

RAO

BULLETIN

1 August 2019



PDF Edition

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

*** ATTACHMENTS ***

- Attachment – Mississippi Vet State Benefits
- Attachment – Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 AUG (Updated)

*** DoD ***



DoD Disability Severance Update 07 ► Lump Sum Payment IRS Tax Refund Available

Veterans who were injured in combat or were disabled due to their military service may have overpaid taxes and are getting a one-time opportunity to seek refunds. But they must act soon. The federal government incorrectly considered lump-sum disability severance payments made to some veterans to be taxable. The payments are taxable in some cases but not when the pay results from a combat-related injury, or if the veteran is approved for Department of Veterans

Affairs disability compensation, according to the IRS. Congress enacted a law in 2016 to give veterans whose payments were taxed improperly additional time to request a refund, or a tax credit.



Our records show that you received Disability Severance Pay in the amount of \$[XXX,XXX.XX] upon your separation from military service in [YEAR XXXX]. If your Disability Severance Pay was taxed, you may be eligible for a refund of those taxes. Your eligibility for a refund depends upon the circumstances of your separation.

Last July (2018), the Department of Defense mailed letters to about 130,000 veterans advising them of their right. To claim a refund, the one-time lump disability payments must have been received after Jan. 17, 1991, and before Jan. 1, 2017. Taxpayers usually can claim refunds only within three years of filing a tax return. The law gives veterans one year from the date they received the notice from the Department of Defense to file, meaning some veterans may be able to claim refunds for taxes they paid back to 1991.

Tax form 1040X, “Amended U.S. Individual Income Tax Return,” must be filed to request the refund or credit. Filers should write “Veteran Disability Severance” or “St. Clair Claim” across the top of the form, according to the IRS. The tax form, and a copy of the Department of Defense notice about their refund eligibility, should be mailed to: Internal Revenue Service, 333 W. Pershing Street, Stop 6503, P5, Kansas City, MO 64108. Veterans can claim the actual amount of their disability severance pay, or if they no longer have documents showing that amount and don’t want to obtain them, they can file for a standard refund.

The standard refund amounts are \$1,750 for tax years 1991 to 2005; \$2,400 for tax years 2006 to 2010; and \$3,200 for tax years 2011 to 2016. Veterans who did not receive a notice still may be eligible to claim a refund. The IRS says they should contact the National Archives, National Personnel Records Center or the VA to obtain the documents necessary to support their claim. They need paperwork showing the amount of the severance and the reason for it, or a letter documenting that the VA has declared them eligible for disability compensation. More information is available at [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov) or by calling the IRS at 833-558-5245 x378. Veterans service organizations also may be able to offer advice. [Source: The Morning Call (Allentown, Pa.) | Paul Muschick | July 16, 2019 ++]

NDAA 2020 Update 19 ► House Version Will Cause Battle in Conference

The House passed its version of the 2020 defense authorization bill 12 JUL by a vote of 220-197, setting up a battle with the Senate over how much money Congress will authorize in defense spending next year. The main sticking point between the two bills — and the reason most House Republicans voted against the bill — is the topline authorization. The Democrat-held House bill allows \$733 billion for defense spending in 2020, while the Republican-led Senate bill allows \$750 billion. That \$17 billion will be caught in a tug-of-war as the two houses go to conference over the bill. Democrats say Republicans want to use the extra \$17 billion for “pet projects,” such as barriers for the wall on the southern border.

“To authorize spending beyond the guidelines provided by the House is like playing with monopoly money, making the House Armed Services Committee and its recommendations irrelevant,” committee Chairman Adam Smith said in June. “Abandoning our offset tradition and authorizing an additional \$17 billion beyond the topline mocks our men and women in uniform, who the minority claims to support. This money simply doesn’t exist. Not only that, it won’t buy another bullet for a soldier, fund military construction projects, or provide our service members with the 3.1% pay raise they deserve.”

The White House already signaled its displeasure with the lower topline in a 9 JUL statement of administration policy and threatened to veto the bill if a \$733 billion topline made it to the president’s desk. The statement also notes

that the administration does not like how the bill moved funds from an emergency war account back into the base budget. The president's budget request put nearly \$100 billion of base budget funding into the overseas contingency operations (OCO) fund, which is not beholden to sequestration caps. The administration used OCO as a means of avoiding the Budget Control Act caps set on the 2020 budget.

Both defense authorization bills move that money back into the base budget. Lawmakers are concerned OCO is becoming a slush fund for DoD and military officials say it causes issues because it only allows the Pentagon to budget for one year since the future use of the fund is in question. Because both bills move those funds back to the base budget, Congress will need to address the return of the budget caps by October. Congress will need to come to a budget deal to raise the caps or risk triggering sequestration or another shutdown.

A deluge of amendments attached itself to the House version of the defense authorization bill. Lawmakers offered more than 430 amendments and a large number of them made it into the House bill. Federal News Network compiled a handful of significant amendments that made it into the bill.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is becoming a recurrent issue in the defense authorization bill debates. An amendment from a previous authorization act asking for a list of bases vulnerable to climate change caused a ruckus this year over how DoD responded. Now lawmakers are asking for more information from the Pentagon and are using the information they already have to ensure the safety of military installations from extreme weather.

- An amendment from Rep. Charlie Crist (D-FL) requires the defense secretary to account for sea-level rise projections and future flood risk when creating guidelines for energy and climate resiliency at military bases. The amendment asks the secretary to take into account historical data and current conditions when building those timelines and to consult with the heads of other departments for energy, climate and cyber resilience.
- A separate amendment that made it into the bill from Rep. Veronica Escobar (D-TX) directs DoD to put a dedicated line in its budget for "adaptation to and mitigation of climate-related risks to military networks, systems, installations, facilities and other assets." The amendment also asks for an estimate of anticipated adverse impacts to readiness and the financial costs covered by the budget because of climate change. DoD already had to ask for extra funds to rebuild Air Force Base Tyndall and Camp Lejeune, which were both devastated by hurricanes.

TRANSGENDER SERVICE MEMBERS

President Donald Trump's restriction on transgender people in the military caused a stir throughout the military and civilian world. After multiple court injunctions and changes to the policy, the restrictions went into effect. Still, as recently as last week top military officials said anyone who meets the requirements to be in the military should be allowed to serve. Army Chief of Staff and nominee to be the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Gen. Mark Milley, reiterated that point during his nomination hearing last Thursday. "If you meet the medical, behavioral health, the conduct standards and physical standards, etc., then it's my view that you should be welcomed in," Milley said.

House Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee Chairwoman Jackie Speier's amendment does just that. It repeals the restrictions set by the Trump administration. The amendment states the military will only take into account "the ability of an individual to meet gender-neutral occupational standards for military service generally and the military occupational specialty concerned in particular, and may not include any criteria relating to the race, color, national origin, religion, or sex (including gender identity or sexual orientation) of an individual."

MILITARY JUSTICE

At the end of May the Government Accountability Office found black and Hispanic men were more likely to be court martialled. GAO recommended “the services develop the capability to present consistent race and ethnicity data, and DoD include demographic information in military justice annual reports and evaluates the causes of disparities in the military justice system.” Rep. Elijah Cummings’ (D-MD) amendment tries to codify those recommendations into law. Cummings’ amendment requires DoD to record the race, ethnicity and gender demographics of the victim or accused during a court martial. The amendment also requires DoD establish criteria for when data indicating possible racial, ethnic or gender disparities in the military justice process should be further reviewed and how that review should be conducted.

[Source: Federal News Network | Scott Maucione | July 15, 2019 ++]

NDAA 2020 Update 20 ► American Public Biological Weapon Exposure Query

If you've ever wondered if the Pentagon has ever exposed the American public to ticks infected with biological weapons, you're not alone. Rep. Christopher Smith (R-N.J.) authored an amendment to the House version of the Fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization Act which would require the Defense Department Inspector General's Office to find out if the U.S. military experimented with using ticks and other insects as biological weapons between 1950 and 1975. If such experiments took place, the amendment would require the inspector general's office to tell lawmakers if any of the ticks or other bugs "were released outside of any laboratory by accident or experiment design."



Smith is the founding co-chair of the House Lyme Disease Caucus. In a news release, Smith said he was inspired to write the amendment after reading books and articles about U.S. military experiments meant to use ticks and other insects to infect enemies. "With Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases exploding in the United States—with an estimated 300,000 to 437,000 new cases diagnosed each year and 10-20 percent of all patients suffering from chronic Lyme disease—Americans have a right to know whether any of this is true," Smith said in the news release. "And have these experiments caused Lyme disease and other tick-borne disease to mutate and to spread?"

Defense officials did not provide a comment for this story. Lawmakers from the House of Representatives and Senate will now consider whether to include Smith's amendment in the final version of the NDAA. President Richard Nixon announced in 1969 that the United States would unilaterally end its offensive biological weapons program. Although the Soviet Union also signed a ban against such weapons in 1972, it continued to weaponize biological pathogens such as anthrax throughout the Cold War. More than 60 people were killed when anthrax spores were accidentally released from a bioweapons facility in Sverdlovsk, Russia. [Source: Task & Purpose | Jeff Schogol | July 15, 2019 ++]

Trump Border Wall Update 01 ► Supreme Court Unfreezes Pentagon Funds

The Supreme Court cleared the way for the Trump administration to tap billions of dollars in Pentagon funds to build sections of a border wall with Mexico. The court's five conservative justices gave the administration the green light on 26 JUL to begin work on four contracts it has awarded using Defense Department money. Funding for the projects had been frozen by lower courts while a lawsuit over the money proceeded. The court's four liberal justices wouldn't have allowed construction to start. The justices' decision to lift the freeze on the money allows President Donald Trump to make progress on a major 2016 campaign promise heading into his race for a second term. Trump tweeted after the announcement: "Wow! Big VICTORY on the Wall. The United States Supreme Court overturns lower court injunction, allows Southern Border Wall to proceed. Big WIN for Border Security and the Rule of Law!"

The Supreme Court's action reverses the decision of a trial court, which initially froze the funds in May, and an appeals court, which kept that freeze in place earlier this month. The freeze had prevented the government from tapping approximately \$2.5 billion in Defense Department money to replace existing sections of barrier in Arizona, California and New Mexico with more robust fencing. The case the Supreme Court ruled in began after the 35-day partial government shutdown that started in December of last year. Trump ended the shutdown in February after Congress gave him approximately \$1.4 billion in border wall funding. But the amount was far less than the \$5.7 billion he was seeking, and Trump then declared a national emergency to take cash from other government accounts to use to construct sections of wall.

The money Trump identified includes \$3.6 billion from military construction funds, \$2.5 billion in Defense Department money and \$600 million from the Treasury Department's asset forfeiture fund. The case before the Supreme Court involved just the \$2.5 billion in Defense Department funds, which the administration says will be used to construct more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) of fencing. One project would replace 46 miles (74 kilometers) of barrier in New Mexico for \$789 million. Another would replace 63 miles (101 kilometers) in Arizona for \$646 million. The other two projects in California and Arizona are smaller. The other funds were not at issue in the case. The Treasury Department funds have so far survived legal challenges, and Customs and Border Protection has earmarked the money for work in Texas' Rio Grande Valley but has not yet awarded contracts. Transfer of the \$3.6 billion in military construction funds is awaiting approval from the defense secretary.

The lawsuit at the Supreme Court was brought by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of the Sierra Club and Southern Border Communities Coalition. The justices who lifted the freeze on the money did not give a lengthy explanation for their decision. But they said among the reasons they were doing so was that the government had made a "sufficient showing at this stage" that those bringing the lawsuit don't have a right to challenge the decision to use the money. Alexei Woltornist, a spokesman for the Justice Department, said in a statement, "We are pleased that the Supreme Court recognized that the lower courts should not have halted construction of walls on the southern border. We will continue to vigorously defend the Administration's efforts to protect our Nation." ACLU lawyer Dror Ladin said after the court's announcement that the fight "is not over." The case will continue, but the Supreme Court's decision suggests an ultimate victory for the ACLU is unlikely. Even if the ACLU were to win, fencing will have already been built.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) issued a statement accusing Trump of trying to "undermine our military readiness and steal from our men and women in uniform to waste billions on a wasteful, ineffective wall that Congress on a bipartisan basis has repeatedly refused to fund." She said the Supreme Court's decision "undermines the Constitution and the law." Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York called the decision "deeply regrettable and nonsensical."

Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan would not have allowed construction to begin. Justice Stephen Breyer said he would have allowed the government to finalize the contracts for the segments but not begin construction while the lawsuit proceeded. The administration had argued that if it wasn't able to finalize the contracts by 30 SEP, then it would lose the ability to use the funds. The administration had asked for a decision

quickly. The Supreme Court is on break for the summer but does act on certain pressing items. [Source: The Associated Press | Jessica Gresko | July 28, 2019 ++]

DOD Discharges ► Less Than Honorable Impact on Vets

When Charles Smith came home after two years in Vietnam during one of the bloodiest periods of the conflict, he was a traumatized 21-year-old who needed help. But all he could think about in 1969 was getting away from the military and “drinking myself to death.” Smith — now 70 years old and living in Conway, S.C. — displayed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, a condition that wasn’t formally recognized by the U.S. medical community until 1980. He dealt with his pain by going Absent Without Leave, or AWOL.



Vietnam War veteran Charles Smith of Conway, S.C., was a combat medic during the Tet Offensive and suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Due to his discharge status, Smith has been fighting for veterans benefits for much of his life.

That action affected the rest of his life. He received an “undesirable” discharge in 1971, which at the time was a subcategory of “less than honorable.” Smith’s mental state and his exposure to combat weren’t part of the evaluation. That became a double injury, because the designation meant Smith would not be eligible to get medical or mental health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs, or any financial benefits like disability payments, housing loans and education. He is among tens of thousands of veterans who have experienced that same type of military separation, even though they are often among the troops who need care the most. Veterans believe many of these discharges are undeserved and call them “bad paper.”

Recent veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have also found themselves subject to “bad paper” discharges and denied access to care for behavioral issues stemming from PTSD, despite the fact the illness is now officially recognized. A Harvard University report in 2016 found that more than 125,000 veterans have received other than honorable discharges since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began. In 2017, Brown University researchers found these specific “other than honorable” discharges were “often the result of minor disciplinary infractions that are actually symptomatic of trauma sustained during military service,” including drug or alcohol abuse related to post-traumatic stress disorder. “When you’re nuts, you don’t know that you’re nuts. You have to be taught that there’s something wrong,” Smith said about himself and so many others. “What person in their right mind would serve the country honorably and then come back and go AWOL? I had to have been nuts.”

‘Just a kid’

Smith enlisted in the Army on May 1, 1967, when he was 18 years old. He never dreamed he’d actually go to war, imagining his father, at the time a high-ranking Pentagon official, would use his connections to get him out of it. But by December 18 of that year, he was headed to Vietnam. Before he left, however, he spent a day training inside the burn unit at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. Smith recalled the bandaged men with injured limbs, moaning and groaning. “You were scared before you went,” he said. “You’re traumatized before you go.” Smith served in Vietnam with the 199th Light Infantry Brigade as an Army combat medic during the Tet Offensive. He saw a close friend get killed and watched soldiers “shooting bodies that were already dead.” When Smith returned home from

Vietnam, he was out of control. He was offered a post at the Walter Reed military medical center but refused: “I said, ‘I don’t want to see any more blood.’” He spiraled downward until he took his last drink on July 8, 1991.

A native of Washington, D.C., Smith eventually sought treatment at the D.C. Vet Center, which advocates for combat veterans and provides care to returning service members whose “bad paper” discharges bar them from receiving federal compensation for social services. There, he met Cary Smith — no relation — who until his recent retirement was the D.C. Vet Center director. Cary Smith said many of the veterans who receive dishonorable discharges aren’t aware of the ramifications until much later on — and by then, it’s too late. Many of the veterans he has counseled said they didn’t challenge their discharges at the time because they just wanted to get out of the military and move on with their lives. “When you’re a kid,” Cary Smith said, “you don’t understand that, ‘Hey, if I receive a bad discharge, I am not going to be able to hold a job.’”

Cary Smith also attributed “bad paper” discharges during the Vietnam War era to the government’s lack of appreciation for the trauma of combat and the readjustment upon return. “When a guy comes back from Vietnam, where there was no rigid rules ... (he’ll) come back into a unit in the states and they’ll start picking on him,” he said, referring to senior Army officials. “Maybe he won’t want to shine his brass anymore. He’s just done with the Army.” Both African Americans, Charles Smith and Cary Smith served in Vietnam during the Civil Rights era, when racial tensions at home were also playing out overseas — and were only exacerbated by the tensions of war. “Minorities receive a disproportionate share of less than honorable discharges,” the Government Accountability Office found in 1980.

‘No benefits’

Charles Smith credits his recovery from alcoholism, and his ability to live with PTSD, to ongoing mental health treatment and the “Friends of Bill Wilson” — a support group for alcoholics where he was first inspired to appeal his undesirable discharge. He said this support system gave him the personal courage to appeal his “bad paper” discharge, and in 1999 he received a correction, which entitled him to benefits. But Smith is still fighting for compensation dating back to the time of his separation from the Army in 1971. The VA is insisting on only recognizing his benefits going back to 1993, and Smith said he has never been able to find out why.

Because his journey was so difficult, Smith understands why other veterans give up trying to correct their discharge. “(The VA) will tell you they had to deny your allocation simply because you’ve been out of the military for more than 15 years, and the only way you can get a discharge change is to get a military correction,” Smith said. “So you’re waiting around three or four years ... and then you get a decision saying you gotta start a whole new process,” he said. “It’s taking time. That’s more suffering mentally, physically and spiritually, really, because you still will continue to drink or use drugs or whatever you want to escape,” he continued. “And most folks get discouraged, because they’re taking ‘No’ for an answer.”

Various veterans advocacy organizations and elected officials have pressed the Pentagon to take the service members’ experience into account before issuing a discharge. Lawmakers and advocates also want the Pentagon to speed the time it takes for a veteran to be able to appeal a discharge characterization, potentially to get access to life-saving medical care. In response, the VA has started opening up some services on a limited basis to veterans with “other than honorable” discharges. Those veterans can now seek care for mental health emergencies at VA centers for a period of up to 90 days. Some members of Congress have tried to provide eligible veterans with additional routes to appeal “bad paper” discharges, which could open the doors to thousands of veterans receiving access to care.

Legislation to accomplish this goal was at one point very recently tucked into a larger bill, the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act. However, U.S. senators removed the language before passing the measure out of their chamber in June, bowing to concerns about the potential costs of extending full benefits to previously excluded veterans. “We are extremely disappointed,” said Kris Goldsmith, the associate director for policy and government affairs at Vietnam Veterans of America, a nonprofit organization. Defense Secretary Mark Esper was asked during his confirmation hearing if he would review the issue of “bad paper” discharges and the time it takes to appeal them.

“I spent my time in war. I know the impacts,” said Esper, a former Army Ranger who served with the 101st Airborne Division during the 1991 Gulf War. “The bureaucracy on these things (appeals) is terrible. We need to just go after it hard. Particularly in matters involving life and health.” Smith knows he’s not alone, but it doesn’t make it any easier. “A lot of folks chose not to go, didn’t go — deferments and things,” Smith said “But I went. I served in the Army, honorably, and all this combat, and come back home and got bad papers where I could not get no benefits. None.” [Source: McClatchy Washington Bureau | Emma Dumain & Tara Copp | July 25, 2019 ++]

Base Housing Update 14 ► 21 Military Housing Bases Incentive Funds Withheld

The Air Force is withholding \$4.3 million in incentive funds at managed by Balfour-Beatty Communities after allegations that the company falsified maintenance records to receive the bonuses. The actions from the Air Force are a direct result of investigations from Reuters-CBS News, which also lead to congressional hearings and a military-wide look at privatized military housing. “The Air Force takes these allegations very seriously and is taking immediate action to ensure housing management controls are in place at locations managed by Balfour-Beatty Communities (BBC),” John Henderson, Air Force assistant secretary for installations, environment and energy told Federal News Network in a statement. “In addition, the Air Force has communicated the gravity of the situation to BBC leadership and notified the Air Force Office of Special Investigations.”

The incentive fee stoppage comes after new allegations of fraud at Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho. “On 2 JUL, the Air Force received information indicating that an employee of BBC at Mountain Home may not have followed proper management procedures in handling maintenance work orders,” Henderson said. The issues are not localized to Mountain Home, however. The Air Force Office of Special Investigations and the FBI are already investigating fraud allegations at three other locations: Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma, Fairchild Air Force Base in Washington and Travis Air Force Base in California.

The incentive fees are paid from a kitty of money collected by the Air Force. The Air Force gives the companies a percentage of the money depending on how the company responds to maintenance requests and repairs. If the company does not earn the fees, then they are invested into the community. Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) said in February that housing companies received incentive fees more than 95% of the time. The fees are only part of the \$33 million in net profit BBC gets from military housing per year. In order for the Air Force Civil Engineer Center to consider reinstating the incentive fees, BBC must “obtain and provide an independent review of its maintenance and work order processes at all 21 of its Air Force installations, within 90 days, and identify how BBC will address deficiencies and ensure its maintenance and work order processes meet Air Force requirements,” Henderson said in the statement.

Earlier this year, before members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, BBC president Christopher Williams pledged, “Absolutely, 100%” to immediately address issues raised by military families in BBC homes. That [hearing](#) was in response to reports of mold, mice, lead paint and other issues in privatized military housing that were not being addressed by the landlords.

On 22 JUL the leadership of the Senate Armed Services Committee jumped on BBC allegations. “*BBC’s allegedly widespread use of fraudulent work order practices is unacceptable, period. The Air Force has done the right thing by suspending all incentive fees to BBC, and this should remain the case while the FBI and other proper military authorities investigate these practices,*” Committee Chairman Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-OK) said. Ranking Member Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI) echoed the concerns. “*These are deeply troubling allegations and I commend the Air Force for stepping in and taking decisive action to stand up for military families and get to the bottom of this,*” he said. “*The health and well-being of our troops and their families must always come first. It appears that military families were getting short-changed so that some of these managers could pocket bonuses. If that is the case, they need to be held accountable and taxpayer money should be clawed back.*”

The House and Senate 2020 defense authorization bills require a tenants' bill of rights for residents of privatized military family housing in response to the issues. The bill of rights is to include:

- A prohibition on reprisal by either the private partner or military chain of command;
- Provision of a housing advocate that is not co-located with or employed by the private partner;
- A dispute resolution mechanism;
- A mechanism for withholding rent payments where appropriate during the dispute resolution process;
- Prompt provision of maintenance by qualified personnel and effective communication regarding the status of their work orders to include access to an electronic work order management system;
- Professional and courteous property management services; and
- Information about known and potential hazards at time of home selection, to include mold, lead, rodent infestation and history of sickened residents.

The Senate version of the bill sets up a dispute resolution process and increases oversight. It also instates new quality assurance and control measures and increase health and hazard inspections. The House version recommendations also prohibit the use of non-disclosure agreements in connection with entering into, continuing or terminating a lease. The military services took immediate steps to fix issues reported by service members after the Senate Armed Services Committee held its hearing. The Air Force ordered checks of all 74,000 of its houses. The Navy checked in with all of its sailors in privatized housing. The Army hired 119 additional staff for its housing authorities on installations and put money in its 2020 budget request to sustain those jobs. [Source: Federal News Network | Scott Maucione | July 23, 2019 ++]

PFAS Toxic Exposure Update 08 ► **New SECDEF Establishes Task Force**

On his first full day as secretary of defense, Mark Esper has signed a memo establishing a task force to deal with cancer-causing chemicals found on military bases. The purpose, he told reporters at the Pentagon 24 JUL, is to “address all the key areas” of the military’s response to the presence of harmful chemicals used in firefighting foam. The chemicals, perfluorooctanoic acid and/or perfluorooctane sulfonate have been found to have caused contamination at more than 230 military installations, according to an environmental advocacy group. The Environmental Working Group says that harmful levels have been detected in groundwater or drinking water sources of the fluorinated compounds, known collectively as PFAS. An additional 44 civilian airports are included that are also used by Air National Guard units, according to the group.

Esper said the new task force will address a wide range of issues resulting from the contamination, “whether it’s cleanup, whether it’s finding an alternative for the current firefighting, you name it,” said Esper. “It will include the military department and our health affairs folks.” Esper said he has also asked the Environmental Protection Agency to be involved, as well as other government agencies “to make sure we go after this problem very aggressively, very holistically and get in front of it, stay in front of it and take care of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines and the outlying communities that are affected by it.”

In his memo, Esper writes that the issue must be tackled in an “aggressive and holistic” way with a “strong and proactive stance.” The working group will be chaired by assistant secretary of defense for sustainment Robert McMahon, and will focus on six key areas: health aspects, clean-up standards and performance, finding/funding an effective substitute firefighting foam without PFAS, science-supported standard for exposure and clean up, interagency coordination and public/congress perception of DoD/s efforts. The new task force will be stood up within 30 days, with an update due to Esper’s desk within 180 days of the memo.

Earlier this month, the Environmental Working Group, which has released maps about the location of the contamination, blasted the Pentagon and EPA for the way they've dealt with the issue. "The EPA and the Department of Defense have utterly failed to treat PFAS contamination as a crisis demanding swift and decisive action," said Ken Cook, president of EWG, in a statement announcing the discovery of the additional sites. "It's time for Congress to end new PFAS pollution and clean up legacy contamination," Cook said at the time. A 2016 Environmental Protection Agency health advisory recommended water sources contain no more than 70 parts per trillion, or ppt, of the PFAS chemicals perfluorooctanoic acid, and/or perfluorooctane sulfonate at sites being addressed, including those under federal cleanup programs. While the EPA's health advisory has been in effect since 2016, neither the Pentagon nor any municipality was required to meet the 70 ppt standard because the contamination limit is an advisory, not a requirement.

For decades, the military used firefighting foams that contained PFAS chemicals. These per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances are also found in hundreds of everyday household products. PFAS chemicals have been linked to cancers and other health problems. When told that thousands of veterans believe their cancers are linked to the chemicals, Esper said that the Department of Veterans Affairs should be consulted. "I think we need to follow the science on this and one of the agencies that we should be talking to is VA on this," he said. "We just need to understand the problem and make sure we have our hands fully around it, follow the science, and then obviously if there is a relationship we need to do our due diligence." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Howard Altman & Aaron Mehta | July 24, 2019 ++]

Military Power ► **MOH Holder Points Out U.S. Weakness | Urban Combat**

Last month former Staff Sgt. David G. Bellavia became the Iraq War's first living Medal of Honor recipient. The details of the extraordinarily brave event read like every soldier's nightmare. A "house of hell" filled with enemy insurgents prepared to die in almost every room. Sergeant Bellavia and his fellow soldiers were outgunned, overmatched — disadvantaged in every respect. That was the sad state of American military capabilities in 2004. But the reality is that if today's military was placed in a similar battle, little would be different.

Bellavia's "house of hell" was just one of the hundreds of similar houses that soldiers and Marines faced during the Second Battle of Fallujah in November of 2004. They actually cleared over 30,000 houses in that city. Each time they were unaware if they were entering a death trap or an empty structure. Enemy forces had cheap but more powerful rifles and rocket-propelled grenades. They had fortified bunkers in concrete houses that most American weapons could not penetrate and the enemy knew it would take suicidal room-clearing assaults and ultimately the destruction of the city to eject them.



A soldier surveys the battlefield with a simulated Barrett M107 .50 caliber sniper rifle on July 12, 2019, in the city of Razish at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif.

Cities give anyone with minimal weapons and determined fighters the ability to contest and, in many cases, tactically defeat a more powerful force. Urban terrain gives the defender the advantage of turning every building into either a sniper attack position, ambush site, or death trap. It allows them to hide both within the concrete jungle and the civilian population. The terrain breaks up an attacking force, minimizing their ability to use advanced technologies, or even basic fire and maneuver tactics.

The United States can see, track and drop a precision-guided bomb on just about anyone or anything in the world. But it is these capabilities that has driven enemy forces around the world into densely populated urban areas. Recently, the Islamic State group captured and infested large cities in Iraq like cancers that had to be cut out. To do so, the Iraqi military (trained and equipped by the United States for over a decade) destroyed hundreds of thousands of houses through intense house-to-house combat worse than Fallujah in 2004. Every bad guy in the world watched and learned — if you want to fight a military, even the U.S. military, get into the cities and make them pay.

One of the objectives of U.S. military power is to be so strong, so capable, so lethal, that they strike fear in opposing forces. This deterrent effect works from the nation state level down to the individual bad guy. We want the world to fear the U.S. military at every level. From our nuclear arsenal to our individual soldiers. We want would-be enemies to fear the involvement of the American forces in any decision they might make. It is the backbone of the international order for American military forces to carry the biggest stick.

The annual Department of Defense budget is over \$700 billion. We will spend \$90 million per plane for new F-35 fighters, \$10.2 billion for three new submarines, and may spend up to \$2 billion to create a new organization to fight in space, but there are no major marked resources for urban combat. Even if there's concern, there's no denying we already dominate in air, sea and space. But inside a building and in a city, we don't dominate, and the grisly proof is available in Bellavia's Medal of Honor citation. There are no Manhattan Projects to change the one spot where the U.S. military does not dominate. Actually, there isn't a single office in the military dedicated solely to urban combat. No major urban combat schools. There are really only two urban combat training sites in the country that can hold more than a hundred soldiers.

The lack of investments and efforts to equip U.S. forces for urban combat are why Sergeant Bellavia couldn't see inside the building he attacked. Why he couldn't distinguish from enemy and civilian personnel inside the building? Even if he could have seen inside the building, he did not have a weapon that could penetrate the concrete walls protecting the enemy. When he did request a tank-like vehicle engage the house with a large machine gun, the enemy inside remained mostly untouched. He didn't have tear gas to clear the building because the United States signed a treaty to no longer use this nonlethal tool. His only remaining choice, and that of a soldier today, was to run inside the house and fight each enemy individual at close range.

Without investment and new ways of thinking, our soldiers will neither dominate nor be feared in urban combat. At today's pace, the age of "Iron Man" Tony Starks busting through walls, impervious to enemy bullets, capable of seeing and engaging bad guys in any dark space they may be hiding isn't coming anytime soon. The U.S. military may be the world's greatest force in air, sea and space. But where the nation's hardest fighting really takes place — urban combat — that's not the case. Consequently, Sergeant Bellavia's experience in the "house of hell" is bound to happen again. [Source: MilitaryTimes | John Spencer | July 15, 2019 ++]

Military Shopping/MWR Benefit ► Expanding to 3-Million More Vets

As about 3 million more people will soon be eligible to shop at military stores, officials are working to make sure these new customers will have access to bases, and that the shelves will be stocked. Starting 1 JAN, all service-connected disabled veterans, Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war and primary veteran caregivers will be eligible to shop at commissaries and exchanges, and officials from three federal agencies are preparing the way. The newly eligible customers will also be able to use certain morale, welfare and recreation activities. It's the largest patronage expansion in more than 60 years, said Virginia Penrod, principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for manpower and reserve affairs, who spoke at a recent meeting of the American Logistics Association.

The departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security have been planning for the expansion for more than six months, with four teams totaling about 70 people. Among other things, they've decided how the new customers will get access to military installations and to the stores; assessed the impact on the stores, and have been making plans to ensure enough products get to the shelves in the right assortment. The fiscal 2019 National Defense Authorization Act expanded the pool of eligible shoppers. Because the expansion also applies to Coast Guard facilities, the Department of Homeland Security has been involved.

The law also included Medal of Honor recipients, but they already had shopping privileges. Previously, veterans with 100 percent service-connected disabilities were able to shop; now all with service-connected disabilities can shop. The benefit extends to MWR programs that are "revenue-generating facilities," according to the law. The expansion is about a 50 percent increase in customers. Currently, about 6 million total households are eligible for the benefit; this adds 3 million, said Justin Hall, director of the DoD office of MWR and Resale Policy. "That's a huge lift across the entire system," he said.

Officials have been mapping out the areas, using VA statistics, where there may be more of an impact on the stores. The impact assessments generally show there will be a low to moderate impact on military stores overall, said Penrod. But she called on representatives of industry for their help to make sure the supply chain "remains responsive to the increased sales volume to ensure no out of stock situations occur" at stores in states with high populations of disabled veterans and in states with higher cost of living. States with a higher population density of disabled veterans are Florida, Texas and California, said Barry Patrick, in the DoD office of resale policy. High cost areas were identified as Hawaii; Alaska, California; the Washington metropolitan area; New York; New Jersey and Washington state, he said.

These new shoppers generally don't have access to military bases. Officials have decided the best form of identification for these groups: Disabled and other eligible veterans: For access into the installation, and for access to the stores, they'll use the veterans health ID card, Patrick said. Officials are working to enable technology at the front gate to scan those veteran cards, and will start scanning the cards in October, he said. Commissary officials are working on adjusting their technology to enable systems to read the veterans health ID card.

Caregivers: The process will be different, initially, Patrick said, since they're not directly affiliated with DoD or VA other than through their annual appointment to be a caregiver. The benefit applies to the primary caregiver of wounded/injured veterans who are registered in the Department of Veterans Affairs caregiver program. Beginning in October, the VA will post a memo to VA.gov for caregivers, to be used for access at the front gate, along with driver's license or other authorized form of ID. The VA process will later transition to a caregiver-type ID card, which will have scanning swipe capability, he said. Currently there are about 30,000 VA caregivers who will qualify for this benefit, but over the next several years the number could potentially grow to about 250,000, Patrick noted.

These new customers will pay a fee for using a credit card at commissaries, except for the military resale system's Military Star card. The amount of the fee has not yet been determined. By law, this expansion can't include extra costs associated with using credit cards in commissaries; the cost must be passed on to the customer. Except for the Military Star card, credit card companies charge transaction fees to retailers when customers use their credit cards. There will be a flag built into the system at commissaries so that when the card is swiped the fee will be charged. The fee applies only to new patrons using credit cards in commissaries, not to Medal of Honor recipients or others who were previously authorized to shop. New customers can avoid the fees by paying by cash, check or using the Military Star card. It only applies at the commissary, which is funded primarily by taxpayer dollars.

The DoD resale community has been working together to estimate the number of likely shoppers by location, and the merchandise categories that will interest those shoppers. For example, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service will be adjusting its inventory by location, said Chris Ward, spokesman for AAFES. "Extending the brick-and-mortar military exchange benefit to all disabled veterans is not expected to require material investments in facilities or technology," he said. Patrick said officials will launch an information campaign to get out the word about the new

benefit to the new customers, but also to installation officials. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | July 22, 2019 ++]

USMC Alaska Base ► Could Become the Corps' Next Twentynine Palms

The sprawling Twentynine Palms, California, training center has served the Marine Corps well, preparing Marines for the desert terrain of the Middle East and mountains of Afghanistan. But as the Corps looks to a fight in other climes, Alaska may prove a better location to prep for the big fight. At least that's the opinion of a Marine lieutenant who penned an article for West Point's Modern War Institute, and an Alaskan senator who temporarily held up the confirmation for Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. David Berger. And the idea is not too far-fetched.



Arctic Edge 18 prepares and tests the U.S. military's ability to operate tactically in the extreme cold-weather conditions found in Arctic environments.

According to Military.com, Sen. Dan Sullivan, (R-AK) has asked Berger to consider Marine bases in Alaska at Port MacKenzie, a mountain-warfare training center in Palmer, Alaska, and an amphibious training base in Adak, Alaska. Sullivan dropped his hold on Berger's confirmation in June, but he told Marine Corps Times in mid-July that "the hold was related to Arctic and national security concerns." Berger became commandant following a passage of command ceremony 11 JUL. Military.com reported that Berger is considering a unit deployment style program for Alaska, similar to the rotations that Marines do through Okinawa, Japan.

"Before forming an opinion on adding a new Marine Corps base anywhere — including Alaska — I would need a much deeper understanding of such factors as overall equipment allocation and distribution plans; infrastructure assessments and [military construction] estimates; access to appropriate training venues; available funding; Navy supportability (amphibious ship and surface connectors); and sustainability from an installations perspective," Berger wrote in a response to questions posed by Sullivan, according to Military.com.

Capt. Joseph Butterfield, a Marine spokesman, told Marine Corps times that about 3,300 Marines rotate through Alaska each year for training. Any new unit deployment program or military installation would be a considerable Marine buildup in Alaska. But what does Alaska offer the Corps? According to Marine 1st Lt. Walker D. Mills — who wrote "Terrain Matters: Training and Basing in Alaska," for Modern War Institute in February while he was a student at Defense Language Institute — Alaska provides the perfect terrain for the Corps to train its forces in contested littoral operations and experiment with new future fighting concepts.

"Our units need to be familiar with amphibious, bridging, fording, and small-boat operations," Mills wrote. "Deploying a rotational force of Marines to Alaska, along similar lines as the Unit Deployment Program in Okinawa, Japan, would provide much-needed arctic and littoral training opportunities and serve as a forward presence and a deterrent in the Arctic." "The Aleutian Island chain stretches for hundreds of miles and is littered with austere and unused airfields left over from World War II. These islands and their airfields offer the perfect terrain for testing expeditionary airfield operations, distributed operations, and littoral operations," Mills wrote.

The premier training centers in California at Fort Irwin and Twentynine Palms “have served the Army and Marine Corps well over the last decades,” Mills wrote, but as the military faces new threats in new climes and terrain it may be time to train elsewhere. “The lessons we learned in the Mojave served the force well in the Middle East, but lessons for the littorals and the Arctic will have to be learned in Alaska,” Mills said. The Senate is considering a review of the Corps plan to distribute its forces across the Pacific. The Senate is asking for details of “alternative locations for basing” in places such as Alaska, Hawaii, Japan and Oceania, among others, according to the Senate’s most recent version of the annual defense legislation. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | July 23, 2019 ++]

DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 JUL 2019

Naval Base, Ventura CA – A former civilian senior procurement official for the Navy in California will spend nearly six years in federal prison for taking \$1.2 million in illegal kickbacks, the U.S. Justice Department announced 15 JUL. **Fernando Barroso Sr.**, 69, worked for 22 years as the master scheduler for Naval Base Ventura County’s public works department, a position that saw him overseeing the Point Mugu, Port Hueneme and San Nicolas Island installations.

Once responsible for approving Navy material purchases, vendors, vendor payments and service contracts, Barroso pleaded guilty in March to conspiracy and signing a false federal income tax return, according to the Justice Department. “Barroso admitted in his plea agreement that he defrauded the United States, submitted false claims for payment and accepted bribes,” a release announcing Barroso’s 70-month sentence states.

Barroso’s crimes also involved Theodore Bauer, a local businessman who operated businesses that received Navy contracts, according to the release. The two forged an agreement in 2008 where Bauer would submit false invoices on behalf of his firms and Barroso would approve the invoices and payments “even though work was not being performed,” and then split the gains, according to the statement. Bauer paid Barroso more than \$375,000 in cash from 2008 to mid-September 2011. On Sept. 14, 2011, Barroso created F. Barroso & Sons and Bauer began issuing checks to them. By late 2013, Barroso had bought a majority stake in a maintenance company and Bauer paid kickbacks to it, too. Federal agents determined that Bauer paid \$846,100 in kickbacks through checks. Bauer pleaded guilty in November to conspiracy to commit bribery and will be sentenced later this month.

Barroso also admitted to failing to report more than \$95,200 in kickbacks on his 2011 tax return and claiming \$331,225 of fictitious deductions in 2012, according to prosecutors. In addition to his prison sentence, Barroso was ordered to pay more than \$1 million in restitution to the Navy and the IRS. Barroso’s attorney did not immediately return requests for comment. [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | July 16, 2019 ++]

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Tinker AFB, OK – A privatized housing company is accused of falsifying maintenance records in order to get paid extra incentive fees at Tinker Air Force Base, Okla. — to the detriment of military families, according to a new investigative report by Reuters and CBS News. And for years, a number of housing office employees told Air Force officials about the doctored records, and the “slum-like living conditions” at the base – to no avail, according to the report. Reuters found that **Balfour Beatty Communities** kept two maintenance logs for work at Tinker AFB – one for the eyes of Air Force officials showing quick turnaround times for repairs, and another with the factual information about how long it was actually taking to do repairs.

Balfour Beatty, according to the report, falsified the logs in order to get paid millions in incentive fees. Those fees are paid from a pool of money set aside by the Air Force, and the company can receive anywhere from 0 to 100 percent of the incentive fees. Those fees benefit company officials and possibly their employees, in a system that’s similar to getting bonuses. If the company doesn’t get the entire amount of incentive fees, the money goes back into that

particular community's housing project— for improvements and repairs, for example. Information was not immediately available about whether the Air Force or the other services are investigating similar issues at other bases with Balfour Beatty or other privatized housing companies. Balfour Beatty owns military houses at 55 locations.

Reuters has been conducting an investigation over the last several years into issues with mold, vermin, water leaks and other problems in military housing. Residents have been frustrated at the lack of response from some companies that manage the housing, and the fact that they have no advocates on the military side to listen to their concerns, which in some cases were affecting their families' health. The former Balfour Beatty manager at Tinker AFB from 2014 to 2017 told Reuters he “doctored work-order information in the electronic maintenance logs at the direction of his superiors and pressured staff to close out unfinished work orders, so that late responses wouldn't count against the company,” according to the report. The manager, Air Force retiree Robert Whittington, told Reuters he knew his actions were leaving families in peril, and “after wrestling with his conscience and refusing further orders to alter records, resigned.”

Reuters documented at least 65 instances in 2016 and 2017 in which Balfour Beatty employees backdated repair requests, filed paperwork claiming false exemptions from response-time requirements, or closed out unfinished requests. Although housing officials at Tinker warned Air Force officials at least 18 times since 2015 that maintenance records were being doctored, the Air Force engineering center reportedly downplayed the requests and gave the company high marks, and advised Tinker housing officials to drop their complaints, Reuters reported. Balfour Beatty could not immediately be reached for comment. Nor did they provide a comment to Reuters on the allegations of false record-keeping. The company announced in May that it has upgraded its resident portal across its 55 military communities to allow residents to enter and track their repair requests.

John Henderson, the Air Force assistant secretary for installations, told Reuters he will await the outcome of ongoing investigations, and said allegations involving the company's operations at Tinker were referred to the Air Force Office of Special Investigations and the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 2017. In a survey conducted early this year by the Military Family Advisory Network, 40 people at Tinker responded, giving their housing an average rating of 2 out of 5, indicating a “negative” overall rating.

Following hearings earlier this year, the military service branches and DoD are examining their policies regarding their oversight of military privatized housing, and ways to strengthen that oversight. They're examining ways to improve the incentive fee system, and increasing the number of government housing employees for more oversight close to the communities. They're also drafting a tenant bill of rights that will provide more protections for service members and their families, such a housing advocate for tenants who will address their concerns. Lawmakers in the House and Senate have also drafted legislation to improve the oversight of the housing.

The family housing privatization effort was launched in 1996 as the military services faced a backlog of dilapidated housing – a problem that DoD officials said it would otherwise have taken 30 years and \$16 billion of taxpayer dollars to fix. Through the housing privatization effort, companies invested money into renovating and replacing housing that suffered from years of lack of upkeep. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | June 18, 2019 ++]

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Fort Meade, MD -- A former National Security Agency contractor who stored two decades' worth of classified documents at his Maryland home was sentenced 19 JUL to nine years in prison. **Harold Martin**, 54, apologized to the federal judge who sentenced him for a theft that prosecutors have called "breathhtaking" in scope. "My methods were wrong, illegal and highly questionable," Martin told U.S. District Judge Richard Bennett. The punishment was in line with the nine-year sentence called for under his plea agreement, in which he admitted guilt to a single count of willful retention of national defense information. The charge carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

A prosecutor and defense attorney both noted there is no evidence that Martin intended to transmit any of the classified information to anyone, but the judge said the trove of records contained "very sensitive material." "That

means people's lives were potentially in danger," Bennett said. The sentencing resolves a mysterious case that broke into the open in 2016, when FBI agents conducting a raid found a massive trove of stolen government documents inside his home, car and storage shed. "This case is enormously significant not only for the Justice Department but also for the intelligence community," Robert Hur, the United States attorney in Maryland, told The Associated Press in an interview before the sentencing. "In any case where you have someone who holds a security clearance at the level that Mr. Martin did and chooses to betray that public trust in such a profound way, it puts national security at risk."

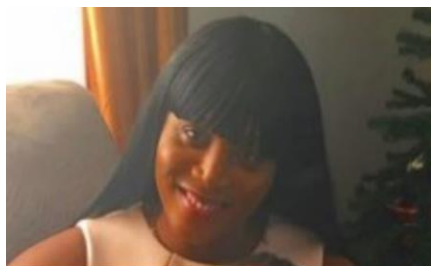
Prosecutors initially said 50 terabytes had been found, though Hur said that estimate had been revised significantly downward. The information spanned from the mid-1990s to the present and included personal details of government employees and "Top Secret" email chains, handwritten notes describing the NSA's classified computer infrastructure, and descriptions of classified technical operations. The case attracted particular attention since the raid took place just weeks after a mysterious internet group calling itself the Shadow Brokers surfaced online to advertise the sale of hacking tools stolen from the NSA. The U.S. believes that North Korea and Russia were able to capitalize on stolen hacking tools to unleash punishing global cyberattacks.

Prosecutors never linked Martin to the Shadow Brokers or charged him in the theft. But prosecutors say he nonetheless jeopardized national security through habitually taking home secret and classified government documents and carelessly storing them. "He knew this was wrong, dangerous and illegal," Justice Department prosecutor Zachary Myers said. Defense attorneys, meanwhile, described him as a compulsive hoarder who never betrayed his country. One of his lawyers, James Wyda, said Martin struggled for years with an undiagnosed mental illness, autism spectrum disorder. "Instability and isolation were constants throughout Mr. Martin's childhood and adult life," Wyda said, adding that the stolen documents "were profoundly important to him when he was in the throes of his mental health situation."

But Hur said defense attorneys' characterization minimized the crime. "This isn't just hoarding," Hur told the AP. "It isn't like wandering into someone's house and finding stacks of newspapers or library books or junk. This is highly classified information, the compromise of which is going to do grave damage to national security." [Source: The Associated Press | Eric Tucker & Michael Kunzelman | July 20, 2019 ++]

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USS George Washington (CVN-73) – While assigned to the aircraft carrier George Washington, Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) 3rd Class **Camesha Kinamarie Walters** stole \$139,420 from taxpayers through a bogus housing scheme involving a husband who's never even visited the United States. A federal judge in Norfolk on 23 JUL sentenced Walters, 37, to five months in prison following a plea deal on a sole felony theft charge after prosecutors dismissed three of the four criminal counts against her. Walters was honorably discharged from the Navy on Feb. 8, according to both court and military records. As part of her pretrial agreement, Walters confessed to her role in a scheme that began in mid-2016, about 1½ years after she traveled to Bangladesh to marry her husband.



On July 18, 2016, Walters updated her Dependency Application/Records of Emergency Data paperwork to reflect her marriage but she listed him as an American citizen on her DEERS form and claimed that he lived in the pricey New York borough of Brooklyn. That hiked the Basic Allowance for Housing to her pay, which was retroactively

dated back to her wedding date, Feb. 15, 2015, according to the plea deal. BAH is an untaxed allowance for service members based on duty location, pay grade and dependency status and it's pegged to local housing markets. The Norfolk-based Walters still needed special approval from her commanders to draw compensation for a dependent supposedly residing in New York and paying more than double the rent someone in Hampton Roads would encounter. So on Aug. 20, 2016, she updated the dependent information on her NAVPERS 1070/613 Administrative Remarks Form — what's usually termed a "Page 13" — to request payment for the Brooklyn bills.

Usually the Navy asks for proof of a mortgage or lease, plus utility bills, but Walters submitted a notarized letter from a property owner saying that her husband's utility costs were included in the rent. Superiors in her chain of command approved her Special Request/Authorization form for the BAH, plus a cost of living allowance kicker that reflected the high rent in Brooklyn. But Naval Criminal Investigative Service agents determined her husband never arrived from Bangladesh and she pocketed at least \$139,420 from the scam — money she now must pay back, according to the terms of her sentence.

"Each time she was required to recertify documents, she had a choice to make: truthfully represent her situation relative to her husband, and make her honest living; or lie, and steal," wrote Special Assistant U.S. Attorney David A. Layne in a legal filing. "The military is somewhat unique in the broad benefits it affords its employees. The military also relies on its members to honestly convey their living and family situations in order to properly allocate those benefits and finite resources. When a service member lies in order to inflate their benefits, that member offends a system built on trust, and insults those colleagues who approach the system honestly. "Ms. Walters inexcusably chose to lie and falsify her way to thousands of dollars in benefits she was never owed over an extended period of time."

Service records released to Navy Times showed that Walters enlisted in the Navy on Oct. 2, 2013, and she initially served on board the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt before reporting to the Norfolk-based George Washington on New Year's Eve in 2015. She became a petty officer on June 16, 2016, two days before she began her scheme. Before her discharge, Walters received a Good Conduct Medal, a Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal and the Enlisted Aviation and Surface Warfare Specialist pins, accomplishments played up by her attorney — Assistant Federal Public Defender Lindsay J. McCaslin — while seeking mercy from the court.

In one legal filing, McCaslin wrote that Navy performance evaluations gave Walters an average score of 4.43, with superiors praising her for "attention to detail" that "was integral to her division," and calling her a "great asset" and "role model" who "greatly exceeded standards" for military bearing and character. "Her command was not wrong in their assessments of her over the five years that she served. But sadly, good people can do bad things," McCaslin wrote. "They can make bad decisions. And Ms. Walters made a couple of very bad decisions and now has a felony conviction that will follow her for life. All she can do now is try to make things right, and she is committed to paying the restitution and will start 'immediately.'"

McCaslin told the court that Walters was originally from St. James, Jamaica. She continued to support her mother, who now lives in the United States, but she was poised to pay back the government for the stolen funds, her attorney added. That's because Walters earned a college degree in the Navy and after exiting the sea service began courses at Manhattan College to pursue a graduate degree in organizational leadership, McCaslin wrote. [Source: NavyTimes | July 24, 2019 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials ► **Reported 16 thru 31 JUL 2019 | Five**

"Keeping the Promise", "Fulfill their Trust" and "No one left behind" are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century as of FEB 2019 are: World War II 73,025 of which over 41,000 are presumed to be lost at sea, Korean War 7665, Vietnam War 1589 (i.e. VN-1,246, Laos-288, Cambodia-48,

& Peoples Republic of China territorial waters-7), Cold War 111, Iraq and other conflicts 5. Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home.

For a listing of all missing or unaccounted for personnel to date refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil> and click on 'Our Missing'. Refer to <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Year/2019> for a listing and details of those accounted for in 2019. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

== Mail: Public Affairs Office, 2300 Defense Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20301-2300, Attn: External Affairs

== Call: Phone: (703) 699-1420

== Message: Fill out form on <http://www.dpaa.mil/Contact/ContactUs.aspx>



Family members seeking more information about missing loved ones may also call the following Service Casualty Offices: U.S. Air Force (800) 531-5501, U.S. Army (800) 892-2490, U.S. Marine Corps (800) 847-1597, U.S. Navy (800) 443-9298, or U.S. Department of State (202) 647-5470. The names, photos, and details of the below listed MIA/POW's which have been recovered, identified, and/or scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin are listed on the following sites:

- <https://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly>
- <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases>
- <http://www.thepatriotspage.com/Recovered.htm>
- <http://www.pow-miafamilies.org>
- <https://www.pownetwork.org/bios/b/b012.htm>
- <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces>

LOOK FOR

-- **Army Pvt. Connie Cagle** was a member of Company K, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division, when his unit was engaged with enemy forces along the Soputa-Sanananda Track, near Buna, in the Australian Territory of Papua (present-day Papua New Guinea.) Cagle was killed in action on Nov. 22, 1942. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cagle.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Robert W. McCarville** was a member of Company L, 128th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division. He was killed in action on Dec. 5, 1942, during an assault against enemy positions near Cape Endaiadere, Duropa Plantation, Territory of Papua. Due to intense enemy fire, his unit was unable to recover his remains. Interment services are pending. [Read about McCarville.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pvt. William E. Rambo** was a member of Company H, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. In Nov. 1943, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed, and more than 2,000 were wounded during the fighting. Rambo was killed on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Rambo.](#)

-- **Navy Fire Controlman 3rd Class Adolph J. Loebach** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma was hit multiple times which caused it to capsize quickly and caused the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Loebach. Interment services are pending. [Read about Loebach.](#)

-- **Navy Mess Attendant 1st Class Johnnie C. Laurie** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma was hit multiple times which caused it to capsize quickly and caused the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Laurie. Interment services are pending. [Read about Laurie.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | July 31, 2019 ++]

* VA *



VA Life Insurance Update 02 ► Options and Eligibility

Different programs cover Veterans (VGLI), service members (SGLI), and family members (FSGLI). You may also be able to get short-term financial coverage through TSGLI to help you recover from a traumatic (severe) injury. And if you're disabled because of an injury or illness caused—or made worse—by your active service, you may be able to get coverage through S-DVI to continue your life insurance beyond 2 years after you leave the military. Note that if you're ending your military tour of duty soon, you'll need to get new coverage quickly. In some cases, you must act within 120 days of leaving the military to be sure there's no break in your coverage.

VA life insurance options

- **SGLI:** Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance -- Offers low-cost term coverage to eligible service members. If you're a service member who meets certain criteria, we'll automatically sign you up. Find out if you're eligible, and learn how to manage your SGLI coverage while you're serving—and convert it when you separate or retire at <https://www.va.gov/life-insurance/options-eligibility/sgli>.
- **FSGLI:** Also known as Family Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance -- Offers coverage for the spouse and dependent children of service members covered under full-time SGLI. Find out how much coverage you may qualify for—and how to apply for and manage your benefits at <https://www.va.gov/life-insurance/options-eligibility/fsgli>.
- **TSGLI:** Also known as Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Traumatic Injury Protection -- Provides short-term financial support to help eligible service members recover from a severe injury. If you were covered by SGLI and experienced a traumatic injury while serving in the military, find out how to file a claim for TSGLI or appeal a past decision at <https://www.va.gov/life-insurance/options-eligibility/tsgli>.
- **VGLI:** With Veterans' Group Life Insurance you may be able to keep your life insurance coverage after you leave the military for as long as you continue to pay the premiums. Find out if you qualify for VGLI—and how to manage your coverage at <https://www.va.gov/life-insurance/options-eligibility/vgli>.

- *S-DVI*: Service-Disabled Veterans’ Life Insurance provides low-cost coverage to eligible service members. If you have a service-connected disability, find out how to apply for S-DVI online or by mail by going to <https://www.va.gov/life-insurance/options-eligibility/s-dvi>.
- *VMLI*: Veterans’ Mortgage Life Insurance offers mortgage protection insurance to the families of Veterans with severe service-connected disabilities who’ve adapted a home to fit their needs. Find out if you qualify—and how to apply and manage your coverage at <https://www.va.gov/life-insurance/options-eligibility/vmli>.



Once you decide to acquire VA life insurance you can access and manage your policy online by going to <https://www.va.gov/life-insurance/manage-your-policy>. If you should become totally disabled or terminally ill, find out if you can get certain benefits by going to <https://www.va.gov/life-insurance/totally-disabled-or-terminally-ill>. [Source: VA Benefits Bulletin | July 2019 ++]

VA Health Care Access Update 68 ► Wait Time Tracking Progress Dismal After 5-Years

The Department of Veterans Affairs still fails to reliably track wait times for veterans seeking health care in the wake of a national scandal that five years ago found more than 200 veterans died while waiting for appointments, a federal watchdog agency reported. The House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs held a hearing 24 JUL to assess the VA’s progress on wait times. This year marks the fifth anniversary of the wait-time scandal, which was first uncovered at the Phoenix VA hospital. It was later revealed the problems permeated throughout the VA health care system.

Debra Draper, director of health care with the Government Accountability Office, told lawmakers that the VA has made some progress since the watchdog agency began reporting on access issues in 2012, but there are still some shortcomings. “At this time, we continue to be concerned that VA has not sufficiently addressed the reliability of its wait-time data,” Draper said. “Long wait times and weaknesses in the scheduling system have remained persistent and have hindered veterans’ ability to access care.” In a report accompanying her testimony, Draper wrote the VA’s procedure for tracking wait times included only a portion of the appointment-scheduling process. When veterans use the VA to seek care from private doctors, they could potentially wait up to 70 days to see a provider despite the agency having a goal of 30 days, the report states. The GAO first made those findings in 2018, and the VA has yet to implement its recommendations, Draper wrote.

In 2017, the GAO found some veterans waited three months to be enrolled into VA health care. The watchdog made several recommendations at that time, but the VA has yet to finalize them, either. To improve, the VA needs a new scheduling system, clear and consistent policies, adequate oversight and effective training, she said. The VA is expected to implement a new scheduling system in all medical facilities by 2021. “The new system that’s expected to roll out in the next couple of years will be effective, but it won’t solve all of the problems,” Draper said. “They’ll have to have training, oversight and accountability, and other things all together.”

Delays still exist. The VA Office of Inspector General reported 23 JUL about the Albuquerque, N.M., VA hospital, where patients were found to have limited access to mental health services. Some veterans had waited longer than 90 days for an appointment. Employees told the OIG that the delays were caused by shortages of medical staff and

schedulers. VA officials testified 24 JUL that it has undergone “tremendous transformation” since 2014, when it was discovered some VA officials kept secret wait lists. An investigation by the VA Office of Inspector General found 215 veterans died while waiting to see specialists in Phoenix. “We recognize there are still challenges ahead of us, but it is important to keep in mind that veterans continue to receive the highest quality care, often with shorter wait times than in the private sector,” said Teresa Boyd, an assistant deputy undersecretary with the VA.

It’s difficult to compare wait times between the VA and the private medical sector because there’s not a standard method for calculating them, said Kenneth Kizer, executive vice president of Atlas Research and a former VA undersecretary for health. Moreover, private-sector providers don’t routinely make their wait times public.

Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA), the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, said the VA’s lack of transparency about true wait times and a shortage of information shared by the private sector make it difficult for veterans to make informed decisions about their health care. Takano called on the VA to be more transparent and set the standard for medical providers across the country. “What seems to be persistent is a lack of transparency for the veteran,” he said. “I believe we have an opportunity for the VA to play a leadership role in terms of helping to set those standards. If VA can get that right – make it simple for veterans to understand – I believe we’ll do not only those veterans a great service, but the American people a great service. I think the private sector will have to adopt it.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | July 24, 2019 ++]

VA Smoking Policy Update 01 ► Does Not Apply To Employees

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced its health care facilities will soon be “smoke-free,” though a smoking ban set to take effect 1 OCT does not apply to employees, the agency clarified 28 JUN. While veterans, visitors, volunteers, contractors and vendors will be prohibited from smoking on VA grounds, employees will keep their smoking privileges because of a memorandum of understanding between the VA and the American Federation of Government Employees, a federal union that represents VA workers. The memorandum requires the department to maintain smoking areas for employees, said Tim Kauffman, a communications specialist with the AFGE.

“By Oct. 1, VA will institute this commonsense policy for patients, visitors, contractors, volunteers and vendors throughout the Veterans Health Administration, but unfortunately, AFGE has not agreed to allow VA to curb employee smoking at department health care facilities,” the VA said Friday in a statement. A VA nurse in Michigan called the discrepancy unfair. “We are not a smokeless facility, then, so why are they even promoting it?” the nurse said, speaking on the condition of anonymity out of concern she would be reprimanded for criticizing the policy. “How can I look at a veteran with integrity and say, ‘I can’t let you go out to smoke,’ but my coworker just went out there? My feeling is, it should be all or none.”

The VA announced in early summer the new smoke-free policy at its hospitals, clinics and nursing homes, citing “growing evidence” that smoking, as well as secondhand and thirdhand smoke, is a medical and safety risk. The policy prohibits cigarettes, cigars, pipes, vape pens and e-cigarettes. Anyone caught violating the policy could be subject to a \$50 fine. The new policy also calls for the “dismantling” and “phasing out” of all designated smoking areas, though a federal mandate — the Veterans Health Care Act of 1992 — requires the VA to maintain them. At the latest count, there were nearly 1,000 outdoor smoking areas at VA hospitals, clinics and nursing homes nationwide, as well as 15 indoor smoking areas.

On 11 JUL, a bipartisan group of lawmakers, led by Rep. Brad Wenstrup (R-OH) introduced legislation that would apply the smoking ban to employees, as well as anyone else on VA premises. The measure would also repeal the section of the Veterans Health Care Act of 1992 that requires the VA to provide designated smoking areas. Wenstrup introduced the same bill in 2017. It passed the House, but the Senate never considered it. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | July 1, 2019 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 162 ► 208,272 Applications Eliminated for Missing Info

An arm of the Veterans Affairs Department in Atlanta eliminated 208,272 applications from across the country for health care early this year amid efforts to shrink a massive backlog of requests, saying they were missing signatures or information about military service and income, according to records reviewed by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Veterans groups say the VA should have done more to communicate with the veterans before closing their applications, some of which date back to 1998. Troops face additional challenges in applying for VA health care, they said, as they grapple with reentry into civilian life, change addresses following overseas deployments and suffer from combat stress.

In the middle of the controversy is the VA's Health Eligibility Center, the Atlanta office that oversees the process by which veterans seek access to the VA medical system. It and its parent agency have come under intense scrutiny in recent years for mismanagement and delays in providing medical care, presenting a thorny challenge for the administration of President Donald Trump, who focused on veterans' care during his presidential campaign. As of April, 8.8 million veterans were enrolled in the VA's health care system, the agency's records show. The VA said it enrolled 395,417 people in its health care system and rejected 98,897 in the fiscal year ending in September. Its backlog of pending applications totaled 317,157 in April, down from a high of 886,045 last year, according to records the VA sent the AJC.

That current backlog is still "way too high," said Jeremy Butler, CEO of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, a New York-based advocacy group. He suggested additional collaboration between the VA and veteran service groups could shrink it more. "Something is not quite working right if we are not getting that number lower than it is," he said. "We need to be working together to get that number down." Butler joined Adrian Atizado, deputy national legislative director for Disabled American Veterans, a nonprofit charity based in Kentucky, in criticizing the VA's efforts to reach the veterans before rejecting and closing their 208,272 applications.

The VA sent out one rejection letter to each of those applicants in 2016. In 2017, a bipartisan group of federal lawmakers — including Georgia Sen. Johnny Isakson — urged the VA to send the applicants an additional letter clarifying what missing information they needed to turn in. The lawmakers were responding to allegations that a coding error caused the VA to send veterans incorrect letters about what they still needed to submit. The VA said it opted against sending an additional letter after its Office of Inspector General determined there was no such error and that the letters it sent in 2016 were appropriate and complied with federal law. Isakson, who leads the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, was unavailable for an interview, according to an aide. But his spokeswoman said the VA took Isakson's recommendation to have the inspector general review the issue and then briefed the senator's committee about its decision to close the applications.

Atizado called the VA's decision to send just one letter to the applicants in 2016 before closing their cases this year "quite unfortunate." "When we hear about the VA not taking a more thoughtful approach to a situation like this — when they only send one letter because they have an incomplete application — I think we all should be expecting our government and this administration to do better by our veterans," he said. The VA said veterans may reapply for health care. The agency said it is now striving to contact people about incomplete applications up to six times each with phone calls and letters. Its Health Eligibility Center in Atlanta, meanwhile, has added 115 employees since July of 2016.

The 208,272 eliminated cases didn't receive such treatment, though. That also has drawn renewed criticism from Scott Davis, a VA employee and whistleblower who testified before Congress in 2014 about problems at the VA's Health Eligibility Center, located off Clairmont Road. "This purge has the dual effect of letting the VA avoid the work of processing the applications and absolving the agency of any responsibility for veterans' delayed access to health and disability benefits," Davis wrote in an article for the Washington Examiner in May.

Defending its decision, the VA pointed to a federal law that says **applications that remain incomplete for a year cannot be approved**. “In accordance with federal law, VA closed 208,272 incomplete health care enrollment applications between January and February,” the VA said in a prepared statement. “It would have been illegal for VA to keep the applications open.” Davis disputed that, saying the law doesn’t say anything about closing applications. In an interview, he accused the VA of “purging applications under a law that does not give them the authority to do so.” Asked how many of the 208,272 applications the agency closed were from former prisoners of war, Purple Heart recipients and combat veterans, the VA told the AJC that the newspaper would have to file a request under the federal Freedom of Information Act for that information. The AJC did that last month and its request is still pending. [Source: The Atlanta Journal-Constitution | Jeremy Redmon | July 15, 2019 ++]

VA Priority Groups ► Explained

Did you know that once a veteran applies for enrollment, their eligibility will be verified by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)? Based on the veteran's specific eligibility status, he/she will be assigned a Priority Group. The Priority Groups range from one to eight, with one being the highest priority. VA uses the following factors to assign a veteran to a priority group:

- Veteran’s military service history
- Veteran’s disability rating
- Veteran’s income level
- Whether or not the veteran qualifies for Medicaid
- Other benefits the veteran may be receiving (like VA pension benefits)

VA will assign veterans with service-connected disabilities the highest priority. VA will assign the lowest priority to veterans who earn a higher income and who don’t have any service-connected disabilities qualifying them for disability compensation (monthly payments). If you qualify for more than one priority group, VA will assign you to the highest priority group. A brief description of each Priority Group is as follows:

Priority Group 1: Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated by VA as 50% or more disabling, veterans determined by VA to be unemployable due to service-connected conditions, and veterans who have been awarded the Medal of Honor.

Priority Group 2: Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated by the VA as 30% or 40% disabling.

Priority Groups 3: Veterans who are former Prisoners of War, veterans who have been awarded a Purple Heart medal, veterans whose discharge was for a disability that was incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, veterans with service-connected disabilities rated by the VA as 10% or 20% disabling.

Priority Group 4: Veterans who receive aid and attendance or housebound benefits from the VA, and veterans who have been determined to be catastrophically disabled.

Priority Group 5: Veterans with nonservice connected or non-compensable service-connected disability and veterans rated by the VA as 0% disabled and who have an annual income below the VA's geographically-adjusted income limit. It also includes veterans who receive VA pension benefits and veterans who are eligible for Medicaid programs.

Priority Group 6: Veterans with a compensable 0% service-connected disability, veterans exposed to radiation during the occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975, veterans of the Persian Gulf War who served between August 2, 1990 and November 11, 1998, veterans who served on active duty at Camp Lejeune for at least 30 days between August 1, 1953 and December 31,

1987, and currently enrolled veterans and new enrollees who served in a theatre of combat operations after November 11, 1998, and those who were discharged from active duty on or after January 28, 2003.

Priority Group 7: Veterans with gross household income below the geographically-adjusted VA income limit for their resident location and who agree to pay co-payments.

Priority Group 8: Veterans with gross household incomes above the VA income limits and the geographically adjusted income limits for their resident location, and who agree to pay co-payments. It also includes veterans in Sub priority groups "a" through "g."

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Note: Failure to follow through on having your annual physical may result in your being dropped from the system. It should be noted that veterans with at least a 10% service-connected disability rating qualify for free eye glasses and hearing aids and are able to receive VA healthcare with co-payments. At 30%, dependents are included for prescription coverage. At 50%, all health care is covered with no co-payments. At 70% long term care is free.

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

VA Lawsuit | Blue Water Navy ► Wilkie Benefit Delay Disheartening and Unnecessary

A lawsuit was filed 22 JUL against Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie over his decision to delay claims processing for tens of thousands of “Blue Water” Navy veterans until next year. Military Veterans Advocacy and the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Association filed the lawsuit in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, arguing Wilkie doesn’t have the authority to delay work on the claims until Jan. 1, 2020 — a decision he announced earlier this month.

Blue Water Navy veterans served aboard aircraft carriers, destroyers and other ships in the territorial seas of Vietnam and fought for years to prove they were exposed to the chemical herbicide Agent Orange. Because of a federal court case and a new law passed by Congress, they became eligible in June for VA disability compensation. Advocates stressed in their complaint that the veterans can’t afford to wait for benefits. The lawsuit names one veteran, Johnnie Harper of Louisiana, who “is not expected to survive” until 2020. “These veterans are dying at a high rate every single day,” the complaint reads. “[They] deserve the peace of mind and sense of closure that accompanies a granted claim for earned benefits.”

'Minimize the impact'

Thinking it marked the end of a long-fought battle, lawmakers and veterans groups celebrated last month when President Donald Trump signed the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, which grants government benefits to thousands of Vietnam War veterans who were previously ineligible. Blue Water Navy veterans cinched another victory when the Department of Justice decided not to appeal a federal court ruling that said they should be extended disability compensation and other benefits from the VA. The two things coalesced in June, 50 years after the Vietnam War and at least a decade since the first Blue Water Navy veterans began pushing the VA and Congress for recognition. Now, they’ll have to wait awhile longer.

Wilkie announced 5 JUL that the VA would begin making decisions on the claims Jan. 1, 2020, not immediately. He cited a provision in the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 that says the secretary can enforce a stay on a claim until the law goes into effect 1 JAN. In an official statement, Wilkie said the VA needed time to implement the law without causing adverse effects on other veterans awaiting claims decisions. “We are working to ensure that we have the proper resources in place to meet the needs of our Blue Water veteran community and minimize the impact on all veterans filing for disability compensation,” Wilkie said in the statement.

The VA said 420,000 to 560,000 Vietnam War veterans could be considered Blue Water Navy vets, but advocates argue those estimates are inflated. John Wells, a former Navy commander who leads Military Veterans Advocacy, believes the total is closer to 90,000 veterans. Wells argued that Wilkie’s decision to implement a blanket stay on all claims goes against the intent of Congress. Moreover, because a federal court decided in June that Blue Water Navy veterans were eligible for benefits, the VA should process those claims now, he said. “We are asking the court to intercede and allow these claims to proceed in accordance with federal law,” Wells said. “It is unconscionable to create more delays and stumbling blocks for veterans whose health and longevity are at stake.”

'Disheartening and unnecessary'

Wells isn’t the only person fighting the delay. Sens. Kristen Gillibrand (D-NY) and Steve (R-MT) sent a letter to Wilkie, decrying his decision as “disheartening and unnecessary.” Eleven other senators signed another letter that requested the VA make decisions on claims for Blue Water Navy veterans “with as much urgency as possible.” “Issuing a stay on the resolution of all benefits decisions will only needlessly delay the delivery of critical health care and contribute to an influx of claims that could be more appropriately managed if processors could begin their work now,” the senators wrote.

The letter was signed by Sens. Jon Tester, (D-MT), Sherrod Brown (D-OH). Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Mazie Hirono ((D-HI), Patty Murray (D-WA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Bob Casey Jr. (D-PA), Gary Peters, D-MI), Bernie Sanders (I=VT), and Joe Manchin (D-WA)> The group of senators also voiced concerns about whether the VA is communicating with Blue Water Navy veterans about the change in law or providing instructions to claim benefits.

John Rowan, president of Vietnam Veterans of America, wrote to Wilkie soon after the VA announced the delay. He called Wilkie’s decision “frustrating” and a step backward in the progress made for Blue Water Navy veterans this year. “Today, the average age of a Vietnam veteran is 73 years old. Time is of the essence as a grant of benefits can mean obtaining vital, lifesaving health care,” Rowan wrote. “The saying, ‘Delay, delay and hope they die’ is the unfortunate reality for veterans and families that have been and continue to suffer from the lethal effects of Agent Orange.”

Disabled American Veterans sent a message to its members last week, saying the organization was working with lawmakers and other veterans groups to lift Wilkie’s stay on the claims. DAV encouraged Blue Water Navy veterans to file claims now, so they could receive benefits as soon as possible. “VA and Congress must find a way to move forward and begin granting Blue Water Navy veterans claims before it’s too late,” the message reads. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | July 22, 2019 ++]

VA Whistleblowers Update 59 ► Culture of Retaliation | New OAWP Office Hasn’t Made A Dent

The Department of Veterans Affairs is preparing new policies, training and guidelines that it says should help the agency — and its still-relatively-new Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection — better foster a supportive culture for whistleblowers. VA’s Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection (OAWP) has had consistent leadership in Dr. Tamara Bonzanto, a veteran, former registered nurse and former House VA Committee investigator, for six months now. “I understand that whistleblowers have a critical role in stopping misconduct within the organization,” she told the House VA Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations at a 23 JUL hearing on the topic. “The Secretary and I value all VA employees and whistleblowers and their commitment to improving care and services for our veterans. I want VA to be a place where an employee can trust that his or her management will take allegations of retaliation or wrongdoing seriously.”



Yet VA employees, senior executives and the whistleblower community haven't quite warmed up to Bonzanto's office during her relatively short tenure. "We certainly welcome the calls for improved culture and attitude, and we welcome Dr. Bonzanto's appointment," Tom Devine, legal director of the Government Accountability Project, told the subcommittee. "The whistleblower community pledges full support for her. But better attitudes at the top aren't a substitute for results, and the results aren't getting better from our experience." Three VA whistleblowers detailed their experiences with retaliation to members of the House Veterans subcommittee [at a hearing last month](#). They described a decades-long culture of retaliation, which they say has continued even after the 2014 wait time scandal brought these challenges to light and Congress passed new legislation.

The Senior Executives Association delivered a blistering account of Leslie Wiggins, a senior executive and network director for VA's hospital network. According to SEA, OAWP conducted five separate investigations of Wiggins and threatened to fire her. When VA management disagreed with the OAWP's proposed removal, the accountability office tried to convince Wiggins' boss to suspend her for five days. When Wiggins' lawyers reviewed a copy of the supporting evidence OAWP had given to the proposing official on her case, they discovered the documents had been tampered with, SEA said. The department ultimately determined the charges against Wiggins were unsubstantiated. OAWP, however, notified her of two additional investigations, SEA said.

"This sequence of events show that the office designed to protect whistleblowers from retaliation acted contrary to the principle of their duty by retaliating against a civil servant who uncovered and disclosed OAWP's own unlawful conduct," SEA President Bill Valdez said in a July 16 [letter](#) to the House subcommittee. "OAWP has created a climate in which whistleblowers are meant to fear the office that is meant to make them feel protected." Her disclosures represent "an endemic problem within OAWP that only Congress can remedy with appropriate oversight and statutory reform," SEA added.

VA's inspector general was more forgiving. "It certainly takes time to change culture," Michael Missal, the department's IG, said. "That culture was in place for a number of years. A little more than a year ago, we were dealing with the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection by fighting with them about access to documents. Certainly we've come a long way from that time. With Dr. Bonzanto's leadership, they're headed in the right direction. It's going to take time, and with whistleblowers they have to prove to them that it's a place where they feel comfortable coming forward and there will not be adverse actions against them."

Bonzanto and her office is developing a variety of new policies that she said will address some of the concerns lawmakers heard from whistleblowers last month. Investigative directives that describe what OAWP employees do and how specifically they should handle certain cases should be ready by 1 OCT, she said. Among those directives are a series of checklists that OAWP investigators can use as a standard guide when working through cases. Not referring a case for investigation back to the VA manager who was potentially involved in the initial retaliation in the first place will be one of those guiding practices, Bonzanto said. VA whistleblowers had previously told the Government Accountability Office those scenarios were happening. Other policies will further explain the whistleblower disclosure process and communication procedures with complainants, which Bonzanto said should be available by the end of 2019.

In addition, OAWP is also working with the VA IG and the Office of Special Counsel on new training for the department's workforce, which will cover how an employee can make a disclosure, what retaliation looks like and the consequences. Bonzanto said that training will be available near the end of the year. Missal, however, suggested actual implementation of that training had been held up top leadership. "We hope it's sooner than later, but it's been months in the works." Missal said of the new training course. "We keep [saying], another step needs to happen, another step needs to happen."

New policies and educational courses may help, but Bonzanto acknowledged her own employees and investigators need additional training opportunities. "Empathizing with whistleblowers and understanding their perspective — those are skills that have to be developed with my staff, and I'm working on that, she said. Communication with whistleblowers about their status within the process also need to improve, Bonzanto added. "Customer service ... is a soft skill," she said. "[They need to understand] that there might be a fear of retaliation. Giving them confidence in the system and understanding that they're putting their jobs on the line [by] coming forward, that's something that we're working on improving internally to OAWP."

Bonzanto's OAWP, of course, is only one piece of the whistleblower disclosure puzzle. Whistleblowers can report retaliation to the Office of Special Counsel or make a complaint to the VA IG. But employees are often confused about who they should report their disclosures to, Missal said. "It's all levels at the VA. Some of the more senior people don't really understand the relationship between OAWP, OSC [and] OIG," he said. "That's why we feel so strongly that VA ought to put out a training that we've prepared on when to come to the OIG [and] when to come to some of the other avenues. We hope that training gets implemented."

Whistleblowers who don't know where to go often make a disclosure to multiple agencies, which overwhelms VA's Office of Inspector General and the government wide Office of Special Counsel. The VA OIG received 35,000 contacts last fiscal year, Missal said. A small percentage of those complaints become whistleblower investigations, which Missal said is largely due to resources. The OIG runs on a budget of \$192 million and 950 employees, which Missal said has remained relatively flat in recent years, even as the department itself grows larger. The Office of Special Counsel, which has a backlog of 2,600 cases to date, is similarly constrained by resources. "The consequences are we just don't get to someone's case, which means you might have a very meritorious case of whistleblower retaliation," Special Counsel Henry Kerner told the subcommittee. "Unfortunately by the time our examiner gets to that, weeks or months have gone by."

Kerner said his agency has reorganized staff in an effort to streamline its operations but could use more staff as more federal employees file more disclosures every year. Disclosures from VA employees comprise some 35% of OSC's annual case intake of roughly 6,000, Kerner added. Members on the House VA subcommittee seemed concerned by the IG and OSC's staffing challenges — and are anxious to track OAWP's progress. Missal's office, meanwhile, is expected to release a report on VA's OAWP soon. The House committee will examine the report at a hearing scheduled for September. [Source: Federal News Network | Nicole Ogrysko | July 24, 2019 ++]

CHAMPVA Update 05 ► Users Now Eligible for Online Prescription Refills

If you are a CHAMPVA recipient, you can now get your prescriptions refilled via the VA's myHealtheVet [website](#). The Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA) is a health benefits program in which the VA pays part of the cost of certain health care services and supplies. The program is available to:

- The spouse or child of a veteran who has been rated permanently and totally disabled for a service-connected disability by the VA.

- The surviving spouse or child of a veteran who died from a VA-rated service-connected disability.
- The surviving spouse or child of a veteran who was rated permanently and totally disabled at the time of death.
- The surviving spouse or child of a military member who died in the line of duty, not due to misconduct. (In most of these cases, these family members are eligible for Tricare, not CHAMPVA.)

Like most insurance plans, you can get your prescriptions filled at a local pharmacy or through the provider's mail-order pharmacy. Effective immediately, CHAMPVA recipients can also use the [myHealthVet](#) site in addition to the other two options. Using MyHealthVet adds a level of convenience to filling and renewing prescriptions. You are able to refill, review and track your prescriptions online using your computer or smartphone. You also have a record of all medications you are taking available at your fingertips. bYou can still get your urgent medications filled at your local pharmacy, but getting long-term or maintenance medications via the MyHealthVet website is faster and easier than using the mail-order pharmacy. [Source: The MOAA Newsletter | July 22, 2019 ++]

VA EHR Update 17 ► Critical Milestone Reached in Modernization Program

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently transferred the health records of 23.5 million Veterans to a Cerner Corp. data center, setting the stage for the records to be processed this summer in support of VA's and Department of Defense's (DoD) common electronic health record solution. This initial data migration phase of VA's Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM), which began in late spring, is an important milestone reflecting the decision to replace Veterans Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA) with the Cerner Millennium EHR solution that powers DoD's Military Health System (MHS GENESIS).

“For decades, VA and DoD have been struggling to achieve interoperability and seamlessly share patient records between our health systems — placing an unfair burden on our Veterans and their families,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “No Veteran, family member or caregiver should have to carry boxes of paper, medical and service records around. This data migration is the first step to solving that problem for good.” To date, over 78 billion records have been compiled from all VA medical centers, accounting for 50 terabytes (equivalent to about 850,000 hours of music) of data storage across 21 clinical areas of patient health records, which includes lab results; pharmacy prescriptions; inpatient and outpatient diagnoses and procedures; and other medical data of both living and deceased Veterans.

New data will move into the Cerner system automatically from VistA in near real time, and then make its way to the Cerner Millennium EHR, which will provide shared access with VA, DoD and community care providers. As future phases are completed, service members' medical records from their years of active duty will reside in one comprehensive EHR. This modernization effort moves VA one step closer toward achieving an interoperable EHR system that will improve military career transitions and drive better clinical outcomes. For more information about VA's Electronic Health Record Modernization, visit <https://www.ehrm.va.gov>. [Source: VA News Release | July 29, 2019 ++]

VA VISTA Update 12 ► VA's Plans Spark Cost Concerns for New EHR

The Department of Veterans Affairs said it will spend nearly \$5 billion over the next 10 years to maintain its legacy electronic health record while it develops and implements a separate, multi-billion-dollar system at medical facilities across the country. VA told the Government Accountability Office it spent \$2.3 billion to maintain and develop the Veterans Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA) between 2015 and 2017. The department

estimated it'll spend a total of \$426 million this year on the legacy system — with a total of \$4.89 billion over the next 10 years.

But VA's cost estimates to sustain and develop VistA are under dispute and likely unreliable, the Government Accountability Office said this week, raising congressional concerns that the department's estimates to replace the legacy system with Cerner's Millennium health record are also inaccurate. "More than half of VA's \$2.3 billion costs couldn't be verified based on the source data that we looked at in our review," Carol Harris, director of GAO's IT acquisition management team, told the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Technology Modernization. "This is of concern because without reliable information, VA will not be a position to make critical management decisions about the system."

The challenge, Harris said, is that VA hasn't been able to fully define the scope, environment and technical performance of VistA since the department began decentralizing the electronic health record shortly after the system's inception. To date, VistA, which supports 150 applications and operations of 1,500 VA medical centers and other facilities, has 130 separate instances. "The purpose of figuring out how much VistA costs is to compare it to Cerner," Rep. Jim Banks (R-IN), the subcommittee's ranking member, said. "But I don't see VA making much effort that [electronic health record modernization] is going to save money, all things considered."

Achieving interoperability with the Defense Department was and is the main driver behind VA's decision to implement Cerner's health record, said Paul Tibbits, executive director of VA's Office of Technical Integration. "Yes, what the costs will turn out to be is very important," he said. "We certainly will make a great effort to make that very clear to whoever needs to know what that is for our own internal management purposes, but... it's the well-being of the servicemember and veteran that is the principle motivation for going to Cerner, not necessarily an economic argument."

VA last publicly estimated it would spend at least \$16 billion to implement a version of the Cerner electronic health record. "We don't have any confidence in what VistA actually entails, so I don't think we have any confidence in that \$4.8 billion, but more importantly, that makes me less confident in the... estimate for Cerner as well," Rep. Susie Lee (D-NV), chairwoman of the technology modernization subcommittee, said. "At what point do we lay out exactly what the costs are?" The department is beginning to use the technology business management (TBM) framework to categorize and track the legacy system's costs. Once VA implements TBM, the department believes it'll have a better sense of VistA's true scope and costs, Tibbits said. Still, developing an accurate return on investment for Cerner health record will be difficult, if not impossible, until VA fully defines VistA, Harris said.

VA is planning to deploy Cerner Millennium at VA medical facilities in the Pacific Northwest starting in spring 2020. The department will begin to decommission VistA instances as it rolls out the new Cerner electronic health record, a process *that will take at least 10 years*. "VA medical centers will be required to run the nationally released 'gold' version of VistA, creating a common set of software routines where possible," Tibbits said. In planning for the initial rollout at three VA sites in the Pacific Northwest, Tibbits said the department has conducted an analysis of VistA instances in those locations. That work, which should continue as VA implements the new electronic health record at additional locations, will help the department develop more accurate cost estimates for both Cerner and VistA, he added.

VistA's migration to the cloud

VA is also continuing to develop a transition plan for VistA, which is expected some time in the fall. Discussions for this plan have been in the works for months, the department said. Part of the transition plan will incorporate VA's expectations for the cloud. The department plans to eventually migrate all 130 instances of VistA to a commercial cloud. The first VistA instance has been migrated, Tibbits said. VA's Office of Information and Technology is also finalizing which VistA capabilities and applications will be part of the new Cerner platform. The department has already determined at least 40% of VistA's current capabilities won't be part of Cerner's system. The majority of those

functionalities, will be developed and replaced as part of other VA IT modernization efforts, such as the department's financial management business transformation.

In addition, VA is partnering with DoD to use its Defense Medical Logistics Standard Support System, which will manage much of Veterans Health Administration's supply chain functions, with a few exceptions. "There's a small percentage of capabilities beyond that that are not being replaced by one of those three modernization systems, and we're in the process of identifying the solution to that," Charles Hume, acting assistant deputy undersecretary for health for VHA's Office of Informatics, said. "It may be an interface to VistA for some time [or] a replacement by a commercial product; we have yet to figure that out." Meanwhile, both DoD and VA are also continuing to meet and finalize the details for the Federal Electronic Health Record Modernization (FEHRM) Program Office, the entity that's supposed to serve as a joint decision-making body for the two departments.

Congress has long asked for both departments to develop a more concrete governance structure, after lawmakers had determined the original inter-agency office never truly served as a single point of accountability. A timeline to stand up the new office is still unclear, Tibbits told the subcommittee. "From my point of view, [the] lack of plan on joint governance continues to be a problem with the rollout of this program," Lee said. [Source: Federal News Update Update | Nicole Ogrysko | July 26, 2019 ++]

*** Vets ***



Homeless Vet Burials Update 01 ► Stephen Jerald Spicer | Bushnell FL

There were no relatives at Vietnam veteran Stephen Jerald Spicer's funeral, but his passing didn't go unnoticed as a few dozen patriotic strangers showed up to honor his service. American flags fluttered behind a procession of motorcycles that escorted a hearse carrying Spicer's black casket with gold trim -- the Army's signature colors -- from Woodlawn Funeral Home in Gotha for 50 miles to Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell. Spicer, 72, died 14 JUN and was designated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as an "unclaimed veteran" -- someone who doesn't have a next of kin to claim their remains.



A retired U.S. Marine Corps master gunnery sergeant salutes the unclaimed remains of three veterans during a Jan. 17 ceremony in Memphis, Tennessee. Funeral homes, medical examiners, veterans' affairs departments and local veterans' groups have combined forces to honor veterans whose bodies were not claimed by relatives.

The Longwood resident is among more than 3,000 unclaimed veterans nationwide who have been buried with full military honors through the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program. The program, which launched in 2000, was "founded upon the belief that every veteran deserves a dignified and honorable burial," spokeswoman Ashley Bunton said. The funeral homes under the Dignity Memorial network provide the casket, transportation to the cemetery and coordinate the funeral services. The VA covers the cost of the opening and closing of the grave, a headstone or marker and burial in a national cemetery.

Nonprofit organizations such as the Patriot Guard Riders and the American Legion Riders often lead processions on motorcycles after a request from a funeral home director. David Shelton of St. Cloud, Florida state captain for the Patriot Guard Riders, said members view all fallen veterans as family even if they've never met. The organization provides escorts to about 800 funerals in the state each year. "They are our fellow brothers and sisters who put themselves in harm's way at one time or another for the freedoms that we have today in this country that we cherish," said Shelton, 65, who served in Air Force for 20 years. "We let them know that they're not alone."

Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings spoke at Spicer's service 18 JUL about the importance of community support for homeless veterans. The number of homeless veterans in Central Florida has dropped by nearly 74% since 2010, but there are only about 17,000 veterans in Orange County out of 70,000 who are receiving any type of benefits. "Unfortunately, many veterans do not know they are eligible for benefits, and still more are unaware that the county is here to help," Demings said.

Spicer, an Oak Park, Illinois, native, wasn't living on the streets when he died. He spent the last eight years at All Stars Assisted Living Facility in Seminole County. In Spicer's obituary, his caretakers, Robert and Mary Singh, said he "was a good man with whom they shared laughter." "He never asked for much, was content and grateful," the couple wrote. [Source: The Orlando Sentinel | Lisa Maria Garza | July 20, 2019 ++]

GI Bill Update 290 ► Everything You Need To Know

What is the Post-9/11 GI Bill?

The Post-9/11 GI Bill is a generous education benefit for the [latest generation](#) of service members and veterans. It includes payment of tuition and fees, a monthly housing allowance and a stipend for textbooks and supplies for up to 36 months. The GI Bill traces its history back to World War II when the Servicemen's Readjustment Act was enacted to provide education and training, home loan guarantee and other benefits for veterans. Revamped several times to aid veterans of war and peacetime, the GI Bill as we know it was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2008 and went into effect the following year. Portions of the GI Bill were updated again in 2017 under the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act, better known as the "[Forever GI Bill](#)."

Who is eligible for the GI Bill?

If you have served on active duty for at least 90 days since Sept. 10, 2001, you are eligible for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits — whether you're still in the military or have already separated with an honorable discharge. The amount of time you spent on active duty determines the percentage of total benefits you can receive. Right now, the VA uses this scale to determine eligibility:

- 100 percent: 36 months or more, or at least 30 continuous days and discharged due to service-connected disability
- 90 percent: At least 30 months, less than 36 months
- 80 percent: At least 24 months, less than 30 months
- 70 percent: At least 18 months, less than 24 months
- 60 percent: At least 12 months, less than 18 months

- 50 percent: At least 6 months, less than 12 months
- 40 percent: At least 90 days, less than 6 months
- No benefit: Less than 90 days

Don't worry about memorizing this, though, because it's about to change in August 2020 when a portion of the Forever GI Bill goes into effect. At that point, the same 90-days-to-six-month window will equal to 50 percent of total benefits. Service members with at least six months and less than 18 months of service will be eligible for 60 percent of benefits. Children or spouses of service members who died in the line of duty on or after 9/11 may also be eligible to use the GI Bill to further their education through the Marine Gunnery John David Fry Scholarship Program. These benefits are available at the 100-percent level to children between age 18 and 33 and spouses who have not remarried for 15 years after the service member's death.

How to apply for your GI Bill

You can apply for GI Bill benefits [online](#) or in person at a [VA regional office](#) near you. You can also call 1-888-GI-BILL-1 to ask the VA to mail an application directly to you. The application process is simple, especially if you do it online. The form will ask you for information about your military background, education history and the school you want to attend. It also asks for your Social Security and bank account numbers, so make sure you have those handy, too. (While the tuition and fee payments go directly to the schools, the housing and textbook allowances go straight to you.) If you're feeling nervous about the process, you can also talk to the school certifying official at your college. This person typically works in the school's registrar's office or financial aid department and will be able to walk you through the application.

GI Bill certificate of eligibility

Once you apply for your benefits, the VA will send you a certificate of eligibility that spells out exactly what you are eligible to receive. This is the document you'll present to your school when you enroll. If your tuition payments are ever delayed, your [certificate of eligibility](#) acts as proof that payment is coming, meaning your school can't charge you late fees or impose other restrictions when there's an outstanding balance on your account through no fault of your own. Keep in mind that it may take a while for the VA to issue your certificate of eligibility to you. In the meantime, you can log into your [eBenefits](#) account to keep track of things.

How much does the GI Bill pay for school?

The Post-9/11 GI Bill includes payment of tuition and fees, a monthly housing allowance and a stipend for textbooks and supplies. For students attending public colleges and universities, the GI Bill covers all tuition and fees at the in-state rate, but it may not have the same reach at a private or for-profit school. The national maximum at such schools will be [\\$24,476.79 for the 2019-2020 school year](#) and generally increases slightly each year.

If the GI Bill doesn't cover the full cost of your education, see if your school participates in the [Yellow Ribbon](#) program. This is an agreement schools make with the VA to split school costs not covered by the GI Bill, reducing or eliminating the amount students must pay themselves. Currently, only veterans and surviving dependents of service members are eligible for the program, though this will extend to active-duty troops in August 2022. A lot of schools participate in this program, including prestigious Ivy League institutions. To see if your school is part of the Yellow Ribbon Program, check out the [interactive map](#) on VA's website.

Should I use my GI Bill while on active duty?

You can, provided you meet the minimum service requirements. But should you? If you use your GI Bill benefits to pay for school while on active duty, you will not receive a monthly housing stipend from the GI Bill in addition to the housing allowance you're already receiving from the military. Depending on which school you attend, that housing stipend could be worth as much as the tuition coverage and possibly more. Therefore, your GI Bill benefits will end up amounting to much less than what you would receive after separating from the military. Still, the choice is yours.

The GI Bill housing allowance.

Your monthly housing stipend depends on the percentage level of benefits you're eligible for and how many courses you're taking. The VA uses the Department of Defense Basic Allowance for Housing, or BAH, rates to calculate how much you will receive. Right now, this is the cost of living wherever the main campus of your school is located — not where you live — at the amount that an E5 with dependents would receive in that area. (Your own rank has no bearing on the total amount you receive.)

Under the Forever GI Bill, however, housing allowances will be determined by the location of the campus where a student takes the most classes. So, that means if you take classes at a satellite campus miles — or even states — away from the school's main headquarters, your monthly stipend will better reflect your cost of living. The VA is expected to roll this out in December 2019. The VA has already done a lot of the math for you through their [GI Bill Comparison Tool](#). Simply search by school name or type and click on the results to see how much you'd receive each month. A few things to remember:

- If you are pursuing a degree entirely online, you will only receive half of the national BAH average. For the 2019-2020 school year, that amounts to \$894.50 per month. Some experts recommend taking at least one class in person if you can, so you can get the flexibility of attending school online with the cash benefits of attending on campus.
- If you're attending school half time or less or are a dependent using GI Bill benefits that have been transferred to you from a service member, you are not eligible for this part of the benefit.

How to change schools with the GI Bill

Changing schools once you've already started using the GI Bill is much like applying for the GI Bill in the first place. You'll need to provide basic information about your military service, education history and the school you want to go to, in addition to your Social Security and bank account numbers. You can do this all [online](#) or in person at a VA regional office.

GI bill status and how to check it.

It's important to maintain an active [Ebenefits](#) account so you can check on the status of your GI Bill benefits — how much you've used and how much you have left.

Transferring GI Bill to your dependents

If you've already finished your degree or just don't see yourself ever going to school, you may want to consider transferring the GI Bill to your dependents. To be eligible for transfer, you must have at least six years of service under your belt and must be able to serve four more after the transfer is approved by the DoD. The DoD is slated to cap the transfer option at 16 years of service in January, though congressional lawmakers are working to kill the policy before it ever goes into effect. If you are an active-duty Purple Heart recipient, disregard all of the above; you can transfer your GI Bill benefits to family members whenever you want.

A dependent child must be 18 or younger when the GI Bill benefits are transferred to them — or under 23 in special cases for approved programs. To use the GI Bill, the dependent must be 18 or a high school graduate. If you decide you want to transfer your benefits, log onto [DMDC milConnect](#) to get started. At the top of the page, you'll see a section labeled, "I want to." Click on the "Transfer my education benefits" option and go from there.

Cool/alternative/creative ways to use the GI Bill

- You have a little flexibility with the GI Bill in that it doesn't have to just go toward a traditional education at a brick-and-mortar school. You can use it to take classes online or through correspondence.
- You can get help starting your own business.
- You can get a tutor to help you with your classes.
- You can also use your benefits toward a flight school or apprenticeship program. Even licensing programs, certification tests and admission tests, such as the SAT or LSAT, are covered.
- If you are a veteran majoring in a STEM field — science, technology, engineering or math — you can apply for more GI Bill benefits, since many of these majors take more than the standard four years of college to

complete. The Forever GI Bill set up the [Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship](#) fund that will give up to \$30,000 to STEM students on a first-come, first-serve basis. Veterans and surviving dependents of deceased service members are eligible for this scholarship.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Natalie Gross | July 20, 2019 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure | AFB PFCs Update 02 ► 58 More Sites Identified

An environmental advocacy group has identified 58 more military sites where levels of harmful chemicals used in firefighting foam have been detected in groundwater or drinking water sources, from Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson, Alaska to Fort Eustis, Virginia. This brings the total to 175 military installations and sites nationwide that are known to be contaminated by fluorinated compounds known as PFAS, according to the Environmental Working Group. An additional 44 civilian airports are included that are also used by Air National Guard units.



The advocacy group's interactive map at https://www.ewg.org/interactive-maps/2019_pfas_contamination/map of all the sites includes information about the contamination in drinking water and groundwater. Many of the new sites reported relatively high PFAS levels — greater than 100,000 parts per trillion. Service members and military families can click on the interactive map to find the levels of contamination in a particular area, based on EWG's research using DoD and other data. These sites were previously identified by military officials. "The EPA and the Department of Defense have utterly failed to treat PFAS contamination as a crisis demanding swift and decisive action," said Ken Cook, president of EWG, in a statement announcing the discovery of the additional sites. "It's time for Congress to end new PFAS pollution and clean up legacy contamination," Cook said.

A 2016 Environmental Protection Agency health advisory recommended water sources contain no more than 70 parts per trillion, or ppt, of the PFAS chemicals perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA, and/or perfluorooctane sulfonate, or PFOS at sites being addressed, including those under federal cleanup programs. The PFOA and PFOS are the two most well-known of the hundreds of PFAS chemicals currently in use. While the EPA's health advisory has been in effect since 2016, neither the Pentagon nor any municipality was required to meet the 70 ppt standard because the contamination limit is an advisory, not a requirement.

For decades, the military used firefighting foams that contained PFAS chemicals. These per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances are also found in hundreds of everyday household products. PFAS chemicals have been linked to cancers and other health problems. DoD officials have identified more than double the amount of sites identified by EWG, as having known or suspected release of these chemicals. DoD and service officials are prioritizing these 401 sites for cleanup, said Deborah Morefield, manager of the Defense Environmental Restoration Program in the office of the deputy assistant secretary of defense for environment, during a recent presentation at the national summit of the Association of Defense Communities.

Officials use the cleanup process under a law known as the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, or CERCLA, she said. "It's a long process, and it doesn't happen overnight." Under

DoD policy, the military is no longer using firefighting foam that contains these chemicals for maintenance, testing or training, Morefield said. It's only being used for real fire emergencies, and even in those cases, "we're treating it as a spill response. We're collecting and trying to make sure it doesn't get into the environment further," she said.

Firefighters need these firefighting foams to be able to extinguish these fires extremely quickly, because often times the fires are in close quarters, with military personnel, munitions, buildings and expensive aircraft, she said. Officials are looking for safer alternatives that can put out fires quickly enough to save lives and property. These firefighting foams are still used more on Navy ships because of the close quarters of personnel, munitions and aircraft, she said.

The firefighting foams were developed in the 1960s by the Naval Research Laboratory with 3M, on the heels of the fire on the aircraft carrier Forrester, said Richard G. Mach Jr., director of environmental compliance and restoration policy, in the office of the deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for environment. The fire killed 134 sailors and airmen and 161 more were injured. "We needed to have an effective firefighting agent that could put out fires quickly, in close proximity to munitions, not sink our ships, not kill our people," he said, at the ADC summit. "It's really, really effective in quickly knocking down and putting down a fire, having that film blanket over the top of the fire, which prevents the vapors from coming up and reigniting, and it also has the cooling effect of the water that's in there," he said. He noted that a change in specifications in 2017 put a limitation on the amount of the chemicals that can be used in the foam, which is the lowest currently available from laboratories; the Navy is also working to further lower the concentration.

Congress has been providing additional money to address the cleanups, Morefield said. "We are trying to get our hands on this, trying to make sure we get the appropriate funding to move forward to take care of our cleanup responsibilities." In addition, DoD and the services are working to find alternatives to foams with these chemicals, currently funding about 80 projects, at a cost of about \$10 million a year, she said. They've been evaluating some fluorine-free foams against military specifications to see if they meet the time requirements and other specifications to put out the fires, Morefield said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | July 14, 2019 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure | AFB PFAS Update 03 ► 4 Private Wells Near Dover Contaminated

Delaware officials say high levels of a worrisome class of manmade chemicals have been detected in four private wells near Dover Air Force Base. Officials said in a news release Sunday that they had been notified about the elevated levels of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, by the U.S. Air Force and Dover Air Force Base. Wells at the base have PFAS levels above a federal health advisory limit, and testing of nearby private wells has been ongoing. According to the news release, the four wells provide water to a shopping center with five businesses, two residences and an office building. The owners have been notified, and the base has provided bottled water. The widely used compounds are linked to a variety of health issues and have come under intense federal and state scrutiny in recent years. [Source: The Associated Press | July 14, 2019 ++]

Vet Fraud & Abuse ► Reported 16 thru 31 JUL 2019

Marines & Mickey Update 02 -- Marine veteran **John Shannon Simpson** was sentenced to four years in federal prison after pleading guilty to wire fraud, United States Attorney Sherri A. Lydon announced 23 JUL. Simpson was ordered to pay restitution of \$141,709.44 to the victims of his charity scam, dubbed Marines & Mickey, where Simpson bilked people into donating money to help Marines and families attend Disney and Marine boot camp

graduation, the release detailed. Sentencing was handed down by United States District Judge David C. Norton of Charleston, South Carolina, who also sentenced Simpson to three years of supervised release following his prison term, according to a press release. Simpson will serve his prison term consecutively with a nine year state sentence for sexual assault he is already serving in Florida.

Court documents revealed that the victims of Simpson's charity scam included active-duty Marines and the mother of a Marine killed in the 2015 attack on the military recruiting center in Chattanooga, Tennessee The Charlotte Observer identified the mother as Cathy Wells, whose son, Lance Cpl. Skip Wells, was killed in the 2015 shooting incident. Wells dished out nearly \$135,000 dollars to the charity, court documents detailed. Simpson pocketed \$391,000 from the nearly \$481,000 he raised from 2014–2016, feds said in court documents.

Feds also alleged in court documents that Simpson lied about his military service to get more donations, telling donors he was a Marine master sergeant and prior drill instructor and recon Marine. But court documents said Simpson served less than five years as a disbursing clerk and was reduced to private following a special court-martial for being absent without leave. The FBI and Naval Criminal Investigative Service aided in investigating the case. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | July 23, 2019 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 250 ► Middle East Opportunities

If you are a veteran who would like to return to the Middle East, the Army & Air Force Exchange Service, or AAFES, may have a job for you. AAFES is currently recruiting veterans for jobs "downrange." Right now, jobs are open in Kuwait, but positions frequently come available in 41 stores in eight countries in the Middle East, including Iraq and Afghanistan. Current openings include safety and security managerial positions, courier, logistics technicians and service business technicians.

According to AAFES, salary is commensurate with experience and, although the jobs start at \$33,000 for salaried positions and range between \$11 and \$22 an hour, downrange employees get free housing and meals at installation dining facilities. Deployments can last from six months to a year, with an option to extend to two years. After a deployment, employees are eligible to apply for other jobs within the system. "When the exchange hires veterans for downrange assignments, these former service members draw on the same strong work ethic, commitment and loyalty they used to serve our country," said AAFES senior enlisted adviser Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Luis Reyes. "Many have already served downrange."

AAFES officials said veterans who have held security clearances are highly desired because they can be employed more quickly than employees who need background checks. The Navy Exchange Service and Marine Corps Exchange each have job openings, but none are in active areas of operations. Information on downrange jobs at AAFES can be found at its website. NEX jobs are posted at its site, and the Marine Corps Exchange advertises its openings through the individual stores' websites. Leroy Elliott, who served in Vietnam, is the service business manager in Kuwait. "The work is challenging and the days are long," he said in a news release. "It's all worth it when we can bring a little bit of home to the men and women who are putting themselves in harm's way and serving our country." [Source: Military/com | Patricia Kime | July 18, 2019 ++]

Semper Fi Fund ► Wounded Veterans' Assistance

Note: The following is NOT a solicitation for donations. Its only intent in to advise the military community of what it is and does for vets.

Semper Fi Fund is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that provides a variety of programs to assist wounded veterans in all branches of the United States Armed Forces. The organization describes its mission as "providing urgently needed resources and support for post-9/11 combat wounded, critically ill and catastrophically injured members of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families." As of March 2018, the Semper Fi Fund has issued 158,000 grants totaling \$165 million in assistance. It began in early 2003 as a gathering of military spouses around a kitchen table discussing ways to help Marines who had been injured during the invasion of Iraq. Early efforts included the distribution of snacks and toiletries at hospitals and a specialized van for a catastrophically injured Marine.

The nonprofit was officially incorporated as the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund on May 17, 2004. At that time General Alfred M. Gray, Jr., who served as the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1987 to 1991, was named the chairman of the board. Charity Watch gives the Semper Fi Fund an A+ rating, one of only two of the 64 veteran and military charities reviewed to receive this highest ranking. They give 93, 94 percent of their spending toward bona fide real programs that help veterans, and their cost to raise money is very small. It's only like 3 or 4 percent. The organization provides a wide variety of assistance to wounded, critically ill and injured service members. These programs are categorized into three main programs:

Service Member and Family Support: Provides direct financial assistance for combat wounded, critically ill and catastrophically injured service members and their families during hospitalization and recovery. In this area the fund provided \$15, 875,000 to service members in 2018. It program includes:

- Bedside Financial Support that provides "needs-based financial assistance for expenses that are most pressing during a long hospitalization or rehabilitation. Typically families use this grant to help with additional travel and lodging expenses, childcare, and out of pocket expenses."
- Caregiver Support & Retreats that provide coping tools and techniques for these amazing people who play such a critical role in the recovery process. The variety of activities are designed to reduce the challenges and stress experienced by caregivers all day, every day.
- Housing Assistance designed to help service members by providing funding toward the cost of modifying existing homes with modifications to accommodate handicapped service members in wheelchairs. The Housing Assistance Program also grants assistance to those who have fallen behind on their housing payment due to injury, recovery and rehabilitation costs.
- Kids Camp, a week-long camp in which children of wounded, injured and critically ill service members are paired with high school student mentors.
- Transportation Assistance
- Canine Program that unites injured service members with service dogs.
- Specialized & Adaptive Equipment grants that cover many different types of equipment that can improve the quality of life for service members with disabilities. These include optic enhancement devices for the visually impaired, software programs for those who cannot type, specialized wheelchairs as needed and therapeutic mattresses for those with multiple injuries and burns.
- Jinx McCain [Horsemanship](#) Program

Transition. A program that makes it easier for wounded service members to thrive beyond injury to recovery. Education support and career assistance provides them with the tools and skills to successfully reconnect with their communities and build new, productive lives. In this area the fund provided \$3,475,000 to service members in 2018. The program includes:

- Education & Career Assistance designed to help service members with books, training fees, travel to job interviews, interview attire, computers, software and other equipment needed to pursue education opportunities and/or a new career. Through several partnership programs, this program also offers career-enhancing seminars and week-long workshops at no cost to the service member that help develop the networking, resume-writing and interview skills necessary to transition into the community workplace.

- Veteran & Unit Reunions to reconnect our warriors to their brothers and sisters in arms to help speed healing through a renewal of their warrior spirit.
- Veteran 2 Veteran Support (V2V) which is an integrated transition program that trains and empowers veterans to help other veterans make a smoother transition back to civilian life.
- Semper Fi Fund Odyssey Retreat. A six-day, holistic transition assistance program for injured and critically ill service members in which participants learn how to transition into civilian life by learning about life-planning skills, establishing goals, employment resources, and by learning to balance four important MEPS elements: Mental, Emotional, Physical and Spiritual.
- Semper Fi Fund Apprenticeship Program which assists service members with a 70% or greater disability rating find meaningful trades, careers and small business opportunities through short-term vocational education and apprenticeships.

Integrative Wellness: A program which provides targeted services and resources to meet the specific needs of those being assisted. In this area the fund provided \$3,575,000 to service members in 2018. It includes:

- PTSD and TBI Support
- NeuroFitness
- High-Tech Medical Devices
- Post-Traumatic Growth [Video](#) Resources
- [Doc's Corner](#) which provides information from the Fund's Medical Director, retired Navy Captain Dr. Robert Koffman
- Holistic Health Solutions
- Counseling
- [Sports](#) Program

Veterans looking for assistance can call 760-725-3680 or go to <https://semperfifund.org/contact-us> and complete the form provided to indicate the support they are looking for. [Source: <https://semperfifund.org> | Editor | July 24, 2019 ++]

Stolen Valor Update 115 ► Meet the Navy Vets Who made it Their Life Mission to Expose It

Why Do Some People Steal Valor? It starts with four letters, maybe even just three. When Don and Diane Shipley find out someone claims to be a Navy SEAL or POW, they won't just take their word for it. And when it comes to liars, they take no prisoners. The couple has made it their mission to track down and expose "phonies" — their word for people who falsely claim to be Navy SEALs and/or former prisoners of war.



Donald Shipley U.S. Navy Seal & Diane Blazer Shipley U.S. Navy BM then and now

One of their latest subjects, Odenton resident Bob Pollock, founded a veterans' memorial on a decades-long lie of being a Navy SEAL and POW. After Pollock lied to a Capital Gazette community columnist, Don Shipley called The

Capital to set the record straight. Pollock is the latest in several fake SEAL busts Shipley has outed to the media. He has appeared in articles and on TV stations around the country, including in The Washington Post and CNN. In 2017, Shipley received a public apology from Fox News when the outlet didn't retract a story about a fake SEAL, even after Don told reporters they'd been fooled. Pollock did not respond for comment. A Maryland man dedicated himself to honoring veterans. He also lied about being a Navy SEAL and POW Over the last decade, the Shipleys say they have exposed thousands of fake SEALs and POWs. Phonies will falsify their records, buy fake awards and uniforms and even get tattoos to further their lie. But the Shipleys can see through it all.

The Shipleys sit in the barn loft on their Cambridge waterfront property. Don, 59, has a white beard and a thick head of silver hair, even longer and thicker than the short blonde highlights on his wife. Diane, 60, has a dark tan from lying out by the pool and on their boat. The loft inside a red barn, dubbed Warrior's Rest, is where the Shipleys house veterans and their families who come to stay with them through their charity organization. Warrior is also the name of their enormous slobbering 2-year-old Labrador retriever. The space is covered in animal pelts and photos of Navy SEALs. There's a bear one of their SEAL friends shot in Alaska and an anaconda skin another brought back from the jungle. The knobs of the white kitchen cabinets are shotgun shells or deer hooves. An alligator head sits atop the microwave. The coasters on the coffee table in front of their camouflage recliners are shaped like 12 gauge bullets.

A moment of rest like this is rare for the Shipleys, as their days are almost entirely consumed with answering dozens of verification requests for those who want to know if their loved ones or local officials are really SEALs. "It never stops," Diane Shipley said. "It's every day from the time we wake up until the time we go to bed." Don is one of a few Navy SEALs in the nation who has been entrusted with a SEAL database. Anyone who has ever been a SEAL or even started SEAL training is in his system, dating back to World War II when they were called Amphibious Scouts and Raiders. He also works with the POW network, who keep their own database of every prisoner of war, and the Naval Special Warfare Headquarters, who can give the official word on someone's SEAL status.

The database was created by a group called AuthentiSEALs, who gathered Navy records to account for every SEAL and ran their own verification system for decades before they handed the system over to Shipley. "It is extraordinarily demanding to go through a single case in a day," Steve Robinson said. He's a Missouri resident and the last of the AuthentiSEALs to pass the torch to Shipley about 10 years ago. "Guys will alter pages and all that sort of thing. Trying to sort all that out from just one set of records, to look through it and play detective is tremendous work and Don has become a master at it." Robinson and the AuthentiSEALs verified SEAL and POW claims, but Shipley changed the game. "Don took it to the airwaves," Robinson said.

Shipley began running a YouTube page where he and his wife would blast fake SEALs in "Phony SEAL of the Week" videos. YouTube shut down his account in February after Shipley went after Nathan Phillips, the Native American elder who made headlines after he faced off with Catholic school students. So now, the Shipleys run their own website where subscribers can pay for their content. Their site, www.videos.extremesealexperience.com, is known for the videos they put up confronting or making fun of fake SEALs. But there are also tabs like "Ask Don and Diane S--t" and "Diane's Country Cookin." She's posted recipes for bloody mary meatloaf, beer bread and sweet potato bison shepherd's pie and videos of her cooking "Kick Ass Ice Water Chicken" and "A Boozy Dessert that will get ya s--t faced."

The couple has fun, but busting phonies has consumed their life. Every time Navy SEALs make the news or appear in movies, the Shipleys get blasted with verification requests. In the wake of events like the SEAL Team Six rescuing an American ship from Somali pirates in 2009 and the execution of Osama Bin Laden in 2011, the Shipleys said they received about 50 verification requests a day. "We do not fly by the seat of our pants," Don said. "When we're calling someone a liar we have everything in order." Don spends hours on each verification. He sends out Freedom of Information Act requests for records, which can take weeks to get back. He checks if people have falsified their records and awards or changed their name. He sometimes receives misspelled names and inaccurate ages, which can make the process harder. But he always finds an answer.

"I know the training class you went through, who you went through training with, the dates, the names, the commanding officers," Don said. "I'm lethal with it. You can't lie to me. You can't even throw me a curve ball." If the Shipleys ever take a vacation, they're hunting down phonies. They've flown to Washington, Oregon, Michigan, Florida, Georgia, North and South Carolina and Texas to help people who are afraid to confront their loved ones or local leaders alone. When people are faced with their lies, the Shipleys say they often get hit with threats and harassment. People spread rumors about the couple on the internet or make fun of Diane for her weight, she said. "They go after me like, 'That loudmouth b----h. She was never a SEAL. She never went through SEAL training. Why does she care?'" she said.

As a Navy veteran who stuck with her husband through SEAL training, raised their child alone while he was deployed, watched her son become a SEAL and come home "broken" and watched her friends' children get deployed and die, Diane said she has a right to care. When people use their fake SEAL status to get opportunities, she says she thinks of her son. "It's a hard, hard life," she said. "I don't want anybody out there getting that job when my son really needs that job."

'A phony is born'

There are a few different types of phonies, the Shipleys say. There are people who say they're SEALs or POWs for financial gain. They profit off of GoFundMes and take advantage of charities for veterans, Don said. At least one in five GoFundMes for a Navy SEAL or POW are fake, Don said. Part of his days are spent getting the fake GoFundMes taken down. Under the Stolen Valor Act, profiting off of false claims of military accolades is a federal crime.

"I get after charities a lot," Don said. "They donate guys these service dogs, houses, country music singers. And the guy never...he was nothin'. You bought him a house and you didn't check? Really? It all comes back to the same thing. 'We didn't want to offend him.' Really? Well, you should have." Then, there are "religious phonies." Dating sites can become hotbeds for fake SEALs, the couple said. "Christian Mingle's the worst because it's supposed to be Christian," Diane said. "It's filled with phonies." Don made headlines in 2011 after he outed a Pennsylvania pastor who bought a SEAL trident medal at a military supply store and told his congregation he was a SEAL for five years. "People think, 'Oh, he's the godly man, he would never lie to me.' The hell he won't," Don said.

Phonies can also be abusers, the couple said, using fake SEAL status to keep a hold on abusive relationships. Don said he often gets calls from families cut off from their loved ones by fake SEALs. "He convinces her, 'There's snipers watching us, the phones are tapped, if you try to check on me you're going to alert the White House and they're going to call me.' It gets very elaborate with what these guys do to the women. They're very abusive and very controlling and it's hard to get them out but one day they wake up," Don said. "They blame everything, all their woes on SEAL pain. 'That's why I beat you, that's why I drank, my PTSD.' They go to such great lengths to cover that charade up."

Some fake SEALs do have some type of military record, but Don says it's often not good. "You had a run in the military and you were just ashamed of it, so you compensate for it by turning yourself into something respectable, something people would admire." Then, there's the tiny white lie that can snowball into something inescapable. "Oftentimes, that guy just had a couple bottles of Loudmouth at the VFW and he drops that SEAL bomb," Don said. "And you heard him and now he can't get out of it." Don said he sometimes gets thanked by the people he busts because they don't have to keep living a lie. When people would ask Don if wearing a SEAL shirt was okay, he used to say yes. But he doesn't recommend it anymore. "When you wear that SEAL shirt, everyone is going to stop you at Walmart and go 'Were you a SEAL?' and you'll say no 10 times, but one time you'll say yes. You'll love the reaction and a phony is born."

Somebody's gotta do it

Don and Diane are supposed to be relaxing in their retirement, but they've stuck with phony hunting as a full-time job because they feel it's so important. Don is hesitant to hand the database off. He's worried about someone making a mistake if they're not careful or sensitive enough. "You have to be tactful, respectful," Don said. "All you hear me call

these guys is 'sir' a lot. Now, they will fire me up on occasion and I'll really go after them. But you have to be really delicate to get that story out. You've gotta be professional. You can't have a hot head."

Diane doesn't want people to think of the couple as bullies. "Don always gives people a way out. You pull all of that s--t down off of your website, off Facebook, and you make an apology for lying to people. And if they do that, he never makes a video," she said. "Once we've outed somebody we do not harass the families. We're not phoning them. We're not calling wives and children. We simply give them a chance to stop and if they don't stop we out them and move on. That's it."

Aside from the time it takes from their family, the Shipley's hate the job most when they come across dead phonies. The couple keeps a close eye on obituaries since sites like ancestry.com and genealogy.com don't verify military information and can immortalize fake accolades. "We get phone calls from children, adults, that they're father's just passed away and want to know if Don can get a bunch of SEALs together to come and be pallbearers at the funeral. And sometimes he doesn't even want to tell them," Diane said. "That's who taught you how to tie your shoes and ride a bicycle, your first fishing buddy. You look up to your mom and dad. You believe them. Then after he's died you find out everything you knew about him was a lie. It would affect your entire life. We hate those. Those are the worst."

There is one plus side to sorting through all the lies, Don said. Notoriety from their videos and fake SEAL hunting reputation also brought attention to the wannabe SEAL training camp they used to run out of their home in Virginia, and now to their charity Warrior's Rest in Cambridge. "People like seeing me get dressed in a phone booth every morning and fighting those guys. I never intended it to have that effect. I just did not like them. But we have this very loyal following of people who like seeing that and think we're doing well. We get the donations, the property," Don said. "So all this, in some strange fashion, those phonies are paying for it."

[Source: The Capital | Selene San Felice | July 23, 2019 ++]

Vet Cemetery Wisconsin Update 02 ► New 2nd Cemetery Named

The new National Veteran's Cemetery in the Oneida County Town of Harshaw has been named. U.S. VA Secretary Robert Wilke said the name is the Northwoods National Cemetery. The closest burial option for veterans currently living in this area is the State-administered cemetery in King, Wisconsin. located 114 miles from Harshaw. This cemetery will be the second Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national cemetery in Wisconsin. Northwoods National Cemetery is part of the VA National Cemetery Administration. VA purchased the six-acre property at 4520 Lakewood Road, Harshaw, Wisconsin for \$24,000 on Sept. 24, 2015. This cemetery will serve more than 38,000 Veterans, their spouses and eligible children within a 75-mile radius of nearby Rhinelander. No formal date for the opening has been announced. [Source: WXPR Radio | Ken Krall | July 19, 2019++]

WWII Cadet Nurses ► Could Become Honorary Veterans

At one point, they were 180,000 strong -- women who joined the U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps in World War II to staff U.S. hospitals during the war years and care for the wounded when they came home. Exactly how many are left is not known, but Thomas Saadi, commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs, told the New London Day that the living and the deceased deserve long-overdue recognition. "It's an issue that's below the radar for many, but, for those who are affected, it would have an incredible impact," Saadi said of proposed legislation now making its way through Congress that would give these nurses veteran status, albeit honorary.



The designation could come this year. An amendment to the House fiscal 2020 defense policy bill offered by Rep. Cheri Bustos (D-IL) was approved earlier this month by voice vote and included in the bill. A similar measure has been introduced in the Senate by Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA). A bipartisan group of 22 senators has signed on to support Warren's legislation. "When our nation faced a shortage of nurses during World War II, women from across the country took action by joining the Cadet Nurses Corps, where they trained and worked hard to provide Americans with necessary care," Warren said. The measures would give the women honorable discharges and honorarily bestow the title of "veteran," a designation that would make them eligible for a service medal from the Defense Department and burial benefits from the VA. They would not be eligible for disability benefits, health care or other veterans' benefits.

From July 1, 1943, to Dec. 31, 1948, more than 120,000 women completed the training and served in the Corps. They were assigned to military hospitals, VA facilities, public and private hospitals, and public health agencies. Cadet Nurse Betty Beecher trained in Boston, Massachusetts, and then served on Staten Island, New York, in a Marine hospital. "We prevented the total collapse of the health care system," she said in a news release. "Had we not stepped up and volunteered and enlisted, I'm afraid the country would have been demoralized and our boys would have come home to a sick country."

To become law, the measure must make it through the reconciliation process between the House and Senate on the National Defense Authorization Act legislation, expected to begin soon. Those interested in learning more about these young women and their role during World War II can find their testimonies at www.uscadetnurse.org. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | July 22, 2019 ++]

Veterans FAQ ► Where Can I Locate a Blue Water Navy Ship Listing?

Q. Does anyone know of a list of ships that served off the coast of Vietnam (Blue Water Navy) that is available? I know of the list of ships that went in to anchorage or tied up, but do not know of any list which includes BWN ship off the coast. I did not set foot on the ground of Vietnam soil, or boots on the ground, but I too have a few medical conditions that are related to AO. Thanks in advance.

Answers

A1: Don't know of any list and not sure the Navy archives probably would have it in some form. Whether they will give it out or share it is a question. Ask your congressman to look into it and you may get it or start one. Here are three I was on that the VA would not put on the list even though two went upriver on firing missions. USS Fletcher DD-445, USS Philip DD-498, USS Mobile LKA-115, and USS New Jersey BB-62 were all off the coast of Vietnam. If I

go thru my records than I may send a list to the VA or may send it to my congressman of ships listed on my chronological history of my ships and plane guarded as well as spotted on patrol duties. (JRM) 7/7/19

A2: I do. (JL) 7/7/19

A3: Go to www.bwnvva.org and join to get full information concerning Blue Water Sailors .. Facebook, Blue Water Navy Association. (RF) 7/7/19

A4: Searched for you and if you go online to "search" and type in Blue Water Navy Ships List it will come up. It is posted as "List of BWN ships exposed to AO....good luck!! (NT) 7/7/19

A5: I'm retired AF & never got to VN, but a friend used sites we found on Google to get his Blue Water benefits. (MS) 7/7/19

A6: You would be better off trying for a list of ships that participated in PROJECT SHAD. (NL) 7/7/19

A7: If you go to the VA's website (www.vba.gov) and in the search box type list of ships. However, there are many ships still not on this list and so far I can't get an answer on how to add a ship to the VA's list of Blue Water Ships. If your ship is not listed recommend you request your personnel records to include your Page4s that show your duty stations and if you have your cruise books, old letter post marked on your ship these are good evidence to support your claim. Even if your ship is not on the VA's list and you have evidence that your ship operated within the 12 mile limits you can use the Code of Federal Regulations Title 38 in Part 0-17 in part 3 the Reasonable doubt rule. Basically it says if there is any doubt about a claim the VA has to grant it in favor of the claimant. So don't sit around. Get your claim in now even though your ship is not listed. If you submit your claim in July your protected date is 1 August, always the first day of the month following the month the VA receives a claim. Hope this is of some benefit to you. (GK) 7/7/19

A8: On Facebook there is a group called "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Association" there is a lot of information available with that association including ships locations and more. (MR) 7/7/19

A9: I have a copy of Navy and Coast Guard Ships Associated with Service in Viet Nam and Exposure to Herbicide Agents, Sept 4, 2018. This is the list that VA Regional Offices use to verify eligibility for the presumption of Agent Orange. ... (JAW) 7/7/19

A10: Google blue water sailor ships or brown water ships. In addition, without a doubt, the VA has a list of each. I know, I found the list, which consist of approximately 30 page. ... (AD) 7/7/19

A11: Yes here's the link <http://www.veteranprograms.com/ships-exposed-to-ao.html>. (BA) 7/8/19

A12: Try the VA Navy Ships list. It is several pages and contains Blue and Brown water vessels. It is a long list but I am certain you will find the ship you are looking for. (MK) 7/8/19

A13: You probably already know of this, but I'll send it with the hopes it helps... <https://www.va.gov/shiplist-agent-orange.pdf>. (JW) 7/8/19

A14: I was on the USS Canberra and I'm Agent Orange afflicted. Ee were in the harbor of Da Nang and went in the river just south of there. If you patrolled the coast close to the coast of Vietnam you might have been given the registration of boots on the ground and given Agent Orange clarification. You have to check with the VFW and find out about that. It will be worth it. (KM) 7/9/19

Note: Go to <http://www.veterandiscountdirectory.com/question172.html> if you would like to add your experience regarding on this question.

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

Veterans FAQ ► Are Our VA Benefits Being Depleted?

Q: I just turned 65. I hear talk around the VA about our benefits being depleted. I am 100% disabled. I hear the VA is planning to discontinue individual Unemployability for veterans over 65 in 2020. Is this true?

Answers

A1: Congress is actually the ones who have been trying to eliminate IU at 62 (the age most of us older veterans can start drawing Social Security) for any veteran who is not 100% P&T. It's come up during the budget process as a way to reduce the VA's budget. Sort of makes sense, even though there are more adverse factors that Congress isn't taking into account during their decision making process. My suggestion is this, if you are receiving IU, open a new claim through eBenefits in the hopes that you can become 100% P&T before you lose your IU; because eventually we're going to lose the battle. (TB) 7/15/19

A2: I am a VSO, and I don't have all the answers yet, BUT, the worst thing you can do is to listen to gossip. Nothing you hear talk around has guarantees. Try talking to a VSO or Veteran Advocate. (GL) 7/15/19

A3: Read <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2017/06/14/va-secretary-backs-off-plan-to-cut-elderly-vets-benefits> which talks about backing off of this plan. (RI) 7/15/19

A4: I've heard the same thing. I too am 100%, so I went to the DAV Regional guy here and asked him. He said he was told Nam Vets are grandfathered but the VA is looking at Iraqi and Afgan Vets and having them repealed. Nothing worse than 2-3 million Vets protesting the WH, the VA and Congress. (DE) 7/15/19

A5: I'm 80% disabled, however also IU 100%. It would be nice if we could know just what to do regarding 2020. This is so uncertain about what to do. (MH) 7/15/19

A6: It is hard to know what the inner workings of government are. Most politicians have never been in the military so do not relate to military service and some are real Draft Dodgers. Any benefits to veterans comes from taxes. If taxes are lower over and over, particularly for those who can afford to pay taxes, then the government has less money available to pay out in benefits. People who have the most to lose are the ones who usually do not vote and many who vote are not informed.

When I lived in Europe working on a PhD I read essays in papers saying the inner core of the Republican Party, the ones you do not see on TV, want to bankrupt the U.S. Government so they can go to the people and say we cannot afford social security, benefits to veterans, Medicare, Aid to Dependent Children, aid for education, and more which they do not want to subsidize in taxes. This is the master plan to get rid of all social programs from FDR and LBJ that they dislike and that includes benefits for veterans. Without everyone (but especially rich people not paying) a fair tax then something has to be reduced and drastically to make up for the loss of tax income. One way is to cut veteran's care and benefits.

Veterans today sit on their collective asses and whine but do nothing. After WWI the war bonuses promised to veterans were not paid and were simply going to disappear. In the 1920s veterans got up and camped out in tens of thousands on the Capitol Mall in DC. Army officers like Patton, Eisenhower, and Mac Arthur used machine guns and fired on fellow veterans to remove them from the mall. Some veterans were killed not in Europe fighting Germans but on the national mall in DC. In the end they got their bonuses. This is where we are today. Veterans are forgotten by the drop of a hat especially by Draft Dodging politicians. Write your representatives in congress. There are three of them plus the president. (JD) 7/15/19

A7: There has been talk in the government.. As to this change, for it to happen I would think US CODE CHAPTER 38 110 would have to be changed by Congress. Not that the attitude to stop benefits is new. Our past Head of the Veterans Admin was quoted as saying why should the government continue to provide retirement benefits for Veterans

rated with Unemployability, let them live on Social Security. Hopefully our Veterans Advocates can monitor and give us a heads up so if bills are drafted we can mount a timely defense. (JM) 7/15/19

Note: Go to <http://www.veterandiscountdirectory.com/question178.html> if you would like to add your experience regarding on this question.

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

WWII Vets 198 ► Sydney Hunnicutt | Philippine War Vet Turns 102

The McCurtain County VA Clinic and members of the local community gathered in Idabel, Oklahoma to celebrate World War II Veteran Sydney Hunnicutt’s 102nd birthday. “We truly care about the Veterans in our community and we just want to make a difference,” said Lisa Morphew, registered nurse and clinic manager. “We love our Veterans and want to show them that we’re here to help, whatever their needs are.” VA clinic staff presented birthday cards and Jonathan Plasencia, associate director for the Eastern Oklahoma VA Health Care System, presented a gift bag to Hunnicutt on behalf of VA Voluntary Service. Twelve of Hunnicutt’s family members were able to attend the party including several who were visiting from California. Dorothy Cash, Hunnicutt’s daughter, said she was grateful to the clinic and community who helped make the day special for her father. “It means the world to us,” said Cash.



During World War II, Hunnicutt was drafted into the U.S. Army and deployed to the Philippines with the 63rd Infantry Regiment, 6th Infantry Division. During the Battle of Luzon, Hunnicutt fought the Japanese and was shot in his left hand. He lost two fingers and was later awarded a Purple Heart. “It’s an honor to be here today to celebrate a member of the Greatest Generation,” said Plasencia, who drove from the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center in Muskogee to celebrate Hunnicutt’s milestone. “Veterans have many options for their health care and when they place their trust in VA that is a privilege we do not take lightly.” “It couldn’t have been better,” said Hunnicutt, who turns 102 on July 13. [Source: Vantage Point | July 15, 2019 ++]

WWII Vets 199 ► John Farritor | 30 Year Marine

A U.S. Marine who fought in some of the most deadly and infamous World War II and Korean War battles, including the battle at Iwo Jima in Japan and North Korea’s Chosin Reservoir, recently celebrated his 100th birthday at the Pacifica Senior Living Center in Vista, California, according to The San Diego Union-Tribune. First Sgt. John Farritor, spent 30 years in Corps — 20 on active duty and 10 in reserves, the Union-Tribune reported. He is one of the few surviving Marine veterans who in September 1942 marched 55 miles from Camp Elliott in San Diego to the newly opened Marine base near Oceanside, California.

Celebrating his birthday in his dress blue uniform, Farritor was joined by a group of Marines from Camp Pendelton, California, 8 JUL. Friends, senior center residents and Marines listened to Farritor's Marine Corps experiences in a slideshow presentation by friend and a local historian Linda Dudik. Farritor sang along to his "Happy Birthday" song and said, according to the Union-Tribune: "I enjoyed the first 100 years. But I don't know what I'll do from here on out."

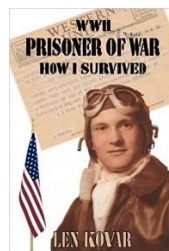


Farritor was 20 when Germany invaded Poland in 1939. He was taken by the look of the Marine Corps uniforms and its "first to fight" mission. A year later, he left his family ranch in Nebraska and enlisted, the Union-Tribune reported. He arrived for boot camp at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego in July 1941. He subsequently was stationed at Camp Elliott and finally Camp Pendleton, where he served in the 3rd Marine Division field artillery. He described the 1945 battle of Iwo Jima in Japan as one of the deadliest battles he was in. Farritor recalls rising at dawn the next day to make sure the U.S. flag was still flying.

In 1950, Farritor was part of the defining Korean War battle at the Chosin Reservoir. As Marines fought their way over 17 days in an impossible escape to the seaport at Hungnam, Farritor suffered his only war injury: a hand wound from flying shrapnel, to which he refused a Purple Heart. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Apoorva Mittal | July 16, 2019 ++]

WWII Vets 200 ► Leonard J. Kovar | AAF POW

Leonard John Kovar always wanted to be a pilot, so he enlisted in the Army Air Force in 1943. He was sent to San Antonio for basic training and then to Harlingen, Texas, to become a pilot. Kovar failed the pilot program and instead became a bombardier. After training, he was assigned to the 451st Bomb Group, part of the 727th Squadron. On his first mission overseas, in the war, Kovar's plane lost oil, and he had to abort the mission. On his 11th mission in August 1944, his plane sustained heavy enemy fire, before catching fire. He and the rest of the crew ejected from the aircraft. When Kovar bailed out, he was hit by shrapnel in the foot before landing in a Hungarian forest.



Kovar tried to find Americans, and successfully evaded capture for a while, sticking to the woods. But one night, while in a town getting water, he was captured by Hungarian soldiers who gave him water but turned him over to the

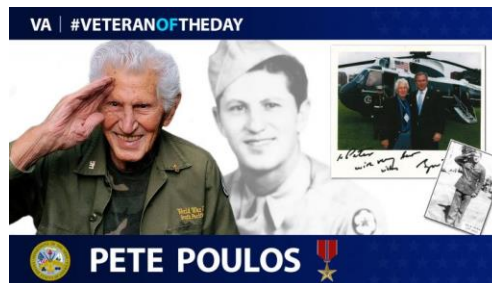
Germans. He was taken to an old prison in Budapest where he was interrogated by a German officer. The officer offered him a cigarette before asking his rank and serial number. Kovar answered, but would not tell him his unit. He was then put on a boxcar and transported to Stalag Luft III, a POW camp.

The train passed through Vienna during an air raid. Kovar remembers there being little food in the POW camp, and he was not there for long before he could hear advancing Russian artillery. The prisoners were soon marched out, walking for two nights and a day without any food or rest. It was cold. They stopped at a brick factory with a big kiln to warm up before moving forward again. Kovar then got onto another box car headed for Nuremberg, where he'd remain for the rest of the war.

After the war, Kovar used his GI Bill for college and then seminary school. He wrote a memoir of his time as a POW, WWII Prisoner of War: How I Survived which can be purchased at <https://www.amazon.com/WWII-Prisoner-War-How-Survived/dp/0984542485>. At <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.33917> more of his story can be found. Thank you for your service, Leonard! [Source: Vantage Point | Kat Blanchard | July 15, 2019 ++]

Obit: Pete Poulos ▶ 17 Jan 2019 | Helped Pull WWII Navy Pilot Bush from the Pacific

Pete Poulos was born in Greece in 1916. After witnessing the horrors of World War I in Europe, Poulos' family immigrated to Chicago in search of better opportunities. His family first lived near Chicago's south side steel mills and later settled in west suburban Elmwood Park. In 1940, Poulos enlisted in the Army. After the US entered the war, Poulos was sent to the Southeast Pacific as a member of Company A, 58th Battalion in August 1942. As a sergeant, Poulos was one of the first people to land at Guadalcanal, and was present for battles at New Guinea, Bougainville, and Sullivan Island. During the liberation of the Philippines, Poulos served as an escort to General Douglas MacArthur, and also helped to free several POWs.



After Japan surrendered, Poulos was tasked with collecting Japanese soldiers' weapons. He left the Army in 1946 and received three Bronze Star medals for his service. Poulos returned home to Chicago. He met a store clerk on the north side who he had rescued in the Philippines. The store clerk had been on fire after his tank was struck by enemy fire. There, he was introduced to the clerk's sister, Julie, whom he later married. Poulos' experience driving Jeeps overseas was put into civilian service when he took a job at the US Postal Service. As a courier, he drove a surplus military Jeep. In addition to his postal service, Poulos also volunteered for over 30 years at Hines VA Hospital in Maywood, Illinois.

For his countless hours of volunteering at VA and for his military service, President George W. Bush requested to meet with Poulos on a visit to Chicago. Poulos met the president when he got off Marine One in Grant Park, and was able to spend an hour with him that day. During their visit, President Bush learned that Poulos was one of the men who pulled his father—President George H.W. Bush, a World War II Navy pilot—from the Pacific after his plane was shot down by the Japanese during the war. Pete Poulos died on January 17, 2019, at the Hines VA Medical Center.

He was 102. He is interred in the Elmwood Cemetery, Chicago Illinois. We honor his service. [Source: The Associated Press | David Koenig | Jul 9, 2019 ++]

Obit: William E. Brandenburg ► 22 NOV 1943 | Tarawa Island 17-yr MIA Old Casualty

Nearly 76 years after he was killed in an intense World War II battle that claimed about 1,000 U.S. Marines and sailors, a Marine from New Miami, Ohio was scheduled to return home as the latest example of the military providing closure to families decades after death. The family of Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. William E. Brandenburg welcomed the entire community, particularly military families, to his funeral. A somber military procession after the funeral, on the way to his burial, was scheduled for 27 JUL to which the public was encouraged to line the streets in Brandenburg's honor.



Brandenburg, 17, was fighting the Japanese on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands in the Pacific Ocean. The battle, which lasted several days, killed 1,000 Marines and sailors and wounded more than 2,000 Americans. The Japanese “were virtually annihilated,” according to a news release about Brandenburg from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). Brandenburg, who went by “Billy,” died on the third day of battle, on Nov. 22, 1943. Born in New Miami on Jan. 3, 1926, he was the son of Robert and Mattie (Rice) Brandenburg. His parents and siblings are all deceased, but still living are numerous nieces and nephews, as well as great-nieces and great-nephews. “A lot of people in New Miami are related with the Brandenburgs, so there’s going to be a lot of the family members here,” said Dave Mangus, a veteran who served 23 years in the Navy and husband of Brandenburg’s great-niece, Marla Mangus. “His family is also anybody who was in the military, and we have a lot of military brothers and sisters coming to bring him home.”

The military listed Brandenburg’s age as 19, but he actually was 17 when he died. Like many others during WWII and Korea, he fibbed about his age and enlisted at 16, four months after his father died and he begged his mother for weeks to let him sign up. Brandenburg’s bittersweet homecoming, and burial just feet away from his parents, was made possible by modern scientific methods. His unidentified body was buried in one of several battlefield cemeteries on the island. His was known as Central Division Cemetery, which later was renamed Cemetery 26. A military operation on Betio between 1946 and 1947 recovered his remains and those of many others, but were unable to identify his body. All of the remains from Betio were sent to the Schofield Barracks Central Identification Laboratory in 1947 for identification. By 1949, those remains that still were unidentified were buried in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, known as the Punchbowl, in Honolulu. One group of those bodies was designated as Tarawa Unknown X-074. That set was dug up in October 2016, for identification.

Scientists from the DPAA and the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System used mitochondrial DNA analysis, anthropological analysis and “circumstantial and material evidence” to make identifications. Because Brandenburg’s body now has been identified, a rosette mark will be placed next to his name on a monument in Honolulu that lists the names of missing military. During the federal fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, 2018, the military identified remains of 203 military — 156 from World War II, 37 from the Korean conflict, and 10 from Vietnam — said Chuck Prichard of

the DPAA. Still, as of 22 JUL 72,688 service members were missing from WWII, 7,649 from Korea and 1,588 from Vietnam.

Brandenburg's sibling who survived longest, Mae Black, gave a DNA sample about eight years ago to help identify him. She died in 2013. She, like their parents and all the family, are buried in the same graveyard. "For me, it's very bittersweet, because my mother wanted him home so bad, and then she didn't live long enough to see the day come," said Patricia Moore, Mae's daughter, who said for her to know about her brother's return, "I think she would be absolutely elated." Brandenburg's siblings were brothers Carl, Charles, Findley and Clyde; and sisters Mae Black, Elizabeth "Lizzie" Steele and Emogene "Dolly" Laws. After the funeral 27 JUL burial with full military honors was scheduled at Hickory Flat Cemetery. [Source: Journal-News | Mike Rutledge | July 24, 2019 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs ► Scheduled As of 1 AUG 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 | July 31, 2019 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule ► As of 1 AUG 2019

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

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

- HTML: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html.
- PDF: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf.
- Word: http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc.

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

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

[Source: Retiree/Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | July 31, 2019 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits ► Mississippi 2019

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

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

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

Vet Jobs Update 248 ► S.2100 The Veterans Jobs Opportunity Act

U.S. Sen. Jacky Rosen (D-NV) detailed her new policy proposal extending startup tax credits to some veteran-owned businesses during a stop today in Las Vegas. The Veterans Jobs Opportunity Act, introduced Thursday, would give veterans interested in starting a small business in underserved communities a 15% tax credit on the first \$50,000 of startup costs. “This gives our veterans a really great launching pad to come home, use the skills that they have or the dreams that they have ... and be able to keep serving their community,” she said. Rosen detailed the proposal at Lazer Ladies, an engraving and gift business in North Las Vegas owned by sisters Cindy Soto and Marylou Soto, an Air Force veteran. According to data from Rosen’s office, one in eight businesses in Nevada is veteran owned.

The bill has bipartisan backing, with Sens. Jerry Moran, (R-KS) and Kevin Cramer (R-ND) signing onto it with Rosen and Sen. Doug Jones (D-AL) Rosen said the bill would help veterans coming home use skills learned in the military to open small businesses. For example, a mechanic in the military could use this bill to open an auto repair

shop, she said. “They have served us so proudly, and we need to let them take the leadership skills, all the things that they’ve learned, and give them a launching pad when they transition,” she said. [Source: Las Vegas Sun | y John Sadler| July 13, 2019 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 249 ► S.2115 | Modify DOD Retirement Authority Military Retiree Hiring Rule

There’s a new push to change the law that requires military retirees to wait 180 days after leaving the military before starting a civilian job with the Defense Department. Several lawmakers say the mandated waiting period makes it hard for the DoD to get the best qualified people to fill government jobs because retirees often choose to pursue careers in the private sector instead of waiting out the 180-day “cooling off” period. “The 180-day rule creates a road block for veterans who want to continue to serve their country in retirement.” said Sen. James Lankford (R-OK) who is one of sponsors of a new bill to repeal the law. "Our bill puts in place common-sense protections to prevent unscrupulous hiring practices but ensures when we find the right person for an important DoD job, they can come on board as soon as possible.”

Originally put into law in 1964, the 180-day waiting policy was intended to make sure that there wasn’t a “revolving door” in the hiring process at the DoD. The law was waived after Sept. 11, 2001, when a national emergency was declared, but was reinstated in 2017. From 2001 to 2014, while the waiting requirement was suspended, more than 41,000 retired service members were permitted to start government jobs without the 180-day wait, according to a report completed by the United States Merit Systems Protection Board. The board’s survey found concerns about the immediate hiring of some veterans. “Respondents in three different surveys indicated that inappropriate favoritism towards veterans was a problem,” the report said. "In the surveys that permitted respondents to identify the source of the problem, some respondents alleged that there had been improper manipulations of the system for the purpose of benefiting retiring military members,” according to the report.

The Senate bill takes some measures to address the original concerns, requiring that positions within the DoD cannot be held open for the retiring member. It also ensures that the specific job requirements don’t offer any sort of advantage to the service member. The bill also ensures the service member is put through the same standard civil service process as any other applicant would be for the position. “This legislation solves an unnecessary hiring hurdle and ensures the most qualified individuals are placed in jobs, while also safeguarding our federal hiring practices that are in place,” Sen. Lankford said.

The bill was introduced by Lankford, Sens. Mike Lee, R-Utah; Mitt Romney, R-Utah; Johnny Isakson, R-Ga.; and David Perdue, R-Ga. They also say that in addition to this bill there is companion legislation that has been introduced in the House. "I look forward to our bill’s full consideration in the days ahead so our qualified veterans can get to work and use their military expertise and background to continue their support of our defense missions and national security,” Lankford said. [Source: MilitaryTimes| Brian Mackley | July 18, 2019 ++]

VA Hiring Update 14 ► S.123 | Ensuring Quality Care for Our Veterans Act

Iowa veteran Anthony French needed surgery to remove a brain tumor in 2017. The Veterans Health Administration neurosurgeon who conducted his procedure had a revoked medical license and was embroiled in malpractice lawsuits at the time he performed French’s surgery. After the surgery, French told his surgeon he was still experiencing symptoms, but the surgeon allegedly put him off, telling him he would improve over time. But French did not improve and another doctor discovered that the surgeon had not removed French’s brain tumor.

Backed by photos of family in uniform and other military memorabilia in her sunlit Senate office, Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA), an Army National Guard veteran and the first woman combat veteran elected to the Senate, told French's story. "Now he's gone all this time without proper treatment," Ernst told Connecting Vets in an exclusive interview Tuesday. French's plight inspired Ernst to introduce the Ensuring Quality Care for Our Veterans Act. "What we want to achieve now is that any veteran treated by a physician with a revoked license, there would be a third-party review of those record to ensure that proper treatment was given to the patients," she said. "There is not a large cost to go back and see if anything has been missed, but we think that's imperative. We have promised these veterans that they would receive proper care at our VAs and we need to follow up on that."

Ernst said she also hopes, if the legislation passes, it will make Veterans Administration hiring practices more accountable. "Bringing it to light that they are not supposed to hire people with revoked licenses and they need to further scrutinize their hiring practices," she said. "I know we are short physicians and nurses across the VA, but that doesn't mean we start allowing substandard care." The bill requires the VA to enter into a contract with a third party to review all care providers in the VHA who had a license terminated for cause by a state licensing board for care or services at non-VA hospitals. Any veteran treated by those providers (doctors, nurses or other employees) would be notified if the third party reviewer finds any below-standard care in the provider's records, according to the bill.

Committee hearings have been held on the bill, but there has not yet been a vote to move it to the floor. Ernst said she's hopeful to see it pass this year and doesn't expect opposition. "It's a message to those patients that we do truly care about you," she said. "You have earned care at the VA and we want to make sure you are receiving that care. Because the VA has failed you in hiring a physician that should not be there, we're going to go back ... and make sure if you did not receive the care you should have ... that you get the care you deserve." [Source: ConnectingVETS.com | Abbie Bennett | July 17, 2019 ++]

Beirut USMC Barracks Bombing Update 01 ► H.R.2790 | OORAH Act of 2019

The House on 17 JUL passed a bipartisan measure freeing up access to over a billion dollars in Iranian funds for the families of over 200 U.S. Marines killed during an Iran-backed terror attack in 1983. The **Our Obligation to Recognize American Heroes** (OORAH) Act passed in a 397 to 31 vote Wednesday evening as an amendment to the Intelligence Authorization Act.



Emergency crews search for survivors after the attack against U. S. Marines in Beirut, Lebanon, October 23, 1983. (USMC)

On October 23, 1983, two suicide bombers with the Iranian-backed terrorist group Hezbollah detonated two truck bombs, one at the Marine base in Beirut, Lebanon, killing 241 American soldiers as well as French military personnel and several civilians. The legislation, sponsored by Vice President Mike Pence's brother, Indiana congressman Greg Pence, makes \$1.68 billion in Iranian government assets kept in the Luxembourg-based bank Clearstream available as "compensatory damages" to the families of the victims. "I served my country as a United State Marine, and I understand what it takes to keep our nation safe," Representative Pence told National Review. "This is the least we can do for the families of those brave 241 American patriots who made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of our country."

The legislation is deeply personal for Pence since he was stationed in Beirut just days before the deadly attack. “I was lucky. My battalion shipped out 10 days before the bombing,” Pence said during remarks on the House floor Tuesday. “I was able to come home to my wife, who was expecting our first child, and my family in Columbus. I told myself I would never forget those men.” “This legislation will help victims and their families obtain just a small amount of justice,” he added in a statement. Several court judgments have found Iran responsible for the terror attack and ordered Iran pay restitution to the families, but the orders have proven difficult to enforce. The measure amends the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012 to permit the family members of the victims to execute on the funds.

Pence, a Republican, was joined by Democratic Representative Ruben Gallego of Arizona in introducing the bipartisan measure. A sister piece of legislation was introduced in the Senate by another group of bipartisan lawmakers, Republican senators Tom Cotton, Ted Cruz, and Marco Rubio as well as Democrats Sheldon Whitehouse, Doug Jones, and Jacky Rosen of Nevada. The measure comes amid increasingly acrimonious relations between the U.S. and Iran. Iranian officials said last month that new U.S. sanctions mean “closing the doors of diplomacy” between the two countries. [Source: National Review Online | Mairead McArdle | July 17, 2019 ++]

Vet Legislation House Wins 2019 ► Passed in House on 23 JUL

The House passed six bills in total that could benefit veterans on 23 JUL, including legislation aimed at women veterans' health care, debt relief as well as the Kules Act.

- HR 617: Creates a partnership between the VA and Department of Energy for access to specialized, superior technology to improve veteran health care, particularly traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress and suicide prevention.
- HR 2943: Requires VA to offer its information materials in Spanish and Tagalog, particularly in areas where many veterans speak any of those languages, such as Puerto Rico.
- HR 2942: Directs VA to begin the Women's Health Transition Training pilot program aimed at helping women veterans transition out of the military and educate them about the benefits they are entitled to.
- HR 3504: The Ryan Kules Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act, named for Army Capt. Ryan Kules, the act expands the grant program for catastrophically wounded veterans to be able to renovate their homes to account for their disabilities.
- S 504: The Legion Act directs the American Legion to determine requirements for membership in the organization to expand eligibility to more veterans.

Each of the bills passed the House and will now head to the Senate for consideration, with the exception of the Senate's Legion Act, which should head to the president's desk for final approval.

[Source: NCOA Advocate | July 26, 2019 ++]

*** Military ***



Military Academies ► Graduates Could See Longer Military Obligations

Senators want to look at the service obligations that graduates of U.S. military academies incur for the first time in more than 20 years. The Senate Armed Services Committee wrote in the latest defense bill that the current eight-year service obligation for academy graduates hasn't changed since 1996. "Since that time, the real cost per graduate has increased by nearly 20 percent," the committee wrote. Graduates of the service academies must serve five years on active duty and the remainder can be served in the inactive reserve. Different careers in the military may require different time commitments after graduation, however.



Graduating Air Force Academy cadets hug as they receive diplomas on May 28, 2015, during their graduation ceremony for the class of 2015, at the U.S. Air Force Academy, in Colorado Springs, Colo.

"Recent studies suggest service academy graduates have lower junior officer retention rates than other officer commissioning sources," lawmakers added. "Meanwhile, the increasingly technical nature of officer careers results in new officers spending less time at their first duty stations due to lengthier, more demanding, initial skills training courses." The service academies are often seen as some of the best educational opportunities in the United States. Tuition, room and board at academic institutions with admission rates and academic rigor comparable to Ivy League colleges are covered by the American taxpayer in exchange for a surplus of capable military officers to lead the armed forces. However, the service academies regularly commission less than one fifth of the nation's new officers each year, according to CNA Corporation, a nonprofit research and analysis firm.

Additionally, the service academies spend four times more per new officer than a typical ROTC program and eight times more than typical graduates of officer training schools, according to a George Mason University Law School veteran and service member legal clinic. Those stats have left some lawmakers wondering how they can keep the academies a net benefit for taxpayers. The Senate's language in the latest defense bill, which has yet to be signed into law, directs the secretary of defense and the subordinate secretaries of each military department to submit a report no later than April 1, 2020, on the issue of service obligation at the academies.

The report would detail how the real cost per military service academy graduate has changed since 1996 and how service academy graduate retention rates compare to those of other commissioning sources, such as ROTC at civilian colleges. The report would also answer how an increase in the initial active-duty service obligation would impact academy application rates. Additionally, lawmakers want the Defense Department to explain how a policy could be implemented that awards preference for admission to a service academy in exchange for an agreement to serve on active duty longer than the minimum amount of time. The Senate is also offering the report to military leaders as an opportunity to solicit other policy recommendations that could be put in place to ensure an adequate return on investment for a service academy graduates. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Kyle Rempfer | July 15, 2019 ++]

Military Academies Update 01 ► Far More Men than Women Nominated by Lawmakers

Males account for nearly 80 percent of current lawmakers' service academy nominees, according to a new report examining nomination data from the past 25 years. Findings from the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center, which obtained the data through a Freedom of Information Request, determined men received 79% of current lawmakers' service academy nominations while women only received 21%. Altogether, this means 72,506 nominations were issued to male candidates while only 19,414 nominations were issued to women from members of the 116th Congress. "This analysis, the first of its kind, finds that members of Congress have overwhelmingly nominated young men rather than young women, thus depriving the academies of a more balanced pool of candidates," the report states.

Most applicants must secure a nomination from members of either the Senate or the House in order to submit an application to a service academy. Spots for such nominations are limited though, because only a maximum of five people nominated by a single member of Congress may attend the service academy at one time. Once a student graduates, or withdraws from a service academy, lawmakers can nominate up to 10 applicants as a potential replacement. "This makes members of Congress essential gatekeepers to the admissions process," Liam Brennan, executive director of the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center, said in a statement. "But the dramatic gender disparity in nomination rates means that members, including many who are deeply committed to gender equality, have failed to recruit and nominate exceptional young women to the academies."

The report examined individual members' track records for nominating women and found that female nominations account for 23% of Senate appointments from current members, and 21% of House appointments from current members. Specifically, Sens. Cory Booker (D-NJ), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), and Martha McSally (R-AZ) have nominated the highest proportion of women in the upper chamber of Congress. Booker has nominated a total of 88 people, 35 of which are women. In the House, Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) nominated the greatest proportion of women. Out of the 40 people he has nominated, 19 were women.

Although men were consistently nominated at higher rates than women, it's unclear if more men were vying for nominations than women. The FOIA request did not apply to Congress, and information is not available on how many women sought to obtain an appointment from members of Congress in comparison to their male counterparts. Retired Col. Ellen Haring, CEO of Service Women's Action Network and West Point graduate, said it was "absurd" the information was only revealed through a Freedom of Information Act request, and argued Congress should report appointments to the service academies annually. As a result, the report suggests lawmakers log information about their applicant pool each year, reach out to high school guidance counselors to identify strong candidates from under-represented backgrounds, and hold several Academy Days with service academy alumnae.

Additionally, the report recommends members of Congress provide in-depth application information on an accessible website, communicate interest in a diverse applicant pool in promotional materials, and require service academies issue an annual report providing information on how many candidates by race, ethnicity, and gender were nominated annually by each lawmaker. The report also advises the Government Accountability Office to conduct an examination of congressional nominations procedures. "Our service members and veterans face incredible barriers in this country," Brennan said. "Our elected officials should be working to break down those walls, but this report shows that they have been systematically routing far more young men than young women into elite opportunities at the academies." "Congress members need to actively recruit diverse nominees in order to produce military leadership that better reflects the country," Brennan said.

Rep. Kathy Castor (D-FL) said the report's findings and recommendations were helpful and that her office does work with high school guidance counselors to facilitate greater applicant diversity. "Members of Congress and America's prestigious military service academies should improve opportunities for young women to attend the academies," Castor said in a statement to the Military Times. "Students across my diverse and dynamic community deserve every opportunity to apply and receive a nomination no matter their background," she said. The report

included all current lawmakers who have nominated more than 10 candidates to the academies. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | July 23, 2019 ++]

CNO ► Vice Adm. Michael Gilday Nominated

President Donald Trump has nominated Vice Adm. Michael Gilday to be the next chief of naval operations according to a senate announcement 17 JUL on the nomination. Gilday, a three-star admiral, is now the director of the Joint Staff, a position he has held since March. If confirmed, he would be promoted to a four-star admiral. "The entire Navy should be very excited by today's announcement," Adm. John Richardson, the current chief of naval operations, said 18 JUL in a statement posted to his official Facebook page. "Adm. Mike Gilday is a true cutting edge warfighter, a surface warrior who, by virtue of his leadership at 10th Fleet, fully appreciates the challenges we face in the cyber warfare arena and the increasing pace of competition in new domains."



Gilday's nomination comes after Trump's first selection for CNO, Adm. William Moran, retired abruptly after reports that he had continued a professional relationship with Chris Servello, a former colleague who was removed from his position as a public affairs adviser to Richardson in 2017 following accusations of sexual misconduct, according to The Associated Press. Servello had also worked for Moran as a public affairs officer.

Gilday, a native of Lowell, Mass., is the son of a career sailor and has served as a surface warfare officer in the Navy since graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1985, according to his Navy biography. He has served on destroyers, including as commander of the USS Higgins and USS Benfold. Gilday also commanded Destroyer Squadron 7 while serving as sea combat commander for the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group, according to the Navy. Gilday has served in Navy and joint senior leadership positions, including as the director of operations for NATO's Joint Force Command Lisbon and U.S. Cyber Command.

He earned a master's degree from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government in 1993 and a second master's degree in 2006 from the National War College, located at Fort McNair in Washington, D.C. His military awards include the Distinguished Service Medal, four Defense Superior Service Medals, three Legions of Merit, a Bronze Star, and the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with Combat "V" device. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Caitlin M. Kenney | July 18, 2019 ++]

Leaving Service ► Harder for Female Vets



When she left the military in 2005, Jodie M. Grenier went from being on a team of intelligence analysts reporting to then-Marine Corps Gen. Jim Mattis, with a top security clearance, to waiting tables. “It was frustrating. I had a very purpose-driven job, and when I got out, I went to a community college and waited tables,” Grenier said. Grenier participated in the transition classes offered by the military, but to her, they were ineffective and unhelpful. She searched job portals and worked as a bartender to support her education. Not having children afforded her flexibility that other women veterans might not have, she said.

Grenier is not alone. More than 30,000 women leave the military every year. There are 2 million women veterans in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, according to data from the Department of Veterans Affairs. By 2040, the VA expects women to make up 18 percent of the veteran population. As more female troops transition from active duty to civilian life, they face unique challenges. Lack of a community of fellow female vets, lack of child care assistance for single mothers and financial instability due to lack of financial literacy are all issues women veterans face, experts say. While some of these challenges affect all veterans, the issues are compounded for women because of cultural stereotypes and the gender pay gap.

“Civilians often fail to recognize women as veterans, leading to mistrust between women veterans and their counterparts,” said Grenier, CEO of Foundation for Women Warriors, an organization that assists women veterans and their children. About 67 percent of women veterans find their financial transition from the military difficult, compared to 47 percent of men; and more women vets experience “loss of income” as a key transition challenge compared to male vets, according to Maureen Casey, CEO of the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University. Women veterans also have different social and psychological experiences than women who are private citizens. When transitioning into society, these differences can upend the expectations people normally have about women.

Dawn Fitzgerald started serving in the Navy right after high school. She transitioned out of active duty in 1998, and worked her way up from a janitor at Merck to a senior specialist in that company’s supply chain division in West Point, Pennsylvania. “When you have strong leadership skills, sometimes, people don’t like that,” Fitzgerald, 44, said. “I have been told many times that I am intimidating.”

The military encourages a direct communication style that many civilian workplaces might not understand, according to Kayla Williams, senior director at the Center for a New American Security. Many veterans talk about the need to change their communication style when they become civilians; the societal penalty for directness is higher for women than men, experts say. “Women can pay a higher penalty for not conforming to some of those expectations,” Williams said. “It is a jarring transition and can take some real recalibration of your presentation style if you are coming into a significantly different work environment.” Fitzgerald, on the other hand, uses her “strong leadership” style to mentor younger women starting out by telling them it’s okay to be called “strong” and “assertive.” “Women get called bitches when they are assertive and strong, but men are called leaders,” she says. “It’s hard.”

The Center for Women Veterans started offering exit seminars for women, but its main focus was making women veterans aware of health care resources. However, experts say that women veterans also need training on social and psychological skills to cope with the transitions. “It took the Army 17 years to get me to the rank of major, so there is

no program that is going to be three to six months that is going to prepare me for civilian life,” Jas Boothe, who founded Final Salute Inc, said. “America needs to carry the torch, and go beyond the handshake and ‘thank you for your service.’ We need a boot camp that is longer and effective.”

More women vets are likely to be single parents than male veterans, experts say. In such a situation, planning for financial stability and housing becomes imperative. Further, finding affordable child care while pursuing education becomes a major obstacle. “There are subsidized programs, but when you are working and in school, your income is just over the threshold, and it becomes an issue to get subsidized child care,” Grenier said. In California, the average weekly cost of care for an infant child is \$211, compared to the subsidized rate of \$60 a week for a single active duty E-4 at a Child Development Center on a base, according to Grenier.

Financial instability can be a major challenge post-service, Casey said. There is a lack of awareness in the women veteran community, and making them informed is also a challenge, she said. “The instructors in transition assistance don’t necessarily know all the services themselves,” Casey said. “The real opportunity is how do we create public-private partnerships, where agencies can come together to provide a complete picture of the opportunities available.”

A lack of a natural peer network where women can freely share their experiences leads to isolation during the transition. “Though the number of women veterans is increasing, there are still so few that they lack a natural peer support network, which can be an emotional challenge,” Grenier said. Grenier’s organization holds workshops to connect veterans with the community. Here are a few of the organizations that help with the challenges mentioned above.

Foundation for Women Warriors

- Connect with the community: The [foundation](#) provides one-day, professional development workshops that bring women veterans together with leaders in business and academia to teach about negotiating salary, self-branding, and creating a sense of community.
- Child care assistance: They provide childcare stipends for daycare (children ages 0-5) and spring, summer and winter camp assistance for working or student veteran mothers.

Final Salute Inc.

- The programs have assisted [women veterans](#) and children in over 30 states and territories.
- One program, called H.O.M.E., provides a full range of transition services like housing, food, clothing, child care assistance. Their other program, S.A.F.E., offers financial education to help with financial planning.

Institute for Veterans and Military Families -- At Syracuse University, [the IVMF](#) works with communities and non-profits across the nation and has a variety of veteran programs.

Onward to Opportunity -- This [program run by Syracuse’s](#) Institute for Veterans and Military Families that provides certification, professional mentorship and connection to a vast network of over employers for placement service.

America Serves -- A coordinated [network of organizations](#) dedicated to serving the military community by connecting them to resources for their specific needs.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Apoorva Mittal | July 18, 2019 ++]

USMC Careers ► Top General Looking to Shake Up Service's Career System

The Marine Corps' top general wants to reward top performers, push promotion authority down to unit-level leaders, offer more job flexibility, and allow people to stay in uniform past the 20-year mark -- moves that could drastically shake up the service's career system. Leaders know their Marines better than those setting policy in Washington, D.C.,

or Quantico, Virginia, Commandant Gen. David Berger told Military.com in a recent interview, and they should be more involved in helping retain the right talent. "Many of us grew up in different timeframes where we were really focused as commanders and senior enlisted leaders on who we were keeping," he said. "We need to put that focus back in place."

Leaders are currently responsible for writing their Marines' performance evaluations, or fitness reports -- the most important factor in determining whether someone will pin on the next rank. But Berger said he'll examine how else they can be involved in selecting who should go, who should stay, and what jobs Marines should be doing. "Can I get their insights to say, 'OK, Berger is a good fit for this, not a good fit for that,' or 'We really need to keep him, time for him to go,'" the commandant said. "[We need] a way to really draw on the people that know them first-hand and closest."

Berger put it candidly in the planning guidance he released to the force last week: There are major shortcomings in the performance evaluation system that must be addressed, he wrote. That includes a growing lack of faith in the Corps' ability to identify Marines' skills, performance and future potential. "The essence of all manpower systems is to encourage those you need and want to stay, and separate [those] who are not performing to standards," he added. "Our current system lacks the authorities and tools to accomplish that simple outcome in anything but a blunt way." Too many Marines are getting promoted based on time and experience, he said, rather than talent, performance or potential. They're also stuck in career fields that are set early in their careers, forcing Marines to accept a job they might dislike or leave. "Even talented, high-performing officers have changing interests over time," Berger said.

The Marine Corps is also letting go of some of its most valuable leaders when they're forced out at the 20-year mark. "[We cut] careers off ... when workers have decades of productivity left in them," Berger said. "These polices ... throw away talent at the point it is most productive and highly trained, and discourage performers who would like to continue serving." There's a need for more incentives for those who "learn, think and innovate," according to the planning guidance. That means bonuses and other rewards should target individual Marines rather than whole military occupational specialties or communities, he added. That's an antiquated model that could be rewarding poor performers. "We should use money like a focused weapon, and aim it at the exact individual we need," Berger said. "Currently, we target people via a mass fires approach, instead of more selective targeting."

Leaders need to be given the chance to identify Marines' unique skills and help them move into jobs for which they're well-suited, the commandant wrote, such as becoming instructors, commanders, staff officers, mentors or special technicians. And he reiterated that building a stronger Marine Corps might mean trimming end-strength "in favor of quality," a concept he has defended as the service faces badly needed training and equipment upgrades. Berger is also pushing for better parental-leave policies, including a year off for new moms, a move advocates say will go a long way in helping the male-dominated service attract and retain women.

Some of the big personnel moves Berger is after might require congressional approval, and he said he'll request that lawmakers give the service more modern tools to compete in today's economy. In the meantime though, he said leaders will consider several changes to the fitness-report process, including allowing Marines an opportunity to assess their own performances; giving officers and senior enlisted personnel the chance to identify their Marines' future potential; helping lead Marines with special skills into jobs like training, planning, mentoring or those that require technical expertise; and rewarding academic performance. "We must and will remedy these shortfalls," Berger said. [Source: Military.com | Gina Harkins | July 24, 2019 ++]

USMC Misconduct ► 25,000+ Marines Lost in the Last Decade Cost DOD \$1B+

The Marine Corps has lost more than 25,000 Marines to misconduct over the past decade, according to Commandant Gen. David Berger. In his 2019 Commandant's Planning Guidance, Berger said that the Corps "continued loss of 8,000

Marines per year to non-EAS attrition is unacceptable," using an acronym to describe the end of active service in an enlistment. A total of 25,336 Marines were booted from the Corps between 2009 and 2019; 11,765 were for drug and alcohol offenses, while 13,571 were over unspecified misconduct. "This must change," Berger wrote, noting that the cost to replace that many Marines was in excess of \$1 billion.

Interestingly, that number should be even higher, as its section on drug use reveals. Since Oct. 2017, 2,410 Marines tested positive for illegal drug use, but only 1,175, or 48.8%, had been separated. "I am deeply troubled by the continued retention of Marines failing to adhere to our standards related to drug use." "We are an elite institution of warriors, and will remain so on my watch," Berger wrote. "It is our shared responsibility to ensure the continued health of our collective soul and identity." Toward the end of the 26-page document, which largely focused on changes Berger intended to implement as the top Marine officer, the new commandant talked about misconduct in the force and what he called "destructive" behavior.

Of sexual assault, for example, Berger said that despite the Corps' efforts, "the continued rise in reporting leads me to conclude that we still do not fully understand the scope and scale of this issue, or that we can say with any confidence that the measures we have taken to date are preventing sexual assaults." The number of reported sexual assaults in the Marine Corps rose by 20% in fiscal year 2018, according to the most recent DoD statistics. Meanwhile, Berger said that he believes hazing is "likely underreported," and the Corps had likewise seen an increase in reports of hazing over the past four years. "Hazing is both a crime and evidence of poor leadership by our [staff non-commissioned officers] and officers," Berger wrote.

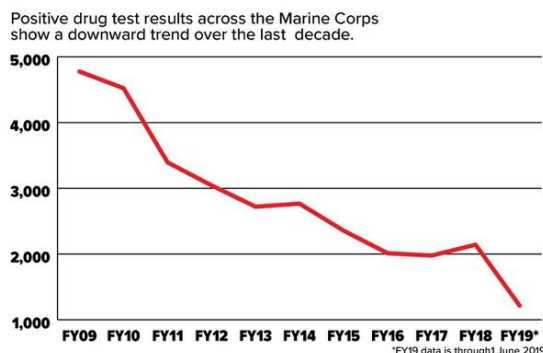
The Corps has had a number of high-profile incidents of misconduct this year, with six commanding officers being relieved of command in just the past two months alone. Berger, for his part, said that commanders should be held accountable whenever they fail to measure up to the service's standards. "When we fail to hold the standard, we establish new lower standards. Elite organizations do not accept mediocrity and they do not look the other way when teammates come up short of expectations. We must hold each other accountable," Berger wrote. "There is no place in our Marine Corps for those who deliberately misuse their authority to physically or sexually assault another; no place for those who risk the lives of those they seek to serve by operating a motor vehicle while impaired; no place for those who are intolerant of their fellow Marines' gender or sexual orientation; no place for those who engage in domestic violence; and no place for racists – whether their intolerance and prejudice be direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional." [Source: Task & Purpose | Paul Szoldra | July 17, 2019 ++]

USMC Drug Waivers ► Vast Majority of Recruits Require Drug Waivers for Enlistment

Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. David Berger said that "the vast majority of recruits require drug waivers for enlistment" in his planning guidance, which was posted late 16 JUL. The top Marine also said he was "deeply troubled" by the number of Marines who have not been booted from the Corps despite failing a drug test. Berger noted that out of the 2,410 Marines since fiscal year 2018 that have failed a drug test only 1,175 have been separated. So is the Corps facing a major drug crisis? The data says the issue is a little more convoluted.

The number of positive drug tests among Marines has dropped from 4,776 in fiscal year 2009 to just 1,216 in fiscal 2019. The drug test figures — obtained by Marine Corps Times on 15 JUL through a government records request — show a general downward trend in positive drug tests over the past decade. The reason for the drop is unknown. The data represents positive test results, which may mean a single individual could have tested positive multiple times. And for the drug waivers, the Corps has often touted the waivers it has dished out based on Defense Department criteria — which is someone who popped on a drug test at a military entrance processing station. That figure has been zero since 2010, according to Capt. Karoline Foote, a Marine spokeswoman.

But that “zero” is not an entirely accurate picture of the Corps’ recruit drug problem. The Corps has a stricter drug use policy for potential recruits than the DoD, and has been issuing its own waivers. Foote explained that the waivers mentioned in Berger’s planning guidance “are internal controls meant to maintain the high quality America expects of its Marines.” The Marine Corps did not provide the number of waivers issued to potential recruits entering the Corps. The drug waiver standards across the services complicates efforts to gauge the overall picture of recruits entering the service who have used or abused drugs. “The only way to compare waivers from one service to the next is to compare those waivers actually defined by DoD as legitimate waivers, since the services have their own unique qualifiers,” Foote said.



From fiscal year 2009 to fiscal year 2019, Berger said that the Corps lost 11,765 Marines for drug and alcohol offenses — another 13,571 were booted for other misconduct. “I am equally troubled by the fact that we do not specifically monitor personnel for continued substance abuse while in-service,” Berger wrote in his planning guidance. Overall, data across the Corps does not appear to show a drug crisis. It is unknown why positive drug test results appear to be declining. All Marines are supposed to undergo drug testing every year, and the Corps also conducts random drug screenings.

“Marine Corps leaders are concerned not only with illicit drug abuse, but any substance abuse,” Foote said. “We are keenly focused on dramatically reducing any destructive behavior that negatively impacts the readiness of our force.” In the fall of 2018, figures provided to Marine Corps Times from Marine Corps Recruiting Command did show an increase in the number of waivers granted to recruits between fiscal years 2015 and 2017. But according to Gunnery Sgt. Justin Kronenberg, a Marine spokesman, the majority of waivers given to recruits were for medical reasons and not drug or misconduct related. But the drug waivers figures cited by Kronenberg were based on DoD criteria. “Recently some improvements were made to the medical screening process that made it more efficient and allowed more applicants’ medical history to be individually considered by the Naval Bureau of Medicine and Surgery,” Kronenberg told Marine Corps Times.

Out of a total of 13,640 waivers granted between fiscal years 2015 and 2017, 12,434 were granted for medical reasons, according to Marine Corps Recruiting Command. Marine Corps Times does not have the waiver data for 2018 or 2019. “Increasing the readiness of our Marines requires purposeful reflection on how we live up to our core values; it is vital we actively cultivate our Marines into resilient leaders who are mentally, morally, and physically fit,” Foote said. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | July 18, 2019 ++]

Submarine Service Update 01 ► Enlisted Women No Longer Have to Wait to Apply

Enlisted women hoping to join the ranks of Navy submariners will no longer have to wait for infrequent opportunities to apply. The Navy will now accept applications continuously from female enlisted sailors to serve in non-nuclear

rates, said an administrative message signed by Vice Adm. John Nowell Jr., chief of naval personnel. Women will be considered to serve on previously integrated crews on four submarines or initial enlisted integration on other boats. In the past, application windows were determined by the submarine community's needs and available billets for the integration of individual boats, the service said in a statement 15 JUL. "Applications will be processed as they are received, and there is no specified due date," according to the statement, which encouraged interested sailors to submit their applications "as soon as possible."

Enlisted women first integrated into submarine crews in 2015, five years after the Navy first lifted the prohibition on women serving in the submarine force, when 38 sailors were selected for two crews of the USS Michigan. Female officers first filled the ranks in 2011. Under the new process, sailors for all communities can apply to be converted into one of 10 open submarine ratings — only four of which are open for chief petty officers and senior chief petty officers. Sailors of all ranks up to senior chief can apply to be a submarine yeoman, culinary specialist, logistics specialist or information systems technician. The ratings of sonar technician, fire control technician, electronics technician navigation and electronics technician communications, as well as machinist's mate weapons and machinist's mate auxiliary are open to sailors up to petty officer first class. "Personnel specialists and independent duty corpsmen will also be considered," the statement said.



The non-nuclear submarine enlisted community manager will best fit each sailor to a rating based on their application package and the needs for each rating. Applications will be considered for four previously integrated submarines: the USS Ohio and USS Michigan, out of Bangor, Wash., and the USS Florida and USS Georgia, out of Kings Bay, Ga. The four subs are the last of the Ohio-class guided missile submarines that were converted from ballistic missile submarines in the 2000s.

Applicants must meet specific requirements, including clean records, the required minimum scores on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery for their desired ratings and the ability to pass a medical screening. All must be U.S. citizens with security clearances or the ability to qualify for one. A separate announcement is expected to outline the conversion process for women in nuclear ratings. The Navy's administrative message with further details can be viewed [here](#). [Source: Stars & Stripes | Joshua Karsten | July 16, 2019 ++]

Military Medicine Update 01 ► Former Surgeon Generals on Proposed Reorganization

Military medicine's responsibility is to keep soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines healthy so they can deploy and fight, to provide lifesaving medical care on the battlefield and rehabilitate service members after they are wounded. Military medicine's success has reduced the percentage of troops who have died of battlefield wounds to a historic low for the most recent two longest wars in American history. Death casualties have fallen steadily from nearly 20% in World War II to 17% during the Vietnam conflict to below 9% now. Since the end of the draft in 1972, this has

been accomplished by operating Graduate Medical Education programs in our largest military hospitals. These programs have provided a steady supply of well-trained military physicians, nurses and other health professionals.

Military hospitals and clinics are also platforms for on-the-job and sustainment training for our enlisted combat medics who are the first responders on the battlefield. Military hospitals also provide care to family members, eliminating the worry from warfighters that their family members will not receive needed care during their absence. In addition, medical research relevant specifically to the military, but not necessarily the civilian population, is also carried out.

Congress believes there are efficiencies to be gained by reorganizing the existing Army, Navy, and Air Force medical systems into a single tri-service medical agency. While this major reorganization moves forward, the Department of Defense, at the recommendation of Pentagon budgeteers and the three services, has taken the opportunity to propose personnel cuts of as much as 20% in the military medical departments. This would significantly degrade military medicine’s current capabilities and threaten its ability to carry out its core missions. As former Army, Navy, and Air Force surgeons general, we strongly assert the need for Congress to table these cuts until a thorough study of the potential consequences of these reductions are evaluated.

The risks of relying on what is, at best, a superficial analysis of promised cost savings derived from large-scale reductions will lead to reduced readiness by not having enough physicians, nurses and medics to care for those in war zones. Further, this short-sighted depletion of capability erodes the training base (graduate education and other programs that generate the medical force), relies on uneven or unavailable civilian care for family members, and will negatively affect recruitment and retention. If even one of these “high-risk, high-regret” consequences unfolds, the percent of those dying from wounds will increase, the all-volunteer force will suffer, and we may be forced to again draft medical personnel – including physicians. [Source: MOAA | Ronald R. Blanck, Harold Koenig, & Charles H. Roadman II | July 12, 2019 ++]

Military Basic Needs Allowance ► Proposal Under Consideration

Advocates are pushing for a new military allowance to help bridge the gap for junior military families who are struggling financially. “No child should go hungry, let alone a child of our service members, yet that is a reality of thousands of military families,” said Rep. Susan Davis (D-CA) during a 17 JUL press call. In the San Diego area, she said, the cost of living is high, and while service members get a housing allowance, many families experience financial difficulty. But military families across the country are experiencing food insecurity, she said. “The military pay system is not designed for junior enlisted members with families in high cost areas,” Davis said, noting the problem is exacerbated by the military lifestyle. Spouses often have difficulty getting a job because of frequent moves, when it’s all the more critical to have a second income.

Erika Tebbens, wife of a Navy veteran and an advocate for the new military allowance, said when she and her husband were living near Seattle, Wash., she was underemployed and working 32 hours a week. She was nervous about making ends meet, although they were careful with their finances. They weren’t able to get base housing, but made sure their housing allowance covered the cost of monthly rent and utilities of their apartment off base. Despite the additional money she was bringing in to the household, it was a struggle, she said. “While I never expected to be flush with cash as a military spouse, I always assumed, perhaps naively, when my husband joined that we would always have our basic needs met,” Tebbens said. She quickly found out that was not the case, she said.

The family was eligible for WIC benefits when she was pregnant and for her baby. Not so with Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program benefits, or SNAP, formerly known as food stamps. “When I reluctantly applied for SNAP I was incredibly embarrassed that I was even having to apply. When they told me I didn’t qualify because they were counting our housing allowance as part of our earned income, all I remember was just sobbing. I don’t even

remember leaving the office because I had been turned down for something I felt I didn't even want to be asking for in the first place. It was a very last ditch effort for us." Her husband left the Navy in 2012, after more than eight years of service. She felt lonely and ashamed at the time of this financial struggle, she said, but has since found others who have been in her situation. "If it can happen to me, it can happen to anyone.... We simply must do better for our military families."

The problem has been difficult to quantify. One national advocacy group estimates that between 20,000 and 30,000 military families struggle with food insecurity, but don't qualify for federal food assistance. "More accurate data collected by DoD would be very helpful to fully understand the scope and severity of this problem," said Josh Protas, vice president of public policy for MAZON: a Jewish Response to Hunger, an advocacy organization working to end hunger in the United States and Israel.

But new numbers from the Congressional Budget Office estimate that about half as many service members, or a little more than 10,000, are in this situation, based on its analysis of DoD data about service members' pay and family size. Those who qualify have an income that's no more than 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines -- which are based on family income as well as family size. (It's not known if spouse income is considered in those 10,200 service members; if spouses have income, the higher total income might disqualify the family.) Those service members would generally qualify if the housing allowance weren't included in calculating their income. And that issue is part of the problem, Protas said. Those in junior ranks with larger families are generally more affected.

The military Basic Allowance for Housing isn't treated as income for most federal assistance programs, but it is considered income in qualifying for SNAP benefits, he said. "As a result, younger enlisted service members with large households are disqualified from getting the help they need from SNAP when their BAH gets treated as income," Protas said. MAZON's initiative, called the Military Family Basic Needs Allowance, is included in the House version of the fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization bill, but it's not included in the Senate version. Davis said the goal is to make sure that it's included in the final version of the bill as representatives of the House and Senate work out the differences during the conference process.

According to an analysis of the proposal by the Congressional Budget Office, the 10,200 qualifying service members would receive an average allowance of \$400 each month. The allowances would cost DoD about \$175 million over the four years from 2021 through 2024. The House version addresses only fiscal 2020, authorizing an additional \$15 million for the allowance for fiscal 2020. "The truth is, we don't know exactly how many military families experience food insecurity," said Protas. "And despite calls by the [Government Accountability Office] and Congress for the Department of Defense to collect data about this to inform efforts to address the problem, to date there is little indication of progress on this front by DoD."

The administration voiced its opposition to this proposal, describing it as an "unnecessary entitlement." The White House statement on the House version of the defense bill contends service members already receive appropriate pay. "Most junior enlisted members receive pay that is between the 95th and 99th percentiles relative to their private-sector peers," the administration stated. The proposal would base the allowance on the service member's household size - potentially including roommates and unrelated individuals, according to the White House policy statement. It would raise fairness concerns, officials stated, because it would exclude members of the Coast Guard, members of the Active Guard and Reserve, and service members stationed outside the U.S.

According to the basic needs allowance proposal, the monthly allowance would be equal to: 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, minus the gross household income of the service member during the preceding year, divided by 12. The guidelines are also adjusted based on number of family members in the household. These are the guidelines used for the SNAP program. Most income, including the spouse's income, is included in these calculations. But under this proposed program, the housing allowance wouldn't be included in the income calculation for the basic needs allowance, unlike the calculations for SNAP. Examples:

- For a family of three, the current income cap for qualifying (at 130 percent of the federal poverty guideline) would be \$2,252 a month. By Military Times calculations, an E3 with two years of service with a spouse and child would receive about \$146 a month in the proposed allowance.
- An E5 with more than four years of service, with a spouse and three children would qualify for this proposed allowance. The income qualifying cap for that family of five is \$3,188 a month. Military Times estimates the allowance would be about \$384 a month.

A similar concept, the DoD Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance, or FSSA, program, was created by Congress in 2000 as an alternative to food stamps for military personnel. To be eligible for FSSA, the household monthly gross income had to be less than 130 percent of the federal poverty level, based on household size. DoD discontinued the program in 2016. Few applied for it, and few qualified for it based on income, which also counted the housing allowance. Advocates also contend that few service members applied for the extra money because they had to apply through their chain of command.

With this basic needs allowance, the service member wouldn't have to involve the chain of command. The service member would be automatically notified by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service if their income places them below 130 percent of the federal poverty level. The service member would be required to present any evidence of additional income that might disqualify the family. Service members who did qualify would begin receiving the allowance automatically. 'It's far more common than people realize'

MAZON has identified food pantries that are located near almost every installation, Protas said. These food pantries are open to everyone in the civilian community, including military retirees, veterans, Guard and Reserve members. "There's nothing wrong with turning to a food pantry for emergency assistance in time of need, but there's no reason those serving in our armed forces should have to do so on a regular basis," he said. Service members and family members have told MAZON that they turn to food pantries on or near military bases in embarrassment, when they are "truly desperate," Protas said, not in an effort to stretch their budget.

Addressing the problem of food insecurity in military families has been a priority of the National Military Family Association for years, said Eileen Huck, deputy government relations director. "While the majority of families may never struggle with food insecurity, it's far more common than people realize," she said. After putting out a call for comments about families' experiences, the organization received dozens of responses, Huck said. One typical response came from a spouse who said that as a junior enlisted family, she often worried about being able to afford groceries. She bought "huge cans of ravioli" to keep in the cupboard because she knew her money would be gone when the next paycheck arrived, Huck said. The proposed basic needs allowance would go a long way toward reducing the stress of these vulnerable families, Huck said. [Source: Military.com | Karen Jowers | 28 Jun 2019 ++]

USMC Retention ► Changes Under Consideration to Retain Corps' Best Talent

The top Marine is on the hunt to keep and retain the best talent the Corps has, and is considering a slew of changes from a new maternity leave policy to changing how Marines are evaluated and promoted. Commandant Gen. David Berger laid out guidance for reshaping the Marine Corps in a planning document posted late 16 JUL. Among consideration is a new policy that would afford moms up to a year leave of absence to stay with their kids before they return back to duty and complete their service obligation.

Berger described the current parental and maternal leave policy as "inadequate" and noted that the policy has "failed to keep pace with societal norms." "We should never ask our Marines to choose between being the best parent possible and the best Marine possible," Berger wrote in his guidance message. "These outcomes should never be in competition to the extent that success with one will come at the expense of the other."



The Corps recently updated its parental and maternal leave policy in 2018. Currently moms can take primary caregiver leave in conjunction with maternity convalescent leave for a total of 12 weeks — which matches the current Defense Department policy. However, the Corps does afford some flexibility that allows mothers to take the first six weeks of maternity convalescent leave and delay the rest for up to a year or transfer the other six weeks to a spouse if they are a dual military household. The DoD previously had an 18-week parental leave policy.

The top Marine is also interested in overhauling the work evaluation process known as the fitness report, which looks at the performance of sergeants through the officer ranks. Berger said in his guidance that “there is a growing lack of faith within our ranks in the system’s ability to accurately identify their skills, performance, and future potential.” Here how Berger wants to re-evaluate the fitness report:

- Give Marines an opportunity to assess themselves.
- Allow for supervisors writing the report to identify future areas of potential.
- Weight reports based on time, command or noncommand reports, and combat or non-combat reports.
- Academic fitness reports should no longer be unobserved.
- Weight academic reports that reward Marines for resident professional military education.
- Look at the performance of supervisors who are evaluating and writing reports on Marines to ensure they are not hurting the careers of other talented Marines.

“Upward growth and mobility must favor the most talented within our ranks while facilitating the identification of those with a special aptitude as instructors, educators, commanders, staff officers, mentors, or with special technical skills,” Berger’s guidance reads. These issues among a host of others are under consideration by the new top Marine as he seeks to build and retain a more talented and skilled Marine Corps that can compete in an age returned to a great power competition. Berger called out current Marine manpower tools and models as being antiquated and “based primarily on time and experience, not talent or performance or potential future performance,”

That’s a common complaint echoed by Marines for generations that too many senior officials across the military are promoted and retained based on time and rank alone. It’s a model many Marines have argued favors and retains bad leaders. “As the complexity of the world has increased, the spread between physical jobs and thinking jobs has increased dramatically,” Berger wrote. “The only way to attract and retain Marines capable of winning on the new battlefield is to compete with the tools and incentives available to them in the marketplace,” Berger said in his guidance message. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | July 17, 2019 ++]

Plasma Laser Balls ► Talking Ones under Development for Use as Non-Lethal Weapons

Instead of beaming a flashing light or shouting over a loudspeaker to keep people away from sensitive areas, new technology being developed could allow troops to fire a laser that can form a “plasma ball” that talks to the potential intruders. The Laser Induced Plasma Effect program is part of the Joint Non-lethal Weapons Directorate program to find ways to deter, stun, basically stop adversaries short of killing them.



Use of directed energy, or lasers, includes heating up a target's skin to extremely uncomfortable levels without burning them, blasting confusing noises or giving voice commands such as, "Stop or we'll be forced to fire upon you." It can pass through glass into a building but not yet penetrate other solid barriers, so in its initial stages, the technology would be best used to protect static areas such as forward bases or permanent installations. But with the right power source setup, a device could be mounted to a small vehicle and make for mobile crowd control or another tool for vehicle patrols to keep people away from convoys.

Researchers such as Brittany Lynn, a scientist with Naval Information Warfare Center Pacific, are fine tuning how to pass sound waves through the laser and they recently completed another round of testing in June. Part of that involves tweaking algorithms to create human speech in the right wavelengths. The next steps, said Dave Law, chief scientist with the directorate, is to push distances out of the short range of a laboratory setting to 100 meters, then to multiple kilometers. Law gave an optimistic timeline of about five years before the tech could be through readiness levels and passed on to troops.

This past year, Lynn told Military Times, they've been adjusting high and low frequencies to mimic human speech. Early speech mimicking has provided a boost to the program that Law sees as promising. That's because once that is solved, the distance problem is much less difficult. "Now I can put it anywhere. Range doesn't make any difference," Law said in an interview with Military Times last year. "Put plasma at a target, modulate it and it can create a voice." At the same time, the setup can also act as a reusable flashbang that can pulse 155 decibel frequencies near continuously, as compare to standard flashbang grenades that can make one, sometimes two loud blasts to disorient people. That increases Tactics, Techniques and Procedures use of flashbangs from seconds to minutes, Law said.

For voice commands, the quality doesn't have to be crystal clear to get the message across, Lynn said. A mobile phone speaker runs at about 8 kilohertz and the human voice ranges to 20 kilohertz. So, there's leeway in the fidelity of the sound. The laser causes a similar effect that a jet airplane does when it creates a sonic boom, both Law and Lynn said. "We're doing the same thing but instead of doing an airplane, we have those electrons," Law said.

The hurdle is creating the effect in a portable 5- to 10-kHz laser, Lynn said. The laser strips away electrons and creates a white ball. That's what the recipient would see, or feel, on the other end of the laser device. The skin heating option works in a very similar way, but to a different effect. The laser-induced plasma weapon uses very high-energy lasers at a very short pulse rate to strip the electrons off a gas, creating plasma. That is then used to poke through clothing and drill smaller than microscopic holes in a person's skin. The drilling doesn't cause damage but it does set off nerve responses, making the person very uncomfortable. "It's basically going to hurt," Law said.

Past efforts hit some of the objectives but couldn't quite get the voice commands to work, according to a posting on the Small Business Innovation Research program. [Source: Breaking Defense || Paul McLeary | July 01, 2019 ++]

USMC Ship Needs ► 38 Navy Amphib Ship Requirement No Longer Realistic

The Corps has held steadfast for nearly a decade on its requirement for 38 amphibious ships to haul Marines and gear to the fight — now the new top Marine says that's no longer the case. Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. David

Berger dropped that requirement, noting that Marines storming a beachhead from an armada parked nine nautical miles offshore in the South China Sea was “impractical and unreasonable.”



Berger’s remarks on the amphib ship requirement were made in a planning guidance document he posted 16 JUL. “We must accept the realities created by the proliferation of precision long-range fires, mines, and other smart-weapons, and seek innovative ways to overcome those threat capabilities,” Berger wrote. That doesn’t mean Marines won’t be storming beaches or capturing enemy airfields and territory, but the Corps will need to work out smarter solutions to how it engages in a fight with more capable adversaries. A new ongoing force structure assessment would help inform the Corps on the “adequate numbers of the right types of ships,” Berger said.

The Corps, he said, would look at a number “different approaches” from long range unmanned systems that can move 200 nautical miles and “create dilemmas” to mine countermeasures. The number and availability of amphib ships has been a contentious issue for the Corps over the years, especially as the Corps has been pushing further naval integration and Marine Expeditionary Force, or MEF, level warfare. The March Pacific Blitz exercise off the coast of California pitted nearly 5,000 Marines and sailors against a near-peer competitor in the Pacific Ocean and involved at least four Navy ships. It was an example of the kinds of large scale amphibious operations the Corps is trying to train for as the force moves beyond counterinsurgency conflicts — but the availability of amphib ships has been a problem.

A 2017 Government Accountability Office blasted the Navy for not fulfilling most of the Corps’ requests for amphibious ships for training. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John M. Richardson and then-Marine Commandant Gen. Robert Neller just testified in April before lawmakers about the need for a 38 amphib fleet. “We still have a requirement for 38 amphib ships, we believe 12 big decks and 26 LPD [amphibious transport dock] similar whole forms. And so we would like to get to 38 ships,” Neller told lawmakers. But there have been other issues too, notably a maintenance backlog for amphibious ships “I believe the Navy has a backlog and a number of platforms for maintenance. So, yes, we are concerned about the availability of these platforms,” Neller, told lawmakers 10 APR..

But Neller also noted there needed to be a balance of the right kinds of ships, because without attack submarines the Corps will not be able to get its forces to the beach. “Obviously, we believe that amphibships obviously are critically important to Marines, but submarines are important to Marines too because if we don’t have submarines we’re not going to get to the fight,” Neller said in April. The Corps is now no longer tied to the 38 amphib requirement and will be looking at a range of solutions. “We will build one force — optimized for naval expeditionary warfare in contested spaces, purpose-built to facilitate sea denial and assured access in support of the fleets,” Berger wrote. [Source: The Associated Press | July 4, 2019++]

USCG Pacific Policy ► Presence and Deployments to Asia Will Increase

The U.S. Coast Guard will increase its presence and deployments to Asia – particularly around Oceania and U.S. Pacific territories – and test out a new operational deployment concept in the region, service head Adm. Karl Schultz told reporters on 25 JUL. “My vision for the Coast Guard is to expand our permanent presence and effectiveness in the region through expeditionary capabilities, which is why we are doubling down in Oceania,” he said. “In the next

month, we'll be deploying Coast Guard assets in a new operating concept to strengthen the community of island nations thorough Operation Aiga – that's Samoan for 'family';" he said.

The operation is a 30-day deployment of a 225-foot Juniper-class buoy tender and a Fast Response Cutter to partner with Pacific island nations. The buoy tender's presence is a proof-of-concept operation to see if it could function as a mothership to smaller patrol craft. If successful, Schultz said this could be the start of similar operations with partner nations. While he said he believed the Coast Guard will continue to contribute to security and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and East China Sea, he added that the most suitable way for the Coast Guard to exert influence in the Pacific is to operate at a partner-nation level.

"I anticipate that mothership-type operation with some patrol boats, maybe trying to lash up with Australian partners and New Zealand partners in the region, Japanese partners, really is that international face that offers an alternative to other actors in the region," he said. That commitment to capacity-building spans the wide range of its expertise – from transferring old American cutters to partners, to multinational security exercises, to bilateral search-and-rescue and law enforcement agreements, to the deployment of training teams to share technical expertise and build proficiency, he said. "My goal for the Coast Guard is to be a partner of choice in the region. So, we tailor our services to the needs of the nation we are supporting," he said.

Schultz said the Coast Guard deployed the National Security Cutters USCGC Bertholf (WMSL-750) and USCGC Stratton (WMSL-752) to the Asia-Pacific and that their deployments and operations were in support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. "Our enduring role is not to replace or duplicate Department of Defense assets or capabilities, but to employ our unique authorities and capabilities to complement Department of Defense forces," the admiral said. Additionally, Schultz said in the next two to three years the Coast Guard will be homeporting three Sentinel-class Fast Response Cutters in Guam. "The addition of the Fast Response Cutters will increase Coast Guard presence throughout the region. Our increased capability and capacity will allow for more frequent and longer patrols to protect the Exclusive Economic Zone from illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing and the threats that those activities bring, and against increasing drug trafficking threats to the region," Schultz said.



USCGC Bertholf (WMSL-750) crew members observe the stars from Bertholf's flight deck as the cutter and crew patrol the South China Sea on April 21, 2019.

In response to a USNI News question as to whether Coast Guard ships would return to participating in the U.S. Navy CARAT series of exercises in the region, Shultz stated as an example that the Coast Guard has been a continuous participant in the biennial RIMPAC exercises and expects to participate next year again with a National Security Cutter, as was the case in the 2018 RIMPAC.

The Coast Guard commandant was critical of the Chinese Coastguard and its activities in the region. He said, though, that the U.S. would not respond by matching a similar number of USCG ships in the South China Sea but instead would champion transparent engagement. "In the face of coercive and antagonistic behavior, the United States Coast Guard offers transparent engagement and partnership," he said. "There's the Chinese Coast Guard – used to be under civilian authority, it is now through the People's Military Police, a direct report to the CCP government. You

look at the Maritime Militia. I think we are seeing behaviors out of the Chinese Coast Guard, out of the Maritime Militia, that are not consistent with the rule-based order.”

Schultz said that the Coast Guard’s specialized capabilities and expansive international relationships enables the United States to build partner-nation capacity and model the rules-based values and behaviors that the U.S. wants to see in the region. “Through engagement, partnership and presence, we are a maritime bridge between the Department of Defense’s lethality and the State Department’s diplomacy.” [Source: The Associated Press | Jennifer McDermott | July 3, 2019 ++]

USMC Sergeant Major ► **Sgt. Maj. Troy Black | Expect A Whirlwind Of Changes Soon**

There’s a new sergeant major of the Marine Corps in town as of Friday, but don’t expect a whirlwind of changes anytime soon. If the mantra of Sgt. Maj. Troy Black, the 19th sergeant major of the Marine Corps, could be summed up, it’s in the popular 1970s Marine Corps recruiting ad: “We don’t promise you a rose garden.” Black told Marine Corps Times in an exclusive interview that Marines shouldn’t expect significant changes to tattoo policies, grooming standards, uniform regulations or re-enlistment incentives: What he’s focused on is the foundation of the Corps and its Marines.



The Corps exists for “a singular purpose” Black said. “The round hitting the target. The Corps is about warfighting.” And there are certain non-negotiables that make up the identity of the Corps. He said he’s focused on reinforcing those. “Hands in your pockets,” and other Marine regulations are, “all important stuff, all contribute to warfighting in some way shape or form,” Black said. “Everybody tries to be like the door-kicker,” he said. But, “people who end up working in that community find out everyone is not a door-kicker.”

An infantryman and former drill instructor, Black, during his 30 plus years in the Corps, has deployed all over the globe, from Desert Storm to Iraq and Afghanistan to even recent operations against ISIS in support of Operation Inherent Resolve in 2014. That experience has shaped Black’s view of the Marine Corps, where after 18 years of being embroiled in counterinsurgency operations, it has lost its focus on its sea and maritime roots. The new Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. David Berger’s recent planning guidance, which outlines a slew of new policies to reintegrate the Corps with its seafaring roots, isn’t new to Black — that was simply how the Corps operated before the war on terror.

From about 2005 and on, the Corps “really started getting invested in PTP [pre-deployment training], everybody is wearing desert cammies 24-hours a day, there’s one place we are going to go. If you’re on a MEU [Marine Expeditionary Unit], good luck to you. You’re going to get some.” That has been the Corps’ routine for almost twenty years as Marines have either flown or been bumped with a Marine Expeditionary Unit into the Middle East, cycle after cycle. The top Marine’s new guidance is focused on the Corps “re-establishing ourselves as a naval expeditionary force,” which Black told Marine Corps Times is foundational to the Corps and how it operates. But there are challenges

for the Corps ahead as the force gets back to integrating with the Navy and contending with rising peer adversaries across the globe. The Corps is evolving to address those challenges and to recruit high demand talent in vital fields like cyber, intelligence and long range fires, while striving to retain experienced infantry leaders.

Often “not enough credit” is given to the citizens who join the services with advanced skills on-hand, and we should “give appreciation” to whom we are enlisting, Black explained. “We think we have to teach everything from ground zero — we don’t,” Black said. “My 11-year-old son is more cyber aware than I will ever be.” And the Corps, Black explained, doesn’t need to throw out its foundation to entice high talented individuals to join in the Corps. Incentives are important, and the Corps should look at which incentives work, Black said. But, according to Black, exit surveys of departing Marines say it’s not about money. “Why do people want to join the Marine Corps?” Black asked. “It’s to be a Marine.” There’s a misconception that talented people suddenly have options they didn’t have before, Black said. He also cautioned the presumption that the Corps loses “all talent because we don’t have some kind of incentive to keep it.”

At the end of the day, the Corps has particular foundations and there’s a set way the Corps does business, Black explained. Even top tier championship winning sports teams will cut star athletes if they don’t conform to the team’s philosophy or routine, Black said. The Corps wants to keep those Marines who understand and work within the Corps’ way of doing things, Black said. While Black said his tenure as the sergeant major of the Marine Corps will not focus on new uniform regulations, the Corps is still considering a decision to allow male Marines use of a black umbrella in uniform, according to Marine officials. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Shawn Snow | July 27. 2019 ++]

Cold War Combat Vehicle Flops ► Lackner HZ-1 Aerocycle



As if battle isn’t dangerous enough, the US Army thought it would be a good idea for soldiers to enter combat with a meat grinder underneath them. Originally built in 1954, the Aerocycle was the Army’s answer to bringing cavalry troops into the 20th century. And believe it or not, the first prototype did so well the Army ordered a dozen more of them.

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang ► ‘Chuffed’ thru ‘CMC’

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

Chuffed – (UK) Extremely pleased.

Chunder – (UK) To vomit. Derived from "watch under!"

CINCHOUSE – Commander In Chief of the House, i.e. one's spouse.

Cinderella Liberty – Liberty where one must be back aboard by midnight.

Circular Run – The result of a malfunction which causes a torpedo to return to its launch point. At least one US submarine was lost to a circular run in WWII.

Circus – In WWII, a fighter-bomber mission whose primary goal was to force the German fighter defenses to come up and engage. Usually consisted of a small bomber force and heavy fighter escort.

CIVLANT (CIVPAC) - Facetious description of one's next duty station when he or she is leaving the service; CIV = Civilian, LANT = atLANTic coast, PAC = PACific coast.

Civvy Street – Civilian life.

CIWS - Close-In Weapon System, a short-range anti-missile point defense system commonly comprised of a radar system and rotary-barreled Gatling gun. In NATO, the system is the Vulcan Phalanx. A newer version, Goalkeeper, uses the GAU-8 30mm Gatling gun found in the A-10 Thunderbolt for increased range and destructive power. Can have anti-surface modes as well, for use against small craft and the like. Derisive interpretations of the acronym include: 'Christ, It Won't Shoot', and 'Captain, It Won't Shoot,' due to common maintenance difficulties.

Clear Datum - (1) (Submarine) To leave the area where you have been detected (see DATUM). (2) To leave the scene of the crime, especially when liquor and members of the opposite sex are involved, and particularly if the member of the opposite sex in question is a GRONK.

Clankie, Clanky - (RN) Mechanical Engineer.

Clara - The radio call from a carrier pilot on approach signifying that he has not sighted the BALL.

Class Alpha Fire – A fire which leaves ashes.

Class Bravo Fire – A fire involving flaming liquids.

Class Charlie Fire – An electrical fire.

Class Delta Fire – A fire involving special materials and firefighting methods. Commonly thought to consist of a fire involving flammable metals, which is one example of a Class Delta fire; another type of Class Delta fire involves deep fat fryer equipment.

Clobbered - Weathered in, as in "We made a good approach, but the field was clobbered and we had to divert," similar to WOXOF. Can also indicate a radio frequency that is over-used: "The tactical frequency was clobbered."

Cluster Fuck – An evolution remarkable for its significant lack of excellence. Mass confusion and chaos. Similar to a GOAT ROPE, Chinese Fire Drill, etc.

Clutch-Brake – A device used to engage or disengage an engine from a propellor shaft, and to stop the shaft if need be.

CMC - Command Master Chief. Similar to the COB, but for surface, shore, and aviation commands. See also MCPOC.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | July 31, 2019 ++]



Battle of Wake Island Update 01 ► December 8-23, 1941

The Battle of Wake Island was fought December 8-23, 1941, during the opening days of World War II. A tiny atoll in the central Pacific Ocean, Wake Island was annexed by the United States in 1899. Located between Midway and Guam, the island was not permanently settled until 1935 when Pan American Airways built a town and hotel to service their trans-Pacific China Clipper flights. Consisting of three small islets, Wake, Peale, and Wilkes, Wake Island was to the north of the Japanese-held Marshall Islands and east of Guam.

As tensions with Japan rose in the late 1930s, the U.S. Navy began efforts to fortify the island. Work on an airfield and defensive positions began in January 1941. The following month, as part of Executive Order 8682, the Wake Island Naval Defensive Sea Area was created which limited maritime traffic around the island to U.S. military vessels and those approved by the Secretary of the Navy. An accompanying Wake Island Naval Airspace Reservation was also established over the atoll. Additionally, six 5-guns, which had previously been mounted on USS Texas (BB-35), and twelve three anti-aircraft guns were shipped to Wake Island to bolster the atoll's defenses.

The Marines Prepare

While work progressed, the 400 men of the 1st Marine Defense Battalion arrived on 19 AUG, led by Major James P.S. Devereux. On November 28, Commander Winfield S. Cunningham, a naval aviator, arrived to assume overall command of the island's garrison. These forces joined the 1,221 workers from the Morrison-Knudsen Corporation which were completing the island's facilities and the Pan American staff which included 45 Chamorros (Micronesians from Guam).

By early December the airfield was operational, though not complete. The island's radar equipment remained at Pearl Harbor and protective revetments had not been built to protect aircraft from aerial attack. Though the guns had been emplaced, only one director was available for the anti-aircraft batteries. On December 4, twelve F4F Wildcats from VMF-211 arrived on the island after being carried west by USS Enterprise (CV-6). Commanded by Major Paul A. Putnam, the squadron was only on Wake Island for four days before the war began.

The Japanese Attack Begins

Due to the island's strategic location, the Japanese made provisions to attack and seize Wake as part of their opening moves against the United States. On December 8th, as Japanese aircraft were attacking Pearl Harbor (Wake Island is on the other side of the International Date Line), 36 Mitsubishi G3M medium bombers departed the Marshall Islands for Wake Island. Alerted to the Pearl Harbor attack at 6:50 AM and lacking radar, Cunningham ordered four Wildcats to begin patrolling the skies around the island. Flying in poor visibility, the pilots failed to spot the inbound Japanese bombers.

Striking the island, the Japanese managed to destroy eight of VMF-211's Wildcats on the ground as well as inflicted damage on the airfield and Pam Am facilities. Among the casualties were 23 killed and 11 wounded from VMF-211 including many of the squadron's mechanics. After the raid, the non-Chamorro Pan American employees were evacuated from Wake Island aboard the Martin 130 Philippine Clipper which had survived the attack.

A Stiff Defense

Retiring with no losses, the Japanese aircraft returned the next day. This raid targeted Wake Island's infrastructure and resulted in the destruction of the hospital and Pan American's aviation facilities. Attacking the bombers, VMF-211's four remaining fighters succeeded in downing two Japanese planes. As the air battle raged, Rear Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka departed Roi in the Marshall Islands with a small invasion fleet on 9 DEC. On the 10th, Japanese planes attacked targets in Wilkes and detonated a supply of dynamite which destroyed the ammunition for the island's guns.

Arriving off Wake Island on December 11th, Kajioka ordered his ships forward to land 450 Special Naval Landing Force troops. Under the guidance of Devereux, Marine gunners held their fire until the Japanese were within range of Wake's 5" coastal defense guns. Opening fire, his gunners succeeded in sinking the destroyer Hayate and badly damaging Kajioka's flagship, the light cruiser Yubari. Under heavy fire, Kajioka elected to withdraw out of range. Counterattacking, VMF-211's four remaining aircraft succeeded in sinking the destroyer Kisaragi when a bomb landed in the ship's depth charge racks.

Calls for Help

While the Japanese regrouped, Cunningham and Devereux called for aid from Hawaii. Stymied in his attempts to take the island, Kajioka remained nearby and directed additional air raids against the defenses. In addition, he was reinforced by additional ships, including the carriers Soryu and Hiryu which were diverted south from the retiring Pearl Harbor attack force. While Kajioka planned his next move, Vice Admiral William S. Pye, the Acting Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, directed Rear Admirals, Frank J. Fletcher and Wilson Brown, to take a relief force to Wake.



Centered on the carrier USS Saratoga (CV-3) Fletcher's force carried additional troops and aircraft for the beleaguered garrison. Moving slowly, the relief force was recalled by Pye on 22 DEC after he learned that two Japanese carriers were operating in the area. That same day, VMF-211 lost two aircraft. On 23 DEC, with the carrier providing air cover, Kajioka again moved forward. Following a preliminary bombardment, the Japanese landed on the island. Though Patrol Boat No. 32 and Patrol Boat No. 33 were lost in the fighting, by dawn over 1,000 men had come ashore.

Final Hours

Pushed out of the southern arm of the island, American forces mounted a tenacious defense despite being outnumbered two-to-one. Fighting through the morning, Cunningham and Devereux were forced to surrender the island that afternoon. During their fifteen-day defense, the garrison at Wake Island sank four Japanese warships and severely damaged a fifth. In addition, as many as 21 Japanese aircraft were downed along with a total of around 820 killed and approximately 300 wounded. American losses numbered 12 aircraft, 119 killed, and 50 wounded.

Aftermath

Of those who surrendered, 368 were Marines, 60 US Navy, 5 US Army, and 1,104 civilian contractors. As the Japanese occupied Wake, the majority of prisoners were transported from the island, though 98 were kept as forced laborers. While American forces never attempted to re-capture the island during the war, a submarine blockade was imposed which starved the defenders. On October 5, 1943, aircraft from USS Yorktown (CV-10) struck the island. Fearing an

imminent invasion, the garrison commander, Rear Admiral Shigematsu Sakaibara, ordered the execution of the remaining prisoners.

This was carried out on the northern end of the island on October 7th, though one prisoner escaped and carved 98 US PW 5-10-43 on a large rock near the killed POWs' mass grave. This prisoner was subsequently re-captured and personally executed by Sakaibara. The island was re-occupied by American forces on September 4, 1945, shortly after the war's end. Sakaibara was later convicted of war crimes for his actions on Wake Island and hung on June 18, 1947. [Source: Together We Served | July 2019 ++]

Military History Anniversaries ► 01 thru 15 AUG

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 AUG**”. [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | July 2019 ++]

Every Picture Tells A Story ► Greek's Fate



At first glance this (left) looks like a shot taken in winter. The pilot of this P-47D Thunderbolt nicknamed *Greek*, had propeller control failure and crashed at RAF *Halesworth* in Suffolk, England on 5 September 1943. The aircraft was flown by Lieutenant Warren M. Chapman at the time. In the right photo, we see *Greek* in better times (LM-G at rear of formation), flown by Lieutenant Harry Coronios of Lowell, Massachusetts (likely the Greek American who named her) with other aircraft of the 67th Fighter Squadron, 56th Fighter Group. Though Coronios was not involved in this crash, he was killed two months later on operations as a result of bad weather.

Luton Riots of 1919 ► English Ex-serviceman Riot and Burn Down Town Hall

During the summer of 1919 military unrest swept into civilian disturbances in many regions. Employers and the authorities took advantage of the post-war depression to try to impose the old bonds of discipline upon returning soldiers. Ex-servicemen were equally determined not to accept pre-war conditions. A fierce conflict took place during which the government and the employers never felt strong enough for a show-down until, with the aid of the TUC General Council and an army purged of its dissident elements, the ruling class was able to defeat the workers during the General Strike of 1926. An adequate account of social upheaval between the Armistice of 1918 and the defeat of the General Strike has yet to be written. What follows is a short account of an incident in Luton, where comradeship in arms was continued in a struggle against the civilian authorities.

The Peace Treaty was signed in June 1919. Luton Town Council planned processions with brass bands, floats, entertainment for the children and a fireworks display followed by an evening of official gluttony described as a 'Mayor's banquet'. The cost of the latter was to be paid from civic funds. Invitations were strictly limited to the Mayor, councilors and close friends - none of whom had served in the armed forces. In fact the officials had not even seen fit to include any ex-servicemen in the preparations. As a result the Discharged Soldiers and Sailors' Federation and the Comrades of the Great War Association withdrew from the activities. They had planned alternative celebrations, but the Mayor and his Council refused them the use of Wardown Park.

On 19 JUL, a rainy Saturday afternoon, a somewhat gloomy official procession set off from Park Street recreation ground, along a route which passed the Federation's headquarters, at the corner of Lea Road, where the ex-servicemen had prepared their own contribution to the 'celebrations'. The Federation lined both sides of the procession route with maimed and disabled ex-servicemen. Across the road they hung a streamer saying: 'Don't pity us, give us work'. As the official procession went past, it was joined by the angry ex-servicemen. Eventually they arrived outside the Town Hall where they halted in heavy rain whilst the Mayor read out the proclamation of peace.

By now the Mayor was the most unpopular man in town and his rating declined even further as thousands of old soldiers booed and catcalled his patronizing speech. Sensing the increasing hostility one councilor called for three cheers for ex-servicemen. This only gave rise to even greater howls of derision. By now the noise was deafening. Suddenly the crowd surged forwards, causing the Mayor and his entourage to beat an undignified retreat into the Town Hall. The crowd swiftly swept aside two constables. Willing hands tore down the doors and the people entered just in time to see some of the mayoral party disappearing through a rear entrance. Once inside, untold damage was done. Decorations for the Grand Ball were torn down. The contents of the Town Hall were hurled through the windows into the street.

Meanwhile someone discovered that the Mayor and some supporters were barricaded inside the Mayor's parlor. Serious harm to them was only prevented by the last minute arrival of a contingent of police. The crowd inside the Town Hall engaged them in pitched battle, the fighting soon spreading to those outside. Missiles were hurled at the Town Clerk's office. Later that evening a crowd of 20,000 gathered in Popes Meadows for the advertised fireworks display. But the rioting and looting at the Town Hall, which had taken on a carnival atmosphere, turned out to be a more powerful attraction. At 10 pm the Mayor was still besieged in his parlor. Instead of the planned banquet the mayoral party had spent seven hours huddled together in the dark behind shattered windows.



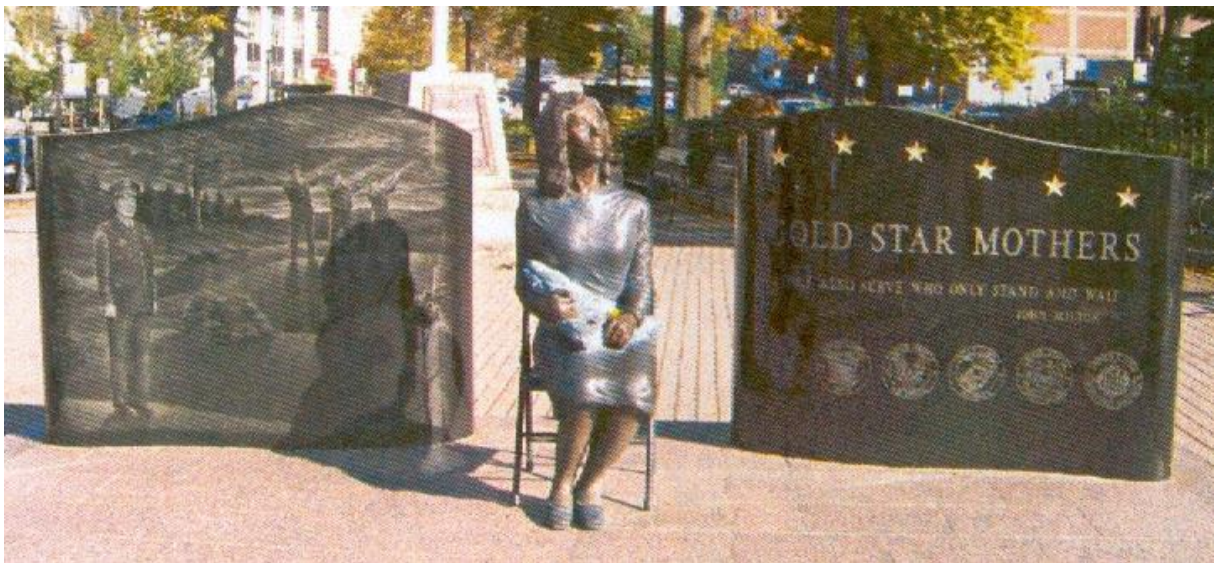
As the night wore on the riot gathered momentum. The Food Office in Manchester Street was raided and several fires started. Attempts to put out the flames were met with resistance and the Fire Brigade beat a hasty retreat. More bonfires were lit outside and inside the Town Hall. In the confusion the Mayor was smuggled out, disguised as a special constable. The nearby garage of Hart's Motors was raided for petrol. When this was added to the fire the Town Hall quickly became a blazing inferno. Attempts to put out the fire were thwarted by the cutting of hosepipes. Remaining hoses had to be used to protect the police from the crowd rather than to quench the flames.

During the fierce fighting that followed the police found themselves heavily outnumbered as soldiers, many in uniform, joined in against them. A chemist's shop was raided and medicine bottles were used as missiles. A man was hit so hard by a fireman's jet that he was hurled through a music shop window. The crowd that went in to rescue him emerged with three pianos. These were dragged into the roadway and used as accompaniments. The crowd sang 'Keep the Home Fires Burning' before the biggest bonfire that Luton had ever seen. The burning down of the Town Hall provided the perfect culmination to what had started as a very wet day.

Around midnight, supported by reinforcements from London, the police read the riot act to the crowd, which by now numbered several thousands. Then, just as the Town Hall clock struck one (before crashing to the ground amid a pile of debris) the police began a savage assault, hitting out at men, women and children. The following morning Luton looked like one of the ravaged cities of World War I. Steel-helmeted troops stood guard amidst the burnt-out embers of buildings and looted shops. The day passed with no signs of hostility between the troops and the locals. But after closing time further outbreaks of rioting and looting began. This continued for three or four nights until either police reinforcements (or lack of further places to loot) brought the business to an end.

Needless to say no more official banquets were planned in Luton for some time. A subdued Council organized a banquet to end all banquets - for the aged and children from the local workhouse. What became of the Mayor? Fearful of his life he cut short his political career and left for Sutton-on-Sea. He only returned to Luton twice. Once for the funeral of a friend and once more for his own. The 'restoration of law and order' led to several arrests. Because the authorities were fearful of further repercussions the judge handed out surprisingly light sentences. He even said there had been 'some provocation'. [Source: <http://libcom.org/history/1919-the-luton-riots> | Ron Hall | September 8, 2006 ++]

Gold Star Mothers Memorial ► Yonkers, New York



Bronze sculpture of a woman holding a folded flag at her sons funeral surrounded by two polished marbles engraved monuments in Yonkers, NY. There are also Gold Star Mother Memorials in Angleton, TX; There are also sculptures in Waterbury, CT; Carmel, NY; Eastchester, NY; and Manchester, NH.

Post WWII Photos ► Liberated Belsen Concentration Camp



On May 21, Colonel Bird, Commandant of Belsen Camp in northern Germany, gave the order for the last hut at Belsen Concentration Camp to be burned. A rifle salute was fired in honor of the dead, the British flag was run up at the same moment as a flame-thrower set fire to the last hut. A German flag and portrait of Hitler went up in flames inside the hut in June of 1945. From 1941 to 1945, almost 20,000 Soviet prisoners of war and a further 50,000 inmates died. When British and Canadian troops finally entered they found over 13,000 unburied bodies and (including the satellite camps) and around 60,000 inmates, most acutely sick and starving. (AP Photo/British Official Photo)

WWII Rationing ► Gasoline, Rubber, and Cars

Seventy-five years ago this week, gasoline rationing began in the United States. Rationing was an important part of life in America during World War II. However, the government was apprehensive about gasoline rationing. As a symbol of freedom of movement, the automobile represented everything American, and politicians feared riots and rebellion if they curtailed that freedom.



Gasoline Shortage

In early 1942, German U-boats ravaged Allied shipping off the US East Coast and in the Gulf of Mexico. Oil tankers were their favorite targets. The Allies needed oil for airplanes, ships, tanks, and to run factories, and the Germans hoped to cut off the supply. It didn't take long for a gasoline shortage to develop on the US East Coast. On April 9, 1942, gasoline deliveries were decreased to seventeen Eastern states, but to ensure fairness, rationing was required. On May

15, 1942, 8 million motorists in those seventeen states registered for gas ration cards, and rationing began on the East Coast on July 22, 1942. Although the U-boat menace decreased late in 1942, the rubber shortage remained crucial. On Nov. 26, 1942, the government announced that nationwide gasoline rationing would go into effect Dec. 1, 1942. The program continued until Aug. 18, 1945.

Rubber Shortage

Another serious issue that eventually led to nationwide gasoline shortage was rubber shortage. The United States didn't have enough rubber for military needs, much less civilian needs. While tires and other rubber items were rationed, the simplest way to reduce wear and tear on tires was to restrict driving.

Drive Less

On Dec. 1, 1942, a nationwide Victory speed limit of 35 mph was instituted, since higher speeds removed tread more quickly. Lightweight Victory Bicycles were introduced in March 1942, but were rationed to war workers and certain professionals and only when public transportation wasn't available – and all other bicycle production ceased. People were encouraged to use public transportation and their own two feet. Commuters were told to “Carry more to win the war,” and to share rides or form car clubs. Employers experimented with staggered shifts to reduce traffic – and therefore, gasoline use. Pleasure driving was banned and the “Vacation at Home” was promoted, not just to save gas and rubber, but due to the strain on the nation's train system by military transport.

US poster, WWII

Fewer Cars

Car manufacturing stopped on Jan. 1, 1942, and no new automobiles could be purchased after Feb. 22, 1942. A small stock was held in reserve for critical replacements. The auto manufacturers converted their assembly lines to produce jeeps, tanks, and bombers, while the American consumer made do. Car theft became a larger problem than ever. On July 1, 1945, automobile production was allowed again, and the first car rolled off the assembly line on Aug. 30, 1945

Stickers and Coupons

The American public learned to deal with an elaborate system. Every motorist was issued a windshield sticker displaying a letter. Some of these categories changed, emerged, or were eliminated during the war:

- A: Most motorists – 3 gallons/week, reduced to 2 gal/wk March 22, 1944
- B: For war workers who shared rides with 3 or more passengers – 8 gal/wk
- C: Essential occupational use, such as physicians, clergy, and mail carriers
- D: Motorcycles
- E: Emergency vehicles such as ambulances, police, fire – unlimited
- R: Non-highway use, such as farm vehicles – unlimited
- T: Truckers, instituted January 1, 1944 – unlimited
- X: A controversial sticker for vips – unlimited

At the gas station, the attendant checked the windshield sticker and took the required number of ration book coupons – also marked with the appropriate letter. Of course, payment was also required – about 19 cents/gallon.

Despite rationing, a serious gas shortage developed early in 1944. The high military use and restricted shipping contributed to this problem. In January 1944 on the West Coast, very little gasoline was available – and none at all in Sacramento, California, not even for emergency vehicles. On March 22, 1944, “A” class drivers were further restricted to 2 gallons/week. Not everyone complied. The black market became quite profitable, cases of gas siphoning made the front page of small-town newspapers, and several ration book forgery rings were broken up.

[Source: Sarah's Blog | Sarah Sundin | July 17, 2017 ++]

WWII Bomber Nose Art [35] ▶ Mount N' Ride



Medal of Honor Citations ▶ Clinton M. Hedrick | WWII



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

To

Clinton M. Hedrick

Rank and organization: Technical Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company I, 194th Glider Infantry, 17th Airborne Div

Place and date: Near Lembeck, Germany, 27-28 March 1945

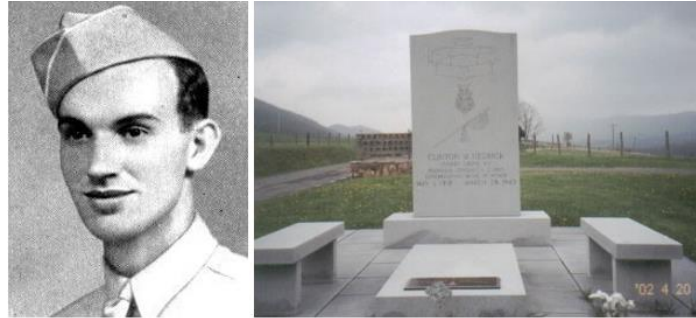
Entered service: Riverton, W. Va. September 1940

Born: May 1, 1918 Cherry Grove, West Virginia

Citation

He displayed extraordinary heroism and gallantry in action on 27-28 March 1945, in Germany. Following an airborne landing near Wesel, his unit was assigned as the assault platoon for the assault on Lembeck. Three times the landing elements were pinned down by intense automatic weapons fire from strongly defended positions. Each time, T/Sgt. Hedrick fearlessly charged through heavy fire, shooting his automatic rifle from his hip. His courageous action so inspired his men that they reduced the enemy positions in rapid succession. When 6 of the enemy attempted a surprise, flanking movement, he quickly turned and killed the entire party with a burst of fire. Later, the enemy withdrew across

a moat into Lembeck Castle. T/Sgt. Hedrick, with utter disregard for his own safety, plunged across the drawbridge alone in pursuit. When a German soldier, with hands upraised, declared the garrison wished to surrender, he entered the castle yard with 4 of his men to accept the capitulation. The group moved through a sally port, and was met by fire from a German self-propelled gun. Although mortally wounded, T/Sgt. Hedrick fired at the enemy gun and covered the withdrawal of his comrades. He died while being evacuated after the castle was taken. His great personal courage and heroic leadership contributed in large measure to the speedy capture of Lembeck and provided an inspiring example to his comrades.



Place of burial North Fork Memorial Cemetery, Riverton, West Virginia

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

*** Health Care ***



Medicare Part D Update 38 ► COLA Only 1/5th of User's Out of Pocket Drug Costs

Out-of-pocket spending on prescription drugs was the fastest rising expense of retirees from 2000 to 2019, according to a recent study of retiree costs by TSCL. While the annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increased Social Security benefits by 50 percent over the 19 year period, out-of-pocket spending on prescription drugs rose more than five times faster — 253%.

A new online survey by The Senior Citizens League (TSCL) finds that older Americans overwhelmingly want Congress to take action to lower the cost of prescription drugs by reducing Medicare Part D's out-of-pocket spending requirements. Fifty-six percent of participants in the survey indicate that they spend more than \$612 a year on prescription drugs. About one-out-of-five retirees spends more than \$250 per month on prescription medications.

Recently we heard from Susan Gross, a 66-year old retired office assistant living in Central Virginia, who spends most of her day caregiving. Her 46-year-old son, who is disabled from cerebral palsy, lives with her, as does her mother, who is now 93. All three receive their healthcare coverage through Medicare. Susan has rheumatoid arthritis and was taking Humira, a drug that would cost more than \$4,000 out-of-pocket if she had to purchase it through a Part D plan. Prior to starting Medicare, she paid a \$5.00 per month co-pay for Humira through her husband's insurance.

Before starting on Medicare though, Susan decided to try a less expensive older generic, Methotrexate, which costs just \$3.00 per month through her Part D plan.

While the cost of the prescription is affordable, the drug causes a number of serious side effects. Susan needs to see her doctor more frequently for monitoring and blood tests. Her biggest prescription cost surprise was learning that her prescription vitamin, folic acid, which she needs to fight the side effects, was not covered under Medicare. Her Part D plan wanted \$140.00 for a one-month supply. Susan instead orders an over-the-counter supply of 400 pills for \$6.99 on Amazon, taking 7 pills every day to get to the required dosage, which is still not as effective as the prescription version of folic acid. Now her doctor is considering a different medication.

Susan's son Andrew requires an expensive anti-convulsive medication, Depakote Sprinkles. None of his Part D plan choices covers the brand drug — which can cost \$5,099 a year retail — only the generic version. But for Andrew, the generic doesn't work, and he has suffered seizures while using it. Susan learned, however, from Advisor editor Mary Johnson, that because Andrew receives Medicare Extra Help, his doctor can ask his drug plan for a coverage exception. Since starting Medicare, Andrew has received coverage for Depakote in each of his Part D plan choices.

Susan's mother started taking the prescription drug Eliquis last year, that will cost her mother about \$1,244 out-of-pocket in 2019 for that drug alone (she takes five other generics). Last year, the cost of Eliquis pushed her mom into the Part D doughnut hole where out-of-pocket costs were higher. Rising costs of the drug in 2019 will mean her mom will hit the doughnut hole a month sooner this year.

“The high cost of prescription drugs forces people to do what we shouldn't have to do, like ordering drugs from Canada,” says Susan. “I have a friend who went without one of her prescriptions because she didn't have the money, and she died of a stroke. Our government is not doing what it's supposed to do. It's a constant struggle and my husband hasn't retired yet because of our concern about the costs of his prescription drugs for which he currently gets good coverage from his job.”

The Senior Citizens League supports bipartisan legislation that would require Medicare to negotiate lower prices for Medicare Part D, would allow safe importation of prescription drugs from Canada and other countries where the same drugs are often sold for much less, and would ban “pay for delay” deals between drug manufacturers that keep cheaper generics off the market. To learn what you can do to help fight high drug costs, visit www.SeniorsLeague.org. [Source: The Senior Citizens Leagues | July 16, 2019 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs Update 33 ► Senate Committee Drug Pricing Reforms Unveiled

The Senate Finance Committee on 23 JUL unveiled a long-awaited package of drug pricing reforms that would cap how much drug makers can hike their prices in Medicare. It would also cap out-of-pocket expenses for Medicare beneficiaries and dramatically reform the program's prescription drug benefit. The bipartisan effort, spearheaded by Sens. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Ron Wyden (D-OR) is projected to save the federal government \$85 billion on drug spending over the next decade. “This legislation shows that no industry is above accountability,” Wyden and Grassley wrote in a joint statement. “Passing these reforms, especially those that will affect some of the most entrenched interests in Washington, is never easy.”

The bill also tweaks other federal drug-payment approaches, including implementing a value-based system for some gene therapies under Medicaid. The bill also ups the maximum rebate allowed under Medicaid, which the committee projected would save taxpayers \$15 billion. The committee estimated the legislation would save beneficiaries \$27 billion in out-of-pocket costs and an additional \$5 billion in premiums in the coming 10-year period. Those savings are in addition to the \$85 billion in savings the bill would generate for taxpayers.

The unveiling comes as Washington has struggled to address rising drug prices despite rising political pressure. In primary debates, Democratic candidates have excoriated the pharmaceutical industry, as has President Trump in his own speeches. But the Trump administration recently withdrew one major policy initiative and saw another struck down in court. The result: mounting pressure on Congress, including a recent visit from health secretary Alex Azar and other top White House officials to support a potential bipartisan Senate package. Last week, Stephen Ubl, the head of the lobbying group PhRMA, visited Capitol Hill with Giovanni Caforio, the CEO of Bristol Myers-Squibb and chairman-elect of PhRMA's board.

“While the budget office is still doing its analyses,” Wyden complained to reporters last week, “you’ve got the pharmaceutical lobby all over Capitol Hill buttonholing senators, telling them that if they do anything to hold down prices for consumers and taxpayers, that that’s going to be the end of Western civilization.” This package, similarly, is sure to be fiercely opposed by the pharmaceutical industry. The cap on price hikes in both Medicare Part B and Part D beyond the rate of inflation is among its most controversial elements. Infighting over that provision, which was spearheaded by Wyden, delayed the bill’s release for weeks.

“The Senate Finance Committee package fails to meet the fundamental test of providing meaningful relief at the pharmacy counter for the vast majority of seniors,” Ubl said in a statement. “The legislation would siphon more than \$150 billion from researching and developing new medicines while giving those savings to the government, insurers and PBMs – not seniors.” The Senate is widely expected to pass legislation that aims to lower drug costs, though it is unclear when and to what degree an eventual bill will mirror the one Grassley unveiled Tuesday. Judd Deere, a White House spokesman, said on Twitter that the Trump administration plans to formally endorse the measure, calling it a “comprehensive package to lower outrageously high drug prices.” [Source: STAT | Lev Facher & Nicholas Florco | July 23, 2019 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs Update 34 ► White House Order Would Cut Medicare Drug Prices

U.S. President Donald Trump is considering a sweeping executive order that would cut prices on virtually all branded prescription drugs sold to Medicare and other government programs, according to two industry sources who had discussions with the White House. The order under discussion would be much broader than the Administration's previously disclosed proposal to lower prices on physician administered, or Part B, drugs by tying prices to lower costs in other countries. The administration is now looking at ways to use this or a similar method to lower prices in Medicare's much larger Part D, which is for widely used prescription drugs patients take at home, such as for cholesterol and blood pressure, the sources said.



The White House declined to comment, and it was unclear how far along the any such plan was from being undertaken. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, also declined to comment. Americans pay the highest prices for prescription drugs in the world as most other developed nations have single-payer systems in which the government negotiates drug prices for its people. The U.S. government in 2016 spent around \$29 billion on prescription

drugs in Medicare's Part B, which includes most injectable drugs, and nearly \$100 billion in Part D, which covers as pills and other drugs usually dispensed in pharmacies. Trump is also considering extending the pricing controls to the U.S. Department of Defense, which runs the Tricare health plan for military personnel and their families, as well as the Department of Veterans Affairs, the sources said.

Executive orders often go through various drafts and incarnations, and sometimes competing versions of the same order are floated within the Trump White House. In addition, some executive orders do not end up being signed. The drug pricing executive order could come as soon as the next few weeks, the sources said. U.S. Senators Chuck Grassley and Ron Wyden - the top Republican and Democrat on the U.S. Senate Finance Committee - earlier this week announced a proposal to lower prescription drug prices that could save \$100 billion in costs to government healthcare programs. The White House could delay the executive order if the Senate bill looks likely to garner bipartisan support, the sources said.

If implemented, the executive order could significantly increase the number of drugmakers whose sales could take a hit. AbbVie, Eli Lilly and Co and Pfizer Inc all have substantial exposure to Medicare Part D. Companies with major exposure to Part B include Merck & Co, Bristol-Myers Squibb Co and Roche. In early July, Trump said his administration was working on a drug pricing executive order with a "favored-nation clause, where we pay whatever the lowest nation's price is." Trump has called the lower prices paid by other nations "global freeloading."

Trump, a Republican, has struggled to deliver on a pledge to lower drug prices before the November 2020 election. Healthcare costs are expected to be a major focus of the campaign by Trump and Democratic rivals vying to run against him. The Trump administration earlier this month scrapped an ambitious policy that would have required health insurers to pass billions of dollars in rebates they receive from drugmakers to Medicare patients. Also in July, a federal judge struck down a Trump administration rule that would have forced pharmaceutical companies to include the wholesale prices of their drugs in television advertising. [Source: U.S. News & World Report | Michael Erman & Carl O'Donnell | July 24, 2019 ++]

Military Health Care Update 01 ► Air Force New Medical Program

A test run of a new Air Force medical program was so successful at reducing the number of airmen who were sidelined and unable to perform their jobs that it's being rolled out at bases across the U.S., officials said. The 366th Medical Group at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho, in a pilot study last year was able to significantly reduce the number of active duty servicemembers who were not mission-ready by visiting airmen in their duty locations, rather than waiting for airmen to come to them.

They learned about the challenges the servicemembers faced and partnered with unit leaders to manage the airmen's care, the Air Force Surgeon General's office said. "We had more than 400 airmen on the base who were considered non-mission capable when we launched in March 2018," Col. Steven Ward, then commander of the 366th Medical group, was quoted as saying by the Surgeon General's office. "In six months, we reduced that number by nearly one-fourth. Our provider teams focused relentlessly on getting airmen back into the fight." Following the success of the test run, the system is being taken nationwide, the Air Force has said. Initially, it will be rolled out at 43 Air Force medical facilities in the continental U.S.

The new system brings agencies that previously had separate, distinct health care roles under the umbrella of a service called the Air Force Medical Readiness Agency. The AFMRA is expected to streamline the Air Force Medical Service "from a dual-focus on health benefit delivery and readiness to one laser-focused on readiness," said Air Force Surgeon General Lt. Gen. Dorothy Hogg at a launch ceremony last month. Some care teams will focus on proactively treating active duty airmen and "improving their availability to support the warfighting mission," while others will care for the families of service members and military retirees, the Air Force said.

In addition to improving readiness among active-duty airmen, the new system saves non-active duty patients around 15 minutes per medical visit because they are no longer required to complete administrative paperwork each time they seek care, an Air Force spokesman said. The changes are part of broader reforms to the Military Health System, which provides care to 1.4 million active duty servicemembers, and 331,000 reserve-component personnel, in addition to their families and military retirees. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Christopher Dennis | July 19, 2019 ++]

Aspirin Update 01 ► Is Taking a Daily Aspirin Really Necessary?

If you're over 70 and don't have a heart attack or stroke history, a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine says baby aspirin isn't necessary for good health. "This study showed that giving aspirin to all patients to try to reduce heart attack was not beneficial," says Dr. Stephen Kopecky, a Mayo Clinic cardiologist who was not involved with the study. "This is not surprising, since it included a population generally at low risk for heart attack or stroke over the next 10 years." The study included more than 19,000 people over 65 in Australia and the U.S. "Since aspirin increases bleeding risk, it should also be avoided by people who have a history of bleeding," adds Dr. Kopecky.

However, there is still evidence a daily low-dose aspirin can reduce the risk of recurrence for someone who has already had a stroke or heart attack. "The current U.S. Preventive Services Task Force guidelines suggest aspirin for higher-risk people, those who have a risk of 10 percent or greater over the next 10 years for a fatal or nonfatal heart attack or stroke," says Dr. Kopecky. He says the risk factor can be determined by using an American College of Cardiology tool that estimates the risk for atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease.

"As always, it is important to revisit and discuss these decisions with your health care provider," says Dr. Kopecky. "She or he can help provide the information needed, like cholesterol levels ... and help interpret your risk score and help you make a plan to lower it, which is primarily a change in lifestyle." [Source: Mayo Clinic | Dana Sparks | September 17, 2018 ++]

TRICARE Retired Reserve Update 08 ► For National Guard & Reserves Under 60

TRICARE Retired Reserve (TRR) is a premium-based health plan that provides medical coverage for retired National Guard and Reserve members under age 60. A premium-based health plan means you pay monthly premiums, in addition to other costs for your health care. TRR coverage is similar to TRICARE Select coverage, with the same retiree copayments or cost-shares and choice of providers. As outlined in the [TRICARE Choices for National Guard and Reserve Handbook](#), Retired Reserve members have different TRICARE options prior to turning age 60 and once turning age 60. Up to age 60, TRR is an option. Here are a few questions and answers to help you better understand the key features of the health plan.

Who can enroll in TRICARE Retired Reserve?

Qualified Retired Reserve members, their family members, and their survivors may be eligible to enroll in TRR. These Retired Reserve members must be under age 60 and not eligible for, nor enrolled in the Federal Employees Health Benefits program. You may check your eligibility on the [milConnect](#) website. Log in to milConnect, click on the "Benefits" tab, and then select "Beneficiary Web Enrollment (BWE)" from the menu. You can also use the [TRICARE Plan Finder](#) to see what plans you and your family may qualify for.

How do you enroll?

“You may enroll in TRR at any time throughout the year, unless you’re locked out,” said Brian Smith, program manager for Reserve Component health plans at the Defense Health Agency. “As with all TRICARE premium-based health plans, you don’t need to wait until TRICARE Open Season to enroll.”

You may purchase TRR online (<https://tricare.mil/Plans/Enroll/TRR>) on the milConnect website. Log in to milConnect, click on the “Benefits” tab, and then select “Beneficiary Web Enrollment (BWE)” from the menu. You can also call your [regional contractor](#). An initial two-month premium payment is due with your enrollment request. You can also mail or fax your completed Reserve Component Health Coverage Request Form (DD Form 2896-1) along with the initial premium payment to your regional contractor within the specified deadline. If you live overseas, you can also purchase TRR coverage in person at a TRICARE Service Center.

How do you get care with TRR?

To get health care, schedule an appointment with any [TRICARE-authorized provider](#). Referrals aren’t required, but some services require [prior authorization](#). You save money if you see a TRICARE network provider. That provider will file your claims for you. If you get care from a non-network provider, you may pay more and have to file your own claims. If you want to get care at a military hospital or clinic under TRR coverage, you can only do so if space is available. Pharmacy services are also provided at a [military hospital or clinic](#). You can also use [TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery](#) and [TRICARE retail network pharmacies](#) to fill your prescriptions.

What are the costs associated with TRR?

With TRR coverage, you pay [monthly premiums](#), a yearly deductible, and applicable copayments or cost-shares for [covered services](#). Learn more about [TRR costs](#) and view costs, including monthly premiums and copayments on the TRICARE website. You may choose to end your TRR coverage at any time. Visit the [Ending TRICARE Retired Reserve Coverage](#) page to learn how to end coverage for the entire family or an individual family member.

If you’re a Reserve member approaching retirement and below age 60, visit [TRICARE Retired Reserve](#) to learn more about costs and coverage under TRR. For more information about TRR and your options at age 60 and up, you can also download the [TRICARE Choices for National Guard and Reserve Handbook](#). Getting to know your health plan will help you make informed choices and take command of your health.

[Source: TRICARE Communications | July 24, 2019 ++]

Senior Surgery ► ASA New Standards to Optimize Options for those Over 75

The 92-year-old had a painful tumor on his tongue, and major surgery was his best chance. Doctors called a timeout when he said he lived alone, in a rural farmhouse, and wanted to keep doing so. "It was ultimately not clear we could get him back there" after such a big operation, said Dr. Tom Robinson, chief of surgery at the VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System. The Denver hospital is trying something new: When their oldest patients need a major operation, what to do isn't decided just with the surgeon but with a team of other specialists, to make sure seniors fully understand their options — and how those choices could affect the remainder of their lives.

It's part of a move to improve surgical care for older Americans, who increasingly are undergoing complex operations despite facing higher risks than younger patients. The American College of Surgeons launched a program Friday to encourage hospitals around the country to adopt 30 new standards to optimize surgery on patients who are 75 and older — information seniors and their families eventually will be able to use in choosing where to get care. Seniors account for more than 40% of surgeries, which is expected to grow as the population ages. Certainly there are plenty of robust elders who can withstand major operations.

But as people get older, they don't bounce back like they did even in middle age. Seniors rapidly lose muscle with even a short period in bed. They tend to have multiple illnesses that complicate recovery. And 15% of older adults

who live at home — and a third of 80-somethings — face particular risks because they're frail, meaning they're weak, move slowly and get little physical activity.

The new standards stress team-based care and better communication about surgical risks and quality of life, to help patients choose their treatment. They must be evaluated for vulnerabilities such as frailty, being prone to falls or having dementia, and the hospital must have plans to handle them. After surgery, standards run the gamut from geriatric-friendly hospital rooms — with non-skid floors and windows to help stay oriented to day and night — to preventing post-surgery complications like delirium, a frightening state of confusion that can impair recovery and cause long-term memory and thinking problems.

Some of the steps have long been recommended, "but we realized guidelines are just that — they're suggestions. The uptake of them in hospitals is pretty spotty," said Dr. Ronnie Rosenthal of Yale University, who chaired the standards task force. So the surgeons' group, with funding from the John A. Hartford Foundation, created a geriatric surgery "verification program," similar to programs credited with spurring trauma and pediatric surgery improvements. Hospital participation is voluntary, but those that join will be inspected and have to document how patients fare.

Eight hospitals including the Denver VA tested the standards. Robinson already sees a difference: 1 in 4 patients change their original surgical plan after a team review, and more go home rather than needing at least a temporary stay in a nursing home or other facility. Consider that 92-year-old with a tumor on his tongue. After consultations with speech and swallowing experts, and an evaluation of his house, Robinson said the man ultimately chose a smaller operation. The tumor and only part of the tongue were removed to relieve pain rather than trying for a cure, and he returned home.

"These are difficult conversations," Robinson said. But choosing to spend, say, their last year at home rather than two in a nursing home, "those are trade-offs people are making." After surgery, the standards also focus on seniors' special needs such as maintaining mobility; prompt return of glasses and hearing aids to help keep patients oriented and able to follow care instructions; and steps to prevent delirium that include avoiding risky medications.



George Barrett, 85, of Lakewood, Colo., is checked by nurse as he recuperates from open-heart surgery

To implement them, Robinson's hospital set up new nurse-led teams that check each older patient daily. For example, no more waiting for the surgeon to decide if physical and occupational therapy are needed; the nursing team puts that in place up front, explained geriatric nurse specialist Jennifer Franklin. One of her team's patients, George Barrett, 85, of Lakewood, Colorado, is recovering from successful open-heart surgery, and being prepped to go to a cardiac rehabilitation facility to regain his strength. "They told me about all the risks and I wanted to go ahead with it anyway," Barrett said of the surgery. "I want to hang around."

Even before any hospitals go through the quality-improvement program, the standards can offer guidance to seniors and their families in making surgical decisions. For example, make sure the patient's vulnerabilities are discussed up front: If dad already needs a walker, will being in the hospital make him worse? And what will the hospital do to help?

Especially make clear the patient's goals: "It's most important they ask, 'What will my life look like after? What will I be able to do?'" said Yale's Rosenthal. [Source: Associated Press | Lauran Neergaard | July 19, 2019 ++]

PTSD Mental Disorder ► Causes, Symptoms, & Treatment Availability

Post-traumatic stress disorder, also known as PTSD, is among only a few mental disorders that are triggered by a disturbing outside event, unlike other psychiatric disorders such as depression. Many Americans experience individual traumatic events ranging from car and airplane accidents to sexual assault and domestic violence. Other experiences, including those associated with natural disasters, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and tornadoes, affect multiple people simultaneously. Dramatic and tragic events, like the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, and wars occur, and with media exposure such as we have today, even people not directly involved might be affected. Simply put, PTSD is a state in which you "can't stop remembering." For example, Vietnam Veterans who "can't stop remembering" the traumatic events of firefights, and other horrific war scenes.

In one out of 10 Americans, the traumatic event causes a cascade of psychological and biological changes known as post-traumatic stress disorder. Wars throughout the ages often triggered what some people used to call "shell shock," in which returning soldiers were unable to adapt to life after war. Although each successive war brings about renewed attention on this syndrome, it wasn't until the Vietnam War that PTSD was first identified and given this name. Now, mental health providers such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and other health care professionals can attempt to understand people's response to these traumatic events and help them recover from the impact of the trauma.

The typical symptoms of PTSD are flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, emotional detachment, hypervigilance, night sweats, and extreme efforts to avoid stimuli that reminds one of the traumatic events. Also prevalent are:

- Flashbacks: Imagine experiencing the most terrifying horror movie you've ever seen playing over and over in your mind. You can't make the images go away. These are the flashbacks so commonly associated with PTSD and usually are thought of in connection with combat veterans in war.
- Emotional detachment: Emotional detachment is a second symptom of PTSD, which is often not as obvious outwardly to anyone other than the person experiencing it. For these people, their emotional systems are in overdrive. They have a hard time being a loving family member. They avoid activities, places, and people associated with the traumatic event. They are simply drained emotionally and have trouble functioning every day.
- Recurring Dreams of trauma.
- An exaggerated startle response to stimuli that reminds one of trauma.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Flat affect.
- Bunkering down - what war veterans do to prepare for battle. (Example: a war veteran who stays in his garage for excessive periods of time preparing for battle.)

Veterans experiencing the above symptoms should know the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has dumped a policy requiring combat veterans to verify in writing that they have witnessed or experienced a traumatic event before filing a claim for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In the past, a veteran had to provide written verification such as a statement from a commander, doctor, psychologist, or testimony from family, friends, co-workers, and war buddies, that the veteran was involved in a traumatic war-time event in order to receive disability compensation for PTSD from VA. Accordingly, the Department of Defense (DoD) uses the same rules in evaluating PTSD for disability retirement pay for active duty service members.

In the future, veterans will be diagnosed with PTSD through a medical examination with no further proof necessary. Former VA Secretary James Peake approved the measure in 2008 and made sure all VA regional offices were in compliance. [Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | July 19, 2019 ++]

Hydration ► Why Water is So Important

One of the simplest things you can do to improve your health is to drink plenty of water and stay hydrated. It's easy to become dehydrated in the summer, especially in extreme heat. Some signs of dehydration include: decreased urine output, dry mouth, dark urine, fatigue, headache, confusion, dizziness. To stay hydrated, most people need between 8-12 cups of water per day. Your water needs depend on your weight, activity level, and how much water you lose through sweat, urine, and any other bodily fluids. A general guide is to drink 0.5-1 oz per pound of body weight.



Benefits of staying hydrated:

- *Maintaining fluid balance:* About 60% of your body is made up of water. The fluids in your body facilitate many important functions, including circulation, absorption, digestion, transportation of nutrients, regulation of body temperature, and saliva production. Without enough water, your body will not be able to function properly.
- *Kidney function:* Fluids transport waste products in and out of your cells. The primary waste compound is called blood urea nitrogen, and this toxin passes through your kidneys to be excreted in urine. Your kidneys need a regular supply of water to continuously push this, and other toxins, out of your body.
- *Bowel function:* When your body is hydrated, things flow smoothly along your gastrointestinal tract, making bowel movements comfortable and regular. If you are dehydrated, the colon must extract water from the stool to keep your body hydrated, resulting in constipation.
- *Energizing your muscles:* When your muscle cells do not receive enough water, they will not be able to function properly. It is important to drink about 2 cups of water 2 hours before you start exercising, and drink at regular intervals while you are exercising.
- *Appetite control:* We often mistake the body's thirst cues for hunger cues, so drinking water regularly can help curb your appetite. Additionally, water is a non-caloric drink and can contribute to weight loss if used as a substitute for higher-calorie beverages. Eating water-rich foods that are healthy and filling, such as fruits, vegetables, beans, broth-based soups, and oatmeal, can also help you trim your calorie intake.
- *Skin:* Dehydration can make your skin look dry and wrinkles become more prominent; you can improve its appearance by staying hydrated.

For strategies on how to build a habit of drinking more water, look at these MOVE! Hydration tips. If you aren't a fan of plain water, add some sugar-free flavorings such as:

- Fruit, cucumbers, mint leaves.
- Lemon juice.
- Calorie-free flavoring agent such as Mio or Crystal Light, or powdered fruit packets.
- Unsweetened tea.
- Calorie-free seltzer waters.

For more information on hydration and improving your health, contact your local VA dietitian. Please also remember that the above information may not apply if you have a condition that requires a fluid restriction like Congestive Heart Failure or Dialysis. If you've been told by your provider to "limit fluids" you can also contact your local VA dietitian to help come up with a personal hydration program. [Source: Vantage Point | Melanya Souza | July 26, 2019 ++]

Cancer Q&A ► 190716 thru 190731

(Q) How does alcohol and caffeine impact on cancer?

Answer. Because people are interested in the possible links between specific foods, nutrients, or lifestyle factors and specific cancers, research on health behaviors and cancer risk is often reported in the news. No one study, however, provides the last word on any subject, and single news reports may put too much emphasis on what appear to be conflicting results. In brief news stories, reporters cannot always put new research findings in their proper context. Therefore, it is rarely, if ever, a good idea to change diet or activity levels based on a single study or news report. The following questions and answers address common concerns about alcohol and caffeine in relation to cancer:

- *Does alcohol increase cancer risk?* Yes. Alcohol raises the risk of cancers of the mouth, pharynx (throat), larynx (voice box), esophagus, liver, breast, and the colon and rectum. People who drink alcohol should limit their intake to no more than 2 drinks per day for men and 1 drink per day for women. A drink is defined as 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1½ ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits (hard liquor). The combination of alcohol and tobacco increases the risk of some cancers far more than the effect of either drinking or smoking alone. Regular intake of even a few drinks per week is linked to a higher risk of breast cancer in women. Women at high risk of breast cancer may want to consider not drinking any alcohol.
- *Doesn't wine have health benefits?* For some people, especially men older than 50 and women older than 60, the cardiovascular benefits of moderate drinking probably outweigh the risk of cancer. Talk to your health care provider about your risk factors for both heart disease and cancer, and make an informed decision about alcohol.
- *Does drinking coffee cause cancer?* No. The possible link between coffee and cancer of the pancreas, which got a lot of attention in the past, has not been confirmed by recent studies. At this time, there is no evidence that coffee or caffeine increases the risk of cancer.
- *Can drinking tea (black or green) reduce cancer risk?* Tea is a drink that results from infusion of the leaves, buds, or twigs of the tea plant (*Camellia sinensis*). Black, green, white, pu-erh, and other varieties of tea all come from the same plant, but reflect the different ways in which they are processed.

Some researchers have proposed that tea might protect against cancer because of its antioxidant, polyphenol, and flavonoid content. In animal studies, some teas (including green tea) have been shown to reduce cancer risk, but findings from studies looking at humans are mixed. The results of lab studies have been promising and tea drinking is a part of many cuisines, but evidence does not support the lowering of cancer risk as a central reason for drinking tea at this time.

[Source: American Cancer Society | July 31, 2019 ++]

Colon Cancer Update 07 ► Cases Have Risen Sharply Among Young People Since 1970

New research shows the percentage of people under age 50 rose to 12.2 percent in 2015, up from 10 percent in 2004, according to a [study](#) published 22 JUL in Cancer. "Several studies have shown that the rates of colorectal cancer in younger adults have risen slowly in the U.S. since the 1970s, but for practicing physicians, it feels like we are seeing more and more young people with colorectal cancer now than we were even 10 years ago," Boone Goodgame, a researcher University of Texas at Austin and study author, said in a news release. "Until just last year, guidelines recommended colon cancer screening beginning at 50. Now many guidelines do recommend screening at age 45, but most physicians and patients don't appear to be following those recommendations."

The researchers used data from the National Cancer Database registry on patients who were diagnosed with colorectal cancer between 2004 and 2015. From the database, which contains more than 70 percent of new cancer diagnoses in the U.S., researchers analyzed data on more than 130,000 people were under age 50 and 1 million people over age 50. Younger adults accounted for 51.6 percent stage III and stage IV cancer cases compared to 40 percent in the older group. Among colorectal cancer diagnoses, black and Hispanic people have disproportionately higher rates than white people. Young adults in the highest income bracket also had the highest percentage of diagnoses -- and the rates continued to climb over time across all income levels. Another study showed colorectal cancer cancers among people younger than 50 were particularly high in western states.

Adults should get regular colonoscopies or other screenings for colorectal cancers starting at age 45, according to the American Cancer Society. "Because the number of colorectal cancer cases from inherited causes are much higher in younger individuals, it is unknown whether screening for sporadic cases in a group with such low disease rate can result in a favorable balance of harms and benefits," Goodgame said. [Source: UPI | Tauren Dyson | July 22, 2019 ++]

Osteoarthritis | Knee ► How to Know You Have It

If your knee feels stiff for a while after resting and hurts when you move it, you may have osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis of the knee is often thought of as normal, age-related "wear and tear" of the joint that gets worse over time and that you can't do anything about. But there are many things you can do for your joints, especially strength and mobility exercises. The widespread belief that you need to go easy on your knees if you have osteoarthritis is wrong – the opposite is true: Strong muscles stabilize and protect joints. Exercise ensures that the joint cartilage gets nutrients.

If it has progressed, interferes with your daily routines, and reduces your quality of life, joint replacement surgery may be an option – especially if exercise and painkillers don't provide enough pain relief. If you're overweight, losing weight can help. Many medications and techniques that are claimed to help in osteoarthritis haven't been proven to be effective, and may even be harmful. So it's worth carefully weighing the advantages and disadvantages of different treatments and being critical of recommendations. Seeing things realistically can avoid disappointment and unnecessary costs.

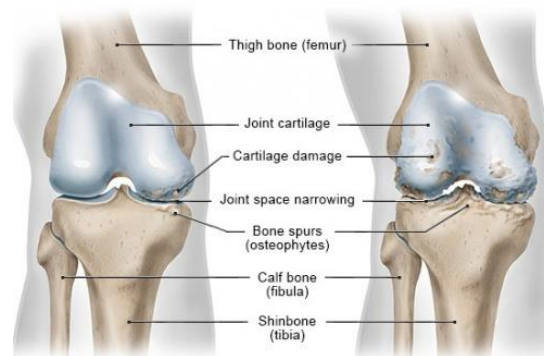
Symptoms

- Osteoarthritis of the knee can develop in three areas: On the inside of the knee joint (medial), on the outside of the knee joint (lateral), and under the kneecap (patellofemoral)
- It typically starts with knee pain that only occurs when you put pressure on the joint. If the osteoarthritis gets worse over time, this pain gets stronger and more frequent. You may even feel it when you rest the joint or at night, and it may keep you from sleeping. You might have other symptoms too, like joint stiffness. Some people's joints are especially painful in the evenings or mornings.

- Depending on the part of the knee that is affected, the inner or outer side of the knee may hurt more. If the area under the kneecap is affected, the pain may be most noticeable when getting up and climbing stairs.
- In severe osteoarthritis, the joint is also painful at rest. Then the pain is often duller and may be very intense at times, leading to exhaustion and really limiting the everyday activities you can do.
- The knee joint can also become stiffer and more tender to the touch. Moving it less weakens the muscles and ligaments, making your knee feel unstable.
- Sometimes the knee gets inflamed for a while. That usually causes the knee to feel warm and swell up, and the pain gets worse for a few days.
- Some people have osteoarthritis only on the inside or outside of the knee joint. In that case it's usually the inside that's affected, and this can be associated with bow-leggedness (varus deformity).

Causes

The knee joint connects the thighbone (femur), shinbone (tibia), calf bone (fibula), and kneecap (patella) with each other. The ends of the bones and the inside of the kneecap are covered with cartilage. Healthy cartilage has a smooth gliding surface that allows low-friction movement. Osteoarthritis develops if the cartilage softens and becomes cracked and thinner. Cartilage can't repair itself as well as other types of tissue can, so any major damage is lasting.



Front view of the right knee; on the left with osteoarthritis on one side of the knee joint (medial), on the right with advanced osteoarthritis on both sides of the knee joint (medial and lateral) – as described in the article

Risk factors

As we age, everyone's joint cartilage wears down a little. But some factors can speed up the wear and tear on the knee joint, increasing the risk of osteoarthritis of the knee. These include:

- Knee injuries, for example due to meniscus damage, tearing of the anterior cruciate ligament, dislocation of the kneecap, or a bone fracture near the knee joint.
- Being very overweight: People who have a BMI over 30 are considered to be very overweight (obese). The higher the BMI, the greater the strain on the joints.
- Repeated major strain on the knee: For example, people who have jobs where they kneel or squat a lot or lift heavy objects are more at risk of osteoarthritis.
- Anatomy: Having legs of different lengths or knee problems (knock knees or bow legs), for example.

Some people believe that exercise puts additional strain on the knees, increasing wear and tear. But in fact, lack of exercise is more harmful for joints. It weakens muscles, for one thing. Also, the joint cartilage is dependent on exercise: When we walk, for instance, alternating pressure is applied to the cartilage. This causes fluids to be exchanged, providing the cartilage with nutrients. There are no exact figures on how many people have osteoarthritis of the knee. According to estimates about 4% of all adults are affected. The risk increases with age: About 10-15% of people aged 60 or older have osteoarthritis of the knee. This condition is somewhat more common in women than in men.

Outlook

Having osteoarthritis doesn't necessarily mean that the knee will eventually become so damaged that you'll need a joint replacement. Many people manage their daily lives well despite the symptoms. It's hard to accurately predict how osteoarthritis will continue to develop. In some people the symptoms are mild for many years, while in others the osteoarthritis progresses more quickly. A large Dutch study that looked at people with osteoarthritis of the knee several times over the course of five years showed the following: About 60% had moderate pain that got only slightly worse or even improved, about 25% had slight pain that stayed relatively constant, about 10% had severe pain that stayed relatively constant, and about 5% had slight pain that got a lot worse over the years. Sometimes the pain comes and goes in episodes: Then phases with more intense pain are followed by phases with less or no pain. A wrong movement or minor injuries can worsen the osteoarthritis pain for some time. But it often gets better on its own again.

Effects

It can cause various changes in the joint over time. After cartilage is lost, the bone surface hardens, and bone spurs known as osteophytes can form on the edges of the bone. They can limit the joint's range of motion and irritate tendons and ligaments, causing pain. In very advanced osteoarthritis, the cartilage might wear away so much in some places that bone is exposed. Meniscus (cartilage disk) damage, weaker muscles, and loosened ligaments are other possible results of advanced osteoarthritis of the knee. In addition, more joint fluid may be produced, which can also be painful (joint effusion).

Diagnosis

To diagnose osteoarthritis of the knee, the doctor will ask about symptoms like constant or recurrent pain and temporary knee stiffness. They will check the range of motion of the knee joint, look at leg alignment, and check for other possible causes of the pain, like meniscus or ligament damage. A knee X-ray is usually enough to diagnose osteoarthritis. Special examinations, like an X-ray of the whole leg, computed tomography (CT), or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) are usually not needed. Once diagnosed, you don't have to have regular X-rays for monitoring purposes. Treatment is based on the severity of pain rather than on what can be seen in the X-rays anyway. Further examinations are only needed if osteoarthritis progresses very quickly or other symptoms suggest that it might be a different medical condition. Other knee scans are also done before implanting an artificial joint (joint replacement). They can be used to help plan the surgery.

[Source: <https://www.informedhealth.org/osteoarthritis-of-the-knee.3275.en.html#sources> | July 19, 2019 ++]

Osteoarthritis | Knee Update 01 ► How to Deal With It

There are various treatment options for osteoarthritis of the knee: Which ones are worth considering depends on things like how advanced it is, whether you have any other medical conditions, and what you expect from the treatment. Despite having osteoarthritis, staying as active as possible helps the joints. Many studies show that regular strength and mobility exercises can relieve pain and improve joint function. If you're overweight, losing weight can reduce stress on the joints. Studies have shown that weight loss of more than 5% can improve the range of motion and slightly relieve joint pain. People often recommend wearing well-fitting shoes with shock-absorbent soles. Shoes should support the arch of your foot and leave enough space for your toes. High heels, in contrast, are not helpful. There are also many treatment options for osteoarthritis of the knee:

- Insoles, orthotics, and special "unloading" shoes are low-risk options that can be tried out, but their effect hasn't been well studied yet. One high-quality study showed that unloading shoes that are designed to reduce pressure on the knee didn't relieve knee pain any better than normal, well-fitting, impact-absorbing shoes when worn for several months.

- Topical anti-inflammatory painkillers to be applied to the affected joint, like a gel containing diclofenac, can relieve osteoarthritis pain in some people, and are an easy-to-use treatment option with few side effects.
- Oral anti-inflammatory painkillers like diclofenac, ibuprofen, and etoricoxib are also proven to relieve osteoarthritis pain. Acetaminophen (paracetamol) doesn't work in osteoarthritis of the knee. Opioids often aren't any more effective than anti-inflammatory painkillers, but they have more side effects and can be addictive.
- Acupuncture: Studies suggest that acupuncture can help relieve osteoarthritis of the knee – but no better than placebo acupuncture, where needles are inserted only superficially or in the “wrong” place. Acupuncture treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee is covered by statutory health insurers in Germany.
- Joint injections: It's unclear if steroid injections help better than injections of saline solution (a mixture of water and table salt), and there are risks associated with using them. Hyaluronic acid injections are the subject of debate. In the best-quality studies so far, they were hardly any better than saline solutions. Plus, you have to pay for them yourself. Injections with autologous blood products (using processed blood plasma taken from your own body) haven't been proven to work.
- X-ray therapy (or orthovoltage therapy) involves treating the joint with low-energy X-rays 6 to 12 times over several weeks. There are no comparative studies on this treatment, so it's not clear if it helps.
- In radiosynoviorthesis (RSO), a weak radioactive substance is injected into the knee. Studies haven't shown it to be effective, and there are reports of complications like bone and joint inflammations.
- Experts don't recommend cartilage restoration surgery for osteoarthritis of the knee – it may even make the pain worse and has no proven benefits. This kind of surgery includes, for example, Pridie drilling, microfracture, cartilage grafts, and cartilage and bone grafts.
- In advanced osteoarthritis of the knee, joint replacement may be an option. An artificial knee joint can considerably relieve the pain of advanced osteoarthritis in most people. After surgery, it's important to have active rehabilitation treatment – and patience because it takes time to get used to your new knee.

Many studies have shown that nutritional supplements with chondroitin or glucosamine don't help. The same is true for endoscopic lavage (washing) of the knee and smoothing of the cartilage (arthroscopy). Many other products and therapies that don't have a proven benefit are also offered to treat osteoarthritis of the knee:

- Herbal supplements like devil's claw
- Foods or food extracts, for example based on soy or avocado
- Ultrasound treatments
- Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS)
- Leech therapy
- A special kind of electrotherapy (“high tone power therapy”)
- Magnetic field therapy
- Microwave therapy

To learn more about how you can deal with this condition refer to the following:

- [What can I do to strengthen my knees?](#)
- [Which painkillers are effective?](#)
- [Do knee injections help?](#)
- [What can I expect from knee replacement surgery?](#)
- [What different types of knee implants are there?](#)
- [What can you expect before and after surgery?](#)

[Source: InformedHealth.org | July 19, 2019 ++]

Contaminated Military Installations ► Dangerous Chemicals Making Veterans Sick

If you're a veteran or a dependent suffering from short-term memory problems, chronic fatigue, headaches, confusion, loss of appetite, painful joints, ringing in your ears, and a host of other physical and psychological conditions, your problems may be associated with you being exposed to dangerous chemicals. Not just herbicides in Vietnam or burn pits in the Middle East, or vaccines given to you prior to being shipped overseas, it could be the result of having been stationed or lived in an area near a military installation contaminated with dangerous chemicals.

Sure, many of the military installations look beautiful. Most are supremely manicured, many offer state-of-the-art facilities, and most military installations are safe havens. However, quite a few of our beloved military installations are dripping with dangerous hidden chemicals. Some of these insidious chemicals have worked their way into the water supply systems on many military installations. The water you consumed for drinking, bathing and recreation, may have been polluted with chemicals that you couldn't see, taste, or smell. But, nonetheless, presented an imminent danger to you, your family and military colleagues.

Listed below are the military installations where many dangerous chemicals contaminated the water supply system on or near a military installation, exposing you and your family to great harm.

Air Force

- Castle AFB, California -- [Trichloroethylene \(TCE\)](#)
- Dover AFB, Delaware -- Arsenic and other metals; [Trichloroethylene \(TCE\)](#)
- Griffiss AFB, Rome New York – Phenols, Ethyl benzene, Benzene, and Toulene
- Hill AFB, Utah -- [Trichloroethylene \(TCE\)](#), [1-2 dichloroethane](#), and 1,1,1 trichlorethane
- Mather AFB, California -- [Trichloroethylene \(TCE\)](#)
- McChord AFB, Washington -- Methylene chloride, Chloroform, Benzene, Arsenic, Chromium, and Mercury
- McClellan AFB, California -- [Trichloroethylene \(TCE\)](#), Methylene chloride, and 1-1 dichlorethylene
- Norton AFB, California -- [Trichloroethylene \(TCE\)](#), Silver, Tetrachlorethylene (PCE), and Radone
- Robins AFB, Georgia -- Halogenated solvents, Heavy metals, [DDT](#), Chordane, Cyanide, Oil products, [Trichloroethylene \(TCE\)](#), and Tetrachloroethylene (PCE)
- Tinker AFB, Oklahoma -- Chlorinated solvents
- Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio -- [Trichloroethylene \(TCE\)](#) and Tetrachloroethylene (PCE)

Army

- Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland -- Chemicals found in water supply: Tetrachloroethane, [Dichloroethane](#), [Dithane](#), and [Hexanone](#)
- Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia -- Chemicals found in water supply: Tetrachloroethane, [Dichloroethane](#), [Dithane](#), [Hexanone](#), and [DDT](#)
- Fort Belvoir, Virginia – Benzene, [Trichloroethylene](#), Chloroform, Toluene, Ethylbenzene, and [1-2-dichloroethane](#)
- Fort Devens, Massachusetts -- A sanitary landfill near the installation was discovered as a potential source of contamination. The landfill is currently closed.
- Fort Dix, New Jersey -- Organic solvents and Petroleum products
- Fort Lewis, Washington - [Trichloroethylene \(TCE\)](#)
- Fort McClellan, Alabama -- Mustard Gas Agent
- Redstone Arsenal, Alabama -- [DDT](#), PCBs, and Heavy metals

Navy

- Brunswick NAS, Maine -- A study is under way to determine contaminants and their migration habits.
- Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center, New Jersey -- Tetraethyl lead, Nitronomine (Carcinogen), Aniline, Furfural (toxic by ingestion, inhalation, or skin absorption), Ferric Chloride Solution, Hydraulic fluids, Asbestos, Cutting Oils, Solvents, Heavy metals, Ordnance shells, Gas-loaded projectiles, Phosgene, Phosphorus, and Mustard agent
- Moffett Field NAS, California -- Volatile organic compounds
- Whidbey Island NAS, Washington -- Waste oil, Solvents, and Jet fuel
- China Lake, California -- Jet fuel
- Indian Head NOS, Maryland -- Jet fuel
- Jacksonville NAS, Florida -- Jet fuel
- Miramar NAS, California -- Research continues at this location
- Pabmont River NAS, Maryland -- Research continues at this location
- Roosevelt Roads NS, Puerto Rico -- Strong indications of contamination, but all studies have been terminated.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | December 10, 2018 ++]

Fisher House Update 07 ► Houston VA Fisher House

For two Army Vietnam Veterans fighting cancer, living at the Houston VA Fisher House has been a game changer. Harry Robinson Sr., 75, a door gunner in Vietnam, and Leonard Adams, 69, a heavy equipment repairman known as “Mr. Fix it”, each currently reside in Fisher House III on the campus of Houston VA Medical Center. And each man has come a long way since his initial cancer diagnosis. “I’ve had prostate cancer for 21 years,” said Robinson, currently in stage four cancer recovery. “I’ve been treated at MD Anderson with six rounds of chemo treatment. My prognosis is looking good. All my vital signs are normal. I feel pretty good right now and have a very positive outlook.”



Adams, who hadn’t been to a VA in 41 years, said outside doctors didn’t know what was wrong with him. “That wasn’t encouraging to me because I needed help,” he said. “But there was one doctor at the Houston VA who told me, ‘Before you leave here, I’m going to get you well.’” Adams had eight rounds of chemotherapy and 100 stem cells from 100 different people. His blisters, which covered his body less the soles of his feet, began to clear up. “The blisters were everywhere,” he said. “All in my mouth, all in my throat. One got in my eye, which caused me to see double. I was a terrible sight to see.”

However, both men today look and sound great. And in addition to the stellar care they each have received, living at the Fisher House has put each one—and their wives—at ease. Fisher House takes the worry out of everyday living and allows the Veterans to focus on just getting better. “We all are family here in the Fisher House,” said Robinson. “We’re all here for the same thing. I’ve been here since 20 FEB. This is it ... home away from home.” Adams, who has resided at Fisher House since 25 FEB, has so much appreciation for his time here. “Being here brings a lot of relief

and joy,” said Adams. “They make you feel like you’re in your own house. They make you feel like you are family. That’s how it makes you feel. You’re not alone in this. It just encourages us and takes our minds off this stuff that we’re afflicted with. Being here is like being at your own house.”

At one’s own home, family would be present. And that’s exactly what makes Fisher House special. Family members of Veterans can stay at no cost while a loved one receives treatment. “As for the Veteran in the hospital, it is important for them to know we in the Fisher House will be doing everything we can for their loved ones and caregivers, to protect and give them the support they need while they are here,” said Frank Kelley, Fisher House manager. “The people in the hospital need to know their loved ones are taken care of so they can concentrate on getting better.” While at Fisher House, family members of various Veterans form bonds and help one another. They become a support system for each other.

“You meet people from all walks,” said Carolyn Adams, wife of Leonard. “Everybody here has something going on in their lives. Fisher House makes you like family because you have no one else. We depend on each other. We’re here to help each other. We are all here fighting together for our loved ones. It’s a wonderful place. It goes beyond what they intended.” Carolyn has been on Family Medical Leave for more than a year. She said her work will call every now and then to ask her to come back, but she refuses to leave her husband’s side. “I don’t want you to leave me” said Adams. “Honestly speaking—I’m not ashamed to say that I don’t know what I’d do without her here.” [Source: VAntagePoint | Todd Goodman | July 29, 2019 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 511 ► TRICARE Qualifying Life Events - TRICARE Publications Survey

TRICARE Qualifying Life Events -- Did you know that outside of TRICARE Open Season, you can only enroll in or make changes to your TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select plan following a Qualifying Life Event, or QLE? A QLE is a certain change in your life, such as marriage, birth of a child, change of address, or retirement from active duty. Different TRICARE health plan options may be available to you and your family members after a QLE. Following a QLE, you and your family members have three options depending on your situation:

- If you wish to continue your current coverage following a QLE and remain eligible for your current health plan, you don’t need to take action. Your coverage will continue uninterrupted.
- If you want to make a change to your health plan enrollment, you have 90 days following the QLE to make any eligible changes.
- If you’re eligible for TRICARE but not enrolled in a TRICARE plan, you have 90 days following the QLE to enroll in a health plan. If you or your family members aren’t enrolled in a health plan and don’t enroll in one within 90 days of a QLE, you’ll only be eligible for care at a military hospital or clinic if space is available.

In most cases, the first step following a QLE is to update your or your family member’s information in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, or DEERS. Once your change shows in DEERS, you may make eligible health plan enrollment changes. To learn more about QLEs, go to www.TRICARE.mil/lifevents.

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TRICARE Publications Survey -- Do you read TRICARE publications to learn more about your TRICARE medical and dental benefit? Check out TRICARE’s July updates to the *Retiring from Active Duty Brochure*, *TRICARE Choices in the United States Handbook*, *Active Duty Dental Program Brochure*, and others. If you find these resources helpful or have ways we can improve them, please share your feedback with us through the TRICARE publications survey. Click on “Publications Satisfaction Survey” at the top of the Publications page at www.TRICARE.mil/publications.

On the Publications page, you can view, print, or download handbooks, newsletters, brochures, and more. Products cover a wide range of topics, like retiring from active duty, Medicare, pharmacy, and costs. Use these resources to help you stay in the know and to take command of your health. So if you have feedback on TRICARE products, take the publications survey by clicking on the “Publications Satisfaction Survey” tab which appears on the webpage at www.TRICARE.mil/publications. This is your benefit, and we want to hear from you.

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | July 22, 2019 ++]

TRICARE Podcast 512 ► FEDVIP Vision Coverage - MHS Bug Week – Retired Reserve

FEDVIP Vision Coverage -- The National Eye Institute reports that a comprehensive eye exam can identify vision problems and prevent diseases that may lead to vision loss or blindness. TRICARE health plans may include an eye exam or other services to diagnose and treat eye conditions. But your eye exam coverage is different based on who you are, your health plan option, and your age. For more robust coverage, including glasses, you may also qualify to purchase vision coverage through the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program, or FEDVIP.

FEDVIP is a voluntary program that offers eligible TRICARE beneficiaries a choice among a number of vision and dental carriers. It’s administered by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. Most FEDVIP vision plans include routine eye exams, vision correction, glasses, and more. Retirees, retiree family members, and active duty family members who are enrolled in a TRICARE health plan may qualify to purchase FEDVIP vision coverage. You may enroll during the annual Federal Benefits Open Season. This year, open season is from November 11th to December 9th. If you enroll during this time, your FEDVIP coverage will be effective on January 1, 2020. You may also enroll after you’ve experienced a FEDVIP qualifying life event. Read the article, “FEDVIP Provides Vision Coverage to TRICARE Beneficiaries,” at www.TRICARE.mil/news to learn more.

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Military Health System Bug Week -- The Military Health System is celebrating Bug Week, from July 27th to August 2nd. The goal is to educate the military community about bug-borne illnesses and ways to prevent bug bites. To kick off Bug Week, the National Museum of Health and Medicine is hosting Bugapalooza. This is a free, family-friendly event on Saturday, July 27th, from 10 AM to noon. Presenters will introduce visitors to a variety of bug-related topics and live bugs will be on display. Additional events include a weeklong exhibit at the museum and blood drives in Okinawa and Hawaii. Next week, learn about the risks of bug-borne diseases and tips to help prevent bug bites at www.TRICARE.mil/news. Also, visit www.health.mil/bugs for more information about Bug Week 2019.

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TRICARE Retired Reserve -- TRICARE Retired Reserve is a premium-based health plan that provides medical coverage for retired National Guard and Reserve members under age 60. A premium-based health plan means you pay monthly premiums, in addition to other costs for your health care. TRICARE Retired Reserve coverage is similar to TRICARE Select coverage, with the same retiree copayments or cost-shares and choice of providers. So:

- *Who can enroll in TRICARE Retired Reserve?* Qualified Retired Reserve members, their family members, and their survivors may be eligible to enroll. These Retired Reserve members must be under age 60 and not eligible for, nor enrolled in the Federal Employees Health Benefits program. You can enroll any time throughout the year unless you’re locked out.

- *How do you purchase TRICARE Retired Reserve?* You may purchase this health plan online on the milConnect website at <https://milconnect.dmdc.osd.mil>. Log in to milConnect, click on the “Benefits” tab, and then select “Beneficiary Web Enrollment” from the menu. You can also call your regional contractor. An initial two-month premium payment is due with your enrollment request.

To learn more about getting care and costs, read the article, “Get to Know Your TRICARE Retired Reserve Plan,” at www.TRICARE.mil/news.

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The above is from the TRICARE Beneficiary Bulletin, an update on the latest news to help you make the best use of your TRICARE benefit. [Source: <http://www.tricare.mil/podcast> | July 26, 2019 ++]

*** Finances ***



Living Wage ► Is Your Income Considered a Living Wage Where You Live?

Can you afford to live where you are? The legal minimum wage in the U.S. is \$7.25 an hour, and some states and a few cities set their minimum wages higher. But the cost of living varies a great deal across the country. If you’re in San Francisco, you’ll need a lot more than in Mississippi. And even in lower-cost areas, a minimum wage may not be enough to support a family. Merriam-Webster defines a living wage as “sufficient to provide the necessities and comforts essential to an acceptable standard of living.” Researchers calculate a “living wage” for an idea of the minimum needed for basic necessities, taking into account local, regional or state costs.

MoneyTalksNews used the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Living Wage Calculator for a state-by-state look at what it takes to earn a basic standard of living. To see if you are earning enough go to <http://livingwage.mit.edu> and select the state where you live and when it opens the county or metropolitan statistical area. It will then show:

- The living wage calculation for that area based on a living, poverty, and minimum wage for the family size you have.
- Typical annual expenses for your family size
- Typical annual salaries for various professions in your location.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Alex Valdes | July 16, 2019++]

Social Security Benefits Update 06 ► Lose 33% of Buying Power Since 2000

Between October of 2018, and January 2019, consumer prices fell according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. On January 1, 2019, Social Security beneficiaries received a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) of 2.8%. Theoretically, the combination of higher benefits, and lower prices, should translate into more money for retirees in the short term. But according to TSCL’s study of the rising costs of older Americans, this is not necessarily the case. Any improvement in Social Security buying power in 2019 has been offset by stiff increases in costs of other

essentials, particularly out-of-pocket spending on prescription drugs that aren't adequately reflected in the inflation measure used to index Social Security benefits for the COLA.

In fact, Social Security benefits have lost one-third (33 percent) of their buying power since the year 2000. That represents a very small 1 percent improvement in Social Security buying power, compared to a loss of 34 percent in from 2000 to 2018. On the other hand, the tepid growth in price inflation suggests that the COLA may be low in 2020, about 1.7%.

This year's study of retiree costs found that, between January of 2000 and January of 2019, Social Security COLAs increased Social Security benefits by 50 percent, but the costs of goods and services purchased by typical retirees rose more than twice as fast — 100.3 percent. Food and medical costs — particularly for fresh fruits and vegetables, and prescription drugs — were among the most rapidly-rising costs over the past year. The study examines the growth since 2000 in the price of goods and services that are typical for retired and disabled households, and compares them to the growth in Social Security benefits due to annual COLAs.

The same \$100 a retired household spent in 2000 can only buy about \$67 worth of goods and services today. For example, older homeowners with an oil tank that holds 500 gallons paid \$575 to fill up in January of 2000. In 2019 however, the same households had to come up with \$1,545 for that amount of heating oil. In 2000, the average Social Security benefit was \$816 per month. Retired householders with average benefits could fill the tank and still have money left over. By 2019, however, COLAs increased the monthly benefit to only \$1,226.60. Average benefit households had to borrow to cover the full cost of a fill-up, dip into savings, or go without adequate heat. Because retiree costs are rising at a substantially faster pace than the COLA, people with an average Social Security benefit of \$1,226.60 today would require a Social Security benefit of \$407.90 more per month, or \$1,634.50 in 2019, *just to maintain his or her 2000 level of buying power.*

A majority of the 60 million senior and disabled Americans who receive Social Security depend on it for at least 50 percent of their total income, and one - third of all beneficiaries rely on it for 90 percent or more of their income. To help protect the buying power of benefits, TSCL is working to build support for bipartisan legislation called the *Fair COLA for Seniors Act* (H.R. 1553) that would base COLAs on the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E). To learn more, visit www.SeniorsLeague.org.

Top Ten Fastest Growing Costs of Older Americans Since 2000

Item	Cost in 2000 Average cost	Cost in 2019 Average cost	Percent Increase
1. Prescription drugs, generic, brand, special, average out-of-pocket annual.	\$1,102.00	\$3,891.90	253%
2. Homeowner's insurance (annual)	\$508.00	\$1,518.97	199%
3. Medicare Part B premiums (monthly)	\$45.50	\$135.50	198%
4. Home heating oil (gallon)	\$1.15	\$3.09	170%
5. 10 lbs. potatoes (gold)	\$2.98	\$7.98	168%
6. Propane gas (gal.)	\$1.01	\$2.43	141%
7. Medigap (average monthly premium, all plans)	\$119.00	\$279.55	135%
8. Real estate tax (annual)	\$690.00	\$1,579.06	129%
9. Total medical costs, not including premiums (annual)	\$6,140.00	\$13,665.00	123%

10. Oranges (lb.)	\$.61	\$1.34	120%
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[Source: The Senior Citizens League | July 16, 2019 ++]

SSA COLA Update 04 ► How the Government Measures Can Mean Bad News

When it comes to the Social Security cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) many, if not most, of you say that you feel the government is cooking the inflation data. The COLA seldom seems to reflect the growing costs you experience. Two factors are to blame; the choice of a consumer price index used to calculate your COLA, and the methodology that our government uses to calculate price inflation to begin with. While you may be familiar with the problem of our government using a price index that reflects the inflation experience of younger workers rather than retired people over the age of 62, you quite likely have not heard very much about the specifics of how our government calculates price indexes. What the average person thinks of as a straight - forward mathematical calculation, the federal government can approach in convoluted ways.

Here’s a hypothetical example: Let’s say that you shop at the same grocery store every week. The price of navel oranges varies by the time of year, but in December of 2018 you were able to buy navel oranges for about \$1.39 a pound. By June of 2019, however, the price goes up to \$1.49. That’s a difference of \$.10 a pound and a 7% jump in cost. That’s price inflation.

However, as you may already suspect, that’s not necessarily the way our government calculates the change in price. The federal government doesn’t simply calculate the difference in cost of navel oranges from one period to another. If another type of orange, such as Valencia is priced lower, at \$1.39 per pound in June when navel oranges are \$1.49, then our government assumes you buy the lower-cost orange, whether or not you actually do so. The price change from \$1.39 in December of 2018 for the navel oranges to \$1.39 in June of 2019 for the Valencias would show no price increase at all for oranges. It would show prices are flat, and that would be reflected then in the overall CPI.

One obvious problem is the fact that consumers can’t always readily substitute lower-costing items in certain expenditure categories, especially for things like medical services and prescription drugs. The problem of how our government calculates price inflation affects more than just Social Security benefits. The consumer price index is also used to adjust many federal programs and other aspects of our laws such as the federal poverty limits and the federal tax code. By growing more slowly, fewer people qualify for safety net programs, or the federal tax code exemptions become less generous over time, and taxpayers pay more in taxes.

Since the start of the first CPI in 1940, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has made changes to how it calculates price inflation — most recently announcing changes to how they collect price data. A new paper reports that the BLS has undertaken several pilot projects in an attempt to supplement and/or replace its traditional field collection of price data with “alternative sources.” If that sounds suspicious, you have good reason to ask questions. The BLS Handbook of Methods lists more than 21 changes (see Chap 17) that economists have made to how they calculate the CPI since 1987. In most cases the so-called “improvements” tend to slow the measured rate of inflation. That means the growth in COLAs is cut and Social Security benefits grow more slowly over time. In short, this boils down to an erosion in the buying power of your Social Security benefits when, in reality, prices are actually going up.

The COLA isn’t living up to the promise of protecting the buying power of your benefits, and retirees are getting short changed. We need to work together to enact legislation that will provide a more fair and adequate COLA. To learn how you can get involved visit: www.SeniorsLeague.org [Source: The Senior Citizens League | Editor Mary Johnson | July 16, 2019 ++]

SSIA Update 06 ► Widow's Tax | Lets End This Terrible Wrong

On Aug. 14, 1966, during the Vietnam War, Congress established a savings plan created for the benefit of American servicemen who were fighting in combat zones. This plan had excellent intent: to allow the pay of these servicemen to accrue at a rate of 10% interest per year tax-free. However, there were glaring exclusions to the plan: Prisoners of War and Missing in Action servicemen, and therefore, their wives and families, were NOT allowed access to this plan.

POW/MIA wives thought this must be an oversight and would be swiftly amended, but the U.S. Comptroller General soon ruled against allowing their families to participate in the new savings plan. This law added insult to injury for POW and MIA wives who had already suffered numerous indignities due to their husband's imprisoned or missing status. For example, they were not able to cash their husbands' paychecks. After many lobbying efforts, the POW/MIA wives and their dependents were admitted (albeit reluctantly) into the 10% savings plan in 1967. Now, in 2019, 53 years after the Congressional legislation excluded American POW/MIA wives and families from financial policies that would benefit them, the government continues to follow this same unjust pattern by excluding military widows and widowers from the full compensatory payments they deserve.

The so-called military "widows tax" punishes the survivors of veterans by decreasing the benefits received by their spouse. Service members, upon retirement, can elect to enroll in the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuity from the Defense Department. However, if a service member is killed while on active duty the SBP annuity is automatic. If a retiree, who is participating in the SBP, dies from service-related causes, their spouse is eligible to receive a separate annuity from the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) from the Veterans Affairs Department. The catch: If both policies are activated, the SBP payments from the Defense Department are reduced depending on the amount of DIC received from the Veterans Affairs Department by the surviving spouse. This reduction or offset affects nearly 66,000 military spouses who lose up to \$12,000 a year.

Mary Ann "Pat" Mearns is one of the West Coast heroines of Heath Hardage Lee's new book: *The League of Wives: The Untold Story of the Women Who Took on the U.S. Government to Bring Their Husbands Home*. Pat's husband, Air Force Capt. Arthur "Art" Mearns, was shot down in 1966 in a mission over Vietnam. Art was characterized as missing in action (MIA) for 11 years before his remains were repatriated. He was finally laid to rest in Arlington National Ceremony.

After Art's shoot-down, Pat became a leader of the National League of Families for American Prisoners of War and Missing in Southeast Asia. She fought alongside National League founder Sybil Stockdale and other brave women who lobbied tirelessly to bring the POWs home and to account for the MIAs. Instead of being honored and heralded for her activism, she experienced decades of benefit reduction. Pat was a school nurse in the toughest neighborhoods in Los Angeles for years. She raised two daughters by herself.

Katie Groves' husband, Army Chief Warrant Officer 3 James Groves III, was killed in Afghanistan in 2013. She was left with two young sons ages 9 and 12 to raise alone. All without the benefit of the SBP monies she should have rightly received. Katie feels that the widow's tax should be viewed as "an issue of fairness and justice for the soldiers that willingly fought for our country thinking their families left behind would be taken care of. I guarantee most soldiers today are not aware of the offset. Why would any soldier willing buy into it knowing their family may not receive the benefit in the end?"

This month, the House added an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would repeal the widows tax. The legislation now moves to a joint conference of House and Senate members for approval. Military spouses are American home front heroines and heroes who deserve equitable financial support. Abolishing the military widows tax should be a unifying cause for Americans today — just as the POW/MIA issue was under the leadership of POW/MIA wives like Sybil Stockdale and Pat Mearns in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

“As a nation, we have broken a contract with these widows,” MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret), says. “And while more than 350 members of the House of Representatives have said it’s time to put an end to this offset, a political stalemate over funding could derail our best efforts again. Congress, on multiple occasions, has found the resources in the past to address these types of problems — let’s find a solution that once and for all ends this terrible wrong.” [Source: MOAA | Heath Hardage Lee | July 11, 2019 ++]

Social Security Q & A ► 190715 thru 190731

(Q) Will the ‘One-Half’ Rule Slash My Benefit? “I was born in 1953. My ex-spouse was born in 1952. We were married 31 years before we divorced. He began collecting Social Security when he reached his full retirement age of 66 last year. I am guessing that he is getting the maximum monthly allowance for Social Security. I was not going to take mine until I turned 70. My benefit at 66 was probably around \$1,650 to \$1,700 a month. Can I still claim one-half of his benefit until I reach age 70 and then switch to mine, which should be about 30% higher at that time? I thought that there was a rule that my Social Security benefit had to be less than one-half of my ex-spouse’s before I could collect one-half of his (assuming other requirements, like marriage for 10 years, are met). In other words, I do not think that I can claim one-half of his benefit until I reach 70, because my benefit is larger than one-half of his right now.”

Answer. You are in luck. Since you were born prior to 1954, you can take advantage of an opportunity that is not available to those born in 1954 or later. Specifically, when you reach your full retirement age (FRA) — which is 66 for you — you can claim half of your ex-spouse’s FRA benefit amount, allowing your own benefit to grow at 8% a year until age 70. This claiming strategy is often referred to as a “restricted application,” since you are restricting your application for benefits to ex-spousal benefits only. Note that this strategy does not require that your own FRA benefit be less than one-half your ex’s FRA benefit. This “one-half rule” is important, but under different circumstances, as discussed shortly.

Sometimes, people confuse the restricted application strategy with the file-and-suspend strategy. These strategies have some similarities, but they are indeed different. Moreover, the file-and-suspend strategy was eliminated as of April 2016. So, if you are talking with a Social Security representative, take care to use the phrase “restricted application” and not “file-and-suspend.” If you mention “file-and-suspend,” you will be told something like: “That option no longer exists, so let’s move on to the rest of your application for benefits.” Finally, let’s return to the one-half rule.

This rule is important when you claim your own retirement benefits. If your FRA benefits are less than one-half your ex’s FRA retirement benefits, then you qualify for a spousal supplement. If your FRA benefits equal or exceed one-half of your ex’s FRA benefits, then you do not qualify. Your case illustrates the complexities of Social Security. Clearly, you could benefit from some inexpensive professional help. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Russell Settle | July 25, 2019 ++]

Car Buying Update 02 ► Secrets Car Dealers Hope You Don’t Know

Knowing how dealerships work is the key to getting the lowest price on your next ride. When the sales manager says, “You’re killing me on this, I’m not making any money on this deal.” That is most likely a fib. In the auto industry dealers bank on huge bonuses from their manufacturers for selling cars. Basically, that’s a payment for each car — for example, \$500 a car — paid when a dealer sells a specific number of designated models during a set time period. Some

automakers have discontinued stair-step incentives at the insistence of dealers. But there are plenty of other ways to make sure you snare the best possible deal on a car.

1. Shop at large dealerships

Forget the adage that small dealerships will give you better deals. Large dealers can move hundreds of cars every month, so they can likely afford to sell at least a few cars for less than the invoice price. Remember, some automakers still offer stair-step awards to dealers. And even if they don't, they may offer other incentives for meeting sales targets or moving specific models.

2. Allow dealers to compete for your sale

There's no need to drive all over town and haggle. Once you have made a list of the models you want to consider, simply go to the automakers' websites. Use the "find a dealer" tool and allow dealers to contact you. Don't shy away from letting dealers know you are talking to others. That puts you in a position of power. One tip: Make sure you get an "out-the-door" price that includes all taxes, fees and extras. You don't want to bank on an ultra-low price only to discover you also have to pay for multiple extras. If you need a car loan, don't forget to shop for the best deal on that as well. Military related Credit Unions usually offer some pretty good rates.

3. Be pleasant

Do you want to work with someone who is unpleasant or hostile? Neither do car salespeople. Yes, they want to sell cars for as much money as possible. They know you want to pay as little as possible. But if your salesperson likes you, he or she may point you to models that better suit your needs and budget — and may sway the sales manager to give you extras or even a price break.

4. Remember, loyalty pays off

If you — or a friend — have worked with a specific salesperson in the past, email him or her directly when you are in the market for a new car. Salespeople who have established client bases are valuable to dealerships. They will work hard to win you a good deal because that increases their professional value.

5. Consider a soon-to-be-discontinued model

Considered models you know dealers are anxious to move such as those that will be discontinued soon. Also, check to see if they have dealer test cars available for sale with low mileage on them. If you are making a loan these are still considered new cars which might result in you obtaining the loan at a lower interest rate.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Nancy Dunham | July 29, 2019 ++]

Social Ad Scam ► "Ad Launderers" Offer Cash for Access to Your Facebook Account

Everyone knows giving a stranger access to your Facebook account is a bad idea. But so-called "ad launderers" are making an offer some people can't resist: quick, easy cash. It might sound like a good way to make money but, it's a bad idea.

How the Scam Works

- You come across a website that says you can rent out your Facebook account for easy cash deposited straight into your PayPal or bank account. Some companies may even claim they only need access to the ad account and therefore your personal account won't be affected. All you have to do is install a special program on your computer and/or hand over your login and password.
- There are several ways this deal can go bad. First, when the company gains access to your Facebook account, your personal information can be compromised. If you are asked to install software on your computer, you

may install malware with it, which can also give a multitude of strangers access to your personal information – including your personal photos and banking information. In one BBB Scam Tracker report, a consumer agreed to receive payments via PayPal, only to have the company use his PayPal account to spend more than \$200 on Facebook ads.

- In addition, even if you don't become a victim of identity theft, your account may be used to help shady companies get around Facebook restrictions. Companies may use your information to promote casinos, dubious health supplements, or other products that can get your account banned from Facebook entirely.

How to Avoid Social Ad Scams

- Never give strangers access to your social media accounts. Not only can they post harmful material under your name, they can easily gain access to your sensitive personal information.
- Beware of easy money schemes. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. If a company promises to pay you for doing nothings, there's probable a catch.
- Never install an unknown program on your computer. This can download malware onto your computer, giving scammers access to all the personal information they need to commit identity theft.

For More Information

To stay alert and avoid falling for scams, read www.BBB.org/ScamTips. If you've been a victim of a scam, report it on the www.BBB.org/ScamTracker. Your report can help other consumers to protect themselves and their loved ones from similar scams.

[Source: BBB Scam Alerts | July 25, 2019 ++]

Military Consumers Update 02 ► At Higher Risk for Marketplace Losses

Military consumers face unique challenges in the marketplace that can result in higher median losses to scammers and other marketplace fraud, according to the Better Business Bureau's new report, Military Consumers & Marketplace Trust: An Analysis of Marketplace Challenges Facing the Military Community (BBB.org/MilitaryReport). The report looked at the more than 28,000 business complaints and 5,000 scam reports submitted to BBB by military consumers in 2018 and then compared those to reports of all consumers in the U.S. and Canada to highlight key differences reported by military consumers. The BBB Institute for Marketplace Trust partnered with the Association of Military Banks of America to release this report during Military Consumer Month.

Military consumers reported losing a median of \$200 when falling victim to a scam, according to data collected through BBB Scam Tracker®, BBB's interactive online reporting tool (www.BBB.org/ScamTracker). This is 32% higher than the \$152 reported by all consumers in 2018. One scenario in which military consumers are often forced to make quicker purchasing decisions than the majority of consumers is during Permanent Change of Station moves. Military consumers filed more complaints about securing and maintaining their homes, moving, and purchases related to relocation than the general population, and they also reported higher rates of losing money to home improvement scammers. Relocation can also make finding secure, stable employment a challenge for spouses and other family members.

"Employment scams were the riskiest scams for military consumers, as they were for all consumers in 2018, according to the BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report," BBB Institute Executive Director Melissa Lanning Trumpower said. "The difference is that for military consumers the median losses reported were \$2,460—more than double that of all consumers." Because scammers don't care about legalities or ethics, education is a consumer's best defense in preventing themselves from losing money to fraudsters. Reports like the one released today help guide the education efforts of BBB and its partners.

For more details from Military Consumers & Marketplace Trust: An Analysis of Marketplace Challenges Facing the Military Community, view the full report at www.BBB.org/MilitaryReport. Learn more about BBB Military Line and BBB's resources and tools for military consumers at www.BBB.org/Military. [Source: Fairbault Daily News | Suzy Rook | July 26, 2019 ++]

Tax Burden for Ohio Retired Vets ► As of JUL 2019

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

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 5.75% (food, newspapers, magazine subscriptions, telephone service and prescription drugs exempt); Counties levy additional sales taxes which may add up to 2.25% in additional sales tax.

Gasoline Tax: 46.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Diesel Fuel Tax: 52.4 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

Cigarette Tax: \$1.60 per pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low. 1.98% starting at \$10,850 to \$16,299 bracket & High 5% on \$217,400+ bracket for tax year 2018

Income Brackets: Seven - Bracket levels adjusted for inflation each year. Release dates for tax bracket inflation adjustments vary by state and may fall after the end of the applicable tax year.

Personal Exemptions: Ohio's personal and dependent exemptions are \$2,350 for an AGI of \$40,000 or less, \$2,100 if AGI is between \$40,001 and \$80,000, and \$1,850 if AGI is \$80,000 or above.

Standard Deduction: n/a

Medical/Dental Deduction: Unreimbursed medical/dental expenses, premiums for long-term care insurance, and unsubsidized health insurance premiums are deductible.

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None.

Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security is exempt. Ohio provides a credit for retirement and pension income that is received on account of retirement. To qualify for this credit, the adjusted gross income less exemptions must be less than \$100,000. The credit is capped at \$200.00 and is based upon the amount of the distribution reported on form 1099-R. The credit is not applicable for separation of employment, loans against the retirement plan, or rollovers. Seniors 65 and over may claim a \$50 credit. Only one credit is allowed for each return. Out-of-state government pensions can be applied toward the retirement income credit. Taxpayers can deduct the following benefits only to the extent that they are included in the taxpayers federal adjusted gross income: Social Security, Tier 1 and Tier II Railroad Retirement benefits, and supplemental and other Railroad Retirement benefits.

Retired Military pay: Military retired pay of taxpayers who retired from service in the active or reserve components of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or from the National Guard can deduct their military retirement income to the extent that income is not otherwise deducted or excluded in computing federal or Ohio adjusted gross income. Taxpayers who served in the military and receive a federal civil service retirement pension are also eligible for a limited deduction if any portion of their federal retirement pay is based on credit for their military service. These retirees can deduct only the amount of their federal retirement pay that is attributable to their military service. Military taxpayers refer to http://www.tax.ohio.gov/ohio_taxes.aspx and <http://www.tax.ohio.gov>.

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

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

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

Property Taxes

The taxable base is the assessed value of land and buildings. Assessed value is 35% of market value, except for certain agricultural land. County auditors must reappraise all real estate every six years. A homestead exemption is available to the homesteads of qualified homeowners who are either at least 65 years old, permanently and totally disabled, or at least 59 years of age and the surviving spouse of a deceased taxpayer who had previously received the exemption. For more details refer to http://www.tax.ohio.gov/ohio_taxes.aspx. The Homestead Exemption is limited to the homestead, which Ohio law defines as an owner's dwelling and up to one acre of land. The value of the exemption may not exceed the value of the homestead. The 2016 income threshold is \$31,500, the 2017 threshold is \$31,800, and the 2018 threshold is \$32,200.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

Ohio does not have an estate tax or an inheritance tax.

Other State Tax Rates

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

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

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Visit the Ohio Department of Taxation site <https://ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/site/residents/topic-hubs/income-taxes/income-taxes> for further information and <https://www.tax.ohio.gov/faq.aspx> for frequently asked questions.

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-new-york-wyoming#OHIO> JUL 2019 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest ► 16 thru 31 JUL 2019

- **Paperclips.** Check out <https://youtu.be/z2TQExXNWjo> to see some of the ways you can use paperclips other than their intended purpose.
- **Iran.** Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said 16 JUL his country does not want a war with the U.S. but said President Donald Trump must lift harsh economic sanctions on Tehran to clear the way for

negotiations. "Once those sanctions are lifted, then ... the room for negotiation is wide open," Zarif said during a visit to New York for a U.N. conference. As tensions have flared between Washington and Tehran in recent weeks, Trump has said that he is open to talks with Iran without preconditions but that he was determined to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

- **D.C. Statehood.** Every Democrat running for president in 2020 has come out in favor of making Washington, D.C., the nation's 51st state. But a new Gallup poll found support for granting full statehood to D.C. as low as ever — across the political spectrum. They found 29 percent of adults polled in June support statehood, and 64 percent oppose it.
- **June CPI.** The June 2019 CPI is 249.747, 1.4 percent above the FY 2019 COLA baseline. The Consumer Price Index for July is scheduled to be released Aug. 13. The CPI baseline for FY 2019 is 246.352.
- **Welcome to America Again.** Songwriter Mark E. Smith teamed with singer Terry Lee Tyler in the early 1990s to produce this version at <https://youtu.be/b6UQ4YolfJk> of the welcome home tribute. Later in years, it was put with the backdrop, "The Wall That Heals" to create a powerful message for those who fought in the Vietnam War that they never got when returning to America, which is to feel welcomed home.
- **DDG-117:** The Navy commissioned its newest Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Paul Ignatius on July 27, at Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale, FL. The ship is named in honor of Paul Robert Ignatius, who served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, and later during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration as assistant secretary of defense for installations and logistics from 1964 - 1967, and secretary of the Navy from 1967 - 1969.
- **Soaring Valor.** Check out the 8 min video at <https://www.youtube.com/embed/13P15s4zWNQ> to see what 45 WWII veterans experienced during the Gary Sinise Foundation event which took them to visit the National WWII Museum in New Orleans.
- **Legion Act.** Passed Congress and before the President for signature. Will allow post-Vietnam vets to join American Legion.
- **B-52.** Click on "[cockpit](#)" to see for the first time the inside of a B-52's cockpit in flight.
- **Good news, Congress is away. Bad news, they'll be back!** Most office-holders left town last week and won't be back until Sept. 9.
- **Nearly Useless Factoid.** All rooms in the Capitol Building are designated as either S (for Senate) or H (for House), depending on whether they are north (Senate) or south (House) of the Rotunda. Additionally, all addresses in Washington, D.C., are designated N.E., N.W., S.E., or S.W., in relation to the Rotunda as well.
- **Marijuana Use.** According to Gallup, Marijuana use among Americans (12%) is now nearly as prevalent as cigarette smoking, which has hit a 75-year low of 15%.
- **911 Lawsuit.** Alleged Sep 11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed has opened the door to helping victims of the terrorist attacks in their lawsuit against Saudi Arabia if the US government spares him the death penalty at a Guantanamo Bay military commission, according to court documents.
- **B-1 Bomber.** Only six of the Air Force's 61 B-1 bombers are fully mission-capable Sen. Mike Rounds (R-SD) said during a Senate Armed Services Committee confirmation hearing on 30 JUL.

[Source: Various | July 31, 2019 ++]

Criminal Justice Reform ► **First Step Act to Release 2200 Federal Inmates**

More than 2,200 inmates are reportedly set to be released under the First Step Act, a bill signed into law last year by President Trump that reduces mandatory minimum sentences in certain instances. A Justice Department official told The Associated Press that under the law's resentencing provisions, more than 1,600 inmates have qualified for a reduced sentence, while more than 1,100 have been released. Barr told the AP that the Justice Department and Bureau of Prisons

are “all in in terms of making it work.” "I’m impressed with how it’s going,” he said of the law's implementation. “While there are a few things I probably would have done a little bit different, I generally support the thrust of the First Step Act.”

Advocates of the measure have urged the Bureau of Prisons and DOJ to have stronger oversight of the First Step Act's implementation, the AP noted, and have called for Congress and the Trump administration to commit to allocating necessary funding. The First Step Act reduces mandatory minimum sentences in certain instances, offers resources for former inmates seeking employment and expands on "good time credits" for well-behaved prisoners looking for shorter sentences. Barr is reportedly slated to reveal a risk-assessment tool that could speed up the release of certain federal prisoners this week. [Source: The Hill | Rachel Frazin | July 13, 2019 ++]

Trump Border Wall ► Supreme Court Freeze on Pentagon Money Use

The Trump administration on 12 JUL asked the Supreme Court to lift a freeze on Pentagon money it wants to use to build sections of a border wall with Mexico. Two lower courts have ruled against the administration in a lawsuit over the funding. Last week, a divided three-judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco kept in place a lower court ruling preventing the government from tapping Defense Department counterdrug money to build high-priority sections of wall in Arizona, California and New Mexico.



At stake in the case is billions of dollars that would allow Trump to make progress on a major 2016 campaign promise heading into his race for a second term. Trump ended a 35-day government shutdown in February after Congress gave him approximately \$1.4 billion in border wall funding, far less than the \$5.7 billion he was seeking. Trump then declared a national emergency to take cash from other government accounts to use to construct sections of wall. The money includes \$3.6 billion from military construction funds, \$2.5 billion from Defense Department counterdrug activities and \$600 million from the Treasury Department's asset forfeiture fund. The Treasury Department funds have so far survived legal challenges, and the transfer of the military construction funds has not yet been approved.

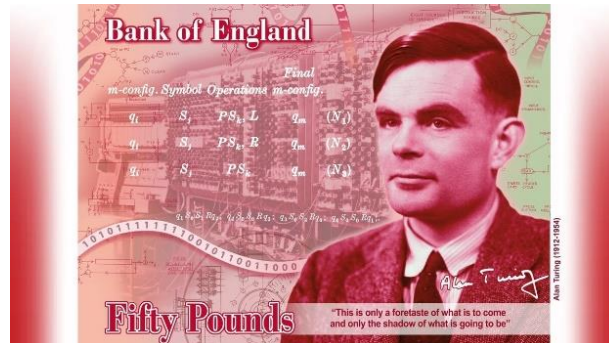
At issue in the case before the Supreme Court is just the \$2.5 billion in Defense Department funds, which the administration says will be used to construct more than 100 miles of fencing. The lawsuit challenging the use of those funds was brought by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of the Sierra Club and Southern Border Communities Coalition. Late Friday, Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan gave the groups until the afternoon of July 19 to respond in writing to the Trump administration's filing.

The administration wants the Supreme Court to lift the freeze on the Department of Defense money while it continues its case at the appeals court and, if necessary, appeals to the Supreme Court. The administration says the trial judge who initially heard the case and put a freeze on the funds was wrong and that the groups bringing the lawsuit don't have a right to sue. [Source: The Associated Press | July 14, 2019 ++]

WWII Cryptologist Honored ► Chosen As the Face of New English Currency

Alan Turing, the brilliant mathematician credited with deciphering Nazi Germany's impenetrable Enigma code, has been chosen as the face of Britain's new £50 note. Bank of England Governor Mark Carney confirmed the selection 15 JUL in an announcement at the Science and Industry Museum in Manchester, calling Turing "a giant on whose shoulders so many now stand." "As the father of computer science and artificial intelligence, as well as war hero, Alan Turing's contributions were far ranging and pathbreaking," Carney said.

Turing is best remembered for his groundbreaking work at Bletchley Park alongside other British cryptologists, whose collective efforts are credited with shortening the war and saving thousands of lives. This period of his life was the subject of the 2014 feature film, "The Imitation Game," starring Benedict Cumberbatch as Turing. The film was nominated for eight Academy Awards and took home the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay. Turing, whose pre- and post-war endeavors at the National Physical Laboratory and the University of Manchester have been credited with laying some of the groundwork for modern technology, was never recognized during his lifetime for his accomplishments due to his homosexuality — a crime in England until 1967.



British authorities arrested and charged Turing with "gross indecency" in 1952. He was subsequently forced to choose between imprisonment or a regimen of chemical castration. Turing committed suicide in 1954, two years after beginning the ongoing procedure of hormonal injection. He was 41 years old. It would not be until 2014, following multiple petitions and at the behest of Justice Minister Chris Grayling, that Turing was issued a royal pardon by Queen Elizabeth II. "Society didn't understand Alan Turing or his ideas on many levels but that was a reflection on us, not on him," technology entrepreneur [Mike Lynch told the BBC in 2013](#). "It has taken us 60 years to catch up."

Turing was chosen for the £50 note from a list of candidates that included Ada Lovelace, Mary Anning, Paul Dirac, Rosalind Franklin and Stephen Hawking. The bill features a number of elements that pay homage to the life and mind of Turing, including:

- Blueprints for the British Bombe, the primary machine used to break the Nazi Enigma code
- A quote by Turing that reads, "This is only a foretaste of what is to come, and only the shadow of what is going to be"
- Ticker tape with binary code that, when translated, spells out Alan Turing's date of birth.

"Alan Turing was a remarkable man who played a key role in saving this country in World War II by cracking the German Enigma code," then-British Prime Minister David Cameron said in 2013. "His action saved countless lives. He also left a remarkable national legacy through his substantial scientific achievements, often being referred to as the 'father of modern computing.'" The note will appear in circulation by the end of 2021. [Source: MilitaryTimes | J.D. Simkins | July 15, 2019 ++]

116th Congress ► Members Born Outside of U.S. | 29

There are 29 congressional members who were born outside the United States – 24 representatives and five senators. Twenty-five are Democrats and four are Republicans. This total represents members who were either born outside the United States to parents from another country or those born in another country to American parents. There are 14 congressional members who were born outside the United States, all of whom are Democrats, who became U.S. citizens. Thirteen of the 14 members of Congress born outside of the United States to non-American parents serve in the House of Representatives. Three of them are from Mexico – Salud Carbajal and Raul Ruiz (California) and Jesus Garcia (Illinois), and two are from India – Raja Krishnamoorthi (Illinois) and Pramila Jayapal (Washington). Other congressional members were born in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Taiwan, Poland, Ecuador, Vietnam, and Guatemala. The lone senator born outside of the United States to parents who are not American is Mazie Hirono of Hawaii, who was born in Japan. There are four other senators who were born in other countries to American parents [Source: USA Today | John Harrington | July 15, 2019++]

ARA San Juan (S-42) Sinking ► Navy Brass, Low Budgets Blamed

An Argentine legislative commission has concluded that the sinking of a submarine with all 44 crew members was caused by the inefficiency of naval commanders and budget limitations, discarding theories the vessel was attacked or hit by a ship. In a report released 18 JUL, the legislators also questioned the handling of the crisis by Defense Minister Oscar Aguad and President Mauricio Macri, who the commission said showed a “low level of involvement with everything related to the tragedy.”



The TR-1700-class diesel-electric submarine San Juan disappeared on Nov. 15, 2017, in the South Atlantic as it sailed back to its base at the port of Mar del Plata after participating in a training exercise. The wreckage wasn't found until almost a year later at a depth of 800 meters (2,625 feet) east of Patagonia's Valdes Peninsula. The discovery was made by a ship from the U.S. Company Ocean Infinity, which had been hired to search. "The hypotheses that the submarine was attacked by a foreign warship, hit by a fishing vessel or was performing secret tasks outside of jurisdictional waters have been discarded," said the commission, which was made up of lawmakers from different parties, including the governing party.

The report pointed to budget limitations in recent years as contributing to the disaster as well as "the failure to update technologies and maintain a minimal level of maintenance based on hours of use that produced a growing deterioration" of the submarine. The navy "tried to continue to fulfill its ordered missions with increasingly reduced

budgets. It accepted as normal operating under conditions that were far from optimal for the task," the report said. The government did not immediately comment on the report.

The night before the submarine disappeared, the crew reported that the entry of water into the ventilation system had started a fire in one of the battery tanks. The vessel surfaced and continued sailing. Its captain reported the next day that the situation was controlled and that he was preparing to descend to 40 meters (131 feet) to assess the damage and reconnect the batteries. Nothing more was heard from the submarine. "Fires in the battery tanks of submarines are very serious accidents ... the issue was underestimated by the entire chain of command" of the navy, the commission said.

The report said the then-commander of the submarine force, Claudio Villamide, "did not seek advice from qualified technical personnel." It said the naval chain of command "did not transmit to political leaders information in a detailed and complete form." The commission said the defense minister was aware of the state of the fleet and the risks facing the submarine when it participated in the exercise. Regarding the search operation, it said, "there was evidence of a lack of leadership in the face of the crisis as well as concealment of the circumstances of the tragedy from family members and public opinion." The report was presented in Argentina's Senate in the presence of family members of the crew, whose remains still lie at the bottom of the sea. Experts who participated in the search that located the wreck have said raising it to the surface would be too risky and expensive.

"This is historic, that a legislative commission is so expeditious and clear in investigating" the tragedy, said Luis Tagliapietra, father of one of the crew members. "I think that the responsibilities are clear." The German-built submarine that sank was commissioned in the mid-1980s and was most recently refitted between 2008 and 2014. During the \$12 million retrofitting, the vessel was cut in half and had its engines and batteries replaced. Experts said refits can be difficult because they involve integrating systems produced by different manufacturers, and even the tiniest mistake during the cutting phase can put the safety of the vessel and crew at risk. [Source: The Associated Press | Deborah Rey | July 19, 2019 ++]

Strait of Hormuz ► Why It Is So Important

Global shipping is constrained by geography. Massive oil tankers and cargo ships – carrying over 90 percent of global trade flows by weight – converge in narrow straits. The result: The world's key shipping lanes are often crowded. This geostrategic significance came into fresh focus when Iran's President Hassan Rouhani recently threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz following the Trump administration's decision to leave the Iran nuclear deal.

What is the Strait of Hormuz?

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's key maritime chokepoints. This narrow seaway connects the Indian Ocean with the Arabian/Persian Gulf. For all of recorded history, the seaway has connected Arab and Persian civilizations with the Indian subcontinent, Pacific Asia and the Americas. For example, before the rise of European seaborne empires in the 15th and 16th centuries, porcelain from China and spices from the Indochina peninsula often passed through the strait on their way to Central Asia and Europe.

Today the Strait of Hormuz separates the modern Iranian state from the countries of Oman and the United Arab Emirates, which have strong defense connections with the United States and Saudi Arabia. All shipping traffic from energy-rich Gulf countries converges in the strait, including crude oil and liquefied natural gas exports from Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Twenty percent of the world's crude oil flows through this 21-mile wide waterway.

This maritime chokepoint became an arena of conflict during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s. Each side in the so-called "Tanker War" tried to sink the other's energy exports. To avoid being targeted, Kuwaiti oil tankers were

reflagged under the U.S. shipping registry. Although crude oil continued to flow, marine insurance rates for vessels operating in the strait spiked by as much as 400 percent. Those higher costs likely contributed to higher gasoline and diesel prices worldwide.

What is happening now?

So are American consumers likely to suffer because of Rouhani’s threat? Iran does not need superior military strength to fulfill its threat to disrupt trade flows through the strait. It could damage commercial shipping with relatively cheap anti-ship missiles, fast patrol boats, submarines and mines. But analysis from retired Adm. Dennis Blair and Kenneth Libenthal concluded that Iran would have trouble stopping all shipping through the strait. Modern cargo vessels are massive and difficult to disable. Unlike in the 1980s, most oil tankers now have double hulls, making them more difficult to sink.

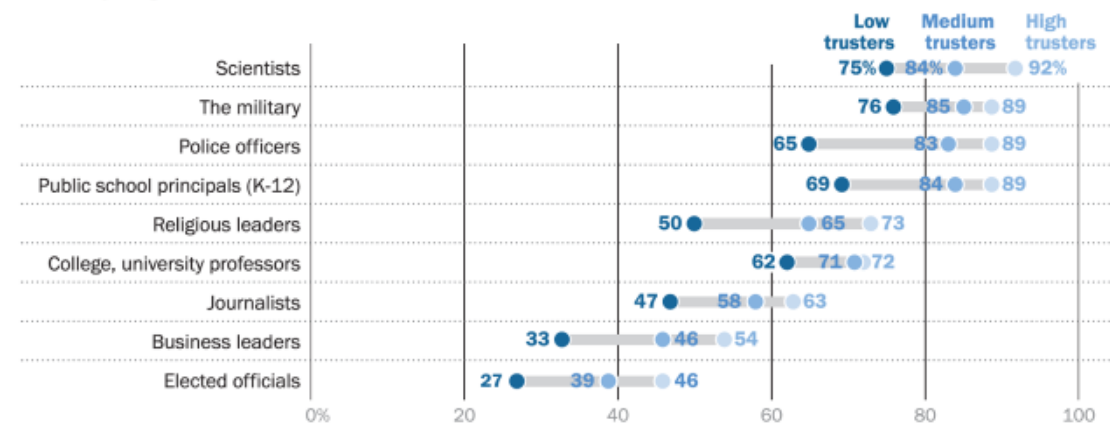
That said, even threats and modest disruption to commercial shipping could trigger economic damage in the form of higher marine insurance rates, crude oil supply concerns and unsettled stock markets. [Source: Tufts University | Rockford Weitz | July 20, 2019 ++]

Trust & Distrust in America ► Military Among the Most Trusted Public Institutions

The U.S. military remains among the most trusted public institutions in America but commands more respect among older generations than younger ones, according to a new survey from the Pew Research Center released 22 JUL. Researchers said their findings as a whole showed serious concerns among Americans in their public institutions. In interviews with more than 10,000 Americans conducted late last year, the center found that 69 percent believe the government intentionally withholds important information from the public that it could safely release, and 75 percent said federal agencies do not deserve any more public confidence than they current have.

Those with high personal trust have higher confidence in key leadership groups

% of U.S. adults in each group who have a great deal/fair amount of confidence that _____ will act in the best interests of the public



Note: The trust scale is built on questions about people’s general trust or distrust in others; their sense of the exploitative tendencies or fairness of others; and their assessment of the overall helpfulness or selfishness of others. For details, see Chapter 2 subsection “People sort along a continuum of personal trust.”

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018.

“Trust and Distrust in America”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The armed forces are one of the exceptions. In the survey, 83 percent of all respondents said they have confidence in the military “to act in the best interests of the public,” tied with scientists for the most of any group or institution listed. Police officers received a 78 percent confidence rating. For journalists, it was 55 percent. Elected officials were among the lowest in the survey, at 37 percent.

Public faith in the military is even higher in older generations — about 91 percent of those 50 or older said they have confidence in the institution — but was sharply lower among adults age 18 to 29. Only 69 percent of those younger respondents expressed confidence in the military — still a majority of the group, but less than the level for public school principals (75 percent) and college professors (74 percent).

The survey also showed higher rates of confidence in the military among Republicans (91 percent) than Democrats (76 percent). Among all individuals surveyed, about 39 percent said that a lack of confidence in government institutions makes it more difficult to find solutions to challenges like immigration, health care and racial strife. Only about 3 percent said that national security issues are hurt by the lack of faith in government. The full survey is available on the [Pew Research Center website](#). [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | July 22, 2019 ++]

Memories ► 1950's Brownies & Cub Scouts



Iran Tensions Update 06 ► Great Britain Can Find Neither Ships Nor Friends

It was a knife-twist that originated in Florida, but it was felt across the Atlantic. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, appearing 22 JUL on Fox News via a live feed from the VFW convention in Orlando, was asked by anchor Brian Kilmeade what the United States’ role was in helping the United Kingdom get its tanker back, which was seized by Iran in a tit-for-tat raid at sea after the U.K. seized an Iranian tanker suspected of smuggling oil to Syria. "The responsibility ... falls to the United Kingdom to take care of their ships," Pompeo said. America’s top diplomat went on to say that the U.S. had a role in policing the Strait of Hormuz, but that “the world has a big role in this, too, to keep these sea lanes open,” he continued. “I’m convinced we’ll do that.”

It was a loaded answer, and the subtext wasn’t missed in the United Kingdom: The U.K. has the responsibility to protect its own ships, but doesn’t have the Navy it needs to do it. Like the U.S. Navy, the Royal Navy has seen a decline in the size of its fleet since the 1980s, only in the case of the Royal Navy, it had fewer ships to lose to start with. The U.S. Navy has struggled to maintain its global commitments with a fleet of 290 ships, and it has seen a 52

percent decrease from its 1987 peak of 594 ships. The U.S. Navy is today pursuing a goal of 355 ships. But during roughly the same time period the Royal Navy has lost more than 40 percent of its fleet, that stood at more than 130 ships. Today's Royal Navy numbers fewer than 80 ships.

Both fleets made similar decisions to focus on high-end capabilities to the detriment of good-old fashioned capacity, trusting to allies and partners to help make up shortfalls where necessary. But the U.S. is tied up on other missions, is renewing its focus on fighting big powers like Russia and China, and is hoping against hope to get itself disentangled from Middle East conflicts. So Iran's seizure of a British tanker, with no Royal Navy assets close enough to stop it, has exposed the shortcomings of a capability over capacity trades that Britain made since the end of the Cold War, experts said. "About \$88 trillion of global [gross domestic product] is being borne by seaborne assets, and they are being protected by fewer than 1,000 gray hulls in the world – talking about the United States and its allies and partners," said Jerry Hendrix, a retired Navy captain and analyst with Telemus Group. "And those who would align themselves against us – Iran, Russia, China – they are choosing to interpret the global international system differently.

"The British pulled back in order to consolidate their resources on the high end. And now they have tankers that are being taken at sea. So you can't have it both ways. That's why I've been arguing for a balance between war-winning capabilities and peace-preserving capacity." The draw-down was a deliberate strategy that bet a lot on the U.K.'s relationship with the United States, said Bryan Clark, a retired U.S. Navy submarine officer and analyst with the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. "The UK's strategy, if you look at their most recent [Strategic Defense and Security Review], they say is that 'Our job is to plug into a U.S.-led force in support of some larger operation, whether that is against a great power or against someone like a Libya,'" Clark said. "And they've designed a Navy and a force that's like a small version of the U.S. Military, with the idea that they plug that in to the US military. And that led them to pursue those two aircraft carriers, submarines, and if you look on the ground, they've got some really high-end units, but they're really small. They are designed to plug in."

The primary focus for the Royal Navy is to build its two new aircraft carriers, along with the escorts necessary to defend it, to augment a US force in a large-scale operation. The U.K. is also building a new ballistic missile sub to contribute to deterrence patrols. That strategy, however, leaves little for holding down presence in places where the U.K. has national security interests, Clark continued. "It doesn't leave a lot of money left over for the low-end capabilities you'd need for maritime security patrol, for example," he said. "They're not designing a global, full-spectrum military. They're designing a military that can plug in with the US for large-scale operations." That strategy works, however, only if the U.S. is willing to commit forces to help protect British interests. But with the advent of the Trump administration and its "America First" policies that demand a greater share of the burden from allies, the faith that America will always be there may no longer be well founded.

'Too Small'

Nobody missed the point when Pompeo told Fox News that the U.K. had to look after its own ships. Immediately when the news broke, U.K. national security Twitter became inundated with grumpy and sarcastic tweet about the "special relationship" between the U.S. and U.K. But they needn't have been surprised. In June, the Pentagon's number two officer, Air Force Gen. Paul Selva, told a group of reporters that the rising threat to shipping in the Strait of Hormuz was not solely the responsibility of the United States. "I think there is a military role in defending freedom of navigation," Selva said. "The question will be to what extent the international community is behind that effort. 'I'm not suggesting for a moment that we don't have a significant role to play in that space. But it will require an international consensus before force is used with one specific caveat: If the Iranians come after U.S. citizens, U.S. assets or U.S. military, we reserve the right to respond with a military action. They need to know that, it needs to be very clear.'" So far the U.S. offered to provide intelligence for an escort mission but has also said it will only escort U.S. shipping through the straits.

But that the Royal Navy isn't large enough to hold down such a mission to protect its ships on its own is something even the Ministry of Defense leadership openly acknowledged this week. "We have three of four vessels going through

100 nautical miles of waterway every single day,” said Tobias Ellwood, the MoD’s personnel and veterans’ chief, in an interview Sunday on Skye News. “It’s not just us, it’s the international community there is well. But it is impossible for us to escort each individual vessel. “If we want to continue playing a role on the international stage, given that threats are changing, all happening beneath the threshold of all-out war, then we must invest more in our defense, including in the Royal Navy. Our Royal Navy is too small to manage our interests across the globe.”

Little Help?

The talking points from US about the UK needing to protect their own ships have been consistent, even as Pompeo and Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Joe Dunford have tried with middling to no success to piece together a coalition of willing partners to patrol the straits, being dubbed “Operation Sentinel.” The U.K. has had its own issues finding a little help from their friends. A United Kingdom-led effort to organize a European mission to defend shipping in the Gulf has so-far fallen on deaf ears, with both France and Germany demurring when asked to pony up some assets for the mission, according to a Wednesday report in the Financial Times. Both Germany and France have cited concerns about escalating the situation. So far, both efforts have been a relative debacle.

The U.S. position to date is in line not just with the Pentagon’s messaging, but with the Trump administration’s America First policies. “It seems consistent with this idea that we want NATO to take responsibility for its own defense,” said Clark, the CSBA analyst. “In that view, this is an example of a country with far-flung interests that has failed to invest adequately in their defense. It fits perfectly in with that argument. “It’s consistent also with Mike Pompeo’s effort on Operation Sentinel: It’s a way to pressure other countries like Britain and Japan and even potentially China and India to fork over some capabilities to help defend their shipping.”

But neither should the emphasis on burden sharing from the Trump administration come as a surprise. For years, U.S. defense secretaries have harped on NATO countries to meet their obligation. In a 2011 speech by then-Defense Secretary Bob Gates in Brussels, he castigated European nations for allowing the U.S. and a select few other nations take on too much of the responsibility. “In the past, I’ve worried openly about NATO turning into a two-tiered alliance: Between members who specialize in ‘soft’ humanitarian, development, peacekeeping, and talking tasks, and those conducting the ‘hard’ combat missions,” Gates said. “Between those willing and able to pay the price and bear the burdens of alliance commitments, and those who enjoy the benefits of NATO membership – be they security guarantees or headquarters billets – but don’t want to share the risks and the costs. This is no longer a hypothetical worry. We are there today. And it is unacceptable. “Part of this predicament stems from a lack of will, much of it from a lack of resources in an era of austerity. For all but a handful of allies, defense budgets – in absolute terms, as a share of economic output – have been chronically starved for adequate funding for a long time, with the shortfalls compounding on themselves each year.”

The U.S. reluctance to lead the policing effort in the Gulf may not just be about telling other counties to police their own, however. Part of the U.S. reticence to lead an armed coalition may be an effort to deescalate the situation with Iran, said Hans Binnendijk, a transatlantic security expert with The Atlantic Council. “I think Trump is unhappy that [National Security Advisor John] Bolton and others have brought the U.S. this close to war with Iran,” he said. “He is trying to deescalate as events threaten to escalate.” However, according to Clark, if the U.S. Navy was in a position to help a British tanker in distress and deter a boarding, it is highly unlikely that the ship would just stand aside.

“In extremis, I don’t see a U.S. Navy ship commander saying, ‘Well I didn’t get orders to defend that ship so I’m going to let that guy burn,’” Clark said. “I don’t see that happening. I think this is more about keeping the pressure on the Brits [to invest in their security] than what you’d actually do in an operational scenario.”

Where are the Frigates?

Of the 55 ships the Royal Navy has shed from its force structure in the decades since the Falklands War in the early 1980s, half of those are frigates – generally ships that perform low-end missions such as security cooperation with smaller nations, presence and maritime security, which includes escorting tankers. This saves larger, more capable

ships for high-end missions such as air defense of high-value units such as an aircraft carrier. But what constitutes a frigate today is much different from what was considered a frigate in the 1980s. For example, the Type 21 frigate, which ran about £28 million in 1978 – a cost of about £165 today, or \$205 million today – would barely scratch the surface of paying for ships that are considered frigates today.



Image showing the Type 26 frigate design by BAE. The Type 26 is a high-end frigate designed for anti-submarine warfare. The Royal Navy has three under contract, with five more planned next decade.

Today, the U.S. littoral combat ship, famously considered under-armed and ill-equipped for modern naval combat, costs about \$360 million. And the ships competing for the U.S. frigate program, the FFG(X), includes several European frigate designs and all are struggling to meet the Navy’s goal of just under \$1 billion per hull. That’s a global trend that makes mass-producing “frigates” to perform maritime security operations and other low-end missions more costly than ever. “Today, European nations are producing ‘frigates’ that just recently you or I would call ‘destroyers,’ based on size and, somewhat, on capability,” said Steve Wills, an analyst and retired naval officer with CNA. “Those ships want to joint up with a coalition, be part of coalitions with U.S. forces – they’re bigger, longer-range ships. The Type 23 that they’re employing right now are perfect for that kind of mission. So, they’ve gone in that direction, but they have much less.”

But the need for a less expensive frigate is one that the U.K. has recognized and is already moving out on, but not without some controversy. The Royal Navy is pursuing a budget frigate, the Type 31e, and recently awarded design contracts to BAE, Atlas Elektronik and Babcock. The program aims to get five new frigates for £1.25 billion, a low number that the Royal Navy hopes will be able to boost its fleet numbers while keeping the costs under control.

Operating Forward

Neither is the fact that the UK needs more presence in the Gulf a new realization. The country last year commissioned its first Middle East forward base in half a century, HMS Jufair, and this Spring the frigate Montrose arrived in the region for a three-year forward deployment with rotating crews to keep it underway as much as possible. The forward deployment model is one the U.S. uses in Rota, Spain, for ballistic missile defense in Europe, and in Japan for BMD and presence in that region. The math is simple: For standing presence requirements overseas, you generally need four ships based in the home country. For every ship you have deployed downrange, you’ll want one in surge status if its needed for an emergency, one in deep maintenance and one training to relieve the ship on deployment. Forward deploying a ship, especially using a rotating crew model, cuts down on the number of ships you need to maintain in your force structure to fulfill a presence requirement because you cut out transit times to the region and you cut out much of the training cycle time. In short, you get more bang for your buck.

Montrose, as of 24 JUL, began escorting the U.K. shipping through the strait, according to a Skye New report. Montrose is scheduled to be joined by the Type 45 destroyer Duncan late this month, former British foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt said Monday. But staging any kind of larger effort will require time to free up assets, and even with two vessels on station, at least temporarily, it will not be enough to hold down an escort mission for any real length of

time, given the need for maintenance and crew rest. And while the U.S. will more than likely, despite the rhetoric, pitch in, its surface assets are also under a great deal of pressure both from high-end missions such as defending the aircraft carriers to very restrictive ballistic missile defense missions that require the ships to be in a narrow geographic area in order to get correct geometries for shooting down missiles based on known launch sites.

The BMD mission was one of the primary drivers that led to a severe drop in readiness in the Japan-based 7th Fleet head of the disastrous summer of 2017, when twin collisions killed 17 sailors aboard the destroyers Fitzgerald and McCain. But the roots of even those issues could reasonably trace back in part to the U.S. Navy's own decision earlier in the decade to trade capacity for capability by decommissioning early the Oliver Hazard Perry-class frigates, which were holding down many of the Navy's low-end missions around the globe. The solution is not a short-term fix but a long-term one, said Hendrix, the Telemus analyst. Until the U.K. and the U.S. grown their fleet with more low-end capabilities, countries such as Iran will continue to take advantage of the vulnerability. "The Iranians have just demonstrated that they've figured it out and there is no quick-fix solution," Hendrix said. "We've allowed ourselves to get into this hole and it will take years to come out of it."

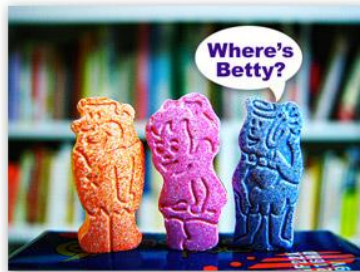
[Source: DefenseNews | David B. Larter | July 25, 2019 ++]

Knowledge ► Do You Know?

So You Think You Know Everything? Did you know the following?

- A dime has 118 ridges around the edge.
- A cat has 32 muscles in each ear.
- A crocodile cannot stick out its tongue, Google "Crocodiles: Facts & Pictures - Live Science"
- A dragonfly has a life span of 24 hours.
- A goldfish has a memory span of three seconds. (actually disputed at this time, to "might be 30 Seconds, if not active)
- A "jiffy" is an actual unit of time for 1/100th of a second. Not sure about the builders measurement of a Pooftenth, (said to be about 1/128th of an inch)
- A shark is the only fish that can blink with both eyes.
- A snail can sleep for three years.
- Al Capone's business card said he was a used furniture dealer.
- All 50 states are listed across the top of the Lincoln Memorial on the back of the \$5 bill.
- Almonds are a member of the peach family.
- An ostrich's eye is bigger than its brain. (I know a few people like that)
- Babies are born without kneecaps. They don't appear until the child reaches 2 to 6 years of age.
- Butterflies taste with their feet. (Not standing on that again)
- Cats have over one hundred vocal sounds. Dogs only have about 10.
- "Dreamt" is the only English word that ends in the letters "MT".
- February 1865 is the only month in recorded history not to have a full moon.
- In the last 4,000 years, no new animals have been domesticated.
- If the population of China walked past you, in single file, the line would never end because of the rate of reproduction.

- If you are an average American, in your whole life, you will spend an average of 6 months waiting at red lights.
- It's impossible to sneeze with your eyes open.
- Leonardo Da Vinci invented the scissors.
- Maine is the only state whose name is just one syllable.
- No word in the English language rhymes with month, orange, silver, or purple.
- Our eyes are always the same size from birth, but our nose and Ears never stop growing.
- Peanuts are one of the ingredients of dynamite.
- Rubber bands last longer when refrigerated.
- "Stewardesses" is the longest word typed with only the left hand and "lollipop" with your right.
- The average person's left hand does 56% of the typing.
- The cruise liner, QE2, moves only six inches for each gallon of Diesel that it burns.
- The microwave was invented after a researcher walked by a radar tube and a chocolate bar melted in his pocket.
- The sentence: "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" uses every letter of the alphabet.
- The winter of 1932 was so cold that Niagara Falls froze completely solid.
- The words 'racecar,' 'kayak' and 'level' are the same whether they are read Left to right or right to left (palindromes).
- There are 293 ways to make change for a dollar.
- There are more chickens than people in the world.
- There are only four words in the English language which end in "dous": Tremendous, horrendous, stupendous, and hazardous.
- There are two words in the English language that have all five vowels in order: "abstemious" and "facetious."
- There's no Betty Rubble in the "Flintstones Chewables Vitamins".



- Tigers have striped skin, not just striped fur.
- TYPEWRITER is the longest word that can be made using the letters only on one row of the keyboard.
- Winston Churchill was born in a ladies' room during a dance.
- Women blink nearly twice as much as men.
- Your stomach has to produce a new layer of mucus every two weeks; Otherwise it will digest itself.

There, now you know (Almost) everything! (According to Virgil).

[Source: Tailwaggers & Jokes | December 17, 2017 ++]

Interesting Ideas ▶ **Bucket Filling**



One Word Essays ▶ **Loneliness**



Have You Heard? ▶ **Old Farts | Memories | Aging with Humor**

Od Farts

If you ain't one, I bet ya you know one!

- Old Farts are easy to spot at sporting events; during the playing of the National Anthem. Old Farts remove their caps and stand at attention and sing without embarrassment. They know the words and believe in them.
- Old Farts remember World War II, Pearl Harbor, Guadalcanal, Normandy and Hitler. They remember the Atomic Age, the Korean War, The Cold War, the Jet Age and the Moon Landing. They remember the 50 plus Peacekeeping Missions from 1945 to 2005, not to mention Vietnam.

- If you bump into an Old Fart on the sidewalk he will apologize. If you pass an Old Fart on the street, he will nod or tip his cap to a lady. Old Farts trust strangers and are courtly to women.
- Old Farts hold the door for the next person and always, when walking, make certain the lady is on the inside for protection.
- Old Farts get embarrassed if someone curses in front of women and children and they don't like any filth or dirty language on TV or in movies.
- Old Farts have moral courage and personal integrity. They seldom brag unless it's about their children or grandchildren.
- It's the Old Farts who know our great country is protected, not by politicians, but by the young men and women in the military serving their country.
- This country needs Old Farts with their work ethic, sense of responsibility, pride in their country and decent values. We need them now more than ever.

Thank God for Old Farts!

P.S. I was taught to respect my elders....It's just getting harder to find them.

-o-o-O-o-o-

Memories

A couple in their nineties are both having problems remembering things. During a checkup, the doctor tells them that they're physically okay, but they might want to start writing things down to help them remember.

Later that night, while watching TV, the old man gets up from his chair. 'Want anything while I'm in the kitchen?' he asks.

'Will you get me a bowl of ice cream?'

'Sure.'

'Don't you think you should write it down so you can remember it?' she asks.

'No, I can remember it.'

'Well, I'd like some strawberries on top, too. Maybe you should write it down, so's not to forget it?'

He says, 'I can remember that. You want a bowl of ice cream with strawberries.'

'I'd also like whipped cream. I'm certain you'll forget that, write it down.' she says.

Irritated, he says, 'I don't need to write it down, I can remember it! Ice cream with strawberries and whipped cream - I got it, for goodness sake!'

Then he toddles into the kitchen. After about 20 minutes, the old man returns from the kitchen and hands his wife a plate of bacon and eggs. She stares at the plate for a moment.

'Where's my toast?'

Nothing enhances the good old days more than a poor memory.

-o-o-O-o-o-

Aging with Humor

- An elderly woman decided to prepare her will and told her preacher she had two final requests. First, she wanted to be cremated, and second, she wanted her ashes scattered over Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart?" the preacher exclaimed. "Why Wal-Mart?" Then I'll be sure my daughters visit me twice a week."
- My memory's not as sharp as it used to be. Also, my memory's not as sharp as it used to be.
- Know how to prevent sagging? Just eat till the wrinkles fill out.

- I've sure gotten old! I've had two bypass surgeries, a hip replacement, new knees, fought prostate cancer and diabetes. I'm half blind, can't hear anything quieter than a jet engine, take 40 different medications that make me dizzy, winded, and subject to blackouts. Have bouts with dementia. Have poor circulation; hardly feel my hands and feet anymore. Can't remember if I'm 85 or 92. Have lost all my friends. But, thank God, I still have my driver's license.
- I feel like my body has gotten totally out of shape, so I got my doctor's permission to join a fitness club and start exercising. I decided to take an aerobics class for seniors. I bent, twisted, gyrated, jumped up and down, and perspired for an hour. But, by the time I got my leotards on, the class was over.
- It's scary when you start making the same noises as your coffee maker.
- These days about half the stuff in my shopping cart says, "For fast relief."
- Remember: You don't stop laughing because you grow old, You grow old because you stop laughing.

Thought of the Week

The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter. — **Winston Churchill**

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