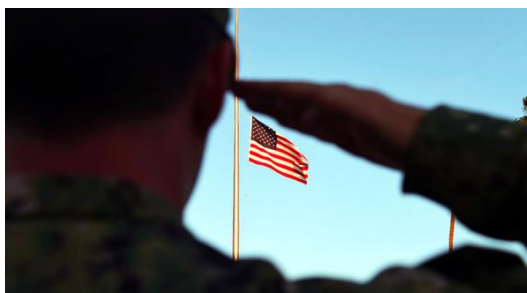


RAO

BULLETIN

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

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- Attachment – Michigan Vet State Benefits
- Attachment – Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 31 MAY (Updated)
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*** DoD ***



USS Harry S. Truman (CVN-75) Update 01 ► Trump Cancels Decommission Plan

The White House has canceled plans to decommission an aircraft carrier 25 years early as a cost savings measure, a plan that was largely opposed on Capitol Hill. Vice President Mike Pence made the announcement to sailors on board the carrier Harry S. Truman, which was to be decommissioned instead of going into its midlife refueling, according

to video posted by a Hampton Roads local news reporter on Twitter. The proposal was met with a wave of skepticism from lawmakers. The proposal also came before the Navy had completed a force-structure assessment due out by the end of the year as well as an ongoing needs assessment from the geographic combatant commanders, leading to questions as to why the service would propose the move without the benefit of those studies.



The decision also coincides with news that Robert Daigle, the head of the Pentagon’s powerful Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation office, will step down in mid-May. Daigle played a key role in the decision to decommission Truman in favor of investments in long-range fires and unmanned technologies. The proposal to decommission Truman kicked off a public debate about the utility of aircraft carriers, which took center stage in Tuesday’s confirmation hearing for the incoming chief of naval operations, Adm. Bill Moran.

Faced with questions about the aircraft carrier’s relevance in light of Chinese and Russian long-range anti-ship missiles, Moran gave a forceful defense of the platform. Moran responded to a question from Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., saying the Navy is conducting a force structure assessment to identify the right capabilities to field. But he notably added that the carrier is still relevant. “We have for years evaluated the threats to our aircraft carriers and the other ships in the strike group to be able to deal with those [threats],” Moran said. “The aircraft carrier is the most survivable airfield that we have today — anywhere. And we project it will remain that way well into the future.” Later during the hearing, Moran offered a “highly classified” briefing to Congressional staffers to discuss the Navy’s investments in the carrier to make it more survivable.

But Blumenthal’s was just one of several questions from senators regarding the aircraft carrier, a conversation spurred by the Navy’s now-defunct decision to propose decommissioning the Truman to avoid paying for its midlife refueling. “As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I have pushed hard against the Administration’s plans to mothball the Truman at the midpoint of its working life,” Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA) said in a statement praising the decision. “I am gratified that the Administration listened and is now committed to the refueling. This is the right call for our national security.”

Moran defended the Truman proposal as necessary to free up money for investments in new technologies and experimentation. Later, he said he is comfortable with an air wing of E-2Ds, Growlers, Hornets and F-35s, but that the weapons needed to be addressed. “The combat lethality of the air wing extends from the air wing,” Moran said. “Where we are trying to regain our superiority is in the weapons that are carried by that air wing: longer range, more networked, all the things that will make us more effective against a tough adversary at the high end.” Moran is expected to sail through confirmation. He will be the first naval aviator to serve as CNO since Adm. Jay Johnson retired in 2000. [Source: Defense News | David B. Larter | April 30, 2019 ++]

China’s Island Building Update 04 ► USN Conducts 7th Freedom-of-Navigation Operation

The Navy sent two guided-missile destroyers on 6 MAY to challenge China’s claims to two reefs it has militarized without internationally recognized authority to do so, according to the Navy. The USS Preble and the USS Chung Hoon sailed within 12 nautical miles of the Gaven and Johnson reefs in the Spratly Islands “to challenge excessive

maritime claims and preserve access to the waterways as governed by international law,” said Lt. Joe Keiley, a 7th Fleet spokesman. China first took possession of the reefs in 1988 and has built military infrastructure on them since 2014, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative.



The USS Preble, seen here last month in the Philippine Sea, took part in its second publicized freedom-of-navigation operation near the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea

A United Nations panel in 2016, ruling in a case brought by the Philippines, rejected China’s claims to sovereignty over the Spratly Islands. Parts of the same territory are also claimed by the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan. The Spratlys, a cluster of more than 100 small islands and reefs, together measure less than 3.1 square miles. They encompass desirable fishing grounds and oil and gas deposits, according to the Council on Foreign Relations, a nonpartisan think tank. The region has become an arena for displays of power projection. “We conduct routine and regular freedom-of-navigation operations as we have done in the past and will continue to in the future,” Keiley said in a statement Tuesday. “FONOPs are not about any one country, nor are they about making political statements.”

At a news conference 6 MAY, Geng Shuang, a spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, said the Chinese navy “warned off” the Preble and the Chung Hoon as they sailed by the reefs, according to a transcript of the briefing. “The trespass of U.S. warships is a violation of China’s sovereignty,” Shuang said. “It undermines peace, security and good order in the relevant waters. China deplors and firmly opposes such moves.” Shuang called the so-called freedom-of-navigation operations “provocations” during the news briefing, urging the U.S. to end them and to “respect China’s sovereignty and security interests and regional countries’ efforts to safeguard peace and stability in the South China Sea. “China will continue to take all necessary measures to defend national sovereignty and security, and safeguard peace and stability in the South China Sea,” Shuang said, according to the transcript.

The Monday mission was the third of its kind and the seventh overall freedom-of-navigation operation challenging Chinese claims this year. The guided-missile destroyer USS McCampbell sailed within 12 nautical miles of the Paracel Islands in January, and the Preble and the destroyer USS Spruance passed within 12 nautical miles of the Spratlys in February. The Navy also has sent ships on freedom-of-navigation operations through the Taiwan Strait four times this year, most recently on 28 APR. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Caitlin Doornbos | May 7, 2019 ++]

Feres Doctrine Update 14 ► Applies to Things Other than Medical Malpractice Lawsuits

On 30 APR, lawmakers and experts came together on Capitol Hill to unpack the Feres doctrine, a law that prevents service members and their families from seeking legal action against the military for injuries or other suffering caused by negligence. In the audience at the House Armed Service Committee hearing was Capt. Katie Blanchard, who wants people to know that Feres isn’t only preventing medical malpractice lawsuits — it also blocks service members from holding accountable a chain of command who fails to protect them from preventable harm. “I just feel like nobody has really identified or talked about the scope of what Feres is and how it affects people,” Blanchard told Army Times on Tuesday.

In September 2016, an Army civilian working under Blanchard at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas' Munson Army Health Center, doused her with a water bottle of gasoline and then lit a match. She had warned her chain of command for months before her attack that Clifford Currie was menacing her, and she believed he would try to kill her. Behind the scenes, according to a subsequent 15-6 investigation, he accused her of racism and declared he would "take care of her" in front of another employee, who was encouraged to keep quiet about the threat. In the intervening years, Blanchard, 29, has had more than 100 surgeries, and Currie was sentenced to 20 years in prison by a federal court. Go to <https://www.facebook.com/KatieAnnBlanchard/videos/549748388782199/?t=54> to view an reenactment of the event.



Capt. Katie Blanchard addresses the Defense Health Agency's National Capital Region Workplace Violence Prevention Program Forum on April 25, 2019, at Fort Belvoir, Virginia

Last fall, Blanchard filed a claim against Leavenworth, asking for \$3.5 million, an estimate of what it would cost to cover expenses like childcare during medical procedures, and necessities like a special moisturizer to keep her extremely delicate grafted skin comfortable, over the rest of her lifetime. But she ran up against Feres. Undeterred, she got in touch with attorney Natalie Khawam, who specializes in Feres. "I don't think, as a whole, the American people know how broad — and the scope of it," she said. "At the end of the day, what it boils down to is, our military has blanket immunity in all cases."

Many of the headline-grabbing stories dealing with the law have included medical malpractice, like that of Sgt. 1st Class Richard Stayskal, who testified 30 APR and is also represented by Khawam. But the military is protected from legal action for anything involving service members and their families, from split-second battlefield decisions that result in deaths or dismemberment, up to and including workplace violence back home, either from fellow service members or other Defense Department employees. "All of us volunteer and we all really want to do this," Blanchard said. "I signed the line knowing that I could go overseas and do all of these dangerous things, but I didn't sign up to be attacked in the office."

Now part of the Warrior Transition Battalion at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, Blanchard wants to make a career as an Army civilian in patient safety. In preparation for that, she's been speaking around the Army about workplace violence, and the need for an organized, powerful policy that allows both service members and civilians to report harassment and have it dealt with. "Three years later, I don't want you to feel bad for me, and I don't want you to want to do something," she said. "I want you to do something."

As part of her trip to Washington, she spoke on 18 APR at the Defense Health Agency's National Capital Region Workplace Violence Prevention Program Forum. "DHA doesn't have a workplace violence policy in place," she said. "I don't want, since they're taking over the military medical system, [it to be] piecemeal. It's not, if you're an Army person, you go here, if you're a Navy person you go here, if you're a civilian — good luck. Hopefully your union listens to you." The symposium was part of a pilot program, she said, and she hopes any enacted policy will look at the full

scope of workplace violence — from harassment, sexual or otherwise, to assault. “Some policies call it disruptive behavior, harassment,” she said. “It’s workplace violence. Let’s just call it what it is.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | April 30 2019 ++]

DoD/VA EHR Update 05 ► Terrible Progress on Meshing the Records

Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan was grilled by lawmakers 1 MAY on the lengthy and costly effort to develop compatible electronic records systems between the Defense Department and the Department of Veterans Affairs. "I don't ever recall being as outraged about an issue than I am about the electronic health record program," Rep. Kay Granger (R-TX) told Shanahan at a House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on the DoD's proposed fiscal 2020 budget.

She said a hearing last month with DoD and VA health program managers on the progress of meshing the records "was terrible." "I can't believe that these program managers think that it is acceptable to wait another four years for a program to be implemented when we've spent billions of dollars and worked on it for over a decade," Granger said. "For 10 years we've heard the same assurances" that the electronic health records problem will be solved," Rep. Hal Rogers, R-Kentucky, said. "It's incredible that we can't get this fixed." Veterans are suffering "because of bureaucratic crap," he said.

In response to Granger, Shanahan said, "First of all, I apologize for any lack of performance or the inability of the people that testified before you to characterize the work of the department in this very vital area." He added that he personally spent "quite a bit of time on how do we merge together" with the VA on the records. He said pilot programs to make the records compatible are underway in Washington state at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Naval Base Kitsap, Naval Air Station Whidbey Island and Fairchild Air Force Base. The "rollout and implementation" of the fix to the electronic health records has shown promise at those installations, Shanahan said, and the next step is to put the program in place at California installations this fall. "I can give you the commitment that these corrective actions and the lessons learned will be carried forward," he said.

"There's a degree of inoperability" between the VA and DoD systems that has defied solution over the years, Shanahan said. "The real issue has been [the] passing on of the actual records. I can't explain to you the technical complexity of that. "We owe you a better answer," he told the committee, "and four years is unacceptable" as a time frame for making the records compatible. He promised to help DoD "deliver" a fix.

Rogers recalled past promises from the VA and DoD and said he is skeptical that the latest attempt at solving the problem will be successful. He cited the case of a service member from his district who was badly wounded in Iraq. He lost an eye, but military doctors in Germany saved his other eye, Rogers said. The good eye later became infected. The service member went to the Lexington, Kentucky, VA Medical Center, but doctors there could not get access to his medical records in Germany. "They could not operate because they didn't know what had been done before," Rogers said. As a result, the service member lost sight in the good eye. "Why can't we have the computers marry? Can you help me out here? Don't promise something you can't deliver," he told Shanahan. "I can't believe that we have not already solved this problem."

In the latest effort to mesh the records, then-Acting VA Secretary Robert Wilkie in May 2018 awarded a \$10 billion, 10-year contract to Cerner Corp. of Kansas City to develop an integrated electronic health record (EHR) system, but related costs over the course of the contract are estimated to put the total price at about \$16 billion. Previous attempts to mesh the EHR systems have either failed or been abandoned, most recently in 2013 when then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and then-VA Secretary Eric Shinseki dropped an integration plan after a four-year effort and the expenditure of about \$1 billion. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | May 1. 2019 ++]

DOD MyCAA ► Spouse Tuition Assistance Program Users on the Decline

The number of spouses of junior personnel who are using the Defense Department’s spouse tuition assistance program declined by about 45 percent between 2011 and 2017, according to a new report by government auditors. About 7 percent of eligible spouses used the My Career Advancement Accounts in 2017, according to the report from auditors in the Government Accountability Office. The program, commonly referred to as MyCAA, provides up to \$4,000 in tuition assistance for education or training for spouses of service members in the paygrades of E1 to E5, W1 to W2, and O1 to O2. MyCAA funds can be used only for the pursuit of certificates, licenses, or associate degrees in a portable career field — a high-growth and high-demand field that is most likely to have job openings near military installations. A recent Rand report found that the program may be contributing to higher retention rates, as well as helping the spouses’ job prospects and earnings.



Auditors said the number of military spouses receiving tuition assistance through MyCAA declined from 38,000 in fiscal 2011 to about 21,000 in fiscal 2017. That 21,000 represented about 7 percent of the 302,000 eligible spouses using the program, which was similar to the rates for fiscal years 2014 through 2016, auditors stated. In 2011 about 10 percent of eligible spouses were using the program. “While we are not particularly surprised by a decline in utilization of the program, the rate decrease from 2011 to 2017 is alarming,” said Jennifer Davis, government relations deputy director for the National Military Family Association (NMFA).

“Since we know, based on DoD’s own data, that over 30 percent of employed military spouses are in fields requiring a license or certification which are covered by MyCAA, and military families [make permanent change of station moves] every two to three years on average, a 40-plus percent drop in program utilization is significant. “This clearly shows that the program is not fulfilling the intent and need of these spouses. We urge DoD and Congress to look at ways to tweak the program in an effort to maximize its impact on military spouse education and employment.” While NMFA understands the need to limit the eligibility, she said, the program may be too rank-restrictive.

“For many spouses of junior-ranked service members, there may be an overload of information, a lack of understanding of support programs in place and which ones are service-specific or DoD-wide, changes in family situations or any number of other challenges.” If the program were expanded to include spouses of those in the ranks of E6 and O3, for example, there would be more usage. “We also believe expanding the program to cover supervision hours for spouses pursuing a mental health profession would increase utilization while also encouraging growth in a high-demand sector of the workforce,” she said.

DoD officials attributed the decline partly to the decreases in the active duty forces, the improvements in the labor market, and to lack of awareness of the program, according to GAO. Survey data of spouses in 2015 as well as 2017 show that spouses noted they didn’t have time for additional education and training because of family and personal obligations. In the 2017 survey, while 21 percent of spouses who were aware of MyCAA said they didn’t have that additional time, a higher percentage — 39 percent — of spouses of enlisted members in paygrades E1 to E4 cited that reason. Others noted they needed education, training or testing not covered by MyCAA, or they weren’t interested in additional education or training. In the 2015 and 2017 surveys of active-duty spouses, about half of all spouses said they weren’t aware of the MyCAA program.

DoD officials have been ramping up outreach to increase awareness of the program over the past several years, but GAO noted some issues with that. As of February, some of the DoD outreach materials contained inaccurate website information. DoD changed the web address in July 2018, as part of a move to a cloud platform. In addition, the website experienced technical problems after that move, from July through August 2018, causing some spouses to be unable to register for Fall 2018 classes. There were 13 outages of MyCAA from June through November 2018. Auditors also had difficulty accessing the website from mobile devices — yet 30 percent of those who visit the MyCAA site do so through a mobile device, according to DoD.

Following the GAO draft report, DoD updated all the MyCAA outreach materials. “We encourage DoD to maintain a critical eye regarding preventable mistakes in the future,” Davis said, to avoid creating barriers for spouses which could discourage further exploration. “We have developed a robust communication strategy for the MyCAA program, to include regular updates to associated outreach materials,” wrote Ann G. Johnston, deputy assistant secretary of defense for military community and family policy, in the DoD response to the GAO draft report. “We will continue to ensure that military spouses are aware of our resources and that those resources are easily accessible,” she wrote. “Supporting military spouse education and career opportunities is a top priority of my office.”

The GAO was required to review the participation and awareness of the MyCAA program, because of a provision in the fiscal 2019 National Defense Authorization Act. Over the years, a number of spouses have asked that the MyCAA program be expanded to more spouses, and for a wider variety of educational programs, such as bachelor’s degrees. When the full-scale MyCAA program was launched in 2009, it was available to any military spouse for a variety of educational programs. But it was abruptly shut down in early 2010 because so many spouses had registered that DoD was overwhelmed by the demand – and there wasn’t enough money budgeted to meet that demand. DoD then scaled it back, limiting eligibility to spouses in only junior ranks. More details about the program, including information about registering, can be found at <https://mycaa.militaryonesource.mil/mycaa>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | April 10 | ++]

NDA 2020 ► Overseas Contingency Operations and Border Wall Concerns

House appropriators took a dim view 1 MAY of a huge increase in funding for Overseas Contingency Operations and a proposal for a border wall included in the Pentagon's budget request for fiscal 2020. However, there were no arguments against the proposed 3.1 percent pay raise for the military and retirees, backed by the White House as part of the record \$750 billion budget request. That request includes \$718 billion for the Defense Department and the rest for the nuclear weapons programs of the Energy Department. The \$718 billion would represent about a 5% increase over the DoD's fiscal 2019 budget.

At a hearing of the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan and Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Joseph Dunford were immediately asked to justify the increase from \$69 billion to \$165 billion in funding for OCO, the so-called "war budget," which doesn't count against budget caps under the Budget Control Act of 2011. Rep. Pete Visclosky (D-IN), the subcommittee chairman, charged that the Pentagon and the administration are seeking to use about \$100 billion from the proposed \$165 billion for OCO to fund the base budget rather than contingency operations in what he called a "thinly disguised" attempt to skirt the caps. The OCO request is "staggeringly out of proportion to prior efforts to avoid the caps," Visclosky said, and "people's cynicism to this approach can be understood."

He also was critical of the administration's proposal to set aside about \$9 billion in the budget for construction of additions to the southern border wall. "I am grossly offended by the unconstitutional action taken by executive branch to fund the construction of an unauthorized wall on our southern border," Visclosky said. "We are here to appropriate funds for the military, not to make good on a campaign promise." Republicans on the subcommittee pushed back on

Visclosky's charges. "We do have a problem along the southern border, and I hope we can discuss it in a meaningful way," said Rep. Ken Calvert (R-CA)

Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK) said he has three goals in the DoD budget negotiations -- to avoid a government shutdown, avoid a sequester of funds, and avoid a continuing resolution, adding that he won't be too particular on the methods used to achieve those goals while meeting national security needs. "This OCO thing is a gimmick," Cole said, and "we know it's a gimmick." In response to the charges about the OCO, Dunford warned that any move to go back to the budget caps would "put at risk our ability to project power -- there's no question in my mind about that." The U.S. currently has a "competitive advantage" over Russia and China, he said, but the wars since 9/11, he said, have eroded that advantage and affected readiness. "Recent budgets have allowed us to build readiness," Dunford said, and the current budget proposal would "allow us to continue restoring our competitive advantage."

Shanahan said the budget request was shaped by the January 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) drawn up by former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, which outlined the DoD's major shift from the counter-terrorism focus since 9/11 to great power competition with Russia and China. The NDS is the "undisputed driver of today's budget request," he added. In addition to the 3.1 percent pay raise for the military, the request also includes the largest increase in research and development funding in 70 years and the largest in shipbuilding in 20 years. It would also provide for a boost in the end strength of the military by 7,700 personnel, Shanahan said.

Shanahan reflected some of the concerns of subcommittee members that sending 3,200 active-duty military members to the southern border is drawing them away from other missions, but he repeatedly said that he is following the lawful order of President Donald Trump. He said he had no immediate answer to the question of how long troops will be at the border. The first request to send troops the border came a year ago in April, he said, and "we've been on this a la carte approach" to border security. Shanahan said there are genuine concerns about the capacity of Customs and Border Protection to secure the border. "They're thousands of people short," he said. He said that troops are driving buses and serving food at the border, adding "we really need to get back to our primary missions." However, "we need to secure the border. I have a legal standing order from the commander in chief to support a national emergency" on the border, he said. "It's within the law." [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | May 2, 2019 ++]

USCG Commandant ► **Talks Domestic Challenges and Threats in the Arctic**



Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz

From home port inspections to transiting the Taiwan Strait, down to Antarctica and through riverine waterways, the Coast Guard has arguably the most diverse mission set of the armed services. But despite these responsibilities, the Coast Guard remains a red-headed stepchild of sorts, a military branch that falls under the Department of Homeland Security. That designation resulted in a lack of payment for Coasties during the 35-day government shutdown of December 2018 and January 2019. But in a chat during the 2019 Sea-Air-Space conference, Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz said his service is back on track, even as it grapples with the same readiness challenges faced by

other services. He also opined on why the Arctic matters more than ever, as well as the difference between the current heavy icebreaker and the coming polar security cutter.

Q. The Coast Guard was hit hard during the government shutdown. What is the service doing to recover?

A. The shutdown was a shutdown. Obviously going 35 days without pay was tough on our members. Not having appropriations challenged us from a readiness standpoint. I think we have recovered. Some of the things like boat maintenance periods, dry dock availabilities, we lost some calendar days on that. That's tough. But going forward, the Coast Guard's ready to do the nation's business.

Q. What's the main message you try to convey to lawmakers on Capitol Hill regarding the last shutdown's impact on the Coast Guard?

A. I've been on the same message since I did my Hill visits before my confirmation hearing in April 2018. The Coast Guard's challenge is readiness. In a budgeting environment we've been flatlined for the good part of eight-plus years. The president rolled out a conversation about national security. It's fantastic and good for [the Department of Defense], they got a 12 percent [funding] bump in 2018.

Being in DHS, we weren't part of that conversation. We are a capital-intensive organization like the other armed forces, and we've got some bills. We've got some maintenance we've been kicking the can on, so since before I even assumed the duties of commandant I've been having this conversation about the readiness of the Coast Guard and testified recently about being at a readiness tipping point. We just need to enhance the understanding, the fact that it's a readiness conversation. We need to take ownership of it, and I need to convince folks that this is important for the nation.

Q. Your predecessor hammered the need for icebreaker capacity. Where is the Coast Guard at regarding its next icebreaker?

A. Two weeks ago today, we award the contract to [VT Halter Marine] down in Mississippi to build the first polar security cutter. We used to talk about heavy icebreakers, now we talk about a polar security cutter. We just rolled out in April what we call the Arctic Strategic Outlook. It's a refresh on what was our Arctic strategic plan in 2013.

We talk about the Arctic through a different lens now. We talk about the Arctic as a competitive space. We've seen China, we see Russia investing extensively. China built icebreakers in the time since we updated our strategy. China's been operating off the Alaskan Arctic for a good part of the last six years on an annual basis. We're championing increased capabilities in the Arctic, we're championing better communications, better domain awareness, we're talking about innovation, we're talking about resiliency, we're talking about rule-based order. I want to see the Arctic remain a peaceful domain. China's a self-declared Arctic state. They're not one of the eight Arctic nations, so for me, for the service, its presence equals influence.

Right now, with one 43-year-old heavy icebreaker, Polar Star, that ship is basically a one-trick pony. It goes down to [McMurdo Station, the U.S. scientific outpost in Antarctica] every year and does the breakout, so the National Science Foundation can maintain their operations down there. The first polar security cutter, which probably hits the waterfront late 2023, 2024, is going to be almost a one for one. It's when we get to the second or third polar security cutter that we start to have some capacity. And again, presence equals influence. I'd like to see us in the Arctic, I'm not saying a fully annual basis, but on a lot more persistent presence up there. That's where we need to be as a nation.

Q. What's the difference between today's heavy icebreaker and the future polar security cutter?

A. It's a designation change, it's the lexicon of adding "security" to the title. We thought it was more artful to capture the reflecting reality in how we talk about that ship. I think that narrative helped raise the bar in understanding.

[Source: DefenseNews | Jeff Martin and Geoff Ziezulewicz | May 6, 2019 ++]

USMC Climate Change Concerns ► Long-Term Flood Projections Nationwide

The Corps is still recovering from nearly \$3.6 billion in estimated damages inflicted on East Coast Marine bases from September's Hurricane Florence. But with this year's hurricane season looming, Marines are preparing to battle more than storms. They're also eyeing a fight with rising coastal waters, both in the coming months and across the span of decades, thanks to global climate change.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Robert B. Neller, told audience members at the 2019 Sea Air Space symposium 6 MAY, that the Corps is "paying attention" to long-term flood projections nationwide. "Think about the idea, hypothetically, if you had to move Camp Lejeune or Camp Pendleton," Neller said. "What would it cost us to move? The bill is pretty substantial." Neller's Monday warning echoed a 2018 report by the Center for Climate and Security. It marked both North Carolina's Camp Lejeune and Camp Pendleton in California as two vital Marine bases potentially threatened by rising seas. By the end of the 21st century, Camp Lejeune could be exposed to 25 percent flooding from a small Category 1 hurricane, and 40 percent flooding from a Category 4 storm, the paper predicted.

In September, Hurricane Florence neared Marine bases on the East Coast as a Category 3 event, but quickly weakened to a Category 1 storm after making landfall. It still unleashed massive amounts of precipitation on Camp Lejeune's aging infrastructure, triggering billions of dollars in property damage, including family housing complexes. To Neller, the Marines fight from the sea so they need to be located "somewhere where we can get to the sea." The top Marine said that none of the new structures on Camp Lejeune suffered damage from Florence, but that hasn't stopped his Corps from contemplating new building standards and where to stow high tech gear before the next storm strikes. Data systems and sensitive electronic components "can't be put in the basement of a building anymore," Neller told audience members. "Its got to be in a different place." [Source: DefenseNews | Shawn Snow | May 6, 2019 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 01 thru 15 May 2019

Newark, NJ -- A Pennsylvania man who took bribes in a scheme involving construction projects at two New Jersey military bases is now headed to prison. Kevin Leondi received a five-year sentence 1 MAY. The 58-year-old Stroudsburg man had pleaded guilty last October to two conspiracy counts. Federal prosecutors say Leondi solicited and accepted more than \$150,000 in bribes in the form of cash, the sale of unneeded equipment and work performed at his personal property. Leondi was employed by the Army as a contract specialist and served as liaison with contractors seeking work at Picatinny Arsenal and Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey. Picatinny is a center for research and development of weapons systems and ammunition. Joint Base McGuire includes the installations formerly known separately as McGuire Air Force Base, Fort Dix and Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Station. [Source: The Associated Press| May 2, 2019 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Fort Shafter, HI -- A former range operations manager at Schofield Barracks admitted 1 MAY to conspiring to accept bribes — including an antique automobile — and to disclose sensitive Army procurement information, the Department of Justice said. **Franklin Raby**, 67, of Greeneville, Tenn., pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Ronnie Greer of the Eastern District of Tennessee, the department said in a statement. His sentencing is scheduled for 5 AUG. The offense carries a maximum term of five years in prison and a fine of at least \$250,000.

Raby had retired as an Army sergeant major in 2004, according to court documents. He served as a range operations manager for the U.S. Army Hawaii Range Division at Schofield Barracks from May 2006 to May 2018, U.S. Army Hawaii said in a statement. As part of his plea agreement, Raby admitted that from March 2015 through May 2018,

while employed with the Army, he accepted tens of thousands of dollars' worth of bribes from an employee of a federal contractor that sought and received business from the Army, the statement said.

In August 2017, the contractor shipped a 1969 Ford Galaxie to the home of Raby's son in Greeneville, court documents said. That same month, the contractor shipped a custom H&H 375 rifle to Raby's home in Ewa Beach, Hawaii, the documents said. He also received diamond earrings valued at \$2,300. In return, Raby gave the contractor sensitive, internal Defense Department procurement information and also used his position to benefit the contractor in securing Army contracts, the statement said. The case had been investigated by the Army Criminal Investigation Command, U.S. Defense Criminal Investigative Service and the FBI. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Wyatt Olson | May 2, 2019 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

El Paso, TX -- An Alaska company and its subsidiary have paid more than \$2 million to settle a lawsuit filed by the federal government that accused the company of paying kickbacks and bribes to secure government contracts at an El Paso Army post, officials said. Kikiktagruk Inupiat Corp. and KIC Development LLC agreed to the \$2,025,000 settlement last month, the El Paso Times reported. A federal court complaint shows the scheme involved a construction work contract at Fort Bliss that was part of a "\$3 billion effort to transform" the base. Court records indicate that from 2008 to 2009, three then-KIC employees unlawfully paid **James G. Tuskan**, a former contract worker with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers.

The scheme was revealed in 2010 after a KIC worker reported the alleged crimes committed by the company's vice presidents **Anthony Acri** and **Christine Hayes**, as well as project manager Earl Hall, according to court documents and officials with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Texas. The bribes included airline flights, money for hotels and vacations, and payments to Tuskan's family. Court documents show some of the bribes happened prior to Tuskan supposedly arranging for the Army Corps in Fort Worth to award KIC with the contract exceeding \$2 million in 2009. KIC was subsequently awarded a \$15 million contract to provide design, construction work, repairs and renovations to two buildings at Fort Bliss. Tuskan pleaded guilty to conspiracy to defraud the U.S. government and was later sentenced to 15 months in prison. Hayes and Acri pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud, with each receiving a five-year prison sentence. [Source: Associated Press | May 3, 2019 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials ► **Reported 01 thru 15 APR 2019 | Seven**

"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 Cpl. Ralph L. Bennett** was a member of Headquarters Company, 209th Engineer Combat Battalion, as an engineer in the China-Burma-India Theater. On June 13, 1944, Bennett's battalion fought in the siege of the Myitkyina, Burma, after successfully taking the airfield west of Myitkyina from Japanese control. Bennett was reported to have been killed during the battle. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Bennett here.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Herschel M. Riggs** was a member of Headquarters Company, 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, involved in combat actions against North Korean forces near Taejon, South Korea. Riggs was declared missing in action on July 16, 1950, when he could not be accounted for by his unit. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Riggs here.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Sterling Geary, Jr.** was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, which was engaged in battle with the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces in North Korea. He was declared missing in action on Nov. 27, 1951, when he could not be accounted for by his unit following fighting at Hill 234 and Tong-dong Village, North Korea. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Geary here.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Elden C. Justus** was a member of Headquarters Battery, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division, which was a part of the 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT). In late November 1950, the 31st RCT deployed east of the Chosin Reservoir where it was engaged by overwhelming numbers of Chinese forces who were there supporting North Korea. Justus could not be accounted for by his unit at the end of the battle. He was reported missing in action as of Dec. 6, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Justus here.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Platoon Sgt. George E. Trotter** was a member of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division. In November 1943, his unit landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and Sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Trotter died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Trotter here.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Wesley L. Kroenung** was a photographer with Headquarters Company, Headquarters and Service Battalion, Fifth Amphibious Corps, temporarily assigned to the 2nd Marine Division. In November 1943,

the unit he was assigned to landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Trotter died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. He was reportedly buried in the 2nd Marine Division Cemetery #4. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Kroenung here.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Jasper L. Pue** 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 crewmembers, including Pue. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Pue here.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | May 15, 2019 ++]

* VA *



VA Medical Marijuana Update 62 ► **VA Opposes Bills Broadening Medical Marijuana Access**

The Trump administration has taken a stance against three separate medical marijuana bills being considered by members of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. Testifying on 30 APR before the House panel's Subcommittee on Health, officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs said the agency opposes each of the bills – the Veterans Equal Access Act, the VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act and the Veterans Cannabis Use for Safe Healing Act.



Offered in response to marijuana being federally prohibited but legalized for medicinal purposes in most states, each of the bills addresses related conflicts currently affecting the VA and its vast network of government-controlled hospitals and physicians: the Veterans Equal Access Act would require the agency to conduct clinical trials to research the potential benefits of pot on vets suffering from certain medical conditions, while both of the other proposals would allow VA doctors to legally recommend the plant in accordance with state law to patients seeking treatment.

Dr. Keita Franklin, national director of suicide prevention for the department's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, testified that the bill requiring the agency to conduct clinical marijuana tests was too ambitious to garner the VA's support. "Any trial with human subjects must include an evaluation of the risks and safety and include the smallest number of participants to avoid putting subjects at increased risk unnecessarily so," she said. "For these reasons, we don't support this proposed legislation." The VA opposes letting its doctors recommend medical marijuana to vets because the plant remains federally outlawed given its status as a Schedule 1 drug under the U.S. Controlled Substances Act, she testified.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration “advised VA that no provision of the Controlled Substances Act would be exempt from criminal sanctions as a VA physician who acts with intent to provide a patient with means to obtain marijuana,” she said. “As long as cannabis or marijuana remains a Schedule I drug, then we are going to look to the DEA and the Department of Justice to give us their opinion on what our prescribers are able to do,” added Larry Mole, chief consultant for the VA’s Population Health department. “DEA has taken no stance on any of these pieces of legislation,” a department spokesperson told The Washington Times when reached for comment.

Thirty-three states have legalized the medicinal use of marijuana to varying degrees, including 10 that have separately legalized recreational use among adults. Several bills pending on Capitol Hill would effectively end the federal prohibition on marijuana if passed by either removing or recategorizing the plant from its current placement under the Controlled Substances Act. [Source: The Washington Times | Andrew Blake | May 1, 2019 ++]

Veteran ID Card Update 18 ► 204,230 Veterans Have Applied for the Card

A verification of military service required for veterans to receive their free ID card from the Department of Veterans Affairs can still take up to six months from the time of application for those who separated before 1980, VA officials said last week. Veterans who served after 1980 can be verified through an automated process rolled out late last year, said Curt Cashour, a VA spokesman. But other veterans, primarily those who served before 1980, require manual verification before the ID card can be processed and produced, he added.

The card is available to any honorably discharged veteran through a program established in 2017. Ordered by Congress in 2015, the IDs are meant to serve as proof of military service at private businesses. The cards are not considered official forms of federal or state ID, do not entitle veterans to any federal benefits and cannot be used to access military bases. To receive the card, veterans must apply at <https://www.va.gov/records/get-veteran-id-cards>, complete the application and upload a photo. Once military service is verified, the card is sent by mail within 21 days, Cashour said. Since November 2017, about 204,230 veterans have applied for the card, he said. Of those, 143,324 have been approved and 143,084 have been mailed as of 8 MAY. [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | May 13, 2019 ++]

VA Medical Center Supplies ► Systemic Problems Nationwide Could Lead to Shortages

VA medical centers nationwide have systemic problems that could lead to shortages of critical supplies for surgery and patient care, according to a report from the agency’s watchdog. The Department of Veterans Affairs Office of the Inspector General released a report recently which “revealed alarming problems within VA’s management of medical supply inventories at its hospitals nationwide,” House Veterans Affairs Committee chairman Mark Takano (D-CA) said in a news release this week. The OIG revealed issues at the VA Medical Center in Washington, D.C. in 2018 before launching a nationwide audit.

The report showed that 19 percent of supplies the OIG reviewed while visiting at least 11 VA medical centers were under-stocked -- potentially putting patients at risk if supplies are not available when needed. The most notable example was at the DC VA Medical Center, “where medical supplies and sterile instruments were not reaching patient care areas when needed” and investigators found that “leaders failed to respond to repeatedly identified significant deficiencies.”

“As a result of years of inaction, the lack of supplies and properly prepared instruments led to multiple delayed surgical procedures,” the report said. Earlier this year, the DC VA Medical Center was downgraded to a 1-Star rating, the lowest ranking out of five possible stars, according to the OIG.

“I take issue with any misallocation or mismanagement of resources intended for our nation’s veterans,” Takano said in a statement. “This report identifies troubling major inventory management problems that can affect the safety and quality of care given to our veterans. VA must act to improve the effectiveness and accountability for tracking the availability of medical supplies. We cannot let mismanagement put the care our veterans receive at risk.” “These supply problems are alarming,” Rep. Chris Pappas, D-N.H., and chair of the House Veterans Affairs Committee subpanel on Oversight and Investigations said in a statement. “VA has acknowledged the seriousness of these problems and has promised action. The Committee will review these steps to make sure they will take the VA in the right direction.”

VA spokeswoman Susan Carter told Connecting Vets that the VA had already worked to address those issues, which were uncovered “well over a year ago.” The report “highlights the type of implementation challenges associated with almost any transition from one inventory system to another,” Carter said. “VHA has overcome all of the challenges highlighted in the report and developed an action plan to address all of the OIG’s recommendations, which we expect to implement by March of 2020.” The HVAC subpanel on Oversight and Investigations plans to hold a hearing to determine the VA’s progress on resolving those issues later this month, the release said, though a date has yet to be set. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | May 3, 2019 ++]

VA Unions Update 06 ► Wilkie Proposes Drastic Cut to Federally Funded Union Time

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie on 2 MAY set out new proposals to cut federally funded union time as the Veterans Affairs Department looks to renegotiate its collective bargaining agreement. The proposals include an annual cap on the time all union workers can get paid by the VA to perform union work to 10,000 hours per year. Another provision would give "frontline supervisors" more authority over workers. The current collective bargaining agreement with the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) has been in place since 2011. The union represents about a quarter million federal workers.

In a statement, Wilkie called for a reset of the "VA's approach to labor-management relations." The VA said that under the Obama administration's agreement, the government was paying more than a million hours' wages for employees to perform union work. "A reluctance to challenge the status quo produced the current agreement, which includes many benefits that favor the union rather than the veterans we are charged with serving," Wilkie said. "With VA facing thousands of vacancies, these proposals could add more than 1 million man-hours per year back into our work force—a vital influx of resources that would make an almost immediate difference for veterans and the employees who care for them."

Meanwhile, the AFGE slammed the proposal as a ‘sham’. "Secretary Wilkie is making a mockery of the collective bargaining process to do the bidding of President Trump," the AFGE National President J. David Cox Sr. said. "This is all part of the Trump administration's strategy to force the VA to fail, thereby paving the road to privatization." The union also argued that in the ramp-up to the expansion of community care for veterans under the VA Mission Act the department is "funneling resources to the for-profit private sector, and failing to fill 49,000 vacancies across the department nationwide."

The Trump administration has been riling unions for the past year, starting with an executive order issued last May that sought to claw back federal workers' time from union business when they're on the government payroll. In that order, the White House specifically called out nearly 500 VA employees, including 74 nurses, who spent 100% of their work time on union duties. As work ramps up to launch the expanded Community Care program for veterans, the VA's new proposed agreement said union contracts must not "interfere" with the department's ability to administer various

laws including the Mission Act— which mandated the consolidation and expansion of VA community care. [Source: Modern Healthcare | Susannah Luthi | May 3, 2019 ++]

VA Community Care Update 07 ► Are you a 30-minute drive from your nearest VAMC facility?

Veterans living in the western United States may benefit significantly more from this summer’s new VA community care rules than their East Coast counterparts, according to [a new map released by the American Enterprise Institute](#) this week. The project plots the location of more than 1,000 Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers and clinics and calculates [a typical 30-minute drive from each](#). That’s one of several standards department officials will use to determine which veterans are eligible for taxpayer-funded health care outside the VA system, under expanded community care rules adopted by Congress last year.

VA officials have not given specifics on what areas of the country will be most affected by the changes, but have estimated the number of veterans eligible could jump from around 700,000 today to more than 2.7 million with the new rules. But the 30-minute drive time provision has raised alarm among critics of the plan, who say it would expand the number of veterans in the outside care program even further than those estimates and shift resources away from core department needs.

Rebecca Burgess, manager for AEI’s Program on American Citizenship and a research fellow with the think tank, said the new map shows reason for those concerns. “The critics are probably right to worry about the cost,” she said. “When you look at these drive times on the map, it leaves a lot of space around the country.” Much of the upper East Coast sits within a half-hour drive from VA medical facilities, which Burgess noted is a reminder of the age of many department buildings. Many of those centers were built in the early parts of the 20th century, before large population shifts to southern and western states.

The map shows large swaths of California, Texas, Arizona and Florida outside the 30-minute drive window, even in counties with some of the highest veterans populations in the country. More rural states like North Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas have only a small fraction of their land masses covered under the map projections. AEI staffers compiled the map based on available VA data and open-source traffic pattern data. That’s a different tool than VA officials will use in their official eligibility standards, but Burgess said the think tank’s calculations for the first time give a clear idea of just how little of the country sits close to a department medical center.

Along with the 30-minute-drive standard, veterans who face a 20-day wait for most care or whose local facility is rated poorly may also be eligible to receive care from a private-sector physician. The new community care standards are set to launch on 6 JUN. Several Democrats in Congress have raised objections but not introduced any formal barriers to the changes. The full map and data explanation are available [at AEI’s web site](#). Check it out to see if you meet the 30 minute drive criteria. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 7, 2019 ++]

VA Bible Policy Update 01 ► Manchester VA Hospital Display Dispute

A dispute over a Bible display at the Manchester Veterans Affairs hospital in New Hampshire is erupting into a full-fledged war, to include close-air support and vows from both sides to trample the enemy underfoot. The Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) filed a federal lawsuit 7 MAY on behalf of an Air Force veteran against Alfred Montoya, the director of the Manchester VA Medical Center, seeking the removal of a Bible on display at a POW/MIA table within the hospital. The display violates the First Amendment’s establishment of religion clause, according to the lawsuit



“The Christian Bible clearly doesn’t represent all of the myriad religious faiths and non-faith traditions of the U.S. armed forces veterans using the Medical Center and to presume that it does is quite blatantly unconstitutional, unethical and illicit” said Michael L. “Mikey” Weinstein, MRFF’s founder and president, in a statement. To drive the point home, MRFF hired a plane to fly near the medical center trailing a banner that read: “VAMC — Honor all POW/MIA — Remove Bible.” At the center of the dispute is a Bible carried by a prisoner of war in World War II, which was added to the missing man remembrance table honoring missing veterans and POWs at the entranceway of the medical center. The Department of Veterans Affairs said Tuesday the table was sponsored by a veterans group called the Northeast POW/MIA Network.

In January, after MRFF was contacted by 15 veterans who are patients at the medical center — 10 of them practicing Christians, according to Weinstein — VA officials agreed to, and did, remove the Bible from the display. But that brought an outcry from other veterans, who objected to the Bible’s removal, and it reappeared on the table in February, this time encased in an acrylic box and bolted to the table. It had been removed “out of an abundance of caution,” Curt Cashour, a Department of Veterans Affairs spokesman, said in an emailed statement Tuesday. But VA officials changed their minds after a slew of complaints from veterans and others, “many of whom dropped off Bibles at the facility” in protest, Cashour said. After consulting with VA lawyers, it was moved back to the table.

Mike Berry, chief of staff at First Liberty Institute, a religious freedom advocacy group, defended the VA’s decision. “Veterans organizations like the Northeast POW/MIA Network should be able to honor and remember those killed, captured or missing with a display that includes a Bible donated by a WWII veteran that represents the strength through faith necessary for American service members to survive,” he said in a statement. “First Liberty recently represented the Northeast POW/MIA Network in successfully ensuring that the POW/MIA Remembrance display it donated would remain intact at the Manchester VA Medical Center.”

The lawsuit filed in Concord by Air Force veteran James Chamberlain says the Bible’s inclusion is in violation of the Constitution. The First Amendment stipulates “that the government may not establish any religion. Nor can the government give favoritism to one religious belief at the expense of others,” according to the suit. Chamberlain, a devout Christian, said in the lawsuit the table should be a memorial to all who have served, regardless of their beliefs. The suit asserted that the original POW/MIA table tradition was started by a group of Vietnam combat pilots and didn’t include a Bible as one of the items.

Cashour calls the table “a secular tribute to America’s POW/MIA community” and apologized to anyone offended by the Bible’s “incorrect” removal. But Weinstein said it is the message that is offensive. “That sectarian Christian Bible bolted down to that POW/MIA table at the Manchester NH VAMC is a grotesque gang sign of fundamentalist Christian triumphalism, exceptionalism and supremacy, indeed a middle finger of unconstitutional repugnance to the plurality and separation of church and state guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution,” Weinstein told Military Times. “As a state actor, the VA cannot elevate one faith over another or no faith,” he continued. “The VA is wretchedly disrespecting millions of American veterans by doing so. The VA has ignominiously made sure that that sectarian Christian Bible sticks out like a tarantula on a wedding cake in that POW/MIA display, and they’ve done so for a reason! It’s immoral, unethical and blatantly illegal under our Constitution. “We look forward to aggressively prosecuting our case in federal court.”

Berry is also looking forward to that confrontation. "I'm confident the MRFF will continue their losing record," he said. "It's sad that the MRFF continues its efforts to bully the VA at the expense of our veterans and service members. "But as I've said, if the MRFF wants to destroy or disturb the Manchester VAMC display, they'll have to come through us." [Source: AirForceTimes | Kent Miller | Leo Shane III | May 7, 2019 ++]

Non-VA Facility Care Update 05 ► Loophole Leaves Veterans Liable For ER Bills

Department of Veteran Affairs representatives said only a single \$12 reimbursement has been paid under a law meant to stop the VA from denying payment for non-VA emergency care, said a congressional aide familiar with specifics of a meeting between congressional staff and the VA. Part of that VA emergency care regulation is also known as the "Staab Rule." The Staab Rule established the standards that the Veterans Administration must follow when reimbursing veterans for emergency medical care when they have other insurance and receive ER treatment at a non-VA hospital.

Today, Richard Staab, 86, the veteran behind the national case that changed the rule's language, still remains without a refund from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Staab hopes his story reaches every U.S. veteran as a warning about the medical debt he feels they could be left with if the emergency care rule in his name is not changed. "It's wrong. I think it's wrong," the Minnesota Air Force veteran said. The exclusive interview comes nearly one decade after Staab's long legal struggle began — on a day in December 2010. "Well, the heart was pounding. And I thought if I would sit down and rest, it would go away. But it didn't. So they called the ambulance," Staab said.

It would end up being life-threatening. Staab would survive emergency open-heart surgery at a non-VA hospital in St. Cloud, Minn., after suffering a heart attack and a stroke. He could not communicate for months. "They told me I'd be lucky if I got out in a year when I was in the nursing home. I said, 'Oh no, I'll be out of here in six months.' And I was," Staab said. When it came time to pay his bills, the VA cited the federal Veterans Emergency Care Fairness Act. The law includes directing how the agency is expected to reimburse veterans for non-VA emergency care. Under their interpretation of that law, the VA said because Staab had Medicare as other insurance covering part of his non-VA emergency care, they would not reimburse him for any of the remaining \$48,000 in bills.

"It's wrong what happened. And I don't see how all the GIs would know what you need to do to be covered," Staab said. Looking back at some of his basic training pictures from 1952, as the Korean War veteran recalled his current VA struggle, he also remembered the promise his country made to him. "You enlist with us. You get to have all health care taken care of. And this, and that. That was the big thing back then," Staab said.

A large part of Staab's story can be seen symbolically in the office of Staab's lawyer Jackie Schuh. She is a veteran herself. This mission is personal. Multiple legal filings, medical records, and appeal pleadings show the journey of VA denials representing the Staab case for most of the last eight years. "There's nobody that should be put in the position that he's been put in where they have to come up with \$48,000 to pay for emergency fees," Schuh said, "when they are promised when they sign the dotted line or do their 20 years, that they're going to be free from that result. It's ridiculous." "So it's got to be fixed. I mean, it's sad to say what has been promised to Dick, and all the other veterans who have that vested benefit, is not what they're receiving," the lawyer added.

After years of legal fights, in 2016 the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims ruled in Staab's favor. Judges said in 2010, **when Congress had changed the law, they intended for the VA to act as a "secondary payer," when veterans' other health insurance only covered part of their non-VA emergency treatment.** Last year, what was thought to be a final clarification of this statute called the 'Staab Rule,' named after Richard Staab, was finally put into the VA's rule book. "And so the Staab Rule made it unconstitutional, or perhaps illegal is a better way to say it, to have the VA implement denials internally when the law required they grant the request for coverage," Schuh said.

During the course of a three-year investigation by Dayton, Ohio, television station News Center 7's I-team, a House Veterans Affairs Committee spokesperson confirmed in January 2018, more than one million Staab Rule-related veterans' claims were waiting to be processed. However, that number differs from what VA spokesperson Randal Noller said in February 2018. Noller said 217,000 veterans are impacted nationally. Refunds, Noller said at that time, would add between \$165 million and \$298 million to their budget during the next five calendar years.

However, when answering questions in October 2018, an unnamed VA Public Affairs spokesperson said once the Staab Rule was published, and all claims were processed, they could not answer how many veterans had been refunded. "These claims became part of our normal workload," the VA Public Affairs email said. "They are not tracked separately." In February 2018, Noller could not answer how many veterans waiting for refunds had died. "The VA is unable to determine how many Veterans with denied claims since 2010 have died," Noller wrote.

Staab's story is also personal for National Veterans Legal Services Program, or NVLSP Executive Director Bart Stichman. He previously was part of the team representing Staab nationally, and is now fighting the VA's emergency care denials with a class action lawsuit. While Staab's court victory specified the VA has to pay the remainder of a non-VA emergency bill, even if a veteran has other insurance, the NVLSP claims that is not happening and says the VA is rejecting claims anyway. "The problem with the new regulation is the VA came up with a different reason for why they shouldn't reimburse veterans who have some private insurance," Stichman said.

The class action suit also claims the VA circumvented Congress by adding the words "deductibles and coinsurance" to the part of the Staab Rule allowing the VA to not cover copayments. "And the VA is trying to drive a Mack truck through that minor exception. So that everything you could possibly reimburse a veteran for, is not subject to reimbursement," Stichman said. Responding last month to the NVLSP suit, the VA claimed that because Congress used the term "similar payments" when referencing copayments, the agency was allowed to interpret the language to mean they are allowed to insert deductibles and coinsurance into the statute. [Source: The Dayton Daily News | Max Filby & Matthew Simon | May 7, 2019 ++]

Agent Orange Update 01 ► Some Vietnam Veterans are Just Now Experiencing the Effects

Orange should stand for something nice — sunsets, tangerines, Creamsicles. But when it's Agent Orange, the color means poison. Agent Orange is the herbicide sprayed by the millions of gallons all over South Vietnam during the war from 1961-71. The operation was designed to remove the triple-canopy jungle and other vegetation the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops used for cover. The operation's motto: "Only you can prevent a forest." The poison got its name from the stripes on the 55-gallon drums in which it was shipped, mostly from several major chemical companies, including Dow Chemical and Monsanto.

The Air Force dumped Agent Orange on South Vietnam for 10 years. That campaign exposed an estimated 2.8 million American troops to the deadly dioxin. Most were not affected while serving in-country. But after they came home — often decades later — tens of thousands of veterans paid a price with their health. House Bill 326, "Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2019," is now pending in Congress. It reads in part: "Agent Orange exposure continues to negatively affect the lives of veterans of the United States Armed Forces, Vietnamese people, Vietnamese Americans and their children. The lives of many victims are cut short and others live with disease, disabilities and pain, often untreated or unrecognized."

The Department of Veterans Affairs has recognized at least 14 cancers and other diseases related to Agent Orange. The VA says veterans and their survivors may be eligible for benefits from these diseases. Court cases and congressional action since 1979 have ruled in favor of veterans afflicted by the herbicides showered over the war zone. In 1991 President George H.W. Bush signed the Agent Orange Act, which ordered treatment for cancers resulting from

wartime service. Further, Vietnam Veterans of America says "significant numbers of Vietnam veterans have children and grandchildren with birth defects related to exposure to Agent Orange."

For decades, the VA has been criticized for some of its actions and reactions for disability claims related to Agent Orange. But one survivor of Agent Orange says he's satisfied with the care he's gotten from the agency. Greg, 69, asked that his last name not be used because he's sensitive about prostate cancer and its effects. He and his wife live in Shawnee, Kan., and winter in Weslaco in the Rio Grande Valley. Greg served in Vietnam 1968-69 as a Seabee with the U.S. Navy. His outfit did repairs around airfields, which became refueling stations for airplanes that were spraying Agent Orange. "We took our breaks sitting on these orange cans," he says. "We read 'defoliant' and nobody thought anything about it ... We put our food on the barrels."

He got out of the Navy after seven years, then joined the Army, attaining the rank of major. He spent 17 years in that branch, serving as a quartermaster during the Persian Gulf War and elsewhere. In 2014, at age 65, during a routine physical, he was diagnosed at a VA hospital with prostate cancer. Nobody in his family had ever had it. His tests were off the charts. He underwent the surgery at a Kansas VA hospital. "I never had a bad experience (with the VA)," he says. "It's no different from the military. I'd say 99 percent of them do a good job." Today, Greg gets a 100 percent disability from his claim — about \$20,000 a year. "They shot at me on five continents," he says, "and missed. Prostate cancer didn't miss." [Source: USVCP | August 31, 2018 ++]

VA User Addresses ► Is Yours Correct?

The Department of Veterans Affairs has notified veterans in several states that the address the agency has on file for them may have been incorrectly changed. In social media postings and press releases, the VA has stated that both the Veterans Health Administration and Veterans Benefits Administration have "detected inconsistencies with how veterans' permanent mailing addresses are being updated and stored at VHA medical facilities and shared with the national enrollment system." The postings urge all veterans to verify that the information the VA has on file for them is correct. To do this, veterans should go to www.va.gov/change-address and verify that their mailing and home addresses, phone number and email information are all correct.

If you don't have an online account, the webpage will let you create one. If you are unable to do so, you can call the VA at 877-222-8387 to speak with a live person to check out the info the department has on file for you. You can also visit a local VA office for assistance. Updating your address will affect the information the VA has for:

- VA health care (including prescriptions, appointment reminders, lab and test results, and other communications)
- Disability compensation
- Pension benefits
- Claims and appeals
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E)

It will not update the mailing address the VA uses for:

- GI Bill benefits
- Home loans
- Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA)
- Veterans Mortgage Life Insurance
- The Foreign Medical Program

Officials say the different computer systems do not talk to each other. The change of address page above explains how to change your address for these programs. [Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | May 8, 2019 ++]

VA Nursing Home Update 14 ► WWII Vet Fatally Injured in Des Moines

Jim Ferguson wants answers. How was his 91-year-old father, who served in the U.S. Navy in World War II, fatally injured in a Veterans Affairs nursing home, the institution Ferguson had entrusted to care for him? Huddled around a computer monitor with managers at the VA in Des Moines, Iowa, Ferguson watched a hallway surveillance video that depicted a chilling blow to his father's head. "I lost it," Ferguson told USA TODAY. "I broke down."



In the video, James "Milt" Ferguson Sr., who had dementia and was legally blind, appears confused. He opens a hallway door, rolls his wheelchair into another resident's room, then wheels back out. No staff members are visible. He circles around and heads back into the room. Halfway through the door, his chair flips over backwards. Milt Ferguson crashes to the floor, landing on the back of his head. Ferguson said he was told the chair was pushed over by the resident in the room, who can't be seen in the video. As staff members rush to assist him, Ferguson is able to turn over and sit up, but the impact causes a massive brain bleed that will kill him within days. What later would turn the son's despair into outrage was what he learned about events leading up to his father wheeling around unsupervised last December, and what happened after he smashed into the floor. "It's like my dad died at their hands," Ferguson said.

Serious problems with resident care have occurred in many VA nursing homes across the nation, including the one where Ferguson was being cared for. USA TODAY reported in March that inspections by a private contractor hired by the VA found deficiencies that caused "actual harm" to veterans at more than half of the 99 VA nursing homes reviewed. The inspections found inadequate supervision or hazardous conditions at 53 of them. In Des Moines – which received the lowest one star out of five in the VA's own ratings, based on surprise inspections – inspectors found managers did not ensure staff treated residents with dignity or followed basic infection-control and prevention measures.

The story of what happened to James Ferguson in Des Moines provides a deeper picture of the care one elderly veteran received. Medical records provided to USA TODAY by his son and legal guardian outline what specialists say was a concerning series of decisions by VA staff, before and after his deadly head injury. Nine days before, VA caregivers determined Ferguson was a danger to himself and others because his dementia caused him to wander around, agitated. They had him on continuous one-on-one observation with an aide, but took him off the strict monitoring when he entered the VA nursing home. There, staff didn't reinstate the heightened observation, despite his repeatedly straying dangerously into other residents' rooms.

After his injury, staff put him back in his wheelchair but did not report the incident to a supervisor for 40 minutes, the records and surveillance video indicate. Ferguson wasn't transported to an emergency room for two hours after that. Then, it took 2½ hours more to send him to a trauma hospital. The time stamp on the video showed the fall occurred at 3:49 p.m. and it wasn't until just before 9 p.m. that Ferguson was transported to the trauma facility.

'A disaster waiting to happen'

Specialists who reviewed Ferguson's medical records at the request of USA TODAY expressed concern about the quality of his care. "It was definitely a disaster waiting to happen, and it did," said Robyn Grant, director of public policy and advocacy at The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, a Washington-based nonprofit advocacy organization. "I just am really struck by the predictability with his repeated episodes of going into other people's rooms," she said. "They should have had some intervention so they could provide him with adequate supervision and address the wandering." Grant said the length of time it took afterward to adequately evaluate and diagnose the severity of his injury and get him to a trauma facility also raises questions. "What was happening there, in terms of those delays?" she said.

Richard Mollot, executive director since 2005 of the Long Term Care Community Coalition, a New York City-based nonprofit advocate of nursing home care improvement, said the shortfalls indicate there was "very likely" a lack of skilled or adequately trained staff to meet his needs. "The point of being in that environment is that you have skilled nursing care and monitoring," he said. Mollot said the reporting delay is particularly concerning. "How often does this happen that no one's looking at? That's what is so upsetting."

'All staff acted properly'

A spokesman for the Des Moines VA, Timothy Hippen, said in a statement that a review after the "untimely death" concluded "all staff acted properly." "Any time an unexpected death occurs, VA Central Iowa Health Care System reviews its policies and procedures to see if changes are warranted," he said. "We did that here, finding that all staff acted properly." In response to questions about the case, national VA spokesman Curt Cashour accused USA TODAY of focusing on "isolated complaints" and "cherry-picking the experiences of a handful of veterans to create the impression of a broad problem." Cashour maintained that, overall, VA nursing homes "compare closely" with non-VA facilities. More than 40,000 veterans rely on care at the agency's 134 nursing facilities each year.

USA TODAY reported last year that about 70% of VA nursing homes scored worse than non-VA nursing homes on a majority of quality indicators tracked by the agency, which include rates of infection, serious pain and bed sores. Hippen declined to respond to detailed questions about Ferguson's case. "We will not be addressing the specifics of this case publicly, but we have been in direct contact with the veteran's family to discuss their concerns," he said.

Jim Ferguson said he remains upset even though VA officials shared the surveillance video with him and said they were sorry about what happened to his father. He wants VA staff held accountable. He wants to make sure policies are in place so it doesn't happen to anyone else. "No one should live their life like that and have what happened to him in the end," he said. "I want this to be the last person this happens to."

A gambler called 'booger'

Even as his dementia worsened, Milt Ferguson flashed glimmers of his younger self. The former deckhand on the heavy cruiser U.S.S. Pensacola was affectionately known as "booger" at the Des Moines Register, where he worked bundling newspapers for 23 years before retiring in 1995. He loved to play the slots and the horses. On a note in his medical record, a nurse practitioner wrote: "Patient laughs when his nickname is mentioned." Jim Ferguson had come for a visit that day, as he did most days. "He was smiling and appeared to be enjoying his son's company," the medical record said.

The decision to place him in a nursing home had been a gut-wrenching one, Ferguson said. He had moved in with his parents and cared for them for three years. But in April 2018 his mother died. He said a VA social worker told him his father needed more intensive, round-the-clock care and supervision. "They made it sound like, well, if he got hurt, I could be charged with a crime," Ferguson said. "So that's when I decided to place him in a nursing home."

'His dementia was acting up'

Ferguson moved his father to Bishop Drumm Retirement Center, a private facility just outside Des Moines, where his mother worked as a nursing assistant in the Alzheimer's unit for more than 20 years before retiring. The center took in Milt Ferguson last August. But three months later, his condition worsened. "The day before Thanksgiving, I got a call from Bishop Drumm – his dementia was acting up," his son said. He hit two staff members, was "agitated all day" and

was “wandering into other residents room(s), causing distress,” a nurse later noted in his medical record. “He is generally ‘sweet’ so this is a departure from his usual behavior.”

Ferguson was taken by ambulance to the Des Moines VA Medical Center, where he was admitted to the acute psychiatry ward. He was put on one-on-one observation with a sitter – an aide tasked with intervening if he lashed out or tried to stray into other patients’ rooms. They adjusted his medications, and, after a few aggressive outbursts, he appeared calm enough after three weeks to transfer into the VA nursing home on the medical center’s campus. But there was a catch, a psychiatric nurse wrote in his record: "Veterans are not put on sitter status over there."

‘Help me, help me’

After a 22-hour trial period without a sitter, Milt Ferguson moved in to the VA nursing home. Problems began within hours. He hardly slept, he hallucinated, he called out "help me, help me" over and over again. He was agitated and again, he "wandered into and out of peers rooms" day after day, nursing staff wrote in his record. They gave him medication. Sometimes he calmed down. Sometimes he didn’t. A psychiatrist was managing his case remotely. According to public records, the doctor worked at a VA facility a few hours away in Lincoln, Nebraska. Through virtual appointments, the psychiatrist advised changes to Ferguson's medication.

On 19 DEC, a week after Ferguson moved in, nursing home staff noted he was still restless and anxious, pacing and screaming and yelling. His care team – psychiatrist, primary care doctor, nursing staff and social workers – met to discuss the case. The psychiatrist said a review of his records showed "increased confusion with wandering" during the past week. The doctor prescribed higher dosages of a mood-stabilizing drug and a sedative. There was no discussion of closer supervision or reinstatement of one-on-one observation, the records show. “Will ask RN to contact this MD in one week with update,” the psychiatrist wrote. By then, Ferguson would be dead.

‘A golf ball-sized lump’

On December 20, when two aides rushed to help Milt Ferguson, his head on the floor and legs crumpled to the side, the time stamp on the hallway surveillance video reads 3:49 p.m. But in a report filled out an hour later, a nurse recorded the time of the accident as 4:30 p.m. His records do not indicate what the staff did with Ferguson during the 41 minutes in between, aside from putting him back in his wheelchair. By that time, he had a “golf ball-sized lump on the back of his head.” The nurse notified the manager on duty, a nurse practitioner, who wrote at 5:06 p.m. that he had ordered an immediate CT scan of his head.

That didn’t happen until about 6:30 p.m., when Ferguson arrived in the emergency department of the medical center on the Des Moines VA campus, on a bed wheeled by a nursing home aide. The aide said Ferguson had earlier been taken for a CT scan but was uncooperative. An emergency room doctor quickly had a sedative administered and the scan was completed. By that point, the World War II veteran had a “large bleed” in the back right side of his brain that was so acute, the CT report says his brain had shifted to the left inside his skull.

The doctor notified MercyOne Des Moines Medical Center, a trauma hospital, at 7 p.m. For nearly two hours, the doctor tried to keep Ferguson comfortable and his blood pressure under control until an ambulance arrived and took Ferguson to Mercy at 8:55 p.m. The doctor also kept calling Ferguson’s son, leaving voicemails. But Jim Ferguson had himself been admitted to a hospital and had provided the VA nursing home with a consent form authorizing staff to contact a close friend if anything happened to his father. That form had been sent "to scanning" that morning. When Jim Ferguson retrieved all the voicemails, he rushed to Mercy the next morning. "He was not responsive. He was laying on his bed, making this horrible noise as they sucked saliva out of his mouth," he said. "I never even got to say any last words to my dad." He died the next day.

Specialists who reviewed the case at the request of USA TODAY singled out multiple shortfalls in his care at the VA that may have affected the outcome. Grant, the policy director at The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, said the 22-hour trial of having no sitter was "not enough time to establish how he was doing." When he then acted out day after day, in agitation and confusion, they should not have allowed him to wander into other residents' rooms, she said. Such situations can cause the other residents to lash out in fear or distress and "lead to an altercation

or violence or striking out." "One would argue that could have been prevented," she said. "There should have been somebody, somewhere who could have seen that this happened and – particularly when he wheeled himself – to have gone in and intervened, 'Let me help you, let's go to your room.'"

Mollot, the executive director at the Long Term Care Community Coalition, said meeting the standards of care means staff identifies risks and needs and ways to meet them and mitigate them and then does so consistently. "This is exactly the kind of thing that happens when those standards are not followed," he said.

'A safe place'

The spokesman for the Des Moines VA, while declining to answer detailed questions about what happened, said that in general, "caring for nursing home residents involves balancing patients' independence with the need for supervision, as appropriate." "While tight scrutiny and strict limits on residents' activities and freedom of movement could possibly lower the risk for adverse events, it would also severely degrade patients' quality of life, which is precisely what we are trying to preserve for as long as possible," he said. Jim Ferguson still has his father's wheelchair in the garage. He keeps the sweatshirt his father was wearing when he last used the chair. Ferguson has retained a lawyer, Brad Biren, to help him figure out next steps and how to hold the VA accountable. "Somebody didn't watch my dad and let him die," he said. "It's supposed to be a safe place."

[Source: USA TODAY | Donovan Slack | May 4, 2019 ++]

VA Unpaid Approved Claims ► Vet Awaits \$40K from VA as Sheriff's Sale Looms on Property

A 71-year-old disabled Army veteran in New Jersey faces imminent loss of commercial property as he awaits long-overdue compensation of more than \$40,000 from the Veterans Administration. "I just don't understand why people don't get their money," Ronald Choplinsky recently told Stars and Stripes in a telephone interview from his home in Millville, N.J. "Why do they wait so long when you're approved?" In a January 2018 decision, the VA Board of Veterans' Appeals determined Choplinsky's disability to be of greater severity than had been previously designated and that he should be compensated back to an earlier date. The decision entitled him to thousands of dollars of back pay. "To date, they haven't paid him his awarded money, and they have not increased his rating," said Sally Stenton, the attorney representing him.

"Since January 2018, his case has bounced between the Philadelphia Regional VA Office and the Appeals Management Center in D.C.," said Stenton, a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel. "So, in 17 months, nothing has happened until I came onto this case in March this year, and now the regional office in Philly has thrown up every conceivable road block not to pay him." Late Friday, Stars and Stripes submitted a privacy waiver, signed by Choplinsky, to the VA media office in Washington, D.C., with a request for an interview. As of the time of publication, no response had been received.

Choplinsky owes roughly \$40,000 in delinquent real estate taxes on an auto body shop he owns in Philadelphia. His father began the business, and Choplinsky ran it for most of his working life. But the paint fumes and other chemicals forced him out when they exacerbated his medical condition, called gastroesophageal reflux disease, he said. Another operator rents the auto body shop, but the income from that has not been sufficient to pay the real estate taxes, Choplinsky said. A sheriff's sale of the auto body property is set for 15 MAY, Stenton said. He has also fallen behind on the mortgage payment on his home, which he took out years ago to pay a mountain of medical bills left from his wife's terminal illness.

Choplinsky was drafted into the Army in July 1968 and went to Fort Bragg, N.C., for basic training. The conditions during training aggravated an existing problem with his stomach and esophagus. "It was all the mud," he said. "They made us put our face in the mud, and you'd open your mouth and mud would go in." During the last week of training, he was hospitalized for a month, he said. "They were going to take part of my stomach out," he said. Instead, he was

honorably discharged in September 1968. The Philadelphia Regional Office denied Choplinsky’s initial 1972 claim of entitlement to a service connection for his gastrointestinal condition, but the office acknowledged not possessing all his service treatment records in making that denial, according to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals decision.

Choplinsky moved to reopen the claim in October 2010, and five months later the regional office granted a service connection for gastroesophageal reflux disease – but only beginning from 2010, the date he had filed to reopen the claim. In its decision last year, the Board of Veterans’ Appeals ordered that the rating of the severity of Choplinsky’s condition be increased retroactively to October 2010, a change that would boost his monthly benefit from roughly \$140 to \$483. “That’s where the \$40,000 comes from,” Stenton said.

But in the same decision, the appeals board ordered the regional office to conduct further investigation into determining whether Choplinsky’s condition was equally severe for the period between 1972 and 2010, which could potentially lead to more retroactive compensation. The decision explicitly states that it would be “beneficial” to Choplinsky to separate the board’s settled decision from any further, unresolved questions. The Philadelphia Regional VA Office, however, has maintained that all additional actions ordered by the appeals board must be completed before any changes in benefits payments are made. But the first part of Choplinsky’s appeal took almost 10 years to conclude, Stenton said. “The remand could take another decade,” she said.

Stenton has demanded the regional office produce a **statute or VA regulation that prevents immediate payment** of the back benefits. She has received nothing. Regardless of what is determined about his benefits in the future, there is no scenario in which Choplinsky would owe the VA money, Stenton said. “And the VA will never owe him less money,” she said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Wyatt Olson | May 12, 2019 ++]

* Vets *



Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 66 ► **Help Urged For Vets Sickened By Burn Pits**

Lawmakers and military advocates on 30 APR urged new action to support servicemembers exposed to toxic burn pits that have been linked to a long list of serious illnesses. Today, a registry of servicemembers exposed to burn pits now totals 173,000. And there could be many thousands more, some experts and lawmakers contend. “We need to take care of our veterans, we need to provide the health care that they need and the benefits that they earned,” Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-CA) told an audience gathered Tuesday on Capitol Hill for a briefing on the issue. “We need to act now.” Ruiz joined Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM), Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-TX), Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI), and a panel of advocates and experts urging new actions on a package of legislative efforts regarding burn pits.

Burn pits exposed deployed servicemembers to dangerous chemicals and fumes that have been linked to a series of deadly illnesses, experts have said. Hundreds of open pits have been used at U.S. military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan to burn trash, human waste, petroleum, rubber and other debris and released hazardous smoke into the air. Some troops exposed to smoke from burn pits have attributed medical conditions, such as respiratory issues and cancer, to the toxic fumes. But much work remains for government officials to make that connection, lawmakers and

advocates said. “It doesn’t take a genius to understand there is an association between this toxic smoke and somebody’s ill health,” said Ruiz, an emergency room physician. “We ban the use of burn pits in the United States of America because it could cause health effects including cancer. Then why are we allowing American soldiers being exposed to burn pits in other countries when our government and our military are doing the burning?”

In February, Castro conducted a series of town hall meetings in Texas to urge action on pending legislation in the lower chamber on burn pits. Castro said Tuesday that servicemembers were exposed for days, weeks and months to burn pits, which total more than 200 so far during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. “We can’t afford to cast a blind eye to the level of exposure and the number of servicemen and women who were impacted,” he said. Castro has sponsored two bills to expand the tracking and evaluation of veterans and servicemembers who spent time living or working near burn pits while deployed overseas.

The first, the **Family Member Access to Burn Pits Registry Act of 2019**, or H.R. 1001, sponsored by Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-TX) and the **Burn Pit Registry Enhancement Acts**, H.R.1381 and S. 554, would let a family members or a designated person enroll a veteran or update the registry. Created in 2014, the registry is managed by the Department of Veterans Affairs and is open to veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, veterans who served in Djibouti, Africa on or after Sept. 11, 2001, Operations Desert Shield or Desert Storm veterans and others who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations on or after Aug. 2, 1990. The second bill, the **Burn Pits Veterans Revision Act of 2019**, or H.R. 1005, would create a diagnostic code and evaluation criteria for obliterative bronchiolitis, a medical condition often linked to burn pits. The law would also create a disability rating for the illness.

Udall said the VA contends it still needs additional documentation to link burn pit exposure to illnesses to approve service-connected disability benefits for servicemembers. That is a next big step that must be reached, he said. “We’ve made progress but our work is far from over. Our goal is to recognize burn pit exposure as a ‘presumptive service connection,’” Udall said. “We won’t rest until we get this done.” In February, Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) also renewed calls for burn pits legislation and a congressional hearing to address the health concerns of servicemembers and veterans exposed to burn pits while deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq. The **Burn Pit Accountability Act**, S. 191, sponsored by Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., who is also a presidential candidate, was introduced Jan. 17 and co-sponsored by a bipartisan group of 31 senators including Brown. The legislation requires the Defense Department evaluate servicemembers for the toxic exposure during routine medical exams and directs more data collection.

Brown, a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, has said Congress needs to hear directly from servicemembers and veterans who have suffered serious health problems related to the open-air burn pits used to dispose of toxic waste. Ruiz on 30 APR urged more impacted servicemembers to contact his office to share their stories. “We’re making real progress because you are making real noise,” he said. “All of you please tell us your stories. You are going to see us amplifying those here in Washington D.C. until we get this fixed.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Claudia Grisales | April 30, 2019 ++]

Burn Pit Toxic Exposure Update 67 ► **Texas to Create a Statewide Registry**

The Texas Senate passed a bill Thursday to create a statewide registry of veterans who were exposed to burn pit smoke. Open burn pits were a common method of waste disposal used by the U.S. military in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Some veterans exposed to the fumes have since reported health problems like cancer, pulmonary issues, and autoimmune disorders. The Texas registry would collect veterans health information and try to isolate trends. It would also function as an outreach tool to inform service members, veterans and their families about:

- The most recent scientific developments on the health effects of open burn pit smoke or other airborne hazards

- The availability of treatment offered by the VA
- The process for applying to the VA for service-related disability compensation
- The manner of appealing to the VA an existing service-related disability rating decision or requesting an increased rating based on these illnesses and conditions

The Department of Veterans Affairs already maintains its own burn pit registry. However, that registry does not allow veterans to report declines in their health, and it does not permit family members to enter health and/or mortality information on a veteran's behalf. Rosie Torres, co-founder of the veterans group Burn Pits 360, said those information gaps prevent VA from getting a full picture of how burn pits have affected veterans. “To not be able to do that really skews the outcome of any proper data for epidemiology,” she said. “This is about addressing the flaws in the national registry, which, as it stands, is a useless tool. Because you don’t have the opportunity to address the true data.”

But, Torres said, the statewide registry seeks to remedy that. “It will allow service members to submit a decline in health. More importantly, it will allow these families to submit death entries, to allow us to track mortality. Sort of a form of acknowledgment, honoring them.” The VA’s current stance is that there is not enough evidence to show that burn pit exposure causes long-term health effects. The bill awaits Gov. Abbott’s signature. It is scheduled to take effect Sept. 1, 2019. [Source: KSTX - San Antonio | Carson Frame | May 2, 2019 ++]

Vet Dental Care Update 01 ► Aspen Dental | Free Care 8 JUN

Aspen Dental dentists and teams will once again be providing free dental care to veterans nationwide on 8 JUN 2019. For the sixth year, nearly 500 Aspen Dental offices nationwide will open their doors to serve veterans in their local communities as part of their community giving initiative, the Healthy Mouth Movement. Starting 1 MAY, veterans can call 844-277-3646 to find a participating Aspen Dental office in their community and schedule an appointment for 8 JUN. Advance appointments are required. Dentists and teams will treat the most urgent needs of each veteran to ensure any dental pain is relieved, including anything from fillings and extractions to basic denture repairs. Routine cleanings and examinations will also be provided free of charge. [Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | May 1, 2019 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 240 ► Unemployment Rate a Record Low of 1.7 Percent in April

The job market has never been stronger for the youngest generation of veterans. The unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans dropped to a record low of 1.7 percent in April, down significantly from March’s figure of 3.1 percent, according to the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics employment data. For context, the previous low for post-9/11 veterans unemployment, a metric that dates back to 2006, was 3.0 percent, recorded in July 2018. It’s worth noting that unemployment rates are volatile and prone to large swings month-to-month, particularly veteran unemployment rates, which are based on small sample sizes. Experts advise analyzing multi-month trends rather than focusing on the data for individual months.

The April unemployment rate was also in record low territory for the overall veteran population. The 2.3 percent rate charted in April is a low that hasn’t been seen since May 2000. This year is shaping up to be the best year for veteran unemployment since 2000 if the numbers for the first third of the year hold steady. For comparison, nonveterans 18 years and older also enjoyed a historically low unemployment rate of 3.3 percent, a significant decrease from March’s 3.9 percent tally but still well above the rates for veterans. In addition to April being a great employment month for veterans, the U.S. added 263,000 jobs and the overall unemployment rate decreased from March’s 3.8

percent to 3.6 percent. The fields that saw the most notable increases in jobs were construction, healthcare, social assistance and business services. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Joshua Axelrod | May 3, 2019 ++]

Homeless Vets Update 94 ► Income Assistance Programs for Veterans

The five (5) following programs assists homeless veterans with monetary help:

1. **Social Security** – a monthly benefit program for people age 62 and over.
2. **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)** – a monthly benefit program for disabled people with little to no income. Go to https://www.disabilityapplicationhelp.org/?gclid=EAJalQobChMIiujdm9WC4gIVgr9kCh02UALWEAYASAAAEgr-vD_BwE to apply.
3. **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)** – a monthly benefit for people who are disabled. To apply go to <https://www.disabilityapplicationhelp.org/Default.aspx?dn=0&mssclid=ae04edf2b4531c2a22a9b13f58b6bb92>.
4. **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** – a cash benefit and work opportunities program for needy families with children. To apply go to <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/tanf>.
5. **VA Compensation** – A monthly benefit paid to veterans who are disabled by injury or disease that developed or worsened in the line of duty. Complete and submit the form Form 21-4138 at <https://va-form-21-4138.com/jsfiller-desk18/?projectId=292197082&expId=4893&expBranch=2#fbae5a3a2a014581a2fc8837363d2895>

[Source: "U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | May 4, 2019 ++]

USERRA Update 21 ► USPS Ordered to Reinstate National Guardsman after 14-YRS

A letter carrier from Auburn, Maine, last week won a legal victory when the U.S. Postal Service was forced to reinstate him in a job after he was absent for 14 years while deployed in the “Global War on Terrorism.” John Patrie, who was called up by the Maine National Guard soon after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists attacks, served almost continuously in U.S. military campaigns that included combat in Afghanistan and Iraq, before his honorable discharge in December 2015, the OSC reported in an 25 APR release. During those years, Patrie regularly provided copies of his orders to his Postal Service managers, maintained his job benefits and expressed a desire to return to mail carrying, the special counsel said.

But the Postal Service informed him in January 2016 that it would not reinstate him because he had “abandoned” his civilian post. His attorneys saw that as a violation of the 1994 Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, which is enforced for federal employees by OSC. At first, Patrie filed a complaint with the Labor Department, whose investigation concluded that USPS violated the veterans protection law, for which Patrie had met the criteria. But after USPS again refused to reinstate him, the department referred his case to OSC, which took it to the Merit Systems Protection Board. That board’s judges held an evidentiary hearing and ruled for Patrie.

“Patrie did everything he could under the law, and he had no idea how long he would be away,” OSC attorney Patrick Boulay told Government Executive. The veteran even kept his locker and union membership. “The whole idea of USERRA is to maintain the employment as an ‘unburned bridge.’ It is the service member’s choice whether to cross that bridge, but the Postal Service decided at the last moment to burn the bridge.” The Postal Service, Boulay added, has been applying its own standards in such cases similarly for years, and is the only agency that doesn’t follow the exceptions to the law’s five-year limit on employment eligibility. “We are very pleased to have won this victory not just for Mr. Patrie but for service members everywhere,” said Special Counsel Henry Kerner. “Our country must honor its commitments to those who serve in uniform and defend our freedoms.”

In its initial decision, the merit board ordered the Postal Service to reinstate Patrie to his position retroactive to January 2016 and provide back pay and benefits. USPS spokesman David Coleman said in a statement: “The Postal Service does not comment on litigation matters; this includes decisions or findings issued for litigation matters.” [Source: GovExec.com | Charles S. Clark | April 29, 2019 ++]

Vet Weight Update 01 ► 78% of Veterans are Considered to be Overweight or Obese

When you are in the service you are more than likely at your healthiest, between physical fitness training and maintaining standards within body composition regulations, the probability of becoming overweight or obese is not great. However, when service members get out the odds are not in their favor. According to Veterans Affairs, 78 percent of veterans are considered to be overweight or obese.

“This is a higher rate than previous estimates in U.S. veterans and is somewhat surprising, since most military servicemembers are fit while serving and are predominantly men, who tend to have lower rates of obesity than women,” Dr. Elina Stefanovics, associate research scientist in Yale’s Department of Psychiatry and at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, said in a statement. The rate was particularly high among younger and non-white veterans, smokers and those with histories of trauma and post-traumatic stress. But veterans can’t collect disability pay because obesity is not a disability related to military service according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Weight and PTS

A Wounded Warrior Project survey of more than 33,000 Post-9/11 veterans found that nearly 52 percent of survey takers were obese and about 6 percent were morbidly obese. Tracey Farrell, vice president of engagement and physical health and wellness for the Wounded Warrior Project told Connecting Vets explains there is more at play than veterans just eating unhealthy. “There is loss of purpose many veterans face as they transition which may lead to depression, anxiety, and destructive behaviors or habits (i.e. overindulgence in food and alcohol; adoption of a sedentary lifestyle). Then there are the possible impacts on the body due to injuries, both visible and invisible, and treatment.” VA research shows that young Iraq and Afghanistan veterans with PTS or depression have a higher likelihood to be overweight or obese.

Why isn't obesity considered a disability?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health recognize obesity as a disease. Medicare covers obesity treatment. But though VA and other research suggest a connection between weight problems such as obesity and service-related disabilities like PTS, the new ruling by VA general counsel only reinforced the VA’s long-held position that obesity is not a qualifying disease or injury under the law for wartime or peacetime compensation. Obesity “occurs over time and is based on various external and internal factors, as opposed to being a discrete incident or occurrence, or a series of discrete incidents or occurrences,” the recent VA ruling said. Obesity can, however, be considered an “extra-schedular rating,” or a factor that can be considered when weighing existing disabilities, according to the VA. It can also be an “intermediate step” between issues that are not service related and those that are and factor into those disability determinations.

Getting help

There is hope for veterans with weight issues, though. The VA offers programs (www.move.va.gov) for veterans struggling with weight and the [Wounded Warrior Project](#) offers intensive, in-depth programs and coaching to help get veterans on a healthier path. “Veterans come to us for help losing weight, but during that process, they also realize that losing weight changes their lives in ways they may not have expected,” said James Herrera, WWP physical health and wellness director. “They get to be there for their families and they see an improvement to their mental health. It can make a world of difference and that’s why we do what we do.”

[Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | May 01, 2019 ++]

Veterans FAQ ► Dental Care for 100% Rated Vets?

Q. I am 100% service connected permanent and total disabled. Can I receive dental care under the Choice program if I live more than 50 miles from the nearest VA dental clinic?

Answers

A1: You might be able to with prior approval from your local VA Medical Center. I would not do it without prior approval as you could get caught with a large bill. (GR) 5/2/19

A2: Best is contact the [VA](#) dental clinic for referral to non-VA dentist. They are best to know if your situation is eligible for a referral. (LK) 5/2/19

A3: Yes you can get Choice dental care so contact the [VA](#) and find out if and what forms you need if any. I had dental done for specialty care for dental that the [VA](#) Dental could not provide. So reason you can not get it. I may try to get implants but sure the VA will not cover them. If the [VA](#) does not give you the information then see a VSO and they should be able to help guide you. (JRM) 5/2/19

Note: Go to <http://www.veterandiscountdirectory.com/question116.html> if you would like to add your experience regarding on this question.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | May 2, 2019 ++]

Veterans FAQ ► Is retroactive disability or disability out of the question?

Q. I served in the USAF from 1970 - 1993, with ten years in the Postal Service. I have many of my active duty medical records, which state kidney problems, high blood pressure, back issues, and other problems. I am 67 years-old now, and all these conditions have been an issue since my retirement. Is retroactive disability or disability out of the question?

Answers

A1: My experience is that it is only retroactive to the date you filed the claim. I had one claim that took two years to be approved, so it was nice to get the two years of back pay. (AB) 2/1/19

A2: Apply for your benefits. The VA will call you in for an exam. Complete a 526ez and submit copies of your disability diagnosis and hopefully have you have been receiving some treatment post active duty, and if so get those treatment records and submit all to the VA's Evidence Intake Center (844) 531-7818. If you need assistance contact a veteran's service office. You can find a list of service offices on the back of the form VAF 21-22 to assist. Better yet you should contact the American Red Cross in Washington DC. 202 632-4612. Good Luck!!! (RT) 2/1/19

A3: I didn't file for disability for my knee until much later. I got 10% but since the amount was less than the retirement check from 22 years in Army I did not get retroactive. The amount was deducted from my retirement check by the VA and sent to me separately each month tax exempt. That is how it was explained to me. (DL) 2/1/19

A4: I submitted my disability request forms for everything in September 2010 I received a denial of my disability request for a few of them in September 2011. Then in February 2017 I received an increase from 30% disability to 60% disability. Although I had submitted all my evidence and documentation they wanted to confirm my conditions with an appointment for me with one of their doctors in January. In February 2017 I was given one month back pay

and that was it! They told me I could get no more because they JUST realized in January that I had the problems which I had submitted for back in 2010! After a hour and 20 minute conversation with over the telephone they looked at all my files and records. They said no that's all you get! I have combat wounds from Vietnam, frag metal next to my lower spine, Tinnitus, significant hearing loss near deaf left ear, hearing aids, PTSD (I had over 100 + combat assaults) and received Purple Heart when wounded, spent 3 1/2months in 4 hospitals with several surgeries. Then after 2 years being treated for PTSD by a Dr. her report was submitted and I am now rated 80% as of Oct 2018 with retro on that for one month too. My combat medic service included Bronze Star -Valor and 5 Army Commendations with V Device for my battles. On my hearing, they responded (after providing all my combat awards to them) their written statement said it appears you may have been in combat and gave me zero on my deafness! They don't care. (BB) 2/1/19

A5: No they are not retroactive. Compensation is paid from date of filing. Go to VSO at the American Legion, VFW, DAV or other Service Organization and file. Take you DD-214 and medical records from service with you. Records such as SF88/93, SF600 and Sick Slips and Treatment records. You should have filed in 1993. (GH) 2/1/19

A6: Retroactive pay would start from the day you filed for disability. You can file for disability but must be able to show some evidence through medical records or a doctor. (MW) 2/2/19

Note: Go to <http://www.veterandiscountdirectory.com/question52.html> if you would like to add your experience regarding on this question.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | May 5, 2019 ++]

Veterans FAQ ► Am I going to get compensated or not?

Q. I was exposed to Agent Orange while in Vietnam. I was stationed aboard USS Catamount LSD-17 from Nov 1965 to 1967 and the stationed in Danang and Dong Ha, RVN 1968-1970. I now have an enlarged prostate and I am sure it is due to handling Agent Orange on the docks in Danang. I am currently being seen by a doctor at Sacramento CA hospital. Question is; am I going to get compensated or not? I was turned down before because they said I didn't have enough evidence.

Answers

A1: You need to do a couple of things. First complete Form 526ez requesting service connection for prostate condition, show proof that you were in Vietnam (DD-214), and get a Nexus Letter (google nexus letter for an example of how it should read) from your doctor stating that he has reviewed your service treatment records and it is in his opinion "it is highly likely" that your enlarged prostate is from your exposure to Agent Orange. Contact a service representative to assist you. A service representative is a free service to veteran's provided by the VA. GOOD LUCK. (RT) 2/1/19

A2: Enlarged prostate is not prostate cancer. Have you filed for Prostate Cancer? Go to a VSO (accredited) with VFW, DAV, Am Legion, or other Service Organization and have them review your denial letter. You appear to have established presumptiveness to Agent Orange by assignments. (GH) 2/1/19

A3: I have a service connected disability and in 1972 they gave me a 10% disability. They keep turning me down for an increase until last year. I got a VA attorney involved and I went up to 60%.Try it. (FJ) 2/2/19

Note: Go to <http://www.veterandiscountdirectory.com/question53.html> if you would like to add your experience regarding on this question.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | May 5, 2019 ++]

WWII Vets 192 ► Vernon Foster | French Legion of Honor Recipient

Vernon Foster, a centenarian, World War II tank commander and retired Baltimore County dairy farmer is now a French knight. Foster, 100, fought the Nazis in France and Germany during the war from his Sherman tank "Dottie," named after his wife. He received the French Legion of Honor badge at the French Embassy in Washington, D.C. Established by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802, the Legion of Honor is the highest French order of distinction for military and civil merits. The country has previously honored other American veterans who helped liberate the country from Germany in World War II.

The honor was bestowed to Foster and four other American World War II veterans just shy of the 75th anniversary of D-Day, when allied forces invaded France's northern beaches on June 6, 1944, in the Normandy region. The event will be attended by retired Sens. Robert Dole and John Warner and Energy Secretary Rick Perry. Foster was 26 years old when he landed on the Normandy beaches a few months later on Nov. 20, 1944. More than 70 years later, Foster is matter of fact about the recognition. "I probably shouldn't say this, but I've been honored so many times, I have so many plaques I can't even count them," Foster said. But, he added, he's "always glad to know that other people appreciate" the sacrifice he made during World War II and approaches most honoring ceremonies similarly. "I guess I take it as it comes," he said, laughing.

An embassy spokeswoman said any American veteran who can prove they were in France during the war may be awarded the Legion of Honor. Foster was a lieutenant in the U.S. Army commanding an M-4 Sherman tank. His unit fought intense battles in France's Alsace region on the German border before pushing deep into Germany, where they fought the Nazis in Herrlisheim and Ludwigshafen. He commanded a crew that included himself, a gunner, a loader, a driver and an assistant driver. Foster was a commander and platoon leader with the 2nd Platoon, Company A, 714th Tank Battalion. It was part of the fabled 12th Division that was attached briefly to the command of Gen. George S. Patton Jr. Foster was hit by German artillery shell shrapnel. Medics pulled most of it out, but he still has a piece of shrapnel behind an eye.



Vernon Foster, front, with 2nd Platoon, Company A, 714th Tank Battalion (left) and today (right)

Rick Scavetta, a journalist with the Aberdeen Proving Ground News, wrote about Foster's military history in 2016. He said interviewing Foster is like "seeing a piece of living history." He visited Foster at his home in Baltimore County, where he said Foster has a table with 200 letters that his wife, Dottie, wrote him in the war and another 200 that he wrote her. Stephen Belkoff, who met Foster about 10 years ago through the Third Gunpowder Agricultural Club, noted the clarity of Foster's memory. "His mind is incredibly sharp. He has attention to details — things people shouldn't remember," said Belkoff, a mechanical engineering professor at the Johns Hopkins University. "I'm a big fan of history, so the guy's a walking textbook. So I'd rather listen to him than read a book at the library."

Belkoff said Foster's recognition is well overdue. "He was part of what's called the Ghost Division," Belkoff said. "A lot of what he and his group did didn't get officially recognized because they weren't supposed to exist." Foster

told The Baltimore Sun in a 2017 interview that going to war didn't feel like a sacrifice, but rather like a reflex. "Most guys wanted to go because they had heard so much about what Hitler had done. "It's like if you're going out to plant corn," the lifelong Parkton farmer said. "You just do it." [Source: The Baltimore Sun | Catherine Rentz | May 08, 2019 ++]

WWII Vets 193 ► Donald Keller | French Legion of Honor Recipient

U.S. Army Veteran Donald Keller, from Strasburg, Virginia, received the French Legion of Honor during a special ceremony at the French Embassy in Washington, D.C. earlier this week. The 96-year old received this honor because of heroic actions during the invasion of Normandy, where he was wounded during a mortar attack at Saint-Lo and helped shepherd two of his fellow soldiers to safety.



Donald Keller with former U.S. Senator, Bob Dole

Keller was drafted in the U.S. Army on New Year's Day in 1943. His father, Mackall B. Keller, served in the U.S. Navy during World War I. When asked if it was hard on his father to see his son go overseas to fight in another great war, he said, "it was harder on my mother; she wrote me every day I was gone. I didn't always get the letters on time, but she always wrote me." Training for Keller included a brutal stint in Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, where he had to learn how to survive in the cold for almost 30 days. Keller deployed to Europe during World War II as a radio operator and was in one of the advances on Omaha Beach during the invasion of Normandy. "Something people didn't think about was how rough the seas were," said Keller. "If you jumped when the ship was too low you would injure yourself on the landing craft; you had to jump off at just the right time."

Keller was tasked to set up a radio transmission station in Saint Louis. During the task he and other service members went out of the woods and into a clearing; unfortunately that was a mistake. "The next morning it was rainy before daylight. There were six of us. The Germans dropped mortars and killed one of the men instantly and wounded two others. Two of the other soldiers fled," said Keller. "Even though I was standing with blood all over my face I was not going to leave them. We were under fire all the way to the field hospital. They were in bad shape, but they were alive."

The U.S. Army sent Keller back to London for surgery. At first, they said he would finish his tour in London with the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) led by General Dwight D. Eisenhower. A few months later SHAEF moved to Versailles, so Keller was back in France. "I had always been a radio operator, but with this new assignment I moved to radio maintenance," said Keller. "We set up transmitters and receivers six miles apart and the transmitters were in these old horse stables." He then deployed to the Battle of the Bulge with a mobile radio unit in Luxembourg, Belgium. He was hit with mortars again and sent back to Versailles before completing his tour and coming back to the states.

Two years ago, Keller’s caregiver, Carole Synowitz, filled out the application for the French Legion of Honor knowing that Keller received two Purple Hearts and was wounded in France. They didn’t know about the Legion of Honor until they took an Honor Flight trip to Washington, D.C. Synowitz received a phone call a few months ago that Keller had been accepted and was invited to the ceremony at the French embassy. She coordinated the efforts for him and ensured all the paperwork was correct and that they would have transportation. “There was no way I was going to let him miss this,” she said. The event was larger than anyone in the group anticipated. Upon arrival, they had found out the event was a D-Day Anniversary celebration sponsored by the World War II Foundation. There were almost 500 people in attendance all to honor the five Veterans who were receiving the Legion of Honor. There were politicians, military leaders and even celebrities in attendance, but Keller was most excited about meeting former Senator Bob Dole, who received a special leadership award from the foundation.

After the Army, Keller returned home to Strasburg, Virginia, and kept working on radio equipment. He started his own business and went to work for and retired from what is now known as the Federal Emergency Management Agency. He built his own radio transmitter in his basement and has volunteered at the local fire department for almost 20 years. George Rathore met Keller through the Strasburg Fire Department, where Keller visits almost every day. “It was an honor to attend this ceremony and drive Mr. Keller to this event,” said Rathore. “He deserves this honor for his acts of bravery and heroism during World War II.” “This means a lot,” said Keller, who was at a loss for words. “I was definitely not expecting all of this. It was very special.

The French Legion of Honor was first established by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802. American Veterans who served in France or with French forces are eligible to be recognized for their service as Knights of the Legion of Honor. [Source: Vantage Point | May 10, 2019 ++]

WWII Allied Vets ▶ **These Canadians Would Be Legends, if People Knew Their Stories**

In April 1943, the Halifax bomber that Wilfred Canter co-piloted was shot down on the way back from a mission over Stuttgart. Canter parachuted out into occupied France, breaking a leg when he landed. The only member of the six-man crew to evade capture, he was given food and clothing by a local family, then passed to members of the Resistance, who smuggled him to Paris, then Bordeaux, then over the Pyrenees by foot into Spain. From there he made his way to Gibraltar and then England. King George VI personally awarded Canter a Distinguished Flying Medal at Buckingham Palace, where he was cited for displaying “courage and tenacity of a high order.”



Mickey Heller’s World War II service photo (left) and with his fellow aviators (far left) plus Wilfred Canter (right)

After less than a month of home leave in Toronto, Canter — one of about 17,000 Jewish Canadians who fought in World War II — deemed himself fit for duty and returned to England to resume his bombing missions, including one in which his plane took fire but returned safely to base. In April 1944, Canter was shot down again, on a bombing run

over Düsseldorf, and was captured by the Germans. After a lengthy Gestapo interrogation, he was detained for nine months in Stalag Luft III, a German prisoner-of-war camp made famous in the 1963 film “The Great Escape,” which recounted how 76 British and Allied aviators tunneled to freedom. All but three of the prisoners were caught, and 50 were executed. Records and chronology indicate that Canter arrived at that camp at least a month after the escape.

As the Allies were closing in on Germany, the camp’s remaining war prisoners were marched west, away from the advancing Soviet Army. Canter escaped and managed to connect with a British unit. Family lore adds that he was briefly recaptured by a German officer, but resistance forces shot the German dead, freeing Canter again and handing him the officer’s Luger pistol, which he kept as a memento.

I didn’t know Canter, but my grandfather, Mickey Heller, did. *Zaidy* — I’ve always called him by the Yiddish word for “grandpa” — speaks fondly of his friend Wilf, the fellow Jewish veteran of the Royal Canadian Air Force who survived three near-death experiences and almost a year as a prisoner of war. Canter would be legendary, if only more people knew the legend.

Unlike their celebrated American and British comrades, Canadian veterans of World War II are rarely remembered in triumphant narratives because there were far fewer of them. Jewish Canadians even less so, but they should be. Though he steadfastly refuses to share his personal war experiences, my grandfather notes with pride that about 40 percent of the military-age Jewish male population of Canada enrolled for active service, most of them volunteers who were dispatched overseas. Roughly 44,000 Canadian service members died in the Second World War, and more than a third of those were in the Air Force, including many of the men with whom my grandfather served. Only in 2011, after years of rebuffing inquiries into his wartime experiences, did my grandfather finally start opening up to me, asking me to help research Canter for a Toronto war memorial for Jewish vets. In the years since, unraveling Canter’s story has helped me understand my grandfather’s past — as well as his reluctance to speak about it — and opened a window into the often-overlooked contribution of Jewish-Canadian airmen in World War II.

My widowed grandfather remains relatively vibrant at age 97, with four children, nine grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren as his lasting legacy. While he points to Canter as an example of Jewish Canadians’ service, his own World War II ordeal remains a mystery. All I know for sure is that Mickey Heller was a navigator in the Lancaster and Vickers Wellington bombers, and he flew missions over Europe from his base in England between 1942 and 1944.

Heller’s biography is almost a cliché of what has become known as the greatest generation: Born into poverty, he went off to war and then came back to marry his sweetheart. He had a family, and he started a clothing business in Toronto. After retiring, he spent his winters in Florida, playing golf and bridge and regaling his grandchildren with jokes and Yiddish sayings. But there was one chapter of his life that remained perpetually sealed: He would never tell us, or anyone else, what he endured during the war. “You don’t like talking about the war that much, do you?” I asked him during a 2011 summer visit to Toronto. “What’s there to talk about?” he replied. “A lot of guys went over, not a lot came back.”

When given the chance, he would talk about almost anything besides himself or deflect with a joke. “I didn’t do much,” he told me in 2015, in his typical modest fashion. “I fought in the battle of Piccadilly Circus, though. Have you heard of that one?” he said, chuckling. “That’s where you met all the girls.” Although two of his sons, nearly all his grandsons and a great-grandson have served in the military, the only advice my grandfather ever dispensed to us was: “Never volunteer” and “Keep your feet clean and dry.” But eventually he began to talk about Canter.

According to Canter’s military records, he embarked from Canada on Aug. 21, 1942, and arrived in Britain on 1 SEP. The vessel that carried him across the Atlantic was the Queen Elizabeth, then the largest passenger ship in the world. It was during this journey to war, on a luxury liner converted into a packed troop transport that my grandfather and Canter met and bonded. “There were thousands of guys on that boat,” he told me, “and we did most of the talking while waiting in line for hours to get a meal.” Canter and my grandfather were each born in 1921 and grew up in downtown Toronto, each graduating from high school before enlisting, earning their wings in training and heading off to battle. They exchanged letters throughout their time in combat. Canter invited my grandfather to the ceremony in

London where he received his Distinguished Flying Medal, but my grandfather couldn't go. His last letter to Canter, sent in 1944, was returned with a military stamp on the envelope noting "present location not known" and a handwritten note that read: "Missing." By then, Canter had already been taken prisoner.

The paths they followed after the war diverged significantly. My grandfather, the youngest of seven children, returned home and never looked back. Canter eventually made it to Toronto, but he never reconnected with my grandfather, and he struggled to find his way after the war, I learned from his family. He had energy and drive, but he had trouble finding a job in which he could apply it. He worked for a while as a draftsman, but he must have longed to fly again, and when he heard, through word of mouth in the Jewish community, that there were aviation opportunities in the new state of Israel, he went.

In 1948, as Israel prepared to declare itself a sovereign nation, it sought foreign assistance to fight the Arab nations moving against it. Thousands of mostly Jewish volunteers from around the world with combat experience made their way to Israel — often in clandestine fashion, to avoid running into trouble with their own governments. Canter left behind a girlfriend in Toronto for the chance to fly again, I learned from Wayne Gershon, one of Canter's nephews, who was born after Canter's death. "I think it was personal for Wilf to double down and go to Israel," he told me. "He recognized the cause. I don't have the impression that he relished battle just for its own sake."

Canter arrived in Israel on Aug. 5, 1948, one of just five Jewish-Canadian World War II veteran pilots in a newly minted Air Force that had few aviators with any significant operational experience. Late on the night of 24 OCT, Canter and four other crewmen, two of them Canadian, took off in their rickety Douglas C-47 Dakota transport from Tel Aviv's Sde Dov airport to deliver supplies to the isolated Negev outpost of Sdom, which was encircled by Egyptian forces. Just minutes after takeoff, the right engine began to overheat and spit out flames. Canter redirected for an emergency landing, but the engine exploded within sight of the airfield, breaking off a wing and sending the Dakota spiraling to the ground. It exploded on impact, killing everyone onboard, in one of the first fatal aerial transport accidents in Israel's history. Canter was 27 when he died.

By that time, my grandfather was already a struggling young salesman and father in Toronto. He learned of Canter's death only years later and didn't delve into the details until enlisting my help to tell his friend's story. "He had quite a life," my grandfather recalled. "The funniest thing about this guy was that he was a crier. He had balls, but he cried at the drop of a hat."

It's impossible to gauge what World War II did to many of the veterans who served — particularly those like my grandfather who flew in bombers. About 45 percent of the flight personnel in Canada's wartime Bomber Command perished — approximately 10,250 in all. Between March 1943 and February 1944, the period when my grandfather was deployed, members of crews that ran a full tour of 30 bombing operations had a grim 16 percent survival rate, according to the Bomber Command Museum of Canada. Unlike their American counterparts, the Canadians and the Royal Air Force flew their missions at night. Their aircraft had no belly gunners and were at the mercy of Luftwaffe fighters that attacked from below. Whenever they lifted off on a mission, they departed with the knowledge that this sortie could easily be their last.

"The Germans used to come up from the bottom, and boom, that was it," my grandfather told me in a rare revelation. In addition to flying in daytime, American crews flew en masse, and "they had five or six gunners in each plane, and lots of firepower, so the Germans couldn't get close to them," he said. The Royal Air Force and Canadian forces, by contrast, "had a terrible time."

Even before he opened up about Canter, my grandfather's scant stories of the war revolved around other men's exploits. He told me about his second cousin, Alfred Brenner, a Canadian pilot whose three-man crew met a convoy of 12 German merchant ships accompanied by five destroyers and took one of the freighters out with torpedoes before being shot down. Brenner's bomber settled into the waves, and the men escaped on a dinghy. They were picked up after drifting for two days in the North Sea near the English coast. Brenner was honored with the Distinguished Flying Cross.

My grandfather also told me about his friend Somer James, with whom he went to synagogue services when they were teenagers. James was a pacifist who avoided the army because he abhorred violence. “So he went to the merchant marine instead, which was even worse,” my grandfather said with a laugh. James found himself on a ship in Italy loaded with high explosives and moored next to a munitions depot when German bombers attacked. With fires raging on the dock, he jumped ashore and wrestled the ship free from its moorings so it could move to safety. For his actions, James received a British Empire Medal and the Lloyd’s War Medal for Bravery at Sea. “He was the only one who got those two medals for one deed,” my grandfather said.

And then there was Canter. During his months in captivity, Canter kept a prisoner-of-war log in which he took notes, drew sketches and preserved mementos. The diary — which his nephew Wayne shared with me — contains no reference to the escape, nor does it chronicle his Jewish faith, details that might have proved fatal if discovered by Nazi troops. Instead, he described the daily routines, the food they ate, barley and jam, and the locker-room conversations among the prisoners, or *kriegies*, as they called themselves. He listed the 102 books he read in captivity and the major events he witnessed, especially as the end of the war was approaching. “V2 rocket flew over the camp,” he wrote on April 4, 1945. “Plenty of excitement the last few days as our armies close in on this area.”

He wrote how the *kriegies* lived off the surrounding land, where they found “countless chicken, geese, turkeys, lambs and pigs.” He noted the dates on which he received parcels from the Red Cross and listed the diseases contracted in the camp. “I would be blessed to have been able to commiserate with my Uncle Wilfred if he had survived,” Wayne Gershon said. “I can only try to imagine the perspective of someone who lived a life as he did.”

Perhaps my grandfather’s stubborn compartmentalization of World War II is what helped him avoid the seductions of war that appear to have lured Canter back. My grandfather kept quiet and moved on to live a long, fulfilling life. Canter was seemingly sucked back to fight for Israel and ended up buried in a foreign land, thousands of miles from home.

One day in the summer of 2012, I decided to go visit him. The resting ground in Rehovot in central Israel is a typical Israeli military cemetery: rows upon rows of simple, uniform, rectangular plots covered by tiny manicured garden beds and headstones engraved with each soldier’s basic information. It was empty, and I found Canter’s grave site easily. Against an eerie silence, I placed a small pebble on his headstone. “Zaidy says hi,” I said aloud. I wondered if anyone else had paid a visit to his grave in the past 64 years. It made me question how many other anonymous men like him were out there — even in just this cemetery — who had lived short, dramatic lives, but left little behind.

In 2002, the Israeli government announced plans to build an official museum for the Jewish soldiers who served in World War II. But the museum has yet to open, mired in bureaucratic wrangling, as the few Jewish war veterans still alive continue to die off. And, as my grandfather has proved, not all the veterans want that part of their lives memorialized. When I told him that I had filled out his profile on the prospective museum’s website and that I hoped his story would one day be featured in its halls alongside Wilf Canter’s, he demurred, as usual. “I’m just happy if they leave me alone,” he said.

Some 1.5 million Jewish soldiers fought for the Allies in World War II; more than 250,000 of them were killed, including some 450 Canadians. Most of their stories are lost to history, and my grandfather’s is probably going to join that long list. That’s the way he wants it. [Source: The New York Times Magazine | Aron Heller | May 8, 2019 ++]

D-Day Memories Update 01 ► **One by One they Fade as War’s Witnesses Die**

One more funeral, one less witness to the world’s worst war. **Bernard Dargols** lived almost long enough to join the celebrations next month marking 75 years since the D-Day, 75 years since he waded onto Omaha Beach as an American soldier to help liberate France from the Nazis who persecuted his Jewish family. Just shy of his 99th birthday, Dargols died last week. To the strains of his beloved American jazz, he was laid to rest 9 MAY at France’s

most famous cemetery, Pere Lachaise. An ever-smaller number of veterans will stand on Normandy's shores on June 6 for D-Day's 75th anniversary. Many will salute fallen comrades from their wheelchairs. As each year passes, more firsthand witnesses to history are gone.



Bernard Dargols poses (left) in this May 8, 2014 photo and the coffin of late Jewish French-American World War II veteran during his funeral ceremony at Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris, 9 MAY 2019

Four weeks from now, U.S. President Donald Trump and other world leaders will pay homage to the more than 2 million American, British, Canadian and other Allied forces involved in the D-Day operation on June 6, 1944, and the ensuing battle for Normandy that helped pave the way for Hitler's defeat. Dargols outlived most of them, and knew the importance of sustaining their memory. "I'm convinced that we have to talk about the war to children, so that they understand how much they need to preserve the peace," he wrote in a 2012 memoir. Until the end, Dargols battled complacency, intolerance and Holocaust deniers who claim that D-Day was "just a movie." In recent years, "seeing any type of violence, of anti-Semitism and racism, either in France in Europe or in the U.S." really upset him, granddaughter Caroline Jolivet said.

Normandy schoolteachers, veterans' families and military memorials are laboring against time to record survivors' stories for posterity. In history's biggest amphibious invasion, on that fateful June 6, some 160,000 Allied forces came ashore to launch Operation Overlord to wrest Normandy from Nazi control. More than 4,000 Allied forces were killed on that day alone. Nearly half a million people were killed on both sides by the time the Allies liberated Paris in August 1944. It's unclear exactly how many D-Day veterans are alive today. The survivors are now in their 90s or 100s. Of the 73,000 Americans who took part, just 30 are currently scheduled to come to France for this year's anniversary. The U.S. Veterans Administration estimates that about 348 American World War II veterans die every day. All but three of the 177 French forces involved in D-Day are gone.

Every day, the names of the departed accumulate, tweeted by veterans groups, published in local newspapers. Dargols wanted to be in Normandy this year, it meant a lot to him. His story is both unusual and emblematic: Born in France, he left Paris in 1938 for New York to learn his father's sewing machine trade. He watched from afar, sickened, as the Nazis occupied his homeland. His Jewish relatives were sent to camps, or fled in fear. Determined to fight back but skeptical of French General Charles de Gaulle's resistance force, he joined the U.S. Army instead. With the 2nd Infantry Division, Dargols sailed from Britain on 5 JUN and only made it to Normandy on 8 JUN, after three interminable days on choppy seas. The road he took inland from Omaha Beach now carries his name.

The battle to wrest Normandy from the Nazis took longer than the Allies thought, but for Dargols the prize at the end was invaluable. When he made it to Paris, he went to his childhood apartment and found his mother — unexpectedly alive. For four decades, he didn't talk much about the war. But as more and more survivors died, and at his granddaughter's urging, he realized the importance of speaking out and sharing his stories with schools and journalists. Friends and family remembered him Thursday as shy but courageous, a lover of oysters and pastrami sandwiches, known for his mischievous smile.

Jolivet, his granddaughter, told the AP of his yearning for leaders who "bring people together, instead of divide them." Dargols would have had a clear message for the D-Day anniversary, she said: "Never take democracy for granted. Dictatorship is always a bad solution. Violence is always a bad solution. Keep democracy alive. Fight for

democracy, for freedom, for peace." The cultural director at Normandy's World War II memorial in Caen, Isabelle Bournier, frets about this fading message, as she watches schoolchildren cycle through her museum every day. "The parents and grandparents of 13-year-olds today didn't experience the war, so the family stories, the family history — where helmets are brought out, where we spoke about what it was like — has been lost," she said. "They don't know the names of the landing beaches," she says. "Pupils spend less time studying World War II than they did 30 years ago, and so the role of D-Day has been reduced."

Dargols himself worried about the day when all the veterans will be gone. "It could start again," he wrote in his memoir. "We must be vigilant, at all times." [Source: The Associated Press | Angela Charlton | May 9, 2019 ++]

Obit: John Dudley Crouchley ► JUN 1944 | WWII Aviator

The long journey home for a World War II aviator finally came to an end 4 MAY with a funeral in Bristol, Rhode Island. Lt. John Dudley Crouchley Jr. was laid to rest next to his wife and son in the North Burial Ground almost 75 years after he died in fighting over Europe. Though much time has passed, the ceremony was stirring and bittersweet for the dozens of relatives and community members in attendance, whose tears sprang not only from grief but from a sense of relief. "It's emotional," said John Dudley Crouchley IV, his grandson, "but it's almost like a homecoming."



Low cloud cover prevented a military flyover, but an honor guard played taps and fired a three-volley salute. Crouchley's descendants, including granddaughter Autumn Williams, were presented with an American flag. "It's nice to finally have closure," Williams said. Crouchley, a Hope High School and Rhode Island College graduate, was a first lieutenant in the Army Air Forces based in Italy. He was flying a B-24 bomber in an operation over Romania in June 1944 when he was attacked by enemy aircraft. Crouchley successfully guided the plane so that nine crew members could escape and parachute into neighboring Bulgaria, but he was unable to save himself before the plane crashed into a mountain.

His remains were missing for decades. Fourteen years ago, an effort was launched to solve the mystery, in part deepened by confusion about where his plane had gone down. His relatives, the relatives of other crew members and a retired police officer all played a part in the effort. With the help of DNA testing and an archaeological dig, the news came last year that Crouchley's remains had been located in Bulgaria. On 2 APR, Crouchley's remains arrived at T.F. Green Airport with military honors. Capt. John Hatfield, a Rhode Island Army National Guard chaplain, told the mourners at Crouchley's funeral that the pilot's life and death were "so long ago, but still affecting our lives today."

Love, Hatfield said, was often portrayed as an emotion rather than a sacrifice — as the way people make us feel rather than pouring ourselves out for others. With his actions in the skies over wartime Europe, Crouchley exemplified sacrifice for his crew, his family and his country, Hatfield said. [Source: Associated Press | Tom Davies | April 28, 2019 ++]

Obit: Tristan Laue ▶ 4 MAY 2019 | Married Five Hours

When Tristan Laue joined the Army in July 2016, he never envisioned an enlistment that would be cut drastically short, but an indiscriminate universe had other ideas. Laue was medically discharged from the service in April 2018 after it was discovered that the young soldier had developed a rare form of liver cancer. Determined to battle the disease, Laue carried on with his life, attending the University of Northern Iowa while seeing his relationship with his girlfriend, Tianna, blossom in ways her family never expected. “Talking to my mom ... she said, ‘Some people don’t get what you two had in the amount of time, like they’ll be together for years and still not have the same connection that you guys did,’” Tianna told KWVL.



But Tristan’s illness continued to advance relentlessly, diminishing with it the couple’s hopes for a long life together. With the writing on the wall becoming more clear with each passing day, Laue made the decision to pursue one final wish and proposed to Tianna on Easter Sunday. But his health was declining, and rapidly. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, Laue’s family enlisted the help of the local community, which put together a ceremony just 48 hours after he proposed, KWVL reported. In the backyard of Tristan’s family home, the couple exchanged vows, becoming Mr. and Mrs. Laue. Just five hours later, the 20-year-old veteran succumbed to his disease — dying after a nearly two-year battle. Tristan Laue was buried 4 MAY in Waverly, Iowa.

His former classmates created a [GoFundMe page](#) to raise money for a memorial in his honor. “All proceeds will be going directly to the memorial as well as any funds left over will be going to help his loved ones in any way they need!” the page says. “Help us remember a great Chickasaw who brought laughter and kindness to us all!” Tianna Laue, married for just five hours before losing her husband, told KWVL the lessons she’s learned from the experience, however brief, will last a lifetime. **“Make sure you tell people you love them because you never know when you won’t be able to.”** [Source: ArmyTimes | J.D. Simkins | May 9, 2019 ++]

Obit: Granville Coggs ▶ 6 MAY 2019 | A Tuskegee Airman

Granville Coggs, who was one of the nation’s first black military pilots during World War II, has died at the age of 93. He died Monday in San Antonio after a bout of pneumonia, family members told local news station KENS5.



Granville Coggs poses in front of an AT-6 at Tuskegee Army Air Field, Ala.

Coggs served in the U.S. Army Air Corps and was a member of the Tuskegee Airmen from 1943 to 1946. He then went on to become a doctor, invented a non-invasive patented device for breast cancer detection, played and sang with a variety of musical groups, and was a gold medalist in the Senior Olympics, according to his obituary. Coggs met his wife, Maud, during his military training when she was a Tuskegee Institute student, and the two were married for 73 years. He retired from the Air Force Reserve in 1985 as a lieutenant colonel.

His military service was a point of pride for him, his daughter Anita Rowell told News4 San Antonio. As a Tuskegee airman in the segregated Army Air Corps, he earned military badges for aerial gunner, aerial bombardier and multiengine pilot. "He enjoyed wearing his Tuskegee Airman cap out in public, and he enjoyed that because he was just waiting on someone to recognize the cap and say 'Are you a Tuskegee Airman?' and he would say, 'Yes I am,'" his daughter Anita told News4 San Antonio.

Coggs recounted his first solo flight in Tuskegee, Ala., for Nebraska Magazine in 2012. "For black people all over the South back then, such an accomplishment seemed almost unthinkable," he said. "But there I was, headed toward the clouds and feeling very proud of myself because I knew I was proving what so many black people had been saying for so many years in this country: 'If you'll just give us a chance, we can meet every challenge that comes our way — and we will succeed.'" [Source: Stars & Stripes | May 11, 2019 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 15 MAY 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 | May 15, 2019 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ▶ As of 15 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.
- PDF: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf.
- Word: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc.

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

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

[Source: Retiree/Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | May 15, 2019 ++]

Vet State Benefits ▶ Michigan 2019

The state of Michigan provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Vet State Benefits – MI**” for an overview of the below benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the following refer to <http://www.michigan.gov/dmva/0,1607,7-126-2362---,00.html> and <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/michigan-state-veterans-benefits.html>

- Housing Benefits
- Financial Assistance Benefits
- Employment Assistance

- Education Benefits
- Recreation Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits
- Discounts

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits> | May 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.

Feres Doctrine Update 15 ► H.R.2244 | Military Medical Accountability Act of 2019

Army Sgt. First Class Richard Stayskal isn't working to change an obscure court ruling that prohibits him from suing the military health system -- the one that missed his terminal lung cancer -- just for himself. He is doing it for his wife, children and the service members who could become victims of military medical malpractice, he told members of the House Armed Services personnel subcommittee on Tuesday. "My children are definitely the true victims of along with my wife. The hardest thing I have to do is to explain to my children ... is that I have no good answers," regarding their future, said the Green Beret, who is dying from metastatic lung cancer. Stayskal's name appears on a new bill introduced 30 APR by subcommittee Chairwoman Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) honoring the soldier's fight against a policy that bars U.S. troops from suing the federal government for medical malpractice.

The H.R.2422 **SFC Richard Stayskal Military Medical Accountability** bill would amend the Federal Tort Claims Act to allow military personnel to sue the federal government for damages relating to injury or death in cases of medical malpractice by military doctors. The bill would pave the way for those with pending claims against military providers at the time of passage. It would also allow service members with future claims to sue. It would not apply to past cases, nor would it apply to mistakes made outside military medical facilities or clinics, whether in combat, at battalion aid stations or on ships.

Speier said the legislation is needed because the federal government has "let service members down" in depriving them of legal rights. "A [prisoner] can sue under the FTCA for malpractice but a service member cannot who is not in a combat setting? This is a gross example of judicial activism of the worse kind," Speier said. Stayskal testified 30 APR alongside Alexis Witt, the widow of an airman who suffered brain damage in 2003 following an appendectomy,

and Rebecca Lipe, a former Air Force judge advocate and attorney who was injured by ill-fitting body armor that prompted a series of unnecessary surgeries and eventually led to infertility.

Witt said the nurse who gave her husband, Air Force Staff Sgt. Dean Patrick Witt, an overdose of fentanyl that caused cardiac arrest and irreversible brain damage, had been involved in the death of another patient a year before her husband's surgery, and she "went on to kill two more patients" afterward. "If the appropriate action had been taken on this nurse during her first legal negligent episode, Dean would still be alive today," Witt told subcommittee members.

The Feres doctrine is a 69-year-old legal ruling that precludes troops from suing the federal government for injuries deemed incidental to military service. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in three separate cases in 1950 that the Federal Tort Claims Act, the law that permits citizens sue the government for wrongdoings by federal employees or agencies, does not apply to most service members for injuries resulting from the negligence of other military personnel. The justices added that the ruling was needed to ensure that Congress was not "burdened with private bills on behalf of military and naval personnel."

During the hearing, Dwight Stirling, a former military attorney and CEO of the Center for Law and Military Policy, called the Feres doctrine "the most spurious, discredited legal doctrine in our history." "To [Justice Antonin Scalia], the ruling was activism at its worst. He also condemned there was a double standard at the heart of the doctrine, that it only applies to military personnel, not to their family members or retirees," Stirling said. Supporters of Feres, however, argue that negating the policy would upset order and discipline within the ranks. They say military personnel already have a robust compensation package that is provided to them or their surviving family members in cases of malpractice. In a recent court filing, the Solicitor General of the United States said the military has an established systems and limits on malpractice help the military pay for health care for military dependents and retirees. "Service members are entitled to generous, no-fault statutory benefits for injuries sustained as a result of medical services provided by the military," Solicitor General Noel Francisco wrote.

During testimony on Tuesday, Paul Figley, professor of legal rhetoric at American University's Washington College of Law, agreed with that argument, made earlier this year as part of a Feres case currently before the U.S. Supreme Court. "It is understandable that such people are frustrated and they perceive that they or their loved ones are being treated unfairly ... from the perspective of fostering the long-term success of the critically important institution, the U.S. military, however, that remedy is a mistake. Simply put, Congress should not alter the Feres doctrine. Doing so would disrupt the vital and special relationships between the government and its service members," Figley said.

Speier has built a bipartisan coalition of support for her bill. Cosponsors include Rep. Richard Hudson (R-NC), Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD), Rep. Guy Reschenthaler (R-PA), Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA), Rep. Markwayne Mullin (R-CA), Rep. Charlie Crist, D-Florida, and Rep. Greg Steube (R-FL). Lawmakers, including Hudson, whose district includes Fort Bragg where the Stayskal family lives, said the legislation is needed to ensure that military personnel and families receive quality health care, because it would hold military doctors responsible and accountable for their actions. "My priority is doing right by my constituent Rich ... I admire him and the Stayskal family's courage to advocate for these changes," Hudson said. [Source: Military.com | By Patricia Kime | 30 Apr 2019 ++]

Reserve DD-214 ► S.____ | The Reserve Component DD-214 Act

"This bill will ensure that members of the National Guard and Reserve receive the complete record of their federal and state service currently provided to our active duty service members," said Senator Lankford. "National Guard and Reserve personnel should be fully recognized for all of their service at home and abroad so that they receive the full benefits promised to them. I'm glad to join Senator Peters to introduce this legislation, and I encourage my colleagues

to pass this bill in the days ahead. This change will help us to continue to support the women and men who have dedicated their lives to protecting our nation.” Nationally, there are approximately 840,000 Guardsmen and Reservists

“The Reserve Component DD-214 Act is long overdue legislation to recognize with parity National Guard and Reservists alongside our Active counterpart's service to our nation,” said Scott L. Meyers, President, National Guard Association of Michigan. “We appreciate Senator Peters for introducing this legislation and leading this bipartisan effort. Having all servicemembers using the same, recognizable document will save time and resources while ensuring all servicemembers can access the care and benefits they’ve earned.”

In addition to directing all branches of the military to provide Reserve Component servicemembers with a DD-214 Form upon their retirement or separation from the service, the Reserve Component DD-214 Act of 2019 updates the form to show all periods of service to include annual training and inactive training periods and total inactive service time for a member’s current service period. Additionally, the bill will bring commonality to discharge forms for all components of the military regardless if they are active or reserve, streamlines the administrative requirements on the National Guard by reducing the number of separation documents administrative support specialists must be trained and proficient completing. It provides all service members with proof of service that will consolidate all service periods allowing them to apply for all entitled benefits while reducing confusion at federal, state and local agencies. [Source: <https://www.lankford.senate.gov> | May 9, 2019 ++]

Military Spouse Employment Update 06 ► **H.R. ___/S. ___ | PCS Act**

In an effort to help military spouses hold onto their jobs, a bipartisan group of lawmakers introduced new legislation 9 MAY to create universal licensing standards for a host of professions and to modify state residency rules to ease barriers for frequently moving families. “We have a whole pool of people who are talented, who have the skills we need for our jobs, and we put up all these barriers to them,” said Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), one of the sponsors of the measure. “This is a way not just to help military spouses, but to help the economy as a whole.”

The bill — dubbed the **Portable Certification of Spouses (PCS) Act** — was unveiled on the eve of Military Spouse Appreciation Day at a Capitol Hill event featuring second lady Karen Pence, whose son serves in the Marine Corps. She announced plans for a White House summit next week with leaders from 46 national businesses to talk about ways to create more job opportunities for the spouses of servicemembers, calling it a critical need for the country. “Spouses are the backbone of the military family, and they can contribute directly to the strength and readiness of our troops,” Pence said. “It is imperative we support them, because they play a significant role in the defense of our nation.”

Defense Department surveys have shown that about one in four military spouses are unemployed, despite efforts in recent years to find solutions to job challenges facing them. About one-third of those with jobs are in careers that require some type of state occupational license. States have adopted a patchwork of rules surrounding credentialing and re-licensing rules surrounding military spouses, but many still face long waits and complicated paperwork when seeking a job after a military move. The new measure aims to fix that in two ways. First, spouses could maintain state residency even after a move, allowing them to keep their current business licenses without running afoul of state laws. Active-duty troops can already choose whether to change their state residency with each move.

The new proposal would also provide \$10 million over the next five years to create “uniform standards for licenses” to allow spouses working as teachers, nurses, realtors and other occupations to get around state credentialing laws. Defense Department officials would oversee the creation of interstate compacts to handle the work, avoiding past concerns from state officials about the expenses related to simplifying the processes. Along with Shaheen, the measure is being sponsored by Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR); Rep. Susan Davis (D-CA); and Rep. Jim Banks (R-IN). All four — members of their respective chamber’s armed services committee — said they hope to include the proposals in the

annual defense authorization bill debate in coming weeks. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 10, 2019 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure Legislation Update 09 ▶ **H.R.____ | OATH Act**

Active-duty service members and veterans who were exposed to toxic hazards can't make disability claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs because the exposure isn't tracked in their medical records. A bill filed in the House 9 MAY would change that. The **Occupational and Environmental Transparency Health (OATH) Act**, introduced by Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA) and Rep. Austin Scott (R-GA) would require military medical records to track service member's exposure to toxins such as mold, dangerous chemicals and open-air burn pits. This would allow veterans file claims for issues they have related to that exposure.

"Our service members and veterans deserve the best care available and to have their medical records accurately reflect any occupational and environmental health hazards they have been exposed to during their service to our great country," Garamendi said in a statement. Only 175,000 veterans and service members have registered so far for the VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, of more than 3 million post-9/11 veterans, according to Veterans Affairs. "Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for a service member to be exposed to toxic substances while performing duties and missions both here at home and abroad," said Scott. "The OATH Act will ensure medical records of our active-duty service members and veterans accurately track exposure ... in an effort to better diagnose and treat illnesses down the road." [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | May 10, 2019 ++]

IRS Kiddie Tax Update 01 ▶ **H.R.2481 | Gold Star Family Tax Relief Act**

A bipartisan coalition of lawmakers are backing a bill that would repeal a tax increase on benefits paid to families of U.S. service members who died in the line of duty. The 2017 tax reform law increased the taxes on certain payments to survivors of the fallen, primarily children who receive survivor benefits from the Defense Department. These benefits were previously taxed at rates of 12% to 15%, but now are taxed at 37% -- the rate used to calculate taxes on income on trusts and estates.

Rep. Elaine Luria (D-VA), introduced the legislation, the **Gold Star Family Tax Relief Act**, or H.R. 2481, which would classify survivor benefits as earned income, reducing the tax burden of the payments. A retired Navy commander and graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, she said Gold Star families have "already paid the ultimate price" and shouldn't have to suffer. "It broke my heart when a surviving spouse from coastal Virginia alerted me to this injustice," Luria said in a release. "I knew I had to fight for her in Congress to fix a broken system that should be working for her and her family."

The bill would affect military widows and widowers who put some of their survivor benefits in their children's names -- a move taken by many to ensure that they don't lose a portion of their Defense Department survivor payments and Veterans Affairs payments. Gold Star spouse Theresa Jones, who lost her husband, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Landon Jones, in 2013, wrote about the change in a Military.com opinion editorial April 29. The taxes she owes for her sons' death benefits for 2018 increased more than four-and-a-half times from the previous year, she said. "The last little bit of stability my children have has now been put on the chopping block," she wrote.

By law, when one person receives both payments, they are offset, meaning they see a \$1 reduction in payments from the Defense Department, called Survivor Benefits Plan payments, for every dollar they receive from the Department of Veterans Affairs for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation. This offset has been dubbed the

"widow's tax." To avoid paying the offset and to better provide for their children, many spouses elect to put the survivors' benefits in the children's names. These are the payments that saw the heavy tax increases this year. When it comes to survivors' benefits, DoD allotments are taxable; Veterans Affairs payments are not.

The bill has 15 cosponsors -- seven Democrats and eight Republicans. Rep. Michael Waltz (R-FL) said the legislation is needed to protect children who have sacrificed so much. "Children of those who have paid the highest measure of devotion to our country shouldn't be burdened with the highest tax rate for their survivor benefits," Waltz said in a release. "I'm proud that a bipartisan group of colleagues came together to fix this oversight in the tax code and urge the House to pass this bill quickly." [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | May 2, 2019 ++]

SSA Benefit Increase ► H.R.860 | Social Security 2100 Act

The idea that Social Security benefits should be modestly boosted, with an across-the-board benefit increase and a more generous cost-of-living (COLA) adjustment, is getting some serious attention in the U.S. House of Representatives. For years, lawmakers have tended to focus almost exclusively on how to cut Social Security benefits, and by how much. In recent years, though, some Members of Congress have begun to realize that Social Security's financing problems aren't limited to the growing number of people starting benefits, and fewer workers paying into the system. They argue that Social Security benefits actually need boosting to support modern retirements that can often last 25 years or more. Also, more Members of Congress are beginning to debate the fairness of how wages are taxed, or not taxed for Social Security.

The interest in strengthening the adequacy of Social Security benefits, while making the program solvent well into the future, is evident in the growing support for U.S. Representative John Larson's **Social Security 2100 Act (H.R. 860)** which he introduced with 200 House co-sponsors. The bill:

- Modestly strengthens benefits of all Social Security beneficiaries with a monthly benefit boost.
- Uses the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E) to increase the COLA, which would result in higher benefits over the course of a retirement.
- Increases the minimum Social Security benefit to ensure that the lowest benefit is 125% of the annual poverty guidelines.
- Lifts the income thresholds for federal income taxation of Social Security benefits from \$25,000 to \$50,000 for single filers and from \$32,000 to \$100,000 for joint filers, so that retirees with more modest incomes can keep more of their money.

The bill pays for boosting benefits and addresses Social Security's solvency by applying the Social Security payroll tax to all earnings above \$400,000, and would allow credit for those earnings above \$400,000 to be used in calculating slightly higher Social Security benefits. In addition, the bill would very gradually increase the payroll tax rate by 0.1 percentage point each year starting in 2020 until reaching 14.8% in 2043 and later. (Currently the payroll tax rate is 12.4%, with employees and employers each paying 6.2%).

Representative Larson's bill has been analyzed by the Social Security's Office of the Chief Actuary, which found that, under the provisions of this bill, Social Security would be solvent for 75 years and "meets the conditions for sustainable solvency." What do you think of this approach? [Please take our all new online 2019 Social Security survey here.](#)

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

VA Healing/Recovery Programs ► H.R 2435 | Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act

Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) on 1 MAY reintroduced bipartisan legislation, HR 2435, to help military veterans heal and seek treatment through outdoor recreation, by providing them better access to federal lands. “Veterans hospitals are renowned for intricate and comprehensive specialty surgeries and treatments, but we can and should do more,” said Smith, former Veterans Committee Chairman and author of the Veterans Health Programs Improvement Act (P.L. 108-422), which authorized new research and education centers for treating veterans with complex multi-trauma combat injuries; today there are five major polytrauma rehabilitation centers.

“Studies have shown—and veterans organizations strongly concur—that outdoor recreational activities can provide powerful therapeutic and healing benefits as well as camaraderie for veterans struggling with combat-related injuries or post-traumatic stress,” said Smith. “We should be thinking outside-the-box to discover as many ways as possible to help veterans, and opening up federal lands and removing barriers to access for remedial outdoor recreation is a no-brainer. My legislation would help increase access to this treatment option.”

Smith’s **Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act** would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish, within 180 days of the bill’s enactment into law, an inter-agency task force to increase the availability of federal lands for use for medical therapy for veterans. Among other actions, the task force would:

- Be co-chaired by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of the Interior and include the Secretaries of HHS, Agriculture, Defense, and Homeland Security, and the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers;
- Discover opportunities for collaboration between the VA and public land agencies to increase the opportunities for veterans to enjoy outdoor recreation;
- Identify obstacles that exist to veteran outdoor recreation.

[Source: Chris smith Press Release | May 1, 2019 ++]

House Vet Bill Progress ► 01 thru 15 May 2019

The House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs sent 18 bills to the full House 8 MAY, including legislation to address veteran suicides, create a fourth administration at the Department of Veterans Affairs and extend benefits to “Blue Water” Navy veterans. The hearing marked the first time that the committee has met during this congressional session to advance legislation. It remained uncertain Wednesday when the bills might be scheduled for votes on the House floor.

“The 18 bills we have before us today represent considerable time and hard work by members of this committee on both sides of the aisle,” said Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA) the committee chairman. Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), the ranking Republican on the committee, voted in favor of the bills but cautioned Takano against advancing legislation in the future without including methods to pay for them. “Several of the bills on today’s agenda have preliminary scores from the Congressional Budget Office that include millions of dollars in discretionary spending costs,” Roe said. “Given the number of worthy proposals competing for limited tax dollars, I believe it is incumbent upon this committee to do the hard work of prioritizing which proposals provide the most bang for the buck of our veterans.” Some of the bills approved Wednesday were:

- **H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019**, which extends benefits to veterans who served offshore on ships during the Vietnam War and have fought for years to prove they were exposed to the chemical herbicide Agent Orange. To help pay for the benefits, the bill increases fees for nondisabled veterans who apply through the VA home loan program. The bill would also extend benefits to veterans who

served in or near the demilitarized zone of the Korean Peninsula beginning Sept. 1, 1967 and require the VA to identify U.S. military bases in Thailand where Agent Orange was used.

- **H.R. 2340, FIGHT Veterans Suicide Act**, which requires the VA to notify Congress of suicides and suicide attempts at VA campuses within seven days. The VA must also provide medical and housing information about the veterans, as well as an explanation of their most recent encounters with VA employees. The bill was introduced after three veterans died by suicide at VA facilities in five days in April.
- **H.R. 2333, Support for Suicide Prevention Coordinators Act**, which requires the comptroller general of the United States to review the responsibilities, workload and vacancy rates of VA suicide prevention coordinators and submit a report to Congress after one year.
- **H.R. 2045, VET OPP Act**, which creates a fourth administration within the VA dedicated solely to veterans' transition into education and employment. The VA is made up of three administrations: the National Cemetery Administration, the Veterans Health Administration and the Veterans Benefits Administration. The bill would add the Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration and a new senior official to lead it.

Three bills that aim to increase veterans' access to medical marijuana were omitted from the hearing Wednesday after originally being listed for consideration. Committee staff said the bills were withdrawn in order to solicit more feedback. The bills would prohibit the VA from denying veterans benefits because of their participation in state marijuana programs, authorize VA health care providers to recommend veterans for state marijuana programs and direct the VA secretary to carry out a clinical trial of the effects of marijuana on chronic pain and post-traumatic stress disorder. During a hearing last week, VA representatives voiced their opposition to the measures, citing the Drug Enforcement Agency's listing of marijuana as a Schedule I drug.

Full list of the 18 bills sent to the full House for consideration is:

- H.R. 299 (Rep. Takano) the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019
- H.R. 2372 (Rep. Underwood) Veterans' Care Quality Transparency Act
- H.R. 2340 (Rep. Rose) FIGHT Veteran Suicides Act
- H.R. 2359 (Rep. Lamb) Whole Veteran Act
- H.R. 1947 (Rep. Roe) To exempt transfers of funds from Federal agencies to the Department of Veterans Affairs for nonprofit corporations established under subchapter IV of chapter 73 of such title from certain provisions of the Economy Act.
- H.R. 1812 (Rep. Roe) Vet Center Eligibility Expansion Act H.R. 2385 (Rep. Lamb) to permit the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a grant program to conduct cemetery research and produce educational materials for the Veterans Legacy Program.
- H.R. 1988 (Rep. David Scott), the Protect Affordable Mortgages for Veterans Act
- H.R. 2045 (Rep. Wenstrup), the VET OPP Act
- H.R. 2333 (Rep. Brindisi) Support for Suicide Prevention Coordinators Act
- H.R.1200 (Rep Luria), the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act
- H.R. 95 (Rep. Brownley), the Homeless Veteran Families Act
- H.R. 1199 (Rep. Luria), The VA Website Accessibility Act
- H.R. 2109 (Rep. Rice), the BRAVE Act
- H.R. 2196 (Rep. Barr), to amend title 38, United States Code, to reduce the credit hour requirement for the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- H.R. 2326 (Rep. Levin) the Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William Bill Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act of 2019
- H.R. 2398 (Rep. Peters), the Veteran HOUSE Act
- H.R. 2399 (Rep. Peters), the Home for Our Heroes Act of 2019

[Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | May 8, 2019++]

*** Military ***



Military Border Missions ► Unknown When or If Will End

Defense Department officials don't know when — or if — the military's deployment to the U.S. southern border will end. In testimony before the House Appropriations Committee on Wednesday, acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan said he is pressing Department of Homeland Security officials for more information on their personnel shortfalls, with an eye towards when the military missions on the border might end. "We're driving buses, we're serving food, we're doing medical support and logistics support," Shanahan said of the military's presence. "For now, we haven't degraded any readiness. But we really need to get back to our primary missions."



On 29 APR, Shanahan approved a plan to send 320 more active-duty troops to the U.S. border with Mexico in response to another support request from Customs and Border Protection. About 3,200 active-duty service members are currently deployed today for those missions, which began last October. In addition, several thousand more National Guard troops have been working in similar support roles since April 2018. On 1 MAY, White House officials announced plans to send a \$4.5 billion emergency supplemental budget request to Congress for "humanitarian needs," that includes building more processing facilities and buying more food for immigrants arriving at the southern border. Of that total, about \$377 million will cover the costs of military deployments. None of the money will be used for wall construction, a senior White House official said.

Congressional Democrats have accused President Donald Trump of militarizing the immigration debate by unnecessarily deploying active-duty troops to southern states. Troops there have been conducting various support roles like barrier placements, but have had limited contact with migrants seeking entry into America. The current authorities for the military missions runs through September. But Shanahan told lawmakers that Homeland Security's personnel shortfalls could total "thousands" of people, casting doubt when the military could be replaced by civilian

staff. “We’re now in the position to ask how long will we be there,” he said. “We’ve gone through, looked at the conditions at the border ... We need to get that into a sustained environment.”

When asked whether troops were still critical to the mission, Shanahan said he was following “a lawful order from the commander in chief” and that “we need to secure the border.” White House officials said the \$4.5 billion in supplemental funding is needed even though administration officials earlier this year announced plans to shift around \$5 billion in Defense Department funds to help with Trump’s controversial border wall project. That money includes \$3.6 billion in military construction projects already approved by Congress. Democrats on Capitol Hill have strongly objected to the plan and inserted language into a fiscal 2020 budget bill earlier this week to block similar moves in the future. A senior White House official said using some of that money to address the humanitarian issues at the border was not possible under existing emergency authorities. The administration is also facing several legal challenges to using that money. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | April 18, 2019 ++]

Army Racism Lawsuit ► Significant Settlement Reached | Racist/Sexist Command Climate

An African-American civilian hospital employee “reached a significant settlement agreement” with the Army in late April after a lawsuit filed last year alleging that she was subjected to a racist and sexist command climate while working in South Korea. **Shawlawn Beckford**, who served on active duty for 11 years before returning in 2006 as a civilian, had accused the Army of supporting a hostile work environment at Brian Allgood Army Community Hospital at Yongsan, where she was an administrator from 2009 to 2015. “As a civilian employee it is my duty to represent and uphold the Army’s mission, vision, and leadership philosophy — in or out of uniform,” Beckford said in a May 1 statement from the office of her attorney, Kellogg Hansen in Washington, D.C. “But I am more than a position. I am a person with feelings and emotions, and I was mistreated in a system that failed to protect me.”

Reached for comment by Army Times, Beckford requested to keep the dollar amount of the settlement private. “While we cannot comment further on the details of the case, harassment is contrary to the Army Values which require us to treat all members with dignity and respect,” Army spokesman Lt. Col. Emanuel Ortiz-Cruz told Army Times in a statement, declining to comment on whether the settlement is an admission of wrongdoing on the part of those named in the lawsuit. The 32-page complaint, filed in April 2018, details Beckford’s allegations of years of demeaning comments and actions from supervisors at the hospital, as well as her attempts to resolve the issue through the Equal Employment Opportunity program. “... the Army disregarded Ms. Beckford’s repeated overtures,” according to the brief. “As a result, the harassing and discriminatory behavior directed towards Ms. Beckford continued unabated throughout her tenure at BAACH.”

And because she was outspoken about the situation, the lawsuit alleged, her command retaliated against her. “Among other things, after Ms. Beckford began speaking out about the hostile work environment at BAACH, her superiors punished her with additional and uncompensated work duties, denied her pay raises that were offered to similarly situated employees, and excluded her from important e-mail communications and meetings involving her team.” During her tenure, Beckford reported directly to a uniformed deputy commander of clinical services, mostly lieutenant colonels — several of whom spoke highly of her — according to the lawsuit. She had no performance or behavioral actions during her time there, nor ever received a negative counseling.

The complaint alleges that her command sergeant major, also African-American, made demeaning comments to Beckford soon after she arrived at the command in 2009. “On a weekly basis during that time period, [the command sergeant major] would visit Ms. Beckford’s office and make belligerent, gendered comments toward her,” according to the lawsuit. “For example, he told her, ‘You’re a single parent. You’re a slut.’ ” He also made comments about her race, the complaint said, calling her “just a house [N-word],” “dumb [N-word],” “our token Black person” and “ghetto.” He also made racially charged comments about others in the command, the lawsuit said. “Specifically, [he]

regularly referred to Ms. Beckford's subordinates as '[N-word],' and made offensive and threatening comments like "What are you [N-word] doing here? You know that master is going to come in here," the complaint said.

The command did open a 15-6 investigation, according to the lawsuit, but during her interview, the investigator was suspicious of her claims. "For example, he asked her if she was 'sure [the command sergeant major] wasn't using [N-word] in slang, you know, the way you talk?' "The 15-6 investigation found that though he used racial slurs in the office, it wasn't in a discriminatory manner, because he himself is black. Still, he was relieved of his position and barred from leading a command again, according to the complaint, but stayed working within the office and continued to harass Beckford. The following year, Beckford lodged a complaint about an officer, saying he referred to women in the command as "bitches" and "clowns." The two completed mediation, and he was not punished, according to the lawsuit.

During the same period, she alleged, her lieutenant colonel "demanded that Ms. Beckford go grocery shopping for him or make him plates of food — tasks that were not part of her job requirements, but that Ms. Beckford believed he viewed as stereotypically female obligations." In a meeting with the command chaplain to discuss the issue, the officer said that "women are only good for purse shopping," the lawsuit alleged; the chaplain suggested Beckford find a new job.

In 2014, she filed an EEO complaint saying another senior enlisted leader made racist statements about one of her colleagues, who also filed a complaint, according to the lawsuit. The NCO had told the colleague that "my dogs don't like Black people and I'll set them on you," "Black people get juice and head grease on my headboards," "Come back, the ghetto called and they want their bling back," and that he couldn't be racist because he had "Black music on my iPod" and was raised by "Black women from the projects," the lawsuit alleged.

Ultimately, Beckford moved on to a job stateside at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. She is currently a program managing director at William Beaumont Army Medical Center at Fort Bliss, Texas. "Not only is this settlement a significant accomplishment in Ms. Beckford's efforts to hold the Army accountable for the abusive treatment that she suffered, but it is also a testament to Ms. Beckford's deep commitment to the Army as an institution, and to her commitment to ensuring that civilian employees on Army installations worldwide are treated equally regardless of their race or gender," her attorney, Katie Cooper, said in the statement. [Source: ArmyTimes | Meghann Myers | May 10, 2019 ++]

Navy Fleet Size Update 17 ► **Navy's Top Officer Wants You to Stop Counting His Ships**

The Navy's top officer wants people to stop thinking about the size of the fleet in terms of how many ships it has, and instead start thinking about what those ships can do. Asked whether he thought unmanned ships would ultimately count against the Navy's battle force of ships, which now stands at 289, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson said he'd like to move away from thinking in terms of ship count. "It's kind of a theoretical discussion," Richardson said. "The thing that really matters is how much naval power do those platforms deliver. That's the thing we're after, I'm not so caught up in what counts against the battle force.

"Because if that platform, manned or unmanned, delivers a requisite amount of naval power that's available and assignable by the theater commander, then OK, that contributes to naval power." The distinction may seem like an exercise in semantics, but for Congress, the number of ships in the fleet has always been a useful metric when discussing the need for a larger or smaller Navy. Even President Ronald Reagan made a specific ship count — 600 ships — an organizing goal and rallying cry. Today, lawmakers in both the House and Senate have made the Navy's current force-structure assessment goal of 355 ships a focal point of their efforts.

Going after a concept like "total naval power" is somewhat more abstract and difficult to fit on a bumper sticker. However, the danger of chasing ship counts is that it could drive the Navy toward buying platforms it doesn't need to

meet a specific number, Richardson said. “We have to be very careful to make sure that we’re not constructing something that counts on a tally but doesn’t contribute to naval power,” Richardson said. “At the end of the day, the real metric is power.” The question will become relevant as the Navy prepares to roll out its force structure assessment later this year, which service leaders have intimated will likely grow the number of ships it needs to support the National Defense Strategy. Richardson’s answer represents a view widely held inside the Navy: that simply counting hulls is inadequate.

However, others have argued that quantity has a quality of its own, and that for a variety of demands placed on the fleet outside of being able to fight and win a war — presence, training with partners and freedom of navigation operations, to name a few — at some point the service will need enough hulls to fulfill the mission. Jerry Hendrix, a retired Navy captain and analyst with Telemus Group, has argued for years that numbers are critical to the Navy’s role in preserving the peace. Citing the 2007 maritime strategy, Hendrix said numbers matter. “In that strategy they found that preserving the peace was at least as important a mission as winning the war,” Hendrix said. “This idea of peacetime presence is crucial, and capacity is very critical in the peace preservation mission. You can’t surge trust and you certainly can’t be virtually present.” [Source: DefenseNews | David B. Larer | May 6, 2019 ++]

USAF Officer Program ► Accelerated Commissioning for SNCOs

The Air Force in August will launch its first test of a turbo-charged commissioning program that seeks to turn senior enlisted airmen into officers in as quick as 14 training days. The beta test of the Officer Training School-Accelerated Commissioning Program will take place at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama, and shorten OTS from its current length of 40 training days, Air Education and Training Command officials said in a 1 MAYy release.

The first test will include 36 senior noncommissioned officer candidates, AETC said. Of those master sergeants, senior master sergeants and chief master sergeants, 26 will be active duty, five will be reservists and five will be from the Air National Guard. To qualify, they must have completed the SNCO Academy course, either in-residence or via distance learning. They were selected through the normal OTS selection board process that took place in January and February. A second beta test is expected to follow in October. After the tests are finished, the Air Force will study the results to see how successful they were.

AETC said the experiment with a shorter training schedule is part of its Continuum of Learning initiative, which aims to combine education, training and experience as airmen develop, giving them more flexibility to steer their own development, at their own pace. In the release, AETC said the Air Force could expand the program and experiment with awarding officer candidates competency credit for their pre-existing education, training and experience. “Ultimately, the aim is to drive agility and flexibility in our processes and programs so that we more efficiently and effectively deliver qualified, trained, educated and experienced airmen to meet mission requirements,” the release said. [Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | May 1, 2019 ++]

Military Base Water ► Shanahan Says Safe to Drink Tap Water at 401 Sites in Question

Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan said 1 MAY that the water on bases nationwide is safe to drink, but a deal has yet to be worked out on firefighting foam that could be polluting groundwater. "No one's drinking contaminated water at the over 400 sites in question," Shanahan said at a hearing of the House Appropriations defense subcommittee. He said concerns raised by a September 2018 Government Accountability Office report on the firefighting foam used by Defense Department for decades, and the potential for runoff contaminating groundwater, are being addressed.

"We no longer train with them [and] we no longer test with them," he said of the fire retardants. "The only use of them is in the event of a fire."

Shanahan noted media reports that the DoD is pressing the Environmental Protection Agency for lower standards on the chemicals used in the firefighting foam. "We've agreed with the EPA on a common standard," he said. He did not specify what the common standard is but said the DoD was currently "in harmonization" with EPA standards. "We have the right standards," he said. The concerns center on the presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl chemicals (PFAS), highly fluorinated chemicals, in the firefighting foam, according to the 2018 GAO report.

Shanahan was responding to questions from Rep. Betty McCollum, the Democratic-Farm-Labor Party representative from Minnesota, who referred to a detailed New York Times report in March that the DoD was pushing the EPA to adopt weaker standards for groundwater pollution. She asked Shanahan to clarify "what's going on with the EPA, what's going on at the Department of Defense with some chemicals known as PFAS?" Shanahan did not respond directly, but said that the health and well-being of service members and their families is a "number one priority" for the DoD. "Besides national security," the health of the force is "our No. 1 priority," he said.

At a hearing in March of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) also pressed Shanahan on whether drinking water had been contaminated at Pease Air National Guard Base in her state. "No one knows what the long-term impacts of drinking that water is," Shaheen said. Shanahan gave assurances that he would "look into this matter," and said he was "accountable and responsible for the safety and security of our men and women."

In a letter to EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler in March, Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) wrote of his "grave concerns regarding the delay in the finalization of EPA's groundwater cleanup guidelines" for PFAS substances. He said the guidelines had been held up since August at the White House Office of Management and Budget. Carper said he had learned that the reason for the delay was that the DoD, NASA and the Small Business Administration were "urging for the adoption of a much less stringent cleanup standard." The GAO report last year said that the firefighting foam used at DoD installations could, at elevated levels, increase the risk of cancer or other health issues. The report said the DoD had identified 401 installations "with known or potential releases of these chemicals," and said that the department "took actions, like providing alternative drinking water, at 32 locations" as of August 2017. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | May 2, 2019 ++]

Military Depots ► GAO Reports More than Half in Poor Condition

More than half of the military's repair and maintenance depots for major weapons systems are in poor condition, resulting in delays in getting assets from submarines to tanks back in the field, according to a Government Accountability Office report. Of the 21 depots that maintain, overhaul and repair complex weapons systems, 12 were listed in poor condition and operating with equipment past its expected service life, according to the 77-page GAO report, issued 29 APR.

The result has been a "general decline in depot performance over the past 10 years" and delays in returning weapons systems to the field for operations and training, the report states. In addition, "the military services can't determine how much of the decline is due to facility and equipment problems," according to the GAO, Congress' audit, evaluation and investigative arm. The report makes 13 recommendations that mainly would require the service secretaries and the commandant of the Marine Corps to develop methods for tracking when depot conditions or the condition of the aging equipment used at the depots cause maintenance delays.

The Defense Department concurred with 12 of the recommendations but "did not concur with our recommendation that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Sustainment develop an approach for managing service depot investments," the GAO said. The report states that poor conditions at the facilities "can make the overall repair process less efficient,

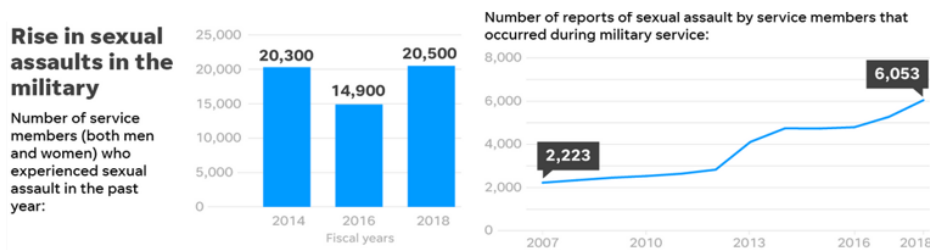
as maintainers perform workarounds that can increase maintenance time and costs." "Because the depots are generally operating with equipment past its expected useful life, the depots may be incurring costs related to operating aging equipment, including performing equipment repairs, procuring spare parts, and expending labor hours to repair equipment while at the same time delaying mission-related work," the report adds. The report cites the following examples:

- At the Albany, Georgia, Production Plant, a shortage of paint booths results in vehicles remaining unpainted and stored outside, but exposure can lead to rusting that increases maintenance time and cost.
- At the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, officials had to re-inspect 10 years' of parts made in a single furnace, after it was discovered that the furnace's controls were reading incorrectly.
- At the Corpus Christi, Texas, Army Depot, engines were being moved across five miles of facilities to conduct repairs.

"According to officials at the depot, this is the result of years of incremental construction that did not allow them to optimize their workflow," the report states. {Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | 2 May 2019 ++}

Military Sexual Assault Update 06 ► 38% Increase | Shanahan Calls For Reforms

Acting Defense Secretary Patrick M. Shanahan called for sweeping changes in the way the military handles sexual assaults and harassment following a reported 38% increase in assaults from 2016 to 2018. That spike in crime within the ranks comes after years of focused effort and resources to eradicate it. The report surveyed Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine personnel in 2018. Based on the survey, there were an estimated 20,500 instances of unwanted sexual contact – an increase over the 14,900 estimated in the last biennial survey in 2016. Unwanted sexual contact ranges from groping to rape.



Enlisted female troops ages 17 to 24 were at the highest risk of being assaulted, said Nathan Galbreath, deputy director of the Pentagon's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office. The Pentagon will target troops in that age range for prevention efforts, he said. "We're very concerned about that," Galbreath said. More than 85% of victims knew their assailant. Alcohol was involved in 62% of the total assaults. Shanahan said in a statement 2 MAY she had reviewed the latest data and "it is clear that sexual assault and sexual harassment are persistent challenges." "To put it bluntly, we are not performing to the standards and expectations we have for ourselves or for each other. This is unacceptable. We cannot shrink from facing the challenge head on," he said in the statement. Shanahan said ways to address the problem include: seeking a stand-alone military crime of sexual harassment, developing new tools to measure the problem, launching a program to catch serial offenders, improving assessments of the character of military applicants, training for junior officers and junior enlisted leaders and focusing on prevention.

The latest report on sexual assaults requires Congress to intervene, said Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) the chairwoman of the Armed Services Committee's personnel panel. "The department must accept that current programs are simply not working," Speier said. "Congress must lead the way in forcing the department to take more aggressive approaches to fighting this scourge." The Pentagon is set to release the recommendations of a task force formed at the urging of Sen. Martha McSally (R-AZ) to deal with sexual assaults in the military. McSally, a retired Air Force officer and

fighter pilot, revealed during an Armed Services Committee meeting in March that she had been raped by a superior officer.

"The status quo is not working," New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand said in a statement. "It's time for Congress to step up and bring accountability where the Department of Defense has repeatedly failed. The evidence is clear – we need to pass the Military Justice Improvement Act so that trained military prosecutors can handle these cases moving forward and give survivors confidence in the system." Based on the survey for 2018:

- Sexual assault rate for women was at the highest level, 6%, since 2006. The rate ranged from 4% in the Air Force to 11% in the Marine Corps.
- The odds of a woman experiencing a sexual assault were highest for the youngest women – from 17 to 20 years old. Those odds were 1 in 8.
- In 96% of the cases the alleged offender was a man. The offender most often was one person (64%), a military member (89%) and a friend or acquaintance (62%).
- Nearly 1 in 4 of all women experienced an "unhealthy climate" because of sexual harassment, which was up in the survey. About 16% of all women faced an "unhealthy climate" because of gender discrimination, also up.

"The results are disturbing and a clear indicator the Marine Corps must reexamine its sexual assault prevention efforts," the Marine Corps said in a statement. "Our Marines have a fundamental right to live and work in an environment free from sexual assault and harassment. The Marine Corps is committed to purging these criminal behaviors from our ranks, taking care of victims, and holding offenders accountable." According to estimates in 2018, 6% of women in the military endured some form of sexual assault, and almost 1% of men were victimized. The Pentagon extrapolated the rate based on the results of the survey, which had a sample size of more than 100,000, with a 95% confidence level.

For women, assaults involving groping and crimes involving penetration both increased, Galbreath said. The type of assaults for men stayed relatively stable. The rate of reporting sexual assault to authorities declined, a trend that might point to less confidence among troops. "We know these are consistent problems, and the department is doing everything it can to address these issues across the military," said Air Force Lt. Col. Carla Gleason, a Pentagon spokeswoman. Sexual assaults in the military have trended down since 2006, when 34,000 troops reported some type of sexual assault. Concerns rose anew in 2013 when the Pentagon released a report that estimated the number of sexual assaults increased 35% from 2010 to 2012, to 26,000 victims. The last survey of troops, in 2016, found that number had dropped to about 14,900.

Galbreath called the increase in 2018 a "tripwire" that should prompt the Pentagon to act. In 2013, Congress hauled the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Capitol Hill and demanded answers. Top uniformed and civilian officials vowed a "zero tolerance" policy on sexual assault. Last month, Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford repeated that goal in a memo to all troops and civilians employed by the military. "Zero tolerance is the only acceptable metric," he said. The rate of reporting sexual assault, an indicator of victims' confidence in the system to care for them and punish the crime, dropped in 2018 to 30% from 32% in 2016. In 2006, only 7% reported.

The surge in estimated assaults in 2013 prompted Congress to intervene, legislating changes in how the military prosecutes sex crimes and cares for victims. The increase in assaults should alarm Pentagon leadership, said Don Christensen, president of Protect Our Defenders, an advocacy group for victims of sexual assault in the military. Christensen's group and some members of Congress have called for prosecution of sex crimes to be turned over to career prosecutors rather than relying on military commanders to decide which cases to pursue. The Pentagon has opposed that change.

"What's frustrating is that the brass keeps refusing to consider any bold changes like reforming the military justice system," said Christensen, the former top prosecutor for the Air Force. "How many more men and women have to be assaulted before they make the changes and hold people accountable? How many times do you have to fail?"

Christensen laid blame on Pentagon civilian and military leaders for the problem, saying offenders have been given a green light because so few face court-martial for sexual assault. [Source: USA TODAY |Tom Vanden Brook | May 2, 2019 ++]

Military Sexual Assault Update 07 ► DoD to Make Sexual Harassment a Crime

Defense Department officials will make sexual harassment a criminal offense amid new reports of increasing bad behavior among service members. In a statement 2 MAY acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan called the move a necessary step to combat the “scourge” of sexual assault and abuse in the ranks. A new report from the department’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response office shows the number of reported cases of sexual assault in the ranks rose from nearly 4,800 in fiscal 2016 to more than 6,050 in fiscal 2018.

Based on reporting rates (about one in three service members reported their assaults to authorities, according to researchers), officials estimated the actual number of assaults in the military for fiscal 2018 at about 20,500 cases, a rise of nearly 38 percent the previous two years. “Within the female active force, increases were concentrated among service women ages 17 to 24 as well as junior enlisted women, who are already at the highest risk for sexual assault,” the report states. “Most perpetrators were in the E3 to E5 rank, and alleged perpetrators were often the same grade, or slightly higher, than the victim.” A day earlier, during testimony on Capitol Hill, Shanahan promised new action to deal with issues of harassment and retaliation against victims of those assaults. Defense officials said they hope to have new criminal penalties in place by this October, including “steps to seek a stand-alone military crime of sexual harassment.”

The department also announced plans for new training for commanders and a new program to root out serial sex offenders, as well as “efforts to select recruits of the highest character.” Specifics of all of those initiatives have not yet been identified. “To put it bluntly, we are not performing to the standards and expectations we have for ourselves or for each other,” Shanahan said in the memo announcing the changes. “This is unacceptable. We cannot shrink from facing the challenge head on.” In a separate statement, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Robert Neller echoed those sentiments. “In the end, this is an issue of trust – trust that fellow Marines will look after each other, trust they will not be assaulted, and trust their command will take appropriate action,” he said. “Only Marines who trust and respect each other can be fully prepared to fight and win our nation’s battles.”

Combating sexual harassment and assault has been a focus of military leaders in recent years, but lawmakers have expressed frustration with the lack of progress on the topic. “Sexual assaults continue to increase dramatically while the number of cases going to trial goes down,” Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D=NY) said in a statement. “The status quo is not working. It’s time for Congress to step up and bring accountability where the Department of Defense has repeatedly failed.” Sen. Martha McSally (R-AZ) and an Air Force veteran who recently revealed her own sexual assault while serving, said the report results “confirm that that the time is now to impart lasting change within the military and that it is more urgent than ever.” “We must not allow women and men to be assaulted while serving our country and we must create an environment that is safe,” she said.

In February, defense officials announced the number of cases of unwanted sexual encounters at the military service academies has increased almost 50 percent since 2016. Last fall, a report from the RAND Corporation found that more than 10 percent of all women experienced a sexual assault at “high-risk” installations inside the military. Shanahan called the problem a critical readiness issue for the armed forces, one that has the potential to undermine trust and morale while also hurting recruiting and retention. “Sexual assault is illegal and immoral, is inconsistent with the military’s mission, and will not be tolerated,” he said in the memo. “We will not rest until all service members can serve in an environment of dignity and respect.”

According to the SAPR report, 43 percent of women who reported a sexual assault to military authorities said it prompted “perceived negative experiences,” including additional harassment and abuse. That number was up from less than one-third in fiscal 2016. However, cases of retaliation for reports were down, from 26 percent in fiscal 2016 to 21 percent in fiscal 2018. Shanahan has said he will consider strengthening criminal penalties for that behavior as part of the upcoming military legal review. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 2, 2019 ++]

Trump Pardons Update 01 ► Soldier Convicted of Killing an Iraqi Prisoner in 2008

A former U.S. soldier from Oklahoma who was pardoned this week for his 2009 conviction for killing an Iraqi prisoner said 8 MAY that he initially didn’t answer the White House’s phone call to tell him of the pardon. Former Army 1st Lt. **Michael Behenna** said he was on the phone with his father, retired FBI agent Scott Behenna, when the call came about 2:30 p.m. Monday as he was driving. He didn’t recognize the number and thought it might be a telemarketer, so he let it go to voicemail. After checking his messages, he returned the call and was told President Donald Trump was granting him a pardon and would call him back. When Behenna’s phone rang again, it was Trump’s office putting the president on the line so he could tell Behenna personally.



Michael Behenna in 2008 (left) and standing with his brother Brett (right) during a news conference in Oklahoma City

“I had tears in my eyes, my heart’s beating fast and I’m smiling from ear to ear. I had a feeling I knew what it was for,” the 35-year-old Behenna said, adding that the call was a surprise because he expected his attorneys to inform him of the decision instead. Behenna was convicted in 2009 of unpremeditated murder in a combat zone in the 2008 killing of Ali Mansur Mohamed, an unarmed Iraqi prisoner. Behenna said he acted in self-defense when the man reached for Behenna’s handgun, but the Army said the argument didn’t hold up because Behenna was pointing his weapon at the prisoner. Behenna admitted during his trial that instead of taking the prisoner home as he was ordered, he took the man to a railroad culvert, stripped him, then questioned him at gunpoint about a roadside bombing that had killed two members of Behenna’s platoon.

A military appeals court in 2012 found that jury instructions on self-defense were incorrect and that prosecutors failed to tell the defense of a crime scene expert who supported the claim of self-defense, but the court said the errors were harmless and did not affect the outcome of the trial. “What I was told by President Trump ... was that I received a pardon because of the prosecutorial misconduct that happened during the trial,” Behenna said Wednesday. The first person he told about the pardon was his father, who didn’t believe him. Scott Behenna recalled later that after talking to his son, he called the same number and was put in touch with a White House attorney who assured him the pardon was real. Behenna’s mother, former federal prosecutor Vicki Behenna, stood waiting outside her son’s vehicle after he had parked, unaware of the topic of his phone conversations. Once he told her, she also didn’t believe him.

Behenna, a native of the Oklahoma City suburb of Edmond, said he initially planned on a career in the military, but is now focused on a 20-acre (8-hectare) cattle ranch he owns in Guthrie, where he lives about 25 miles (40 kilometers) north of Oklahoma City. Supporters of Behenna’s pardon request include Oklahoma Sens. Jim Inhofe and James Lankford, both Republicans, and Republican state Attorney General Mike Hunter, who twice sent a letter to Trump, urging that a pardon be granted. Michael Breen, president and CEO of Human Rights First, which describes itself as an organization that urges "the U.S. government and private companies to respect human rights and the rule of law," criticized the decision.

“President Trump’s pardon of a service member convicted of murder by the U.S. military undermines the morale of our armed forces, erodes our allies’ trust of the armed services overseas and — by showing that we won’t hold our forces to the same standards we demand of others — places our service members in greater danger in combat zones and beyond,” Breen said in a statement. Behenna said he has maintained contact with several soldiers he served with in Iraq and that many have called him since Monday to say his pardon was overdue. [Source: The Associated Press | Ken Miller | May 8, 2019 ++]

USMC Theft Rings ► Five NC Marines Stole, Pawned, and Sold Equipage for 2-yrs

From 2016 to 2018 the motor pool and supply warehouse for 3d Raider Battalion aboard Camp, Lejeune North Carolina, were the targets of thieves within the elite commando unit, according to military charge sheets. The culprits, five Marines with 3d Raider Battalion, managed to steal vehicle parts, military tactical gear, SureFire flashlights and even flashbang grenades in one instance. More than \$300,000 worth of government property was stolen by one group of four Marines in 2017 alone, according to Gunnery Sgt. Lynn Kinney, a spokeswoman with Marine Forces Special Operations Command. Some of the stolen gear found its way into a local Jacksonville, North Carolina, pawn store, while other gear was sold to an unnamed civilian.

The crime spree involves two separate theft rings, which spanned from 2016 to 2018, according to charge sheets. Four Marines, who raided the 3d Raider Battalion supply warehouse in 2017, were subject to courts-martial, where the accused Marines pleaded guilty and were sentenced to confinement ranging from five to 28 months, according to Kinney. The Marines were subsequently demoted in rank and punitively booted from the Corps, Kinney said. A fifth Marine, who broke into various motor transport lots in 2016, including the 3d Raider motor pool, was also subject to a court-martial, according to details in charge sheets. Some of the charges included larceny of government property, wrongful sale of military property and obstruction of justice for at least two Marines.

“These actions are not consistent with Marine Forces Special Operations Command values and deter from our priority mission of deploying special operations forces,” Kinney told Marine Corps Times in an emailed statement. The details of these crimes were laid out in a series of charge sheets obtained by Marine Corps Times via Freedom of Information Act request. One of the Raider bandit theft rings involved four Marines, two lance corporals and two corporals, all from 3d Raider Battalion. The names on the charge sheets have been redacted and it’s unknown what jobs those Marines held at Marine Forces Special Operations Command.

For at least a year, the Marines conspired together in some instances to steal equipment from the 3d Raider supply warehouse, and a couple of the Marines also took gear designated for the Defense Reutilization and Marketing Office, or DRMO. In March 2017, one of the corporals conspired with another lance corporal to steal SureFire Hellfighter Lights — a popular weapon mountable tactical flashlight. To carry out the crime, the two Marines moved pallets to block the view of a security camera at the 3d Raider supply warehouse. After stealing the tactical flashlights, they sold 13 of the SureFires for \$2,600 to an unnamed civilian, according to the charge sheets. Other instances of theft, which involved the entire gang of four, included loading 72 fixed rifle buttstocks and 130 rifle buttstock subassembly parts into a Marine Corps 7-ton vehicle where the gear was then offloaded into a lance corporal’s personal car. Those rifle parts were then sold to a civilian in Sneads Ferry, North Carolina.

The four Raider bandits, between the time span of January 2017–January 2018, managed to steal Leatherman multitools, Benchmade knives, SureFire scout lights, SureFire helmet lights, Ka-bars, Gerber knives, recon sleeping systems and Blackhawk rifle slings, charge sheets detailed. The gear was sold to a civilian in Sneads Ferry. And around January 2018, two of the Marines loaded 25 pelican cases containing portable solar panels for charging communications gear. That equipment was intended for the DRMO lot, which often houses old or outmoded gear that may be reused again by other units who find use for it. Around Aug. 1, 2016, and May 2017, one of the Marines, without proper authorization, sold a Leatherman, four Benchmade knives, four Gerbers, one MTech knife, one Ka-bar, three SureFire lights, two SureFire scout lights and one SureFire light with an M93 rail mount to the Jacksonville Park-n-Pawn store.

Two of the Marines attempted to clean up after their crimes, according to charge sheets. After learning that security cameras at the Raider warehouse may have recorded them stealing the equipment, two of the Marines made an effort to destroy the footage. Sometime around July and August 2017, at least two of the Marines went to a local Jacksonville Best Buy where they purchased a hard drive. They then replaced the hard drive connected to the 3d Raider security camera with the newly acquired hard drive. The old hard drive was tossed into a body of water.

The theft ring came crashing down around March 2018 when the command dished out charges to the four Marines for theft of the equipment. But prior to that, in 2016, another 3d Raider Marine had managed to steal tactical military equipment and vehicle parts from several motor transport lots. The Marine lance corporal gained entry to one the motor pool lots with a key, and in another instance, he used bolt cutters to cut a chain link fence. The Marine stole gear from from the 3d Raider motor pool lot and the II Marine Expeditionary Force Headquarters Group motor transport lot. The lance corporal also used bolt cutters to gain entry to a vehicle lot housing Logistics Vehicle System Replacements, or LVSR, trucks.

Looted gear from the crime spree included flashbang diversionary hand grenades, tool kits, multi-meters, BF Goodrich Baja tires, plate carriers, helmets, M16 magazines, military medical kits, fog lights, wire harnesses, headlights and composite lights. In all, over the past several years, hundreds of thousands of dollars in tactical gear and vehicle parts have been stolen by Marines, where the 3d Raider warehouse and motor pool lot have been the central focus of the crime sprees. “We are committed to accountability against any violation the standards we set for our Marines,” Kinney said. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | May 6, 2019 ++]

USMC Tropical Boots ► New Ones May Be Available By Late 2019

New hot weather and tropical boots may be in the hands of Marines by late 2019, according to Marine officials. The tropical boots have been through various stages of development and testing over the past several years and now, according to a post on the government’s business opportunities website, the Corps is ready to order nearly 70,000 pairs. In 2017, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines, stomped around jungle environments testing three tropical boot prototypes from boot manufacturers Danner, Bates and Rocky. From that testing, the Corps announced its desired tropical boot will be the brand name Rocky Tropical and Danner Tropical, or a similar produced boot, according to the posting.

The Corps said the Rocky Tropical boot performed well in the 2017 user evaluations. But, the new boots will not be part of an initial seabag issue and not every Marine will get their hands on them. The tropical and hot weather boots are headed for Consolidated Storage Program, where they will be doled out to Marines during predeployment training before heading to a hot or tropical climate, Manny Pacheco, a spokesman for Marine Corps Systems Command, told Marine Corps Times in an emailed statement. “Additionally, if the boot vendor submits for certification, the boot can be sold at the Marine Corps Exchange as part of the optional boot effort,” Pacheco said.



The Corps wants the Rocky and Danner tropical boots to weigh between 1.85 pounds to 1.5 pounds for a size 10R, and the boots should be able to perform in hot and temperate climates for up to 12 months, according to the solicitation message. And both styles of tropical boots will be between 9.5 inches and 10 inches in height, the posting reads. The Corps wants its hot weather boots to operate in hot and dry environments ranging from 40–170 degrees Fahrenheit, while weighing 2.10 pounds per boot for a men’s 10R and less than 1.80 pounds for a women’s size 8RF, the solicitation message details. And for the height, the Corps wants the new hot weather boot to be between 8.5–9.0 inches for the men’s boot and 8.0–8.5 inches for women, according to the posted message.

“Materials that trade water absorption and drying time for durability or overall performance are not in the best interest of the US Marine Corps,” the solicitation message for the hot weather combat boot reads. The Danner Reckoning Hot Weather Boot was authorized by the Corps for wear in 2017. The Reckoning and Rocky Tropical boots went through a user evaluation to test overall recruit improvement while wearing lighter boots. That evaluation was held aboard the recruit depot at Parris Island, South Carolina, in 2018. The tropical boots will pair with the Corps’ “jungle jammies” — its new tropical uniform, which Marines have described as “light, like pajamas.” The new uniforms are expected this summer. The Corps issued a contract for the tropical uniforms to SourceAmerica, in Vienna, Virginia, for \$954,713 in August 2018. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | May 8, 2019 ++]

Military USVs ► Unmanned Surface Vessel Weaponized Prototype

The Navy and Textron showed off for the first time 6 MAY a weaponized prototype of a small unmanned surface vessel (USV) designed to revolutionize sea warfare. Textron principal systems engineer Gary Hartman said the display of the 40-foot Common Unmanned Surface Vehicle (CUSV), docked at the annual Sea-Air-Space Exposition at National Harbor, Maryland, is the first of the boat mounted with a 50-caliber machine gun and a housing for Hellfire missiles.



The Navy and Textron showed off for the first time a weaponized prototype of a small unmanned surface vessel (USV) designed to revolutionize sea warfare

The weapons display is the outgrowth of the Cooperative Research and Development Agreement signed last year by Naval Sea Systems Command and Textron "to develop and integrate surface warfare payloads onto the Common Unmanned Surface Vehicle." According to the agreement, "the payloads will include various missiles, designators, sensors, and remote weapon stations." The weapons are part of what Hartman called an "expeditionary warfare package" for the CUSV, but he stressed that the display is intended only to show possible future capabilities. "As an initial package, there's not a lot of appetite for it" currently, he said. Hartman said the CUSV itself is a program of record with the Navy, but there is no timeline for when the systems will be deployed.

The CUSV was initially developed to be carried aboard Littoral Combat Ships and launched to conduct countermine and surveillance operations. The missions can be programmed into the CUSV, and radars and other sensors aboard alert the mother ship to what the CUSV finds, Hartman said. Hartman noted that the CUSV is programmed to be compliant with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs). The CUSV, which is capable of 30 knots and has a range of 400 nautical miles, will independently pass behind an approaching vessel and then resume its original mission direction, he said. During countermine activities, when it is programmed to stick to a given course, the CUSV will independently slow to allow the approaching vessel to pass and "then get back on track," Hartman said. The CUSV's COLREG-compliant feature also has possible applications for manned Navy surface vessels, he said. "It doesn't lose focus; it doesn't lose attention," as sailors might. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | May 6, 2019 ++]

Weapon Cemeteries ► Deadly Gases May be Starting to Leak From WWI & WW2 Sites

After World War I and World War II, officials decided to dump hundreds of thousands of metric tons of munitions into the oceans around Europe, which at the time appeared to be the most easily accessible disposal ground. Some of those weapons — including mines containing mustard gas — were simply dropped into the Baltic and North seas in the heart of Europe rather than being taken to faraway dump sites near the Arctic Circle. But the hidden legacy of those world wars may come to haunt the continent for decades to come.

This week, the Belgian newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws* reported that officials have grown concerned that one of those dump sites — close to the Belgian coastal municipality of Knokke-Heist — has started to leak. At the site, two out of 23 probed locations showed signs of contamination, the paper said. The revelation followed months of official inquiries into what authorities fear could be a mounting public safety threat. Used as a potentially deadly chemical agent during World War I, mustard gas can burn victims' skin, respiratory tract and eyes. If confirmed, the leaks would hardly come as a surprise to other officials around Europe. They see themselves in a race against time to prevent the leaking of deadly gases and other hazardous substances, but they have struggled to have their concerns heard.

While mustard gas leaks from Europe's underwater weapons cemeteries were long considered a worst-case scenario, officials also are expressing alarm over leaks of explosives such as TNT from dumped land mines or sea mines. While those substances have been contained inside metal cases for eight decades in the case of World War II, and about a century in the case of World War I munitions, the metal has rusted and become porous. In the 1920s and 1940s, that may have seemed like a distant threat amid the still vivid horrors of some of the deadliest conflicts in world history. But in more recent years, such leaks have posed a growing environmental threat. Activists have blamed the leaks in part for decreasing biodiversity in the Baltic Sea.

The problem extends far beyond the "weapons cemeteries" that are now making headlines. In the neighboring Baltic Sea, more than 80,000 mines are believed to be lurking beneath the surface. Unlike the North Sea's mass dump sites, the locations of single mines are more difficult to track down. There are only vague maps of where the mines might be hidden — and most of them appear to be spread out across hundreds of miles. Reminders of their potentially deadly impact have mounted. In 2005, three Dutch fishermen were killed after they accidentally caught an American-

made World War II bomb in their fishing net. Similar discoveries regularly trigger mass evacuations — for instance, last August in the Polish resort city of Kolobrzeg, where three bombs were discovered in the nearby bay.

European navies help out with remote-controlled vehicles and clearance divers within their own territorial waters. But in some areas, the density of explosives is believed to be so high that fishing is still prohibited there a century later. Pipeline construction companies often hire private mine-clearance contractors to do the job if there is no way around it and when the explosives are found far out at sea, where European navies do not claim responsibility. "It's unbelievable how many mines there still are," Cmdr. Peeter Ivask, the head of Estonia's navy, told a visiting reporter late last year. "Our mission here will last decades," said Ivask. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Rick Noack | May 3, 2019 ++]

Base Housing Update 12 ► Private Companies Set up Complex Systems to Escape Accountability

Private companies handling military housing have set up overly complex systems to escape accountability and reap significant financial rewards even when they fail to meet Defense Department expectations, according to new findings from a senior senator's investigation into troops' poor living conditions. Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the results of her work show that "the documented failures of private housing companies to meet basic standards is unacceptable, hurts families, and damages morale."

For the last few months, lawmakers have been probing into problems with military housing, including reports of mold, lead paint, vermin and unaddressed repairs. Many of the issues were brought to light in a series of reports by Reuters and the Tampa Bay Times over the last year. Military officials have promised to reforms, including more oversight of private contractors and more resources for military families to file complaints against poorly-performing housing managers. But they have also insisted that the privatized housing model has produced a better quality of life for service members than in the past.

The private housing model originated due to concerns with the quality of on-base housing in the early 1990s, when Defense Department was still responsible for construction and maintenance of those homes. About one-fourth of service members today live in privatized homes, with their monthly housing allowances going directly to outside companies. In a letter to the Army, Navy and Air Force secretaries — as well as armed services committee leaders — Warren said that arrangement has allowed private companies handling military housing to "set up a complicated web of subcontracts and subsidiaries that undermines accountability for substandard conditions."

Warren, a Democratic presidential candidate who has introducing legislation mandating stricter oversight of those contractors, said her review of the five largest military housing companies' operations shows unclear systems for processing families' complaints and for investing appropriate resources into upkeep. Officials from the private contractors testified before Congress in February, insisted that failures to keep up the quality of housing options would hurt their profits. Warren's report states the opposite, noting that the flow of housing stipends from military officials ensures constant cash flow regardless the problems renters report. Part of the blame for that falls on military leaders charged with oversight, Warren said. "Incentive fees were included in the housing contracts ... to give the private housing companies an extra financial incentive to provide quality living conditions and financially sound properties," the report stated. "However, it appears that even when they fail to do so, the companies still receive significant incentive payments."

Military officials have promised to reform that aspect of the housing system, an increase overview of the private housing program. Warren wants legislative action to require things like unannounced site inspections and harsh penalties for poor upkeep. Senate Armed Services Committee leaders have indicated they hope to include potential fixes to the housing issues in the annual defense authorization bill. The panel's draft of that measure is scheduled to be completed later this month. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | May 1, 2019 ++]

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang ► Breakaway thru Bug Out

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

Breakaway – The act of disconnecting from an UNREP ship and maneuvering clear. Can be either a normal or emergency evolution, the difference being simply how quickly the various actions are accomplished.

Brigadier Chief – Senior Chief Petty Officer (who has one star on the anchors of his insignia).

Broke Dick – Non-functional. See 'TITS UP.'

Brow – The proper term for what is often called the 'gangway,' the temporary bridge connecting the ship's quarterdeck to the pier.

Brown-Bagger – Married member of the crew. Aka "Khaki Sacker."

Brown-Shirt – (Aviation) A Plane Captain, so called because of the brown jersey he wears; a.k.a. "turd shirt."

Brownshoe - Member of the aviation community. Refers to the brown boots or shoes which once were worn by aviation personnel with the Aviation Green uniform. Unauthorized footwear for a while, but recently re-approved for all USN service communities.

Brown Water - Shallow water or shallow draft, especially a ship or navy whose ships are not suited to deep (or open) water and deep-water combat.

Brown Water Ops – Naval operations in shallow water, typically consisting of water depths of 100 fathoms or less.

Bubblehead – (1) Member of the submarine community. Frequently modified by members of the surface fleet with the adjective "fucking". See "6 D's". (2) Diver, especially a "hard hat" diver (i.e. a diver who wears the spherical metal helmet of a Navy diver).

Buddy Fucker – Someone who will not stand up for, or defend, a friend or shipmate, or someone who screws over a shipmate.

Buddy Store – A self-contained unit which makes it possible for aircraft not originally designed as tankers to deliver a limited amount of fuel to other aircraft. Buddy stores are hung on wing or fuselage hardpoints.

Buffer - (UK) The senior rate responsible for seamanship evolutions, typically a Chief Boatswain's Mate. According to some, stands for "Big Ugly Fat Fucker Easily Replaced."

Bug – (Aviation) (1) See PLASTIC BUG. (2) A heading indicator on a compass of Horizontal Situation Indicator (HSI).

Bug juice - A substance similar in appearance to Kool-Aid which is served as a beverage aboard USN ships. Its color has no bearing on its flavor. Largely composed of ascorbic acid. Used extensively as an all-purpose cleaner/stripper for bulkheads, decks, brass fire nozzles, and pipes.

Bug Out - 'Getting the hell out of Dodge.' An escape maneuver from an air-to-air fight, generally consists of choosing the proper moment to unload and select ZONE FIVE.

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

Warships That Will Change The Future ► Steregushchiy 530



The Steregushchiy is the largest and leading vessel in the Steregushchiy class of littoral combat warships built and deployed by the Russian Navy. It has been upgraded from the rest of its class in the fact that it is the only one to have been built with a radar-absorbent fiberglass hull, thus significantly reducing the ship's radar signature. Additionally, it also has updated field reduction capabilities.

The Steregushchiy class corvettes are the new multirole warships being built by the Severnaya Verf shipyard and Amur Shipbuilding Plant for the Russian Navy. Locally these are known as Project 20380 warships. The lead vessel was commissioned in 2007, 2nd in 2011, 3rd in 2013, and the 4th one in 2014. Russian Navy plans to build 12 vessels of this class from which 6 warships are already active. More Steregushchiy class corvettes are planned to be commissioned within the next 3 years.

This ships have stealthy design which significantly reduces the radar signature. The acoustic, infra-red, magnetic and visual signatures were also reduced by incorporating the stealth technology in the construction of the warships. These vessels have a length of 105 meters, width of 13 meters and can reach a maximum speed of 27 knots. It can complement 100 personnel, including helicopter maintenance crew. These corvettes are basically used for coastal patrol, anti-submarine warfare, escort, and anti-shipping duties. Vessel are fitted with advanced radars, anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air missiles, and torpedo launchers. For anti-ship role it has two quadruple launchers with Kh-35 (Western designation SS-N-25 or Switchblade) anti-ship cruise missiles. These missiles can hit a target at a range of up to 260 km.

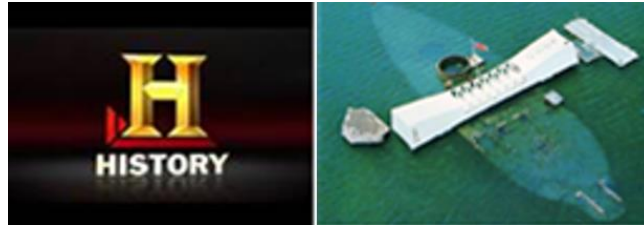
The first Steregushchiy class ship was fitted with Kashtan Close-In Weapon Systems (CIWS), however all further ships are fitted with a 12-cell Redut-K Vertical Launch System (VLS) in place of the Kashtan. This VLS is a naval version of the S-350 Vityaz land-based air-defense system. It fires medium-range air defense missiles. Last ditch defense against incoming anti-ship missiles is provided by two 30 mm six-barreled AK-630M CIWS. These mounts can fire up to 5,000 rounds per minute each for a maximum range of 5 km.

The main gun fitted forward is an Arsenal A-190 100 mm naval gun which has range over 20 km. For anti-submarine role there are two quadruple launchers with 330 mm torpedo tubes for unique Paket-NK torpedoes. These can engage both enemy submarines, as well as incoming torpedoes, thus serving a dual role. These warships have hangar for a single Ka-27 helicopter, which can be used for reconnaissance and anti-submarine missions. Primary radar has a range

of up to 150 km. The countermeasures equipment includes a TK-25E-5 countermeasures system and PK-10E decoy system. The Stereguschiy class has four 16D49 Diesel engines, that develop a combined power output of 23 320 shp. The propulsion system provides a maximum speed of 27 knots and a cruising range of 7 400 km (4 000 nautical miles) at 14 knots. The Steregushchiy class has a sea endurance of 15 days.

[Source: http://www.military-today.com/navy/stereguschiy_class.htm | April 2019 ++]

*** Military History ***

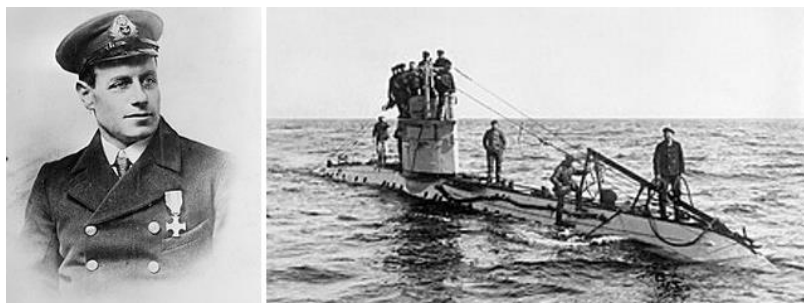


WWI Thomas Crisp ► Posthumous Recipient of the Victoria Cross

Skipper Thomas Crisp was in civilian life a commercial fisherman operating from Lowestoft in Suffolk, England. He earned his Victoria Cross after being killed during the defense of his vessel, the armed naval smack His Majesty's Smack Nelson, in the North Sea against an attack from a German submarine in 1917.

Crisp was born into a family of shipwrights and fishermen in Lowestoft. Although his father was the owner of a successful boatbuilding firm and thus could afford an education for his children, Thomas did not enjoy school, instead showing a "marked preference for quayside adventure to school routine". Leaving school, Thomas took to the sea, spending several years as a herring fisherman before joining a fishing trawler out of Lowestoft. He was a natural to the work, being a remarkably good sailor, but tired of it quickly and joined the Atlantic steamship SS Mobile, becoming her quartermaster and making several trans-Atlantic voyages. In 1895, aged 19, he met and married Harriet Elizabeth Alp and settled with her at 48 Staithe Road in Burgh St. Peter near Lowestoft, where they had two sons and a daughter, including Thomas Crisp Jr., who would be with his father on the day he won the Victoria Cross.

When the First World War began in July 1914, he was at sea. Unaware of the outbreak of war, he remained in the North Sea for several days, and was surprised on his return to learn that enemy submarines were expected off the port at any moment. When this threat failed to materialize, Crisp returned to fishing, considered too old for military service and in an occupation vital to Britain's food supplies. In late September, the George Borrow passed HMS Aboukir, HMS Hogue and HMS Cressy just hours before they were all sunk, with over a thousand lives lost, by German U-boat U-9. Tom Crisp Jr. later wrote of finding bodies in their fishing nets for weeks afterwards.



Thomas Crisp (left) and A UC-class coastal U-boat similar to the one that may have sunk Nelson (right)

In early 1915, Tom Crisp Jr left the vessel to join the Royal Navy. A few weeks later the U-boat threat expected so many months before arrived, as submarines surfaced among the undefended fishing fleets and used dynamite to destroy dozens of them after releasing the crews in small boats. This offensive was part of a wider German strategy to denude Britain of food supplies and took a heavy toll on the fishing fleets of the North Sea. The George Borrow was among the victims, sunk in August, although it is not known if Tom Crisp (father) was aboard at the time.

While temporarily working in a net factory following the loss of his vessel, he was scouted by a Navy officer recruiting experienced local fishing captains to command a flotilla of tiny fishing vessels, which were to be secretly armed. The boats were intended to be working fishing vessels fitted with a small artillery piece with which to sink enemy submarines as they surfaced alongside. In this manner it was hoped they would protect the fishing fleets without the diversion of major resources from the regular fleet, in the same manner as Q-ships deployed in the commercial sea lanes.

Agreeing to this proposal, Crisp became first a Seaman and by the summer of 1916 a Skipper in the Royal Naval Reserve, arranging for his son to join the crew of his boat, the HM Armed Smack I'll Try, armed with a 3-pounder gun. On 1 February 1917 in the North Sea, the I'll Try had its first confrontation with the enemy when two submarines surfaced close to the smack and her companion the larger Boy Alfred. Despite near misses from enemy torpedoes, both smacks scored hits on their larger opponents and reported them as probable sinkings, although post-war German records show that no submarines were lost on that date. Both skippers were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and a present of £200 for this action, and Crisp was offered a promotion and transfer to an ocean-going Q-ship. However, he was forced to turn down this offer due to his wife's sudden and terminal illness. She died in June 1917.

In July, the I'll Try was renamed Nelson and the Boy Alfred became Ethel & Millie, in an effort to maintain their cover. The boats continued to operate together and Crisp's crew was augmented with two regular seamen and a Royal Marine rifleman, providing Nelson with a crew of ten, including Crisp and his son. The smacks set out as usual on 15 AUG and pulled in a catch during the morning before making a sweep near the Jim Howe Bank in search of cruising enemies. At 2.30 pm, Crisp spotted a German U-boat on the surface 6,000 yards away. The U-boat also sighted the smack and both vessels began firing at once, the U-boat's weapon scoring several hits before Nelson's could be brought to bear. By this stage in the war, German submarine captains were aware of the decoy ship tactics and no longer stopped British merchant shipping, preferring to sink them from a distance with gunfire.

With such a heavy disparity in armament between the smack's 3-pounder and the submarine's 88 mm deck gun the engagement was short lived, the submarine firing eight shots before the Nelson could get within range of her opponent. The fourth shot fired by the U-boat holed the smack, and the seventh tore off both of Crisp's legs from underneath him. Calling for the confidential papers to be thrown overboard, Crisp dictated the message "*Nelson being attacked by submarine. Skipper killed. Jim Howe Bank. Send assistance at once*" to be sent by the boat's four carrier pigeons: like many small ships of the era, Nelson did not possess a radio set.

The sinking smack was abandoned by the nine unwounded crew, who attempted to remove their captain, who ordered that he should be thrown overboard rather than slow them down. The crew refused to do so, but found they were unable to move him and left him where he lay. He died in his son's arms a few minutes later. It is said that he was smiling as he died and remained so as the ship sank underneath him. The Ethel & Millie had just arrived on the scene as Nelson sank, and her captain Skipper Charles Manning called for Nelson's lifeboat to come alongside. Realizing that this would greatly overcrowd the second boat, the survivors refused and Manning sailed onwards towards the submarine, coming under lethal fire as he did so. His vessel was soon badly damaged and began to sink.

The crew of the Ethel & Millie then abandoned their battered boat and were hauled aboard the German submarine, where the Nelson survivors last saw them standing in line being addressed by a German officer. The seven British sailors of the Ethel & Millie were never seen again, and much controversy exists surrounding their disappearance. Prevailing opinion at the time was that they were murdered and dumped overboard by the German crew or abandoned at sea without supplies, but these scenarios cannot be substantiated. Another theory is that they were taken prisoner

aboard the boat and killed when the submarine was itself sunk. The son of Arthur Soanes, a sailor who disappeared in this incident, later claimed to have contacted his father through his powers as a spiritual medium, reporting that he had died on board the German vessel. UC-63 has been named as the submarine that sank both vessels.

The survivors of Nelson drifted for nearly two days until they arrived at the Jim Howe Buoy, where they were rescued by the fishery protection vessel Dryad. A pigeon named "Red Cock" had reached the authorities in Lowestoft with news of the fate of the boats and caused the Dryad to be dispatched to search for survivors.

A court of enquiry praised the surviving crew and their dead captain and authorized the award of the Victoria Cross posthumously to Thomas Crisp and Distinguished Service Medals to his son and another member of the crew. On 29 October 1917, David Lloyd George made an emotional speech in the House of Commons citing Crisp's sacrifice as representative of the Royal Navy's commitment "from the icy waters of the Arctic Ocean to the stormy floods of Magellan", which promoted Crisp into an overnight celebrity whose story ran in all the major London papers for nearly a week, containing as it did a story of personal sacrifice, filial devotion and perceived German barbarity. The medal presentation was made to Tom Crisp Jr at Buckingham Palace on 19 December 1917.

Crisp's self-sacrifice in the face of this "unequal struggle" was used by the government to bolster morale during some of the toughest days of the First World War for Britain, the summer and autumn of 1917, during which Britain was suffering heavy losses at the Battle of Passchendaele. His exploit and the speech read aloud by statesman David Lloyd George in the Houses of Parliament made headline news for nearly a week. [Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Crisp | April 2019 ++]

VE Day 1945 ► **The Celebration Heard 'Round The World**



New Yorkers shout their joy at hearing reports of Germany's unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945.

For just over five years and eight months a war had been raging in Europe that began with Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. By the summer of 1941, the military of Germany's fascist dictator Adolf Hitler had conquered or subdued virtually all of Europe from Spain's eastern border to the western border of the Soviet Union. Italy, under the control of the fascist Benito Mussolini, was allied with Germany, and the two nations fought against the British (and later the Americans) in North Africa and Italy. While still at war with Great Britain Hitler invaded the USSR on June 22, 1941, and on December 11 of that year he declared war on the United States of America, to honor a mutual support pact he had signed with Imperial Japan. The "European War" and the war the Japanese had been

fighting in Asia and the Southwest Pacific were now a global conflict — the Second World War. Upon entering the war in December 1941, the United States agreed on a “Europe first” strategy: concentrate on defeating Germany, Italy and their satellites rather than focusing the bulk of men and resources on the war in the Pacific.

V-E Day, therefore, marked a major milestone for the Allies but did not end the war — as Allied governments pointedly reminded their citizens. Attention turned to finishing the war against Imperial Japan. Continue reading to see how the news of victory in Europe was received in Allied nations around the world and by front-line troops in Europe and the Asia-Pacific theaters.

In the British Isles

In London, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill learned of the German surrender at 7:00 a.m. on 7 MAY, but no official announcement was made until 7:40 that evening. The Soviet Union’s premier Josef Stalin wanted to keep to the agreed-upon schedule of holding off on announcements until 9 MAY. Finally, Churchill growled that he was not going to give the Communist leader the satisfaction of holding up the news that was already spreading. (Germany had already informed its people of the surrender.) The understated official announcement from Britain’s Ministry of Information said simply, “In accordance with arrangements between the three great powers, tomorrow, Tuesday (8 MAY) will be treated as Victory in Europe Day and will be regarded as a holiday.”

Tens of thousands rushed into the streets of London and continued celebrating until heavy rains arrived around midnight that night. On V-E Day the next day, celebrations continued as best they could with rationing still in place. The Home Office declared, “Bonfires will be allowed, but the government trusts that only material with no salvage value will be used.” The Board of Trade lifted rationing of cloth just a smidgen: “Until the end of May you may buy cotton bunting without coupons, as long as it is red, white or blue, and does not cost more than one shilling and three pence a square yard.” English novelist Mollie Panter-Downes wrote in a letter that ran in *New Yorker Magazine* on 19 MAY that even dogs trotted along wearing immense tricolored bows, and “American sailors and laughing girls formed a conga line down the middle of Piccadilly.” Others, however, noted that many faces in the crowds were glum, too deeply affected by the war to be jubilant.

Churchill, greeted with cries of, “Winnie, Winnie,” from the crowds, announced Britons “may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing. Advance Britannia. Long live the cause of freedom! God save the King!” Then it would be time to get back to the work of finishing the war against Japan.

- In Scotland, the people joined in their national dance, the “eightsome reel,” and enjoyed nighttime illumination that had been forbidden for five years when all of Great Britain was “blacked out” to keep from helping German bombers find targets.
- In Wales, street parties broke out. Sugar had been sharply rationed during the war and would not be available in any quantity for some time to come, but the Welsh used whatever they had managed to save to create sweets for the children. Long tables with the treats were set up in the streets; the young ones also enjoyed a two-day holiday from school.
- In Northern Ireland, bunting and Union Jack flags hung from the houses, flying above spontaneous celebrations. As in Wales and elsewhere, whatever reserves of sugar could be found were used to bake desserts and special treats. (The Republic of Ireland remained neutral during the war. Some 5,000 men of its Irish Defense Force who went AWOL in order to enlist elsewhere in the war against the Germans were officially designated as deserters until they were officially pardoned in 2013.)

V-E Day 1945 in Canada

Some 1 million men and women — nearly a tenth of Canada’s population of 11 million — served in the military during the war, and the country was the fourth-largest producer of war materiel. The country emerged from the war with a new level of international respect. Riots broke out in a few towns. The worse was in the port of Halifax where pubs and liquor stores were ordered to be locked up on V-E Day. What began as a break-in to get drinks at a pub turned into riotous looting, damaging over 550 stores and causing \$1 million damage.

V-E Day 1945 in Australia and New Zealand

The Sydney Morning Herald in Australia greeted V-E Day with the question, “Since when has it been customary to celebrate victory halfway through a contest?” The war with Japan had been the great threat to Australia itself, and the country’s sons were still fighting and dying in that war. Accordingly, the mood was more somber than in Europe. On 9 MAY, some 100,000 people attended a service at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne. Regardless, Australian service personnel overseas joined in the raucous celebrations of whatever country they were in that day.

Headlines announced the victory to New Zealanders on the morning of 8 MAY, but Walter Nash, acting prime minister, refused to allow celebrations until Winston Churchill officially announced the peace from London. That didn’t happen until 9 MAY at one o’clock in the morning, New Zealand time, so for the most part New Zealanders observed V-E Day on 9 MAY, although there was some spontaneous dancing in the streets. Preparations had been underway for weeks, in part to keep celebrations from getting out of control. Events included speeches, thanksgiving services, and the singing of the national anthems of New Zealand, America and the Soviet Union. A People’s Victory March in Christchurch drew 25,000.

V-E Day 1945 in South Africa

In Cape Town the thousands of celebrants brought traffic to a near-standstill. The Cape Times of the following day wrote, “The gnawing, ceaseless anxiety in many homes for loved ones in danger has vanished like an evil dream.” South Africa was home to many people of German descent, however, and in 1940 the decision to fight as part of the British force against Germany and Italy was not popular with those who supported Hitler’s policies. On V-E Day itself, a group overpowered guards and raided the office of the chief controller in Pretoria.

V-E Day 1945 in France

Charles de Gaulle, who had led the Free French Forces throughout the war, made the official announcement to his people that Germany was defeated and Hitler was dead:” The war has been won. This is victory. It is the victory of the United Nations and that of France. The German enemy has surrendered to the Allied Armies in the West and East. The French High Command was present and a party to the act of capitulation ... Honor to our nation, which never faltered, even under terrible trials, nor gave in to them. Honor to the United Nations, which mingled their blood, their sorrows and their hopes with ours and who today are triumphant with us.” Church bells rang out to relay his message. Celebrations continued for two days.

Today, V-E Day is known as World War II Victory Day in France. At various times it has been observed on the feast of St. Joan of Arc (May 16), Armistice Day (November 11, marking the end of the First World War), and the second Sunday in May. In 1975, the government announced there would be no official observance of the end of the war, which drew protests from veterans. Following a great deal of public debate, World War II Victory Day became an official national holiday in 1982, observed on 8 MAY.

V-E Day in the Low Countries

The Low Countries — Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg — were the first countries invaded by German forces on the way to attack France in May 1940, and most of the vicious fighting of the Battle of the Bulge (December 16, 1944–January 16, 1945) took place in Belgium and Luxembourg.

In Holland, V-E Day arrived just two days short of the fifth anniversary of the day German troops had invaded the country. Prime Minister William Mackenzie King announced the “victory won at so great a price” and reminded citizens that the war against Japan continued. The grateful Dutch joyously swarmed Canadian troop convoys, throwing flowers and sometimes knocking men from their tanks in the enthusiasm to thank them. People too sick to walk were often carried outside to join in the celebration. Dutch flags and orange streamers (for the royal family of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the House of Orange-Nassau) flew from nearly every house. It was the beginning months of “Holland’s wild summer of 1945” — which stood in marked contrast to the “Hunger winter” of 1944-45 when Germans cut off food, coal and medical supplies to the country in retaliation for the Dutch assisting Allied troops.

In Belgium, the old buildings of Brussels that had witnessed so much history in a country known as “the crossroads of Europe” were illuminated by fireworks, spotlights and bonfires as thousands thronged the streets after the news was announced on the evening of 7 MAY. The crowds returned the next day, after thanksgiving services in churches. Britain’s Union Jack and America’s Stars and Stripes were carried along with the black, yellow and red tricolor of Belgium. The story was much the same in Luxembourg: delirious over the war’s end, citizens swarmed Americans, giving them flowers and drinks of wine.

V-E Day 1945 in the United States

President Harry S Truman announced the victory in Europe to the American people and appointed Sunday, 13 MAY — Mother’s Day, appropriately enough — a day of prayer for thanksgiving. In part, his announcement said, “Our rejoicing is sobered and subdued by a supreme consciousness of the terrible price we have paid to rid the world of Hitler and his evil band. Let us not forget, my fellow Americans, the sorrow and the heartache which today abide in the homes of so many of our neighbors — neighbors whose most priceless possession has been rendered as a sacrifice to redeem our liberty ... If I could give you a single watchword for the coming months, that word is work, work, and more work. We must work to finish the war. Our victory is only half over.”

Many communities attempted to subdue celebrations, wanting to give the occasion the solemnity they felt it deserved and reminding Americans that, as Truman said, “Our victory is only half over.” Across the country, however, joyous celebrations broke out. Thousands gathered in New York’s Times Square. New Orleans took on the appearance of Mardi Gras, with people dancing in the streets. Church bells rang out the glorious news in small towns and major cities.

The Cincinnati Enquirer wrote in its 8 MAY morning edition, “After shadow boxing for a couple of weeks with rumors, news ‘scoops,’ and unconfirmed announcements, Cincinnati is expected to receive the official announcement of V-Day with a minimum of excitement.” President Truman’s announcement came “almost as an anticlimax after yesterday’s almost official announcement of victory.” Most of Cincinnati’s stores would close, but schools, the city’s stock exchange, and banks remained open, streetcars would operate normally. Most importantly, the majority of factories would continue to hum, producing war materiel, although a few declared a holiday or planned to close at noon. Continuing production was the theme of factories across America, and “absenteeism” was still unacceptable.

V-E Day 1945 in the Soviet Union

Western journalists had leaked word of the German capitulation on 7 MAY, inducing Western nations to move up their official announcements. In the Soviet Union, Josef Stalin insisted on maintaining the agreed-upon schedule and make the announcement on 9 MAY. A little after 1 a.m. on May 9, however, a radio reporter told those who were awake at that hour in the USSR that Nazi Germany had officially surrendered. As had happened elsewhere, impromptu celebrations broke out. In Red Square people sang, danced and kissed. A crowd gathered outside the U.S. embassy in Moscow, apparently to show gratitude for American Lend-Lease assistance during the war. Fireworks exploded over the Kremlin.

Stalin himself seemed less than enthusiastic. His deputy Nikita Khrushchev telephoned to congratulate the Soviet leader on his victory, and Stalin reportedly snapped at him, “Why are you bothering me? I am working.” The USSR’s official victory parade took place in a downpour over a month later, on 24 JUN. “Europe” was not placed after “Victory” for the Soviets’ Victory Day on 9 MAY; it was simply Victory Day, marking the end of what they called the Great Patriotic War in which 25-30 million Soviet citizens had died, two-thirds of them civilians. One captain summed it up by saying, “Pora jit” (It’s time to live). May 9 held no special significance, at least officially, between 1948 and 1964, but for the 20th anniversary in 1965 the day was declared a holiday, and a military parade took place in Red Square. Parades were held again in 1985 and 1990, after which they have been held annually. Flowers, with red carnations favored, are given to veterans in the streets.

V-E Day in the front lines of Europe

While soldiers, sailors and pilots in London and New York were dancing in the streets and stealing kisses from pretty girls, for the men in the front lines reaction was subdued. First Lieutenant William Lee Preston in the U.S. Third Army’s

65th Infantry Division wrote, “the front line troops didn’t celebrate. Most of the men merely read the story of victory from the division bulletin sent to the troops, said something like ‘I’m glad,’ and walked away. Perhaps it was a different story in their hearts, or perhaps they were too tired, or thinking of home too much, or thinking of their buddies who didn’t live to see the victory, to do much celebrating or merry making.” (Click here to read the [complete text of Lt. Preston’s letter](#), as well as a letter by 22-year-old artist Lila whose USO duties included working with a sketching unit that visited recuperating soldiers in military hospitals.)

V-E Day in the Pacific Theater

Victory in Europe was welcome news to Allied troops in the Pacific and the China-Burma-India theaters of war. They greeted it with thanksgiving but there was little celebration. As a London Times special correspondent in Burma wrote, “The war is over. Let us get on with the war.” Now that Europe would no longer be receiving the bulk of troops and materiel, officers and enlisted personnel in the war against Japan hoped they would be given more men and equipment quickly, in order to end their war sooner. Meanwhile, fighting continued in New Guinea, the Philippines, Okinawa, the CBI and elsewhere. Kamikazes still made suicide dives to sink Allied ships. The lights may have gone on over Europe and America, but a funereal pall still darkened the Pacific and Asia.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Gerald D. Swick | May 8, 2019 ++]

Japan’s Carrier Shinano ► Deployment and Sinking of Japan's Top Secret Ship

As 1944 neared its end, the tottering Japanese empire toiled terribly to find ways to hold off U.S. forces as they advanced ever closer to the Home Islands. U.S. troops under General Douglas MacArthur were resolutely reclaiming the Philippines. Huge Boeing B-29 Superfortress bombers were beginning the destruction of Japan’s major cities. Perhaps most devastating were the omnipresent U.S. Navy submarines that were sweeping Japanese shipping from the Pacific. Yet, if the Imperial Navy could produce a single monster of a warship perhaps it could at least temporarily stem the advance of the enemy. Maybe this floating megaweapon could even check or turn back the Philippine liberation and abort the anticipated attack on Okinawa.

The aircraft carrier Shinano started out as the third sister of a planned trio of super battleships that included the 70,000-ton Musashi and the Yamato. After the crippling loss of aircraft carriers inflicted on the Japanese Navy at the Battle of Midway, Shinano’s construction was altered to instead make her into the largest carrier ever to float. Named for a province of medieval Japan, Shinano’s builders hoped to have her seaworthy in her redesigned state by February 1945, yet rapidly waning military fortunes resulted in a quickened pace of construction. Overworked shipyard workers toiled in 16-hour shifts to complete the great warship. To learn more about the construction fate of this supercarrier refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Imperial Japan's Top Secret Aircraft Carrier**”. [Source: Warfare History Network | Kelly Bell | April 20, 2019 ++]

Virginia Hall ► One Of The Most Important American WWII Spies

Virginia Hall is one of the most important American spies most people have never heard of. Her story is on display at the CIA Museum inside the spy agency headquarters in Langley, Va. — but this is off-limits to the public. "She was the most highly decorated female civilian during World War II," said Janelle Neises, the museum's deputy director, who's providing a tour. So why haven't more people heard about Hall? A quote from Hall on the agency display offers an explanation: "Many of my friends were killed for talking too much." But now — more than 70 years after her wartime exploits in France, and almost 40 years after her death — Virginia Hall is having a moment. Three books have just come out. Two movies are in the works.

British author Sonia Purnell wrote one of the books, *A Woman of No Importance*, and she explains the irony in the biography's title. "Through a lot of her life, the early life, she was constantly rejected and belittled," said Purnell. "She was constantly just being dismissed as someone not very important or of no importance." Hall was born to a wealthy Baltimore family in 1906, and she was raised to marry into her own privileged circle. But she wanted adventure. She called herself "capricious and cantankerous." She liked to hunt. She once went to school wearing a bracelet made of live snakes.



Hall briefly attended Radcliffe and Barnard colleges. Then she went to study in Paris and fell in love with France. She decided to become a diplomat, said Purnell. "She wanted to be an ambassador. She got pushed back by the State Department. She applied several times," Purnell said, noting that women accounted for only six of the 1,500 U.S. diplomats at the time. Hall did land a clerical job at a U.S. consulate in Turkey. But while hunting birds, she accidentally shot herself in the foot. Gangrene set in, and her left leg was amputated below the knee.

Recovery was long and painful, as she learned to use a clunky wooden leg. Yet it was also a turning point, said Craig Gralley, a retired CIA officer who has written his own book about Hall — a novel, *Hall of Mirrors*. "She had been given a second chance at life and wasn't going to waste it. And her injury, in fact, might have kind of bolstered her or reawakened her resilience so that she was in fact able to do great things," he said.

When World War II erupted and Nazi Germany invaded France, Hall volunteered to drive an ambulance for the French. France was soon overrun, forcing her to flee to Britain. A chance meeting with a spy put her in contact with British intelligence. After limited training, this one-legged American woman was among the first British spies sent into Nazi-occupied France in 1941. She posed as a reporter for the *New York Post*.

There were failures, especially in the early days, when members of her network were arrested and killed. But Hall was a natural spy, keeping one step ahead of the German secret police, the Gestapo. "Virginia Hall, to a certain extent, was invisible," said Gralley. "She was able to play on the chauvinism of the Gestapo at the time. None of the Germans early in the war necessarily thought that a woman was capable of being a spy." Hall operated in the eastern French city of Lyon. She initially stayed at a convent and persuaded nuns to help her. She befriended a female brothel owner and received information that French prostitutes gathered from German troops.

Hall organized French resistance fighters, providing them with safe houses and intelligence. This didn't go unnoticed, said Purnell. "The Germans came to realize that they were after a limping lady," she said. Hall constantly changed her appearance. "She could be four different women in the space of an afternoon, with four different code names," said Purnell. The man in hot pursuit was none other than the Gestapo's infamous Klaus Barbie, known as "the Butcher of Lyon" for the thousands in France tortured and killed by his forces. Barbie ordered "wanted" posters of Hall that featured a drawing of her above the words "The Enemy's Most Dangerous Spy — We Must Find And Destroy Her!"

The Nazis appeared to be closing in on Hall around the end of 1942. She narrowly escaped to Spain, embarking on a harrowing journey that included walking three days for 50 miles in heavy snow over the forbidding Pyrenees

Mountains. While researching his book, Gralley, a marathon runner, made a part of that walk and found it exhausting. "I could only imagine the kind of will and the kind of perseverance that Virginia Hall had by making this trek," he says, "not on a beautiful day, but in the dead of winter and with a prosthetic leg she had to drag behind her." When Hall reached Spain, she was arrested because she didn't have an entrance stamp in her passport. She was released after six weeks and made her way back to Britain. She soon grew restless and wanted to return to France. The British refused, fearing it was too dangerous.

However, the Americans were ramping up their own intelligence service, the Office of Strategic Services, or OSS, which had virtually no presence in France. The Americans needed Hall, yet the Nazis were everywhere, making it even more difficult for her to operate, said Purnell. "She got some makeup artist to teach her how to draw wrinkles on her face," she said. "She also got a fierce, a rather sort of scary London dentist to grind down her lovely, white American teeth so that she looked like a French milkmaid." Hall's second tour in France, in 1944 and 1945, was even more successful than the first. She called in airdrops for the resistance fighters, who blew up bridges and sabotaged trains. They reclaimed villages well before Allied troops advanced deep into France. At its peak, Hall's network consisted of some 1,500 people, including a French-American soldier, Paul Goillot — who would later become her husband.

Hall's niece, Lorna Catling, is now 89 and lives in Baltimore. She recalls meeting her aunt after the war. "She came home when I was 16, and she was pale and had white hair and crappy clothes," Catling said. And what did Hall say about the war? "She never talked about it," Catling added. The British and the French both recognized Hall's contributions — in private. President Harry Truman wanted to honor Hall at a public White House ceremony. Hall declined, saying she wanted to remain undercover. William Donovan, the OSS chief, gave Hall the Distinguished Service Cross — making her the only civilian woman to receive one in World War II. Hall's mother was the only outsider present at the ceremony. "I do think that she became America's greatest spy of World War II," Gralley said of Hall.

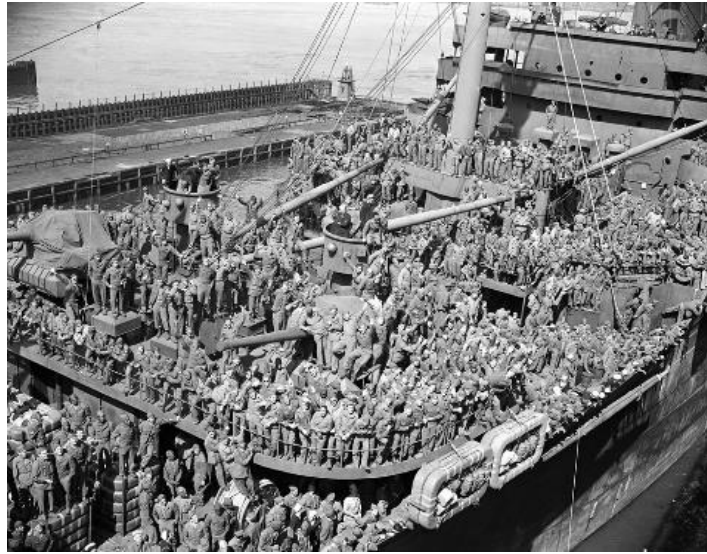
Hall then joined the newly formed CIA, which succeeded the OSS, and worked there for 15 years, mostly at headquarters. These were not her happiest days. She thrived on the adrenaline of acting independently in the field during wartime. Now she was largely confined to a desk. "As you get higher in rank, now it's all about money and personnel and plans and policy and that sort of bureaucratic stuff," said Randy Burkett, a historian at the CIA. And Hall faced discrimination as a woman. "Was she treated properly? Well, by today's standards, absolutely not," said Burkett.

Hall retired in 1966 and never spoke publicly. She died in 1982 in Maryland, her story still confined to the intelligence community. Purnell said it was a challenge piecing together Hall's story. "It was detective work," she said. "So many files, papers, documents have been lost, destroyed or misfiled. She operated under so many different code names that people hadn't really pulled together all the strands." Now the books are on the shelves. The movies are coming. And at the CIA, recruits train in a building recently named The Virginia Hall Expeditionary Center. [Source: NPR | April 18, 2019 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 16 thru 31 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 16 thru 31 MAY**". [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | May 2019 ++]

Post WWII Photos ▶ **Super Transport Ship With Returning Vets**



The super transport ship, General W.P. Richardson, docked in New York, with veterans of the European war cheering on June 7, 1945. Many soldiers were veterans of the African campaign, Salerno, Anzio, Cassino and the winter warfare in Italy's mountains. (AP Photo/Tony Camerano)

Every Picture Tells A Story ▶ **Battle T Trainer**



At first quick glance, one might think this was two Fairey Battle light bombers flying in very tight formation or even an looking aircraft were built, many being converted versions of standard Battle aircraft. The Battle has long been maligned as one of the worst aircraft of the Second World War, underperforming as a light bomber and swept from the skies over France by the Luftwaffe. Regardless of its failures in a combat role, it saw journeyman service as a target tug and gunnery training platform in Great Britain and across Canada with the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. This Battle T (R7365) was with No. 1 Service Flying Training School at RAF *Netheravon*, Wiltshire, which is today the oldest military flying training school in the world.

War Memorials ► Jatiyo Smriti Soudho



A monument in Bangladesh. It is the symbol of the valour and the sacrifice of those killed in the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, which brought the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistani rule. The monument is located in Savar, about 35 km north-west of the capital, Dhaka.

WWII Bomber Nose Art [30] ► Hardships



Medal of Honor Citations ► John D. Hawk | WWII



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

John D. Hawk

Rank and organization: Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company E, 359th Infantry, 90th Infantry Division

Place and date: Near Chambois, France, 20 August 1944

Entered service: Bremerton, Wash. 1943

Born: May 30, 1924

Citation

He manned a light machinegun on 20 August 1944, near Chambois, France, a key point in the encirclement which created the Falaise Pocket. During an enemy counterattack, his position was menaced by a strong force of tanks and infantry. His fire forced the infantry to withdraw, but an artillery shell knocked out his gun and wounded him in the right thigh. Securing a bazooka, he and another man stalked the tanks and forced them to retire to a wooded section. In the lull which followed, Sgt. Hawk reorganized 2 machinegun squads and, in the face of intense enemy fire, directed the assembly of 1 workable weapon from 2 damaged guns. When another enemy assault developed, he was forced to pull back from the pressure of spearheading armor. Two of our tank destroyers were brought up. Their shots were ineffective because of the terrain until Sgt. Hawk, despite his wound, boldly climbed to an exposed position on a knoll where, unmoved by fusillades from the enemy, he became a human aiming stake for the destroyers. Realizing that his shouted fire directions could not be heard above the noise of battle, he ran back to the destroyers through a concentration of bullets and shrapnel to correct the range. He returned to his exposed position, repeating this performance until 2 of the tanks were knocked out and a third driven off. Still at great risk, he continued to direct the destroyers' fire into the Germans' wooded position until the enemy came out and surrendered. Sgt. Hawk's fearless initiative and heroic conduct, even while suffering from a painful wound, was in large measure responsible for crushing 2 desperate attempts of the enemy to escape from the Falaise Picket and for taking more than 500 prisoners.



Hawk was born in San Francisco, California, and grew up in the Rolling Bay area of Bainbridge Island, Washington. He graduated from Bainbridge High School in 1943 and joined the Army two weeks later from Bremerton, Washington.

By August 20, 1944, Hawk was serving in Europe as a sergeant in Company E, 359th Infantry Regiment, 90th Infantry Division. During a German counterattack on that day, near Chambois, France, he was wounded in the right thigh while taking cover behind a tree. A German shell had penetrated the tree trunk. ("French apple trees aren't worth a darn," he said in 1994.) Hawk continued to fight and, in order to direct the shots of friendly tank destroyers, he willingly exposed himself to intense enemy fire. For his actions during the battle, he was issued the Medal of Honor on July 13, 1945. The medal was formally presented to him by President Harry Truman.

Hawk recovered from his wounds and continued to serve in combat. He was wounded three more times before the end of the war, earning a total of four Purple Hearts. In 1945, Hawk returned from the war and then attended the University of Washington, graduating with a bachelor's degree in biology. For more than thirty years he worked as a teacher and principal in the Central Kitsap School District. On April 5, 2008, Hawk received the Medal of Honor flag in the Capitol rotunda in Olympia, Washington. He was presented the flag by Brigadier General Gordon Toney, commander of the Washington Army National Guard. Hawk said of his Medal of Honor: What I did was not such a big thing. I never did anything more than the people I served with. The [Medal of Honor] is a symbol and it stands for service, everybody's service. I did it for the people who were there and they were doing the same thing for me.

He died on November 4, 2013 at the age of 89. Jackson Park Elementary in Bremerton was renamed John D. "Bud" Hawk Elementary in his honor

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

* Health Care *



VA-CMS Prescription Agreement ► Greatly Improves Drug Safety Monitoring

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) recently announced an agreement that greatly improves drug safety monitoring of prescriptions, including opioids. The agreement, which was formalized 21 MAR, will give VA the ability to monitor medical prescriptions issued outside the VA through Medicare Part D.

“VA is committed to patient safety, and our robust medication surveillance systems are part of that commitment,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This agreement greatly enhances medication safety for Veterans by providing better oversight of drugs that Veterans may be able to obtain from both agencies.” VA currently has a robust system in place for medication surveillance to ensure safe use by Veteran patients and the ability to analyze patient outcomes. This new agreement will enable VA to incorporate up-to-date Medicare prescription information into its safety surveillance operations. By incorporating prescriptions dispensed through Medicare, VA providers have access to more accurate information about the medications used by its patients.

More than 5 million Veterans receive prescription medications through VA. With the creation of the Medicare Part D benefit, Veterans dually enrolled in VA and Medicare have access to prescription benefits through both VA and Medicare, creating the potential for adverse drug interactions, duplication of use and greater risk of adverse drug events, including overdoses. “This agreement represents a new level of information sharing between VA and CMS, which will improve care coordination and better protect our beneficiaries,” said CMS principal deputy administrator for Operations

and Policy Kimberly Brandt. “Leveraging data is a key element of CMS’ efforts to combat the opioid epidemic, and we look forward to continued collaboration with VA on this important issue.”

To learn more about the risks of opioid-related adverse events and overdose among Veteran patients receiving dual prescriptions with VA and CMS, visit <https://annals.org/aim/fullarticle/2728200/dual-receipt-prescription-opioids-from-department-veterans-affairs-medicare-part>. [Source: A News Release | April 30, 2019 ++]

Military Health System Update 02 ► 18,000 Medical Positions to be Eliminated

First and foremost, military medicine is a national treasure, and its importance to our country cannot be overstated. The military has a long history of producing medical innovations which have resulted in great benefit for civilian medicine. The progress made on the battlefield during the past 18 years of war represent a transformation of extraordinary medical achievement for the United States and the world. However, now there is tangible movement to dismantle this national treasure and potentially damage it beyond repair - and this takedown has been insidious. Thus, it is a fair question to ask, is the true intention to outsource military medicine?

The Defense Department’s fiscal 2020 budget calls for the elimination of about 18,000 military medical positions. This is roughly 20% of the military’s medical force. This reduction in medical capacity seems to have been developed absent a medical readiness requirement analysis in support of combatant operational plans. Instead, they appear to be based on a market or network analysis in the vicinity of installations. A 20% force reduction constitutes a qualitative change to the military health system, which will cause unintended consequences and may affect all of American medical care.

These consequences will be felt in the areas of combat casualty care capabilities; recruitment and retention; and in the already taxed civilian health care sector. These changes will not only dramatically affect currently serving troops. Retirees could see, and many are already experiencing, reductions in care, including pharmacy services. Many TRICARE Prime enrollees are already being a pushed into the civilian network for all of their care. This may be just the beginning. MOAA is looking for answers to the following key questions and more:

- Surge capacity – can military medical departments still support operational plans, medical requirements, combat operations, humanitarian aid and disaster relief missions? Simultaneously?
- How will the reductions affect recruitment and retention of military medical professionals to include the reserve component?
- Will there be adverse effects on recruitment or retention of the parent services? (The military health benefit is the top benefit when it comes to retention and re-enlistments).
- What is the stateside-to-overseas dwell ratios for deployments? Are they acceptable and predictable levels, or will the reductions result in more frequent deployments?
- What will be the effect on the Graduate Medical Education programs (the pipeline of physicians)? Not to mention the quality...
- What will be the effect on civilian medical communities associated with closure or downsizing capabilities of military treatment facilities?

Proceeding without full analyses and transparency could leave the military community insufficiently sized or with inexperienced medical personnel stateside to support overseas deployments, combat operations, and humanitarian missions. MOAA asks that you alert Congress to this issue by asking them to include provisions in the upcoming 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) directing the DoD to:

- Develop metrics to measure long-term impacts on military readiness, family member readiness, graduate medical education and combat casualty care capabilities.

- Delay medical force restructuring implementation until approved metrics are implemented and can be monitored.
- Develop a phased implementation plan with milestones for each phase to be met if and before advancing phases.
- Provide Congress with a full assessment prior to any proposed large-scale billed reprogramming initiative.

TAKE ACTION: Tell Congress not to dismantle military medicine. [Click here](#) for a prewritten editable message to be sent to your members of Congress. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Kathryn M. Beasley | May 2, 2019 ++]

TRICARE Claim Reversal ► Approval Withdrawn | Billed \$46k After surgery

First, Tricare approved the surgery that a retired and disabled Air Force master sergeant needed to correct a debilitating back disease and reimbursed his costs. Then, the Defense Department’s health insurance program said they had made a mistake — and sent him a bill for nearly \$46,000. Retired Master Sgt. Robin Gift, 56, has now been fighting Tricare on this for roughly seven years, and he’s almost out of moves — and money. Tricare at one point agreed to cut the \$45,956 debt in half, to \$22,978, his attorney Stephen Jewell said — but he would have to declare the forgiven debt as income and pay taxes on it.

Gift now lives in Seminole, Florida, on his disability payments from his time in the Air Force, with a roommate to make ends meet. If Tricare forces him to repay this debt, Jewell said, it will make his already-dire financial situation even worse. Defense Health Agency spokesman Kevin Dwyer said the agency could not comment specifically on Gift’s case. “Tricare is committed to providing safe, quality, accessible and patient-centered care for those in our charge and their families,” Dwyer said in an email Tuesday. “Though we do not discuss specifics regarding any particular case, Tricare continually reviews claims to ensure they have been properly paid. Tricare works with patients to secure repayment.”

Gift medically retired in 2006, after serving more than 22 years in passenger service operations for aircraft — hauling cargo and baggage, as well as cooking and serving food and working as a flight attendant. He pulled a back muscle during physical training one day, sought treatment, and in 2002 was diagnosed with a pre-degenerative disc disease in his back, Jewell said. In 2003, he was diagnosed with full-blown degenerative disc disease, and the military found he had become injured as a result of his job. “It was kind of a wear-and-tear type of thing,” Jewell said of Gift’s injury. “He’s 100 percent disabled, he pretty much can’t work. He’s really in some rough shape.”

In 2009, he underwent a lumbar disc replacement surgery in Germany, the cost of which he paid up front. Tricare approved the surgery and in early 2010, reimbursed him for \$45,956. But by 2012, Tricare’s opinion had changed, according to a release from Jewell’s law firm, Tully Rinckey. Tricare told Gift that it had made a mistake; the procedure was not covered and he would have to repay the full amount. Gift refused to pay, Jewell said, and asked them to reconsider. He had a letter from his doctor at the time of the surgery, which said that without the procedure, he might not have been able to walk within a year. “When he started [fighting] this back in 2012, he thought cooler heads would prevail,” Jewell said.

Gift asked for help from his representatives, including Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL). Jewell said congressional assistance helped convince Tricare to offer some relief, such as by offering to cut his debt in half. But Jewell said Gift doesn’t think he should have to pay, since Tricare agreed to cover the costs nearly a decade ago. What’s more, Jewell said, Tricare now officially covers the surgery Gift received, and has since at least 2017. Gift is almost out of moves, Jewell said. He’s exhausted his appellant options and doesn’t have any more money to further pursue a lawsuit. He’s hoping someone in Congress steps in to relieve him of the financial burden. If he has to pay, Jewell said, “he does not know what will happen to him.” [Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | May 2, 2019 ++]

Diabetes Update 16 ► Patient Readmission Rate 40% Higher after Discharge

People with diabetes and low blood sugar levels have a 40 percent higher risk of hospital readmission after discharge, a new study says. Diabetes patients with blood sugar levels below 100 milligrams per deciliter had higher 30-day readmission rates after discharge than those with normal levels, according to research published Wednesday in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism. They also had higher 30, 90 and 180-day post-discharge death rates, as well as higher combined 30-day readmission and death rates when their blood sugar levels were low. The researchers say the burden of hospital readmissions cost the U.S. healthcare system about \$25 million annually.

"In our novel nationwide study, we examined data of almost 1 million hospitalizations at the VA Health care system," Elias Spanakis, a researcher at the Baltimore VA Medical Center and study author, said in a news release. "We found that patients with diabetes who are discharged with low or even near normal glucose values during the last day of the hospital stay are at a higher risk of dying or being readmitted to the hospital." To gather their numbers, the researchers examined the readmission and death rates of more than 843,000 patients over 14 years. In all, about 9.4 million people in the United States have diabetes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Although future studies are needed, physicians should avoid discharging patients with diabetes from the hospital until glucose values above 100 mg/dl are achieved during the last day of the hospitalization," Spanakis said. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Brandon Ballenger | April 18, 2019 ++]

Mouth Microbes ► The Helpful and the Harmful

Do you know what's in your mouth? It's home to about 700 species of microbes. These include germs like bacteria, fungus, and more. "Everybody has these microbes in their mouth," says Dr. Robert Palmer, an NIH expert on oral microbes. Some microbes are helpful. Others can cause problems like tooth decay and gum disease. Troubles begin when microbes form a sticky, colorless film called plaque on your teeth. Brushing and flossing help to keep your mouth clean. But after you brush and floss, germs grow again and more plaque forms. That's why you need to clean your mouth regularly.



Different microbes grow in different places. Some stick to your teeth. Others prefer your tongue. Some lurk in the tiny pockets between tooth and gum. Once they've found their homes, they form diverse communities with the other germs. Mouth microbes work together to protect themselves with a slimy, sticky material called a matrix. The matrix in plaque makes it harder to remove it. The communities within the matrix include both helpful and disease-causing microbes. The good microbes help keep the growth of bad microbes in check. Good microbes also help you digest food and can protect against harmful microbes in food.

Certain things you may be doing can help bad microbes grow better than the good ones. Sugary foods and drinks feed some microbes and help them increase in number and spread out. Some of these sugar-loving microbes can turn sugar into matrix and acid. The acid destroys the surface of your teeth. The more sugar in your diet, the more fuel is

available for these microbes to build up plaque and damage teeth. “It’s more productive to think about the community than it is to think about the single microbe that causes disease,” Palmer explains. You can’t stop tooth decay by getting rid of just one type of acid-making microbe. There are several different types of microbes in the plaque that make acid. The good news is that limiting sweets and brushing and flossing regularly can help prevent bad microbes from growing out of control.

“Many bacteria in our mouths depend on help from other members of their community to survive and prosper,” says Dr. Floyd Dewhirst, a dental expert who studies microbes at the Forsyth Institute. Because microbes grow in communities, it’s important to understand how both helpful and harmful microbes work. Dewhirst’s team is trying to identify all the different germs living in the mouth and what they do. Before the team can study a microbe, they have to figure out how to grow it. The challenge is that some microbes don’t like to grow anywhere but in your mouth. About 30% of the 700 species haven’t been grown in the lab yet. Dewhirst’s team is working on growing those microbes in the lab that no one has grown before. They’re using genetic and other information to identify each one and learn more about them. “The question is,” he says, “once you know who is there and have a quick way of identifying them, what are all of these bacteria doing?”

Dewhirst’s studies have shown that some microbes make certain substances that help their neighbors grow. His team is trying to identify what those substances are. They also want to find out how these microbes may affect people’s health. Being able to grow microbes in the lab lets scientists run tests to figure out how they’re involved in health and disease. This information could one day help scientists come up with better ways of preventing and treating oral diseases.

An important health problem caused by mouth microbes is early childhood tooth decay. “In the U.S., about 23% of our children between the ages of 1 and 5 are affected by this disease,” says Dr. Hyun (Michel) Koo, a dental researcher and oral health expert at the University of Pennsylvania. Tooth decay can get worse very fast. The microbe matrix and acid from bacteria are thought to be the main cause of tooth decay in young kids. Koo’s team has found that there’s also fungus in the plaque of kids with rampant tooth decay. The fungus partners with the matrix- and acid-making bacteria to worsen tooth decay. “Bacteria by itself can cause tooth decay,” Koo explains. “But when fungus is there, it boosts up the entire machinery.” Koo’s team has shown that some fungus can get energy from sugar that bacteria release while making acid. The fungus then releases substances that feed the bacteria’s growth. This helps the bacteria form an even tougher matrix and make more acid.

Koo’s team is looking for new ways to fight plaque buildup and tooth decay. They’ve developed tiny substances, called nanoparticles, that are small enough to get inside and destroy the matrix that protects microbes. The nanoparticles can also kill the acid-making bacteria without harming good bacteria in the mouth. Koo’s team has shown that these tiny substances can reduce acid damage to the tooth surface. The researchers hope to test the approach in people in the future. Nanoparticles are just one approach now being studied to prevent or treat mouth diseases. Future technologies may help keep our mouths healthier. But there are many things you can do to keep bad mouth microbes in check now. See the Wise Choices box for some tips. You can’t have a healthy body without a healthy mouth. [Source: NIH News in Health | May 2019 ++]

Synesthesia ► **Mingling Senses**

What does the color blue taste like? Does guitar music smell sweet or spicy? These questions might sound like nonsense. But for people with a condition called synesthesia, they describe real experiences. We have five senses: touch, sight, taste, sound, and smell. Most people experience their senses one at a time. In synesthesia, one sense can be experienced at the same time as another. For example, a person with synesthesia might feel something rough brush against their hand every time they smell a flower. They can also experience the same sense in two ways. For example,

seeing letters or numbers in a specific color, like the letter “A” always being red no matter what color it’s written in. This is the most common type of synesthesia.

Synesthesia isn’t very common. It sometimes runs in families. This makes researchers think that genes may play a role. Synesthesia isn’t dangerous, and rarely causes problems for people. Most people with synesthesia say they enjoy their special senses. For researchers, “studying synesthesia allows us to think about what the brain does,” explains Dr. Krish Sathian, a neurologist at Pennsylvania State University. Scientists don’t know what happens in the brain to cause synesthesia. “There are a few explanations that have been put forward,” Sathian says. These involve the way neurons talk to each other. Neurons are the brain cells that process information from the senses. Some researchers think that people with synesthesia have extra connections between neurons in some areas of the brain. Others think that the direction that information can flow between brain cells might be different.

Sathian’s lab uses imaging tests to watch how the brain works. They’ve found that, even in people without synesthesia, the senses often work together in ways previously unrealized. For example, when you touch an object and try to identify its shape, the part of your brain that processes sight becomes active along with the area that processes touch. Sathian’s team showed that people had more difficulty sensing an object’s shape by touch when the brain area that processes sight was blocked using magnets. His team has wondered if synesthesia is an extreme version of these brain collaborations. They tested whether people with synesthesia are better at tasks that use more than one area of the brain. People with synesthesia performed faster at a task that linked language with a specific shape than people without the condition. But they weren’t any better at other tasks requiring more than one sense.

Synesthesia remains a mystery for now. But Sathian and other NIH-funded researchers plan to keep studying it. The condition may hold keys to understanding things that are fundamental to being human, such as language and memory. “It’s been shown that people with synesthesia have better memories than people who don’t,” Sathian says. “Maybe understanding synesthesia could give us insight into some of the mechanisms that underlie memory. And then perhaps eventually to some better treatments for people who have memory disorders.” [Source: NIH News in Health | May 2019 ++]

Middle Ear Infection ► **Recognition and Treatment**

Acute middle ear infections (acute otitis media, or AOM) are among the most common illnesses in babies and young children. Most children will have had at least one acute middle ear infection by the age of three. These children then have an earache and fever. It becomes difficult to sleep through the night, and they tend to cry a lot. Their parents also have a restless night ahead, and they may worry that something more serious might be causing the symptoms. But an acute middle ear infection generally goes away on its own within two to three days, and serious complications are very rare. Giving the child painkillers and fever-reducing treatment, as well as a lot of care and attention, is usually enough. But it is important to keep an eye on the child’s condition because further treatment may sometimes be necessary.

Symptoms

Acute middle ear infections in young children are typically associated with severe earache, fever over 38°C (100.4°F), and poor hearing, because fluid builds up in the middle ear. Children often suddenly feel much worse. Some also have to throw up. Young children are often not able to localize pain and may complain of a stomach ache although it’s their ears that are hurting. It’s also difficult for parents of babies or very young children to know how severe the pain is. Some children shake their heads a lot and hold or rub their ears when they have an earache. Most of them will have trouble hearing. In general, children who have this kind of infection are more restless, cry more, have a poor appetite and sleep badly. Some children may be weak and quieter than usual, though. It’s very common for children who have an acute middle ear infection to wake up at night crying because the pain is so bad they can hardly sleep.

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Causes and risk factors

Acute middle ear infections usually develop as part of a cold, flu, sore throat or a similar infection. Viruses or bacteria get into the throat and the mucous membranes become inflamed and produce more fluid. The membranes lining the ear and the Eustachian tube (the canal that connects the middle ear to the throat area) swell up too. As a result, the fluid secreted in the Eustachian tube and the middle ear can no longer drain out. It builds up in the middle ear and pushes on the eardrum. This can be painful and make your hearing worse. The Eustachian tube is still very narrow and short in babies and toddlers, so germs in their upper throat can easily spread to their middle ear. Middle ear infections are less common after the age of seven because the Eustachian tube and the immune system are more developed.

Enlarged adenoids (“polyps”) can block the middle ear too, increasing the risk of an infection. Further risk factors include allergic reactions and sinusitis. These conditions can lead to swelling in the Eustachian tube, affecting the middle ear. Children are slightly more likely to get middle ear infections if they

- Use a pacifier (a dummy),
- Often have close contact with other children, for example at daycare or a nursery school,
- Were fed formula from the start rather than mother's milk, or
- Are often exposed to cigarette smoke.

Prevalence and outlook

Middle ear infections are among the most common reasons babies and toddlers are taken to the doctor. By the time they are three years old, 80 out of 100 children have already had a middle ear infection. Up to a third of them have had multiple infections. The infections usually clear up on their own within two to three days and generally do not lead to any complications. If the fluid that builds up in the middle ear pushes too hard on the eardrum, the eardrum can burst. The thick, sticky fluid, sometimes also mixed with pus and blood, flows out into the ear canal and the pain gets better. The hole in the eardrum is usually only small and heals on its own within a few days or weeks. A small amount of fluid may continue to drain out of the ear until it heals. This is what doctors refer to as “otorrhea.”

If the infection continues for several weeks, it's considered to be a chronic middle ear infection (chronic otitis media). The earache and fever will go away, but the fluid that has built up in the middle ear remains. In many children, fluid mixed with pus will continue to keep on flowing out of their ear. There is also a risk of permanent hearing loss from persistent infections. Parents can pay attention to how well their child hears and ask about it at their next visit to the doctor.

Effects

Sometimes fluid remains in the middle ear after the infection has disappeared and the eardrum has healed. This is called otitis media with effusion (OME), also known as glue ear. Children who have glue ear often feel pressure inside their ear, but rarely experience pain. Glue ear can cause hearing loss, which may delay speech and language development. If a child has frequent middle ear infections and the eardrum ruptures again and again, this thin membrane may become scarred. This can make the eardrum harder, preventing it from moving freely. That makes it harder to hear properly. Complications following an acute middle ear infection are very rare. Rare complications include the following:

- Mastoiditis (bacterial infection of the membranes lining the mastoid bone in the skull, found behind the ear)
- Meningitis (infection of the membranes covering the brain and spinal cord)
- Damage to the inner ear (e.g. damage to the nerves, which can lead to hearing loss)

The main symptom of mastoiditis is pain behind the ear, sometimes accompanied by swelling and fever too. Mastoiditis must be treated with antibiotics to prevent the infection from spreading to the bone or from causing meningitis.

Diagnosis

Sometimes it's not easy to clearly diagnose an acute middle ear infection. Normally the doctor first asks about the acute symptoms and the history of the illness. This is followed by examinations of both ears, the neck and the throat. The doctor also takes the child's temperature. The eardrum is examined with an instrument called an otoscope. This is a device with a magnifying glass and a small lamp that allows the doctor to look into the ear canal. The doctor can check the child's hearing with a "tympanometer." This instrument can generate and pick up noises. It can also change the air pressure to see whether the eardrum is able to move freely. Three main signs of an acute middle ear infection include

- Sudden onset of the illness with severe earache, fever, hearing problems and general weakness,
- A red eardrum, and
- An eardrum that bulges outward, does not move freely and is not transparent, which suggests there might be fluid trapped behind the eardrum.

Prevention and Treatment

Middle ear infections usually can't be prevented. But doing certain things may possibly lower the risk a bit. One is to give children a pacifier (dummy) less often. It's especially important that the children grow up in a smoke-free environment. Passive smoking increases the risk of infections in the airways, as well as in the upper throat. It also weakens the child's immune system.

Acute middle ear infections can be very painful, so treatment focuses mainly on providing fast pain relief. Medicines that relieve pain and lower fever, such as acetaminophen (paracetamol) or ibuprofen, can be used for this purpose. The problems then typically go away without any further treatment. Some parents wonder whether their child needs antibiotics. But those are only effective if bacteria have caused the infection. They are ineffective against viruses. If a child has fluid mixed with pus coming out of their ear, or if a child under the age of two has an infection in both ears, it is a sign that the infection is bacterial. In that case antibiotics can help.

People are often advised to use decongestant nose drops to reduce the swelling and help open up the passages leading to the middle ear. Decongestants probably do not influence the course of the infection or the symptoms, though. If the child's nose is blocked, nose drops can make it easier for them to breathe through their nose for a few hours. The nose drops should not be used for more than a few days. Many parents try out home remedies like leg compresses to lower fever or onion wraps to relieve the earache. They haven't been proven to be effective, though. This is also the case for herbal products. Homeopathic products aren't effective.

[Source: Informedhealth.org: Newsletter | May 9, 2019 ++]

Mosquitos ► Inexpensive Ways to Send the Hungry Pests Packing

Forget about snakes, sharks and crocodiles. There's a bigger — and yet, significantly smaller — predator in town: the mosquito. Many people consider mosquitoes to be a mere nuisance. But the blood-sucking insects are actually among the most lethal pests on the planet, responsible for millions of deaths each year from the diseases they carry. According to the World Health Organization: "In 2015 malaria alone caused 438,000 deaths. The worldwide incidence of dengue has risen 30-fold in the past 30 years, and more countries are reporting their first outbreaks of the disease. Zika, dengue, chikungunya, and yellow fever are all transmitted to humans by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito."

The health risk also appears to be growing in the U.S. Last year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said cases of disease linked to mosquitoes, ticks and fleas had more than tripled in the country since 2004. The CDC attributed the rise to increased global travel and trade, environmental changes and a lack of prevention efforts. Chances are, a mosquito bite or two won't land you in the ICU. But at the very least, the itchy bites are sure to bug you. Here, we've identified seven smart and inexpensive ways to send those hungry pests packing.

1. Consider vinegar

Similarly, mosquitoes aren't fans of the fragrance of apple cider vinegar. Sipping 1 tablespoon of the stuff daily should keep them at a distance, according to Reader's Digest. If the idea of tossing back apple cider vinegar is too much for you to stomach, not to worry! They share an additional trick: "Another time-honored approach to keep gnats and mosquitoes at bay is to moisten a cloth or cotton ball with white vinegar and rub it over your exposed skin."

2. Pick up a plant

Certain plants are known to repel mosquitoes and other pests. Chief among them are inexpensive herbs like basil, rosemary or lavender. Pick up a small potted plant for use as an outdoor centerpiece. Here's what Garden Design Magazine has to say about rosemary: "Both the New York Botanical Garden and PlantShed recommended this plant. Rosemary is an herb that many of us are very familiar with and their woody scent is exactly what keeps mosquitoes as well as cabbage moths and carrot flies away."

3. Avoid peak hours

Fun fact: Mosquitoes loathe wind. So, the calm, still hours of dawn and dusk basically serve as happy hour for the famished insects. To avoid the feeding frenzy, stay indoors or in a screened area until a gentle breeze sets in.

4. Find a fan

Remember how we mentioned that mosquitoes hate the wind? Pick up an inexpensive personal fan or a small table fan to keep the irritating insects at a distance.

5. Stay covered

The less skin you expose, the less likely you are to get bitten. Therefore, wearing long sleeves and pants can serve as a wonderful mosquito deterrent. Tightly woven clothing — especially items made from synthetic fibers and those designed to block the sun — tend to be the most effective.

6. Keep calm

Believe it or not, your racing heart could actually summon the blood-thirsty bugs! According to Prevention: "Carbon dioxide (CO2) is the primary thing mosquitoes search for to identify food sources. And when your heart rate is elevated, your body produces more CO2. From exercise to drinking alcohol or eating spicy foods, anything that cranks up your metabolic rate will increase your CO2 production — and make you irresistible to mosquitoes."

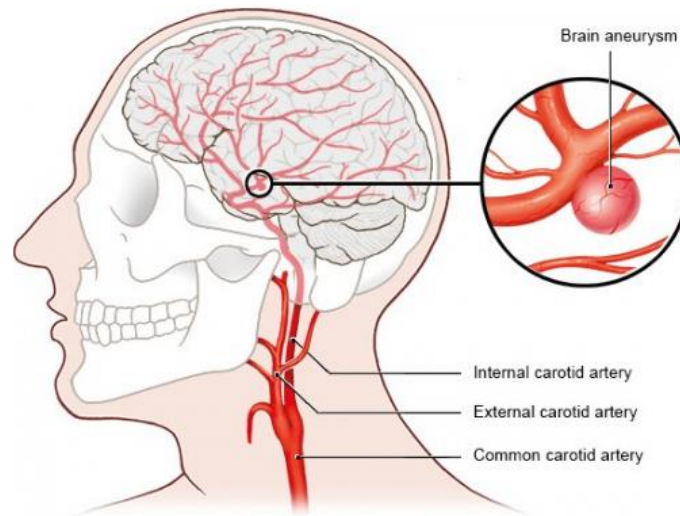
7. Get your garlic on

The scent of garlic reportedly repels vampires — and definitely deters mosquitoes. Plus, your skin emits sulfur compounds after you consume the plant, which is another deterrent for the picky pests. So, indulge in some homemade garlic bread or other garlicky fare before heading outdoors, and the bugs will give you a wide berth.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Melissa Neiman | May 8, 2019 ++]

Brain Aneurysm ► Recognition and Treatment

A brain aneurysm is a berry-shaped bulge in an artery in or near the brain. Normally, arteries are strong and elastic, like hoses. An aneurysm develops when part of an artery wall becomes weak, stretches outward, and forms a bulge. Aneurysms can develop in various parts in the body, for instance in the largest artery in the belly (abdominal aortic aneurysm) or an artery in the head (brain aneurysm). Brain aneurysms often form at points where the arteries that supply the brain with blood split and branch off. Many people with a brain aneurysm will never know that they have one. But others experience symptoms – or their aneurysm is more likely to eventually rupture (burst) and cause life-threatening bleeding in the brain. To prevent such ruptures and relieve the symptoms, treatment is sometimes considered.



Brain aneurysms are often located in the middle of the brain

Symptoms & Causes

Aneurysms often cause no symptoms at all. These aneurysms are called “asymptomatic.” Symptoms can arise if an aneurysm is particularly large or located in certain parts of the brain. Such aneurysms can press against brain tissue or nerves carrying information away from the brain – for instance on the optic (eye) nerve. This can cause symptoms such as headaches, vision problems, and eye muscle paralysis. Less common symptoms include seizures and sensory, speech, or hearing problems.

Brain aneurysms typically develop over time because the affected part of the vessel wall becomes less elastic. This can happen as a result of the normal aging process, increased pressure on the wall of the blood vessel in people with high blood pressure, or damage to the blood vessel due to smoking or inflammation. Rarely, aneurysms are caused by genetic diseases such as Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, which leads to weak connective tissue and – as a result – weak blood vessel walls.

Risk factors

People with high blood pressure and people who smoke are more likely to develop brain aneurysms. Women are at a higher risk of brain aneurysm than men – as are people who have a parent or sibling with a brain aneurysm. The risk also increases with age. The same factors make the aneurysm more likely to eventually rupture. But this risk depends on things like the exact location and size of the aneurysm.

Prevalence and outlook

About 3 in 100 adults have a brain aneurysm. Some people have several brain aneurysms. Most brain aneurysms don’t change, never cause any symptoms, and therefore remain unnoticed. Even if an aneurysm is discovered by chance, it doesn’t necessarily need to be treated. But knowing that you have an aneurysm can be worrying. A brain aneurysm that grows over time can cause symptoms. Larger aneurysms are also more likely to rupture.

Effects

Aneurysms may rupture (burst). They are then called ruptured aneurysms. Ruptures result in bleeding in the brain – more specifically known as subarachnoid hemorrhage. This is a life-threatening emergency that needs to be treated as quickly as possible. Bleeding increases the pressure within the skull and damages the delicate brain tissue. A sudden, extremely severe headache is a typical symptom. Many patients say that the headache is the worst they have ever experienced. The pain often starts at the back of the head and neck. It then spreads across the entire head and down into the back. Other typical symptoms of a bleeding aneurysm include stiff neck, nausea, vomiting, confusion or loss of consciousness

Bleeding is the most common complication of aneurysms. The likelihood of brain aneurysms rupturing and causing bleeding depends on the above-mentioned risk factors and especially on the size of the aneurysm. A rare further complication of brain aneurysms is the blockage of an artery in the brain: Blood clots often form inside aneurysms, but they generally don't cause any problems. In rare cases, though, one of these blood clots moves back into the brain artery. The clot may then be carried in the bloodstream to a smaller branch of the artery, which it blocks (embolism), causing a stroke.

Diagnosis

Many people find out by chance that they have a brain aneurysm during an examination for another medical problem. If someone has symptoms such as headaches or vision problems, doctors may recommend doing a scan: magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or computed tomography (CT). Aneurysms are particularly easy to see using a technique known as digital subtraction angiography (DSA), where an x-ray is taken with and without injecting a contrast medium. A computer then calculates an image that only shows blood vessels – other structures, such as bones, can no longer be seen. The diagnosis, check-up scans, and the fear of complications can be distressing. So if someone has an aneurysm that would never have caused any symptoms or ruptured, and that aneurysm is discovered by chance, the chance discovery (“incidental diagnosis”) may cause unnecessary distress. This is known as “overdiagnosis.”

Treatment

If the aneurysm isn't causing any symptoms and isn't particularly likely to rupture, treatment isn't always needed. It's often difficult to decide whether or not to have treatment because so many factors play a role – such as the position of the aneurysm and your general health. But it's always worth trying to minimize the risk factors for complications – for example, by treating high blood pressure and by not smoking. If the aneurysm isn't treated, an MRI or CT scan is done every one to three years. The scan shows whether the aneurysm has changed and the risk of bleeding in the brain has increased. For people who have symptoms or a higher risk of complications, two main treatment options are considered:

- Surgery (“neurosurgical clipping”): The aneurysm is clamped off with a small metal clip.
- Endovascular coiling: A catheter (hollow plastic tube) is gently pushed through the blood vessel to the brain aneurysm. Tiny platinum coils are then guided through the catheter and into the aneurysm. As a result, the blood in the aneurysm clots and the aneurysm is closed off.

Both methods can permanently stop blood from flowing into the aneurysm. Although they prevent the aneurysm from bursting, they are themselves associated with risks. To find out which option would be best for you, it can help to have an in-depth consultation with doctors specializing in the treatment of brain aneurysms – known as neurologists or neurosurgeons.

[Source: Informedhealth.org: Newsletter | May 9, 2019 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs Update 30 ► The Money and Politics

If there's one area of health care where Republicans and Democrats might strike a deal, it's prescription drugs. President Donald Trump has floated a plan to cut drug prices. Democratic and Republican ideas abound in Congress, where lawmakers have put more than 40 bills on the table. In 2018, 39 states passed 94 laws targeting pricing and costs. Florida's House recently approved a move backed by the state's Republican governor to allow imports from Canada. So far, Vermont is the only state to take that step.

Why do prescription drugs draw so much attention? Because millions of Americans rely on them, and eight out of 10 say the cost is "unreasonable." America spends about \$460 billion a year on these drugs, roughly as much as the combined revenues of the top three car makers. That spending flows mainly in two ways: Retail drugs sold at pharmacies, and drugs provided by doctors and other clinicians at hospitals, outpatient clinics and long-term care

centers. Retail drugs account for about 10 percent of all health care spending. The doctor-administered drugs add about another 6 to 7 percent.

Tracking the money challenges the savviest of analysts. Between the drug makers and the patients lie an array of middlemen, who end up masking the true prices through discounts to each other and rebates to patients. With all the focus on affordability, it's worth noting that about a third of all retail prescriptions come at no cost to the patient. Another half have an out-of-pocket cost of under \$10. In recent years, the average out-of-pocket cost has fallen from about \$10 to a bit over \$8. There are several reasons, including company rebates, better drug cost protections through the Affordable Care Act, and greater use of generic drugs, which are cheaper than brand name drugs protected by patent. But just because the pressure has eased on average doesn't mean the financial burden isn't intense for the relative few. A small number of people and prescriptions accounted for a huge share of the estimated total out-of-pocket costs of \$57.8 billion in 2017.

Even if most individuals are cushioned from rising drug prices, taxpayers, through the federal government, are not. Spending skyrocketed after the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit took effect in 2006 and has continued to rise rapidly since. One reason states such as Florida are interested in importing drugs from Canada is many drugs are cheaper there. The Commonwealth Fund, a New York-based health policy group, compared a basket of common drugs (of the retail sort) in the United States and several other countries. Using the American cost as a benchmark of 100, it calculated the cost in Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Switzerland and Australia.

Germany was the closest match to the American price tag, but Canada, the UK and Australia were all about half the cost. Other studies reached the same general result. The U.S. Health and Human Services Department looked at the top 27 Part B drugs (physician-administered drugs) and found that for 20, prices were higher in the United States. A Canadian-American research team looked at spending on primary care drugs in America and 10 other nations, including all of the ones in the Commonwealth study. It found U.S. spending was about twice as high as the average elsewhere. Broadly, the United States spends more on drugs because prices for many drugs are higher, and patients, usually on the advice of a doctor, take newer, high-cost drugs.

One of the reasons the prescription drug market poses a challenge to lawmakers is because it has many moving parts. On the payer side, there are patients, the government and employers. On the receiving end are drug makers, wholesalers, health care plans, pharmacies and Pharmacy Benefit Managers, which are firms that negotiate prices on behalf of payers. The money moves around a lot, but policy analyst Allan Coukell at the Pew Charitable Trusts modeled the flow among all the players to estimate how much money ended up with each one. For 2016, the drug makers were the top gainers with \$204 billion (on the retail side), but the pharmacies also did well with about a quarter of the total.

Ever since the passage of the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit, pharmaceutical companies have invested heavily in lobbying. There was a spike in 2009 as Congress debated the Affordable Care Act, but after a short dip, spending rose again and now stands at \$281 million, about where it was nearly a decade ago. No industry group spends more on lobbying — by a long shot. The insurance industry came in a distant second at \$158 million on lobbying last year. The drug industry can't ignore the big proposals in Washington that could change the landscape, said Georgetown University researcher Jack Hoadley.

Both Democrats and Republicans, including the White House, have bills to peg American prices to prices in Japan and Europe. There are bills to let the government negotiate directly with drug companies to reduce prices in the Medicare program. Among the public, that approach enjoys broad bipartisan support with 80 percent of Republicans and 90 percent of Democrats in favor. "The fact that the administration, congressional Republicans, and Democrats are all talking about drug prices is putting all stakeholders on edge," Hoadley said. [Source: POLITICOFACT | Jon Greenberg | April 30, 2019 ++]

Canada/Mexico Prescription Drugs Update 02 ► FL Taking First Step to Allow Sales

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis appears to be taking the first step toward implementing a recently passed law that would allow Floridians to buy cheaper prescription drugs from Canada. The progress comes after the Governor and Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) huddled with President Donald Trump in the Oval Office 6 MAY. "Gov. DeSantis and I have talked about the unique position that Florida has with so many seniors burdened by the high cost of drugs," Gaetz said in an interview with Spectrum News.

It's clear both Gaetz and DeSantis, long-time allies of the president, have his ear. After the Florida legislature recently passed a bill that aims to bring in lower cost prescription drugs from Canada for state programs like Medicaid, the duo appealed to him directly because the plan will ultimately need federal approval. "President Trump directed his HHS Secretary Azar to work with Gov. DeSantis and I, so that Florida could essentially be the model for the country," Gaetz said. The development is a reversal from more traditional Republican perspectives in the past that opposed importing drugs, citing safety concerns, but the Florida Congressman is pushing back. "Drugs from Canada weren't exactly whipped up in somebody's bathtub. This is a safe system. We have been able to evaluate the safety standards of these Canadian distributors," he said.

While some in the Florida delegation don't oppose importing lower cost prescription drugs from Canada, they believe the creation of this program doesn't necessarily address the root of the problem. "These are drugs that are manufactured in the United States that are sent to Canada and then we have to go buy them back from Canada to get a cheaper price," said Rep. Darren Soto (D-FL). "The real issue is resolving the pharmaceutical drug pricing program at home." The pharmaceutical industry is opposed to the idea, and Secretary Azar has dismissed the idea of drug importation in the past, but with the President on his side, the Florida Republican is confident. "It looks like HHS has received express direction from the President to work with Florida to get this plan approved quickly," Gaetz said with a smile. The legislation gives Florida until 2020 to submit a plan for federal approval, but Gaetz said he expects a plan will be evaluated and established much sooner. [Source: Spectrum News 13 | Samantha-Jo Roth | May 7, 2019 ++]

Moving With TRICARE Update 01 ► Impact on Your Benefit

Are you and your family moving? Moving doesn't change your TRICARE eligibility. But it may change the TRICARE health care options available to you and your family. A [change of address](#), such as moving to a new country, city, region, or ZIP+4 code is a TRICARE [Qualifying Life Event](#) (QLE). This QLE means you have 90 days from the date of your address change to enroll in or change your TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select health plan based on your eligibility or plan availability in the new location. A QLE lets you enroll in or change your TRICARE health plan outside of the annual [TRICARE Open Season](#). When a QLE happens for one family member, it creates a QLE for the entire family. This means all family members may be able to switch TRICARE health plans when one person in the family has a QLE.

Before you move:

- Don't disenroll from your current health plan. Your current coverage will continue until your enrollment transfer is completed after you arrive at your new location.
- Contact your current [regional contractor](#) about your upcoming move, so they can begin transferring your enrollment.
- Learn about TRICARE options in your new location. Use the [TRICARE Plan Finder](#) to see what plans are available and what you and family members may qualify for.

After you move:

- Update your address and other new information in the [Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System](#) (DEERS).
- If you want to make changes and you're eligible to do so, you may change the TRICARE health plan for you or your family members.
- If you make changes to your health plan, the effective date will be the date your address change is effective in DEERS.
- Tell your [regional contractor](#) and doctors if you have [other health insurance](#) (OHI) besides TRICARE. TRICARE pays after most other health insurance. Click to close Health insurance you have in addition to TRICARE, such as Medicare or an employer-sponsored health insurance. TRICARE supplements don't qualify as "other health insurance.". OHI doesn't apply to active duty service members (ADSMs).

For a Stateside Move

If you're enrolled in [TRICARE Prime](#) and moving to another Prime Service Area within the U.S., you can transfer your TRICARE Prime enrollment. Depending on how far you move from your current home, you'll likely need to [change your primary care manager](#). TRICARE Prime isn't available everywhere. You can use the [TRICARE Plan Finder](#) to see if TRICARE Prime is available in your area. If you're moving to an area where TRICARE Prime isn't available, the QLE will allow you to change your enrollment. (ADSMs may only use TRICARE Prime.)

If you're enrolled in [TRICARE Select](#) or a premium-based plan ([TRICARE Reserve Select](#), [TRICARE Retired Reserve](#), [TRICARE Young Adult Select](#), and the [Continued Health Care Benefit Program](#)), update your personal information in DEERS. Then find a new TRICARE-authorized network or non-network provider in your new location. Using a [TRICARE network provider](#) will help keep your out-of-pocket costs lower.

For an Overseas Move

Before you move, call the [TRICARE Overseas Program](#) (TOP) Regional Call Center for your new area. Although retirees and their family members aren't eligible for [TOP Prime](#) options, they may be eligible for [TOP Select](#). Only active duty family members who are command-sponsored may enroll in TOP Prime or [TOP Prime Remote](#).

Remember that your TRICARE coverage moves with you. Take command of your health by learning more about [QLEs](#). [Source: TRICARE Communications | May 9, 2019 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 500 ► New Child Stateside - Registering Child in DEERS - New Child Overseas

Adding a New Child Stateside – Whether giving birth or adopting, adding a new family member is a TRICARE Qualifying Life Event, or QLE. The QLE allows you to enroll any new eligible family members. It also allows you 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. You should register your new child in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS. Then, enroll your child in a TRICARE health plan if necessary.

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 you'll show the child's birth certificate, proof of adoption, or letter of placement of the child into your home by the court. 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.

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 your child is automatically enrolled into TRICARE Prime. If you don't live in a Prime Service Area, 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 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. After 90 days, you can only enroll your child following another QLE or during TRICARE Open Season. To learn more, read the article "Adding a New Family Member Stateside? Take Action to Get TRICARE Coverage for Your Child," at TRICARE.mil/news.

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Registering Your Child in DEERS -- All newborn and adopted children must be registered in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, also known as DEERS, within 90 days, or within 120 days if living overseas. To do this, the sponsor must go to a uniformed services ID card office with one of the following documents:

- The child's birth certificate
- A certificate of live birth from the hospital, or
- A record of adoption, or letter of placement of your child into your home by a recognized placement adoption agency or the court.

Once your child is registered in DEERS within the given time period, you'll have 90 days to enroll your child in an eligible TRICARE health plan. If your child is registered in DEERS but not enrolled in a TRICARE plan, they'll only be able to receive care at a military hospital or clinic, if space is available. The sponsor will only be able to enroll the child in an eligible TRICARE plan after another Qualifying Life Event, or during the annual TRICARE Open Season. Go to www.TRICARE.mil/deers to learn more.

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Adding a New Child Overseas -- Are you giving birth or adopting overseas? Both are TRICARE Qualifying Life Events, or QLEs. The QLE allows you to enroll any new eligible family members. It also allows you to make changes to your TRICARE Overseas Program Prime, or TRICARE Overseas Program Select health plan. You must take action to get TRICARE coverage for your new child. Register your newborn or adopted child in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS in 120 days, then enroll them in a TRICARE health plan within 90 days.

For active duty families, your child will automatically be enrolled in TRICARE Overseas Program Select once you register them in DEERS. You have 90 days from the date of DEERS registration to enroll, change, or transfer your child's enrollment to another overseas plan. TRICARE will backdate your coverage to the date of birth, date of adoption, or date of court order if you enroll in a new plan. Ask your contractor to re-process any health care claims that TRICARE denied or that they should process under a different plan. If you don't take action, your child will remain in TRICARE Overseas Program Select.

For children of overseas retirees, there's no automatic enrollment. You must enroll your child in a health plan within 90 days of registering him or her in DEERS. If you don't enroll in a plan, your child can only get health care and pharmacy services at a military hospital or clinic if space is available. After the 90-day QLE period, you can only enroll your child following another QLE or during TRICARE Open Season. To learn more, read the article "Adding a New Family Member Overseas? Take Action to Get TRICARE Coverage for Your Child," at 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> | May 3, 2019 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 501 ► Moving w/TRICARE - Mental Health Awareness Month - Plan Finder

Moving With TRICARE -- Are you and your family moving? Moving doesn't change your TRICARE eligibility. But it may change the TRICARE health care options available to you and your family. A change of address, such as moving to a new country, city, region, or ZIP code is a TRICARE Qualifying Life Event, or QLE. This QLE means you have 90 days from the date of your address change to enroll in or change your TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select health plan. Your health plan options will depend on your eligibility or plan availability in your new location.

Before you move:

- Don't disenroll from your current health plan. Your current coverage will continue until your enrollment transfer is completed after you arrive at your new location.
- Contact your current regional contractor about your upcoming move, so they can begin transferring your enrollment.
- Learn about TRICARE options in your new location.

After you move:

- Update your address and other new information in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS.
- If you want to make changes and you're eligible to do so, you may change the TRICARE health plan for you or your family members.
- If you make changes to your health plan, the effective date will be the date your address change is effective in DEERS.
- Tell your regional contractor and doctors if you have other health insurance besides TRICARE.

To learn more, read the article, "A Change of Address May Mean New TRICARE Health Options," at www.TRICARE.mil/news.

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Mental Health Awareness Month -- May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Mental health and substance use disorders can interfere with your life and overall physical health. They can be mild and brief, or more serious and persistent. And, they're also treatable. TRICARE covers mental health and substance use disorder care that's medically and psychologically necessary. This includes both outpatient and inpatient services. Similar to physical health, mental health requires regular care. Here are some easy things you can do regularly to improve your mental health:

- Exercise often
- Eat nutritious foods
- Get adequate sleep
- Maintain social connections, and
- Practice destressing techniques, such as yoga, meditation, and breathing

If mental health concerns start to interfere with your daily life, seek help. Visit www.TRICARE.mil/mentalhealth to learn about covered mental health care services. If you or someone you know has suicidal thoughts, call the Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, or text 838255.

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TRICARE Plan Finder -- Did you know that the TRICARE website can help you learn what health plans you may be eligible for? And that you can compare plan features and costs? If you aren't sure what health plans you may be eligible for, start by using the TRICARE Plan Finder at www.TRICARE.mil/planfinder. After you answer a few questions, the tool will display the plans you may be eligible for based on who you are and where you live. Different family members may be eligible for different plans.

If you want to compare several health plans, you can do so by using the Compare Plans tool at www.TRICARE.mil/compareplans. Select the plans you're interested in learning more about and the results will display in a table. You can compare the main features and costs of each plan, including:

- Cost for a primary or specialty care visit
- Annual deductible
- Maximum out-of-pocket costs, and
- Enrollment requirements

TRICARE Plan Finder and Compare Plans are just two helpful tools that make it easier to determine the right health plan for you and your family.

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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> | May 9, 2019 ++]

* Finances *



Car Insurance Update 20 ► What It Costs to Insure America's Favorite Cars

Americans sure do love their pickup trucks. Last year, the three most popular vehicles sold in the United States were trucks, according to the 2019 State of Auto Insurance report from insurance search engine [The Zebra](https://www.thezebra.com). For the report, The Zebra looked at the 10 most popular cars in the U.S. based on sales for 2018 models and then figured what it costs to insure those vehicles. Here's how that shook down for America's most popular cars:

- Ford F-series — average annual premium of \$1,516
- Chevy Silverado — \$1,532
- Ram pickup — \$1,787
- Toyota RAV4 — \$1,556
- Nissan Rogue — \$1,546
- Toyota Camry — \$1,692
- Honda CR-V — \$1,509
- Honda Civic — \$1,801
- Toyota Corolla — \$1,724
- Honda Accord — \$1,624

As it turns out, the average annual car insurance premiums for these cars are relatively low. To put them in perspective: The Zebra reports that the cheapest car to insure is the Subaru Outback, with an average annual premium of \$1,392. The most expensive car to insure in the Audi R8, with an average annual premium of \$4,102. So the average premiums on the 10 most popular vehicles are much closer to the cheaper end of the spectrum. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Donna Freedman | April 30, 2019 ++]

Surviving Spouses Update 01 ► What Financial Mess Will You Leave Them?

When a person dies, what kind of mess is left behind for survivors and beneficiaries? I'm not talking about a garage full of collectibles or leftover tools and home improvement supplies. I'm talking about financial situations. Think ahead: Pull out statements on all your financial accounts or write down a list of all your financial positions. Think in terms of all the places you pay someone or they pay you: Savings, investment, and retirement accounts. All the insurances. Loans. Credit cards. Mortgages. Properties. Precious metal holdings. Online accounts with automatic payments – Netflix, Amazon, streaming TV apps, banks, investment firms – or with automatic renewal programs that charge a credit card or bank account, such as regular donations.

If you have a hard time remembering or managing all the dealings, put yourself in the shoes of the person inheriting the mess. They are not involved with it on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. They are clueless and overwhelmed during a vulnerable time. Take time to simplify your financial life. Consolidate similar accounts. Get rid of programs you don't use regularly. Make a list of user names and passwords; without that list, survivors are locked out of managing the online accounts. Establish beneficiaries for your accounts. Some financial products, such as retirement accounts and insurances, have beneficiaries; others, like bank and investment accounts, can have beneficiaries designated. The bottom line: Don't assume what's second nature to you will be easy for a survivor. [Source: The MOAA Newsletter | Shane Ostrom | May 7, 2019 ++]

Tax Rates by State ► Comparisons for Retirement

FYI for current and others planning for retirement. When you plan to move to another state when you retire, examine the tax burden you'll face when you arrive. State taxes are increasingly important to everyone, but retirees have extra cause for concern since their income may be fixed. 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.

Go to <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-by-state> and click on map for the state you are considering or a summary of taxes you will be liable for. For another perspective go to <http://www.tax-rates.org> and click on whichever of the following options you would like to check on for whatever state you are thinking about moving to:

- Income tax
- Sales tax
- Property taxes
- Business tax
- Calculators
- World taxes

[Source: VFW Post 6756 | Leo Miller | May 4, 2019 ++]

SBP DIC Offset Update 55 ► Time to Eliminate | 60 Senate Cosponsors Now On Board

Three more senators have signed on as cosponsors of a bill to eliminate the “widows tax,” giving the bill enough support to surpass a critical legislative hurdle. **S. 622**, the **Military Widow’s Tax Elimination Act**, introduced by Sen. Doug Jones (D-Ala.), now has the backing of an additional 60 senators – enough to end debate on the bill and move to a vote.

“This is a fantastic development, and we thank Sen. Jones for his steadfast support of military families,” said MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Dana Atkins, USAF (Ret). Under current law, survivors of deceased military members must forfeit part or all of their purchased Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuity when they are awarded the VA’s Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). The loss of any portion of the SBP annuity is known as the widows tax, and for approximately 66,000 military survivors, it makes SBP the only insurance product in the country that you pay into but are legally prohibited from collecting.

SBP is a voluntary, member-purchased annuity provided by DoD, allowing a continuation of a portion of military retired pay upon the death of the servicemember. According to DoD, the intended purpose of SBP is to “ensure that the surviving dependents of military personnel who die in retirement or after becoming eligible for retirement will continue to have a reasonable level of income.” Coverage later was expanded to active duty personnel who die from a service-connected injury or illness. DIC is a VA-paid monetary benefit for eligible survivors whose sponsors died of a service-connected injury or disease. These separate benefits are paid for separate reasons and should not be construed as duplicative compensation.

“Ending the military widow’s tax is long overdue,” Jones said in a prepared statement. “These families have sacrificed more for our nation than most people can ever fully appreciate, and they deserve to get the full survivor benefits to which they are entitled and have paid for.” Before the bill can go to the floor for a vote, it must first advance out of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-OK), chairman of the committee, is a cosponsor of Jones’s bill. “We are encouraged by the level of support we’ve seen and urge Sen. Inhofe to allow this bill to go to the Senate floor for a vote,” said Atkins.

TAKE ACTION: Ask Your Legislators to End the Widows Tax. Act now to send your elected officials this MOAA editable [suggested message](#) to end the widows tax. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | James F. Naughton | May 2, 2019 ++]

Social Security Q & A ► 190501 thru 190515

(Q) Are We Eligible for ‘Free Spousal Benefits’? “My wife and I were both born in 1953. I was the breadwinner, and my spouse has low Social Security benefits — approximately \$800 a month. At full retirement age — November 2019 — can she claim benefits of \$800 and I claim spousal of \$400? Then, when I turn 70, can I change to my benefits to \$3,100, and then can she get \$1,400 (one-half of what I would have received at 66)?”

A. *One claiming procedure can boost Social Security benefits. But not everyone can use it.* The scenario that you outline in your question is correct. The only mistake is that the benefits that you will receive at 70 will be higher than you state in your question. The claiming procedure that you outline here is referred to as a “restricted application.” In your case, the wife claims first and then the husband claims a spousal benefit at full retirement age (FRA). Then, the husband claims his own benefit later. (Note: You must wait until FRA to claim a spousal benefit, or you will not be able to claim your own benefit later.)

Because the husband waited to claim his own benefit, his benefit will be higher. The wife can then get a spousal supplement to her benefit that reflects half the benefit he would have received at his full retirement age. The reverse

situation is also possible, where the husband claims first and the wife gets a spousal benefit, etc. The benefit of using a restricted application is that you will receive \$400 a month while you are waiting to receive your benefit, and your benefit increases every month that you wait. There is no penalty for getting this extra spousal benefit. We sometimes refer to this as “*free spousal benefits*” because this is all extra money in your pocket.

The good news here is that you have underestimated your benefit at age 70. If your benefit at FRA is \$2,800, then waiting until 70 to claim your benefit will increase your benefit to \$3,696, a 32% increase over your benefit at 66. This 32% increase is true for anyone who has a FRA of 66 and waits until 70 to claim. For someone who has a FRA of 67, the increase is 24%. For people with an FRA between 66 and 67, the increase is something in between. Unfortunately, not everyone can use the restricted application strategy. The law was changed in 2015, and now only people born before Jan. 1, 1954, can use this strategy. It looks like you and your wife got in just under the wire.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Jeff Miller | May 9, 2019 ++]

Debit Cards Update 02 ► Times You Should Not Use One

A debit card is a lot like cash, because transactions are instantaneous. The minute you check out is essentially the minute that money leaves your bank account. Using debit cards can be risky, too. They don’t offer a lot of financial protection and are more attractive to thieves in certain situations. For these reasons and others, sometimes you’re better off using a credit card or cold, hard cash. Here are nine examples:

1. Online purchases

It’s safer to pay with a credit card when shopping online, according to the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC). If a cybercriminal intercepts your debit card number, they can immediately drain your account. Credit cards come with more protection. For example credit card transactions are protected under the Fair Credit Billing Act: “This federal law provides you certain consumer protections, like the ability to dispute billing errors and to withhold payment while your creditor investigates the disputed charges. Perhaps more importantly, the law generally limits your responsibility for unauthorized credit card charges to \$50.”

2. Gas

Gas stations can be hot spots for criminal activity. According to Visa, about 1.3% of payment fraud in the U.S. occurs at fuel pumps. Earlier this year, the FTC warned travelers about the use of card skimmers at gas pumps. Skimmers are illegal card readers that criminals can attach to payment terminals. Fuel pump payment terminals are attractive targets because they are not manned by employees. The FTC continues: “*These card readers grab data off a credit or debit card’s magnetic stripe without your knowledge. Criminals sell the stolen data or use it to buy things online. You won’t know your information has been stolen until you get your statement or an overdraft notice.*”

Though not a completely risk-free option, a credit card is safer for buying gas. If you must use a debit card, the FTC advises running it as a credit card. When you use a debit card as a credit card, you won’t have to enter the PIN — which helps keep your PIN safe — and the money won’t be immediately deducted from your bank account.

3. Eating out

Let your debit card out of sight for a few minutes, and it could end up in the wrong hands — or in a card skimmer. Try to use cash or a credit card when eating out — unless your waiter brings a handheld payment system to the table so your plastic never leaves your sight.

4. Hotel reservations

To secure your room reservation and cover incidentals, hotels will put a hold on your payment card. If you give a hotel a debit card, it will effectively take the amount of the hold out of your bank account, according to Frommer’s. The funds will be returned after you check out. But it might take your bank several days to process the request, meaning the

funds will remain inaccessible to you for several days after your hotel stay. Avoid the headache and book hotels with a credit card, instead. Just be careful not to exceed your credit limit while the hold is on your credit card.

5. Car rentals

If you don't have a credit card, renting a car will likely cost you more than the daily fee. Some Avis, Budget and Hertz locations, for example, perform credit checks on many customers who rent with a debit card, according to their websites. That can ding your credit score. Some car rental companies might also place a hold on your debit card.

6. Other rental items

When it comes to planning events — like a wedding or kid's birthday party — use a credit card to rent tables, tents and bounce houses. Party rental companies often require a deposit. So, presenting a debit card means the deposit amount will be taken straight out of your bank account. The same goes for renting trucks and tools at a home improvement store.

7. Big-ticket items

Have you ever had new furniture delivered, only to find the corners dinged or the upholstery stained? If you paid with a credit card, you could dispute the charges and get your money back. Again, the Fair Credit Billing Act gives you the ability to dispute credit card transactions and to withhold payment while your credit card company investigates. Unfortunately, it's not the same with debit card transactions. Plus, the money will be long gone from your bank account before you even notice the furniture damage.

8. Subscriptions and automatic purchases

In the age of meal-delivery services, auto-ship programs and electronic toll-road passes, you may be tempted to set it and forget it. You simply put your debit card on file, and the company automatically charges you on a recurring basis. But if you don't tally these expenses into your monthly budget, your bank account might end up in the red. To avoid overdraft fees, use your credit card for automatic recurring expenses.

9. Cash back at independent ATMs

Withdrawing cash at a free-standing ATM can put your debit card in danger. These machines are less likely to be monitored than ATMs at banks, which means fraudsters can more easily compromise them. So, if you're trying to get cash to buy dinner, use an ATM at a physical bank.

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

Regretful Purchases ► 20 That Most Buyers Tend to be Unhappy With in Time

There are certain purchases that buyers tend to regret. No, that doesn't mean everyone: There are plenty of happy boat and hot tub owners out there, and surely more than a few people count their timeshare property as a true delight. But when faced with one of the potential purchases listed here, take a breath and think seriously about the purchase.

Boat -- There's an old saying: The two best days of owning a boat are the day you buy it and the day you sell it. Owning a boat is a lot of work. If you live on a lake and have plenty of room for it, and are willing to spend the money needed to keep afloat, then ship ahoy! But most of us can get by with an occasional boat rental, or wait until our friend Gilligan invites us over for a sail. Check out, "[4 Cheaper Ways to Go Boating Without Buying a Boat](#)".

Timeshares -- Having a partial share of ownership in a vacation property is probably one of the most stereotypically regretted purchases — and for good reason. You may love vacations, but do you always want to vacation in the exact same spot? Yes, you can exchange your timeshare with others, but booking a hotel or resort is more flexible. There are many reasons why Money Talks News founder Stacy Johnson says, "I'd chop off my own foot with a dull ax before buying a timeshare."

Extended warranties -- You've bought the product, but the sales pitch isn't over: Now your clerk is gunning to sell you an extended warranty, just in case the brand-new product falls apart. Research the product you're buying, and also check if you may have coverage through other sources, such as a manufacturer's warranty or through your credit card. You may not even need to fork out for extra coverage.

Desktop computer -- Desktop computers once were an amazing innovation, but few people need that kind of computing power these days. A tablet or laptop gives you the flexibility to move your home office around. Think different, a la Apple's motto, if you like. But when it comes to home computing, don't think big, think small.

DVDs -- Movie-watching has moved online, with streaming and downloadable films much easier to handle than ever. Maybe you have Netflix, or Hulu or your Amazon Prime membership gives you free streaming privileges. What you don't have is storage space for hundreds of DVDs — you're not Blockbuster Video, and look what happened to them.

Giant tent or other expensive camping equipment -- For hardcore campers, owning a nuclear-fueled camp stove, a three-bedroom tent, an enormous inflatable mattress or a kit specifically made for roasting s'mores might make sense. But for those of us who camp maybe only once every year or two, a small tent and standard sleeping bag work just as well. And you can always just toast marshmallows on sticks, which are still free.

Camcorder -- Most of us carry smartphones these days, and their video capabilities keep getting better and better. Hauling around a camcorder, storing it and getting the videos off of it is a chore we don't need.

Home printer -- Even those of us who run a home business are finding fewer and fewer opportunities to use our gigantic printers, as many documents can be filled out and even electronically signed online. Printers take up a ton of space and require replacement ink cartridges that sometimes cost as much as a new printer would. Those who live in a major city and really need a printer for one-time use can make the occasional trek to the public library or local business offering printing services.

Pedometer -- Counting steps to keep yourself moving is trendy again, but it's not pedometers that brought it back. Instead it's wrist-worn fitness trackers and smartphones and smartwatches. As with the camcorder above, you have to really plan to wear a pedometer. With a smartphone or smartwatch, you can track your steps almost without thinking.

Home exercise equipment -- There likely have been days when you wished you didn't have to make the trek to the gym to work out. Buying exercise equipment seems like a no-brainer! But the equipment is huge, bulky and expensive, and storing it takes up precious space in your home.

One-use kitchen gadgets -- Some kitchen appliances make solid sense: Coffeemakers and toasters earn their keep every day. But appliances that are super-specific and can perform only one rarely needed task are rarely worth the money. Will you really use a juicer, a bread maker, a hot-dogger, a food dehydrator? Maybe once or twice, but enough to assign it counter space?

Pools and hot tubs -- Sure, some people swim every day. And some of us can't imagine gloomy winters without our hot tub. But for many people, there's only a short period of time when a pool or hot tub is used enough to earn its keep. After that, it becomes a huge bowl of water that needs to constantly be cared for and cleaned.

Piano -- If you're on Facebook, head to the online shopping section to see how many people are desperately trying to give away pianos for free. Few things take up more space and are more difficult to move than a piano. If you truly have a junior Beethoven in your house, you may really need a piano. But if your kid hasn't even learned middle C yet, maybe start with a borrowed portable keyboard and see if music lessons hit the right note.

Fine china -- Once, fine china was on every bride's wedding registry and was broken out regularly for dinner parties and family holidays. We're a more temporary world now, for good or for ill, and few brides are requesting 12 place settings of Royal Doulton bone china. If china really appeals to you, check with the older generations in your family, who may be willing to give you theirs.

Extravagant wedding -- A wedding lasts one day, and then it's all photos and memories. You'll be just as legally married in a \$100 gown as in a \$5,000 one, and you'll have a lot more money left over. You can pull off a wedding elegantly without going into debt in the process. Check out, "[Your Own Royal Wedding: 20 Classy Ways to Save on The Big Day](#)".

Pricey engagement rings -- And speaking of weddings, consider whether a whopping diamond ring is really the best way to tie the knot. Modern jewelers can offer more price-conscious alternatives that are just as lovely, and those extra dollars will last a lot longer if they're used for a home down payment. Check out: ""[Why Your Next Diamond Should Be From a Lab](#).""

Collectibles -- Face facts: Those Beanie Babies that were all the rage in the 1990s are never going to make you rich. The same goes for most collectibles, from Franklin Mint collector plates to Department 56 Snow Village buildings. If it makes Grandma happy to buy a spoon or shot glass from each country or state she visits, let her have fun. But don't collect with the idea that you'll make money off your collection one day.

Baby gadgets -- New moms and dads don't need half of the items on many baby registries. Diapers and clothes, sure, burp cloths and bassinets, go for it. But a diaper-wipe warmer? If you're giving a present to a new parent, consider a gift card.

Giant desserts -- Many restaurants have one on the menu — a giant, jumbo, lollapalooza, monster-sized dessert. But eat one, and you'll quickly regret it. So, unless you have a soccer team or hungry family to help you eat the giant treat, skip it.

Putting standard items on credit -- You'll almost certainly regret using your credit card for everyday purchases, such as clothing or groceries. If your card is set up to earn you a true benefit, such as frequent-flier miles on an airline that you actually use, you might consider using it — but with one giant caveat: You must keep track of anything you use it for and pay it off right away. If you forget, you'll suddenly see a giant bill and wonder how the heck it got that high.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Gael F. Cooper | May 8, 2019 ++]

Medical Equipment Scam ► Back Brace | Targets Seniors

Seniors are less likely to fall for scams overall, according to the BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report (BBB.org/RiskReport). But here is one scam that's aimed right at seniors: free medical equipment. The Better Business Bureau is hearing from consumers – more than 200 since the first of the year – who have been targeted by scammers for "free" back braces.

How the Scam Works

- You get a call saying you qualify for a back brace or a knee brace – totally paid for by Medicare. The scammer may pretend to be from Medicare, or they may claim to be the maker of durable medical equipment (DME). They say you qualify for the equipment for free, and they repeatedly call until you relent and allow them to submit an order to your doctor for the equipment. Or you may say no, but the company ships the brace anyway.
- Other times the equipment just shows up on your doorstep and Medicare receives the bill. Often consumers have a difficult time returning the unnecessary equipment.
- By law, no one is allowed to make unsolicited calls to consumers about durable medical equipment. If they do, it's Medicare fraud. And taxpayers' foot the bill for all the unwanted products. If you get such a call, just hang up.

How to Protect Yourself and Medicare from DME Fraud

- Refuse and report anyone offering "free" equipment, supplies, or services in exchange for your Medicare number.

- Know that Medicare medical suppliers are not allowed to make unsolicited telephone calls or send e-mails to sell you equipment unless you've done business with them in the last 15 months.
- Never sign a blank form from your health care provider or equipment supplier.
- Always read your Medicare Summary Notice (MSN) or Explanation of Benefits (EOB) to look for any charges for equipment you do not need or did not receive.
- Protect your Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security cards; keep them in a safe place (not your wallet), and only get them out when you are going to see a health care provider.
- Report scams to the Medicare fraud hotline: 800-633-4227 (800-MEDICARE)

For More Information:

To report a scam, go to www.BBB.org/ScamTracker. To learn more about health care and Medicare scams, go to www.BBB.org/HealthCareScam. To learn how to protect yourself, go to [10 Steps to Avoid Scams](https://www.bbb.org/avoidscams) at <https://www.bbb.org/avoidscams>. Thanks to BBB of Central and Northwest North Carolina for investigating this scam and providing this Scam Alert. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | April 26, 2019 ++]

Free Trial Scam ► Consumers Pay Shipping for Nonexistent Products

For years now, scammers have been tricking consumers out of their money using "free trial" scams. Recently, consumers have been reporting a new twist on this scam on the [BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://www.BBB.org/ScamTracker), one that involves offering consumers a variety of products at no charge.

How the Scam Works

- You are scrolling through your social media feed when you see an ad with a great offer. A company is doing a limited time sale in which clothing, pet toys, or another product is available free of charge. All you have to do is pay the shipping costs. In some cases, the company offers one free product and in others they say you can fill your shopping cart with as many products as you like and still only pay shipping.
- If that sounds too good to be true, well, it is. Consumers report paying around 10 to 15 dollars for shipping but no products are ever delivered. If you fall for this scam, you'll lose the shipping money, you won't get what you ordered, and you won't be able to contact customer service.

Protect Yourself from Free Product Scams

- Be wary of deals that seem too good to be true. Legitimate companies do run sales, but if a deal is so good it's hard to believe, take a second look. A real business won't be able to stay afloat if it gives products away at prices that are free or well below cost.
- Research the company before you buy. If you haven't heard of the company offering the sale, take a few minutes to look it up. Search for business ratings and customer reviews to find out if there is anything fishy about the business. A great place to start is [BBB.org](http://www.BBB.org).
- Make online purchases with your credit card. If anything goes awry with an online purchase, you can dispute charges with your credit card company. If you use other payment methods, there is usually no chance of recuperating lost funds.

For More Information

To learn about best practices when shopping online, read the article "[BBB Tip: Smart Shopping Online](#)." Find out more about how to avoid scams in general by visiting [BBB.org/AvoidScams](http://www.BBB.org/AvoidScams). If you've been the victim of an online purchase scam, report it on the [BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://www.BBB.org/ScamTracker) to help others become aware of the danger.

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

One Ring Scam ► Get a One-Ring Call? Don't Call Back

The Federal Communications Commission is alerting consumers to reported waves of “One Ring” or “Wangiri” scam robocalls targeting specific area codes in bursts, often calling multiple times in the middle of the night. These calls are likely trying to prompt consumers to call the number back, often resulting in per minute toll charges similar to a 900 number. Consumers should not call these numbers back. Recent reports indicate these calls are using the “222” country code of the West African nation of Mauritania. News reports have indicated widespread overnight calling in New York State and Arizona. Generally, the One Ring scam takes place when a robocaller calls a number and hangs up after a ring or two. They may call repeatedly, hoping the consumer calls back and runs up a toll that is largely paid to the scammer.

Consumer Tips:

- Do not call back numbers you do not recognize, especially those appearing to originate overseas.
- File a complaint with the FCC if you received these calls: www.fcc.gov/complaints
- If you never make international calls, consider talking to your phone company about blocking outbound international calls to prevent accidental toll calls.
- Check your phone bill for charges you don't recognize.

Advances in technology allow massive amounts of calls to be made cheaply and easily. In addition, spoofing tools make it easy for scammers to mask their identity. The FCC is working to combat scam calls with enforcement actions, a strong push for caller ID authentication, and support for call blocking tools. Another key tool is consumer education like this alert and the FCC's One Ring scam consumer guide: <https://t.co/pROJ0ldMXv>,

[Source: Federal Trade Commission | Michael Atleson | May 2019 ++]

Tax Burden for New Hampshire Retired Vets ► As of MAY 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 retire in New Hampshire.

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: None. However, there are some specific sales taxes: 9% tax on restaurants, prepared food, hotel rooms and car rentals; 55 cents per megawatt hour on electricity, 7% on telecommunication services, plus additional taxes on real estate transfers and alcohol.

Gasoline Tax: 42.23 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 48.23 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$1.78 cents/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

New Hampshire depends more upon real property taxes for revenue than most states since there are no general income, sales or use taxes. The state also receives substantial revenue from taxes on motor fuels, tobacco products, alcoholic beverages sold through the state liquor stores, and pari-mutuel betting. The state income tax is limited to a 5% tax on dividends and interest income of more than \$2,400 (\$4,800 for joint filers). A \$1,200 exemption is available for

residents who are 65 years of age or older. Go to <https://www.revenue.nh.gov/assistance/tax-overview.htm> for an overview of New Hampshire taxes.

Retirement Income: Not taxed.

Retired Military Pay: Not taxed.

Military Disability Retired Pay:

Disability Portion – Length of Service Pay: Member on September 24, 1975 – No tax; Not Member on September 24, 1975 – Taxed, unless combat incurred.

Retired Pay – Based solely on disability. Member on September 24, 1975 – No tax. Not Member on September 24, 1975 – Taxed, unless all pay based on disability, and disability resulted from armed conflict, extra-hazardous service, simulate war, or an instrumentality of war.

VA Disability Dependency and Indemnity Compensation: 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

- Local property taxes, based upon assessed valuation, are assessed, levied and collected by municipalities.
- A state education property tax rate of \$2.26 per \$1,000 of total equalized valuation is assessed on all New Hampshire property owners. An elderly exemption for property taxes can be age, net income limits, including Social Security income, and net asset limits. Property taxes can be deferred but accrue interest at the rate of 5% per annum. The deferred property tax may not exceed more than 85% of the equity value of the residence. The deferral is available (if granted) by the assessing officials, to any resident property owner who is at least 65 years old. The minimum exemption is \$5,000 of the assessed value of the home. However, each municipality determines the exemption amount, and a larger exemption may be available for older taxpayers. Meanwhile, the minimum annual income limit is \$13,400 for a single person and \$20,400 for a married couple. The minimum asset limit is \$35,000, not including the value of the home. To qualify, taxpayers must have lived in New Hampshire for the last three years
- There is a Low & Moderate Income Homeowner's Property Tax Relief program in New Hampshire. Refer to <http://search.nh.gov/revenue-search.htm?q=property+tax+relief&cmd>. You must own a homestead subject to the state education property tax; reside in such homestead as of April 1 of the year for which the claim for relief is made; have a total household income of (1) \$20,000 or less if a single person or (2) \$40,000 or less if married or head of a New Hampshire household. For more information refer to <https://www.revenue.nh.gov/index.htm>
- Call 603-271-2687 for details on property taxes.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

New Hampshire's Legacy & Succession Tax was repealed in 2002 and is effective for deaths occurring on or after January 1, 2003. As a result there is no inheritance or estate tax.

Other State Tax Rates

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

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

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For further information visit the [New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration](http://www.revenue.nh.gov) site or call 603-271-2318.

[Source: <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#NEWHAMPSHIRE> | May 2019 ++]



Notes of Interest ► 01 thru 15 MAY 2019

- **Jobs.** Private payrolls grew by 275,000 in April, the biggest increase since July, when they expanded by 284,000. Economists polled by Dow Jones expected private payrolls growth of 177,000. Services-providing jobs increased by 223,000 in April, led by a gain of 59,000 positions in professional and business services. Education and health services companies added 54,000 jobs while employment within the leisure and hospitality industry expanded by 53,000.
- **Military Discount.** On what they're dubbing "Military Mondays," the department store chain Kohl's now offers a 15 percent, in-store discount on purchases for active duty members, retirees and veterans. Show your valid military ID, military dependent ID or a veteran ID at the cash register. Veteran IDs accepted include a state-issued identification indicating veteran status, or a Form DD-214. Among the other retailers that offer year-round military discounts are Lowe's and Home Depot; both offer 10-percent discounts.
- **F-35 Flying cost.** The Pentagon's cost assessment office doesn't believe the F-35 program office can achieve a "stretch goal" of getting the "A" model's cost per flying hour to \$25,000 by fiscal 2025, its director said 3 MAY.
- **Retirement.** Honorably discharged veterans in New York who are members of a state retirement system can now purchase service credit for up to three years of military service performed, thanks to a bill sponsored by Senator William Larkin (Cornwall-on-Hudson) and co-sponsored by Senator Simcha Felder (Brooklyn). The new law is one of nine recent measures pushed by the Senate to provide important benefits and recognition to veterans and their families.
- **Cyberattack.** Baltimore's government on 7 MAY rushed to shut down most of its computer servers after its network was hit by a ransomware virus. Officials believe it has not touched critical public safety systems.
- **POW/MIA.** U.S. military efforts to recover the remains of fallen troops from North Korea have been halted after a breakdown of diplomatic talks between the two countries' leaders. More than 35,000 Americans died on the Korean Peninsula during the war between North and South Korea. Of those, 7,700 are still listed as missing in action, with 5,300 believed to be on North Korean soil.
- **CIA.** 58-year-old Jennifer G. Hernandez allegedly trespassed on the grounds of the Langley, Virginia, headquarters on four separate occasions before finally requesting an audience with "Agent Penis" a police complaint said.
- **Pentagon Websites.** Number unknown. The Pentagon could be responsible for 5,000 publicly accessible websites. Or it could be less than half that. Nobody appears to know for sure. "Between 2,000 and 5,000 is the estimate," said Army Col. Paul Haverstick, acting director of the Defense Media Activity, on 24 APR. "We have less than a third of that." DMA runs some 825 public websites and blogs for the military, its website says.
- **Iran.** The country threatened 8 MAY to enrich its uranium stockpile closer to weapons-grade levels in 60 days if world powers fail to negotiate new terms for its 2015 nuclear deal, raising regional tensions as a U.S. aircraft carrier and bombers headed to the Middle East to confront Tehran.
- **Iran.** After the U.S. withdrew from the nuclear accord a year ago, it restored sanctions, exacerbating Iran's economic crisis. The rial, which traded at 32,000 to \$1 at the time of the accord, traded on 9 MAY at 156,500, creeping further downward.

- **Iran.** A senior Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander said on 12 MAY the U.S. military presence in the Gulf used to be a serious threat but now represents a target, the Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA) reported.
- **Vets.** Since transitioning to an "all volunteer force" in the aftermath of the Vietnam War draft, Americans now serving in our military comprise less than 1% of the population. The number of US military veterans continues to plummet from almost half the population in 1970 to 16% as of 2014.
- **Spratly Islands.** China has created 3,200 new acres of land in the South China sea's Islands since 2013, building artificial land masses for military outposts.
- **Oil Leak.** A WWII shipwreck (British tanker Coimbra) is slowly leaking oil off the South Shore of Long Island, according to the U.S. Coast Guard. On Jan. 15, 1942, the vessel was torpedoed by a German U-boat 30 miles southeast of the Shinnecock Inlet, killing 36 of the 46 people on board. The Coimbra was loaded with 2.7 million gallons of lubricating oil and heading to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, when it sank.
- **Missiles.** The U.S. government has developed a specially designed, secret missile for pinpoint airstrikes that kill terrorist leaders with no explosion, drastically reducing damage and minimizing the chances of civilian casualties, multiple current and former U.S. officials said.
- **North Korea.** U.S. authorities have seized one of NDAK's largest cargo ships in connection with a scheme to illicitly export tons of coal in violation of international sanctions. The 17,061-ton carrier, known as the Wise Honest, also was used to smuggle heavy machinery into the rogue nation to assist its industrial expansion. Federal authorities said the enormous coal exports have been used to finance North Korea's nuclear proliferation and ballistic missile programs.
- **Twins.** Kendra & Maliyah were born as conjoined twins, and were fused together at the torso. They now live with one leg each, after life-saving surgery to separate them. To see what their life is like now go to <https://www.facebook.com/BornDifferentShow/videos/377691822830889>.
- **Suicide.** The Department of Defense plans to release its 2018 report on active-duty service member deaths by suicide later this year, and the report will include a first -- a look at deaths by suicide in military families.
- **Driving.** Go to <https://youtu.be/lkqz3lpUBp0> to see what it was like to drive in New York City in 1928.

[Source: Various | May 15, 2019 ++]

Clark Air Base ► RP Turning to China to 'Build, Build, Build'

Vince Dizon makes sure his guests take in the view from his ninth-story office before they leave. A set of windows looks out over a hazy, expansive airfield that was the center of the United States' largest overseas military base, until it was handed back to the Philippines in 1991. The concrete skeleton of a new commercial-airline terminal can now be seen in the distance. Dizon, who leads the Philippine government agency charged with redeveloping old military sites, is fond of telling visitors that the Americans built a runway of such quality that the U.S. Space Shuttle could have landed on it.

Three decades on, the area is still dotted with vestiges of Clark Air Base, where Americans first established a presence during the Spanish American War while searching for grazing land for their horses. A manicured veterans cemetery is managed by the U.S. government; a building that was once a base hospital sits abandoned outside the gates of a new water park; an American Legion post is wedged between two "entertainment bars"—the infamous red-light district, which flourished thanks to demand from U.S. troops, didn't leave when they did.

Now, though, the Chinese, not the Americans, are the ones fueling investments here. Officials from Dizon's agency, the Bases Conversion and Development Authority, and China's Gezhouba Group, an engineering and construction company that has moved aggressively into foreign markets in recent years, are finalizing the details of a \$2 billion, 500-hectare industrial park, Dizon told me, while Chinese loans will fund a railway linking Clark to the coastal city

of Subic, the site of a former U.S. naval base. Separately, Chinese firms are also angling to take over a failing shipyard in Subic. The projects are part of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's aptly, if not creatively, named "Build Build Build" economic strategy, under which the government plans to transform the Clark base into a green, disaster-resilient, stand-alone city that developers hope will relieve pressure on Manila, the perpetually gridlocked capital some 60 miles south.

Chinese investment in what will be known as New Clark City "is critical," Dizon said in an interview. "It is how it all started." He sees the investments as symbols of a "newfound friendship and relationship" between Manila and Beijing. It is one of several similar projects launched across the Philippines, and across Southeast Asia, as China and Chinese companies plow money into projects, largely as part of Chinese President Xi Jinping's much-touted Belt and Road Initiative. The globe-spanning infrastructure and investment program has been criticized by Washington, but has nevertheless won admirers: Last month, Italy became the first major European economy to join.

This redevelopment of a former symbol of American might here in Clark by a Chinese developer may be the best example of the shift under way in Southeast Asia, as a more assertive Beijing courts traditional American allies in a part of the world where Washington's power long went unchallenged. "It is so important," Dizon, who worked on Duterte's presidential campaign in communications and was appointed to his current job by the president, said. "I think it will be one of the major legacies of this shift in foreign policy under President Duterte."

Though Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines say they still need an American military presence in their backyard and fear a rising China—Duterte himself has told Beijing to "lay off" an island claimed by the Philippines in the South China Sea—a debate is raging on what that relationship with Washington should now look like. Analysts that I spoke with noted worries in the region that President Donald Trump's White House appeared uninterested in Southeast Asia compared with its predecessors. At the same time, staunch American allies, including Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, have looked to China as the rare country that is hungry to sink billions into infrastructure projects and fund development.

To be sure, China's efforts in Southeast Asia have not been without difficulties. Beijing has inserted itself as a power broker in Myanmar's (also called Burma) long-running civil wars and Rohingya crisis, and has stirred public resentment as it pushes to restart a highly controversial, and currently suspended, hydropower dam project. Though Malaysia has recently revived two major Chinese-backed projects, it had initially turned away Belt and Road investments whose price tags became too high to bear. And even as the Philippines invites Chinese investment, it has almost no security relationship with Beijing. (By contrast, Manila maintains exceptionally close ties with Washington, its former colonizer, which is still widely trusted and respected here.)

Yet the shift in ties between the Philippines, as well as much of the rest of Southeast Asia, and the U.S. is clear. Vacancies for ambassadorships in the region have piled up and include Singapore and Thailand. Trump in March nominated an ambassador to ASEAN, the regional bloc, after a more than two year vacancy, and Patrick Murphy, the nominee for ambassador to Cambodia, continues to face confirmation delays. David Stilwell, nominated last year to be assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, also has yet to be confirmed. Barack Obama—who lived for part of his childhood in Indonesia—took a particular interest in Southeast Asia, and while his administration's "pivot to Asia," meant to be a centerpiece of his foreign-policy legacy, was never fully realized, even those limited efforts have not been replicated. A 2016 summit convened by Obama with Southeast Asian leaders, the first of its kind, has not been held again. After attending part of the 2017 ASEAN Summit, Trump skipped two Southeast Asia-focused meetings last year.

The Trump administration has defended its handling of Southeast Asia. In particular, the White House has sent a large number of officials to visit the region. Murphy, who currently serves as the principal deputy assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific affairs, met with Southeast Asian officials in March to "reaffirm our embrace of ASEAN centrality." An increased number of military operations in the South China Sea have also been a central, and highly visible, part of the administration's efforts to push back on China's combativeness in the contested waters. And Washington, which will publish an Indo-Pacific strategy report this year, has announced new funds for technological

and infrastructure initiatives across Southeast Asia, though the amounts on offer are a fraction of what China is spending.

These moves are not gaining much traction. A February survey of 1,008 Southeast Asian experts, business leaders, and policy makers by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, a think tank in Singapore, found that 68 percent believed that U.S. engagement with the region has either decreased or decreased substantially. A similar proportion were unsure of, or had little confidence in, Washington's reliability as a strategic partner and provider of regional security. Separate surveys last year from the Pew Research Center and Gallup found Trump's image remains poor internationally, while countries continue to recognize the rising power of China. "How can you reportedly be spending so much time in Asia and yet not [be] reassuring anybody by doing it?" Greg Poling, director of the Washington-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, part of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told me. "There is a sentiment in Southeast Asia that U.S. officials come in and want to lecture about the things that matter to us and don't have nearly enough patience for the things that matter to Asian partners."

Nina Hachigian, who served as the U.S. ambassador to ASEAN during the Obama administration, said she doesn't see "the strategic vision for Asia as a whole and what the U.S. role and interests are." Hachigian, who now works in the Los Angeles mayor's office, added that China could exploit that to tell regional allies "that we can't be trusted, that we are not really Asian anyway, that we are unreliable, that we will leave, that we are only in it for our own interests." China's infrastructure-building is perhaps something that the U.S. does not want to, or cannot, compete with—Manila's finance secretary, Carlos Dominguez III, for example, publicly lamented last year that American investors "have no interest" in the country's redevelopment plans. But the U.S.'s once rock-solid defense ties may also be under pressure.

Recent focus in Manila has been on the Mutual Defense Treaty, which was signed in 1951, five years after the Philippines gained independence from Washington. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in March reassured the Philippines that the U.S. would come to the country's defense if it were attacked in the South China Sea—a significant statement that aimed to address long-standing consternation here over the lack of a firm American position on the issue. But just a week later, Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said that it was not the lack of reassurances that worried him, but rather that the Philippines would be drawn into "a war that we do not seek and do not want," noting that increased U.S. naval operations meant the Philippines "is more likely to be involved in a shooting war."

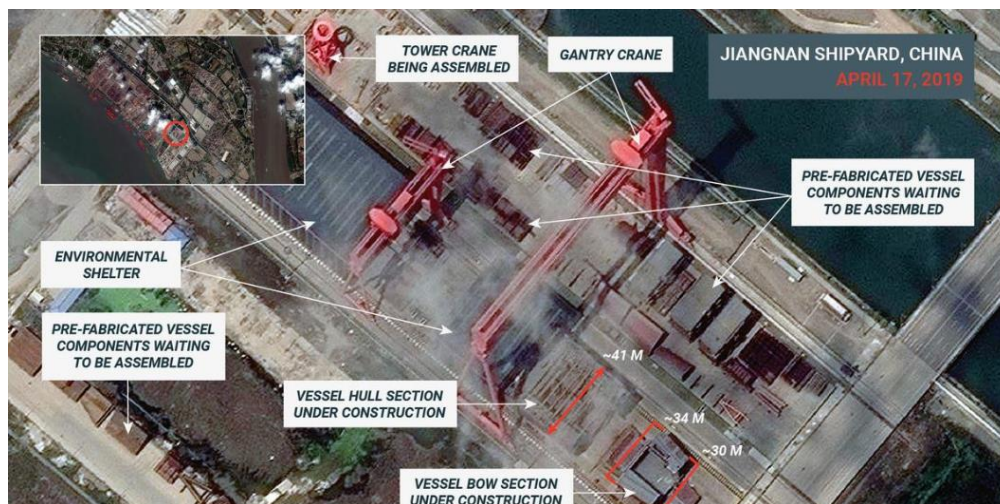
While stressing that the two countries remain steadfast allies, Sung Kim, the U.S. ambassador to Manila, admitted to me in an interview that "it may not be the simplest time to be working on the U.S.-Philippines relationship for various reasons." He pointed to "political rhetoric" from the infamously brash Duterte as one of the factors that complicated the relationship. The U.S., Kim said, was looking at whether "any adjustments could be made to update and improve" the 1951 treaty, issues that might be "identified together" with counterparts from the Philippines. (Changes to the text of the treaty, though, would require ratification from lawmakers in both countries.)

Dizon's concerns are more immediate: He is hoping to drum up more Chinese support for New Clark City. Local media reported that two deals were signed between China and the Philippines at a Belt and Road event in Beijing in April. As I said goodbye to Dizon after our interview, a team from Chinese state television was waiting outside his office, getting ready to film a story on the enormous construction project. The Clark development would, he told me as he walked to join them, "spur the long-term relationship between China and the Philippines." [Source: The Atlantic | Timothy McLaughlin | May 8, 2019 ++]

China's Carrier Program ► 1st Full Sized Carrier Under Construction

Construction of China's first full-sized aircraft carrier is well under way, according to satellite images obtained and analyzed by a U.S. think tank. The images from April, provided to Reuters by the Center for Strategic and International

Studies (CSIS) in Washington, reveal considerable recent activity during the last six months on a large vessel at the Jiangnan shipyard outside Shanghai. China has not formally confirmed it is building a third carrier, despite recent hints in state media, and the timing and extent of its carrier program remain state secrets. The Pentagon said last week that work had begun, but no images have emerged until now.



A satellite image shows what appears to be the construction of a third Chinese aircraft carrier

Both Asian and Western militaries, and regional security analysts, are seeking information on the carrier, which is expected to be China's first large, modern platform capable of leading a full range of strike group operations. The effort to build a large, locally designed carrier is seen as a core part of China's extensive military modernization drive. A series of recent Reuters Special Reports showed how that effort is challenging decades of U.S. strategic superiority in East Asia. (Click this link to read the series: [here](#))

The CSIS images show a bow section that appears to end with a flat 30-metre (98-foot) front and a separate hull section 41 meters wide, with gantry cranes looming overhead. That suggests a vessel, which China has dubbed Type 002, somewhat smaller than 100,000-tonne U.S. carriers but larger than France's 42,500-tonne Charles de Gaulle, analysts say. Fabrication halls the size of several soccer pitches have been built nearby, and work appears to be continuing on a floodable basin, possibly to float the finished hull into the nearby Yangtze River estuary. "While details regarding the Type 002 are limited, what is observable at Jiangnan is consistent with what is expected for the People's Liberation Army Navy's third aircraft carrier," said the CSIS' ChinaPower analysis, published on its website Tuesday.

CSIS analyst Matthew Funaiole told Reuters that images taken late last year were inconclusive, but that now the work under way is clear. "From what we can see there has been a lot of activity in the last six months or so," he said. "It would appear that it is the third carrier, and if it is not, it's hard to envisage what other large vessel it would be." The Pentagon's annual report on China's military modernization, issued last Friday, noted that the third carrier would probably be larger than the first two and fitted with a catapult launch system to accelerate aircraft during takeoff. "This design will enable it to support additional fighter aircraft, fixed-wing early-warning aircraft, and more rapid flight operations," the report said. Funaiole and other analysts said it was unclear what kind of catapult - traditional steam-powered or a more cutting-edge electromagnetic system - would be used. It also remains unclear whether the Type 002 would be nuclear-powered. China has 10 nuclear-powered submarines, but so far no surface ships with nuclear propulsion; some analysts think China is not ready to make that step.

Singapore-based regional security analyst Ian Storey said a full-sized carrier would make some of China's neighbors nervous and highlight the importance of their strategic relationship with the United States. "Once completed, it will outclass any warship from any Asian country, including India and Japan," said Storey, of the ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute. "It is yet another indication that China has emerged as Asia's paramount naval power." China's first

two carriers are relatively small, with only up to 25 aircraft, less than half the number aboard U.S. carriers, and have jump ramps built into their bows. That configuration limits not just the types of aircraft that can fly off them, but how much weaponry and fuel they can carry.

Its first carrier, the Liaoning, was a Soviet-era Ukrainian ship bought secondhand in 1998 and re-fitted in China. A still-unnamed second carrier based on that design, launched in 2017, was built locally. The Liaoning had been seen as more of a training platform for teaching personnel the tricky art of carrier operations. But last month, Chinese state media said the ship “is starting to play a combat role following recent modifications and intensive training exercises.” The second carrier has been undergoing sea trials from its base in northern Dalian and is not expected to enter service until 2020. China’s state media have quoted experts as saying China needs at least six carriers. The United States operates 11 carriers. China’s Ministry of Defense did not respond to a request for comment. [Source: Reuters | Greg Torode & Ben Blanchard | May 6, 2019 ++]

Iran Tensions ► Carrier Sent to Middle East after Indications of Planned Attack on US forces

The United States deployed an aircraft carrier strike group and a bomber task force to the Middle East in response to "clear indications" Iran and Iranian proxies were planning an attack on U.S. forces in the region, U.S. officials said. On the evening of 5 MAY, the White House made the surprise announcement that the USS Abraham Lincoln and a bomber task force were being deployed in response to unspecified "troubling and escalatory indications and warnings." A statement from national security adviser John Bolton said the deployments were intended "to send a clear and unmistakable message to the Iranian regime that any attack on United States interests or on those of our allies will be met with unrelenting force." "The United States is not seeking war with the Iranian regime, but we are fully prepared to respond to any attack, whether by proxy, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or regular Iranian forces," the statement continued.

U.S. officials told ABC News the deployments were in response to "clear indications" Iranian and Iranian proxy forces were **preparing for a possible attack against U.S. forces on land**, including in Iraq and Syria, and at sea. The decision was based in part on intelligence indications that Iran had moved short-range ballistic missiles by boat in waters off its shores, an American official said 7 MAY. U.S. Central Command requested approval from acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan to move additional assets into the region, which Shanahan approved on Sunday, one official said. "The movement of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln to the region was expedited and it was ordered there effective immediately," another official said. Shanahan called the move, on Twitter, a "prudent repositioning of assets in response to indications of a credible threat by Iranian regime forces." "We call on the Iranian regime to cease all provocation," he said. "We will hold the Iranian regime accountable for any attack on U.S. forces or our interests."

Speaking with reporters in Finland on Monday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the U.S. has a responsibility to protect American diplomats around the world, but he specifically mentioned Erbil and Baghdad in Iraq and Amman in Jordan. "And so any time we receive threat reporting, things that raise concerns, we do everything we can both to -- do all that we can to make sure that those planned or contemplated attacks don't take place and to make sure that we've got the right security posture," Pompeo said.

The USS Abraham Lincoln, the lead ship in the deployed Carrier Strike Group, left Norfolk, Virginia on 1 APR. The Navy no longer provides destinations for its carrier deployments, but the carrier likely would have had to transit through the Middle East toward its new home port of San Diego at the end of its deployment. The ship is currently in the Mediterranean Sea.



USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) transits the Strait of Gibraltar, entering the Mediterranean on April 19.

The day after the White House released its stern statement announcing the immediate deployments of an aircraft carrier strike group and bomber wing to the Persian Gulf to deter an unnamed Iranian threat, Navy chief Adm. John Richardson was put in what has become a familiar position for the Pentagon brass: explaining a surprise White House statement on a controversial topic. In response to National Security Advisor John Bolton’s Sunday evening statement that the forces were being dispatched to the Gulf in response to “a number of troubling and escalatory indications and warnings,” by Iran, Richardson said Monday that, essentially, the deployment was just **business as usual**.

“The Abraham Lincoln Strike Group was planned to deploy for some time now,” Richardson told the SeaAirSpace conference. He touted the Lincoln’s new route to the Gulf as an example of “dynamic force employment,” a new Navy tactic that is meant to surprise potential adversaries by having US ships show up off their coastlines without warning. He didn’t explain how a White House press release is an example of tactical surprise. The Navy’s carrier strike groups, he continued, are “designed to move around the globe very fluidly in response to changing security situations,” and “if the dynamic changes and national leadership requires or requests that force package to go to a different theater.” After his remarks, Richardson tweeted, “this is the beauty of having a dynamic force. The @USNavy can easily maneuver to protect national interests around the globe.”

While Richardson spoke Monday morning, the rest of the Pentagon wasn’t quite as swift. It wasn’t until Monday afternoon that senior OSD officials managed to weigh in, when Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan confirmed he approved of the deployment in response to “a credible threat by Iranian regime forces.” That was followed several hours later by a statement by Pentagon spokesman Charles Summers, who said the deployment of the Lincoln and bomber wing are “a prudent step in response to indications of heightened Iranian readiness to conduct offensive operations against U.S. forces and our interests,” largely repeating Bolton’s statement.

The Pentagon statement went to some lengths to say, “remains integrated with the rest of the government.” Bolton’s White House missive comes a week after Vice President Mike Pence surprised many in the Navy — and at the Pentagon — by making another bold carrier announcement, telling sailors that the administration was reversing course, and would not retire the USS Harry S. Truman early. [Source: ABC News & BreakingDefense | Luis Martinez, Elizabeth McLaughlin, Meredith McGraw, Andmartha Raddatz & Paul McLeary | May 6, 2019 ++]

Iran Tensions Update 01 ► Israel’s Perspective on Current Threat Levels

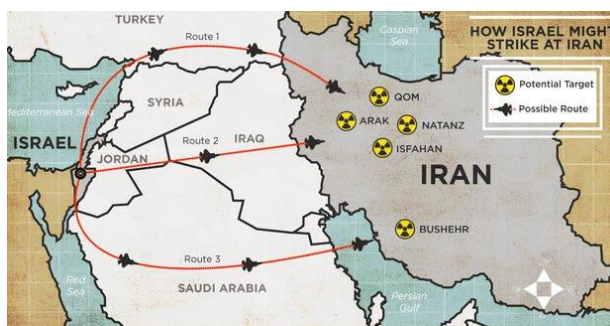
As Israelis celebrated their independence day, sources there told Breaking Defense that at least one of the B-52s deployed to the region passed through their airspace, headed to “one of the Gulf states.”

The author of this article Arie Egozi confirmed that Israeli intelligence was the driving force behind Washington's decision to send an aircraft carrier to the Persian Gulf. More updated intelligence data is being transferred to the U.S as these lines were being written. The Israeli defense forces (IDF) are now in the highest alert along the borders with Lebanon and Syria. Large infantry and armor formations were deployed along the border with Gaza after last weekend's fighting during which the Hamas launched 600 rockets into Israel. The Iron Dome anti-missile system intercepted 90 percent of those with a deadly trajectory. However, four Israelis were killed.

What is driving the major increase in the public threat levels? Israeli sources said 8 MAY that the pressure put by the U.S on Iran for not fulfilling the "nuclear deal" is prompting Teheran to "take aggressive action." This, according to the sources, may take the form of Iranian attacks on U.S targets in the region, as well as Iranian-backed operations against the Israeli Air Force (IAF) if it attacks Iranian targets in Syria. The White House announced on 5 MAY that the U.S was dispatching the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group and a task force of Air Force B-52 bombers to the Middle East (CENTCOM). Here's the detailed breakdown of the CSG:

- Carrier Air Wing 7 (which relies on the F-18E/F/Gs for strike & EW)
- Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Leyte Gulf (CG 55)
- Destroyer Squadron 2
- Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers USS Bainbridge (DDG 96), USS Gonzalez (DDG 66), USS Mason (DDG 87) and USS Nitze (DDG 94). (The Pentagon would not comment on whether allied ships would remain with the Lincoln as the CSG left the Med.)

Meanwhile, Israel is focusing all its intelligence "sensors" on Iran. Among the Israeli experts who spoke with us, there is an assessment that the Revolutionary Guards are most likely to attack an American vessel in the Persian Gulf. In recent days, Israel's Mossad has warned the U.S again that Iran had already used Iraqi militias to carry out attacks against American soldiers in Iraq and that the preparations for more attacks were at an advanced stage. The timeline was tight: they assessed that the attacks might be carried out even in a few days. The Israeli intelligence sensors are fully focused on Iran to detect any specific preparation for an attack on U.S forces. They are also focused on Iranian ships carrying short-range ballistic missiles that in recent days sailed to the waters of the Persian Gulf.



The above map is six years old but the concepts haven't changed much. These ballistic missiles could hit American ships or US and British coast facilities in the Persian Gulf — especially the allied naval bases in Bahrain and elsewhere.

The Israeli warning caused immediate action in Washington. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo canceled his planned visit to Germany and flew to Iraq to warn its prime minister of serious consequences if terrorist attacks were carried out in his country against American soldiers who came to help fight ISIS. Professor Uzi Rabi, a senior researcher at the Center for Iranian Studies at Tel Aviv University, told Breaking Defense that Teheran has "lost the capability to forecast what will happen if they act against the U.S or its allies in the region" since President Trump took office. Rabi added that his assessment is that the Iranians will act only "out of desperation" if the U.S. sanctions create an unbearable situations for them.

If Iran grows desperate enough, they may direct attacks or rocket fire on the Golan Heights, and perhaps on the Lebanese border. There is also a possibility that the Iranians will press the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza to strike against Israel. In Jerusalem it is clear Iran is now becoming desperate the last round of US **sanctions may pose a real**

threat to the survival of the ayatollahs. When Iran is desperate, it may act not only against American interests, but also against the interests of the allies of the United States and Israel at the top of the list.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responded on 8 MAY to Iranian President Hassan Rowhani’s threats to accelerate uranium enrichment: “On my way here, I heard that Iran continues its plans to achieve its nuclear program. We will not allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons,” Netanyahu said at the state memorial service in Jerusalem. Should we consider that a red line? [Source: Breaking Defense| Arie Egozi | May 08, 2019 ++]

Arctic Encroachment ► **Secretary of State Pompeo Issues Warning to China, Russia**

The U.S. warned against encroachment in the Arctic by China and Russia, calling on nations with Arctic territory to guard against aggressive claims and actions in an area that has attracted global competition. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said 6 MAY that all countries that have Arctic territory and make up the eight-nation Arctic Council—Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the U.S.—should benefit from the area’s resources, as well as other countries. However, he said in a speech at a Rovaniemi, Finland meeting of the council: “All parties in the marketplace have to play by the rules. Those who violate those rules should lose their rights to participate in the marketplace.”

“Just because the Arctic is a place of wilderness, it need not become a place of lawlessness,” Mr. Pompeo said. Receding ice in the Arctic has opened up new navigation channels and prompted competition among global powers for the region’s resources, leading to charges of unwarranted claims. China, which isn’t a member of the council but holds observer status, has sought to assert itself as a “near-Arctic” state, though U.S. officials have said the council recognizes no such designation. Citing nearly \$90 billion in Chinese investment in the region from 2012 to 2017, Mr. Pompeo said Beijing’s “pattern of aggressive behavior elsewhere should inform what we do and how it might treat the Arctic.”

He said that Russia, a member of the council, has mounted its own aggressive actions, staking a claim to international waters in the Northern Sea Route and boosting its military presence in the Arctic. “No one denies Russia has significant Arctic interests,” Mr. Pompeo said. “We recognize that Russia isn’t the only nation making illegitimate claims,” he said, adding that Russia is unique and warrants special attention from the council, in part because of the scale of its claims. Mr. Pompeo said the U.S. is responding to this new strategic environment by expanding its diplomatic presence and increasing military resources, including a larger icebreaker fleet and enhanced budget for the Coast Guard. Energy Secretary Rick Perry will detail U.S. plans to tap the region’s resources during a keynote address to the Arctic Circle Assembly in Iceland later this year, Mr. Pompeo said. [Source: Wall Street Journal | Courtney McBride | May 6, 2019 ++]

Arctic Encroachment Update 01 ► **Arctic Now America’s ‘First Line of Defense’**

In order to operate in the Arctic, the U.S. military must spend more money on joint training and cold weather technology and more time on Alaska’s ranges and working with Native American tribes, according to defense officials. U.S. defense officials announced at the Sea Air Space forum in Washington D.C. on 6 MAY that September Arctic sea ice is receding at a rate of roughly 13 percent per decade. That presents economic opportunities for nations with coastlines that hug the region but also competition from rivals.

Russian forces are projecting power within the Arctic, operating the world’s largest icebreaker fleet while building out air bases, sea ports, weapons and domain awareness tools to operate there. China also has declared itself a “near-

Arctic state" as it angles for a share of the trillions of dollars to be made off minerals, natural gas, ocean fisheries and trade routes in the region. "I'm not sure that's even a defined term," U.S. Air Force Gen. Terrence O'Shaughnessy said of China's self-designated title. O'Shaughnessy, who helms both U.S. Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command, said that enforcing a "rules-based international order" is at the forefront of U.S. policy. But the security implications of a warming Arctic are clear: the U.S. homeland is no longer a sanctuary. "The Arctic is the first line of defense," O'Shaughnessy said.

While the U.S. Coast Guard continues to invest in a new icebreaker fleet, defense officials say more must be done to cement America's place in the Arctic. Exercises like NATO's Trident Juncture — involving 50,000 troops, 150 aircraft, 65 ships and 10,000 vehicles — gave a taste of the frigid challenges the alliance would face should a northern member, like Norway, be invaded. During that autumn training operation, the aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman became the first U.S. Navy flattop in nearly three decades to sail north of the Arctic Circle for an extended period of time.

Waging war in the Arctic will also require troops capable of conducting mountain terrain analysis, cold-weather operations, land navigation in the alpine wilderness and rock climbing, among other skills. Aircraft crews will need to understand and prepare for cold-weather flight, not to mention the strain that ice, cold and high latitudes put on airframes. And the armed forces must collaborate with those who have lived in the region for generations — especially the Alaska Federation of Natives, or AFN, the largest statewide Native organization, according to O'Shaughnessy and other defense leaders. "We need them. I need to tap into that local knowledge," said Navy Rear Adm. John Okon, commander of Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command. "Leveraging indigenous people's knowledge to operate up there is critical for us."



Coast Guard Diver 1st Class Dylan Smith, assigned to Regional Dive Locker West, dives into a water hole during a torpedo exercise in the Arctic Circle in support of Ice Exercise 2018.

Native Alaskans have an acute understanding of ice-flow, melting conditions and shifting weather patterns, Okon said. Tapping into that knowledge will be critical because the region remains an operational enigma for much of the military, he added. Okon warned that the state of weather observation in the Arctic today is comparable to that across the continental United States during World War I. "We're a hundred years behind understanding the conditions of where we'll have to defend the homeland and our partners," Okon said. While computer models can map weather patterns, the military needs to make those models reliable by collecting detailed observations at sites across the Arctic. "We're operating in the blind," Okon said, and that's a problem because the "Arctic is harsher than any other place on Earth, under, on or above the sea." Temporal conditions make predicting weather tricky and the lack of accurate navigation charts complicate operations even more, he warned.

American efforts to shore up decades of Arctic inattention come amid growing Russian influence in the region. Moscow's forces already operate across the Bering Strait at Kotelnny Island's Northern Clover military base. The installation brims with coastal defense missile systems and a cold-weather version of Pantsir medium-range surface-to-air missiles. Russian forces are preparing to monitor airspace and secure the Northern Sea Route, which has the potential to turn the Arctic into a geostrategic thoroughfare on par with the Strait of Malacca — a major shipping channel connecting the Indian and Pacific oceans — and the Suez Canal, according to the U.S. Coast Guard.

Officials said that Pentagon planners contemplating 21st century operations in the Arctic must confront challenges unique to the region. For example, while America’s military embraces autonomous vehicles, those systems are limited in the Arctic by a lack of persistent operations and high costs to create and maintain them. New technology deployed to the region must be reliable, affordable and allow for persistent operations, they said, but a major limitation remains the duration of battery power in cold conditions. [Source: DefenseNews | Kyle Rempfer | May 6, 2019 ++]

GTMO Prison Update 13 ► Is it Becoming a Nursing Home for Its Aging Terror Suspects

The oldest man still held in military detention here is 71 years old. Many others are in their 50s. It’s not entirely clear how the U.S. government plans to care for them in their old age. The 40 remaining prisoners at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base have the same physical ailments of any aging population. They need hip replacements, eye surgeries, treatment for sleep apnea, mental health disorders and, one day, probably cancer and dementia. As the military commissions designed by the Bush administration lurch unevenly towards convictions — a federal appeals court recently tossed aside three years of litigation in the USS Cole case — it appears increasingly likely that many of these men will grow old and die on the U.S. taxpayer’s dime.

The aging population at Gitmo poses unique challenges for Adm. John Ring, the latest in a string of officers who have led the prison on one-year deployments. Defense attorneys say many detainees suffer the ill effects of brutal interrogation tactics now considered to be torture. The United States has committed to providing the same health care to the remaining detainees that it provides to its own troops, as required by the Geneva Conventions. But the secure medical facilities built to treat the detainees — Ring calls them “guests” — can’t cope with every kind of surgery geriatric patients typically need, and weren’t built to last forever. Congress has prohibited the transfer of detainees to the continental United States, which means any treatment they receive will have to take place at a remote outpost on the tip of Cuba.

“I’m sort of caught between a rock and a hard place,” Ring said. “The Geneva Conventions’ Article III, that says that I have to give the detainees equivalent medical care that I would give to a trooper. But if a trooper got sick, I’d send him home to the United States. “And so I’m stuck. Whatever I’m going to do, I have to do here.” For now, with all of the detainees healthy enough to get around without assistance, that system is mostly working. Specialists and equipment are flown in as needed, including a handicapped-accessible cell sent to the war court facility so that a 57-year-old inmate recovering from emergency spinal surgeries could stay overnight at the complex rather than endure transport back and forth from the detention facility.

Officials on the island have been told to expect to keep the lights on for another 25 years. Most of the long-term planning Ring and his successors need to turn Gitmo into a nursing home for terrorists is up to policymakers at the Pentagon — and, it’s not clear how much planning has actually been done. “A lot of my guys are prediabetic. Am I going to do dialysis down here? I don’t know. Somebody has got to tell me that. Are we going to do complex cancer care down here? I don’t know, somebody has got to tell me that,” Ring told reporters.

What is the Pentagon’s plan?

“We’re in the early stages of feeling this out,” Ring said. The long-term goal is to continue to house detainees in communal living configurations, so that they can help care for one another as they age. In the coming months, he is sending a team to study how Federal Bureau of Prisons facilities in the United States handle end-of-life care for elderly prisoners. And eventually, the senior medical officer, or SMO, expects to replace the detainee acute care unit, where surgeons have already performed both emergency and routine elective procedures, to include ramps, grab bars, and other amenities required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

“This facility was built as sort of a stop-gap measure,” the SMO said. “It’s not the final solution. The detainee acute care unit is designed with a seven-year time frame so somewhere around 2025, they’re going to have to look at a more

permanent solution.” But experts say that still leaves a lot of unanswered questions about the breadth of care that will be available.

“I just can’t imagine being able to configure a suite of [operating rooms]. What you do in a neuro suite versus a cardiac suite are all a bit different. What are you going to do when you decide you’re going to do a cardiac bypass? You need a special OR,” said Dr. Stephen Xenakis, a retired military psychiatrist who has worked with Gitmo detainees and now advocates against the use of torture at the nonprofit NGO Physicians for Human Rights. “There’s constraints. And there’s realities. And at the highest levels, there’s going to have to be some very hard decisions.”

A Pentagon memo from February 2018 — shortly after President Trump announced that he would be keeping Gitmo open — says that U.S. Southern Command will provide the detainees with the same level of care as the U.S. armed forces only “when it is possible” and “to the extent practicable.” If the appropriate care can’t be provided on the island, according to the memo, “a panel will be formed to provide direction...on medical courses of action. The memo directs the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop an “execute order” that would, among things, “refine medical options, address urgent and chronic health issues, long-term medical treatment requirements, staffing requirements, and structural changes to camps and medical facilities.”

“This EXORD will assist in defining ‘the practicable extent’ of medical capabilities that could be brought to bear at GTMO in order to provide the appropriate medical care required by a detainee’s condition,” reads the memo, signed by Defense Undersecretary for Policy John Rood and obtained by Defense One. But as of April, the order had not been issued — and is not expected until June, according to Col. Pat Ryder, a spokesman for the Joint Staff. “This EXORD is a first step towards addressing detainee healthcare policy guidelines tasked by the Undersecretary of Defense,” Ryder said in a statement. And although the memo directs the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs to update the DOD regulations governing medical program support for detainee operations, they have not been amended since 2006.

Just how old is old?

In one of Gitmo’s communal cellblocks, guards sit in a chilled, dim passageway called the “rotunda” and watch through one-way glass as inmates sip tea, gesture and talk, read and pop bites of food in their mouths. A handwritten reminder is pinned to the desk: “Fill out hunger strike meal inventory before and after meals go on/off block.”

Some detainees are starting to use canes and walkers, but none are showing signs of serious age-related illness yet, according to Ring and the senior medical officer. The chief medical officer expects the first hip and knee replacements to be needed soon. And, he said, “I am seeing a few cases that may look like early cognitive impairment.” But no one is making permanent use of a wheelchair yet and no one has cancer, they say. “I haven’t gotten anything that I would diagnose as dementia,” the SMO said. “Generally across the board versus an American population of age-matched controls, we have the same conditions, although they tend to be a little bit less [prevalent] here,” including high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol and mental health illnesses.

That claim raises some eyebrows among current and former DOD officers who have worked with detainees at the camp. Maj. James Valentine, the government-appointed defense attorney for two of the detainees kept in Guantanamo Bay’s maximum-security “Camp 7”, believes that one of his clients has some kind of cancer. Mohamed Rahim has shown Valentine sequential CAT scans showing “nodules that are growing in at least five different body organs,” he said. “Typically that is an indication of some kind of precancerous growth when they’re growing all over different parts of your body.” Valentine emphasized that he is not a physician and does not have access to Rahim’s complete medical records. Other detainees suffer various chronic conditions that defense attorneys blame on mistreatment by U.S. interrogators — in particular, “walling,” in which detainees were placed in a neck collar and slammed against a wall; and the use of stress positions, where the detainee was shackled in a painful position for an extended period of time.

Compounding the challenges of caring for an aging population in a high-security facility is a longstanding policy: medical caretakers are not allowed to ask detainees about the origins of any injury or illness that may have arisen from

the use of torture during interrogations. “That means you’re not getting the right clinical history. You need that history as a doctor. You need to know what’s happened,” Xenakis said. That history is particularly important when providing mental healthcare to elderly patients, he continued. “Their capacity to cope with things is diminished and so these experiences they had in their younger years revisit them very, very vividly.”

“Depression does increase with age,” the SMO said. “There are mental health diagnoses that do pop up more as people age.” Even if they are healthy now, Ring acknowledges that some of the detainees may not be mentally competent by the time their case goes to trial. “While the commission’s processes are taking a lot of time, I think there are isolated cases where they might not be lucid and able to participate, but I think overall they will be,” said Ring. That determination is up to the Military Commissions, not Ring or his staff. Ring’s deployment began just over a year ago. A new commander will take over in June. [Source: DefemseOne | Katie Bo Williams | April 26, 2019 ++]

China’s Concentration Camps ► 1M Plus Muslims Have Been Sent to Reeducation Sites

The United States accused China on 3 MAY of putting well more than a million minority Muslims in “concentration camps,” in some of the strongest U.S. condemnation to date of what it calls Beijing’s mass detention of mostly Muslim Uighur minority and other Muslim groups.



Workers (left) walk by the perimeter fence of what is officially known as a vocational skills education centre in Dabancheng in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, China September 4, 2018. Muslim protesters (right) hold banners during a rally outside China’s embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia, Dec. 21, 2018.

The comments by Randall Schriver, who leads Asia policy at the U.S. Defense Department, are likely to increase tension with Beijing, which is sensitive to international criticism and describes the sites as vocational education training centers aimed at stemming the threat of Islamic extremism. Former detainees have described to Reuters being tortured during interrogation at the camps, living in crowded cells and being subjected to a brutal daily regimen of party indoctrination that drove some people to suicide. Some of the sprawling facilities are ringed with razor wire and watch towers. “The (Chinese) Communist Party is using the security forces for mass imprisonment of Chinese Muslims in concentration camps,” Schriver told a Pentagon briefing during a broader discussion about China’s military, estimating that the number of detained Muslims could be “closer to 3 million citizens.”

Schriver, an assistant secretary of defense, defended his use of a term normally associated with Nazi Germany as appropriate, under the circumstances. When asked by a reporter why he used the term, Schriver said that it was justified given what we understand to be the magnitude of the detention, at least a million but likely closer to 3 million citizens out of a population of about 10 million. “So a very significant portion of the population, (given) what’s happening there, what the goals are of the Chinese government and their own public comments make that a very, I think, appropriate description,” he said. The Chinese embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on 3 MAY used the term re-education camps to describe the sites and said Chinese activity was “reminiscent of the 1930s.”

The U.S. government has weighed sanctions against senior Chinese officials in Xinjiang, a vast region bordering central Asia that is home to millions of Uighurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities. China has warned that it would retaliate “in proportion” against any U.S. sanctions. The governor of Xinjiang in March directly dismissed comparisons to concentration camps, saying they were “the same as boarding schools.” U.S. officials have said China has made criminal many aspects of religious practice and culture in Xinjiang, including punishment for teaching Muslim texts to children and bans on parents giving their children Uighur names. Academics and journalists have documented grid-style police checkpoints across Xinjiang and mass DNA collection, and human rights advocates have decried martial law-type conditions there. [Source: Reuters | Phil Stewart | May 3, 2019 ++]

China’s Power Projection ► DOD Report On Chinese Military

China is increasingly willing to project its military power, grow its armed forces and develop military technology, all with growing negative perceptions of the United States, according to a report on Chinese military power released 2 MAY by the Defense Department. The report, mandated by Congress, highlights Chinese military advancements in power projection, stating that “ground, naval, air, and missile forces are increasingly able to project power through peacetime operations.” China, the report states, is expanding its capacity to contest U.S. military superiority in the event of a regional conflict in the Indo-Pacific.

China is expected to commission its second aircraft carrier this year, further expanding the country’s ability to project its military power beyond the militarized islands and reefs it’s developed in the South China Sea since 2014, according to the report. The U.S. has 11 carriers, with four more under development. “China’s aircraft carrier and planned follow-on carriers, once operational, will extend air defense coverage beyond the range of coastal and shipboard missile systems and will enable task group operations at increasingly longer ranges,” the report said.

Randall Schriver, assistant secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, said China is expected to field its first fifth-generation fighter, the J-20, this year. In addition, China is continuing to test ballistic missiles for submarines in pursuit of a nuclear triad of land, air and sea-based nuclear weapons to match the U.S., he said. China also is expected to build more military outposts worldwide, possibly beginning with Pakistan, increasing its global influence following construction of its first overseas military base, in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa, according to the report.

The thrust of the report focuses on the threat to U.S. national security interests -- and its traditional position as the major power in the Pacific -- posed by Chinese expansionism, building off its claims of sovereignty in the South China Sea to seek influence worldwide through military and economic means. "China's advancement of projects such as the 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative will probably drive military overseas basing through a perceived need to provide security for OBOR projects," the annual report to Congress states. "China will seek to establish additional military bases in countries with which it has a longstanding friendly relationship and similar strategic interests, such as Pakistan," according to the report. China's reach is expected to extend into the Arctic. Beijing has invested in icebreaker vessels and last year published its first arctic strategy. "Civilian research could support a strengthened Chinese military presence in the Arctic Ocean, which could include deploying submarines to the region as a deterrent against nuclear attacks," the report states.

Despite its growing military capabilities and arsenals, China is still wary of open conflict with the U.S. and its allies, the report states. "China's leaders employ tactics short of armed conflict to pursue China's strategic objectives through activities calculated to fall below the threshold of provoking armed conflict with the United States, its allies and partners, or others in the Indo-Pacific region," the 123-page report says. The main goal of China's buildup is aimed at "advancing a comprehensive military modernization program aimed at completing modernization by 2035 and making the PLA [People's Liberation Army] into a 'world-class' military by 2049," according to the report.

China currently has the region's largest navy, with more than 300 surface combatants, submarines, amphibious ships and patrol craft. A top priority is modernization of the submarine fleet, the report states. Four nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBN), six nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSN), and 50 conventionally powered attack submarines are now in operation in China's submarine force, it adds. China's first domestically built aircraft carrier was launched in 2017, completed sea trials in 2018, and "will likely join the fleet by the end of 2019," the report says. The new carrier is a modified version of the Liaoning, a converted former Soviet ship with a sloping deck for jump jets, but lacks a catapult launch system and has a smaller flight deck than U.S. carriers, according to the report. China began construction of its second domestically built aircraft carrier in 2018, "which will likely be larger and fitted with a catapult launch system," the report states.

The report also noted advances made by the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF) with anti-ship missiles that Chinese military leaders claim can knock out U.S. carriers. "China's conventionally armed CSS-5 Mod 5 (DF-21D) anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) variant gives the PLA the capability to attack ships, including aircraft carriers, in the western Pacific," according to the report. China currently has 90 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and "the PLA Rocket Force also continues to enhance its fixed ICBMs [by] adding more survivable, mobile delivery systems," the report says. Schriver adds, "China continues to grow its inventory of DF-26 intermediate-range ballistic missiles. These missiles are capable of conducting conventional and nuclear precision strikes against both ground and naval targets in the western Pacific and Indian oceans."

China is also adept at using espionage to steal technology in pursuit of its military buildup against the U.S., it states. "China uses a variety of methods to acquire foreign military and dual-use technologies, including targeted foreign direct investment, cyber theft, and exploitation of private Chinese nationals' access to these technologies," according to the report. China is also "harnessing its intelligence services, computer intrusions, and other illicit approaches" in an all-out effort to blunt U.S. advantages, it adds.."

The report said China increasingly sees the U.S. "as adopting a more confrontational approach, reflecting China's long-held perception that the United States seeks to contain China's rise." The 2018 National Defense Strategy listed China as a competitor and a threat for its expanding influence in the Pacific and militarization of islands and reefs in the South China Sea. "China sees recent U.S. actions on trade and the public releases of U.S. defense and national security strategies as indicative of this containment strategy," the report said.

The report said China's advancement and expanding reach increases the risk of an accident that could lead to a conflict, so it's important to maintain an open dialogue between leaders of both countries. In September, the USS Decatur and Chinese destroyer Luyang nearly collided when the Luyang came within 45 yards of the U.S. destroyer during a freedom-of-navigation operation near the Spratly Islands. "In 2018, the U.S. and China military-to-military relationship focused on advancing strategic communications and reducing the risk of misunderstanding or miscalculation through high-level engagements and recurrent exchanges," the report said.

The report said the Pentagon will continue to shape its engagements with China in a way that encourages Beijing to act in accordance with a "free and open international order," to reduce the risk of confrontation and defuse tensions between forces operating close to one another. "The United States will compete from a position of strength while encouraging China to cooperate with the United States on security issues where our interests align," the report said. "DoD engagements with China seek to reduce risk and prevent misunderstanding in times of increased tension."

China is also adept at using espionage to steal technology in pursuit of its military buildup against the U.S., it states. "China uses a variety of methods to acquire foreign military and dual-use technologies, including targeted foreign direct investment, cyber theft, and exploitation of private Chinese nationals' access to these technologies," according to the report. China is also "harnessing its intelligence services, computer intrusions, and other illicit approaches" in an all-out effort to blunt U.S. advantages, it adds.

Earlier this week, Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Joseph Dunford spoke to the difficulty of establishing regular lines of communication with the Chinese military to avoid having incidents escalate to the point of nuclear confrontation.

During his tenure as chairman since 2015, Dunford said he has met with his Russian counterpart, General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov, four times and they have maintained regular communications. "I'm confident we have the ability to mitigate the risk and manage a crisis with Russia," but with China "we don't have that same capability," he said at a hearing 1 MAY of the House Appropriations Subcommittee.

"With China, for more than a decade, we attempted to create a formal framework" for military-to-military communications similar to the Russian framework, Dunford said, but "I am not confident that that's where it needs to be now." "It's a priority for us, we need to do that," he said. "In the meantime, we have to rely on diplomatic channels." He added, "There's a lot of suspicion on both sides." [Source: Stars & Stripes / Military.com | Caitlin Doornbos & Richard Sisk | May 3, 2019 ++]

Taiwan-China Dispute Update 06 ► China Laying Groundwork For War

China is improving and increasing its options for a possible future invasion of Taiwan, with military reforms and investments in multi-domain military capabilities offering a range of options to defeat the self-governing island, according to a Pentagon report. These options range from an air and sea blockade of Taiwan to a full-scale invasion, although the latter option would require a significant increase in the number of amphibious ships, according to the latest annual China Military Power Report released 2 MAY by the Department of Defense.



Airmen walk in formation prior to a combat drill with H-6K bombers.

Nevertheless, the report cautioned that the People's Liberation Army or PLA's efforts to convert the bulk of its maneuver units to combined arms brigades, "should eventually create more capable, modular brigades and battalions," while the "expansion of army aviation and the creation of two new air assault brigades also provides more attack, air assault and close air support options for a Taiwan invasion."

China's PLA has also made efforts to improve its ability to insert forces by air, by restructuring its airborne corps and establishing air assault units, which would be charged with aerial insertion and seizing key terrain. This restructure saw it reorganizing its previous units into airborne infantry brigades, a special operations brigade, an aviation brigade, and a support brigade, with the corps conducting training exercises in 2018 that involved long-range raid and airborne operations based on actual war plans.

The service has also established a joint logistics support force in late 2016, with the primary goal of supporting a strategic campaign such as a Taiwan invasion. This would be accomplished through command and control of joint logistics, delivering of materiel, and managing various civil-military integration support mechanisms. It's strategic support force would then be responsible for the use of electronic warfare and cyber operations during a Taiwan

contingency, by “seizing and maintaining battlefield information control in contemporary informatized warfare.” The report added that the PLA is likely still exploring how to reform its joint command processes to integrate information operations and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities more fully at the theater-level, but noted that the structural reforms have removed the biggest barriers to integrating these strategic capabilities.

Nonetheless, the report raises questions about China’s current ability to conduct a full-scale invasion. Despite advances in the quality and quantity of its surface combatants and submarines, the PLA Navy has in recent years only acquired a small number of landing platform docks “indicating a near term focus on smaller scale expeditionary missions rather than a large number of [Landing Ship Tanks] and medium landing craft that would be necessary for a large-scale direct beach assault.”

The preparedness of the recently expanded PLA Marine Corps was also in doubt, with exercises rarely going beyond battalion level events, and its newly raised brigades yet to receive “their full complement of required equipment and not fully mission capable.” As a consequence, the report noted that the scope of training for these units was “rudimentary and the new brigades remain unequipped to perform amphibious assault operations,” concluding that an invasion of Taiwan, besides being fraught with significant political risk, “would likely strain China’s armed forces.” [Source: DefenseNews | Mike Yeo | May 3, 2019 ++]

Secrets of Flying (2) ► 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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Your Sized Up As You Board -- It’s always reassuring to see your flight attendants greeting you as you enter the aircraft. Sure it’s excellent customer service but they actually have an ulterior motive for doing so. As the passengers enter the plane, the flight attendants quickly make important assessments. They look over each and every passenger and make mental notes of who might be problematic or intoxicated, who is traveling alone, or for those passengers who might be in need of extra assistance such as when they’re handicapped or traveling with children. They are also seeing who’s strong and who might be useful in an emergency.

There’s No Rules against Flight Attendants Fraternizing with Passengers -- As for flight attendants getting extra chummy with passengers, many airlines don’t really have policies on it. So if you find your flight attendant quite attractive, you can go ahead and shoot your shot. But chances are, that won’t fare well because flight attendants experience too much of that. More often, flight attendants are the ones fighting off unwanted attention while they’re just trying to do their job. Still, they are allowed to meet a potential partner if they wish to do so!

Definitely Do Not Accept A Coffee -- Many flight attendants wouldn’t suggest drinking the coffee or tea served on flights. While the potable water is filtered and not necessarily the same water that flows through the lavatories, you still might want to pass on these hot beverages that are made in flight. The tanks that the potable water is kept in apparently don’t get cleaned as often as you’d think. And sometimes, the valve for the lavatory water is located precariously close to the valve for the clean water. So next time, you might just want to stick to the bottled and canned drinks.

The Food Is Questionable Too -- Speaking of things you should steer away from, you might also want to think twice about airline food. Meals served on longer flights usually look pretty balanced, but the nutritional content of those meals is shocking. In-flight meals are loaded up with salt, sugar, fat, and simple carbs that make you feel full but actually have no nutritional value. If you're stuck on a long-haul flight with nothing else to eat, those meals are your saving grace. But you might want to remember to bring your own food on board next time.

Flight Attendants are Disgusted by Passengers Who Walk Around Barefoot -- Everyone understands how uncomfortable it is to be stuck on a plane for more than two hours. A lot of times you'll see that passenger who takes their shoes off, and they'll even walk around the cabin without putting them back on! It may seem like they're just making themselves comfortable, but it's actually pretty disgusting. Flight attendants know just how filthy the floor of the plane really is. Plenty of accidents occur in-flight. While those accidents do get cleaned up, it's still not as sanitary as you'd hope, especially in between flights. Plus, cleaning supplies are limited on airplanes.

Flight Attendants Have The Power To Restrain You -- You better behave yourself the next time you fly. If you get too unruly, then your flight attendant has the authority to arrest you (or at the very least, restrain you). You may have seen people removed from a flight before takeoff, but what happens when things come to light mid-flight? If a flight attendant really needs to, they have the power to restrain overly aggressive or trouble causing passengers. They usually have zip ties available or they could use the seatbelt extensions as restraints. The passenger would then be placed in an area where they can't be disruptive and would be escorted off at the first stop.

You Might Want To Think Twice About First Class -- It's probably not all that worth it to sit in first class. Studies have shown that in the event of a plane crash, those who are sitting towards the front of the plane are more likely to die. The safest seats are those within a few rows of the emergency exit and the aisle seats. Studies have shown that passengers in the rear of the plane have the highest survival rates compared to those in first class. In any case, no matter where you sit, it's always smart to fasten your seat belt.

The Oxygen Masks Have A Time Limit -- The oxygen masks on a plane will deploy when the cabin pressure falls below a certain point, but more often than not, that point never comes. In the event that it does, however, how long would it allow you to breathe? There are around 12 to 15 minutes of oxygen in those masks. It doesn't seem like a lot of time, but it is. If you ever find yourself in a situation that warrants the use of these masks, just try to relax and breathe. The pilot is working to get the plane to a safe altitude where you will be able to breathe without them.

[Source: <http://www.postfun.com/travel> | May 15, 2019 ++]

Saudi Arabia Military Support ► Senate Fails to Override Trump Veto on Yemen

U.S. military support for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen survived a critical vote in the Senate on 2 MAY as Democrats failed to override President Donald Trump's veto, shifting the fight to the nascent defense policy and appropriations bills. The vote was 53-45, short of the two-thirds majority that would have been required. "This is the first time in 45 years the War Powers Act was used successfully to try to stop U.S. intervention in an unauthorized war," Sanders, a co-sponsor of the legislation and one of many Democratic presidential candidates, said during the vote. "No one should think this is the end of that process. This is the beginning of that process. What you're seeing now is Congress finally having the courage to reassert its constitutional [war-making] responsibility."

The dispute over whether the U.S. should continue military support for the Emirati and Saudi-led coalition fighting Iran-backed rebels in Yemen may next be fought in the drafting of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act or defense-spending legislation. Both are considered must-pass pieces of legislation, which, if they reach the president's desk with Yemen language he opposes, would test his resolve. Though the legislation has yet to be drafted, Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA), the sponsor of the Yemen resolution in the House, said he would be seek language akin to the War Powers Resolution in the annual defense policy bill. "The NDAA will be the next big step, and it will keep the pressure

on the Saudis,” said Khanna. Khanna is a member of the House Armed Services Committee, which drafts and negotiates the bill with its Senate counterpart.



Yemenis gather around the coffins of schoolchildren during a funeral in the capital Sanaa on April 10, 2019. Rebels there held a mass funeral for children killed in an explosion near two schools in the capital Sanaa.

One of the Senate measure’s co-sponsors and an appropriator, Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT) said he likewise expects a bid to defund U.S. military assistance in Yemen in the 2020 defense spending bill. Sen. Jack Reed, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee and a senior appropriator, was favorable. “The measure passed here on a very strong bipartisan basis, and that could generate the appropriate support in the appropriations bill or NDAA,” he said, acknowledging such a move would invite partisan resistance.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Richard Shelby (R-AL) and SASC Personnel Subcommittee Chairman Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC) were among Republicans opposed to such a strategy, as it might impede the progress of the bills. “That, to me, is more of a stunt,” Tillis said. “The NDAA is more about Department of Defense authorities, readiness, capabilities. This is more of a policy discussion that falls outside of that. I can see this as a tactic, but I don’t think it’s appropriate, and that’s why I don’t think it would prevail.”

In April, Congress sent Trump a bipartisan, never-before-used War Powers Resolution that sought to invoke Congress’ constitutional authorities, but Trump used the second veto of his presidency to strike it down. Since the administration of President Barack Obama, U.S. military support included intelligence sharing, logistics and, until late last year, aerial refueling. Many of the Democratic candidates for president are now opposed to U.S. military support in the Yemen war. Former Vice President Joe Biden of the Obama administration aligned himself this week with the Senate Democratic Caucus — which includes presidential candidates Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Cory Booker, Michael Bennett Kirsten Gillibran, Kamala Harris and Amy Klobuchar. In the House, candidates Tulsi Gabbard, Eric Swalwell and Seth Moulton voted for the measure to remove the military from the Yemen war, while Tim Ryan did not vote.

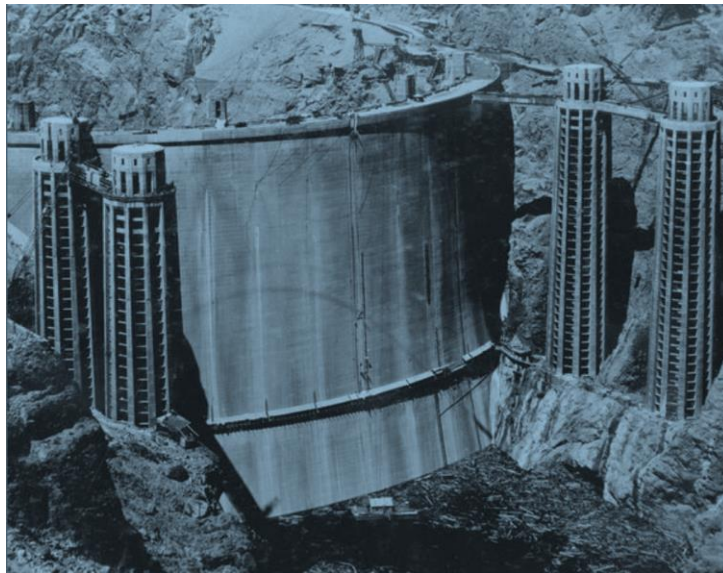
Lawmakers have grown concerned about the thousands of civilians killed in coalition airstrikes since the conflict began in 2014, and they have criticized the president for not condemning Saudi Arabia for the alleged killing of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi who lived in the U.S. and had written critically about the kingdom. In the floor debate ahead of the vote, Democrats said that invoking the 1973 War Powers Act was an important step in Congress reclaiming its long-atrophied war-making authorities, while Republicans argued the law was being misapplied and would, if successful, empower Iran. “We do indeed have important security and military partnerships with the countries comprising the coalition,” said Sen. Bob Menendez, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “but these partnerships are not a blank check for weapons and direct support for a campaign that is decidedly working against U.S. interests in the region.”

Seven Republicans broke ranks to vote with Democrats on Thursday in attempting to overturn Trump’s veto, but they represented too small of a minority, as most GOP lawmakers stood with the president. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) said that halting U.S. training, intelligence sharing and other noncombat support would weaken U.S. influence and pressure on allies to find a diplomatic end to the war. “I share many of my colleagues’

serious concerns about aspects of Saudi Arabia’s behavior, but the best way for us to encourage better behavior from our partners is to remain involved with Saudi Arabia and the UAE and not push them into the arms of Russia and China,” McConnell said.

Trump, with the second veto of his presidency, argued not only that the Yemen measure’s passage would weaken efforts to fight al-Qaida and Islamic State affiliates but also that Congress was overstepping its authority and impinging on the president’s constitutional powers as commander in chief. [Source: DefenseNews | Joe Gould | Mat 2, 2019 ++]

Memories ▶ **Hoover Dam 1936**



The rarely seen back of the Hoover Dam before it filled with water 1936

Interesting Inventions ▶ **Calendar Ring**



One Word Essays ► Relating



Have You Heard? ► Missing Wife | Unintentionally Funny | Survivors of the 30's thru 70's

Missing Wife

A husband went to the sheriff's department to report that his wife was missing. The following conversation ensued:

Husband: My wife is missing. She went shopping yesterday and has not come home...

Sergeant: What is her height?

Husband: Gee, I'm not sure. A little over five-feet tall.

Sergeant: Weight?

Husband: Don't know. Not slim, not really fat.

Sergeant: Color of eyes?

Husband: Sort of brown I think. Never really noticed.

Sergeant: Color of hair?

Husband: Changes a couple times a year. Maybe dark brown now. I can't remember.

Sergeant: What was she wearing?

Husband: Could have been pants, or maybe a skirt or shorts. I don't know exactly.

Sergeant: What kind of car did she go in?

Husband: She went in my truck.

Sergeant: What kind of truck was it?

Husband: A 2015 Ford F150 King Ranch 4X4 with eco-boost 5.0L V8 engine special ordered with manual transmission and climate controlled air conditioning. It has a custom matching white cover for the bed, which has a matching aftermarket bed liner. Custom leather 6-way seats and 'Bubba' floor mats. Trailering package with gold hitch and special wiring hook-ups. DVD with full GPS navigation, satellite radio receiver, 23-channel CB radio, six cup holders, a USB port, and four power outlets. I added special alloy wheels and off-road Michelins. It has custom running boards and indirect wheel well lighting. (VIN) #1HGBH41JXMN109186.

At this point the husband started choking up.

Sergeant: Don't worry buddy. We'll find your truck.

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Unintentionally Funny

The United States military loves slapping an acronym on anything that moves. Actually, things that don't move are equally likely to be described with a jumble of letters when words would do the trick just fine. Sometimes it's obvious that the acronym-izer should've put more thought into the process, and we get some unintentionally hilarious descriptors:

1. PMS -- Professor of Military Science
2. MANPADS -- Man-Portable Air-Defense System
3. MANCOC -- Maneuver Advanced NCO Course
4. DICC -- Defense Intelligence Collection Cell
5. DISCO -- Defense Industrial Security Clearance Office
6. MAGIC CARPET -- Maritime Augmented Guidance with Integrated Controls for Carrier Approach and Recovery Precision Enabling Technologies.
7. DRBOB -- Defense Resale Business Optimization Board
8. FARP -- Forward Area Refueling Point
9. FAP -- Fleet Assistance Program
10. BLT -- Battalion Landing Team
11. AOC -- Army Operating Concept

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Survivor's of the 30's thru 70's

To all the kids who survived the 1930s, '40s, '50s, '60s and '70s!!

- First, we survived being born to mothers who may have smoked and/or drank while they were pregnant. They took aspirin, ate blue cheese dressing, tuna from a can, and didn't get tested for diabetes.
- We were put to sleep on our tummies in baby cribs covered with brightly colored lead-based paints.
- We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, locks on doors or cabinets, and, when we rode our bikes, we had baseball caps, not helmets, on our heads.
- As infants and children, we would ride in cars with no car seats, no booster seats, no seat belts, no air bags, bald tires and sometimes no brakes.
- Riding in the back of a pick- up truck on a warm day was always a special treat.
- We drank water from the garden hose and not from a bottle.
- We shared one soft drink with four friends, from one bottle, and no one actually died from this.
- We ate cupcakes, white bread, real butter, and bacon. We drank Kool-Aid made with real white sugar and we weren't overweight. Why? Because we were always outside playing...that's why!
- We would leave home in the morning and play all day, as long as we were back when the streetlights came on. No one was able to reach us all day. And, we were okay.
- We would spend hours building our go-carts out of scraps and then ride them down the hill, only to find out we forgot the brakes. After running into the bushes a few times, we learned to solve that problem.
- We did not have Play Stations, Nintendo and X-boxes. There were no video games, no 150 channels on cable, no video movies or DVDs, no surround-sound or CDs, no cell phones, no personal computers, no Internet and no chat rooms. We had friends and we went outside and found them!
- We fell out of trees, got cut, broke bones and teeth, and there were no lawsuits from those accidents.

- We would get spankings with wooden spoons, switches, ping-pong paddles, or just a bare hand, and no one would call child services to report abuse.
- We ate worms, and mud pies made from dirt, and those worms did not live in us forever.
- We were given BB guns for our 10th birthdays, .22 rifles for our 12th, rode horses, made up games with sticks and tennis balls, and - although we were told it would happen - we did not put out very many eyes.
- We rode bikes or walked to a friend's house and knocked on the door or rang the bell, or just walked in and talked to them.
- Little League had tryouts and not everyone made the team. Those who didn't had to learn to deal with disappointment. Imagine that!!
- The idea of our parents bailing us out if we broke the law was unheard of. They actually sided with the law!

Our generations have produced some of the best risk-takers, problem solvers, and inventors ever. The past 50 To 85 years have seen an explosion of innovation and new ideas.. We had freedom, failure, success and responsibility, and we learned how to deal with it all. If YOU are one of those born between 1925-1970, CONGRATULATIONS!

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Thought of the Week

"Word to the Nation: Guard zealously your right to serve in the Armed Forces, for without them, there will be no other rights to guard." -- President John F. Kennedy

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1. The Bulletin is provided as a website accessed document vice direct access. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with

the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 19,666 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others were deleted from the active mailing list.

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

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7. Articles within the Bulletin are editorialized information obtained from over 100 sources. At the end of each article is provided the primary source from which it was obtained. The ++ indicates that that the information was reformatted from the original source and/or editorialized from more than one source. Because of the number of articles contained in each Bulletin there is no way that I can attest to their validity other than they have all been taken from previously reliable sources. My staff consist of only one person (myself) and it is a 7/10-12 endeavor to prepare and publish. Readers who question the validity of content are encouraged to go to the source provided to have their questions answered. I am always open to comments but, as a policy, shy away from anything political. Too controversial and time consuming.

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