is too important to veterans' health care for the VA to get wrong," Tester, the ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, said in a statement. "Our bill will create another layer of accountability and oversight of the process to make sure the VA rollout does right by the 9 million veterans who will rely on this system."

Blackburn said that a crucial part of giving veterans better care is improving the way the DOD and the VA organize their health records. "The EHR Advisory Committee will be entirely devoted to ensuring the implementation and transition is done as smoothly as possible. Comprised of professionals who have experience in the health care field, as well as veterans currently receiving care at the VA, this committee will have the knowledge and expertise to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the VA's services," she said. The committee will be tasked with analyzing the VA's strategy for implementation, developing a risk management plan, touring VA facilities as they transition to the new system and ensuring veterans, VA employees and medical staff and other participants have a voice in the process. The committee also will meet with the VA secretary at least twice a year on their analysis and recommendations for implementation.

Tester and Blackburn said the EHR advisory committee is necessary to help keep the VA on target and transparent on its rollout of the new multibillion-dollar commercial EHR system for 9 million veterans. The VA plans to pilot initial operating capabilities of its new Cerner EHR platform in March 2020 across three sites in the Pacific Northwest. The VA has faced regular hiccups in its development of an EHR system, as revealed in numerous watchdog reports and during congressional hearings.

Lawmakers in both houses of Congress have made it clear that they continue to have concerns about the cost and timeline of the project, as well as ensuring seamless interoperability between the VA and DOD systems and with private sector healthcare providers. The Government Accountability Office has examined the VA's system modernization efforts and found that the department has significant challenges in managing its IT projects and programs. At a recent hearing, a GAO official said the VA's EHR project already is facing serious challenges and the ability of the VA and the DOD to hash out differences between their EHRs would be crucial to the success of the projects.

The VA's EHR project also has been plagued by gaps in leadership. The VA announced an oversight entity, the Office of Electronic Health Record Modernization, back in July. Genevieve Morris, formerly principal deputy national coordinator for health IT at ONC, was tapped for that post, but she resigned two months later. She cited her resignation to differences in opinion over where the project should be heading. The VA has had high turnover in its CIO role, with 10 CIOs since 2004 and six since 2012, according to the GAO. At one point, a top lawmaker tasked with overseeing the VA's EHR effort, Rep. Jim Banks (R-IN), called out the agency's "deteriorating and rudderless" leadership in the wake of two key departures.

In addition, a Politico article last year detailed major failures in the Pentagon's \$4.3 billion Cerner EHR implementation. Military and VA health IT specialists and doctors reported that technical glitches and poor training caused dangerous errors and reduced the number of patients who could be treated, according to that article. Lawmakers have also scrutinized the VA's IT initiatives to support its Community Care initiative following a highly critical report from the U.S. Digital Service about a flawed software tool the VA is building.

[Source: FierceHealthcare | Heather Landi | Apr 19, 2019 ++]

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## VA Privatization Update 17 ► Latest Battleground for Congressional Rising Stars

A pair of prominent freshman lawmakers offered sharply different views about the future of the Department of Veterans Affairs health care this week, bringing the ongoing debate over fears of department privatization to the next generation of elected leaders. The duo — Democratic New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Republican Texas Rep. Dan Crenshaw — have both built national followings since their elections last fall, and recently have sparred directly over social media concerning rhetoric surrounding Muslims and the Sept. 11 attacks. But this week marked each legislator's first focused entry into VA policy discussions, and their comments suggested both will make those issues a key focus in months to come — with very different positions on the issue.



In her home district on 17 APR, Ocasio-Cortez took part in a rally organized by National Nurses United and other advocates who warned that current administration plans are taking the department on a path towards privatization by dramatically expanding community care eligibility for veterans. **“They’re trying to ‘fix’ the VA for pharmaceutical companies, they’re trying to ‘fix’ VA for insurance corporations, and ultimately they’re trying to ‘fix’ the VA for a for-profit health care industry that does not put people or veterans first,”** she told an applauding crowd of advocates who have lobbied against the changes for months. “We have a responsibility to protect (VA). Because if there is any community that deserves Cadillac, first-class health care in the United States of America, it is our military servicemembers and veterans.”

A day later, in his home district, Crenshaw offered the opposite view during discussion held by Concerned Veterans for America (CVA). He insisted the health care moves “are in no way trying to give away VA responsibilities” but instead are helping the department evolve into a modern, more effective health care system for veterans. “There’s a knee jerk reaction in Washington when something isn’t perfect to just add more money, add more personnel, it’ll all be OK,” he said. “That’s not true, especially with complex issues like veterans health care.”

At issue are looming changes to eligibility rules for veterans seeking medical care from private-sector doctors at taxpayer expense. Under the VA Mission Act passed last summer, new standards will be put in place this June that could nearly quadruple the number of veterans who could go outside the federal system for that care. About 600,000 veterans enrolled in VA health care are eligible for the existing community care programs. The proposed expanded standards will raise that number to between 1.5 million and 2.1 million patients, according to the department. Supporters of the change — including CVA — have argued it amounts to providing more choices and more convenient, timely care for veterans. Opponents — including NNU — have called it a way to siphon off VA dollars to private companies, and eventually privatize the government’s responsibility to care for veterans.

Neither Crenshaw, who lost an eye while serving as a Navy SEAL in Afghanistan, nor Ocasio-Cortez, a progressive leader who has already made health care reforms a key point of her congressional focus, sit on the chamber’s veterans policy committee. Neither was in Congress last year when the Mission Act passed. But both are poised to be key voices as the June deadline approaches, and as Democrats try to decide whether they should halt or stall the changes amid lingering concerns from their supporters.

Ocasio-Cortez argued that VA care has been unfairly maligned in recent years, a point that the nurses group and union leaders have emphasized for months. Recent studies have shown that VA wait times are lower than private-sector

options and care quality generally exceeds that of outside clinics. “The entire opening and approach that we have seen when it comes to privatization is the idea that this thing that isn’t broken, this thing that provides some of the highest quality care to our veterans, somehow needs to be fixed, optimized, tinkered with until we don’t even recognize it anymore,” she said. “We believe some things should not be for sale in this country. Caring for our veterans should not be for sale in this country.”

Crenshaw said he has received care at four different VA facilities since his return from the war, but that too often care is inconsistent from location to location. Expanding options for veterans who face longer waits or insufficient expertise is not only a sensible step ahead, he argued, but a duty for the country. “I need the VA to be flexible enough to send me outside for care,” he said. “This is a step in the right direction.”

The debate over the Mission Act changes will return to Capitol Hill later this month, when Crenshaw, Ocasio-Cortez and the rest of the House returns from its April legislative break. Leaders from the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee have already demanded more information from VA on the financial impact of the changes and unfilled health care vacancies within the Veterans Health System. That debate is also likely to shift from the committee’s hearing room to the House floor as the deadline approaches, giving Ocasio-Cortez and Crenshaw another chance to square off on VA issues. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 19, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Privatization Update 18 ► If it Ain't Broke, Don't Fix it**

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) defended the treatment of veterans by the Department of Veterans Affairs during a town hall event in her district last week. The freshman congresswoman said privatization of the VA will not help veterans because of the "for-profit healthcare industry." "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," Ocasio-Cortez, 29, said, insisting the VA provides "some of the highest quality" healthcare for veterans. She said people who advocate for a privatized VA are only trying to fix it in favor of pharmaceutical companies. "Here's the thing, they are trying to fix it. But who are they are trying to fix it for, is the question we gotta ask ...They are trying to fix the VA for pharmaceutical companies, they are trying to fix the VA for insurance corporations, and, ultimately, they are trying to fix the VA for a for-profit healthcare industry that does not put people or veterans first," she said.

Because people are trying to privatize the VA, Ocasio-Cortez said, "We have a responsibility to protect it." Calls to privatize the VA were heightened after news broke of secret waiting lists, which delayed many veterans' care, in 2014. For instance, CNN reported at least 40 people died waiting for time-sensitive care because of the lists at the Phoenix Veterans Affairs Health Care system. The Nation reported the socialist Democrat said the main problem with the department is that it is understaffed. "If we really want to fix the VA so badly, let's start hiring, and fill up some of those 49,000 [staff] vacancies," she said, adding the VA would be a blueprint if "Medicare for all" were to pass: "If you ask me, I would like VA for all." [Source: Washington Examiner | Julio Rosas | April 22, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Vet Choice Update 84 ► Program Eligibility Mileage Change**

Many veterans are unaware of recent VA changes to policies, programs and procedures that have a major effect on their benefits. For instance, to expand eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program, VA will determine eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program based on the distance between a veteran’s place of residence and the nearest VA medical facility using driving distance rather than straight-line distance. This change has been published in the Federal Register for reference if needed. The change from straight-line to driving distance roughly doubles the number of eligible veterans eligible for the program. VA sent letters to the newly eligible veterans to let them know they are now eligible for the Veterans Choice Program under this new expansion policy. If a veteran does not remember receiving a Veterans

Choice Card or has other questions about the Choice Program, they can call 866-606-8198. Additionally, VA changed the mileage calculation for beneficiary travel. The change will ensure consistency in VA's mileage calculations across the two programs. For clarification of VA changes, veterans are advised to contact their Veterans Service Officer (VSO) or local VAMC. [Source: USVCP | August 31, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Women Vet Programs Update 37 ► What's Available at Your VAMC**

At each VA Medical Center nationwide, a Women Veterans Program Manager is designated to advise and advocate for women Veterans. She can help coordinate all the services you may need, from primary care to specialized care for chronic conditions or reproductive health. Woman Veterans who are interested in receiving care at VA should contact the nearest VA Medical Center and ask for the Women Veterans Program Manager. VA health care for women Veterans includes:

### **Primary Care**

- General care includes health evaluation and counseling, disease prevention, nutrition counseling, weight control, smoking cessation, and substance abuse counseling and treatment as well as gender-specific primary care, e.g., cervical cancer screens (Pap smears), breast cancer screens (mammograms), birth control, preconception counseling, Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, menopausal support (hormone replacement therapy).
- Mental health includes evaluation and assistance for issues such as depression, mood, and anxiety disorders; intimate partner and domestic violence; sexual trauma; elder abuse or neglect; parenting and anger management; marital, caregiver, or family-related stress; and post-deployment adjustment or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Military Sexual Trauma (MST). Women—and men as well—may experience repeated sexual harassment or sexual assault during their military service. Special services are available to women who have experienced MST. VA provides free, confidential counseling and treatment for mental and physical health conditions related to MST. Go to <https://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/trauma.asp> for more on this subject.

### **Specialty Care**

- Management and screening of chronic conditions includes heart disease, diabetes, cancer, glandular disorders, osteoporosis, and fibromyalgia as well as sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis.
- Reproductive health care includes maternity care, infertility evaluation and limited treatment; sexual problems, tubal ligation, urinary incontinence, and others. VA is prohibited by legislative authority from providing abortion services.
- Rehabilitation, homebound, and long-term care. VA referrals are given to those in need of rehabilitation therapies such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language therapy, exercise therapy, recreational therapy, and vocational therapy. Homebound and long-term care services are available as well, limited to those meeting specific requirements.

**Telephone Care** -- For enrolled women Veterans, a VA health care professional is available by phone at each VA Medical Center to answer questions and advise on health concerns 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you are currently enrolled as a VA patient, you can [contact your VA Medical Center](#) and ask for the telephone care number.

**Programs for Special Groups** -- Special programs provide services for [homeless women Veterans](#), victims of domestic violence, and women Veterans interested in education and training, employment assistance, and vocational rehabilitation.

[Source: [https://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/womenshealthservices/healthcare\\_about.asp](https://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/womenshealthservices/healthcare_about.asp) | April 21, 2019 ++]

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## VA Infertility Services Update 01 ► VA Can Help Veterans and Their Families

Infertility is a common problem for women in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 12% of women between the ages of 15 and 44 years old have difficulty conceiving or carrying a pregnancy to term. During National Infertility Awareness Week, April 21-29, take this opportunity to share these resources with Veterans you know.



VA infertility services are available to help eligible Veterans. Through VA health care, enrolled Veterans have access to many different types of fertility treatments, procedures and services including infertility counseling, laboratory blood testing, genetic counseling, sperm testing, ultrasounds, surgery, reversal of a vasectomy or tubal ligation, medication and other treatments. Veterans with certain service-connected conditions that result in infertility, and their spouses, may be eligible for in vitro fertilization (IVF) or another form of assisted reproductive technology services. Coverage is determined case by case, based on an infertility evaluation at a VA medical center. Qualified Veterans or their spouses may be eligible for up to three IVF treatment cycles. To qualify for the benefit:

- The Veteran must be legally married.
- The Veteran must have a service-connected condition causing infertility.
- The Veteran or spouse must have an intact uterus and at least one functioning ovary or own cryopreserved eggs.
- The Veteran or spouse must be able to produce sperm or own cryopreserved sperm.

This benefit does not cover surrogacy, donor eggs, donor sperm or donor embryos. To receive treatment for infertility, Veterans enrolled in VA health care can take the following steps:

- Veterans can schedule an appointment with a VA provider (e.g., primary care provider, gynecologist or urologist) for an evaluation to identify the cause of infertility before determining eligibility for the benefit.
- Veterans can contact their local VA medical facility to schedule an evaluation.
- For questions regarding eligibility and services, contact the Women Veterans Call Center at (855) 829-6636.
- If the Veteran is eligible for assisted reproductive technology (ART)/IVF, VA will refer the Veteran (and spouse) to a Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility (REI) specialist in the community.
- The community provider works with the Veteran and spouse to perform any evaluations and tests to develop a treatment plan.
- Medical care is provided based on the treatment plan developed by the Veteran and community provider.

To learn more about IVF treatment and other services through VA, visit VHA's Office of Community Care at <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/ivf.asp>. [Source: Vantage Point | April 21, 2019 ++]

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## VA Individual Unemployability Update 07 ► What It Is in plain, understandable English.

Unfortunately, many veterans are too often confused about Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) 100 percent disability ratings and whether or not they are allowed to secure gainful employment if rated at 100 percent. While complex, and sometimes confusing to the most experienced VSO, let's take a look at the four types of 100 percent disability ratings in plain, understandable English.

**1. Combined.** When a veteran's service-connected disabilities are combined to reach 100 percent, he/she is allowed to work full time or part time. For example, if a veteran is rated 70% for PTSD, and 30% for IBS, the two disabilities equal 100% (sometimes – see rating table), and the veteran is allowed to hold a full time or part time job.

**2. TDIU or IU.** Total Disability/Individual Unemployability. This is a specific type of claim made by a veteran, requesting that he/she be paid at the 100 percent rate even though his/her disabilities do not combine to reach 100%. The request is often made because the veteran is unable to maintain "gainful employment" because his/her service-connected disabilities prevent him/her from doing so. The basic eligibility to file for Individual Unemployability (IU) is that the veteran has one disability rated at 60 percent or one at 40 percent and enough other disabilities that result in a combined rating of 70 percent or more. The one disability at 40 percent criteria can be a combined rating of related disabilities.

Meeting the basic criteria is not a guarantee that the veteran will be awarded 100 percent under IU criteria. The medical evidence must show that the veteran is unable to work in both a physical and sedentary job setting. A veteran not meeting the percentage criteria may still be awarded IU if the disabilities present a unique barrier to gainful employment. If a veteran is granted 100 percent under IU he is prohibited from working full-time, because in filing the claim for IU the veteran is stating he/she is unable to work because of his/her service-connected disabilities. However, receiving IU does not necessarily prevent a veteran from all employment circumstances. The veteran can work in a part-time "marginal" employment position and earn up to a certain amount annually, but not allowed to surpass a certain amount.

**3. Temporary 100 percent rating.** If a veteran is hospitalized 21 days or longer or had surgery for a service-connected disability that requires at least a 30-day convalescence period, the VA will pay at the 100 percent rate for the duration of the hospital stay or the convalescence period. For example, if a veteran has a total hip replacement for a service-connected hip disability, the VA will pay 100 percent compensation for up to 13 months, the standard recovery period for a replacement of a major joint. The duration of 100 percent temporary disability for any other type of surgery will depend on what the doctor reports as the recovery period.

**4. Permanent and total.** A 100 percent "permanent and total" rating is when the VA acknowledges that the service-connected conditions have no likelihood of improvement and the veteran will remain at 100 percent permanently with no future examinations. The P&T rating provides additional benefits, such as Chapter 35 education benefits for dependents, among others. Veterans sometimes make the mistake of requesting a P&T rating simply because they want education benefits for their dependents. The one caveat that veterans need to keep in mind is that when P&T is requested, all of their service-connected disabilities will be re-evaluated. If improvement is noted during the subsequent examinations, a reduction from 100 percent can possibly be proposed.

Because many veterans are service-connected for conditions that VA says have a "likelihood of improvement," most ratings are not considered permanent and are subject to future review. The only time veterans can't work a full-time position, that is considered a gainfully-employed job is if they were awarded 100 percent disability through a claim for IU. Additionally, a 100 percent rating under either IU or combined ratings may or may not be rated as permanent and total. A temporary 100 percent rating is just that: temporary due to being hospitalized or recovering from surgery on a service-connected condition.

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If a veteran is approved by the VA for IU, not only do they receive the 100-percent service-disabled rate of pay but they may also receive additional benefits including health insurance for their dependents, Property Tax Credit, a service-disabled military ID card and a \$10,000 life insurance policy with a waiver on monthly premiums. To apply for IU download Veteran's Application for Increased Compensation Based on Unemployability form [VA Form 21-8940](#). Complete the form, and mail it to Department of Veterans Affairs. Evidence Intake Center, PO Box 4444, Janesville, WI. 53547. Veterans may fax form to 1-844-531-7818. Keep in mind, it is always best for a veteran to work with an accredited Veteran Service Officer (VSO) who can explain the complex workings of the VA benefit system. [Source: USVCP | July 9, 2018 ++]

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## **VA Whistleblowers Update 57** ► **New VA Protection Office Under Investigation for Retaliation**

The Veterans Affairs Department's watchdog is investigating a new office created by President Trump early in his administration that was designed to protect whistleblowers from reprisal but is now facing allegations of aiding retaliation against them. VA's Office of Inspector General is leading the investigation from its new Office of Special Reviews, which the IG created to conduct "prompt reviews of significant events" and examine allegations of senior VA employee misconduct, an IG spokesman said. The new IG office is looking into activities at the **Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection** as part of an ongoing review of the implementation of the 2017 law that created OAWP.

Trump created OAWP by executive order in 2017 and later codified it when he signed the 2017 VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act into law. The office was mostly celebrated, with advocates hopeful that the focus on the rights and protections for whistleblowers would reverse a culture infamous for intimidation and reprisal. That optimism has largely soured, however, leading to hotline tips to the inspector general and bipartisan scrutiny from Congress. "There has been considerable interest by some members of Congress and other stakeholders in this effort," said Mike Nacincik, the IG spokesman, who said he could not comment further on ongoing work.

President Trump has frequently touted the law as one of his signature legislative achievements, focusing primarily on the reforms it made to expedite the disciplinary process for VA employees. But Trump also spoke of the promises on which skeptics now say the law has failed to deliver: "This bill protects whistleblowers who do the right thing," Trump said. "We want to reward, cherish, and promote the many dedicated employees at the VA."

Government Executive spoke to several VA employees who expressed frustration or anger toward OAWP, three of whom have already been interviewed by IG investigators. They described feeling betrayed or neglected by an office they believed was going to help them but ended up doing the opposite. They said they have shared information with the investigators, including documentation of alleged reprisal. Curt Cashour, a VA spokesman, said the department "welcomes the inspector general's oversight," but defended it against most allegations. He acknowledged that the office experienced some growing pains, but said it has "evolved over time, refining and improving its policies and practices along the way."

### **What Whistleblowers Are Telling Investigators**

- *Jay DeNofrio* said, "It's a crooked system where literally the fox is guarding the hen house". DeNofrio, an administrative officer at a VA facility in Altoona, Pa., had prior experience as a whistleblower before OAWP was created—years ago, he disclosed information about a doctor he said was losing mental capacity and putting veterans at risk—so he thought he understood the investigative process that takes place after employees make disclosures to investigators. OAWP, however, was the first body he'd ever worked with that coordinated with VA headquarters to find blemishes on his own record after he reported wrongdoing, he said. Investigators questioned his coworkers, telling them DeNofrio does not "walk on water" just because he is a protected whistleblower and encouraged them to immediately report "any instances of poor behavior," according to

transcripts of those conversations obtained through records requests and provided to Government Executive. DeNofrio said IG investigators took the allegations against OAWP seriously and called their review “high profile” and “high priority.”

- *Dan Martin*, a chief engineer at VA’s Northern Indiana Health Care System, said OAWP failed to protect him when his case came before it. Martin said in 2016 he discovered contracting violations related to a non-functioning water filtration system, but when he reported the problems to superiors he was stripped of his responsibilities and sent to work in an office without heat or air conditioning. The VA inspector general launched an investigation into the contracting practices, and asked Martin to surreptitiously record conversations with procurement officers, Martin said.

Rose Gottenmoeller, then Acting Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security, joined Anatoly Antonov, then Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, in a side event at the 2013 NPT Prepcom in Geneva. It was not until OAWP got involved in the case that Martin’s supervisors became aware of that cooperation. When OAWP allegedly shared that information with leadership at his facility, Martin said his supervisors “had no choice but to shut me down” so he could no longer send recordings about the supervisors’ “very inappropriate relationships with contractors” to investigators in the OIG. “OAWP set me up,” said Martin, who initially felt far more optimistic about OAWP’s capacity to help his cause. “They incentivized [my facility] to go after me.”

Martin is also fighting his case through the Merit Systems Protection Board. During that process, VA’s Office of General Counsel came to Martin and his attorneys asking for certain information about the case. The attorneys representing Martin told the lawyers in the Office of General Counsel they would only hand the information over during discovery. Shortly after rejecting the request, Martin said, OAWP followed up to ask for the same information. “Some of them are so crooked they swallow nails and spit up corkscrews,” Martin said.

- A *third VA employee*, who requested anonymity to protect his ongoing cases, recently informed IG investigators about what he alleged is OAWP’s betrayal of trust and subsequent inactivity. The employee made an initial whistleblower disclosure in early 2017 that was bounced around to several offices within VA. He subsequently was removed from his position as a technician and is now relegated to “brain-dead work,” he said. He contacted OAWP about the alleged reprisal later that year. During his interactions with the whistleblower office, he turned over sensitive information about his hospital that a colleague had provided—the OAWP investigator was the only individual with whom he shared the information. Days later, the employee said, the colleague was “chewed out” by leaders at the facility for sharing the information. To the employee, it felt like OAWP had betrayed him, he told Government Executive.

The employee said he then experienced 21 months of “radio silence.” He recently spoke with OIG about his negative experiences with OAWP. A few days later, the employee said he unexpectedly heard from the OAWP investigators. He said he is now “very, very cautious” in his interactions with OAWP. “It scares you,” he said. “You don’t want to come forward. People are afraid.”

- *Tonya Van*, formerly a doctor at a VA facility in San Antonio, also became a whistleblower after disclosing to a supervisor that a doctor at her facility was giving incorrect diagnoses. She filed a complaint with OAWP after she alleged her supervisor made her work life so miserable she was forced to resign. But she quickly became disenchanted with the office due to lack of communication, she said. She tried to follow up with OAWP but never heard back. The office eventually closed out her case, though it later contacted her about opening a second investigation. She said she has “no idea” what the results of either investigation were. Van alleged that her supervisors’ reprisal against her took the form of accusations of using foul language in the workplace. Martin, the Northern Indiana employee, said he faced an investigation for similar accusations.

The alleged collaboration between the Office of General Counsel and OAWP has troubled observers. Tom Devine, legal director at the Government Accountability Project, a whistleblower advocacy group, said his initial excitement about OAWP has been dampened by “structural developments,” including what he called veto power the department’s general counsel has over the whistleblower protection office. This would appear to be in violation of the 2017 law that permanently authorized OAWP, which prohibits the office from existing “as an element of the Office of General Counsel” and its leadership from reporting to OGC. Cashour said it was false to suggest that the Office of General Counsel exercises veto power over whistleblower claims, but acknowledged OAWP and OGC do coordinate. “OAWP has a collaborative working relationship with OGC, but OAWP retains final decision making authority on all OAWP matters,” Cashour said.

Rebecca Jones, policy counsel at the Project on Government Oversight, said the office can likely not completely fix its issues while it remains an “internal clearinghouse” for whistleblowers rather than a truly independent office. Jones praised the IG for investigating the alleged retaliation. “I wish it hadn’t come to this,” she said. Devine praised some of OAWP’s early accomplishments, such as delaying VA’s disciplinary decisions that involved alleged reprisal and the hiring of high-profile whistleblower Brandon Coleman as a liaison between whistleblowers and the office. Coleman even established a mentoring program to help assist victims of retaliation, but it has since been shut down. “They didn’t have the teeth to enforce their good deeds,” said Devine, who has significantly curbed his cooperation with OAWP. “They turned on whistleblowers.”

### **Changes and Cautious Optimism**

Cashour, the VA spokesman, said OAWP does not provide “detailed information related to the specific outcome of an investigation to employees” due to privacy concerns. He added that the office has revised its policies to disclose more information to claimants, including when an investigation has been closed and if claims of retaliation were substantiated. Multiple VA employees criticized this practice, calling it counterintuitive that VA would claim privacy concerns over investigations that the employees themselves requested.

Cashour said OAWP has changed other practices after a draft of a June 2018 Government Accountability Office report faulted the office for its investigatory practices, including allowing officials accused of retaliation to be directly involved in the inquiries in which they are named. VA told GAO it would not end its practice of “referring cases of misconduct back to facilities and program offices where the misconduct occurred.” However, Cashour said OAWP now informs employees upfront when their matters will be referred elsewhere for review. To protect whistleblowers, he said, OAWP now allows employees “to either opt-out of the disclosure or withhold the release of their name.”

In August 2018, however, when Van had an in-person interview with OAWP investigators, she and her attorney were still alleging retaliation by OAWP. While asking about Van’s allegations, an OAWP investigator told Van she could be penalized for violating a prior settlement with VA by asking a former colleague to write a recommendation. Her attorney said Deirdre Weiss, the OAWP employee, was ignoring the intent of that prior agreement. “The bottom line is that, as accountability investigators, where we see possible wrongdoing we cannot look the other way just because somebody is a complainant, okay,” said Weiss, according to a transcript of the proceedings.

Last year, before his office formally launched an official investigation into the practices of OAWP, VA Inspector General Michael Missal became part of a public spat with then acting Secretary Peter O’Rourke over documents housed within the office. The IG requested access to information on the cases filed with OAWP, but O’Rourke refused to comply. They aired their grievances through a series of public letters, which included O’Rourke harshly reminding Missal that the IG served as the secretary’s subordinate. Congress ultimately intervened by emphasizing in a spending bill that the IG had the right to any and all documents it requested. O’Rourke had previously served as the first head of OAWP, a period in which many of the complaints against the office originated. Current VA Secretary Robert Wilkie reportedly asked O’Rourke to resign last year after determining he was doing little work as a senior advisor.

OAWP is still a small office, employing just 96 workers—28 of whom are investigators—for a workforce of 380,000. Its employees receive standardized training in investigative techniques, both internally and from outside experts such as those at the Homeland Security Department and the Office of Special Counsel. The office is now headed

by Tammy Bonzanto, who previously served as an investigator on the House Veterans Affairs Committee. Her tenure has received mixed reviews. DeNofrio, for example, is still concerned by what he calls her lack of transparency. Other observers are cautiously optimistic that her leadership could get the office back to its original mission. "We're confident they have good-faith leadership now," said GAP's Devine. "The question is how much professional freedom she'll have." [Source: Defense One | Eric Katz | April 16, 2019 ++]

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## **VA 3D Printing Update 01 ► VA Looks to Create Artificial Organs, Even Bones**

A veteran at a VA medical center had been diagnosed with a tumor in his one remaining kidney. Facing possible dialysis for the rest of his life, the former service member was anxious about surgery and wondered whether he should risk removal of the mass. Confused by the CT scans of his diseased organ, the veteran faced difficulty making a decision about the potentially life-altering procedure. But his VA surgeon had another option: the doctor loaded the medical imagery into a 3D printer, which used the information to build an exact replica of the patient's kidney, tumor included. Using the model, the doctor could walk the veteran through the surgery, step-by-step. Then, once the veteran agreed to the surgery, the doctor followed the exact plan in the operating room.

"[3D printing] is a total game-changer," said Dr. Beth Ripley, a radiologist at VA Medical Center Puget Sound and chair of the Veterans Health Administration's 3D Printing Advisory Committee. "Often [technology] pushes us further away from our patients ... this technology is allowing our VA staff to really come close to the patient." VA has launched an aggressive campaign to put 3D printers in many of its medical centers. The initiative aims to improve patient care by aiding surgical planning, crafting assistive medical devices and prosthetic limbs and eventually, creating bones and organs for transplant. The department has more than 100 printers at 23 medical centers, up from just three in 2017. And it has plans to expand to even more, making it a leader in the effort to adapt 3D printing for medical use nationwide, where fewer than 100 academic and private health facilities -- mainly at research universities -- use 3D printing, according to Ripley.

"VA remains at the forefront of innovative work in 3D printing by expanding our expertise across VA," Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a release. "Through this growing virtual network, VA continues to help define how 3D printing technology will be used broadly in medicine for the benefit of patients." While models may be the most obvious use for 3D printers, which create three-dimensional solid objects by layering various materials slice-by-slice, bottom-up, VA scientists are also looking to bioprinting -- using the technology to create replacement tissues and organs -- to treat diseases.

VA Ann Arbor Healthcare Systems in Michigan currently is working on creating an artificial lung that could be utilized while a patient waits for a lung transplant or needs help breathing during recovery from a respiratory illness. The 3D artificial lungs would replicate the structure and size of the blood vessels and would be constructed of substances that would be more compatible with the human body, reducing immune response. According to a VA release, the technology could eventually have long-term applications, such as providing replacement lungs. "This exciting project is the latest in a long string of incredible research and medical advancements developed by researchers over the years," Wilkie said.

Other bioprinting initiatives at VA include creating vascularized bones. Ripley said that while the biologics printing is at least eight to 10 years away, VA plans to complete installation of the technology and train staff within the next two years; grow its ability to print prosthetics and other devices using advanced materials such as titanium in the next three to five years; and then, hopefully, be able to start implementing its development of human body parts within a decade.

The technology can also help occupational therapists build devices to improve veterans' mobility and create orthotics that can be made and fitted in a day. In one case, an occupational therapist at Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical

Center in Richmond, Virginia, designed a specialized device that enabled a veteran to balance a pool cue at a billiards table, despite having lost an arm in combat. "He was a world-class pool player ... he could start to play pool again with just one hand. That is so cool," Ripley said.

All this work is made possible, in part, through a partnership with GE Healthcare that provides software and work stations for the initiative while VA provides feedback on its medical needs and use of printers. "We have a very comprehensive program that we are building throughout VA to make sure we are using 3D-printing technologies to the fullest," Ripley said. The VA's 3D Printing Center of Excellence falls under what VA calls its VHA Innovation Ecosystem, which encompasses programs that aim to identify best practices at VA medical centers and push them out across the VA's health system.

Ripley did not say how much the buildout of the printing network is costing VA, but she said printers, which come in seven different types, range from \$3,000 for a basic printer that builds with simple plastics to \$300,000 for one that can print with different colors and materials and up to \$1 million for a titanium metal printer. She said VA does not have a titanium printer -- yet. "Walter Reed [National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland] has titanium printers ... and we talk with them. But we have [one] is in our three- to five-year plan, so stay tuned," Ripley said.

She said for radiologists and physicians using the technology, it's an exciting time to be at VA. "This is happening through a specific program that encourages frontline staff to bring their best ideas forward ... What you see with 3D printing is that the decision of what gets made is happening on the frontlines. These are people that are caring for patients every day, interacting with patients every day, seeing what they need. 3D printing allows them to become innovators at the bedside," she said. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | April 19, 2019 ++]

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## **PTSD Update 250 ► Prolonged Exposure vs. Coping Skills Therapy Use**

According to a new study by the VA San Diego Healthcare System, prolonged exposure (PE) therapy is more effective at treating PTSD than coping skills therapy for patients who also have an alcohol use disorder. The research will provide clinicians with important guidance for helping veterans cope with both PTSD and problem drinking. When the researchers compared patients who were given prolonged exposure treatment with those given coping skills treatment, they found that both methods effectively reduced PTSD symptoms and heavy drinking. However, patients receiving prolonged exposure therapy had significantly lower scores on a measure of PTSD symptoms.

PE therapy is used for vets who have been avoiding things that remind them of their traumatic event. PE will help confront them. It involves eight to 15 sessions, usually 90 minutes each. Early on in treatment, your therapist will teach you breathing techniques to ease your anxiety when you think about what happened. Later, you'll make a list of the things you've been avoiding and learn how to face them, one by one. In another session, you'll recount the traumatic experience to your therapist, then go home and listen to a recording of yourself. Doing this as "homework" over time may help ease your symptoms.

The study was led by Dr. Sonya Norman, who is a researcher at the San Diego VA, the director of the PTSD Consultation Program for the National Center for PTSD, and a professor of Psychiatry at the University of California San Diego. "The research is not showing concerns that PTSD patients with alcohol use disorder can't handle exposure to be true," said Dr. Norman. "The main takeaway of the study for me is that we may be doing a disservice to veterans if we don't offer them the best treatments we have available for PTSD, such as prolonged exposure."

People suffering from both PTSD and alcohol use disorder tend to have shorter periods of abstinence from drinking and a greater risk of suicide and homelessness. Compared to individuals with just one disorder, these patients also tend to have more legal and psychological problems. During prolonged exposure therapy, patients gradually confront memories, feelings, and situations related to their trauma. The goal is for them to be able to face these experiences without triggering anxiety and stress.

While previous studies have shown that prolonged exposure therapy is the most effective treatment for PTSD, many therapists do not offer this particular psychotherapy to problem drinkers out of concern that it will cause them to drink more. However, the results of the new study show that prolonged exposure therapy is more effective at treating PTSD regardless of whether patients also have alcohol use disorder. The researchers concluded that many patients are not getting the best available treatment because of their issues with alcohol. The next stage of this research, is to learn how to make prolonged exposure even more effective for patients with PTSD and alcohol use disorder,” explained Dr. Norman.

“We are now conducting a study where we are combining medication to help reduce drinking with prolonged exposure to see if the combination helps patients complete prolonged exposure and benefit even more from the treatment.” The study is published at <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/article-abstract/2731312> in the journal JAMA Psychiatry.

[Source: Earth.com News | Chrissy Sexton | April 25, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 30 APR 2019**

**Northglenn, CO** -- A Colorado man has been sentenced to a year in prison for defrauding the Department of Veterans Affairs out of nearly \$1.3 million over 35 years by pretending to be blind. **Mike Blea**, of Northglenn, was sentenced 10 APR and ordered to pay the VA \$1,273,180 in restitution. Investigators say Blea is a Vietnam veteran who started getting VA disability payments in 1969 for visual impairment. He did have a minor problem with his eyesight but started to exaggerate how bad it was. Blea had eye exams outside of the VA system that showed his vision could be corrected to 20/30 in one eye and 20/40 in another. He also had a driver’s license and drove regularly. U.S. Attorney Jason Dunn said after the sentence that “justice may be blind, but Mr. Blea isn’t.” [Source: The Associated Press | April 14, 2019 ++]

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**Harrisburg, PA** -- A Thompsett Pennsylvania man who spent \$316,360 of a disabled veteran’s VA and Social Security benefits after becoming the veteran’s VA Fiduciary and Legal Custodian was sentenced 15 APR to 19 months in federal prison, according to the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of PA. **Jason Ehrhart**, 48, also must pay that total in restitution to his nephew (the veteran’s son). The veteran died at the VA Hospital in Lebanon in July 2018.

The veteran was deemed by the VA on Aug. 8, 2006, to be incompetent to handle his own financial affairs, Jason Ehrhart on Oct. 2, 2006, successfully applied to serve as the veteran’s VA fiduciary and legal custodian. The agreement warned him the funds were exclusively for the veteran’s benefit and that he had to submit an annual accounting to the VA with respect to the amount of money spent on the veteran’s behalf. Documents said that Jason and Laurie Ehrhart, who was then Jason’s wife, misspent \$316,360 of the veteran’s VA and Social Security disability benefits totaling \$476,260 on themselves between October 2006 and August 2016.

Ehrhart made the checks payable to his children in which he instructed them to cash the checks and surrender it to him. He also wrote \$19,890 in checks to another couple and treated them and their children to dinners out and at least two, all-expense paid vacations to Disney World as well as the purchase of two new vehicles for the family and payments toward the wife’s dental work, the U.S. Attorney’s Office said. Ehrhart submitted eight false annual accountings to the VA to conceal the embezzlement. [Source: FOX 43 News | Sean Naylor | April 16, 2019 ++]

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## VA Blue Water Claims Update 69 ► Supreme Court Grants 30-Day Denial Extension

The Supreme Court this week granted a 30-day extension to Department of Justice officials contemplating an appeal of a lower court ruling in January which extended presumptive benefits to tens of thousands of Navy veterans who have claimed exposure to toxic chemical defoliants during the Vietnam War. But advocates say they are not concerned by the move, calling it a typical legal maneuver and not a serious threat to getting benefits to the group of so-called “blue water” veterans. “This just seems to be going through the motions,” said John Wells, retired Navy commander and the executive director Military-Veterans Advocacy, which has lobbied on the issue for years. “It’s not a setback for us. Veterans Affairs Secretary (Robert) Wilkie has told us this was not initiated by his department.”

In January, a federal court ruled that VA officials for years has used faulty reasoning to deny disability benefits to veterans who served in ships off the waters of Vietnam. VA officials had argued that for years that existing law established only that troops who served on the ground on on ships close to shore were entitled to the presumption of exposure to chemical defoliants like Agent Orange, speeding the process for their disability benefits. Sailors on ships further out to sea were not, even though many contracted the same rare cancers and respiratory illnesses that their land-based counterparts did. They have been required to provide proof of chemical exposure during their combat tours, a near-impossible prospect given the decades that have passed and lack of environmental monitoring at the time.

Until the court ruling in January, VA officials had also argued that extending presumptive benefits to the estimated 90,000 blue water veterans would cost as much as \$5 billion over 10 years, a figure that advocates have disputed. But since the ruling, Wilkie has said publicly he will work with veterans groups and Congress on a path ahead for awarding the benefits. He also advised Justice officials against appealing the federal court ruling. Department of Justice officials had until next week to raise that objection, but instead asked for a 30-day extension. In their court request, lawyers for the department did not indicate they intend to fight the decision, but needed more time to research the potential impact of the ruling on other pending court cases.

Wells said he would not be surprised if the department requested another extension next month too. He said the move does not affect congressional work to draft an implementation plan for the benefits, and has not stopped the Board of Veterans Appeals from starting to accept some veterans’ benefits cases based on the federal court ruling. Several bills are pending in the House and Senate to address the issue, including bipartisan legislation announced last week from Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Steve Daines (R-MT). The House Veterans’ Affairs Committee is scheduled to discuss a proposal from Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA) during a hearing on 1 MAY. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 24, 2019 ++]

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## VAMC Indianapolis IN Update 02 ► Why No One Was Fired After Foot Amputation Error



Officials at the Indianapolis Veterans Affairs hospital insist they wanted to fire the administrator whose mistakes led to the amputation of a veterans foot due to missed home care appointments, but couldn't because the staffer retired before they could act. "Had (the investigation) been completed before the employee retired, the Roudebush Veterans Affairs Medical Center would have proposed the employee for termination," Craig Larson, spokesman for the VA's Chicago District, said in a statement. "The employee chose to retire while the investigation was ongoing, and there was nothing the center could do to stop that."

Last week, officials from the U.S. Office of Special Counsel said that an administrative decision in 2017 to stop recording home health care consults into a VA's patient record system jeopardized the health of numerous patients at the Indiana VA hospital, and forced at least one of them to lose his foot to a medical amputation. That man, who had been discharged from care after a diabetes treatment, was left to change the dressings on his foot wound by himself for several days, even though VA staffers were supposed to do that. "[His] worsening infection ... and subsequent amputation appears to have been related to the delay of the dressing changes by the home care agency," their report states.

Pete Scovill, public and congressional affairs officer for Veteran Health Indiana, said hospital officials "remain in close contact with the veteran" today and have offered an apology and "options moving forward." He also said that all affected staff have been re-trained to ensure that home health care consults are being properly conducted and recorded. But the Special Counsel report noted that despite the grave nature of the mistakes, no staffers were fired. A social work assistant chief was reassigned to a different position, and the senior chief retired. Larson defended the moves, saying center leaders took immediate action in response to the whistleblower allegations. But officials could not prevent the senior chief from retiring, and could not take any adverse job actions after that.

President Donald Trump made accountability at VA a key promise during his election campaign. After less than six months in office, he signed a new department accountability measure into law, speeding up the time in which staffers can be fired and allowing the department to recoup bonuses from individuals later convicted of criminal wrongdoing. But VA officials said none of those measures would apply in this case. Overall firings at the department have increased each of the last three calendar years, as the number of VA staff has also continued to climb. In 2016, VA fired 2,001 individuals through regular removals and probationary terminations. In 2017, that number rose to 2,537. Last year, from January to the end of November, it was 2,889.

But critics have insisted that more firings does not necessarily mean better outcomes for veterans, especially if administrators making sweeping decisions can avoid punishment. In a statement in response to the Special Counsel report, American Legion National Commander Brett Reistad said that "increased accountability will improve an already strong VA system" and called for the department to institute a broader plan to prevent future communication mistakes. "Tragedies such as what happened in Indianapolis should never occur," he said. "We expect VA to learn from this and act accordingly." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 15, 2019 ++]

**\* Vets \***



## Veterans In Politics Program ► For Veteran Eyeing a Run for Office

If you're a veteran eyeing a run for office, you now have access to a training program specially designed to get you in the race. Syracuse University, with a grant from JP Morgan Chase & Co., plans to start a training program late this fall or early winter for veterans on the nuts-and-bolts of running for office at the state, local and federal levels. The goal of the "Veterans in Politics," or VIP, program is to take advantage of veterans' commitment to public service and translate that into organizing and running a campaign, but the school is upfront about potential pitfalls.



"We want to be clear about what they're getting into. It's not all cookies and cream," said Steve Lux, director of executive education at the university's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, located in central New York state. He said the program will start with online preparation, leading to a free, week-long intensive seminar at the Maxwell School, tied for No. 1 with Indiana University as the nation's top public affairs graduate school, according to U.S. News & World Report. The program's launch was announced last week by Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families, or IVMF, and the Maxwell School, with the intent of aiding veterans and military family members who aspire to public office or administration.

In a statement, David M. Van Slyke, dean of the Maxwell School, said the collaboration with IVMF would "empower those who have served our nation in uniform with preparation, expertise and confidence, so that they can extend their commitment to public service in the form of a political career at the local, state or federal level." University and IVMF officials said VIP courses will cover election law, party politics and public policy; creating, managing and leading campaign teams; campaign finance; understanding voters; message development; and other aspects of running for office.

Dr. Mike Haynie, executive director of IVMF, said he began discussions with the Maxwell School about a year ago, adding "once we started the conversation, it was a no-brainer." He called JP Morgan's grant "generous," though he would not give details. In a statement, Mark Elliott, head of Military and Veterans Affairs at JP Morgan & Chase, said the program is intended "to help develop the next generation of political leaders" from veterans and their families, who have a commitment to the public sector. Both Haynie and Lux said VIP is non-partisan and open to veterans with widely divergent political views, but there will be screening to keep out extremists whose values are not in line with those of the university.

Lux said the plan is to start small with a first class of 20 to 25 applicants. The first phase will be online with required readings and videos to set up the week-long, on-campus phase involving immersion seminars, he said. The third phase entails follow-ups to gauge the veterans' progress in achieving their political goals, he said. "We don't just want to send them out there in the woods and say 'Good luck.'" "We need to keep the first cohort size relatively small," Haynie said. But, he added, the eventual goal is to put more veterans in office in Congress and at the state and local level.

According to IVMF, veterans made gains in the 2018 elections, but overall veteran representation in Congress has dropped from more than 75% in the 1960s to 19.1% today. Currently, the 116th Congress has a total of 96 veterans - 30 Democrats and 66 Republicans. More information on the VIP program and instructions on how to apply are available at <https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/executive-education/training-programs/veterans-in-politics>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Richard Sisk | April 15, 2019 ++]

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## **U.S. Census 2020 ► Veteran Status Question**

The former head of the Utah Department of Veterans Affairs is pushing for the U.S. census to include a question about veterans next year. Terry Schow, a Vietnam veteran, wants the 2020 census to ask about veteran status so the state can have a more accurate count of people with military service, the Standard-Examiner reported 20 APR. "It's really just one question: Are you a veteran?" Schow said.

The Census Bureau pulled the veteran status question from the questionnaire in 2010, according to the agency. The bureau continues to collect data on veterans through three smaller surveys: the American Community Survey, the Current Population Survey and the Survey of Income and Program Participation. These surveys only go to a portion of the population, Schow said. The American Community Survey, the largest of the three, is sent out to about 3.5 million people each year.

Current counts of veterans from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Census Bureau are likely missing a significant number of people, Schow said. The department lists about 152,000 veterans in Utah while the bureau says the state has about 144,000. A state database indicates Utah has about 180,000 veterans, Schow said. The VA uses census data to determine spending on veteran housing, hospitals and assistance programs, Schow said. Republican U.S. Rep. Rob Bishop sent a letter to the bureau's director earlier this month, asking for the veterans question to be included. "I believe this small change will have a big impact on our ability to take care of our nation's heroes and the proper allocation of resources for veterans cemeteries and homes," Bishop wrote. [Source: The Associated Press | 22 Apr 2019 ++]

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## **GI Bill Update 283 ► VES Study | How Schools Utilize Taxpayer Money Received**

Some of the schools that receive the most Post-9/11 GI Bill money spend the least on teaching students, a new report suggests. The study, conducted by the nonprofit group Veterans Education Success, analyzed more than 4,600 higher-education institutions and found that in 2017, 427 of those schools spent less than 30 percent of their gross tuition dollars on instruction, according to VES. That's about \$980 million in GI Bill money that went toward costs other than directly educating student veterans, VES estimates.

"Is it appropriate for colleges to charge taxpayers for GI Bill funds but then divert those funds away from veterans' actual education?" asked VES President Carrie Wofford during a Capitol Hill briefing on the report 18 APR. "And does Congress owe it to veterans and taxpayers to more carefully guard veterans' earned benefits?" The three schools receiving the most GI Bill money nationwide from fiscal year 2009 through fiscal year 2017 – University of Phoenix, DeVry University and Strayer University, all of which are for-profit schools – spent only 15.3 percent, 12.4 percent and 10.9 percent respectively of their overall revenue on instruction in 2017.

But some schools are pushing back on the report, saying that its definition of "instruction" doesn't make sense for the online schools many veterans attend. A spokeswoman for Strayer parent company Strategic Education Inc. told Rebootcamp in an email that, as a mostly online school, Strayer must make significant IT investments that aren't counted as "instruction" spending. In addition, spokeswoman Elaine Kincel said that other schools' "instruction" numbers are inflated based on academic research. "As Strayer University is not a research institution, it reports only direct instructional expenses," Kincel said.

The VES study defines "instruction" in line with the Education Department's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System Outcome Measures Survey, including funds for academic and training essentials like providing classes and professors. It notably does not include investments in academic support or student services in that definition. The

study used data from the Education Department’s IPEDS Outcome Measures Survey, the 2016-17 IPEDS Finance Survey, the College Scorecard database and VA’s records of schools’ GI Bill tuition and fee payments.

VES calculated how much of a school’s GI Bill revenue is going toward teaching and learning by dividing the total amount schools spent on instruction by the total amount they received in tuition and fees. In addition to analyzing GI Bill revenue, the report also looked at schools’ success graduating their students within eight years of enrolling and whether those graduates were making more or less than \$28,000 a year — what the average U.S. high school graduate makes — within six years of entering a college. VES concluded that seven of the top 10 schools receiving GI Bill funds failed to graduate more than 50 percent of their students. It also found that only about 47 percent of GI Bill students at those schools were earning more than \$28,000 a year within six years of starting school.

The worst schools — or the ones the VES dubbed the “bottom of the barrel” — for allocating GI Bill money for instruction were all for-profits: Colorado Technical University, American Intercontinental University and Capella University, all of which spent less than 10 percent of their gross revenue on instruction in 2017. For context, the study noted that health insurance companies are required to spend 80 percent of patient premiums on improving the quality of patient care.

VES did point out quite a few schools that were putting a large portion of their GI Bill tuition revenue toward instruction. That group included some of the country’s most prestigious institutions, like Yale University and Stanford University, as well as schools that grant lower-level degrees, like Bismarck State College and Lakeshore Technical College. The study also spotlighted a few for-profit schools with high completion rates and post-graduate salaries that are also using most of their GI Bill tuition money toward instruction, like Professional Golfers Career College, Fox College and Swedish Institute.

Wofford said that GI Bill benefits are designed to be not only a reward for veterans service but also an investment by the government in their future success after the military. “There are no rules on how a college spends the money once they receive it,” she said. “And I think Congress may be surprised what many of these institutions are doing with it.” A University of Phoenix spokesman questioned the study, saying the data it focuses on “fails in many respects to represent the full fabric of the university and the academic quality of our programs.” “University of Phoenix strongly supports a constructive, fact-based policy discussion about student outcomes,” he said. “Unfortunately, this report does not get us there.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Joshua Axelrod | April 16, 2019 ++]

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## **Veterans FAQ ► Could My Lesions be From Exposure to Agent Orange?**

**Q.** I served in Vietnam from 1967 – 1968. I was infantry soldier, and I was exposed to Agent Orange almost every day. I now have lesions all over my body. My legs, arms, chest, and neck are covered with these lesions. It looks like ring worms but it is not. Doctors at the VA and my civilian doctor don’t know what I have. The lesions look horrible. So bad that physical therapists and massage specialists won’t touch me because they are afraid they will contract what I have since no one can put a name to this condition. VA doctors act like I have leprosy, they too are afraid to touch me. This condition is very embarrassing. It doesn’t itch or hurt, just looks really awful. Could the lesions be from exposure to Agent Orange?

### **Answers**

A1: Yes (JW) 4/12/19

A2: You were in Nam at the same time as I; when the height of the most intense spraying of Agent Orange took place. The VA considers you exposed to certain presumptive diseases such as soft tissue Sarcomas, Multiple Myeloma,

Google VA Agent Orange Associated Diseases & just get checked out as to what it is. I ended up with an aggressive form of Prostate Cancer. Make them find your problem! (BB) 4/12/19

A3: I feel it is more likely than not you have been poisoned by Agent Orange. That was nasty stuff and so many vets are suffering from exposure. My vet has Leukemia. Get to Mayo Clinic. You need to be diagnosed asap. How long have you had these symptoms? Is it Lupus? Go right to Mayo Clinic website. Ask for help. My guess is what you have is rare but they will figure it out. (JM) 4/12/19

A4: Go to a local VSO for advice ASAP. (WP) 4/12/19

A5: I was with the 4th ID in II Corps 1967/68. I have these lesions on my legs, ugly looking. I separated in 1970, failed my ETS physical because of the lesions that I did not have before Vietnam. So to get out and go home, I signed a waiver on the condition, which I'm now told was illegal, an attempt at CYA by the Army. I have not had good experiences with the VA now I'm 71, and at this point it doesn't seem to be worth my time to chase down medical records etc. etc. to be told again, there's nothing here for me. (BM) 4/13/19

A6: Hire an attorney. Look on these sites for an ad. I use HILL & PONTON. They are excellent. A lawyer will get YOU TREATED FAIRLY. (DD) 4/15/19

**Note:** Go to <http://www.veterandiscountdirectory.com/question94.html> if you would like to add your experience regarding on this question.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | April 22, 2019 ++]

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## **Veterans FAQ ► Why Isn't my IU Application on record with VA?**

**Q.** I'm 70% disable, and filed for IU 3/12/2019, however, when I went to e-benefits checking my file, it said I do not have any open submitted items on record with VA at this time. The VSO helped me with the paper work etc. Can anyone tell me what happen?

### **Answers**

A1: In my experience brother, the only "VSO's" that are any good are with the DAV. They're the ones who know how to get things done. Try that and best of luck to you. (BO) 4/12/19

A2: Could possibly mean no open claims or submitted as it is under something else on E-benefits like already processed or something, I had something of that sort 4 years ago, I just forget exactly where else it was, don't worry too much at this point. If nothing in a month then at least you have the VSO to look into it. (BB) 4/12/19

A3: First e benefits is not updated very often by the VA. It will take 30-90 days for the VA to send out the letter asking for more info. You can call 18008271000 to make sure they got it. (GR) 4/12/19

A4: Go to VA.gov and create an account. You can log on with your DS logon password and even with your my healthy vet account. ebenefits is phasing out little by little. Va.gov has more info. If you don't see the claim, it wasn't filed. (JD) 4/14/19

**Note:** Go to <http://www.veterandiscountdirectory.com/question95.html> if you would like to add your experience regarding on this question.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | April 22, 2019 ++]

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## Veterans FAQ ► How Can I Prove Drill Sergeant Beatings Caused My Medical Problems?

**Q.** I served 6 years in the Marine Corps (1980 – 1986), making the rank of Sergeant. During basic training my drill instructor practiced his MMA moves on us. He literally knocked a few grunts unconscious with kicks and blows to the head. I was one of the grunts he knocked out. He actually knocked me out four times. None of this was put in my medical records, it was all considered part of making me a Marine. Well, today I suffer short term memory loss, headaches, double vision, and major neck pain. I am sure my problems are due to this drill sergeant beating the heck out of me. If I put in a claim for my problems with the VA, how can I prove they were caused by this drill sergeant who routinely kicked my butt?

### Answers

A1: Simply by finding another Marine Grunt who was there at that training with you when this happened and by obtaining a ‘Buddy Letter’ verifying what had happened. Look online for Myhealthvet.com & google and research examples of Buddy Letters. You can submit with the Buddy Letters any and all medical files, too. I hope this helps. I would contact a VSO, either American Legion, VFW, or DAV. They would assist you at no cost. Try [www.usvets.com](http://www.usvets.com). Also [www.military.com/benefits/veteran-benefits/the-ebenefits-program.html](http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-benefits/the-ebenefits-program.html). Good luck. (SS) 4/16/19

A2: I'm sorry, I don't believe this story. Notice the Marine uses the term Drill Sergeant, which is an Army term. No true Marine would make this mistake. I also don't believe the level of alleged physical attacks the recruits suffered from. It's highly possible they were assaulted with much less physical attacks; however, nothing life threatening nor prolonged. If this punishment were true, I would think at least one recruit would have reported it to proper authorities. Recruits/Marines have "Request Mast", wherein they can report serious abuses as well as other alleged wrongdoing. Why did this Marine wait so long to divulge these alleged abuses In summary, I believe this Marine is a liar. I also believe he needs help from a mental health provider. (TR) 4/15/19

A3: You probably cannot prove it, but you need to file a claim for it anyway. The burden of proof is not on you. Its on the Marine's. You may be able to find someone who experienced the same thing in your unit or at least witnessed it to provide a statement for your claim. (LR) 4/16/19

A4: I am a VSO for the Vietnam Veterans of America. You will need to get what is called a buddy letter. Try to find some one you served with that saw you get knocked out and have them write a letter describing the incident. Make sure they sign the letter and not just an email. (RA) 4/16/19

A5: To (TR), I respectfully want to respond to your skepticism about my tenure in the Marine Corps. I am sorry if I offended you, but I refer to all basic training personnel as "Drill Sergeants." After my tenure in the Marine Corps I joined the Air Force, and eventually retired as a Senior Master Sergeant. Air Force drill sergeants are titled as "Training Instructors," but I simply refer to them as Drill Sergeants too, and everyone in the Air Force knew what I was referring to. The kind of rigid thinking you illustrate is exactly why I left the Marine Corps. Think about it for a moment (TR), I was simply trying to make the point that the Marine Corps trainers beat me and others endlessly all in the name of training. Your insult to me and other Marines who were beaten to a pulp is aggravating and disappointing. You sir, are the epitome of absolute thinking. I know many Marines who understand what I mean by the term “Drill Sergeants,” and think no less about dissecting a meaning only another Marine would understand without pause. I apologize for being abstract to those who don’t understand generic terms, but I will never apologize for being a Marine and an Airman who has a working brain. Food for thought [abstract concept] (TR), jumping to illogical conclusions is a dangerous exercise often done by mediocre minds. (WT) 4/16/19

A6: You can get statements from people that witnessed these events. Find members from your unit that were there when it happened. Maybe you wrote a letter to a family member. If so, get a copy and have a notarized statement that they can attest to what you told them. (BG) 4/16/19

A7: Hello, I have been helping my husband's company with their reunions for many years now, and this is not the first time I've heard of this kind of abuse. Where do you live? And have you been to the American Legion. They are wonderful here in Houston and can help you with this. Bless you and hope you can find some relief. (EB) 4/16/19

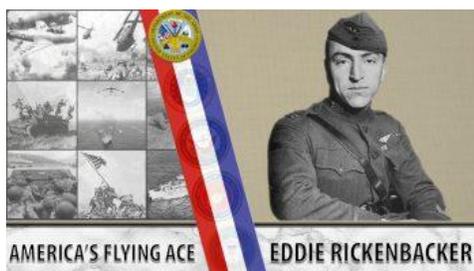
**Note:** Go to <http://www.veterandiscountdirectory.com/question97.html> if you would like to add your experience regarding on this question.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | April 22, 2019 ++]

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## WWI Vets ► Eddie Rickenbacker | America's Flying Ace

Born in Columbus, Ohio, Rickenbacker was a mischievous, but motivated child. As a young man, he began a career in the emerging field of motorsports, starting as a mechanic and eventually becoming a driver for the Maxwell Race Team. Rickenbacker gained moderate fame during his career as a race car driver, competing four times in the Indianapolis 500 and earning the name "Fast Eddie."



When World War I began in 1914, Rickenbacker hoped to join the Allied forces. Though the United States had not yet entered the war, Rickenbacker voluntarily left his motorsports career to serve as an aviator in the United States Army. When the United States entered the war in 1917, Rickenbacker was deployed to France as part of the first contingency of the American Expeditionary Forces under General Pershing.

Rickenbacker arrived in France on June 26, 1917 and was assigned as an engineer officer with the 3rd Aviation Instruction Center stationed in Issoudun, France. There, during his downtime, he practiced flying and became a highly skilled pilot. Despite possessing the skills and desire to fly, Rickenbacker continued to serve as an engineer officer as his commanders felt his skills as a mechanic were indispensable. After finding a qualified replacement, Rickenbacker convinced his superiors to reassign him as a pilot with the 94th Aero Squadron.

Rickenbacker's service with the 94th Aero Squadron was exceptional, earning him the title of "America's flying ace." By the end of the war, he had amassed 26 air combat victories, the most of any American pilot during World War I. The most notable of these engagements took place on Sept. 25, 1918, when Rickenbacker encountered seven enemy aircraft while on a solo patrol. Despite being outnumbered, Rickenbacker engaged the enemy singlehandedly, downing two enemy aircraft and escaping the rest. He earned the Medal of Honor for his actions on that day.

Throughout his career as a pilot with the Army Air Service, he pioneered many air combat techniques and maneuvers. Following the Armistice, Rickenbacker returned to the United States and was discharged at the rank of captain. In addition to the Medal of Honor, he earned seven Distinguished Service Crosses, the Medal for Merit and several other awards and commendations, making him the most decorated American veteran of World War I. After leaving the military, Rickenbacker returned to the automotive industry, started his own car company and went on to found Eastern Airlines in 1926. In 1942, following U.S. involvement in World War II, Rickenbacker was asked by Secretary of War Henry Stimson to travel to the Pacific theater as an observer and report on U.S. Army Air Forces'

units stationed there. Rickenbacker agreed, placing his career on hold and traveling to the atoll of Kanton, located in Micronesia.

During the flight to Kanton, the navigational equipment aboard Rickenbacker's B-17 became uncalibrated, leading the plane astray in the Pacific. As fuel ran low, the men prepared to ditch their plane over open ocean. When their B-17 finally ran out of fuel, the men landed the plane in rough waters, crashing violently into the sea. All seven men aboard survived the landing, but were injured to some degree following the impact. As water quickly filled the plane, the men struggled to retrieve their emergency rafts and supplies. After managing to escape, the men realized nearly all of their food and water had been washed away, leaving them with only four oranges and a handful of cherries.

The men subsisted on the fruit for six days. They attempted to catch fish with the hooks provided in their emergency kits, but without bait they had no luck. In their dire conditions, Rickenbacker took charge, encouraging his fellow survivors and refusing to let them give up hope. On the 8th day, the men had their first stroke of good luck when Rickenbacker managed to catch a seagull. After eating the bird, the men used the intestines for bait and began catching fish. Later, the men passed through a storm and were able to collect rainwater. Despite their stroke of good luck, Sgt. Alexander Kaczmarczyk, who had been sick before the crash, died on the thirteenth day from dehydration after consuming sea water. On the 20th day, the men, increasingly desperate, decided to split up the rafts in hope of increasing their odds of being spotted. The idea was a success after one of the rafts was spotted the men were able to direct the Navy towards the other rafts. On the 23rd day, near death, Rickenbacker and the two other men on his raft were finally spotted by Navy sea planes and rescued.

After recovering, Rickenbacker went on to complete his mission and evaluated the Army Air Forces' units in the Pacific. Hoping to further serve his country, in 1943 Rickenbacker undertook a fact-finding mission to the Soviet Union, securing permission to visit the nation under the guise of providing the Soviets with technical assistance for their American aircraft. There, he gained the favor of Soviet officials and obtained information on Soviet strategies and capabilities. After returning to the United States, Rickenbacker disclosed the information to American officials. For his efforts, Eddie was awarded the civilian Medal for Merit. After the war, Rickenbacker continued running Eastern Airlines, living primarily in New York City. He remained a popular figure throughout his life, giving speeches on his experiences and visions. Rickenbacker passed away following a heart attack in 1973 at the age of 82. [Source: Vantage Point | Nicholas Rogers-Dillon | April 22, 2019 ++]

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## **WWII Vets 191 ► Arthur Joseph Holmes | Bronze Star Recipient**

Holmes was born in New York on December 11, 1923. He lived in Manhattan with his mother and two siblings and worked as an errand boy in 1940. In January 1942, Holmes left for Parris Island and trained to become one of over 200,000 Marines that served in World War II. Pfc. Arthur Joseph Holmes enlisted in the United States Marine Corps one month after the United States entered World War II. He spent over two years of his young life in the island-hopping campaigns of the Pacific with the 1st Marine Division. Holmes participated in many of the battles that took place in the Pacific during the war. He never returned home.

He joined Company C, First Battalion, First Marine Regiment in April 1942. After his unit assignment, his military career moved quickly. By July 11, 1942, he arrived in New Zealand and began preparations for the Guadalcanal Campaign. On August 7, 1942, Holmes and 11,000 other Marines landed on the island of Guadalcanal. Only 6 months after leaving New York for the Marines, Holmes participated in some of the heaviest fighting that the 1st Marine Regiment experienced during the entire war. On the night of August 21, 1942, the Japanese launched a massive counter-offensive against the Marines to retake the islands. Between 41 and 43 Marines were killed during the Battle of Tenaru. Despite the heavy fighting, the Marines held their positions against nearly 1,000 enemy soldiers.

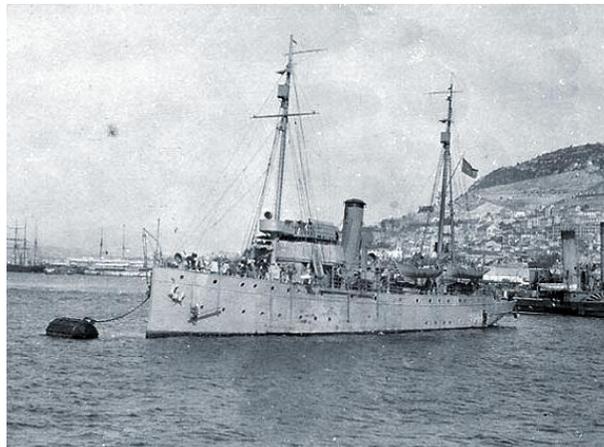
It was just the beginning of Holmes's experience of the war. He participated in one battle to another for the next two years. From September to December 1943, he fought alongside the Australian 9th Division on the Huon Peninsula. In January 1944, Holmes's unit participated in the Battle of Cape Gloucester. In September 1944, the Battle of Peleliu began. Within 10 days, the First Marine Division lost half of its fighting force. Over 2,000 Americans lost their lives during the fighting. Pfc Arthur J. Holmes Jr. was among them. He was killed in action on September 19, 1944, at the age of 20. He spent the last two years of his life at war, and never returned home.



Holmes was awarded the Purple Heart and a Bronze Star. He was buried at sea and his name can be found on the Walls of the Missing in Manila American Cemetery. Last year, the Veterans Legacy Program partnered with the University of Central Florida to learn about Veterans memorialized at Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, Florida. Holmes was among the Veterans that students conducted research on. One student discovered Holmes's story and wrote a biography for him to share his legacy. At <https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/BMD-0-31-F.html> you can read Holmes's biography [Source: Together We Served | April 2019 ++]

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## **USCGC Tampa** ► **WWI's Greatest Combat Loss by the U.S. Naval Forces**



On September 26, 1918, the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Tampa (operating as the USS Tampa under wartime rules) was lost with all hands, a total of 131 men. This was the greatest combat loss taken by the U.S. Naval forces during World War I as well as the greatest loss of life incurred by the U.S. Coast Guard in its entire history. The Tampa's short story began on August 9, 1912, when the U.S. Revenue Service Cutter (UCRC) Miami, built by the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Corp., was commissioned at Arundel Cove, MD. The ship was named for the Miami Indian

tribe rather than for the then little settlement in south Florida. At the time, several revenue cutters were named after Indian tribes. The Miami was 190 ft. long, with a 14.6-ft. draft and a displacement of 1,181 tons. Her normal crew complement was 70 Officers and men, she carried three quick-firing six-pounders and various small arms, and she could do 13 knots.

The Miami's first duty was with the International Ice Patrol, operating out of Halifax and looking for icebergs. Subsequently, she was based at Tampa, Florida, and developed a relationship with the city. In January 1915 the Revenue Cutter Service and the Lifesaving Service were merged and re-named the U.S. Coast Guard. It was then decided that the Indian tribal names were to be phased out, so in February 1916 the Miami was renamed the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter (USCGC) Tampa.

Soon after war was declared on April 6, 1917, according to law the U.S. Coast Guard was transferred to the U.S. Navy for the duration of the war. Three days later, the USS Tampa, along with the former USCGC Tallapoosa, seized the Austrian merchant ship Borneo, the first overt action by Coast Guard ships in the war. At the time the USCG had 23 cutters capable of ocean service, which were sent to east coast Navy yards where they were up-gunned and outfitted with depth charges. In August and September of 1917 the cutters Ossipee, Seneca, Yamacraw, Algonquin, Manning, and Tampa left for European service. They were designated as Squadron 2, Division 6 of the Atlantic Fleet's patrol forces (the flagship was the slightly larger gunboat USS Paducah PG-18), and the squadron was based at Gibraltar. These cutters escorted hundreds of vessels convoying between Gibraltar and UK and also performed escort and patrol duty in the Mediterranean.

On the evening of her loss, USS Tampa was detached from escorting Convoy HG-107 in the Bristol Channel with orders to proceed to Milford Haven, Wales, to discharge passengers. At 8:45 p.m. an explosion was noted by a hydrophone operator in the convoy. Subsequently, the Tampa failed to arrive at her destination and a search was made for her by U.S. and British patrol craft. A small amount of wreckage identified as belonging to the Tampa and two unidentified bodies in Naval uniforms were found. Two other bodies later washed ashore. Losses were 111 U.S. Coast Guard, four U.S. Navy, eleven Royal Navy, and six civilians.

The British Admiralty notified Rear Admiral William Sims, USN, commander of the U.S. Navy in Europe: Their Lordships desire me to express their deep regret at the loss of the USS Tampa. Her record since she has been employed in European waters as an escort to convoys has been remarkable. She has acted in the capacity of ocean escort to no less than 18 convoys from Gibraltar comprising 350 vessels, with a loss of only 2 ships through enemy action. The commanders of the convoys have recognized the ability with which the Tampa carried out the duties of ocean escort. Appreciation of the good work done by the USS Tampa may be some consolation to those bereft and Their Lordships would be glad if this could be conveyed to those concerned.

The German U-boat UB-91 claimed credit for sinking the Tampa. Her captain, Kapitänleutnant Wolf Hans Hertwig, wrote in his service log that he had spotted the Tampa while he was running on the surface and submerged and fired the torpedo from the stern tube at a distance of 550 meters, which hit the Tampa amidships. Clearly, UB-91 wasn't spotted by any lookouts on the Tampa, which took no action or countermeasures whatsoever. From the reported distance at the time the UB-91 launched her torpedo, the ships had been quite close together. Why did Hertwig submerge? With his 105mm deck gun, he had the Tampa out-ranged. He could easily have fallen back and engaged Tampa with his gun, which would have saved a torpedo.

Hertwig was a very new U-boat commander in a new craft; the UB-91 had been commissioned in April. He had spent nearly all of the war with the High Seas Fleet, having served at the Battle of Jutland on SMS Westfalen, had only recently graduated from the U-boat training program, and his first patrol had no results. How did an inexperienced U-boat commander and crew pull off a tricky stern shot at very close range so flawlessly? In any event, the official U.S. Coast Guard history doesn't concede that UB-91 sank the Tampa.

The men of the USS Tampa are commemorated at the Brookwood ABMC Cemetery and Memorial in Surrey, UK, and also on the U.S. Coast Guard memorial in Arlington National Cemetery. [Source: Together We Served | James Patton | April 2019 ++]

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## **Obit: Richard Lugar** ► 28 APR 2019 | Navy Officer & 36 Year U.S. Senator

Former Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN), a foreign policy sage known for leading efforts to help the former Soviet states dismantle and to secure much of their nuclear arsenal, but whose reputation for working with Democrats cost him his final campaign, died early Sunday. He was 87. The Lugar Center issued a statement saying Lugar died at the Inova Fairfax Heart and Vascular Institute in Virginia from complications related to chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy, or CIPD, a rare neurological disorder.



A soft-spoken and thoughtful former Rhodes Scholar, Lugar dominated Indiana politics during his 36 years in the U.S. Senate. That popularity gave him the freedom to concentrate largely on foreign policy and national security matters — a focus highlighted by his collaboration with Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., on a program under which the U.S. paid to dismantle and secure thousands of nuclear warheads and missiles in the former Soviet states after the Cold War ended. “Every stockpile represents a theft opportunity for terrorists and a temptation for security personnel who might seek to profit by selling weapons on the black market,” Lugar said in 2005. “We do not want the question posed the day after an attack on an American military base.”

He served for decades on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, twice as chairman, where he helped steer arms reduction pacts for the presidential administrations of George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, supported an expansion of NATO and favored aid to Nicaragua’s Contra rebels. Lugar tried to translate his foreign policy expertise into a 1996 presidential run, where his slogan was “nuclear security and fiscal sanity.” But his campaign for the GOP nomination went badly from the start. His kickoff rally began just hours after the 1995 bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building, and he struggled to build name recognition and support. “He is not, nor does he try to be, a good ol’ boy,” Rex Early, a former state Republican chairman who worked on many of Lugar’s campaigns, said during the presidential run. “He is not a back-pounder and doesn’t tell funny jokes and have a beer with the boys.”

Lugar tried to counter questions about his demeanor, contending that the presidency is “serious business. The presidency is not entertainment.” But he was chafed at criticism that he was too straight, too smart, too dull. “I don’t know what that means,” he said. “Is it better to have someone stupid? Or mediocre? Or halfway there?” He withdrew a year into the race after failing to win a single convention delegate, but not before eerily foreshadowing the threat of terrorism that would become all too real on Sept. 11, 2001. Three of his television ads depicted mushroom clouds and warned of the growing danger of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of terrorist groups.

Lugar’s time as a Washington foreign policy expert was the highlight of a political career that began with his election to the Indianapolis school board in the early 1960s. It was there that he caught the eye of city GOP leaders, who encouraged him to run for mayor in 1967. He served two terms at the city’s helm, leading the unification of Indianapolis and its suburban communities in Marion County, which solidified the city’s tax base and added so many

Republican voters that Democrats weren't able to win the mayor's office again for more than 30 years. He also started efforts to revive the city's downtown with construction of Market Square Arena, which in turn helped bring the Indiana Pacers into the NBA and spurred Indianapolis' development as a sports city that culminated in the 2011 Super Bowl.

As mayor, he was referred to as "Richard Nixon's favorite mayor" for backing the move of federal programs to local governments. He first ran for Senate in 1974, but lost narrowly to Sen. Birch Bayh in the Democratic landslide at the time of the Watergate scandal. But he ran again two years later and easily unseated three-term Democratic Sen. Vance Hartke, launching a 35-year Capitol Hill career that made him Indiana's longest-serving senator. He built a reputation as someone willing to work across the aisle and showed he could buck his party, notably with two major disagreements with President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.

- In 1986, Reagan was inclined to accept the rigged election that would have kept Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos in office. But Lugar went to the islands as an election observer and said Reagan was misinformed. Lugar's stand shifted U.S. support to the ultimate winner, Corazon Aquino, bringing down Marcos.
- In another break with Reagan, Lugar pushed through Congress — over the president's veto — the economic sanctions that Nelson Mandela said played a crucial role in overthrowing white minority rule in South Africa.

His foreign policy work didn't sit well with everyone. Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC) ousted him as the top Republican on the foreign relations committee in 1986 over being "too internationalist." But at home, Lugar remained the Indiana GOP's most popular figure, trouncing his opponents by winning at least two-thirds of the vote in four straight elections. Democrats considered him so invincible that they didn't nominate a challenger to him for the 2006 election. He was the top Republican on the Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee when he first worked with Obama, taking the then-Illinois senator with him to Russia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan in 2005 to visit weapon dismantlement sites. He then co-sponsored 2007 legislation with Obama on eliminating stockpiles of shoulder-fired missiles.

Obama frequently cited his work with Lugar during the 2008 presidential campaign as evidence of his bipartisanship and foreign policy experience. Lugar endorsed John McCain but didn't distance himself from Obama at the time, saying "I'm pleased that we had the association that Sen. Obama described." That changed by the time of Lugar's 2012 re-election campaign. His tea party-backed challenger, state Treasurer Richard Mourdock, maintained that, "Lugar has clearly lost his way on issues like our raising the debt limit, wasteful earmark spending and massive bailouts of private companies at taxpayer expense."

Lugar's campaign ads highlighted his votes against Obama's "bankrupting" budgets, and the senator said his relationship with Obama was "overhyped." But those attacks on his conservatism — combined with voter wariness about his age and long Washington tenure and questions about him not owning a home in Indiana since the late 1970s — led to Lugar's first defeat since 1974, as Mourdock grabbed 60 percent of the GOP primary vote. In conceding defeat, Lugar said he knew some of his positions had been considered "heretical" by some, including his opposition to earmarks and support for immigration reform. "I believe that they were the right votes for the country, and I stand by them without regrets," he said.

After Lugar's defeat, Nunn, the Democratic senator with whom he worked on nuclear disarmament, suggested that many people may have misinterpreted Lugar's positions as they accused him of being too liberal. "Dick Lugar never compromised his principles in anything we did together, nor did I," Nunn said at the time. "We found ways to work together because we examined the facts and let the facts have a bearing on the conclusions, and I'm afraid in today's political world, too often, people start with the conclusions and then hunt facts to justify them." The Nunn-Lugar program led to the deactivation of about 7,600 Soviet nuclear warheads and the destruction of more than 900 intercontinental ballistic missiles by the time Lugar left office, according to U.S. military figures. The program is credited with removing all nuclear weapons from the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus.

Born April 4, 1932, in Indianapolis, Lugar became an Eagle Scout and graduated at the top of his classes at both Indianapolis Shortridge High School and at Denison University in Ohio. At Denison, he played cello in the orchestra and was the student body co-president with his future wife, Charlene. They married in 1956 and had four sons. He

was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University, and in 1956 he became a Navy officer, spending time as an intelligence aide for the chief of naval operations. He moved back to Indianapolis in 1960 to help run the family's food machinery manufacturing business. A longtime fitness advocate, he sponsored runs in Indiana and even at age 70 completed a 3-mile competitive race in Washington in just over 28 minutes. [Source: Associated Press | Tom Davies | April 28, 2019 ++]

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### **Obit: Robert Graham** ► **12 APR 2019 | WW2 Guadalcanal & Bougainville Vet**

Last week, hundreds of people gathered in Shrub Oak, New York to attend the funeral of Robert Graham, a 97-year-old veteran who served in the Pacific as a Marine Raider during World War II. The attendees came from all across the state, many were veterans themselves, and few if any of them had ever met Graham. But they came just the same because they heard he wouldn't have any family at his funeral, a local CBS news affiliate reported. Graham died April 12 at Yorktown Rehabilitation and Nursing Center in Yorktown reports the Associated Press. Graham's wife of 60 years, Rosie, passed away two years ago, and with no close relatives, and few friends from his Marine days left, Graham's passing may have gone unnoticed, if not for the efforts of Beth Regan.



"I was afraid the funeral was not going to be well attended," Regan, who volunteers at the nursing home where Graham lived, told CBS. "I thought there would only be a handful of people there." When Graham passed away, she took to social media and asked for people to attend his funeral, telling CBS that she "thought there would only be a handful of people there." Word quickly traveled and when Graham was laid to rest on April 26, his funeral included a police motorcade, an escort, and more than 200 military veterans, police, and firefighters from across the state in attendance. According to the Associated Press, Graham fought at Guadalcanal and Bougainville as a member of the Corps' elite Marine Raiders, and earned both the Silver and Bronze star medals for his service in the Pacific. After the war, Graham returned to New York, and worked as a corrections officer. [Source: Task & Purpose| James Clark | April 28, 2019 ++]

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### **Vet Hiring Fairs** ► **Scheduled As of 1 MAR 2019**

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 <https://www.hiringourheroes.org>. 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 | April 30, 2019 ++]

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## **Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ► As of 1 MAY 2019**

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](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html).
- PDF: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.pdf](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf).
- Word: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.doc](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc).

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](mailto:Milton.Bell126@gmail.com)

[Source: Retiree/Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | April 30, 2019 ++]

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## **Vet State Benefits ► Massachusetts 2019**

The state of Mississippi provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Veteran State Benefits – MA**” for an overview of the below those benefits. The below are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each refer to <http://www.mass.gov/veterans> .

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/massachusetts-state-veterans-benefits.html> | April 2019 ++]

**\* Vet Legislation \***



**Note:** To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 116th 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.

**Agent Orange Diseases Update 05 ► H.R.2200 | Keeping Our Promise Act**

A group of lawmakers introduced legislation that would add nine more diseases to a list of conditions presumed to be caused by the chemical herbicide Agent Orange, giving veterans who suffer from them a fast-track to Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation and health care. The **Keeping Our Promises Act**, introduced last week, adds prostate cancer, bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, hypertension, stroke, early-onset peripheral neuropathy, AL amyloidosis, ischemic heart disease and Parkinson-like syndromes to a list of diseases presumed to be caused by Agent Orange exposure during the Vietnam War.

Researchers with the National Academy of Medicine released findings in November that there was “suggestive” evidence that eight of the diseases could be caused by Agent Orange. For hypertension, researchers found that “sufficient” evidence exists. “American heroes affected by Agent Orange deserve the peace of mind knowing that the federal government recognizes the existing link between their exposure and illness,” said Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) one of eight lawmakers who banded together to introduce the legislation.

VA experts have begun a “formal, deliberative review” of the National Academy of Medicine’s latest report, VA Press Secretary Curt Cashour said 16 APR. The review is expected to be complete in the summer, at which time the agency will make recommendations about presumptive conditions, he said. During a Senate hearing 26 MAR, Richard Stone, the executive in charge of the Veterans Health Administration, guessed the review would be complete within 90 days. “We’re working our way through that right now,” Stone said of the national academy report. Recommendations would be sent to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, who would choose when – and whether – to act on them.

The VA previously recommended that some of the conditions be added. After the last National Academy of Medicine report in 2016, the VA took 20 months before it sent recommendations to the White House that bladder

cancer, hypertension, hyperthyroidism and Parkinson’s-like tremors be added to the list. The recommendation hasn’t made it past the White House’s Office of Management and Budget. Last year, VA officials told the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs that the Office of Management and Budget is waiting for results of ongoing mortality and morbidity studies, which could provide more evidence of a connection between the diseases and Agent Orange. On Tuesday, Cashour said some of those results will be published as early as mid-2019.

But some lawmakers don’t want to wait on the executive process. Fitzpatrick, along with Reps. Annie Kuster (D-NH), Bruce Westerman (R-AR), Scott Tipton (R-CO), Elise Stefanik (R-NY), Joe Cunningham (D-SC), Brendan Boyle (D-PA), and Mike Thompson (D-CA) are trying to use a legislative route. Boyle estimated it would help tens of thousands of Vietnam War veterans. “This bipartisan legislation makes good on that promise by ensuring all servicemembers exposed to these herbicides and chemicals as a part of their military service get the health care they need,” Boyle said in a statement. “Not one more servicemember should be forced to suffer in this way without the best care our federal government has to offer.”

The bill is likely to face an uphill battle in Congress, where veterans and advocates have fought for years to prove toxic exposures and secure VA benefits. Attempts failed in Congress last year to approve benefits for “blue water” Navy veterans – sailors who served on ships off the coast of Vietnam and argue they were exposed to Agent Orange. The veterans could be close to getting VA benefits, but the victory was won in court, not Congress. The VA opposed the legislative effort to approve benefits for blue water Navy veterans, citing high costs and insufficient scientific evidence. The agency has not yet issued an opinion on the Keeping Our Promises Act. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | April 17, 2019 ++]

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## **DIC Update 11 ► S.1047 | DIC Improvement Act**

Survivors receiving pay from the Department of Veterans Affairs would see an increase in benefits under a new bill introduced by Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT). Tester’s bill, the **Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Improvement Act**, would increase the amount of DIC paid to surviving spouses and align the benefit with other federal programs. The proposal, which could net survivors an extra \$5,400 a year, has been a long-time goal of both MOAA and The Military Coalition.

Currently, DIC is paid at a monthly rate of \$1,319, with additional allowances in certain circumstances. That works out to 40 percent of what a veteran with a 100 percent service-connected disability rating receives from the VA. However, federal survivor programs provide up to 55 percent of a civil servant’s pay, computed as if the employee retired on disability at the date of death. DIC is a tax-free monetary benefit paid to a surviving spouse and dependent children when a servicemember dies of a service-connected cause. This includes death while on active duty or death later due to an injury or disease contracted while the servicemember was on active duty.

The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee plans to work on the bill later this year. Act now to send your senators a MOAA-suggested editable message on this bill which is available at <http://takeaction.moaa.org/moaa/app/write-a-letter?2&engagementId=498946>. [Source: The MOAA Newsletter | April 25, 2019 ++]

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## **Tricare Reserve Select Update 16 ► H.R.613/S.164 | TRS Improvement Act**

More National Guard and Reserve members, many of whom have remained on rotational deployments in overseas operations throughout the country’s longest war, may soon have a new choice when it comes to health insurance. MOAA has long supported opening enrollment of TRICARE Reserve Select to all retired National Guard and Reserve

members, and congressional subcommittees now are reviewing legislation that would allow members of the National Guard and Reserve who are federal employees covered under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan (FEHBP) to enroll in the TRICARE plan. “It’s more choice,” said Capt. Kathy Beasley, USN (Ret), government relations director of health affairs for MOAA. “Guard and Reserve members are more utilized now in the past 17 years than before the war. It’s important to look after them. They’re utilized a lot. They go on and off duty, and that’s a disruption.”

The Tricare Reserve Select program was established in the 2005 National Defense Authorization Act to offer reserve-component members and their families health insurance. However, Guard and Reserve members who are eligible for FEHBP were not allowed to enroll. Discussions to offer these troops more choice began as the operational tempo increased for National Guard and Reserve units. Last month, more than 3,500 soldiers with the Mississippi and Kansas National Guard returned from a nine-month deployment in support of Operation Spartan Shield – the first time in the past decade that a reserve component that large had been deployed.

The House’s proposed legislation, introduced by Rep. Trent Kelly (R-MS) has been referred to the House Armed Services subcommittee on military personnel, while the Senate version, introduced by Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT) is in the Senate Armed Services Committee. The proposed legislation would allow about 113,000 Guard and Reserve members to choose whether to enroll in TRICARE Reserve Select. It would provide a cost savings of about \$1.5 billion in discretionary spending over 10 years, according to the Congressional Budget Office, against a \$240 million increase in mandatory outlays.

**TAKE ACTION:** Ask Your Lawmaker to Support Making TRICARE Reserve Select Available to All Reservists and Guard Members at <http://takeaction.moaa.org/app/write-a-letter?4&engagementId=498918>. [Source: The MOAA Newsletter | Amanda Dolasinski | April 25, 2019 ++]

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## **Vet Suicide Update 31 ► H.R.2333 | Support for Suicide Prevention Coordinators Act**

VA employees whose task it is to prevent veteran suicides by identifying high-risk veterans and making sure they get help are “overworked” and “unable to keep up” with the demand, Rep. Anthony Brindisi (D-NY) said. Veteran suicide is a ‘gut-wrenching’ ‘crisis,’ officials say. Here’s what Congress is doing about it. Brindisi is sponsoring the “**Support for Suicide Prevention Coordinators Act**” filed 18 APR, which is intended to ensure that those VA staff members “have the tools and resources they need to provide veterans with critical mental health resources,” a news release from Brindisi’s office said.

“Twenty veterans die by suicide every day,” Brindisi said in a statement. “This is wrong and unacceptable, and we must do more. It is our responsibility to ensure every veteran has a place to turn when he or she needs help. Our bill is an important step to improve VA suicide prevention resources and ensure all veterans have access to the life-saving mental health care they need.” The bill would require an assessment of the responsibilities, workload and number of vacancies in the Department of Veterans Affairs suicide prevention coordinators.

Suicide prevention coordinators “are the face of the VA’s efforts to combat veteran suicide,” according to Brindisi. “They identify high-risk veterans and ensure they receive appropriate care, conduct outreach and promote awareness and suicide prevention best practices within the VA, among other responsibilities,” according to the release. “Many suicide prevention coordinators report being overworked and unable to keep up with their many responsibilities.”

“It’s clear we’re not doing enough to support our veterans when they need it most, but the truth is there’s a lot we still don’t know about veteran suicides,” Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA), chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, said in a statement. “That’s why I’m proud to support this legislation to require GAO to review training, workload and staffing at VA to ensure this critical workforce is prepared to care for veterans in crisis.”

“At the forefront of this national epidemic are the caring VA suicide prevention coordinators,” Rep. Jim Banks (R-IN) said in a statement. “I am proud to co-lead this bipartisan legislation that will help those who work tirelessly to save the lives of our beloved warriors.” “We have a duty to ensure our heroes considering suicide have access to the tools and resources they need to know they are not alone,” Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL) said in a statement. “But we have our work cut out for us.” If the bill passes, a report on findings will be due to Congress no later than one year after its passage. For more information on potential warning signs of suicide, click [here](#). [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | April 25, 2019 ++]

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## **Vet Suicide Update 32 ► H.R.2340 | Fight Veterans Suicide Act**

Congressman Max Rose, an Army combat veteran and former non-profit healthcare executive, introduced legislation 18 MAY aimed at addressing the troubling trend of veterans dying by suicide on Department of Veterans’ Affairs (VA) campuses. Just this month, it’s been reported that three veterans have committed suicide at VA facilities. “It’s imperative that we receive not only basic information from the VA, but substantive data on this rising trend of veterans committing suicide at VA facilities,” said Rose, a member of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee. “Getting this data more quickly and thoroughly would guide Congress’ efforts in understanding this crisis, and preventing these tragedies. We must ensure all veterans have the services they need when they need them, plain and simple.”

“Veteran suicide is a national public health crisis that we need to address—that’s why the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs has made it a top priority,” said Rep. Mark Takano, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. “Congress can help develop a response to these tragedies, but we have to know what’s happening. I’m proud to support this bill to ensure Congress gets the data it needs as quickly as possible so we can work together to prevent these incidents and give veterans in crisis the support they desperately need.”

Rose’s legislation is a key effort in response to recent tragedies of veterans committing suicide on VA campuses. Congress has found that VA is not always forthcoming with timely information around these events. Having key data points which this legislation requires from VA would help Congress fully understand the scope of this crisis to better serve our veterans in need. The legislation would require VA to provide notice to Congress of the suicide or attempted suicide and the name of the facility and location where the suicide or attempted suicide occurred no later than seven days after the incident. Additionally, the legislation would require VA to provide notice to Congress within no more than 60 days of the incident the following information regarding the veteran who committed or attempted to commit suicide:

- The enrollment status of the veteran with respect to the patient enrollment system of the Department;
- The most recent encounter between the veteran and any employee or facility of the Veterans Health Administration before the suicide or attempted suicide occurred;
- Whether the veteran had private medical insurance;
- The Armed Force and time period in which the veteran served;
- The age, marital, employment, and housing statuses of the veteran; and
- Confirmation that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs has provided notice to the immediate family members of the veteran regarding any Department support or assistance for which such family members may be eligible.

Rose, who serves on the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, has called on the Department of Defense to change the policy that leads to servicemembers and veterans on Staten Island receiving hundreds of dollars less per month for housing than the other four boroughs. Additionally, Rose passed legislation through the House of Representatives to expand childcare coverage from VA to apply to veterans seeking treatment for addiction and joined a bipartisan meeting with the Secretary of Veterans’ Affairs at the White House to discuss priorities and challenges facing VA. [Source: Congressman Rose Press Release | April 18, 2019 ++]

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## MOH Awards Update 11 ► H.R. \_\_\_/S. \_\_\_ | World War I Medals Review Act

Congress is preparing to order the Pentagon to review the records of scores of decorated soldiers who served in World War I to determine if they were denied the nation's highest battlefield honor because of their race or religion. The bipartisan **World War I Medals Review Act**, expected to be unveiled 18 APR, marks the latest effort to rectify the military's history of discrimination against black soldiers and other minorities who fought and died alongside their white comrades but were shunned and often the victims of racial violence. "We are in a historical conversation about race," said Timothy Wescott, director of the George S. Robb Centre for the Study of the Great War at Park University in Missouri, which is already reviewing some of the cases for the nonprofit United States Foundation for the Commemoration of the World Wars. "If there are corrections to make it is time to make those corrections in the bigger picture of reconciliation as a nation."

The reviews would be the first of their kind for the century-old conflict that pitted Great Britain, France, Russia and eventually the United States against foes including Germany and the Ottoman Empire. The research will initially focus on about 70 African American troops and then turn to other minority groups, according to officials involved in the effort. The new legislation, shared in advance with POLITICO, calls for the review of cases involving African, Asian, Hispanic, Native and Jewish Americans. The measure is expected to be included later this year in the National Defense Authorization Act, an annual defense policy bill.

Black troops served in segregated units during World War I, which means that "the information for forensic, historical and genealogical research is comparatively easy to locate" compared with the other four minority groups, said Wescott, a retired Marine. "We have been receiving information from other genealogists and family members, particularly in the Hispanic American and Jewish American grouping."

To warrant a review, the service members must have been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross or the Navy Cross, both considered the nation's second-highest awards for valor, or the French Croix de Guerre with Palm, France's highest honor, according to the proposed legislation. Soldiers and sailors will also qualify for a review if they were recommended for the Medal of Honor but didn't receive it. In all these categories, commanders at the time signed notarized statements on their forces' exploits, ensuring that the reviews rely solely on first-person accounts of the battles. The review process, which researchers estimate could take between five and seven years, will also compare the records with other cases in which troops were awarded the Medal of Honor.

The House version of the bill is being sponsored by Rep. French Hill, an Arkansas Republican who is enlisting co-sponsors in both parties. Identical Senate legislation is being sponsored by Sen. Chris Van Hollen, a Democrat from Maryland, and Roy Blunt, a Republican from Missouri. "Servicemembers of all races, religions and backgrounds fought in WWI, but the Medal of Honor was patently denied to minority veterans until the 1990s," said Van Hollen's office, which is planning a public roll-out Thursday in Cambridge, Md. The event will include representatives from the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion. "We cannot erase the discrimination minority service members faced, but we can make sure their heroic deeds are acknowledged and honored," added Blunt in a statement.

The legislation urges the secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force to work with the Medals Review Task Force, which was established by the World Wars foundation and the George S. Robb Centre. The Pentagon has conducted similar reviews for minority groups who served in other conflicts stretching from World War II to the war in Afghanistan. The systematic reviews began in the 1990s for World War II, a conflict in which black units remained segregated. That effort resulted in more than 100 soldiers receiving the Medal of Honor, all but one of them posthumously.

World War I, in which more than 116,000 Americans died, "was never included in any of these systematic projects," said Zachary Austin, who has also been researching some of the minority medal cases. He said the conflict stands out for another reason: All the Medals of Honor went to white soldiers. In contrast, Medal of Honor recipients

were much more ethnically diverse in preceding conflicts, such as the 1898 Spanish-American War and the Philippine insurrection between 1899 and 1902. Evidence is strongest that the military leadership during the First World War downplayed the African American soldiers' battlefield heroics, historians say.

More than 367,000 African American troops served in World War I in 1917 and 1918. Those included soldiers in the 369th "Harlem Hellfighters," which completed more combat days and suffered more casualties than any other American regiment, according to the World War One Centennial Commission, which Congress established in 2013 to help commemorate the 100th anniversary of the conflict. But none received the Medal of Honor. And as a sign of the enduring discrimination against black Americans after the war, an official report by the commandant of the Army War College in 1925 referred to African Americans as a "sub-species of the human family." The legislation is needed, advocates say, in part because the rules governing the Medal of Honor say it has to be recommended within three years of a battle and awarded to the recipient within five years. And only Congress can waive that restriction.

The push to reopen the World War I files was originally sparked by the case of Army Sgt. William Butler of Salisbury, Md., a veteran of the 369th. Butler received the Distinguished Service Cross, according to military records, "for extraordinary heroism in action near Maisons-en-Champagne, France, on Aug. 18, 1918. "Sergeant Butler broke up a German raiding party which had succeeded in entering our trenches and capturing some of our men. With an automatic rifle he killed four of the raiding party and captured or put to flight the remainder of the invaders." Some historians believe he should have received the Medal of Honor but didn't because he was black. "It is the one we know the most about," Austin said of the Butler case, which is among those that will be reviewed. "It spawned the whole effort."

Others believe the effort is long overdue. "It's honoring them — maybe a little late," said retired Army Col. Gerald York, who has been advising the World War One Centennial Commission. York is the grandson of Sgt. Alvin York, one of the highest decorated veterans of World War I, who was eventually awarded the Medal of Honor for his exploits in the so-called Meuse-Argonne Offensive in October 1918. Gerald York said his grandfather faced discrimination due to his initial claim of being a conscientious objector on religious grounds. Alvin York had originally only been recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross. York said securing the deserved honors for past victims of discrimination is not just about righting the wrongs of history. "It's also telling folks serving today on active duty that they won't be forgotten," he said. [Source: POLITICO | Bryan Bender | April 18, 2019 ++]

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## **Gold Star Families ► Senate Compromise Would Extend Free College Tuition in New York**

Democrats and Republicans in the New York Senate joined forces 15 APR to unveil a bill that would provide free college tuition for the families of any New York military member killed or disabled in the line of duty. The bipartisan bill comes less than a week after Assembly Democrats blocked similar legislation proposed by Republicans, setting off calls from both sides of the aisle to find common ground on the issue. Assembly Democrats had criticized the bill last week for coming up outside of the state budget process.

The GOP bill would have changed an existing state scholarship program that offers tuition aid to children, spouses and financial dependents of military members killed or disabled in combat zones. The change would have provided free SUNY tuition to family of military members killed or disabled anywhere in the line of duty, including training accidents in the U.S. or overseas.

Some Democrats had criticized the bill as too loosely defining what constitutes a death or injury for military members conducting "official duties." Sens. John Brooks (D-Long Island) and Robert Ort, (R-North Tonawanda), the top Democrat and Republican on the Senate Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs Committee, unveiled a compromise bill 15 APR. Their bill, co-sponsored by 10 Democrats and eight Republicans, would become effective April 1, 2020 – allowing the state Legislature to provided funding in next year's budget process. The extra

time would allow lawmakers to better estimate the additional costs that would be added to the [MERIT scholarship](#) program.

The legislation also would address concerns raised by Veterans of Foreign Wars leaders about the definition of what “official duties” would be covered by the law, according to a spokesman for Brooks. Would that cover a member of the military who died at a desk job? Under the bill, the commissioner of the state Department of Education would be asked to propose rules about what military duties qualify surviving family members for free tuition. Any proposed rules would be subject to hearings and public review. Assemblyman Felix Ortiz (D-Brooklyn) is expected to introduce a companion bill in the Assembly.

After the GOP bill was blocked last week in the Assembly Higher Education Committee, political leaders across the political spectrum called for New York lawmakers to reconsider the issue. Gov. Andrew Cuomo said he would support the bill outside of the budget process because, “We have a moral obligation, a social obligation to help those families who lost their provider, their loved one, in service to this nation.” President Donald Trump weighed in on the issue late Friday night with a tweet. “In New York State, Democrats blocked a Bill expanding College Tuition for Gold Star families after approving aid for illegal immigrants,” Trump tweeted. “*No wonder so many people are leaving N.Y. Very Sad!*” [Source: [www.syracuse.com](http://www.syracuse.com) | Mark Weiner | April 15, 2019 ++]

**\* Military \***



## **Transition Assistance Program Update 08 ► Changes Coming to TAP this Fall**

Changes are coming to the Pentagon's program for transitioning troops, which is designed to boost veterans' chances for success, starting with requirements that must be completed more than a year before a service member plans to leave. Starting 1 OCT, service members will have to complete their initial counseling with a Transition Assistance Program adviser and fill out their personal self-assessment, also known as an individual transition plan, no later than 365 days before retirement or the end of their enlistment.

As before, they will then be required to attend an eight-hour Defense Department pre-separation training day, during which they will learn about resiliency and managing their transition. They also receive coaching on how to translate their military skills into recognizable civilian terms, among other workshops, followed by day-long briefings from the departments of Veterans Affairs and Labor. Then, service members will have a couple of days of the usual five-day TAP to choose workshops on one or more of four tracks: employment, vocational, higher education and entrepreneurship.

The changes should prompt service members to focus on their futures earlier, providing an opportunity to consider all that goes along with leaving the military, including networking, financial planning, higher education and employment, DoD officials said. "The psychological and emotional aspects of transition are important to consider and are embedded in a variety of places in TAP. Not only are individual goals and needs addressed during the individualized counseling, but transitioning service members also receive more information on these topics during TAP," said Tamre Newton, director of the Pentagon's Transition to Veterans Program Office, in a news release.

The adjustments also should improve participation in the optional specialized workshops, which provide tailored training on how service members can reach their goals. A report issued in November 2017, by the Government Accountability Office found that, while 85% of active-duty service members attended TAP, 15% of transitioning service members -- and just 9% of officers -- took advantage of the sessions, which added two days to the weeklong TAPS curriculum.

Finally, the last requirement for TAP, the Capstone, during which commanders verify that troops have met career readiness standards and have a transition plan, must be completed no later than 90 days before separation. The GAO report found that fewer than half of service members in TAP completed Capstone 90 days before leaving the military. "These changes will tailor TAP to meet individual needs and with a look at their unique transition experience to best prepare for civilian life," Newton said.

All troops who have served on active duty for 180 continuous days or more, including National Guard and Reserve members being released from active duty, are required to go through TAP. The DoD recommends that retiring service members begin the process two years out. It also suggests that spouses or designated caregivers attend pre-separation counseling. The bill that made the changes to TAP, the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal 2019, also initially included a pilot program for spouses to participate in TAP, but that provision did not make it into the final law. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | April 18, 2019 ++]

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## **Military Recruiting Update 13 ► Do US High Schools Bar Military Recruiters?**

Activists are trying to call Pentagon's bluff. Peace activists are offering \$2,000 to a high school that admits it prevents U.S. military recruiters from entering its campus -- an effort, they say, to discredit military leaders who claim that 1,100 high schools nationwide are barring recruiters from schools. Author and anti-war activist David Swanson and Pat Elder, director of the National Coalition to Protect Student Privacy, are asking schools that deny access to military recruiters to post a video online with the hashtag #recruiterfree school, "explaining why their school keeps out military recruiters."

The two will award one of the schools \$2,000 to organize an education day focused on peace and non-military related careers. Swanson said the offer was made to challenge what he described as a falsehood perpetuated by senior military leaders: that schools are keeping recruiters out.

- In February, Army Secretary Mark Esper said that, after falling short in meeting recruiting goals in 2018, the service launched a major recruiting campaign in 22 cities but was finding that "schools are not letting our recruiters in, or counselors are not even presenting as an opportunity the chance to serve your country."
- Addressing members of the Senate Armed Services Committee in December, Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer described an "excess of 1,100 schools and districts that deny access to uniform members to recruit on campuses," mainly in the northeast and northwestern United States, he said.
- And Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Ronald Green in January said there are just some places where we are not allowed to recruit. "I'd like to see a more open-door process. In some high schools, there is just no entry point," Green said at a forum on military readiness at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

But Swanson and Elder say they can't find any schools that restrict access and add that the Defense Department has not provided a list of schools. Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, public high schools that accept federal funds must give recruiters the same access to students as employers and colleges. "A number of organizations can't find any evidence to prove that it is happening. If schools were doing this, it would be in violation of federal law," Swanson said. Interpretation of the law can vary by school and district. Access may mean direct contact and freedom to approach students on campus or in classrooms, or it may be tightly controlled, restricted to requiring direct

appointments only and limiting distribution of information. It also may be limited to offsite events such as college fairs.

A Defense Department spokeswoman said 25 APR that problems sometimes arise when recruiters are not provided the type of access they believe they should have to meet their recruiting goals, and schools provide only minimum access under the law. But sometimes schools are actually not in compliance, Pentagon public affairs officer Jessica Maxwell said. According to Maxwell, the Office of the Secretary of Defense reviews the status of school access twice a year and, if any schools are found not to be in compliance, they receive a visit from a senior-level officer. If problems continue, a SecDef representative will contact either the school or the state's board of education. Maxwell added that the 1,100 schools Spencer discussed were largely in New York City. The Navy, she said, has since worked with the Chancellor of the New York City Schools to restore access. Currently, no schools in the U.S. are non-compliant, she said.

Swanson said the services are having trouble recruiting because of low unemployment and the unpopularity of "participating in endless brutal wars that serve no clear purpose, increase hostility to the United States and leave participants at heightened risk of death, physical injury, brain damage, post-traumatic stress disorder, moral injury, violent crime, homelessness and suicide."

Both Elder and Swanson favor restricting the release of student information to the DoD and support a ban on military recruiting in schools. "[Recruiters] should not be there," Swanson said. "It's illegal to recruit minors into the military. And even if they are talking to people who are 18, much of what they are doing is targeted to people under age 18." Green said students have the right to consider a career in the military and believes recruiters should be allowed to speak with them. "There are people that want to serve in the military. I don't think any door should be slammed shut or closed. There should be limits about when we come in; we can work with that," Green said. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | April 26, 2019 ++]

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## **UFO Reporting ► Navy Drafting New Guidelines**

The U.S. Navy is drafting new guidelines for pilots and other personnel to report encounters with "unidentified aircraft," a significant new step in creating a formal process to collect and analyze the unexplained sightings — and destigmatize them. The previously unreported move is in response to a series of sightings of unknown, highly advanced aircraft intruding on Navy strike groups and other sensitive military formations and facilities, the service says.

"There have been a number of reports of unauthorized and/or unidentified aircraft entering various military-controlled ranges and designated air space in recent years," the Navy said in a statement in response to questions from POLITICO. "For safety and security concerns, the Navy and the [U.S. Air Force] takes these reports very seriously and investigates each and every report. "As part of this effort," it added, "the Navy is updating and formalizing the process by which reports of any such suspected incursions can be made to the cognizant authorities. A new message to the fleet that will detail the steps for reporting is in draft."

To be clear, the Navy isn't endorsing the idea that its sailors have encountered alien spacecraft. But it is acknowledging there have been enough strange aerial sightings by credible and highly trained military personnel that they need to be recorded in the official record and studied — rather than dismissed as some kooky phenomena from the realm of science-fiction. Chris Mellon, a former Pentagon intelligence official and ex-staffer on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said establishing a more formal means of reporting what the military now calls "unexplained aerial phenomena" — rather than "unidentified flying objects" — would be a "sea change."

"Right now, we have situation in which UFOs and UAPs are treated as anomalies to be ignored rather than anomalies to be explored," he said. "We have systems that exclude that information and dump it." For example, Mellon

said “in a lot of cases [military personnel] don’t know what to do with that information — like satellite data or a radar that sees something going Mach 3. They will dump [the data] because that is not a traditional aircraft or missile.”

The development comes amid growing interest from members of Congress following revelations by POLITICO and the New York Times in late 2017 that the Pentagon established a dedicated office inside the Defense Intelligence Agency to study UAPs at the urging of several senators who secretly set aside appropriations for the effort. That office spent some \$25 million conducting a series of technical studies and evaluating numerous unexplained incursions, including one that lasted several days involving the USS Nimitz Carrier Strike Group in 2004. In that case, Navy fighter jets were outmaneuvered by unidentified aircraft that flew in ways that appeared to defy the laws of known physics. Raytheon, a leading defense contractor, used the reports and official Defense Department video of the sightings off the coast of California to hail one of its radar systems for capturing the phenomena.

The Pentagon's UFO research office, known as the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program, was officially wound down in 2012 when the congressional earmark ran out. But more lawmakers are now asking questions, the Navy also reports. "In response to requests for information from Congressional members and staff, Navy officials have provided a series of briefings by senior Naval Intelligence officials as well as aviators who reported hazards to aviation safety," the service said in its statement to POLITICO. The Navy declined to identify who has been briefed, nor would it provide more details on the guidelines for reporting that are being drafted for the fleet. The Air Force did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Advocates for treating such sightings as a potential national security threat have long criticized military leaders for giving the phenomenon relatively little attention and for encouraging a culture in which personnel feel that speaking up about it could hurt their career. Luis Elizondo, the former Pentagon official who ran the so-called AATIP office, complained after he retired from government service that the Pentagon's approach to these unidentified aircraft has been far too blasé. [Source: POLITICO | Bryan Bender | April 23, 2019 ++]

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## **Military Draft Update 02 ► Trump Appeals Ruling That Male Only is Unconstitutional**

The Trump administration has moved to defend the male-only military draft, appealing a federal court ruling that Selective Service registration is unconstitutional because it discriminates based on sex. The appeal on 22 APR comes as the plaintiffs in the case step up their legal efforts to force the government to either force women to register for the draft or to eliminate mandatory draft registration entirely. The case is in an unusual posture because U.S. District Judge Gray Miller declared the current system unconstitutional in February but didn't require the Selective Service System to change it. So the agency is continuing to require registrations from men while forbidding women from registering.

So the plaintiffs – two men who say they're more likely to go to war because women are excluded from the draft-eligible pool – have asked the Houston judge to expand that ruling with an injunction ordering Selective Service to put men and women on an equal footing. But the Justice Department says ordering women to register for the draft is particularly problematic. "It would impose draft registration on all eligible American women by judicial fiat before Congress has considered how to address the matter," argued Justice Department lawyer Michael Gerardi. "No party before this court represents the interests of those who would be impacted by this change."

Congress has been debating the issue since President Jimmy Carter restored draft registration in 1980. Carter asked Congress to include women, but Congress refused – and in 1983 the Supreme Court held that the all-male draft was constitutional because only men could serve in key combat roles. But after the Pentagon opened all positions in the military to women, Congress created the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service to study the future of the draft and women's role in it. The commission will hold a series of hearings Wednesday and Thursday in

Washington on whether military draft registration should be expanded or eliminated. [Source: USA TODAY | Gregory Korte | April 23, 2019 ++]

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## Night Vision Update 01 ► ENVG-B | One of the Most Advanced Optics Available Being Deployed

US Army soldiers will soon be deploying with game-changing new night vision goggles as the service wraps up the final round of testing this week. Troops will be putting the Enhanced Night Vision Goggles - Binocular (ENVG-B), recognized as one of the most advanced night vision optics available, to the test at Fort Drum in New York at the last of ten limited user events. Once the testing is complete, the ENVG-B will enter full-rate production with fielding scheduled for this fall, PEO Soldier announced Monday. An armored brigade combat team set to deploy to South Korea this fall is expected to be the first unit to deploy with the new system, according to Army Times.



ENVG-B

Highlights of the new night vision goggles include dual-tubed binoculars for improved depth perception and increased situational awareness, white phosphorous tubes (a higher-resolution improvement over the traditional green glow), and improved thermal capabilities that allow soldiers to see through dust, fog, smoke, and just about anything else that might impair a soldier's vision on the battlefield. But, the really impressive capability is the ability to wirelessly connect the new goggles to the Family of Weapon Sights-Individual (FWS-I) for Rapid Target Acquisition. With the picture-in-picture setup, soldiers can fire accurately from the hip or point their weapon around a corner to observe or fire on targets effectively while remaining hidden.

This capability "enables Soldiers to detect, recognize and engage targets accurately from any carry position and with significantly reduced exposure to enemy fire," the Army explained. "Now, if a soldier's on a patrol, weapon's down at his hip, all of a sudden a threat pops, instead of having to flip up a goggle, shoulder his weapon, reacquire, he has that aim point in his field of view, and he can actually shoot from the hip," a BAE Systems spokesman previously told Business Insider. The FWS-I, along with the highly-capable monocular ENVG IIIs, were developed by BAE. The new ENVG-Bs were developed by L3.

Army officials have spoken highly of the new goggles and their improved capabilities. "It is better than anything I've experienced in my Army career," Lt. Gen. James Richardson, deputy commander of Army Futures Command, recently told Congress, according to Army Times. He said there had been a marked improvement in marksmanship, explaining that Rangers had "gone from marksman to expert" with the help of the new optics. Referring to the Rapid Target Acquisition capability, Brig. Gen. Dave Hodne, director of the Army's Soldier Lethality cross-functional team, told reporters last fall that he "can't imagine, right now, any future sighting system that will not have that kind of capability." The new goggles are also suitable for augmented reality, an option that allows the Army, and later the Marines, to turn the optics into a virtual reality platform for synthetic training. [Source: Business Insider | Ryan Pickrell | April 23, 2019 ++]

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## Army Promotions ► Way For Senior NCO Promotions Completely Revamped

The days of biding your time until you come up for promotion are over. The Army has done away with sequence numbers, which take into account how long a noncommissioned officer has been serving and rank them versus their peers. The Army will now promote based purely on talent. They'll do it with a multipurpose selection board, Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey told Army Times on 16 APR. The board will rank staff sergeants through sergeants major within their military occupational specialties. The new list, like the current Order of Merit rundowns, will be based on their mandated milestones and further informed by NCO Evaluation Reports.



“If you need to select for promotion, school attendance, training, you start from the top,” he said “If you need to manage the size of the force by MOS and skill level, you can start from the bottom.” So rather than the seven to nine separate boards the Army currently convenes each year, each rank will get its own quarterly board where this master list is assembled. Then, when Human Resources Command needs to fill training seats, select for broadening opportunities like drill sergeant or recruiter, and move some soldiers up to the next rank, they can consult the list.

- "If you meet the eligibility requirements and you're the number one person, you'll be the number one selected for school," Dailey said, regardless of time in service or grade, and
- During a drawdown, if there's a need for a qualitative management selection, those at the bottom of the list will be the first to go, rather than getting together an entirely new board to decide who is under-performing.

The new board process will “most importantly, create opportunities for upward mobility for those who are seeking to reach the highest standards,” Dailey said, because the most talented soldiers will be selected, rather than the ones with the most seniority.

### New boards

The board system isn't going away, but it will be condensed. “It's paying back what I call the unbuyable resource – time,” Dailey said, eliminating the need to take leadership out of their formations, pay for them to travel on temporary duty and help make individual decisions about promotions, education slots and so on.

The staff sergeant board will convene in February, the master sergeants in May, sergeants major in August and sergeants first class around December. “So the fundamental premise of leadership is what the board looks for and evaluates,” said Jerry Purcell, the Army's personnel policy integrator. Once the board is over, soldiers can sign onto Army Career Tracker — or the Integrated Pay and Personnel System, when it's fully fielded — and see where they stand. “If you're an infantryman, you will see you're number X of N,” Purcell said. “It will be transparent to the individual affected.” There will also be notes, he added, with feedback from board members, who can select on a drop-down menu which of the soldier's attributes most affected their standing, good or bad. For example, “character negative” or “character positive.” There will be another, public list, but it will be alphabetical and only include soldiers who are fully qualified in their MOS and grade — with an asterisk next to those are who are at or near the top.

The roll-out will happen over the next three years, starting later in 2019, with the next class of U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy students, who were selected for sergeant major before attending school. Their standing on the Order of Merit List will determine which jobs they're selected for once they graduate, Purcell said. Next year, training selections will be according to the OML. And this year's master sergeant and sergeant first class boards will be the

last. They will select for promotion and those NCOs will eventually go to training and get promoted. Next year, the Army will skip those boards, allowing this year's selections to fill up all of the available slots, and then in 2021 start selecting according to the OML. A senior enlisted council of about 300 sergeants major will be trained on the new system and will fan out to every installation, Dailey said, to teach soldiers face-to-face about the new system.

### **Rebalance**

There's another benefit to this system — rather than trying to predict the future, Human Resources Command will know how many NCOs it needs on a monthly basis. "We're not going to try to predetermine and forecast for the next years, and draw a line on that board," Dailey said. "We're going to have a continuous, running talent assessment, where we select people for training, and educate them, and then select them for promotion based on an annual requirement that year."

This is the progression now: An NCO is selected for promotion, then selected for a seat at the education course required for the next rank up, then finally promoted when a space opens up at the next grade. That whole process could take two years. "So in order to allow time to do all of that — and then satisfy a year's worth of promotion demand — we're really looking, 27, 28 months in the future at structure and at loss behavior over that entire time frame," Purcell told Army Times. And, inevitably, when those two-plus years are up, the forecast won't be 100-percent accurate — the Army could launch into a buildup or a drawdown that affects the number of NCOs it needs, or a good economy might convince some NCOs to brave the open job market, and there won't be enough to fill every slot.

"They're educated guesses, but they're often wrong," Purcell said. "So we end up with people on a list who we have to promote — because we've committed to do that — when they're excess, and they create skill and grade imbalances." Meaning that in a year when they overshoot the number, the next year has fewer promotions. Or if they undershoot it, they have to promote some soldiers lower down on the list to fill in the gaps. But all that is over. Now, the yearly, streamlined OML allows the Army to go one step at a time. At 18 months in grade — rather than the current 24 — soldiers will be "boarded," and they can't opt out. "Now we're going to simply inform who to train to qualify for promotion," Purcell said. "The promotion will come later when there is an actual requirement."

First comes school. If they're at the top of the OML for 11B staff sergeants, for instance, they'll get a spot at the Senior Leader Course. When they complete it, they'll be eligible for promotion, but they won't be selected until there's a requirement for them. "Every month, we decide by month," Purcell said. "We'll be able to look at the next month, establish exactly what we need, go down every MOS for every grade, and we'll be able to promote to the actual requirements." So the days when a soldier would rock staff sergeant-promotable for months before his or her name are done. Now, you might know a few weeks out that you're getting promoted. "We sacrifice soldier predictability for improved readiness," Purcell said.

As a consolation, the Army will publish a quarterly list of promotion projections. "Once we're 90 days out, we have a pretty good idea of what the requirements are going to be," versus the current two-year forecast, he said. And because the more accurate predictions will fix the problem of course-correcting later on, he added, it's likely that the Army will make more progress down the list than in years past. "We'll end up promoting more people from this process than we ever have before," he said.

### **Up or out?**

Within the discussion over talent management in the past couple of years, Dailey has floated the idea of limiting looks at promotion boards for E-7s, in the name of making space for promising E-6s to move up. It probably won't be necessary to force NCOs out if they're not selected for promotion twice in a row, he said, but there will be provisions in place to keep everyone performing and improving. "What we're going to try to do is eliminate the retention control point environment," Purcell said, in favor of performance. The Army doesn't want to force out successful NCOs, he added, just because of time. It takes eight new soldiers to replace a staff sergeant, and if that staff sergeant is good, he said, they don't want to lose him or her.

For soldiers who have missed professional milestones, the backstop will be a letter from the Army Department, triggered after a soldier is determined unqualified for promotion. Those will start going out in 2021. They'll have until the next year to correct it, Purcell said, or risk involuntary separation. In some rare cases, there may be soldiers who turn down a promotion. If they are high-performing, Dailey said, there will be a specific exception that allows them to continue serving. "We are putting together a set of rules for that," he said. "As long as you're doing exactly what the Army needs you to do, and there's no detriment to anybody else in the Army as a result of it, and we need you – so there's got to be a requirement, you don't just get to stay – we think that there's a provision to say that that's okay." [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | April 23, 2019 ++]

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## **USCG China Mission ► U.S. Using Coast Guard to Help Counter China**

As a U.S. Coast Guard cutter sailed through the East China Sea last month, Chinese vessels shadowed it on the high seas, service officials said. It was a reminder to the Americans of where they were: in a strategic area a couple hundred miles from China's shores. The situation underscored the evolving U.S. response to the rise of China and the Coast Guard's role operating missions typically closer to home. The Coast Guard is increasingly orienting itself toward China, senior officials said, by deploying new cutters, repositioning older ones and dispatching service members to countries such as Vietnam and Sri Lanka to help train those nations' coast guards.

Adm. Karl Schultz, the Coast Guard commandant, said that as the Defense Department shifts its focus to competing with Russia and China, the Navy is "oversubscribed." The factors he cited include "realities in the South China Sea" and the loss of two Navy destroyers involved in deadly collisions in 2017. "The Coast Guard brings some capacity to that equation," Schultz said in an interview. "The Coast Guard brings some authorities below the threshold of war. We're U.S. warships, but we look different, with a white hull and an orange stripe."



**U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf (WMSL-750)**

The deployment of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf to the Asia-Pacific region from Alameda, Calif., in January marked an expansion of Coast Guard operations there. The vessel, part of the service's growing fleet of modern cutters, is under the control of the Navy's 7th Fleet in the Asia-Pacific region during the deployment, despite the Coast Guard being part of the Department of Homeland Security. The Bertholf has carried out several missions that are typically assigned to the Pentagon, including a high-profile transit of the Taiwan Strait in March alongside the USS Curtis Wilbur, a Navy destroyer that was meant to demonstrate that international waterways near China remain open.

More recently, the Bertholf made a port stop in Hong Kong on 1 APR, the first time the Coast Guard has visited the Chinese territory in 17 years. The ship has carried out sanctions-enforcement operations in the East China Sea, preventing illegal ship-to-ship transfers of cargo meant for North Korea. The deployment of the Bertholf marks the

first time in years that the Coast Guard has deployed a large vessel to the Asia-Pacific region. The service has committed to the deployment later this year of another similar cutter, the Stratton, which will focus on training partner nations in the Asia-Pacific region to patrol their own waters, said Vice Adm. Linda Fagan, who leads Coast Guard operations in the region.

The Coast Guard did not want the Bertholf used “solely like a combatant” ship if it was deployed to the Pacific under Navy control, Fagan said she told Defense Department officials. There also was a desire to show that national security cutters have “interoperability” with Navy ships, she said. The Coast Guard also can provide deep insight into such areas as search-and-rescue operations and fisheries enforcement. Air Force Brig. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, the deputy director of operations for U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, said in a statement to The Washington Post that the Coast Guard “brings deep knowledge and unique capabilities” important to partners and allies in the region. The service’s law enforcement authorities also complement the Defense Department’s objectives, he said.

The Coast Guard’s involvement in the region has included transferring a decommissioned 378-foot Coast Guard cutter, the former USCGC Morgenthau, as well as 45-foot aluminum shark boats to the Vietnamese coast guard. The vessels will assist Vietnam in stopping smuggling, piracy and illegal fishing, according to a statement released by the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi. The United States handed over another decommissioned Coast Guard cutter, the former USCGC Sherman, to the Sri Lankan navy last year. The Coast Guard is in the process of adding fast-response cutters — 154-foot ships manned by a crew of 24 people — in the Pacific. Three will be based in Hawaii and three in Guam. One already has sailed about 2,400 miles west from Honolulu to Kwajalein Atoll, part of the Marshall Islands.

The deployments of the national security cutters come as the Coast Guard wrestles with interdicting more than 400,000 pounds of cocaine per year closer to home, mostly off the coast of Colombia. Fagan acknowledged that cutters in the Asia-Pacific region might otherwise be deployed there, where the service has sought to put more vessels. “That becomes a national-level, commandant-level conversation,” she said. “How do we not lose focus on the interdictions and the need to be present in the eastern Pacific, and the value of the national security cutters in that?”

Lyle Morris, an analyst with Rand Corp. who studies security issues in the region, said the Coast Guard has been involved in Asia “in a minor way” for decades but is now responding to requests from smaller nations in the region to control their own territorial waters. “They see the role of law enforcement vessels and coast guards as relatively non-escalatory, or less escalatory, than a navy,” he said. The need for the Coast Guard goes beyond countering China, he added. “China is a factor, and an increasing factor, but I would say that it’s not the only factor,” he said. “The biggest constraint for these countries is the money. They just don’t have the money to buy a lot of new vessels.” [Source: The Washington Post | Dan Lamothe | April 21, 2019 ++]

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## **Base Housing Update 11 ► New Registry and Hotline Aims to Address Housing Woes**

In the wake of families’ complaints about mold, vermin and other problems with some military housing, and possible related health effects, the Army Medical Command has established a new housing health registry and hotline that will be manned 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And this is part of a broader initiative that will result in a tool that will allow military families to search a database, by Army housing property, to find out about potential exposure and adverse health impacts. The hotline and registry is aimed at addressing the health or safety concerns of former and current residents and helping them get access to medical care for any housing-related illnesses. Information was not immediately available about whether the other services are also establishing similar registries.

“Great 1st step, but joint service registry would be best. We’ll watch how connection to health care will work,” tweeted Joyce Raezer, executive director of the National Military Family Association, on 16 APR. However, those who serve in other branches of service, but live or have lived in Army housing can call the Army hotline for assistance

and to provide information for the registry. It will provide a two-way exchange of information for all potential enrollees.



**Mold and mildew are shown on the ceiling of buildings at U.S. Army Garrison Fort Lee in Virginia.**

“We want to hear all concerns so we can make sure they are properly addressed,” said John Resta, director of the U.S. Army Public Health Center and acting deputy chief of staff of Public Health for the Army Medical Command, in an announcement about the hotline. A team of trained professionals will document the caller’s concerns and assist them with access to medical care if needed, said Resta. They can also refer any housing related concerns to the appropriate installation Department of Public Works, he said. The staff members will also provide current and former residents of Army housing with information on environmental health hazards.

The toll-free hotline/registry number is **800-984-8523**. Other registry numbers: Overseas: DSN (312) 421-3700; Stateside: DSN 421-3700; Stateside Commercial: 210-295-3700. Calls to the toll-free and commercial numbers confirmed that staff members answer the phones immediately. A timeline for launching this digital application for a searchable database has not yet been determined, said Doug Holl, spokesman for the Army Public Health Center. It’s the third phase of a broad initiative to establish the fully integrated registry of Army housing properties and environmental health assessments, Holl said.

In the second phase, officials will compile the information about the housing inventory and associated environmental health hazards and enter it into the DoD Enterprise Military Housing system. Housing environmental health exposure data will be entered into the Defense Occupational and Environmental Health Readiness System. “The registry was created as an Army initiative directed by Vice Army Chief of Staff Gen. James C. McConville and seen as an additional opportunity to engage in a dialogue with our Army family and better understand their housing concerns,” Holl said. “This registry is currently available to anyone and provides an opportunity to pursue further information and support regarding any health or safety concern that may not have been fully addressed,” stated Army Surgeon General Lt. Gen. Nadja West, in a letter to housing residents.

The third phase will result in a solution for understanding the health effects of potential environmental hazards found in housing; assess future needs for health interventions and health education; and inform the individuals about potential exposure and adverse health impacts, Holl said. Darlena Brown, an Army wife who says her son, now almost 9, still suffers from the effects of lead poisoning in Army housing, said the hotline and registry are a step in the right direction. She and other military families and family advocates have questioned whether officials were tracking and treating the health issues that are linked to their military housing.

DoD is collecting data on the health effects, said Dr. Terry Adirim, deputy assistant secretary of defense for health services policy and oversight, during a March 19 meeting of the DoD Military Family Readiness Council. The issue is important not just to the families with health issues they believe are connected to their current base housing, but also to those who lived in those houses previously, said Karen Ruedisueli, deputy government relations director for the National Military family Association, at the council meeting.

The Army Public Health Center provides continuously updated online health information and resources on mold and lead for service members, families, civilians, contractors and health care providers. The website, <https://phc.amedd.army.mil/topics/campaigns/housing/Pages/HEHRR.aspx> also has information about the registry. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | April 17, 2019 ++]

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## **CBD Products** ► **Military Users Risk Testing Positive for Illegal Drug Use**

The Department of Defense is warning servicemembers about the risk of being exposed to illegal drugs when using products containing cannabidiol, popularly known as CBD. The warning follows passage of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, which removed hemp from the government’s list of controlled substances. The crop is now treated as an agricultural commodity if it has extremely low concentrations of delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol or THC. In a command message on the American Forces Network, DOD officials are letting troops know that they could potentially get a dose of THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, when using supplements containing CBD.



The hemp extract is found in many widely available products ranging from vape oil to gummies and marketed as a treatment for ailments such as chronic pain, anxiety, inflammation and cancer. CBD products are legal under federal law as long as they contain less than 0.3 percent THC, which is present in hemp at much lower concentrations than in marijuana. However, it’s uncertain whether THC levels in all CBD products comply with the law, said Patricia Deuster, a professor in the Department of Military and Emergency Medicine at Uniformed Services University, said in a telephone interview 11 APR.

There have also been cases of CBD products that contain synthetic cannabinoids, said Deuster, who also serves as director of the Consortium for Health and Military Performance. “CBD isn’t psychoactive but if it is adulterated it could contain psychoactive ingredients,” she said.

Nate Atwood, 45, a former civilian defense worker at Misawa Air Base, Japan, and Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, said he’s used CBD products to battle inflammation and pain. “I would definitely recommend it for anyone who has problems with inflammation, including arthritis and backpain,” he said. “You can easily replace Motrin and most other over-the-counter pills, and a lot of pharmaceutical pain pills as well. I’m living proof of that.” Atwood recently started growing cannabis at home in Salcha, Alaska, to make his own CBD oil, he said.

Some CBD manufacturers guarantee no THC, but others might add it to give their products a kick, he said. “That’s the stuff people need to be wary of,” he said. “If you do get tested for drugs at your place of employment, THC might show up. I doubt it’s possible, but if the military could come up with a list of approved brands, it could be beneficial to a lot of people.” The military’s Operation Supplement Safety campaign posted a message on its website 26 FEB warning that “Military Service Members should avoid using any product with CBD, as it could contain THC and result in a positive drug test.”

In a two-month period last year, military bases in the U.S. reported more than 100 medical incidents related to such products, Deuster said. The incidents involved things such as emergency room visits with troops reporting symptoms ranging from increased heart rates to hallucinations, she said. Military regulations prohibit members of the Army and Air Force from consuming hemp products. The Navy and Marines allow their servicemembers to consume them but Deuster said those who do are taking a risk consuming "foods that might cause them to fail a drug test." A positive test for THC is a career ender, she said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Seth Robson | April 16, 2019++]

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## **USMC Parris Island Update 03 ► 956 Day Recruit Becomes a Marine**

Lance Cpl. Caleb Eudy first stepped on the yellow footprints in 2016, and on April 26, 2019 he'll finally depart Parris Island, South Carolina as a United States Marine. Though recruit training is typically just three months long, for Eudy it was an uphill battle that took 956 days. Just a month after arriving at boot camp, Eudy was diagnosed with Lymphoma. "So i just got told I had a cancer, how do you react to that?" Eudy said in a Marine Corps video by Cpl. Andrew Neumann that chronicled his lengthy journey to become a Marine. "Most people don't know what that's like, ever. It's like 'hey you've got a deadly disease.' Do you say 'thank you?'" Do you just stand there and stare? Do you cry?"



**Lance Cpl. Caleb Eudy, with Charlie Company, 1st recruit training battalion, grimaces during an event and boxes at the Crucible on Parris Island, S.C. April 12, 2019.**

After his cancer was diagnosed, Eudy returned home to Alabama to serve with a reserve artillery unit in Huntsville, roughly 30 miles from his hometown of Arab. From there, he underwent cancer treatment, and fought to keep from being medically separated from the Marine Corps. "I was like, I just need to stay in the Marine Corps," Eudy said in the clip. "The Marine Corps can do a lot of things for me and I think I can do a lot of great things in the Marine Corps as well, and I figure I should fight for it." Eudy's battle with cancer lasted two years before it went into complete remission. "He was ready to get all the chemo over with, get well, and get back to Parris Island," Eudy's mother said. "That was what he was determined to do."

Earlier this year, Eudy went before a medical board, which found him fit for duty and he returned to Parris Island as a recruit to finish his training. This week he completed the Crucible; the final challenge would-be Marines must overcome before they earn the title. "Cancer took away everything, but it also gave me everything. It took away my mind, my body, my spirit, but it also gave me everything, because I realized we're not going to live forever, we're going to die one day," Eudy said in the video interview. "One day I'm going to wake up without my wife, or she's going to wake up without me. It just made me treasure the time that we have." "I owe it to the Marine Corps, because they got me through the cancer," he continued. "They gave me the mindset that I can do anything, and I'm very thankful for that." [Source: Task & Purpose | James Clark | April 20, 2019| ++]

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## Toxic Exposure | Kirtland AFB ► Jet Fuel Seeping Into The Ground For Decades

The Air Force says it has spent \$125 million so far cleaning up thousands of tons of soil and millions of gallons of water contaminated by jet fuel at a base bordering New Mexico’s largest city. Air Force Deputy Assistant Secretary Mark Correll briefed Albuquerque water utility managers on the project at Kirtland Air Force Base during a meeting last week. The Albuquerque Journal reports Correll also reiterated the Air Force’s commitment to the clean-up. He said drinking water wells are tested monthly and no contamination has been found. The fuel leak — believed to have been seeping into the ground for decades — was detected in 1999. While state and military officials say drinking wells are protected, community watchdogs are pushing for an independent review of the cleanup. [Source: The Associated Press | April 23, 2019 ++]

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## RC Transgender Troops ► 3 More States To Allow Them to Serve

The Nevada, Washington State, and Oregon National Reserve Component Guards will continue to allow transgender people to serve. As the Trump administration’s transgender troop ban enters its second full week of being in effect, these three states have told The Daily Beast that they will join two others—California and New Mexico—who have said that transgender people will continue to be able to serve in their National Guard organizations. “

- The State of **Nevada** does not discriminate against anyone, including and especially servicemembers, based on gender identity or expression,” Helen Kalla, communications director for Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak, told The Daily Beast. “Governor Sisolak believes the only criteria to serve in the Nevada National Guard is one’s readiness to serve.”
- **Oregon** Gov. Kate Brown told The Daily Beast that she is “appalled that the Supreme Court is delivering an intentional blow to civil rights by supporting a push from the Trump Administration to bar transgender people from serving in the military.” “I will use every option available to ensure that every eligible Oregonian, regardless of gender identity, can serve their state and country,” Gov. Brown added.
- A spokesperson for **Washington** State Gov. Jay Inslee told The Daily Beast that his office “stands in solidarity with transgender Americans across the country in opposing this policy and won’t stop fighting until it is defeated.” “Until then, we will continue to welcome transgender service members to the greatest extent possible under the rules,” the spokesperson added. “It’s our understanding that is what New Mexico is doing as well.”

All 50 states—and four U.S. territories—have their own National Guard units that are primarily under gubernatorial control. That chain of command could allow individual governors to challenge—or at least test the limits of—the Trump administration’s newly-implemented policy, which disqualifies recruits with gender dysphoria while threatening most currently-serving transgender people with the risk of discharge. As The Hill reported shortly after the transgender troop ban went into effect on 12 APR, Maj. Gen. Matthew Beavers of the California National Guard said that gender identity “is the least of our concerns.”

He added that California will not only work to “bring transgender individuals in under the current policy” but also that “every transgendered soldier or airmen currently serving in the California National Guard will remain in our ranks.” “Further,” Maj. Gen. Beevers noted, “we will not treat any soldier or airman any differently today than we did yesterday.” Then, on 20 APR, a spokesperson for New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham confirmed to local TV station KOB4 that transgender service will still be permitted within the state’s National Guard, making it the second state to buck against the intention of the Trump administration’s ban in this fashion.

Reached for comment, Gov. Lujan Grisham’s communications director Tripp Stelnicki told The Daily Beast, “We’re not interested in auditing any individual’s fitness to serve on the basis of gender identity.” Now, the addition

of Nevada, Washington and Oregon makes five. All five of these states have Democratic governors. All five also number among the minority of states that have non-discrimination protections for transgender people in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations. Combined, the five states boast a total of over 40,000 people serving in their National Guard organizations. [Source: Daily Beast | Samantha Allen | April 25, 2019 ++]

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## Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang ► Boot Topping thru Break (the)

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

**Boot Topping** – The black paint used at the waterline of many warships. Separates the hull paint from the anti-fouling underwater paint.

**BOSNIA** – Big Old Standard Navy Issue Ass. Refers to the size of the sterns of some (usually female) navy personnel.

**Boss** – Short for AIR BOSS.

**Bosun** – The phonetic spelling of 'boatswain.'

**Bosun's Whistle** (or Pipe) – A small metal whistle used to signal the announcement of important messages, or for ceremonial purposes.

**Bounce** - (1) Carrier landing practice. (2) (older usage) Surprise air-to-air attack by a fighter, usually from above and behind.

**Bow Array** – (Submarine) That part of the sub's sonar suite which is located in the bow.

**Box the Compass** – (1) To name all the points of the compass. (2) To face successively in all directions, as when a ship loses steerage and drifts aimlessly.

**Boy Butter** – A light tan grease used by weapons types on torpedoes.

**Bracket** – In shipboard gunnery, a bracket results when one salvo lands to the left of the target and the next lands to the right. Adjustments in deflection usually result in a hit soon after.

**Bracket and Halving** – A method of correcting the aim of shipboard gunnery. For example, say a SALVO falls left of the target; a "spot" (an aim correction) is made using right deflection, and the next salvo falls to the right of the target. Another spot is applied back to the left, half the amount of the previous correction. In this way, the FALL OF SHOT is walked onto the target.

**Brain Fart** - Conceptual discontinuity. Loss of the bubble. Polite forms: 'brain fade', 'brain cramp'.

**Brass** – Officers, especially senior officers.

**Bravo Zulu** - Phonetic pronunciation of 'BZ' from the NATO signals codes. Signifies 'Good Job' or 'Well Done.'

**Break (the)** - Maneuver used by pilots of tactical aircraft to slow to traffic pattern speed. Typically, a 180-degree turn to the downwind leg at 4.5-6 G's (depending on speed of entry and type of aircraft).

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | April 15, 2019 ++]

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## Warships That Will Change The Future ► USS Port Royal (CG-73)



This missile cruiser is the last Ticonderoga class missile cruiser to be built. It is based out of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, and is known as being one of the fastest ships in the United States Navy. This is a huge feat considering the types of cargo (ie, giant missiles) that the ship carries when on a mission. Currently patrolling the waters of the South China sea, this ship's motto is "The Will To Win," something we believe it would do in any adversarial confrontation.

Port Royal and Lake Erie are the original cruisers for the navy's Linebacker Program (Milestone Phase I, II and III), which provided theater ballistic missile defense capability, as test platforms to detect, track, cue, intercept, and interact with other national assets to shoot down ICBMs. The vessel's Aegis and Standard Missile Tracking systems have been upgraded with "long range surveillance and track (LRS&T)", and the ships were outfitted to carry the modified SM-2 Block IVA TMD. As of 2009, Port Royal along with Lake Erie and Shiloh were the only three Ticonderoga-class cruisers to be equipped for the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense Program. Port Royal participated as a tracking ship during operation "Stellar Athena" FTM 12 on 22 June 2007 off Hawaii. Port Royal's role has been taken by Hopper.

Four (LM2500) gas turbine engines propel Port Royal with 80,000 shaft horsepower (60,000 kW) at speeds greater than 30 knots (56 km/h; 35 mph). Two five-bladed controllable reversible pitch propellers (17-foot (5.2 m) diameter) and two rudders assist in acceleration and deceleration. Sensors include:

- AN/SPY-1B(V) Multi-Function Radar (Four Mounts)
- AN/SPS-49(V)8 Air Search Radar
- AN/SPS-55 Surface Search Radar
- AN/SPS-64(V)9 Navigation Radar
- AN/SPQ-9 Gun Fire Control Radar
- AN/SPG-62 Illuminators (Four Mounts)
- AN/SQQ-89A(V)15 Sonar Suite
- AN/SLQ-32A(V)3 Electronic Warfare Suite

The cruiser at 567 feet length with a 55 feet beam and a 34 foot draft displaces approx. 9,600 long tons (9,800 t) full load. Her complement is 30 officers and 300 enlisted

[Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS\\_Port\\_Royal\\_\(CG-73\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Port_Royal_(CG-73)) | April 2019 ++]



## Go For Broke Day ► Japanese-American Army Unit is the Reason We Celebrate it Nationally

That phrase was allegedly coined by Hawaiian Pidgin craps players to mean “bet everything on a single roll.” But it was popularized as the motto of the Army’s famed 442nd Regimental Combat Team during World War II. In fact, National “Go For Broke” Day is celebrated on 5 APR every year likely because it was on April 5, 1945, that Pfc. Sadao Munemori — the 442nd RCT’s first Medal of Honor recipient — was killed in action near Seravezza, Italy, according to a Department of Defense history of that highly decorated unit.



**The Color Guard of the Army’s 442nd Regimental Combat Team stands at attention while citations are read following the fierce fighting in the Vosges area of France, Nov. 12, 1944.**

The 442nd RCT was made up entirely of Japanese-American soldiers and was formed during a time when that ethnic group was banned from military service after the attack on the naval base at Pearl Harbor. The Army eventually allowed Japanese-Americans (known as “Nisei”) to serve through the 100th Infantry Battalion, the 1399th Engineer Construction Battalion, the Military Intelligence Service and the 442nd RCT, which was officially activated on Feb. 1, 1943. After finishing their training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, the soldiers of the 442nd RCT deployed to Italy in June 1944 to fight alongside the 100th IB. By mid-August, the 100th was absorbed into the 442nd and the “go for broke” motto became an ingrained part of the unit’s identity.

In September 1944, the 442nd was reassigned to southern France where they helped liberate a few cities from German control. They were reassigned again in March 1945 and helped — along with the 92nd Infantry Division, an all-black unit — drive German forces out of northern Italy. Their accomplishments in battle inspired the U.S. to reinstate the draft in Japanese-American internment camps back home to allow them to fight as well. The 442nd RCT was inactivated about a year after the war ended. It was only around for two years, but soldiers in the 442nd RCT and 100th IB earned seven presidential unit citations, two meritorious service plaques, 36 Army Commendation medals and 87 division commendations between them.

Individual soldiers from both units earned 21 Medals of Honor, 29 Distinguished Service Crosses, 15 Soldier’s Medals and 9,500 Purple Hearts, among many other honors. On a more somber note, 650 men from those two units were killed during WWII, 3,700 were wounded in action and 67 were declared missing in action. In 2011, 450 Japanese-

American soldiers from the 442nd RCT and 100th IB were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the United States' highest civilian award for service. That unit also inspired a 1951 Hollywood movie aptly titled "Go for Broke." So every 5<sup>th</sup> of April remember the 442nd RCT and the 100th IB for their groundbreaking role in re-integrating the military and the motto with which they served their country. [Source: ArmyTimes | Joshua Axelrod | April 5, 2019 ++]

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## **WW2 Operation Vengeance** ▶ **Coordinated Effort to Kill Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto.**

Despite dire warnings from subordinates of possible enemy ambushes, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander of the combined Fleet of the Imperial Japanese Navy, intended to press ahead with his morale-boosting visits to forward units in the South Pacific in April 1943. He had no idea that the Americans had plotted through a military operation codenamed Operation Vengeance to intercept and shoot down his transport bomber aircraft. The 60-year-old mastermind of the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941 knew his forces needed a psychological boost in the face of a string of defeats at the hands of the U.S. Navy in 1942 and early 1943. When U.S. Navy cryptographers decrypted a message referring the Admirals intended movements it was decided to make an attempt at intercepting and shooting down his transport plane. To read how this was planned and executed refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Operation Vengeance**". [Source: Warfare History Network | Phil Zimmer | January 25, 2019 ++]

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## **Vietnam War Radiomen** ▶ **Life Expectancy**

At the height of the Vietnam War, up-and-coming commo guys who wanted to learn the art of radio operation would walk into a classroom and see a huge number five written on the chalkboard. Inevitably, someone's curiosity would win out and they'd ask what the big number meant. The instructor would then calmly tell them, "that's your life expectancy, in seconds, in a firefight. So, listen up and you might learn something that'll keep you alive." That number wasn't some outrageous scare tactic. During the Vietnam War, the odds were tremendously stacked against radio operations - and that 5-second life expectancy was, for some, a grim reality.

In all fairness, that number was on the more extreme side of estimates. The life expectancy of a radio operator in the Vietnam War ranged between five to six seconds all the way up to a slightly-more-optimistic thirty seconds, depending on your source. If you look at all the things the radio operators were tasked with, it becomes abundantly clear why commo guys weren't expected to last long. The first and most obvious tally in the "you're screwed" column was the overall weight of the gear radio operators were expected to carry into battle. The PRC-77 radio system weighed 13.5 lbs. without batteries. Toss in batteries, some spare batteries, and the unsightly, large encryption device always called the NESTOR and you're looking at carrying 54lbs on your back. Now add your weapon system onto that and try to keep up as you fight alongside your unencumbered brethren. It took a lot of getting used to - but they managed.

If the weight wasn't problem enough, next comes the antennae. They weren't all too heavy, but they were extremely uncomfortable to use and would often give your position away to the enemy. The three-foot version was easier on the radio operator, but it wouldn't work in thick jungles. For that environment, the radio operator needed a ten-foot whip antenna to stick out of their back, which was a great way to draw unwanted attention. The Viet Cong knew what it meant to take out a guy with a giant, ten-foot antenna sticking out of their back - you might as well have painted a bullseye on them. You take out the radio operator and you effectively avoid dealing with air support. Additionally, it was well known that a radio operator's place in the marching order was at the heels of the officer-in-charge - two high-priority targets in one spot.

And it wasn't just the bullets that radio operators had to watch out for. The large antenna also acted as a targeting point for mortars and other explosives. All they had to do was aim for the antenna and they could wipe out anyone near the radio operator. As terrible as it sounds, this meant that the radio operator would sometimes move in isolation, away from the rest of the squad. It is unclear exactly how many radio operators lost their lives during the Vietnam War. While many radio operators were fulfilling their MOS, others just had a radio strapped to them in times of need. One thing is for certain, though: Being a radio operator back in the Vietnam War puts you among the most badass troops the military has to offer. [Source: Together We Served Updates | Eric Milzarski | APR 2019 ++]

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## **General Henri Giraud** ► **Escaped the Germans in Both World Wars**

In August 1914, what many feared, and indeed, some had secretly hoped for, was finally taking place. The major European military powers were at war. At a time when nationalist and imperialist sentiment was rampant, there could be no better way than war to prove who the dominant power was. By the end of August 1914, Germany had the French on the run. They had smashed their way west through Belgium and northern France, despite surprisingly strong resistance from the Belgians and an expeditionary force from Britain. After breaking through Mons and Charleroi, the vaunted German army's so-called strong right wing began to wheel its massive wall of humanity to the south towards its ultimate goal, Paris.

Withdrawing to St. Quentin, the French were in desperate need of a counterattack to halt the German advance. The task fell to the Fifth Army under Charles Lanrezac. It would not be easy, especially given that the Fifth was separated from friendly armies by several miles, but there could be no delay. The Fifth was to counterattack against Karl von Bulow's German 2nd Army in full force. Among the Fifth Army's ranks was the 4th Zouaves Regiment, in which a captain named Henri Giraud served. Giraud hailed from humble Alsatian roots, and was an exceptional student as a boy. An adventurous person by nature, Giraud attended the Saint-Cyr military academy and graduated in 1900. He was assigned to the 4th Zouaves in North Africa, until the unit was transferred to France in 1914 upon the outbreak of war.

On 30 August 1914, the French Fifth Army began its counterattack against von Bulow's 2nd Army. Captain Giraud led his 4th Zouaves in a bayonet charge. In these first stages of the war, the French were learning the hard way that a gallant, spirited charge, while noble, was practically suicide against a modernized foe that had produced technology specifically designed to combat such tactics. The Germans' machine guns wreaked havoc on any bayonet charge, and Giraud's charge was no exception. Although the Fifth Army's counterattack was successful in halting the German advance, it came at a great loss with 10,000 French killed and 2,000 captured. Among the captured was a severely wounded Henri Giraud.

Giraud was sent to a prison camp in Belgium. Given his injuries, life in the camp was no doubt harsh for the captain. But the strong-willed Giraud was given an opportunity he couldn't pass up: the opportunity to escape. Edith Cavell, a British nurse, had begun to set up an escape network for wounded French and British prisoners. The network allowed the prisoners to reach the neutral Netherlands. With Cavell's help, Giraud was set to be funneled out of Belgium to freedom. Two months after his capture, Giraud broke out of the POW enclosure and worked his way towards the Netherlands by assuming an array of disguises; when the need arose, he would become a traveling circus roustabout, a stable boy, a coal salesman, whatever the situation demanded. Soon, he reached the Netherlands, and was evacuated to the United Kingdom.

He soon rejoined the 4th Zouaves in France. As for Edith Cavell, her network would soon lead to her death, as she was arrested in August 1915 after the Germans discovered that she had helped about 200 Allied soldiers escape. She was executed in October 1915 for treason.



**General Henri Giraud**



**Nurse Edith Cavell**

Such stories of daring escapes never fail to capture the imagination. But Giraud had not made his last escape! The date was 10 May 1940. The now-General Giraud, the commander of France's Ninth Army, was defending his homeland from same enemy he had fought in 1914, only under new leaders and in a new war. For the second time in 25 years, Germany was invading France.

The Ninth had taken up defensive positions in Le Catelet, France, when German infantry from the 6th Panzer Division poured out of the Ardennes Forest near the city. The brave General Giraud went straight to the front lines to get a handle on the situation. He made his way to a machine-gun emplacement, which, to his misfortune, became surrounded by the Germans. Soon, the unyielding emplacement was barraged heavily by German artillery, and the Germans asked the survivors to surrender. Among the survivors was none other than General Giraud.

General Giraud's escape in World War I had not been forgotten by the Germans. Due to his high rank, he was to be treated with respect, but nevertheless, they made it a priority to put him in a high-security, "escape-proof" location. He was taken to Koenigstein Castle, near the Czech border. It seemed the ideal location to prevent an escape; it stood beside a 150-foot-high cliff, and every exit was guarded with double intensity. Regular inspections of the inside were made, and if someone was missing, the Gestapo would be on the case instantly.

Naturally, General Giraud started to scheme for his escape upon arrival. At age 61, he was not a young man anymore, and the injuries he sustained in the First World War had left him with a permanent limp. Regardless, Giraud refused to give the Germans his word that he would not try to escape. He learned to speak German fluently, memorized to the square yard a map of the surrounding area, and even managed to set up communication with friendlies back in France, from which he acquired copper materials for a rope.

On the morning of April 17, 1942, after two years at Koenigstein Castle, Giraud was ready. Looking down the 150-foot cliff, Giraud waited for the guard to leave the area, and then successfully descended the cliff. Finding cover, he covered his conspicuous general's uniform with a raincoat, put on a Tyrolean hat, and shaved off his trademark mustache. A prearranged escort met him, and helped him reach a nearby train station. The German military was on high alert for a tall Frenchman with a distinctive limp trying to leave the country. Giraud's plan was to ride continuously train after train within Germany until his escape became old news. He possessed fake identification, but the photograph was of another person who happened to look like Giraud, so he took care to avoid showing it to the Gestapo. On one train, Giraud happened to be sitting across from a young German lieutenant who had served in the Afrika Korps; he struck up an amiable conversation. A Gestapo man came around and asked for Giraud's ID, as well as the lieutenant's.

The lieutenant, incensed, shouted, "How dare you interrupt us!" and ordered the man to go away. At one particular train station, the Gestapo security was unusually tight, and was thoroughly searching every single passenger. It was a risk he could not take. So, Giraud waited until the train began to pull out of the station. Briefcase in hand, holding his hat on his head, Giraud started off running towards the train- without limping. The pain was excruciating, but he was

not about to give himself away. A Gestapo soldier, fooled completely into thinking Giraud was simply an agitated businessman in a hurry, helped him aboard.

Giraud had wanted to return to France, but when he finally got there after numerous train rides, he discovered that anyone six feet or taller was being searched by guards. So, he boarded yet another train and headed back into Germany, his destination Switzerland. The security there was also tight, so upon arrival, he struck off on a neglected trail through the woods. Suddenly, he found himself surrounded by bayonets. Fearing the worst, he turned to face his captors, but was relieved when they spoke with a Swiss dialect- they were friendlies. The Germans were furious to hear that the Swiss had taken him in, but their demands that he be turned over were refused.

Finally, Giraud made his Hail Mary pass back to France, this time by road. He threw off the Germans by changing cars several times while driving through Switzerland. The trick worked, and Giraud had successfully pulled off a second escape from the Germans. Henri Giraud's escape inspired a France that was going through one of the darkest times in its history. Such was the effect that the Germans attempted to assassinate Giraud, forcing him into hiding. But never again would they find the man that they simply could not contain. When Giraud made it back to France, he sent his wife a telegram that read: "Business concluded excellent health affectionately Henri." It was an exact replicate, word for word, of the telegram he had sent his wife after his escape in 1914. [Source: War History Online | Jan 15, 2016 ++]

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## Post WWII Photos ► General Charles de Gaulle Visits Lorient France



**General Charles de Gaulle (center) shaking hands with children, two months after the German capitulation in Lorient, France , in July of 1945. Lorient was the location of a German U-boat (submarine) base during World War II. Between January 14 and February 17, 1943, as many as 500 high-explosive aerial bombs and more than 60,000 incendiary bombs were dropped on Lorient . The city was almost completely destroyed, with nearly 90% of the city flattened. (AFP/Getty Images)#**

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**War Memorials** ▶ Shrine of Remembrance



For the Australian soldiers of all wars in Melbourne, Australia

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**Every Picture Tells A Story** ▶ Little Friend



Perhaps a little too close for comfort, yet comforting still, a yellow-nosed Republic P-47D Thunderbolt piloted by 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Vernon R. Richards slides in close to an Eighth Army Air Force B-24 Liberator en route to Ludwigshaven. Known as “Little Friends”, fighter escorts like this beefy P-47 nicknamed “Tika” from the 374<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron at RAF *Bottisham* were a welcome sight to bomber crews who began their war in the summer of 1942 without adequate fighter escort cover for daylight missions

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**WWII Bomber Nose Art [29]** ▶ Big Time Operator



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## Military History Anniversaries ► 01 thru 15 MAY

Significant events in U.S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 MAY**”. [Source: This Day in History [www.history.com/this-day-in-history](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history) | April 2019 ++]

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## Medal of Honor Citations ► Louis James Hauge | WWII



*The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the  
MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously*

*To*

### **LOUIS JAMES HAUGE, JR.**

**Rank and organization:** Corporal, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve 1st Marine Division

**Place and date:** Okinawa Shima, 14 May 1945

**Entered service:** Tacoma, Washington on April 23, 1943

**Born:** December 12, 1924 in Ada, Minnesota

### **Citation**

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as leader of a machinegun squad serving with Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Okinawa Shima in the Ryukyu Chain on 14 May 1945. Alert and aggressive during a determined assault against a strongly fortified Japanese hill position, Cpl. Hauge boldly took the initiative when his company's left flank was pinned down under a heavy machinegun and mortar barrage with resultant severe casualties and, quickly locating the 2 machineguns which were delivering the uninterrupted stream of enfilade fire, ordered his squad to maintain a covering barrage as he rushed across an exposed area toward the furiously blazing enemy weapons. Although painfully wounded as he charged the first machinegun, he launched a vigorous single-handed grenade attack, destroyed the entire hostile gun position and moved relentlessly forward toward the other emplacement despite his wounds and the increasingly heavy Japanese fire. Undaunted by the savage opposition, he again hurled his deadly grenades with unerring aim and succeeded in demolishing the second enemy gun before he fell under the slashing fury of Japanese sniper fire. By his ready grasp of the critical situation and his heroic 1-man assault tactics, Cpl. Hauge had eliminated 2 strategically placed enemy weapons, thereby releasing the besieged troops from an overwhelming volume of hostile fire and enabling his company to advance. His indomitable fighting spirit and decisive valor in the face of almost certain death reflect the highest credit upon Cpl. Hauge and the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country.



Louis Hauge Jr. was active in all athletics, but left high school after his first year and worked in a canning factory in Ada, Minnesota where he became assistant foreman. He later was employed by a ship yard in Tacoma, Washington as a painter.

He was inducted into the Marine Corps Reserve and completed light-machine gun school at Camp Elliott, California before serving with the 1st Marine Division at New Caledonia and New Guinea. Later, he saw combat action on Peleliu as a message runner with Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. In this capacity, he distinguished himself for his bravery under fire and was given a meritorious promotion to corporal.

The award was presented to his father on June 14, 1946 by Col Norman E. True, USMC, who represented the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Corporal Hauge's remains were eventually returned to the United States and interred in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii.

The United States Navy container & roll-on/roll-off ship, MV Cpl Louis J. Hauge Jr. (T-AK-3000), commissioned on September 7, 1984, is named in honor of Cpl. Hauge. This ship is the lead ship of its class of five maritime prepositioning ships. The Cpl. Louis J. Hauge Jr. class is the original class of MPS ships chartered by Military Sealift Command. Also, A Marine Corps installation on the island of Okinawa was named Camp Louis J. Hauge Jr. During the Vietnam War, Camp Hauge served as a staging installation for Marines in transit to and from Vietnam. The camp was decommissioned following the return of Okinawa to the Japanese government.

[Source: <https://history.army.mil/moh/wwII-g-1.html> | April 2019 ++]

**\* Health Care \***



## Health Care Cost Update 02 ► Americans Report Great Angst Over Healthcare Costs

Recent research by West Health and Gallup discovered that American adults fear a major health event could lead to bankruptcy, that the U.S. economy is in significant danger and that the U.S. government is ill-equipped to address rising healthcare costs in a significant way. The study findings are based on a nationally representative survey of more than 3,500 randomly selected U.S. adults. The study revealed more than 3 in 4 Americans believe they pay 'too much' for

healthcare relative to the quality of care they receive. Furthermore, 45% of the American public is concerned that a major health event could result in personal bankruptcy.



Surprisingly, this concern remains relevant for Americans in the top 10% of earners. Of Americans who reported earning more than \$180,000 a year, 1 in 3 were "concerned" or "extremely concerned" that a major health event could result in personal bankruptcy. But the anxiety induced by healthcare costs goes beyond worry over personal finances. Three quarters of Americans (77%) say they are concerned healthcare costs will result in significant and lasting damage to the U.S. economy. Despite Americans' concerns about U.S. healthcare costs, their perceptions about the quality of healthcare in the United States are surprisingly positive. 64% of Americans reported being completely or mostly satisfied with the U.S. healthcare system when it comes to meeting their needs and that of other household members.

This optimistic outlook seems somewhat disjointed with key healthcare outcomes reported by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development or OECD. When compared with 36 other developed nations within the co-operation, the U.S. ranks 28th in life expectancy and 31st in infant mortality, two indicators considered important barometers of national healthcare quality. Furthermore, perceptions around quality differ by partisan affiliation. 67% of self-identified Republicans vs. 38% of Democrats believe the U.S. healthcare system is "among the best" or "the best in the world." But despite these opposing outlooks, both party groups report similar effects on their finances and health due to high healthcare costs.

In the past 12 months alone, Americans reported borrowing an estimated \$88 billion to pay for healthcare. In the same time period, Americans reported heavy withdrawals against their future by tapping into long-term savings and retirement funds to the tune of \$126 billion. A Gallup Panel member who was interviewed in-depth as part of the study brings this figure to life, saying:

*"I'm a 61-year-old male married 40 years, no children. Both my wife and I are heavily considering our retirement and one of the biggest hurdles is our healthcare. We're hoping something positive will happen in our healthcare system, so we can enjoy our retirement."*

But perhaps more worrisome than the financial burden is the effect that the cost of healthcare has on the health of the American people. In the past 12 months, 38 million Americans elected to forgo a medical procedure, test or evaluation that was recommended by a physician, for a "somewhat" or "very serious" medical condition because they didn't have enough money to pay for it. A sobering conversation with another member of the Gallup Panel illustrates the gravity of this problem:

*"My brother died because he didn't have access to healthcare. He didn't go to the doctor because he couldn't afford it and he had prostate cancer. I think he got Medicare, but then when he went to the doctor, it was too late."*

### **Outlook for the Future Is Pessimistic**

Americans currently have little optimism about future healthcare costs. Three in four (76%) predict that healthcare costs will continue to increase over the next two years. An overwhelming majority of Americans believe the government is not doing enough to ensure that prescription drug prices and healthcare costs, in general, remain affordable (77% and 74%, respectively). Americans have little faith that the government will achieve this goal; only 8% of Americans say they are confident that bipartisan legislation will be achieved to reduce the cost of healthcare.

Ironically, this pessimism is uniform across party affiliation with more than two-thirds of Republicans and Democrats saying they are "not at all confident" elected officials will be able to work together to reduce costs. To learn more, download West Health and Gallup's full report: [The U.S. Healthcare Cost Crisis](#).

[Source: Gallup Blog | Mike Ellrich & Lance Stevens | April 2, 2019 ++]

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## **PTSD Detection ► Voice Analysis Software | 89% Accurate**

Voice analysis software can help detect post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in veterans based on their speech, a study suggests. Doctors have long understood that people with psychiatric disorders may speak differently than individuals who do not have mental health problems, researchers note in *Depression and Anxiety*. While some previous research points to the potential for distinct speech patterns among people with PTSD, it's been unclear whether depression that often accompanies PTSD might explain the unique voice characteristics.

In the current study, voice analysis software detected which veterans had PTSD and which ones did not with 89 percent accuracy. "Those with the PTSD talked more slowly (slower tongue movement), were more monotonous with fewer bursts of vocalization, were less animated and energetic (lifeless) in their speech, and had longer hesitations and a flatter tone," said lead study author Dr. Charles Marmar, chair of psychiatry at NYU School of Medicine in New York City. "Our findings suggest that speech-based characteristics can be used to diagnose this disease, and with further refinement and validation, may be employed in the clinic in the near future," Marmar said by email.

Marmar's team used an artificial intelligence program that "learns" how to classify individuals based on examples of speech. First, researchers recorded hours-long interviews based on questions often asked by clinicians to diagnose PTSD. Altogether, they interviewed 53 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans with PTSD related to their service as well as 78 veterans without the disease. Then, they fed the recordings into voice analysis software developed by Stanford Research Institute (SRI) International, designers of the "Siri" App, to yield a total of 40,526 speech-based features captured in short spurts of talk. The software linked patterns of specific voice features with PTSD, including less clear speech and a lifeless, metallic tone, both of which had long been reported anecdotally as helpful in diagnosis.

While the study did not explore the disease mechanisms behind PTSD, the theory is that traumatic events change brain circuits that process emotion and muscle tone that affect a person's voice, the study team writes. The study was small, and it wasn't designed to prove whether or how PTSD might directly cause changes in vocal patterns. It's also possible that results might be different for people who experienced trauma unrelated to military service such as sexual assault or a natural disaster.

Other warning signs of PTSD may also be easier for family members to spot, said Dr. Ronald Pies of Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston. "I think more general, observable indicators of trauma are more relevant in such cases," Pies, who wasn't involved in the study, said by email. "Noticing that a family member exposed to a recent trauma appears to be unusually irritable, aggressive, hyper-vigilant, or reports nightmares, flashbacks of the trauma, or appears socially withdrawn or depressed ... would warrant a clinical assessment." But it may not be too far in the future that a tool like the one tested in the study could be one way to identify people who need to be evaluated for PTSD, said U.S. Army Capt. Jeffrey Osgood of the Center for Military Psychiatry and Neuroscience at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research. "In a perfect world, I see this technology used as an early warning tool for PTSD," Osgood, who wasn't involved in the study, said by email.

It's possible a version of the software tested in the study could be readily available, perhaps as a smartphone app, to analyze a person's speech during and after highly stressful or traumatic experiences and to flag potential problems to patients or clinicians, Osgood said. "This could prompt a more thorough screening and early intervention," Osgood said. "However, more studies are needed before clinicians can confidently use this tool to help make diagnoses." For

more on the subject refer to Depression and Anxiety [www.bit.ly/2vhqhA0](http://www.bit.ly/2vhqhA0) . [Source: Reuters Health News | Lisa Rapaport | April 22, 2019 ++]

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## **Medicare Freebies ▶ Seniors, Don't Overlook These Six**

If you have Medicare or will soon, you probably know the basics of what it covers. But how much do you know about all the lesser-known benefits that are included with Medicare health insurance coverage? They aren't exactly free, because [Medicare isn't free](#). But these included services have no out-of-pocket costs for many Medicare beneficiaries. There are some caveats. For example, there may be limitations on frequency, and your health care provider must accept Medicare's payment conditions. Still, it's worth knowing these benefits are in your pocket if you have Original Medicare, which is one of the two main types of Medicare plans.

Costs may differ for Medicare Advantage plans — the other main type of Medicare plan — because they are offered by private insurers and generally come with their own set of benefits, as are explained further in [“7 Facts You Need to Know About Medicare.”](#)

### **1. Annual wellness visit**

The purpose of the [annual wellness visit](#) is to develop or update a personalized plan to help prevent disease and disability based on your health situation. According to Medicare.gov, the official government website for Medicare, the visit might also include:

- A review of your medical and family history
- Developing or updating a list of your health care providers and prescriptions
- Routine measurements — such as height, weight and blood pressure
- Detection of cognitive impairment
- Personalized health advice

Just note that costs such as a deductible might apply if during an annual visit you receive additional tests or services that aren't covered preventive benefits.

### **2. Counseling**

The following types of counseling are among those covered by Medicare for people who meet eligibility requirements:

- [Alcohol counseling](#) — up to four sessions per year
- [Smoking and tobacco counseling](#) — up to eight sessions in a 12-month period
- [Cardiovascular behavioral therapy](#) visits — one per year

While the first two types of counseling are intended to help a patient quit alcohol or tobacco, which are moves with extensive health benefits, cardiovascular behavioral therapy is targeted at helping you lower your risk of developing heart disease. “During therapy, your doctor may discuss aspirin use (if appropriate), check your blood pressure, and give you tips to make sure you're eating well,” says Medicare.gov.

### **3. Screenings**

Medicare covers screenings for a variety of health conditions. They include screenings for:

- [Cardiovascular disease](#) — one blood test every five months
- [Colorectal cancer](#) — one colonoscopy every 24 or 120 months, depending on your risk
- [Depression](#) — one screening per year
- [Diabetes](#) — up to two screenings per year

Some screenings have eligibility requirements, while others do not.

### **4. Vaccines**

One [influenza shot](#) per flu season is free. A total of two [pneumococcal shots](#) are also covered. These vaccines protect against pneumococcal disease, which the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention describe as any type of infection caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria. Vaccines for [hepatitis B](#) may also be covered, depending on your risk.

### 5. The ‘What’s Covered’ app

Medicare recently debuted a free app called “[What’s Covered](#),” which is available for Apple and Android devices. You can use the app to look up other items and services and find out whether Medicare covers them. “The app delivers general cost, coverage and eligibility details,” says Medicare.gov. If you don’t want to download the app or don’t have a smartphone or internet-connected tablet, you can use a computer to access Medicare.gov’s [Your Medicare Coverage tool](#), which also lets you search for an item or service and find out whether it’s covered.

### 6. Insurance assistance

People who are eligible for Medicare as well as their families and caregivers have access to free in-depth, one-on-one insurance counseling and assistance from State Health Insurance Assistance Programs (SHIPs) SHIPs are funded by grants that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) makes to states, according to the HHS Administration for Community Living. There is a SHIP for every state as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands. SHIPs can be especially helpful during open enrollment season, although they offer various other services besides one-on-one assistance with reviewing your Medicare plan options. They can also:

- Answer questions about what Medicare does and does not cover.
- Tell you about out-of-pocket cost assistance programs for which you might be eligible.
- Help you understand Medicare’s eligibility criteria.
- Explain how Medicare coverage works in conjunction with supplemental insurance policies, Medicaid and other forms of health insurance.

To find the SHIP for your state, [visit the national SHIP website](#) or call 877-839-2675.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Brandon Ballenger | April 18, 2019 ++]

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## Heart Disease Update 05 ► People with Stress Disorders Like PTSD are at Higher Risk

People coping with psychological trauma have a heightened risk of developing cardiovascular disease, a large-scale study finds. Researchers used national health registers to identify 136,637 Swedish patients with no history of cardiovascular disease who were diagnosed with a stress-related disorder — a cluster of mental health conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder, triggered by acute trauma — from 1987 to 2013. The team compared each of these patients with siblings and with unrelated people of the same age and sex, both of whom had a clear bill of mental and heart health.

In the patients first year after being diagnosed, those with a stress-related disorder had a 64 percent higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease than their siblings without a mental health diagnosis, and a 70 percent higher risk than unrelated patients, the scientists report. The cardiovascular disease accounted for included heart failure, arrhythmia, stroke, hypertension and heart attack. The study found that those with a stress-related disorder were most vulnerable in the year following their mental health diagnosis: They had four times the relative risk of heart failure compared with their siblings. After one year, the patients with a stress diagnosis had a 29 percent higher risk for all cardiovascular disease than their siblings. Over the course of 27 years, 10.5 percent of patients with stress-related disorders developed cardiovascular disease — compared with 8.4 percent of the sibling group and 6.9 percent of the general population group.

The study, published 10 APR in the British Medical Journal, builds on a growing body of research linking mental health with heart disease. “Researchers have been connecting mental health and cardiovascular disease for at least 40 years,” says Mary Whooley, a professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, who was not involved in the study. But much of the previous research into the link between psychiatric stress and heart health has focused on populations of male veterans of PTSD, says Whooley, who is also director of cardiac rehabilitation at the San Francisco Veterans Affairs health care system.

“Whats really impressive about this study is the enormous number of patients,” Whooley says. More than half the patients with stress-related disorders were women. By comparing siblings, the study was also able to better control for genetic traits and childhood experiences that might contribute to a person’s risk of developing cardiovascular disease. [Source: Britain Today News | April 16, 2019 ++]

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## **Bed Sores Update 01 ► Researchers Working on 3D Method to Aid Treatment**

VA researchers are developing a new instrument for measuring bedsores, using 3D cameras, tablet computers, and algorithms, to help treat the problem in Veterans with spinal cord injuries. Investigators at the James A. Haley Veterans’ Hospital in Tampa, Florida, are testing an innovative computer-based system designed to more accurately measure bedsores, also known as pressure ulcers. Accurate measurement of the wound, followed by optimal treatment, is key to preventing it from worsening.

Pressure ulcers are painful injuries to the skin and underlying tissue resulting from prolonged pressure on the skin. People with spinal cord injuries are at high risk for pressure ulcers due to immobility and other risk factors. The wounds most often develop around bony areas of the body, such as the heels, ankles, hips, and tailbone. In general, the worse the pressure ulcer, the more advanced the care needed for it to heal. However, assessment of the wound has traditionally been based on a manual process that can lead to treatment challenges.

“That type of measurement can’t accurately account for small improvements or deterioration over the entire surface area, and doesn’t consider changes in the wound’s depth,” says Dr. Matthew Peterson, a biomedical engineer who is leading the testing of the computer-based system. “Accurate pressure ulcer measurement is vital for clinicians to accurately assess the severity of the wound and the degree of tissue damage, and to determine whether current treatment strategies are effective. “If the size of the pressure ulcer has been shrinking over time, the wound is healing. But if the size stays the same or increases, the treatment may not be effective and may need to be modified. Therefore, effective treatment depends on reliable and valid measurements of the pressure ulcers. Intervening early to prevent them from worsening is critical for improving patient outcomes and reducing costs.”

Peterson is testing a technology that’s designed to be more objective and reliable than the manual system in current use. His system captures 3D images with a camera mounted to a tablet. An algorithm uses the color, geometry, and formation of the wound to assess its length, width, and depth. “This digital technique, which basically captures the whole image rather than just parts of it, is going to provide greater accuracy in measuring the wound,” Peterson says. “We’re capturing the full perimeter and diameter, rather than just having one measurement for length, one measurement for width, and one measurement for depth. Essentially, we aim to determine the size of the wound based on its entire features.”

He explains, for example, that because pressure ulcers can be shaped irregularly, the spot where the depth is marked in a manual system may not be the deepest point in the wound. His instrument is designed to more accurately mark that point. Currently, SCI-PUMT is the only validated system for evaluating pressure ulcer healing in Veterans with spinal cord injury. Clinicians use a paper ruler or cotton swab to measure the length and width, and a cotton swab to measure the depth. Those figures are used to calculate a score for the wound. The higher the score, the more severe

the ulcer. To read more of this story go to [VA Research Currents](#). [Source: Vantage Point | Michael Richman | April 24, 2019 ++]

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## **Ticks Update 02 ► Season Has Begun**

Once outdoor temperatures go over 8 degrees Celsius (about 46 degrees Fahrenheit), ticks start coming out. They usually wait in forests, meadows, parks and gardens, hoping that a host will brush against them while walking through tall grass or shrubs. Anyone who spends a lot of time outdoors will probably come across them sooner or later. News reports on ticks can paint an alarming picture, but they aren't actually as dangerous as many people think. Although ticks can carry and spread disease, tick bites don't usually cause health problems. If you are bitten by a tick, any problems are usually only temporary and minor. Tick bites rarely have serious or lasting effects.

Two main diseases can be transmitted by them: Lyme disease (also called Lyme borreliosis) and tick-borne encephalitis (TBE), which can cause inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) or the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis). Infection is only possible if the tick that bites you is infected, and also manages to transmit the viruses or bacteria. Lyme disease is much more common than TBE. Generally speaking, TBE is rare, and doesn't occur at all in many regions. Neither of these two diseases can be spread from one human to another. In other words: if someone is infected, they are not contagious to others.

Learn more

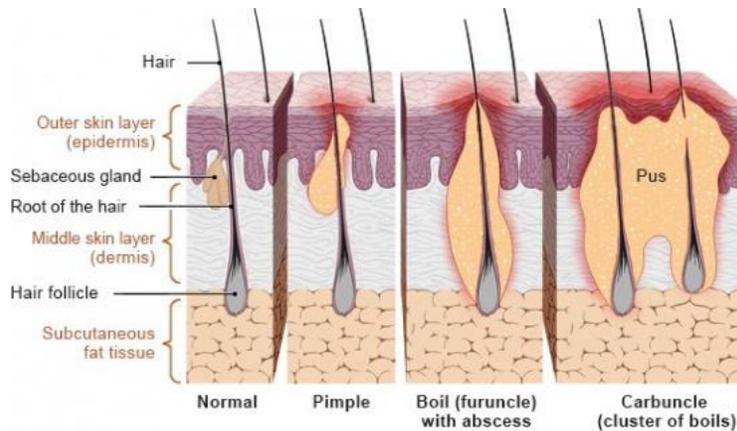
Your risk of a tick bite will mainly depend on where you spend your time and what you do outdoors. Wearing closed shoes on hikes through tall grass or shrubs can help keep ticks out. Clothes that cover as much of your body as possible – like full-length trousers and long-sleeved shirts – make it harder for ticks to attach. It is easier to see them on light-colored clothing. Ticks can be found both out in the wild and in gardens or parks. Ticks may wander around your body for a few hours before biting. So you can prevent bites and substantially lower your risk of Lyme disease or TBE by checking your body for ticks right after spending time in a forest or meadow, and removing any you find. Children often won't remember to look for ticks, so they might need a reminder or some help. It also makes sense for adults to have someone help, especially to check hard-to-see places.

According to the German Robert Koch Institute, tick repellent sprays only offer temporary protection from ticks. The effect wears off after two to four hours, so you will need to re-apply the spray on longer walks. There is a vaccine for TBE. The TBE vaccine may be a good idea if you spend a lot of time outdoors in high-risk areas. Last but not least, it's important to look out for signs of infection if you have been bitten, and to seek medical attention if any symptoms develop. [Source: Informedhealth.org: Newsletter | April 25, 2019 ++]

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## **Boils & Carbuncles ► Recognition and Treatment**

A boil is a pus-filled bump in the skin that is caused by a bacterial infection. It's a bit like a very big yellow pimple, but it's deeper in the skin and hurts a lot more. Boils develop when a hair follicle and the surrounding tissue become infected. Hair follicles consist of one hair, the root of the hair, a sebaceous gland and a small muscle that can pull the hair up, making it stand on end. Hair follicle inflammations are sometimes also referred to as "deep folliculitis" or "perifolliculitis." The infection causes the skin tissue inside the boil to die, creating a pus-filled hollow space (an abscess). Skin abscesses can develop from boils, but also from other things like infected insect bites or injections with dirty needles. If several boils merge into a larger bump, it's called a carbuncle. Sometimes boils go away again on their own, without causing any problems. But it's often a good idea to get medical treatment. This can help make boils go away quicker, relieve the pain and prevent complications.



**Different types of hair follicle infections**

Boils are painful swollen bumps, ranging from roughly the size of a cherry stone to that of a walnut. They feel warm and look red, and yellowish pus may show through the skin. If a cluster of boils (a carbuncle) develops, the infection might cause a fever too, making you feel weak and tired. Boils mainly occur on the face and neck, including the back of the neck. But they sometimes also develop in the armpits, groin, genital area, on the back, bottom or thighs.

#### **Causes and risk factors**

Boils are caused by bacteria, most commonly by *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria (a staph infection). A lot of people have these bacteria on their skin or – for instance – in the lining of their nostrils, without them causing any problems. They are more likely to lead to boils or other skin infections in people who have weakened immune systems. For this reason, boils are more common in people with medical conditions such as diabetes, chronic infections or cancer. They are also more common in people with eczema, conjunctivitis or certain allergies such as allergic asthma.

#### **Prevalence and outlook**

Skin infections are generally very common, but most of them are caused by something else. Only about 3 out of 100 people who go to their doctor with a skin infection have a boil. Boils develop within a few hours or days. Once the pus has escaped from the red, swollen lump after a few days – either on its own or following treatment – the boil heals within a few weeks. A small scar is left behind. Sometimes boils heal without the pus coming out. The pus is then broken down by the body.

#### **Effects**

If you squeeze a boil or scratch it open, the bacteria might spread in the body along the blood or lymph vessels. If, for instance, you can see a red streak leading away from the boil, it means that the infection is moving along a lymph vessel. Lymph nodes in the affected area may also become inflamed and hurt (lymphadenitis). People sometimes think that the red streak caused by lymphangitis is a sign of blood poisoning (sepsis). But this very rare, severe complication only develops if a lot of bacteria enter the blood at once and quickly spread throughout the whole body.

If boils occur on the face – particularly around the nose and upper lip area – there’s a certain risk that the bacteria might get into the brain, where they could lead to meningitis or life-threatening blood clots in the large blood vessels (called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis, or CVST). Especially in people with a weakened immune system, boils can keep coming back or occur in several different places at the same time. Doctors call this furunculosis. If several boils develop in neighboring hair follicles and merge into a larger connected area of infection under the skin, it’s called a carbuncle. Carbuncles often occur at the back of the neck, and go deeper into the tissue than boils do.

#### **Diagnosis & Treatment**

Doctors usually recognize boils based on their typical appearance and a description of the symptoms. Further diagnostic procedures such as blood tests or a pus swab are only needed if someone often gets boils, has several boils at the same time, or is thought to be at high risk of complications. The pus is examined in a laboratory in order to find

out exactly what kind of bacteria are causing the infection, and determine which antibiotics are most likely to work the best. Blood tests help to find out whether the infection has already spread and whether the person has any other medical conditions that could increase the risk of bacterial infections occurring.

Boils are usually treated by a doctor. The treatment typically involves opening the pus-filled abscess with a small cut, draining the pus, disinfecting the wound and placing strips of sterile gauze inside it to soak up and remove any remaining pus. The wound stays open while healing, so it doesn't have to be sewn shut. It's very important not to squeeze boils yourself – especially if they're on your face. If a boil is still growing in size, the abscess hasn't yet fully developed. Doctors can feel the boil with their hands to see whether that is the case. In this phase, you can try to start or speed up the healing process by applying a warm, moist cloth or a special ointment that draws (pulls) pus out of the boil. This kind of ointment is also known as "drawing salve".

Antibiotics are only needed if complications are likely or have already occurred – for instance, if several boils have merged and developed into a carbuncle. People then sometimes go to the hospital to get antibiotics through a drip (an infusion). It is particularly important that carbuncles are cut open so that the pus can escape. The wound is then repeatedly cleansed using an antiseptic solution.

[Source: Informedhealth.org: Newsletter | April 25, 2019 ++]

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## **TRICARE After Retirement ► Must Enroll Within 1-YR**

When you retire from active duty or turn age 60 as a retired reserve member, your TRICARE coverage changes. After either of these [Qualifying Life Events](#) (QLEs), you must take action and enroll in a TRICARE retiree health plan so that you and your family members don't have a gap in your TRICARE coverage after retirement. Under a recent change, you have up to 1-YR after your retirement date to enroll in a TRICARE plan as a retiree. If you don't, you and your family members will only be able to get care at a military hospital or clinic if space is available.

Each service is responsible for updating the [Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System](#) (DEERS) with your retirement date. Until that date is posted to DEERS, you can't enroll in a retiree TRICARE plan. In some cases, the retirement date doesn't show up in DEERS until days or even months after you've retired. "This allows plenty of time to update DEERS and enroll in a TRICARE health plan as our new retirees adjust to civilian life."

Coverage must begin effective the day after you ended your previous TRICARE coverage, and any TRICARE enrollment fees must be paid retroactive to that date. Continuing TRICARE health care coverage isn't automatic following these QLEs. If you don't enroll in a plan after retiring from active duty or turning age 60, you'll lose TRICARE coverage and only be able to receive care at military hospitals and clinics if space is available. After the 12-month period, you may only enroll in or make changes to your health plan during the annual [TRICARE Open Season](#) or following another QLE.

You'll need to make sure you update your and your family's information in DEERS. You and your family members will also need new identification cards upon the sponsor's status change. No matter when you enroll within the 12-month period, coverage begins on the first day of your retirement and you must pay all enrollment fees back to that date.

### **Retiring from Active Duty**

If you're [retiring from active duty](#), you previously paid nothing out of pocket and your family's costs were minimal (if covered under TRICARE Select). As a retiree, you'll now pay retiree costs for care. Depending on the retiree TRICARE health plan you choose, you may see an increase in your enrollment fees, deductibles, copayments, cost-shares, and other fees.

### **Retired Reservists Turning Age 60**

If you're a [retired reserve member who turns age 60](#) and were enrolled in TRICARE Retired Reserve (TRR), your TRR coverage ends the day you turn age 60 and become eligible for TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select coverage. You must have your retirement fully completed with your service personnel office or command. This means your retirement pay is processed and activated

To confirm your retired status is properly reflected in DEERS, visit <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect> or call the DEERS Support Office (1-800-538-9552). Once DEERS is accurate, enroll in a TRICARE health plan based on your residence within 12 months from your 60th birthday. As a retiree, you'll pay retiree costs such as enrollment fees, deductibles, copayments, and cost-shares.

### **Health Plan Options**

You and your family members may be eligible for one of the following TRICARE health plans:

- TRICARE Prime (if residing in a Prime Service Area)
- TRICARE Select or TRICARE Overseas Program Select
- US Family Health Plan
- TRICARE For Life

Visit the [TRICARE Plan Finder](#) to learn more about your options. Once you enroll in a TRICARE health plan, you also have [pharmacy coverage](#).

### **Dental and Vision Options**

Retiring service members and their eligible family members have the option to enroll in the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP). You don't have to be enrolled in a TRICARE retiree health plan to purchase dental coverage. However, you must be enrolled in a TRICARE health plan to potentially qualify to purchase vision coverage through FEDVIP. For more information about FEDVIP and to check your eligibility, visit the [FEDVIP website](#).

Learn more about retiring with TRICARE by downloading the [Retiring from Active Duty Brochure](#) and [Costs and Fees Sheet](#). Take command of your health and understand your benefits before you retire.

[Source: TRICARE Communications | April 23, 2019 ++]

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## **Family Addition ► What You Need to Do for TRICARE Coverage**

Whether giving birth or adopting, this change in your family composition is a TRICARE [Qualifying Life Event](#) (QLE). The QLE allows you to enroll any new eligible family members. Or to make changes to your TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select health plan. You must take action to get TRICARE coverage for your newborn or adopted child. Register your newborn or adopted child in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS), as well as choose a TRICARE health plan and enroll your child in one if necessary.

### **You Must Register Your Child in DEERS**

If you're an active duty service member or a retiree living stateside, you must [register your child in DEERS](#) within 90 days of [birth](#), [adoption](#), or [court-appointment](#). To do this, the sponsor must go to a uniformed services ID card office. There they'll show the child's birth certificate, proof of adoption, or letter of placement of the child into their home by the court.

Don't wait for the government to issue your child's Social Security number to register your child in DEERS. However, update your child's DEERS record as soon as he or she gets a Social Security number. If you don't register your child in DEERS, your child won't show as TRICARE-eligible. TRICARE will deny claims for your child starting on the 91st day after the date of birth.

### **Choose a TRICARE Health Plan and Enroll if Necessary**

After you register your child in DEERS, choose a TRICARE health plan and enroll your child if necessary. If you're an active duty family living in a stateside Prime Service Area (PSA), your child is automatically enrolled into [TRICARE Prime](#). If you don't live in a PSA, your child is automatically enrolled into [TRICARE Select](#). You have 90 days from the automatic enrollment date to change your child's enrollment to a different TRICARE health plan. For example, [TRICARE Prime Remote](#) or [US Family Health Plan](#), if available. After 90 days, you can only enroll your child following another QLE or during [TRICARE Open Season](#).

For children of stateside retirees, there's no automatic enrollment. You must enroll your child in a health plan after registering him or her in DEERS within 90 days. If you don't enroll your child in a health plan, your child can only get health care and pharmacy services at a military hospital or clinic if space is available. Your child won't have access to TRICARE covered civilian health care or retail or home delivery pharmacy services.

### **Avoid Late DEERS Registration**

If you're an active duty service member and register your child in DEERS after the 90 days, your child is automatically enrolled in TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select. Coverage will backdate to the date of birth, date of adoption, or date of court order. You still have 90 days from the auto-enrollment date to change your child's health plan. TRICARE will backdate the new health plan to the date of birth, for example. Ask your [TRICARE regional contractor](#) to re-process any health care claims that TRICARE denied or that they should process under the new plan.

For retirees, if you register your child in DEERS late, TRICARE won't backdate coverage. Your child will only be able to receive care at a military hospital or clinic if space is available. You have to pay all civilian health care costs from day 91 until you enroll your child in a TRICARE health plan. You can only enroll your child in a health plan during the annual open season (only applies to TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select plans) or following another QLE.

Learn more about getting [TRICARE coverage for your child](#). And visit [Qualifying Life Events](#) to learn about other QLEs you might experience in the future.

[Source: TRICARE Communications | April 29, 2019 ++]

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## **Prescription Drug Costs Update 29 ► S.64 | Prohibit Delaying Generic Drug Market Entry**

Sens. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Chuck (R-IA) announced Sens. Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Kevin Cramer (R-ND) have joined their bipartisan legislation to bring down the skyrocketing prices of prescription drugs. The **Preserve Access to Affordable Generics and Biosimilars Act** would limit anticompetitive pay-for-delay deals that prevent or delay the introduction of affordable follow-on versions of branded pharmaceuticals. The use of "pay for delay" deals—the practice in which drug companies use pay-off agreements to delay the introduction of cheaper substitutes—could make some critical prescriptions unaffordable for patients and impose significant costs on the U.S. health care system. Sens. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., and Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, have previously co-sponsored this bill.

"I'm glad that we have the support of Sens. Durbin and Cramer for our bipartisan legislation to spur competition in prescription drug markets, which will help to reduce prices and ensure patients can access the medications they need," Klobuchar stated in the release. "By promoting increased competition from generic drugs and biosimilars, this legislation will help curb the skyrocketing costs of prescription medications." [Source: Brainerd Dispatch | April 16, 2019 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 498 ► Freedom Quitline - Military Kids Connect**

**Freedom Quitline** -- Imagine living a tobacco free life at last. If you're ready to quit smoking, the Freedom Quitline can help you take the steps toward a successful quit. The Freedom Quitline is grant-funded by the National Institutes of Health in cooperation with the University of Virginia and the Department of Defense. There are no out-of-pocket costs for participants. Participants must be TRICARE beneficiaries. Quitline services include free nicotine patches mailed right to your door and personalized phone sessions with trained counselors. All of these can help you stay focused on your goal of being tobacco free. If you're interested, or if you know another TRICARE beneficiary who is thinking of quitting cigarette smoking, join the growing number of people who are finally tobacco free. Call the Freedom Quitline at 1-844-I-AM-FREE. Visit [TRICARE.mil/tobaccocessationservices](http://TRICARE.mil/tobaccocessationservices) for additional resources to help you quit smoking.

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**Military Kids Connect** -- Military Kids Connect is a Department of Defense online resource created to help military children improve their psychological health. Military kids often experience many challenges, like coping with a parent's combat injury, the deployment of a family member, and frequent military moves. Military Kids Connect addresses the unique situations that military kids face and offers resources for them to stay positive and strong. Through videos, activities, and participation in the Military Kids Connect monitored online forums, children can share their own ideas, experiences, and suggestions with other military children. This helps them to know they're not alone in dealing with the stresses of military life.

Parents, caregivers, and educators can also find free resources from Military Kids Connect to help them support military kids at home and school. To highlight what it's like to be a military child and how kids cope, Military Kids Connect shares videos during Military Children's Health Month showing the strides made in their community by military kids. To watch these videos and access other resources, go to [www.militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil](http://www.militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil).

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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> | April 23, 2019 ++]

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## **TRICARE Podcast 499 ► MilConnect & BWE - Activating? - Coverage After Retirement**

**MilConnect & Beneficiary Web Enrollment** -- Staying current on how to enroll in TRICARE health and dental programs will help you and your family get the most out of your TRICARE coverage. Online enrollment through Beneficiary Web Enrollment (BWE) now takes place through milConnect at [milconnect.dmdc.osd.mil](http://milconnect.dmdc.osd.mil). To enroll in TRICARE health and dental plans online:

- Sign into milConnect.
- Click on the "Benefits" tab at the top of the page.
- Select "Beneficiary Web Enrollment" from the menu.

Follow these steps to enroll in stateside health care plans only. You may only enroll in an overseas health plan by phone, by mail, or at a TRICARE Service Center. Remember, you can only enroll in or change enrollment in TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select options following a Qualifying Life Event or during TRICARE Open Season. Visit [TRICARE.mil/milConnect](http://TRICARE.mil/milConnect) for more information on milConnect features.

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**Activating?** -- Are you a member of the National Guard or Reserve? If so, you may become eligible for active duty medical and dental benefits when called or ordered to active duty under federal orders for more than 30 days. Your family members also become eligible for active duty benefits. Activating is a change in your sponsor status. This is a TRICARE Qualifying Life Event, or QLE. This means you may not be able to continue your existing coverage. The QLE allows your family to change health plans during the 90 days following your activation date.

When you arrive at your duty station, you'll enroll in a TRICARE Prime option. As new active duty family members, your family will be automatically enrolled in TRICARE Prime, if in a Prime Service Area, or TRICARE Select. Family members have 90 days from the date of the automatic enrollment to change their health plan.

If you're enrolled in TRICARE Reserve Select, or TRS, your coverage ends when you activate. You'll get a refund for premiums paid after your activation date. When you deactivate, you may purchase TRS again if you still qualify. If you're eligible for the TRICARE Assistance Management Program, or TAMP, you may purchase TRS after TAMP ends. To learn more, read the article, "Activating Soon? Your TRICARE Options May Change," at [TRICARE.mil/news](http://TRICARE.mil/news).

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**Coverage After Retirement** -- When you retire from active duty or turn age 60 as a retired reserve member, your TRICARE coverage changes. After either of these Qualifying Life Events, you must take action and enroll in a TRICARE retiree health plan. This way, you and your family members don't have a gap in your TRICARE coverage after retirement. Typically, you have up to 90 days after your retirement date to enroll in a TRICARE plan as a retiree. If you don't, you and your family members will only be able to get care at a military hospital or clinic if space is available.

Each service is responsible for updating the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS, with your retirement date. Until that date is posted to DEERS, you can't enroll in a retiree TRICARE plan. For the time being, the Defense Health Agency is allowing retiring members and their families up to 12 months from their retirement date, or turning age 60, for retired reserve members, to enroll in a TRICARE health plan. No matter when you enroll within the 12-month period, coverage begins on the first day of your retirement and you must pay all enrollment fees back to that date. After the 12-month period, you may only enroll in or make changes to your health plan during the annual TRICARE Open Season or following another Qualifying Life Event.

Learn more about your health and dental options when you retire by reading "Continuing TRICARE Health Coverage after Retirement," at [TRICARE.mil/news](http://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> | April 26, 2019 ++]

**\* Finances \***



## IRS 2019 Filing Season ► 7 Ways Your Taxes Will Change in 2020

Once you're done breathing that sigh of relief after filing your taxes this year, it's time to get right back to work preparing for the next tax season. We're already nearly one-third of the way through tax year 2019 — the one for which your return is due by April 2020. If you want to make the most of everything from tax deductions to tax-advantaged accounts this year, now is the time to learn the rules that will apply to your next return. Many key dollar figures — from standard deductions to retirement account contribution limits — can change every year due to inflation. Additionally, some aspects of 2017's tax reform didn't take effect until this year. So, here is a look at some of the biggest ways in which the federal tax return you file in 2020 will differ from the one that you hopefully filed by today:

**1. No individual mandate penalty** -- Most of the tax code changes stemming from the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 took effect in 2018. One exception is the change to the shared responsibility payment, which takes effect this year. The shared responsibility payment — commonly referred to as the individual mandate penalty — has applied to folks required to have health insurance under the Affordable Care Act but who didn't get coverage and didn't qualify for an exemption. If you owed the penalty, it was due when you pay your taxes. Starting this year, however, there is no penalty. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act zeroed it out effective in 2019. So, folks who don't have health insurance this year will not owe the penalty when they file their taxes in 2020.

**2. Higher medical expense deduction threshold** -- Another way in which 2010's Affordable Care Act had an impact on taxes was by raising the threshold for deductible medical and dental expenses from 7.5% to 10% of adjusted gross income, which made it harder to qualify for the deduction. This meant that if you itemized your tax deductions, you could deduct eligible out-of-pocket medical expenses if they exceeded 10% of your income, rather than the previous 7.5%. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act gave taxpayers a brief reprieve from that change, lowering the threshold back down to 7.5%, but only for the 2017 and 2018 tax years. Starting this year, it returns to 10%. In other words, as the IRS puts it in Publication 5307, which details how tax reform affects individuals: "If you plan to itemize for tax year 2019, your unreimbursed medical and dental expenses will have to exceed 10% of your 2019 adjusted gross income in order to be deductible."

**3. No alimony deduction** -- Elimination of the alimony deduction is another Tax Cuts and Jobs Act change that took effect in 2019 rather than 2018. For divorce and separation agreements made or modified this year or thereafter, alimony payments will not be deductible, says IRS Publication 5307. So, a spouse who gets divorced this year and pays alimony this year cannot write the payments off on a tax return in 2020. That also means that a spouse who gets divorced this year and receives alimony this year will not count the payments as income on the tax return filed next year.

**4. Higher retirement account contribution limits** -- This year, you can stash more cash in various types of tax-advantaged retirement accounts, as is detailed in "[Limits for 401\(k\), IRA and Other Retirement Plans to Rise in 2019.](#)" Contributions that you make to such accounts, including traditional 401(k) plans and traditional individual retirement accounts (IRAs), in 2019 could be deductible on your next tax return. The 2019 contribution limits include:

- 401(k) base contribution: \$19,000 (up from \$18,500 last year)
- 401(k) catch-up contribution (for taxpayers age 50 and older): additional \$6,000 (unchanged)
- IRA base contribution: \$6,000 (up from \$5,500)
- IRA catch-up contribution (for taxpayers age 50 and older): additional \$1,000 (unchanged)

The increases to IRA contributions limits for 2019 are a particularly big deal, as this is the first year since 2013 that IRA limits have budged.

**5. Higher HSA contribution limits** -- Health savings accounts are another type of tax-advantaged account for which the contribution limits generally increase as the years roll along. HSAs are not strictly for retirement savings, although you can effectively use them as retirement accounts, as we explain in "[3 Reasons You Need a Health Savings Account](#)

— [and How to Open One Today](#).” The 2019 contribution limits for people who are eligible for an HSA and have the following types of high-deductible health insurance policies are:

- Self-only coverage: \$3,500 (up from \$3,450 last year)
- Family coverage: \$7,000 (up from \$6,900)

6. Higher standard deductions -- Standard deductions are somewhat higher this year on account of inflation. The IRS reports that they are:

- Married filing jointly: \$24,400 (up \$400 from last year)
- Married filing separately: \$12,200 (up \$200)
- Head of household: \$18,350 (up \$350)
- Single: \$12,200 (up \$200)

The standard deduction reduces the amount of your income that’s subject to federal taxes. So, if a married couple filing a joint tax return is eligible for and chooses to take the standard deduction on their next return, they would not be taxed on the first \$24,400 of their taxable income from 2019.

7. **Higher income brackets** -- Income tax brackets are also somewhat higher in 2019 than they were last year on account of inflation. The IRS reports that the tax rates and corresponding 2019 income brackets are as follows for folks whose tax filing status is single:

- 37% tax rate: Applies to incomes of more than \$510,300
- 35%: More than \$204,100 but not more than \$510,300
- 32%: More than \$160,725 but not more than \$204,100
- 24%: More than \$84,200 but not more than \$160,725
- 22%: More than \$39,475 but not more than \$84,200
- 12%: More than \$9,700 but not more than \$39,475
- 10%: \$9,700 or less

For complete 2019 tax rate tables for all tax filing statuses, see [IRS Revenue Procedure 2018-57](#). They start on Page 8 of the document. For the 2018 tables, see [Internal Revenue Bulletin 2018-10](#).

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | April 15, 2019 ++]

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## **IRS Kiddie Tax ► A Disaster for Some Gold Star Families**

For some, tax season brings a small boon in the form of a refund. For others it can be a source of stress. But Theresa Jones sees it as an annual reminder of her husband, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Landon Jones, who was killed in a helicopter crash on Sept. 22, 2013. Since then, Jones and her two sons, ages 5 and 11, have received monthly compensation in the form of survivor benefits — one allotment through the Department of Defense is taxable, and another through the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is not taxed. For the past several years she's had to pay roughly \$1,150 in taxes on her sons' benefits. This year, it was \$5,400. "My kids are owing the government back money, that the government gave them, because their dad died, and my kids have to pay it back," Jones told Task & Purpose. "And every year this comes around and it's just this reminder of this tragedy, and it's literally like throwing salt in the wound."

Military widows and widowers **who put their benefits in their child's name** saw a significant spike in their taxes this year. To make matters worse, Jones, along with three other military widows who spoke with Task & Purpose, said they were not aware how much their taxes would increase and were unable to budget or otherwise prepare for the hike in cost. "It was a very hard pill to swallow, that they're even taxed; that they have to give money back in general, as kids," said Jones, who provided Task & Purpose with copies of her tax documents for 2018 and 2017. "I've been sitting here for four days trying to figure out why it's so much more. I looked at it and realized this is going to be something

that's going to happen every year so this is going to have to be calculated into the monthly budget now. If it's going to be \$400 a month, that's like a car payment. That's something that I'm going to have to take into account every year.", Jones said.

The increase was due to a change with the "Kiddie Tax" under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which President Donald Trump signed into law in December 2017. Previously, survivors benefits that were allocated to the children of a fallen service member were taxed at the parent's rate. Under the new tax code, those benefits are instead treated the same as a trust or estate, which means they can be taxed at a rate as high as 37%, and that threshold is reached faster than it did before. While the change in the tax code may have had an immediate financial impact on Gold Star families this year, it may be a consequence of a more pervasive problem with how survivors benefits are classified and paid out.

### **Just the tip of the iceberg**

Though the change in the tax code has had a direct impact on Gold Star families this tax season, some advocates argue that it's a symptom of a larger issue: A rule against concurrent receipt or "double dipping," which bars recipients from getting two simultaneous types of federal monetary benefits. Beyond the Service Members Group Life Insurance policy, which provides a one-time lump-sum payment up to \$400,000 to a beneficiary if the service member elected to pay into it, there are two different types of survivor benefits for military spouses and children.

- There's the Department of Veterans Affairs Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), which provides roughly \$1,300 per month to a surviving spouse, regardless of the service members' grade or length of service, and is not taxed, nor is it transferable.
- And then there's the Survivor Benefits Plan (SBP), a Department of Defense insurance annuity that varies in amount depending on the service member's rank, and is based on 55% of projected retired pay with 30 years of service.

Because recipients can't double dip, the VA benefit and the military benefit are offset — meaning that if a survivor chooses to put both the VA benefit and the DoD benefit in their name, then they'll see a \$1 reduction in their SBP for every \$1 they receive from their DIC plan. This dollar for dollar offset in survivors benefits has become known as the Widow's Tax. This offset typically means that survivors are left with just the VA benefit, which tends to be higher, and is roughly \$15,800 a year. As of last year 65,255 military widows and widowers were subjected to this offset, according to a fact sheet provided by the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), a non-profit that advocates for and provides support to military families who lost a loved one.

To get around the Widow's Tax, survivors can put their SBP in their child's name, and for years, it was a reliable workaround to ensure that military spouses with children who lost a loved one could actually take home the benefits they were entitled to. But even that fix has pitfalls: If a parent puts their military survivors benefits in their child's name, those benefits disappear when the child turns 18, or 22 if he or she is a full-time student. Additionally, if a survivor remarries, then he or she forfeits their VA benefit. This has forced Gold Star families to make tough financial decisions on how they'll allocate their benefits, whether they'll remarry, and what will happen as their kids grow up. 'It's a survivor's benefit. It's not a tax shelter for us'

Cheryl Lankford, whose husband U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Jonathan Lankford, Sr. died in Iraq on Sept. 22, 2007, told Task & Purpose that she saw her taxes for her 14-year-old son's survivor benefits increase from roughly \$100 and \$200 dollars per year to about \$2,500 this year. "I heard rumors that this year we were gonna be paying a little bit more, especially after the news broke that the taxes have changed and there may be a bit of an increase," Lankford told Task & Purpose. "I had no idea it would be quite that much money. That was a shocker for me"

It was the same for Jessica Braden-Rogers. For the last seven years since her husband, Army Capt. Michael Braden, died on April 18, 2012 while deployed to Afghanistan, Braden-Rogers has paid roughly \$1,100 in taxes for her son's benefits. This year she said it jumped to \$4,600. "None of us knew any of this until we all started filing our taxes and had such a significant increase in our tax burden," said Braden-Rogers, who has since remarried and no longer receives the VA benefit. "We've always had a tax burden, but for me, quadrupling the tax burden of a Gold Star child is completely unfair. It's cruel. I mean why would you tax a nine year old?"

When Jessica Johns started seeing comments on social media about how the tax code may impact Gold Star families like hers — Johns' husband, Army 1st Lt. Jonathan Rozier was killed in Iraq in 2003 — she told Task & Purpose she thought the reactions may have been overblown. Then she did her taxes, too. Like Braden-Rogers, Johns has also remarried and subsequently lost her VA survivor benefits. Her 16-year-old son Justin, however, still receives the military's Survivor Benefit Plan, and now those benefits are being taxed at a higher rate than ever before.

Last year Johns paid around \$400 in taxes for her son's benefits. This year she claims to have paid almost \$3,000. "I kind of was in denial," Johns told Task & Purpose. "I mean I was shocked first of all and then I started to get mad 'cause I'm like, well first of all, the name of the annuity is Survivor Benefit Plans so I don't understand why they tax it in the first place, but if they are going to tax it, why are they all of a sudden taxing like we are trying to shelter money in our kid's names so that we don't get taxed on it?" "It just made absolutely no sense to me at all," Johns continued. "That's really what they're doing and they're taxing it like we are rich people and pushing some of our income into our children's names so that we can shelter that from having to pay a higher tax bracket for us, but that's not what we are doing. It's a survivor's benefit. It's not a tax shelter for us."

The unexpected tax increase has led to some tough choices for the survivors who spoke with Task & Purpose: Cancelled vacations and trips; no summer camp for the kids; a tighter budget year-round; and a monthly, if not weekly re-assessment of finances as parents struggle to pay this year's taxes and plan for next year. And then there's the impact it has on their families that goes beyond the financial burden the tax hike has imposed. "It was heavy on my heart when I realized that my son receives this money because his dad died," Lankford said, speaking of her son Jonathan. "Now we feel like it's a challenge for us because he's a child, he's paying taxes, but he's paying taxes on the money that was left for him because of his father's service."

"That's a lot for a kiddo to take in," Lankford continued. "He's not unaware, and most of our kids are not unaware of what's happening around them. They know what's going on. And at the same time, we want to provide for them, we want to shelter them from these things, but it's important as surviving spouses that we come together and we help Congress understand how important it is to our families and to our well-being, that this can change. This needs to change. It needs to be changed soon."

### **Repealing the offset could end the tax issue**

"In layman's terms, surviving spouses are having to give their benefits to their children in order to receive all of the benefits they have earned," Ashlynn Haycock, the deputy director of policy and legislation for TAPS told Task & Purpose. "The tax code isn't the issue," said Haycock, the Widow's Tax is. Under the new tax code "those benefits are being taxed at an astronomical rate," Haycock explained. "If we end the offset, those benefits will be reassigned back to the spouses, so they'll get all of the benefits they have earned, and we won't have this tax issue going forward."

Advocates like Haycock argue that the military's Survivor Benefits Plan and the VA's Dependency and Indemnity Compensation are two separate benefits that come from different pots — SBP is an insurance annuity, and DIC is a VA benefit — and so shouldn't count against each other. Currently, two bills aimed at removing the offset from survivors benefits have been introduced to the House and Senate; the Military Widow's Tax Elimination Act of 2019, sponsored by Sen. Doug Jones (D-AL); and the Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act sponsored by Reps. Joe Wilson, (R-SC) and John Yarmuth, (D-KY).

Even with bills to remove the offset introduced the House and Senate, survivors like Johns, Braden-Rogers, Lankford, and Jones are left to deal with the fallout of this year's tax season on their own. "A lot of us as military widows, many of us didn't have jobs, didn't have careers, when our spouses were killed, because we had followed our husbands around," Jones, who works part-time in real estate, in between going to college and caring for her sons, told Task & Purpose. "Now you're a single parent and you're trying to be there for your kids, and they've already lost one parent and you've got to go to work all day long, and you're trying to balance this," Jones continued. "It's so hard, and it's so exhausting. How am I going to pay for this... What am I going to do when this child turns 18 and all this drops

off. Am I going to have to sell my house, are we going to have to move?" [Source: Task & Purpose | James Clark | April 23, 2019 ++]

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## Rent Or Own ► 13 Cities Where Renting Is Cheaper Than Buying

Americans' homeownership rate is 64.8%, according to the latest U.S. Census data. Home ownership is a big part of the American dream. With it comes with a sense of accomplishment, security and pride. It also comes with responsibility for maintaining the home, paying property taxes, carrying insurance, paying utilities and keeping up with community commitments such as paying association fees. These costs add up quickly, so it's important to weigh the advantages and disadvantages before you buy. LendingTree, the online loan marketplace, recently compared rents with mortgage payments in the 50 largest U.S. metros, finding that, in 30 of the 50 metros, renting is cheaper than purchasing a home. Following are the 13 metros where renting is cheaper by more than \$150 a month, beginning with cities with a smaller advantage for renters.

### 13. Baltimore

- Median monthly rent: \$1,325
- Median monthly mortgage payment: \$1,483
- Renting saves: \$158

Renting costs less, on average, than owning in Baltimore. But don't give up on buying a home if you live here. Three of Baltimore's neighborhoods made Redfin's newest list of the [10 hottest affordable neighborhoods](#) in the U.S. "Affordable," in this case, means their median price tag is under \$294,000.

### 12. Sacramento, California

- Median monthly rent: \$1,342
- Median monthly mortgage payment: \$1,517
- Renting saves: \$175

Renting is a clear winner in Sacramento. And yet, there's room to grow if you're interested in homeownership. The city is among Indeed.com's 2018 [top 10](#) best markets for job seekers.

### 11. Detroit

- Median monthly rent: \$945
- Median monthly mortgage payment: \$1,123
- Renting saves: \$178

Low rent helps make living in Detroit affordable. The cost of living in Detroit is 3% below the national average. But that's not all that's great about Motown. Detroit is home to [four](#) professional sports teams and the [sixth-largest](#) fine arts museum in the United States.

### 10. Chicago

- Median monthly rent: \$1,180
- Median monthly mortgage payment: \$1,362
- Renting saves: \$182

Chicago has recently seen a surge in home construction and home maintenance spending — the most of any of the largest 10 U.S. metros. The [Chicago Tribune](#) reports a 60.2% increase in new construction and growth of nearly 20% in spending on maintenance.

### 9. Raleigh, North Carolina

- Median monthly rent: \$1,200

- Median monthly mortgage payment: \$1,383
- Renting saves: \$183

Although renting remains cheaper on a monthly basis, the Raleigh-Durham region is one of the [top 10 areas](#) for a real-estate investment, according to the annual Emerging Trends in Real Estate report, published by PricewaterhouseCoopers and the Urban Land Institute.

## 8. Philadelphia

- Median monthly rent: \$1,159
- Median monthly mortgage payment: \$1,367
- Renting saves: \$207

Philadelphia’s rental market is booming, at least among baby boomers. Philly saw [36% growth](#) in rentals among residents 55 and older between 2008 and 2017. That’s compared to an 8% rise among renters younger than 55. At least one reason is plain: Renting offers older residents a maintenance-free lifestyle, making it easier to enjoy all Philly has to offer.

## 7. Providence, Rhode Island

- Median monthly rent: \$1,016
- Median monthly mortgage payment: \$1,242
- Renting saves: \$226

You can spend the money you save by renting in Providence on the city’s legendary restaurant scene. Two of the city’s chefs were among 2019’s [James Beard Award](#) semifinalists.

## 6. New York City

- Median monthly rent: \$1,489
- Median monthly mortgage payment: \$1,738
- Renting saves: \$249

When home sales in the Big Apple slowed way down in the fourth quarter of 2018, rental prices dropped too, [writes Forbes](#) contributor Frederick Peters. He is CEO of Warburg Realty, which serves Manhattan’s Tribeca and Upper East Side neighborhoods. Peters writes: “Apartments continue to rent at lower prices than they did three years ago and spend much longer on the market.”

## 5. San Francisco

- Median monthly rent: \$1,856
- Median monthly mortgage payment: \$2,130
- Renting saves: \$275

You may not be able to afford to buy a home in San Francisco, but the high rents here might be worth it if you get a great job. Indeed.com’s latest [Best Cities](#) for Job Seekers report named the city one of the best metropolitan areas for job seekers. Salary, labor market, work-life balance and job security and potential for advancement were among factors considered.

## 4. Boston

- Median monthly rent: \$1,417
- Median monthly mortgage payment: \$1,700
- Renting saves: \$284

Like San Francisco, Boston ranks high on Indeed.com’s Best Cities for Job Seekers report. Here’s more good news for Boston renters: Some Massachusetts lawmakers are supporting a [rent control bill](#), which is meant to limit the amount of rent increases by property owners by linking it to the local consumer price index.

## 3. Oklahoma City

- Median monthly rent: \$900
- Median monthly mortgage payment: \$1,200
- Renting saves: \$300

In March, Apartment List reported that Oklahoma City was one of several U.S. metros seeing a surge of high-income renters, those earning at least \$100,000 a year. Yahoo Finance [interviewed](#) Igor Popov, chief economist for Apartment List, who explained: “We found that these are the places that have seen enormous growth... mid-sized cities with strong growing economies where the rental landscape has really changed dramatically over the last 10 years.”

## 2. Milwaukee

- Median monthly rent: \$925
- Median monthly mortgage payment: \$1,225
- Renting saves you: \$301

Home listings in metro Milwaukee [were down 14.4%](#) from February a year ago. The average sale price of a home in the metro area rose 6.8% in 2018, to \$264,087, the Milwaukee Business Journal says. Milwaukee’s \$301 gap between renting and buying landed it the No. 2 spot on LendingTree’s list.

## 1. Louisville, Kentucky

- Median monthly rent: \$866
- Median monthly mortgage payment: \$1,195
- Renting saves: \$329

In Louisville, the median home price is [\\$180,100](#), which earned the city No. 6 on a list of least expensive housing markets. However, renting is an even better deal. Renters enjoy a median savings of \$329 a month over those with a mortgage. Plus, that extra money goes further in Louisville, where the metro area’s cost of living is 8% lower than the national average. So, whether you’re looking for a temporary home or you’re ready to put down roots, you should like the costs in this Kentucky Derby town.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Elizabeth Lotts | April 10, 2019 ++]

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## Social Security Q & A ► 190415 thru 190430

### **(Q) What if I die before I collect. Will my surviving spouse receive benefits based on the age that I pass away?**

**A.** The amount that your spouse will receive will differ depending on whether you claim benefits or not. If you do not claim benefits, the amount will depend on your age when you die. Let’s compare these situations first.

- If you do not claim your own retirement benefit and you die before your full retirement age (FRA), then survivors benefits will be based on your benefit at full retirement age. For example, if your benefit is \$1,000 per month at FRA and you die before your FRA, Social Security will determine the survivors benefits based on this \$1,000.
- On the other hand, if you claimed your own benefit at 64, your retirement benefit would be less than \$1,000, and the survivors benefits would be based on this smaller amount. (There is a limit on the size of this reduction. The reduction cannot be below 82.5 percent. So, if you claimed at 62, Social Security would base the survivors benefits on \$825 even though your benefit is smaller.)

The situation changes if you live beyond your full retirement age. If you claim benefits after FRA, the survivors benefits will be based on your retirement benefit, and delayed claiming increases your Social Security benefits by 8 percent each year until age 70. If you do not claim benefits and pass away between your FRA and 70, the survivors

benefits would be based on an amount that you would have received if you claimed on the day that you died. Thus, if you pass away one year after you reach FRA, the survivors benefits would be based on \$1,080.

This, however, is only the first step in the calculation of the actual survivors benefits. The actual benefit also depends on your spouse's age when she claims survivors benefits. If she waits until her full retirement age, then these are indeed the amounts she will receive. If she claims before her FRA, however, her benefit will be smaller. If she claims at 60, the earliest age she can claim, then her benefit will be 71.5 percent of the base amount. Each month she delays claiming her benefit will increase until at FRA, she will get the full base amount. Waiting to claim beyond FRA will not increase her benefit. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Jeff Miller | April 18, 2019 ++]

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## **Hotel Fees ► Tips for Avoiding Ridiculous Ones**

Hotels seem to be perfecting the practice of adding extra fees. In fact, fees in the hospitality industry have been multiplying like rabbits in spring. Some of those unpleasant surprise add-ons include:

- Early check-in fees.
- Early check-out fees.
- Cancellation fees.
- Fees for using the room safe.
- Fees to hold your baggage behind the front desk.
- Automatic gratuities (tips for staff).

Hotels have become adept at hiding fees, revealing them only in fine print on a website, in the final stages of a transaction or as you check out at the end of a stay. For example, you might find a \$25 charge on your bill for using Wi-Fi, or a fee for storing your own yogurt in the minibar fridge. Sadly, hotel fees may be here to stay. So, it is up to consumers to be vigilant. Here are 11 ways to help you find and avoid or fight hotel fees:

**1. Read the fine print** -- Shocked incredulity may not be an effective defense when you are checking out and discover surprise fees added to your bill. Instead, find and read the rules found on a hotel's website, during check-in and in the room. Also, ask for a list of fees when you check in. And when shopping for a hotel, keep an eye out for "daily resort charges" and "resort charge" in ads and promotions.

**2. Call ahead** -- You often can avoid fees by calling ahead and inquiring about packages, many of which include fee waivers for things like Wi-Fi and parking.

**3. Look up resort fees** -- Use [ResortFeeChecker.com](http://ResortFeeChecker.com) to find fees charged at the hotels or resorts you are considering.

**4. Negotiate a waiver** -- Some hotels will waive fees if you tell them at check-in that you won't be using the items — such as Wi-Fi, the gym or the pool — covered by the fees.

**5. Steer clear of hotels with fees** -- The surest way to deal with hotel fees is to avoid hotels that charge them. Choose establishments that show all the charges upfront. Booking a room in an independent hotel or motel — or a bed and breakfast — instead of a chain often can help you avoid fees.

**6. Use peer-to-peer home rentals** -- Skip hotels entirely and instead rent a private home through sites like [Homestay](http://Homestay) and [VRBO](http://VRBO). These typically charge a cleaning deposit and booking fee, but the companies' websites should display such costs clearly. In addition, incremental fees for use of equipment or amenities are uncommon.

**7. Get loyalty program elite status** -- Some fees, like late check-out and internet fees, typically aren't charged to elite members of a chain's loyalty program, says Shawn Coomer of the [MilestoMemories](http://MilestoMemories) travel blog. "I have also had mixed success with getting resort fees waived at select hotels," he says, adding that hospitality chain rewards programs typically offer elite status to guests who use their co-branded credit card.

**8. Book with rewards points** -- ThePointsGuy says that some chains or certain hotels in a chain will waive resort fees when you book using rewards points. Read the [blog post](#) for a detailed discussion.

**9. Park elsewhere** -- Hotels — even suburban hotels and motels — have begun charging to park in their nonvalet lots. Your options include:

- Finding free on-street parking.
- Staying in the suburbs, where parking is often free or cheaper.
- Searching the internet for cheaper parking garages near your hotel.
- Using a coupon. Search online for “parking” and “coupons” and the city’s name.

**10. Rethink the minibar** -- The minibar can be expensive. So, avoid it. Don’t eat or drink treats from the minibar unless you are desperate, or are ready for big charges. In fact, don’t even open your room’s refrigerator. Avoiding it entirely is the best way to avoid a shock on your room bill. Want a chilled beverage or snack? Fill your room’s ice bucket with ice from down the hall and keep your goodies in it.

**11. Foil Wi-Fi fees** -- Fewer hotels are charging for in-room internet access. But for those that still do, here are some workarounds:

- Own your own Wi-Fi hotspot: If it’s capable, turn your cellphone into a personal hotspot. “A Personal Hotspot lets you share the cellular data connection of your iPhone or iPad,” explains Apple in this how-to. (Don’t forget to check with your wireless carrier to find out if this will cost you additional data charges.)
- Jog down to the lobby and see if you can use Wi-Fi there for free.
- Use [Wi-Fi Space](#) to find nearby free internet access points.
- Find a nearby Starbucks or local, independent coffee shop and use it as your home away from home.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Marilyn Lewis | April 8, 2019 ++]

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## **Hidden Cable Fees ► Let's End Those Sneaky Fees!**

Like the airline and hotel industries, the cable TV and broadband sector has a masterful knack for obnoxious, hidden fees. From fees for simply trying to pay your bill to broadband surcharges based entirely on fluff and nonsense, the industry has spent years advertising one rate, only to hit you with a significantly higher price once your bill actually comes due. A new bill being proposed by Senator Ed Markey and Representative Anna Eshoo is attempting to put an end to the practice. The duo’s **Truth-In-Billing, Remedies, and User Empowerment over Fees (‘TRUE Fees’) Act** would require cable TV or broadband providers to include all additional surcharges in the advertised price, helping consumers avoid sticker shock.

In recent years the industry has been under fire for its misleading “broadcast TV” fees, which simply takes a part of the cost of programming and buries it below the line. In many areas consumers can pay as much as \$12 per month extra just from this fee alone. Several class action lawsuits against cable giants like Comcast have yet to derail the practice. With so many consumers on auto-payment systems, most will never realize that they’re suddenly paying a higher rate, something consumer groups say is entirely by design. “Communications service customers are almost used to being hit by mysterious fees at the end of the month, never knowing what the true cost of service will be until the bill shows up—or, if they have automatic bill payment set up, maybe never really knowing about or even seeing these hidden fees increase,” Matt Wood, General Counsel of Consumer Group Free Press told Motherboard in an email. “That’s a shame, and they shouldn’t have to accept it.”

Regulators and lawmakers have historically turned a blind eye to the practice across industries. For example, the hotel industry in the States routinely imposes resort fees also intended to misleadingly jack up the advertised price, a practice banned in many European countries. And anybody that’s flown lately is well aware of the wide variety of

nonsensical surcharges that can quickly result in a far more pricey trip than you may have originally expected. Wood said that instead of addressing this problem for what it is (false advertising), American leadership tends to treat such spurious surcharges as the height of capitalistic creativity. And when bills addressing the problem arrive, they tend to go nowhere thanks to industry lobbying.

Consumer Reports has attempted to draw some additional attention to the problem via its “What the Fee?!” campaign, highlighting misleading charges like “regulatory recovery” fees (designed to trick users into believing government is to blame for higher rates), to soaring charges for antiquated cable boxes and DVRs that cost companies a pittance to provide. “This legislation is simple, straightforward, and effective,” Consumer Reports said of this latest legislative effort. “The TRUE Fees Act would address the out-of-control fee problem in the telecommunications marketplace and deliver much-needed transparency for cable and internet providers’ unnecessarily-complicated billing practices.”

The government’s apathy has come with a steep price for cable and broadband customer wallets. Many of these fees have been jacked upwards of 241% in just the last few years, leaving American consumers paying even higher rates for what’s already some of the most expensive cable TV and broadband prices in the developed world. You are encouraged to [take a moment to add your voice here, so this pro-consumer legislation can be passed!](#) **Take Action.** [Source: Truth-In-Billing & MoneyTalksNews | Karl Bode & Miranda Marquit | February 19 & April 9, 2019 ++]

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## **Use Tax** ► **Legal Obligation and Civic Duty to Pay**

People living in a state which has no income tax but does have a sales tax who shop in a neighboring state which has an income tax but no sales tax are normally obligated under state law to pay use tax on any purchases which are brought back to their state of residence. Washington state law does mandate they do this. “Use tax is equal to the amount of WA sales tax that would have been paid, had the item been bought in WA state. In fact, some enforcement personnel from the Washington Department of Revenue are sent to Oregon on a regular basis to note WA license plates in shopping parking lots to note who might be making purchases, especially of high value items, like computers, appliances, cars, furniture, etc. and they then contact them at their WA residence to inform them of their obligation.

Other Washington residents, contrary to WA law, purchase and/or license cars in Oregon, which has no sales tax, but also extremely low license fees. To be entitled to those low license fees and no sales tax, you need to be a resident of Oregon, paying income and property taxes to that state.

When you are a resident of WA, and not paying an income tax, paying sales tax to the state in order to fund the state services, is one’s civic duty. Note that if a WA resident was instead shopping [in] a state or country with taxes equal or equivalent to WA, there is no use tax obligation. If you are paying a sales tax lower than that of WA, you owe use tax in the amount of the difference. Purchases from eBay or other internet sellers on which no sales tax is paid also generate use tax obligations. Note that if a WA resident who purchases restaurant meals or lodging in Oregon is not liable for use tax on those services, which are used in Oregon.” [Source: Federal News Network| Mike Causey | April 29, 2019 ++]

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## **Genetic Testing Scam** ► **How it Works**

Be on alert about a potential scam being perpetrated on Medicare beneficiaries. The scam involves genetic testing and promises that the simple submission of a painless cheek swab will entitle them to a DNA test. The DNA test, seniors are told, will be helpful in determining which and how much of common medications, such as Coumadin, will give

the optimal result. Better cognition, vitality, and function are the inferred results of the testing. The beneficiaries are told that the testing is free because Medicare will pay for the testing. The truth is Medicare does not pay for genetic testing under such circumstances, but the disclosure of their Medicare numbers will leave them vulnerable to further fraud in the form of medical identity theft. For further information please call the DeKalb County Council on Aging and ask for Lynn Hixon, your Alabama State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) Counselor, at 256-845-8590. [Source: Times-Journal Feb 13, 2019 ++]

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## **Global Entry Scam ► Misleading Lookalike Websites**

If you're a frequent traveler, you may consider applying to the [Global Entry program](#), which cuts down wait times in airport border security checkpoints. But watch out! [BBB.org/ScamTracker](#) has received reports about misleading websites that fool people into handing over money and sensitive personal information.

### **How the Scam Works**

- You do a web search for the Global Entry application. The official [CBP.gov](#) website appears high up in your results. But also listed is another website, likely an ad, that has been skillfully designed to look very similar to the official one.
- When you click on the link, you find a third-party company that offers to do all of the paperwork. You are asked to fill out a form with your personal information, including your full name, passport number and home address. Then, you are prompted to pay \$100 (the amount the government charges) plus another fee for the third-party service.
- In reality, scammers have tricked you into paying extra money to complete the form on the official government website. Also, they now have access to your personal information and credit card details.

### **Protect Yourself from Third-party Service Scams**

- *Visit the official website first.* When applying for government services, first visit the official website and read up on the application process. You will likely find there is no need for a third-party service.
- *Read the fine print.* If you do decide to use a third-party service for an application process, read the fine print carefully. Scammers often create websites that appear to offer additional services but in reality, they simply charge consumers for free information or for services they could easily do themselves.
- *Make sure a business is legitimate.* Look up the business you are planning to use on [BBB.org](#) before you make a payment or share your personal information. There, you can find the business rating, reviews, and any complaints.

### **For More Information**

If you've been the victim of a scam, report it on the [BBB.org/ScamTracker](#). By doing so, you can help others protect themselves from falling prey to similar scams. Learn more about scams at [BBB.org/ScamTips](#) and learn how to avoid them at [BBB.org/AvoidScams](#).

[Source: BBB Scam Alert | April 5, 2019 ++]

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## **Notre Dame Cathedral Scam ► Watch for Phony Crowdfunding**

Across the globe, people are in shock over the fire that severely damaged Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Now that the fire is out, BBB has already seen crowding funding efforts to raise money for the repair of the magnificent and historic building. BBB is advising people to wait to donate. Before you send money, be sure donations are going to an official Notre Dame rebuilding fund and not into the hands of scammers.

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

- Facebook pages and crowdfunding campaigns requesting donations always spring up in the wake of disasters like the Notre Dame fire. Some fundraising efforts are outright scams: con artists pocket the donations or use scam donation forms to collect banking information.
- Others are created by well-meaning people or groups. They may intend to do good with the donations, but they lack the infrastructure required.
- Still others are "click bait" designed to create a large number of followers that can later be sold to a new page owner. If the fundraiser isn't associated with official channels, resist the urge to donate.

**Tips to Avoid These Cons:**

BBB Wise Giving Alliance suggests that donors keep the following tips in mind to help avoid questionable appeals for Notre Dame rebuilding and future causes:

- Verify the trustworthiness of soliciting relief organizations. Visit Give.org to access free reports that specify if the charity meets the 20 BBB Standards for Charity Accountability.
- Don't rush to donate: Rebuilding will take time. It's best to wait until more details emerge about which official entities are raising funds to assist the rebuilding.
- Find out if the charity is providing direct aid or is raising money for other groups. Some charities may be raising money to pass along to relief organizations. If so, you may want to consider "avoiding the middleman" and give directly to charities that have a presence in the region.

**For More Information**

If you see a scam aimed at raising funds for Notre Dame (or any disaster), please report it to BBB Scam Tracker at [www.BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://www.BBB.org/ScamTracker). For tips on avoiding scams, go to [www.BBB.org/AvoidScams](http://www.BBB.org/AvoidScams). For more information on giving to trustworthy charities, go to [www.Give.org](http://www.Give.org).

[Source: BBB Scam Alert | April 19, 2019 ++]

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**Tax Burden for Nebraska Retired Vets ► As of APR 2019**

Many people planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales and property taxes can more than offset the lack of a state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn't necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. States raise revenue in many ways including sales taxes, excise taxes, license taxes, income taxes, intangible taxes, property taxes, estate taxes and inheritance taxes. Depending on where you live, you may end up paying all of them or just a few. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you retired in **Nebraska** in 2019. Note: The state has a statutory provision for automatic adjustment of tax brackets, personal exemptions or standard deductions to the rate of inflation.

**Sales Taxes**

**State Sales Tax:** 5.5% (food and prescription drugs exempt); local option taxes could add an additional 2.0% to the state rate. For local rates, refer to <http://www.revenue.nebraska.gov/ratefinder.html>.

**Gasoline Tax:** 46.6 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 52 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes. *Fuel taxes are variable and are reset on July 1 and January 1*)

**Cigarette Tax:** 64 cents/pack of 20

**Personal Income Taxes**

**Tax Rate Range:** 2.46%; High – 6.84%

**Income Brackets:** Four. Lowest – \$0 to \$3,289; Highest – \$31,780 and over. (These are for filing single. For married couples filing jointly, the same rates apply for income under \$6,570 to over \$63,550.)

**Personal Tax Credits:** Single – \$140; Married – \$280; Dependents – \$140;

**Standard Deduction:** Single – \$7,050, Married – \$14,100

**Medical/Dental Deduction:** Federal amount

**Federal Income Tax Deduction:** None

**Retirement Income Taxes:** Railroad Retirement benefits are exempt. Out-of-state government pensions are fully taxed. Social Security is taxable to the extent of federal taxation.

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

**Military Disability Retired Pay:** Retirees who entered the military before Sept. 24, 1975, and members receiving disability retirements based on combat injuries or who could receive disability payments from the VA are covered by laws giving disability broad exemption from federal income tax. Most military retired pay based on service-related disabilities also is free from federal income tax, but there is no guarantee of total protection.

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

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

### **Property Taxes**

Real property is assessed at 100% of its actual (market) value. A property tax credit is provided for all parcels of property based on the valuation of each parcel. The estimated credit for 2012 is \$71.50 for each \$100,000 in valuation. The state has a homestead exemption that provides relief from property taxes by exempting all or a portion of the valuation of the homestead from taxation. There are three groups of exemptions: A) persons age 65, B) certain disabled individuals, and C) certain disabled veterans and their widow(er)s. Call 800-742-7474 or 402-471-5984 for details or go to <http://www.revenue.nebraska.gov/info/96-299.pdf>. For information about the homestead exemption refer to <http://www.revenue.nebraska.gov/PAD/homestead.html>.

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

Nebraska's inheritance tax, which is collected at the county level, applies to bequests, devises, or transfers of property or any other interest in trust or otherwise having characteristics of annuities, life estates, terms for years, remainders, or reversions. The inheritance tax is 1% of the clear market value of the property over the exempt amount of \$40,000; this applies to parents, siblings, and other relatives of the decedent. However, in some instances, the inheritance tax exemption is \$15,000; this applies to a decedent's distant relatives, including aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. The Nebraska inheritance tax is computed on the fair market value of such annuities, life estates, terms for years, remainders, and reversions. The fair market value is the present value as determined under the provisions of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954, as amended, and its applicable regulations with respect to estate tax. The Nebraska estate tax and generation-skipping transfer tax have been repealed for decedents dying or transfers made on or after Jan. 1, 2007. For further information, visit the [Nebraska Department of Revenue](http://www.revenue.nebraska.gov) site.

### **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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Visit the Nebraska Department of revenue site [www.revenue.nebraska.gov/index.html](http://www.revenue.nebraska.gov/index.html) for further information.

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#NEBRASKA> | APR 2019 ++]



## Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 30 APR 2019

- **Drug Recall Alert.** On 19 APR the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced a voluntary recall of a small number of cartons labeled Fentanyl 12 mcg/h Transdermal System patches. Fentanyl is used to manage pain for patients who can tolerate opioids. Using a 50 mcg/h patch instead of a prescribed 12 mcg/h patch could result in serious, life threatening, or fatal respiratory depression
- **Man's Universal Weakness.** Men have many different flaws as any woman will kindly tell you but there is one universal weakness that applies to men. Check it out at <https://youtu.be/gXn2kyouPO4>.
- **The recalled cartons contained 50 mcg/h patches instead of 12 mcg/h patches.**
- **Vet Employment.** The unemployment rate in March 2019 was 2.9% for male veterans and 2.6% for female vets. The March unemployment rate for all veterans, 2.9%, was down from 4.1% in March 2018 and was nearly a full percentage point lower than the total unemployment rate of 3.8% in March 2019.
- **Sex and The Swastika.** At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNCIGI1OpMs> is a 48 minute film of the allies attempts to destabilize WWII Germany's leadership through black propaganda.
- **The Spa.** At <https://biggeekdad.com/2018/12/the-new-hot-tub> is a touching short film about a man who has retired and orders a new hot tub to enjoy with his wife who is also retiring. Sometimes things don't always go as planned so when life serves you lemons try to make lemonade. Life is short so Live, Love, Laugh and enjoy every moment you have.
- **First Lady.** The Associated Press reports Melania Trump says she's ready to serve another four years as first lady if her husband is re-elected.
- **Trump.** President Donald Trump's job approval rating increased relatively sharply over the past month to 45% in an April 1-9 Gallup poll, up from 39% in March. This marks the third time the 45th president has reached a 45% job approval rating in Gallup trends -- his highest in the series.
- **River crossing.** An interesting look at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oS8jHfbcme8> on how Russians cross the river Nyarma-Yaha (200 km north of Vorkuta) using excavators to bridge the span of water. Of course, the question remains: Why did the Russians cross the river?
- **Vietnam.** At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbyqS5pk9GY> can be viewed 'River Patrol', a 29 minute video on 1967 US Navy Mekong Delta Operations.
- **SSA.** The Social Security Administration will start eating into its capital to pay for current expenses. In their annual report to Congress, the Social Security Trustees said they expect total costs to exceed income next year, and in all the years beyond that. Its outlays, nudging at a trillion dollars, have exceeded its payroll tax income since 2010. SSA has made up the difference with interest on its reserve fund. But now SSA will have to dip into reserves, which would disappear by 2034 for old age insurance.
- **USMC Housing.** After promising to reach out to all service members living in privatized on-base military housing, the Marine Corps said more than 14,000 of them requested visits or phone calls. The service conducted the survey after numerous reports of poor living conditions. After speaking with the services members, Marine leaders said they're working to mitigate the issues.
- **Worst Place to Live.** Take a look at the county that was declared the absolute worst place to live in America by a reporter from the Washington Post. Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJSsSa5uTds>.

- **Frank Sinatra.** Any fan of Frank Sinatra should enjoy this performance of “My Way” played on a Stradivarius violin. At <https://youtu.be/d1yfX6VnrSU>.
- **Don’t Screw it Up.** A touching speech by the Father of the Bride to the Groom that shows this father's love for his daughter at <https://youtu.be/eqEkPiUbmIA>.
- **Dancing At the Movies.** Chck out [https://youtu.be/PVG\\_QA5stBc](https://youtu.be/PVG_QA5stBc) for an entertaining video compilation of some great dance clips from various movies.
- **Burial At Sea.** WWII 23-year old Loyce Edward Deen, killed by anti-aircraft fire at the Battle of Manila Bay, could not be extracted from his plane upon its return to the USS Essex (CV-9) as a result of the plane’s extensive damage. At <https://www.youtube.com/embed/jpt6Bvr2L-s?rel=0&controls=0&showinf> can be seen the burial at sea ceremony in which the aircraft is pushed over the side with him in it.
- **Saving Pvt. Ryan.** Steven Spielberg’s “Saving Private Ryan” (1998) will be in 600 cinemas nationwide for just two days — June 2 and June 5 — to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the June 6, 1944, landing of Allied forces in Normandy.
- **Global Military Spending.** Overall military expenditures rose 2.6 percent between 2017 and 2018, to hit a total of \$1.82 trillion, according to new research from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. The total from 2018 is 5.4 percent higher than 2009, and represents a 76 percent increase over 1998, a 20-year period.
- **DoD Commissaries.** Defense Department commissaries continue to rank highly on a Consumer Reports survey of the country's best supermarkets, on par with stores such as national wholesaler Costco and regional groceries Publix and Fareway.

[Source: Various | April 30, 2019 ++]

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## **Afghan Manning Levels Update 04 ► Afghanistan’s Hired Guns**

The number of security contractors the military employs in Afghanistan is higher now than at any time since President Barack Obama declared an end to combat operations in the country in 2014, Defense Department documents show. More than 5,800 privately employed security personnel are currently operating in Afghanistan under Pentagon contracts, according to the latest report released this month that the military headquarters overseeing Middle East wars compiles for Congress. The number of security contractors jumped by more than 1,000 in the three months since the last report – a spike of more than 20 percent and the biggest increase in two years.

More than 17,000 uniformed troops from NATO and partner countries are currently operating in Afghanistan in support of local forces, up from roughly 13,000 when President Donald Trump took office. Of those, roughly 8,500 are Americans. Another 5,500 U.S. troops remain in Afghanistan for the separate mission of hunting insurgent forces like the Islamic State group and elements of the Taliban. The last time the number of private security contractors exceeded 5,000 was in April 2014 during the height of the Obama administration's effort to withdraw all U.S. troops from Afghanistan. When Trump entered the White House in January 2017, the number stood at just over 3,400.

The new data comes amid concerns that the administration could increasingly turn to private companies to carry out the war. Officials and analysts, meanwhile, are raising alarm that the U.S. government is concealing the situation on the ground. "The main problem with contractors of all sorts is there's just not enough attention to what they're doing. That's not been reported out in a clear way to anybody's satisfaction for all these years," says Catherine Lutz, a professor at Brown University and a director of its Costs of War project, which documents the use of private contractors in U.S. conflicts. "The Pentagon should be telling us, the American public, who's funding this, what that means, why this is happening." "The main problem with contractors of all sorts is there's just not enough attention to what they're doing."

U.S. military headquarters in Kabul did not immediately respond to a request for comment. A Pentagon spokeswoman declined to provide further detail on how the military uses its security contractors and what accounts for the sudden increase. Of the 5,883 security contractors outlined in the latest reports from U.S. Central Command, 2,567 of them are armed private security contractors. The rest provide support functions, like driving vehicles or other logistics work related to security activities.

Security contractors – both armed and unarmed – are a subset of a larger group of contractors who perform a broad range of tasks, including translation, construction and information technology services. But at nearly 20 percent of that pool, they now represent a bigger portion of all contractors than at any time since 2013. The Costs of War project has documented that as many as 2,800 contractors have died in Afghanistan – a figure that often goes unmentioned in public remembrances of the 2,400 U.S. military deaths in that war.

The extent to which the U.S. needs more security contractors because of a deteriorating situation on the ground is unclear, largely because the Trump administration, like its predecessors, has opted to withhold pertinent information. Faced with reports of a rising death toll among Afghan soldiers and national police officers, the government in Kabul – with U.S. support – stopped releasing those figures two years ago. Even those who monitor the security situation there closely cannot discuss it publicly. When asked, for example, about the death rate among Afghan soldiers, which open source reporting indicates has reached unsustainable levels of as many as 40 per day, a top official tasked with scrutinizing reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan said he could not answer.

"A lot of the answers or information to answer that question is classified now," John Sopko, the congressionally appointed special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, told a small group of reporters earlier this week. "What we are finding now is almost every indicia, metrics, however you want to phrase it, for success or failure is now classified or nonexistent." When pressed about whether the situation appears to be improving or worsening, Sopko again refused to answer, but added, "Governments don't usually classify good news."

Contractors have provided critical support functions in U.S. conflicts going back to the Revolutionary War and regularly carry out benign tasks like meal service and maintaining infrastructure on military bases. They may also be called upon to train local troops or service military equipment like helicopters. In other circumstances, like with the subsequently rebranded firm Blackwater in the early days of Iraq, they provide security for high-profile officials or for U.S. bases and convoys. Prohibitions on their engaging in direct combat become murky when they operate in conflict zones where enemies move freely among the local populace. Blackwater, in particular, generated heated controversy for its heavy-handed battlefield tactics with seemingly little oversight.

And American leaders have relied on private security contractors to purposefully mask distasteful aspects of war. The Obama administration reportedly replaced troops that came home with private contractors, allowing it to maintain pressure on enduring enemies while publicly claiming the war was waning. Lutz draws particular attention to Blackwater's founder Erik Prince, who has developed close ties with the Trump administration and who has advocated for Trump to turn over responsibility for the war in Afghanistan to private companies, akin to the British East India Company that governed colonial commerce in South Asia and whose use of private armies to maintain stability grew increasingly forceful. Prince's suggestion wrought widespread criticism.

In response to queries about the spike in the number of security contractors, Pentagon spokeswoman Heather Babb said in an emailed statement that military leaders in Afghanistan "continue to assess and right-size contracted support to provide executable options in pursuit of established strategic goals." She added that these leaders regularly conduct reviews of existing contracts "to identify requirements for reduction, consolidation, elimination, or transition to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan." Services provided by private contractors in this fiscal year amount to approximately \$2.3 billion, Babb says. [Source: U.S. News & World Report | Paul D. Shinkman | April 26, 2019 ++]

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## Grandchildren ► Things They Will Never Understand

I'm a firm believer that kids should learn about what the world was like when their parents and grandparents were growing up. Record players and in-car ashtrays can be lessons in how a previous generation was raised, reminding us of what was important, creating connections and sparking conversations. See if the following relics stir up memories and conversations for you.

1. **Record player** -- You can still buy record players — now they're often called “turntables.” Some have USB connections and cost hundreds of dollars. The generation raised on iTunes may need a few lessons, though.
2. **Built-in bathtub soap dish** -- Does your bathtub have a built-in soap dish? When's the last time you actually used it for bar soap? Some people love a good bar of Dove or Lifebuoy soap, but kids today are more likely to use shower gel or body wash. The New York Times noted in 2018 that fancy, pricey artisan soaps are lathering up a following again, perhaps also bringing back demand for built-in soap dishes.
3. **Rotary dial phone** -- Here's a fun test: Find a kid born in the past decade and hand them a rotary dial telephone. See if they know how to make a call. Then sit back and laugh while they try to figure it out. The fun video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OADXNGnJok> shows just how mystifying it this once-familiar routine can be. Wait, you have to pick up the receiver? Where's the delete button?
4. **Fixing a cassette tape with a pencil** -- Back in the day, we listened to music on cassette tapes. Sometimes the tape would unravel. That's when a wooden pencil was every music lover's best friend. You just stab the pencil into the cassette holes and wind the tape back until it's tight. This was an odd bit of 1980s surgery that every kid knew how to perform. Now it's faded into the mists of memory along with ninth-grade algebra.
5. **Drive-in movie theaters** -- My childhood drive-in movie theater — the Vali-Hi in Lake Elmo, Minnesota — is still operating (once the snow melts), with dollar hot dogs. But many kids today may never know the thrill of wearing footie pajamas to the drive-in movies. Drive-ins are a fast-fading phenomenon. According to the United Drive-In Theatre Owners Organization, there were just 317 drive-ins in the U.S. as of August 2018. Get this: In 1958 there were more than 4,000 drive-ins in the U.S.
6. **Encyclopedia sets** -- Do you still have a multi-volume set of encyclopedias on your bookshelf? Encyclopedia Britannica is celebrating its 250th anniversary this year, although it no longer offers the [print editions](#) that may have been a staple of your youth. You still can get the 22-volume [World Book](#) in hardcover, though. Kids today, however, are likely to be more familiar with Wikipedia and other online resources than the heavy, alphabetized books that once dominated home libraries.
7. **Manual transmission cars** -- Want to protect your car from thieves? Get a vehicle with a manual transmission, operated with a stick shift. “Stick shifts” represented only about 3.5% of vehicle sales in the U.S. in 2018, according to USA Today. There was at least one [recent report](#) of a car thief who tried to steal a car only to realize that it was a stick shift — which he apparently didn't know how to drive.
8. **Roller skate key** -- Kids today roller skate, of course, although many prefer inline skates to the four-wheel variety. But hand a kid a roller skate key and watch their brain combust as they try to figure out its purpose. One type of old-style skates clamped onto the skater's street shoes. The metal key was a type of small wrench that you used to adjust the fit.
9. **Milk delivery** -- In 1963, according to The New York Times, about 30% of consumers had milk delivered to their home. By 2005, only 0.4% of total sales were home delivered. Milkmen and women were in danger of becoming the punchline for jokes as stale as last month's carton of 2%. But it may be too soon to count milk delivery dead. [Some](#)

[dairies](#) are reviving the tradition of home delivery. And AmazonFresh, Amazon's grocery delivery and pickup service offered in select cities, includes milk among groceries it delivers.

10. **Handkerchiefs** -- My dad was never without a handkerchief. A businessman by day and a farmer by night and on weekends, he was not about to haul Kleenex around with him — not in his company's warehouse nor at home on his tractor. As [HandkerchiefHeroes.com](#) notes, the rise of Kleenex facial tissue, starting in the 1920s and 1930s, started to push hankies out. A pocket square still makes a fashion statement today, but in these enlightened times, who wants to stick a drippy hanky back into a pocket?

11. **Car window cranks** -- Hey, wind down the window, will you? Say that to a youngster in a car and they might look at you like you sprouted a second head. "Wind down?" Today, we push a button to roll down a car window. Back in the day, we manually turned a crank for the same result. Crank windows still can be seen in older cars. But as of 2016, Car and Driver reports, only 6% of new cars for sale in the U.S. — including models from Jeep, Ford, Nissan, Chevrolet, Kia and Toyota — offered manual windows.

12. **Floppy disks** -- Floppy disks were the go-to data-storage solution in the early days of personal computing. You could save your essay, carry it with you and print it anywhere — ground-breaking conveniences at the time. Those disks gave way to CD-ROMs (compact disc read-only memory), rewritable CD-RWs and ever more storage innovations. Now, essays and documents float around in the cloud.

13. **Telephone switchboard operators** -- A few generations ago, the job of switchboard operator was a career path for aspiring young women. Operators sat at a switchboard, inserting and removing plugs to connect telephone callers across the city or across the world. As telephone service became automated, the need for these workers — usually women — shrank, although the job of telephone operator has not entirely disappeared.

14. **Lick-and-stick postage stamps** -- Youngsters might be puzzled when tell them you once had to lick a stamp to stick it to an envelope. We older folks can still taste the adhesive that postage stamps once used. Today's self-adhesive stamps may be an improvement over that taste, but some of us do miss actual letters. All this led me to wonder: Are lickable stamps still made? A dogged U.S. Postal Service representative searched hard and found the answer for me: "No water-activated postage stamps have been printed since 2015." That year, two lickable stamps were printed: a 1-cent stamp depicting a [bobcat](#), and a 10-cent stamp of an [American clock](#).

15. **Pull-tab cans** -- Ah, canned drinks. Such an easy and convenient way to quench one's thirst. But opening the cans used to be quite different. You needed a can opener. And then, in 1959, an engineer named Ermal Cleon Frazee came up with the pull-tab beverage opener. His New York Times obituary says Frazee hit on the idea after he was forced to use a car bumper to pry open a can of beer at a picnic. Kids today are unlikely to know pull tabs. That's probably a good thing, since the tabs could become street litter or a choking hazard for drinkers who dropped them into the can they were drinking from. Today's cans have a stay-put tab.

16. **Correction fluid** -- We're not saying that correction fluid has completely dried up. You can still buy it. And it's still useful, especially when you want to correct a mistake on a form that can't easily be redone. But now that erasing an error by computer is as easy as back spacing, that smelly, messy liquid is less common. When you explain correction fluid to your grandkids, you can share this fun fact: It was invented in 1951 by Bette Nesmith Graham, mother of Michael Nesmith of The Monkees. And, then, be prepared to explain who The Monkees were.

17. **Cassette mix tapes** -- Cassette mixtapes were quirky, fun DIY compilations of tunes that you choose and personally recorded, usually from a variety of sources. They are ancestors of contemporary mixtapes. The kids in your life may know old-style mixtapes from the 2014 superhero film "Guardians of the Galaxy," in which the film's hero, Peter Quill, frequently is shown listening to a cassette mixtape of hits from the 1960s through 1980s. The music helps him remember his late mother, who made it for him.

18. **Print catalogs** -- When holidays or special occasions rolled around in the old days, kids made Christmas or birthday lists by consulting fat, colorful department-store catalogs. Delivered to your door by the mail carrier, these dream books from J.C. Penney, Sears, Montgomery Wards and the other iconic national merchandisers of the era offered Barbies, BB guns, clothes and so much more. Sears even sold [mail-order homes](#).

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Gael F. Cooper | April 24, 2019 ++]

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## **Women's Hall of Fame ► Vote Fails to Keep Jane Fonda from Being Inducted**

A resolution to end funding for the Women's Hall of Fame if Jane Fonda was inducted failed to pass a Seneca Falls Town board meeting Tuesday night. But that was only after over an hour of passionate debate between Hall supporters and Vietnam Veterans on the actresses actions in the 1970s. Last week Town Supervisor Greg Lazzaro proposed a resolution, which would end town financial donations for events associated with the Hall, because of Fonda's nomination.

Vern Brewer was one of the many Vietnam Veterans who were at the meeting to protest the nomination of Fonda. They say seeing her travels to North Vietnam during the war were disrespectful, and says the hall should honor more women connected to the war. "I'm here basically today to ask these feminists why they don't care about the mothers, the daughters of the dead." Brewer was standing with Ken Lisk, a fellow veteran who called Fonda a "war mongerer." "I watched her in North Vietnam when I was in South Vietnam; it was not a good picture."



But there were supporters of the hall as well, many who said the town doesn't have a place to decide who does or doesn't get inducted. Susan Souhan from Seneca Falls supports the hall of fame. "I am here also to support our veteran's because they fought in a war that most people did not like but they did what their government told them to. And I have nothing against the vets, I just think what our town supervisor has done is unfair to the hall." Jill Byington, holding a sign of support says the hall of fame is "A place for the world, it's not a place for just this town."

In the end, the resolution failed with three votes against it, one vote by the town supervisor in favor, and one board member who opted not to vote. Former President of the Hall Betty Brayer said she was relieved, but says the meeting just showed a need for more communication between the hall and the town. "There's a lot of history and emotion in the room, and one of the things that struck me was how much dialogue is missing." The community center in Seneca Falls was buzzing as Vietnam veterans, residents of the town and everyone in between gathered to discuss the induction of Jane Fonda into the hall of fame.

The National Women's Hall of Fame is located at 76 Fall St, Seneca Falls, NY 13148. The gallery exhibit and gift shop are closed on major holidays. For months of the year when the gallery is officially closed on Monday and Tuesday, it will be made available by appointment by calling 315.568.8060. Admission charges are: Adults – \$5,

Seniors (65+)/Military – \$4, Students – \$4, Families – \$8, Members/Children 5 and under – FREE. For additional info refer to [www.womenofthehall.org](http://www.womenofthehall.org). [Source: NCPR | Caitlin Whyte | April 3, 2019 ++]

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## **Afghan Withdrawal ► Poll | Veterans, Military Families Want Out**

Veterans and military families overwhelmingly support plans to fully withdraw troops from Afghanistan and similarly favor a complete U.S. military pullout from Syria, according to a new poll from a conservative activist group released Wednesday. Concerned Veterans for America, which has close ties to the conservative Koch brothers' network and the Trump administration, said the results indicate that President Donald Trump should follow through with his public comments to bring those troops home. "Veterans and military families have borne the brunt of America's endless wars, and after nearly two decades of fighting there is clear support among both groups for a new approach to American foreign policy," said Dan Caldwell, executive director at Concerned Veterans for America.

"President Trump would have strong support from these communities if he were to follow through on his promise to remove U.S. troops from Afghanistan and Syria, and get serious about our country's financial future." In recent months, CVA officials have teamed up with leaders from VoteVets.org — a left-leaning advocacy group with close ties to the Democratic Party — to push lawmakers to halt open-ended foreign military operations, arguing the "forever" wars cost too much in taxpayer funds and military readiness. CVA leaders say results from the survey show support for that position from among veterans and military families.

Less than 40 percent of those surveyed said that keeping troops in Afghanistan is still necessary for the safety of the United States. Sixty percent said they support removing all U.S. personnel from Afghanistan. The U.S. military mission in Syria got more support — about 55 percent of those surveyed said they think having a military presence there is important to U.S. national security — but roughly half said they still would support removing all American military personnel from that region. Less than one-third said they would oppose a total withdrawal from Afghanistan, and about 45 percent said they would oppose a full pull out from Syria.

Trump in recent months has vacillated on the troop presence in both areas. In his State of the Union speech in February, Trump said that "great nations do not fight endless wars" and hinted at major personnel changes in both areas. But rumored plans for a full withdrawal from both combat zones have not yet materialized. The potential rapid drawdown of troops from both combat zones was also a factor in the resignation of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis last year. The veterans and military households surveyed by CVA offered a mixed view of the president's work as commander in chief. Of those surveyed, 53 percent said they approve of his job performance, while 47 percent said they disapprove. Those figures echo Military Times' own poll of service members from last fall, which found 44 percent had a favorable view of Trump's presidency and 43 percent a negative view.

One of Trump's repeated military policy accomplishments over the last year has been securing a sizable increase in the defense budget, to \$716 billion. He has also requested \$750 billion in national security spending for fiscal 2020. But only about one-third of the individuals surveyed by CVA say the military needs another funding increase next year. Among veterans surveyed, half said spending levels should remain the same. Among military households, nearly a quarter said spending levels should be decreased. "The vast majority of veterans and military families do not support massive increases in defense spending and appear more concerned about the negative consequences of our growing national debt," Caldwell said.

The results also showed more than three times as many respondents in support of a new base closure round than opposed to the idea. More than 70 percent said the national debt poses a significant threat to American security. The full survey results are available on CVA's web site at [https://mk0wehezuhu1jcn3uqvn.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/I20190424\\_PO-CVA-Survey\\_Interview-Schedule\\_Release.pdf](https://mk0wehezuhu1jcn3uqvn.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/I20190424_PO-CVA-Survey_Interview-Schedule_Release.pdf). The data was collected between April 5 and 14, and includes responses from a randomized sample of 800 veterans and 800 more military

households. Group officials said there is a 3.5 percent margin on the responses. It was conducted by the communications firm Pursuit Of — an organization connected to the Koch brothers’ network, though with separate funding and operations from CVA. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 24, 2019 ++]

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## South China Sea Update 03 ► Vietnam vs. China Islet Development

Both China and Vietnam are building up tiny islets across Asia’s most disputed sea, but while China receives international criticism Vietnam receives very little, and even gets some support because its pace of construction is slower and widely seen as defensive. Vietnam’s work on islets it has held for decades is kept to areas of the South China Sea closest to its mainland coasts. The country shuns military mega projects that might appear offensive. And it belongs to the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) known for working out any bilateral differences. These factors differ from China.

“They’ve never had, I think, a standoff with any other country, because all the other claimants have respectfully kept to their developable spheres around the South China Sea, and I think there’s this intra-ASEAN consensus, that within ASEAN the claimants do not rock the boat so as to present a common front towards China,” said Alan Chong, associate professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore. Vietnam has slowly added buildings on some of its 10 major islets since 2017, the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative said in a report earlier this month. The initiative under the U.S. think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies also tracked new communications equipment, a sports field and the extension of a runway from 750 meters to 1,300 meters on its largest holding Spratly Island.

Development of military-controlled islands that Vietnam has occupied for decades in the South China Sea’s Spratly Island chain involves landfill work plus installation of solar panels on some buildings, the initiative report says. The report points also to 25 “pillbox” forts that Vietnam has built on sometimes submerged reefs or banks. Vietnam is very slowly reclaiming land for construction that offers self-defense against harsh weather, said Trung Nguyen, international relations dean at Ho Chi Minh University of Social Sciences and Humanities. Construction has shunned use of large ships that might grab international attention, he said. “The Vietnamese government has made it very clear they just reclaim the islands for self-defense, and they do not expand massively for other purposes,” Nguyen said. “I don’t think the Vietnamese government wants to draw a lot of attention from other countries on their reclamation, so that’s the reason they want to do it quietly.”

Hanoi hopes its tiny islets can get by without much help from mainland Vietnam, Chong said. He said the country is preparing for a long stay on the islets. Vietnam is upgrading islets to make them harder for China to take without a cost, not for offensive military use, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative Director Gregory Poling said. “The Vietnamese endgame seems to be making these facilities more survivable, raising the cost for the Chinese to try to take them,” he said. China normally leaves Vietnam alone at sea because they have shown a willingness to “bump shoulders” with Chinese vessels if pushed, he said.



An aerial view of Southwest Cay (left), also known as Pugad Island, controlled by Vietnam and part of the Spratly Islands in the disputed South China Sea, April 21, 2017. Anti-China protesters (right) shout "down with invasive China" and hold placards that read "The country will not forget - Johnson South Reef - 14th March, 1988" during a gathering to mark the anniversary of the Spratly Islands clashes between Vietnam and China.

### China contrast

China claims about 90 percent of the disputed sea, overlapping Vietnam's smaller claim as well as tracts that four other governments call their own. The other claimants are Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan. Chinese reclamation work particularly alarms Vietnam because China controls the full Paracel archipelago, also claimed by Hanoi, and three major islands in the Spratly chain. Beijing's reclamation work has created infrastructure for military aircraft and radars, the think tank initiative says. Chinese contractors had used 1,294 hectares of reclaimed land to help develop reefs and atolls under their control, according to a Pentagon estimate in 2016. China draws attention from other countries, including the United States, when it sends bombers and naval vessels into the sea. Both China and Vietnam cite historic usage to back their maritime claims.

### Keeping peace

China and the Philippines have complained occasionally to Vietnam over the years because its islets fall into their claims. But the complaints fade because the other countries do not see Vietnam as a threat, scholars believe. Vietnam's armed forces and maritime development budget lag China, which is Asia's top economic and military power. Chinese officials meet sometimes with ASEAN leaders but lack access to the regular events for Southeast Asian heads of state, defense chiefs and foreign ministers. "One ASEAN country is not going to war with another ASEAN country," said Oh Ei Sun, senior fellow with the Singapore Institute of International Affairs. "We would find consensus. That's the true spirit of diplomacy." Vietnam also has picked up support from Japan and the United States, both keen to limit Chinese expansion. Japan's agreement in 2014 to donate six coast guard vessels to Vietnam helped prove its "power projection abilities," Chong said. The U.S. Navy regularly passes ships through the sea to warn China.

[Source: VOA | Ralph Jennings | April 19, 2019 ++]

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## GoFundMe Scam Update 02 ► Female Accomplish Pleads Guilty | Will Serve 4 years

A New Jersey woman pleaded guilty 15 APR to her role in concocting a feel-good tale about a homeless man rescuing her from the side of a highway in order to scam 14,000 donors out of \$400,000 in GoFundMe contributions. **Katelyn McClure** pleaded guilty in state Superior Court to second-degree theft by deception under a plea agreement that calls for her to serve four years in state prison and help repay the \$400,000. She had initially faced up to 10 years in prison if convicted under the charges prosecutors initially brought. McClure, 29, of Bordentown, must also testify against her former boyfriend and co-defendant Mark D'Amico, who also faces state charges in the scheme. He has denied wrongdoing.



McClure's plea comes after Johnny Bobbitt, a homeless military veteran, was sentenced Friday to five years' probation for his role in the scheme. Under his plea agreement, he will also help repay the money, according to prosecutors. The trio fabricated the story that Bobbitt rescued McClure from the side of a Philadelphia highway in = The group solicited donations through GoFundMe, purportedly to help Bobbitt, and garnered significant attention with a media blitz that included posing for photos together, revisiting the spot where they claimed their first encounter happened, appearing on "Good Morning America." In all, more than 14,000 people contributed.

Authorities said the three split the money and spent lavishly — as they had planned all along — including on a BMW, designer bags and trips to Las Vegas and elsewhere. They say the scheme "was designed to pull at the heartstrings of caring, trusting individuals." Authorities started an investigation in 2018 last year after Bobbitt sued the couple for allegedly not giving him his share of the money. GoFundMe has said it refunded the donations. McClure faces sentencing on state charges in June. She also pleaded guilty to one federal count of wire fraud conspiracy in the scheme, and Bobbitt also pleaded guilty to a federal money laundering charge last month. No sentencing date has been set for either on those federal charges. D'Amico doesn't face any federal charges. He and McClure were charged last fall in state court with theft and conspiracy. [Source: The Associated Press | April 15, 2019 ++]

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## California Unclaimed Property ► \$9.3 Billion Waiting to be Claimed

California's Unclaimed Property Law was enacted to reunite lost and abandoned property with the rightful owner or heirs and to safeguard private property from being lost or forgotten. California's Unclaimed Property Law requires corporations, businesses, associations, financial institutions, and insurance companies (referred to as "Holders") to annually report and deliver property to the California State Controller's Office after there has been no activity on the account or contact with the owner for a period of time specified in the law - generally (3) three years or more. Sometimes the owner forgets that the account exists, moves and leaves no forwarding address, or the forwarding order expires. The most common examples of unclaimed private properties include:

- Bank accounts and safe deposit box contents
- Uncashed cashier's checks or money orders
- Matured or terminated insurance policies
- Stocks, bonds, mutual funds, or dividends
- Certificates of deposit
- Mineral interests and royalty payments, trust funds and escrow accounts

Life insurance settlement properties – Are you a beneficiary? The State Controller's Office has settled with several national life insurance companies to restore \$266.7 million in unpaid benefits to California beneficiaries. If you would like to isolate your unclaimed property search results to life insurance settlement property only and find out if you are the beneficiary of one of these old policies, go to the [Life Insurance Settlement Search](#) page.

There is no time limit to claim your property. An unclaimed property search by name is simple! Visit the State Controller's website at [www.claimit.ca.gov](http://www.claimit.ca.gov) where you can search the database. If you need further information contact the Call Center between 8am and 5pm Pacific Standard Time. Monday through Friday, excluding state holidays, at (800) 992-4647 (Nationwide) or (916) 323-2827 (Outside of US), or you may contact them by [email](#).

If you are not a resident of California check with your state Comptroller's data base. There is no cost to see if the state is holding any unclaimed property that belongs to you, so beware of scams that offer to recover your unclaimed property once you've paid a "deposit." [Source: <https://ucpi.sco.ca.gov/UCP/Default.aspx> | April 18, 2019 ++]

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## Iran Revolutionary Guard ► US Terrorism Label Takes Effect

The U.S. terrorism label for Iran's Revolutionary Guard formally took effect on 15 APR, amid a battle between the Trump administration and some in Congress over waivers on oil and nuclear sanctions that are due to expire or be extended early next month. The Guard's formal designation as a "**foreign terrorist organization**" — the first-ever for an entire division of another government — kicked in with a notice published in the Federal Register. The move adds a layer of sanctions to the elite military unit and makes it a crime for anyone in or subject to U.S. jurisdiction to provide it with material support. Depending on how broadly "material support" is interpreted, the designation may complicate U.S. diplomatic and military cooperation with certain third-country officials, notably in Iraq and Lebanon, who deal with the Guard.



In this Sept. 21, 2016, file photo, Iran's Revolutionary Guard troops march in a military parade marking the 36th anniversary of Iraq's 1980 invasion of Iran, in front of the shrine of late revolutionary founder Ayatollah Khomeini, just outside Tehran.

President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the step with great fanfare last week, opening a one-week consultation period with Congress during which members could have raised objections. Lawmakers were broadly supportive, but congressional Iran hawks are now expressing concern that the administration may extend waivers on oil and nuclear sanctions. Those sanctions, which are unrelated to the Guard designation, were imposed last November following Trump's withdrawal of the U.S. from the landmark 2015 Iran nuclear deal that May.

They target major elements of Iran's economy, notably its energy sector, by hitting foreign companies and governments with so-called "secondary sanctions" if they continue to do business with targeted Iranian entities. A main goal has been to dry up revenue from Iran's oil exports, which the U.S. says is the main driver of the country's funding of destabilizing activities throughout the Middle East and beyond.

In order not to shock oil markets with the sudden loss of Iranian crude, the administration granted several waivers that allowed some nations and Taiwan to continue their imports as long as they moved to reduce them to zero. Those waivers are due to expire in early May, and Iran hawks in Congress and elsewhere are urging the administration not to renew any of them. They say extending even some of the eight waivers would run counter to Trump and Pompeo's stated goal of keeping "maximum pressure" on Iran. U.S. officials have been coy when asked about the waivers, leading to concern among hawks that some or all of them may be extended. The administration's point man for Iran, Brian Hook, has said that three of the waivers won't need to be extended as those countries have eliminated all Iranian oil imports. But he has remained silent on the other five. Pompeo has similarly refused to comment on the possibility of extensions.

In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last week, Pompeo was pressed by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) about whether the oil sanctions waivers, as well as waivers related to technical cooperation at Iranian nuclear facilities, would be extended. He suggested that some at the State Department were pushing for extensions. "Let me urge you and urge the department unequivocally not to grant the nuclear waivers and not to grant the oil waivers," Cruz said, "I think maximum pressure should mean maximum pressure." Pompeo demurred, but during a trip to South

America over the weekend he bristled when asked if the Iran hawks had reason to be concerned. “It’s ludicrous,” he told reporters accompanying him. “It’s ludicrous. Look, people want to tell stories, people want to sell newspapers. I’ve got it. Congressmen will grandstand, I’ve got that, too. The State Department’s going to get it right. We understand our mission.”

Cruz was not impressed. “The Senate Foreign Relations Committee needs to understand why some in the State Department think it’s a good idea to keep enriching the Ayatollah with oil billions and to let Iran keep spinning centrifuges in a bunker that they dug into the side of a mountain so they could build nuclear weapons,” he said in a statement released by his office.

Iran’s lawmakers on 16 APR overwhelmingly approved a bill labeling U.S. forces in the Middle East as terrorist. Iran’s Defense Minister Gen. Amir Hatami introduced the bill authorizing the government to act firmly in response to “terrorist actions” by U.S. forces. It demands authorities use “legal, political and diplomatic” measures to neutralize the American move, without elaborating. The U.S. move aims at “thwarting Iran’s influence,” and shows that America’s longstanding sanctions against Iran have become ineffective, Hatami told lawmakers. [Source: The Associated Press | Matthew Lee | April 15, 2019 ++]

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## **Fort Trump ► Poland Nearing a Deal for New In Country U.S. Base**

Poland is nearing a deal with the U.S. to establish an American military base in the former Soviet Bloc country, according to people familiar with the matter — an outpost the Poles see as a deterrent to Russian aggression and that the Kremlin likely would consider a provocation. If a deal is reached, President Donald Trump is considering traveling to Poland in the fall, in part to commemorate the agreement. But it’s unclear whether he fully supports the idea, even after he said during a September meeting with Polish President Andrzej Duda that the U.S. was looking “very seriously” at establishing a base. Duda, who joked that it could be named “Fort Trump,” remains committed to contributing \$2 billion for its construction.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki planned to visit Washington this week to discuss the proposal with Trump’s national security adviser, John Bolton, but his trip was postponed, according to two people familiar with the matter. He’s traveling to Chicago and New York instead. Trump often has criticized NATO allies for not spending enough toward their own defense, and he’s considered demanding that countries hosting U.S. forces pay the full cost of the bases, plus as much as a 50 percent premium for the privilege, according to people familiar with the matter. But the American president has an affinity for Poland, a NATO member whose government has clashed repeatedly with European Union leaders in Brussels over rule-of-law issues. Duda has employed Trump-style anti-migrant and nationalist rhetoric. Trump stopped in Warsaw in July 2017 to deliver a speech before attending a Group of 20 summit in Hamburg.

The U.S. now rotates about 4,000 troops into and out of Poland. Rather than immediately begin constructing a base, that arrangement could be bolstered, according to a person familiar with the White House’s thinking. Polish and U.S. officials now don’t want an eventual base to be named “Fort Trump,” according to a person familiar with the discussions. All of the people asked not to be identified because the issue concerns national security. The plan is now being considered in what’s known as an interagency process led by the Defense Department with input from Bolton, the people said. “The United States and Poland are engaged in ongoing discussions on the status of forces, and we have nothing to announce at this time,” Garrett Marquis, a spokesman for the National Security Council, said in an email.

A spokesman for Duda said that talks are progressing but declined to comment further. One person familiar with the matter described the outstanding issues as largely technical matters, such as how many more U.S. troops would be sent to Poland, where, precisely, they’d be located and what equipment they’d bring with them. Polish leaders have

been eager to increase the U.S. presence in their country and have asked American officials for the permanent stationing of a full Army brigade. Like many eastern European states, the Poles grew more wary of Russian territorial aspirations after the Kremlin annexed Crimea from neighboring Ukraine in 2014. After the Crimea episode, the U.S. and allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization established a constant, but fluctuating, rotation of troops in Poland. The Poles have argued for a permanent, costlier plan, including a headquarters.

Polish officials raised the subject when Vice President Mike Pence visited the country in February, according to a person familiar with the talks. The idea of permanently stationing U.S. troops in Poland could prompt opposition from European allies chagrined by the country’s turn toward autocracy, including a revamping of the judiciary that critics say would subordinate courts to politicians. And some U.S. critics have said the permanent stationing of American forces in Poland would be a disincentive for additional defense spending by NATO members. Poland says it already meets the NATO goal of spending 2 percent of its gross domestic product on defense. [Source: Bloomberg | Jennifer Jacobs, Justin Sink, Nick Wadhams & Marek Strzelecki | Bloomberg | April 16, 2019 ++]

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## U.S. African OPS ► The U.S. Footprint in Africa



Many Americans first became aware of U.S. military operations in Africa in October 2017, after the Islamic State ambushed American troops near Tongo Tongo, Niger, killing four U.S. soldiers and wounding two others. Just after the attack, U.S. Africa Command said U.S. troops were providing “advice and assistance” to local counterparts. Later, it would become clear that those troops — the 11-man Operational Detachment-Alpha Team 3212 — were working out of the town of Oullam with a larger Nigerian force under the umbrella of **Operation Juniper Shield**, a wide-ranging counterterrorism effort in northwest Africa.

Until poor weather prevented it, that team was supposed to lend support to another group of American commandos who were trying to kill or capture Islamic State leader Doundoun Cheffou as part of **Obsidian Nomad II**. Juniper

Shield and Obsidian Nomad II were not isolated efforts but part of a panoply of named military operations and activities U.S. forces have been conducting from dozens of bases across the northern tier of Africa. Many of these operations are taking place in countries that the U.S. government does not recognize as combat zones, but in which U.S. troops are nonetheless fighting and, in several cases, taking casualties.

Between 2013 and 2017, U.S. special operations forces saw combat in at least 13 African countries, according to retired Army Brig. Gen. Don Bolduc, who served at U.S. Africa Command from 2013 to 2015 and then headed Special Operations Command Africa until 2017. Those countries, according to Bolduc, are Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan and Tunisia. He added that U.S. troops have been killed or wounded in action in at least six of them: Kenya, Libya, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan and Tunisia. The following map is provided to help enlighten readers where the U.S. has established themselves on the continent to date from which Special Operations forces have or will be launched. [Source: Yahoo News | Nick Turse & Sean D. Naylor | April 17, 2019 ++]

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## U.S. African OPS Update 01 ► Operations Conducted to Date

Yahoo News has put together a list of three dozen special operations across the African continent which have been conducted to date. The code-named operations cover a variety of different military missions, ranging from psychological operations to counterterrorism. Eight of the named activities, including Obsidian Nomad, are so-called 127e programs, named for the budgetary authority that allows U.S. special operations forces to use certain host-nation military units as surrogates in counterterrorism missions.

Used extensively across Africa, 127e programs can be run either by Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), the secretive organization that controls the Navy's SEAL Team 6, the Army's Delta Force and other special mission units, or by "theater special operations forces." These programs are "specifically designed for us to work with our host nation partners to develop small — anywhere between 80 and 120 personnel — counterterrorism forces that we're partnered with," said Bolduc. "They are specially selected partner-nation forces that go through extensive training, with the same equipment we have, to specifically go after counterterrorism targets, especially high-value targets."

Using documents obtained via the Freedom of Information Act, interviews, published reports and a Defense Department list of named U.S. military operations that leaked online, Yahoo News put together the following list of 36 operations and activities that are (or were until recently) ongoing in Africa. Where possible, Yahoo News has also listed the bases that support these operations, relying mostly on information sheets about those locations obtained via the Freedom of Information Act. Yahoo News does not claim that this list is comprehensive. While the Defense Department has acknowledged the names, locations and purposes of some of these operations, others are far lower-profile. Almost all are unknown to the general public:

**ARMADA SWEEP:** A U.S. Navy electronic surveillance effort conducted from ships off the coast of East Africa, Armada Sweep supports the U.S. drone war in the region. Bases used: Unknown

**ECHO CASEMATE:** This operation covers a series of activities in the Central African Republic. It began in 2013 as a support mission for French and African forces deployed to the troubled Central African Republic for peacekeeping purposes and continued as an advise-and-assist mission to those African peacekeeping forces. However, U.S. forces neither accompanied their partners in the field nor formally trained them. The operation also covered the introduction of contractors and Marines to secure the U.S. Embassy in Bangui and the deployment of a small U.S. special operations contingent to assist the U.S. ambassador in missions to counter the Lord's Resistance Army. In the first days of the operation, the U.S. military airlifted hundreds of Burundian troops, tons of equipment and more than a dozen military vehicles into the Central African Republic, according to Africom. The U.S. military continued transporting French

forces in and out of the Central African Republic, and the mission was still underway in early 2018. Base used: Abeche, Chad

***EXILE HUNTER:*** One of a family of similarly named counterterrorism efforts that U.S. special operations forces have conducted in East Africa. Exile Hunter was a 127e program in which elite U.S. troops trained and equipped an Ethiopian force for counterterrorism missions in Somalia. Bolduc says he shut it down in 2016 because the Ethiopian government was uncomfortable about the force not falling under its command. However, a February 2018 Defense Department list of named operations suggests it had been resurrected. Bases used: Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti

***JUKEBOX LOTUS:*** Operation Jukebox Lotus began as the crisis response to the September 2012 attack in Benghazi, Libya, that killed U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans, but continued until at least 2018. It gives Africa Command broad authority to conduct a variety of operations in Libya as required and is specific to neither special operations nor counterterrorism. Bases used: Faya Largeau and N'Djamena, Chad; Air Base 201, Agadez, Niger

***JUNCTION RAIN:*** A maritime security effort in the Gulf of Guinea involving African and U.S. Coast Guard boarding teams operating from U.S. Navy ships or those of African forces. In 2016, the hybrid teams conducted 32 boardings, resulting in \$1.2 million in fines levied for more than 50 maritime violations, as well as the recovery of a diesel fuel tanker that had been seized by pirates. Last year, operations with the Senegalese and Cabo Verdean navies resulted in at least 40 boardings — mostly of fishing vessels — and \$75,000 in fines handed down for two fishing violations. Base used: Dakar, Senegal

***JUNCTION SERPENT:*** A surveillance effort in Libya that, as part of the 2016 campaign of airstrikes against Islamic State positions in the Libyan city of Sirte, gave Joint Special Operations Command specific authorities to coordinate assets in order to develop targeting information for the campaign Bases used: Unknown

***JUNIPER MICRON:*** In 2013, after France launched a military intervention against Islamists in Mali code-named Operation Serval, the U.S. began Operation Juniper Micron, which involved airlifting French soldiers and supplies into that former French colony, flying refueling missions in support of French airpower, and assisting allied African forces. Juniper Micron was ongoing as of October 2018, with plans for it to continue in the future. Bases used: Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; Istres-Le Tube Air Base, France; Bamako and Gao, Mali; Air Base 201 (Agadez), Arlit, Dirkou, Madama and Niamey, Niger; Dakar, Senegal

***JUNIPER NIMBUS:*** Juniper Nimbus is a long-running operation aimed at supporting the Nigerian military campaign against Boko Haram. Bases used: Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; N'Djamena, Chad; Arlit, Dirkou and Madama, Niger

***JUNIPER SHIELD:*** The umbrella operation for the mission that resulted in the deadly ambush in Niger, Juniper Shield is the United States' centerpiece counterterrorism effort in northwest Africa and covers 11 nations: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia. Under Juniper Shield, U.S. teams rotate in every six months to train, advise, assist and accompany local partner forces to conduct operations against terrorist groups, including ISIS-West Africa, Boko Haram and al Qaida and its affiliates. Bases used: Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; Garoua and Maroua, Cameroon; Bangui, Central African Republic; Faya Largeau and N'Djamena, Chad; Bamako and Gao, Mali; Nema and Ouassa, Mauritania; Air Base 201 (Agadez), Arlit, Diffa, Dirkou, Madama and Niamey, Niger; Dakar, Senegal

***JUPITER GARRET:*** A JSOC operation aimed at high-value targets in Somalia, Jupiter Garret first came to light in a 2012 Washington Post article. It was ongoing as of February 2018 Bases used: Camp Lemonnier and Chebelley, Djibouti; Laikipia, Manda Bay and Wajir, Kenya; Baidoa, Baledogle, Bosasso, Galcayo, Kismayo and Mogadishu, Somalia

***JUSTIFIED SEAMOUNT:*** Another counter-piracy effort in the waters off East Africa. Bases used: Chebelley, Djibouti; Laikipia, Mombasa and Wajir, Kenya; Victoria, Seychelles; Baidoa, Baledogle, Kismayo and Mogadishu, Somalia

**KODIAK HUNTER:** A 127e program in which U.S. special operators trained and equipped a Kenyan force to conduct counterterrorism missions in Somalia. Base used: Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti; Manda Bay, Kenya

**MONGOOSE HUNTER:** A 127e program in which U.S. special operations forces trained and equipped a Somali force for counterterrorism missions against al-Shabab. Base used: Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti; Baledogle, Somalia

**NEW NORMAL:** An Africa-wide crisis response capability established by the U.S. military after the 2012 attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya. Bases used: Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti; Libreville, Gabon; Accra, Ghana; Dakar, Senegal; Entebbe, Uganda

**NIMBLE SHIELD:** A low-profile effort targeting Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa. Bases used: Douala, Garoua and Maroua, Cameroon; Bangui, Central African Republic; N'Djamena, Chad; Diffa, Dirkou, Madama and Niamey, Niger

**OAKEN SONNET I-III:** A series of three contingency operations in South Sudan. Oaken Sonnet I was the difficult 2013 rescue of U.S. personnel from that country at the beginning of its civil war. Oaken Sonnet II took place in 2014 and Oaken Sonnet III in 2016. Base used: Juba, South Sudan

**OAKEN STEEL:** The reinforcement of the U.S. Embassy in Juba, South Sudan, to protect State Department personnel during a conflict between rival factions in that country's civil war, Operation Oaken Steel, which ran from July 12, 2016, to Jan. 26, 2017, saw U.S. forces deploy to Uganda to provide for rapid crisis response during the unrest. Bases used: Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti; Moron Air Base, Spain; Entebbe, Uganda

**OBJECTIVE VOICE:** In 2010, the first head of Africa Command, Army Gen. William "Kip" Ward, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that Operation Objective Voice was an "information operations effort to counter violent extremism by leveraging media capabilities in ways that encourage the public to repudiate extremist ideologies." Coordinated with other government agencies, this propaganda effort included "youth peace games" in Mali, a film project in northern Nigeria, and, according to his successor, Army Gen. Carter Ham, a "variety of messaging platforms, such as the African Web Initiative, to challenge the views of terrorist groups." Objective Voice continues today. Bases used: Garoua and Maroua, Cameroon; Bangui, Central African Republic; Abeche, Faya Largeau and N'Djamena, Chad; Bamako and Gao, Mali; Nema and Ouassa, Mauritania; Air Base 201 (Agadez), Arlit and Madama, Niger; Dakar, Senegal; Entebbe, Uganda

**OBLIQUE PILLAR:** A program to provide private contractor helicopter support to Navy SEAL-advised units of the Somali National Army fighting al-Shabab in Somalia. The operation was in existence as of February 2018. Bases used: Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti; Mombasa and Wajir, Kenya; Baidoa, Baledogle, Kismayo and Mogadishu, Somalia; Entebbe, Uganda.

**OBSERVANT COMPASS:** An operation to capture or kill Joseph Kony and eradicate his Lord's Resistance Army, a militia that has committed atrocities since the 1980s. In 2017, with around \$780 million spent on the operation, and Kony still in the field, the United States wound down Observant Compass and shifted its forces elsewhere. But the operation didn't completely disband, according to the Defense Department. "U.S. military forces supporting Operation Observant Compass transitioned to broader scope security and stability activities that continue the success of our African partners," Pentagon spokesperson Cmdr. Candice Tresch told Yahoo News. Bases used: Obo, Central African Republic; Abeche, Chad; Dungu, Democratic Republic of Congo; Juba and Nzara, South Sudan; Entebbe, Uganda

**OBSIDIAN LOTUS:** A 127e activity concentrated on Libya, in which U.S. commandos trained and equipped Libyan special operations forces battalions. One of those units ended up under the control of renegade warlord Gen. Khalifa Haftar, according to Bolduc. Bases used: Unknown

**OBSIDIAN MOSAIC:** A 127e counterterrorism effort focused on Mali. Bases used: Unknown.

**OBSIDIAN NOMAD I and II:** Two 127e counterterrorism programs in Niger: Obsidian Nomad I in Diffa and Obsidian Nomad II in Arlit. The operational name emerged in the wake of the October 2017 ambush in Niger that killed four U.S. soldiers. Bases used: Arlit and Diffa, Niger

**OCTAVE ANCHOR:** A psychological operation focused on Somalia Bases used: Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti; Mogadishu, Somalia

**OCTAVE SHIELD:** An Africa Command psychological operation focused on Somalia, carried out under the aegis of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, based at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti. Bases used: Camp Lemonnier and Chebelley, Djibouti; Laikipia, Manda Bay, Mombasa and Wajir, Kenya; Victoria, Seychelles; Baidoa, Baledogle, Bosasso, Galcayo, Kismayo and Mogadishu, Somalia; Entebbe, Uganda.

**OCTAVE SOUNDSTAGE:** A JSOC psychological operation focused on Somalia. Bases used: Unknown

**OCTAVE STINGRAY:** A JSOC psychological operation focused on Somalia. Base used: Mogadishu, Somalia

**OCTAVE SUMMIT:** A JSOC psychological operation focused on Somalia. Base used: Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti

**ODYSSEY LIGHTNING:** The campaign of special operations-directed airstrikes against Islamic State targets in Sirte, Libya, between August and December 2016. Base used: Naval Air Station, Sigonella, Italy

**ODYSSEY RESOLVE:** Another component of the 2016 special operations campaign of air strikes against the Islamic State in the Libyan city of Sirte, Operation Odyssey Resolve consists of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance flights. It was ongoing as of February 2018. Bases used: Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; Faya Largeau, Chad; Benina and Misrata, Libya; Bamako and Gao, Mali; Nema and Ouassa, Mauritania; Arlit and Niamey, Niger; Dakar, Senegal; Bizerte, Tunisia; Entebbe, Uganda

**PALADIN HUNTER:** A 127e counterterrorism program in the semi-autonomous Puntland region of Somalia. Bases used: Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti; Bosasso and Galcayo, Somalia

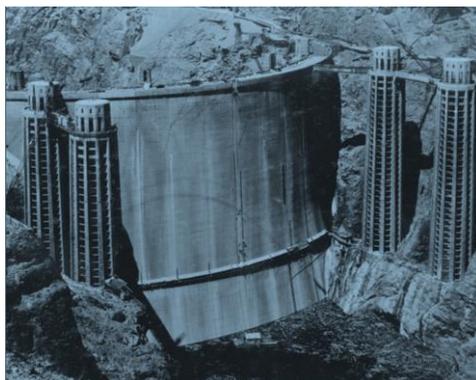
**RAINMAKER:** A highly sensitive classified signals intelligence effort. Bases used: Chebelley, Djibouti; Baidoa, Baledogle, Kismayo and Mogadishu, Somalia

**ULTIMATE HUNTER:** A 127e counterterrorism program using a U.S.-trained, equipped and directed Ugandan force in Somalia. Bases used: Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti.

[Source: Yahoo News | Nick Turse & Sean D. Naylor | April 17, 2019 ++]

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## Memories ► Hoover Dam 1936



The rarely seen back of the Hoover Dam before it filled with water 1936

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## Immigrants ► Foreign Born Residents by State in America

The US is a nation of immigrants from all around the world. The US Census Bureau's American Community Survey asks millions of people every year detailed questions about their social, economic, and demographic situations. One of the questions asks respondents what their country of birth is. The Census Bureau pooled together survey responses from between 2013 and 2017, allowing the bureau's statisticians to publish estimates of how many people in the foreign-born populations of each state and the District of Columbia came from various countries.



The percentage of the population born outside the US varies widely from state to state. Among those immigrant populations, countries of origin also vary widely. For 32 states, the most common country of birth among respondents who said they were born outside the US was Mexico. Therefore, the map above looks at the country other than Mexico that is the birthplace of the most foreign-born respondents in the survey. India tops that list in 21 states. Several states have Canada as a major source of immigrants. Several Asian, African, and Central American countries also have large immigrant populations in various states. For more interesting maps refer to:

- <https://www.businessinsider.com/percentage-immigrants-born-outside-united-states-by-state-2018-12> for how many people in each state were born outside the U.S.
- <https://www.businessinsider.com/highest-paying-job-in-every-us-state-2019-2> for the highest paying job in each state
- <https://www.businessinsider.com/animated-map-of-200-years-us-border-territory-changes-2016-1> to see how the map of the United States has changed in 200 years.

[Source: Business Insider | Andy Kiersz | April 19, 2019 ++]

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## Secrets of Flying (1) ► What You May Not Know

If you're flying somewhere for a trip, it helps to know what you're getting yourself into before checking in at the airport. Flight attendants know all too well the habits of frequent flyers and families who are confused as they wrangle their kids onto a plane for what will be their only vacation that year. There are plenty of things that annoy your flight

attendants, but they can only grin and bear it. But if you really knew what was going on behind that smile, you'd be in for a surprise. In addition there are a number of things you may not be aware of that are going on around you during the flight. Following are a few of them:

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**They'll Cut You Off If They Need To** -- You might want to watch it next time you opt for booze on a flight. Not only is it illegal for flight attendants to enable passengers to get drunk on a flight, it's actually illegal to be intoxicated on a plane. Should you end up breaking that law, you can get up to a two-year sentence for this odd criminal offense. But think of it this way: you don't need to overdo it on a flight because the changing cabin pressure causes alcohol to have a stronger effect on your body than it does on land.

**Order Diet Coke If You Want To Be Annoying** -- If you don't want to annoy your flight attendant during beverage service, then don't order a Diet Coke. Flight attendants hate when a passenger requests Diet Coke and for very good reason. Diet Coke is noticeably fizzier than other carbonated drinks. And at over 30,000 feet in the air, those bubbles take forever to settle. Flight attendants have to pay extra attention not to let it overflow, but that just means that it takes about three times longer to pour than the other available beverages. Flights are so dehydrating anyway so it's probably best if you just ask for water.

**There's A Secret Compartment for Attendant's Naps** -- When it comes to long-haul flights, you might get to take several snoozes but what about the flight crew? They constantly have to be around to tend to passenger needs and are always on their feet, but that seems like a lot for a flight that's over ten hours. Don't worry, flight attendants get to take their breaks too. Big planes like Boeing 777 or 787 jets have secret sleeping cabins built in for staff. These windowless sleeping quarters are built above or below the galley, so that's probably where your favorite flight attendant is if you've noticed you haven't seen them for a while.

**Flight Attendant's Communicate With A Secret Code** -- The flight crew uses subtle codes to communicate with each other about the goings on in the plane without letting the passengers know. There might be things they need to tell each other to look out for, but they don't want to freak out the passengers. Those bells and chimes you often hear during a flight aren't for no reason. For example, those "dings" you hear at the beginning and end of a flight? That's to signal to the crew that the most dangerous stages of the flight are over since takeoff and landing are the most precarious parts of flying.

**The Job Is Not For Everyone** -- Flight attendants may have a jet-setting life with the ability to visit new places, but it's not all fun and games. On the ground, many people see flight attendants as having a glamorous job, but in the air that changes as their jobs are minimized to that of a waitress. A flight attendant job is a demanding one. You're constantly jet-lagged, sometimes having to work on flights back to back. You'll often get 4 A.M. wakeup calls and be scheduled to work on holidays, not to mention being kept apart from your family for long periods of time.

**There's A Reason They Turn off the Lights** -- As the plane prepares for takeoff or for its descent, the lights in the cabin will get shut off. This is never really explained and there's not much to think of it since the lights get turned back on just a few minutes later. But there's actually a good reason for this. Takeoff and landing are the most problematic stages of a flight. The lights get turned off so that everyone's eyes can adjust to the light in the event of an emergency. This can help people orient themselves with the space easily if they needed to take action.

**It Doesn't Actually Pay Very Well** -- Flight attendants have to go to work the minute they arrive on the plane. That means doing safety checks before a flight and then greeting and assisting passengers during the boarding process. But for all they do before the plane takes off, they're not even getting paid. Flight attendants only get paid for the hours that the engine starts and the plane pulls away from the gate. Any time before that, they aren't getting paid — or they're at least not getting paid their full rate. Hours spent away from home but not in the air are compensated with a rate as low as \$1.50 an hour.

**Flight Crews Do Get Involved With Each Other** -- You wouldn't be wrong to assume that flight crews get involved with each other in more ways than one. Relationships between crew members are apparently quite common, which makes sense since they spend so much time with each other in such an enclosed space. While flight attendants can fraternize with one another, their main priority is, of course, to remain professional at all times. Just like any job, you wouldn't want to air your dirty laundry in front of customers.

[Source: <http://www.postfun.com/travel> | April 30, 2019 ++]

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## **DPRK Russia Relations ► Kim Jong Un's Upcoming Summit Objectives**

When North Korean leader Kim Jong Un meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin for their first one-on-one meeting, he will have a long wish list and a strong desire to notch a win after the failure of his second summit with President Donald Trump. But it's not entirely clear how much Putin can or will oblige. Despite a relationship that goes back to the very foundation of North Korea, relations between Pyongyang and Moscow haven't always been the picture of comradery, or even particularly close. A look at what Kim is hoping to get out of his furtive pivot north, and why he might be looking to shake things up as his talks with the U.S. and parallel campaign to win massive investment from South Korea have stalled.



### **KIM'S WISH LIST**

Kim has two urgent concerns as he heads to the summit. More than 10,000 North Korean laborers still employed in Russia, many working in the logging industry in the Russian Far East, are being kicked out by the end of this year as a 2017 U.N. sanctions resolution takes effect. The laborers, who previously numbered as many as 50,000, have provided a revenue stream estimated by U.S. officials in the hundreds of millions of dollars that the Kim regime would like to keep flowing. Kim is also looking at the possibility of a food shortage this summer. Russia has shown a willingness to provide humanitarian aid and just last month announced that it had shipped more than 2,000 tons of wheat to the North Korean port of Chongjin.

But his decision to more actively court Putin undoubtedly goes deeper than that. Despite all the talk in Washington about denuclearization, Kim's primary concern is improving his country's economy. After the breakdown in his February summit with Trump in Hanoi, his efforts to get out from under sanctions that are keeping him from doing that have reached an impasse. North Korea has long depended on China as its primary trading partner. But that reliance, and the influence it threatens to give Beijing, makes many officials in Pyongyang nervous. Kim has also pushed Seoul hard to participate in joint inter-Korean projects to rebuild its railroads and improve its moribund infrastructure. His appeal to Korean unity, however, has run headfirst into the South's allegiance to Washington, which has warned Seoul against any actions that would undermine sanctions.

According to internal documents obtained by a South Korean researcher and published this week in a Japanese newspaper, Kim wants to boost trade with Russia tenfold — to \$1 billion — by 2020. That would obviously require some significant easing of sanctions, which would seem unlikely. But it would also require a change in Russian behavior. Unlike China, which has lots of businessmen on the ground in North Korea, Russia has a very small footprint

in the North. Officials have long talked about big projects — including rail routes to Europe, or pipelines across the Korean Peninsula — but Putin hasn't shown much interest in actually carrying them out.

### **WHY NOW?**

The Kim-Putin meeting, whose exact date has not been announced, is coming surprisingly late in the game. It's been nearly a year and a half since Kim announced his plan to emerge from relative isolation at home and expand diplomatic relations with China and South Korea and open denuclearization talks with Washington. He has since held four summits with Chinese President Xi Jinping, three with South Korean President Moon Jae-in and two with Trump. The summitry has done a lot toward establishing Kim as a serious player on the world stage. But the Hanoi summit showed his limitations. It ended with no agreements on either denuclearization measures or the lifting of sanctions, which may now be even more difficult to accomplish since both sides are digging in on hard-line negotiation positions.

Kim's decision to meet with Putin now may reflect his frustrations over that. Putin has more experience with North Korea's leaders than most. He visited Pyongyang in 2000, and met with Kim's father, Kim Jong Il, in Moscow in 2001 and in Vladivostok in 2002. Former President Dmitry Medvedev also met Kim Jong Il in Vladivostok, in 2011. Moscow played an instrumental role in bringing Kim's grandfather, Kim Il Sung, to power and helped rebuild the country after the 1950-53 Korean War. Those ties fell apart after the 1991 Soviet collapse and Russia's decision to end support for former Soviet allies amid its own economic meltdown.

Like Kim, Putin is no admirer of Washington's use of sanctions as a political tool. Even a cautious statement of solidarity with the North, or a rebuttal of any of Washington's "maximum pressure" policies, would be a win for Kim. But Putin has a lot on his plate and good reason to be cautious about making any big new commitments. He particularly doesn't want to anger China. Immediately after seeing Kim, Putin will fly to Beijing for a major international meeting on China's "Belt and Road" initiative, which could be lucrative for Russia.

### **WHAT'S NEXT?**

If Putin chooses to take a more hands-on approach to North Korea, Washington's efforts to keep Kim's focus on denuclearization could get a lot more complicated. He has already expressed his opposition to Trump's sanctions-centric approach. It's also in Putin's general interest to weaken Washington's influence in the region — though, like China, Russia does not want a chaotic collapse in the North that would create a wave of refugees and economic instability.

So what's the bottom line? Even if he isn't planning to make any immediate changes in his policies toward Pyongyang, meeting with Kim provides a good opportunity for Putin to reassert himself as a player in a contest for political influence that is, after all, right on his own border. And for Kim, with the pressure from Washington not likely to let up soon, keeping all options open makes a lot of sense. [Source: The Associated Press | Eric Talmadge | April 23, 2019 ++]

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## **U.S. Sanctions | Iran Update 02 ► Bill Labels all U.S. Military Forces as Terrorist**

Iranian lawmakers on 23 APR overwhelmingly approved a bill that labels all U.S. military forces as terrorist, state TV reported, a day after Washington ratcheted up pressure on Tehran by announcing that no country would any longer be exempt from U.S. sanctions if it continues to buy Iranian oil. The bill is a step further from the one last week, when lawmakers approved labeling just U.S. troops in the Middle East as terrorist, in response to the U.S. terrorism designation for Iran's Revolutionary Guard earlier this month. The Trump administration re-imposed sanctions on Iran, including on its energy sector, last November, after pulling America out of the landmark 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers.

The U.S. designation against Iran's Revolutionary Guard — the first-ever for an entire division of another government — added another layer of sanctions to the powerful paramilitary force, making it a crime under U.S.

jurisdiction to provide the guard with material support. On 22 APR, President Donald Trump decided to do away with waivers as part of the administration’s “maximum pressure” campaign on Iran that aims to eliminate all of its revenue from oil exports that the U.S. says funds destabilizing activity throughout the Mideast and beyond. Hours before Trump’s announcement, Iran reiterated its long-running threat to close the Strait of Hormuz if it’s prevented from using the crucial waterway in the Persian Gulf through which about a third of all oil traded at sea passes. The U.S. Navy has in the past accused Iranian patrol boats of harassing American warships in the waterway.

Iran’s Foreign Ministry promptly brushed off Trump’s move to stop the oil waivers, saying the Islamic Republic “basically has not seen and does not see any worth and validity for the waivers.” But on Tuesday, 173 out of 215 lawmakers at the parliament session in Tehran voted for the new bill. Only four voted against while the rest abstained; the chamber has 290 seats. The bill confirms Iran’s earlier label of the U.S. Central Command, also known as CENTCOM, and all its forces as terrorist. Any military and non-military help, including logistics support, to CENTCOM that can be detrimental to the Revolutionary Guard will be considered a terrorist action, the semi-official ISNA news agency said.

The bill also demands the Iranian government take unspecified action against other governments that formally back the U.S. designation. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Israel have all supported the Trump administration’s designation. The lawmakers also requested Iran’s intelligence agency provide a list of all CENTCOM commanders within three months so that Iran’s judiciary can prosecute them in absentia as terrorists. The bill requires final approval by Iran’s constitutional watchdog to become law. Other than underscoring Iran’s defiance, it’s unclear what impact the bill could actually have, either in the Persian Gulf or beyond. The Revolutionary Guard has forces and wields influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, and is in charge of Iranian missiles that have U.S. bases in their range. [Source: The Associated Press | Nasser Karimi | April 23, 2019 ++]

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## Interesting Inventions ► Charges + Window Stickies



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## One Word Essays ► Accomplishment



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## Have You Heard? ► Husband and Wives | Then (1945) and Now (2016)

### Husband and Wives (2)

#### *Avocados*

"Could you please go shopping for me and buy one carton of milk and if they have avocados, get 6.

A short time later the husband comes back with 6 cartons of milk. The wife asks him, "Why did you buy 6 cartons of milk?"

He replied, "They had avocados."

Note: If you're a woman, I'm sure you're going back to read it again! Men will get it the first time.

#### *Carburetor Water*

WIFE: "There is trouble with the car. It has water in the carburetor."

HUSBAND: "Water in the carburetor? That's ridiculous"

WIFE: "I tell you the car has water in the carburetor."

HUSBAND: "You don't even know what a carburetor is. I'll check it out.

Where's the car?

WIFE: "In the pool"

#### *Mental Illness*

25% of the women in this country are on medication for mental illness.

That's scary. It means 75% are running around untreated.

#### *Cell Phone*

A young man wanted to get his beautiful blonde wife something nice for their first wedding anniversary. So he decided to buy her a cell phone. He showed her the phone and explained to her all of its features.

Meg was excited to receive the gift and simply adored her new phone.

The next day Meg went shopping. Her phone rang and, to her astonishment, it was her husband on the other end.

"Hi Meg," he said, "how do you like your new phone?"

Meg replied, "I just love it! It's so small and your voice is clear as a bell, but there's one thing I don't understand though..."

"What's that, sweetie?" asked her husband.

"How did you know I was at Wal-Mart?"

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### **Then (1945) and Now (2016)**

1945 - NCO's had a typewriter on their desks for doing daily reports.

2016 - Everyone has an internet access computer, and they wonder why no work is getting done.

1945 - We painted pictures of girls on airplanes to remind us of home.

2016 - They put the real thing in the cockpit.

1945 - Your girlfriend was at home praying you would return alive.

2016 - She is in the same trench praying your condom worked.

1945 - If you got drunk off duty your buddies would take you back to the barracks to sleep it off.

2016 - If you get drunk they slap you in rehab and ruin your career.

1945 - You were taught to aim at your enemy and shoot him.

2016 - You spray 500 bullets into the brush, don't hit anything, and retreat because you're out of ammo.

1945 - Canteens were made of steel, and you could heat coffee or hot chocolate in them.

2016 - Canteens are made of plastic, you can't heat anything in them, and they always taste like plastic.

1945 - Officers were professional soldiers first and they commanded respect.

2016 - Officers are politicians first and beg not to be given a wedgie.

1945 - They collected enemy intelligence and analyzed it.

2016 - They collect your pee and analyze it.

1945 - If you didn't act right, the Sergeant Major put you in the brig until you straightened up.

2016 - If you don't act right, they start a paper trail that follows you forever.

1945 - Medals were awarded to heroes who saved lives at the risk of their own.

2016 - Medals are awarded to people who work at headquarters.

1945 - You slept in barracks like a soldier.

2016 - You sleep in a dormitory like a college kid.

1945 - You ate in a mess hall, which was free, and you could have all the food you wanted.

2016 - You eat in a dining facility, every slice of bread or pad of butter costs, and you better not take too much.

1945 - We defeated powerful countries like Germany and Japan.

2016 - We come up short against Iraq and Afghanistan.

1945 - If you wanted to relax, you went to the rec center, played pool, smoked and drank beer.

2016 - You go to the community center, and you can play pool.

1945 - If you wanted beer and conversation you went to the NCO or Officers' Club.

2016 - The beer will cost you \$2.75, membership is forced, and someone is watching how much you drink.

1945 - The Exchange had bargains for soldiers who didn't make much money.

2016 - You can get better and cheaper merchandise at Walmart.

1945 - We could recognize the enemy by their Nazi helmets.

2016 - We are wearing the Nazi helmets.

1945 - We called the enemy names like "Krauts" and "Japs" because we didn't like them.

2016 - We call the enemy the "opposing force" or "aggressor" because we don't want to offend them.

1945 - Victory was declared when the enemy was defeated and all his things were broken.

2016 - We haven't a clue as to what victory is or what it takes to achieve it.

1945 - A commander would put his butt on the line to protect his people.

2016 - A commander will put his people on the line to protect his butt.

1945 - Wars were planned and run by generals who knew how to fight and win.

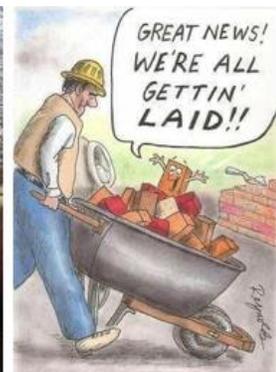
2016 - Wars are planned by politicians who haven't a clue about fighting or winning.

1945 - We were fighting for freedom, and the country was committed to winning.

2016 - We don't know what we're fighting for, and the government is committed to social programs and political correctness. Now our real enemy is global warming.

1945 - All you could think about

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