

# RAO BULLETIN

## 1 July 2019



### PDF Edition

**THIS RETIREE ACTIVITIES OFFICE BULLETIN CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING  
ARTICLES**

Pg	Article	Subject
<b>* DOD *</b>		
04 ==	NDAA 2020 [08] ----	(HASC Draft   GI Bill Transfer Ban for Older Troops)
05 ==	NDAA 2020 [09] ----	(HASC \$733B Draft Advanced to Full House)
06 ==	NDAA 2020 [10] ----	(Latest on TRICARE, Medical Billet Cuts, and More)
08 ==	NDAA 2020 [11] ----	(Senate Passes S.1790 Setting Up Fight with House)
09 ==	Subic Bay Philippines [02] ----	(Navy Eyes Shipyard in Philippines as R&M Facility)
10 ==	Transgender Troops [24] ----	(Gallup Poll   71% Support Serving in Military)
11 ==	DoD/VA EHR [06] ----	(Making Records Compatible Is an Immense Challenge)
12 ==	Nuclear Weapons Arsenal [06] ----	(Warheads 2019 vs. 2018)
13 ==	DOD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ----	(Reported 16 thru 30 JUN 2019)
13 ==	POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials ----	(Reported 16 thru 30 JUN 2019   Seven)
<b>* VA *</b>		
15 ==	VA Suicide Prevention [54] ----	(PREVENTS Task Force Launched)
16 ==	White House VA Hotline [04] ----	(Growing in Size, Staff and Call Intake)
16 ==	VA Medical Marijuana [63] ----	(HVAC in Agreement   VA Must Study Use)

- 17 == VA Medical Marijuana [64] ---- (Doctor Recommendation Amendment Withdrawn)
- 18 == VA Lawsuit | Godsey v. Wilkie ---- (Excessive Claim Appeal Wait Times)
- 19 == VA Facility Safety [03] ---- (New Wheelchair Policy)
- 20 == VA Mission Act [11] ---- (Top Questions Answered)
- 21 == VA Hearing Loss Fixes ---- (Top Service-Connected Disability among Vets)
- 22 == VAMC Salisbury NC [02] ---- (Unauthorized \$2.3M Purchase)
- 23 == VAMC Washington DC [13] ---- (Culture of Complacency)
- 24 == VA Whistleblowers [58] ---- (Three Employees Claim VA Tried to Silence Them)
- 27 == VA Suicide Prevention [55] ---- (New Depression Drug Endorsed | Spravato)
- 28 == VA Suicide Prevention [56] ---- (Spravato Approval Declined for Widespread Coverage)
- 29 == VA Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ---- (Reported 16 thru 30 JUN 2019)

**\* VETS \***

- 31 == TEAM Coalition ---- (New | Represents Sick Troops/Vets Exposed to Environmental Hazards)
- 32 == Wounded Warrior Project [07] ---- (Recommendation | Renew SAH Benefit Every Decade)
- 22 == Vet Suicide [33] ---- (Three-digit, 911-Style Suicide Hotline Urged for Vets)
- 34 == PTSD [251] ---- (Study Says Vets w/PTSD More Likely to Die from Suicide & Accidents)
- 35 == Fallen Soldier Donor Memorial ---- (Honors Fallen Servicemembers Who Donated Organs)
- 36 == National WWI Museum & Memorial ---- (Dedication Wall Defaced)
- 36 == Desert Storm Memorial [11] ---- (Two Years, \$32 Million to Go)
- 38 == Vet Lawsuit | Harold Cantrell ---- (Assisted Living Facility Negligence Led to Vet's Death)
- 38 == Bladensburg WWI Vet Memorial [08] ---- (Supreme Court Ruling | Okay)
- 39 == GI Bill [286] ---- (Small-Business Loan Option)
- 40 == Vet Senior Care ---- (Soon to Be gone - From a Military Doctor)
- 41 == WWII Vets 194 ---- (Grant Jiro Hirabayashi | Merrill's Marauders Hall of Famer)
- 42 == WWII Vets 195 ---- (Oscar Leonard | Pacific POW Survivor)
- 44 == WWII Vets 196 ---- (William A. Bonsall | Atlantic POW Survivor)
- 45 == Vet Jobs Update 245 ---- (Potential Job Interview Questions 2 | Be More Prepared)
- 46 == Veterans FAQ ---- (Why Did the VA Downgrade My Rating?)
- 47 == Veterans FAQ ---- (How Should I Proceed to Increase My Current Assigned Rating?)
- 47 == Obit: Robert Friend ---- (21 June 2019 | 142 Combat Mission Tuskegee Airmen)
- 48 == Vet Hiring Fairs ---- (Scheduled As of 01 JUL 2019)
- 49 == Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ---- (As of 01 JUL 2019)
- 49 == Vet State Benefits ---- (Minnesota 2019)

**\* VET LEGISLATION \***

- 50 == VA Blue Water Claims [72] ---- (H.R. 299 | Blue Water Navy Vietnam Vet Act of 2019)
- 51 == Vet Deportations [26] ---- (S.1040, 1041, 1042 | Bills to Prevent Vet Deportations)
- 51 == VA Telehealth Program ---- (H.R.3228 | Expand Vet Pool of Healthcare Providers)
- 52 == Vet Treatment Courts ---- (H.R.886 | Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act of 2019)
- 53 == GI Bill [285] ---- (H.R.3369 | Defending all Veterans in Education Act (DAVIE))
- 54 == Airport Security [06] ---- (S.1881 | Veterans Expedited TSA Screening Safe Travel Act)
- 55 == PTSI Month/Day ---- (H. Res. 455 | National Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Month/Day)
- 55 == Military Sexual Misconduct [02] ---- (H.R.2388 | Harmony's Law)
- 56 == Military Sexual Trauma [06] ---- (H.R.1092 | Servicemember/Vet Empowerment Support Act of 2019)
- 57 == MOH Awards [11] ---- (H.R.3467 | Remove the Stain Act)

## \* MILITARY\*

- 58 == USS Minneapolis-St. Paul (LCS-21) ---- (Launched 15 June)
- 59 == Feres Doctrine [17] ---- (Defense Bill Amendment Would Allow Medical Claims)
- 60 == Madigan AMC ---- (\$12M Awarded in B.J.P. Medical Malpractice Claim Case)
- 61 == Warships That Will Change the Future ---- (HSV-2 Swift)
- 62 == GI Bill [256] ---- (Cap on Benefit Transfer Option to Dependents Effective 12 JUN)
- 63 == Military Memorabilia ---- (“We Will Prove Ourselves Men” Civil War Flag)
- 64 == USS Cherokee Nation ---- (Next Rescue Ship Contract Awarded)
- 65 == Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang ---- (‘CAG’ thru ‘CAVU’)

## \* MILITARY HISTORY \*

- 66 == B-17 Tragedy Over Berlin ---- (Return Leg Collision | 15 of 20 Crewmembers Lost)
- 68 == WWII D-Day [01] ---- (Germany's Desperate Defense of Normandy)
- 69 == Wham Paymaster Robbery ---- (\$28,000 Army Payroll has Never Been Recovered)
- 69 == Military History Anniversaries ---- (01 thru 15 JUL)
- 70 == Post WWII Photos ---- (Hermann Goering's Private Loot)
- 70 == Every Picture Tells A Story ---- (Brush with Death)
- 71 == War Memorials ---- (Brazil Monument to the dead of World War II)
- 71 == WWII Bomber Nose Art [33] ---- (The Outlaw)
- 71 == Medal of Honor Citations ---- (Joe J. Hayashi | WWII)

## \* HEALTH CARE \*

- 73 == PTSD Treatment | SGB ---- (Stellate Ganglion Block Gives Positive Results)
- 74 == VA HIV Care [05] ---- (All Vets Should be Tested at Least Once)
- 74 == TRICARE Nurse Advice Line [05] ---- (Don't Guess! 24/7 Access to a Nurse)
- 75 == Medical Cost Hardship ---- (Survey | Common in the United States)
- 76 == Diabetes [20] ---- (Study Finds 25% of U.S. Patients Ration Insulin)
- 77 == TRICARE Podcast 506 ---- (ECHO - Reporting Fraud/Abuse – Children Moving to College)
- 78 == TRICARE Podcast 507 ---- (Healthy Tips for Men - TRICARE Costs Tools - Sun Safety Tips)
- 80 == TRICARE Podcast 508 ---- (DEERS - EOBs - MHS Nurse Advice Line)

## \* FINANCES \*

- 81 == Senior Discounts [07] ---- (10 Retailers That Give Discounts to Older Shoppers)
- 82 == VA Loan Limits ---- (2019 Cap of \$484,350 Removed w/H.R.299 Signed into Law)
- 82 == Credit Monitoring [02] ---- (New Rules for Military Free Service)
- 83 == SBP DIC Offset [58] ---- (CBO Cost Estimate to Eliminate)
- 84 == SBP DIC Offset [59] ---- (Proposed NDAA Senate Amendment to Eliminate Fails)
- 85 == Medicare Coverage [04] ---- (SSA Processing Error Impacts 250,000 Seniors)
- 86 == Spirit Taxes ---- (How High Are They in Your State)
- 87 == Social Security Q & A ---- (190616 thru 190630)
- 88 == Job Scam 2 ---- (New Twist)
- 89 == Online Plane Ticket Scam ---- (Scammers Pretending to be Online Airline Ticket Brokers)
- 89 == WhatsApp Scam ---- (Scammers Turn to a New Platform)
- 90 == Tax Burden for Nevada Retired Vets ---- (As of JUN 2019)

## \* GENERAL INTEREST \*

- 91 == Notes of Interest ---- (16 thru 30 June 2019)
- 93 == Congressional Term Limits ---- (Countering Power Abuse or Counterproductive?)
- 94 == Iran Tensions [04] ---- (Downed U.S. Drone Displayed as Trophy)
- 96 == Battleships for Sale ---- (Four German Ones Scuttled 100 Years Ago)
- 96 == Driving BAC Limits ---- (Japan and Now South Korea 0.03%)
- 97 == Appliances | America's Most Reliable ---- (New Rankings from Consumer Reports)
- 98 == China U.S. Trade ---- (Meeting Chinese Made Product Demand)
- 99 == Secrets of Flying (5) ---- (What You May Not Know)
- 100 == Toilets [01] ---- (What You Should NOT Flush Down Them)
- 101 == Stains ---- (Suggestions on How to Remove)
- 103 == Memories ---- (Woodstock Opening Ceremony 1969)
- 103 == Interesting Inventions ---- (Self Locking Bike)
- 104 == One Word Essays ---- (Tenacity)
- 104 == Have You Heard? ---- (Our Nation's Debt | Aphorisms 2)

**NOTE**

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

**\* ATTACHMENTS \***

- Attachment – Minnesota Vet State Benefits
- Attachment – Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 JUL (Updated)
- Attachment – Army 1899 Payroll Robbery

**\* DoD \***



**NDAA 2020 Update 08 ► HASC Draft | GI Bill Transfer Ban for Older Troops**

Senior service members would once again be able to share their GI Bill benefits with spouses and children under a provision included in a House panel's budget bill draft. The measure was unanimously approved by the House Armed Services Committee during their debate of the annual defense authorization bill on 12 JUN. Sponsor Rep. Joe Courtney (D-CT) said the idea is to reverse "a truly lousy decision by the Department of Defense last year." The measure still must survive negotiations with the Senate before it becomes law, but supporters said they hope it sends a clear message to Defense Department leaders about their disapproval of the rule change, which blocks troops with more than 16 years of service from transferring their education benefits to a spouse or children.

That move goes into effect on 12 JUL. Military officials in recent weeks have warned affected service members to finish their transfer paperwork before that deadline or lose out on sharing tens of thousands in education benefits with their family. "This decision ... punishes those who have served over a long period of time, maybe got married late or started a family later," Courtney said. "It cuts them off from being able to get the GI Bill's really special component of transferability. "If you talk to service members, it is one of the most popular aspects of the benefit — to have that for

their family.” Service members wounded in combat are exempted from the rule change. Courtney said reserving the decision would not have a significant financial impact on the federal government but could help with retention and morale.

The post-9/11 GI Bill benefits cover the full cost of in-state tuition plus a monthly living stipend for eligible troops, veterans and family members. Troops must serve six years before they can transfer benefits to a family member. Officials from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America have lobbied for the change in recent months, arguing it unfairly limits benefits promised to service members. Senate officials have not yet weighed in on the idea.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 12, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **NDAA 2020 Update 09 ► HASC \$733B Draft Advanced to Full House**

House lawmakers advanced a \$733 billion defense policy bill on 13 JUN after nearly 21 hours of sometimes heated debate on the size of the Pentagon budget, the size of the country’s nuclear arsenal and a host of other military priorities for next year. The 33-24 final vote by the House Armed Services Committee on the draft of the defense authorization bill marked one of the most divided stances from the committee in years, as Republicans voiced concerns with Democrats’ priorities in the measure.

The legislation, which sets military spending policy for the upcoming fiscal year, has been adopted by Congress for 58 consecutive years, usually by sizable bipartisan margins. Committee officials insist that’s because the needs of the military usually rise above the partisan politics of Capitol Hill. But this year, the narrow passage out of committee illustrated the stark divide in defense policy between the two parties, and hints at a lengthy battle to come as the measure moves across Capitol Hill to the Republican-controlled Senate in the coming weeks.

Committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-WA) in recent days said he is committed to finding a palatable bill for both Republicans and Democrats. But during the marathon debate he repeatedly defended his party’s plans for \$733 billion in defense spending for fiscal 2020 as a responsible and sufficient mark. “By a reasonably comfortable margin, this is the largest budget we will have ever passed in Congress (for defense) and it’s a significant improvement on where we were before,” he said before the committee vote. Smith had already set aside some of his own priorities in a bid to win support from the panel’s hawkish Republicans, who are likely to influence their caucus when it comes time to vote the bill out of the House. Without that support, Democrats may struggle to gather enough votes from progressives in their own caucus, who have questioned even the lower level of spending.

But Senate Republicans have already set their authorization bill draft at \$750 billion, a mark recommended by the White House and defended by HASC ranking member Mac Thornberry (R-TX). He said that the figure is needed to keep pace with military modernization and readiness needs. Thornberry’s amendment included a lengthy laundry list of weapons and platforms left out of the bill. “I worry that we talk about this like it’s just numbers we’re pulling out of the air,” he said. “These are real things. An aircraft carrier gets delayed a year if \$733 billion is the way it comes out.”

The bill includes a 3.1 percent pay raise for troops next January — a point of agreement on both sides that Smith repeatedly referenced — and provisions for increased protections for sexual assault victims, increased oversight of military housing problems and parameters for a new Space Corps within the Air Force. But fights over the effects of climate change on national security, limitations on the use of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp and a provision mandating gender integration in Marine Corps basic training further divided the committee. On a series of Republican amendments aimed at preserving funds for the nuclear arsenal — including one to protect deployment of low-yield nuclear weapons on submarines — Democrats repeatedly defeated Republican proposals.

Similarly, the committee upheld several provisions designed to put a check on President Donald Trump’s ability to shift resources from the Defense Department to the U.S. southern border with Mexico. Democrats have accused Trump of abusing his emergency powers to shift Department of Defense funds for the border and send thousands of troops there. In the committee debate, Republicans generally argued Trump is taking necessary and normal steps to secure the border given political resistance to addressing the issue. “I want everybody to understand we have been sending DoD assets to the border since the Alamo,” said Rep. Mike Rogers, who sponsored one of the amendments. “We have to do it in order to keep our border secure and deal with the humanitarian crisis.”

The measure now shifts to the full House, where Smith and Democratic leadership will have to build a coalition of supporters to get the measure to negotiations with the Senate. That chamber will vote on its draft next week. Work on a compromise draft between the House and Senate is expected to last through most of the summer and fall.

[Source: Defense News | Leo Shane III & Joe Gould | June 13, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **NDA 2020 Update 10 ► Latest on TRICARE, Medical Billet Cuts, and More**

With the full Senate set to debate its version of the annual defense authorization bill during the week of 20 JUN and the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) recently completing a record 21-hour debate on its version, MOAA’s staff has been tracking the amendments, proposals, and changes that will shape military spending for the next year and beyond. While both House and Senate versions of the National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 2500 and S. 1790, respectively) are far from finalized, MOAA has provided a chart at <https://www.moaa.org/uploadedfiles/nda-2020-moaa-comparison-chart.pdf> to help chapters, members, and supporters keep track of what’s been proposed.

The HASC and Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) bills included several important Storming the Hill issues, an early indication of the impact and success of MOAA’s combined national and grassroots engagement with members of Congress. Two critical examples: MOAA is pleased to report the 3.1 % pay raise is included in both versions of the NDA and recommended by the administration, and neither NDA version includes proposals to increase TRICARE fees, or plans to alter to TRICARE for Life (TFL). Some analysis from MOAA on key issues follows:

### **Military Health Care**

While neither bill includes TRICARE fee hikes or TFL changes, DoD is proposing a reduction in military medical personnel by approximately 18,000 billets. The HASC bill contains a MOAA-supported provision that would prevent these reductions until the DoD conducts rigorous analyses, develops detailed plans describing the risks and how these will affect beneficiaries, and communicates the results under Congressional oversight. However, the Senate’s version of the NDA was silent on the topic. Next steps will be to influence key members of the Senate to adopt the House language when the two come together to negotiate differences during conference later this summer.

### **Military Housing**

Both versions included robust provisions to address the health and safety hazards in military family housing. With unique items in both versions of the bill, provisions will have to be reconciled during conference. MOAA worked directly with congressional offices to help draft legislation such as the Military Housing Oversight and Service Member Protection Act (S. 1229) and the Ensuring Safe Housing for Our Military Act (S. 703). Major provisions from these bills were incorporated into the SASC NDA markup. MOAA will work to make sure the language is inclusive of other tenants, such as DoD civilians and veterans who live in on-base housing, and ensure the legislation covers government owned housing where appropriate.

### **Commissary and Exchange**

Last year’s NDA directed the secretary of defense to “conduct a study to determine the feasibility of consolidating the military resale entities into a single defense resale system.” The Business Case Analysis (BCA) has been completed

but not shared with the public, although Lisa Hershman, acting DoD chief management officer, recommended consolidation in a 1 MAR memo based on the BCA. The 2019 NDAA prohibited DoD from spending any money on consolidation until Oct. 1, 2019. With that date quickly approaching, the HASC and SASC versions of the FY 2020 NDAA prescribe very different futures for the Defense Resale system.

The House legislation helps put the brakes on the four-way merger (Defense Commissary Agency, Army and Air Force Exchange Service, Marine Corps Exchange, Navy Exchange). It requires a separate GAO study on the merger along with congressional approval to move forward. The Senate version green-lights a merger without further review or congressional approval. MOAA has spoken out alongside its partners in The Military Coalition in favor of additional review like the measures introduced by the House.

### **The Widows Tax**

During HASC markups, Rep Joe Wilson (R-S.C., sponsor of H.R. 553) offered up an amendment to repeal the Survivor Benefit Plan-Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset, better known as the Widows Tax, but it was later withdrawn because it was offered without a corresponding offset to pay for the provision. Wilson's office continues to work diligently to focus on strategies to pay for the offset. The congressman's bill is still in motion, as it met the threshold of support in the House to be placed on the consensus calendar for a floor vote, which will likely occur in July. MOAA staff will continue to engage congress on this issue.

### **What's Next**

While the Senate debate continues, the House is not expected to consider its version of the bill until 9 JUL. Once both chambers have voted on their respective defense bill, a bicameral conference will commence to work out and resolve the differences. Concurrently, the House and Senate are also working the FY 2020 and 2021 defense appropriations bill. The House is backing a topline defense funding bill of \$733 billion while the Senate and President Donald Trump are pushing for \$750 billion topline. While it looks more likely to agree on a one-year spending bill, both chambers must come to a budget agreement before the new fiscal year begins on 1 OCT to prevent a government shutdown.

Meanwhile MOAA is preparing materials and activities so our chapters, members, and supporters can engage on some of these key issues of concern over the next few weeks and during the summer recess, when lawmakers leave town to go back to their states and districts. MOAA will continue to report on the NDAA process as more details emerge.

### **In Summary**

As it stands now the bill would:

- Authorize appropriations totaling an estimated \$727,569 million for 2020, mainly for the military functions of the Department of Defense (DoD), the atomic energy defense activities of the Department of Energy, and the Maritime Administration
- Authorize an additional \$538 million for the Maritime Administration and other nondefense activities and \$24 million for DoD over the 2021-2024 period
- Prescribe personnel strengths for active-duty and selected-reserve components of the U.S. Armed Forces
- Extend DoD's authority to pay various bonuses and allowances to military personnel
- Make several changes to health benefits for both active and retired military personnel and their families
- Create a new military service to organize, train, equip, and operate space forces
- Require DoD to sell Internet Protocol version 4 (IPv4) addresses over the next 10 years
- Impose intergovernmental and private-sector mandates by increasing the authorized end strength for active-duty personnel, preempting state and local authorities, and amending certain contracts for military housing

[Source: MOAA Newsletter | June 20, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*



## **NDA 2020 Update 11 ► Senate Passes S.1790 Setting Up Fight with House**

Senators on 27 JUN overwhelmingly passed a \$750 billion defense authorization bill for next year despite concerns from congressional Democrats over the size spending totals, an expansion of the U.S. nuclear arsenal and a lack of a check on President Donald Trump's war powers. The 86-8 vote all but erased a week of uncertainty surrounding the must-pass budget policy measure, which has passed Congress for more than five consecutive decades. That measure has faced a difficult path this year as the White House and Democratic leaders spar over a host of military issues.

Among the Democratic presidential candidates, Sens. Corey Booker and Amy Klobuchar voted "nay," while Sens. Michael Bennett, Kirsten Gillibrand, Kamala Harris, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren did not vote — likely due to the primary debates in Florida this week. Republicans Mike Braun, Rand Paul and Mike Lee also voted "nay" alongside Democrats Ed Markey, Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Jim Inhofe (R-OK) framed the bill as a continuation of the Trump administration's efforts to "rebuild" the military and to counter threats from around the globe.

"The world is more unstable and dangerous than any time in my lifetime," Inhofe said when he introduced the bill. "The National Defense Strategy gave it to us straight: strategic competition with China and Russia; continuing threats from rogue countries like Iran and North Korea, and terrorist organizations; new technology and new war-fighting domains in outer space and cyberspace; not to mention, years of underfunding under the previous administration." "This is a very good bill," the committee's top Democrat, Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, said in the run up to the vote. "It passed our committee on a vote of 25-2, a totally bipartisan vote. It contains many needed authorities, funding authorizations, and reforms that will help the men and women of our armed services."

The House is expected to vote on its version of the measure next month, after floor debates on issues of transgender enlistment, nuclear weapons limits, climate change's impact on national security and money for President Donald Trump's controversial southern border wall. The Senate version adopted Thursday bypasses most of those issues, but does contain authorization for about \$17 billion more in defense spending next year than House Democrats have backed in their appropriations measures. The two chambers are expected to reconcile their bills in conference during the weeks and months ahead.

In an unusual move designed to advance the massive defense bill before the 4 JUL congressional recess, senators approved the legislation on Thursday pending the outcome of a day-long vote on U.S. military involvement in Iran on 28 JUN. The amendment, which needs 60 votes to pass, would prohibit funding of U.S. military action against Iran without the approval of Congress. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and other Senate leaders opposed the measure but allowed the vote to accommodate Democrats in Florida for the party's primary debates. It is expected to fail, given a lack of support among the majority Republicans.

House Democrats have set a defense budget target of \$733 billion next year, and already adopted that level as part of a broader government appropriations plan. House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-WA) has argued that level is an appropriate increase in funding from fiscal 2019 (up about 2.4 percent) that meets military readiness and modernization needs without the potential for waste and abuse. But Inhofe has called the \$750 billion figure the "bare minimum" needed for the military to respond to evolving security threats. The White House and House Republican lawmakers have backed that level too.

By passing the Senate authorization bill with bipartisan backing, supporters are hoping they'll have extra momentum for that higher spending level as they head into inter-chamber negotiations. Those will begin after the House passage of the authorization bill and are expected to last into the fall. If the two sides can't reach a deal on defense (and non-defense) spending levels by 1 OCT, they risk triggering another partial government shutdown. Other provisions included in the bill were:



- A 3.1 percent pay raise for troops starting next January, in line with plans from House Democrats and the White House. If approved, it will be the largest yearly pay boost troops have seen in a decade.
- Going along with White House plans to add about 6,200 service members to the active-duty force next year. Of that, about 2,500 would be added to the Navy, 2,000 for the Army, 1,700 for the Air Force and 100 for the Marine Corps.
- About \$300 million in new spending authorities for improvements to military housing, in response to reports of substandard living conditions at bases around the country. The House defense plan includes similar provisions but only half the money. The White House's draft includes no such plans.
- Fully funding Pentagon modernization programs, including the triad of delivery systems on the nuclear arsenal. That is sure to be a sticking point when the measure reaches negotiations with House Democrats, who have proposed sharp cuts in that area.
- Authorizes \$10 billion for 94 fifth-generation Joint Strike Fighter aircraft, adding 16 to the administration's request, while buying eight fourth-generation F-15X aircraft for \$948 million, shorting the administration's F-15X request by \$162 million. It also authorizes \$2.8 billion for 15 KC-46A aircraft, or three more.
- Including twelve new ships for \$24.1 billion. Submarine spending includes \$4.7 billion for Virginia payload modules in two Virginia-class subs and advanced funding for an additional Virginia-class submarine.
- Surpassing the administration's request for the Army with 48 AH-64E Apaches and 33 UH-60V Black Hawk conversions, but seven fewer UH-60M Black Hawks. The service would buy 65 Armored Multi-Purpose Vehicles, 53 Paladin Integrated Management sets, and spend \$393.6 million on the Stryker, adding to the administration's request for the 30mm cannon upgrade.

[Source: DefenseNews | Leo Shane III & Joe Gould | June 27, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Subic Bay Philippines Update 02 ► Navy Eyes Shipyard in Philippines as R&M Facility**

A bankrupt commercial shipyard in the Philippines may present an opportunity for the Navy to re-establish itself at a major port it vacated nearly 30 years ago. "The U.S. Navy is exploring the viability of Subic Bay Hanjin Shipyard for use as a potential repair and maintenance facility," Cmdr. Nate Christensen, the fleet deputy public affairs officer, said in an email 26 JUN. The shipyard's owner, Hanjin Philippines, declared bankruptcy earlier this year owing \$900 million to South Korean creditors. Since then, a pair of Chinese firms have expressed an interest in buying the facility sparking alarm in some quarters.

Subic Bay was once home to thousands of U.S. sailors and their families before the Navy vacated its bases there in 1992. It's still a regular port call for U.S. warships and Marines who practice beach landings nearby in Zambales province. The strategic harbor's importance has grown amid Chinese efforts to build military facilities on artificial islands and claim sovereignty over territory to the west in the South China Sea. "No final decisions have been made [about the shipyard]," Christensen said. However, retired Navy Capt. Brian Buzzell, writing in the U.S. Naval Institute's "Proceedings" magazine this month, said Hanjin's financial woes represent a "golden chance to return to Subic Bay." He wrote:

- China wasn't a naval threat when the U.S. and the Philippines negotiated their alliance in the 1940s, he wrote. "No one foresaw the emergence of China as a political, economic, and military juggernaut that would assert historical claims to South China Sea islands, reefs, and territory."
- Navy freedom-of-navigation operations and Air Force overflights are not deterring Beijing from using asymmetric tactics to gradually secure de facto sovereignty over the South China Sea.
- Hanjin's Subic facility was the fifth-largest shipyard in the world, with more than 30,000 Filipino employees. Before it closed in February it had built 123 large cargo container vessels, bulk carriers and carriers of crude oil, liquified petroleum gas and mineral ores since 2008.

- The shipyard could help the Navy’s mission in the western Pacific by negating the need to send ships to Pearl Harbor for maintenance or repairs. It could also help the Navy grow its fleet to 355 ships after the closure of many U.S. shipyards in recent decades.

“The confluence of all these factors gives the U.S. Navy a perfect opportunity to return to Subic Bay, except this time as an equal partner respecting the laws and sovereignty of the Philippines and benefitting the Filipino people and economy,” Buzzell wrote. “It also would send a strong message to Beijing that, despite its efforts, the alliance between the United States and the Philippines is strong and unbreakable.”

Patricio Abinales, a Philippines expert at the University of Hawaii said in a 13 JUN email that the idea of the Navy returning to Subic Bay sounded good. However, there needs to be more incentive to get the Philippine military on board, she added. “[The U.S.] must be able to offer ... something more than just refurbished Vietnam War Coast Guard cutters,” he said. “The Philippines has been able to buy jets from South Korea. So it is -- financially -- in a position to purchase more recent vintage destroyers ... If the US is serious about this it needs to offer the Philippines more than just official visits and assurances and excess and old surplus.” [Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | June 4, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Transgender Troops Update 24 ► Gallup Poll | 71% Support Serving in Military**

As President Donald Trump's ban on most transgender military servicemembers continues to face legal challenges, 71% of Americans support allowing openly transgender men and women to serve in the military. This data is from a May 15-30 Gallup poll, which was conducted prior to a recent U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision that allows the ban to stand for the time being, but calls for a review of the policy that could still jeopardize its legal standing. On 18 JUN, the House of Representatives voted to block funding to implement the policy -- though the measure's chances of passing in the GOP-controlled Senate, much like the recently passed Equality Act, are unlikely.

Majorities of Americans across nearly all key demographic groups, except for Republicans, support allowing transgender men and women to serve in the U.S. military. Republicans (43%) are far less likely than Democrats (88%) and independents (78%) to support allowing trans servicemembers. A small majority of adults with military experience (56%) say that transgender people should be allowed to serve, though nonveterans are more likely to say this (73%). Women are more likely than men to support transgender military service, and support is higher among younger adults than older Americans.

These findings about Americans' views of transgender people serving in the military are similar to Gallup's polling in the years leading up to the 2010 repeal of the military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, which barred gays and lesbians from serving openly. At the time, Gallup found that most Americans supported allowing openly gay servicemembers. Americans Remain Split on Transgender Bathroom Policies

Americans' views on gender-related policies governing public restrooms have shown little movement in recent years. Gallup first polled on the issue in 2016, when Barack Obama's Department of Education directed public schools to allow transgender students to use restrooms and locker rooms that correspond with their gender identity, rather than their birth gender. This policy has since been rescinded under the Trump administration. The issue has roiled local and state politics, but public opinion has changed little, with 51% of Americans saying that transgender people should have to use the restroom corresponding with their birth gender and 44% saying that transgender people should use the restroom that corresponds with their gender identity.

The percentage of Americans who now have no opinion (5%) is half of what it was in 2016, likely reflecting that they have become more familiar with the issue in recent years. Having restroom assignment based on birth gender is preferred by most by Republicans (78%) and men (61%). By contrast, Democrats (66%), adults aged 18 to 29 (61%)

and women (53%) are the groups most likely to say students should be able to choose bathrooms based on their gender identity.

[Source: Gallup | Justin McCarthy| June 20, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **DoD/VA EHR Update 06 ► Making Records Compatible Is an Immense Challenge**

"This won't be easy," the prime contractor said 4 JUN of the \$16 billion effort to overcome decades of failure and finally make veteran and military health records compatible with a few computer clicks. "This undertaking is immense. It carries risk, and we don't take the challenges lightly" in implementing Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) programs across the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense, said Travis Dalton, president of government services for Cerner Corp. of Kansas City.

"We must deploy to 117 sites, train over 300,000 VA employees, collaborate with DoD, interoperate with the community, aggregate decades of clinical data and update technology," he told a hearing of the House Veterans Subcommittee on Technology. In addition, the new system will have to link with additional community health care providers expected to come onboard with the 6 JUN rollout of the VA Mission Act, which will expand private health care options for veterans, said Rep. Jim Banks, R-Indiana, the ranking member of the subcommittee. "Interoperability with the community providers is still the elephant in the room," he said. About 30% of veterans currently get health care at taxpayer expense in the private sector, and they "rightfully expect their records to follow them," Banks said. He said his main concern is that a "half-baked system" will be rushed into use.

Rep. Susie Lee (D-NV), chairwoman of the subcommittee, said that Cerner and partners Leidos and Booz Allen Hamilton are attempting to create "one seamless lifetime record for our service members as they transition from military to veteran status," but "this effort also has the potential to fail." "The VA unfortunately does not have a great track record when it comes to implementing information technology," she said, "and it threatens EHRM."

Previous attempts to mesh VA and DoD records 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. "This won't be easy, but it is achievable and we are making progress" in the overall effort to let "providers have access to records wherever they deliver care," Dalton said. Jon Scholl, president of the Leidos Health Group and a Navy veteran, said the example to follow is the MHS Genesis system, the new electronic health record for the Military Health System. "MHS Genesis is the solution," he said at the hearing. However, Lee said that "a suitable single management structure has yet to emerge" for EHRM since then-Acting VA Secretary Robert Wilkie awarded a \$10 billion, 10-year contract to Cerner in May 2018. The cost estimate for the contract has since risen to \$16 billion.

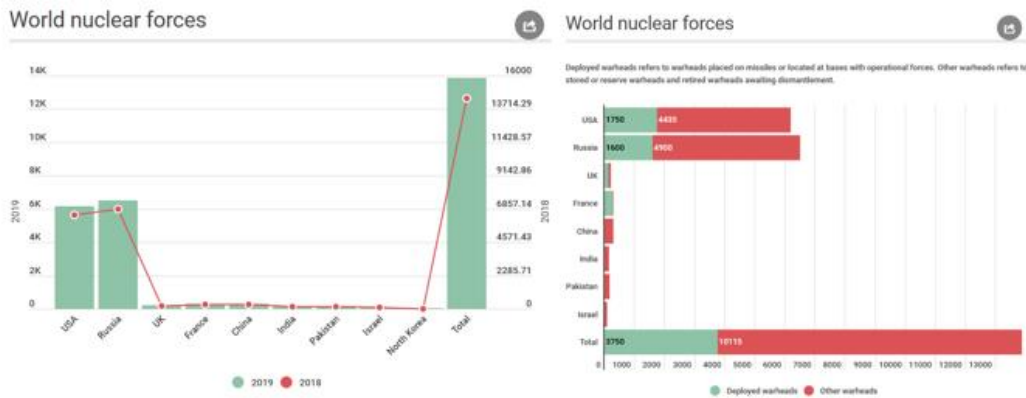
At a hearing last month of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan was challenged on the DoD's efforts to work with the VA on EHRM. "I don't ever recall being as outraged about an issue than I am about the electronic health record program," Rep. Kay Granger (R-TX) told him. "Personally, I spend quite a bit of time on how do we merge together" with the VA on the records, Shanahan assured her. He said pilot programs on making 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, adding that the next step is to put the programs in place at California installations in the fall. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | June 6, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Nuclear Weapons Arsenal Update 06 ► Warheads 2019 vs. 2018

The number of warheads has decreased over the past year, even as countries continue to modernize their nuclear forces, according to an annual assessment of global nuclear arms. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute released the SIPRI Yearbook 2019 on the current state of armaments, disarmament and international security. The report found that 13,865 warheads in existence at the start of 2019 were owned by nine nations: the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. The year before hosted an arsenal of 14,465 warheads.

“A key finding is that despite an overall decrease in the number of nuclear warheads in 2018, all nuclear weapon-possessing states continue to modernize their nuclear arsenals,” Jan Eliasson, SIPRI Governing Board chair ambassador and former deputy secretary-general of the United Nations, said in a news release. The U.S. and Russia were the only nations that decreased their warhead inventory, by 265 and 350 respectively, according to the report. The U.K., China, Pakistan, North Korea and possibly Israel all increased their number of warheads, SIPRI found. India and France saw no changes to the size of their arsenals.



One big cause of the decrease in arsenal size, according to SIPRI, is the implementation of the New START Treaty between the U.S. and Russia, meant to reduce and set limits on ballistic missiles. The two nations produce more than 90 percent of the world’s nuclear arms. The U.S. and Russia announced in 2018 that they had met the limits of the New START Treaty. But if an extension is not implemented, the treaty will expire in 2021. The U.S. is in the process of modernizing its nuclear arsenal per the Trump administration 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, which put forth measures to continue a modernization program started by the Obama administration. However, the NPR moves away from reducing nuclear weapons and instead sets a plan to develop new versions while and modifying others.

The U.S. hopes to achieve its goals by expanding nuclear options to include low-yield nuclear weapons, which will expand capabilities associated with submarine-launched ballistic missiles. This would add to a U.S. arsenal that already contains 1,000 gravity bombs and air-launched cruise missiles with low-yield warhead options, according to the SIPRI report. The NPR claims these new capabilities are necessary without evidence that the existing arsenal is insufficient. The SIPRI report notes that America’s focus on its nonstrategic nuclear arsenal could push other nations in that same direction.

“Russia’s decisions about the size and composition of its non-strategic nuclear arsenal appear to be driven by the USA’s superiority in conventional forces and not by the US non-strategic nuclear arsenal or by weapons yield,” according to the SIPRI report. “Instead, pursuit of a new [submarine-launched cruise missile] to ‘provide a needed non-strategic regional presence’ in Europe and Asia could — especially when combined with the parallel expansion of US long-range conventional strike capabilities — strengthen Russia’s reliance on non-strategic nuclear weapons and potentially could even trigger Chinese interest in developing such a capability,” the report adds. SIPRI data shows Russia has about 4,330 nuclear warheads; approximately 1,830 of them are categorized as nonstrategic.

In 2018, Russia continued long-range operations over the Arctic, Atlantic and Pacific oceans. And in December, it also sent to Venezuela two Tu-160 planes, which are part of its long-range aviation command fleet. Russia also fired air-launched cruise missiles from a Tu-160 bomber over northern Russia in November, which caught attention because the number of cruise missiles launched.

China has an estimated 290 nuclear warheads. Though China is working to expand its nuclear forces, the report notes, it has said it's committed to a no-first-use policy. However, the report added that China has taken steps to improve its retaliation response. Rivals India and Pakistan each provide little information about the size of their nuclear arsenals. However, they have made separate statements about missile tests. India has an estimated 130-140 warheads, and Pakistan has an estimated 150-160 warheads. Both nations are estimated to have increased their arsenal by 10 to 20 warheads in the last year. North Korea has provided little transparency about its nuclear weapons capabilities, besides announcing missile tests afterward. It's estimated the country has 20-30 warheads, which would be an increase of 10-20 warheads from a 2018 estimate.

The SIPRI report cites a lack of transparency from most nations in regard to nuclear stockpiles. The U.S., the U.K. and France have disclosed some information about their respective arsenals. Information from other nations is mainly based on missile tests and the supply of military fissile materials. [Source: DefenseNews | Kelsey Reichmann | June 16, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

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

**Ft. Benning/Ft. Gordon, GA** – A construction executive from Tennessee was paid at least \$436,000 in kickbacks in a scheme involving multimillion-dollar contracts at two Georgia military bases, according to court filings by federal prosecutors. A grand jury indicted David Kennedy on charges of wire fraud and taking illegal kickbacks. U.S. District Court records say Kennedy worked as director of operations for an unnamed company that was awarded more than \$37 million for Army construction projects at Fort Benning in Columbus and Fort Gordon in Augusta.

Kennedy used his position to steer work to a subcontractor, Southern Atlantic Construction LLC, in exchange for cash payments he received in 2015 from the subcontractor's owner, Gary Hamby, according to the 16 MAY indictment. Prosecutors say Hamby's company submitted fraudulent invoices for work that was never performed. Kennedy pleaded not guilty 6 JUN before a federal judge in Columbus. His attorney, Paul Bruno of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, did not immediately return a phone message seeking comment Wednesday.

The indictment says the Army Corps of Engineers in 2013 awarded Kennedy's company a \$29.3 million contract to renovate barracks at Fort Benning. The following year the firm was awarded a \$7.7 million contract for construction at Fort Gordon. Court records don't name Kennedy's employer. They show he was arrested in Tennessee and ordered to report to a probation officer in Nashville as a condition of his release from custody pending trial. Hamby pleaded guilty in May 2017 to a single count of conspiring to violate federal anti-kickback laws. He has not been sentenced. His plea deal included an agreement to cooperate with federal investigators. [Source: The Associated Press | June 19, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials ► Reported 16 thru 30 JUN 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**

-- **Air Force Col. Roy A. Knight, Jr.** was a pilot with the 602nd Tactical Fighter Squadron, assigned to Udorn Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand. On May 19, 1967, Knight's aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire, severing the right wing. No parachute was observed prior to the aircraft crashing and bursting into flames. The Air Force declared Knight deceased in September 1974. Interment services are pending. [Read about Knight.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Sgt. Howard F. Gotts** was a radio operator assigned to the 66th Bombardment Squadron, 44th Bombardment Group. On Aug. 1, 1943, the B-24D aircraft on which Gotts served, crashed during the largest bombing mission against the oil fields and refineries at Ploiesti, north of Bucharest, Romania. The Romanian government announced they had recovered and buried 216 Americans killed in the bombing raid, but could only identify 27 of the men at the time of the recovery. The remaining casualties were said to have been buried as Unknowns in the Hero Section of the Civilian and Military Cemetery of Bolovan, Ploiesti, Prahova, Romania. Interment services are pending. [Read about Gotts.](#)



-- **Army Cpl. Robert L. Bray** was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Regiment. He was reported missing in action on July 20, 1950, when he could not be accounted for following his unit fighting in a defensive action against enemy forces near Taejon, South Korea. The Army declared him deceased on Dec. 31, 1953. Interment services are pending. [Read about Bray.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Ballard McCurley** was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, during the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest. On Nov. 29, 1944, his battalion went to a reserve position in the woods west of the town of Hürtgen. According to witnesses, while clearing out a tree stump, McCurley inadvertently set off an enemy anti-personnel mine and he was killed instantly. His remains were not recovered or identified immediately after his loss. Interment services are pending. [Read about McCurley.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Jacob W. Givens** was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division, which was engaged in battle against enemy forces in the Raffelsbrand sector of the Hürtgen Forest near Germeter, Germany. He was reported missing in action as of Oct. 20, 1944, when his company reorganized after a severe counterattack. [Read about Givens.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Vernon R. Judd** was a member of Company D, 89th Medium Tank Battalion, 25th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 28, 1950, when he was captured by enemy forces in the vicinity of Ipsok, North Korea. According to reports, Judd died at Hofong Prisoner of War camp on Feb. 15, 1951. Interment services are pending. [Read about Judd.](#)

-- **Navy Reserve Seaman 2nd Class Moyses A. Martinez** was stationed aboard the USS Colorado, which was moored approximately 3,200 yards from the shore of Tinian Island. Early in the morning, the USS Colorado came under attack by a concealed Japanese shore battery. From the attack, four crewmen were declared missing in action, and 39 personnel were killed, including Martinez. Interment services are pending. [Read about Martinez.](#)

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

\* VA \*



## **VA Suicide Prevention Update 54 ► PREVENTS Task Force Launched**

As part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and White House initiative to curb Veteran suicide, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie and Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council Joe Grogan launched a cabinet-level task force 17 JUN to develop a national roadmap. The President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End the National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) task force will include a community integration and collaboration proposal, a national research strategy and an implementation strategy. Efforts supporting the development of the roadmap are already well under way and are on target for the March 2020 delivery to the White House.

“This is a call to action,” Wilkie said. “In order to decrease the rate of Veteran suicide, we need to engage our local and community partners in addition to leveraging the resources of the departments. We need an all-hands on-deck approach to preserve the lives of our Veterans who have served our country. As such, I am thrilled to announce that Dr. Barbara Van Dahlen, the founder and president of Give an Hour, has agreed to serve as executive director of the critical PREVENTS work. Dr. Van Dahlen is widely recognized for changing the culture surrounding mental health and suicide and is an expert and thought leader in large-system change. We are proud to have her leading this effort.”



On 5 MAR, President Donald J. Trump signed an executive order (EO) titled “National Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End Suicide.” The EO directed the Secretary of VA and the director of the White House Domestic Policy Council to co-chair and stand up an interagency task force to develop a plan implementing a roadmap for the prevention of Veteran suicide at the national and community level. As part of the effort to ensure the broadest stakeholder input in the development of the national research strategy, the task force is releasing a Request for Information (RFI) to gather feedback on how to improve research and the use of research to radically reduce Veteran suicide. Input may be provided at [www.research.va.gov/PREVENTS](http://www.research.va.gov/PREVENTS).

“In signing this Executive Order, President Trump demonstrated that once again he is putting a high priority on the needs of our Veterans,” Grogan said. “Through the standup of a collaborative task force, the development and implementation of a public health approach and enhanced research, we will increase our efforts to prevent Veteran suicide with the aspirational goal of zero Veteran suicides.” To learn more about VA’s suicide prevention resources and programs, visit [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention). Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, can call Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day. Call 800-273-8255 and press 1, send a text message to 838255 or chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat).

[Source: VA News Release | June 17, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **White House VA Hotline Update 04 ► Growing in Size, Staff and Call Intake**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ new telephone hotline for veterans eclipsed 250,000 phone calls and spread its operation into a sprawling office complex in the mountains of Shepherdstown, West Virginia. The White House VA Hotline, which first opened as a small operation in the basement of VA headquarters in 2017, has rapidly grown in size, staff and call intake. The hotline — 1-855-948-2311 — is staffed by operators, 90 percent of whom are veterans. The 24-hour operation accepts calls from veterans nationwide.

The hotline initiative was announced in 2017 amid criticism from veterans and veteran service organizations about the challenges of reaching VA representatives by phone. VA officials shifted the hotline from the basement of the VA’s central office near the White House to a federal office complex in Jefferson County. “This is our frontline,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said. “It’s probably the most efficient triage service we have for veterans in crisis.” VA records show the hotline has received approximately 250,000 calls since its inception. The size of the staff operating the hotline is increasing. Call operators are spread through a wide office space, roughly the size of a gymnasium. The employees sit at cubicles with a pair of computer screens. The computers are equipped with electronic VA guidebooks, contacts and instructions for navigating the large and complex agency and its services.

“It provides a front door,” VA Chief Veterans Experience Officer Dr. Lynda C. Davis said. “(Operators) are lowering the veterans’ anxiety and helping them improve their quality of life.” VA studies of the hotline show calls are answered in an average of nine seconds. Operators said a large number of calls come from veterans with questions about claims, benefits or prescriptions, including medications that hadn’t arrived on time. The VA’s Choice program and its new Mission Act, both of which allow veterans to seek non-VA care for some medical needs, also produce a growing number of calls, employees said. “We have people calling with concerns that are very specific,” Davis said. “What is the status of my benefits claim? When is my prescription ready to pick up? We get calls from all over the country.”

[Source: NBC News 4 Washington | Scott MacFarlane & Rick Yarborough | June 28, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Medical Marijuana Update 63 ► HVAC in Agreement | VA Must Study Use

Both sides of the aisle on the House Veterans Affairs Committee seem to agree -- the VA must study medical cannabis to determine if it could help veterans. They just don't seem to necessarily agree on how to go about it. "I believe cannabis must be objectively researched," Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA) said at a committee hearing 20 JUN. Ranking member Phil Roe (R-TN) submitted a bill that would require the VA to study medical marijuana/cannabis and its uses for chronic pain, post-traumatic stress disorder and other conditions. Rep. Lou Correa (D-CA) submitted a similar bill. Correa's bill outlines more specifics about the studies and how research should be conducted to ensure fair, accurate results, he said.

Roe and Rep. Andy Barr (R-KY) said they supported research but did not want to see the VA limited on what studies and how the research is conducted. Members of both parties seemed clear on one thing -- they don't want to wait any longer to do the research. "We authorized VA last year to do the studies. They didn't do it," Roe said. "We need to make sure that they have to study (medical cannabis for veterans). I just don't think we as politicians should be telling scientists how to design the studies."

Veterans service organizations attended the hearing and many threw their support behind medical cannabis research. "VA's current effort in this area is not meeting the needs of veterans," said Adrian Atizado, deputy national legislative director for Disabled American Veterans (DAV). Travis Horr, director of government affairs for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) said his organization's latest member survey showed 90 percent supported medical cannabis research and more than 80 percent supported full legalization. "Without research, we are unable to make policy decisions that could improve veterans' lives," Horr said. "Without research done by VA ... veterans will not have conclusive answers to ways cannabis might aide their health needs. This is unacceptable."

Twenty percent of IAVA members already say they use cannabis, Horr said, and of those, 30 percent said they haven't talked about it with their VA doctors, for fear of losing benefits. If veterans are unable to get the care they need from VA, "they will go around it," Horr said, but VA doctors should be able to provide complete care to veterans, including advice and treatment plans involving medical cannabis. Joe Plenzler, spokesman for the Wounded Warrior Project said WWP supports federal research of cannabis, and "urges the VA to pursue any and all evidence-based therapies that can help improve healthcare outcomes for veterans." Carlos Fuentes, director of national legislative services for Veterans of Foreign Wars, said VFW members "tell us that medical cannabis works, and it's a better alternative to opioids" they are prescribed by VA.

Dr. Igor Grant, director of the Center for Medicinal Cannabis Research at the University of California, told the panel that THC-containing cannabis is shown to help certain types of chronic pain that are sometimes difficult to control with traditional medication and there's evidence cannabis could help with sleep and anxiety disorder, including PTSD. Grant said his center was preparing to study whether THC or CBD, or a combination, could be helpful with PTSD, sleep disorders, anxiety or other issues veterans commonly face. "We recommend that the area of medical application of cannabis has matured to the level that these drugs can be helpful for some conditions, including those found in a moderately high percentage of veterans," Grant said, adding that VA doctors should be informed of current science and authorized to recommend cannabis use to veterans where it is legal and medically justified. "It's essential that high-quality medical studies continue."

Many at the hearing stressed they did not want to "slow the legislative process" and agreed that whether it be Roe, Correa or another legislator's bill, they want to see progress. "If that's our only opportunity, I prefer that to nothing," Barr said. "I do want to see us move expeditiously on the research ... I'm willing to step in to create that compromise."

[Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | June 20, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Medical Marijuana Update 64 ► Doctor Recommendation Amendment Withdrawn

An amendment to the House's annual spending bill that could have allowed Department of Veterans Affairs doctors to help veterans access medical cannabis was pulled from a vote. Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) co-chairman of the Congressional Cannabis Caucus, withdrew an amendment he has offered several times before that would have allowed VA doctors to recommend medical cannabis to their patients in states where the substance is legal, and help them through the process to get it.

Blumenauer, on the House floor, said "the VA has not been as helpful as it should be" in aiding veterans seeking medical cannabis as an alternative treatment for issues including chronic pain and post-traumatic stress disorder, instead of highly addictive opioids and other drugs. "All of a sudden the VA has decided, well, they would be putting their doctors at risk," he said. "I hope that we'll be able to work together to fix this little quirk to ensure that VA doctors can do what doctors everywhere do in states where medical cannabis is legal, and be able to work with their patients ... The VA ought to give their patients -- our veterans -- the same consideration to be able to have these conversations with the doctors who know them best."

The amendment Blumenauer said he "reluctantly" withdrew would have prohibited the VA from interfering with a veteran's participation in state-level medical marijuana programs and prohibited the VA from denying that veteran VA services. It also would have allowed VA doctors to recommend their patients participate in legal medical cannabis programs. A standalone bill, the **Veterans Equal Access Act**, sponsored by Blumenauer in the 114<sup>th</sup> and 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, is similar to the amendment he withdrew. Republicans and Democrats appear in general agreement that Congress should take action to explore expanding access to veterans and plan to require the VA to study its use.

VA leadership has repeatedly said they strongly oppose draft legislation that could expand veteran access to medical marijuana, citing its classification as a Schedule I substance by the federal government, though so far 33 states have legalized it to some degree. VA leaders said as long as the substance remains Schedule I, they will look to the Drug Enforcement Agency and Department of Justice for what to allow. "This committee can make strong proposals for us to move forward with recommendations of filling out forms and such, but in the end, we need to go back to DEA and DOJ for their opinion. I've not seen anything to suggest their opinion will change," Larry Mole, chief consultant for VA population health, said at a previous House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | June 24, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VA Lawsuit | Godsey v. Wilkie ► Excessive Claim Appeal Wait Times

A federal court **for the first time** will allow a class-action lawsuit against the Department of Veterans Affairs to move ahead, a move that legal experts said opens the doors for a host of similar cases against the bureaucracy. The decision, which could affect thousands of veterans, came late last week in the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. Last August, the same court for the first time ruled that class-action lawsuits would be allowed against VA in "appropriate cases," but no such claims met court standards until now.

This case — Godsey v. Wilkie — sought relief for veterans facing waits of more than two months for the department to certify their disability benefits appeals claims. The case was originally filed in 2017 on behalf of four veterans facing lengthy delays, but lawyers argued it should be broadened to include an entire class of individuals waiting for their benefits. VA officials in oral arguments last year testified that more than 2,500 veterans had been waiting for certification for more than two years. In a 2-1 decision, the court modified the class to include only veterans facing a wait of more than 18 months for VA to advance their appeals, saying those delays "deprive (veterans) of their constitutional right to due process."

Plaintiffs hailed the decision as a win for the veterans frustrated by the appeals process and for advocates trying to force changes within the department. “(The court’s) order certifying a class action for the first time in its 30-year history is a landmark moment, and will help ensure that our veterans and their families have more access to the justice they deserve,” said Bart Stichman, executive director of the National Veterans Legal Services Program, which has helped oversee the case. “It has been a long time coming.”

Legal advocates for years have pushed the courts to overturn a long-held ban on class-action lawsuits against the department, arguing it effectively allows VA officials to push off systemic corrections by addressing only complaints from individual veterans. In private lawsuits, individuals must prove they suffered a specific injury or hardship in order to win judgment. But in class-action lawsuits, plaintiffs can show illegal or harmful activity against a larger group, bringing with it different standards for correction. The court thus far has not allowed class-action lawsuits involving direct payouts to veterans. But Stichman said the move will force VA to address rules and regulations to respond to a collection a veterans complaints at once, instead of reacting to individual problems separately.

And the court in its decision said on these veterans’ complaints, VA has not acted quickly enough. “We are not content to wait for the (VA) Secretary to remedy these unreasonable delays on his own,” the judges wrote. “The Secretary has had many years to act and initiate pre-certification review of class members' cases, and he has failed to do so ... Simply put: the time has come for judicial intervention.” The ruling requires VA to conduct a precertification review of all cases for all class members within 120 days for their initial filing, and requires the department to provide a status update on that work back to the court before the end of the summer. Covington & Burling LLP and NVLSP officials will serve as counsel for the class. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 17, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Facility Safety Update 03 ► New Wheelchair Policy**

The Department of Veterans Affairs now has a policy requiring veterans in wheelchairs to switch to ones provided by the facility during emergency room visits to make sure they're not hiding guns, a top VA official testified 18 JUN. The policy was adopted following a February incident at the West Palm Beach, Florida, VA Medical Center in which a double-amputee patient pulled a weapon from his motorized wheelchair and fired at least six shots in the emergency room, wounding a doctor in the neck and injuring two staff members, said VA official Renee Oshinski.

Oshinski said the wheelchair transfer policy is directed at all VA medical centers, but she couldn't vouch for how many had put it into effect besides the West Palm Beach facility. However, "we are asking at all sites that, when people come to the emergency department, they be put in a wheelchair that is owned by the medical center," said Oshinski, the acting deputy under secretary for Health for Operations and Management at the Veterans Health Administration. Oshinski testified at a House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hearing on "Examining VA's Police Force" and security issues at VA facilities. She was questioned by Rep. Brian Mast, R-Florida, an Army veteran of Afghanistan who lost both legs to an improvised explosive device.

Mast noted that there was a suicide at the West Palm Beach VA facility in February in addition to the shooting incident, adding that VA Secretary Robert Wilkie at the time pledged "a complete review of our security protocols." In response, Oshinski said a construction project is underway at West Palm Beach to broaden coverage by security cameras and "to make sure parking facilities are patrolled." Other members at the hearing cited instances of alleged use of excessive force and misconduct by the VA police.

Rep. Kathleen Rice (D-NY) cited the case of a constituent, Afghanistan veteran Jean Telfort, who said he was "body slammed" by VA police while recovering from spinal surgery after getting in a dispute with staff at the Northport, New York, VA Medical Center. Telfort also said he was brought up on federal charges over the incident, which stemmed from a dispute with a medical support assistant at the hospital. In response, Frederick Jackson, from the VA's Office of Security and Law Enforcement, said, "One incident of the use of force is one too many." But he defended the actions

of the VA police at Northport. Agents interviewed Telfort at length after the incident and also interviewed witnesses. "Based upon what the police said to him and what Mr. Telfort said, the witnesses thought that the officers acted properly," Jackson said. Oshinski told Rice "how difficult it was to listen to what you described during your discussion, and I am so sorry about what happened. And I wish we could go back and do it over again."

In his prepared statement for the subcommittee, VA Inspector General Michael Missal said his previous reports on the VA police force found that the "VA failed to develop adequate threat assessments and written policies" for its police, "which contributed to security vulnerabilities." "Common challenges identified in these and other OIG reports, such as staffing shortages, the splintering of oversight responsibilities, confusion about roles, and lack of clear guidance can undermine VA's well-intentioned goals and objectives" for its police, Missal said.

In her own prepared statement, Oshinski said that the VA's police often encounter "trained military veterans suffering from medical and psychological traumas." Their training emphasizes defusing situations rather than resorting to force, she said. "Due to the unique policing environment, all VA police officers receive specialized training at the VA Law Enforcement Training Center" in North Little Rock, Arkansas, Oshinski said. "VA police officers are taught the necessary skills to resolve incidents in a humane, respectful manner," she added. Currently, the VA has about 4,200 police officers, about 700 short of the level authorized, Oshinski said. The average salary is about \$53,000. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | June 13, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Mission Act Update 11 ► Top Questions Answered**

On 6 JUN VA implemented changes to community care under the VA MISSION Act. The changes included expanded eligibility for community care and a new urgent care benefit. As part of our outreach and engagement efforts, the VA collected the top questions received from Veterans and provided answers to each one below with the goal of making it easier to access the care you have earned.

### **General Health Care**

- *When can I receive community care?* Eligibility for community care depends on your individual health care needs or circumstances. You should discuss community care eligibility with your VA care team to determine if you are eligible. This video provides a quick overview of Veteran community care.
- *Can I get dental care through the MISSION Act?* Eligibility for dental services has not changed under the MISSION Act. You should talk to your VA care team about eligibility for dental services. Click here for more information about dental care.
- *How does a community provider know I am eligible to receive community care?* If your VA care team has determined that you are eligible for community care and you chose a community provider, VA will send the provider a referral and authorization prior to you receiving care. You must receive approval from VA prior to obtaining care from a community provider in most circumstances.
- *I was authorized for community care under the Choice program. What happens now?* The Choice program expired on June 6, 2019, and specific Choice eligibility for community care is no longer being used. If you were eligible for community care under Choice, you should speak with your VA care team or a VA staff member at your local VA medical facility about updated eligibility for community care. This video also provides a quick primer regarding community care eligibility under the new Veteran community care program.

### **Urgent Care**

- *How do I become eligible for the urgent care benefit?* You must be enrolled in VA health care and have received care through VA from either a VA or community provider within the past 24 months to be eligible for the urgent care benefit.

- *How can I find an urgent care provider?* To find an urgent care location in VA’s contracted network, use the VA facility locator at <https://www.va.gov/find-locations> . Select the link entitled “Find VA approved urgent care locations and pharmacies near you”.
- *What is the difference between urgent care and emergency care?* Urgent care consists of medical services provided for minor illnesses or injuries that are not life-threatening such as strep throat, pink eye, or influenza. Emergency care consists of inpatient or outpatient hospital services that are necessary to prevent death or serious impairment of health such as severe chest pain, seizures or loss of awareness, heavy uncontrollable bleeding, or moderate to severe burns.
- *Do I have to pay a copayment if I receive urgent care that relates to my service-connected condition?* Copayments for urgent care are different from other VA medical copayments. Copayments for urgent care depend on your assigned priority group and the number of times you visit any urgent care provider in a calendar year. Visit the Urgent Care webpage for more information about copayments.
- *How do I get prescription medication related to an urgent care visit?* VA will pay for or fill prescriptions for urgent care. For urgent care prescription medication longer than a 14-day supply, the prescription must be submitted to VA to be filled. For urgent prescriptions written by an urgent care provider, you can fill a 14-day supply of medication at a contracted pharmacy within the VA network, in VA, or at a noncontracted pharmacy. If a noncontracted pharmacy is used, you must pay for the prescription and then file a claim for reimbursement with your local VA medical facility.

Go to <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/pubs/factsheets.asp> for more detailed information on community care and urgent care. [Source: VA News| June 19, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Hearing Loss Fixes ► Top Service-Connected Disability Among Vets**

The word “disability” conjures different images in the mind, but by far the most prevalent service-connected disability among veterans isn’t even visible to the naked eye. In 2017, more than 1.7 million veterans received compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs for tinnitus, and more than 1.1 million veterans received compensation for hearing loss—representing the top 2 service-connected disabilities among veterans. “It is a significant problem in the veteran community, and one that flies a little too far under the radar,” said National Service Director Jim Marszalek. “It can have such a far-reaching and devastating impact on someone’s quality of life.”

And indeed, for individuals like DAV life member Dr. Bruce Douglas, the impact of suffering from hearing loss can oftentimes be crippling in their daily lives. “Unfortunately, my experiences in the Navy caused an acoustic traumatic event that eventually led to my hearing disability,” said Douglas, a World War II and Korean War veteran. “Because of my hearing situation, there were some aspects of life that I had to adjust. I started to stare at people when they talked to me, as I was subconsciously learning to read lips. Lord knows how many times in my life that my hearing impairment affected my relationships with the outside world.”

According to Dr. Rachel McArdle, national director of audiology and speech pathology for the VA, the most common type of hearing loss among veterans is high-frequency sensorineural hearing loss—generally caused by noise exposure, age or both—which results in difficulty distinguishing sounds or understanding speech. And, she says, it’s critical when veterans believe they are experiencing hearing loss or tinnitus to get a proper assessment and the right care for their problems. “When hearing loss is untreated, psychological effects can include low self-confidence, frustration, embarrassment and depression,” said McArdle. “Adults with hearing loss have difficulty participating fully in conversations at work, at home and may withdraw from social situations.”

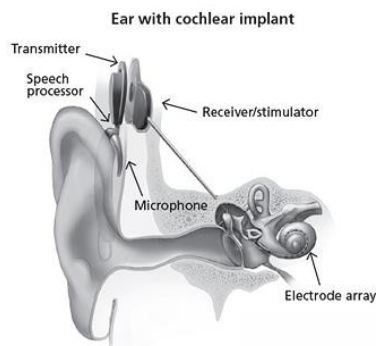
Military occupations, from flight lines to firearms, put veterans at particular risk. Because this disability can be particularly damaging to a sufferer’s career, it can exacerbate other problems that affect nearly every aspect of daily



living and basic human interaction, which is why getting the proper care and treatment is so vital. The most common treatments for high-frequency sensorineural hearing loss are hearing aids—which provide amplification mainly in the frequency region where the user has a hearing loss—and cochlear implants.

In 2018, the VA issued 786,741 hearing aids to veterans, but it is the cochlear implant that helped Douglas the most. “Cochlear implant devices have two primary parts: the internal implant and the external sound processor,” said Nancy Cambron, chair of the Veterans Health Administration’s Cochlear Implant Advisory Board. “The implant is placed in the ear by a surgeon who specializes in ear surgery. Surgery is typically an outpatient procedure done under general anesthesia and lasts two to three hours. Patients are given two to four weeks to heal, during which time they will not hear anything from the implant. After the site has healed, they return to an audiologist who programs the external sound processor.”

Most sound processors look like a behind-the-ear hearing aid with a cable attached to a coil and magnet. Sound enters the microphones where it is processed and converted to electrical pulses, which are then transmitted to the internal implant via the coil that attaches to the head by a magnet. The electrical pulses stimulate the hearing nerve, the signal travels to the brain, and the patient can hear. “Cochlear implants can greatly improve hearing for people who have hearing losses ranging from moderate to profound, poor ability to understand speech, and who obtain limited benefit from hearing aids,” said Cambron. “It may take three to 12 months for a new implant user to obtain maximum benefit from a cochlear implant. It is critical that implant recipients use the sound processor consistently to allow their brains to become accustomed to the new sounds.”



Douglas, who got his first set of hearing aids in 1980, thought he may have missed his opportunity to try cochlear implants. “I found my way to a VA hospital’s audiology department, where I started to get appropriate care,” said Douglas. “At the time, I thought my hearing aids were working relatively well. I knew about cochlear implants but was convinced that, at age 90, it was too late for me. I cannot even begin to express my appreciation to the two audiologists at the VA hospital for their support in encouraging me to have cochlear implant surgery on my almost-deaf right ear.”

Douglas said that the VA remained by his side while his brain worked overtime to teach his right and left ears to “talk” to each other, enabling him to remain active in his academic and professional life. “I returned to the real world of hearing,” said Douglas. “My hearing aid and cochlear implant are working amazingly well together, but it was the implant that introduced me to a world of sound that I could not have known existed if I had not had the implant surgery done. I strongly encourage any and all veterans who are suffering from hearing loss to take it seriously and seek an appointment with their local VA audiologists.”

With his hearing improving, Douglas has been able to stay active and continue his career as a professor of health and aging at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health. “Assuming that the future will bring more miracles, I am hoping that most of them happen before the year 2025, when I reach my 100th birthday,” Douglas said with a laugh. The VA offers comprehensive care services to veterans with hearing loss, tinnitus or both. Veterans experiencing hearing loss or tinnitus should contact their local VA audiology department for assistance in obtaining a comprehensive audiology evaluation. [Source: DAV News | Bryan Lett | June 18, 2019 ++]



\*\*\*\*\*

## VAMC Salisbury NC Update 02 ► Unauthorized \$2.3M Purchase

A federal watchdog reported 19 JUN the Department of Veterans Affairs hospital in North Carolina spent \$2.3 million on a surgical robot without approval. The VA Office of Inspector General found that staff at the W.G. (Bill) Hefner VA Medical Center in Salisbury, N.C., bought the robotic surgical system using leftover funds at the end of fiscal year 2017 before receiving approval from regional and national leaders, as policy requires. Because of the lack of planning, the system sat inactivated for five months while the hospital prepared the site where it would be used. The inspector general's office blamed an "ineffective capital investment review process" and "weak internal controls" in the region of the VA that extends across the mid-Atlantic states. The IG asked region leadership to remind staff of the approval process for equipment costing more than \$1 million.



According to VA policy, biomedical engineers must submit applications for expensive equipment to the Healthcare Technology Management office. That office then makes a recommendation to the VA assistant deputy undersecretary for health, who gives final approval. The Salisbury VA ordered the surgical robot on Sept. 14, 2017 and it arrived Sept. 22. It was put into use in February 2018. "In this instance, the Salisbury VA requested almost immediate delivery of equipment without adequately assessing and completing site preparation requirements," the inspector general's office wrote. "The delay... wasted almost five months of the one-year warranty included in the purchase price." [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | June 19, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## VAMC Washington DC Update 13 ► Culture Of Complacency

The VA Medical Center in Washington, D.C. has taken steps to overcome a "culture of complacency" that put patients at risk. But the reform effort suffered another setback last month with a bizarre escape from the locked psychiatric ward, a House subcommittee was told 20 JUN. The 5 MAY escape from a third-floor unit, first reported by NBC4 Washington, occurred when a 29-year-old patient allegedly broke through ceiling tiles in the shower room and made his way to an adjoining office. From there, he allegedly went to the emergency room and had staff call a cab for him, although he was wearing only a hospital gown, NBC4 Washington reported.

Prince William County, Virginia, police later reported arresting the patient at the home of a female relative and charging him with abduction and assault and battery. In response, the medical center said in a statement that policies and procedures were being reviewed but patient privacy rules barred further comment. "Incidents like this remind us that there's a long road ahead" in overcoming deficiencies at the hospital, said Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Government Operations. Other problems already led to two scathing reports from the VA's Office of Inspector General and a rating as one of the poorest performing in the VA system.

The Washington VA Medical Center was once a "flagship" for the system and now "unfortunately, it's anything but," after going through five directors in a little over two years, Connolly said at a subcommittee hearing. The problems at the main hospital extended to outlying clinics, said Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton, a Democrat who is the District's delegate but cannot vote on the House floor. In questioning Michael Heimall, who took over as director of the Washington, D.C., VA Medical Center last October, Norton noted that the DC Community Based Outpatient Clinic in southeast Washington was ordered closed this week because of a broken sprinkler system. Norton said there were rumors in the community that the aging clinic was about to close permanently and she wondered what would happen to the veterans who "don't have anyplace to go now." Heimall, the former director of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, in Bethesda, Maryland, said no final decision has been made on whether to close the clinic. The lease is up in September.

In his testimony, VA Inspector General Michael Missal said his teams had found widespread problems in the Medical Center's supply systems and inventories, a backlog for prosthetics, risks for unsterile equipment being used in surgeries, and a "culture of complacency" in the staff. At one point, the hospital's entire blood supply had to be thrown out because it had been improperly stored, he said. "The problems we identified were pretty well known at the facility," but rather than address them "they just decided they were going to live with them and have work-arounds," Missal said. However, Missal also said the hospital's performance has improved since Heimall took over and stopped the revolving door in leadership.

"Overall, we found important progress being made at the medical center" with new hires leading to improved efficiency, Missal said. Heimall said the 149 new hires would help "make sure we never repeat the failures highlighted by IG's report." He also pledged to see through the reforms as the permanent director. "I am here for the long haul," he said.

[Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | 21 Jun 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Whistleblowers Update 58 ► Three Employees Claim VA Tried to Silence Them**

Three Veterans Affairs health care professionals who reported patient care issues say the agency continues to try to silence them, jeopardizing veterans and undercutting a key Trump promise of whistleblower protection. They work at different sites – in the Phoenix area, Baltimore, and Iowa City, Iowa – yet the VA response has been similar. All were stripped of assigned patient-care and oversight duties, and they suspect VA managers are retaliating against them for speaking out, and sidelining them to prevent them from discovering or disclosing any more problems with veteran health care.



**Dr. Katherine L. Mitchell, medical director at the Phoenix VA Health Care System's Iraq and Afghanistan Post-Deployment Center, testifies at a hearing on Capitol Hill on Sept. 17, 2014. Mitchell called the VA "two-faced," in that "what it says it does and what it actually does are two entirely different things."**

In exclusive interviews with USA TODAY, their assertions contradict proclamations by agency leaders and President Donald Trump that VA employees who disclose wrongdoing at the agency are being celebrated and not scorned. "The VA is two-faced: What it says it does and what it actually does are two entirely different things," said Katherine Mitchell, a physician who reported shortfalls in care at the Phoenix VA that earned her a federal "Public Servant of the Year Award" in 2014. Mitchell is scheduled to testify at a congressional hearing 25 JUN examining the treatment of whistleblowers at the VA. She will be joined by Iowa City CT technologist Jeffrey Dettbarn, who blew the whistle on mass-cancellations of diagnostic test orders, and Baltimore VA psychologist Minu Aghevli, who reported veterans had been removed improperly from wait lists for opioid-addiction treatment.

Mitchell said the retaliation against her and others who speak out sends a signal to other employees to keep their mouths shut and "jeopardizes the health and safety of every veteran in the system." "Whistleblowers who are brave enough to report problems serve as a vital safety net for veterans," she said. "If people can't identify problems, veterans will suffer and die. That's what it boils down to."

Trump signed an executive order creating a VA Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection and then a law making it permanent in 2017. Early reviews were promising – within several months, the office had delayed disciplinary actions against 70 VA employees who disclosed alleged wrongdoing. But the VA inspector general has since launched a wide-ranging investigation of the office's handling of whistleblower cases and reports of problems. The Government Accountability Office issued a report last July that said the office allowed officials accused of wrongdoing or retaliation to be involved in investigations of the accusations – calling into question their independence and findings. And leadership at the office has turned over multiple times, causing confusion and disruption.

In response to inquiries from USA TODAY, VA spokesman Randall Noller issued a statement 19 JUN saying the agency "welcomes the inspector general's oversight." "For the last several months, we've been cooperating closely with the IG on its assessment and encouraging the office to release its report as soon as possible," he said. An assistant secretary who took over the office in January, Tamara Bonzanto, plans to use its findings as a "roadmap" for improving office operations, Noller said. In the meantime, she has been "working on a number of key improvements." "These include providing timelier resolutions, more responsive recommendations and enhancing communications with whistleblowers," he said. Noller declined to say what policies are in place to ensure the office doesn't allow managers accused of wrongdoing or retaliation to be involved in investigating the accusations. Noller also declined to comment on assertions made by Aghevli, Dettbarn and Mitchell, citing federal privacy laws.

Whistleblower advocates say they haven't seen much difference in recent years. Jacqueline Garrick, founder of non-profit peer-support group Whistleblowers of America, said more than 190 VA employees have contacted her since 2017, complaining about retaliation for speaking out about problems at the agency, most about how veterans are treated. She said those who have gone to the Trump-created whistleblower protection office for help said the office's employees turned around and investigated them instead, launching "counter accusations and further retaliation." She said Bonzanto told her in February she planned to "reset" the office's operations. Still, Garrick said, "I haven't seen any real sign of that." She and other advocates also are slated to testify before Congress Tuesday at the hearing before the House VA Committee's Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations examining whistleblower concerns.

### [Backlogs and Lists](#)

**Iowa City, Iowa** -- CT technologist Jeffrey Dettbarn noticed something was awry in 2017 when patients showed up to get CT scans but orders for the tests had been cancelled in the computer system. He reported the problems to administrators, who later admitted they had been mass-cancelling diagnostic test orders as part of a national effort to clear out a backlog of out-dated or duplicate orders. Weeks after Dettbarn reported his concerns that orders had been cancelled without contacting patients or a medical review to determine if veterans still needed the tests, he was removed from his job and then transferred to another position, pending an investigation – of him.

He said he has been spending all day every day making copies and doing other paperwork ever since, nearly two years later. Dettbarn went to the whistleblower protection office for help, but said he didn't hear back for months on

end. "As far as I know, I'm still under investigation," he said. He wants to go back to caring for patients, and he worries about being away from the diagnostic clinic for so long. "There's nobody there to watch out for the veterans," he said. "They've got everybody else scared to say anything. Who's taking care of those patients?"

**Baltimore, Maryland** -- VA psychologist Minu Aghevli began reporting problems with wait lists five years ago, at the same time a national scandal unfolded about VA wait times following revelations that veterans died while they waited for care at the VA hospital in Phoenix. Aghevli, coordinator of the opioid-addiction treatment program at the VA Maryland Health Care System, reported being pressured by supervisors to remove veterans from a wait list for treatment and schedule them in an "imaginary clinic" so the list would appear shorter. "Suddenly our wait list went from being well over 100 to being minimal, I mean, well under 20," she said. A review of her allegations by the VA inspector general later concluded veterans were removed from the list and placed in "non-count" status, even though they still wanted opioid-addiction treatment at the Baltimore VA.

But Aghevli said she quickly became "unpopular" with supervisors who turned around in the ensuing years and investigated her repeatedly, tried to transfer her, and threatened to shut down her program – which serves roughly 400 veterans. She said they excluded her from meetings, changed her hours, and at one point, detailed her to clerical duties. Through it all, she continued to report patient care problems when she came across them – including improper discharges, short-staffing and medication issues – to her supervisors, to the inspector general and to members of Congress. "If I see somebody not getting adequate treatment, or not getting treatment that's clinically indicated, I will speak up about it," Aghevli said.

However, she said she is still being retaliated against. In April, Baltimore VA officials once again moved her out of her job to a data entry post and stripped her of her clinical privileges, pending investigation. Aghevli said the reason they gave was that she had visited a veteran patient in a non-VA hospital after he had suffered a health crisis, a situation that ostensibly could give rise to charges she was practicing at a hospital where she didn't work. Aghevli called the explanation "nonsensical." She is going public with her story for the first time. "I just am not sure what else to do," she said. She wants protections for whistleblowers expanded and strengthened. "I would like other people to not go through this," she said. "It's been really awful."

**Gilbert, Arizona** – Phoenix VAHCS Katherine Mitchell has endured more subtle retaliation. After she reported poor training and inadequate triage at the emergency room at the Phoenix VA, she reached an agreement with VA officials to move to a new job assessing health care quality and efficiency at facilities in the region. "I was hoping to improve patient care on a wider scale," said Mitchell, who was a nurse before becoming a doctor. But she said that, with very few exceptions, she hasn't been allowed to perform those oversight duties. Mitchell has had to resort to helping veterans "under the table" – in some cases, receiving reports confidentially from VA employees, taking it upon herself to investigate, and then writing reports to regional administrators. They included flagging poor care provided by a neurologist who was later removed, a facility's failure to biopsy a potentially cancerous skin lesion and radiation oncology treatments delayed by short-staffing.

"They were not happy," she said of administrators, but they didn't stop her and facilities appeared to take actions to address the problems. Still, she said, VA employees told her they were "actively being discouraged from talking" to her. Since 2018, Mitchell has been in charge of implementing an initiative to complement medical care with yoga, acupuncture and other methods to improve veterans' health. "They don't want me involved in any patient safety problems – any problem of any significance, they want to keep me away from it," she said. Mitchell has asked another federal agency that helps whistleblowers for help, the Office of Special Counsel, and is speaking out again about problems in the meantime that she says are jeopardizing veterans. "As a physician, nurse, and basically as a human being, I will not back down if someone's health or safety is being threatened," she said.

-o-o-O-o-o-

Noller, the VA spokesman, declined to comment on Aghevli's case as well as Dettbarn's and Mitchell's unless they signed waivers of their rights under federal privacy laws. Mitchell and Dettbarn declined, fearing further retaliation.

Aghevli's lawyer, Kevin Owen, agreed on the condition the waiver be negotiated with VA general counsel. He said 21 JUN that agency lawyers had not contacted him. 'I will not back down'. [Source: USA Today | Donovan Slack | June 22, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Suicide Prevention Update 55 ► New Depression Drug Endorsed | Spravato**

Confronted by a rising rate of suicides in some groups of veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs on 21 JUN decided to approve the use of a new and costly depression drug, despite concerns among doctors and other experts about the drug's effectiveness. The decision to endorse the drug — called Spravato, and manufactured by Janssen, a unit of Johnson & Johnson — came days after President Donald Trump offered to negotiate a deal between the drugmaker and the agency. Johnson & Johnson reportedly was working with associates at Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, and the company has been supporting VA suicide-prevention efforts.

A spokesman for the VA said that the decision to approve the drug, which would cover its use by doctors in its nearly 1,000 clinics nationwide, was a medical one. In a statement, the agency said, "VA will closely monitor the use of esketamine" — the generic name for Spravato — "in veterans to more fully understand its relative safety and effectiveness as compared to other available treatments. Based on this information, VA may revise its clinical guidance" and the availability of the drug. The VA stopped short of putting Spavato on its formulary, the list of drugs it requires to be carried in its 260 or so pharmacies.

The approval enables VA doctors to offer the drug to patients they believe it could benefit. Some congressional Democrats expressed concern at the fast approval process. "I am incredibly alarmed by reporting today that suggests Spravato, a controversial new drug, is being rushed through critical reviews and may be prescribed to veterans before fully vetting the potential risks and benefits," said Mark Takano (D-CA), chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, in a prepared statement released 19 JUN. The top Republicans on the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committees said this week that they had yet to take a position on the issue.

The VA has rushed to distribute Spravato through its system since the Food and Drug Administration approved the drug, in March, for severe depression. The approval stirred excitement among doctors because it represented a new direction in depression treatment: Spravato is a nasal spray derived from an old and widely used anesthetic, ketamine, rather than an iteration of commonly used antidepressants like Prozac. The spray contains esketamine, an active portion of the ketamine molecule, and the recommended course is twice a week, for four weeks, with boosters as needed, along with one of the commonly used oral antidepressants.

But psychiatrists, pharmacologists and suicide experts who have seen the data presented to the FDA are far from convinced that the drug will be a game-changing addition. "It's doing something, all right, but it's not all it's cracked up to be," said Dr. Erick Turner, a former FDA reviewer and an associate professor of psychiatry at Oregon Health & Science University. "I just don't think it's going to live up to all the hype."

Cost is another issue. Janssen is charging the public from \$4,720 to \$6,785 for a course of treatment, and clinic costs will add more to the bill, not to mention monthly boosters, if needed. The VA, not veterans, would foot the bill for whatever price it negotiates with Janssen. But nasal-spray formulations of generic ketamine are already cheaply available from compounding pharmacies, which mix individually tailored doses to order for doctors. FDA approval requires that people taking Spravato be monitored in a doctor's office for at least two hours and their experience entered in a registry. Like ketamine, the drug often causes out-of-body sensations and hallucinations. It is unclear how much of that cost insurers would cover.

"I've tried the generic ketamine nasal spray in about 20 patients with treatment-resistant depression, and a handful of them have done very well on it," said Dr. William Niederhut, a psychiatrist in private practice in Denver. Niederhut

had the patients take four or five doses over a month, making sure a friend or family member was present, given the disorienting effects. He had the spray made at a local compounder. The development of Spravato followed a number of small studies over the past decade, which found that doses of the generic anesthetic ketamine could provide fast relief to some severely depressed people who hadn't responded to other treatments.

Generic ketamine has been available for years, at hundreds of clinics around the country; these provide a course of intravenous doses, at \$400 to \$500 a dose, usually a half dozen over a couple weeks with boosters as needed, for mood problems. The VA is already running its own trials of IV ketamine for severe depression, and the agency could easily have the nasal spray made very cheaply, experts said. Ketamine and esketamine seem to have similar benefits and risks, although careful comparisons have not been done. For depression, esketamine has been studied far more rigorously than generic ketamine. "It cost me \$35 for five doses" of generic ketamine, said Niederhut, who recently retired. "That's \$7 a dose. I don't know why anyone would pay thousands of dollars, or whatever they're charging, when you can get the generic spray for \$7."

The VA and the Department of Defense have been trying to reverse an alarming trend of suicide among veterans and members of the military since the late 2000s, when rates began to rise. Suicide rates in the VA system have been higher than in the general population for at least a decade, according to Robert Bossarte, an associate professor in the department of behavioral medicine at West Virginia University, in Morgantown. The overall veteran suicide rate decreased recently, from 30.5 per 100,000 in 2015 to 30.1 per 100,000 in 2016, but longer-term trends are alarming in some groups. In 2015, the suicide rate for male veterans age 18 to 34 rose to 44 in 100,000 per year, from 25 in 100,000 in 2005.

"The VA has prioritized suicide prevention at every level, and it is in a unique position to address it in a way no one else can," Bossarte said. "In this case, they could perform trials of this drug, so we can see who benefits and who has unintended reactions to fast-track studies, rather than have a blanket rollout policy" where everyone deemed at risk of suicide gets the drug.

[Source: New York Times | Carey & Steinhauer | June 21, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Suicide Prevention Update 56 ► Spravato Approval Declined for Widespread Coverage**

A Department of Veterans Affairs committee has declined to approve widespread coverage of a new depression treatment that has generated controversy but also received an express endorsement from President Trump. Instead, the drug was approved on a more limited basis. Many experts have embraced the medication, which is known as esketamine and is being sold by Johnson & Johnson (JNJ) under the brand name Spravato, as a critical option for patients in dire need of new treatments — particularly because it might work faster than existing antidepressants. But it has faced pushback since its approval in March, with some watchdog groups citing effectiveness and safety concerns.

In a decision 21 JUN, a VA committee declined to cover the drug for all beneficiaries, instead restricting the nasal spray to patients who have not responded to other treatments and requiring an authorization process before it can be prescribed. The decision came just one week after Trump gave an unconventional endorsement of the treatment. During an Oval Office event on 12 JUN, he predicted to Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie that Johnson & Johnson would be "very generous" in pricing the treatment. "And if you like," Trump said, "I'll help you negotiate."

A VA spokesperson said in a statement that drug was approved on a "non-formulary" basis, likening it to "prior authorization" that many private insurers mandate before permitting the use of potentially risky or expensive treatments. The decision "will enable VA psychiatrists to offer esketamine to patients when clinically indicated," the spokesperson said, ensuring "the medication is prioritized for use in Veterans who have not previously responded to adequate trials



of other available treatments for major depression.” The agency will continue to monitor the drug for safety and effectiveness compared to other depression treatments, the agency said, and could revise the drug’s status if called for.

The VA panel’s decision not to mandate coverage of the drug was “absolutely the correct decision,” said Diana Zuckerman, president of the National Center for Health Research, a nonpartisan institute that studies science and health in Washington. “The effectiveness data weren’t particularly good,” she said. “Especially for men and people over 65, and that’s mostly who the VA serves.” In briefing documents submitted to a Food and Drug Administration advisory committee, the agency noted six deaths — including the three suicides — among patients who were taking the drug. Since the patients in question had severe illnesses and there were no distinct patterns observed among the deaths, the FDA reviewers said they did not necessarily see the deaths as drug-related.

The VA’s decision to exclude Spravato from formulary coverage also came a day after the Institute for Clinical and Economic Review, a Boston nonprofit that reviews drugs and health services for cost-effectiveness, released an analysis claiming the true value of the drug was between 25% and 52% lower than Johnson & Johnson’s chosen price. Currently, its wholesale acquisition cost stands between \$590 and \$885 per treatment session. Costs for the first month of treatment, which includes two sessions per week, could range from \$4,720 to \$6,785. “Maybe it’s become politically untenable to cover it because of the media coverage, despite the pressure from the administration or Trump directly,” Zuckerman said. “We know that members of Congress were looking into this.”

[Source: STAT News | Lev Facher & Ed Silverman June 21, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

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

**AFGE** -- The union representing 260,000 Department of Veterans Affairs employees recently won a "cease and desist" arbitration ruling against the department's posting of lengthy lists of firings, suspensions and other disciplinary actions in violation of the Privacy Act. The ruling found that the VA was guilty of an "unfair labor practice" against the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) in the website postings of "Adverse Action Reports" that allowed for the easy identification of workers targeted for disciplinary procedures. In his ruling, Andrew Strongin, an arbitrator with the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, directed the VA to "remove the AARs from its website and cease and desist publishing the AARs in that or like manner until such time as it achieves compliance with the Privacy Act."

Strongin wrote that the VA began posting the lists in a "public relations" effort to restore its image following the wait times scandals of 2014 but, in the process, "flagrantly disregarded the agency's own General Counsel's advisory opinion and the rights of those employees" who were listed. The AARs included the type and date of the disciplinary action, as well as the grade, level, position and category of the employees, making them identifiable in violation of the union's contract and their privacy rights, according to the AFGE. The VA's actions were taken "in a pursuit to shame employees and erode veterans' trust in the VA," AFGE President J. David Cox Sr. said in a statement. "VA leaders should be focusing on improving veterans' access to quality health care at VA facilities, not publicly shaming employees and violating their privacy."

The arbitrator's ruling was handed down in March and announced last week when the decision was finalized, AFGE spokesman Tim Kauffman said. The AARs were one of the immediate results of the Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act, signed into law by President Donald Trump in June 2017 in what he said was an effort to remove "bad actors" from the VA. The Accountability Act made it easier for VA management to fire, suspend or otherwise discipline employees. In its first year of operation, it resulted in more than 3,500 actions against workers, according to the VA. However, the union and several House Democrats, including Rep. Mark Takano, D-California, currently chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, charged that the VA was mostly targeting low-wage custodial, laundry and food service staff while ignoring infractions by supervisors.



[Source: MilitaryTimes | Richard Sisk | June 16, 2019 ++]

-o-o-O-o-o-

**New Bloomfield, PA** -- The United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Pennsylvania announced that **Laurie Ehrhart**, age 48, of New Bloomfield, Pennsylvania was sentenced 6 JUN to 6 months home confinement and 2 years probation for helping her former husband defraud a disabled veteran out of \$316,360. According to United States Attorney David J. Freed, Laurie Ehrhart pleaded guilty on December 7, 2018, to one count of Health Care Fraud. Ehrhart's former husband, Jason Ehrhart, also pleaded guilty to Health Care Fraud and was sentenced on April 15, 2019 to 19 months' incarceration. The charges against the couple related to their misappropriation of Michael Ehrhart's veteran's disability benefits.

While serving in the U.S. Army in 1985, Michael Ehrhart, a former resident of Perry County, Pennsylvania, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. In 1998 Michael Ehrhart began receiving disability benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Michael was eventually hospitalized on a permanent basis at the VA hospital in Lebanon, Pennsylvania in November of 2004 and began receiving disability benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA) in 2006. In August of 2006 Michael was deemed by the VA to be incompetent to handle his own financial affairs. As a result, on October 2, 2006, Michael's brother, Jason Ehrhart, applied to serve as Michael's VA Fiduciary and Legal Custodian. Under the terms of a Fiduciary Agreement, Jason Ehrhart agreed to use all of Michael's VA disability benefits exclusively for Michael's benefit. The agreement warned Jason that the funds were not for his personal use. The Fiduciary Agreement also required Jason Ehrhart to submit an annual accounting to the VA with respect to the amount of money received and spent on Michael's behalf.

While Jason Ehrhart served as Michael's VA Fiduciary and Legal Custodian, all of Michael's VA benefits, plus most of his Social Security disability checks, were deposited into a checking account Jason opened at The Orrstown Bank. Altogether, \$476,260 in federal benefits (\$422,828 in VA disability, \$48,187 in Social Security disability, and \$5,244 in VA clothing allowance) were deposited into the account between January 2009 and August 2016. However, during that same time period \$316,360 of the \$476,260 was misappropriated by Jason and Laurie Ehrhart and converted to their own use. Checks totaling \$218,832 (\$96,202 payable to Jason and \$122,630 payable to Laurie), were drawn against the account. Of the \$218,832, \$157,742 was deposited into Jason and Laurie Ehrhart's joint checking account at the Juniata Valley Bank (JVB) and at least \$23,496 was converted to cash. Thereafter, the funds in the joint JVB account were employed by Jason and Laurie Ehrhart to pay personal expenses. Also:

- Checks totaling \$7,174 were also made payable to Jason and Laurie Ehrhart's two minor children. Jason Ehrhart would instruct the children to take the checks to the bank, cash them, and surrender the cash to him.
- Checks totaling \$19,890 were also made payable to another couple who were Jason and Laurie Ehrhart's best friends. Jason Ehrhart regularly treated the couple and their children to dinners out and at least two, all-expense paid vacations to Disney World in Florida. Jason also purchased two automobiles for the family and paid for the wife's dental work.

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

Jason Ehrhart also falsely claimed in the annual accountings that he spent thousands on miscellaneous expenditures for the veteran, including storage unit rentals, vehicle maintenance bills, state and local taxes, life and auto insurance, and credit card bills. However, in 2016 the veteran's specially equipped wheelchair van, for which Jason Ehrhart claimed he spent approximately \$32,395 on maintenance, was found broken down and abandoned along a Perry County roadside. Laurie Ehrhart admitted she helped Jason complete the 8 false annual accountings in her handwriting.

Michael Ehrhart died at the Lebanon VA Hospital on July 30, 2018. As part of their sentences Judge Conner ordered Laurie and Jason Ehrhart to pay \$316,360 restitution to Michael's son, his only known heir.

[Source: DoJ Middle District of Pennsylvania | U.S. Attorney's Office | June 6, 2019 ++]

**\* Vets \***



### **TEAM Coalition** ► New | Represents Sick Troops/Vets Exposed to Environmental Hazards

A dozen veterans and health organizations have joined forces to represent sick U.S. troops and veterans whose illnesses may be related to exposure to environmental hazards on the battlefield and aboard U.S. military installations. The **Toxic Exposures in the American Military**, or TEAM, Coalition, announced in early June, will review all current resources and available exposure data and press for additional research, medical treatment and disability compensation for thousands of ill service members.

According to retired Army Lt. Gen. Mike Linnington, Wounded Warrior Project CEO, the coalition is needed to ensure that Congress, the executive branch and veterans organizations work to "provide the necessary care and resources to help those suffering from this wound of war." "We must do more to address the illnesses we are seeing in America's service members and veterans as a result of toxic exposures," Linnington said in a news release. More than 175,000 service members and veterans are enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs' Airborne Hazards and Burn Pit Registry, a database for personnel who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Djibouti and elsewhere in the Persian Gulf region that tracks health consequences related to exposure to burn pits and other regional environmental conditions.



**Interpreters with U.S. forces dump trash into a burn pit in Zhari, Afghanistan, in 2012**

Thousands of veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere have developed respiratory illnesses, skin diseases, cancers, autoimmune disorders and other conditions they believe are related to exposure to the burn pits, which were used to incinerate garbage, plastics, medical waste and more. More than 250 burn pits were used in Iraq and Afghanistan, the largest being nearly 10 acres across at Joint Base Balad. That pit was in use 24 hours a day.

Troops serving in the region also were exposed to heavy metals found in airborne dust, depleted uranium, hazardous chemicals used during cleanups or released into the air, and other exposures. Closer to home, service members and their families have been affected by water and chemical contamination on military bases, including chemicals linked to cancer known as polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, that are found in firefighting foams and have leached into groundwater.

The coalition plans to focus on toxic exposures of the post-9/11 era, what the group considers "a looming crisis." But members of the coalition have lobbied for years to obtain health care and benefits for troops affected by exposures in previous conflicts. The American Legion and the National Veterans Legal Services Program have represented veterans seeking compensation for exposure to Agent Orange. Other participating groups include California Communities Against Toxics, Cease Fire Campaign, the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States, Hunter Seven, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Military Officers Association of America, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) and Veteran Warriors.

Representatives from some of the participating TEAM Coalition groups have been meeting in the past year to address toxic exposures. On 13 JUN, Bonnie Carroll, TAPS founder and president, spoke at an event sponsored by the Wounded Warrior Project and The Washington Post, The Changing Face of America's Veterans, in Washington, D.C., on exposures and their effects on troops, veterans and family members. Over Memorial Day weekend, TAPS sponsored a panel for surviving family members on understanding toxic exposure illnesses.

Rosie Torres, executive director of Burn Pits 360, a grassroots organization created in 2010 by ill veterans and their family members to raise awareness of the health effects of burn pits and push for legislation to help sick troops, said her organization is "blessed to be part of this coalition" given the effort she and her husband, retired Army Reserve Capt. Leroy Torres, and others put into pressing for a burn pit registry and other related legislation. "This is a pivotal moment for us, the first time in years we are seeing this systemic momentum in Congress and the veterans organization community," Torres said. "Our hope is to work jointly with these amazing groups in implementing effective legislation that addresses the needs of veterans, active service members and families."

Several bills have been introduced in Congress this year aimed at strengthening the VA's burn pit registry. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI), an Army National Guard member who served in Iraq in 2005, has sponsored legislation that would require the Pentagon to make sure that eligible service members enroll in the registry. Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-TX) has sponsored a bill that would let a person other than a veteran update the registry in the event of a death or register a veteran if they are incapacitated or died before they could enroll. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Elizabeth Howe | May 28, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Wounded Warrior Project Update 07 ► Recommendation | Renew SAH Benefit Every Decade**

Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) director of government affairs, Derek Fronabarger, testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee 20 JUN on the Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) benefit. Fronabarger highlighted areas where Congress can take action, specifically around the existing financial and timeframe limitations of the benefit. "As younger veterans grow, get married, or have families, their needs in an adaptive home change dramatically," said Fronabarger. "This is also true for those whose disabilities get worse over time. A veteran with a prosthetic leg might be fine to walk around their home when they are in their 30s, but they might require a motorized wheelchair when they become senior citizens. We recommend the full Specially Adapted Housing benefit be reinstated to those in the program every 10 years to accommodate moving and normal life changes."

During the hearing, a new draft bill was announced and discussed that is named in honor of Army Capt. (Ret.) Ryan Kules, WWP director of combat stress recovery. "The Ryan Kules Specially Adapted Housing Improvement Act of 2019 will improve the quality of life for many wounded warriors and their families by helping ensure their

homes fit their abilities," said WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Linnington. "We are grateful to Rep. Gus Bilirakis for sponsoring this bill and to Rep. Mike Levin for co-sponsoring, and we thank them both for their leadership and great fidelity to our nation's wounded warriors." "Wounded warriors face unique challenges in recovering from their injuries," said Kules. "The Specially Adapted Housing benefit has helped me tremendously, and renewing this benefit every 10 years will help ensure wounded veterans' homes can be adapted as our needs change throughout our lives."



**Veterans's advocates are pushing for legislation boost the VA's Specially Adaptive Housing Grant by more than 15 percent (to \$98,000) and allow disabled veterans to renew the payout every 10 years.**

WWP's Independence Program and Benefits Service assist veterans and service members in need of home modifications for daily living if they do not qualify for SAH grants, which provide allowances to service members and veterans with certain permanent and total service-connected disabilities. Eligible SAH grantees include those who have lost the use of both arms or both legs, or one leg and one arm; those who are blind in both eyes; and those who have certain severe respiratory injuries, or certain severe burns. The total amount of funds that an individual can use is currently capped at \$85,645. A veteran or service member can access these funds up to three times and cannot exceed the capped amount. This new bill will allow veterans to use this benefit every 10 years, and increase the cap to over \$98,000 and the usage from three times to six times. The passage of this bill is a major legislative priority for WWP during the 116th Congress.

Already about 2,000 veterans use the SAH grants, according to WWP, which would likely expand if veterans could get a second round of grant money. Expanding the program could cost as much as \$120 million over the next 10 years. Go to <https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/media/183307/wwp-62019-sah-leg-hearing.pdf> to read WWP's full testimony before the committee. To learn more about how WWP works with our nation's leaders to improve the lives of wounded veterans and their families visit <https://wwp.news/Newsroom>. [Source: WASHINGTON PRNewswire | June 20, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Vet Suicide Update 33 ► Three-digit, 911-Style Suicide Hotline Urged for Vets**

Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) wants to accelerate creation of a three-digit, 911-style suicide hotline to ensure that veterans have easier access to the existing Veterans Crisis Line in an emergency. Manchin said 20 JUN he will introduce legislation that would require the Federal Communications Commission and the Department of Veterans Affairs to move forward on a three-digit number for veterans to call.

In a letter Manchin sent May 7 to FCC Chairman Ajit Pai and VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, the senator said West Virginia loses at least one person a day to suicide, and many who take their own lives are veterans. But while the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018 called for a study on the effectiveness of a three-digit code -- with a report due to Congress by the end of August -- Manchin said he "remains concerned about the lack of urgency on

the issue" and he wants to see assurances that a yet-to-be-determined number, now known as N911, will be implemented. "The first line of defense we have to prevent suicide is the hotline we have. The number is 800-273-8255. How many of us can remember that? We are going to that three-digit," he said during a hearing of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on suicide prevention among veterans.

Under the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act, FCC was directed to study the effectiveness of the current suicide prevention line, known as the Veterans or Military Crisis Line, which connects directly to the VA if the caller presses 1. It connects to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for all other callers. The commission is also studying the feasibility and cost of finding a three-digit dialing code. In his letter, Manchin asked for an update on the report. But he said Wednesday he will request support from other members of Congress for rapid implementation.

The suicide rate for American veterans is 1.5 times the civilian rate. An estimated 20 veterans die by suicide each day. Veterans from the Vietnam era and shortly thereafter make up the majority of these deaths. The Veterans Crisis Line receives 1,700 calls a day and Wilkie said VA is working with Manchin "to make a three-code call-in to make the process even easier than it is now." Wilkie added that VA has turned over its portion of information for the congressionally mandated study to the FCC. He said he hopes the results will be "turned around quickly in anticipation of" Manchin's proposed legislation.

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA) said he has visited a Georgia satellite office of the Veterans Crisis Line and was "astounded at how many calls come in and how rapid they come in." "The better we do at making our services accessible, and the better we do at making sure our people educated to deliver these services, the better it will be for our veterans, the more over time it will help and we will reduce the number of suicides," Isakson said. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | 20 Jun 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **PTSD Update 251 ► Study Says Vets w/PTSD More Likely to Die from Suicide & Accidents**

For many veterans, life in combat is hard, but for those who survive it, the mental stress of war can be deadly, new research shows. Although the risk is smaller than in previous studies, veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder have an elevated risk of dying from accidental injury, viral hepatitis and suicide compared to the general population, according to a study published Monday in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine. They also have a higher risk of developing chronic liver disease and diabetes. "Our findings suggest that treatment-seeking veterans with PTSD, including young veterans and women, are dying from largely preventable causes compared with the general population," Jenna A. Forehand, a researcher at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center and study lead investigator, said in a news release.

The retrospective cohort study included more than 490,000 veterans undergoing treatment for PTSD at various Veterans Affairs Medical Centers between 2008 and 2013. During that time, more than 5,200 veterans, at an average age of 48.5, died during their first year of care. About 90 percent of them were males, 63.5 percent were white and nearly 35 percent were deployed in Afghanistan or Iraq. In the first year of care, younger veterans with PTSD were at risk for suicide and accidental injury from poisoning, while older veterans were likely to die from heart disease or malignant tumors. In all, 1.1 percent of veterans in the study died a year after starting treatment, representing a 5 percent higher rate than the general population.

Veterans may turn to opioid use to deal with comorbid pain from lingering combat injuries, pain disorders and PTSD sustained in combat. This misuse of opioids, the researchers say, may lead to suicides, accidental injuries and hepatitis-related deaths, particularly among younger veterans. "Future studies should develop preventative interventions that target PTSD and comorbid depression, pain disorder and substance use to lessen the risk of suicide, accidental poisoning and viral hepatitis in veterans with PTSD," Forehand said. "Similarly, lifestyle modifications may reduce the risk of diabetes and chronic liver disease in this patient population. Veterans seeking treatment for



PTSD should receive comprehensive education on the benefits of diet and exercise and the risks of chronic stress and substance use." [Source: UPI | Tauren Dyson | June 24, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Fallen Soldier Donor Memorial** ► **Honors Fallen Servicemembers Who Donated Organs**

Servicemembers who have died at the military's largest overseas hospital were remembered 28 MAY for the gifts of life they gave others, as part of an organ donation program believed to be the only one of its kind outside the United States. They were recognized at the unveiling of the Fallen Soldier Donor Memorial in Landstuhl Regional Medical Center's memorial garden. An inscribed bronze plaque featuring a sculpture of cupped hands holding dog tags is fixed upon a rock in the garden. "Today we honor the sacrifices of our fallen brothers and sisters in arms, who even in death continued to make a positive impact on our country and allied nations through organ donation," said Col. Claude Burnett, LRMC deputy commanding officer.

The plaque is the sister memorial to one dedicated in 2016 at the United Network for Organ Sharing headquarters in Richmond, Va. Both honor organ donors from the U.S. military. The donations differ from typical U.S. programs in that they generally go to patients from Germany and neighboring countries. Transferring organs across the Atlantic is not possible because of the distance and time involved, hospital officials said. Gary Foxen, a transplant recipient and Air Force veteran, conceived of the idea after hearing about soldiers who donated their organs after dying at LRMC, his wife Lois Foxen said in 2016, according to the Richmond Times Dispatch. Her husband died in 2014, more than 15 years after receiving a lung.



**Fallen Soldier Donor Memorial**

Since 2003, 83 servicemembers have donated 236 organs to the German Foundation for Organ Transplantation, or DSO, officials said. All the organs, including from servicemembers who died of wounds received downrange, in training accidents in Europe or in the U.S. Africa Command theater, were successfully transplanted. Most of the organ donations were made between 2006 and 2013, during the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, hospital officials said. Organ donation from LRMC is rarer now, happening about once every six months to a year, officials said. Servicemembers can elect to be organ and tissue donors and have their choice indicated on their IDs. When their wishes are unclear, next of kin are involved in the decision, said Maj. Brian Cohee, a pulmonary and critical care physician at LRMC.

"What we're really asking is, 'What would the soldier — the military member — what would they have wanted?'" Cohee said. "It's a very personal decision, but those (families) that I've talked to that went through it, it helped them deal with the whole situation, knowing that something good was going to come out of it." Once a donor is identified, a German team goes to LRMC to remove the organs and transfer them by car or plane to the hospital where the recipient is waiting, said Ana Paula Barreiros, DSO's central region director. The biggest need in Europe — as it is worldwide — is for kidneys, followed by a liver, then lungs and the heart. "It's a great gift that the American population gives to

us in Germany,” Barreiros said. “There is no legal obligation. You didn’t have to do this, so it’s a great gift. It’s saving lives.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Jennifer H. Svan | May 28, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## National WWI Museum & Memorial ► Dedication Wall Defaced

The dedication wall at the National WWI Museum and Memorial’s in Kansas City, Missouri was defaced 16 Kansas City Police Chief Rick Smith said two men were responsible for the vandalism spray painted “Xs” over the faces of World War I generals and “communist symbols” just before 1 a.m. Tuesday morning, according to the department’s blog. They also spray painted a message referencing the 1986 prison revolts in Peru. The suspects retreated after they were yelled at by a driver, who notified police about the behavior.



"To desecrate the National World War I Memorial and Museum is both illegal and stupid. It insults the tens of thousands of men who gave their lives so that we might continue to have the right to express our political beliefs," Smith said. "Who knows what kind of oppressive government we might be living under had those men not given their lives?" "We, as a police department, will not tolerate the desecration of one of the most beloved landmarks in Kansas City, and we know the community won't either," he added. Smith, who said the police department has "solid leads" on the suspects, also said the suspects may be linked to other vandalism episodes this week in Kansas City. Police believe the suspects also defaced a church, bridge, and a vacant building Tuesday morning.

Matt Naylor, president and CEO of the National WWI Museum and Memorial, said that while the museum embraces protesters, another approach could have been taken, according to NBC-affiliate 41 Action News, which first reported the incident. "This is Kansas City's front porch," Naylor said, "It's very disappointing to see people would cause damage here to this memorial." "We welcome protesters, we're a free-speech campus and the tragedy is that they didn't need to do damage to the memorial to make their point," Naylor said.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | June 19, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Desert Storm Memorial Update 11 ► Two Years, \$32 Million to Go

The National Desert Storm War Memorial committee has approval for a site on the National Mall and is hoping to dedicate the new monument on the 30th anniversary of the conflict, but it needs to raise another \$32 million to get there. Scott Stump, CEO and president of the committee, said at the National Press Club 25 JUN that some \$8.4 million has been raised so far against an estimated \$40 million cost to erect the memorial, but that final design and all construction is still to be done. Stump was speaking at an event to launch the first of three "capital campaigns" to raise



the bulk of money needed to build the memorial. “We are hoping for conceptual approval in the fall,” he said. “We expect to break ground in 2020, and we are looking for the dedication in January 2021,” he explained.

The site chosen—and approved in the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act—is a plot near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., at the intersection of Constitution Avenue and 23rd Street. The site, which is now used as a pick-up sports field, is across the street from the National Institute for Peace. Stump said it was intentionally chosen to be near the Vietnam War and Korean War Memorials, and will be easily seen by travelers visiting those sites and driving in the area.



Renderings of the memorial as currently conceived show a relatively flat design with arcs of engraved stone. Stump told *Air Force Magazine* that a vertical design, like that of the Air Force Memorial, would not be approved because it would visually compete with and potentially detract from the Lincoln Memorial. Moreover, at an unnamed, alternate site where “verticality” would have been acceptable, “nobody would be able to get to it,” he said. However, he said the final version “will have figures,” although whether they will be realistic statues such as those at the Korean War memorial or merely suggestive of generic people has not yet been decided. “We believe that is an important element and we are working on incorporating that,” Stump noted.

The memorial will recognize the contributions of the US military services, as well as the 35 countries that contributed people, materiel, or money to the effort, Stump said. “This is not a place of mourning,” he asserted, having earlier said that the memorial is necessary to prevent “a forgotten victory.” The “positive messages” of the 1991 conflict—a coming together of many nations to repel aggression, victory with few casualties relative to the mass casualties expected, and the re-embrace of the American military by the American people—will be highlighted. “Future generations will look at this and say, if we can do this, then anything is possible,” he asserted. Stump also noted that the design will take technology into account, offering ways to see historical footage or backstory on a mobile device. The memorial will not, however, have an interpretive center or museum. It will be intended to evoke an “emotional connection” and inspire visitors to learn more about the conflict on their own.

In introducing a panel of speakers to discuss the historical significance of the Gulf War, Stump said he has been corrected from describing Desert Storm as a “100-hour” ground war, given the six-week air campaign that preceded the ground phase and destroyed more than 50 percent of the Iraqi forces in or near Kuwait. Retired Lt. Gen. David Deptula, dean of AFA’s Mitchell Institute, who served as one of the principal architects of the Desert Storm air campaign, said the war was historically influential for five reasons:

- “It set the expectations for low casualties” on both sides of an American war.
- It “presaged the age of precision weapons,” he said, noting that although Desert Storm was often thought of as a war of precision weapons, only seven percent of the munitions used actually fit that description. In Operation Inherent Resolve, however, the number leaped to 98 percent, he said.
- It marked the first use of a joint force concept of operations, and it was the first campaign to employ the Goldwater-Nichols reforms.
- It was the first war aimed not specifically at attrition, but on achieving desired effects, Deptula said.
- And, it was the first time “airpower was the key force” in achieving victory in a military campaign; a modern reality quickly recognized and embraced by Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, the overall commander of the coalition force.

[Source: Air Force Magazine | John A. Tirpak | June 25, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Lawsuit | Harold Cantrell ► Assisted Living Facility Negligence Led to Vet's Death**

Joyce Cantrell's last visit with her husband was hurtful for both. With tears in his eyes, 85-year-old Harold Cantrell told his wife he wanted to go home, but she knew his Alzheimer's disease and other health maladies were too far along for him to go back. She and her family had made the painstaking decision to put him in a home with around-the-clock care. Following her visit, while she was in the parking lot, Joyce Cantrell sent a text to her husband's orderly stating, "Harold is upset and I hope he gets over it." About an hour later, Harold Cantrell slipped through the front door of the Indigo Palms Assisted Living Facility and headed east.

Eighteen days later, Cantrell's decomposed body was found tangled in some fencing wire less than a mile from the Daytona Beach facility. Joyce Cantrell, 80, is suing Indigo Palms. Her attorneys have said the facility's staff's negligence led to the "tragic death" of Harold Cantrell. Cantrell was admitted to the facility April 27, 2017. He was suffering from Alzheimer's disease, diabetes and heart trouble. For the latter, Cantrell had a small defibrillator implanted in him, which delivered an electric shock to his heart whenever it detected an irregular heartbeat. Cantrell, a retired school teacher and a U.S. Navy veteran who served during the Korean War, went missing July 5, 2017, less than six weeks after he was admitted.

A resident at the facility had opened the door to the lobby and Cantrell walked outside without being seen. Then he sprinted away from the property. That was at 3:33 p.m. No one noticed Cantrell was gone until after 5 p.m., when dinner was served to residents. When employees did notice, they didn't act fast enough, not according to Joyce Cantrell. "The staff failed to take timely and reasonable action to determine Mr. Cantrell's whereabouts," wrote Steve Watrel, a Jacksonville attorney representing the plaintiff. Darren Pedigo, the facility's director of nursing who is also one of the defendants in the lawsuit, reviewed the security camera to determine Harold Cantrell's whereabouts and saw footage of him leaving the facility, according to court documents. That was at 5:30 p.m. He waited 15 minutes before calling 9-1-1 and waited until 6 p.m. to call Cantrell's wife, Watrel said.

For several days, volunteers went looking for Cantrell. Ten days after his disappearance, Cantrell's family, with the help of police, organized a large-scale search party that stretched across two days. Cantrell wasn't found. On the morning of July 23, 2017, Daytona Beach police were contacted by someone at 524 Fairmount Road regarding a foul odor. When police arrived, they found Cantrell's remains. Joyce Cantrell is seeking damages for the facility staff's "negligence" and oversights that led to her husband's death, the lawsuit states. More specifically, she is seeking wrongful death damages for the anguish she suffered and everything she lost -- including her husband's companionship.

According to Agency for Health Care Administration, there are 3,104 assisted-living facilities and 683 nursing homes in Florida. In 2016 in Florida, it was reported that 507 clients left assisted living facilities, and another 168 from nursing homes. A civil jury trial for the Cantrell case is scheduled for 3 SEP.

[Source: The Associated Press | June 1, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Bladensburg WWI Vet Memorial Update 08 ► Supreme Court Ruling | Okay**

The Supreme Court ruled 20 JUN that a Peace Cross war memorial on public land outside Washington, D.C., can stand, determining in a 7-2 decision that it does not violate the Constitution. Residents of Prince George's County,

Maryland and the American Humanist Association had sued to have the cross taken down, but the court determined that factors including the history of the memorial support the notion that it is not religious in nature. “

For nearly a century, the Bladensburg Cross has expressed the community’s grief at the loss of the young men who perished, its thanks for their sacrifice, and its dedication to the ideals for which they fought,” Justice Samuel Alito wrote in the court’s opinion. “It has become a prominent community landmark, and its removal or radical alteration at this date would be seen by many not as a neutral act but as the manifestation of ‘a hostility toward religion that has no place in our Establishment Clause traditions,’” he continued, quoting Justice Breyer’s concurrence in the 2005 decision in *Van Orden v. Perry*.

The court's decision reverses the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, which ruled that the cross was unconstitutional. The 7-2 majority on Thursday cited the structure's historical nature in its narrowly drawn decision, saying the Latin cross design reflected the nationwide trend at the time it was erected to honor war dead with community monuments. The Bladensburg Peace Cross, as it is known, sits in a traffic circle in the Washington suburbs, to honor 49 local World War I soldiers who died in battle overseas. Its supporters, including the Trump administration, said it was created solely to honor those heroes and is secular in nature. Opponents called it an impermissible overlap of church and state, since it is controlled and cared for by a Maryland parks commission.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane June 3, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **GI Bill Update 286 ► Small-Business Loan Option**

In marking the 75th anniversary of the original GI Bill, a top Department of Veterans Affairs official on 19 JUN pointed to a glaring difference between the post-World War II and post-9/11 versions -- the small-business option. Paul Lawrence, head of the Veterans Benefit Administration, said, "One of the things I get asked about wherever I go is: 'Why can't I use the GI Bill to start a business? Why can't I do that?'" "It once was in the bill" signed on June 22, 1944, by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the form of a small loan as startup capital, Lawrence said at a forum sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce celebrating the 75th anniversary of what was formally called the "Servicemen's Readjustment Act."

Lawrence, an Army veteran and the main administrator of the current GI Bill, noted that previous forum panelists from the business community, government and veterans advocacy groups had said that half of all the World War II veterans started a business. And now it's a much smaller fraction. "The law in 1944 enabled it," he said of the small-business opportunity for veterans. "It once existed, and it begs the question: If it was so popular, why can't we do it? Certainly, we could figure this out. "I'm just sharing, I'm not advocating for anything, but it's what I get asked about regularly," Lawrence said in his remarks at the forum and in an earlier aside with *Military.com*.

Previous efforts in Congress to expand benefits under the current GI Bill to allow veterans to use education funds for small-business startups have died in committee. An earlier panel at the Chamber of Commerce forum stressed that the current GI Bill has primarily become an education benefit, and contrasted the large number of post-World War II veterans who chose a business opportunity over college and the relatively small number in the current generation who take that path.

Elizabeth O'Brien, chairwoman of the Small Business Administration advisory committee on veterans business affairs, and former Rep. Patrick Murphy (D-PA), the former undersecretary of the Army, said that access to capital is a major hurdle for veterans in starting their own businesses. They said that 50% of post-World War II veterans went directly into business when they came home, compared to about 5% in the current generation. "That's an unbelievable dip" from 75 years ago to the present, O'Brien said. "Less than 5% of veterans starting their own businesses. That's not good," Murphy said.

In her presentation at the forum, Rosalinda Maury, director of applied research at Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families, detailed the immense contribution to the nation that WWII veterans made with the education they gained through the original GI Bill. She called FDR's foresight in pressing for the bill before the war ended "the single largest investment in an educated workforce in American history." For every dollar spent on their education, the post-WWII veterans returned seven to the economy, she said. From the original bill, the nation gained 450,000 engineers, 238,000 teachers, 67,000 doctors, and 91,000 scientists, according to Maury. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | 19 Jun 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Senior Care ► Soon to Be gone - From a Military Doctor**

I am a doctor specializing in the Emergency Departments of the only two military Level One-Trauma Centers, both in San Antonio, TX and they care for civilian Emergencies as well as military personnel. San Antonio has the largest military retiree population in the world living here. As a military doctor, I work long hours and the pay is less than glamorous. One tends to become jaded by the long hours, lack of sleep, food, family contact and the endless parade of human suffering passing before you. The arrival of another ambulance does not mean more pay, only more work. Most often, it is a victim from a motor vehicle crash. Often it is a person of dubious character who has been shot or stabbed.

With our large military retiree population, it is often a nursing home patient. Even with my enlisted service and minimal combat experience in Panama, I have caught myself groaning when the ambulance brings in yet another sick, elderly person from one of the local retirement centers that cater to military retirees. I had not stopped to think of what the citizens of this age group represented.

I saw 'Saving Private Ryan.' I was touched deeply. Not so much by the carnage, but by the sacrifices of so many. I was touched most by the scene of the elderly survivor at the graveside, asking his wife if he'd been a good man. I realized that I had seen some of these same men and women coming through my emergency Department and had not realized what magnificent sacrifices they had made. The things they did for me and everyone else that has lived on this planet since the end of that conflict are priceless. Situation permitting, I now try to ask my patients about their experiences. They would never bring up the subject without my inquiry. I have been privileged to hear an amazing array of experiences, recounted in the brief minutes allowed in an Emergency Dept. encounter.

These experiences have revealed the incredible individuals I have had the honor of serving in a medical capacity, many on their last admission to the hospital. There was a frail, elderly woman who reassured my young enlisted medic, trying to start an IV line in her arm. She remained calm and poised, despite her illness and the multiple needle-sticks into her fragile veins. She was what we call a 'hard stick.' As the medic made another attempt, I noticed a number tattooed across her forearm. I touched it with one finger and looked into her eyes. She simply said, 'Auschwitz ..' patients of later generations would have loudly and openly berated the young medic in his many attempts. How different was the response from this person who'd seen unspeakable suffering.

Also, there was this long retired Colonel, who as a young officer had parachuted from his burning plane over a Pacific Island held by the Japanese. Now an octogenarian, he had a minor cut on his head from a fall at his home where he lived alone. His CT scan and suturing had been delayed until after midnight by the usual parade of high priority ambulance patients. Still spry for his age, he asked to use the phone to call a taxi, to take him home, then he realized his ambulance had brought him without his wallet. He asked if he could use the phone to make a long distance call to his daughter who lived 7 miles away. With great pride we told him that he could not, as he'd done enough for his country and the least we could do was get him a taxi home, even if we had to pay for it ourselves. My only regret was that my shift wouldn't end for several hours, and I couldn't drive him myself.

I was there the night M/Sgt. Roy Benavidez came through the Emergency Dept. for the last time. He was very sick. I was not the doctor taking care of him, but I walked to his bedside and took his hand. I said nothing. He was so sick, he didn't know I was there. ...I'd read his Congressional Medal of Honor citation and wanted to shake his hand. He died a few days later. I was there to see:

- The gentleman who served with Merrill's Marauders,
- The survivor of the Bataan Death March,
- The survivor of Omaha Beach,
- The 101 year old World War I veteran,
- The former POW held in frozen North Korea,
- The former Special Forces medic - now with non-operable liver cancer,
- The former Viet Nam Corps Commander.

I may still groan when yet another ambulance comes in, but now I am much more aware of what an honor it is to serve these particular men and women. I have seen a Congress who would turn their back on these individuals who've sacrificed so much to protect our liberty. I see later generations that seem to be totally engrossed in abusing these same liberties, won with such sacrifice. It has become my personal endeavor to make the nurses and young enlisted medics aware of these amazing individuals when I encounter them in our Emergency Dept. Their response to these particular citizens has made me think that perhaps all is not lost in the next generation.

My experiences have solidified my belief that we are losing an incredible generation, and this nation knows not what it is losing. Our uncaring government and ungrateful civilian populace should all take note. We should all remember that we must "Earn this."

If it weren't for the United States Military, there'd be NO United States of America! And now as you have finished reading this, our Congress enjoys their free medical care, for LIFE (which of course they voted in themselves) and are in the process of charging these people for their medical care and at the same time possibly reducing their retirement pay. ...A typical political "Thank you" for their Service... [Source: Emmitsburg News Journal | CPT. Stephen R. Ellison, M.D. US Army | June 21, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **WWII Vets 194** ► **Grant Jiro Hirabayashi | Merrill's Marauders Hall of Famer**

At the urging of his older brother, and when he was just eight-years old, Grant Jiro Hirabayashi left Japan. It was 1940, and his brother felt the deteriorating relations between Japan and the United States would soon make conditions dangerous. A year later, following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hirabayashi and other Japanese-American citizens were sent to an internment camp at Jefferson Barracks.



Hirabayashi earned his US high school diploma ten years later, and was quickly drafted into the army. When he graduated basic training, he served as a flight clerk for the Army Air Corps until 1942—where all Japanese-Americans



in the Air Corps were reassigned. Later, Hirabayashi was sent to Military Intelligence School, and became deeply immersed in the Japanese language. While there, he volunteered for a dangerous and secret mission to Burma in 1943. In Burma, Hirabayashi and his fellow soldiers were trained in jungle warfare by both American and British instructors. The goal of his unit, Merrill's Marauders, was to defeat the Japanese 18th Division and capture the all-weather airstrip of Myitkyina to disrupt supply of Japanese troops. It also allowed American supply planes a route into China.

After five major battles and 30 minor engagements, the Marauders were successful in capturing the airstrip. Hirabayashi spent the remainder of the war in China as an interpreter and interrogator of Japanese prisoners. When the war ended, he served as the personal interpreter for the American observer to the Japanese surrender in China. Hirabayashi was discharged in Nov. 1945 and went to teach Japanese at the Military Intelligence School in Minnesota.

In 1947, he worked for the Supreme Commander of the Allied Power Legal Section, where he translated and interpreted the Yokohama war crime trials. Afterwards, Hirabayashi returned to the United States and earned a degree in International Relations from the University of Southern California. He worked for the Department of the State and the Library of Congress, and later retired from the National Security Agency in 1979. In 2004, he was inducted into the Ranger's Hall of Fame. Grant Hirabayashi died in 2010. He was 91. [Source: Vantage Point | Savannah Labbe | June 21, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## WWII Vets 195 ► Oscar Leonard | Pacific POW Survivor

With the Imperial Japanese Army hot on his heels, Oscar Leonard says he barely slipped away from getting caught in the grueling Bataan Death March in 1942 by jumping into a choppy bay in the dark of the night, clinging to a log and paddling to the Allied-fortified island of Corregidor. After many weeks of fighting there and at Mindanao, he was finally captured by the Japanese and spent the next several years languishing under brutal conditions in Filipino and Japanese World War II POW camps. Now, having just turned 100 years old, the Antioch resident has been recognized for his 42-month ordeal as a prisoner of war, thanks to the efforts of his friends at the Brentwood VFW Post #10789 and Rep. Jerry McNerney (D-CA).



**In 1942, Oscar Leonard, 98, escaped the Bataan peninsula by swimming to the island of Corregidor while holding onto a floating log. The U.S. veteran returned to the Philippines and walked portions of the death march trail on April 8, 2017.**

McNerney, Brentwood VFW Commander Steve Todd and Junior Vice Commander John Bradley helped obtain a POW award after doing research and requesting records to surprise Leonard during a birthday party last month. Because he had been in the Special Forces, some of Leonard's records were redacted. Many of his military records also were destroyed in the 1973 National Archives fire. And to make matters worse, his home in the Northern California town of Paradise where he had settled down also burned down in last year's deadly Camp Fire. Fortunately, Leonard and his wife, Mary, had moved to their daughter and son-in-law's Antioch home two years earlier and taken some mementos there, including six diaries from his years as a prisoner of war.



Bradley said the local veterans group was happy to help Leonard, whom they'd met years earlier at Bataan Memorial Death March events in New Mexico and later at an event in Brentwood. "Oscar is our really special veteran for the moment — he has a lot of support from us and the Paradise veterans group where he previously lived," Bradley said. "It was 75 years ago; he needs to be recognized for his sacrifice." Leonard, a retired pharmacist, downplayed his exploits, which included collecting data on the enemy as a member of the Counter Intelligence Corps — predecessor to the CIA. "I'm not that important," he said.

Leonard joined the Idaho National Guard's 116th Cavalry Guard in 1939 just as the war was breaking out in Europe. He says he later asked to be stationed in the Philippines because his father had served there during the Spanish-American War. "I had heard about the Philippines — good things — and I wanted to go there," Leonard said. He became part of the U.S. Army Air Corps' Coast Artillery Corps and was assigned to an anti-aircraft battery in Corregidor. But the expert marksman's military career took a surprise turn when he was moved to the Counter Intelligence Corps. He was later transferred to Clark Air Field's 28th Bombardment Squadron, where he observed enemy cargo ships while flying in B-10s and Japanese sea captains from the ground, writing reports on what he saw. As a cover, he worked as an airplane mechanic. "I knew enough Japanese to get by," Leonard said.

It wasn't long before Pearl Harbor was bombed and 200 Japanese came overhead and took out many of the U.S. planes at Clark Field. "People didn't have time to be frightened," he said. Leonard said he and others were ordered to decommission the air field, ridding it of anything the Japanese could use by booby-trapping the arsenal with bombs. It exploded when the Japanese came in, he said. At one point, Leonard and his colleagues tried to take off in a B-10 but were knocked out of the sky, said George Gonzalez, who is Leonard's son-in-law, caretaker and record keeper. While the Japanese Zero fighter planes were flying overhead, Leonard said he sensed something unusual about their flight pattern and climbed a nearby hill to find a Filipino man speaking into a radio in Japanese. The man, whom he later learned was a spy, took out a gun, but Leonard says he shot him first.

"Oscar said the bullet hit the man's skull and then the wall, so he picked it up and he carried it with him," Gonzalez said, noting that Leonard kept it throughout his life until it was lost in the Paradise fire. Outnumbered in the battle, Leonard and the remaining soldiers held back as long as they could before fleeing to Bataan. With the Japanese in pursuit and Bataan about to fall, Leonard escaped by jumping into a bay and hanging onto a log, along with a nurse who was an expert swimmer, and paddling across the water to Corregidor, Gonzalez said. Leonard later was reassigned back to the coast artillery unit with the anti-aircraft guns, which he said he reconfigured to fire on ships. It wouldn't be long, though, before the young soldier volunteered to collect dynamite from nearby mines and bring the explosives south to Mindanao, a 600-mile trip that would take days to complete as they hid during the day, moving the barge only during the cover of night.

Once there, he joined the line, was given a rifle and told to aim for the officers trying to cross the river onto the island, Gonzalez said. "We would wait until the (Japanese) got to fighting the current in the water, and we would pick them off with rifle fire," Leonard recalled. Later, likely because of his advanced special operations training, he would fight alongside the Moros — Muslim natives who long had resisted the Japanese. "They (the Moros) would take the Japanese and roast them — literally," Leonard said, noting the Moros were brutal fighters and experts with knives. Leonard said he surrendered when the Japanese threatened to shoot fellow soldiers if he didn't emerge from the jungle cover. He was then imprisoned in the Philippines and later in Japan. In the Japanese camp, Leonard said some of the guards beat soldiers with bamboo canes and once pulled out his fingernails in an effort to extract information.

"I didn't give them any (information)," Leonard said stoically. One torture tactic was to make the prisoners put their feet in buckets of freezing water, Gonzalez said. Near the end, Leonard was forced to clean up after the second Nagasaki bomb was dropped. Some of the prisoners hummed tunes during the cleanup, he said, because they knew the bombing meant the Allies were winning. When finally liberated, Leonard said he was inexplicably given a fresh uniform and taken away by the OSS to the U.S.S. Missouri anchored in Tokyo Bay. When Leonard finally made it back to the U.S., he weighed only 68 pounds, and it took him many months to regain his strength, yet he continued in the service for the next seven years, Gonzalez said. "I think he did what he needed to do because he was a survivor,"

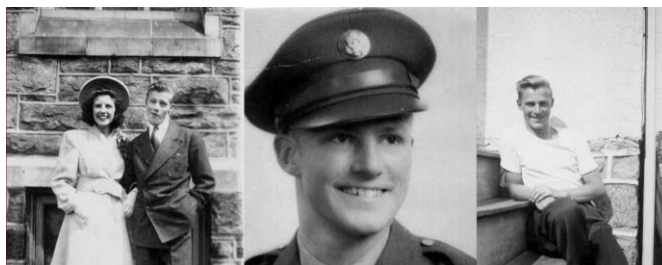
said Leonard's daughter, Ida Gonzalez. "Swimming against the current in (Corregidor) when you don't swim — that's a different kind of bravery."

Leonard's VFW friends have gathered his veteran's medical records and more to see if he might also qualify for a Purple Heart based on his POW injuries and likely radiation exposure in Nagasaki. Though not banking on it, they're hoping the final award, the Purple Heart, will come sooner than later. "He wonders why we go through all the hoopla," Todd said. "Well, World War II was really the greatest generation — these guys are all (mostly) gone now. They have stories to tell but no one knows them." [Source: East Bay Times | Judith Prieve | June 24, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## WWII Vets 196 ► William A. Bonsall | Atlantic POW Survivor

Army Veteran William A. Bonsall. William served during World War II. William A. Bonsall enlisted in the United States Army in 1942. After completing his semester at Pennsylvania State University, Bonsall was sent to Camp Walters, Texas, for basic training. From Camp Walters, he was sent to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, and assigned to the 16th Mountain Division Ski Troops. He remained at Camp McCoy for the winter and was reassigned for overseas deployment following the dissolution of the 76th Mountain Division.



In May 1944, Bonsall arrived in England in preparation for the D-Day assaults on France. Two days after the initial invasion, he arrived on Utah Beach and joined the 9th Infantry Division, who then made its way to the front line, beginning their push through France. After moving around German-occupied Paris, Bonsall and the 9th Infantry Division made its way to the Meuse River in Belgium. Bonsall recalls crossing a river and climbing up a heavily wooded hill, when they came under heavy fire. In the ensuing chaos, Bonsall and his radio man became separated from their squad. While attempting to regroup, the men were captured and taken prisoner by German forces. Bonsall and his fellow prisoners were loaded onto trucks and brought to the prisoner of war camp at Aachen, Germany. There, they were processed and assigned to different camps based on rank. From Aachen, Bonsall was sent to POW Camp 12A in Limburg, Germany. Having been conversationally proficient in German, he was tasked by his captors with translating basic orders to his fellow prisoners.

As American forces began closing in on Limburg in the winter of 1944, Bonsall and his fellow POWs were loaded onto box cars and moved to Camp 3C near the town of Alt Drewitz bei Küstrin, 60 miles from the Polish border. As the Allies closed in on Berlin, conditions in the camp quickly deteriorated. By the middle of January, he and his fellow prisoners learned that Russian forces would reach Camp 3C in the coming weeks. In response, the POWs began stockpiling food and taking notes of their surroundings. As Russian forces closed in on Camp 3C, the prisoners prepared to march towards Berlin. As they began their march, Russian forces reached the camp and began firing on their position. The men dove for cover and waited for the assault to end. After emerging, Bonsall and his fellow prisoners made contact with Russian units and were told to go east into Poland where they eventually reached Warsaw. There, they were enthusiastically greeted by the Polish and put on a train to Odessa, Ukraine, where they boarded a ship bound for the American-occupied city of Naples, Italy.

After being repatriated in Italy, Bonsall was sent back to the United States and was discharged from Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, in August 1945 at the rank of staff sergeant. Following his discharge, Bonsall returned to Penn State where he earned a degree in physical education. He then went on to found and head the men's gymnastics program at West Virginia University for 31 years. William Bonsall died in 2015. He was 91. We honor his service. [Source: Vantage Point | Nicholas Rogers-Dillon | June 24, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Jobs Update 245 ► Potential Job Interview Questions 2 | Be More Prepared**

While there are as many different possible interview questions as there are interviewers, it always helps to be ready for anything. Following are 50 more potential interview questions. Will you face them all? Not likely. Will you face a few? Probably. On the surface many would not seem to be related to the position you are applying for. But if you think about them most could indicate to the interviewer your work experience, your ability to think on your feet, and how you handle unusual circumstances. Will you be well-served by being ready even if you're not asked these exact questions? Absolutely.

51. Give me an example of a time that you felt you went above and beyond the call of duty at work.
52. What would you do if you won the lottery?
53. Can you describe a time when your work was criticized?
54. Have you ever been on a team where someone was not pulling their own weight? How did you handle it?
55. What is your personal mission statement?
56. Tell me about a time when you had to give someone difficult feedback. How did you handle it?
57. What is your greatest failure, and what did you learn from it?
58. What irritates you about other people, and how do you deal with it?
59. What is your greatest fear?
60. Who has impacted you most in your career, and how?
61. What do you see yourself doing within the first 30 days of this job?
62. What's the most important thing you've learned in school?
63. What three character traits would your friends use to describe you?
64. What will you miss about your present/last job?
65. If you were interviewing someone for this position, what traits would you look for?
66. List five words that describe your character.
67. What is your greatest achievement outside of work?
68. Sell me this pencil.
69. If I were your supervisor and asked you to do something that you disagreed with, what would you do?
70. Do you think a leader should be feared or liked?
71. What's the most difficult decision you've made in the last two years?
72. What do you like to do for fun?
73. Why are you leaving your present job?
74. What do you do in your spare time?
75. How do you feel about taking no for an answer?

76. What was the most difficult period in your life, and how did you deal with it?
77. What is your favorite memory from childhood?
78. Give me an example of a time you did something wrong. How did you handle it?
79. Tell me one thing about yourself you wouldn't want me to know.
80. Tell me the difference between good and exceptional.
81. Why did you choose your major?
82. What are the qualities of a good leader? A bad leader?
83. What is your biggest regret, and why?
84. What are three positive character traits you don't have?
85. What irritates you about other people, and how do you deal with it?
86. If you found out your company was doing something against the law, like fraud, what would you do?
87. How many times do a clock's hands overlap in a day?
88. How would you weigh a plane without scales?
89. What assignment was too difficult for you, and how did you resolve the issue?
90. If I were to ask your last supervisor to provide you additional training or exposure, what would she suggest?
91. If you could choose one superhero power, what would it be and why?
92. What's the best movie you've seen in the last year?
93. Describe how you would handle a situation if you were required to finish multiple tasks by the end of the day, and there was no conceivable way that you could finish them.
94. What techniques and tools do you use to keep yourself organized?
95. If you could get rid of any one of the US states, which one would you get rid of, and why?
96. With your eyes closed, tell me step-by-step how to tie my shoes.
97. If you had to choose one, would you consider yourself a big-picture person or a detail-oriented person?
98. If selected for this position, can you describe your strategy for the first 90 days?
99. Who are your heroes?
100. Tell me 10 ways to use a pencil other than writing.

[Source: Military.com | May 17, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Veterans FAQ ► Why Did the VA Downgrade My Rating?**

**Q.** The VA rated me a 100% disabled veteran after I had a heart attack. Prior, I was rated at 30% for IHD resulting from Agent Orange exposure. After I left the hospital the VA downgraded my rating back to 30%. I still have IHD and the doctor said I could have another heart attack at any time. I thought I would stay at 100% since the VA recognizes I have IHD. Why did the VA downgrade my rating?

### **Answers**

**AI:** IHD, is rated by MET, 0-3, is 100%, 3-5 60%, 5-7 30%, 7 and above is 10%. So when a stress test is done and the doctor looks at the results then the MET is determined. (GR) 6/26/19

**A2:** I don't know whether this will be helpful, but I hope it is. Did you conduct a stress test recently? The VA regulations focus heavily upon stress test results along with continuing care and meds when determining percentage of disability. (AG) 6/26/19

**A3:** Check it again. You are probably looking at a report that only covers THIS health problem, because this is the only one you were in the hospital for. The other problems do still exist, but this particular problem is the only one that will be in this report, because this is the only one they worked on while you were in the hospital this time. (JM) 6/26/19

**A4:** I have heard of the VA upgrading when you go into surgery and during your initial recovery. Then they revert it back to the prior rating. If you want it increased then you will have to reopen a claim and have proof as to the reasons why. Since you had surgery they consider you all well and healed and improved just their mind set. Contact a VSO and your congressman for help and if you put enough pressure on then they may increase it but most likely a new claim will have to be done. (JRM) 6/23/19

**Note:** Go to <http://www.veterandiscountdirectory.com/question163.html> if you would like to add your experience regarding on this question.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | June 30, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Veterans FAQ ► How Should I Proceed to Increase My Current Assigned Rating?**

**Q.** I retired in December 1991. When the initial C&P evaluation was completed, I was awarded a 40% overall rating. There were several conditions that were recognized as service connected but assigned/given a zero (0%) rating. One condition was later classified as one of the chronic diseases associated with Agent Orange. Thru numerous office visits and submissions of claims and review request, nothing was approved. I still believe that there should be an adjustment based on the Nehmer class member entitlements. Any guidance to continue my belief would help.

### **Answers**

**A1:** First what is the chronic disease that you have under AO. One of the things you can do is file a claim for the zero disability rating and some of them could be upgraded. Also you need to file for CRSC since you are retired if you haven't done that. (GR) 6/26/19

**A2:** I believe that medical files are reviewed using only the process that searches for ways to reduce benefits. It would be quite shocking if raters would increase a rating based on their own review. **YOU HAVE TO FILE A CLAIM.** File your claim. Even if it gets rejected, there is value in doing so. If you refile the rejected claim and it get approved in the future, the rating could be back-dated to the original filing. The caveat is that you cannot go more than 365 days or the claim will be considered as a new claim and back-dating will not be awarded. Also, you must provide a narrative that explains the persistence and worsening of the condition backed up by a recent exam. **REMEMBER,** just going to the doctor is not enough. You have to **FILE A CLAIM.** Good Luck! (GC) 6/26/19

**Note:** Go to <http://www.veterandiscountdirectory.com/question1165.html> if you would like to add your experience regarding on this question.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | June 30, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Obit: Robert Friend ► 21 June 2019 | 142 Combat Mission Tuskegee Airmen**

America has lost another of its original Tuskegee pilots with the passing of retired Lt. Col. Robert "Bob" Friend, who died Friday afternoon at a hospital in Long Beach, daughter Karen Friend Crumlich said. Friend was 99 years old.

“My dad was my hero. He was always there for me and at the end I wanted to be there for him,” Crumlich told The Desert Sun. “He passed with family and dear friends surrounding him with love and affection. “He is truly a National Treasure who I will carry in my heart,” she continued. “I promise to keep his legacy alive by telling his story to anyone who wants to hear it.”



**In this Sept. 11, 2013, file photo, actress Loni Anderson, left, receives the Millie Taylor award from Lt. Col. Bob Friend, a Tuskegee Airman, during the 2nd Annual Heroes Helping Heroes Benefit Concert at The House of Blues, in Los Angeles**

While he didn't live in Palm Springs, Friend was a friend and frequent visitor of the Palm Springs Air Museum. A few years ago, in Friend's honor — and with his help — the museum restored the P-51 Mustang “Bunny” and painted it with the same numbers and markings as the one flown by Friend during World War II. “He was our guiding light,” said Air Museum Director Fred Bell. “It will be a long time before there is another man like him.” Bell first met Friend in 2012, when a group of Tuskegee Airmen were honored at the museum's annual gala. The two hit it off instantly, Bell said, and Friend, who lived in Irvine, got involved with helping restore the P-57 and through that became a frequent visitor to the museum.

“Bob was probably the closest thing to a father figure that I had in some time,” said an emotional Bell, who lost his father years ago. He described Friend as a patient, “glass-is-half-full” person who was always positive and friendly and had an “infectious laugh.” “One of the best days I remember is when we brought the airplane back and Bob got into the back of it and away he went,” Bell said, sitting in his office at the museum, where a large, framed photo of “Bunny” hangs on a wall and a signed photo of the colonel hangs above his desk. “He got so much joy from flying in that airplane. He was a sweet man.” When at the museum, Friend would often take a chair and go sit next to the airplane, happy to talk to anyone who stopped by about “Bunny” and his experiences in the military. “It would be a hundred degrees and he would sit there, and he would talk to them, and if there were a thousand people there, he would have greeted each one,” Bell said. “He loved people. He genuinely loved being around people.”

Born in South Carolina on 1920's leap day, Friend flew 142 combat missions in World War II, piloting P-47 and P-51 fighter aircraft, as part of the elite group of fighter pilots trained at Alabama's Tuskegee Institute. The program was created after the NAACP began challenging policies barring black people from flying military aircraft. Friend's 28-year Air Force career included service in the Korean and Vietnam wars. He also worked on space launch vehicles and served as foreign technology program director before retiring and forming his own aerospace company. [Source: Palm Springs Desert Sun | Sherry Barkas | Jun 21, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 1 JUL 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 | June 30, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ► As of 1 JUL 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\vetterans related websites and resources.

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

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

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

Please report broken links, comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and\or other military retiree\vetterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, [Milton.Bell126@gmail.com](mailto:Milton.Bell126@gmail.com)

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

\*\*\*\*\*

## **State Veteran's Benefits ► Minnesota 2019**

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

- Housing
- Financial
- Employment

- Education
- Recreation
- Other State Veteran Benefits

[Source:<http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/minnesota-state-veterans-benefits.html> | June 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.

-o-o-O-o-o-

## **VA Blue Water Claims Update 72 ► H.R. 299 | Blue Water Navy Vietnam Vet Act of 2019**

The “blue water” Vietnam veterans benefits act is now law. Late Tuesday night, President Donald Trump signed the legislation, which grants presumptive status for disability benefits to an estimated 90,000 Navy veterans who served in the seas around Vietnam during the war. Unlike their fellow service members stationed on the ground and on inland waterways, those veterans faced additional paperwork barriers to prove exposure to toxic defoliants during their deployments, even after developing identical serious cancers and respiratory illnesses.

Advocates had long complained that put an unfair burden on the aging veterans, since water monitoring records from decades ago were inaccessible or non-existent. The higher proof of exposure blocked most so-called “blue water” veterans from eligibility for benefits, which can total several thousand dollars a month. A federal appeals court in January overturned Veterans Affairs officials’ policy of denying the Navy veterans claims, and lawmakers followed in subsequent months with a legislative fix to reinforce the legal ruling. Last week, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said during a Senate hearing that even before passage of the new legislation, department staff have already begun processing the claims. “We are working with the Department of Defense and the Department of Navy to make sure that we have those adequate lists (of eligible veterans),” he said. “I cannot tell you now the numbers. I can tell you we are working on them. I will promise to come back to (Congress) if we need additional resources.”

The new law will pay for the presumptive benefits change — expected to total \$1.1 billion over 10 years — with a new fee on certain VA home loans. Disabled veterans will be exempt from the extra cost. In addition to the Navy Vietnam veterans, the legislation also expands presumptive disability benefits to troops who served in the Korean Demilitarized Zone and to children of herbicide-exposed Thailand veterans born with spina bifida. Numerous veterans groups, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion, have praised Congress for the action.

However, John Wells, retired Navy commander and the executive director of Military-Veterans Advocacy (which helped file the blue water lawsuit), has criticized the legislation in recent weeks for potentially limiting the scope of veterans affected by adopting a different definition of the area covered than the court ruling. Unfortunately, the artful

wording on the part of House Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA) may have cut off benefits for up to 55,000 additional veterans who served offshore Vietnam but outside the territorial sea. This includes a number of carrier sailors who were exposed by the surging waters of the Mekong River that discharged into the South China Sea. He said his group will continue lobbying Congress to add those veterans as well.

Wells also wants to acknowledge the extra oratory efforts of a band of volunteers within the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Association led by Mrs. Susie Belanger, a Gansevoort, New York housewife and former Navy spouse. This group of disabled former sailors spearheaded the successful effort. Military-Veterans Advocacy was proud to ally with these citizen sailors who selflessly devoted time and money to this effort. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 26, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Deportations Update 26 ► S.1040, 1041, 1042 | Bills to Prevent Vet Deportations**

Ten days after news broke that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement does not know exactly how many veterans it has deported over the last five years, a U.S. senator has reintroduced several bills to prevent deportation of veterans. “Men and women willing to wear our uniform shouldn’t be deported by the same nation they risked their lives to defend,” said Duckworth. “These pieces of legislation will help service members become citizens and help veterans ... who have been deported return to this country, enabling them to live here with their families and ensuring they can access the life-saving VA care they earned through their tremendous sacrifices.” Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) an Army veteran, reintroduced:

- **Veterans Visa and Protection Act:** S.1041 Requires the Secretary of Homeland Security to create a veterans visa program to permit veterans removed from the U.S. to return as immigrants as long as they were not removed based on a criminal conviction. The bill also would make those veterans eligible for naturalization because of their service under the Immigration and Nationality Act.
- **Healthcare Opportunities for Patriots in Exile (HOPE) Act:** S.1042 Amends the Immigration and Nationality Act to allow “alien veterans” to be brought to the U.S. for healthcare at the Veterans Administration.
- **Immigrant Veterans Eligibility Tracking System (I-VETS) Act:** S.1040 Requires the Secretary of Homeland Security to identify “each alien who is serving, or has served” in the U.S. military on their immigration documents.

Duckworth said the three bills “would prohibit the deportation of veterans who are not violent offenders, give legal permanent residents a path to citizenship through military service and strengthen VA healthcare services for veterans.” Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), a Marine veteran, is one of several Democrat co-sponsors of the three bills. “No one who serves our nation in uniform, volunteering to die for it, should be forced to leave it,” he said. “Providing a path to earned citizenship and basic health care mean keeping faith with veterans.”

A recently released watchdog report showed that ICE has policies in place for handling noncitizen veterans who may be subject to removal from the country but “does not consistently adhere to those policies and does not consistently identify and track such veterans.” ICE also had not tracked how many veterans it had deported in several years, the report said. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | June 17, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Telehealth Program ► H.R.3228 | Expand Vet Pool of Healthcare Providers**

Congress is considering a bill to expand the pool of healthcare providers able using telemedicine to treat the nation’s veterans. The VA MISSION Telemedicine Clarification Act of 2019 (HR 3228), introduced 12 JUN by U.S. Rep Earl

“Buddy Carter” (R-GA), would enable professional trainees to take part in the Department of Veterans Affairs’ “Anywhere to Anywhere VA Care” program, which allows the VA to treat veterans via telehealth no matter where they live. The bill aims to correct what its sponsors say is a flaw in the VA MISSION Act of 2018. That bill, signed into law in June 2018, opened the door to the use of connected health technology by authorizing the “Anywhere to Anywhere VA Care” program, unveiled one year earlier by then-Secretary Robert Shulkin, but it restricted care delivery to doctors. Dig Deeper

“The telemedicine section of the bill was designed to allow VA covered practitioners to provide telehealth services across state lines to increase veteran access to VA services (but) missed a large population of health care providers,” Carter said in a press release. “This meant that only doctors could provide services through telehealth, not students, interns, residents or fellows. This is a major problem especially for interns, residents and fellows who have graduated medical school and are training to become full time doctors because they are not able to get the necessary experience in telehealth at the VA until the time they become fully licensed.” “Increasing the use of telehealth at VA health centers is critical to ensure veterans are able to receive the care they need no matter where they live,” Carter added.

If approved, the effort would help to expand a program that saw more than 1 million healthcare encounters in 2017, and for which VA Secretary Robert Wilkie is seeking more than \$1 billion in federal funding to continue that growth. “Telehealth is a critical tool to ensure Veterans, especially rural Veterans, can access health care when and where they need it,” Wilkie told a House appropriations subcommittee in March. “With the support of Congress, VA has an opportunity to continue shaping the future of health care with cutting-edge technology providing convenient, accessible, high-quality care to Veterans.” Co-sponsoring the bill with Carter are U.S. Reps. Alexander Mooney (R-WV), Greg Gianforte (R-MT), Ann Kuster (D-NH), Steve Watkins (R-KS), Gregory Steube (R-FL), Jim Banks (R-IN) and Andy Barr (R-KY). The bill has been referred to the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. [Source: mHealth Intelligence | Eric Wicklund | June 17, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Vet Treatment Courts ► H.R.886 | Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act of 2019**

New federal regulations could help more veterans navigate the justice system by expanding veterans treatment court programs across the country. Col. D.J. Reyes, USA (Ret), and members of the National Veterans Court Alliance met with administration officials and congressional leaders the week of 10 JUN to encourage their support for the Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act of 2019. The bill directs the Attorney General to establish and carry out a Veteran Treatment Court Program. The legislation will establish an office in the Justice Department that would provide support and possibly funding to states to establish and maintain veterans treatment courts. The courts are significant because they would help veterans charged with crimes linked to service-connected issues, such post-traumatic stress or traumatic brain injury.

“Veterans treatment courts address root problems,” said Reyes, a MOAA Life member. “We found that veterans were put in the conventional crime pipeline, but that doesn’t address the root problem. With the help of the VA, we’ve realized that this person had issues identified during their military service. We drew that connection.” Unlike a typical court proceeding, veterans court programs are non-adversarial and divert honorably discharged veterans away from jail time by pairing them with specially trained judges, caseworkers and mentors. The programs have eligibility criteria, such as only accepting veterans who have been charged with misdemeanor offenses or non-violent felonies. Eligibility rules vary by state. “We’re out of uniform now, but it’s the same,” Reyes said. “I’m not going to leave you behind. The bipartisan bill, sponsored by Rep. Charlie Crist (D-FL) is being discussed in the House Judiciary Committee. Funding of \$25 million has been identified, but not appropriated.

The first veterans court was established in Buffalo in 2008. More than 400 programs are active nationwide, according the National Veterans Court Alliance. Cmdr. Luis Quinonez, USN (Ret), a Vietnam veteran who serves as the chairman of the alliance, said the courts are necessary because veterans have unique experiences that separate

them from civilians. The courts not only give misguided veterans a second chance, but hope. “My message to veterans is, Don’t give up,” said Quinonez, a MOAA member. “There’s options out there. Returning everyone back to be a member of their family is one of the best things we can do.”

By allowing the Justice Department to establish a program that would advise and help fund state veterans courts, the law would help standardize a veteran’s legal experience nationwide, Quinonez said. This would be a step toward the alliance’s goal to ensure each veterans court expunges criminal charges so that veterans can get a fresh start; not all veterans courts do so. “This will give them a real way to get back to normality,” he said. “This is why we insist the expungement of the record be part of the treatment. It’ll be much easier for someone to reintegrate into society if they don’t have an albatross hanging around their neck.” [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Amanda Dolasinski | June 14, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **GI Bill Update 285** ► **H.R.3369 | Defending all Veterans in Education Act (DAVIE)**

On the 75th anniversary of the GI Bill, freshman U.S. Rep. Donna Shalala (D-FL) is taking aim at for-profit colleges, introducing a bill 19 JUN that would close a loophole she says props up substandard schools that view veterans as "cash cows." Shalala's proposed "Defending all Veterans in Education Act," or DAVIE, would change what is known as the 90/10 rule, which allows for-profit colleges to receive federal student aid if they generate at least 10% of their revenue from sources other than federal dollars. The bill would change the requirement to an 80/20 ratio. It also would make schools count GI Bill benefits as federal dollars. Currently, GI Bill payments are not counted as federal monies in the calculations, allowing for-profit schools to include them as contributing to the 10% requirement.

Shalala, a former University of Miami president, said the loophole allows schools to earn nearly all of their revenue from the federal government. "We need to ensure veterans and GI Bill recipients do not fall victim to the predatory recruitment tactics of low-quality institutions that see them as little more than the profits they provide," she said in a statement. "My bill protects our veterans from these dishonest schemes." In the past decade, a number of high-profile, for-profit universities have shuttered their doors unexpectedly, leaving thousands of students, including many veterans, without degrees, in debt or robbed of their GI Bill benefits. Among the most high-profile closures were Corinthian Colleges and ITT, whose closures in 2015 and 2016 under stricter rules and investigations by the Obama administration left nearly 7,000 veterans in the lurch. More recently, the shuttering of the Art Institutes and Argosy University affected roughly 1,700 GI Bill recipients, according to Shalala.

While Congress passed legislation in 2017 to restore benefits to many affected veterans, some schools continue to actively recruit military and veterans students for their reliable income streams, Shalala argues. "Current federal laws permit bad actors in the for-profit education industry to take advantage of our veterans. ... It is unacceptable and un-American that some for-profit institutions continue to use our veterans' hard-earned benefits to line their own pockets," she said. For-profit universities cater to non-traditional students, the working class or those below the poverty line who need the flexibility provided by many of these institutions, including convenient class times and online courses, as well as professors who work in their respective fields and only teach, not conducting research.

In the past several years, a number of for-profit schools have sought to become nonprofits or have merged with a nonprofit, such as Purdue University's acquisition of Kaplan University to extend the reach of Purdue online and to non-traditional students. The conversions and mergers can be seen as a way to maintain a system of nontraditional schools to serve students who need them. But increasingly, the strong economy and competition from not-for-profit schools such as Southern New Hampshire University and University of Maryland University College have forced for-profits to adapt.

Michael Dakduk, a former Marine who co-chairs Veterans for Career Education, a group that promotes veterans education benefits for training and education outside traditional college learning, said Shalala's proposal would limit veterans access to higher education. "The real travesty is how the credentials being earned by veterans at career schools

are being labeled worthless as proposals on the 90/10 rule continue to be debated. Fortunately, veterans at career schools are fighting back by telling politicians to respect their choice of school and program of study," Dakduk said in a statement to Military.com.

In announcing her bill, Shalala cited the case of Eric Luongo, a Navy veteran who testified in March that he was left with more than \$100,000 in debt and an associate's degree from DeVry University in web graphic design that did not help him get a job. Luongo said he told a DeVry representative before he enrolled that he wanted to use his GI Bill benefits and grants to pay for school and was assured he could. But during the application process, the school made him complete massive amounts of paperwork, some of which he understood to be loan applications in case they were needed but would never be used. He began receiving bills from loan companies shortly after graduation. "I never thought that I would be the subject of such predatory acts like those I experienced with DeVry. It just kind of shows that this really can happen to anybody," he told members of the House Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services and Education subcommittee March 12.

Shalala's bill would ensure that if a school violated the proposed 80/20 metric, it would be cut off from federal funds immediately and given a year to bring itself back into compliance. It would also tweak what schools can count as revenue toward the percent of non-federal funds. A number of veterans organizations, including the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), the American Legion, the Association of the United States Navy and the Military Child Education Coalition, have come out in support of the bill. Retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Dana Atkins, president and CEO of MOAA, said closing the 90/10 loophole is one of his organization's top legislative priorities. "When the rule was enacted, the exclusion of the Defense Department and [Department of Veterans Affairs] education benefits from the definition of federal funds created a financial loophole that predatory institutions use to take advantage of military-connected students," Atkins said. "This has gone on too long." [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | 19 Jun 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Airport Security Update 06 ► S.1881 | Veterans Expedited TSA Screening Safe Travel Act**

Disabled veterans may soon be able to bypass long airport security lines if a bill introduced in the Senate today becomes law. The bipartisan legislation would grant TSA PreCheck privileges to veterans who are blind or paralyzed, as well as veteran amputees. The service allows members to enter an expedited airport security line and pass through without removing shoes, laptops, liquids, belts and light jackets. It typically costs \$85, but qualifying veterans would get it for free — a benefit already extended to active-duty service members and those in the National Guard and Reserves.

“Millions of veterans have sacrificed a great deal in service to our nation and returned home with service-connected disabilities,” Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) said in a news release. “For those of us who rely on prosthetics and wheelchairs for mobility, air travel and passing through airport security can be a challenge.” Duckworth, a former Army lieutenant colonel and Iraq veteran, is herself a double amputee. She co-sponsored the Veterans Expedited TSA Screening Safe Travel Act with Sen. Todd Young (R-IN) and said the measure would make the airport experience “a little easier and less intrusive.” According to the Transportation Security Administration website, TSA PreCheck is available at more than 200 airports nationwide, and the vast majority of TSA PreCheck members get through security in five minutes or less.

Under the legislation, the Department of Veterans Affairs would be required to certify that a veteran is eligible for the benefit. Veterans who successfully pass a background check and interview with TSA would



be granted TSA PreCheck at no cost. The legislation is supported by veterans advocacy groups, such as the Wounded Warrior Project, Disabled American Veterans, and the American Legion, but must first gain the approval of the Senate, House of Representatives and President Trump before becoming law. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | June 20, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **PTSI Month/Day ► H. Res. 455 | National Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Month/Day**

Reps. Scott Peters (CA-52) and Brian Mast (FL-18) introduced a bipartisan bill to reduce the stigma that prevents veterans and servicemembers from seeking mental health care. The bill designates June as National Post-Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI) Awareness month and June 27th as National PTSI Awareness Day.

“Battle scars aren’t just physical—that truth is tragically underlined by the twenty American veterans who die by suicide every day. The stigma associated with accessing mental health treatment can discourage some veterans from seeking help at all. That’s why we need a bold statement that veterans can and should seek mental health care services just as they would seek care for a physical injury. I want to thank Rep. Mast for his service—both in Congress and in the Army—and for joining me to help end the stigma of mental health,” said Rep. Peters.

“Rarely does a day go by when I don’t talk to a veteran who is struggling with their own self-worth,” Rep. Mast said. “While the physical wounds may heal, the mental toll of war follows many servicemembers home. Removing the stigma around mental health is critical to making sure our brothers and sisters in arms feel safe seeking help in their fight against post-traumatic stress.” Rep. Peters introduced the bill during the 115th Congress with Rep. Walter Jones (NC-03), who passed away earlier this year. Peters previously served on the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committees. [Source: Rep. Scott Peters Press Release | June 20, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military Sexual Misconduct Update 02 ► H.R.2388 | Harmony’s Law**

U.S. Representatives Brian Mast (FL-18), along with Haley Stevens (MI-11) and Bill Posey (FL-8), introduced legislation named **Harmony’s Law**, which will help prevent hundreds of rapists—who were convicted and found guilty of rape in the military—from being freed from jail on a misconstrued technicality. The bill is named after Harmony Allen, of Port St. Lucie, Fla., who was raped during her third month in the Air Force by her instructor. Despite being found guilty and sentenced to jail time, he was subsequently freed due to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces misinterpreting the Congressionally-mandated statute of limitations.

Although Congress has made its intent clear in the National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAA) of Fiscal Years 1987 and 2006 that these heinous offenses will have no statute of limitations in the military, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces ruled in *U.S. v. Mangahas* that the statute of limitations for sexual assaults that occurred before 2006 is five years. In doing so, the Court incorrectly overruled the military’s standard in place from 1986 to 2006 that rape could “be tried and punished at any time without limitation” and misinterpreted the Congressional intent of the 2006 NDAA by failing to apply it to cases that occurred prior to 2006.

As a result, starting last year, convicted sexual offenders in the military are now able to appeal their convictions and be set free if they committed the offense before 2006 but were not charged within five years. Two convictions have already been overturned, including Harmony Allen’s case, and there are dozens more in the appellate queue. There may well be hundreds of convicted rapists released early from their sentence and acquitted of their crimes by the time the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces has an opportunity to rule on every Mangahas appeal. “Harmony’s rapist was set free because of an absurd appeals court ruling that directly contradicts Congress’ intent to hold military

members who commit rape accountable,” Rep. Mast said. “This is a massive miscarriage of justice for Harmony and many others, which is why Congress needs to intervene to prevent possibly hundreds of rapists from being set free without repercussion.”

Harmony’s Law will help hold these convicted criminals accountable and make sure justice is served for victims by:

- Authorizing the House Office of General Counsel to represent the interests of Congress in any cases related to the Mangahas decision
- Expressing the intent of Congress that the passage of time should not bar the prosecution of rape or sexual assault under the Uniformed Code of Military Justice
- Eliminating statutes of limitations for sexual offenses in the military against children

“I am glad to join Congressman Mast to co-sponsor this bipartisan legislation because survivors of sexual assault deserve justice,” Rep. Stevens said. “I am appalled that through a legal technicality, victims who were assaulted while serving our country may see their attacker walk free. Congress must clarify this misinterpretation of the statute of limitations for sexual assault in the military, and Harmony’s Law will ensure that those found guilty are held fully accountable for their heinous actions.” “This important legislation will increase accountability and help better ensure that there is justice for victims of sexual assault in the military,” Rep. Posey said. “I was happy to partner with Reps. Mast and Stevens on this bill, and I commend all of my colleagues who have joined us in supporting this critical issue.” [Source: Brian Mast Press Release | April 30, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military Sexual Trauma Update 06 ► H.R.1092 | Servicemember/Vet Empowerment Support Act of 2019**

The Department of Veterans Affairs is opposing a new bill that would expand access to disability benefits for survivors of military sexual trauma. Department officials characterized the legislation at a congressional hearing 20 JUN as too broad, saying it would require the VA to approve claims based on a veteran’s word alone without any corroborating evidence. But after a recent inspector general report found the VA may have wrongly refused benefits to thousands of military sexual assault victims in recent years, supporters of the **Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act of 2019** say changes are necessary to keep the department from retraumatizing victims who deserve to be compensated for what they went through — even if there’s no paper trail.

“It is just unthinkable that in this day, we ask people to serve in the military, they have these horrendous experiences ... but then people present themselves for claims — and many of them going back an incredibly long period of time — and then hit these brick walls,” said Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-ME) who introduced the legislation. Among other things, the bill would lessen the burden of proof for military sexual assault survivors applying for disability benefits, requiring the VA to resolve every reasonable doubt in favor of the veteran, as is already standard VA practice for claims of combat-related PTSD. It would also put into law that veterans can submit evidence outside of their official Department of Defense records, including police records, statements from family members and evidence of change in behavior following the traumatic event.

Thousands of veterans could be affected by these changes. Approximately 6 percent of female service members and 0.7 percent of male service members were victims of sexual assault in 2018, according to a Defense Department report released last month. The DoD estimates more than 20,000 service members had experienced some kind of assault last year, up from around 15,000 in 2016. The VA receives an average of 18,000 claims related to military sexual trauma a year, and officials estimate this could jump to 30,000 or more by opening up service-connected disability benefits to mental health disorders other than PTSD.

Beth Murphy, executive director of compensation service at the VA, said the department has already expanded the type of evidence it considers as proof of military sexual trauma-related disorders, but to compare combat and military sexual trauma is going too far. “The concern for liberalizing almost to a combat level is that the tenants of combat are such that it’s not documenting and record keeping that is going on at that time. It’s a serious situation with people ducking and people trying just to execute the mission,” she said — to which Pingree responded that it’s often the same for victims of sexual abuse. “Our concern is mainly that we would defaulting to the fact that this happened without an appropriate level of corroboration that we have in the current way we process claims,” Murphy said.

Expert witnesses at the hearing testified that it’s unusual for people to make up accusations of sexual assault. “I don’t think this is an experience people want to share readily, let alone make up,” said Elizabeth Tarloski, an adjunct professor at William and Mary Law School who works in the school’s veterans’ benefits clinic. “I am concerned that differing standards kind of puts our PTSD survivors who are veterans in two different categories. We should believe those who are in combat who can’t document what happened, but we need additional evidence from those who suffer from (military sexual trauma), and to me that’s troubling.”

Less controversial sections of the bill would expand the types of mental health conditions eligible for service-connected disability benefits beyond PTSD, including depression and anxiety, if military sexual trauma is found to be the originating cause — a provision the VA supports — and allow victims of online harassment, stalking or other forms of “technological abuse” to receive VA counseling and treatment for military sexual trauma. VA officials said they are taking steps to fix past mistakes, which led to the VA Inspector General’s report that the department mishandled at least 1,300 cases during a six-month stretch in 2017 due to procedural and paperwork mistakes. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | June 22, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## MOH Awards Update 11 ► H.R. 3467 | Remove the Stain Act

On a day the first Medal of Honor was bestowed on a living Iraq War recipient, lawmakers and members of the Sioux nation announced their plan to take away those awarded for what became known as The Wounded Knee Massacre. The **Remove the Stain Act** was introduced 25 JUN by Reps. Denny Heck (D-WA), Deb Haaland (D-NM), and Paul Cook (R-CA). It was named for the U.S. military’s massacre of more than 200 Lakota Indians, confined to a camp near Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota, on Dec. 29, 1890. Eventually, 20 men were awarded the military’s highest honor for that engagement and the bill seeks to address what proponents call an historic wrong.

“I believe the introduction of this bill today shows the continued work and strength of the Native American people who have fought for over a century for the United States to acknowledge the genocide of our people that has taken place on this soil,” Haaland said. “We are here today because we revere the Congressional Medal of Honor,” Heck said. Proponents say that although the United States is 129 years late, they believe that this bill can help heal some of the wounds from the massacre and honor all the other Medal of Honor recipients who earned their honors in combat, not genocide.



Rep. Cook knows something about combat. A retired Marine colonel, he was awarded a Bronze Star Medal with "V" device and two Purple Hearts. "I join in this because we are remembering the past and correcting something that was tragic in all ways," Cook said. "And to make it even more so was awarding those particular medals for such a horrible, horrible event." Rep. Heck acknowledged that he and other supporters are in for a fight. "One of the burdens that I think especially that Congressman Cook and I hear is helping some of our non-Native American colleagues understand the depth of pain that this causes," Heck said.

After the politicians made their opening remarks, Native Americans shared photos and accounts of what happened to their ancestors, many of whom were direct descendants of those killed at Wounded Knee. Some, like Marcella LeBeau, are veterans. LeBeau served in WWII, as a first lieutenant in the Army Nurse Corps. She earned The French Legion of Honor. She said she has been fighting for justice for her people most of her life. "They took the lives of innocent women and children and (Lakota Sioux Chief) Big Foot as he laid there suffering from pneumonia, unable to help himself," LeBeau said. "So we are here today to ask that you remove those Medals of Honor."

LeBeau also talked being bombarded during WWII and what it was like inside her hospital's trauma room. She also shared some experiences of her ancestors and talked about the need for healing. She finished with a prayer she said on Omaha beach during D-Day's 60th anniversary. "I had the opportunity to serve as a nurse in WWII. It was one of the greatest honors and privileges in my life," LeBeau said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Brian Mackley | June 25, 2019 ++]

**\* Military \***



**USS Minneapolis-St. Paul (LCS-21) ► Launched 15 June**

A shipyard on the border between Wisconsin and Michigan was for one day crowded with Minnesotans who showed up 15 JUN to watch the launch of the U.S. Navy's newest combat ship, named in honor of the Twin Cities. The littoral combat ship Minneapolis-St. Paul was dropped sideways into the water at the Fincantieri Marinette Marine shipyard in Marinette, Wisconsin, about 55 miles north of Green Bay. The ship is designed to be fast and agile in order to conduct missions close to shore. The ship's sponsor, Northfield, Minnesota native and Deputy Under Secretary of the Navy Jodi J. Greene, christened the ship by smashing a bottle of champagne against its bow, the EagleHerald reported.



Greene said her role as sponsor has allowed her to reconnect with her Minnesota roots in the last few years. "Being the Navy sponsor of the future USS Minneapolis-St. Paul is the honor of a lifetime," she said. U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum, the keynote speaker, praised those who built the ship and those who will serve aboard it. "You are the backbone of America's industrial base," she said, directing her comments to shipyard workers. "You make our economy strong and that's very important for making sure that we have a nation that is secure for future generations." The ship is the latest in a line of near-shore Navy vessels constructed by Fincantieri Marinette Marine and Lockheed Martin. [Source: NavyTimes | Mark D. Faram | May 30, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Feres Doctrine Update 17 ► Defense Bill Amendment Would Allow Medical Claims**

A senator has taken up the cause to negate a controversial court ruling that bars service members from suing the federal government in cases of medical malpractice by military doctors. Sen. John Kennedy (R-LA) has introduced an amendment to the Senate's proposed defense policy bill that would allow military personnel to file claims for injury or death caused by improper medical or dental care or during research studies at a military medical facility. Troops are prevented from suing the federal government for injuries deemed incidental to military service, including medical malpractice, under a 1950 court ruling, *Feres v. United States*. In that case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that service members fall under an exception to the Federal Tort Claims Act -- the law that allows citizens to sue the government.

Kennedy's amendment mirrors similar legislation introduced in April in the House, which seeks to exempt medical negligence or wrongful acts by military physicians from the ruling, commonly referred to as the Feres doctrine. Under the proposed amendment, troops and their families would be allowed to sue, except in cases of care rendered at battalion aid stations, in combat or at a field facility in a combat zone. The Senate plans to debate the defense bill this week; whether any amendments will be considered and included in the final draft has not been announced. In past years, fewer than a handful of amendments have received a roll call vote.

In the House, Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) has sponsored the Sgt. First Class Richard Stayskal Military Medical Accountability Act, named for an Army Green Beret and former Marine who has terminal lung cancer and whose military doctors failed to follow up on a suspicious mass found during a pre-training medical screening. Speier said the legislation, which has been forwarded to the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties, is needed because the Feres ruling has "deprived troops of their legal rights."

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 said the ruling was needed to ensure that Congress was not "burdened with private bills on behalf of military and naval personnel." Critics have argued, however, that the compensation package provided to troops or their families following a major medical error in a U.S. military medical facility is not sufficient to care for severely injured or ill personnel or their families in cases of death.

Speier's proposed legislation was the first introduced in nearly a decade challenging Feres in medical malpractice cases. Rep. Maurice Hinchey, a New York Democrat who passed away in 2017 after serving in Congress for 20 years, introduced the Carmelo Rodriguez Military Medical Accountability Act in 2010. The bill was named for a Marine sergeant who died at age 29 in 2007 from melanoma. His military doctors found an unusual growth and labeled it in Rodriguez's records as a melanoma, but never told him and didn't treat it.

Last month, the U.S. Supreme Court decided against hearing a case that challenged the legitimacy of the Feres ruling. In similar cases during the past several decades, the justices have said that Congress needed to change the law if it wanted troops to have the right to sue. As with the House bill, Kennedy's amendment would apply to claims



pending on the date the bill becomes law and any claims arising after the bill is signed. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | 18 Jun 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Madigan AMC ► \$12M Awarded in B.J.P. Medical Malpractice Claim Case**

The 13-month-old son of a young Army soldier spent 22 days in an intensive care and burn unit in 2015 after a botched surgery ignited a fireball that left second- and third-degree burns across the boy's face and neck. The boy, now 5 years old and identified only as B.J.P., was undergoing surgery to remove a benign cyst from near his left eye at Madigan Army Medical Center, on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, according to court documents obtained by Army Times.



Four years after the surgery, U.S. District Court Judge Ronald Leighton hit the government with a \$12.3 million verdict, local media first reported. The court concluded that Madigan Army Medical Center personnel “failed to exercise the degree of care, skill, and learning expected of a reasonably prudent health care provider.” The legal team was satisfied with the judgment, Gemma Zanowski — an attorney at Evergreen Personal Injury Counsel who helped to represent the family of B.J.P. — told Army Times. “We think it’s a fair judgment that accounts for the extent of this little boy’s harm and losses and will give him support and opportunity going forward in his future and make sure his needs are taken care of,” Zanowski said.

During the surgery, Army pediatric surgeon Dr. John Horton and Army anesthesiologist Dr. Phillip Cuenca failed to communicate with each other about the oxygen levels being administered as well as the use of an electrocautery device, rather than a scalpel, to remove the cyst tissue, court documents stated. After activating the device, the enriched oxygen environment was ignited, causing a surgical fire. The surgical team should have allowed the excess oxygen to dissipate prior to using the electrocautery device, and should have better communicated with one another, according to the court findings. The judge wrote that “the surgical fire was preventable.”

“The treatment providers doused saline on B.J.P.’s face,” the documents read. “The surgical mask, which had fallen to the floor in flames, was extinguished with water.” B.J.P. was airlifted to Harborview Medical Center in Seattle for further treatment of the injuries. Since the incident, B.J.P. has been in and out of hospitals for various surgeries and other treatments related to the fire, and is expected to have additional surgeries and medical care throughout his life, the family’s attorneys argued. After his wounds fully closed and his condition stabilized, the boy underwent four surgical procedures in a two-year period.

The boy’s family filed claims against the U.S. government under the Federal Tort Claims Act, and the government admitted fault. “The United States deeply regrets that it negligently caused the September 2, 2015, operating room fire that resulted in B.J.P.’s physical injuries and sincerely apologizes for the pain and suffering that resulted from this very unfortunate incident,” U.S. attorney Whitney Passmore wrote in a 30 MAY brief. The government does have the opportunity to appeal the judge’s decision, but there is no indication that will occur. “My hope would be that they pay this and let the family move forward,” Zanowski said. The public affairs office at Madigan Army Medical Center said the hospital had no comment. Officials would not provide details on the status of the pediatric surgeon and



anesthesiologist who were found to have made the mistakes that caused B.J.P.'s burns. Army Times attempted to reach them for comment.

While the government admitted fault, and agreed that B.J.P.'s life care plan should be fully funded, it disputed some of the non-economic damages the family's attorneys brought forward. Non-economic damages included pain, suffering, mental anguish, loss of capacity to enjoy life, disability, disfigurement, inconvenience, humiliation and other non-tangible harms that are difficult to quantify. "Injuries of this magnitude always have a ripple effect and B.J.P.'s damages have deeply affected both his parents and changed their relationship with their son — not the amount of love they have for B.J.P. — but how they perceive his place in the world, how they think about their interactions with their son, what they see when they look at him," Zanowski wrote in her May 30 trial brief.

The parents of B.J.P. are now divorced, with the father still serving the remainder of his Army contract at Joint Base Lewis-McChord and the mother living on the East Coast. The government argued in its trial brief that the divorce was not related to the injuries their child suffered. [Source: ArmyTimes | Kyle Rempfer | June 21, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Warships That Will Change The Future ► HSV-2 Swift



The HSV-2 Swift is a high speed warship which is primarily used to rapidly ferry troops and goods from one location to another around the world. And with its double, catamaran style hull, the boat can really move. The Swift was recently leased out to the United Arab Emirates for use for their war in Yemen. It was actually almost sunk by Houthi militants who had gotten ahold of an anti-ship missile, but was able to be towed to Eritrea.

HSV-2 Swift was originally built under the JHSV program as a proof of concept. As part of this program, she was directly leased for evaluation from her builders by the United States Navy Military Sealift Command from 2003 to 2013, primarily as a mine countermeasures and sea basing test platform. Later during her official naval career she was mostly used for fleet support and humanitarian partnership missions.

The ship is a wave-piercing, aluminum-hulled, commercial hybrid catamaran with military enhancements, such as a helicopter flight deck, vehicle deck, small boat and unmanned vehicle launch and recovery capability, and a communications suite. She features a new, modular design, which will allow her to be refitted to support missions without requiring long shipyard periods. While from the front the vessel looks like a trimaran, the center hull does not rest in the water and is not used for buoyancy. As a logistics vessel, the ship does not have water-tight compartments or weapons systems. Propulsion is provided by directional water jets, so the ship does not have propellers or a rudder for steering, and can maneuver in 3.7 m (12 ft) of water.

The HSV stands for "High Speed Vessel", and her home port while chartered as a MSC vessel was Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek in Norfolk, Virginia. The vessel had two CONMAR crews that typically rotated every three months to keep the ship deployed eleven months per year. The minimum crew size is 35; during her time with the MSC 18 were military with the balance civilian, provided through American Maritime Officers and Seafarers International Union of the United States Merchant Marine. On rare occasion that she was in a United States port, it was usually Naval Station Mayport, Florida, supporting the Fourth Fleet or Charleston, South Carolina, for major maintenance. Rota, Spain, was considered by the crew to be the "Mediterranean home away from home."

#### **General characteristics**

Displacement: 1,668 long tons (1,695 t) full 940 long tons (955 t) standard  
Length: 321.5 ft (98.0 m)  
Beam: 88.6 ft (27.0 m)  
Draft: 11.15 ft (3.40 m)  
Propulsion: Caterpillar 3618 marine diesel engines  
Speed: 45 knots (52 mph) maximum, 30 knots (35 mph) operating  
Range: 3,500 nmi (4,000 mi)  
Capacity: Approximately 605 long tons (615 t) Approximately 28,740 sq ft cargo deck  
Complement: 17 Contract Mariners; berthing for 107 w/additional temporary berthing for 87 when seating is converted  
Crew: 35  
Armament: 4 × .50 caliber M2 Browning machine gun mounts

[Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HSV-2\\_Swift](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HSV-2_Swift) | June 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **GI Bill Update 256 ► Cap On Benefit Transfer Option to Dependents Effective 12 JUN**

Starting later next month, some mid-career and senior servicemembers will be unable to transfer their Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits to family members. New rules the Pentagon put in place last summer take effect 12 JUL, limiting the option to transfer the benefit only to troops who have served at least six years, but not more than 16, and who commit to serve an additional four years. The date next month also marks the end of a policy exception the Pentagon announced in January to allow troops with at least 10 years of service, but who were ineligible to reenlist for an additional four, to transfer their benefits. That exception applied to servicemembers affected by mandatory retirement, a career-ending medical problem or failure to gain timely promotion.

Under previous rules, such troops could still transfer the benefit if they committed to serve for the maximum amount allowed by service policy or statute, even if it was less than four years. The new rules were meant to do away with that provision immediately last July, until the retroactive extension was announced earlier this year. Servicemembers wounded in combat who have received Purple Heart medals are exempted from the rule changes. In most cases, the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits cover the cost of in-state public university tuition, plus a monthly housing stipend that can pay for a four-year degree or other educational programs for eligible troops, veterans and family members. Many private schools also offer grants to pay the difference between the cost of public and private school tuition.

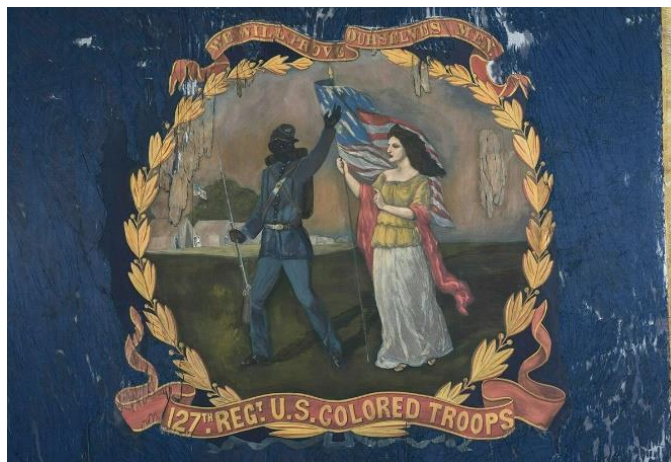
There had not previously been a restriction on when servicemembers could transfer education benefits to their family members, once they had served six years. When veterans' advocates criticized the new cap at 16 years, military officials said the transfers were intended as a retention tool and not a benefit to careerists. Earlier this month, during debate of the annual defense authorization bill, the House Armed Services Committee unanimously approved a provision that would allow continued eligibility for senior servicemembers to transfer the benefits to their family

members. The measure must still gain the backing of the full House and Senate before it becomes law. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Scott Wyland | June 24, 2019++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military Memorabilia** ▶ “We Will Prove Ourselves Men” Civil War Flag

“We Will Prove Ourselves Men,” reads the inscription at the top of the regimental flag carried into battle by members of the 127th United States Colored Troops. The phrase offers a sense of what was at stake for black men, many of whom formerly in bondage, who fought to end slavery during the Civil War. Six feet wide and more than four feet tall, the silk flag was painted by an African American artist in Philadelphia. It is now in the collection of the Atlanta History Center, and represents the most expensive artifact the center has acquired. It shows a black soldier carrying a rifle and bidding goodbye to a white figure dressed as “Columbia,” representing the U.S.



**This undated photo shows a detail of the 127th Regiment United States Colored Troops battle flag in Denver, Pa. The flag, carried into battle by one of the 11 black Union regiments during the Civil War, was sold at auction to Atlanta History Center on June 13, 2019.**

The center bid on the flag at an auction this month. According to the history center, at least 180,000 African Americans served in the United States Colored Troops, a branch of the U.S. Army formed after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. The units were segregated and commanded by white officers. Estimates are that three-fourths of the soldiers were formerly enslaved men.

The history center has 11,000 items in its Civil War collection, which is one of the largest in the nation, and includes the Beverly M. DuBose Family Collection and the George W. Wray Collection. Items from those collections are displayed in the 9,200-square-foot exhibit "Turning Point: The American Civil War." In February the center opened an exhibit centered around the enormous "Battle of Atlanta" cyclorama painting. But items specifically associated with the U.S. Colored Troops are very rare, and the center owns only a dozen. This is partly because black soldiers were issued the same uniforms and equipment as white soldiers. "So unless a soldier put his name on a piece of gear or it came down through the family, we will never know who used it," said Gordon Jones, military historian and curator at the history center.

An exception: Battle flags of USCT regiments. There are perhaps 25 such flags in existence. Jones said he had been on the lookout for such a flag to come to auction. This is the only surviving example of 11 similar flags painted by David Bustill Bowser, a Philadelphia sign-painter, portraitist and anti-slavery activist. The flag had previously been displayed at the Grand Army of the Republic Civil War Museum and Library in Philadelphia. Silk is a particularly fragile material, said Jones, and much of the flag had deteriorated. He said fragments of the original painting had been reassembled, "like pieces of a puzzle," during extensive restoration of the artifact.

The auction took place in Denver, Pennsylvania, 60 miles west of Philadelphia. A small group of bidders physically attended the auction, while many others, including Jones, participated online. The auction price was \$160,000, plus a \$36,800 buyer's premium. It's the highest price paid for an artifact by the history center, which has received most of its objects through donations. The 127th served during the U.S. siege of Petersburg, Virginia, and was present during the surrender at Appomattox Courthouse. Later the regiment participated in occupation duty in Texas. "This flag is worth it in exhibit value alone," said Atlanta History Center president and CEO Sheffield Hale, in a statement. "It's one of those things that doesn't need words to tell you what it is and what it represents." Jones said "Very few artifacts have that kind of emotional punch." [Source: The Atlanta Journal-Constitution | Bo Emerson, | June 23, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **USS Cherokee Nation ► Next Rescue Ship Contract Awarded**

One of the U.S. Navy's newest towing, rescue and salvage ships is being named the "Cherokee Nation" to honor the service and contributions the Cherokee people have made to the Navy and Marine Corps. Secretary of the Navy Richard Spencer announced 21 JUN that Gulf Island Shipyards has been awarded a \$64.8 million contract to build the vessel, scheduled for completion by 2021. The Navy says the contract includes an option for six additional vessels, each to be named in honor of a prominent Native American or tribe. Navy officials say it's the fifth U.S. ship to be named in honor of the Cherokee people and the first since a World War II-era tugboat launched in 1939 dubbed the Cherokee (AT-66). Cherokee Nation is the second vessel in its class (T-ATS 7). Workers will build the vessel in Houma, Louisiana.



**An artist rendering (left) of the future towing, salvage, and rescue ship Cherokee Nation being built to replace the Powhatan-class fleet ocean tugs (T-ATF 166) on the right**

In his prepared remarks, Navy Secretary Spencer lauded the many Cherokee Nation citizens who've served in uniform and predicted that the new vessel "will expand our capabilities and form a critical backbone for the strength and readiness of the entire fleet." Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Bill John Baker praised the Navy for recognizing the generations of Cherokee men and women who "bravely and humbly sacrificed for our freedom today." "Our Cherokee people have contributed in every major battle and war ever fought in this country, and continue to serve in the armed forces in some of the highest rates per ethnicity. Cherokees are a strong, resilient people and we are privileged to have a U.S. ship at sea that reflects both our country and tribe's history and values."

In 1966, South Carolina Cherokee Boatswain's Mate 1st Class James E. Williams killed an unknown number of Viet Cong guerrillas while destroying 65 vessels and disrupting their logistic operation in South Vietnam's Mekong Delta. Williams was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the three-hour battle. [Source: The Associated Press & U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command | June 22, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang ► ‘CAG’ thru ‘CAVU’

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

**CAG** - Carrier Air Group. Can also refer to the Carrier Air Group commander. Sometimes seen as CAW for Carrier or Commander Air Wing.

**Cake and Arse** – (RNZN) Derogatory term for an officers’ cocktail party.

**Cake Hole** – Mouth. Also seen as "snack hole."

**Call For Fire** – A request for gunfire support.

**Call the Ball** - A radio transmission to a pilot requesting that he report when he has sighted the BALL during approach to the carrier, or the action of reporting same. Typically consists of SIDE NUMBER, aircraft type (to ensure proper ARRESTING GEAR settings), and amount of fuel onboard in thousands of pounds, e.g. '205 Tomcat ball, 3.5'.

**Calve** – The process whereby icebergs form, as chunks of ice fall from a glacier into the sea.

Camel Station - Rendezvous point for ships in the Indian Ocean.

**CAMS** - Central Atmosphere Monitoring System. A mass spectrometer that samples the atmosphere on submarines.

**Can** – (1) Short for TINCAN. (2) In radio parlance, cans are a set of headphones.

**Candy Ass** – Someone who doesn’t do his (or her) share of the work. Similar to the older "Feather Merchant."

**Cannon Cocker** - Gunnery specialist.

**CAP** - Combat Air Patrol. Usually defensive in nature. There are several types: TARCAP (TARget CAP), BARCAP (BARrier CAP), RESCAP (REScue CAP, i.e. for SAR operations).

**Captain's Mast** - Non-judicial disciplinary procedure, usually meted out by unit commanders.

**Captain of the...** - Person in charge of a particular part of the ship, e.g. Captain of the Focs'le. Derogatory, ‘Captain of the Head.’

**Captain's Table** - (RN) A disciplinary hearing. See CAPTAIN'S MAST.

**Careen** – To lay a ship on its side in shallow water or on the beach, generally to work on the hull.

**Carrier Landings** – A game involving a long flat table and, generally, a lot of beer. Participants run toward the table and dive onto it face-first. The goal is to arrive safely and not slide off the end. Refinements such as the need to engage "arresting gear" with one’s toes, "crash and smash" teams using pitchers of beer to extinguish post-crash fires, etc., are common.

**CAS** – Close Air Support. Moving mud to help out the grunts.

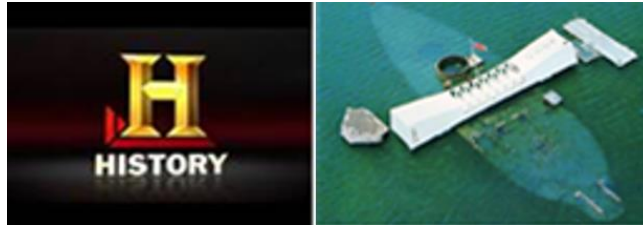
**Cat** – (1) Catapult. (2) Short for cat o’nine tails, a form of whip used to administer a flogging. Generally made up of three short lines, each with three knotted ends, spliced to a short rope or wooden handle.



CAVU - Aviation term, short for 'Ceiling And Visibility Unlimited'.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | June 30, 2019 ++]

## \* Military History \*



### **B-17 Tragedy Over Berlin** ► Return Leg Collison | 15 of 20 Crewmembers Lost

John Clark, Robert James, Willard Johnson, Paul Young. These are the names of four men interred in four different national cemeteries. Though they now rest hundreds of miles apart with no relation immediately obvious, they are all connected through a single tragic event. One that occurred exactly 75 years ago today.



Ssgt. Edward Koster & Tech. Sgt. John J. Clark shown 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> left to right in back row

On the morning of June 21, 1944, 20 men boarded two B-17 Flying Fortress bombers in Norfolk, England. Both crews belonged to the 728th Bomb Squadron, 452nd Bomb Group. They arrived at Deopham Green airfield in January and flew mostly strategic bombing missions over Germany. They also supported the D-Day invasions on the coast of Normandy. Tech Sgt. John Clark, a twenty-year-old from Virginia, enlisted in the Army Air Forces after the United States entered World War II. He served as a radio operator on the B-17 numbered 42-102662 (#662). Serving alongside him on the #662 left waist gun was SSgt Robert L. James, from Texas, and eight other men.

While the crew of the #662 prepared for departure, so did the crew of the B-17 "Little Colonel." The tail gunner, Sgt. Willard Johnson conducted his pre-mission checks. He was a twenty-eight-year-old auto mechanic from Chicago and a first generation American born to Swedish parents. That morning he boarded the plane alongside a nineteen-year-old bombardier from Kentucky, 2nd Lt. Paul Young, and eight other crew members. Both planes joined a bombing formation and took off over the North Sea headed towards Berlin. Their intended target was an aircraft engine factory. The group reached their target at about 10:30am and both #662 and "Little Colonel" released their bombs. During the mission, "Little Colonel" took some damage from flak but remained operable. The entire group turned and began heading towards the rally point designated a few miles Northwest of Berlin.



About ten minutes later, as the group approached the rally point, #662 and “Little Colonel” collided. #662 made a right turn entering the path of “Little Colonel.” When the two planes made contact, #662’s tail broke off and entered into a tight spiral towards the ground. “Little Colonel,” already damaged by flak, broke apart. A pilot from another bomber in formation observed #662 as it spiraled downwards about 20,000 feet before losing sight of it. He later noted that “it seemed impossible for anyone to bail out.” Meanwhile, a few parachutes deployed from “Little Colonel” after breaking apart.

From the ground, German civilians, military, and police watched as the two planes came down near Rheinsberg. The rural police hurried to secure the crash site of #662 where they found one survivor, Ssgt. Edward Koster. Koster was a twenty-year-old from Rochester and served as the plane’s tail gunner. He was separated from the rest of #662 when the tail broke apart. He was taken prisoner and transported to the town of Neuruppin. No other crew aboard the #662 survived. The remains of seven crewmen were found at or near the wreckage. One was taken to the nearby town of Beerenbusch where he was buried in the community cemetery the next day. The other six members were buried in Kleinzerlang’s municipal cemetery.

The two others from #662 were not discovered until later. German forces suspected that they may have attempted to escape. However, a German civilian discovered the remains of John Clark a few days later in a fir forest. A few weeks later, Robert James was found by a lake. Both were buried in the Beerenbusch cemetery. Of the ten crew members of “Little Colonel,” only four survived. Two of them suffered broken right legs and another had received a cut on his head. They too were captured almost immediately after crashing and were taken to Neuruppin as prisoners joining Koster. The remaining crew of “Little Colonel” were buried in Beerenbusch alongside three of their comrades from #662. In total, the following fifteen of twenty crew members perished that day:

- **#662** - 2nd Lt. Edward B. Armm, 2nd Lt. William H. Stooks, 2nd Lt. Glen E. Swing, Flt O. James E. Dozier, Tech. Sgt. Arthur C. Kaule, Sgt. Joseph J. Ostrander, Ssgt. George A. Thut, Tech. Sgt. John J. Clark, and Ssgt. Robert L. James,
- **“Little Colonel”** - 2Lt. Richard F. Dean, 2nd Lt. Paul S. Young, Tech. Sgt. Frederick W. Thomas, Tech Sgt. Edward J. McGrath, Ssgt. Richard V. Graham, and Sgt. Willard N. Johnson.

The five survivors taken prisoner were: Ssgt. Edward Koster, 2nd Lt. Harold Lerum, 2nd Lt. Melvin Van Gundy Jr., Sgt. George M. Slossman, and Sgt. Kenneth L. Salsbury. After the war ended, efforts were made to recover the American remains buried overseas. The American Graves Registration Command (AGRC) launched an investigation in towns surrounding where #662 and “Little Colonel” went down to identify and locate all fifteen men who died that day. Through cooperation with local civilians, the AGRC were able to accurately locate all but one crew member: John Clark.

In 1945, as Soviet forces pushed into Germany, many Soviet soldiers were also buried in the Beerenbusch cemetery. When the war ended, they too attempted to return the remains of their service members home. Because Beerenbusch lay in Soviet territory after the war, the Soviet military disinterred graves at the cemetery first. According to the German civilians interviewed by AGRC, the identification bracelet and cross placed at John Clark’s grave went missing during the disinterment. Therefore, it was impossible to make a positive identification on his remains.

Today, Tech Sgt. John Clark has a memorial marker in Gerald B.H. Soloman Saratoga National Cemetery. Three other members of the #662 and “Little Colonel” also rest in one of our national cemeteries. Ssgt. Robert L. James is interred in Golden Gate National Cemetery. Sgt. Willard N. Johnson rests in Rock Island National Cemetery. And lastly, 2nd Lt. Paul Sweazy Young is buried in Zachary Taylor National Cemetery. Let us remember them. Join us in honoring them by sharing their stories, ensuring that their memories never fade and that their legacies never die. [Source: Vantage Point | Kenneth Holliday | June 21, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## WWII D-Day Update 01 ► Germany's Desperate Defense of Normandy

On June 6, 1944, the Allies invaded Normandy. For the German troops defending this region of occupied France, it was the beginning of a desperate fight as they tried to halt the Allied invasion of Western Europe. The quality of the German troops varied but was generally quite high. Some were SS men, highly politicized troops dedicated to the Nazi cause, brash and confident in the certainty of victory. Some were seasoned veterans who had fought across Europe, including the bitter fighting on the Eastern Front. Some were new soldiers or came from units that had seen little battlefield action.



To many, it must have been clear that this was the last chance for victory. If they could not stop the Allies while they were contained in this small area, then they would never stop them at all. Germany's proud military tradition and its successes early in the war had left many soldiers dismissive of the quality of their opponents. They were about to see how wrong their assessment had been. The first days of fighting took place amid chaos and confusion. Though an invasion was expected, Allied counter-intelligence work had left the Germans expecting it further east, around Calais. Even as the enemy hit the beaches, there was confusion about where attacks were coming and what would follow. The chaos was made worse by the damage done to communication lines. Resistance operatives and Allied bombers had destroyed roads, railways, bridges, and phone lines. It was hard to get messages through and harder still to get troops to where they needed to be.

The Germans had the advantage of fighting on the defensive. This was a particularly powerful advantage in Normandy because of the terrain. Much of Normandy was filled with bocage, a landscape of winding roads between high hedgerows and hills. It provided countless places of concealment. From these, the Germans launched ambushes against the Allied troops as they advanced. Having to advance meant having to take risks, and the Germans made the most of that. They waited for the Allies to come to them, staying in cover for as long as possible, firing at exposed enemies from covered positions.

The Germans had occupied this territory for four years and during the final year, they had been making concerted preparations for its defense. They might struggle to move troops up, but they could use the bunkers, pillboxes, and trenches already in place. Whether it was fighting for the beaches on the first day or defending key positions like the city of Caen, they were ready to stand firm. They often rushed troops to counter in an area. There, they would make use of their skill and experience to hold up the crude offensive tactics of the Allies for as long as possible. The weight of numbers and firepower meant that, sooner or later, they would have to give up, retreat to the next line, and settle in to fight again.

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, commanding the defense, was a great believer in bold action. He tried to throw together a decisive counter-attack but never managed. Fuel shortages, tactical challenges, and enemy action always thwarted him. Rommel was still one of Germany's best commanders, and he put up a fierce fight. When he was injured in an Allied air attack on July 17th and so put out of action, it was a serious blow to his troops.

However hard they fought, the Germans were at a constant disadvantage. The Allies had more men, more resources, and less trouble getting them to where they were needed. Critically, the Allies ruled the skies, allowing them to launch

regular air strikes against German positions which the Germans could not counter. Combined with substantial forces of artillery, this could leave German defenses seriously compromised before an attack even began.

Though they were inflicting serious losses on the attackers, the Germans were suffering their own losses, which they were less able to replace. Every time they fell back from a position they did so with fewer men and less equipment than they had before. Supply shortages and transport problems meant that replacements were slow in coming. The loss of key commanders was particularly challenging. On June 12, 1944, an Allied air attack killed Wehrmacht General Erich Marcks, commander of the 12th SS Panzer division. Five days later, General Heinz Hellmich, the commander of the 243rd Infantry was killed by an Allied air attack. The head of the 77th Infantry Division, Lieutenant General Stegmann, was lost in mid-June with 300 of his men after getting caught up in Allied shelling. In just over a month, the Germans lost 2,360 officers, 94,000 men, and 225 tanks. Only 6,000 men and 17 tanks arrived as replacements.

Four days before he himself was injured, Rommel predicted that the front would collapse within a month. He was right. In late July, the Americans launched Operation Cobra, a breakout on the western flank. Hit hard by Allied air power and armor, the Germans there were unable to hold. Commanded by General Patton, American forces swept south and then east, flanking the remaining Germans. By the middle of August, tens of thousands of German soldiers were trapped in a pocket of ground outside Falaise, about to be surrounded. They kept fighting fiercely, but the end was clearly in sight. Some fled through a gap to the east before it was closed. Thousands more fell captive when the gap was closed, and the defenders were forced to surrender.

In Normandy, German troops fought to keep a country they ruled against its will, to prop up a murderous regime. No moral argument could justify their presence there. But they fought with skill, courage, and tenacity. It was a struggle against the odds that revealed the character of the German soldier. [Source: Together We Served Newsletter | June 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Wham Paymaster Robbery ► \$28,000 Army Payroll has Never Been Recovered.**

An armed robbery on a United States Army paymaster transporting over US\$28,000 in gold and silver coins (about \$790,410 in present-day terms) and his escort. Major Joseph W. Wham was transporting a payroll from Fort Grant, Arizona Territory to Fort Thomas when he and his escort of eleven Buffalo Soldiers were ambushed. During the attack, the bandits wounded eight of the soldiers, forced them to retreat to cover, and stole the payroll. As a result of their actions under fire, Sergeant Benjamin Brown and Corporal Isaiah Mays were awarded the Medal of Honor while eight other soldiers received a Certificate of Merit. Eleven men, most from the nearby Mormon community of Pima, were arrested with eight tried on charges of robbery. At trial, all the accused were found not guilty, and the stolen money has never been recovered. To learn the events that led up to this robbery, how it was conducted, and the subsequent trial of the accused refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Army 1899 Payroll Robbery**”. [Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wham\\_Paymaster\\_robbery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wham_Paymaster_robbery) | May 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Military History Anniversaries ► 01 thru 15 JUL**

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

\*\*\*\*\*

**Post WWII Photos** ► **Hermann Goering's Private Loot**



A U.S. soldier examines a solid gold statue, part of Hermann Goering's private loot, found by the 7th U.S. Army in a mountainside cave near Schonau am Konigssee, Germany, on May 25, 1945. The secret cave, the second found to date, also contained stolen priceless paintings from all over Europe. (AP Photo/Jim Pringle)

\*\*\*\*\*

**Every Picture Tells A Story** ► **Brush with Death**



While we are on the subject of guys named Edwin who had a brush with death in a P-47 Thunderbolt, how about this shot of Lieutenant Edwin "Lucky" Wright of the 404<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group. Lucky Wright's propeller blade was hit by flak in October of 1944 over Münster, Germany, and despite what must have been severe vibration, Wright pressed home his bombing attack, managed a "spot" of strafing and then returned to base at St. Trond, Belgium where he found a nine inch hole in his 11-inch propeller blade. Had the flak struck an inch on either side, the blade would have been severed and the aircraft lost. It was the sixth time that Wright had been struck by flak, hence the name "Lucky". It was his 39<sup>th</sup> mission and his luck continued, eventually surviving 88 missions in his trusty "Jug". Wright was called up again to fight in the Korean War and left the USAF as a major.

\*\*\*\*\*

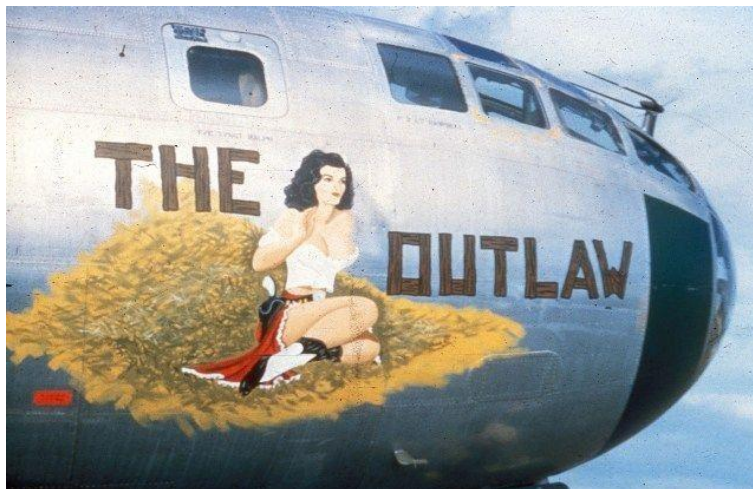
**War Memorials** ▶ **Brazil Monument to the dead of World War II**



Commemorates Brazil's participation and losses in the Second World War

\*\*\*\*\*

**WWII Bomber Nose Art [33 ]** ▶ **The Outlaw**



\*\*\*\*\*

**Medal of Honor Citations** ▶ **Joe J. Hayashi | WWII**





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

**JOE J. HAYASHI**

**Rank and organization:** Private, 442d Regimental Combat Team

**Place and date:** Near Tendola, Italy, 20 & 22 January 1944

**Entered service:** Los Angeles, California May 1941

**Born:** August 14, 1920 Salinas, California

**Citation**

Private Joe Hayashi distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action on 20 and 22 April 1945, near Tendola, Italy. On 20 April 1945, ordered to attack a strongly defended hill that commanded all approaches to the village of Tendola, Private Hayashi skillfully led his men to a point within 75 yards of enemy positions before they were detected and fired upon. After dragging his wounded comrades to safety, he returned alone and exposed himself to small arms fire in order to direct and adjust mortar fire against hostile emplacements. Boldly attacking the hill with the remaining men of his squad, he attained his objective and discovered that the mortars had neutralized three machine guns, killed 27 men, and wounded many others. On 22 April 1945, attacking the village of Tendola, Private Hayashi maneuvered his squad up a steep, terraced hill to within 100 yards of the enemy. Crawling under intense fire to a hostile machine gun position, he threw a grenade, killing one enemy soldier and forcing the other members of the gun crew to surrender. Seeing four enemy machine guns delivering deadly fire upon other elements of his platoon, he threw another grenade, destroying a machine gun nest. He then crawled to the right flank of another machine gun position where he killed four enemy soldiers and forced the others to flee. Attempting to pursue the enemy, he was mortally wounded by a burst of machine pistol fire. The dauntless courage and exemplary leadership of Private Hayashi enabled his company to attain its objective. Private Hayashi's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the United States Army.



Joe Hayashi is the son of immigrants who were born in Japan. He is a Nisei, which means that he is a second generation Japanese-American. Working as a mechanic before the war, he enlisted in the Army in May 1941 and volunteered to be part of the all-Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Team. This army unit was mostly made up of Japanese Americans from Hawaii and the mainland.

For his actions during the battle near Tendola, Italy, he was awarded the Army's second-highest decoration, the Distinguished Service Cross. A 1990s review of service records for Asian Americans who received the Distinguished Service Cross during World War II led to Hayashi's award being upgraded to the Medal of Honor. In a ceremony at the White House on June 21, 2000, his surviving family was presented with his Medal of Honor by President Bill



Clinton. Twenty-one other Asian Americans also received the medal during the ceremony, all but seven of them posthumously.

Hayashi, aged 24 at his death, was buried in Evergreen Cemetery, Los Angeles, California. He was posthumously re-promoted to Sergeant.

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

**\* Health Care \***



## **PTSD Treatment | SGB ► Stellate Ganglion Block Gives Positive Results**

A therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder that some doctors believe will “revolutionize the way PTSD is handled” was the subject of a recent “60 Minutes” report featuring a number of afflicted veterans, including one Medal of Honor recipient. The breakthrough treatment, called stellate ganglion block, or SGB, has been shown to significantly diminish various symptoms of PTSD, such as depression, anxiety, and insomnia. By injecting an anesthetic that numbs a bundle of nerves at the base of the neck, the SGB treatment dulls the area that serves as the body’s “fight or flight” response transmitter, providing instantaneous relief from some of the epidemic’s most chronic symptoms.



**A patient is administered the SGB treatment by doctor and former Navy SEAL Sean Mulvaney**

The shot, which was initially used to treat women experiencing menopausal hot flashes, is meticulously administered using ultrasound imagery to track the injection’s precision. Its results, meanwhile, are almost immediate and can last for months. “I feel like a million pounds was taken off me,” Medal of Honor recipient and Marine veteran Dakota Meyer told “60 Minutes” immediately after being administered one of the shots. “The best analogy I got for you is, like, if you took from being downtown New York City in rush hour traffic to, all of a sudden, driving down a quiet country road with nowhere to be.”

Meyer was in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, in September 2009, when a patrol he was providing security for was ambushed by more than 50 enemy fighters. Realizing the team’s exit had been cut off, Meyer made five trips into the ambush zone over a period of six hours, braving walls of enemy fire each time to save as many pinned down personnel as he could. “He would tell us that he was not able to get the war out of his head,” 60 Minutes correspondent Bill Whitaker said of Meyer’s time since that hellish day. “He brought it home with him. He was tense, he was anxious. He

was quick to anger. He was losing his friends." But after receiving the injection by current doctor and former Navy SEAL Sean Mulvaney, a relieved Meyer felt "normal."

And while SGB is not designed to get rid of memories associated with the trauma veterans have endured, it will significantly calm the way an afflicted individual responds to those thoughts. Thus, improving responsiveness to other forms of therapy, the "60 Minutes" study claimed. Previous studies of small participant groups have backed up such proclamations. In 2014, for example, a study in the "Military Medicine" journal found that just one week after the first SGB injection, nearly 80 percent of study participants experienced significant relief from PTSD symptoms. Two years later, the Army received a \$2 million grant from the Department of Defense to begin a randomized, three-year study to test the effects of the treatment on a group of 240 veterans afflicted by PTSD. That study is set to conclude sometime this year.

Nearly 3 million service members like Meyer have deployed in support of American war operations since 2001. Of those who deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, approximately 14 percent to 20 percent suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Watch the full "60 Minutes" report on SGB at <https://youtu.be/w7aD-QrJkWQ>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | J.D. Simkins | June 18, 2019++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA HIV Care Update 05 ► All Vets Should be Tested at Least Once**

June 27<sup>th</sup> was National HIV testing Day. Earlier this year, the President announced a plan to end HIV by 2030, and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) subsequently released an ambitious plan to do so. This plan aims to:

- Diagnose all people with HIV as early as possible after infection
- Treat them as soon as possible
- Protect people at risk for HIV
- Detect and rapidly halt outbreaks
- Deploy an HIV Health Force to hard-hit areas of the country

As the single largest provider of HIV care in the U.S., VA has a critical role in this effort. VA provides care to nearly 31,000 Veterans with HIV across its health care system and has a well-established National HIV Program. For all Veterans in care, VA will do its part to end HIV in the U.S. by:

- Offering HIV testing at least once to every Veteran and more frequently to those at risk;
- Rapidly linking those with newly diagnosed HIV to effective treatment;
- Expanding timely access to high-quality HIV care and prevention across VA's integrated network, using face-to-face encounters and telehealth;
- Offering PrEP, a medication that can prevent HIV, when clinically appropriate

VA invites you to watch their video address from Dr. Richard Stone, Executive in Charge, VHA at [https://players.brightcove.net/2851863979001/default\\_default/index.html?videoId=6042701424001](https://players.brightcove.net/2851863979001/default_default/index.html?videoId=6042701424001) as he describes VA's efforts towards this goal. This National HIV Testing period is the perfect time to ask your VA provider about HIV testing and HIV prevention. Together, we can work to end HIV in our country. Visit the HIV website <https://www.iheart.com/artist/hank-williams-5059/> for resources. [Source: Vantage Point | June 27, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **TRICARE Nurse Advise Line Update 05 ► Don't Guess! 24/7 Access to a Nurse**

Welcome summer! Hopefully, you and your family members will be spending more time outside being active or even traveling. Whether biking, hiking, or taking a road trip, do you know what to do if you experience a minor, non-

emergency injury or illness this summer? With TRICARE, you have an expert to turn to if you need health care advice. Instead of waiting or worrying, use the Military Health System (MHS) Nurse Advice Line and get advice from a registered nurse anytime. A registered nurse is available 24/7 to:

- Answer your health care questions
- Assess your symptoms and provide recommendations for the most appropriate level of care
- Provide evidence-based instructions to treat minor ailments at home
- Help locate an urgent care or emergency care facility
- Help you schedule an appointment within 24 hours at a military hospital or clinic, when recommended by the nurse, and if enrolled at a military hospital or clinic

To reach a nurse, visit the [Military Health System \(MHS\) Nurse Advice Line](#) to begin a secure web chat or video chat. You can also call and speak to a nurse. If you're in the U.S., Guam, or Puerto Rico, call 1-800-TRICARE (1-800-874-2273) and choose option 1. For all other country-specific phone numbers, visit the [website](#). The MHS Nurse Advice Line is only available to TRICARE beneficiaries living or traveling in the U.S. or a country with an established military hospital or clinic. There's no cost to you. If you're enrolled in the US Family Health Plan; however, there's a different resource for you to use for 24/7 assistance.

Remember, the MHS Nurse Advice Line isn't for [emergencies](#) that threaten life, limb, eyesight, or safety, or that requires immediate medical assistance. If you reasonably think that you have an emergency, call 911 or your local emergency service center immediately. Or, go to the nearest emergency room. The next time you need help making decisions about your or your family's health care needs, don't guess. Contact the MHS Nurse Advice Line for 24/7 support and guidance for any non-emergency situation. [Source: TRICARE Communications | June 27, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Medical Cost Hardship** ► **Survey | Common in the United States**

Researchers have found that about 137 million adults experienced significant difficulty with their medical costs. Their findings are based on National Health Interview survey of 68,828 people aged 18 to 64 years and 24,614 people aged 65 years and older. Medical financial hardships were more common among 18 to 64-year-olds, especially for those without health insurance. Hardships were found to be greater for those with Medicare only than those with private or public insurance in addition to Medicare. People with the least educational attainment tended to report the greatest hardships.

High-deductible health insurance plans fared poorly in the national survey. Especially for adults with employer-sponsored health insurance (ESI). Kaiser Family Foundation/LA Times Survey of Adults with Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance. Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. May 2019 reported:

- Most people with ESI are generally satisfied with their health plans.
- Four in ten report that their family has had either problems paying medical bills or difficulty affording premiums or out-of-pocket costs.
- About half say someone in their household skipped or postponed some type of medical care or prescription drugs in the past year because of the cost.
- Seventeen percent say they've had to make what they feel are difficult sacrifices in order to pay health care or insurance costs.
- The higher the deductible, the more likely people are to view their health plan negatively and experience problems affording or putting off care due to cost.

- Among those in the plans with the highest deductibles (at least \$3,000 for an individual or \$5,000 for a family), more than half say the amount of savings they could easily access in the short term is less than the amount of their deductible.
- Three-quarters of those in the highest deductible plans who say someone in their family has a chronic condition say that a family member in their household has skipped or delayed some type of medical care or prescription drugs for cost reasons in the past year.
- Seven in ten with employer coverage report engaging in some type of cost-conscious health care shopping behavior in the past 12 months.
- Two-thirds say it is difficult to find out how much medical treatments and procedures provided by different doctors and hospitals would cost them.
- Over four in ten say they have had difficulty understanding how much they will have to pay out of their own pocket when they use care.

[Source: Consumer Health Digest #19-24 | June 16, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Diabetes Update 20 ► Study Finds 25% of U.S. Patients Ration Insulin

Two vials of insulin for \$250 — with insurance coverage — seemed kind of steep to Joseph Strank. But he paid it anyway because he needs the medication to manage his Type 1 diabetes, which keeps his body from producing its own insulin. But last year, when the cost increased to \$250 for just one vial, the 60-year-old Philadelphia resident knew he had a problem. “I was limiting my carbs so I wouldn’t have to give myself as much insulin,” said Strank, who typically uses one or two vials a month.



About a quarter of people with Type 1 diabetes ration their insulin because of cost, according to a study published last week by T1International, which advocates for insulin access and affordability. Internationally, 18 percent of people with Type 1 diabetes reported rationing their medication at least once in the past year, exposing themselves to potentially serious complications. “The prices of insulin are astronomical, and even patients with good insurance coverage are getting squeezed.... They’re having to make choices. I see this every day in my practice,” said Mark Schutta, the director of the Penn Rodebaugh Diabetes Center at Penn Medicine and Strank’s doctor.

The T1International report reinforces findings in previous, smaller studies, including a letter by Yale researchers published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in January that reported one in four diabetes patients at an urban health center rationed insulin. T1International used an online survey of 1,478 people in 90 countries, with 44 percent of participants from the United States, to learn more about how people cope with the cost of insulin. In addition to rationing their medication, the survey found that patients commonly ration the testing supplies they use to manage diabetes. About 34 percent of respondents in all countries — 39 percent in the U.S. — said they stretched their testing supplies in the past year. Rationing insulin is dangerous because it puts people with diabetes at higher risk of medical complications, including diabetic ketoacidosis, a severe complication that can lead to a coma or death if untreated, Schutta said. “The thing that worries me is that we know definitively that glycemic control leads to reduced risk for complications,” he said.

Patient outrage and physician concern over high prices have sparked a national debate about the cost of prescription drugs, including insulin. The Trump administration said it wants drug makers to include prices in television ads and the issue is one that has received bipartisan attention in Congress. In the meantime, patients are finding their own ways to cope. An increasingly popular option is to buy medications from international pharmacies, where prices are often much lower. Sometimes, international pharmacies have generic options not available in the U.S. In a 2016 survey of 1,202 adults by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 8 percent of people said they or someone in their household had traveled to another country for medications or used an international online pharmacy.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration does not enforce rules against importing prescription medication among individuals buying small amounts for personal use. Earlier this year, Strank joined the trend. Through a pharmacy in Canada, he's able to get his insulin for \$50 a vial — a price he can afford. [Source: Philadelphia Inquirer | Sarah Gantz | June 25, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **TRICARE Podcast 506 ► ECHO - Reporting Fraud/Abuse – Children Moving to College**

**Extended Care Health Option** -- Do you have a family member with special needs? Do they need health care services beyond those covered by their current TRICARE health plan? The TRICARE Extended Care Health Option, known as ECHO, may be right for them. ECHO provides supplemental health care coverage for active duty family members with a qualifying mental or physical disability. Qualifying conditions for ECHO may include, but are not limited to:

- Autism spectrum disorder
- Moderate or severe intellectual disability
- Serious physical disability
- Physical or psychological condition that causes the beneficiary to be homebound

ECHO provides health care products and services beyond those offered by your TRICARE health plan. When medically necessary, covered products and services include:

- Durable equipment
- Rehabilitation
- Respite care
- Institutional care
- Special education and training
- Transportation in some circumstances

Registration for ECHO isn't retroactive. You must get prior authorization from your regional contractor for all ECHO services. And you must get these services from a TRICARE-authorized provider. Active duty family members seeking ECHO services must have:

- TRICARE Prime,
- TRICARE Select,
- US Family Health Plan,
- TRICARE Overseas Program, Prime, or
- TRICARE Overseas Program Select

Learn more about ECHO in this week's article, "TRICARE Extended Care Health Option Helps Families with Special Needs," at [TRICARE.mil/news](http://TRICARE.mil/news). And if you think your or a family member qualify for ECHO, talk to your regional contractor.

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Reporting Fraud or Abuse** -- Fraud against TRICARE beneficiaries can happen. Protecting your personal information is vital to your privacy, and prevents abuse of taxpayer funds. Be safe; don't share your military ID or other personal or family information with an unknown person.

Fraudsters often target TRICARE beneficiaries, including active duty service members. Examples include fake surveys used to collect personal information or offering gift cards to get your information, then billing TRICARE for services you didn't need or never received. If you think you're the victim of TRICARE-related fraud, you can report it to the Defense Health Agency at [www.health.mil/reportfraud](http://www.health.mil/reportfraud). You can also report cases where you think someone is trying to defraud TRICARE. For example, if your TRICARE explanation of benefits shows a bill for something you didn't get, tell your TRICARE regional contractor.

TRICARE usually doesn't contact you asking for personal information, such as your military ID number or Social Security number. Only provide that information to a trusted entity, like your doctor, a claims processor, or your TRICARE regional contractor. Be wary of an unknown person offering a gift or reward in exchange for providing a health service. They may be trying to get your information to commit fraud. Learn more at [www.health.mil/fraud](http://www.health.mil/fraud).

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Children Moving Away to College** -- Will your child be heading to college this fall? TRICARE coverage of eligible dependents extends to college students. A change of address, such as moving to a new country, city, region, or ZIP+4 code is a TRICARE Qualifying Life Event. If this Qualifying Life Event, or QLE, applies to your student, you have 90 days from the date of the address change to change his or her TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select health plan. A QLE lets you enroll in or change your TRICARE health plan outside of the annual TRICARE Open Season. All family members may be able to switch TRICARE health plans if your child moves away to college. Update the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS, with your child's new address. Maintaining an up-to-date student status in DEERS ensures eligibility for TRICARE.

TRICARE health plan options and payment requirements depend on the location of the college your student attends, your sponsor status, and your family's individual preferences. Children are eligible for TRICARE benefits until age 21. But coverage extends up to age 23 for unmarried children of TRICARE-eligible sponsors, if both:

- The child is a college student enrolled in a full-time course of study at an approved institution of higher learning, and
- The sponsor provides over 50 percent of the child's financial support

Learn more about TRICARE options for college students in the article, "Moving Away to College May Change Your Child's TRICARE Options," at [www.TRICARE.mil/news](http://www.TRICARE.mil/news).

-o-o-O-o-o-

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> | June 13, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **TRICARE Podcast 507 ► Healthy Tips for Men - TRICARE Costs Tools - Sun Safety Tips**

**Healthy Tips for Men** -- Many of the major health risks that men face can be prevented with a healthy lifestyle. A healthy lifestyle can start with one small choice. Are you ready to make your first healthy choice today? In support of Men's Health Month, here are a few tips to help you get you started:

- Move. Men need at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity, or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity, each week. Moderate activities include brisk walking and mowing the lawn.



- Say no to tobacco. Quitting smoking improves your health and lowers your risk of heart disease, cancer, lung disease, and other smoking-related illness.
- Control stress. Stress is part of life. Focus on taking care of yourself. Talk to friends and loved ones. Let them know how you're feeling and how they can help
- Eat better. Reduce your intake of processed and packaged foods. Eat more fruits, vegetables, and nuts.
- Drink water. Increase your water intake when you're more physically active in hot or cold climates.
- Get plenty of sleep. Sleep hygiene is critical. Go to bed and get up around the same time every day.
- Prevention first. Cancer screening tests can spot disease early, when it's easier to treat. And immunizations can prevent many illnesses from impacting you at all. See the preventive services that TRICARE covers at [www.TRICARE.mil/preventive](http://www.TRICARE.mil/preventive).

To learn more about these tips and others, check out the “Nine Tips for Men’s Health” article at [www.health.mil/news](http://www.health.mil/news).

-o-o-O-o-o-

**TRICARE Costs Tools** -- Do you have questions about your TRICARE costs? Your health care costs are different based on who you are and your health plan options. In some cases, you may have to pay a portion of the cost for a health service or prescription as a cost-share or copayment. Active duty service members pay nothing out of pocket for any type of authorized care. Also, there are no costs for services received at a military hospital or clinic, except for a per-day fee when using inpatient care. Costs change annually based on a number of factors. Understanding your costs will help you make informed health care decisions. View 2019 costs at [www.TRICARE.mil/costs](http://www.TRICARE.mil/costs). You may also view and compare costs between TRICARE plans using the TRICARE Compare Cost Tool at [www.TRICARE.mil/costs/compare](http://www.TRICARE.mil/costs/compare).

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Sun Safety Tips** -- Summer is here, and soaking up the sun is one of the best parts about summer. However, make sure to protect your skin when enjoying the sun-filled days ahead. Too much unprotected exposure to the sun’s UV rays can cause sunburn, eye damage, and skin damage, according to the American Cancer Society. It can also cause skin cancer. Depending on your risk for developing skin cancer, TRICARE covers skin cancer screening exams.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Skin cancer is the most common of all cancers in the United States.” Preventing your exposure to UV light from the sun and avoiding artificial sources like tanning beds and sunlamps, is the best way to lower your risk of skin damage and skin cancer. There are many easy ways to protect your skin while outdoors in the sun.

- Apply broad-spectrum sunscreen with at least SPF 15 or SPF 30 on all parts of exposed skin before you go outside.
- In addition to sunscreen, wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, or long skirts when possible.
- Seek shade under an umbrella, tree, or other shelter when the sun’s summer rays are strongest, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Wear a hat with a wide brim to shade your face, head, ears, and neck.
- Protect your eyes, vision, and the skin around your eyes by wearing sunglasses that block at least 99 percent of both UVA and UVB rays.

Following these sun safety tips will help protect the whole family this summer. Check out the article, “Summer’s Fun, Just Avoid Too Much Sun,” to learn more about sun safety at [www.TRICARE.mil/news](http://www.TRICARE.mil/news).

-o-o-O-o-o-

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> | June 19, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **TRICARE Podcast 508 ► DEERS - EOBs - MHS Nurse Advice Line**

**Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System** -- Summer is when you and your family may fulfill new orders and move to a new duty station. If you move this summer, don't forget to update your information in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS. DEERS is a database of active duty and retired service members, their family members, and others who are eligible for TRICARE. Keeping your DEERS record up to date is key to you getting timely and effective TRICARE benefits.

In DEERS, make sure to check your address, duty status, phone numbers, and email addresses. You should do this after permanent change of station, or PCS, moves and anytime you experience a Qualifying Life Event. This includes getting married or divorced, giving birth, or retiring. Learn more at [TRICARE.mil/lifeevents](http://TRICARE.mil/lifeevents). Your Social Security number and the Social Security number of your covered family members must be included in DEERS for your TRICARE coverage to be accurate.

Changing your contact information in DEERS is easy, and you have several options to do so. You can make changes online, by phone, fax, or mail, or in person at the nearest ID card office. Learn more about how to make changes in DEERS at [www.TRICARE.mil/deers](http://www.TRICARE.mil/deers). Also, check out the article, "Moving? Update DEERS for Uninterrupted TRICARE Coverage," at [www.TRICARE.mil/news](http://www.TRICARE.mil/news).

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Explanation of Benefits** – If you've ever visited the doctor or hospital and used your health benefits, you've probably received an explanation of benefits, or an EOB. An EOB is sent after the claim for your visit is processed. It resembles a medical bill, but it's not. It's an itemized statement that breaks down the cost-shares and deductibles. Your EOB includes the date you received the medical treatment or service, along with several amounts. This includes the amount billed, the amount covered, and the amount paid by TRICARE, Medicare, or other health insurance. It will show any balance you owe your provider. It will also let you know how much has been credited toward your annual deductible and catastrophic cap.

TRICARE regional and overseas contractors don't mail EOBs. EOB statements are available online on your TRICARE regional or overseas contractor website. You must first log in or register on the contractor's secure portal to get access to your EOB statements. For more information about your TRICARE explanation of benefits, including pharmacy and dental EOB statements, visit [www.TRICARE.mil/eob](http://www.TRICARE.mil/eob).

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Military Health System Nurse Advice Line** -- Hopefully, you and your family will spend more time outside being active or even traveling this summer. Whether biking, hiking, or taking a road trip, do you know what to do if you experience a minor, non-emergency injury or illness? With TRICARE, you have an expert to turn to if you need health care advice. The Military Health System Nurse Advice Line provides TRICARE beneficiaries' access to a registered nurse 24/7. The registered nurse can:

- Answer your health care questions,
- Assess your symptoms and provide recommendations for the most appropriate level of care,
- Provide evidence-based instructions to treat minor ailments at home,
- Help locate an urgent care or emergency care facility, or
- Help you schedule an appointment within 24 hours at a military hospital or clinic, when recommended by the nurse, and if enrolled at a military hospital or clinic

To reach a nurse through a secure web chat or video chat, visit [www.mhsnurseadvice.com](http://www.mhsnurseadvice.com). If you're in the U.S., Guam, or Puerto Rico, call 1-800-TRICARE and choose option 1. For all other country-specific phone numbers, visit [www.mhsnurseadvice.com](http://www.mhsnurseadvice.com). Learn more about the Military Health System Nurse Advice Line in this week's article, "Don't Guess. You have 24/7 Access to a Nurse," at [www.TRICARE.mil/news](http://www.TRICARE.mil/news).

-o-o-O-o-o-

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> | June 27, 2019 ++]

## \* Finances \*



### Senior Discounts Update 07 ► 10 Retailers That Give Discounts to Older Shoppers

Not everyone likes getting older, but that doesn't mean we can't take advantage of it. Many retailers across the nation offer a wide variety of "senior" discounts to people as young as 50. Some have stipulations beyond age — often, it's an AARP membership — but not all places have that requirement. The following stores offer senior discounts that don't require an AARP membership. At most, you may have to show identification to prove your age or join a store's free loyalty program to qualify for the discount. For even more options, check out "These Are the 33 Best 'Senior' Discounts of 2019" at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/slideshows/best-senior-discounts>:

- 1. Bealls** -- Every Tuesday is Bealls Day, when you generally can get an extra 15% off your in-store purchase if you're 50 years of age or older. Bealls Day discounts can fluctuate, but the retailer's website shows a month's worth of Tuesday deals ahead of time.
- 2. Bealls Outlet** -- You can enjoy 15% off your in-store purchase every Monday if you're 50 or older.
- 3. Walgreens** -- If you're at least 55 years old, you can take advantage of discounts at Walgreens stores and online. The discount generally runs the first Tuesday of every month.
- 4. Michael's** -- If you're 55 years of age or older, you can enjoy 10% off your entire in-store purchase at Michael's — even sale items. This promotion is offered every day, although there might be some exclusions.
- 5. Pep Boys** -- If you're 55 or older, you can enjoy a 10% discount at Pep Boys. The discount is available only in stores.
- 6. Kohl's** -- Shoppers age 60 or older can take 15% off every Wednesday, in stores only. Keep in mind that if you have other percent-off coupons, you won't be able to combine them with your senior discount. However, you'll be able to combine the senior discount with dollar-off discounts, Kohl's Cash and Yes2You rewards.
- 7. Harris Teeter** -- If you're 60 or older, enjoy 5% off every Thursday at these food and pharmacy stores. Exclusions include fuel, pharmacy purchases, tickets and gift cards.
- 8. Rite Aid** -- On the first Wednesday of every month, Rite Aid shoppers 65 years of age or older get 20% off in-store and online purchases. You'll need to be enrolled in Rite Aid's free wellness65+ program to qualify for the discount.
- 9. Ross** -- Every Tuesday, seniors 55 years of age or older can enjoy 10% off their purchase at Ross Dress for Less stores.
- 10. Goodwill** -- Ask your local Goodwill store if it offers a senior discount, as some do. Goodwill Industries of North Central Wisconsin, for example, offers a 10% discount to shoppers age 60 and older on Tuesdays.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Dori Zinn | June 14, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VA Loan Limits ► 2019 Cap of \$484,350 Removed w/H.R.299 Signed into Law**

The Department of Veterans Affairs can now back loans that exceed the conforming loan limit, as a bill eliminating this cap was signed into law by President Donald Trump on 26 JUN. The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act allows homebuyers to borrow above the 2019 limit of \$484,350 for most counties without any down payment. Earlier this month, the Senate unanimously approved the bill, and now President Trump’s signature makes it official. The move comes after a decades-long fight for veterans to receive health care benefits for diseases related to Agent Orange exposure, according to military.com, which said the bill will “fast-track disability compensation” for as many as 90,000 affected former service members.

In an earlier draft of the bill, the cost of these benefits were to be financed by raising VA loan fees 0.35% to 0.5% for non-disabled veterans, according to military.com. But trade groups like the National Association of Realtors (NAR) lobbied against such an increase, and lawmakers opted to raise the loan cap as a way to raise funds to support benefits instead. NAR president John Smaby said the association teamed with other housing industry trade groups to ensure veteran benefits would be extended without increasing VA loan fees.

“Realtors support efforts to boost veteran participation in this program, but we also believe VA loan guarantee fees should be based on the risk of the loan made, not the costs of other VA programs or benefits,” Smaby said. “As we aim to ensure our nation’s veterans have every possible opportunity to achieve the American Dream of homeownership, the National Association of Realtors has remained a strong supporter of the VA home loan guaranty program,” said Smaby. “This vital tool encourages private lenders to offer favorable home loan terms to qualified veterans and provides a much-needed resource to those who have sacrificed so much for this country.” [Source: HousingWire | Jessica Guerin | June 26, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Credit Monitoring Update 02 ► New Rules for Military Free Service**

Starting in September, service members will be able to request free credit monitoring services from the nationwide credit reporting agencies, under certain circumstances. These free credit monitoring services, often costing \$30 or more a month, can help troops keep on top of their finances, by warning them about new activity on their credit reports. With early detection, troops can then take steps to nip fraud and other problems in the bud. However, there’s a catch, under final rules of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), to be published soon in the Federal Register. Because of the way the law is written, most of those who will be eligible for the free credit monitoring are those “assigned to service away from the usual duty station of the consumer.” That applies to active duty members and reservists on active duty under Title 10 orders.

But National Guard members don’t have to be deployed from their “usual duty station” in order to be eligible for the free credit monitoring, according to the FTC clarification. That’s because Congress added National Guard members to the group of those entitled to get free credit monitoring, but didn’t apply the requirement that a Guard member be away from his or her usual duty station. The FTC notes the apparent inequity. “To the extent that Congress intended to provide free credit monitoring more broadly, the [FTC] calls on Congress to address this issue through additional legislation,” stated an FTC press release announcing the upcoming rule. The 2018 Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and Consumer Protection Act gave the new benefit to service members. Defense officials earlier recommended that the FTC broaden the definition to be consistent with the definition of active duty in the military compensation law,

which doesn't require a service member to be deployed away from the usual duty station, according to the FTC final rule.

There's also an issue of credit reporting agencies' ability to determine who is qualified for the free service – especially when it comes to verifying deployments. So the FTC is encouraging the credit reporting agencies to “err on the side of providing the free service more broadly.” To reduce the likelihood that an eligible military consumer is excluded, the FTC will consider a credit reporting agency to be in compliance with the law if it provides free electronic credit monitoring services to consumers who self-certify active duty status; consumers who self-certify they are a reservist on active duty under Title 10 orders; and those who self-certify they are member of the National Guard. It will be up to the credit reporting agencies as to whether they will give this benefit to more service members.

The FTC's final rule includes a provision that the credit reporting agency's verification of active duty military status is valid for two years. After that, the credit reporting agency may require the consumer to provide additional proof. There's nothing in the FTC rule that requires a military consumer to notify the credit reporting agency when he or she returns to the duty station, according to FTC spokeswoman Juliana Gruenwald.

The nationwide credit reporting bureaus – Equifax, Experian and TransUnion – are still working out the details of how service members can sign up for the free credit monitoring, according to the FTC. These services alert consumers about material additions or changes to their credit files, such as new accounts opened in your name; changes to address, name or phone number; changes to credit limits; and inquiries or requests for a consumer report, other than for pre-screening or account review.

These credit files include information about where you live, whether you pay your bills on time and the amount of debt; whether you've been sued or arrested; or filed for bankruptcy. The information is used to make decisions on whether to lend you money, whether to rent you an apartment, and, importantly for many in the military, it's used in security clearance determinations. And under new guidelines, officials are conducting continuous monitoring of financial records of those who have roles in national security, including service members.

By using these proactive monitoring services, consumers can learn early on about potential fraud or problems, and deal with them early. The FTC final rule extends the amount of time the credit reporting agencies have to notify a service member of changes to their credit file, from 24 hours to 48 hours, and to notify the consumer by mobile app, email or text message. The notice can also link to a website where the consumer can find more specifics. Military consumers won't have to pay to get access to their credit files if they receive notice that there's an important change. If the credit reporting agency notifies a consumer about such a change to the credit file, it must also provide the consumer with free access to the file, according to the final rule.

In the law requiring this new free access, Congress didn't set a deadline for credit reporting agencies to start providing the free monitoring. But they gave the FTC one year after the law was enacted on May 24, 2018, to come up with the rules implementing it. So the FTC set a deadline for three months after the new rules are published in the Federal Register. But recognizing that the credit reporting agencies may need extra time after the rules are set -- to create systems to accept proof of active duty service, and to make changes in their systems to generate alerts about the changes -- the FTC states that they will allow credit reporting agencies to offer their current commercial credit monitoring service for free to service members, for up to a year after the effective date of the rule. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | June 25, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **SBP DIC Offset Update 58 ► CBO Cost Estimate to Eliminate**

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) on 25 JUN released their cost estimate for activation of H.R. 553, Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act as introduced in the House of Representatives on January 15, 2019 which would:

- Permit surviving spouses of deceased veterans who are eligible for Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuities and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) to receive the full amount of both of those benefits.
- Eliminate the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance that is available to surviving spouses who have SBP annuities reduced by the amount of their DIC.
- Eliminate the refund of SBP premiums that are paid to surviving spouses whose SBP payments are reduced.
- Eliminate the optional SBP annuities paid to dependent children of service members who died on active duty and restore the SBP annuities to the surviving spouses of those service members

Estimated Budgetary Effects of H.R. 553													
By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars													
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2019-2024	2019-2029
<b>Increases in Direct Spending</b>													
Estimated Budget Authority	0	480	500	530	550	580	590	610	620	630	650	2,640	5,740
Estimated Outlays	0	440	500	530	550	580	590	610	620	630	650	2,600	5,700
<b>Increases in Spending Subject to Appropriation<sup>a</sup></b>													
Estimated Authorization	0	0	280	290	290	300	310	310	320	330	340	1,160	2,770
Estimated Outlays	0	0	280	290	290	300	310	310	320	330	340	1,160	2,770

a. Outlays from accrual payments to the Military Retirement Fund are intragovernmental transactions that have no net effect on federal spending.

The above figures are based on CBO’s assumption that H.R. 553 will be enacted near the start of fiscal year 2020 and that the accrual payments that the DoD makes to the Military Retirement Fund will reflect the changes made by H.R. 553 beginning in fiscal year 2021. CBO estimates that H.R. 553 would increase direct spending, on net, by \$5.7 billion over the 2020-2029 period. This takes into consideration elimination of SSIA, elimination of premium refunds, and repealing the Optional Annuity for Dependent Children provisions currently in effect.

The most significant source of uncertainty in this estimate is projecting the number of surviving spouses whose SBP payments would be offset over the next decade. The portion of SBP recipients whose annuities were offset increased from 18.5% in 2009 to 23.5% in 2018. CBO projects that share will reach 25.8% by 2029. If the number of surviving spouses subject to the SBP-DIC offset instead grows at the same rate as in the previous decade, then another 14,000 surviving spouses would be subject to the offset in 2029. In that scenario, estimated direct spending would increase by an additional \$0.5 billion over the 2020-2029 period. [Source: Congressional Budget Office| June 25, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## SBP DIC Offset Update 59 ► Proposed NDAA Senate Amendment to Eliminate Fails

With overwhelming support in Congress, two senators hope this is the year a dollar-for-dollar offset in compensation to surviving military spouses of military personnel and retirees -- known colloquially as the "widow's tax" -- is eliminated. Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) and Sen. Doug Jones (D-AL) took to the Senate floor 24 JUN urging for a vote on their proposed amendment to the national defense policy bill to overturn the offset. The legislation, which has the backing of 75 senators, would repeal deductions taken from those who receive payments under the Defense Department's Survivor Benefit Plan and also get Dependency and Indemnity Compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The move to put a fix on the military’s “widows tax” failed 27 JUN after Senate leadership blocked plans to include it the fiscal 2020 defense authorization debate. While advocates are hopeful they advance the issue, if their attempt in the House next month also fails, it could mean the end of efforts this year to address the situation. We’re incredibly disappointed today,” said Kelly Hruska, Government Relations Director for the National Military Family Association. “But we have other options, and we are exploring every one of them to make sure this gets done this year.” Senate



Armed Services Committee Chairman Jim Inhofe (R-OK) and one of the 74 co-sponsors of S.622, the Military Widow's Tax Elimination Act, blocked Jones' parliamentary moves because of the financial questions and other unnamed senators' objections. "I support and will continue to support the permanent fix," he said. "It's going to happen. We're going to do it ... but it can't be on this bill."

Under the Survivor Benefit Plan, military retirees pay a portion of their retirement benefit to ensure that family members receive up to 55% of their retirement pay when they die. The program, which is subsidized by the Defense Department, requires retirees to pay up to 6.5% of their gross retired pay, depending on the amount of coverage desired, much like an insurance plan. On the other hand, DIC is automatically awarded to surviving families of troops or veterans who die of service-related conditions. But under the current system, family members who receive both see their SBP reduced dollar for dollar for the amount they receive in DIC. In some cases, Collins said, the offset can lead to total elimination of the Survivor Benefit Plan. "It is out and out unfair and harms the survivors of our service members and military retirees," Collins said Monday. "The average offset [of \$925] is a significant amount of money that the widower or widow needs to support themselves and their families in the absence of their service member."

Roughly 65,000 military family members are affected by this offset, which amounts to a loss of more than \$65 million in income each year. Jones said given that the family members paid into the Survivor Benefit Plan, they should receive full payment of both benefits. "We obviously can never repay these families for their loss. ... But we can dang sure stop the government from robbing them of the benefit they have paid for and earned."

The Senate voted 86-6 Monday to take up debate this week of its version of the National Defense Authorization Act, a \$750 billion bill that will support military programs and policies in fiscal 2020. Senators have offered nearly 600 amendments to the NDAA. But which of the amendments, if any, will receive a vote remains to be seen. In recent years, debate on most amendments has been blocked by members, especially proposals that are considered controversial or non-negotiable. Elimination of the "widow's tax" has been proposed numerous times in the last 18 years.

Critics have argued that the cost, estimated to be \$5.7 billion over a decade, must have a funding source before it can be seriously considered. Jones said, however, that previous congresses have not required the proposed legislation to have a funding source, also known as a "pay-for" or "pay-go," adding that it shouldn't be required now. Collins agreed. "We have an obligation to make sure we are taking care of our military families who have sacrificed so much," Collins added. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime & Leo Shane III | June 25 & 27, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Medicare Coverage Update 04 ► SSA Processing Error Impacts 250,000 Seniors**

At least a quarter of a million Medicare beneficiaries may receive bills for as many as five months of premiums they thought they already paid. But they shouldn't toss the letter in the garbage. It's not a scam or a mistake. Because of what the Social Security Administration calls "a processing error" that occurred in January, it did not deduct premiums from some seniors' Social Security checks and it didn't pay the insurance plans, according to the agency's "[frequently asked questions](#)" page on its website. The problem applies to private drug policies and Medicare Advantage plans that provide both medical and drug coverage and substitute for traditional government-run Medicare.

Some people will discover they must find the money to pay the plans. Others could get cancellation notices. Medicare officials say approximately 250,000 people are affected. Medicare and Social Security said they expect proper deductions and payments to insurers will resume this month or next. Insurers are required to send bills directly to their members for the unpaid premiums, according to Medicare. But neither agency would explain how the error occurred or provide a more exact number or the names of the plans that were shortchanged. The amount the plans are owed also wasn't disclosed. A [notice to beneficiaries](#) on Medicare's website lacks key details.

Rep. Richard Neal (D-MA) who chairs the House Ways and Means Committee, and two colleagues wrote to both agencies about the problem on 22 MAY but have not received a response from Medicare. Social Security’s response referred most questions to Medicare officials. Organizations that help seniors say they are getting some questions from Medicare beneficiaries. Two seniors in Louisiana lost drug coverage after their policies were canceled because of the SSA error, said the state’s Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) director, Vicki Dufrene. One woman had had the same drug plan since 2013, and it dropped her at the end of April. She was without coverage for the entire month of May until earlier this week, when Dufrene was able to get her retroactively re-enrolled.

Dufrene said some people might not notice that their checks did not include a deduction for their Medicare Advantage or drug plan premiums. If their check was a little more than expected, they could have assumed that extra amount was the expected cost-of-living increase, among other things. In Ohio, a Medicare Advantage plan reinstated a member due to unpaid premiums less than 48 hours after the state’s SHIIP got involved, said director Christina Reeg. Medicare beneficiaries have had the option of paying their premiums through a deduction from their Social Security checks for more than a decade, she said. However, they can also charge payments directly to a credit card or checking account instead of relying on Social Security.

Humana spokesman Mark Mathis said about 33,000 members were affected — or fewer than 1% of its total Medicare membership. None of those members lost coverage. The company blamed Medicare’s nearly 15-year-old IT systems for the failure and urged the agency to invest in new equipment. A UnitedHealthcare representative said none of its 32,000 Medicare Advantage or Part D members affected by the SSA problem lost coverage. The company has the highest Medicare enrollment in the U.S. Aetna has not received payments for Medicare Advantage and drug plans for the months of February through May for 43,000 affected members, said spokesman Ethan Slavin. Customers will receive bills for the unpaid premiums and can set up payment plans if they can’t pay the entire amount.

These and other affected insurers must allow their members at least two months from the billing date to pay. And they must offer a payment plan for those who can’t pay several months of premiums at once, Medicare said. With both steps, “plans can avoid invoking their policy of disenrollment for failure to pay premiums while the member is adhering to the payment plan,” Jennifer Shapiro, the acting director for the Medicare Plan Payment Group, warned the companies in a May 22 memo. Lindsey Copeland, federal policy director for the Medicare Rights Center, an advocacy group, said she is concerned that older adults will view the bill with suspicion. “If you think your premiums are being paid automatically and then your plan tells you six months later that wasn’t the case, you may be confused,” she said.

If you are unable to find out from your plan whether you were affected — or if you learn that you were indeed affected — you can also seek assistance from one of these entities:

- Medicare: The federal program notes that you can call 800-MEDICARE, or 800-633-4227. Teletypewriter users can call 877-486-2048.
- Your State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP): These federally funded programs offer free counseling and assistance to Medicare beneficiaries. For contact information, visit the national [SHIP website](#) and click on the “Find Local Medicare Help” button in the upper right corner.
- Medicare Rights Center: This nonprofit notes that its Helpline counselors are available at 800-333-4114.

[Source: Kaiser Health News | Susan Jaffe | June 6, 2019 ++]

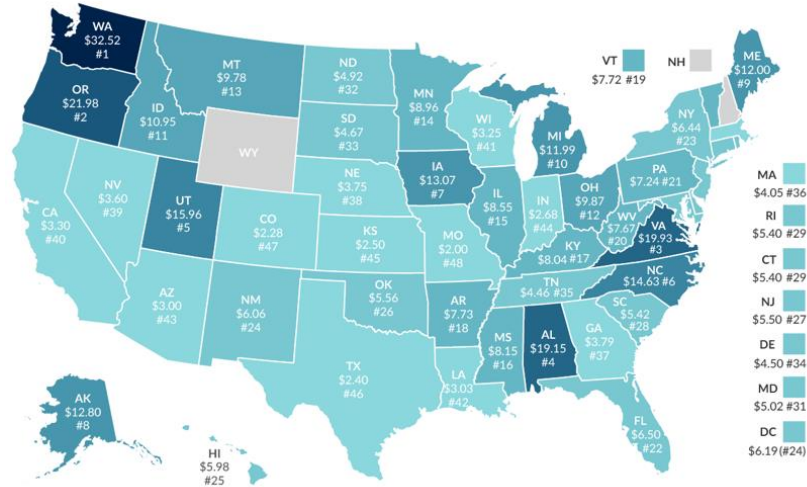
\*\*\*\*\*

## **Spirit Taxes** ► **How High Are They in Your State**

Of all alcoholic beverages subject to taxation, stiff drinks—and all distilled spirits—face the stiffest tax rates. Ostensibly, this is because spirits have higher alcohol content than the other categories, like wine and beer.

- Lowest per gallon spirit taxes: WY & NH (\*\*), MO (\$2.00), CO (\$2.28), TX (\$2.40), and KS (\$2.50)
- Highest per gallon spirit taxes: WA (\$32.52), OR (\$21.98), VA (\$19.93), AL (\$19.95), and UT (15.96)

- \*\*These two control states gain revenue directly from alcohol sales through government-run stores and have set prices low enough that they are comparable to buying spirits without taxes



Like many excise taxes, the treatment of spirits varies widely across the states. Spirits excise rates may include a wholesale tax rate converted to a gallonage excise tax rate; case and/or bottle fees, which can vary based on size of container; retail and distributor license fees, converted into a gallonage excise tax rate; as well as additional sales taxes. Rates may also differ within states according to alcohol content, place of production, or place purchased (such as on- or off-premise or onboard airlines). [Source: Tax Foundation Maps | June 19, 2019++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Social Security Q & A ► 190616 thru 190630

**(Q) How Can My Spouse Squeeze the Most From Her Benefits?** “I have reached full retirement age (FRA) and am now drawing Social Security. My spouse is 62. Her FRA benefit is less than half of mine. Can she start receiving 50% of what I receive from Social Security? If she claims a spousal benefit and continues to work, can she receive more than 50% of my benefit if her full retirement benefit eventually exceeds 50% of my benefit?”

**Answer.** The question raises a number of issues related to the interaction among retirement benefits, spousal benefits and the earnings test. (The earnings test can reduce benefits if you start taking benefits before full retirement age and continue working.)

- First, since your wife was born after 1953, she is covered by the [deeming rule](#), regardless of her claiming age. This means that if she claims one benefit — say, a spousal benefit — the Social Security Administration deems that she is also claiming her own retirement benefit at the same time. So, she has no opportunity to switch from one benefit to another.
- Second, the spousal benefit is always treated by the SSA as a supplementary benefit. If your wife is eligible for her own retirement benefit, then she is paid that benefit first. If her FRA retirement amount falls below half of your FRA benefit amount, she is eligible for a supplemental spousal benefit. Claiming at her FRA, the supplemental amount would bring her up to one-half of your FRA amount.
- Third, early claiming complicates matters, since both benefits are reduced, but at [different rates](#). To illustrate, suppose your FRA amount is \$2,500 and your wife’s FRA retirement amount is \$1,000. This implies that her FRA spousal supplement would be \$250, to bring her total benefit up to \$1,250, or one-half of yours. If she claims at 62 (and assuming that she was born in 1957, as her age now indicates), her own monthly benefit is

reduced by 27.5%, or to \$725. Her spousal supplement is reduced by 32.5%, or to \$169. Overall, her monthly benefit falls from \$1,250 to \$894 if she claims at 62.

- Finally, the earnings test could further reduce the benefits that your wife receives if her earnings exceed \$17,640 per year. Her benefits will be reduced by \$1 for every \$2 she earns over this limit. The good news is that any money she loses because of the earnings test is potentially recoverable after she reaches FRA, when there is an adjustment for such lost benefits.

You suggest that if she continues working, her own benefit may eventually be greater than 50% of yours. One way that can help you forecast this is to use one of the [benefit estimators](#) available on the SSA website. Generally, these calculators require previous earnings information available on a person's Social Security statement. She can access this by going to the [My Social Security](#) webpage. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Jeff Miller | June 6, 2019 ++]

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Russell Settle | June 27, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Job Scam 2 ► New Twist

Employment scams are nothing new but they are on the rise. In 2018, employment scams were the riskiest, according to the *BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report* ([BBB.org/RiskReport](#)). As technology changes, so do scammers' tactics. In this new twist on a long-time scam, con artists use text messages and Google Hangouts to convince people to hand over money in exchange for a job that doesn't exist.

### How the Scam Works

- You post a resume or apply to a job online. Before long, you are contacted via text message by someone claiming to have seen your resume. The representative explains that you would be a great fit for their position and may claim to represent a real business with a good reputation. They ask you to contact them for an interview via Google Hangouts or another video chat service.
- After talking, you are immediately offered a job with excellent pay. This pattern is a change from the past, when scammers typically emailed targets and made a job offer without an interview.
- Your new "job" has some unusual requests, however. The interviewer may send you funds to deposit into your bank account, which you'll use to purchase supplies for your new job. Or they require your banking information under the guise of setting up direct deposit. They also may send you surplus funds in a bad check, ask you to deposit it and wire some funds back to the company. Job scams take many forms. See [BBB.org/EmploymentScam](#) for more variations.
- If you question the company's methods, you'll likely be met with a defensive response. But don't give into the pressure and follow the demands. The job isn't real!

### How to Protect Yourself from Employment Scams

- **Double check the job posting.** If a person claims to represent a reputable company, visit the official website and look for the job posting before agreeing to an interview. If you can't find it, it's probably a scam.
- **Be wary of unusual procedures.** No real company would ask you to pay money to receive a job offer, nor would they send you a check before you've completed any work or overpay you for supplies and ask you send back part of the money.
- **Look out for generic job offers.** Jobs that are very general, for example "customer service representative," are the most likely to be scams. If you find the same job description for different companies posted on many websites, that could be a red flag, too.

### For More Information

For more ways to protect yourself from this kind of scam, see the [BBB.org/EmploymentScam](#). You can find general tips for avoiding scams at [BBB.org/AvoidScams](#). If you've been the victim of an employment scam, help others spot fraudsters by reporting your experience at [BBB.org/ScamTracker](#).

[Source: BBB Scam Alert| June 14, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Online Plane Ticket Scam ► Scammers Pretending to be Online Airline Ticket Brokers

Taking a vacation this summer? If you book your airfare through a third-party website, be sure to use caution. BBB Scam Tracker is receiving reports of scammers pretending to be online airline ticket brokers. They cancel your airline ticket reservations, but not before charging you.

### How the Scam Works

- While doing an online search to find the cheapest flight to your destination, you come across a website that has a great deal. You haven't heard of the company before, but the website looks legitimate and everything seems to be in order. When you begin the payment process, however, red flags start to appear.
- In the most common version of the scam, you pay with your credit card like normal. But shortly after making the payment, you receive a call from the company asking you to verify your name, address, banking information or other personal details – something a legitimate company would never do.
- What makes the scam so convincing is that, once you pay, you receive a confirmation code that can be verified with the airline. However, after a day or two, your reservation will be cancelled and the company that charged you will disappear. It appears the scammers booked the flight and charged your card – only to cancel it shortly after and make off with your money.

### How to Avoid Travel Scams

- **Do your research.** If you come across a company you haven't dealt with before, research it before making any purchases. Look on [BBB.org](http://BBB.org) for reviews and feedback from previous customers.
- **Don't cave under pressure.** Many scammers pressure you to make a payment or give up your personal details, claiming you'll lose out on a great deal or have to pay extra fees. If something doesn't feel right, hang up and contact your credit card company. Let them know about the situation and ask them to put a hold on your payment.
- **Only make purchases with your credit card.** If a company asks you to pay with a pre-paid debit card or to wire funds, don't do it. These are not standard payment methods and, if you go through with them, there will be no way to get your money back. Credit card charges, on the other hand, can be contested.

### For More Information

To learn more ways to protect yourself from travel scams, read [BBB.org/TravelScam](http://BBB.org/TravelScam). You can also review the general tips found at [BBB.org/AvoidScams](http://BBB.org/AvoidScams). If you've been a victim of an airline ticket or other travel scam, please report your experience at [BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://BBB.org/ScamTracker). By doing so you can help others to avoid falling prey to scammers.

[Source: BBB Scam Alert | June 7, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## WhatsApp Scam ► Scammers Turn to a New Platform

For years, scammers have been contacting strangers via telephone, email and, more recently, text message and Facebook Messenger. Now scammers are turning to a new platform: WhatsApp. WhatsApp is a free messaging app many people use to contact friends and family. But as with any communication platform, always exercise caution.

### How WhatsApp Scams Work

- You receive a message from someone you’ve never met before. Their goal? To access your personal information or convince you to send them money – preferably wired funds or prepaid debit cards. Their methods for achieving this goal can vary. Scammers may use WhatsApp to convince you they are romantically interested in you... and then ask for money. Or scammers may contact you through WhatsApp with a job offer. But there’s a catch: to be hired you must first send your personal information in an application or pay a fee for equipment you’ll need.
- Another consumer reported being contacted on WhatsApp with an investment opportunity. All he needed to do was deposit \$300, so the man sent the funds. But when he attempted to withdraw his investment gains, the scammer blocked him, and the “company” became unreachable.
- In any scenario, the end result is likely to be the same. Once scammers have your personal information or money, they will block your number and disappear.

### Protect Yourself from WhatsApp Scams

- Don’t open messages from strangers. Only read and reply to messages from people you know and trust.
- Block unknown senders and report their messages as spam. If you receive an unsolicited message from someone you don’t know asking you to share your personal information or send money, block them. Help others avoid getting scammed by reporting the message as spam.
- Do your research before engaging with a company. Do thorough research about any company you plan to do business with. Legitimate companies should have good consumer reviews, real customer service contact information, and clear terms of service.

### For More Information

You can find general tips for avoiding scams at [www.BBB.org/AvoidScams](http://www.BBB.org/AvoidScams). If you’ve been the victim of a scam, help others spot fraudsters by reporting your experience at [www.BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://www.BBB.org/ScamTracker).

[Source: BBB Scam Alerts | June 21, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Tax Burden for Nevada Retired Vets ► As of JUN 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 Nevada. **Note:** The state has a statutory provision for automatic adjustment of tax brackets, personal exemptions or standard deductions to the rate of inflation.

### Sales Taxes

**State Sales Tax:** 6.85%.

- Groceries and prescription drugs are exempt from the Nevada sales tax. Nevada treats both candy and soda as groceries for sales tax purposes. Other items including gasoline, alcohol, and cigarettes are subject to various Nevada excise taxes in addition to the sales tax.
- Counties and cities can charge an additional local sales tax of up to 1.25%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 8.1%
- Nevada has 249 special sales tax jurisdictions with local sales taxes in addition to the state sales tax
- Nevada has a lower state sales tax than 75% of states



**Gasoline Tax:** 51.92 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)  
**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 52.96 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)  
**Cigarette Tax:** 1.80 cents/pack of 20

### **Personal Income Taxes**

**Retirement Income:** Not taxed. There is no state income tax.

### **Property Taxes**

All property in the state is subject to tax by the state, counties, cities, towns, and school districts. Property taxes are applied to property of every kind and nature, including real and personal property. The assessed valuation for tax purposes is based on 35% of the fair market value of the property and is revalued every year. Refer to <http://tax.nv.gov/Publications/Publications>. The Department of Taxation and county assessors and treasurers are required to provide information on the Internet concerning property taxes, including, a description of the assessment process, an explanation of the manner in which property taxes are calculated, the rates of taxes imposed by various taxing entities and the revenues generated by those taxes.

The median property tax in Nevada is \$1,749.00 per year for a home worth the median value of \$207,600.00. Counties in Nevada collect an average of 0.84% of a property's assessed fair market value as property tax per year. Nevada is ranked number twenty four out of the fifty states, in order of the average amount of property taxes collected.

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

There is no inheritance tax and a limited estate tax related to federal estate tax collection.

### **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>.

-o-o-O-o-o-

Visit the Nevada Department of revenue site <http://tax.state.nv.us> or call 866-962-3707 for further information.

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

**\* General Interest \***



### **Notes of Interest** ► 16 thru 30 JUN 2019

- **U.S. flag desecration.** There are currently no penalties for the physical desecration of the flag. The American Legion and other members of the Citizens Flag Alliance continue working toward securing a constitutional amendment to protect the flag from physical desecration.
- **Military Academy sports.** A new Trump policy will let promising athletes defer their five-year service commitment if they are drafted to play professional sports.

- **Reports to Congress.** The listing of Reports to Congress signed in 2019 has been updated. Individual reports can be downloaded at <https://health.mil/congressionalreports>.
- **Screaming Eagles in Nam.** At <https://www.facebook.com/tony.holden.106/videos/351703348717852> is 28 minutes of footage on the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division first year of fighting in Vietnam.
- **Battle of the Bulge.** At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1WF8AEGnoM> a veteran of the battle who was in the 377th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion. 101st Airborne Division tells his experience in that battle.
- **How Aircraft Carriers Work.** At is an interesting look at how USN Aircraft Carriers operate and why they are considered so vital for our defense. An aircraft carrier is basically a small city at sea with its own airport. Check it out at <https://youtu.be/c0pS3Zx7Fc8>. One thing this video doesn't discuss is that there are a number of Helicopter Carriers in service as well by various nations. These are called Amphibious Assault Ships by the United States Navy as they can deploy Marines for a ground assault. The USN currently has nine helicopter carriers capable of providing air support with F-35B Lightning II stealth strike-fighters or AV-8B Harrier II attack aircraft.
- **HMS Hood Sinking.** On 24th May 1941 at 05:52 the pride of the British fleet, HMS Hood, engaged the mighty German ship Bismarck in battle. At 06:00 the Hood was hit and it sunk in less than 3 minutes. Only 3 of her 1418 crew survived – the single biggest loss of life in a single engagement in the history of the Royal Navy but why this 860 feet long ship sank so quickly has been a mystery for over 70 years. The 48 minute video at [https://youtu.be/4\\_jDaUSSPhc](https://youtu.be/4_jDaUSSPhc) on 'How Did the Bismarck Manage to Sink HMS Hood So Quickly?' helps answer this question.
- **We Build the Wall.** Check out <https://youtu.be/1IwaZigPXAaw> & [https://youtu.be/FK9m9nfw\\_CRQ](https://youtu.be/FK9m9nfw_CRQ). Disabled vet Brian Kolfage's project moving forward.
- **Old Glory Movie.** A Civil War epic that earned Denzel Washington his first Academy Award is returning to theaters in July 30 years after it was first released. "Glory" tells the harrowing story of the Second Battle of Fort Wagner, a July 1863 Union assault at Morris Island, South Carolina, on one of the Southern Confederacy's prominent strongholds. The movie, which the New York Times hailed as evoking an "almost overwhelming emotional impact," highlights the heroics of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, the climactic assault's spearheading unit that was made up of black soldiers and commanded by Col. Robert Gould Shaw (Broderick).
- **Housing Starts.** A gauge of U.S. home building declined in May, a fresh sign of weakness in the housing market. Housing starts fell 0.9% from the prior month to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.269 million, the Commerce Department said 18 JUN. That was a steeper decline than the 0.4% decrease economists had expected.
- **Man's Guide to Women.** "The Hot Crazy Matrix" diagram at <https://biggeekdad.com/2014/08/mans-guide-women> is full of wisdom every man can appreciate and should know.
- **Displaced people.** A record 71 million have been displaced worldwide by war, persecution and other violence, the U.N. refugee agency said 19 JUN, an increase of more than 2 million from a year earlier — and an overall total that would amount to the world's 20th most populous country.
- **Social Security.** The Social Security Advisory Board has recommended shifting the work of updating the agency's Death Master File to the Treasury Department. The board found SSA has been unable to guarantee the accuracy of deaths it records. It blamed tightening administrative budgets. The board said the agency wrongfully records about 8,000 living people as deceased annually. The GAO has recently recommended SSA share its Death Master File with Treasury to curb improper payments.
- **IRS.** Response times to incoming calls at the Internal Revenue Service remains the biggest challenge the agency has in dealing with the public. The IRS is successfully processing most returns. But for those who need more help the experience is challenging. In the 2019 filing season, the IRS answered only 25% of calls from people looking for help. When they did answer, the average wait time was 13 minutes. The IRS served fewer taxpayers who sought help at Taxpayer Assistance Centers, and continued its policy of answering only a limited scope of tax law questions on the phone and in person.

- **Border Illegals.** The U.S. Border Patrol chief told lawmakers 20 JUN that support from National Guard and active-duty troops has been invaluable for her short-handed organization, crediting servicemembers for contributing to the apprehension of more than 100,000 migrants since October.
- **Computer Hackers.** The Palm Beach suburb of Riviera Beach, Florida agreed to pay \$600,000 in ransom to hackers who took over its computer system, the latest in thousands of attacks worldwide aimed at extorting money from governments and businesses.
- **Drones.** It will soon be illegal to fly drones while under the influence of alcohol in Japan, something that was already prohibited on U.S. military facilities, according to American and Japanese officials. Japan’s new rules don’t set a blood alcohol limit for drone operators but state that those flying them improperly when intoxicated face up to a year in prison with hard labor or a fine of up to about \$2,800.
- **Salt.** Handy Ways to Use Salt Around the House at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPSb3Nzk0Og> shows how to remove bathtub stains, unclog hairy drains, clean irons, put out stove pan fires, cleanup broken eggs, remove caked on greasy residue from frying pans, and clean sponges.
- **Iran.** President Trump said he had signed an executive order imposing “hard hitting” sanctions on Iran’s most senior leader, military officials and its top diplomat, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif. When asked if he believes he has the authority to initiate military action against Iran without first going to Congress, he said, “I do.” In a 24 JUN Tweet President Trump questioned the U.S. military’s presence in the region to safeguard oil-shipping routes. Major oil importers like China and Japan should be protecting their own ships in the Strait of Hormuz.

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

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Congressional Term Limits ► Countering Power Abuse or Counterproductive?**

Texas Senator Ted Cruz has a plan that he says will ensure lawmakers can’t make a career out of serving in the same congressional seat by adding an amendment to the Constitution that would limit U.S. senators to two six-year terms and U.S. House Representatives to three two-year terms. The proposed amendment was introduced in early 2019 and has only garnered support from Republican lawmakers thus far, though Cruz noted at a 18 JUN hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee that the concept is supported by a majority of Republicans, Democrats and independents.

“We do not have to speculate as the founders did that the prospect of a permanent tenure in Congress might tempt senators and representatives toward self-interested, short-term thinking. We know for a fact, especially in recent decades when control of Congress has been constantly up for grabs, this short-term thinking has become Congress’s defining defect,” said Jim DeMint, a former U.S. senator and witness at the hearing. “For individual members, short-term thinking warps incentives toward bringing home the bacon and fundraising and to the special interests who can deliver them both. Members spend less time legislating and more time raising money.”

But according to other witnesses at the hearing, studies of states that have instituted similar term restrictions have not always borne out the assumption that such limits reduce the prevalence of career politicians. Lynda Powell, a professor of political science at the University of Rochester who has conducted research on term limits since 1995, said that term-limited state legislatures do not have significantly different demographics than non-term-limited legislatures; term-limited legislators statistically spend less time addressing constituent casework; and those elected officials have less time overall to form working relationships with their fellow lawmakers.

“Notably, there is no support for term limits significantly increasing the proportion of citizen legislatures, rather than career-oriented politicians. Term-limited newcomers, in the study after implementation, were more likely to have held other elected prior office than non-term limited newcomers,” said Powell. She pointed to a specific study of the Michigan legislature conducted by researchers Marjorie Sarbaugh-Thompson, Lyke Thompson, Charles Elder, John

Strate and Richard Elling that found “tenure in office does not appear to sate legislators’ ambition, and legislators attracted to serve after term limits are more, not less politically ambitious. This increased political ambition is the most distinctive characteristic of the new breed of term-limited legislators.” Lack of experience, Powell said, could also lead some legislators to defer to unelected think tank and research groups that have established themselves as experts in that area.

Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) suggested that other types of election reforms may do a better job of imposing term limits on legislators than actual laws defining those limits. “There are better and easier ways, and I would say more effective ways, to connect the government more directly and honestly to the people. In my view, the most effective term limits are elections, and the most knowledgeable term-limiters are voters,” she said, encouraging policies that support voting rights while keeping members of Congress from taking certain jobs after they retire from office. “We should not be able to profit from our public service once we are finished with it, either. If, for example, you served as head of a department making decisions about detaining immigrants — like former Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly — you should not be allowed immediately to go through a revolving door and get paid by a corporation building those detention facilities. Former members of Congress should not have floor privileges if they use them to lobby clients.”

But according to Nick Tomboulides, executive director of the U.S. Term Limits grassroots organization, the financial practicalities of elections give incumbents an outsized advantage. “Elections may in theory be capable of dethroning incumbents, but that isn’t how it works in the real world: congressional incumbents have a 98 percent reelection rate,” said Tomboulides. “It’s predominantly made up of lawyers and politicians and is disproportionately old, white, rich and male. Term limits would give us a legislature that better reflects the diversity of our society.”

John David Raush, Jr., a professor of political science at West Texas A&M University, said that his research found term limits somewhere in the middle ground, in terms of usefulness: some states had managed to develop more responsive and fiscally responsible legislatures, while others ended up with elected bodies that lacked experience and had diminished power in relation to their executive branches. [Source: FederalTimes | Jessie Bur | June 19, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Iran Tensions Update 04 ► Downed U.S. Drone Displayed as Trophy

Iran made a trophy show 21 JUN of purported wreckage from a downed U.S. drone as President Donald Trump said he called off a retaliatory strike to avoid killing Iranians. Brig. Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) aerospace force, posed with debris that officials said was pulled from the sea near the Straits of Hormuz and taken to Tehran for display, according to Iran's Tasnim news agency. The military had said that unmanned aerial vehicle system shot down 20 JUN over the Gulf was a \$100-million plus Northrop Grumman RQ-4 Global Hawk operated by the Navy, but Iranian officials described it as a similar Northrop Grumman MQ-4C Triton, Tasnim reported.



Debris from what Iran's Revolutionary Guard aerospace division describes as the U.S. drone which was shot down on Thursday is displayed in Tehran, Iran, Friday, June 21, 2019

Video from Iran's state-sponsored news agency Press TV purported to show the launch of the surface-to-air missile that shot down the drone. It depicted a truck-mounted Khordad 3 air defense system firing a Sayyad 2 missile at the target that allegedly violated Iranian airspace. U.S. officials have maintained that the Global Hawk was at least 21 miles outside Iranian airspace when it went down and did not enter Iranian airspace at any point during its flight. The shootdown of the Global Hawk, following the explosions last week that set two tankers ablaze in the Gulf of Oman, marked the latest escalation in the crisis in the region and raised concerns about how the U.S. would respond.

In a series of tweets Friday morning and in an interview with NBC's Chuck Todd for the "Meet the Press" program on Sunday, Trump said he had given the military the go-ahead for a retaliatory strike at the launch site and radar installations supporting the missile that shot down the drone, but called the operation off about 10 minutes before it was set to begin. He said no warplanes had been launched -- possibly referring to F/A-18 Super Hornets from the aircraft carrier Lincoln in the Gulf region -- before he gave the order to stand down, out of concern that the action would lead to a wider war. When asked if strike aircraft were already on the way to targets, Trump said, "No, but they would have been pretty soon, and things would have happened to a point where you would not turn back, you could not turn back."

In segments of the NBC interview that were aired Friday on MSNBC, Trump said he began having concerns about how many Iranians might be killed in retaliation for the downing of an unmanned drone. The military was "ready to go, subject my approval," Trump said. But then, he said, he asked his generals: "I want to know something before you go. How many people would be killed, in this case Iranians?" When the unnamed generals said about 150, Trump said he thought about it for a second. "And I said, you know what -- they shot down an unmanned drone, plane, whatever you want to call it, and here we are sitting with 150 dead people that would have taken place probably within a half an hour after I said, 'go ahead,'" Trump said. "And I didn't like it, I didn't think, I didn't think it was proportionate."

In a series of tweets earlier, Trump made the same point, saying that the military was "cocked and loaded" for airstrikes. But, he said, he intervened at the last minute to avoid inflicting casualties. "I am in no hurry" to attack Iran, Trump said, but added that efforts by the regime to acquire nuclear weapons would change his calculus. In what may have been an effort to show the multiple-target capabilities of Iran's air defenses, Hajizadeh, the IRGC aeroforce commander, said his systems could have shot down a U.S. P-8 Poseidon surveillance aircraft and killed Americans Thursday, but he chose instead to target the Global Hawk to avoid inflicting casualties. The P-8 anti-submarine, anti-surface warfare aircraft "was also violating our airspace and we could have downed it too," Hajizadeh said, according to a report from Iran's Fars news agency. But the Global Hawk was targeted "because our aim was to warn the terrorist forces of the U.S.," rather than start a conflict, Fars reported.

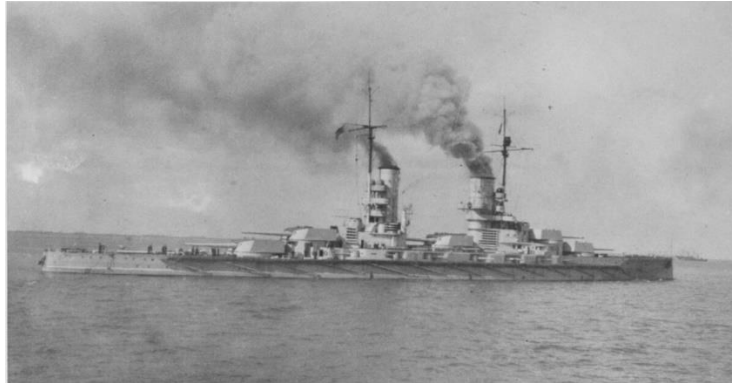
In a statement late 21 JUN, Lt. Col. Earl Brown, a spokesman for U.S. Central Command, said that the U.S. thus far had been unsuccessful in recovering any debris from the Global Hawk. He said the drone was hit by the missile at high altitude and, consequently, left a large debris field. "We dispatched assets to recover debris. However, due to a large debris field and high winds and heavy seas, we have no reports of recovered debris," Brown said in the statement, released in question-and-answer form. He did not respond directly to Iranian charges that the U.S. was warned several times prior to the missile launch by the IRGC that the Global Hawk and the P-8 Poseidon were in violation of Iranian airspace.

"We are aware of the IRGC's claims," Brown said. "At no point in time did any U.S. aircraft enter Iranian airspace on June 19, 2019. U.S. aircraft routinely operate in the region, and do so in a manner consistent with international law." Brown also confirmed that the P-8 Poseidon was in the same general area as the Global Hawk. "Yes, the U.S. routinely flies missions in the area, and does so in a manner consistent with international law," he said. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | 21 Jun 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Battleships For Sale ► Four German Ones Scuttled 100 Years Ago

Ever want to own your own WWI battleship? Well, you can, via a sale on eBay. But there's a catch. The vessels are at the bottom of the sea. Four German battleships that were scuttled in Scapa Flow near the Orkney Islands of Scotland are for sale for a total asking price of more than \$1 million, according to Scotland's national newspaper, The Scotsman. The scuttling was carried out on 21 June 1919 on the orders of Admiral Ludwig von Reuter to prevent allied forces seizing the ships after Germany's defeat in WWI. Diving contractor Thomas Clark, 70, first purchased the German High Seas Fleet vessels in 1981, but is ready for another to own them. “



A German König-class battleship in about 1915-1916, possibly the Markgraf, which was scuttled in 1919

It has been an absolute pleasure to own and dive on these iconic vessels and I regret I have not managed to do more with them during the period of my ownership,” Clark said, according to the Scotsman. “I look forward to passing them on to the new owner and hope they get the opportunity to realize their aspirations for the vessels.” The Naval wreck is comprised of the Markgraf, Karlsruhe, Konig, and Kronprinz Wilhelm. The vessels, along with 48 other German battleships, were scuttled by the Germans 100 years ago on Friday (21 JUN) in 1919. Although most of the ships were recovered from the sea and scrapped, the four vessels for sale on eBay and three others were not lifted and are scheduled monuments where divers can view them.

Drew Crawford, Clark's agent, said they've been “pleasantly surprised” the amount of interest the ships have attracted. “We anticipated that there's a very small number of people that would be interested in such a purchase, and would have the funds for such a purchase. And that it was necessary to cast the net as wide as possible,” Crawford said, the BBC reports. “We've had a lot of interest. A lot of people from overseas have been in contact,” he said. “We've been pleasantly surprised at the number of people who've been in touch, and the interest that we've had to date.” The ships will remain under eBay's “Buy it Now” option until 26 JUN. After that, the vessels will go to auction on eBay. [Source: ArmyTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | June 21, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Driving BAC Limits ► Japan and Now South Korea 0.03%

A new law took effect in South Korea on 25 JUN, an amendment to its Road Traffic Act that sets stricter limits on the consumption of alcohol and operating a motor vehicle. The change lowers the legal limit for blood alcohol content to 0.03%, down from the 0.05% that had been the standard for the past 57 years. An individual who weighs approximately 140 pounds and consumes just one 12-ounce beer will likely have surpassed the legal 0.03% threshold. If caught and tested by Korean authorities, the maximum penalty for impaired driving will be up to five years of imprisonment and/or 20 million won in fines (about \$17,325).



“I definitely think it’s a change for good,” said Tech. Sgt. Kenneth Amaro Vega of the 303rd Intelligence Squadron. “People try to explore where the gray area is, and .05% gives space for that gray area,” he said. “If you put it below almost a full beer, its either I drink and have someone take me home, or I don't drink at all. There's no gray area there.” In the United States, 0.08 is the legal limit in all states, though penalties vary from state to state.

The tougher Korean drinking restrictions come just after the U.S. military suspended a longstanding 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. curfew for troops in Korea earlier this month. “I don't think we have all acclimated to the new curfew changes,” said Tech. Sgt. Jose Cardenas, a dental assistant with the 51st Dental Squadron. “Some friends and I went out intending to break the curfew and then 1 a.m. rolls up and we are ready to go home.” Cardenas said he doesn’t agree with South Korea’s new law. “I don’t think .03% is enough to affect your capability to do anything, maybe depending on your physiology,” he said. “But I doubt it's hardly enough to cause harm to someone, outside of you just being clumsy naturally.”

Col. John Gonzales – the new commander of Osan’s 51st Fighter Wing – said he expects servicemembers to “be good wingmen and to help their friends and coworkers continue to make responsible decisions.” “[South Korea’s] new policy on the legal blood alcohol limit doesn’t change my message to our service members,” he said in a statement issued Tuesday afternoon. “If you drink, don’t drive.” For civilians, servicemembers and their families on the peninsula, this law also includes electric scooters, bicycles and electric skateboards. If caught operating these devices on a military installation with a blood alcohol content equal to or greater than 0.03%, individuals may be charged with driving under the influence. Servicemembers in Japan also must abide by a 0.03% limit; the threshold in the U.S. is set at 0.08% in all 50 states. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Matthew Keeler | June 25, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Appliances | America’s Most Reliable** ► **New Rankings From Consumer Reports**

America’s top-rated appliance maker is not a household name, according to new rankings from Consumer Reports. Speed Queen took top honors in the publication’s first-ever Appliance Brand Reliability Rankings. Speed Queen makes clothes washers and dryers only. So, if you are looking for another type of appliance, you might want to consider Miele, Ikea or LG, which took the next three spots in the rankings.

In compiling its list, Consumer Reports looked at data collected from its members on more than 381,000 kitchen and laundry appliances purchased between 2008 and 2018. The publication continues:

*“To calculate predicted reliability, we asked members how many times the products they own broke or stopped working as well as they should. We used that data to estimate how new models from a given brand will hold up over the first five years.”*

The publication also gave each appliance brand an “average predicted reliability score” on a scale from 1 to 100. The scores are adjusted to account for differences among different types of appliances. The most reliable brands are as follows:

- Speed Queen — average predicted reliability score of 83 out of 100
- Miele — 75
- Ikea — 70
- LG — 68
- Thermador — 63
- Bosch — 63

The least reliable brands are:

- JennAir — average predicted reliability score of 37 out of 100
- Asko — 37

- Fisher & Paykel — 29
- Dacor — 29
- Electrolux — 28
- Viking — 15

Consumer Reports emphasizes that reliability is different from performance. For example, while Speed Queen is tops for reliability, its machines “don’t always perform well in our lab tests,” the publication says. Still, some models are “remarkably consistent” when it comes to reliability, Consumer Reports says: “If you’re looking to outfit your kitchen or laundry room with appliances from the same brand, you’d do well to consider Miele, LG, Thermador, and Bosch. And you’ll want to be careful when considering Samsung, Jenn-Air, Dacor, Electrolux, and Viking because each has multiple appliance categories that earn a Poor reliability rating.” [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | June 28, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## China U.S. Trade ► Meeting Chinese Made Product Demand

The Container Ship Emma Maersk, part of a Danish shipping line shown in the photos below, crosses from China to U.S. in just 5 days. What a ship.....no wonder 'Made in China ' is displacing North American made goods big time. Another two will soon be commissioned. These ships were commissioned by Wal-Mart to get their imported goods from China. The full crew is just 13 people on a ship longer than a US Aircraft Carrier, which has a crew of 5,000. With its 207' beam it is too big to fit through the Panama or Suez Canals, it is strictly transpacific. Cruise speed: 31 knots. The goods arrive four days before the typical container ship (18-20 knots) on a China -to California run. So this behemoth is hugely competitive even when carrying perishable goods.



The ship was built in five sections. The sections are floated together and then welded. The command bridge is higher than a 10-story building and has 11 cargo crane rigs that can operate simultaneously unloading the entire ship in less than two hours.

- Cargo capacity - 15,000 TEU (1 TEU = 20 cubic feet)
- Crew - 13 people!
- First trip - Sept. 08, 2006
- Construction cost - US \$145,000,000 + Silicone painting applied to the ship bottom reduces water resistance and saves 317,000 gallons of diesel per year.

A recent documentary in late March on the History Channel noted that all of these containers are shipped back to China, EMPTY! Yep, that's right. We send nothing back on these ships. What does that tell you about the current financial state of the west in crisis? So folks, just keep on buying those imported goods (mostly gadgets) until you run out of money. Then you may wonder what the cause of unemployment is. (Maybe even your job) in the US, UK, Canada, England & even in Australia. [Source: Military Service Coalition Austin TX | Brian Colfac | June 19, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Secrets of Flying (5) ► 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:

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Do Not Walk Barefoot** -- Do not ever walk barefoot once on board the plane. Everything including baby urine, blood, vomit, and milk have all been spilled on the floor of a plane. You just read how often they clean the trays and blankets, so how familiar do you think the vacuums are with those floors? The gamble is yours to take. Basically, airplanes are giant cabins you're stuck in where germs can manifest at any time. But it's totally still the safest way to travel. Just bring plenty of penicillin with you!

**Backhanded** -- Have you ever noticed that flight attendants always seem to greet passengers with their hands clasped behind their backs? Turns out that there's a good reason airline employees do this. Hiding their hands makes it easier to conduct a head count as people enter the plane – they're keeping count on their fingers! If you saw them counting on their fingers in front of you, you probably wouldn't think too highly of them. The trust between the attendant and passenger must never be broken.

**Don't Forget Your Headphones** -- Next time you travel, be sure to bring your own headphones. Airline-issued headphones are sometimes free, and sometimes not. And let's be honest, you're never going to reuse those flimsy things. They're more likely to break in your bag on the way back home. Depending on the length of your flight, there's more than likely in-flight entertainment that you'll want to view. You wouldn't want to have to pay for headphones to enjoy the movie.

**Don't Go To the Airport Starbucks** -- Starbucks may be delicious and addicting, but it could be better for you if you skip that long line. For one, you can get free coffee on your flight so you would be saving money. Secondly, if you are flying Alaska Airlines or Delta, you get a complimentary Starbucks as part of their services. This is something flight attendants definitely want you to know. It saves them time not making you coffee and you don't get gross coffee with water possibly from the toilet. We call that a win-win!

**Is the Mile-High Club a Thing?** -- For as long as humans have been traveling by plane, the idea of the "mile-high club" has been glamorized. But considering what we know about airplane bathrooms (let's be real — they're tiny, the lighting is awful, and they don't always smell so good), a mid-flight romp isn't all its chocked up to be. What's more, flight attendants carefully watch the bathrooms, so even going inside of the bathroom with another person and getting away with it is nearly impossible. If you do get caught, you could face serious repercussions, including indecent exposure.

**What's the Deal With Air Marshals?** -- Think there's an air marshal on every flight? Not quite. While the exact number of air marshals isn't public information, CNN reported that the number of air marshals was being cut by around 3,500 back in 2014. Still, you never know when you might be sitting next to one on your flight. Air marshals wear "normal" clothing, but are armed on flights, as their presence is to protect against a terrorist attack.

**The Brace Position Isn't a Myth** -- When flight attendants go over the safety procedures before a flight, they detail the "brace position," in which passengers put their head towards their knees and cup the back of their head lightly. But for years, some conspiracy theorists have claimed that the brace position is actually deadly. On the contrary, this

position helps compact the body, protecting the vital organs from injury. The topic has been so hotly debated that Myth Busters even did an episode on it.

**Medical Emergencies Happen** -- Medical emergencies can happen any time — even mid-flight! Luckily, flight attendants and the rest of the crew are trained accordingly to handle a series of situations that may be thrown their way. Flight attendants are trained to act as first responders in the event that there is a medical emergency during a flight. This includes things like CPR and the Heimlich maneuver. All planes are also equipped with defibrillators and first aid kits if a passenger may need care during a flight. If there is a more grave situation, the flight attendants might ask if there is a doctor on board. A pilot may also choose to divert and ground the plane, which usually takes just 15 or so minutes, unless it is an overseas flight.

[Source: <http://www.postfun.com/travel> | June 30, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## Toilets Update 01 ► What You Should NOT Flush Down Them

You may temporarily get away with treating your toilet like a garbage can, but sooner or later you'll end up with an expensive plumbing bill. Toilets were designed to do only one thing: Dispose of human waste and toilet paper. Even so, many people are tempted to use them to get rid of various things. Clogged toilets are caused by everything from discarded food to cat litter. In addition to damaging your plumbing, some items can harm the environment if they find their way into the ecosystem. Following are things you should never flush down your toilet.



### 1. Cigarette butts

You may think cigarette butts are small enough to pass through your plumbing without causing problems. But they can stop up your pipes because, unlike toilet paper, they don't dissolve in water, says Stephany Smith, a plumber at the Fantastic Services property maintenance company in London. So, empty your ash tray in the trash bin.

### 2. Tampons and sanitary napkins

The cotton used in tampons and sanitary napkins wasn't meant to be flushed down toilets, says Glenn Gallas, the vice president of operations at Mr. Rooter Plumbing. "The cotton in these items can easily snag and grab on just about anything," he tells Money Talks News. In addition to harming your own plumbing, such products can clog up the waste disposal system down the line, he notes. Cotton then must be removed from the waste stream by workers and sent to landfills. Tampon maker Tampax notes that while its products biodegrade in landfills, flushing tampons is not the best way to dispose of them. It's better for the environment to put them in the trash.

### 3. Cooking oil and grease

It's always a mistake to attempt to dispose of cooking oil or grease in a toilet. These substances will "wreak havoc in your plumbing system," says Smith. Alex Berezow, vice president of scientific affairs for the nonprofit American

Council on Science and Health, explains to Money Talks News: “Cooking oil absolutely clogs pipes because it solidifies as it cools.”

#### **4. Stringy materials**

Hair, dental floss, thread and string can cause a mountain of troubles if flushed down the toilet, Smith tells Money Talks News. That’s because they don’t easily dissolve in water. If flushing hair down the toilet becomes a habit, sooner or later you can expect “a massive ball” of debris to form in your pipes, Smith adds. When cleaning hair from your bathtub drain, resist the impulse to drop it into the toilet.

#### **5. Cat litter**

Cat litter contains more than your cat’s waste, says Gallas. “It also has clay and sand, which are extremely troublesome,” he says. Cat litter is designed to absorb moisture and create clumps, which can turn into large clogs once they enter your pipes. The only safe place to dispose of cat litter is the trash. Cat litter can create clogs even it is labeled as flushable, reports The New York Times.

#### **6. Medicines**

Wastewater treatment plants aren’t designed to filter out medicines. So, drugs that are flushed down toilets eventually may enter rivers, streams and lakes, reports The New York Times. “While prescription medication, over the counter medication, and other substances don’t necessarily mess up your pipes, the ingredients in pharmaceuticals can pose dangers to your water supply,” says Gallas. “Instead, dispose of medications responsibly, through your local pharmacy or medication disposal program.”

#### **7. Wet wipes**

One of the easiest ways to clog your toilet and sewer lines is to flush wet wipes. Even if they are promoted as flushable, Smith doesn’t recommend putting them in your toilet. Wet wipes have created clogs in aging sewage systems in some U.S. cities, Gallas says. That’s because they don’t disintegrate as quickly as toilet paper.

#### **8. Food**

Some foods — such as pasta, noodles, rice, grits and bread — absorb water and expand after you drop them into a toilet, says Smith. They are likely to form blockages in pipes. To play it safe, never put food of any kind in your toilet.

#### **9. Contact lenses**

Many contact lenses are disposable. But if you flush them down the toilet, they won’t biodegrade easily, The New York Times reports. Some may end up polluting waterways.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Emmet Pierce | June 28, 2019 ++]

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Stains ► Suggestions On How to Remove**

There are a few important things to keep in mind. Firstly, the below processes need time to work – patience is a virtue. Secondly, the water you use shouldn’t be more than lukewarm – you don’t want to cook the stain into the material. And thirdly, dab – don’t rub the stain in further. Simple, effective and natural – with nary a stain on your conscience. And here’s how to use them to the five most common types of stain:

- 1. Red wine** -- Sprinkle salt or cornstarch on the fresh stain. These substances draw moisture into themselves, and will suck most of the wine out of the material. Next....yes, you guessed it, the old adage is true: splash on some white wine. Leave it for 15 minutes, then dab with warm water.
- 2. Grass** -- Mix a cup of white wine vinegar diluted with warm water. Add a few drops of eucalyptus oil to the stain and rub in well, then soak it in the diluted vinegar. Leave to activate, then dab away.

**3. Ink** -- Speed is everything. Soak the stain in rubbing alcohol as quickly as possible. If the stain is persistent, even after three or four washes, then consider re-use options. What color is the stain? Would it make a nice color for the whole garment? If so, get your dye out!

**4. Blood** -- Salt is the answer. Not only will it soak up fluids, it breaks down the proteins in blood. Soak the fresh stain in a strong saline solution. Washing soda (Sodium Carbonate Decahydrate) also breaks down proteins, so use this next with some warm water.

**5. Grease** -- The best way to deal with oils is to mop them up. Use salt or cornstarch, combined with a paper towel. (Cat litter is apparently a great alternative!). Once you've sponged up as much as you can, bring out the concentrated orange cleaner to loosen those last pockets of grease.

#### **6. Common stains on clothes**

- a. A mix of equal parts of ammonia, liquid dish detergent and water in a spray bottle can remove stains. Spray it on and wash later, after it dries.
- b. Hydrogen peroxide (3%) is the star of this recipe that removes stains from clothing and other fabrics. Mix together one part hydrogen peroxide and two parts Dawn dish detergent. A spray bottle is the preferred method of application.
- c. Robin Shreeves used a combination of lemon juice and salt to treat a stain that had set on a favorite white blouse, then reapplied lemon juice and hung it in the sun.

#### **7. Perspiration stains**

- a. This [How Stuff Works](#) article about the power of lemon as a stain remover says a mixture of lemon juice and water will remove those dreaded armpit stains. Just be sure you wash the clothes quickly after applying.
- b. Two crushed aspirin tablets dissolved in a cup of hot water also is good for perspiration stains, [Mrs. Clean](#) says.

#### **8. Lipstick, ink, and similar types of stains**

- a. WD-40 lubricant can remove grease, oil, crayon and lipstick from clothes. In fact, there are scores of ways in which [WD-40 can be a life-saver](#).
- b. [Reader's Digest](#) says an overnight soaking in milk will remove ink.
- c. For stubborn spots, use vinegar and let it soak as we detail in "9 Expensive Cleaning Supplies You Can Easily Make for Pennies."

**9. Stains on pots and pans** -- Half a lemon dipped in salt will eliminate stains from the copper bottoms of pots and pans. Rub lightly. That combination of lemon juice and salt is also said to remove rust stains from a variety of surfaces.

#### **10. Hard-water stains**

- a. Keep a spray bottle of half white vinegar and half water for many cleaning tasks, including removing hard-water stains.
- b. For stubborn spots, use vinegar and let it soak as are detailed in "[9 Expensive Cleaning Supplies You Can Easily Make for Pennies](#)."

**11. Water rings** -- Paul Michael of [Wise Bread](#) vouches for this method of removing a water ring from the dining room table: Mix mayonnaise with some cigarette ash and leave it on the stain overnight.

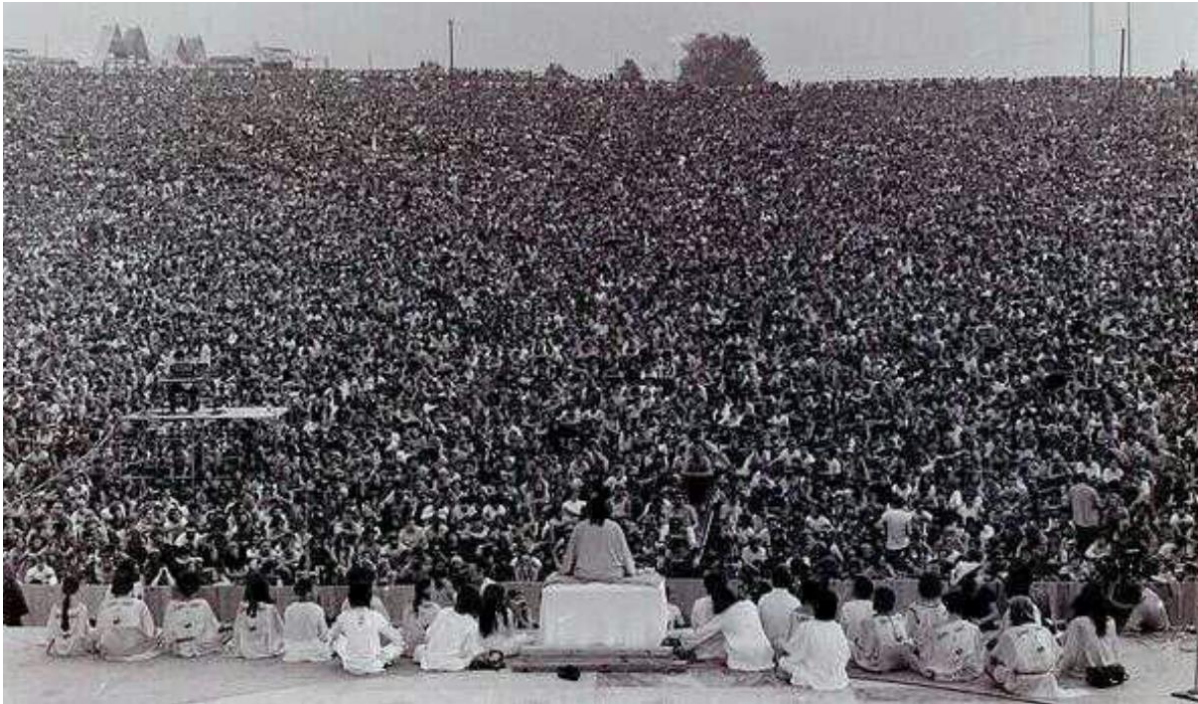
**12. Stained toilet bowls** -- For a stained toilet bowl or grease on your garage floor, use Coke (or any cola brand). Even if you don't drink the stuff, keep some around, and check out: ("[From 47 Remarkable Ways to Use Coca-Cola](#)."

[Source: MoneyTalksNews & Ecosolon | Karen Datko & Mike Sowden & June 12, 2019++]

\*\*\*\*\*



**Memories** ▶ Woodstock Opening Ceremony 1969



\*\*\*\*\*

**Interesting Inventions** ▶ Self Locking Bike



\*\*\*\*\*

## One Word Essays ► Tenacity



\*\*\*\*\*

## Have You Heard? ► Our Nation's Debt | Aphorisms 2

### Our Nation's Debt

Our Nation is in Deep Debt. We're spending money we don't have—we're borrowing from our kids; how will they pay it back. Here's an example: There's the overpriced, over budget and overdue F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, "including eight additional planes for the Air Force, six for the Navy, and two for the Marine Corps. In development for nearly 18 years and eight years behind schedule, total acquisition costs now exceed \$428 billion; nearly double the initial estimate of \$233 billion. A 2019 DOD Selected Acquisition Report noted that the F-35's lifetime operation and maintenance costs will total approximately \$1.2 trillion, the most expensive weapon system in US history."

This is the Pentagon's equivalent of California's ludicrous \$77 billion high-speed rail project, which at least has been sharply cut back. Unfortunately, when it comes to federal spending, failure is never a sufficient reason to stop.

-o-o-O-o-o-

### Aphorisms 2

An Aphorism is a statement of truth or opinion expressed in a concise and witty manner. The term is often applied to philosophical, moral and literary principles.

- I read that 4,153,237 people got married last year. Not to cause any trouble, but shouldn't that be an even number?
- I find it ironic that the colors red, white, and blue stand for freedom until they are flashing behind you.
- When wearing a bikini, women reveal 90% of their body. Men are so polite they only look at the covered parts.
- Relationships are a lot like algebra. Have you ever looked at your X and wondered Y?
- America is a country which produces citizens who will cross the ocean to fight for democracy but won't cross the street to vote.
- You know that tingly little feeling you get when you love someone? That's your common sense leaving your body.
- My therapist says I have a preoccupation with vengeance. We'll see about that.

- Money talks ... all mine ever says is good-bye.
- You're not fat, you're just easier to see.
- If you think nobody cares whether you're alive, try missing a couple of payments.
- I always wondered what the job application is like at Hooters and Twin Peaks. Do they just give you a bra and say, "Here, fill this out?"
- I can 't understand why women are OK that JC Penny has an older women 's clothing line named, "Sag Harbor."
- Denny's has a slogan, "If it's your birthday, the meal is on us." If you're in Denny's and it's your birthday, your life sucks!
- The location of your mailbox shows you how far away from your house you can go in a robe before you start looking like a mental patient.
- I think it's pretty cool how Chinese people made a language entirely out of tattoos.
- Money can't buy happiness, but it keeps the kids in touch!
- The reason Mayberry was so peaceful and quiet was because nobody was married. Andy, Aunt Bea, Barney, Floyd, Howard, Goober, Gomer, Sam, Ernest T. Bass, Helen, Thelma Lou, Clara and, of course, Opie were all single. The only married person was Otis, and he stayed drunk.

Now, don't you feel better knowing what an aphorism is?

\*\*\*\*\*

## Thought of the Week

It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit — **President Harry S Truman**

**FAIR USE NOTICE:** This newsletter may contain copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. The Editor/Publisher of the Bulletin at times includes such material in an effort to advance reader's understanding of veterans' issues. We believe this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, the material in this newsletter is distributed without profit to those who have expressed an interest in receiving the included information for educating themselves on veteran issues so they can better communicate with their legislators on issues affecting them. To obtain more information on Fair Use refer to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>. If you wish to use copyrighted material from this newsletter for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.

-o-o-O-o-o-

**TO READ and/or DOWNLOAD THE ABOVE ARTICLES, ATTACHMENTS, OR PAST BULLETINS GO Online To:**

- <http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html> (PDF Edition w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://www.veteransresources.org> (PDF & HTML Editions w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions in Word format)
- <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> (PDF & HTML Editions w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://www.nj-americanlegionpost493.org> (PDF Edition w/ATTACHMENTS)
- <http://www.veteransresources.org/rao-bulletin> (past Bulletins)

**Note:** The above websites are blocked by some, if not all, USAF & USCG military commands for security purposes. To gain access you may need to open them using a non "[...@us.af.mil](mailto:...@us.af.mil)" / "[...@uscg.mil](mailto:...@uscg.mil)" source. Contact [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) if you are unable to do this.

## Notes:

1. The Bulletin is provided as a website accessed document vice direct access. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin's size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user's capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 19,595 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others were deleted from the active mailing list.
2. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines, whether or not they live there, can request to be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of notices on Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, and TRICARE in the RP.
3. New subscribers and those who submit a change of address should receive a message that verifies their addition or address change being entered in the mailing list. If you do not receive a message within 3 days it indicates that either I never received your request, I made an error in processing your request, or your server will not allow me to send to the email addressee you provided. Anyone who cannot reach me by email can call (858) 842-1111 to ask questions or confirm info needed to add them to the directory.
4. If you have another email addressee at work or home and would like to receive Bulletin notices there also, just provide the appropriate addressee to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net).
5. Past Bulletin articles as well as an index of all previously published article titles are available on request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net). Bear in mind that the articles listed on this 200 page plus index were valid at the time they were written and may have since been updated or become outdated.
6. The Bulletin is normally published on the 1st and 15th of each month. To aid in continued receipt of Bulletin availability notices, recommend enter the email addressee [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) into your address book. If you do not receive a Bulletin check either [www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html](http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html) (PDF Edition), [www.veteransresources.org](http://www.veteransresources.org) (PDF & HTML Editions), <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> (PDF & HTML Editions), or <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions) before sending me an email asking if one was published. If you can access the Bulletin at any of the aforementioned sites it indicates that something is preventing you from receiving my email. Either your server considers it to be spam or I have somehow incorrectly entered or removed your addressee from the mailing list. Send me an email so I can verify your entry on the validated mailing list. If you are unable to access the Bulletin at any of these sites let me know.
7. Articles within the Bulletin are editorialized information obtained from over 100 sources. At the end of each article is provided the primary source from which it was obtained. The ++ indicates that 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) which makes it a 10-12 hour daily endeavor to prepare and publish it. Gives me something to do in my retirement years which are going on 31 now. I was a workaholic in the Navy and old habits are hard to break. Readers who question the validity of content are encouraged to go to the source provided to have their questions answered. I am always open to comments but, as a policy, shy away from anything political. Too controversial and time consuming.
8. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin to other vets or veteran organizations.



== To subscribe first add the RAO email addree [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) to your address book and/or white list. Then send to this addee your full name plus either the post/branch/chapter number of the fraternal military/government organization you are currently affiliated with (if any) “AND/OR” the city and state/country you reside in so your addee can be properly positioned in the directory for future recovery. Subscription is open at no cost to all veterans, dependents, military/veteran support organizations, and media.

== Anyone who wants to remove or change their email addee from the Bulletin mailing list can the automatic “UNSUBSCRIBE“ or “Change of Address“ tabs at the bottom of this message or send a message to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) with the word “DELETE“ or “COA“ in the subject line.

-o-o-O-o-o-

**RAO Bulletin Editor/Publisher:**

Lt. James (EMO) Tichacek, USN (Ret) Tel: (858) 842-1111 Email: [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net)  
Bulletin Web Access: <http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html>, <http://www.veteransresources.org>, <http://frabr245.org>  
, and <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> [PDF & HTML Editions w/ATTACHMENTS]

**RAO Baguio Director:**

SSgt Terrance (Terry) Parker, USAF (Ret), PSC 517 Box 4107, FPO AP 96517-1000, Tel: Smart 0921824728 or Globe 09454073380, Email: [rao.dir.baguio@gmail.com](mailto:rao.dir.baguio@gmail.com)

**RAO Baguio Office:** Mountain Lodge, 27 Leonard Wood Road, Baguio City, 2600 Philippines  
FPO Mail Pickup: TUE & THUR 09-1100 --- Outgoing Mail Closeout: THUR 1100

**Warning:**

DELETE the end-paragraph (i.e. UNSUBSCRIBE Option) of the Bulletin before you forward it to others. The option following this warning is required by law and offers the recipient an opportunity to “UNSUBSCRIBE“, if they choose to. This “unsubscribe” link contains **YOUR** email address vice theirs and whoever receives your re-distribution has the opportunity, whether purposely or inadvertently, to terminate your future receipt of Bulletin messages if they should click on it.

