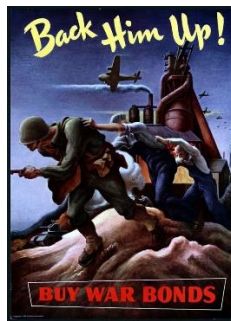


# RAO

# BULLETIN

## 1 November 2019



### PDF Edition

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

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- Attachment – Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 NOV (Updated)
- Attachment – Medical Murderers



## USS Gerald R. Ford

### Update 15: Navy Secretary Slams Congress for Spreading Disinformation

Navy Secretary Richard Spencer on 23 OCT slammed Congress for spreading “disinformation” about Navy shipbuilding plans, while accusing the country’s largest shipbuilder of having “no idea what we’re doing.” The remarks came in response to criticism from Rep. Elaine Luria 22 OCT about delays on the Navy’s new \$13 billion

aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford, which has suffered a series of delays in its construction, leading to pointed criticism from Capitol Hill. “Leaders in Congress who make disparaging comments against a platform [for which] we’re developing new technologies — you could not ask for a better disinformation program for our competitors,” Spencer said Wednesday at the Brookings Institution. “And I truly mean that.”



The issue with the carrier came up during a testy exchange 22 OCT between Luria, a 20-year Navy veteran, and two Navy service acquisition officials during a hearing on ship readiness. “I just truly don’t feel like this is a great investment as a taxpayer,” the congresswoman said, adding that spending “\$13 billion on a ship that’s going to deploy six years past its original design timeline” has been frustrating for lawmakers. She called the Ford a “\$13 billion nuclear-powered berthing barge.” Spencer shot back today that, “if she wants to get on board and help...we have open arms.” Responding to Spencer’s criticism, Luria said in a statement today she finds it “disappointing that the Secretary finds Congressional oversight disparaging.”

Bringing up the uncomfortable promise Spencer once bragged he made to President Trump that the weapons elevators on the Ford will work, “or you can fire me,” Luria continued, “Secretary Spencer himself promised the President that the weapons elevators would be fully functional by the end of this past summer. It is now fall and no elevators accessing the ammunition storage areas are functioning, which results in a carrier with no combat capability. I have yet to see a detailed plan to fix the multitude of problems with these new technologies. The Navy accepted the design of these systems and accepted the ship in an incomplete state from HII, so it is absolutely my role to question Navy leadership on their current failure to deliver an operational ship to the fleet.”

The secretary didn’t aim his ire solely at Luria. He blamed Congress for virtually all that ails the Navy, including having six of the service’s 10 aircraft carriers under repair and unable to deploy. Spencer cited a Navy study that concluded the nine continuing resolutions placed on the Pentagon in lieu of full-year budgets cost the service \$4 billion. “So when I get accused of cost overruns on the Ford by my board of directors and they go and burn \$4 billion, I’m confused as to who is responsible for wasting or diddling with resources,” he said. “It is an atrocity that a CR exists.” Spencer also attempted to deflect responsibility for the Ford’s delays — it was supposed to be ready in 2018 but is still years away from completion — to the shipbuilder, Huntington Ingalls.

As Luria mentioned, the Ford will run trials at sea later this month with just four of the 11 electromagnetic elevators functional. The tests were scheduled for July but pushed back when it was discovered that none of the elevators were working. The Navy made the decision years ago to forgo testing the electromagnetic elevators before installing them on the ship, something it is paying for now. The secretary today explained that he made the deal with the president because he “needed to rally the troops because I didn’t think [Huntington] was really focusing on it enough,” and intended the “bet with the president as a rally.” But, he said, in the spring of this year, Huntington’s “management says, ‘Oops! It’s going to be 2020. We really have no idea what we’re doing.’”

Huntington Ingalls spokesperson Beci Brenton said in emailed statement the “Ford is a first-in-class ship and with that come many unique challenges,” including the decision to install a bevy of new technologies on the first ship of the class, as opposed to phasing them in over the first three ships of the class. “That plan was changed in 2002 when

a decision was made to install all of the new technology on the first ship,” she said. In another point blank criticism of the Virginia-based company, which builds and repairs all of the Navy’s 11 aircraft carriers, he added, “faith and confidence of senior management at HII when it comes to this project is very, very low.” [Source: Breaking Defense | Paul McLeary | October 23, 2019 ++]

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## **Arlington National Cemetery**

### **Update 83: What You Need to Know About Proposed Changes**

On 25 SEP, then-Acting Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy announced the proposed eligibility changes for burial at Arlington National Cemetery. These draft revisions begin the first step of the federal rule-making process, a minimum nine-month procedure. The Administrative Procedures Act requires the Department of the Army, to publish the notice of proposed rulemaking in the Federal Register and allow any interested parties to comment. The agency is also required to respond to “significant” comments and consider changes based on those comments. Since the release of the proposed revisions, many MOAA members have written and called the Member Service Center with questions. To better understand the rulemaking process and how these proposals affect them, MOAA has prepared several Frequently Asked Questions:

**Q.** *How do these proposals differ from current eligibility?*

**A.** Current eligibility standards can be found in this Arlington [fact sheet](#). Primary differences between the draft proposals and the existing eligibility standards are:

- Emphasis on combat service for award recipients and government officials
- Minimum service of two years on active duty with combat service for traditional veterans
- Distinctions between below ground internment and above ground inurnment for eligibility

**Q.** *Which groups won’t see significant changes?*

**A.** These individuals who are now eligible for both inurnment and in-ground burial would remain so under the proposal:

- Any veteran who received the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross (Air Force or Navy), Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star, or Purple Heart with combat service.
- Any former prisoner of war who, while a prisoner of war, served honorably in the active military, naval, or air service; whose last period of service terminated honorably; and who died on or after Nov. 30, 1993.
- Any president or vice president.
- Spouses, minor and adult dependents of qualifying veterans

**Q.** *Which groups would be most affected by the proposed changes?*

**A.** These individuals would see significant changes under the proposed eligibility rules:

- Those who die on Title 10 federal active duty (other than for training) had been eligible for inurnment and in-ground burial. They would remain eligible for both under the draft, but only if their death is combat-related.
- Those veterans who retired from active duty and are receiving retirement pay would no longer be eligible for ground burial but would remain eligible for inurnment.
- Veterans who served less than two years on active duty in combat no longer would be eligible for inurnment. At present, veterans who served at least a day on active duty (other than for training) are eligible; this group is not eligible for in-ground burial.
- Any member of a reserve component, and any member of the Army National Guard, whose death occurs under honorable conditions while on active duty for training or performing full time service would retain eligibility for inurnment only if death occurs in active duty combat or if they served at least two years in

active duty combat. They would remain ineligible for in-ground burial unless they meet other qualifying criteria.

**Q.** *Are there any exceptions to the proposed changes?*

**A.** Yes. World War II era veterans would be eligible for inurnment, and veterans with combat service who also served out of uniform as a government official with significant contributions to national security would be eligible for both inurnment and in-ground burial.

**Q.** *My spouse is already buried at Arlington. Will I be able to be buried with him/her?*

**A.** Yes. The current policy at ANC states that spouses who are considered derivatively eligible and/or have pre-deceased the servicemember are still eligible for burial if space is available in the same gravesite. There will be no change to this policy.

**Q.** *I am a retiree of xx years and had planned to be interred at ANC. Will I still be eligible?*

**A.** It is still too early in the rulemaking process to know the specifics of what DoD plans; however, the current proposal allows for above-ground inurnment for any member of the armed forces [eligible to receive retired pay] who is not otherwise eligible. Above ground inurnments qualify for the same level of funeral honors as ground burials.

**Q.** *I am not eligible for burial under the proposal. What does this mean for my plans and what are my options?*

**A.** This is only the first step of a lengthy process, which includes a period of public comment. At that time, members of the public will be encouraged to share their thoughts in the Federal Registry on the proposed rule change. MOAA Members are encouraged to participate during the public comment period. There are 138 [Veteran Cemeteries](#) active to-date, which include accommodations for honored burial for veterans which are continuing to expand. (For more, read MOAA's publication [Your Guide to Military Burials](#).)

**Q.** *When will these revisions take effect?*

**A.** The proposal is still in the draft form and still must undergo the nine-month rulemaking process before taking effect. These ten steps (see this [graphic](#)) include review and approval by the secretary of defense and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) before being published in the Federal Registry for Public comment. After this 60-day period, the Army will review and respond to the comments before drafting the final rule for DoD and OMB approval.

**Q.** *When will the public comment period be?*

**A.** This largely depends on the timeliness of the DoD and OMB. At this time, the public comment period is estimated to take place in April 2020.

**Q.** *The Secretary's proposal emphasizes "combat-service." What does this mean for veterans who served during eras of non-combat engagement?*

**A.** The Secretary has stated the new rules, once implemented, must be applicable across all eras of service and equitable across all the branches.

**Q.** *What does the proposal for "government official" mean? Does this allow for civilians to be buried at Arlington?*

**A.** The current eligibility rules include over 100 Title V positions. In order to extend the life of the cemetery "well into the future," the SecArmy is endeavoring to scale this list of government officials to articulate the imperative of "Sacrifice, Service, and Impact." Under the proposed criteria, non-veterans would not be eligible for burial at Arlington, unless they were a spouse or dependent family member of qualifying veteran.

**Q.** *Will other medals for valor awards or religious burial considerations be weighed with eligibility criteria?*

**A.** Again, it is too early in rulemaking process to discuss specific scenarios. The current eligibility standards for valor awards state: "Received Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross (Air Force or Navy), Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star, or Purple Heart." The Army's proposal does not account for burial requirements based on religion. Due to the ongoing challenge of wait times at ANC, coupled with the scheduling process for funerals, individuals who are unable to go through with cremation or must schedule immediate burial have the option of using the 138 Veteran

cemeteries run by the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), as well as state cemeteries, or private cemeteries which allow for VA burial benefits.

**Q.** *What is MOAA doing?*

**A.** MOAA leadership is currently evaluating the impact these proposals may have on the living veteran and retiree population, and will keep our members informed on next steps and how members may engage on this very important issue. We will be taking advantage of the public comment period next spring and will continue to stay engaged with senior leaders in the Department of Defense and Congress. Since 2016, MOAA has stayed actively engaged through multiple avenues, including submitted testimony before the Armed Services Committee, participation in roundtable discussions with other VSO's and the Advisory Committee on ANC, and disseminating multiple surveys on revised burial criteria. We are looking forward to continued representation of MOAA members throughout this process. For more information, please visit <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/About/Proposed-Revised-Eligibility-Criteria>.

[Source: MOAA Newsletter | Caitlin Hamon | October 23, 2019 ++]

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## **JVS Chairman Senior Enlisted Adviser**

### **New SEAC Air Force CMSgt Ramon Colon-Lopez**



Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Ramon Colon-Lopez will be the next senior enlisted adviser to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, defense officials said Wednesday. "Our brothers and sisters in service are in the best hands possible with our newest Senior Enlisted Adviser to the Chairman," said Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth O. Wright in a Facebook post. "I'm proud to say that Chief CZ, our SEAC #4, is a friend and an exceptional leader." Colon-Lopez, currently the senior enlisted leader for U.S. Africa Command, joined the Air Force in 1990 and served as an air traffic controller before becoming a pararescueman. He will replace Army Command Sgt. Maj. John W. Troxell, who has served as the SEAC since December 2015.

Troxell gained popularity among soldiers and on social media during his term for his straightforward messages. In January 2018 on Twitter, he told the Islamic State group that they needed to surrender or die, even if it meant beating them to death with shovels. He was temporarily removed last year after an investigation by the Army Inspector General found that he improperly used military personnel to carry out tasks and improperly endorsed commercial fitness and nutrition products on military social media accounts. Troxell was reinstated in March after Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said he had weighed the gravity of the ethics violations against Troxell's 37 years of military service, which included five combat tours.

Colon-Lopez will be the first airman to serve in the position. His awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit and two Bronze Star Medals with Valor, according to his biography. The SEAC position, created in 2005, is the senior noncommissioned officer in the U.S. armed forces. The SEAC is appointed by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to serve as an adviser on all matters involving joint and combined total force



integration, utilization, health of the force and joint development for enlisted personnel. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Brian Ferguson | October 17, 2019 ++]

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## **Commissary/Exchange News**

### **Update 14: More Answers as Installations Ready for Extra Shoppers**

A little more than two months before a new shopping benefit takes effect for about 3 million newly eligible shoppers, defense officials have tested and rolled out the system that will allow these shoppers through the gates. The technology is in place at the installations' gate scanning systems at all Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps installations, and at about 40 Army installations, according to Defense Department spokeswoman Jessica Maxwell. Starting 1 JAN, all Department of Veterans Affairs service-connected disabled veterans, Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war and primary veteran caregivers will be eligible to shop at commissaries and exchanges on base, and to use certain morale, welfare and recreation facilities. All veterans with VA service-connected disability ratings of 0 to 90 percent are newly eligible.

Service-connected disabled and other veterans who are newly eligible will use their veterans health ID card, or VHIC to gain access to the installation, and to shop. Defense officials have added the capability of scanning the VHIC card at most installations' front gate scanning systems. The balance of the Army installations will have the capability by the end of September, 2020, Maxwell said, but most of the remaining installations don't have facilities that offer the benefits, she said, such as commissaries and exchanges.

The fiscal 2019 National Defense Authorization Act expanded the pool of eligible shoppers. The expansion also applies to Coast Guard facilities. 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. One example is golf courses. This is the largest expansion of eligible customers in more than 60 years, and officials at the departments of defense, Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security have been planning for the rollout for more than nine months.

#### **Don't have a VHIC card, but you're eligible?**

Officials have also come up with a system that will allow access for about 37,000 veterans who qualify for the new benefits, but aren't eligible for the VHIC. The only eligible veterans who aren't currently eligible for a VHIC are those veterans with a zero percent service-connected disability rating whose income exceeds the Housing and Urban Development indices, Maxwell said. "The VA will provide a letter to these disabled veterans indicating they are eligible for these privileges, even if not eligible for the VHIC," she said. That letter, along with a driver's license, passport or other authorized form of ID, will allow these newly eligible shoppers access to the installation, and allow them to use the privilege at commissaries, exchanges and designated MWR facilities.

This is similar to the process for veteran caregivers. The benefit applies to the primary caregiver of wounded/injured veterans who are registered in the VA caregiver program. The VA will post a memo to VA.gov for caregivers, to be used for access at the front gate, along with a driver's license, passport or other authorized form of ID.

#### **Can my spouse shop, too?**

Theoretically, no. However, your spouse and family members can come into the stores with you, but they just can't buy anything. That said, it might take longer to get on base if they're with you. The procedures for access to the installation require people without a DoD-issued credential to stop at the visitor control center to undergo a check for criminal history and terrorism indicators, Maxwell said. If the check is successful; if the person's credential presented

can be enrolled; and the installation has installation access control system enrollment capabilities, guests may be able to enroll for recurring access for later visits with their sponsor.

**Does this new benefit apply to me if I live overseas?**

It does, unless you are living in an area where international agreements or host-nation laws limit access to commissaries and exchanges.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | October 21, 2019 ++]

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## **NDAA 2020**

### **Update 24: New Worries about the Possibility of Reaching a Compromise**

Senate Armed Services Committee officials this week will release a “skinny” defense authorization bill plan as lawmakers grow increasingly pessimistic about the possibility of reaching a compromise on a host of disputed issues with the massive military policy bill. Committee Chairman Jim Inhofe (R-OK) said last week that the move is designed to ensure that a host of necessary items — including numerous military specialty pay authorizations — are passed by the end of the year. But a day later, House Armed Services Chairman Adam Smith (D-WA) said a stripped-down version of the measure wouldn’t solve all of lawmakers’ problems. Negotiations on the broader measure have stalled in recent weeks as Democrats and Republicans have fought over military construction money used for President Donald Trump’s controversial border wall project. The authorization bill has been a rare point of bipartisanship over the decades, passing for 58 fiscal years. Lawmakers on both sides say they don’t want recent fights over military deployments in Syria and the House’s ongoing impeachment probe to break that streak. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | October 28, 2019 ++]

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## **DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse**

### **Reported 16 thru 31 OCT 2019**

A former medical records administrator pleaded guilty for his role in a foreign-based conspiracy the Justice Department called the largest identity theft scheme against military members and their families. **Fredrick Brown**, 38, who worked as a civilian technician at a United States Army base in South Korea, pleaded guilty on Tuesday to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and one count of conspiracy to launder money. Brown faces up to 20 years in prison for each count.

Brown admitted that, from July 2014 to September 2015, he stole the personal identifying information of thousands of military members, including names, Social Security numbers, Department of Defense ID numbers, dates of birth, and contact information by taking photos of his computer screen while logged into the U.S. military’s health records database. Brown then handed over that stolen data to the scheme’s alleged ringleader, **Robert Wayne Boling Jr.** “so that Boling and others could exploit the information in various ways to access Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs benefits sites and steal millions of dollars,” authorities said. The 24-page indictment outlined a conspiracy where Brown would steal the personal identifying information from military members, both active duty and veterans, and their families, and pass the information to Boling, who worked with two foreign nationals to divert bank funds and military benefits, mostly from Veterans Affairs accounts belonging to disabled or elderly veterans, into their own personal accounts overseas using that data. Another conspirator laundered the money. Evidence of this scheme was uncovered earlier this year.

Authorities said Boling, a U.S. citizen raised in South Korea and living in the Philippines, was assisted in the Philippines by **Allan Albert Kerr** of Australia and **Jongmin Seok** of South Korea with exploiting the stolen information to obtain records, such as military personnel files and credit reports, and to use the Department of Defense’s military benefits portal to divert money and benefits away from the military members. **Torice Crawford**, a U.S. citizen living in California, recruited and supervised “money mules,” people who agreed to use their accounts to receive stolen funds, authorities said, and helped move the funds from those accounts back to the co-conspirators in the Philippines after taking a cut. Boling, Crawford, Kerr, and Seok have been charged with multiple counts of conspiracy, wire fraud, and aggravated identity theft. The DOJ said on 30 OCT that Boling, Kerr, and Seok are in custody in the Philippines awaiting repatriation or extradition to the U.S., where they will likely be tried in the Western District of Texas. Crawford is already in federal custody.

The DOJ said in August that there were at least 3,300 victims and said on 30 CT that the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs are still coordinating with the DOJ to notify and provide resources to the thousands of identified victims. The thefts and attempted thefts of personal information began in 2014 and continued through this summer, totaling in the millions of dollars. “To our knowledge, this is the largest criminal case ever involving identify theft of military-affiliated personnel,” U.S. Attorney John Bash of Texas said in August. [Source: Washington Examiner | Jerry Dunleavy | October 30, 2019 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials**

**Reported 16 thru 31 OCT 2019 | Fifteen**

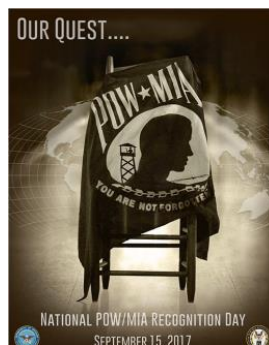
“Keeping the Promise“, “Fulfill their Trust” and “No one left behind” are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century as of FEB 2019 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 Air Forces 2nd Lt. Earl F. Ferguson**, 26, of Minneapolis, Minn., was a pilot assigned to the 329th Bombardment Squadron, 93rd Bombardment Group (Heavy), 8th Air Force. Ferguson was the co-pilot of a B-24 aircraft on Aug. 1, 1943, when it crashed as a result of enemy anti-aircraft fire during Operation Tidal Wave, the largest bombing mission against the oil fields and refineries at Ploiesti, north of Bucharest, Romania. His remains were not identified following the war. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ferguson.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. John F. McTigue**, 22, of Astoria, N.Y., was a member of the 407th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy,) 92d Bombardment Group (Heavy,) 40th Combat Bombardment Wing, 1st Air Division, 8th Air Force. On Aug. 24, 1944, McTigue co-piloted a B-17G Flying Fortress aircraft, carrying nine crewmembers, which was struck by German anti-aircraft fire and crashed during a bombing raid over Merseburg, Germany. McTigue's remains will be buried Nov. 18, 2019 in Woodside, NY. [Read about McTigue.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Sgt. R.L. Tyler**, 22, of Denton County, Texas, was a member of Headquarters Squadron, 19th Bombardment Group, when taken prisoner after the fall of Bataan in the Philippines on April 9, 1942. He reportedly died July 18-19, 1942. Tyler will be buried at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Tyler.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Willard R. Best**, 24, of Staunton, Ill., was a member of the 407th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy), 92d Bombardment Group (Heavy), 40th Combat Bombardment Wing, 1st Air Division, 8th Air Force. On Aug. 24, 1944, Best was the top turret gunner aboard a B-17G Flying Fortress aircraft, carrying nine crewmembers, which was struck by German anti-aircraft fire and crashed during a bombing raid over Merseburg, Germany. Best's remains will be buried in his hometown in the spring of 2020. [Read about Best.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Charles H. Grubb**, 21, of War Eagle, W. Va., was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 1, 1950, in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Grubb.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Lloyd B. Odom**, 19, of Odessa, Mo., was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, 31st Regimental Combat Team. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Odom will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Odom.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Robert L. Bray**, 18, of Chillicothe, Ohio, whose identification was initially announced in June, will be buried Nov. 6 in Bainbridge, Ohio. Bray was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Regiment. He was reported missing in action on July 20, 1950, when he could not be accounted for following his unit fighting in a defensive action against enemy forces near Taejon, South Korea. The Army declared him deceased on Dec. 31, 1953. [Read about Bray.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Ysabel A. Ortiz**, 19, of El Monte, Calif., whose identification was initially announced in August, will be buried Oct. 28 in Riverside, Calif. Ortiz was a member of Battery D, 15th Anti-aircraft Artillery Automatic

Weapons Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when enemy forces attacked his unit near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. His remains could not be recovered following the attack. [Read about Ortiz.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Donald E. Mangan**, 26, of Elkton, S.D., whose identification was initially announced in August, will be buried Oct. 22 in Gig Harbor, Wash. Mangan was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Sept. 17, 1944, after his unit was attacked by enemy forces near Wettlingen, Germany. His remains could not be recovered after the attack. [Read about Mangan.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Connie Cagle**, 23, of Sweetwater, Tenn., 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. Cagle will be buried in Grand Rapids, Mich. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Cagle.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Billy J. Maxwell**, 19, of Hogansville, Ga., whose identification was initially announced in August, will be buried Nov. 9, in his hometown. Maxwell was a member of Heavy Mortar Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 30, 1950, when his unit engaged against enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. His remains could not be recovered following the battle. [Read about Maxwell.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. David A. Feriend**, 23, of Fife Lake, Mich., whose identification was initially announced in August, was buried Oct. 13 in Kingsley, Mich. Feriend was a member of Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. [Read about Feriend.](#)

- **Marine Corps Pfc. Quentin W. McCall**, 22, of Union Church, Miss., was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force. McCall landed on the island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed, including McCall on the fourth day of the battle, Nov. 23, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about McCall.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Ernest A. Matthews, Jr.**, 34, of Dallas, Texas, was assigned to Headquarters Company, Headquarters Battalion, Division Special Troops, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Matthews participated in a landing against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. He was killed that day in an attempt to secure the island. Matthews remains will be buried Nov. 5, 2019, in San Antonio, Texas. [Read about Matthews.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Hubert P. Hall**, 20, of Floyd County, Ky., whose identification was initially announced in August, will be buried in the spring of 2020 at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, in Honolulu. Hall 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 Hall. [Read about Hall.](#)

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

\* VA \*



## VA Adaptive Sports Program

### Update 01: \$14.8M in Grants Awarded to 126 Organizations

The Adaptive Sports Grant Program is facilitated and managed by the National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events Office (NVSP&SE). The mission of the NVSP&SE office is to provide opportunities for Veterans to improve their independence, well-being, and quality of life through adaptive sports and therapeutic arts programs. VA awards grants to qualifying organizations to plan, develop, manage, and implement programs to provide adaptive sports opportunities for disabled Veterans and disabled members of the Armed Forces as authorized under 38 United States Code 521A.

To be eligible for a grant, an organization must be a **non-federal** entity with significant experience in managing a large-scale adaptive sports program. As per 38 Code of Federal Regulations 77, criteria for inclusion is defined as programs that are

- 1) Affiliated with a National Paralympic Committee or a National Governing Body authorized to provide Paralympic sports,
- 2) An adaptive sports program of a National Governing Body that meets additional requirements, or
- 3) An adaptive sports program in which at least 50 persons with disabilities participate or the eligible participants reside in at least five different congressional districts.

Of note, federal agencies are not eligible to receive grant funding through the Adaptive Sports Grant Program. However, federal agencies are encouraged to partner with non-federal entities to jointly create national, regional, and community-based programs that provide adaptive sports activities for disabled Veterans and members of the Armed Forces. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awarded \$14.8 million in grants for adaptive sports programs benefitting Veterans with disabilities and disabled members of the Armed Forces at the end of September. Of the total, \$1.5 million is being used to support organizations that offer equine-assisted therapy to support mental health. Click [Adaptive Sports Grant Recipients List](#) to see the 126 organizations that received grant in 2019. Those national, regional and community programs will reach about 11,000 Veterans and service members.

The application process is currently closed but when it opens for 2020 VA will issue a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) through the federal government's designated grant portal (<https://www.grants.gov>). Please see the "Apply" tab for detailed information on the application process. Adaptive sports activities that are authorized under the Adaptive Sports Grant Program:

- Instruction, participation, and competition in adaptive sports;
- Training and technical assistance to program administrators, coaches, recreation therapists, instructors, VA employees, and other appropriate individuals; and
- Coordination, Paralympic classification of athletes, athlete assessment, sport-specific training techniques, program development (including programs at the local level), sports equipment, supplies, program evaluation, and other activities related to the implementation and operation of the program.

To sign up for Adaptive Sports Grants updates or to access your subscriber preferences, enter your contact information at <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USVA/subscribers/qualify>. [Source: VA News Release | October 15, 2019 ++]

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## Agent Orange Diseases

### Update 07: White House Responsible for Delayed Decision on New Additions

Two years ago, then Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin decided to add three health conditions to the list of diseases eligible for Agent Orange benefits, but White House officials challenged his authority and impeded enactment,

according to internal documents obtained by a veteran through the Freedom of Information Act. Now tens of thousands of veterans are still waiting. Shulkin decided to add three health conditions — bladder cancer, Parkinson’s-like symptoms and hypothyroidism — to the list of diseases eligible for Agent Orange benefits. Heavily redacted emails and briefings released recently to former Army Spc. Jeff O’Malley, of Pearland, Texas, show Shulkin made the decision sometime before Oct. 3, 2017 — a move that would have given ailing veterans faster access to disability compensation and health benefits.

But the Office of Management and Budget, including Director Mick Mulvaney, and other White House officials objected, according to the documents. While the specifics of OMB’s opposition were redacted, legible portions show that the office believed the scientific evidence supporting the proposed additions was limited and it had concerns about the budgetary impact of the expansion, as well as any adverse effects on the existing disability benefits program. According to the documents, roughly 83,000 veterans are afflicted with one of the three proposed presumptive conditions. The estimated cost for providing disability compensation to these former service members was redacted.

In 2016, scientists with the Institute of Medicine (IOM), now known as the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, found there was “limited or suggestive evidence” linking bladder cancer and hypothyroidism to Agent Orange exposure. That represented an upgrade from a previous recommendation that there was an inadequate or insufficient evidence to link the diseases to the toxic herbicides used as defoliants in Vietnam. The 2016 IOM report also recommended that veterans with “Parkinson’s-like symptoms” — not just those diagnosed with Parkinson’s — be granted service-connected presumption. The IOM report was released five months after a provision in the Agent Orange Act of 1991 expired — one that allowed the VA secretary to prescribe regulations for presumption of service connection for diseases, provided the medical and scientific evidence existed.

Knowing the provision had expired, Shulkin cited the VA’s general authority to support his decision, citing previous rulings by VA secretaries that awarded benefits for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, and osteoporosis for prisoners of war, even though the IOM said more evidence was needed or there was limited proof of any association. Shulkin planned to issue a press release on Nov. 1, 2017 — and did — saying he had “made a decision” on the new presumptive conditions and would conduct a regulatory review. But also that day, Mulvaney and Darin Selnick, who was then serving as veterans adviser on President Donald Trump’s Domestic Policy Council, met with Shulkin to discuss the press release and his authority to make the decision, which they questioned given that the Agent Orange Act of 1991 had expired. “We apparently have confusion around the Agent Orange presumptive,” Shulkin wrote in an internal email on 31 OCT. “We are going to have an urgent meeting ... I need to understand what is the normal process in the past.”

Selnick, a former senior adviser for Concerned Veterans for America and a proponent of expanding private health care options for veterans, was considered a prominent influence in the Trump White House on veterans policy. He left his post on the Defense Policy Council to return as a senior adviser to then Acting VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. Just days after Shulkin’s internal email, in a speech at the National Press Club in Washington, Shulkin said the regulation and rule-making process would begin in a few short months. “I think it’s a matter of months, not anything longer than that,” Shulkin said. Things appeared to progress smoothly: in the following weeks, VA’s director of Regulations Management and representatives from the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and other offices met with officials from OMB Budget, the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, the Office of General Counsel and Selnick to discuss the rule-making process, and in emails, Shulkin described the meetings as “productive.”

But on Jan. 31, 2018, Shulkin received an email from OMB, which Shulkin said had the support of Mulvaney, that spelled out OMB’s objections and made new requests for additional evidence. Shulkin responded to Mulvaney on March 8, 2018, urging him to support the decision. “As we have discussed, Mick, I would like for you to direct your team to meet and have another discussion with our team, to specifically review our scientific support for this regulatory proposal ... it is imperative to add these [redacted] ... our veterans are counting on us,” Shulkin wrote. It’s unclear whether Mulvaney replied, but Trump fired Shulkin 20 days later, amid reports that he spent lavishly and erroneously

accepted tickets to Wimbledon during an official trip to Europe the previous year. Trump later said Shulkin was dismissed because he didn't agree with the White House's efforts to expand care for veterans in the private sector.

For many veterans living with one of the three conditions, as well as those with hypertension, which was linked to Agent Orange by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine last November, the wait has been frustrating and financially burdensome. "The VA seems to drag their feet on these types of issues in hopes we'll all die out before they make a decision," retired Army Sgt. Major John Mennitto wrote *Military Times*. "I was in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969 and now have bladder cancer. The VA doesn't want to hear about it," said Hawthorne, California, resident and Navy veteran John Murray, who repaired river patrol boats in Vinh Long.

In November, the NASEM ruled "sufficient evidence" existed for hypertension, more commonly known as high blood pressure, being linked to Agent Orange. Previously, the scientific body had suggested there was only "limited or suggestive evidence" to link it to the herbicide. The condition was discussed between Shulkin and OMB in the same documents as the other three presumptive illnesses, but the former VA secretary's opinion on whether it should be included was blacked out. More than 300,000 Vietnam veterans enrolled in VA health care have high blood pressure, which also is an age-related condition. VA officials have previously stated that it would be a challenge to determine who has high blood pressure as a result of exposure to Agent Orange or whether it simply is a factor of their age. Veterans continue to wait for a decision on the proposed presumptive conditions and lawmakers and veterans advocates alike have pressed VA for answers.

Earlier this year, Veterans Health Administration executive in charge Dr. Richard Stone told Congress he hoped to release a decision on new Agent Orange presumptive conditions would be announced within 90 days. That was in March. During an interview on 17 SEP, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said a decision would be forthcoming, but he declined to say when or what the decision was. On 25 SEP, Dr. Patricia Hastings, VA's chief consultant for post-deployment health told the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee that "those [presumptives] are still with leadership in coordination for the decisions to be made."

According a briefing delivered in May 2018 to the new acting secretary, Wilkie, the department is waiting for the results of two studies — the VHA's Vietnam Veteran Morbidity Study and the Vietnam Mortality Study — before "re-engaging OMB on prescribing presumptions." Both studies were scheduled to be completed this year, but the results have not been released. In a proposed statement drafted by VA but never released, officials said VA and the administration determined in "late March (2018) that there is insufficient data and information to overcome the limitations in the scientific support for the rulemaking." "These two studies could produce additional scientific insights into an association between exposure to Agent Orange and stroke, hypertension, hypothyroidism, Parkinson's disease and bladder cancer," the statement noted. "VA is committed to working closely with the administration on the exploration of any new evidence or information that would provide the sufficient scientific support for potential new presumptions."

In his letter to Mulvaney, Shulkin said VA provided OMB with more than 40 scientific studies, peer-reviewed studies and other documents supporting his regulatory proposal. He also noted in private messages to subordinates that he feared the department would not be able to obtain additional sufficient scientific evidence to support any future presumptions that OMB agrees to. "We may need to consider other options as well. Congress is adding AO presumptions to the Blue Water Navy House bill," he wrote. The delay in the regulatory process for the new presumptive diseases coincided with a fight between Congress and VA to award benefits for veterans who served on U.S. Navy ships off the coast of Vietnam; the issues surrounding the "Blue Water Navy" veterans also were discussed in length in the documents and showed the VA, under Shulkin, planned to pursue extending benefits to ill veterans who had served on Navy vessels that entered bays and harbors bordering the country. Ultimately, Congress passed a law this June extending disability benefits to veterans with an Agent Orange related diseases who served on Navy ships within a 12-mile mapped range of the coast. The VA will begin processing claims applications for blue water Navy veterans beginning 1 JAN.



In an interview with Military Times last week, Shulkin declined to call the holdup on the presumptives “political interference.” Instead, he said the process for adding new conditions is backwards. “I think we have the obligation to support our veterans first and then, if it takes a while to look at the data, or the data shows something else, then we need to make changes in the policy. But the current policy makes our veterans wait,” said Shulkin, who has recently released a book detailing his three years working for VA, “It Shouldn’t Be This Hard to Serve Your Country.”

Vietnam veteran O’Malley, who has uncontrolled hypertension, said he can’t help interpreting the back-and-forth in the documents as anything but political maneuvering. “What they really want to say is ‘we’re not approving anything, we are not going to spend an extra penny on Agent Orange than we have to,’” O’Malley said. “They have figured out every possible way of delaying ... I don’t believe Secretary Wilkie would intentionally shut down benefits for veterans, but I do believe Mr. Mulvaney would shut down any process that would add a penny to the budget.” “Dr. Shulkin wanted to do this and the White House didn’t. The longer they delay, the fewer veterans they will have to provide benefits for,” O’Malley said.

Veterans are demanding answers from the White House and the Department of Veterans Affairs after they delayed the decision to add more diseases to the list of health concerns eligible for Agent Orange disability benefits. “In light of today’s news regarding the continued delay to add four presumptive diseases to the Agent Orange list, the VFW is extremely upset and dissatisfied with the backdoor political games that are being played in Washington as the lives of our veterans are at stake,” VFW National Commander William “Doc” Schmitz said in a statement today. “The health and welfare of our nation’s veterans should, and must, be our number one priority.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | October 23, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Suicide Prevention**

### **Update 61: Pain Intensity & Suicide Attempt Link**

Many factors are associated with suicide risk. These factors range from PTSD, depression and anxiety disorder to financial and interpersonal concerns to access to opioids and other lethal means, like firearms. Even when we take these risk factors into consideration, moderate to severe pain intensity is associated with suicide risk.

Veterans are a particularly vulnerable group. The suicide rate among Veterans is 1.5 times that of the general population. Also, Veterans develop chronic pain conditions at higher rates and report greater pain severity than members of the general population. VA’s Behavioral Health Autopsy Program: Executive Summary reports pain is the most common factor Veterans experience before they die by suicide. The VISN 2 Center of Excellence (CoE) for Suicide Prevention studied the link between reported pain intensity and suicide attempts. The results may uncover how effective pain treatment can be a critical suicide prevention tactic.

#### **Managing pain in daily life**

Veterans have several treatment options through VA to cope with pain and reduce pain intensity. Nonmedication interventions are considered first-line treatments. They include physical therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy for chronic pain and chiropractic care. Medication-based treatments include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications and injections. Examples are cortisone for low back pain and botulinum toxin for migraines. Opioids may be used under close monitoring when they are taken appropriately and the benefits outweigh the risks.

#### **Strategies**

Strategies that improve psychological well-being can also help Veterans cope with pain in everyday life. Veterans can discuss the following tactics with care providers to see which may work best:

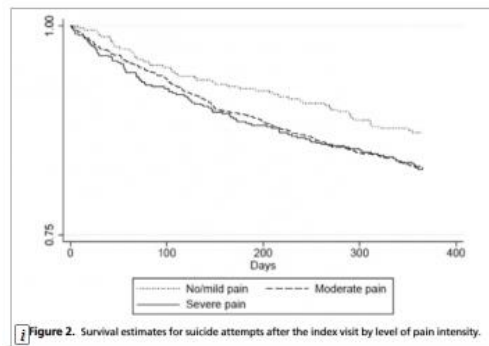
- Be honest about the pain you’re experiencing. An important step in managing chronic pain is accepting that it is part of your life. Accepting the presence of pain can help you move on and engage in enjoyable and everyday activities despite that pain.

- Pace your activities. Although you may not be able to do everything you did before the pain began, try to find ways to reintroduce some activities in a moderated way and create more balance in the activities you're doing. For example, if you plan to go for a long walk in the morning, consider taking a break mid-day to give your body time to recover and to prevent a pain flare-up. Even if you start to feel better over time, avoid overdoing it to avoid a relapse or further injury.
- Explore mindfulness. Increasing awareness of the present moment can help relieve emotional and mental tension that can intensify physical pain. Meditation and other mindfulness practices help you become more comfortable in feeling the way you feel without judgement, helping to prevent pain from taking over your thoughts and acting on autopilot.

To learn more about pain management treatment provided by VA, explore VA's [pain management webpage](#) for Veterans.

### Study findings

A CoE study looked at Veterans' average pain intensity scores in the year after they began receiving pain specialty services to determine whether pain intensity was associated with suicide attempts. Based on data from 2012–2014, moderate and severe pain over the course of a year increased the risk of a suicide attempt, even after considering other factors like a Veteran's history of suicide attempts. As the graph below shows, those with higher pain intensity had lower survival rates than those who had mild pain or no pain at all. This close correlation between pain intensity and suicide risk and death rates suggests that reducing pain, or the perception of that pain, can help prevent Veteran suicide.



### Advice for Veterans' family members and friends

Family members and friends are often the first to realize that a Veteran may be at risk for suicide. Warning signs include changes in mood or behaviors, outward comments about suicidal thoughts or increased interest in lethal means, such as firearms and opioids. If you see these signs in a Veteran in your life:

- Start the conversation. Topics of pain and suicide can be challenging to talk about. Still, don't be afraid to begin the conversation with the Veteran you're concerned about. Starting the conversation can help the Veteran realize the need to address pain. It also reassures the Veteran that you're willing to help.
- #BeThere for the Veteran and engage in healthy activities. Invite your friend or loved one to a movie or dinner or for a walk around the neighborhood. Getting a Veteran out of the house can remind them of activities they can enjoy, despite their pain. Research suggests changing a Veteran's mindset and engaging them in activities can improve overall wellness.

### To Learn more:

- Visit VA's pain management page to learn more about resources specific to pain management.
- Explore VA's suicide prevention resources for information on how to identify and address thoughts of suicide.

- If you or a Veteran you know is in immediate crisis, contact the Veterans Crisis Line: Call 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, text to 838255 or chat online.

[Source: Vantage Point | Lisham Ashrafioun | October 30, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Scam Protection Effort**

### **GAO Says VA Not Doing Enough to Protect Vets**



A report issued Oct. 3, 2019 by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) says that the Department of Veterans Affairs needs to do more to protect veterans, especially older ones, from fraud. It also said the VA needs to work with other government agencies to help track and prosecute those who prey on the most vulnerable veterans. The report also noted that the VA, as a steward for public funds, has a responsibility to both veterans and taxpayers to work in the best interest of both groups. The GAO is an independent, nonpartisan agency that works for Congress. It examines how taxpayer dollars are spent and reports its findings to Congress and government agencies in an attempt to save taxpayer dollars.

#### **Older Disabled Veterans at Biggest Risk**

As directed by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2017 (Public Law 115-131), the GAO examined pension and aid & attendance (A&A) payments made to veterans and survivors in fiscal 2018. During that time, the VA paid a total of \$3.2 billion to approximately 232,000 beneficiaries, averaging about \$14,000 per person. A veteran may be eligible for A&A when:

- They need the aid of another person in order to perform personal functions required in everyday living, such as bathing, feeding, dressing, attending to the wants of nature, adjusting prosthetic devices, or protecting themselves from the hazards of their daily environment.
- They are bedridden.
- They are a patient in a nursing home due to mental or physical incapacity.
- They are blind, or have corrected vision of 5/200 or less in both eyes, or concentric contraction of the visual field to 5 degrees or less.

The average age of veterans and family members receiving A&A benefits is 81. So, besides having little or no income, as well as a severe disability, this group of beneficiaries also is among the most vulnerable to financial exploitation as older adults. Older adults, in general, are more at risk of financial exploitation because they may have diminished capacity to make financial decisions, and may be targeted because they receive ongoing benefits payments.

#### **How Scammers Target Veterans**

Examples of fraud against veterans listed in the report include:

- *Being charged fees to apply for VA benefits* -- Federal law prohibits individuals from charging veterans fees to help them apply for benefits. The report found some attorneys label their fees as things like a "pre-filing consultation fee" to get around this.
- *Being charged unreasonable fees for legal services* -- A 2018 opinion of the Kansas Supreme Court described how a veteran and their spouse paid unreasonable fees for legal services related to applying for benefits. The couple, who were in their late 80s and had nearly \$500,000 in assets, entered into an agreement with an attorney for estate and long-term care planning. The couple was charged about \$31,000 in fees that should have been closer to \$5,000.
- *Pension advance loans* -- In 2018, the Virginia Attorney General busted a company and charged it over \$50 million in debt relief and civil penalties for making high-interest loans to more than 1,000 veterans and retirees. According to the Virginia Attorney General's press release, the suit had claimed that the company disguised its illegal, high-interest loans as "pension sales" that could provide pension holders with a quick lump sum of cash.
- *Charging too much for in-home care* -- Some in-home care providers know how much the VA will provide veterans for in-home A&A care and charge veterans more than they charge others since they know the VA will pay the higher amount.
- *Having payments sent to another's bank account* -- The application for pension benefits asks claimants to provide their direct deposit information, either on the form or by providing a voided check. But if the applicant doesn't attach a voided check, the VA will process the application normally. This can result in funds being sent to the scammer's bank account. The VA says it is the veteran's responsibility to provide correct information, arguing that many veterans don't have checking accounts and get their benefits put onto a debit card. However, the Social Security Administration verifies bank account information by requesting documents such as a personal check, an account statement or a passbook.

#### **VA's Action on GAO's Findings**

The report made four recommendations of steps the VA can take to help prevent fraud:

- Share information with other government agencies.
- Place more warnings on applications and its website about the potential for fraud.
- Train staff to spot fraud.
- Examine ways to prevent direct deposit fraud.

While the VA agreed in principle to sharing information with other agencies about fraud, it noted that there are hurdles when dealing with different enforcement agencies and regulations. It did agree to implement all the other recommendations. For its part, the VA says that, while many of these schemes may not be in the best interest of veterans, they are not against the law. VA officials also said that as long as beneficiaries are competent, they can spend their benefits as they see fit. The VA also deferred addressing financial exploitation issues to its Inspector General's office, saying there is limited incentive to track issues when they involve actions against veterans that do not violate laws or VA rules.

[Source: VA News Release | October 8, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Medical Error Investigations**

### **Update 01: Congress Grills VA over Additional Incidents**

Department of Veterans Affairs watchdogs and journalists have reported about veterans being hurt by or dying because of underqualified or negligent VA doctors and other medical providers for years. In the past months, a former VA pathologist was charged with manslaughter in the deaths of three veteran patients and is alleged to have botched diagnosis in 3,000 cases, a former nurse has been charged with stealing pain medication from veterans, a VA staff member is accused of sexual assaults and another former staff member is a person of interest in multiple veteran

homicides, among others. A recent VA Inspector General report showed that VA hired and then allowed an under-qualified eye doctor to perform cataract surgeries for two years. The VA announced it was disciplining nine employees at a nursing home where a veteran reportedly died covered in ant bites.

Marine veteran Brian Tally, who nearly died because of medical malpractice and still feels its effects, is championing multiple pieces of legislation in Congress to fight back. At a House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing 16 OCT, members of Congress pushed VA leadership for answers and heard from representatives from the VA Inspector General and Government Accountability offices. "These reports are sickening," Rep. Chris Pappas (D-NH) said, adding that VA leaders have shown "disregard for patient safety risks ... and ignored concerns raised by staff" about substandard care and mismanagement. "It appears many of these problems are, in large part, failures of leadership," Rep. Jack Bergman (R-MI) said.

Collectively, the recent string of cases "speaks to a wider problem" at VA, Pappas said, adding that he wanted to know "What red flags are VA's facilities missing or overlooking or choosing to ignore?" And this is not new territory for VA, Pappas said. In 2017, Congress held a similar hearing on medical harm to veterans at VA and at that hearing, VA leaders committed to changes to improve veteran care and safety. But since then, VA has not made those changes. "This needs to serve as a wake-up call," Pappas said. "We need to see that VA leaders are as outraged as we are." VA leaders said policy changes were in progress, expected to be complete in summer 2020. "Our veterans deserve better and we must give them our best effort because they have given us their best effort through their service," Bergman said. "We have to mitigate the risk of future failures."

In testimony submitted to Congress, the Government Accountability and Inspector General's offices found that VA did not always address medical staff who didn't meet license requirements and did not always document reviews of medical staff. Steven Lieberman, acting principal deputy undersecretary for health at the Veterans Health Administration emphasized that VA is treating more veterans than ever, and said it was "a shame" that the actions of "a few" VA staff members could "overshadow" the work of thousands of other VA workers, and said most medical mistakes "are unintentional."

"VA removes people who willfully cause harm in patient care," Lieberman said. "We have not found a common thread between the recent incidents. Instead, there are a small number of people who acted inappropriately." VA has a "robust" system for background checks and vetting of hires, Lieberman said. "Unfortunately, there is no way in healthcare to predict every human failing," he said. "I am sorry for any pain any veterans and their families have experienced because of our employees acting inappropriately." [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | October 16, 2019 ++]

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## **VA ATLAS Program**

### **Telehealth Outreach Launched to VFW, American Legion Posts**

The Department of Veterans Affairs is expanding its telehealth platform to give veterans access to healthcare at local American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts. VFW Post 6786 in Eureka, MT became the first in the nation this week to open a connected health clinic as part of the VA's ATLAS (Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations) program. The project aims to improve access to care for the nation's 20 million veterans, roughly 5 million of which live in designated rural areas. "Our goal is to make sure every veteran has access to healthcare," VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a press release. "ATLAS eliminates another healthcare hurdle for veterans living in rural areas or with limited Internet access, and it's a great example of how public and private organizations can work together to solve the challenges of healthcare."

The program is a partnership involving the VA, VFW, American Legion and Philips, which is providing the virtual care platform and mHealth devices for the telehealth stations. Clinics will soon be opening at a VFW post in Linesville,

PA, a combined VFM/American Legion post in Los Banos, CA and an American Legion post in Springfield, VA. “Sitting inside state-of-the-art, private, Internet-connected healthcare pods developed and donated by Philips, veterans will benefit from virtual appointments in familiar surroundings conducted by VA medical professionals,” VFW National Commander William J. “Doc” Schmitz said in the press release. “This removes geographic and digital barriers and is the latest way today’s VFW Posts are innovating to address the needs of our Veterans and their families.”

The VA-Philips partnership was unveiled in late 2018 as part of the agency’s “Anywhere to Anywhere VA Health Care” initiative launched a year earlier by Wilkie’s predecessor, David Shulkin. Along with the Philips deal, the VA also forged partnerships with Walmart to establish telehealth clinics in select locations and T-Mobile to host the VA’s Video Connect mHealth app. While the mHealth app enables veterans to access care from their smartphone or laptop, the Walmart and Philips deals aim to reach veterans who don’t normally use mHealth devices, but would go to a locally located clinic.

“(It) totally changes the VA’s footprint for delivering care,” Deborah Scher, executive adviser to the VA’s Center for Strategic Partnerships, said last year. “We mapped out where our veterans are in greatest concentration against VA facilities, and then we put the Walmart map on top of that. Ninety percent of Americans live within 10 miles of a Walmart. Ninety percent of veterans don’t live within 10 miles of a VA medical center. This totally changes their ability to access care in a way that works for their lives.” VA officials have estimated that the agency’s connected health platform has logged more than 1.3 million video visits serving some 485,000 veterans since 2017. In FY 2019 alone, the platform has seen more than 2.5 million episodes of care. [Source: VA News Release | October 1, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Data Protection**

### **VA Largely Silent on Measures to Safeguard It**

In the wake of massive data breaches across the U.S., and a Department of Veterans Affairs announcement of new plans to share veteran healthcare records digitally with its private provider network, the VA has been largely silent on measures it’s taking to protect veterans’ sensitive information. VA’s announcement and longtime goal of creating digital health records that automatically follow veterans from doctor to doctor -- whether a VA doctor, contractor or private “community care” VA network provider -- has some veterans concerned about who might have access to their most private data, particularly in light of past VA and Defense Department data breaches. Previously, veterans had to provide written permission to VA before the department could share their records. Both VA and the Defense Department have been sued in the last month over veteran data security.

VA says it treats as many as nine million veterans each year in what has become the largest healthcare system in the United States. The department handles millions of sensitive health records, and with the launch of the MISSION Act on 6 JUN, it expanded its community care network of private providers and telehealth opportunities -- which could mean more data sharing than ever. Some veterans, including those who brought a lawsuit in September over the plans for automatic records sharing, say requiring veterans to opt-out of having their sensitive data shared, and automatically sharing them in any way, could violate their Constitutional rights to privacy and put them at risk. The lawsuit coincided with VA delaying the start of the new policy until Jan. 1, 2020.

And it's not only VA security that veterans are concerned about. Another lawsuit earlier this month brought by [Vietnam Veterans of America](#) against the Defense Department challenged DoD’s “leaking of personal information belonging to active duty and veterans.” The lawsuit, which reached a settlement agreement 3 OCT, alleged that DoD was “leaking” the data of service members and veterans “to identity thieves and companies who sell data for unauthorized commercial purposes.” “The government has a duty to veterans and service members to safeguard their privacy and to ensure that it is not leaving sensitive information unsecured,” said Jonathan Manes, an attorney who represented VVA in the suit.

## Who has access?

A VA spokesperson told Connecting Vets that VA's health information sharing is similar to non-VA healthcare policies -- "only those with a need for the veterans' health records and legally authorized to have the records are provided them." Those people include but are not necessarily limited to:

- The veteran;
- The veteran's VA and community care healthcare providers;
- VA employees with a "need to know" for treatment, payment and healthcare operation purposes, such as nurses, doctors, claims staff and others.

Part of the massive healthcare records sharing includes the [eHealth Exchange](#), an initiative of an entity known as the "[Sequoia Project](#)," a third-party group of companies and organizations advocating for and working on large health information exchange networks. Some veterans are concerned that means third parties could potentially access their records, or that lack of security could risk data breaches or mining. When asked if any third-parties involved in facilitating the health records exchange could access any veteran data or health records, VA responded simply: "No." VA has a system to track access to a veteran's health record if that record is flagged as sensitive, officials said. But there is not a system for logging access if the record is not labeled "sensitive."

VA policy requires users of its information system who access personal information as part of their official duties to avoid unauthorized sharing of that data and prohibits other users from accessing that information without permission, but if the record is not labeled "sensitive," VA's system does not track their access. The VA's Privacy Notice specifically mentions that VA may use or disclose veterans' health information without permission to law enforcement, credit reporting agencies; other federal departments such as Defense, National Security, the FDA or Centers for Disease Control; judicial officials; correctional facilities; Congress; VA academic partners; state drug monitoring programs. Unless veterans opt-out of the VA's medical center patient directory when you are admitted to a VA hospital or clinic, VA can also release: your general condition, religious affiliation and the location where you're receiving care to people who ask about you by name.

## VA data breaches

In the past 10 years, VA has had five major data breaches in which more than 5,000 veterans' data has been compromised, according to documents obtained by Connecting Vets through Freedom of Information Act Requests. The breaches have largely worsened over time, though they remain a smaller percentage of the millions of records VA possesses. The largest happened last year, affecting nearly 20,000 veterans.

- 19,254 veterans in October 2018
- 7,029 in November 2014
- 7,405 in February 2013
- 5,126 in June 2011
- 5,933 in April 2011

The first breach in 2011 and the 2018 breach both directly involved protected health information (PHI). The second breach in 2011 involved financial information and VA was required to offer credit monitoring to thousands of veterans. VA did not provide information on specifically how veterans were affected by the data breaches or what steps the department took to address the issue, saying only that "the system does not collect that information" and declining to comment further.

A VA Inspector General report released 17 OCT found that "veterans' sensitive personal information was left unprotected" on two shared network drives accessible to veteran service organizations not connected to those veterans. Investigators "determined that mishandling this sensitive personal information was a national issue" in part because VA staff "failed to discover and remove any sensitive personal information stored on shared network drives." "Without better protection, veterans and VA are at risk," the report said. "Veterans are at significant risk of unauthorized disclosure and misuse of their sensitive personal information. This has the potential to expose veterans to fraud and identity theft." VA could also be liable and "could also lose credibility with veterans who trust that their sensitive

personal information is being appropriately secured.” The assistant secretary for information and technology agreed with the report recommendations. Meanwhile, the VA’s Data Breach Response Service determined the issue did not qualify as a “data breach” so the VA does not have to notify the affected individuals that their information was compromised nor offer them credit protection services.

### **Security**

When asked what assurances VA can provide veterans that their data is secure, is not being shared, mined or otherwise accessed by anyone other than their healthcare providers or VA staff determining their claims, VA was brief: “VA health records are only accessed by or shared with individuals who have a need for the veterans’ health records and are legally authorized to have the records,” a spokesman said in a statement, without responding to requests for specifics measures in place to secure that information. “VA complies with all federal security requirements and continually monitors compliance with those regulations.” VA’s Notice of Privacy specifically says, “We will not sell your health information.” Despite multiple requests, VA declined to make Secretary Robert Wilkie available for interviews or to provide a statement of any kind from the head of the VA about how the department is working to protect veterans’ private information.

### **Get help**

The Veterans Health Administration “Notice of Privacy Practices” outlines all uses and disclosures of veterans’ health records by VA. To read that notice, [click here](#) and then select “[VA Privacy Practices](#)” under the “Resources” section. That notice includes many situations in which VA says it is authorized to release veterans’ private health information to a variety of parties without the veteran’s permission. Veterans who are concerned their privacy rights have been violated can file complaints with:

- The privacy officer at your local VA;
- VA on its website, calling 1-800-983-0936 or by writing the VHA Privacy Office at 810 Vermont Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C., 20420;
- The [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights](#);
- The [Office of the Inspector General](#).

[Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | October 18, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Breast Cancer Care**

### **Update 01: Awareness and Available Tools**

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in women, following lung cancer. Besides skin cancer, breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among American women. About 1 in 8 U.S. women will develop invasive breast cancer over the course of her lifetime. This makes breast cancer a serious concern for women Veterans. The good news is that localized breast cancer has a 99% survival rate if detected early, and VA leads the nation’s health care systems in providing mammograms to those who need them.

VA encourages all women between ages 50 and 75 to get mammograms every two years. If your health care provider recommends a mammogram outside of that age range, VA will still provide it. Breast cancer risk varies among women. Explore your risk with your health care team – they can help determine when you should start receiving mammograms and how you can reduce your risk of developing breast cancer. Check out the following tools available to VA patients and health professionals to assist in evaluating your risk and optimizing any treatment needed:

- [Breast Cancer Risk Calculator](#)
- [Breast Cancer Risk Factors](#)
- [Know:BCRA](#)(determine your genetic risk)
- [Reduce Your Risk](#)



All VA medical centers have a Women Veterans Program Manager to help women Veterans access VA benefits and health care services. Veteran patients can sign into [My HealtheVet](#) and send a secure message to your health care team. To find the VA medical center nearest you, call 1-877-222-8387 or visit [www.va.gov/directory](http://www.va.gov/directory). VA Women Veterans can call 1-855-VA-WOMEN (1-855-829-6636) to ask questions about available VA services and resources. Want to know more? Check out VA's dedicated resources for Women Veterans: [Women Veteran Call Center](#).

[Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | October 18, 2019 ++]

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## VA Secretary

### Update 88: Former Secretary Shulkin's Tell-All Book

Former Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin released a tell-all book 22 OCT about his time in President Donald Trump's administration, detailing everything from his interview in Trump Tower to his firing-by-tweet 14 months later. Stars and Stripes spoke with Shulkin about his book, "**It Shouldn't Be This Hard to Serve Your Country.**" Part of the interview is below, with his responses lightly edited for brevity and clarity.

**Q:** *Why did you decide to write a book about your time as secretary?*

**A:** I really wanted the American public to understand why [the VA] is such an important system and why it's important that we maintain a strong VA -- that it's a fixable system. The second reason was that I'm increasingly concerned about peoples' willingness to volunteer for public service, to serve their country. With this type of environment that's out there in Washington now -- and the public attacks on people who are public servants -- I felt like we need a reset in the way that things work in Washington. I really wanted to share my story to let people understand how difficult it is now just for people to do their jobs and help the government function properly in this type of environment. In both of those cases, I felt like the story needed to be told.

**Q:** *You mention in the book that the VA is heading toward "grave danger," in part because of the VA Mission Act, a major expansion of veterans' access to private doctors. Can you expound on those warnings?*

**A:** The Mission Act is, overall, a bill that I strongly support. It's actually, in many ways, the culmination of the work I was doing for three years at the VA, which was to make the system to access the private sector work better. But the part that really concerns me is the issue related to access standards. I had asked Congress to allow the access standards to be at the discretion of the secretary. Obviously, I was no longer secretary after the Mission Act passed, so when the new access standards did finally get published, that's where my concern is. They continue to use what I call administrative or non-clinical rules for accessing the private sector -- they use wait times and drive times. I was a strong believer that access standards for veterans should be ... based on the clinical needs of a patient, not these administrative rules.

**Q:** *What specifically has you concerned about the access standards?*

**A:** It opens up the system in a way that may not be clinically appropriate. If that's the case and we start seeing a dramatic increase in the use of the private sector, that's going to cost a lot of money. My fear would be that would come out of the resources that are currently allocated to the VA, and as a result, lead to the deterioration of the VA. I just think that might be an unintended consequence of this policy and something we really have to be vigilant about and monitor. Without looking for it, we might reach a point where the resources in the VA and the volume in the VA have deteriorated to a point of no return.

**Q:** *You write about a group of political rivals inside the VA whom you say planned your demise because of your unwillingness to privatize the agency. Many of them have left the department since your termination. Are you still concerned about privatization efforts?*

**A:** I don't know anybody who's coming out and saying they favor privatization, but you wouldn't come out and say that, even if that was your belief. You'd simply follow a policy like [the Mission Act], continue to open up the system and ultimately watch a shift in resources. While nobody is coming about and saying that their policy is to privatize the system, we have to watch this very carefully to make sure that doesn't happen. I think that many people have just gone underground right now and are waiting for the right opportunity to continue to push for these types of things.

**Q:** *If you were secretary right now, what would be your most urgent priorities?*

**A:** Nobody knows better than I do the complexity and difficulty of being secretary. There is no such thing as a single priority, there are multiple priorities in this job that require that you balance a number of those and pay attention to all of them. I think on the benefits side, the top priority has to be to resolve outstanding issues that make veterans and their families wait for answers or continue to have to fight through a legal system ... that isn't consistent with our values. I think on the health care side, the continued modernization of the VA system, which includes the electronic health record and improving the access to private-sector care. I think the focus on veteran suicide as a top priority is something that the VA has continued, and that's a very, very good thing. I think filling staffing vacancies out there is important to do. And listening to veterans and understanding what it is they want -- that's ultimately what this is about.

**Q:** *In the book, you give your account of a European trip that became a national scandal during your tenure. Looking back now, would you have done anything differently in regard to the trip?*

**A:** I think people may not realize that when the secretary has to travel, there's very complex logistics and a team that schedules that. All aspects of it were approved ahead of time by ethics lawyers, the State Department and other federal agencies, so I don't know how I could have avoided the issues. Do I regret that this was attention taken away from what the agency should've been focused on? Of course I do. Do I regret that people used this in a political sense? Of course. But one can't look back and change things that frankly probably weren't changeable.

**Q:** *What do you want veterans to take away from reading your book?*

**A:** I dedicated this book to veterans because, ultimately, they inspired me to such a great degree. When I question whether this was all worth it because of the painful experience I had toward the end of my term, I just think (about) the veterans. It was nothing but an honor to be able to improve the system and to serve them. I want to continue to be a proactive advocate on behalf of veterans and continue to see the system evolve and do well.

**Q:** *Is there anything else you want people to know?*

**A:** You don't write books because you're going to earn money. You write them because you have something that you really want people to hear. I think if we want to continue to rely on a voluntary military where people are going to raise their hands to protect the rest of us, they have to know there's a system in place should they need it when they come back. I really see [the VA] as an integral part of our national security system. Secondly, just every day, watching the amount of people that are coming in and out of the revolving doors in the Cabinet, in the White House, and then the personal attacks that follow -- it just makes me sad. I know this country is better than that, and I know how important it is that we continue to have people who are willing to spend time in making this government work better. I want to see us return to some normality in the political process.

[Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | October 22, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Special Monthly Compensation**

### **Update 04: SMC(L) & (L ½) Entitlements**

When veterans are receiving compensation at the 100% rate, they're not getting the most compensation available them? Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) is a benefit that is paid in addition to the basic rates of pay available through the VA's rating schedule. Establishing entitlement to a basic level of SMC allows a veteran to then be potentially

eligible for even higher compensation under other categories of SMC. The purpose behind SMC is to compensate veterans who have service connected disabilities involving the anatomical loss or loss of use of certain body parts or when there is impairment of certain senses. Refer to the Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) Rate Table at [https://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/resources\\_comp02.asp](https://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/resources_comp02.asp) to see the compensation rate for SMC(L) & (L ½). The following conditions qualify for a rating under Category L:

- Amputation of both feet (below the knee)
- Loss of use of both feet (below the knee)
- Amputation of one foot (below the knee) and the loss of use of the other foot
- Amputation of one hand (below the elbow) and one foot (below the knee)
- Loss of use of one hand (below the elbow) and one foot (below the knee)
- Amputation of one foot (below the knee) and the loss of use of one hand
- Amputation of one hand (below the elbow) and the loss of use of one foot
- Blindness in both eyes
- Permanently bedridden
- In regular need of another person to help dress, clean, feed himself, and use the restroom (aid and attendance)

The following conditions qualify for a rating under Category L ½:

- Amputation of one foot and amputation of the other knee
- Loss of use of one foot and amputation of the other knee
- Amputation of one foot and loss of use of the other knee
- Loss of use of one foot and loss of use of the other knee
- Amputation of one foot and amputation of one elbow
- Amputation of one foot and loss of use of one elbow
- Loss of use of one foot and amputation of one elbow
- Loss of use of one foot and loss of use of one elbow
- Amputation of one knee and amputation of one hand
- Amputation of one knee and loss of use of one hand
- Loss of use of one knee and amputation of one hand
- Loss of use of one knee and loss of use of one hand
- Blindness in one eye and total blindness in the other eye with only the ability to perceive light
- Blindness in both eyes and loss of use of one foot (rated by the VASRD less than 50%)

The issue of entitlement to SMC(L) or (L ½) should not have to be raised by the veteran filing a claim on a specific form. Because it is an inferred issue, the VA is supposed to consider it automatically if there is evidence in the veteran's file supporting a finding of entitlement. If, however, you feel that you qualify and you are not receiving, contact your local VA office. [Source:

[Source: <http://www.veteranprograms.com/2019-smc-codes.html> | September 2019 ++]

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## **VA Whistleblowers**

### **Update 60: New OAWP Has Put them in Further Danger**

Two years ago, Congress created a new office within the Veterans Affairs department to investigate employee misconduct and protect whistleblowers from retaliation. But instead, the office has put whistleblowers in further danger, and failed to live up to many other aspects of its statutory mission, according to a VA inspector general review released 17 OCT. Fifty. That's the number of times a report from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Inspector General

(OIG) used the word "fail" or "failure" in its review of a VA office designed to protect agency whistleblowers. While OIG investigators said there were signs that VA had started to turn the office around, they found the first two leaders of the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection (OAWP) “engaged in misdeeds and missteps that appeared unsupportive of whistleblowers.”

The report said OAWP operated without any written procedures and processes to guide its work — one possible explanation for the fact that dozens of complaints “fell through the cracks” and went uninvestigated for nine months. In other cases, the office took steps that actively put whistleblowers in more danger of retaliation. In hundreds of instances, the whistleblower protection office simply referred complaints back to the VA organizations that were the subjects of the problems whistleblowers complained about. Out of more than 3,000 complaints OAWP handled between mid-2017 and the end of 2018, the office sent just over 500 to its own investigative staff. The rest were referred to other VA organizations — including more than 1,600 to the Veterans Benefits Administration and more than 200 to the Veterans Health Administration.

And when it made those referrals, OAWP did not always conceal the whistleblowers’ identities or even notify them that they were sending them back to VA components, according to the IG. In cases of whistleblower retaliation claims, the office required them to agree to let their names be revealed if they wanted an investigation done. The report offered one example of a whistleblower — a VA psychologist claiming misconduct and whistleblower retaliation by management — who withdrew his complaint after learning it would be impossible to stay anonymous. “I guess, bottom line, the facility knows it’s me,” he told OAWP. “I just don’t want my own HR to ‘investigate’ this and stir up yet more problems when they’ve been involved at every step.”

In another case, the IG said VA appears to have used the office to retaliate against one of its own whistleblowers. That example involved Peter Shelby, the then assistant secretary for human resources and administration, who was the subject of several complaints to OAWP. One of Shelby’s subordinates, a career senior executive who’d accused him of retaliation and discrimination, became the target of an OAWP investigation himself after Shelby told OAWP the whistleblower was insubordinate. According to the report, OAWP recommended the whistleblower’s firing after a lightning-fast nine day investigation in which it interviewed only one witness. “Multiple witnesses aware of the circumstances relating to [the whistleblower] told OIG investigators that the treatment...had a chilling effect on their willingness to come forward with allegations of wrongdoing,” according to the report. “One witness quoted Mr. Shelby as saying, ‘I’ll whip out my Accountability Act and just start firing people.’”

The report’s critiques extend well beyond OAWP’s handling of whistleblower retaliation. The IG said the office’s leadership misinterpreted many aspects of the law that authorized its creation from the very beginning. As one result of that, the office declined to investigate some matters it was legally required to, and held onto some complaints that should have been sent to other VA organizations. For instance, the office decided to investigate a June 2018 case in which a VA police officer allegedly used excessive force against a hospital patient, because the incident had caught the attention of VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. OAWP ultimately determined there wasn’t enough evidence that the officer acted improperly. But since the incident was a potentially serious criminal matter, it should have been sent to criminal investigators at the Office of the Inspector General.

Conversely, the office declined to investigate complaints that were actually within its scope because of widespread confusion about its mission under the law, the IG said. The 2017 Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act tells the office to investigate both whistleblower disclosures and allegations of misconduct or poor performance by supervisors, VA senior leaders and policymakers. “Witnesses provided the OIG with conflicting responses when explaining whether the OAWP curtailed its investigative authority to investigate only matters that arose from whistleblower complaints,” according to the report. “Similarly, the OIG’s review of cases identified examples in which the source of the allegation was not a whistleblower. The conflicting information on this subject underscores the need for the OAWP to issue clear written triage guidance that conforms with the OAWP’s statutory scope.”

The IG found many of the office’s problems stemmed from the fact that its staff were made up predominantly of people with human resources backgrounds — not investigative ones. “This deficiency was aggravated by the OAWP’s failure to provide sufficient training on such critical topics as interviewing witnesses, conducting investigations, and writing reports,” according to the report. And thus far, the office doesn’t appear to have had much of an impact on one of its main purposes: holding VA leaders accountable for poor performance or misconduct. The IG said it could find only one instance in which a “covered executive” had been fired under the Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act: Brian Hawkins, the former director of the Washington, D.C. VA Medical Center. OAWP handled 35 cases involving allegations against VA leaders between June 2017 and March 2019. But the VA officials in charge of meting out disciplinary actions agreed with OAWP’s recommendations in only three of those cases.

“The OIG determined that VA’s lack of adequate written guidance concerning penalties left disciplinary officials to largely rely upon subjective judgments in actions involving covered executives, which has resulted in frequent mitigation of OAWP’s recommended discipline,” investigators wrote. The OIG said VA “deciding officials” often declined to follow OAWP’s disciplinary recommendations because they determined the proposed penalties were too harsh. That may have been because the office had a practice of only providing the evidence that supported punishment or removal, and not mitigating factors that could argue against it. “OAWP investigators did not conduct investigations designed to ensure that all known or obviously relevant evidence was obtained,” according to the report, “Rather, in many instances, they focused only on finding evidence sufficient to substantiate the allegations without attempting to find potentially exculpatory or contradictory evidence. One disciplinary official described OAWP investigations as ‘a [disciplinary] action in search of evidence.’”

The OIG review mostly covered the period of mid-2017 through the end of 2018 — just before VA hired Dr. Tamara Bonzanto as its new assistant secretary for OAWP in January of 2019. Investigators acknowledged the office has made some improvements under the leadership of Bonzanto, a registered nurse and former House Veterans Affairs Committee investigator. In her written response to the report, Bonzanto said she had already identified many of the same problems the OIG called out in its report, and agreed with all 22 of the recommendations investigators made. “By April 2019, Dr. Bonzanto identified several deficiencies that needed to be corrected, including staff who were making decisions on her behalf with little to no oversight; teams who were duplicating efforts; investigators who were conducting investigations without sufficient training; a lack of communication with whistleblowers about the status of their matters; a lack of written policies and standard operating procedures; and reports and recommendations that displayed a lack of training,” according to VA’s statement to the IG. “Dr. Bonzanto developed and implemented a plan to correct these deficiencies.”

VA says it resolved several of the recommendations in September, when it issued a new directive that clearly lays out OAWP’s policies and missions. But the OIG said the new directive doesn’t cure all of the problems it found, and it still considers all 22 recommendations to be unresolved. For instance, investigators contend that VA is still defining OAWP’s investigative authority in a way that goes beyond what Congress allowed. “Specifically, it expands the scope of the OAWP’s authority to investigate misconduct and poor performance for individuals other than those identified in the statute. The OIG has seen no evidence of consultation with Office of General Counsel or other analysis to justify how such an expansion of the OAWP’s investigative authority complies with statutory requirements.”

And the IG says OAWP still hasn’t solved the whistleblower confidentiality problem. The new directive does make clear that their identities can only be disclosed with the whistleblower’s consent, but IG says the office is still requiring employees who complain of retaliation to give that consent before it will open an investigation. “The OAWP only provides complainants with two options: to consent to release identity or not,” according to the report. “As a result, employees could only receive OAWP’s investigative services if they consented to release and risk disclosure of their identity.” [Source: Federal News Network | Jared Serbu | October 25, 2019 ++]

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## VA Hiring

### Update 16: MSEP Program Expands

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced 25 OCT it is expanding employment opportunities for military spouses department wide, as part of its formal induction into the Department of Defense (DOD) Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) program. The career program connects military spouses with more than 390 affiliated employers who have committed to recruit, hire, promote and retain military spouses in portable jobs. “Hiring and retaining military spouses is not only good for business, but the quality of life and financial stability of military families tie directly to the readiness and retention of the military forces,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “VA is committed to delivering better services to Veterans and their families and military spouses possess the education, diversity, skills and unique perspectives that can help us deliver on our promise to care for Veterans.”

VA’s Board of Veterans’ Appeals (Board) joined the MSEP last year and is working to identify additional best practices for hiring military spouses through a Board military spouse working group. In July 2019, the Board, as VA’s representative, entered into an agreement with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Hiring Our Heroes to share best practices for the hiring and retaining of military spouses, including membership in MSEP. MSEP is part of DOD’s broader Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) program which seeks to reduce the 24% unemployment rate experienced by military spouses and 25% wage gap experienced by military wives. SECO provides education and career guidance to military spouses worldwide and offers free, comprehensive resources and tools related to career exploration to include education, training and licensing, employment readiness and career connections.

To learn more about SECO, search [Military OneSource](#) or call 800-342-9647 to speak to a SECO career coach. Visit [MSEP job](#) for more information on the 350,000 plus active career postings for military spouses. [Source: <http://www.militarydisabilitymadeeasy.com/specialmonthlycompensation.html> | September 2019 ++]

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## VA Fraud, Waste, & Abuse

### Reported 16 thru 31 OCT 2019

**Bath, NY** – U.S. Attorney James P. Kennedy, Jr. announced 21 OCT that **Nolan Rogers**, 32, of Lisbon, CT, pleaded guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge Marian W. Payson to possession of fentanyl. The charge carries a maximum penalty of one year in prison, and a fine of up to \$100,000. Assistant U.S. Attorney Sean C. Eldridge, who is handling the case, stated that the defendant was a resident at the Bath, NY Veterans Affairs Medical Center. On March 3, 2019, Rogers returned to the facility after a trip home to Connecticut, when he encountered a VA Police officer. During a pat-down, 20 small bags were removed by the officer from the defendant’s pocket, and Rogers told the officer that the bags contained fentanyl. Laboratory testing confirmed that the substance was fentanyl. Sentencing is scheduled for November 11, 2019 before Judge Payson. [Source: DOJ Western Dist. of New York | U.S. Attorney’s Office | October 21, 2019 ++]

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**Anchorage, Alaska** – U.S. Attorney Bryan Schroder announced that **Richard Vaughan**, 72, and **Donald Garner**, 47, were arrested 23 OCT and have been charged in a 31 count indictment with bribery and wire fraud related to Small Business Association (“SBA”) “set-aside” contracts with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (“VA”). Vaughan was a VA contract officer representative (“COR”) and was responsible for awarding and managing numerous contracts awarded by the VA, including certain Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) “set-aside” contracts. Vaughan also had “Purchase Card Program” authorization to spend approximately \$600,000 per year on “micro-purchases” for nonstandard supplies and services for the VA. Garner was the owner and manager of

Veteran Ability, LLC, a government contractor that provided various services, such as snow removal and housekeeping, to the U.S. government, including the VA in Anchorage, Alaska.

From June 2015 through January 2017, Garner paid at least \$29,235 in bribes to Vaughan in exchange for, among other things, preferential treatment in awarding certain VA contracts and purchase card orders and certifying payments on deficient invoices submitted by Garner for work that was unnecessary or never performed. The scheme resulted in Garner receiving the benefit of payments of approximately \$725,226.56 under a VA snow removal contract, \$776,272.00 under a VA housekeeping contract, and purchase card payments in the amount of \$194,330.40. If convicted both defendants face a maximum of 20 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, and 3 years of supervised release for the most serious charges in the indictment. Under the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, the actual sentence imposed will be based upon the seriousness of the offense and the prior criminal history, if any, of the defendant. An indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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## VA Home Care

### New Medical Care Requirement Causing Problems

Once a week for the last couple of years, a home care worker named Lori has shown up at Steve Viera's house to do laundry, carry in food, clean and generally help the disabled veteran live his life. Viera is a former sheet metal worker who served in the Navy in the Middle East from 1979 to 1981, so the U.S. Veterans Administration pays for the visits. It's just a short few hours, but for Viera, a divorced New Haven resident, it's a lifeline. "If it wasn't for them I wouldn't exist," the 59-year-old Viera said 25 OCT.

Lori works for Companions & Homemakers Inc., a large, statewide agency that had more than 200 home care clients through the VA until recently. Starting 1 OCT, Companions lost that work for reasons that make little sense. Lori is still coming to help Viera every week, but under murky circumstances, as Companions — probably not being paid for the visits — tries to sort out what's happening. The VA home care system changed under the sweeping MISSION Act in 2018. Home care for veterans such as Viera, which was arranged by local VA offices, is now organized by giant third-party administrators. In the Northeast, that's Optum, a health services business owned by UnitedHealthcare. And as we might expect when centralized bureaucracies grow because of grand, flawed visions of efficiency, this reform includes useless rules. To participate in the VA program, home care companies must now certify that they're medical providers.

Trouble is, they're not medical providers under a strict federal definition. Claiming they are could put their separate Medicaid business — a huge amount of their revenues — in jeopardy. "We will not lie under oath," said Linda Grigerek, the Companions & Homemakers president. Her company has lost two-thirds of its VA clients, about \$1.2 million a year of work, as a result of the rule she can't meet, even as the VA and Optum apparently struggle to find caregivers. Although the VA did not confirm that it's having problems filling the needed shifts, Companions & Homemakers is still working with more than 60 of the former clients because, Grigerek and other executives said, the VA **has not found** others to do the work under the new rules.

We all understand, of course, that business conditions and contract requirements change and that causes disruption with winners and losers. If this profitable company loses a few clients and other firms pick them up, that's all part of the landscape, not my concern or the nation's. But this change is nettlesome because it represents a boneheaded government screw-up for no clear benefit. The home assistance companies — about 600 registered in Connecticut, many of them mom-and-pop firms — are not providing medical care such as blood pressure screenings and administering drugs. That's a different level of care, not covered by the low-cost contracts for caregivers who spend hours at a time with clients. The VA pays \$16.48 an hour to home care providers in Connecticut for most contracts, meaning the workers typically make barely more than the minimum wage.

So all we have is a needless ruse creating chaos for vulnerable clients. “There are other businesses that have signed a contract,” Grigerek said. “I don’t know if they know they’re lying under oath.” Two of those smaller firms, which are on board in the new system, did not return calls on Friday 25 OCT. Late Friday, U.S. Rep. John B. Larson (D-CT-01) sent a letter to Robert Wilkie, secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, offering help in straightening out the issue. “The local VA has assured us that there will be no disruption of care,” Larson said in the letter he sent after Companions & Homemakers reached out to him. “However, this change has undoubtedly caused a disruption in the lives of the veterans impacted by it.” But as Larson said, it’s unclear how many caregivers have been replaced by new firms. Viera said the head of a home care agency has called him about 20 times, hoping to recruit Lori away from Companions & Homemakers. “He wants to talk to her and try to convince her to come to him. I can’t give him her number,” Viera said.

Among other issues, he said, Lori — the home care employee — would lose seniority she has at Companions, and would make less money with the new agency, he said she told him. “She wants to work, she wants to help me. She’s like emotionally involved with her clients. She calls up to check on me to see if I’m okay,” Viera said, noting that’s not true of all caregivers. As for jumping to a new firm, “She’s not gonna unless they come up with money and pay her, which is the American way.” That raises a related issue of controversy. With the state budget adopted in June and signed by Gov. Ned Lamont, home care agencies such as Companions & Homemakers lost the right to enforce so-called non-solicitation agreements with their caregivers. That means as of this year, the agencies can’t stop employees from poaching the very clients they’re serving, as they’re serving them, to take the work away.

Most of us would agree it’s unseemly for employers to impose non-compete agreements on low-wage workers, preventing them from working for competitors. Advocates including Sen. Chris Murphy have fought for states and the federal government to outlaw noncompete clauses, and the state of California has set an outright ban. That’s good policy. But Connecticut barring the non-solicitation agreements — with no debate in a hidden paragraph in the state budget — was bad policy, a measure too far. Groups such as New Haven Legal Assistance, which have fought for an end to non-compete agreements for low- and moderate-wage workers, have not sought an end to non-solicitation agreements — although James Bhandary-Alexander, a staff attorney there, said the solicitation issue may not pose a significant threat.

Grigerek at Companions & Homemakers says it does threaten the company — and insists the VA issue is a perfect illustration, as competing firms try to hire her caregivers for the very clients she had. “There’s just nothing to protect the work that we do,” she said, matching caregivers with clients and providing back-up support. All of this represents gray areas of law and government practice, and Grigerek said she’d prefer to work with the state to clear up the non-solicitation ban. As for the VA transition, it will work out fine for disabled veteran clients in the end, as these things do. But the medical designation for non-medical work is frustrating for affected families and firms because, at the rates they’re paying, the **VA is not getting medical care**, period, no matter what the documents show.

Linda Stewart, a Bristol resident and part-time caregiver for Companions, lost a client in the changeover and isn’t leaning toward signing up with the new firm, for just over \$11 an hour and travel expenses not covered. “I enjoyed working for him,” Stewart said, adding, “He has issues with trusting people because he has PTSD.” [Source: CT Post | Dan Haar | October 25, 2019 ++]

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## VA Legacy Appeals

### 31 DEC 2022 Set as End Date for Resolving All Pending Ones

There’s now an end date for resolving legacy appeals pending across the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA announced on 29 OCT that it expects to complete its remaining legacy appeals by the end of calendar year 2022. A legacy appeal is a disagreement with a VA benefits decision made before Feb. 19, 2019. That’s when the Veterans



Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (AMA) went into effect. AMA created a new appeals system with three review options: A higher-level review by a more senior claims adjudicator; a supplemental claim option for new and relevant evidence; and an appeal option for review by the Board of Veterans' Appeals "AMA has been in place for almost a year and we are finally starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel for the resolution of legacy appeals," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie in a news release.

The Board of Veterans Appeals will continue to work appeals from the Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration, and National Cemetery Administration. The Veterans Appeals Board says it handed down 95,089 decisions in Fiscal Year 2019, which ended 1 OCT. That's 5,000 more decisions than the VA's goal and about 11 percent more than last year -- the previous record high, according to VA. Under the new framework, veterans can choose the appeals option that meets their needs. AMA also includes safeguards to ensure claimants receive the earliest effective dates possible for their claims. Veterans who are waiting for their decisions are encouraged to check the status of their appeal via the [appeals status tracker](#). [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Julia LeDoux | October 30, 2019 ++]

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## VAMC Clarksburg WV

### Update 03: Ten Deaths – 2 Ruled Homicides, 8 Others Might Be

Nurse Charles Cullen worked at nine hospitals in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, killing dozens of patients by spiking saline IV bags with deadly doses of drugs physicians did not order and patients did not need. Donald Harvey, who worked as an orderly among other hospital jobs, roamed units at three hospitals in Cincinnati and Kentucky where he killed more than two dozen patients. The health care killers used insulin, heart drugs or poisons such as cyanide. They had access to frail patients on hospital floors. Ultimately, they were convicted of murdering patients under their care.

As investigators assemble clues in at least two homicides and at least eight other suspicious deaths at a Clarksburg, West Virginia, Veterans Affairs hospital, past examples of health care workers who killed patients with unneeded medications — including insulin, the drug suspected in the VA deaths — show how difficult such cases can be to detect and prove. To learn more about this difficulty refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Medical Murderers**". [Source: KHOU-11 | Chloe Alexander | September 30, 2019 ++]

\* Vets \*



## Vet Cancer

### Dramatic Rise in VA Cases Raises New Questions

According to a disturbing new report veterans nationwide have seen a staggering increase in urinary, prostate, liver and blood cancers over the past two decades — leading some military families to wonder whether toxic environments

in the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan are to blame. The rate of treatments, according to a McClatchy investigation published 30 OCT for ex-soldiers at Department of Veterans Affairs health care centers in fiscal year 2000 thru 2018, increased:

- 96 percent for liver and pancreatic cancers
- 61 percent for urinary cancers — including bladder, kidney and ureter cancers
- 23 percent for prostate cancer treatment, and
- 18 percent for blood cancer treatments — lymphoma, myeloma and leukemia —

In general, the rate of cancer treatments received by veterans at VA facilities peaked in the fiscal year 2009 and declined over the past several years, according to the outlet’s probe. Still, the rate is significantly higher than before the 9/11 attacks that led to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the investigation revealed. For liver and pancreatic cancers specifically, the rate of treatments more than doubled for both Army and Marine Corps veterans, the news organization reported. McClatchy conducted its investigation through an analysis of all billing data for veteran visits involving a cancer diagnosis at VA medical facilities. The Department of Veterans Affairs disagreed with the organization’s approach, noting that analyzing billing data would create an over count.

“According to the latest official VA cancer data, the annual total number of cancer cases among enrolled veterans peaked in 2010 and has been declining since,” the agency said in a statement. “Colorectal and prostate cancer have been declining, while hepatocellular and skin (melanoma) cancer have been increasing. These trends largely mirror national cancer trends.” Still, an analysis of the data provided to the outlet from the VA’s cancer registry system still showed increases in many types of cancer between 2000 and 2017.

Veteran Marine Corps Sgt. Mark S. Villamac Ho, who was deployed in early 2003 to Al Numaniyah, Iraq, as an aircraft rescue firefighter, told the outlet he developed multiple myeloma, a type of blood cancer, and a second cancer in his nose and throat. He was exposed to open-air trash-burning pits, as well as a firefighting foam — which the military is discontinuing over its links to cancer. “I got cancer because of my service in the military,” Ho told McClatchy. “There could be hundreds, thousands of veterans behind me getting cancer.” But Dr. Michael Kelley, chief of hematology and oncology for the VA, argued that far more research is necessary. “The time between possible exposure to a common carcinogen, for example, and the diagnosis of cancer is oftentimes measured in decades,” Kelley told McClatchy. “It can be very difficult to recreate what was happening in retrospect.” [Source: New York Post | Amanda Woods | October 30, 2019 ++]

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## Stolen Valor

### Update 117: Elderly Army Nurse’s Service Called into Question

In the wake of a heartwarming viral video that was featured everywhere from Good Morning America to the Daily Mail comes a disheartening revelation: The 84-year-old self-described Army nurse cranking out push-ups in her crisp Vietnam-era uniform might not be who she said she was.



**Margaret DeSanti (left) congratulating seniors during the Veterans Day celebration at Higly High School in Gilberton in 2014, and at 84 challenging a TSA agent (right) to a push-up competition, has been accused of misrepresenting her military service.**

Maggie DeSanti, allegedly a retired Army lieutenant colonel who rappelled out of helicopters in Vietnam, was captured in a video challenging a TSA agent to a push-up competition ahead of a flight to Washington, D.C., with the Arizona chapter of the organization Honor Flight on 16 OCT. The video soon was everywhere, and many who shared it, including Honor Flight, hailed DeSanti's toughness and spirit. But now the organization is quietly backing away from prior claims. In a statement posted in the Honor Flight Arizona Facebook page the group will acknowledge reports that an individual -- not mentioned by name -- had "misrepresented or embellished their military services which they are taking very seriously (<https://www.facebook.com/pg/honorflightaz/posts>)

Multiple efforts to reach DeSanti for comment were unsuccessful; one phone number, verified as belonging to her, was declining new calls. An email sent to her personal email account bounced back. DeSanti, as it turns out, had previously been investigated by several veterans who make it their business to uncover cases of military fraud, or, as it's also called, stolen valor. In 2014, the late Jonn Lilyea, an Army veteran of Operation Desert Storm, devoted a post to DeSanti on the website Valor Guardians, challenging her military claims. Lilyea wrote that he had submitted a personnel records request, using her Social Security number, to the National Personnel Records Center and got no records in return. While that does not conclusively indicate DeSanti never served -- famously, a 1973 fire burned millions of military personnel records -- it casts grave doubt on the fact.

"There's gotta be pay records, but there was absolutely nothing on her in there," Doug Sterner, the military valor historian who created the database Hall of Valor, told Military.com. "The odds are 999 out of 1,000 that that's totally accurate." If doubt remains on that count, other claims are immediately disprovable. DeSanti appears in multiple news photos in a uniform featuring a Silver Star -- even though no woman received the Silver Star during the Vietnam War. In 2005, Army Sgt. Leigh Ann Hester was the first woman to receive the prestigious medal since World War II. A biography from an event featuring DeSanti at the Chamber of Commerce in Mesa, Arizona, also claimed she had earned the Silver Star, as well as the Soldier's Medal. "That one always tees me off, because I always look at that with absolute reverence," Sterner said. Vietnam veteran Karen Offutt, a personal friend of Sterner's, received the rare Soldier's Medal for heroism not involved in fighting the enemy in 2001, after congressional intervention. She's believed to be the only female recipient from Vietnam.

DeSanti's service claims also appear to have changed over time. During a town board meeting in the town of Riverhead, New York, in 2004, she introduced herself during a comment period as a retired Army captain; she now claims to be a retired lieutenant colonel. According to another biography, for a scholarship created in her name by the Maricopa Association for Combat Veterans, DeSanti requested and was returned to active duty after Sept. 11, 2001, when she would have been already in her 60s. Jerry Walker, president of that organization, called any accusations regarding DeSanti's military service "ridiculous," saying he knew she had been recalled to active duty. "I knew her when she was a captain in the Nurse Corps," he said. "She's a really good person."

Susan Howe, the founder of Honor Flight Arizona, told Military.com that her organization had been subjected to "a firestorm" ever since the video featuring DeSanti was posted. It's only the second time since Honor Flight began that doubt has been raised about an individual's service record, she said. And since the organization cannot require that veterans present official records to verify military service, organizers take a lot on faith. Honor Flight Network began in 2005; it encompasses state and regional Honor Flight programs across the country. It started as a project to send World War II veterans to the nation's capital to see the WWII memorial; some hubs now also accept Korea and Vietnam-era veterans.

"Maybe over 300,000 veterans have been sent to Washington, D.C., to honor them," Howe said. " ... We have to trust that what they're telling us is the truth." Moving forward, she said, the organization plans to do more background research before highlighting any individual Honor Flight participant on social media. [Source: Military.com | Hope Hodge Seck | October 21, 2019 ++]

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## California GI Bill

### Update 03: State Backs Down over for-profit College Certification Issue

California has backed down from a fight with the Department of Veterans Affairs over a decision that restricts the state's power to regulate for-profit colleges enrolling students with GI Bill benefits. California had used its authority in the past to sanction colleges with shaky finances and to investigate complaints from veterans who felt misled by higher education programs. The VA in September announced that it would end the agreement that gives California a role in certifying colleges as eligible to receive GI Bill payments, citing the state's failure to carry out compliance surveys that track whether veterans' benefits are paid accurately. The state and the VA have been at odds for several years over the compliance surveys that are central to California's

California through the state Department of Veterans Affairs sought to put more resources into investigations, while the VA reiterated in a series of letters that the state had to catch up on the compliance surveys. "We want to ensure GI Bill beneficiaries are using their well-earned education benefits in programs that meet the quality standards they deserve," VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a 1 OCT statement announcing the federal government's move to cut California out of the process. California initially rebuffed the VA, insisting the state had the resources and authority to continue monitoring programs where students use GI Bill benefits. It changed its position with a notice to colleges 30 SEP in which it said it would relinquish its oversight power to the federal agency until it can negotiate a new agreement with the VA. "We are considering options and cooperating with the VA to ensure the mutual goal of protecting veterans education benefits and tax payers dollars," California Department of Veterans Affairs Deputy Secretary Lindsey Sin said.

The GI Bill gives veterans a living allowance and pays for most school expenses for up to 36 months. The benefits can be exhausted, leaving veterans at risk of choosing programs that fail in preparing them for civilian careers. Some can wind up in debt despite the GI Bill's generous benefits. Recently, California's Department of Veterans Affairs has sought to suspend schools for factors that state officials argue violate federal law. Last year, California temporarily suspended a group of schools with headquarters in other states. California officials questioned whether the schools' satellite programs in California met criteria for them to receive GI Bill benefits. Also, California's state approving agency has refused to declare a for-profit college called Ashford University as eligible to receive GI Bill benefits. The state is suing Ashford, alleging it engaged in unfair business practices that misled students.

California's recent efforts to suspend schools have not held up in court and the VA has chided the state for pursuing those enforcement actions while falling behind on compliance surveys. Some advocates are working with the state and the VA both to resume California's GI Bill contract, fearing the VA is too distant from the state to provide adequate oversight. U.S. Rep. Mark Takano (D-Riverside) meanwhile, wrote a bill that would give states a mandate to investigate whether colleges and career-training programs deliver on the promises they make when recruiting students. Lawmakers discussed his bill at a 16 OCT hearing. It would empower the state agencies that regulate the GI Bill with the VA to sanction schools over misleading statements from recruiters, and require programs to disclose more information to veterans prior to enrollment.

The House of Representatives Veterans Affairs "Committee has been actively working with VA and CalVet to reach an agreement and will continue to improve ... contract standards so that (California) and other states can crack down on predatory schools," Takano said in a written statement. "I am hopeful we will see a contract offered soon so we can ensure California's student veterans are protected from institutions who abuse the system, target veterans, and leave them with worthless diplomas."

[Source: Sacramento Bee | Adam Ashton | October 23, 2019 ++]

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## Wounded Warrior Project

### Update 01: Employment & Quality of Life Survey Findings

Wounded veterans have seen improved employment opportunities and quality of life in recent years but still face serious long-term mental health and physical health challenges, according to a new survey of Wounded Warrior Project members released this week. Among the most disturbing findings is that one-third of veterans polled for the report had suicidal thoughts in just the past two weeks. The survey, the 10th annual membership poll conducted by WWP officials, gathered responses from about 36,000 wounded veterans, nearly two-thirds of whom have a VA disability rating of 80 percent or more. About 90 percent of the group receives some disability payouts from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The findings do not represent the veteran population as a whole but do offer a snapshot into the challenges and successes of veterans injured in the last few decades. Researchers have seen positive trends in these veterans' quality of life, according to Melanie Mousseau, WWP's director of metrics. The survey found that unemployment among WWP members appears to have declined over the last three years, from 11.7 percent in 2017 to 10.3 percent in this year's survey. Similarly, home ownership rates among the veterans has increased to about 57 percent, and about 30 percent reported their financial situation has improved from the previous year, up from 25 percent in 2017. Almost half of the group surveyed said they could often or always deal with unforeseen challenges in their daily life.

But Mousseau warned that wounded veterans' difficulties still present significant hurdles in their lives. Mental health issues "continue to grow at an alarming rate," researchers wrote, with significant levels of depression (77 percent), anxiety (81 percent) and post-traumatic stress (83 percent) in the survey population. Nearly 88 percent of veterans who participated said they face significant sleep problems on a regular basis, up from about 75 percent two years ago. About 13 percent of the group said they think about harming themselves multiple times a week. In addition, the survey indicates that wounded vets also have significant physical challenges and aren't seeking care for their medical conditions.

The research showed that the number of veterans who are obese or morbidly obese has risen steadily in the last decade — putting them at increased risk for diabetes, sleep apnea, cardiovascular disease and other health conditions. Veterans also are reporting that their physical health affects their quality of life, limiting their daily activities: Nearly 72 percent said they have difficulty climbing stairs, while two-thirds reported limitations on moderate activity such as playing golf or doing housework. But according to the survey, 38 percent of these veterans are either not seeking or are putting off care for these physical challenges, while 32 percent reported not seeking care for mental health conditions, according to Melanie Mousseau, WWP's director of metrics.

"We often spend a lot of time, effort and energy focusing on the barriers to mental health care, so I think it's equally important for us to recognize the challenges associated with physical health. There's the obvious noted connection between mind and body," Mousseau said. In 2019, 52 percent of the 35,908 survey respondents reported being obese, up from 40 percent in 2009. Roughly 40 percent of the general population in the U.S. is obese, according to the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention. The physical challenges aren't surprising for this population, 91 percent of whom have three or more injuries or illnesses and 48 percent of whom say they exercise just a few times a month or not at all. Barriers to exercise include fear of re-injury, fear of or experiencing pain, time, cost and unease in social situations, the respondents said.

They also reported having other unhealthy habits, including not eating enough fruits and vegetables, and consuming alcohol at a pace that puts them at risk for alcohol abuse — more than half consume at least one or two alcoholic beverages a day. Mousseau said the results indicate that 17 percent of the population is at risk for substance abuse. The WWP annual survey helps guide the nonprofit's program and services decisions and also provides a look at the issues facing post-9/11 veterans who deployed to a combat zone. WWP has 136,000 veteran members and 35,000 family support members. While 90 percent of veterans have access to VA care, the organization augments those

services with health and wellness programs, employment, education and VA benefits counseling, and support for severely injured service members with brain, head and spinal cord injuries.

For the first time, the WWP survey asked whether its members were exposed to battlefield toxins such as burn pits, chemical munitions, ionizing radiation and environmental pollution. More than 70 percent said they had been exposed, and among those who said they probably or definitely were, nearly 90 percent reported their health as poor or fair, as opposed to good, very good or excellent. According to the survey, just 9 percent of those who say they encountered an environmental hazard during military service have received treatment for their exposure at the Veterans Health Administration. “I was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome and a mitochondria dysfunction. My life as never been the same,” wrote one veteran in the survey’s comments section. “I am still detoxing all those toxins out of my system and it’s like the VA is clueless about it and the issues I’ve had.”

WWP and other veterans organizations have made environmental exposures a top legislative priority this year, seeking funds for research as well as resources and benefits for affected veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs established an Airborne Hazards and Burn Pits Center of Excellence in May to increase its understanding of related illnesses, oversee research and provide health evaluations for patients. More than 187,000 people have enrolled in the VA’s Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pits registry since 2014. Roughly 31 percent of the WWP respondents said they are enrolled in the registry, which was established by Congress to encourage the VA to document and track the health of troops exposed to pits used in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere to burn trash, medical waste and garbage. The survey also found that:

- The number of WWP members with a 100 percent disability rating is on the rise — 38 percent in 2019, up from 31 percent in 2017.
- Cannabis use also is common in 1 in 5 injured veterans, with nearly 20 percent reporting using in 2019 and 18 percent in 2018.
- Opioid use held relatively steady, with 11.7 percent reporting having used opiates in the previous 12 months in 2018, and 10.5 taking them in 2019.

In the coming months, WWP analysts will examine the results to determine what factors are helping or hurting their members’ well-being. From the comments section, though, the non-profit heard at least one clear message: help veterans “get active.” “Help us get cannabis, nutrition, physical fitness. I can’t afford to get into a good crossfit/intense training that will push me to get healthy ... It’s been a super-rough transitioning [sic], and convenient gym access is more important than the VA. So many fat, depressed vets, and it has to change,” a veteran pleaded. The full survey is available online at the [WWP web site](#). [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime and Leo Shane | October 30, 2019 ++]

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## Maine Vet Cemetery

Construction Begins on 2<sup>nd</sup> VA Cemetery



Construction is underway for the new "Acadia National Cemetery." It's Maine's second federal cemetery that will be run by the Department of Veteran Affairs. It's being built on Route 1 in Jonesboro and expected to be completed by next spring. The project is part of a VA initiative to improve burial access for veterans in rural parts of our nation. [Source: CBS WABI-5 | October 22, 2019 ++]

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## **Melwood Veterans Services**

### **Offers Resources to Service Members**

Melwood Veteran Services (MVS) is where veterans, service members, families, and caregivers can find programs, resources, and a community – all geared towards recognizing and serving those who have served. Their mission is to empower veterans struggling with the effects of service-related trauma and/or seeking employment to transform their own lives and exercise their fundamental right to the pursuit of happiness.” Over the years, Melwood has supported hundreds of veterans in their efforts to overcome the physical, behavioral, and emotional challenges associated with post-traumatic stress, mild traumatic brain injury and other service-related traumas, such as military sexual trauma and moral injury.

MVS is a non-profit organization within the Melwood family of services. It grew out of the very successful Operation Tohidu® program, which was founded in 2014 as an experiential and healing retreat for veterans and service members. Their team is comprised of veterans and specialists who have direct experience with the issues at hand, either from their own military service or from relevant work in direct support of those who served. MVS offers a variety of services to our nation’s warfighters. Through this 501(C)(3) non-profit service organization, veterans seeking assistance with employment, career development and community reintegration can find the resources and support they need to thrive both in their professional and personal lives. Our transformative retreat program continues to promote “Peace with the Past, through Power in the Present” and encourages participants to reframe their trauma, injuries or memories from war and military experience, so that they can approach life with renewed purpose and positivity.

MVS also provides corporate leadership training on best practices for hiring and retaining veterans with differing abilities in the workforce. Melwood’s longstanding history of employing and training veterans with physical, behavioral, or other and service-related challenges revealed a gap in employment-related services geared towards wounded warfighters in the community. Melwood human resources and vocational support services staff work in partnership with MVS to implement appropriate accommodations for veterans living with post-traumatic stress or other behavioral or physical challenges.

#### **MVS Offerings**

- 1.) [Operation Tohidu](#) – A 5-day, high-impact, transformative retreat for veterans, service members, partners and caregivers at no cost to participants. Each session serves between 8-16 participants, including male and female veterans and service members representing all branches of service, as well as their spouses, partners or caregivers for a couple's retreat. Operation Tohidu assists participants in changing their mindset, reconnecting with their spiritual selves, adapting their approach to trauma, and regaining a sense of wellbeing and purpose. MVS’s adventure-based programming and positive psychology approach combine to encourage participants to overcome obstacles to their recovery and achieve the Operation Tohidu mission of Peace with the Past, through Power in the Present. Once your application (<https://fs30.formsite.com/OperationTohidu/form12/index.html>) is completed and submitted, MVS will reach out to you, typically within 48 hours of registration.
- 2.) [Vets Ready2Work Program](#) – A training, development and work placement program for former and transitioning military. The VR2W Program assists veterans and Wounded Warriors with their professional development while transitioning from the military to civilian sector. The team at Melwood specializes in identifying skill sets received during military tenure to help the veteran population gain meaningful employment. The Boot Camp is used for

veterans to network with one another and VR2W staff, and for discussing job related issues that affect the veteran population. The VR2W staff will give a presentation on current topics that are relevant to the veteran's job search activities. The Boot Camp will also be used to apply for positions within the community along with providing Job Readiness and Development skills. To learn more or apply send an email to [VetsReady2Work@Melwood.org](mailto:VetsReady2Work@Melwood.org).

[Source: Federal News Network | Morning Federal Report | October 28, 2019 ++]

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## California Power Outages

### Concerns Over Vet Impact

Amid rolling blackouts in California leaving millions without power are veterans who need electricity to power home health devices, refrigerate medicine or who need medical care at hospitals and clinics going dark. On 28 OCT, Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie sent a letter to California Gov. Gavin Newsom, concerned that Pacific Gas and Electric Company's decision to cut off power to thousands of Californians could put veterans at risk. "This action and possibly future ones like it could create significant life-threatening issues for the region's veterans and their families, as well as VA community care partners attempting to provide essential health care services," Wilkie wrote. About 5.2 percent of California's population are veterans, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In Wilkie's letter, he says California is home to more than 1.6 million veterans and their families.

While VA hospitals are capable of generating back-up power, VA can't guarantee the same for individual veterans who need care at home or for VA's network of private doctors in its community care program. "Power outages could become dangerous for veterans receiving in-home care and those who rely on power for the refrigeration of life-saving medications like insulin," Wilkie wrote. "With so many veterans dependent on these necessities, the uncertainty these power outages pose is extremely troubling." Wilkie asked Newsom to restore "power certainty" to California, "including veterans who depend on power for their health and safety." AMVETS National Executive Director Joe Chennelly said the VSO was working with VA to connect at-risk veterans in California with resources needed to survive the blackouts. "It is dire for many," he said. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | October 28, 2019 ++]

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## WWI Vets 08

### Army Pfc. Charles Barger

In World War I, "no man's land" marked the spot between Allied and enemy trenches where cruel and deadly battles often took place. It was called "no man's land" for a reason — no one wanted to be there. But in October 1918, Army Pfc. Charles Barger and another young soldier braved this wasteland to save two officers. That courage earned them both the Medal of Honor.





Barger's life was filled with challenges from the start. He was born on June 3, 1894, in Mount Vernon, Missouri, to George and Cora Staffelbach. When he was three, though, his father, who was part of a notorious gang, was sentenced to life in prison, so his mother placed him for adoption. He was raised by Sidney and Phoebe Barger and grew up in Stotts City, Missouri, working as a farmhand. Barger enlisted in the Army on April 1, 1918, and became part of the 354th Infantry, 89th Division, Company L. His unit arrived in France in June 1918, and the 24-year-old was selected to be an automatic rifle gunner. He quickly earned himself a fearless reputation.

In late October 1918, Barger and his assigned regiment, the 177th Brigade, were situated on the southwest edge of Bois-de-Bantheville, France, to surveil German positions ahead of a prepared advance. Their mission was part of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the 100 day offensive that brought an end to the war. For more than a week, everyone in the brigade dealt with the effects of mustard gas that was released via high-explosive shells fired by the Germans. No one escaped the fumes, which lingered for days. Barger was no exception, but he never reported for medical treatment.



**World War I soldiers (left) ducking down low are surrounded by large cartridges as they battle in a barren wasteland. Smoke can be seen in the distance. One soldier looks directly at the camera. Several soldiers in the distance run away from the camera in what appears to be a burned-out, barren wasteland. Army Gen. John Pershing (right) shakes hands with Medal of Honor recipient Pfc. Charles Barger after awarding him the honor at his headquarters in Chaumont, France, on Feb. 7, 1919.**

On Oct. 31, 1918, several patrols were sent into no man's land during the daylight hours — an unusual move considering most patrols were sent at night during the cover of darkness. Two patrols from Barger's regiment got pinned down by heavy gunfire in the exposed area. Two wounded officers were trapped. Once Barger got word of this, he and Pfc. Jesse Funk voluntarily ran about 500 yards with a stretcher through heavy machine gun fire to rescue the men. They got to 2nd Lt. John Millis first, but he insisted the pair rescue 1st Lt. Ernest Rowell. They did that and returned for Millis when they realized there was a third enlisted man about 50 yards from an enemy machine gun nest. After taking Millis to safety, they returned for that man, too. For their actions, Barger and Funk were awarded the Medal of Honor, which was presented to them by Army Gen. John Pershing in February 1919. The pair also earned decorations from several Allied governments, including the French Croix de Guerre.

After the war, Barger returned to farming with his family, then tried construction before briefly returning to the Army in 1921. He was discharged again after only a few months. In 1922, Barger joined the Kansas City Police Department. Not long after he was hired, he was involved in a shootout with suspected criminals. Barger was shot five times in the wrist, arm, chest and head, yet he still managed to return fire. He survived and continued to work as a police officer for the next decade. By 1936, Barger had moved to a farm outside of Oak Grove, Missouri, where he remained until he died on Nov. 25, 1936. He was buried in Blue Springs Cemetery, not far from his home.

According to "Quietly Exploding," a Barger biography written by Air Force Master Sgt. Joseph Bowman, Barger's medals were donated to the Liberty Memorial Museum in Liberty, Missouri, after his death. Sadly, in 1967, someone broke into the museum and stole several items, including Barger's Medal of Honor. It was never recovered. Barger's family worked for decades to get the medal replaced. Their efforts finally paid off in January 2014, when the Army

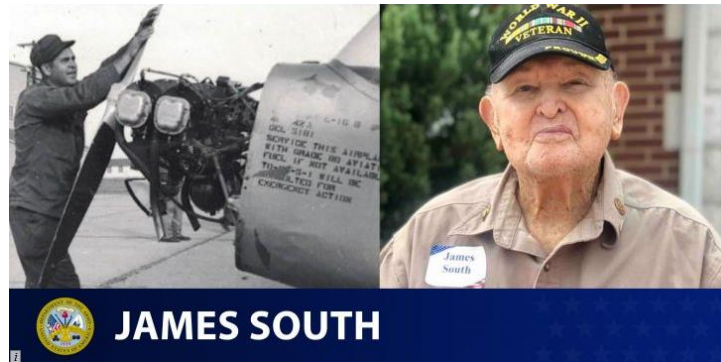
reissued the medal. In October, the Army's 88th Readiness Division is conducting a memorialization ceremony at an Army Reserve Center in Kansas City, Missouri, to name the facility after Barger. [Source: Department of Defense | Katie Lange | October 14, 2019 ++]

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## WWII Vets 206

**James South | Turned 100 on 7 OCT**

James South was born on Oct. 7, 1919 and grew up in northeast Texas where his family were sharecroppers. He joined the Army in 1940, at the beginning of World War II.



In 1944, South deployed to Normandy seven days after D-Day, the beginning of the Allied invasion of France on June 6, 1944. Along with two million other Allied troops, South landed in Normandy between June 6 and Aug. 21, 1944. The invasion was known as the “beginning of the end” of World War II. The Allies liberated the French city of Caen from Nazi occupation on 19 JUL; they liberated Paris on 25 AUG. Allied troops would eventually cross the Rhine River in March 1945, leading to the surrender of Germany and the end of the war in Europe on May 7, 1945.

During his time in the Army, South received many letters from his girlfriend, Sophie. “I was gone four years, and she had written me a letter every day that I was gone,” South told reporters. After the war, he married Sophie, and the two remained married for 55 years. South retired at age 65 and has since spent his time woodworking, gardening, golfing, and attending church. He moved to Fort Worth, Texas, at age 98. South celebrated his 100th birthday Oct. 7, 2019. He played golf, ate fried steak and catfish, and spent time with his family. South’s son, Jim South, speaks fondly of his father, saying that his father taught him that “money wasn’t the goal in life – it was happiness.” Thank you for your service! [Source: Vantage Point | October 16, 2019++]

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## WWI VETS 09

**Orville Rogers**

Army Veteran, Orville Rogers was born in December 1886 and grew up in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Rogers graduated from Harvard University, then Harvard Medical School in 1912. After graduating, Rogers went to work at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. In 1915, three years out of Harvard Medical School, Rogers volunteered to serve a three-month stint with the Harvard Medical Unit in Paris though the United States had not yet joined World War I. Between April and July he served as a member of the Army's Medical Corps at the American Ambulance Hospital, founded when the war broke out in 1914.



Rogers kept a diary, mainly for his father, who was a field doctor during the Civil War. Sailing out of Boston in March 1915, Rogers spent time on the uneventful voyage treating the passengers' seasickness and administering vaccines. By 1 APR, Rogers arrived in Paris and began his work at an American Ambulance Hospital. During his three months in Europe, Rogers kept busy with the casualties coming back from the Western Front. These casualties showed him the terrible cost of the war first-hand, and his care for the patients is evident throughout his journal. A 2 MAY entry reads, "From here to Chambry the fields are just full of graves. It is a terrible sight. They are all mixed up-French and German-for the fighting was hand to hand, with bayonets and rifle butts, all across that region."

Rogers saw the effects of the war from all angles when treating casualties in Yrpes to touring the aftermath of The Battle of the Marne (First Battle of the Marne) and its impact on the French home front. He charted how the French were good hosts and hopeful that America would join the war. After the 7 MAY sinking of the Lusitania, which failed to bring the U.S. into the fighting, the French remained hospitable to him but turned sour toward the American government. Rogers' time in France ended in June. He returned home by July 14, 1915, after another uneventful voyage.

Rogers remained in the Army until his discharge in 1919 at the rank of major. He would go on to marry Lydia Lincoln Soule. In 1916, Rogers became a medical assistant at Yale University and would eventually become the director of the Health Department in 1936. He remained until he retired in the 1950s. Rogers was also involved as a warden and vestryman at St. Paul's Church in New Haven. He died at the age of 89 in Portland, Maine, in July 1976. We honor his service. [Source: Vantage Point | Nathan Giacalone | October 22, 2019 ++]

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## **Obit: Francis C. Curry**

**8 OCT 2019 | WWII MOH Recipient**

Francis Currey, one of the last three surviving recipients of the Medal of Honor for valor during World War II, came of age on a farm in the Catskill Mountains of New York, where he was taken in by a foster family after he was orphaned at 12. He worked for an embalmer during high school and planned to enter the profession until he decided, one week after his graduation in 1943, to join the Army. He shipped out in the spring of 1944 for Europe, making his way from Normandy in the wake of the D-Day invasion to the Netherlands and then, by winter, to the Ardennes region of Belgium. There, as a 19-year-old private first class during the Battle of the Bulge, the infantryman was credited with almost single-handedly holding back a German attack on the town of Malmédy.

For his actions — heralded days later in a New York Times account reporting that he had "helped immobilize three German tanks, wiped out a house full of Nazis, rescued six of his trapped buddies and saved five wounded men" — Currey received the Medal of Honor, the military's highest decoration. He died Oct. 8 at his home in Selkirk, New York. He was 94 and had congestive heart failure, said his daughter, Kathryn Domery. Currey's Medal of Honor — which he received on July 27, 1945, after the Allied victory in Europe and just before the defeat of Japan — was one of 472 awarded for service during World War II, according to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. His death

leaves two living honorees from that conflict: Charles Coolidge, 98, who was recognized for his actions as an Army technical sergeant in France in fall 1944, and Hershel "Woody" Williams, 96, recognized for his bravery as a Marine Corps corporal at Iwo Jima in the Pacific.



Currey, who was 6 feet tall but only 130 pounds, found himself at the heart of the Battle of the Bulge, the last major German offensive of World War II and a bloody affair resulting in 80,000 American and 100,000 German casualties. The town of Malmedy became infamous as the site of a massacre by Waffen-SS troops of more than 80 U.S. soldiers who had been forced to surrender at the start of the battle. Four days after the massacre, at about 4 a.m. on Dec. 21, 1944, Currey was in a foxhole when "a German armored column spearheaded by captured American tanks rolled out of the heavy mist," *The Times* reported, overpowering an American antitank unit and surrounding Currey and several other soldiers. Taking shelter in an abandoned paper factory, the American soldiers discovered a bazooka but no ammunition. Currey left the building and, while completely exposed to enemy fire, ran to a supply of ammunition across the street to load the bazooka. With another soldier, he shot at a German tank.

"By what he would later call a miracle," reads an account in the book "Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty," "the rocket hit the exact spot where the turret joined the chassis and disabled the vehicle." Currey then turned his attention to a German-held stone house, firing with an automatic rifle on three enemy soldiers. "I got all three with one good burst," he told *The Times*, "then, while the other fellows in the factory covered me, I stood up in plain sight and knocked down half a wall of that house with the bazooka. "When I stood up," he continued, "I saw a number of our guys trapped in a small hole between me and the house. They had been held down there for hours and asked me to help them out."

In a desperate effort to rescue them, he obtained grenades, which he used to attack the German-held house and German tanks threatening the Americans. When the grenades ran out, he continued firing on the Germans with machine guns. "Under his covering fire the 5 soldiers were able to retire to safety," reads the citation for his Medal of Honor. "Deprived of tanks and with heavy infantry casualties, the enemy was forced to withdraw. Through his extensive knowledge of weapons and by his heroic and repeated braving of murderous enemy fire, Sgt. Currey was greatly responsible for inflicting heavy losses in men and material on the enemy, for rescuing 5 comrades, 2 of whom were wounded, and for stemming an attack which threatened to flank his battalion's position." Reflecting on his actions, he told the *Times-Union* newspaper of Albany, New York, decades later, "It was just one day of nine months of steady combat."

Francis Sherman Currey was born on June 29, 1925, in Loch Sheldrake, New York, and grew up with his foster parents in nearby Hurleyville. After joining the Army, he completed Officer Candidate School training, but it was decided, according to "Medal of Honor," that he was "too immature" for a commission, an irony not lost on those who chronicled his deeds at Malmedy. "We were all teenagers, the oldest one was maybe twenty-one years old, and I was the one with all the training," he said in an interview for the book "Voices of the Bulge" by Michael Collins and Martin

King. "I knew what I was doing, since I had been in training the year before." Besides the Medal of Honor, his military decorations included the Silver Star, the Bronze Star Medal and three awards of the Purple Heart. He attained the rank of sergeant before completing his military service.

After the war, Currey worked as a benefits counselor at a veterans hospital in Albany and ran a landscaping business. Survivors include his wife of 70 years, the former Wilma French, of Selkirk; three children, Michael Currey and Kathryn Domery, both of Selkirk, and Jonathan Currey of Dudley, Massachusetts; seven grandchildren; and 12 great-grandchildren. Decades after the war, Currey became the first Medal of Honor recipient to be represented as a G.I. Joe action figure. However, he preferred not to seek attention for his recognition. "I got it; that's all," he told the Times-Union in 2013. "I don't make a big issue out of it." Frank enjoyed hunting, fishing, gardening and traveling. Frank's greatest joy in his life was spending time with his family. Interment was scheduled in Mt. Pleasant Cemetery, South Bethlehem, NY.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo called Currey a "true American hero" and ordered flags on government buildings to be flown at half-staff on 18 OCT to honor him. [Source: The Washington Post | Emily Langer | October 10, 2019 ++]

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## Veterans FAQs

### How do I Get a Copy of My Boot Camp Medical Records?

**Q.** I spent 6 days in hospital during boot camp but no record of it was sent when I requested medical records. How do I get a copy of them?

#### Answers

**A1:** Get Form: SF-180.....Fill out, sign and date it. Mail it to appropriate military branch where records are kept. All return addresses are listed on the form. Just be patient they will do the rest and mail you what you are looking for. Be patient, but persistent, Brother! You will get them. (RA) 7/28/19

**A2:** Contact the hospital records section & ask how long they are required to keep your records & x-rays. You will then know if the records you are requesting are still available. Good luck. (VT) 7/28/19

**A3:** You did not state when you did basic training but prior to 2001 they did not keep all medical records or other records. Only a sampling of something considered major. They did not have digital recording and were concerned about space. If you do not have them then they are gone. If it is something major such as heat stroke, heart attack, or broken limb you could search for the doctors who treated you or fellow trainees who remember why you were in the hospital to write letters of support. You did not say why you were in the hospital so it may not be something you can claim. (JD) 7/29/19

**Note:** Go to <http://www.veterandiscountdirectory.com/question195.html> if you would like to add your experience regarding this question.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | October 31, 2019 ++]

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## Veterans FAQs

### Will I get Back Pay for the Time since I Applied for My Hearing Problems?

**Q.** I received a letter from the VA stating that 3 of my problems had gone to remand. They informed me to wait for word from them for next step. I went to a C&P for my hearing and sleep apnea. I was awarded an increase on my

hearing evaluation and denied compensation for the sleep apnea. My question is will I get back pay for the time from which I applied for the hearing which was about 4 years?

**Answers**

**A1:** Yes, provided you complied with the requirements such as an appeal within one year of the decision. You mentioned an increase in hearing loss. The detail of that could be interesting, especially with the court decision (appeal by VA for hearing loss for each ear), regarding total disability and rating. (NB) 7/30/19

**A2:** I got back pay (about five years) for hearing loss back to the date that I first applied. (RA) 7/30/19

Note: Go to <http://www.veterandiscountdirectory.com/question198.html> if you would like to add your experience regarding this question.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | October 31, 2019 ++]

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## Veterans FAQs

### Am I Eligible for Special Monthly Compensation?

**Q.** I am rated 100% disabled and heard I was eligible for SMC due to loss of use. I have diabetes. Disability came from AO. Am I eligible for SMC?

**Answers**

**A1:** It all depends as there are a lot of factors to meet SMC. I suggest that you contact your SVO (Service Veterans Organization) to assist you in determining possible eligibility. (SR) 9/2/19

**A2:** If you go to the site <https://www.hillandponton.com/additional-compensation-smc-k> you will see (JP) 9/2/19

**A3:** Yes, you are eligible for SMC K, a little over \$100 a month. You do need to have "loss of use" confirmed by a VA doctor and then apply for it. (DB) 9/1/19

**A4:** Yes you are eligible to apply for SMC for loss of use. Make sure the medical evidence from your doctor or a VA doctor verifies your condition before you apply. Include the diagnosis from your doctor with your claim. Use VA Form 21-526EZ. (KG) 9/1/19

Note: Go to <http://www.veterandiscountdirectory.com/question238.html> if you would like to add your experience regarding this question.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | October 31, 2019 ++]

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## Vet Hiring Fairs

### Scheduled As of 1 NOV 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 | October 31, 2019 ++]

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## **Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule**

**As of 1 NOV 2019**

The Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is intended to serve as a one-stop resource for retirees and veterans seeking information about events such as retirement appreciation days (RAD), stand downs, veterans town hall meetings, resource fairs, free legal advice, mobile outreach services, airshows, and other beneficial community events. The events included on the schedule are obtained from military, VA, veterans service organizations and other reliable retiree/veterans related websites and resources. The current Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is available in the following three formats. After connecting to the website, click on the appropriate state, territory or country to check for events scheduled for your area.

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

Please note that events listed on the Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule may be cancelled or rescheduled. Before traveling long distances to attend an event, you should contact the applicable RAO, RSO, event sponsor, etc., to ensure the event will, in fact, be held on the date/time indicated. Also, attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214. Please report broken links, comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and/or other military retiree/veterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, [Milton.Bell126@gmail.com](mailto:Milton.Bell126@gmail.com). [Source: Retiree/Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | October 31, 2019 ++]

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## **State Veteran's Benefits**

**Pennsylvania | OCT 2019**

The state of Pennsylvania provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these plus discounts listed on the Military and Veterans Discount Center (MCVDC) website, refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Vet State Benefits – PA**” for an overview of the below benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the following refer to <http://www.ok.gov/odva>

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/pennsylvania-state-veterans-benefits.html> & <http://www.dmv.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx> | October 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.

## Homeless Vets

### Update 96: H.R.95 | Homeless Veteran Families Act

When the Department of Veterans Affairs offers aid to homeless veterans, that aid could also extend to their children, if a bill that passed the House unanimously 15 OCT also makes it through the Senate and receives a presidential signature. The Homeless Veteran Families Act updates the VA's per-day payment calculation for organizations that provide services to homeless veterans to include money for children. The money from VA comes in daily payments or "per diem" and the bill would increase that daily payment amount for a homeless veteran by about 50 percent for each child. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA), chairwoman of the Women Veteran Task Force, came to a vote following a Congressional hearing where advocates told members of Congress that women veterans who are homeless are less likely to seek help because they fear losing their children.



Women veterans are the fastest-growing group in the military, but they're also the fastest-growing group of homeless veterans and are more likely than men to be single parents, according to the Defense Department and VA. From 2016



to 2017, the number of homeless women veterans increased by 7 percent, compared to 1 percent of male veterans, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimates. The rate of women veteran homelessness has more than doubled since 2006. "It is critical that vets and their families receive the housing support they need to simply get back on their feet," Brownley said. "Unfortunately, many homeless veterans with children are unable to obtain assistance because (support groups) only receive funding from VA for the veteran, not their children. The veteran is forced to choose between getting their own housing assistance and caring for their ... children. No veteran should be forced to choose between housing ... and caring for their children."

"This could be some of the best money we ever spend if it keeps these families together ... this bill should go through the house and senate unanimous," House Veterans Affairs Committee ranking member Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN) said. Another bill, the Housing for Women Veterans Act (H.R.2924), sponsored by another House Veterans Affairs member and California Democrat, Rep. Mike Levin along with Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) would allocate at least \$20 million to groups aiming to help women veterans and their families. Homeless women veterans are afraid to be separated from their children if they seek help, advocates say. Women veterans are the fastest-growing group of homeless vets. This bill aims to help. Also on 15 OCT, the House:

- Approved by floor vote a bill H.R.2385 to allow the VA to establish a grant program for cemetery research and for educational materials for the Veterans Legacy Program. The Legacy program is an online memorial space managed by the National Cemetery Administration, with a profile page for each service member.
- Approved by voice vote the VA Website Accessibility Act (H.R.1199), which directs the VA to study how accessible the department's websites are for people with disabilities.
- Approved by voice vote the bill H.R.2334 to name the VA community-based outpatient clinic in Odessa, Texas the "Wilson and Young Medal of Honor VA Clinic." The clinic would be named for Vietnam veterans Marine Corps Private First Class Alfred "Mac" Wilson and Army Staff Sgt. Marvin "Rex" Young. Wilson and Young were posthumously awarded Medals of Honor. Wilson received his when his platoon was ambushed and he threw himself on an enemy hand grenade to protect his fellow marines. Young received his for his actions when his platoon came under heavy fire, their leader was killed and he assumed command, saving the platoon and rescuing men who were pinned down, sustaining fatal wounds in the process.

[Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | October 15, 2019 ++]

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## **Nuclear Testing**

### **S.947/H.R.3783 | Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments of 2019**

Atmospheric nuclear weapons testing exposed more states and more people to radiation fallout and resulting cancers and other diseases than the federal government currently recognizes, Western governors said. The Western Governors' Association on 11 OCT sent letters to the U.S. Senate and U.S. House urging passage of proposed changes to a law involving "downwinders." The U.S. between 1945 and 1992 conducted more than 1,000 nuclear weapons tests, nearly 200 in the atmosphere. Most were conducted in Western states or islands in the Pacific Ocean. The changes to the 1990 Radiation Exposure Compensation Act would add all of Nevada, Arizona and Utah, and include for the first time downwinders in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico and the island territory of Guam.

The changes would also include increasing the maximum payment to \$150,000 for someone filing a claim. Compensation currently ranges from lump sums of \$100,000 for uranium workers to \$50,000 for those who lived downwind of the Nevada Test Site. The new legislation called the **Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments of 2019** would also include those who lived downwind of the 1945 Trinity Test in New Mexico's Tularosa Basin. "We encourage you to expeditiously consider and approve this important legislation, which acknowledges that nuclear weapons production and testing has had much broader impacts than currently recognized

by statute,” the governors wrote in letters to each chamber signed by Oregon Democratic Gov. Kate Brown and North Dakota Republican Gov. Doug Burgum.

Tona Henderson is the director of Idaho Downwinders, which for years has sought the inclusion of Idaho in the compensation program. She said 14 of her 38 family members in the Emmett area in southwestern Idaho have died of cancer, the youngest at 15, and many others have survived that and other diseases. She has battled cancer and other health issues. During the nuclear testing, farmers would go out to their fields on summer mornings to find them covered with dust carried on the wind from the nuclear blasts, she said. The dust occurred so often, she said, it picked up the name “summer frost.” “I don’t know why we weren’t included,” said Henderson, who was an infant growing up on her parents’ dairy farm during the tail end of the atmospheric testing in the early 1960s. “Other than the government didn’t want to admit that they did something wrong.” The Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium in New Mexico is another group seeking recognition as having been adversely affected by nuclear testing. “We don’t wonder if we’re going to get cancer, we wonder when,” said Tina Cordova, a cancer survivor and co-founder of the Tularosa consortium.

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act was first passed in 1990 as an alternative to costly litigation to ensure the federal government met its financial responsibilities to workers who became sick as a result of the radiation hazards of their jobs. The proposed legislation on the Senate side was introduced in March 2019 by U.S. Republican Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho. Crapo for years has sought the inclusion of Idaho as a downwind state. The proposed legislation on the House side was introduced in July 2019 by Rep. Lujan, Ben Ray [D-NM-3]. The bills currently have 7 and 42 cosponsors respectively.

Besides downwinders, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act also includes money for workers made sick during uranium ore mining and milling activities that took place in 11 states in the Western U.S. Downwinders should receive equal compensation as offered those workers, Henderson said. “Energy workers knew what they were signing up for,” she said. “We didn’t know what was happening to us.”

[Source: The Associated Press | Keith Ridler | October 16, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Website**

### **Update 05: H.R. 1199 | VA Website Accessibility Act**

A bill passed by the United States House of Representatives this week aims to make services more accessible for disabled veterans. The VA Website Accessibility Act passed 15 OCT after being introduced by Congresswoman Elaine Luria. It directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study of all websites of the VA to determine whether they are accessible for people with disabilities, including blindness and hearing loss. "Our service members put themselves in harm's way to protect American freedom. It is only right that Congress uphold our end of the promise by giving disabled veterans the care they earned," Congresswoman Luria said in a statement. "I'm grateful the House has advanced my effort to eliminate barriers preventing some of our bravest men and women from receiving quality medical care, as well as disability, vocational and educational benefits."

The VA would have to submit a report to Congress within 90 days of the completion of the study to identify what material needs to be brought into compliance. This includes kiosks at VA medical centers, which are often required to check in for appointments. The bill 10/16/2019 Received in the Senate on 16 OCT, read twice, and referred to the Senate’s Committee on Veterans' Affairs. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | September 27, 2019 ++]

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## VA Grant Programs

### Update 01: H.R.4589 | Rural Veteran Medical Transportation

**Veteran Bills Advanced for House Vote:** This week, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs advanced six bipartisan pieces of legislation to the full House for a vote. The six bills covered a wide range of veteran benefits and protections to include improvements for homeless veterans, student veterans, veteran-owned small businesses, and improved reporting transparency within VA. These six bills are just some of the important work the Veterans' Affairs Committee has worked on this session, and they have shown a commitment to work for veterans in a bipartisan manner. Now, the bills will be up for a vote by the full House of Representatives in the coming weeks. [Read the bills.](#)

[Source: Press Release | T.J. Cox | October 4, 2019 ++]

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## National Cemetery Administration

### Update 04: H.R.2385 | Veterans Legacy Program Grants

The Veterans Legacy Program (VLP) is NCA's educational outreach initiative. Their mission is to memorialize our nation's Veterans through sharing their stories of service and sacrifice. They partner with universities, schools, teachers, professors, and students of all levels to research Veterans interred in NCA cemeteries and how they contributed to their country as servicemembers, and how they contributed to their community as Veterans. VLP also works to modernize how we memorialize. This they do by embracing new media for sharing Veterans' stories and through digitizing the national cemetery experience for all.

On 16 OCT, the House passed VFW-supported H.R. 2385 which had been introduced in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress by Rep. Conor Lamb (D-PA-17) on 29 APR. This bill would permit VA to establish a grant program to conduct cemetery research and produce educational materials for the Veterans Legacy Program (VLP). Under the current program, the VLP awards contracts to universities, colleges, and institutions to develop educational programs to teach students and others about the veterans interred in the National Veterans Cemeteries in their communities. Transitioning to a grant-based program would broaden the reach of the VLP beyond large universities to smaller groups that wish to engage with VA in memorializing veterans.

The bill was received in the Senate on 16 OCT, read twice, and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, The VFW applauds all the members of the House who showed their support for this important program that promotes civic engagement and fosters respect for service and sacrifice. Now it is time for the Senate to do the same and send it to the president's desk. You can learn more about the Veterans Legacy Program at <https://www.cem.va.gov/legacy>. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | October 18, 2019 ++]

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## VA Medical Malpractice

### Update 01: H.R.4526 | VA Employment Transparency Act Endorsement

On 18 OCT, American Veterans (AMVETS) announced its endorsement of the bipartisan Brian Tally VA Employment Transparency Act (H.R. 4526). Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA-49) introduced the Tally bill in September 2019 to provide veterans who suffer harm while under the care of a VA contractor have more due process protections in the pursuit of a tort claim. Rep. Mark Meadows (R-NC-11) first introduced a similar bill in July 2019 after working with Brian Tally, a Marine Corps veteran, who suffered permanent disability after a VA contractor failed to timely

diagnose and treat a flesh-eating spine condition for over six months. The VA failed to disclose the doctor's status as a VA contractor, thus could not be sued as an agent of VA under the Federal Tort Claims Act. Tally was not notified of the clinician's status until the statute of limitations under state law had expired, leaving him with no legal recourse.

The current version of the bill would set time limits on when VA must disclose the status of contracted VA providers and provide information to potential claimants on their rights under state and federal tort law. Rep. Meadows has since co-sponsored H.R. 4526. In a letter to House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano dated October 18, 2019, Joseph Chenelly, Executive Director of AMVETS, expressed the organization's support of the bill.

*"We believe passage of this law will address the longstanding problem of breached due process for veterans who suffer disability, as well as survivors who lose loved ones due to medical malpractice or negligence on the part of the Department of Veterans Affairs independent contractors," wrote Chenelly. "Veterans have sat at the mercy of a VA system where a lack information and failures to disclose relevant information have hindered due process for far too long. This bill will level the playing field by ensuring federal and state tort claims related to VA medical malpractice are fairly adjudicated once veterans and their families are provided the necessary components for filing a claim."*

Click [here](#) for more information on the Brian Tally VA Employment Transparency Act, including the history of the bill and a list of supporting organizations. [Source: Smvets News Release | October18, 2019 ++]

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## **VA Fiduciary Program**

### **Update 10: HR 592, the "Protect Veterans from Financial Fraud Act**

More than 177,000 veterans have fiduciaries assigned to them by the Department of Veterans Affairs to oversee and manage their government benefits. Yet, some of these very people designated to help the vets harm them. In Fiscal Year 2019, 975 fiduciaries were removed by the V.A. based upon findings of misuse. However, under a quirk in the law, the V.A cannot restore lost or stolen benefits to affected vets unless the fiduciary managed at least ten veterans' portfolios. "These are our most vulnerable veterans who are unable to manage their own financial decisions because of their age or their health conditions," said Rep Julia Brownley. "This ten or more rule prevents the V.A. from making all veterans whole when they been taken advantage of by those entrusted to care for their finances at a very vulnerable time in their lives."

H.R.592, the "Protect Veterans from Financial Fraud Act" would drop the arbitrary ten requirement, and ensure that all veterans receive the benefits that they have earned. "I have heard how devastating it can be for a veteran and their family when they are victims of fraud," said Rep. Elaine Luria (D-VA-02). "Without pause, I know Congress and the VA must do more to serve our veterans and protect them from fraudulent practices." [Source: Mike Gooding | October 22, 2019 ++]

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## **Gold Star Spouse**

### **Update 01: H.R.1911 - Gold Star Survivors Act**

The House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs in October 2019 discussed ten bills in all. One of them, A bill that would free Gold Star widows from having to wait until age 57 to re-marry lest they lose their survivor benefits, is on the table to be considered. One lawmaker called that rule "archaic." H.R.1911, the "Gold Star Survivors Act" would eliminate the rule, let widows remarry when they want to, and keep their benefits. "My

legislation simply allows surviving spouses to continue to move forward with the lives, allowing them to re-marry, free of fear of losing their benefits owed to them for the family's noble sacrifice," said Rep. Michael Waltz (R- FL). Ashlynn Haycock from Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) supports the bill. "Preventing surviving spouses from maintaining benefits upon re-marriage prevents them from fully moving forward with their lives," she said. "The average age of a military widow in the Post-9-11 era is twenty-five. The should not have to wait 32 years to remarry." [Source: Mike Gooding | October 22, 2019 ++]

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## Overseas Pharmacies Use

### Update 03: H.R.4710 | Pharmaceutical Independence Long-Term Readiness Reform

MOAA supports House bill introduced 17 OCT that would require DoD to acquire and purchase only American-made medicines and vaccines — including only U.S.-produced raw materials — for use by our military. The Pharmaceutical Independence Long-Term Readiness Reform Act (H.R. 4710) also will require DoD to identify the national security vulnerabilities caused by our current dependence on pharmaceuticals from China. MOAA commends Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA) and cosponsor Rep. Vicky Hartzler (R-MO.) for introducing the bill whose test can be read [here](#)).

MOAA's awareness of the issue was heightened well over a year ago, when the blood pressure medication valsartan was pulled off the market by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). MOAA members called and voiced their worries, too, especially because a probable cancer-causing chemical was identified in the active pharmaceutical ingredient ... and traced back to its manufacturer in China. As MOAA worked this issue and it gained more traction, it highlighted our nation's increased reliance on generic medications manufactured outside the U.S. Unfortunately, this reliance includes the associated medication manufacturing processes and ingredients, which are not under the strict scrutiny of the FDA.

While there are many forces impacting our national industrial base, MOAA became convinced the risks to the pharmaceutical sector should be more closely examined. These factors led to a consensus that something needed to be done, and this legislation serves as a crucial beginning in that process. As Rep. Garamendi put it, "The reality is that if the Chinese wanted to cripple the United States they could sabotage or cut off our supply of generic medications and antibiotics used by our military. This simply is a vulnerability that we cannot let continue to exist." MOAA will continue to support and build awareness of this legislation, and encourages those in the Congress to join in cosponsoring this important act. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Kathy Beasley | October 22, 2019 ++]

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## VA Hiring

### Update 15: S. \_\_\_ | Hire Act

Two Republican senators have introduced a bill that would relocate several federal agencies out of the Washington, D.C., Beltway to economically distressed areas in an effort to boost local economies across the country. The bill, titled the "**Helping Infrastructure Restore the Economy (HIRE) Act**," is sponsored by Republican Sens. Josh Hawley of Missouri and Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee. Hawley cited plans by the Bureau of Land Management to move portions of the agency to Colorado and Missouri for his support for relocating parts of the federal government.

"Every year Americans' hard-earned tax dollars fund federal agencies that are mainly located in the D.C. bubble," he said in a news release announcing the bill. "That's a big part of the problem with Washington: they're too removed from the rest of America. The HIRE Act will move policymakers directly into the communities they serve, creating thousands of jobs for local communities and saving taxpayers billions of dollars along the way." Blackburn said the series of moves would "enable Americans across the country to have greater access to good jobs." Under the bill, 10

agencies would be required to relocate 90 percent of staffers. The Department of Agriculture would move to Hawley's home state of Missouri and Blackburn's Tennessee would be home to the Department of Education.

Health and Human Services would relocate to Indiana, the Department of the Interior to New Mexico, the Department of Transportation to Michigan, Commerce to Pennsylvania, the Department of Veterans Affairs to South Carolina, the Department of Energy to Kentucky, the Department of Labor to West Virginia and the Department of Housing and Urban Development to Ohio. Hawley touted the plan as a savings to taxpayers. "Moving agencies also is cheaper long term. Lease costs typically are less outside D.C.," the release states.

Hawley has been an avid supporter of moving the Department of Agriculture headquarters to Kansas City, Mo., a move that has proved difficult after massive resignations at USDA's Economic Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture following news of the planned relocation. Critics argue moving the USDA and BLM would weaken the agencies and reduce their influence with lawmakers. This fall, 27 top BLM officials will move to its Grand Junction, Colo., headquarter while hundreds of staffers will be spread out across the West. A few dozen will remain in Washington. The Trump administration argues the move makes sense since 99 percent of the land the agency is responsible for is located west of the Mississippi River. [Source: Fox News | Louis Casiano | October 23, 2019 ++]

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## **Kentucky Vet Legislation**

### **Update 02: BR 127 & 247 | Vet Service Organization Tax Exemption**

Kentucky legislators are joining the march to aid the more than 586 Kentucky-based veterans' service organizations (VSO) in gaining tax-exempt status. There are 45,559 VSOs in the United States and while some of these, like those in Alabama, Missouri, North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina, Indiana, Ohio and Illinois, are tax-exempt, many, like those in Kentucky, are not. For those in less populated areas, tax hikes may not be an issue, but for those such as Owensboro Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 696 that are located in lucrative areas, not being tax-exempt can be debilitating, especially in terms of their charitable works. For instance, the Owensboro VFW's bill this year for city and Owensboro Public Schools taxes is \$20,433, putting a strain on many of the organization's charitable ventures, said Post Commander Joey Benningfield.

"Last year, through our electronic gaming, canteen and fundraisers, the VFW was able to distribute more than \$20,000 to various community causes," he said. "The tax bill is almost over what we gave out. If we aren't able to be exempt from the property tax especially, we will have to pull back to cover costs just so we can stay in our building. "Yes, we could sell that property, but we are not there for profit, we are there for combat veterans to relax and have peace of mind. It is the greatest location in town in my opinion. We do a great deal for the community, and we are involved in everything that we can be in. There are many veterans organizations that are feeling the crunch like we are."

While many in the community were surprised when Benningfield posted the post's tax statement on Facebook on 28 SEP, the reality is that post officials knew that the tax hammer would inevitably come down hard as the downtown area, where the post is located, continued to develop and grow. Initially, the organization went through the channels of applying for tax-exempt status with the state, only to be denied. Then, VFW officials reached out to former state Rep. DJ Johnson. Johnson, now an executive adviser for Gov. Matt Bevin, initially entered in a bill that would help alleviate the property tax issue for VSOs statewide, but his legislative initiatives were cut short by a 30-day session and his loss to Rep. Jim Glenn in 2018. Despite that, Johnson has continued his advocacy to alleviate tax burdens for veterans' organizations throughout the state.

"I know the good work that they are doing," Johnson said. "Especially now having worked first hand with them as we have gone along in this process. ... I'm not knocking the taxes or how they are used, but I know that these guys are

doing good work and shouldn't have a tax burden that could put them out of business and hurt those works. Not many veterans organizations are going to have an almost 300% increase in their taxes in a four-year period, but every one of them should be protected." Since Johnson's ascension into the governor's office, two state representatives, both veterans, have joined his cause and taken a two-pronged approach to adding VSOs to the language of Section 170 of the state's constitution and to the statutory language of which organizations qualify to be exempt from property taxes.

Navy veteran and District 29 Republican Rep. Kevin Bratcher and Marine veteran and District 72 Republican Rep. Matthew Koch have pre-filed two pieces of legislation into the 2020 legislative session -- BR (bill request) 127 by Bratcher, and BR 247 by Koch. "I'm doing it constitutionally and he is doing it statutorily," Bratcher said. "There are constitutional issues with changing property tax and exemptions of property tax and I have a bill that would change the constitution to allow this to happen. The process would be easier to pass his (proposed bill). The way it is looking now, we are probably going to go with his. The process will be easier to change the statutory language, (but) the question is whether or not it will stand up in court."

Koch's bill would create a new section in KRS Chapter 132 to exempt veteran service organizations from ad valorem taxation if more than 50% of the organization's annual net income is expended on behalf of veterans and other charitable causes. This action, given that there would be no changes to the constitution, could be more palatable in terms of garnering political support, but, as Bratcher pointed out, there could be problems down the road. "There is language, and it matches federal requirements, that makes sure that these organizations are giving half of their net profit to charitable organizations to be eligible," Koch said. "Everyone will get behind their vets, we all do. I don't know anyone in our legislator that doesn't. "We will have to take a hard look at the money. We will make sure this is fair and that these organizations are doing what they say they are doing. At the end of the day, I believe that the right thing will be done and we will be able to give some relief to these organizations. It is straightforward and if vets can't be straightforward, then all is lost. In reality, these bills are ensuring that veterans can do what they do best -- serve their communities."

So, VSOs and members of the state legislature are working toward providing veterans organizations that do charitable work the opportunity to gain property tax exemption, begging the question, what can be done by those community members that rallied behind their VFW when the tax man came knocking? The answer is simple, said Chuck Kucera, Post 696 adjutant -- Show their support. "To support us, the community needs to do two things," he said. "Come down to the post to sign our paper petition the old school way or print one and mail it in or sign our online petition. Our goal is to get as many signatures as we can so that I can take a big stack of documents to DJ (Johnson) and he can get them into the right hands."

Looking forward to the legislative session, Johnson is optimistic, he said. "I think the bill's passing looks promising," he said. "A lot of that is based on these VSOs educating us on how we can do this by statute and not making this a constitutional issue. They have made a strong case. When you have a military organization with an objective in mind, look out. This is a precision operation and they are good at this kind of thing, they have made a lifetime of doing it." [Source: Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, Ky. | Jacob Mulliken | October 13, 2019++]

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## **Other Vet Legislation**

### **Update 02: Veteran Bills Advanced for House Vote**

During the week of 14 OCT the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs advanced six bipartisan pieces of legislation to the full House for a vote. The six bills covered a wide range of veteran benefits and protections to include improvements for homeless veterans, student veterans, veteran-owned small businesses, and improved reporting transparency within VA. These six bills are just some of the important work the Veterans' Affairs Committee has worked on this session, and they have shown a commitment to work for

veterans in a bipartisan manner. Now, the following will be up for a vote by the full House of Representatives in the coming weeks.

#### Text of Legislation

- H.R. 4625 - Protect the GI Bill Act [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/14/2019 at 10:43 AM
- H.R.3749 - Legal Services for Homeless Veterans Act [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/14/2019 at 10:43 AM
- H.R.4613 - VA Reporting Transparency Act [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/14/2019 at 10:43 AM
- H.R.4477 - Reducing High Risk to Veterans and Veterans Services Act [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/14/2019 at 10:43 AM
- H.R.4162 - GI Bill Planning Act of 2019 [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/14/2019 at 10:43 AM
- H.R.561 - Protecting Business Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2019 [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/14/2019 at 10:43 AM
- Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 3749 Offered by Rep. Cisneros [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/14/2019 at 10:43 AM

#### Amendments

- Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 4625 Offered by Rep. Takano [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/14/2019 at 10:43 AM
- Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 4477 Offered by Rep. Takano [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/14/2019 at 10:43 AM
- Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 4162 Offered by Rep. Roe [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/14/2019 at 10:43 AM
- Amendment to the Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 4625, offered by Rep. Bilirakis [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/15/2019 at 03:13 PM
- Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 3749 Offered by Rep. Rose [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/15/2019 at 03:46 PM
- Amendment to H.R. 4613, Offered by Rep. Roe [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/15/2019 at 04:34 PM

#### Support Documents

- Agenda [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/14/2019 at 10:43 AM
- Markup Notice [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/14/2019 at 10:45 AM
- Markup Notice Update [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/14/2019 at 10:49 AM
- Markup Results [\[PDF\]](#) Added 10/17/2019 at 09:56 AM

[Source: <https://docs.house.gov/Committee/Calendar/ByEvent.aspx?EventID=110057> | October 2019 ++]

**\* Military \***





## **Army 16-Year Plan**

### **Launched to Tackle Russia, China**



The Army has unveiled an ambitious four-stage plan to modernize itself completely by 2035. That means new technology, new kinds of combat units, and, trickiest of all, a new approach to cultivating its people’s talents. But in the here and now, as many as 118 Army programs are on hold while Congress struggles to pass authorization and appropriations bills for the fiscal year that began two weeks ago. The Pentagon is currently operating under a stopgap measure called a Continuing Resolution, which (with rare exceptions) allows agencies to continue spending at last year’s levels, but not to start any new programs or grow existing ones. (Cuts are banned as well). That could disrupt the plan by delaying development of key weapons, like long-range hypersonic missiles, that the Army wants to field in the next few years. The chief of the year-old Army Futures Command, Gen. John “Mike” Murray,” told reporters 16 OCT that the service had done everything it could to anticipate the current gridlock, but the longer it continues, the greater the damage. “It would be easier to list the programs that won’t be affected,” he said.

The new Army Modernization Strategy – a 12-page public document plus roughly 250 pages of Army-only implementation plans – pulls together a lot of ideas, programs, and dates previously reported on. But it’s the first time we’ve seen everything in one succinct package and tied to such a clear timeline. While 16 years is long enough for everyone involved today to have retired, the plan does have deliverables in the next three years for which the Army can be held accountable. In fact, technically, the countdown to 2035 has already started, because Fiscal Year 2020 – the first year of Phase I — began on Oct. 1st. (phases numbers and names are provided in the following summary, since the Army document lacks them).

#### **Phase I, 2020-2022: First Fielding**

The Army will “begin initial fielding” of its 34 top-priority programs. That’s a number in flux. The service listed 31 in its ’20 budget, from long-range missiles to wireless networks to targeting goggles, but with the subsequent creation of a high-priority Program Executive Office to work on hypersonic weapons, directed energy (e.g. lasers), and space programs, Army officials often add those three as well. And the service has said programs that fail may get cut from the list, while new and promising weapons might get added. The most prominent example of these near-term technologies: a set of goggles known as IVAS (Integrated Visual Augmentation System) that project a targeting cross-hairs, compass directions, and other tactical data over a soldier’s field of vision as desired. IVAS is supposed to enter service in 2021 – but skeptics in Congress have proposed steep cuts in prototyping funds for the program of which IVAS is a part, the Synthetic Training Environment (STE).

Alongside the equipment, and informing its development, the Army will continue testing its concept for future conflict, Multi-Domain Operations. The focus of this effort is field exercises by new units called Multi-Domain Task Forces, one of which is already at work in the Pacific and a second of which has just stood up in Europe. Meanwhile,

the Army will also “begin adjusting its global force posture.” That means not only creating new units like the MDTFs but potentially changing where forces are deployed to better deter Russia and Chinese aggression.

Sandia National Laboratories graphic

### **Phase II, 2023-2025: Rearm & Reorganize**

The Army begins reorganizing units across the force to execute the new Multi-Domain tactics and incorporate the new equipment that will start entering production. This is the time period when the Army wants to start large-scale use of the VR simulations and augmented reality tools developed by the Synthetic Training Environment, which (as mentioned above) Congress wants to cut in '20. This is also the period when the Army's highest-priority weapon, its land-based Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon, is supposed to enter service with a prototype battery of missile launchers. But fielding an all-new weapon by 2023 depends on getting work underway ASAP.

The Army awarded several key hypersonics contracts at the end of FY 19 to avoid getting stuck in the 2020 gridlock, so “we think we're in a really good position until the first of the year,” the Program Executive Officer, Lt. Gen. Neil Thurgood, told reporters today. But if the Continuing Resolution extends beyond Jan. 1 – and there's talk on the Hill of making it last all year – Thurgood says he'll have to start delaying parts of the program to preserve its core elements.

### **Phase III, 2026-2028: Ready for Russia**

Production begins on some of the biggest and most expensive Army programs. That includes the replacement for the M2 Bradley, the new Optionally Manned Fighting Vehicle – a program which is currently down to only one competitor after all the others were disqualified or dropped out. It also includes a new aerial scout to replace the retired OH-58 Kiowa, the Future Attack Reconnaissance Aircraft – for which there is a lively competition with five entrants of varying sizes. These new weapons will go into new and redesigned units at every level, from individual combat brigades – the focus of fighting during Afghanistan and Iraq – to newly created four-star Field Armies in crucial theaters. By 2028, “the Army will certify the first MDO force package and begin building the next one.”

That means the Army will have enough modernized forces to conduct large-scale Multi-Domain Operations against one great-power adversary in one theater of war. While the strategy doesn't specify the theaters outright, it makes clear elsewhere that Russia is the “pacing threat” and the “most capable... in the near term,” while China is a larger but longer-term problem. So we can predict with confidence that the first force package will be tailored to a land war in Europe, defending vulnerable allies like the Baltic States against Russia.

### **Phase IV, 2029 2025: Ready for China**

“During this period,” the strategy says, “the Army will finish certifying the next force package” – which we can safely assume will be one optimized for a naval war in the West Pacific against China. While many of the vital technologies will be the same, such as a command-and-control network resistant to hacking and jamming, the mix of forces will certainly be different – fewer tanks and more ultra-long-range missiles, for example. The role of the Army in the Pacific is also a supporting one to the Navy and Air Force, like an anvil to a pair of hammers. By fortifying islands with land-based firepower, the Army can keep Chinese ships and planes at bay, imposing casualties and constraining their maneuver.

But modernization does not end here, the strategy document and Army leaders emphasize. “While this AMS outlines an end state for the future Army in 2035, Army modernization will remain ongoing,” the document says, “as we must continue to test and refine operating concepts, draw on emerging technologies, and anticipate changes in the operating environment.” “We're in a hole right now,” Gen. Murray told the AUSA conference this morning, relying on much-upgraded 40-year equipment from the Reagan buildup. The Army must not do another burst of modernization and then stop, he said, because “we'll find ourselves in another hole in 30 years.” The Army, he said, must become ‘a persistently modernizing organization.’”

[Source: Breaking Defense | Sydney J. Freedberg Jr. | October 16, 2019++]

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## Gold Star Families

### Update 01: The Ultimate Sacrifice Comes Heavily Taxed

In early March 2006, two days after learning her husband had died in Iraq, Malia Fry was sitting at her kitchen table in North Carolina. She was flipping through a three-ring binder with a casualty assistance officer who was shepherding her through the long **list of decisions** she had to make in the fog of grief. Gunnery Sgt. John Fry was an explosive ordnance disposal technician in the Marines. He had been disarming an improvised explosive device in Anbar Province when it exploded. Malia turned the pages, picking out her husband's casket. Her two youngest children, Gideon, then 7, and C.L., just 2, played in the next room. Her daughter, Kathryn, was at the beach with another Marine family, a much-needed escape from the reality that had settled over the Fry house. Kathryn was 9 years old and understood best that her dad was not coming home.

"Five [caskets] were metal and two were wood. Why I remember that, I don't know," Malia says, 13 years later. "You remember the weirdest things." John Fry had been a woodworker. Malia chose a wood casket. And then the casualty assistance officer -- a Marine staff sergeant who had worked with John Fry -- flipped through the binder to the next decision Malia needed to make: how to structure her monthly survivor benefits. She reviewed one from the Veterans Affairs Administration called Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), a benefit for family of service members who die in the line of duty or due to a service-related injury or illness. As the name implies, it compensates dependents for the loss of income of their fallen military member and renders the federal government not liable for the deaths of US troops. There was also the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP), paid out by the Department of Defense. It's the military's version of a life insurance policy. Whether the military member is killed in action or they retire and continue to pay into the benefit, the SBP guarantees part of their retirement pay as a modest monthly income for a spouse who may outlive them. "One he paid for with his work every day and the other he paid for with blood," Malia, who was 28 when her husband died, says.

She was stunned when she learned she **would not receive both benefits in full**. For every dollar she received from the VA DIC benefit, her casualty assistance officer told her, it would be deducted from the Survivor Benefit Plan payments, an offset referred to as "the widow's tax." It affects an estimated 65,000 Americans whose service member spouses died as a result of their service in conflicts dating back to World War II. Malia could avoid the offset by transferring the SBP to her children. That meant instead of receiving the monthly payments for the rest of her life, they would end when the Fry children turned 18 or, if they went to college, 22. But it took care of her immediate financial worries.

"The Marine helping me told me if I put the SBP in my name I would only collect \$120 a month. And I thought, 'how am I going to feed my kids?'" Malia recalls. The "child option," as it's called, channels an average of \$925 per month from Gold Star spouses to Gold Star children. But it's a less than perfect work-around -- often referred to by advocates as a band-aid. In military families, the service member is frequently the breadwinner. Constant moves make steady employment a challenge for non-military spouses. And in the immediate years after losing a service member spouse the SBP provides some financial stability to families. But earlier this year when Gold Star children filed their taxes -- they file individually because the benefits transferred to them count as income and render them no longer dependents of the surviving spouse -- an expensive surprise was awaiting them. The tax reform bill passed by Congress in 2017 and signed into law by President Donald Trump hit them with a huge tax hike.

In what's become known as "**the kiddie tax**," the United States government inadvertently applied the tax meant to collect revenue on inheritances and trust funds to several thousand children who had lost their mom or dad to war or service-related injuries or illness. "It's a lot to go from 12 to 13%, to 37%," Malia told CNN Home Front. "Normally we paid around \$100 to \$150, each child. This last tax season we paid close to \$1,000 each child." Republicans controlled both the House and Senate two years ago, passing the tax overhaul along party lines. Democrats now lead

the House. But when members of Congress found out what had happened this year, whether or not they voted for the legislation, they uniformly vowed to change the mistake.

But Memorial Day came and went, and the full Congress had failed to send a fix to the President's desk. Congress returned to Washington from summer recess in early September. Trump and first lady Melania Trump honored the families of fallen troops at the White House a few weeks later on Gold Star Mother's and Family's Day. Still, no bills from Congress. And now, with Veterans Day quickly approaching, the immediate financial future of Gold Star families is uncertain. The Senate moved a standalone bill to fix the "kiddie tax" in May but the House of Representatives, where tax bills are supposed to start, rolled the fix into a larger retirement savings bill. Both bills passed with overwhelming bipartisan majorities, but the House retirement bill is stalled in the Senate where Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) has put a hold on it because it does not include a tax benefit for home schooling.

Congress is dealing with the overarching problem, the "widow's tax," separately. The House eliminated it in the National Defense Authorization Act, a bill that funds the entire Department of Defense. But it hit a wall in the Senate, literally. House Democrats had blocked defense budget funds from being diverted to fund Trump's border wall, putting them at odds with Senate Republicans and the White House. Sens. Doug Jones (D-AL) and Susan Collins (R-ME) have spearheaded a standalone bill in their chamber as well as a 94-0 vote on the Senate floor, instructing the Senate to include the "widow's tax" repeal in the defense funding bill.

One of the big obstacles to fixing the "widow's tax" has been the price tag. The Congressional Budget Office calculates getting rid of it would cost \$5.7 billion over 10 years. And it is mandatory that Congress cut something else to pay for it. Advocates say that is a problem for Congress to solve, not for Gold Star families to bear. "Taking care of our widows and their families is the nation's obligation," says Candace Wheeler, senior adviser for Policy and Legislation at the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, a nonprofit dedicated to caring and advocating for Gold Star families. "We are not honoring the commitment we have made to our service members and veterans who have not only earned this, they have paid for it either with their deferred compensation or their life."

Now, with a 21 NOV deadline looming to pass the NDAA, Senate Armed Services Chairman Jim Inhofe (R-OK) is proposing a temporary extension of defense funding at its current level, which does not address the "widow's tax" or a number of other outstanding fixes to the sweeping tax reform law. It would extend funding for the Department of Defense likely into tax filing season, forcing Gold Star families to prepare for a second year of sky-high taxes. For Malia and her kids, the "kiddie tax" has meant scrimping and saving. C.L., who is now 16 years old and the spitting image of his father, would not be able to go on his band trip this year. "We cut things like a new band instrument," Malia says. "You don't eat out and you buy the off-brand macaroni." And if Congress fails to address the "widow's tax," life will be significantly more difficult for the Fry family. In the next few years, as the two youngest Fry children come of age, their survivor benefits from the Defense Department will expire.

Before her husband died, Malia held down part-time jobs between changes of duty stations by babysitting or working at Walmart. After, she dedicated herself full-time to her three children. Now that they're older, she has started college and plans to major in political science. But she won't make enough money. "I will have to sell my house. The house I bought after he died that I moved to and raised our children from the ages of 2, 7 and 9," Malia says. It's the kind of house where Gunnery Sgt. Fry dreamed of bringing up his children.

In August 2005, two weeks before deploying to Iraq, he sat down with his wife to discuss what would happen if he died. "I told him I don't want to talk about this, and he said, 'We have to talk about this,'" Malia recounts. She would have to move. The couple was living on base at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, but their families were in Texas. "He said to me, 'Buy some land so the boys can run in the country like I did as a kid,'" Malia recalls her husband saying two weeks before he deployed. And that's what she did. Malia bought a house in a small town outside of Waco, Texas, five miles up the road from her husband's childhood home. Her children grew up playing in the limestone creek that borders one side of the property, the same creek John Fry played in as a child. During that difficult pre-deployment conversation, John also reviewed the separate benefits from the VA Department and the Defense Department that his wife would

receive if he did not return. "He said, 'You will get this forever. I will take care of you forever,'" she says, tearing up. **He did not**, Malia says, **know** the **benefits would not pay out in full**.

[Source: CNN | Brianna Keilar | October 28, 2019 ++]

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## **Air Force Fitness Assessment Under Review**

The U.S. Air Force is considering administering the abdominal circumference test at a separate time from the rest of the physical fitness assessment in order to prevent added body stress and unwanted injuries, according to the service's top enlisted leader. Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth O. Wright told audiences here during the annual Air, Space and Cyber Conference that the service is weighing administering the measurement, known as the tape test, at least seven days apart from the pushups, sit-ups and run components of the PT test. "We have airmen who go to great lengths to get a good score on the abdominal circumference because it counts for 20% of the test," Wright said during a speech, adding some airmen have gone to extremes, even starving themselves, to pass the waist measurement test.



"And then they try to run or do the other components, and we've had airmen who have lost their lives or have become injured," Wright said. There have been three PT-related deaths in the last five months, the most recent at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, last month. Investigations into their deaths have not yet been released. In June, Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina briefly suspended all PT tests after two airmen died less than a week apart from following completion of their PFAs.

The current Air Force fitness test is gender and age-normed and combines a 1.5-mile run time with maximum pushup and sit-up repetitions within one minute. Wright previously told Air Force Times that the tape test and PFA, if separated, should be taken more than seven but not more than 30 days apart. He reiterated that the service is also reviewing other changes, such as instituting a mock test. In July, Wright's spokesman, Senior Master Sgt. Harry Kibbe, said the service began looking at the possibility of a no-fail trial PT test, that, if passed, would count as the airman's official score. The intent would be to reduce test-taking anxiety among airmen.

Wright on 16 OCT said there are groups of airmen who believe that elements of the PFA should be altered or removed, and others who believe they don't need a PT test at all because they live a healthy and fit lifestyle. That will never be a reality, he said. But Wright hopes small changes will make a big difference for Airmen. Another possibility under consideration may be to modify how the service measures VO2 max, or a person's maximal oxygen uptake, which can be measured in run time and divided by his or her waist-to-height ratio. "One of the things we've talked about, but we haven't gotten there yet is, not everybody's a runner. And we want to be able to measure VO2 Max maybe by rowing or swimming or cycling," Wright said.

"So we'll keep you updated as we conduct [these] tests, and as we get the right approvals and right system. But I would like for us as an Air Force to start thinking about what health and fitness means [which] is not just a test; Being

healthy, comes from you living a lifestyle of fitness 365 days a year," he said. [Source: Together We Served | October 2019 ++]

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## **Air Force Indefinite Enlistment**

### **Takes Effect 18 November 2019**

The Air Force will move to a new system of “indefinite enlistment” for airmen with at least 12 years of service on 18 NOV, service officials confirmed 25 OCT after a leaked memo appeared online Wednesday evening. Under the new system, airmen who hit 12 years time-in-service will now automatically have their enlistments extended to their rank’s high year of tenure mark. They can apply to retire once they become eligible, or separate before becoming retirement-eligible, when they wish, as long as they don’t have an active-duty service commitment.

Airmen who are promoted will have their service extended to their new rank’s high year of tenure. This will eliminate the need for airmen to re-enlist, if they want to remain in uniform. “Career airmen are consummate professionals who have demonstrated their commitment to service,” said Air Force personnel chief Lt. Gen. Brian Kelly in a statement. “They play a crucial role in developing the next generation of airmen. With this adjustment, we’re providing them the associated flexibility to make individualized career decisions.”

The Personnel Services Delivery Memorandum dated 21 OCT was posted on the unofficial Air Force amn/nco/snco page 23 OCT. Capt. Carrie Volpe, an Air Force spokeswoman, confirmed it is genuine, but noted that it was a draft memo used to communicate personnel changes to force support squadron commanders and military personnel flight leaders in advance of a policy change. Those changes are ongoing, she said, and service officials had tentatively planned to announce the policy change 5 NOV. They are now considering an earlier release date. The change represents a significant shift in how the Air Force manages its more experienced enlisted airmen and is similar to how the Army operates.

Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth Wright first floated this idea publicly two years ago, suggesting it could reduce paperwork and unnecessary administrative burdens on airmen who want to stay in anyway. When Wright first started discussing this in 2017, the Air Force was considering making 15 years of service the point where indefinite enlistment kicks in. “Every four years, I’ve got to go through the ‘Yeah, I’m still here’” process, Wright said at a conference in Orlando, Florida, in October 2017, shortly after he himself re-enlisted. “Now, it’s a time-honored tradition. I love it, but I think we’d like to get to once you hit your 15-year mark, then you’re an indefinite enlistment — you’re good until your high year of tenure. I believe at 15 years of service, most of us are plugged in, dedicated and ready to roll.”

The selective re-enlistment program will continue for airmen with 12 years or more of service. Airmen serving in the NCO Career Status Program may request receipt of an authorized Selective Retention Bonus no earlier than 30 days prior to meeting their eligibility requirements, according to the draft memo. The Air Force Personnel Center will notify all airmen eligible for an SRB. Those who choose to accept the bonus — and the active-duty service commitment that goes with it — will complete their request online. As usual, airmen must not only be in a qualifying Air Force specialty code, but also be performing duties in that skill at the time of their request. “Airmen should expect to serve their full commitment in the bonus skill,” the draft memo states. “Airmen no longer performing duties in the bonus specialty are subject to termination and recoupment of unearned portions.” Airmen may request at least three years, but not more than six years of bonus entitlement, not to exceed the airman’s high year of tenure or authorized HYT adjustment, the memo states. [Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | October 25, 2019 ++]

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## Army Combat Fitness Test

### What Will the Army do About the Fail Rates?



The ACFT is the planned successor to the proven and successful Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT). The APFT essentially costs a unit ten bucks and two hours to run through an entire company of soldiers, whereas the ACFT costs... more. Tens of millions of dollars more. But the ACFT could be the greatest thing to happen to the Army since the black beret, the blue service dress uniform, or the retro World War II-era pinks and greens! What if the ACFT produced one million hooah-shouting, Ironman-winning, CrossFit-teaching soldiers with the physiques of Greek gods and goddesses? What if we went to war with China and the enemy just dropped their weapons and ran the opposite direction, so intimidating were the American men and women on the front lines? What if, so musclebound and terrifying were our soldiers, that the Army stopped issuing rifles just to make it a fair fight when we went to war?

However that is not likely to happen. Allegedly the pass/fail rates for the eleven battalions taking the ACFT are not promising. According to the numbers, a jaw-dropping 36% of soldiers overall failed the test, with 64% passing. When you break it down by gender, 70% of men passed but 84% of women failed the test. Here is why those fail numbers are so bad, male or female: you fail your physical training test, you get flagged. You aren't going to military schools like Basic Leader Course or Airborne School. And if somehow you get there anyway, when you're tested again you'll be turned around and sent home. You cannot be promoted. You cannot be reclassified into another MOS. In the Guard and reserve, you cannot be transferred. You lose your tuition assistance. You can't even reenlist!

Here is where it gets really ugly. If 84% of women assigned in battalions specifically preparing for the ACFT are failing this test, you have essentially eliminated women from the United States Army. It gets uglier yet. When a woman gives birth, she gets a six-month profile excusing her from the ACFT. The thing is: the real killer for women is the "leg tuck" portion of the ACFT, in which you assume a pull-up position and bring your hips and knees up to your elbows and back down as many times as possible in two minutes. That's asking an awful lot for a woman who has given birth in the last few months; and allows, basically, for no time to actually train up for the event once her profile expires. Already, women are allegedly failing the leg tuck test by 72%. At present the ACFT consists of six events:

- Strength Dead-Lift (120-420 pounds)
- Standing Power Throw (10-pound medicine ball)
- Hand-Release Push-Ups
- Sprint-Drag-Carry (sprint, drag a sled, and then lateral shuffle then carry two kettle-bells)
- Leg Tuck (hanging from a pull-up bar, bring your knees or thighs to your elbows)
- 2-Mile Run (20 minute max)

The Army has yet to address the myriad problems the ACFT presents for the Guard and reserve components, which make up the majority of the military branch. The gear necessary to take the test is locked up in cages by supply personnel who do not have time to sign out a literal LMTV's worth of equipment on an already busy drill weekend.

If your unit doesn't have access to the Super Dome, your nearby testing grounds are not likely to meet the ACFT standard. (Dry grass, no rocks, no snow, no morning dew.) And because Guard and reserve soldiers do not have daily access to the gear and testing grounds (as their active duty counterparts do), they will be forced to purchase on their own dime a gym membership—and not the cheap gym, either. The reserve components are already missing their recruitment goals. This isn't going to help.

But you know who it may help? The U.S. Air Force. Supposedly Air Force recruiters were warned by higher ups not to poach Army soldiers as the ACFT is implemented throughout the service. But, recruitment is an ugly business and recruiters have quotas. All they have to do is state the facts: Hello prospective female recruit: 84% of women are failing the Army's so-called fitness standards. The problem is the test—not the woman. So do you want to enlist and be a private forever, or do you want to join the Air Force and reach your potential? The ACFT rolls out to the entire Army in less than a year. If it is not modified it will be interesting to see what the Army will deal with their career orientated troops. [Source: Clearance Jobs | David Brown | October 5, 2019 ++]

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## **College Credits for Military Education**

### **Marines & Sailors Could Soon Get**

Sailors and Marines could soon be eligible for real-world college credit for all that classroom time they put into career training and professional military education. Navy leaders are pushing to stand up the new Naval Community College by 2021. The school will offer Marines and sailors free associate's degrees and college credits that are easily transferable to accredited schools across the country, said John Kroger, the Navy's new chief learning officer. Kroger has been on the job for only a few weeks, but he's already on a path toward standing up the school. It is one of several ways Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer wants to shake up his sailors' and Marines' education programs. "I think it's completely transformational," Kroger said of the Naval Community College. "I think it's going to help with recruiting because we're entering an era where the idea of community college [being] free ... is spreading through the States.

"I think it's really important that we be able to say, 'Look, we know you have that opportunity in the civilian world. You have that opportunity here too.'" Degrees could range from computer science to history or data analytics, said Kroger, who served as an enlisted Marine before earning his bachelor's and master's degrees from Yale University, as well as a Harvard law degree. The college will professionalize the fleet as weapons and communication systems get more complex, he said. "We're going to need to tap the full potential of our enlisted force," Kroger said. Here's how the new Naval Community College is likely to work:

- **Transferable Credits and Degrees --** The Navy is looking to partner with colleges and universities that already offer strong associate's degree programs, Kroger said. And when assessing whether to choose them as partners, it will be looking for specific criteria. "We want to make sure that it's a fully accredited institution and that we're granting degrees that will be respected by civilian universities ... when it comes time to transfer credits," he said.
- **Crediting Existing Training --** In sitting in on some PME courses at the Marine Corps University and other Navy Department institutions, Kroger said it's obvious collegiate-level learning is already happening in the sea services. And he wants Marines and sailors to be able to earn certificates or credits toward an associate's for stuff many of them are already doing. "I think some sailors and Marines would be surprised at how much college credit they should be accruing going through the current training they're already doing," he said.
- **Flexible Programs --** It can be tough for troops to finish a traditional college education when they're constantly being sent off to train or deploy. Courses at the Naval Community College will have built-in flexibility that will allow Marines and sailors to pick up the work when they're able. "If you were taking a civilian class and you're deployed in the middle of it ... then you have to start over when the class is offered



again," Kroger said. "We're going to have to work with our partners on units that can be done in ways with greater flexibility so when sailors and Marines do have the time, they can focus on their education and, when their operational responsibilities make that impossible, they can put that on hold for a moment and come back to it without having gone backward."

- **Online and In-Person** -- Naval Community College isn't going to be a traditional campus experience. Most of the work will be done online, but Kroger hopes to offer a selection of in-person courses in places with high sailor and Marine populations. "I can imagine [Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia] or [Camp Pendleton, California] eventually having something that looks more like a traditional classroom," the chief learning officer said.
- **Retroactive Degrees?** -- A big question remains for those who just left the service with a bunch of PME and MOS training: Will degrees be available to them, too?

For now, Kroger said he's primarily focused on the active-duty force -- or those about to leave it. "If a sailor or Marine decided not to reenlist 85% of the way through a degree, we're going to want to have a transitional period of time after the termination of their enlistment to try to help get them finish," he said. [Source: Military.com | Gina Harkins | October 15, 2019 ++]

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## Fort Bliss AMC

### Almost Done 3 Years Late at a Cost of \$1.4B

The most expensive U.S. military hospital project currently under construction is nearing the finish line — three years late and more than \$629 million over the original contract awards. After six, troubled years of construction, the new, mammoth William Beaumont Army Medical Center complex in East El Paso is expected to be completed 15 NOV with a price tag that's ballooned to \$1.4 billion, reported officials at the Army Corps of Engineers' Fort Worth District office, which oversees the project. The hospital complex was to be built for \$740.4 million under the original construction contracts. The six-building, 1.1 million-square-foot complex is located on 270 acres of Fort Bliss land at Spur 601 and Loop 375 in East El Paso.



The new William Beaumont Army Medical Center

The hospital isn't scheduled to open until September 2020 because it takes several months to bring in medical equipment, furniture, conduct staff training and make moves from the old Beaumont, Army officials have said. It originally was to open in April 2017. Construction originally was scheduled to be completed in November 2016. The project has been plagued by design errors and omissions, contract changes and time delays, according to an audit

released in June 2018 by the U.S. Department of Defense Inspector General. "This project has faced challenges both in design and construction that affected delivery timelines and budgets," according to an Army Corps of Engineers statement. "This project has incorporated necessary design revisions to ensure delivery of a world class medical complex."

U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar, D-El Paso, said in a recent interview with the El Paso Times that she took a tour of the new hospital in February or March, shortly after she took office, and said officials told her that the delays and budget overages were the "result of procurement and (they) learned lessons as a result." "It's shocking to me how over budget it is and how delayed the project is. It's still mind boggling how procurement issues could have caused this," Escobar said. "I don't know anyone was held accountable when the overages and delays occurred, and that's unacceptable. We wouldn't accept that at local government, but at the federal level, this is kind of routine," Escobar said.

The hospital complex is being built by Clark McCarthy Healthcare Partners II, a joint venture of two huge, private contractors — Clark Construction Group of Bethesda, Maryland, a Washington, D.C., suburb, and McCarthy Building Companies of St. Louis. It was designed by HDR Inc., a global architectural firm headquartered in Omaha. Clark McCarthy and HDR spokespersons said all comments about the hospital project had to come from the Army Corps of Engineers. The project is the most expensive U.S. military hospital project currently being built in the world, according to a U.S. Department of Defense report sent to Congress in July. The only other project that comes close is a military hospital complex being built in Germany, with an estimated cost of \$1.02 billion as of March 31. The Fort Bliss hospital also is one of the most expensive construction projects in El Paso history, second only to the \$5 billion Fort Bliss expansion, which involved constructing buildings, roads and other facilities over six years. The post expansion was completed in 2012

Midwest Steel, a Detroit company that erected steel columns for the project alleged in a recently settled federal lawsuit against Clark McCarthy that the construction project was "extraordinarily troubled from the start." "There were major defects in the design, which impacted the schedule and greatly increased costs and time on the project" for Midwest Steel and other contractors, the lawsuit states. Midwest Steel's work was scheduled to last 16 months. Instead it spent 50 months, or just over four years at the site and "suffered significant losses on the project," according to the lawsuit.

Clark McCarthy denied most of Midwest's allegations and in a counterclaim asserted that the main steel contractor, W&W-AFCO Steel's "performance and management failures contributed to Midwest's untimely performance and further delayed the work progress of other trades, which needed the structural steel in place before they could begin their work" on the complex. Midwest Steel, Clark McCarthy, W&W-AFCO, and several other companies named in the lawsuit, reached an out-of-court settlement in the lawsuit, according to a 28 AUG court filing. The settlement is confidential, a lawyer representing Midwest Steel said, and no details are being released, except that each party in the lawsuit agreed to pay their own court and attorney fees.

Construction on the hospital buildings began in August 2013. The construction workforce peaked at 1,100 workers in the summer of 2017. It was down to about 700 people in August, the Army Corps of Engineers reported. The six-building complex includes the seven-story, 135-bed hospital, two six-story clinic buildings, administration building, clinical investigation, or research, building with labs and central utility building with power generators. All the buildings, except for the research building are in one connected complex. It's replacing the 47-year-old, 12-story, 670,024 square-foot, 115-bed Beaumont hospital now located on Fort Bliss land at 5005 N. Piedras St., in North Central El Paso. About 2,000 people, including about 1,000 civilians, work at the hospital — a number that is expected to stay about the same at the new campus, reported Amabilia Payen, a spokeswoman for the hospital. Also, about 1,000 people, including about 600 civilians, work at several Beaumont clinics. Some specialty clinics will be in the new hospital complex, and other clinics will remain in various areas on Fort Bliss, Payen said. [Source: El Paso Times| Vic Kolenc | October 17, 2019 ++]

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## **Navy Doomsday Plane**

### **E-6B Mercury Class-A mishap**



A Navy doomsday aircraft that would play a vital communication role in the event of a nuclear war had one of its four engines replaced this month after it struck a bird at a Maryland air station. An E-6B Mercury, a nuclear command-and-control plane, hit the bird at Naval Air Station Patuxent River on 2 OCT. The aircraft, which belongs to Air Test and Evaluation Squadron Twenty, was landing on a runway while conducting a touch-and-go, said Tim Boulay, a spokesman for Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division. Touch-and-go landings are a routine part of aviators' training in which they land and take off again without stopping.

Boulay said the aircraft landed safely after the bird strike around 3:12 p.m. There were no injuries reported. "The engine has been replaced, and the aircraft has been returned to service," he said. He declined to answer several other questions about the incident, including how many people were on board and what kind of bird the plane struck, citing the ongoing investigation into the mishap. The Naval Safety Center classified the incident as a Class-A mishap, which means there was at least \$2 million in damage to the aircraft.

This is at least the second Class-A mishap for an E-6B Mercury in 2019. In February, one of the planes clipped a hangar as it was being moved at Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma. That incident also led to millions of dollars in damages. The bird strike at Pax River was also the Navy's second Class-A aviation mishap in fiscal 2020, which started ` OCT. On 7 OCT, a student naval aviator was flying in Texas when the engine on a T-45C Goshawk failed and caught fire. The pilot and instructor on board landed safely -- no injuries were reported. [Source: Military.com | Gina Harkins | October 17, 2019 ++]

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## **Army Housing**

### **Q&A on Recent Problems**

Reports of mold, vermin and lead contamination in family housing units and a limited response to families' complaints about the problems put the Defense Department's privatized housing program under congressional scrutiny in recent months. Two Army housing surveys conducted this year by an independent third party showed a drop in overall

satisfaction rates from 2018. The service is working to address those issues, according to Army Secretary Ryan D. McCarthy, and evidence of that should start percolating this winter. McCarthy discussed the housing issue with Army Times leading up to the Association of the United States Army’s annual gathering. This Q&A has been edited for length.

(Q): *What went wrong with the Army’s housing situation over the past few years?*

(A): A lot of it was, in 2014, taking the chain of command out of the process and not having the resources there to manage this and recognize you can’t outsource something like this. You can have a partner, or a vendor, provide a service or a capability to help you, but ultimately, these are our families. This is something we are responsible for. We have to make sure that they have the appropriate quality of life that they deserve.

(Q): *What is the Army doing to make it right in the near-term?*

(A): We put about 115 additional people against the management of these systems, reinserting the chain of command, putting apps on phones so you can manage a work order on your iPhone. So there were simple things that had to be done to just manage the process better.

(Q): *How will the Army stay ahead of the problem in the future?*

(A): The other [part] is working with the partner to emphasize the fact that we’re going to change incentive award fees so we can drive towards the appropriate behaviors to improve the quality of a work order, to decrease the span of time for work order completion. We’re talking with them about what it would take in the form of cost to have a more aggressive or robust recapitalization plan, as well as the types of investments we make in our installations so it’s more innovative so that these communities are ... much more efficient, convenient. You don’t just get yourself in a loop of repairing homes that are depreciating, then it becomes like a Band-Aid. We want it to be more creative.

(Q): *What are the next steps and when will changes be seen?*

(A): Just recently ... one of the partners is launching about \$360 million into the system, over \$100 million of that is going to Fort Bragg alone. But we need more funding. And we’re looking at the manner in which we could increase not only the speed but the scale of the recapitalization schedule. We’re very close on the [Tenant] Bill of Rights, and we’d like to get that done this fall. And we’re looking at a dispute resolution process as well. Part of that is [determining] who would be the appropriate third party that would work out that dispute between the vendor and the tenant. A lot of good work has been done and I think you’ll start to see the results come in — noticeable improvement — in the late fall and winter time frame.

[Source: ArmyTimes | Kyle Rempfer | October 18, 2019 ++]

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## **Aircraft Carriers**

### **Update 04: Carrier Sharing Plan with U.K.**

For the first time, a US Marine Corps F-35B squadron will deploy aboard the UK’s new aircraft carrier on its maiden voyage in 2021, a milestone hailed as “unprecedented” — even among close allies. “We’re not talking about interoperability anymore; we’re talking about proper integration to a level we’ve never seen,” British Fleet Commander Vice Adm. Jerry Kyd told me on the deck of the carrier as it launched and recovered aircraft during an exercise in the Atlantic. The integration of Marines into the British carrier’s operations from Day One is “unprecedented,” he said. “It would be hard to think of another two countries on the planet who can do that right now.”

As Kyd and fellow Royal Navy officers praised the “special relationship” between Washington and London during a recent visit to the ship, the US Navy’s top admiral was half a world away, using much the same language to pitch his own ideas for closer linkages between allied navies. “Today, the very nature of our operating environment requires shared common values and a collective approach to maritime security,” Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Mike

Gilday, told a seapower conference in Venice. Gilday alluded to the British upgrades and increasing operations with NATO allies at sea, noting that Adm. Mike Mullen, former Navy chief, once talked about a 1,000-ship Navy. “I say, why not a 10,000-ship navy? With like-minded partners, there’s a lot we can do together to keep the maritime commons free and open.”

Spurring the move toward greater linkages between allied forces are the realities of a more aggressive and rapidly modernizing Chinese navy, and an increasingly unpredictable Russia. “We are defending international norms to foster global economic prosperity; we do it to protect the right to navigate the world’s international waters; we do it to ensure smaller nations are not bullied by others,” Gilday said in Venice. Similarly, Kyd sees the increasing integration as an obvious move in an era punctuated by a variety of potential threats. “Why wouldn’t we be far more integrated with our key ally at a moment where the rules-based international system is under threat, and we need to reinforce our western values and operate together?” Kyd, who commanded the Queen Elizabeth last fall when she ran weeks of trials off the US east Coast, is now responsible for overseeing all operational elements of the Royal Navy. Last year’s deployment saw the Brits flying US-based F-35s, but just this past week Royal Navy pilots began flying their own F-35Bs from the ship, becoming the first non-US pilots to own and fly carrier-based Joint Strike Fighters.

The QE is joined on this trip by the newly-formed Westlant 19 Carrier Strike Group – comprised of Type 45 destroyer HMS Dragon, submarine hunter HMS Northumberland and tanker RFA Tideforce. “We are learning how to fight a carrier strike group beyond the jets for the first time,” Commodore Michael Utley told me. The new ship, flying new aircraft, “is a huge step forward. It’s not just a return,” to carrier operations, he said. The QE has been working up to its 2021 deployment to the Mediterranean and Middle East in the waters along the US East Coast since July, readying for the Royal Navy’s first carrier operations in a decade. The new carrier has been specifically designed to operate the F-35, and British officers on board refer to it as a “5th generation” ship that represents a massive leap over the Invincible-class big decks the Royal Navy retired in 2010, leaving the country — which has one of the proudest naval traditions in the world — without a carrier.

“This aircraft carrier for the UK is strategic, not just in terms of scale — she’s the biggest carrier we’ve ever had — but she’s interoperable with the US Marine Corps and again it’s that trust. You can’t surge trust,” Kyd said. That integration with the Marines comes as the Corps and the Navy are working on a new force structure assessment due later this year aimed at more closely linking the operations of the two. It’s a major shift for the Corps, which is coming off almost two decades of operating primarily as a ground force in the Middle East. As part of the emerging shift back to the sea, the Marines are looking to begin testing unmanned platforms to quickly refuel and rearm their F-35Bs operating from remote, austere bases in the Pacific — part of an effort to be more nimble and unpredictable, as the traditional American dominance at sea and in the air erodes.

Last month, Marine leaders announced a year-long round of war games to push the force into the future, while Gilday and Marine Commandant Gen. David Berger recently signed a memo pledging to work on a joint project to hack out a new way to project power forward. The goal is to more closely align their doctrine, training, and equipping plans to complement one another, rather than the Navy simply providing lift and cover for the Corps. And now, with the QE preparing to set sail, it appears the Royal Navy may play a key part in those plans. With the QE in the fleet, “we’ve jumped into a much more sophisticated networked environment, and together [with the US] there’s huge potential in the next 4 to 5 years to really squeeze out the maximum from this very advanced aircraft that we couldn’t even think about 10 years ago,” Kyd said.

The Royal Navy’s second F-35-specific carrier, HMS Prince of Wales, is currently undergoing sea trials in the North Sea in preparation for its planned first deployment in 2023. Having two brand-new carriers that can swap aircraft and missions with the US Navy and Marine Corps is, by any measure, a significant move at a time when US East Coast-based carriers are having some trouble making it out to sea on schedule. [Source: Breaking Defense | Paul McLeary | October 21, 2019| ++]

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## **Air Force Officer Fields**

### **Six New Promotion Categories Created**

The Line of the Air Force is no more. The Air Force on 21 OCT announced it has broken the massive category — which represented about 87 percent of its active duty officers in more than 40 Air Force specialty codes — into six officer development groupings for managing their careers and promoting them. The new categories were established Oct. 7, according to the Air Force. “It will be the largest change that we’ve made in the way officer personnel management is working since the birth” of the Air Force, said Shon Manasco, the assistant secretary of the Air Force for manpower and reserve affairs, in an 11 OCT briefing with reporters at the Pentagon. The six categories will be:

- Air Operations and Special Warfare, including pilots
- Space Operations
- Nuclear and Missile Operations
- Information Warfare, including cyber and intelligence officers
- Combat Support, including maintenance, logistics and security forces officers
- Force Modernization, including engineers and acquisition officers.

Air Force spokeswoman Capt. Carrie Volpe said in an email that the six new categories will keep the LAF prefix. The first promotion board to use the new categories will be the lieutenant colonel board scheduled to meet next March, Air Force personnel chief Lt. Gen. Brian Kelly said at the briefing. “This is an important step forward in the way Air Force leaders are developed,” Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett said in the release. “The team has done exceptional work to get us to this point and I look forward to implementing this together.” Previously, the Air Force only had unique categories for smaller, specialized groups of officers, including lawyers, doctors, nurses and chaplains. But that meant some officers in the broad LAF category, which had remained virtually unchanged since the Air Force’s creation as its own service in 1947, were disadvantaged, Kelly said in April. Some officers were forced to develop in ways that were better suited to other jobs in order to stay competitive for promotions, he said.

Earlier this year, Kelly used the example of acquisition officers, who faced a lack of command opportunities that, under the broader LAF system, would have helped them at promotion time. Establishing a more refined category that includes acquisition officers would make a lack of command less punitive in terms of promotion, Kelly said at the time. It could also allow acquisition officers to stay longer at a base and provide more continuity with their programs, he said. “This change is about ensuring we maintain a winning team,” Chief of Staff Gen. Dave Goldfein said in the release. “The existing Line of the Air Force category has served our Air Force well and molded the excellent leaders we have today. As we look to the future of warfighting, we must have an agile system that allows for a wider range of development paths to ensure officers have the needed skills and expertise to fight and win. This sets us on that path.”

On 11 OCT, Kelly said that the overall promotion board process for officers will remain the same. “We don’t want to change that at all, and we’re not changing it,” Kelly said. But instead of competing against airmen from some 40 other Air Force specialty codes, Kelly said, officers will be competing against a much smaller cohort of officers that are in jobs closer to their own. Manasco said they will also benefit from “more tailored development experiences,” which should make them even more competitive for promotion. “Changing the promotion system was the key to unlock the ability to create these unique development paths,” Manasco said. “That, to us, is where the real power is. And that’s where, over the course of time, we are convinced that we will see an even more talented group of officers [who] will populate our ranks.”

Over the summer, Air Force officials held 42 town hall sessions at more than a dozen bases, talking to more than 3,700 airmen about the changes and gathering their suggestions. Ultimately, the six categories remained unchanged from when they were announced in May — though some airmen did offer suggestions on how the categories might be different. But Kelly said talking to airmen helped the service hone its message and more effectively communicate

why the changes are necessary and how they will work. For example, the Air Force stopped referring to them as promotion categories and instead began referring to them as developmental categories to emphasize the career development aspect of it.

The Air Force wants to make this process more transparent, Kelly said. So it will publish the Air Force secretary's annual promotion board guidance, called the memorandum of instruction, which explains what is expected of all officers, regardless of career field, in terms of competency and character. And in the beginning of each year, the Air Force will publish the career field brief, or specific instructions on what the service values in education, training and experience in each career field. For the first time, Kelly said, promotion boards will receive these briefs to tell them what they need to look for in an officer's developmental path.

The promotion boards for officers in each developmental category will not be stacked entirely with officers from that same category, Kelly said, though some will be from that category. Instead, there will be a mix of officers, depending on the size of the board, to make sure the board gets an "institutional perspective." This is how boards for the current, smaller categories such as chaplains, JAGs or medical personnel already are structured, Kelly said. Kelly acknowledged he's sure the Air Force didn't get it 100 percent right, and some tweaks might be needed in the future. "Until we flesh this out and actually go through it a couple times, we won't know exactly" what adjustments might be needed, Kelly said. The complete list of career fields in each category is as follows:

- ◆ Air Operations and Special Warfare, or LAF-A: pilot (11X), combat systems (12X), remotely piloted aircraft pilot (18X), air battle manager (13B), special tactics (13C), combat rescue (13D), tactical air control party (13L);
- ◆ Space Operations, or LAF-S: space operations (13S), astronaut (13A);
- ◆ Nuclear and Missile Operations, or LAF-N: nuclear and missile operations (13N);
- ◆ Information Warfare, or LAF-I: cyber operations (17X), intelligence (14N), operations research analyst (61A), weather (15W), special investigations (71S), information operations (14F), public affairs (35X);
- ◆ Combat Support, or LAF-C: airfield operations (13M), aircraft maintenance (21A), munitions and missile maintenance (21M), logistics readiness (21R), security forces (31P), civil engineering (32E), force support (38F), contracting (64P), financial management (65X);
- ◆ Force Modernization, or LAF-F: chemist (61C), physicist/nuclear engineer (61D), developmental engineer (62E), acquisition management (63A).

[Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | October 21, 2019 ++]

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## **Military MREs**

### **Update 05: Don't Blame them for Your Gastrointestinal Discomfort**

Consuming nothing but Meals Ready-to-Eat for three weeks may not be the most appetizing thing to do, but a study by Army scientists has found that it doesn't harm gut health. That may come as a surprise to anyone whose stomach has rumbled after eating the highly processed military rations for just one day, let alone 21, which is the maximum time the Army says MREs should be the sole source of subsistence for soldiers. "It's not MREs underlying a lot of anecdotal reports of gastrointestinal discomfort," said Dr. J. Philip Karl, a scientist and research dietitian at the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, and lead author on the study published in this month's Journal of Nutritional Biochemistry.

Service members usually eat MREs when they're training or on a mission, in harsh terrain, under stress and possibly overseas, where hygiene might not be at high standards, Karl said in a phone interview. They may also be dehydrated, he said. The study set out to determine if it's the rations or the environment that causes the digestive issues service members often associate with MREs. Sixty-four people, mostly men, responded to the Army's 2015 call for volunteers

to eat only MREs. Four dropped out for reasons including gastrointestinal distress and not sticking to the study protocol. Participants were divided into two groups, one of which ate their usual diet while the other ate nothing but MREs for three weeks. The MRE group could have water and up to three cups of black coffee a day in addition to the rations, but that was it.

The volunteers kept logs, while dieticians monitored their weight and adjusted food intake if they gained or lost weight. Researchers collected blood, urine and stool samples from the volunteers several times during the study and analyzed the samples to determine if MREs were impacting health by causing changes to gut microbiota – bacteria, fungi and viruses that live in the intestines. Research suggests gut microbiota influence our moods, digestion and immune systems, Karl said. Even a small change can alter how nutrients are absorbed, or inflame the intestinal lining, leading to stomach pain and even chronic diseases, he said. But Karl and his team of researchers found almost no difference in gut chemistry between those who ate only MREs and those who continued to eat normally. Those who ate just rations did have one fewer bowel movement per week, the researcher found. The just-MREs group also had lower levels of gut bacteria that have been found in other studies to increase the frequency of defecation.

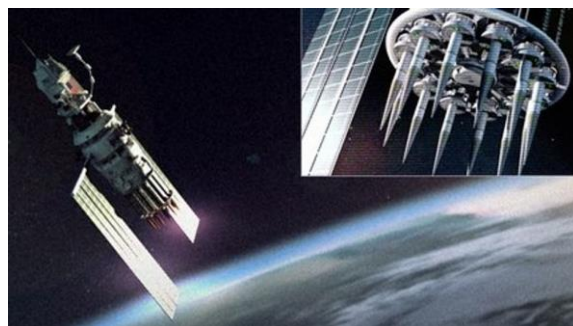
Many people get those helpful bacteria by eating fermented food, such as yogurts and cheeses, which are not included in MREs. While MREs contain similar amounts of carbohydrate, fat, protein and fiber as the average American diet, they also need to withstand tough conditions and maintain a three-year shelf life, the Army said in a statement last month. As a result, they contain no fresh foods. Then again, the average American also consumes too few fresh foods, Karl said. "Americans tend not to eat enough fruits, vegetables and whole grains," he said. "The MRE actually provides more fiber and more of several vitamins and minerals compared to people's typical diets. I think MREs get a bad rap." [Source: Stars & Stripes | J.P. Lawrence | October 23, 2019 ++]

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## **Military Proposed Weaponry**

### **Project Thor**

The 107-country Outer Space Treaty signed in 1967 prohibits nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons from being placed or used from Earth's orbit. What they didn't count on was the U.S. Air Force's most simple weapon ever: a tungsten rod that could hit a city with the explosive power of an intercontinental ballistic missile. During the Vietnam War, the U.S. used what they called "Lazy Dog" bombs. These were simply solid steel pieces, less than two inches long, fitted with fins. There was no explosive – they were simply dropped by the hundreds from planes flying above Vietnam. Lazy Dog projectiles (aka "kinetic bombardment") could reach speeds of up to 500 mph as they fell to the ground and could penetrate nine inches of concrete after being dropped from as little as 3,000 feet



A concept design of Project Thor



The idea is like shooting bullets at a target, except instead of losing velocity as it travels, the projectile is gaining velocity and energy that will be expended on impact. They were shotgunning a large swath of jungle, raining bullet-sized death at high speeds. That's how Project Thor came to be. Instead of hundreds of small projectiles from a few thousand feet, Thor used a large projectile from a few thousand miles above the Earth. The "rods from god" idea was a bundle of telephone-pole sized (20 feet long, one foot in diameter) tungsten rods, dropped from orbit, reaching a speed of up to ten times the speed of sound.

The rod itself would penetrate hundreds of feet into the Earth, destroying any potential hardened bunkers or secret underground sites. More than that, when the rod hits, the explosion would be on par with the magnitude of a ground-penetrating nuclear weapon – but with no fallout. It would take 15 minutes to destroy a target with such a weapon. One Quora user who works in the defense aerospace industry quoted a cost of no less than \$10,000 per pound to fire anything into space. With 20 cubic feet of dense tungsten weighing in at just over 24,000 pounds, the math is easy. Just one of the rods would be prohibitively expensive. The cost of \$230 million dollars per rod was unimaginable during the Cold War.

These days, not so much. The Bush Administration even considered revisiting the idea to hit underground nuclear sites in rogue nations in the years following 9/11. Interestingly enough, the cost of a single Minuteman III ICBM was \$7 million in 1962, when it was first introduced (\$57 million adjusted for inflation). The trouble with a nuclear payload is that it isn't designed to penetrate deep into the surface and the fallout from a nuclear device can be devastating to surrounding, potentially friendly areas. A core takeaway from the concept of weapons like Project Thor's is that hypersonic weapons pack a significant punch and might be the future of global warfare. [Source: We Are the Mighty | Blake Stilwell | October 3, 2019 ++]

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## **Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang**

### **'Dip' thru 'Dodge City'**

**Dip** - To lower a sonar transducer into the water from a hovering helicopter.

**Direct Fire** – Gunnery and fire control where the fall of shot can be directly observed by the firing unit.

**Dirt Sailor** – A member of the Navy's Construction Battalions (Seabees).

**Dirty Shirt Wardroom** – (USN) A wardroom (officer's mess and lounge) aboard ship which does not require patrons to be in the uniform of the day, i.e. flight suits or other working uniforms are permitted. The etiquette of the wardroom, which is usually fairly formal, is also relaxed in the dirty shirt wardroom.

**Dit** - (RN) Short written note.

**Ditty Bag** – A small cloth bag with drawstring closure; usually used to hold toilet articles and the like.

**Dive the intakes** - Cleaning engine air intakes, usually by crawling into them.

**Dive Planes** – The "elevators" of a submarine; movable, horizontal surfaces used to control the dive (pitch) angles. Usually there are two pairs of planes, mounted on bow and stern, or on the fairwater (sail) and stern.

**DIW** – Dead In the Water. Not making way (q.v.).

**Dixie Cup** - The USN sailor's white hat. See also WHITEHAT.

**Dixie Station** - One of the two positions typically occupied by an aircraft carrier off the coast of Vietnam. 'Dixie' was the southern station, tasked with troop support (CAS).

**Dobie** - (RCN) Laundry. Also seen as 'Dhobi.'

**Dobie Dust** - (RCN) Laundry soap.

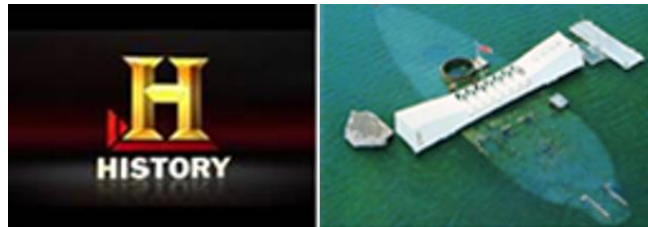
**Dockyard Tour** - (RN) An excuse to slide away early when at a fleet school.

**Dodge City** - Diego Garcia island, a British possession in the approximate middle of the Indian Ocean. US military forces maintain a NAVCOMSTA there and an emergency landing field for the space shuttle. USN personnel are normally assigned only a one year tour of duty there because of its isolation. [Note: Unfortunately, since I decided to retire while serving as EMO there I had to do a two year tour of duty.)

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

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

**\* Military History \***



## Red Ball Express

**Without it, Victory in Europe Would Have Been Impossible**

The Germans were reeling, and the Allies were chomping at the bit to deliver them the final blow. Since D-Day on June 6, 1944, Allied forces were locked in a stagnant battle against the Germans. However, in late July the German lines ruptured and they began to retreat rapidly. The Allies were not simply marching from the beachheads of Normandy into occupied France - they were sprinting. The American General George S. Patton's Third Army was particularly aggressive, astonishing the Germans who had invented blitzkrieg. Patton was given permission to wheel some of his forces toward Paris in order to trap pockets of retreating Germans. The chase was on, but by late August 1944, the Allies were facing a logistical nightmare.

According to the memoirs of General Omar Bradley, each army division required up to 750 tons of supplies a day, and there were 28 divisions marching across France and Belgium. In a single day, Patton's Third Army used up 800,000 gallons of gasoline alone. Working railways were mostly non-existent - ironically bombed to pieces by the Allies prior to D-Day - and the Germans still held the major cargo ports of Le Havre and Antwerp. Getting fuel, food, and munitions to the front line were proving to be almost impossible. Patton stopped his advance not because he was stymied by the Germans, but for lack of gas. Allied leaders conferred and developed the Red Ball Express, sometimes referred to as the Red Ball Line, which operated from August 25, 1944, until November 16, 1944. The name comes from an earlier logistical express used by the British.



Theoretically, trucks ran in convoys of no fewer than five, racing to the front to deliver materiel. Each truck was numbered for its position in the convoy and they were to stay sixty feet apart. It was a well thought out plan. However, initially the Red Ball Express bogged down in civilian and military traffic. In response, the Army commandeered two parallel highways that traveled from the Normandy beachhead to Chartres, France outside of Paris. The northern highway carried trucks filled with supplies and the southern route was filled with empty trucks returning to Normandy. The route was later extended as the Allies advanced on Paris. Once the route was established, the Red Ball went into full swing. On 29 AUG it reached its highest tonnage day with nearly 6,000 vehicles carrying over 12,000 tons of supplies to the fight.

One of the notable features of the Red Ball Express was that it was a central contribution of African Americans to the war effort. Most of the personnel who manned the Red Ball (about 75%) were black. This was due to the racial segregation of the U.S. Army at that time and the typical assignment of black troops to support and service assignments in the Quartermaster Corps rather than as frontline troops. And support the men of the Red Ball Express gave, in an admirable and often overzealous fashion. There was a shortage of trucks and drivers. Therefore, the Army seized trucks anywhere it could. Drivers for the Red Ball were not selected for their driving acumen, but for their availability. Soldiers who knew about as much about driving a truck as to how to build an atomic bomb were chosen, perhaps given a cursory training, "qualified," and told to get driving and keep driving.

The established rules of the road were routinely ignored. Even though drivers were supposed to go at 35 miles per hour, many removed the governors from the trucks that limited their speed to 56 miles per hour. It was not uncommon for Red Ball Express trucks to be careening along the roads at up to 70 miles per hour. Sleep deprivation was a major woe that usually didn't stop the drivers as much as stripped gears, constant breakdowns, compromised roadways from overuse, and mud. The road was littered with C-ration cans, shrapnel, barbed wire, and all other sorts of war debris. Over 40,000 truck tires were worn out. Trucks tipped over due to supplies being overloaded and stacked much too high. There was also sabotage. German POWs, who were at times used to assist by checking tire pressure, cleaning windshields, and checking oil levels, were caught deliberately putting water in gas cans. When a truck broke down (not if), the driver would get the vehicle out of the way and he would hop aboard another truck until he was recycled back to the Normandy beachhead.

Food, cigarettes, and other rations were shipped on the Red Ball Express. But the most precious commodity that Red Ball trucks carried was gasoline, often carried in five-gallon "jerrycans," German-designed gasoline containers that were superior to Allied analogs. A few drivers were able to make their assignment on the Red Ball profitable as there was a lucrative black market in France. One jerrycan could fetch \$100 on the black market. By the time the Red Ball Express was discontinued, the truckers had brought over 412,000 tons of supplies to the front thus ensuring Allied success as it pushed into Germany. Subsequent truck supply lines were also dubbed the Red Ball, but it is this original that has lived on in lore. Without the Red Ball Express, victory in Europe would have been impossible.

[Source: Together We Served | October 2019 ++]

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## Sherman's March to The Sea

### Civil War's Most Destructive Civilian Population Campaign



The March to the Sea, the most destructive campaign against a civilian population during the Civil War (1861-65), began in Atlanta on November 15, 1864, and ended in Savannah on December 21, 1864. Union General William T. Sherman abandoned his supply line and marched across Georgia to the Atlantic Ocean to prove to the Confederate population that its government could not protect the people from invaders. He practiced psychological warfare; he believed that by marching an Army across the state he would demonstrate to the world that the Union had a power the Confederacy could not resist. "This may not be war," he said, "but rather statesmanship."

After Sherman's forces captured Atlanta on September 2, 1864, Sherman spent several weeks concerned with preparations for a change of base to the coast. He rejected the Union plan to move through Alabama to Mobile, pointing out that after Rear Admiral David G. Farragut closed Mobile Bay in August 1864, the Alabama port no longer held any military significance. Rather, he decided to proceed southeast toward Savannah or Charleston. He carefully studied census records to determine which route could provide food for his men and forage for his animals. Although U.S. President Abraham Lincoln was skeptical and did not want Sherman to move into enemy territory before the presidential election in November, Sherman persuaded his friend Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant that the campaign was possible in winter. Through Grant's intervention, Sherman finally gained permission, although he had to delay until after election day.

After General John Bell Hood abandoned Atlanta, he moved the Confederate Army of Tennessee outside the city to recuperate from the previous campaign. Early in October, he began a raid toward Chattanooga, Tennessee, in an effort to draw Sherman back over ground the two sides had fought for since May. But instead of tempting Sherman to battle, Hood turned his Army west and marched into Alabama, abandoning Georgia to Union forces. Apparently, Hood hoped that if he invaded Tennessee, Sherman would be forced to follow. Sherman, however, had anticipated this strategy and had sent Major General George H. Thomas to Nashville to deal with Hood. With Georgia cleared of the Confederate Army, Sherman, facing only scattered cavalry, was free to move south.

Sherman divided his approximately 60,000 troops into two roughly equal wings. The right wing was under Oliver O. Howard. Peter J. Osterhaus commanded the Fifteenth Corps, and Francis P. Blair Jr. commanded the Seventeenth Corps. The left wing was commanded by Henry W. Slocum, with the Fourteenth Corps under Jefferson C. Davis and the Twentieth Corps under Alpheus S. Williams. Judson Kilpatrick led the cavalry. Sherman had about 2,500 supply wagons and 600 ambulances. Before the Army left Atlanta, the general issued an order outlining the rules of the march, but Soldiers often ignored the restrictions on foraging.

The two wings advanced by separate routes, generally staying twenty miles to forty miles apart. The right-wing headed for Macon, the left-wing in the direction of Augusta before the two commands turned and bypassed both cities.

They now headed for the state capital at Milledgeville. Opposing Sherman's advance was Confederate cavalry, about 8,000 strong, under Major General Joseph Wheeler and various units of Georgia militia under Gustavus W. Smith. Although William J. Hardee had overall command in Georgia, with his headquarters at Savannah, neither he nor Governor Joseph E. Brown could do anything to stop Sherman's advance. Sherman's foragers quickly became known as "bummers" as they raided farms and plantations. On November 23rd the state capitol peacefully surrendered, and Sherman occupied the vacant governor's mansion and the capitol building.

There were a number of skirmishes between Wheeler's cavalry and Union troopers, but only two battles of any significance. The first came east of Macon at the factory town of Griswoldville on November 22nd, when Georgia militia faced Union infantry with disastrous results. The Confederates suffered 650 men killed or wounded in a one-sided battle that left about 62 casualties on the Union side. The second battle occurred on the Ogeechee River twelve miles below Savannah. Union Infantry under William B. Hazen assaulted and captured Fort McAllister on December 13th, thus opening the back door to the port city. The most controversial event involved contrabands (escaped slaves) who followed the liberating armies. At Ebenezer Creek on December 9th, Jefferson C. Davis removed the pontoon bridge before the slaves crossed. Frightened men, women, and children plunged into the deep water, and many drowned in an attempt to reach safety. After the march, Davis was soundly criticized by the Northern press, but Sherman backed his commander by pointing out that Davis had done what was militarily necessary.

After Fort McAllister fell, Sherman made preparations for a siege of Savannah. Confederate Lieutenant General Hardee, realizing his small Army could not hold out long and not wanting the city leveled by artillery as had happened at Atlanta, ordered his men to abandon the trenches and retreat to South Carolina. Sherman, who was not with the Union Army when Mayor Richard Arnold surrendered Savannah (he had gone to Hilton Head, South Carolina, to make preparations for a siege and was on his way back to Georgia), telegraphed President Lincoln on December 22nd that the city had fallen. He offered Savannah and its 25,000 bales of cotton to the President as a Christmas present.

Sherman's march frightened and appalled Southerners. It hurt morale, for civilians had believed the Confederacy could protect the home front. Sherman had terrorized the countryside; his men had destroyed all sources of food and forage and had left behind a hungry and demoralized people. Although he did not level any towns, he did destroy buildings in places where there was resistance. His men had shown little sympathy for Millen, the site of Camp Lawton, where Union prisoners of war were held. Physical attacks on white civilians were few, although it is not known how slave women fared at the hands of the invaders. Often male slaves posted guards outside the cabins of their female friends and relatives.

Confederate President Jefferson Davis had urged Georgians to undertake a scorched-earth policy of poisoning wells and burning fields, but civilians in the Army's path had not done so. Sherman, however, burned or captured all the food stores that Georgians had saved for the winter months. As a result of the hardships on women and children, desertions increased in Robert E. Lee's Army in Virginia. Sherman believed his campaign against civilians would shorten the war by breaking the Confederate will to fight, and he eventually received permission to carry this psychological warfare into South Carolina in early 1865. By marching through Georgia and South Carolina he became an archvillain in the South and a hero in the North.

[Source: Together We Served | October 2019 ++]

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## **Tanks**

### **A Major-Maneuver Warfare Asset**

The battlefields of World War II featured some game-changing technologies. In the sky, strategic bombers debuted in the skies. Aircraft carriers reigned supreme on the seas. And, the star of the land campaign was the tank. Tanks were

first used toward the end of World War I, but in a limited way and mostly for close support of infantry. Between World Wars I and II, improvements were made to the tank engine to give it greater speed and power; track and suspension systems and weaponry upgrades came as well. Doctrine also evolved that gave tanks a greater role as a major-maneuver warfare asset — including use as mobile artillery support, a replacement for the traditional horse cavalry and combat engineering roles.



**M4 Sherman**



**M46 Patton**

Before the U.S. entered World War II, the Army held large-scale, combined-arms exercises in Louisiana — aptly called the Louisiana Maneuvers. Some tanks and anti-tank forces were deployed by friendly and opposition forces. However, there were not enough tanks available for the exercises, so trucks with the word "tank" painted on them served as surrogates. The lessons learned proved valuable to the troops who participated and the senior leaders who led the exercises and rose to senior-level generals during the war, including Omar Bradley, Dwight Eisenhower and George Patton.

Meanwhile, America's allies and foes were not idle in tank development, production and doctrine. They were producing very capable tanks — most notably Germany and the Soviet Union, as well as the United Kingdom, France and others. Early in the war, the U.S. relied on its light tank M2 series. They were light and maneuverable, but poorly armored. Some were employed in the Battle of Guadalcanal in 1943 — where the Japanese also fielded some light tanks — but a more capable replacement had been sought early in the war. That replacement came in 1942 and was named the medium tank, M4, but it's better known as the M4 Sherman. Interestingly, it was the British who first dubbed it the Sherman, named for Army Gen. William T. Sherman, who fought for the Union during the Civil War. About 50,000 Sherman tanks were produced from 1942 to 1945 and they saw service in both the Pacific and European theaters. They continued to be used for many years after the war.

The first heavy Army tank was the M26 Pershing, which was deployed near the end of the war. Its design informed the blueprint for the postwar M60 series. Through the lend-lease program, the U.S. shipped tanks to allies worldwide, including the Chinese, free French government-in-exile of occupied France, British and the Soviets. While tanks saw action in the Pacific, they really came into play in Europe and North Africa where there were large, open spaces suitable for maneuvering. They were also effective in urban warfare.

Patton's Third Army employed tanks during the Battle of Arracourt in France in September and October of 1944 and later that year in the Battle of the Bulge to the northeast of France, Belgium and Luxembourg. The largest tank battle in history, however, was the Battle of Kursk in July and August 1943 between German and Soviet tank forces on the Eastern Front. Today, tanks remain an important element in the Army, the Marine Corps and in the arsenals of other nations. They've been deployed in recent years in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

[Source: Dept. of Defense | David Vergu | October 21, 2019 ++]

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## Strategic Bombing

### Development During WWII



Strategic bombing is a military strategy used in total war with the goal of defeating the enemy by destroying its morale, its economic ability to produce and transport materiel to the theatres of military operations, or both. It is a systematically organized and executed attack from the air which can utilize strategic bombers, long- or medium-range missiles, or nuclear-armed fighter-bomber aircraft to attack targets deemed vital to the enemy's war-making capability. Strategic bombing became a significant part of America's war strategy during World War II, although it was slow at first to get off the ground, so to speak.

The strategic bombing conducted in WWII was unlike anything the world had seen before. The campaigns conducted in Europe and Asia could involve hundreds of aircraft dropping thousands of tons of conventional bombs or a single aircraft dropping a nuclear weapon over a single city. The practice of area bombardment came to prominence during WWII with the use of large numbers of unguided gravity bombs, often with a high proportion of incendiary devices, to effect indiscriminate bombing of the target region – either to kill war workers and/or destroy materiel, or as a means to demoralize the enemy. This, in high enough concentration was capable of producing a firestorm effect. The high explosive bombs were often on timers and used to intimidate or kill firemen putting out the fires caused by the incendiaries. Initially, this was effected by multiple aircraft, often returning to the target in waves. Nowadays, a large bomber or missile can be used to create the same effect on a small area (an airfield, for example) by releasing a relatively large number of smaller bombs.

Strategic bombing campaigns were conducted in Europe and Asia. The Germans and Japanese made use of mostly twin-engined bombers with a payload generally less than 5,000 pounds, and never produced larger craft to any great extent. By comparison, the British and Americans (who started the war with predominantly similarly sized bombers) developed their strategic force based upon much larger four-engined bombers for their strategic campaigns. The payload carried by these planes ranged from 4,000 lb for the B-17 Flying Fortress on long-range missions, to 8,000 lb for the B-24 Liberator, 14,000 lb for the Avro Lancaster, and 20,000 lb B-29 Superfortress, with some specialized aircraft, such as the 'Special B' Avro Lancaster carrying (22,000 lb) Grand Slam.

The United States Army Air Forces adopted a policy of daylight precision bombing for greater accuracy as, for example, during the Schweinfurt raids. That doctrine, based on the erroneous supposition that bombers could adequately defend themselves against air attack, entailed much higher American losses until long-range fighter escorts (e.g. the Mustang) became available. Conditions in the European theatre made it very difficult to achieve the accuracy that had been possible using the exceptional and top-secret Norden optical bombsight in the clear skies over the desert bombing ranges of Nevada and California. Raids over Europe commonly took place in conditions of very poor visibility, with targets partly or wholly obscured by thick cloud, smokescreens or smoke from fires started by previous raids. As a result, bomb loads were regularly dropped "blind" using dead-reckoning methods little different from those used by the RAF night bombers. In addition, only the leading bomber in a formation actually utilized the Norden sight,

the rest of the formation dropping their bombs only when they saw the lead aircraft's bombload falling away. Since even a very tight bomber formation could cover a vast area, the scatter of bombs was likely to be considerable.

Add to these difficulties the disruptive effects of increasingly accurate anti-aircraft fire and head-on attacks by fighter aircraft and the theoretical accuracy of daylight bombing was often hard to achieve. Accuracy, described as "pinpoint", never exceeded the best British average of about a 3 mi radius from point of aim in any case. Postwar, German engineers considered bombing of railways, trains, canals, and roads was more harmful to production than attacks on factories themselves, Sir Roy Fedden (in his report on a postwar British scientific intelligence mission) calling it "fatal" and saying it reduced aeroengine production by two thirds (from a high of 5,000 to 7,000 a month). Strategic bombing was initially a way of taking the war into Europe while Allied ground forces were unable to do so. Between them, Allied air forces claimed to be able to bomb "around the clock". In fact, few targets were ever hit by British and American forces the same day, the strategic isolation of Normandy on D-Day and the bombing of Dresden in February, 1945, being exceptions rather than the rule. There were generally no coordinated plans for around-the-clock bombing of any target.

Perhaps the earliest and most publicized use of strategic bombing was the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo and surrounding areas of Japan by 16 B-25B Mitchell medium bombers in April 1942. Despite causing a limited amount of damage and casualties on mainland Japan, the raid provided a morale booster to the American people, who still had the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, fresh on their minds. The Doolittle Raid also demonstrated the limitations of strategic bombing at this early stage in the war. The problem was that the aircraft didn't have the range to return to the carrier, so it was a one-way mission. As it turned out, most of the aircraft crash-landed in China — amazingly 77 of the 80 crew members survived the initial landings.

The Army realized it needed two things to make strategic bombing a success: longer-range bombers and the capture of islands closer to mainland Japan so aircraft could make a round trip. Finally, in late 1944, the Army began the effective strategic bombing of Japan with its longer-range B-29 Superfortress heavy bombers, operating from the captured Mariana Islands and later from Iwo Jima in 1945. It augmented the B-17 Flying Fortress, which didn't have the range or payload capacity necessary to travel long distances of over 3,000 miles.

Meanwhile, in the European theater, distances from the United Kingdom to enemy-held territory were much shorter, so in 1942, the U.S. flew B-17 missions. However, these missions were at a cost in loss of planes and high U.S. casualties, because no long-range fighter aircraft were available to protect the bombers. In 1943, however, the P-51 Mustang fighter proved to have the range needed to travel from the U.K. to Germany and other Axis areas. It was also employed in the North African and Pacific Theaters, where it provided bomber escort. Incredibly, the Mustang remained in service until the early 1980s. The B-29s also proved so effective, they were used later during the Korean War.

After the war, when the Air Force became a separate service in 1947, it took over the mission of strategic bombing from the Army. Strategic bombers today are an important component of America's nuclear triad system, the other two being land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. [Source: Dept. of Defense | David Vergun | October 22, 2019 ++]

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## **Military History Anniversaries**

**01 thru 15 NOV**

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 NOV**". [Source: This Day in History [www.history.com/this-day-in-history](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history) | September 2019 ++]



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## Military Prop Photos

c. 1910-1915



c. 1910-1912 “Flight from the sand desert, Neuhammer Military Camp, Germany” (left) and c. 1915 “Flight from Elsenborn to Paris” Truppenübungsplatz (military training ground) Elsenborn, Germany (right)

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## Warships That Will Change The Future

HMS Dauntless (D33)



A guided missile destroyer for the British Royal Navy, the HMS Dauntless is one of six vessels which are being put into operation in order to phase out the UK’s older fleet of frigates. The ship is unique in that it has two different anti-ship missile launchers installed into its sides, enabling the Dauntless to effectively defend itself against enemy vessels. A long range boat, the HMS Dauntless has the ability to sail over 7,000 nautical miles in a single go.

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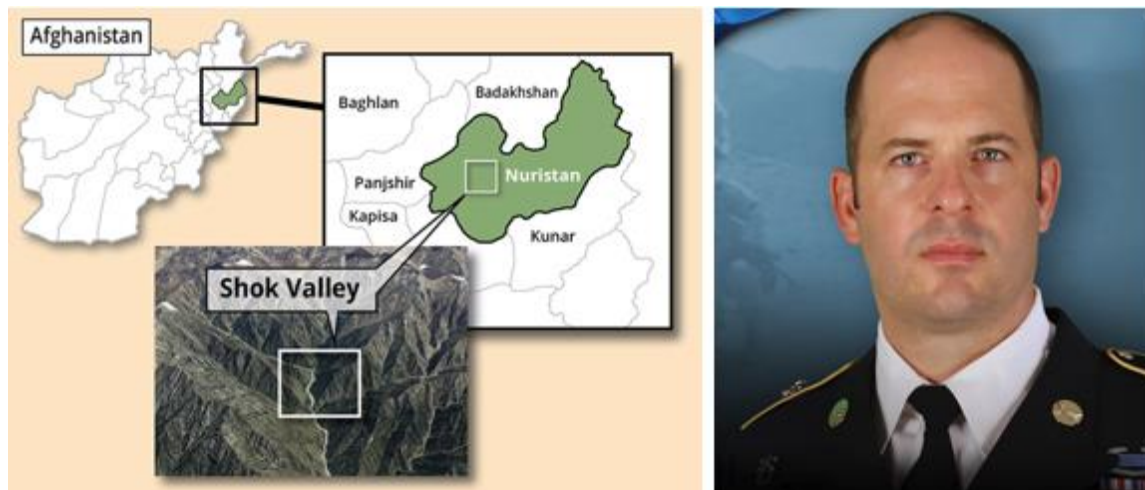
## Operation Commando Wrath

Afghanistan Mission to Capture/Kill High-Value Targets

Then-Sgt. Matthew Williams served as a weapons sergeant with Operational Detachment Alpha 3336, Special Operations Task Force 11, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan. On April 6, 2008, the ODA was on a mission to capture or kill high-value targets of the Hezeb Islami al Gulbadin in Shok Valley, Nuristan Province, Afghanistan. Williams was part of an assault element consisting of several American Soldiers and a larger Afghan

commando force, who were inserted by helicopter into a location in Nuristan Province. As they were moving up a mountain toward their objective, they were engaged by intense enemy machine guns, snipers and rocket-propelled grenades.

The lead portion of the assault element, which included the ground commander, sustained several casualties and was pinned down on the mountainside. While this was going on, Williams and the rest of the trailing portion of the assault element were forced to take cover as they began to receive intense enemy fire. Insurgent fighters had the entire assault element pinned down. “It was kind of quiet, then all of a sudden everything exploded all at once – machine gun fire, some RPGs started going off. [The insurgents] had some pretty good shooters and a lot of people up there waiting for us.”



Map depicting the Operation Commando Wrath insertion point in Shok Valley

As the Afghan commandos and American Soldiers desperately engaged the enemy, Williams heard that the lead element had sustained several casualties and was in danger of being overrun. He immediately gathered the commandos around him while braving intense enemy fire and led a counterattack across a 100-meter long valley of ice-covered boulders and a fast-moving, ice-cold, waist-deep river. After leading his commandos up the mountainside to the besieged element, Williams arrayed his Afghan commandos to provide suppressive fire to keep the insurgents from overrunning the position. As Williams worked to defend his position, his team sergeant, Master Sgt. Scott Ford, was hit by a sniper round. Once again, Williams braved intense enemy fire to provide Ford first aid and moved him down the sheer mountainside to the casualty collection point. Then, knowing the commandos and his fellow Soldiers were still in danger, Williams fought and climbed his way back up the mountainside, under enemy fire, to help defend the lead assault element, which still had several serious casualties to evacuate.

Upon reaching the lead element, he provided suppressing fire, killing several insurgents, before once again exposing himself to enemy fire in order to move to the element’s satellite radio and reestablish their communications capability. Williams then continued to expose himself to enemy fire as he assisted moving the wounded down the mountainside to the casualty collection point. After Williams reached the casualty collection point with three wounded Soldiers, enemy fighters began maneuvering to overrun their position, putting the lives of the wounded and those caring for them at risk. Realizing the danger to the wounded, Williams again led the Afghan commandos in a counterattack and fought for several hours against the insurgents, keeping them at bay until helicopters arrived to evacuate the wounded.

Again and again, as the wounded were being evacuated, Williams exposed himself to enemy fire while carrying and loading casualties onto the helicopters. He then continued to suppress numerous insurgent positions by directing commando fires, which allowed the patrol to evacuate the wounded and the dead without further casualties. Master Sgt. Williams’ actions exemplify of leadership under fire. His ability to take initiative, successfully command troops pinned

down in an ambush, and disregard his own safety to protect his commandos and fellow Soldiers saved numerous lives and prevented his element from being overrun. He is scheduled to receive the Medal of Honor for his actions on 30 OCT. At [https://youtu.be/xwRMB\\_QbOjE](https://youtu.be/xwRMB_QbOjE) a 5 minute recap of the events narrated by Master Sgt. Matthew Williams can be viewed. [Source: <https://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/williams> | October 28, 2019 ++]

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## WWII Bomber Nose Art

### [41] Bombs Away



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## WWI Memorials

### Update 01: D.C. Plans Clear Another Hurdle

The United States Commission of Fine Arts has approved plans five years in the making for the new National World War I Memorial for Washington, D.C., which will include a sculpture and fountain commemorating the significance of the war while maintaining the existing qualities of its Pershing Park location. The plans must now be reviewed and approved by the National Capital Planning Commission. Once approved, the World War I Centennial Commission will work with the National Park Service to finalize the construction permit to begin work this fall.



**An illustration of a proposed statue and waterfall that would make up a portion of the National World War I Memorial in Washington, D.C.**

“One hundred years ago, 4.7 million American families sent their sons and daughters off to a war that would change the world,” said Daniel S. Dayton, executive director of the commission. “Finally, with this memorial, they will be recognized in the nation’s capital.” The commission has published an 81-page document describing the memorial that can be downloaded [here](#). Highlights include:

- A Soldier’s Journey, a bronze and granite sculpture of a battle featuring an excerpt from “The Young Dead Soldiers Do Not Speak,” a poem by World War I artillery officer, Librarian of Congress, and multi-time Pulitzer Prize awardee Archibald MacLeish.
- The Peace Fountain, a cascading waterfall located on the back side of the Soldier’s Journey sculpture.
- The Belvedere, a structure designers call the memorial’s “interpretive hinge” between the Soldier’s Journey sculpture and the existing Pershing Memorial statue. The granite and bronze belvedere includes descriptions various portions of the memorial along with details on U.S. involvement in the war and a World War I Victory Medallion. It will also have a donor panel of those who contributed to the memorial.

The memorial has been in the making since 2014, when Congress authorized the commission to locate the memorial in Pershing Park. The design by architect Joseph Weishaar was selected in 2015. A ceremonial groundbreaking took place in November 2017 as part of World War I centennial events, but the construction permit is not in place; as of earlier this year, plans called for the structure's completion by November 2021. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, D-Mo., said the memorial will connect future generations to the country’s history. “It’s important that we have a tribute in our nation’s capital to the millions of men and women who served during World War I so that future generations may come to understand the sacrifices made on behalf of liberty,” Cleaver said in [a news release announcing the design approval](#). “This moment has been a long time coming, and I couldn’t be happier with the result. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Amanda Dolasinski | October 8, 2019 ++]

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## **MOH Awards**

### **Update 14: Plea for Army 'Legend' Alwyn Cashe**

On 17 October 2005, Army Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe likely could've walked away relatively unscathed after his Bradley Fighting Vehicle hit an improvised explosive device in Iraq. Instead, the soldier chose to head back into the burning vehicle to save his comrades. He did so even though they were still facing enemy gunfire and his uniform was soaked with fuel. Cashe risked his life and went beyond the call of duty, which is why he deserves the Medal of Honor, three members of Congress wrote in a letter to Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy on the 14th anniversary of the soldier's actions.



Cashe has become "something of a legend in military circles," Reps. Dan Crenshaw, Michael Waltz and Stephanie Murphy wrote. The Silver Star he received for his 2005 actions in Iraq, they added, should be upgraded to the Medal of Honor. "We believe that SFC Cashe has earned the highest award for military valor that our nation bestows, and we hope you will ensure that his case is scrutinized with the utmost care," the letter states. The Silver Star is the nation's third-highest award for battlefield bravery. Cashe kept going back into that vehicle even after his uniform ignited, and flames severely burned most of his body. He got all of his soldiers out, and refused medical evacuation they were tended to first. Three soldiers, Staff Sgt. George Alexander Jr., Sgt. Michael Robertson and Spc. Darren Howe, later died from burn wounds. Cashe also died three weeks later.

Crenshaw, a Texas Republican, is a retired Navy SEAL officer. Waltz, a Florida Republican, served as an Army Special Forces officer. And Murphy, a Florida Democrat, worked for the Defense Department as a national security specialist. "Each of us proudly served in the United States military or worked at the Department of Defense," they wrote on 17 OCT. "In addition, each of us cares about the process our nation uses to award medals for military valor, believing this process should satisfy the most rigorous standards of independence and integrity." The three lawmakers aren't the first to call on Pentagon leaders to reconsider Cashe's award. As the Defense Department wraps up a years-long review of its post-Sept. 11, 2001, valor awards, several have pushed to see his Silver Star upgraded. More than 55 valor awards have been upgraded as a result of that review.

Doug Sterner, who runs an extensive military awards database, called Cashe's case "the most perfect example of a Medal of Honor I've ever seen." The soldier's case highlights the problems with the military's awards process. "If the review is done and Alwyn Cashe hasn't been awarded the Medal of Honor, I won't be a happy camper," Sterner told Military.com in April. Officials said in April that four Army awards would be upgraded before the end of the year. The service has since awarded or announced two Medal of Honor upgrades to Staff Sgt. David Bellavia and Master Sgt. Matthew Williams and two Distinguished Service Crosses to Maj. Nicholas Eslinger and Spc. Gregory Waters.

That's despite Cashe's commander at the time -- now-Maj. Gen. Gary Brito, the head of the Army's Maneuver Center of Excellence -- taking the rare step of speaking out on this case. Brito has said he didn't know the extent of Cashe's injuries at the time he put him up for the Silver Star. The two-star has since submitted sworn statements in an effort to see the award upgraded. Cashe was determined to protect his soldiers before they even got to Iraq. When his sister, Kasinal Cashe, told him not to play a hero on his deployment, to "learn how to duck and come home," he told her he had to take care of his boys, the Associated Press reported after his death. And that's exactly what Cashe did, Murphy, Crenshaw and Waltz wrote. "SFC Cashe--who was thrown from the vehicle and virtually unharmed--returned again and again to the burning vehicle to extract his fellow soldiers," their letter states. "SFC Cashe saved the lives of multiple soldiers, but suffered severe burns in the process and ultimately died from those burns." [Source: Military.com | Gina Harkins | October 17, 2019 ++]

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## Medal of Honor Citations

Rodolfo P Hernandez | Korean War



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

**Rodolfo P Hernandez**

**Rank and organization:** *Cpl, Company G, 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team, U.S. Army*

**Place and date:** *Near Wontong-ni, Korea, 31 May 1961*

**Entered service:** *Fowler, Calif.*

**Born:** *14 April 1931, Colton, Calif.*

### Citation

Cpl. Hernandez, a member of Company G, distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action against the enemy. His platoon, in defensive positions on Hill 420, came under ruthless attack by a numerically superior and fanatical hostile force, accompanied by heavy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire which inflicted numerous casualties on the platoon. His comrades were forced to withdraw due to lack of ammunition but Cpl. Hernandez, although wounded in an exchange of grenades, continued to deliver deadly fire into the ranks of the onrushing assailants until a ruptured cartridge rendered his rifle inoperative. Immediately leaving his position, Cpl. Hernandez rushed the enemy armed only with rifle and bayonet. Fearlessly engaging the foe, he killed 6 of the enemy before falling unconscious from grenade, bayonet, and bullet wounds but his heroic action momentarily halted the enemy advance and enabled his unit to counterattack and retake the lost ground. The indomitable fighting spirit, outstanding courage, and tenacious devotion to duty clearly demonstrated by Cpl. Hernandez reflect the highest credit upon himself, the infantry, and the U.S. Army.



A five minute video interview is available for viewing at <https://youtu.be/rYVooL5hua0/>. Hernandez died December 21, 2013 (aged 82) in Fayetteville, North Carolina and is buried in the Sandhills State Veterans Cemetery, Spring Lake, NC. [Source: <http://www.cmohs.org/recipient-detail/3127/hernandez-rodolfo-p.php> | October 2019 ++]

**\* Health Care \***



## **TRICARE Website**

### **Update 03: DoD Medical Facility Microsites**

Four of the largest military hospitals have new pages (microsites) on the Tricare website an early step in a transition that will move the Defense Department's medical facilities under the Defense Health Agency.

- [Fort Belvoir Community Hospital](#) in Virginia
- [Naval Hospital Jacksonville](#) in Florida
- [Walter Reed National Military Medical Center](#) in Maryland
- [Womack Army Medical Center](#) in North Carolina

The newly launched microsites on <https://www.tricare.mil> have easy tabs to access the Tricare portal and view the hospital's directory. "We hope this change to the website will make it easier for you to find information about your benefit and get care," Karen Roberts, Defense Health Agency deputy director of communications, said in a news release. "You won't have to learn a new website every time you move to a new location." The Tricare website's expansion is part of an ongoing consolidation of medical treatment facilities under the Defense Health Agency. Lawmakers hope the change will allow the individual service branches to focus on military readiness and keep costs down. By the end of the transition, in 2021, more than 350 individual military hospital and clinic websites will be hosted on the Tricare.mil website, officials said. All the websites have the same blue horizontal menu with links to make an appointment and review Tricare options.

Womack Army Medical Center so far is the only website with forms to download other than the Active Duty Dental Claim Form, and Fort Belvoir Community Hospital's directory under the "About Us" tab includes a maps in addition to departments' phone numbers and hours. The directories on each site contain listings ranging from medical services like dentistry and cardiology to shops like Starbucks, Subway or the flower shop. [Source: Military.com | Dorothy Mills-Gregg | 18 Oct 2019 ++]

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## **Addiction Treatment**

### **<https://findtreatment.gov> Unveiled for Substance Abusers**

The Trump administration has unveiled a website aimed at helping millions of Americans with substance abuse issues learn about and locate treatment options. <https://findtreatment.gov> is the latest development in the administration's effort to address the nation's opioid crisis. The White House said it believes the site, which went up 30 OCT, will enable

the tens of millions of Americans with a variety of substance abuse and mental health issues to better access the care they need. Kellyanne Conway, the counselor to President Donald Trump who is leading the White House response to the drug crisis, said the site is designed to provide "connectivity" between treatment providers and those who need help.

FindTreatment.gov modernizes an obscure directory of 13,000 licensed treatment providers maintained by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), adding user-friendly search criteria and tools. For instance, it will now allow users to search based on the type of treatment sought — such as inpatient, detox or telemedicine — by payment option and whether the treatment is medication-assisted. Users also will be able to select between options that focus on youth, veterans and LGBT Americans. The website also is meant to be an educational resource for those needing care and their loved ones with information on how to pay for treatment. "We know that the drug crisis is indiscriminate, so we want the response to be indiscriminate," Conway said.

The website was built in-house by government coders and is managed by the White House. The administration is calling FindTreatment.gov an example of "American-First design" that offers easy access to information without breaking the federal budget. "We designed it with human-centered principles in mind," Conway said. "We used real words for real people." The effort included employing a language expert for help with providing "destigmatizing" explanations for treatment options to make them more acceptable to those in need. The site's design was informed by more than 300 user feedback responses and 60 detailed interviews with those who have sought treatment, their family members and providers, the White House said.

The website builds on other efforts by the White House to address the drug crisis, including law enforcement efforts, securing billions of dollars from Congress for treatment and working with the private sector on promoting drug "take back" days. More than 70,000 Americans died in 2017 from drug overdoses, the bulk of them involving opioids. Future developments include plans to more closely integrate the site with the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide more targeted resources to the community of former service members. For help finding treatment you can also call 1-800-662-HELP (4357). [Source: Associated Press | Zeke Miller | October 30, 2019 ++]

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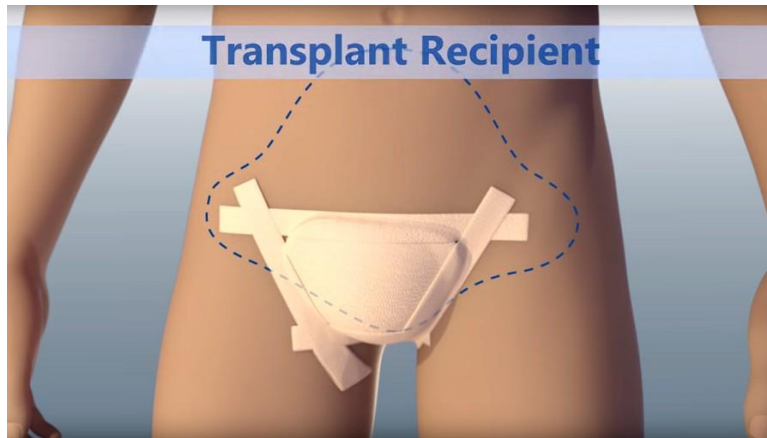
## **Penis Transplant**

### **Vet Said One of the Best Decisions He Ever Made**

A U.S. Navy veteran who had a penis transplant eight years after a bomb in Afghanistan blew off the lower half of his body said the pioneering surgery has helped him feel back to normal again. "This surgery was a way for me to overcome that little subconscious voice or whatever it was that would always keep me feeling different from everyone else," the former Navy corpsman, who asked not to be named, told the MIT Technology Review in a story published 14 OCT. "It was one of the best decisions I ever made." The veteran, referred to by the pseudonym Ray in the article, lost both legs, his penis, scrotum and a chunk of his abdominal wall when he stepped on a roadside bomb as he ran to help a soldier during a Taliban ambush in 2010. In March 2018, he became the fourth man ever and the first military veteran to have a penis transplant.

From October 2001, when the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan began, to August 2013, 1,367 male servicemembers sustained one or more injuries to their genitalia or urinary systems, it said, citing an article published in the Journal of Urology in 2017. Most of the servicemembers who have sustained severe groin injuries were under 30 years old and in the Army or Marine Corps, the journal article stated. Ray told his story to let them know that servicemembers have options, he said. Since his transplant, he has become more confident and outgoing, friends and the surgeon who led his transplant said. "He told me, which was the best news I could hear, that it feels normal," Redett said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | J.P. Lawrence | | October 15, 2019++]





A screenshot from a Johns Hopkins Medicine video on how a penis transplant operation is performed.

The injuries he sustained in Afghanistan were so severe, and the surgical procedure so complex, that it took 14 hours for a team of surgeons at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, led by Dr. Richard Redett, to transplant a donor’s penis, scrotum, and tissue from the thigh and lower abdomen to Ray, the story said. The Navy veteran began regaining sensation in his groin area within six months, he told the MIT Technology Review. He can urinate standing up and get erections but cannot become a biological father. Ray’s story is not an isolated one, the story said. “Bombs from below used to be a death sentence, but better body armor and modern casualty care ensure that more wounded soldiers survive — and more of them with devastating genital-urinary trauma,” it said.

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## **Vet Medical Care Continuity**

### **VA Jeopardizing the MHS GENESIS EHR Project**

Since 1982, the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have been trying to create a simple, interoperable system that could transfer patient information for service members transitioning from the DoD into the VA health care system. This process has been anything but smooth, starting with paper medical records being attached to gurneys each time a patient was moved to the squandering of hundreds of millions of dollars on numerous attempts to create an electronic health records (EHR) system that could work in both agencies. Until June 2017, the VA used the same EHR system for nearly 40 years, with the Veterans Health Information System and Technology Architecture (VistA). It is an open source platform that permits modifications by health care information technologists based on the perceived needs of each clinic or medical center. Unfortunately, this led the VA to customize the VistA EHR system in each facility without any centralized planning. It also caused difficulties for the VA and the DoD to provide interoperable health care management to service members and veterans.

The VA finally decided to phase out the VistA EHR and adopt the DoD’s new EHR system, known as MHS GENESIS. This 10-year, \$10 billion process to house all patient data for both the VA and the DoD in one common platform will help enable seamless care between the two agencies. In a sign of progress in this efforts, on July 29, 2019, the VA transferred 23.5 million veteran patient records to the shared Cerner Data Center, a critical milestone that will enable the transition of these records into the new EHR system. But, like many other well-intended federal programs, all is not well with the interoperability of all veterans’ health records.

On Aug. 21, 2019, the VA Office of Inspector General (VAOIG) released the results of an audit regarding the digitization of medical records for veterans at Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities. The OIG found that as of July 19, 2018, there was a significant backlog of “paper documentation that measured approximately 5.15 miles high and contained at least 597,000 individual electronic document files dating back to October 2016.” The scanning of

medical documents was not always subject to the proper reviews, including quality and legibility. This failure to provide up-to-date information puts “continuity of care at risk” and “makes it challenging to ensure [patients] receive accurate diagnoses and timely care.” The OIG recommended that the VHA take steps to improve the management of scanning activities with sufficient resources and staffing to ensure “appropriate quality assurance monitoring.” That includes the creation of an adequate training program for personnel who scan and index medical records.

Under the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018 (MISSION Act), veterans are now allowed to seek medical care not just through VA medical facilities, but also through telehealth virtual options and community health care providers. This was a welcome and much-needed change to the delivery of health care to veterans, but the additional treatment options have also made the transfer of EHR information more complex.

The VHA has both a massive backlog of medical records and insufficient resources to ensure the accuracy of the medical records that have been and are waiting to be transferred. Unless patient information is 100 percent accurate, there is no assurance that the care veterans receive as they transition from DoD healthcare to VA healthcare will be what they need and deserve. VA officials should take the advice of the VAOIG and move quickly to resolve the issues raised in the report. Otherwise, the lengthy and expensive process to move all patient data to the Cerner Data Center will become much longer and more costly, to the detriment of the nation’s veterans and taxpayers. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | October 2, 2019 ++]

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## **Traumatic Brain Injury**

### **Update 74: VA/DoD Launch LIMBIC**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DOD) launched the Long-Term Impact of Military-related Brain Injury Consortium (LIMBIC) 1 OCT, for which the two organizations pledged to fund up to \$50 million, to research mild traumatic brain injuries (TBI) or concussions. The five-year effort will receive \$25 million in funding from DOD and up to \$25 million from VA, depending on availability of funds. “VA and DOD share an urgent, ongoing commitment to better understand the long-term impact of TBI,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Through this overarching effort, we are harnessing the best work of our nation’s scientists and will lay the groundwork for meaningful progress in diagnosis and treatment.”

LIMBIC is composed of researchers and resources from more than 20 organizations, spanning VA, DOD, the National Institutes of Health, universities and nonprofit organizations. VA and DOD’s funding will support a consortium led by a team at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia. The lead investigator, Dr. David X. Cifu, is a senior TBI specialist for VA and a professor at VCU. The consortium extends the work of a previous collaborative effort known as the Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium, or CENC, also led by Dr. Cifu. The existing CENC cohort, consisting of more than 2 million Veterans and service members, started in 2012 and has become the world’s largest and best-characterized research cohort dedicated to the study of military TBI. It will expand the cohort; integrate with other government, academic and nonprofit research; and spur new public-private partnerships.

Researchers associated with CENC, and now with LIMBIC, have already documented links between combat concussions and dementia, Parkinson’s disease, chronic pain, opioid usage and suicide risk. They have also developed specialized diagnostic tests using questionnaires, physical exams, brain imaging, fluid biomarkers and electrophysiology to probe how the brain recovers from injury. [Source: OPIA News Release | October 22, 2019 ++]

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## Dementia

### Update 08: Steps to Prevent Dementia May Mean Taking Actual Steps

To ward off age-related cognitive decline, you may be tempted to turn to brain training apps. Last year, consumers spent nearly \$2 billion on them, some of which claim to improve cognitive skills. Evidence suggests you'd be better off spending more time exercising and less time staring at your phone. This year the World Health Organization (WHO) released evidence-based guidelines on reducing risks of cognitive decline and dementia. Although it pointed to some systematic reviews that reported positive cognitive effects of brain training, the W.H.O. judged the studies to be of low quality. Among the studies' limitations is that they measure only short-term effects and in areas targeted by the training. There is no long-term evidence of general improvement in cognitive performance.

Instead of mind games, moving your body is among the most helpful things you can do. At least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week, including strength training, yields not just physical benefits but cognitive ones as well. But to be most effective, you need to do it before cognitive decline starts, according to the W.H.O. Some evidence to support this recommendation comes from short-term studies. Several randomized studies of tai chi for older adults found it yielded cognitive benefits. Likewise, randomized studies of aerobic exercise for older adults found short-term improvements in cognitive performance.

A systematic review published this year in PLOS One examined 36 randomized studies of exercise programs that were as short as four weeks and as long as a year. It found cognitive benefits of activities such as bicycling, walking, jogging, swimming and weight training. Results like these may not be durable over time, but doing experiments on the long-term cognitive effects of physical activity is hard. It's not practical to randomly assign people to decades of different levels of activity, and then test their cognitive function in old age. That's why long-term studies demonstrate an association, not necessarily causation, between a physically active lifestyle and better cognitive performance later in life. It's possible, for example, that people who are motivated (or have the luxury) to be more active over a long period may also do other things or have other characteristics — perhaps even genetic — that ward off cognitive decline.

Nevertheless, a 2017 review in Brain Science concluded that physical activity reduces the risk of cognitive deficits in old age. One study it pointed to was published in JAMA Psychiatry. It assessed the physical activity and television-viewing habits of 3,247 adults over two and a half decades. When the study began in 1985, participants were 18 to 30 years old; when it concluded, they were at least middle-aged. The study found that persistently watching more than three hours of television per day or failing to regularly engage in at least a moderate level of physical activity is associated with worse executive function and lower processing speed in midlife.



Dementia exacts a huge toll, including on families and caregivers. Globally, it affects 5 percent to 8 percent of the population at an estimated annual social cost of more than \$800 billion, or about 1.1 percent of the global economic output. A recent study in Health Services Research found that the additional cost of dementia to Medicare is nearly \$16,000 per person over five years. About 14 percent of people in the United States over the age of 71 have some form of dementia. Alzheimer's disease is the leading cause, afflicting 5.7 million people. Exercise won't reduce these numbers to zero, but it could lower them. But why would exercising the body help the mind? There are several potential

pathways. One, suggested by a nearly 10-year study of almost 500 people over 79, is that physical activity is a gateway for social and cognitive engagement. The study found that participants who were more physically active also had more social contact that engaged their brains.

In other words, physical activity brings us in closer proximity to others, with whom we then interact socially — think running clubs, adult soccer leagues, basketball pickup games or doubles tennis. And the social part, not just the physical one, may help keep our minds active. But the physical aspect of exercise may help, too, by reducing the likelihood of vascular dementia — a common form of dementia caused by an inadequate supply of blood to the brain. Physical activity can promote the development of new blood vessels in the brain, and increase blood flow to it. This can help rid the brain of harmful metabolic waste and provide new blood flow pathways that can be alternate routes if others become blocked.

Exercise also reduces the risks of developing hypertension or Type 2 diabetes, or can help reduce their severity. Both ailments are associated with dementia. Likewise, exercise can help treat and prevent depression and reduce the prevalence of poor sleep — further risk factors for dementia. The W.H.O. also found evidence linking a reduced risk of cognitive decline to a healthy diet and moderation in alcohol use. Supplements like vitamin E have not been found to be useful. “A lot of this boils down to common sense,” said Mary Sano, director of research at the James J. Peters V.A. Medical Center in the Bronx and a professor of psychiatry and director of Alzheimer’s disease research at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. “Keep physically and socially active, eat sensibly, don’t smoke and don’t drink to excess, and treat your treatable conditions.”

This approach yields many physical benefits as well. She also advises to “protect your head, which means wear seatbelts and helmets and use sturdy ladders because falls which occur frequently as we get older can be devastating to the brain.” So, whether for your body or your mind, put down the phone and go for a walk. [Source: The New York Times | Austin Frakt | October 21, 2019 ++]

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## Concussions

### Update 01: \$50 Million Project Investigating the Long-Term Impacts



When Joe Montanari left the Army in 2008 after a decade of service, he knew little about traumatic brain injury. He’d deployed to Iraq and served abroad in Kosovo and elsewhere over the years. But no one told him what could happen inside his brain after one or more concussions. “I believe it needs to be talked about more. When I got out, I didn’t even know I had mild TBI,” said Montanari, now 39. “I knew I hit my head a couple times but I didn’t have much knowledge.” He learned more about combat concussions after joining ongoing research at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. For instance, the injuries can cause headaches, nausea, speech problems, sleep issues, dizziness and more, weeks or even years down the line. “Getting into this study really brought to light what it was and how to know signs and symptoms,” he said. It’s important “being able to identify when you do have one.”

Montanari is now both a participant and coordinator for the research at VCU, which was recently tapped by the federal Defense and Veterans Affairs departments to oversee a \$50 million national project investigating the long-term impacts of combat concussions among military veterans and service members. Researchers are following Montanari and thousands of others throughout their lifetimes to observe and test how the brain injuries affect their mental and physical health. Nearly three dozen so far come from the military-heavy Hampton Roads region, and more are being recruited.

“The military cares about what happens to its folks in combat, short term and long term, and the VA has to take care of these people,” said Dr. David Cifu, lead researcher and chair of the VCU School of Medicine’s Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. The goal is to find out how to treat people early and prevent progressive neurological disorders. Cifu said the military started to really notice the issue about a decade ago, when they saw “that there were lots and lots of individuals who were coming back from the Iraq and Afghan wars with a lot of brain injuries.” A national research action plan signed by President Barack Obama in 2012 called for further study of the topic and soon afterward, VCU received \$62 million to lead a consortium of universities, VA hospitals and military treatment facilities.

The group has created an electronic medical records database of more than 2 million veterans and service members that allows researchers to learn about the common traits between people and conclusions that would be hard to draw from a single study. Cifu said VCU stores a massive data set on a server in a locked room. The new grant allows the research to continue and expand. In addition to the study that follows thousands of participants, smaller targeted projects use data gathered through it, such as DNA and biomarkers in blood.

An initial day and a half of testing at the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond includes a specialized MRI, computerized eye tracking, smell and balance testing, questioning and more. Researchers later check in with the participants periodically. The service members and veterans are allowed to ask questions about their results, and are referred for available treatment when needed. If, say, a new treatment or clinical trial becomes available for a certain symptom, officials can also use the national registry to reach out to those who could benefit. More than 380,000 service members have been diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury since 2000, [according to numbers from the Department of Defense](#), about 60% of them in the Army and the rest evenly divided between the Marines, Navy and Air Force. The cause is almost always either blasts or vehicle collisions.

There’s a clear association between the injuries and the eventual development of dementia, Parkinson’s disease, opioid addiction, chronic pain and suicide risk, Cifu said. “There’s something about brain injury that increases your lifetime risks of those problems,” he said. “Concussion is important because it alerts us that there’s something about this group of people that elevates their risk. It may be the door that opens us up to these people: ‘Your brain health is key, so let’s do things to nurture your brain, treat your mental health difficulties more aggressively.’”

Inside the brain, combat concussions are no different from those sustained in athletics or civilian life, Cifu said. A football player who collides with an opponent and a soldier hit by a roadside bomb experience similar impacts: a whiplash-like motion that moves the brain around in damaging ways. “While there are unique aspects to being injured in combat ... if you remove those elements and just look at the concussion itself, the brain has no way of knowing how it was injured,” he said. “It looks to the brain exactly the same as being beaten up in a fight.” There is, however, a much higher rate of post-traumatic stress disorder that goes along with combat concussions. About 40% of those who sustain them develop PTSD, as opposed to about 5% in the general population. That’s not surprising considering many of those concussions are experienced alongside traumatic wartime events. The brain injuries don’t cause PTSD, “but the same event is probably the seed that caused them,” Cifu said.

Because of the similarities between combat and civilian concussions, “what we learn in civilians we can apply to combat, and vice versa.” As a result of the coalition’s research, he said, the military has changed its standard concussion care protocols in the battlefield. “In the Green Zone there are actually concussion tents set up for service members who get injuries,” he said. In the early days of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, some of these soldiers would be flown home

or somewhere in Europe because there wasn't the knowledge of how to handle it. Now "they've gotten well before either going back to battle or coming home. That's a difference." The team has also found that women who have combat injuries report more challenges and symptoms as a result, something Cifu said held true among civilians and athletes.

There are about 1,700 current participants in the research — all service members and veterans with combat experience, some who've had concussions and a control group who have not. The research is planned to expand to more than 3,000. "Many of us don't miss the job or the hardships that came along with being in the military, but we miss those we served with," said Kevin Sickinger, 56, a participant and research administrator who served 23 years in the Army and retired as a lieutenant colonel in 2010. "This is a way of staying connected. A way of helping those I served with."

Project leaders need large numbers of participants to be able to draw conclusions in the data. Sickinger said they'll be headed down to Hampton Roads soon to recruit more active duty members. Only about a fifth of the current subjects are in active service; a majority of them are veterans. "There might not even be a cure, a quick fix or long term fix," Sickinger said. "But to be able to participate in helping to find out anything that can help our future brothers and sisters in the military, is worthwhile." Anyone interested in participating in the study can visit [www.cencstudy.org](http://www.cencstudy.org). [Source: The Virginian-Pilot | Katherine Hafner | October 21, 2019 ++]

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## Medicare Fraud

### Update 140: Disclosures 16-31 OCT 2019

**Genetic Tests Scams.** Thirty-five individuals associated with dozens of telemedicine companies and laboratories have been charged with fraudulently billing Medicare more than \$2.1 billion for expensive cancer genetic (CGx) tests. Nine of the defendants are medical doctors. One of the defendants, Khalid Satary, is an entrepreneur connected with diagnostic labs in four states who was supposed to have been deported more than a decade ago. The various indictments include charges of conspiracy to commit health care fraud, conspiracy to pay and receive kickbacks, and substantive counts of health care fraud and receiving kickbacks. Various defendants allegedly:

- Duped Medicare recipients into signing up for unnecessary or non-existent cancer screening tests through telemarketing and "health fairs".
- Failed to provide test results to beneficiaries or provided worthless results to their doctors.
- Used telemarketing to lure hundreds of thousands of elderly and/or disabled patients into the scheme.
- Paid doctors to prescribe CGx testing, either without any patient interaction or with only a brief telephone conversation with patients they had never met.

The U.S. Office of Inspector General (OIG) has warned the public about scammers who offer Medicare beneficiaries "free" screenings or cheek swabs for genetic testing in order to obtain their Medicare information for identity theft or fraudulent billing purposes. Beneficiaries could be responsible for the thousands of dollars charged for the testing if Medicare denies the claims. OIG advises consumers:

- If a genetic testing kit is mailed to you, don't accept it unless it was ordered by your physician. Refuse the delivery or return it to the sender. Keep a record of the sender's name and the date you returned the items.
- Be suspicious of anyone who offers you "free" genetic testing and then requests your Medicare number. If your personal information is compromised, it may be used in other fraud schemes.
- A physician that you know and trust should assess your condition and approve any request for genetic testing.
- If anyone other than your physician's office requests your Medicare information, do not provide it.
- If you suspect Medicare fraud, contact the [OIG Hotline](#).

[Source: Consumer Health Digest 19-43 | Stephen Barrett | October 27, 2019 ++]

**Nashville, TN** – A 16-count superseding indictment unsealed 15 OCT charged Michael Kestner, 67, of Nashville, Tennessee, Brian Richey, 37, of Cookeville, Tennessee, Daniel Seeley, 58, of Batesville, Mississippi, and Jonathan White, 49, of Tullahoma, Tennessee, with conspiracy to commit health care fraud and multiple counts of healthcare fraud, announced U.S. Attorney Don Cochran for the Middle District of Tennessee and Assistant Attorney General Brian Benczkowski of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division. Richey and Seeley, both nurse practitioners, and White, a physician assistant, were indicted in April on one count of healthcare fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit healthcare fraud. Today’s superseding indictment charges each with four additional counts of healthcare fraud and also charges Kestner, the owner of MedManagement, Inc. (MMI), with one count of conspiracy and 15 counts of healthcare fraud. Kestner surrendered to U.S. Marshals 15 OCT and will be making an initial appearance before a U.S. Magistrate Judge later in the day. Richey, Seeley and White are expected to surrender at a later time.

According to the indictment, Kestner was the owner and CEO of MMI and was the majority owner of Pain MD, with a principal place of business in Franklin, Tennessee. Richey, Seeley and White were employed by MMI, which managed Pain MD. Pain MD operated pain and wellness clinics throughout middle Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina and Michael Kestner, who has neither medical training nor certifications, served as its President. Pain MD represented itself to be an “interventional” pain management practice and it claimed to provide procedures, including injections and durable medical equipment (“DME”) that were intended to reduce patient reliance on opioids and other narcotic pain medications. The indictment alleges that, in fact, these practices were intended to increase revenues for Pain MD and to personally enrich Pain MD providers.

Between 2010 and continuing through May 2018, the indictment alleges that Kestner, Richey, Seeley and White conspired to enrich themselves and their employers by submitting false and fraudulent claims to Medicare, Medicaid and TRICARE. Kestner and others took steps to ensure Pain MD providers increased their “productivity” by providing more and more services, without consideration of whether those services were medically reasonable and necessary. These steps included, but were not limited to: paying productivity-based bonuses to providers; locking providers into legally questionable employment agreements that included extended non-compete periods of up to 24 months; threatening providers who had low productivity numbers with termination and other consequences; sending regular emails, sometimes more than once daily, comparing and ranking providers based on the number of injections or DME devices they had provided; providing erroneous clinical trainings to under-experienced providers, instructing them on inappropriate care protocols and anatomically incorrect injection procedures; and sending Richey, Seeley and White out to clinics to “train” providers, who were not providing a high percentage of injections and DME, and how to “control” the patients and get them to agree to receive unnecessary medical procedures, under threats to discontinue their narcotic pain medications if they refused.

Richey, Seeley and White provided services to patients, namely “Tendon Origin Injections,” which were neither medically necessary nor anatomically possible, provided medically unnecessary DME, and then submitted fraudulent claims to Medicare, Medicaid and TRICARE. These services were provided to further the company’s business model by increasing revenues and to personally enrich Pain MD providers and executives. As a result of the conspiracy, Kestner, Richey, Seeley and White caused the submission of more than \$27,537,383.17 to be billed to Medicare, resulting in approximately \$5,054,525.07 in reimbursement; more than \$8,567,657.00 to be billed to TennCare, resulting in approximately \$101,077.79 in reimbursement; and more than \$2,544,322.01 to be billed to TRICARE, resulting in approximately \$284,458.51 in reimbursement. If convicted, the defendants face up to 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine on each count.

[Source: DoJ Middle District of Tennessee | U.S. Attorney’s Office | October 15, 2019 ++]

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## Cannabidiol (CBD)-Containing Products

### Unsupported Claims

On 10 SEP the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) warned three unnamed companies marketing cannabidiol (CBD)-containing products that it is illegal to advertise that a product can prevent, treat, or cure human disease without competent and reliable scientific evidence to support such claims. CBD is a chemical compound derived from the cannabis plant. According to the FTC:

- One company's website claimed that CBD "works like magic" to relieve "even the most agonizing pain" better than prescription opioid painkillers. To bolster its claims that CBD has been "clinically proven" to treat cancer, Alzheimer's disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), fibromyalgia, cigarette addiction, and colitis, the company states it has participated in "thousands of hours of research" with Harvard researchers.
- Another company's website claimed that CBD products have been proven to treat autism, anorexia, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety, depression, Alzheimer's disease, Lou Gehrig's Disease (ALS), stroke, Parkinson's disease, epilepsy, traumatic brain injuries, diabetes, Crohn's disease, psoriasis, MS, fibromyalgia, cancer, and AIDS. The company also advertised CBD as a "miracle pain remedy" for both acute and chronic pain, including pain from cancer treatment and arthritis.
- The third company's website promoted CBD gummies as highly effective at treating "the root cause of most major degenerative diseases, including arthritis, heart disease, fibromyalgia, cancer, asthma, and a wide spectrum of autoimmune disorders." The company also claimed that its CBD cream relieves arthritis pain and that its CBD oil may effectively treat depression, PTSD, epilepsy, heart disease, arthritis, fibromyalgia, and asthma.

This month on 22 OCT, the FTC and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued a joint warning letter to Rooted Apothecary, LLC for selling CBD products online with unsubstantiated claims that the products can treat autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), as well as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, among other conditions. As described in the letter, the Florida-based company used its online store and social media sites to make health and efficacy claims that included:

- "Increasing evidence suggests that CBD oil is a powerful option for pain . . . anxiety . . . and autism . . . It seems like an attractive and safe option for children."
- "CBD oil may have neuroprotective properties and may protect against neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease."
- "Possible uses for CBD include helping with skin problems such as acne, autism, ADHD, and even cancer. It's often used in conjunction with traditional treatments to provide extra help. Children can use high amounts of CBD safely and without any risk."

Earlier this year, the FTC and FDA issued similar joint warning letters to three other CBD sellers.

[Source: Consumer Health Digest 19-43 | Stephen Barrett | October 27, 2019 ++]

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## Cancer Q&A

191016 thru 191031

### (Q) How do pesticides and herbicides 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 address common concerns about pesticides and herbicides in relation to cancer:

- *Do pesticides and herbicides in foods cause cancer?* Pesticides and herbicides can be toxic when used improperly in industrial, farming, or other workplace settings. Although vegetables and fruits sometimes contain low levels of these chemicals, overwhelming scientific evidence supports the overall health benefits and cancer-protective effects of eating vegetables and fruits. At this time there is no evidence that residues of pesticides and herbicides at the low doses found in foods increase the risk of cancer. Still, fruits and vegetables should be washed thoroughly before eating, not only to lower exposure to these compounds but also to limit the risk of health effects from germs.
- *What are phytochemicals, and do they reduce cancer risk?* The term "phytochemicals" refers to a wide variety of compounds made by plants. Some of these compounds protect plants against insects or have other important functions. Some have either antioxidant or hormone-like actions both in plants and in the people who eat them. Because consuming vegetables and fruits is linked with a reduced risk of cancer, researchers are looking for the specific compounds responsible for the helpful effects. But at this time, no evidence has shown that phytochemicals taken as supplements are as good for your long-term health as the vegetables, fruits, beans, and grains from which they are extracted.

Examples of phytochemicals include flavonoids (found in soy, chickpeas, and tea), carotenoids (found in butternut squash, cantaloupe, and carrots), anthocyanins (found in eggplant and red cabbage), and sulfides (found in garlic and onions).

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

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## TRICARE Podcast 523

### TRICARE & FEDVIP Open Seasons - TRICARE Pubs - TRICARE Webinar

**2019 TRICARE and FEDVIP Open Seasons** -- Did you know that the TRICARE Open Season and Federal Benefits Open Season happen only once a year? Unless you experience a Qualifying Life Event, open season is your only chance to enroll in or make a change to your enrollment for the participating programs. TRICARE Open Season applies to anyone enrolled in or eligible for a TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select health plan. Federal Benefits Open Season is for enrollment in the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program, or FEDVIP. With FEDVIP, eligible TRICARE beneficiaries can choose between multiple dental and vision plans and carriers. Both the TRICARE and FEDVIP open seasons will run from November 11th to December 9th. The enrollment choices that you make during this period will take effect on January 1, 2020. If you have a premium-based plan, TRICARE Open Season doesn't apply to you. You can purchase premium-based plans any time. TRICARE Open Season also doesn't apply to TRICARE For Life.

FEDVIP dental coverage is available to:

- Retired service members and their eligible family members
- Retired National Guard and Reserve members and their eligible family members
- Certain survivors, and
- Medal of Honor recipients and their immediate family members and survivors

FEDVP vision coverage is available to

- Active duty family members
- National Guard and Reserve members and their eligible family members enrolled in TRICARE Reserve Select or TRICARE Retired Reserve
- Retired service members and their eligible family members, and

- TRICARE For Life beneficiaries

To learn more, read this week’s article, “2019 TRICARE Open Season, Federal Benefits Open Season Starts Next Month,” at [www.TRICARE.mil/news](http://www.TRICARE.mil/news).

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**TRICARE Publications** -- Do you read TRICARE publications to learn more about your TRICARE medical, dental, and pharmacy benefit? Check out the Retiring from Active Duty Brochure, TRICARE Choices in the United States Handbook, TRICARE Choices for National Guard and Reserve Handbook, TRICARE Costs and Fees Sheet, and others. If you find these resources helpful or have ways we can improve them, please share your feedback with us. Click on “Publications Satisfaction Survey” at the top of the Publications page at 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 at [www.TRICARE.mil/publications](http://www.TRICARE.mil/publications) This is your benefit, and we want to hear from you.

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**Oct. 24 TRICARE Webinar** -- The TRICARE webinar on 24 OCT talked about open season and your 2020 health care, dental, and vision coverage options. Open season for TRICARE beneficiaries starts November 11th and ends on December 9th. Two open seasons take place during this time: TRICARE Open Season and Federal Benefits Open Season. This webinar will discuss both. During TRICARE Open Season, you may be eligible to enroll in a TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select plan, or switch between the two plans. You can learn about the differences between TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Select at [www.TRICARE.mil/prime](http://www.TRICARE.mil/prime) and [www.TRICARE.mil/select](http://www.TRICARE.mil/select). If eligible, you and your family members can enroll in a dental or vision plan through the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program, or FEDVIP. Visit the FEDVIP website at [www.benefeds.com](http://www.benefeds.com) to check your eligibility and to compare plans. For more information on Beneficiary Web Enrollment, read this week’s article, “*Make Enrolling in TRICARE Easy with Beneficiary Web Enrollment*,” at [www.TRICARE.mil/news](http://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> | October 11, 2019 ++]

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## TRICARE Podcast 524

### Website Expansion - EOB - TRICARE Open Season Webinar

**TRICARE Website Expansion** -- The TRICARE website is growing. As of October 1st TRICARE welcomed several military hospitals and clinics to its website. Fort Belvoir Community Hospital, Naval Hospital Jacksonville, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, and Womack Army Medical Center now have microsites under TRICARE.mil. This change comes as part of a larger Military Health System transformation. The Department of Defense is transforming the Military Health System to improve the health care provided to service members, retirees, and their families. By 2021, over 350 individual military hospital and clinic websites will move to TRICARE.mil. To learn more about what this change means for you, read this week’s article, “TRICARE Website Expands to Include Military Hospital Sites,” at [www.TRICARE.mil/news](http://www.TRICARE.mil/news) .

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**Explanation of Benefits** -- If you’ve ever visited the doctor or hospital and used your health benefits, you’ve probably received an explanation of benefits, or EOB. Once your medical claim is processed, both you and your provider will receive an itemized statement with a breakdown of cost-shares and deductibles. This is an EOB. It resembles a medical

bill, but it's not. The EOB is an itemized statement that shows what action TRICARE has taken on your claims. Your EOB includes the date you received the medical treatment or service, along with several amounts. This includes the amount billed, the amount covered, and the amount paid by TRICARE, Medicare, or other health insurance. It will show any balance you owe your provider. It will also tell you how much has been credited toward your annual deductible and catastrophic cap. You should always carefully review your EOB to make sure the information is correct. EOB statements are available online on your TRICARE regional or overseas contractor website. You must first log in or register on the contractor's secure portal to get access. Visit [www.TRICARE.mil/eob](http://www.TRICARE.mil/eob) to learn more.

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**TRICARE Open Season Webinar** -- Are you prepared for open season? Being prepared means knowing what health plans you're eligible for, what changes you can make, and understanding which plans are best for you and your family. To learn about your options for your 2020 health care, dental, and vision coverage, join TRICARE for a presentation and Q&A session on October 24th from 1 to 2 p.m. eastern time. Open season for TRICARE beneficiaries is from November 11th to December 9th. Both TRICARE Open Season and Federal Benefits Open Season take place during this time. This webinar will discuss both.

During TRICARE Open Season, you may be eligible to enroll in a TRICARE Prime option, including the US Family Health Plan, or TRICARE Select. You can also switch between plans, or switch from individual to family coverage. Remember that if you want to stay in your current TRICARE health plan, you don't have to take any action during open season. You'll continue in your current health plan through 2020 or as long as you're eligible. Also, if eligible, you can enroll in the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program, or FEDVIP, during Federal Benefits Open Season. If you're already enrolled in a FEDVIP dental or vision plan and you don't want to make a change, your enrollment will continue in 2020. To learn more about both open seasons and to join next week's webinar, read the webinar article at [www.TRICARE.mil/news](http://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> | October 17, 2019 ++]

\* Finances \*



## Income Considered Non-Taxable

**Things Uncle Sam Can't Touch — So Long as You Play by the Rules.**

Just because you've stopped working doesn't mean you're done paying taxes. Much of the income you receive in retirement, even if it's not directly from employment, can still be taxable. But not all of it is subject to federal taxes — especially if you play your cards right. You can or might be able to avoid paying federal income taxes on the following types of retirement income.

### 1. Social Security benefits

If what the Social Security Administration calls your “combined income” is below a certain amount, you generally won’t be taxed on your Social Security retirement benefits. The exact amount depends on whether you file a tax return as an individual or jointly with your spouse. The Social Security Administration lays out the details on its [website](#).. However, even if your combined income is high enough that you would owe taxes on your benefits, there are ways to get around it — legally. Check out “[5 Ways to Avoid Taxes on Social Security Income](#).”

## **2. Health savings account distributions**

Health savings accounts are popular specifically for their tax advantages, as is explained in “[3 Reasons to Get a Health Savings Account](#).” In short, your contributions to an HSA are tax-deductible, they grow tax-free, and withdrawals are tax-free when used for eligible medical expenses. So, you will never pay federal taxes on money you put in an HSA, provided that you follow the IRS rules for this type of account.

## **3. Reverse mortgage payments**

The IRS plainly says: “Reverse mortgage payments aren’t taxable.” The federal agency considers them loan proceeds, not income. The lender pays you, the borrower, loan proceeds (in a lump sum, a monthly advance, a line of credit, or a combination of all three) while you continue to live in your home.

- With a reverse mortgage, you retain title to your home.
- Depending on the plan, your reverse mortgage becomes due with interest when you move, sell your home, reach the end of a pre-selected loan period, or die.
- Interest (including original issue discount) accrued on a reverse mortgage isn't deductible until you actually pay it (usually when you pay off the loan in full). Also, a deduction of interest may be limited because a reverse mortgage generally is subject to the limit on home equity debt, which is not deductible unless the proceeds are used to buy, build, or substantially improve the home that secures the loan. For information on deducting mortgage interest and the debt limit that applies, see Publication 936, Home Mortgage Interest Deduction.

Whether you get a lump sum, a monthly advance, a line of credit or all three, you won’t face federal income taxes on the funds. Now, if this feature alone is making you wonder whether a reverse mortgage is right for you, you had better first check out “[Ask Stacy: Should I Get a Reverse Mortgage](#)”. This source of retirement income is not for everyone.

## **4. Roth IRA distributions**

One advantage of a Roth individual retirement account (IRA) over a traditional IRA is that [qualified distributions](#) are not taxed. Distributions that you receive on or after reaching age 59 ½, for example, are generally among those that can be considered “qualified.”

This doesn’t mean you’re entirely escaping taxes. One way that contributions to a Roth IRA differ from those to a traditional IRA is that you pay federal income taxes on them for the tax year in which you deposit the money into the account, as opposed to the year for which you withdraw the money. You’re paying on the front end instead of the back end. This often makes Roth accounts attractive to people who want to avoid taxation in retirement, and those who expect to be in a higher tax bracket during retirement than during their working years.

## **5. Life insurance proceeds**

Generally, life insurance proceeds you receive as a beneficiary due to the death of the insured person, aren't includable in gross income and you don't have to report them. However, any interest you receive is taxable and you should report it as interest received. See [Topic 403](#) for more information about interest. If the policy was transferred to you for cash or other valuable consideration, the exclusion for the proceeds is limited to the sum of the consideration you paid, additional premiums you paid, and certain other amounts. There are some exceptions to this rule. Generally, you report the taxable amount based on the type of income document you receive, such as a Form 1099-INT or Form 1099-R. For additional information, see [Publication 525](#), Taxable and Nontaxable Income.

## **6. Municipal bond interest**

Municipal bonds are essentially loans to state or local governments, and it would be awfully rude for the federal government to tax you on any interest you make from such loans. The IRS even refers to them as “[tax-exempt governmental bonds](#).” That doesn’t mean municipal bond interest is completely tax-free. You may end up paying in other ways. For instance, your earnings from municipal bond interest could raise your combined income enough that you must pay federal taxes on your Social Security benefits.

### **7. Profit from selling your home**

Capital gains from the sale of your primary home might not be subject to federal income tax, depending on how much you made. “You may qualify to exclude up to \$250,000 of that gain from your income, or up to \$500,000 of that gain if you file a joint return with your spouse,” [the IRS says](#). The qualifications for this tax break include having owned the property and used it as your main home for at least two years over the course of the five years prior to you selling the home.

### **8. Veterans benefits**

A wide variety of benefits paid through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are not treated as income. These benefits, which are laid out in [IRS Publication 525](#), include:

- Disability compensation and pension payments for disabilities that are paid to veterans or their families.
- Veterans’ insurance proceeds and dividends paid to veterans or their beneficiaries.
- Interest on insurance dividends left on deposit with the VA.

### **9. Reimbursements and expenses for volunteering**

Certain kinds of funds that you receive related to volunteer work for federal programs are not subject to federal taxes. As laid out in IRS Publication 525, they include various reimbursements to volunteers in:

- The Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)
- National Senior Service Corps programs
- The [Tax Counseling for the Elderly](#) program

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Brandon Ballenger | October 14, 2019 ++]

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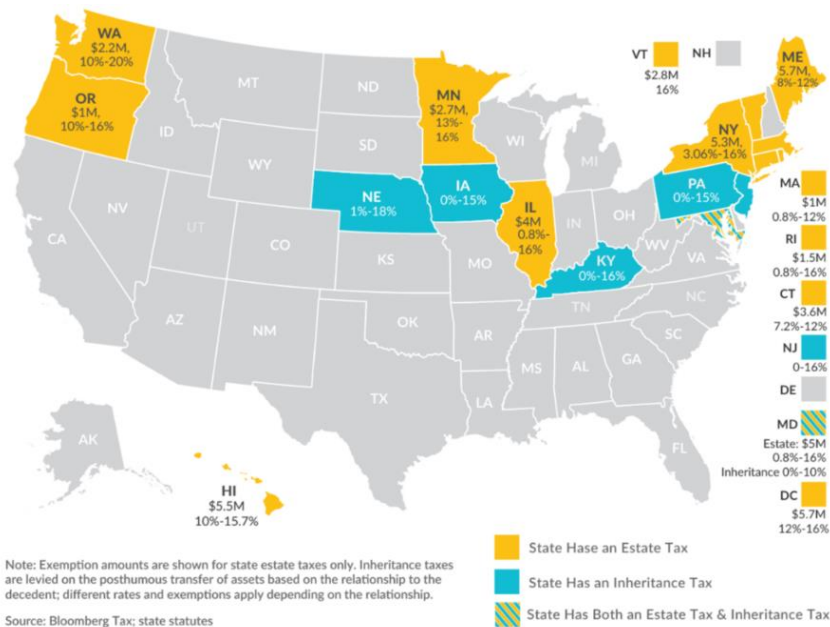
## **Inheritance Tax**

### **Federal & State**

An inheritance tax is a tax on property, cash or other assets that are bequeathed to a deceased person’s relatives, significant others or friends. There are state and federal laws applying to inheritances that can make receiving a tax quite challenging. Inheritance tax is also called an estate tax, and the federal revenue system uses the term estate tax to levy its fees. The federal government assesses a tax on the gross value of the property or cash, minus funeral expenses, charitable contributions and legal claims against the state. The tax runs 18% to 40% on the amount in excess of the \$11.18 million exemption. This tax has full portability for married couples, meaning if the right legal steps are taken a married couple can avoid paying an estate tax on up to \$22.46 million after both have died. Estate tax should not be confused with inheritance tax. Inheritance tax is money paid by the person who received or inherited the money after it has already been dispersed. Estate tax is taken by the government from the estate of the deceased before their heirs receive it.

Twelve states and Washington, D.C. impose estate taxes and six states impose inheritance taxes in addition to the federal estate tax. Maryland is the only state to impose both. Washington State has the highest estate tax rate, although Hawaii is set to increase its top rate on January 1, 2020. Nebraska has the highest inheritance tax. Most states have been moving away from estate or inheritance taxes or have raised their exemption levels, as estate taxes without the federal exemption hurt a state’s competitiveness. Estate and inheritance taxes are burdensome. They disincentivize business

investment and can drive high-net-worth individuals out-of-state. They also yield estate planning and tax avoidance strategies that are inefficient, not only for affected taxpayers, but for the economy at large. The handful of states that still impose them should consider eliminating them or at least conforming to federal exemption levels.



Similar to the estate tax, an inheritance tax affects property that is passed on to loved ones (or strangers). The tax applies not to the estate itself, but to the recipients of property from that estate. For example if you receive \$1,000 in inheritance and are subject to a 10% inheritance tax, you would pay \$100 back in taxes. Although your state might not impose an inheritance tax it may have some exceptions. For example some inherited income is still considered taxable in the state of California. Primarily any inheritance, which is considered income in respect to the decedent. This type of income is money that should have been collected and taxes paid on. If the person has died before they can pay taxes, the taxes will be taken out of the inheritance. Also if a person dies in another state, but the beneficiary is in California, the benefactor's state will tax the inheritance. [Source: <https://smartasset.com/retirement/retirement-taxes> & Tax Foundation Maps | October 2019 ++]

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## Amtrak

### Passenger Discount for Military Veterans

Veterans and Active duty military can enjoy a 10% savings on rail fares across the entire Amtrak network through 21 JAN 2021. The discount applies on the lowest available rail fare on most Amtrak trains. Veterans must have served in one of the following branches:

- Army
- Marine Corps
- Navy
- Air Force
- Coast Guard

To obtain discount use the Fare Finder on <https://www.amtrak.com/promotions/deals.html> and select 'Military Veteran' for each passenger as appropriate to receive the discount at the beginning of your search. Discount Limitations

- The veteran discount is not valid with Saver Fares.
- The veteran discount is not valid on weekday Acela trains.
- The veteran discount does not apply to non-Acela Business class, First class or sleeping accommodation. These upgrades are permitted upon payment of the full accommodation charges.
- The veteran discount is not valid for travel on certain Amtrak Thruway connecting services.
- The veteran discount is not valid on the Canadian portion of services operated jointly by Amtrak and VIA Rail Canada.
- The veteran discount may not be combinable with other discount offers; refer to the terms and conditions for each offer.
- Additional restrictions may apply.

[Source: VA News | October 16, 2019 ++]

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### **Air Force Lodging Rates to Increase in November**

The nightly rates for rooms at the Air Force's European inns will more than double starting next month as the services begin to foot the bill for most of their operating expenses. The cheapest rooms at some lodging on Air Force bases in Europe will be \$149 a night from Nov. 1, up from \$70, regardless of whether travel is for official duty or leisure, information provided by officials in Germany shows. The higher rates mean military units will have to budget more for temporary duty and permanent change of station moves. The new rates could also mean that more personnel may look for cheaper lodging options off base.

Military members are required to stay on base if their temporary duty assignment is to a U.S. installation, and encouraged but not required to if their TDY is to a location near a military installation. In the Spangdahlem and Ramstein areas, most off-base lodging runs well under 100 euros, or about \$110, according to listings on the travel reservation site Booking.com. As of next month, the cheapest accommodation offered at Spangdahlem's on-base Eifel Arms will be \$149 a night, compared to \$70 prior to the changes, the Air Force's deputy assistant secretary for cost and economics Pamela Schwenke said in a memorandum issued last week. The cost of overnighting in a business suite for officers ranked 0-6 and above will nearly triple, from \$79 a night to just under \$200, the memorandum shows. Ramstein and bases in the United Kingdom will see an identical rate hike to Spangdahlem's. The new rates vary by location and are within per diem levels for all room types at all locations, the memorandum says.

The rate changes were calculated to ensure facilities could fund operations while maintaining standards, the Pentagon said. At the Army base lodge in Wiesbaden, the cheapest room has gone up from \$55 to \$70 a night, a front desk clerk said by phone 21 OCT. Other rooms at the lodge went up by \$10 to \$15 starting on 1 OCT. "Customers are upset. They are really complaining about the \$15 increase," said the clerk, who declined to give his name since he wasn't authorized to give an interview. The increase was the result of the lodge no longer being supported with base funds, he said. The increases come as service branches scramble to cover costs without taxpayer dollars, which won't be available at the start of the new fiscal year on 1 OCT.

The rate hikes are part of a Pentagon plan announced last year to make military business operations more efficient and shift funds to higher priority programs. The Navy began raising its lodging rates a year ago. In the Europe, Africa and Southwest Asia regions, rates increased \$11 to \$31 per night, depending on room type, a Navy statement said. Resorts operated for morale, welfare and recreation, such as Garmisch's Edelweiss Lodge and Resort, are excluded from the new policy. Lodging at Fisher House, which allows military and veteran families to stay for free when a family member is in the hospital, is also excluded. [Source: Stars and Stripes | Jennifer H. Svan| October 21, 2019 ++]

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## SSA Windfall Elimination Provision

### Update 01: Legislation to Make it Fairer

Some people earn a retirement or disability pension from a job that does not pay into the Social Security system. Typically these people are federal service employees under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) after 1956 or state employees like teachers. If these same people have employment in other jobs that do pay into Social Security, their earned Social Security benefits are decreased just because they have pension income from their non-Social Security job. This is due to the WEP. The WEP is law with good intentions, but in practice it unfairly treats people with earned Social Security benefits because of their past employment in a non-Social Security job.

There are two bills working in the House to reform the WEP and make it fairer: The Equal Treatment of Public Servants Act of 2019 (H.R.3934) and the Public Servants Protection and Fairness Act (H.R.4540). These provisions would change the calculation used for WEP to correct the current discrepancy of penalizing retirees with Social Security earnings. These bills will not completely fix the WEP issue, but they do move down a path toward a permanent solution. If you want to weigh in on the changes with your representative, go [here](#) for contact information. The WEP does not apply to survivors benefits, but those benefits can be reduced due to another law known as the Government Pension Offset. Check out this [fact sheet](#) for details.

For more information, check out the Social Security Administration [fact sheet](#) on the WEP. You can get full details on the reform bills, including their status in Congress, by visiting the Congress.gov site (H.R. 3934, H.R. 4540). [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Shane Ostrom | October 21, 2019 ++]

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## Retiree Savings

### Make Them Last a Lot Longer by Avoiding these Costly Mistakes

Retirees usually have a limited amount of money to spend during their golden years. Unfortunately, some people make costly mistakes that can deplete their nest egg prematurely. From giving away cash indiscriminately to refusing to embrace lifestyle changes, here are some surprising ways retirees waste their hard-earned savings.

#### 1. Ignoring senior discounts

It's a mystery why anyone would pay more than needed, but retirees do just that when they ignore senior discounts. Maybe they don't realize how much these benefits can add up. Some retailers, for example, offer storewide discounts ranging from 5% to 20% on certain days. At <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/slideshows/best-senior-discounts> is a list of the 33 best senior discounts that covers everything from store savings to wireless plans to travel services.

#### 2. Buying unneeded insurance

During a person's working years, disability insurance can ensure someone has the cash needed to pay bills if they become sick or injured and can't hold down a job. However, it's a waste of money to keep paying disability insurance premiums when you're retired. The same goes for life insurance if you no longer have kids at home or a spouse whom you're financially supporting. In fact, there's a long list of insurance products you could probably drop from your budget, as we illustrate in "[9 Types of Insurance That Might Be a Waste of Money.](#)"

#### 3. Supporting grown children financially

Parents spend \$500 billion annually to support their adult children, according to a 2018 Merrill Lynch [study](#). That's money retirees, particularly those with meager savings, really can't afford to spend. While it's understandable that parents want to help their children, there are [ways](#) for you to lend a hand financially without paying their bills or handing over cash.

#### 4. Maintaining two cars



Two cars are often a necessity for households in which two partners work. However, retirees who have more flexible schedules may be able to easily get by with a single vehicle. Transportation is the second-largest expense category for retirees, according to federal data. Ditching the second vehicle can save money on insurance, gas and registration fees. To further cut your costs, review these [seven ways](#) to save money on your remaining vehicle.

#### 5. Refusing to downsize

Transportation is second only to housing when it comes to retiree expenses. One-third of spending in households led by someone age 65 or older goes to keeping a roof over everyone's head, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data. You would think empty nesters might be keen to move to smaller, less expensive homes, but half don't. In fact, nearly a third actually upsize to a bigger house to accommodate visiting family members, says a Merrill Lynch-Age Wave [study](#). Retirees who are stretching their dollars should consider whether money on a bigger home is well-spent if the rooms remain empty for most of the year.

#### 6. Insisting on brand-name medications

Medications are one of the items you should always buy as a generic, regardless of whether you're a retiree. The Food and Drug Administration says generic drugs must have the same active ingredients and strength as brand-name medications, and they can cost up to 85% less. Some stores will even give you certain [generic prescriptions for free](#).

#### 7. Donating to every charity that calls

Many retirees have big hearts and are quick to open their checkbook whenever approached about a good cause. However, people living off savings should be careful that they don't give away too much and jeopardize their ability to live comfortably in the years to come. What's more, older Americans are often targeted by scammers who may use fake charity appeals to get money. We have [tips](#) to help you donate to charity the smart way, and don't forget that you can also [give](#) to charity without spending money.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Maryalene LaPonsie | August 18, 2019++]

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## Debt

### Update 01: Surefire Ways to Get rid of it ASAP

Debt can destroy your financial dreams. Whether you carry a small balance on your credit card each month or are staring up at a mountain of financial obligations, debt makes it impossible to get ahead. Paying off debt requires dedication, determination and persistence. Here are a few smart ways to pay off debt fast:

#### 1. Stop using credit cards

If you really want to get out of debt, stop using credit cards. The more you swipe, the more the balance climbs. Even if you continue to use your card, avoid leaning on perks such as the ability to take cash advances. As we explain in "The [10 Most Common Credit Sins and Mistakes](#)": "Unlike when you withdraw cash from your bank account via debit card, a cash advance via credit card generally costs you a steep cash-advance fee as well as a steep interest rate. In addition, interest charges start accumulating immediately, usually from the day you take out the loan." Having a hard time letting go? Try freezing the cards in a cup of ice. By the time you are able to access them again, hopefully you will have changed your mind about spending.

#### 2. Pay as much as you can afford each month

Creating an emergency fund should be a top priority. But once you have accomplished this goal, use any funds at your disposal to pay down debt. The more you pay, the faster you'll be free of your obligations. Did you save money at the grocery store by stacking coupons with sales? Use the savings to pay off debt. Did you work some overtime last week? Apply the extra earnings to your debt.

#### 3. Make cuts to your spending

Take a good look at where your money is going and separate necessities from mere wants. Skip daily trips to the local coffee shop or to your favorite lunch spot. Over time, these savings can add up. Use them to dig out of the hole much quicker than you expected. If you are struggling to figure out which expenses you can cut, start by crafting a budget. Use software such as [You Need a Budget](#) to help you get spending priorities on track.

#### 4. **Double up on payments**

Congratulations if you have paid off one credit card. However, accomplishing that goal doesn't mean it's party time. Keep the momentum going by allocating those funds that are now freed up to the next balance in line.

#### 5. **Use windfalls to pay down balances**

If you get a sudden windfall — such as a tax refund or bonus at work — don't spend it on a splurge. Instead, bite the bullet and use a portion of the funds to pay off debt.

#### 6. **Freelance to earn extra money**

Try your hand at freelancing to make a few dollars on the side. In some instances, you may be able to generate a substantial amount of cash, all of which should be contributed to the debt-payoff fund. For some ideas on trading your skills for cash, check out “[19 Unusual Ways to Earn Extra Cash](#).”

#### 7. **Tackle debts with the highest interest rates first**

Although some prefer the debt snowball method, which suggests that you pay the debts with the lowest balances first to build momentum, it makes more financial sense to clear those debts with the higher interest rates first. The ultimate goal is to pay off debt, however, so the choice is yours.

#### 8. **Don't sacrifice the things you love the most**

Paying off debt may require you to make a few lifestyle changes, but it doesn't have to be depressing. If you have a difficult time adjusting to new circumstances, implement gradual changes so the process won't become too overwhelming. And if you need help click on the following sources of debt-related help:

- [Credit card debt](#)
- [Student loan debt](#)
- [Tax debt](#)

[Source: Military.com | Jim Absher | 10 Oct 2019 ++]

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## **Gasoline Savings**

### **Update 06: Top Tier Detergent**



To protect vehicle investments, AAA urges drivers to switch to a type of gas that costs an extra 3 to 8 cents per gallon on average — Top Tier detergent gasoline (\$0.36 to \$0.96 for a 12 gallon tank). This announcement follows the nonprofit having various brands of Top Tier and non-Top Tier gas tested by an independent engine testing lab. After 4,000 miles of simulated driving, the non-Top Tier brands caused 19 times more engine deposits than Top Tier brands, which contain more detergent additives than is required by the federal government's standards. According to AAA, those carbon deposits can:

- Reduce fuel economy
- Increase emissions

- Negatively impact vehicle performance, especially for newer vehicles

John Nielsen, AAA’s managing director of automotive engineering and repair, explains: “AAA was surprised to learn the extent to which detergent additives impact gasoline quality. As advertised, tested Top Tier gasolines kept engines remarkably cleaner than other fuels we tested.” Few drivers — 12 percent — select a gas station based on whether it offers Top Tier gas, however. AAA reports that drivers more commonly select a gas station based on the following:

- Three-quarters of U.S. drivers choose a gas station based on location (75 percent) or price (73 percent).
- Nearly one-third (29 percent) of U.S. drivers choose a gas station based on a rewards program.
- Only 12 percent of U.S. drivers select a gas station based on whether the gasoline contains an enhanced detergent package.
- Nearly half (47 percent) of U.S. drivers do not regularly buy gasoline that contains an enhanced detergent additive.
- Men (44 percent) are more likely than women (26 percent) to regularly buy a gasoline that contains an enhanced detergent package, as are baby boomers (41 percent) compared to millennials (32 percent).

Top Tier gas is not the same as premium gas, which has a higher octane rating. Top Tier is a standard developed in 2004 by eight top car manufacturers that believe the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s current minimum detergent requirements for all gas sold in the U.S. “do not go far enough to ensure optimal engine performance,” according to the [Top Tier website](#): Top Tier Detergent Gasoline help drivers avoid lower quality gasoline which can leave deposits on critical engine parts, which reduces engine performance. That’s something both drivers and automakers want to avoid. You can find a list of Top Tier providers [here](#). [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | July 8, 2016 ++]

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## **Long Term Care FLTCIP**

### **Update 11: New FLTCIP 3.0 Plan Now Available**

Federal employees and annuitants now have a new long term care insurance option. The Office of Personnel Management earlier this week launched a new plan and rate structure under the Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program. The new plan, called FLTCIP 3.0, is available to federal and Postal Service employees, annuitants, **active and retired military members and qualified relatives** who apply for coverage on or after Oct. 21, 2019. Current long-term care insurance participants aren’t impacted by the new plan or rate structure, Long Term Care Partners, the company that administers the FLTCIP on behalf of the John Hancock Life and Health Insurance Company, said.

FLTCIP 3.0 emphasizes home and community care services. Notably, the new plan includes what Long Term Care Partners have described as a “premium stabilization feature” (PSF). The feature is supposed to reduce the need for future premium increases, which, as current FLTCIP participants can attest to, have risen dramatically in recent years. Under this feature, the premium stabilization amount will be calculated as a percentage of premiums paid under the FLTCIP 3.0 group policy. This amount can be used to offset an enrollee’s future premium payments under specific conditions or will provide a refund of a premium death benefit. This amount can be changed at any time, and OPM must change the PSF percentage. Enrollees will be notified of these changes, according to Long Term Care Partners. Premium payments may be offset by as much as 50% when the participant has reached age 85 and has been enrolled in 3.0 for at least 10 years. In addition, the participant must have enough PSF available to pay 50% of his or her monthly premium. Participants can ask to stop the premium offset by contacting the program in writing.

Long-term care insurance premiums rose as much as 126% the last time OPM re-competed its contract for the program back in 2016. The premium hikes affected roughly 264,000 active and retired federal employees, who are paying an average of \$111 more per month for the same coverage they had in previous years. With the current pace of

change in the long-term care insurance market, FLTCIP participants could see even higher premiums in the future, the OPM’s inspector general said last year. Premiums rose the previous time OPM re-competed its long-term care contract in 2009, but the increases weren’t as dramatic.

The IG said in 2018 it wanted to see more formal plans and preparations for what it described as “fast-paced change” in the long-term market. OPM last year said it was considering new product and plan options for the FLTCIP, but Congress would have to authorize more significant changes to the long-term care program in the future. OPM’s premium rate announcement back in 2016 angered members of Congress on both sides aisle. The agency is required by law to issue a new contract for the long term care program every seven years. The last fixed-price contract award went to John Hancock, the only bidder. John Hancock itself stopped selling group long-term care insurance plans back in 2010 and individual policies in 2016. It only administers the FLTCIP, and its current contract with OPM will expire in 2023. [Source: Federal News Network | Nicole Ogrysko | October 25, 2019 ++]

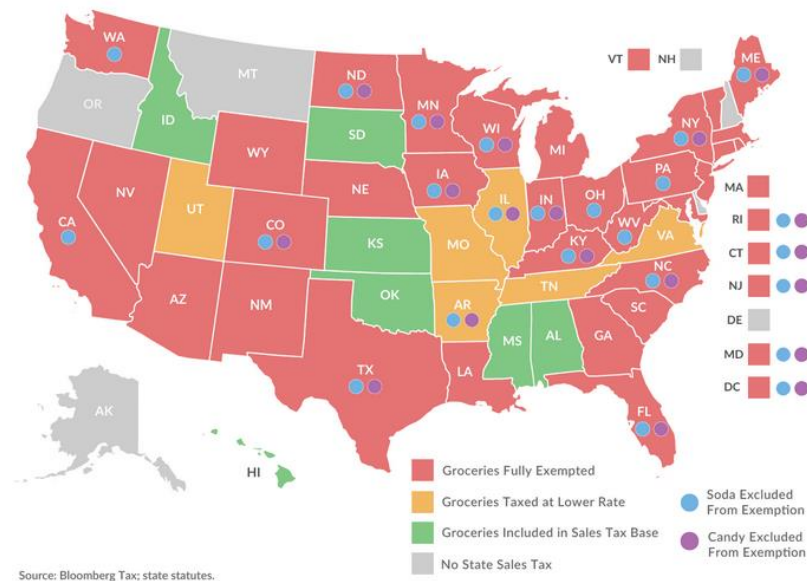
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## Sales Tax

### Update 03: Groceries, Candy, and Soda

If you’re like many Americans, you’ve been stockpiling bags of chocolate and candy to share with trick-or-treaters. According to the National Retail Federation, Halloween shoppers plan to spend \$2.6 billion on candy this year. In other words, there’s no better time for a map looking at how different state sales taxes treat consumable goods like candy, groceries, and soda. Currently, forty-five states and Washington, D.C. levy a state sales tax. Of those, thirty-two states and D.C. exempt groceries from the sales tax base. Twenty-three states and D.C. treat either candy or soda differently than groceries. Some state definitions can make food and candy taxation counterintuitive. Twenty-four states align with the Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement (SSUTA), which determines that candy is different from other sweet foods due to their ingredients and how they are produced.

**Sales Tax Treatment of Candy, Soda, and Groceries as of 1 JAN 2019**



Base uniformity across states is a good thing, but this particular definition leads to some interesting distinctions: If you bought a Hershey’s® bar, it would be subject to sales tax. If you bought a Twix® bar, it would be tax-free. Similar conundrums appear when you get into the difference in definitions between prepared food and food intended for off-

site consumption: a rotisserie chicken would be taxed if it's heated by a warming device, but untaxed if it's packaged and refrigerated.

The aim of a grocery exemption is to reduce tax burdens on necessities, particularly those which take up a large share of overall consumption for low-income consumers, which obligates states to decide which products are essential. When foods are categorized as necessities based on nutritional value, soda and candy are among the first products to be added to the "taxable" list. This raises obvious questions about a host of other food items like chips, baked goods, and ice cream. This picking and choosing creates arbitrary and counterintuitive discrepancies that go beyond the bowl of Halloween candy too. If you live in New Jersey, for example, it also affects the jack-o-lantern on your front porch. Ultimately, states and consumers alike would benefit from a low, flat-rate sales tax that captures all final consumer products. Such a tax would be easy to administer, providing a stable source of revenue through a neutral and transparent structure. [Source: Tax Foundation | Janelle Cammenga | October 30, 2019++]

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## **Estate Planning**

### **Update 04: More than Just a Will**

Many federal workers and retirees don't bother with estate planning. Mostly because they don't think of themselves as the estate type. Get a will off the internet, get it notarized and all is well, right? Not necessarily. Wills are great, but if you are or were a career civil servant, if you own a house, if you have money in your TSP account, bank or investments — chances are you have an estate. If you check all those boxes and are still married to your first spouse, you almost certainly do. Tom O'Rourke, an estate/tax attorney in the Washington D.C. area, says many people have estates but don't realize it. He says having an estate plan can keep your loved ones out of court and make a difficult time, like an extended illness or death, much less stressful for all concerned.

Virtually every conversation he has with prospective clients about an estate plan starts with the client saying, "I need a will". While a will is certainly an important part of an estate plan, it is by no means a complete estate plan. If you have a will and nothing more, you have a deficient estate plan. The purpose of a will is to distribute your assets in the way you want following your death and to name a person to oversee that the wishes expressed in your will are carried out. This person is your personal representative or executor. A will can be very simple or extraordinarily complex and may include one or more trusts. A will only becomes effective at your death!

Many of the issues that need to be addressed in an estate plan arise while you are alive. For example, how do you wish to be cared for while you are alive, but incapacitated? Who is going to make decisions about how you are cared for? Who is going to make sure that your financial affairs are being taken care of who? Who is going to pay your bills, file your tax returns, elect your insurance coverage and care for your home? A complete estate plan should not only address how your affairs will be handled after you die, but also how you are cared for while you are alive. A complete estate plan should include all of the following:

- A will or revocable trust.
- A financial power of attorney that authorizes an agent to manage your finances if you become incapacitated.
- An advance medical directive that includes a health care power of attorney (or health care proxy), a living will, and a HIPAA authorization authorizing your agent to have access to your medical information and to discuss your care with your physicians.

Other matters you may wish to include as part of your estate plan include a personal property memorandum that outlines how your personal property should be distributed and funeral or burial instructions. Dealing with the death or incapacity of a loved one is always difficult even if the loved one has a complete and thorough estate plan. If there is no plan, the only way to deal with the issues that need to be addressed is through a court proceeding. [Source: Federal News Network | Mike Causey | October 30, 2019 ++]

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## Great Depression

### Gallup Vault | Gloomy Outlook

Ninety years ago this month, the New York Stock Exchange collapsed in an event commonly known as Black Tuesday. The events of Oct. 29, 1929, precipitated the worst economic downturn in U.S. history and a depression that would cloud the nation for a decade. Gallup was founded in October 1935, right in the middle of the Great Depression, and many of its earliest questions asked Americans about employment, the economy and the government's role in reviving it.



In 1937, few Americans (15%) reported owning stocks or bonds listed on a stock exchange -- a much smaller percentage than is the case today -- perhaps because some were scared off by the events of 1929, but more likely because few Americans had money to invest. Americans' predictions for the economy were decidedly gloomy in the 1930s. In 1936, two in three Americans (67%) believed that yet another depression was on the horizon, and an even greater 83% believed that poverty would never be "done away with" in the U.S. Cities across the country became dotted with shantytowns, where unemployed, evicted and poverty-stricken people built makeshift huts for shelter. The shantytowns became known as "Hoovervilles" -- a dig at former President Herbert Hoover, whose presidency had barely begun when the stock market crash occurred and who received much of the blame from critics.

But most Americans in 1938 resisted labeling the economic crisis with Hoover's name -- two in three Americans said it wasn't fair to call the slump the "Hoover depression." A smaller majority (53%) rejected labeling it as the "Roosevelt recession/depression," as then-President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal had gone into effect. Roosevelt is largely credited with stabilizing the U.S. economy with his sprawling New Deal in the 1930s. But reviews of his approach were mixed at the time, as Americans' views on the government's newly enhanced role fluctuated. Six in 10 Americans in 1935 said the government's expenditures for relief and recovery were "too great." Yet in 1937, most Americans (54%) felt the government should repeat Roosevelt's spending policies if another depression struck. That same year, few Americans sought to do away with the Works Program Administration (21%).

Although exactly how the Great Depression ended is debatable, the economy rebounded in the 1940s as the U.S. fought in World War II. But the Depression had left its mark on Americans. In 1944, more than one in four (27%) reported that they or their head of household had struggled to find employment during the Depression -- and the vast majority of these respondents (72%) said they were out of work for a year or longer. [Source: Gallup | Justin McCarthy | October 22, 2019 ++]

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## Free Cash Scam

### False Promise of Unclaimed Rewards

Free cash you didn't know you had? It sounds like a dream come true, but it's actually a trick many consumers have reported to [BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://BBB.org/ScamTracker). In this scheme, con artists use the false promise of unclaimed rewards to fool consumers into giving up their credit card information.

#### How the Scam Works

- You receive a postcard in the mail, an email, or a message on social media stating you have an unclaimed reward that can be redeemed with major retailers, such as Walmart and Target stores. According to the message, your reward is worth \$100 dollars or more. But you had better act quickly, because you only have a few more days to redeem it. You are given a phone number to call to find out how to get your reward.
- When you call, you are asked for personal information in order to “confirm your identity.” Con artists may ask you for your name, address, government ID number, or other sensitive details. Once your identity is confirmed, you may be asked to pay a small fee to cover mailing costs. Now, the person needs your debit or credit card number. Scammers will have gained access to your personal information and may attempt to make fraudulent charges using your card information. And, of course, your “unclaimed money” will never arrive because it never existed.

#### Tips to avoid this scam

- Think you have unclaimed assets? In the United States, there is no central place to look for unclaimed assets. [Unclaimed.org](http://Unclaimed.org) has links to resources for each US state (and some Canadian provinces). In Canada, unclaimed balances are transferred to the Bank of Canada, where residents can claim them.
- Be wary of unsolicited correspondence. If you receive an unsolicited letter, phone call, email or any other kind of correspondence from a stranger, be careful! Most legitimate companies will not contact you this way unless you have previously given them permission to do so.
- Never give your personal information to strangers. Never give anyone you don't know and trust access to any of your personal information. This includes your full name, phone number and address, your ID numbers, and your banking information.

#### For More Information

To find out more about how to protect yourself from scams and con artists, visit [www.BBB.org/ScamTips](http://www.BBB.org/ScamTips). In the United States, learn more about unclaimed money and how find it at [USA.gov/unclaimed-money](http://USA.gov/unclaimed-money). If you've been the victim of a scam, help others avoid the same fate by reporting your experience on the [www.BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://www.BBB.org/ScamTracker). [Source: BBB Scam Alert | October 11, 2019 ++]

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## Publisher Clearing House Scam

### Imposters Are Back Again

You've won – a new car! Millions of dollars! Cash for life! The crazy thing is you don't even recall entering the contest. Con artists pose as Publishers Clearing House and play on our desire to “get rich quick.”

#### How the Scam Works

- You receive a phone call, text message, email, social media message or even a letter in the mail claiming you've won millions of dollars or another high value prize through Publishers Clearing House. The correspondence seems real. It's complete with official seals and contact information for the contest organizer. It typically lists affiliation with legitimate organizations, such as Better Business Bureau, the IRS, the FDIC, and major retailers.
- The catch? You are responsible for paying shipping and handling, insurance, taxes, and other fees before you can claim your prize. Scammers may pressure you to pay quickly, claiming that if the fees aren't paid in this specific way and right on time, you'll forfeit your prize money.
- A few thousand dollars may not sound like much compared to the millions you've just won. However, con artists keep asking you, the "lucky winner," to pay again and again. But it's never enough to get the funds transferred. Of course, in the end, your prize money never existed.
- The real Publishers Clearing House is a BBB Accredited Business with a good rating, and it never asks people to pay upfront fees for anything. The company is frequently mimicked by scammers because of its reputation for real prizes.

### Tips to avoid these scams

- Reach out to Publishers Clearing House: If you are contacted by a scammer impersonating PCH, report by calling (800) 392-4190. Also, PCH provides a tollfree customer service number (800-645-9242), which consumers can call at any time to check on suspicious behavior.
- Be wary of unsolicited correspondence. If you receive a notice out of the blue and can't recall entering the contest, it's likely a scam. Look for typos and misspellings. They are tell-tale signs of a scam.
- Never pay fees to claim a prize. You should never have to pay any fees upfront before receiving winnings. Not even taxes.
- Keep track of any contests you enter. You can't win a contest you didn't enter. If you often enter contests and sweepstakes, keep track of them. This will help you spot a fake contest.

### For More Information

Get more tips for spotting a Publisher Clearing House scam on their website's [fraud information center](#). To learn more about sweepstakes scams and how they work, see BBB's [study](#) on these scams. If you've been the victim of a scam, please report it to [www.BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://www.BBB.org/ScamTracker). By sharing your experience, you can help others avoid falling victim to similar scams. [Source: BBB Scam Alert | October 25, 2015 ++]

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## Charity Scam

### Learn to Avoid During International Charity Fraud Awareness Week

Con artists are experts at playing to our emotions. In honor of International Charity Fraud Awareness Week (October 21-25), BBB Wise Giving Alliance offers these tips on what to watch out for in a charity scam.

### How the Scam Works

- Scammers can use charitable causes to tug on your heartstrings, so it is important to stay vigilant as you try to do good. Bad actors can try to hook you by misleadingly claiming that they will help particular individuals (like veterans or cancer patients), using robocalls deceitfully suggesting they represent a particular charity, or selling items with the false promise of benefiting a cause.
- Donors also need to be on guard when responding to appeals by individuals on crowdfunding sites, particularly during the wake of a disaster. While there are a number of ways to check out charitable organizations, it is difficult to vet so many individuals requesting help on crowdfunding sites.



- You may stumble across such online content while surfing the web or scrolling through your social media feed. Sometimes though, fraudsters reach out to you directly via an email, social media direct messages, or even door-to-door campaigns. To help donors avoid disappointment or potential fraud, the first and most important step is to find out more about the charity before giving.

**Tips to avoid charity scams**

- Watch out for charity name confusion. Be alert to questionable groups seeking to confuse donors with names that sound similar to charities you know.
- Resist pressure to give on the spot. Don't give in to excessive pressure on the phone to make an immediate donation.
- Find out more about the charity. The charity's website provides access to information on its programs, board roster and finances. You can also verify government registration. About 40 of the 50 states in the U.S. require charities to register with the attorney general's office or secretary of their state. In Canada, check with the Canada Revenue Agency.
- Do an online search to reveal potential scams. Search the person or charity in question along with the words "complaint" and "scam." What you find could reveal a dishonest scheme. BBB Scam Tracker can help you learn from others' experiences (BBB.org/ScamTracker).
- Check for BBB charity accreditation. Visit charity reports on Give.org to verify if the organization meets the 20 BBB Standard for Charity Accountability (i.e., a BBB Accredited Charity.) There is no charge to charities for accreditation.

**For More Information**

BBB is joining charity regulators, associations, and others for the second annual International Charity Fraud Awareness Week (ICFAW) from October 21 to 25. For more resources, visit BBB Wise Giving Alliance's website (Give.org) for smart giving tips. If you've been the victim of a charity scam, report it to [www.BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://www.BBB.org/ScamTracker). By sharing your experience, you can help others avoid falling victim to similar scams. [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | October 18, 2019 ++]

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**Tax Burden for South Dakota Retired Vets**

**As of OCT 2019**

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

**Sales Taxes**

**State Sales Tax:** 4.50% (prescription drugs exempt); municipalities may add up to an additional 2 %. Residents who are age 65 and older and have a yearly income of under \$12,060 (single) or in a household where the total income was under \$16,240 are eligible for a sales tax refund. The Special Tax Division, 445 East Capitol Avenue, Pierre SD 57501 Phone: (800) 829-9188 Option 2, Email: [specialT@state.sd.us](mailto:specialT@state.sd.us), Division Director: Doug Schinkel is responsible for the sales and property tax refund program for the elderly and disabled.

**Gasoline Tax:** 48.40 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Diesel Fuel Tax:** 54.40 cents/gallon (Includes all taxes)

**Cigarette Tax:** \$1.53 cents/pack of 20

\* Tax rates do not include local option tax of 1 cent.

### Personal Income Taxes

No state personal income tax

**Retirement Income:** Not taxed.

### Property Taxes

Property taxes in South Dakota can be levied by school districts, cities, townships, counties, water districts, and additional special districts for specific purposes such as fire protection or sanitary systems. They are based on a home's true market value, which is determined annually by the county director of equalization in each county. All property is to be assessed at full and true value. Then the property is equalized to 85% for property tax purposes. Property taxes are assessed and collected by local government entities. A tax freeze and/or municipal property tax reduction is available for seniors age 65 and older and disabled persons. The state has several other property tax relief programs. For additional details, [click here](#).

There is a property tax exemption for disabled veterans. Veterans that have been rated as permanently and totally disabled as the result of a service-connected disability may be eligible for up to \$100,000 of their property value to be exempt from property taxes. [Click here for details](#).

The state has a property tax Homestead Exemption that delays payment of property taxes until the property is sold. Taxes are a lien on the property and must be paid along with 4% interest before the property can be transferred. For a single person, his or her annual income must be less than \$16,000. For a multi-member household, the limit is \$20,000. For more information [click here](#).

For more information on all property taxes, [click here](#) or call 800-829-9188.

### Inheritance and Estate Taxes

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

### **Other State Tax Rates**

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

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

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For further information visit the South Dakota Department of Revenue site <http://dor.sd.gov> or call 800-829-9188.

[Source: <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-by-state> | October 2019 ++]

**\* General Interest \***



## Notes of Interest

October 16 thru 31, 2019

- **Veterans Day Discounts.** Veterans Day is on 11 NOV and many businesses are honoring the day with discounts, deals and freebies. Before you head out to cash in on any of the deals, it's always a good idea to call ahead to make sure the location near you is planning to offer the deal. For a 26 page alphabetical listing of what business in the U.S are offering this year go to <http://www.veteranprograms.com/discounts.html>.
- **Quid pro quo.** Latin for “something for something” — is a legal phrase describing an arrangement where you give someone something they want, but only if that person gives you what you want.
- **Military Retiree Events.** Following are upcoming Retiree Appreciation Days and other retiree events.
  - 1 NOV: Annual Retiree Summit, Career Fair & MWR Showcase, Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, Virginia Beach, VA Time: 9:00 A.M. until 1:30 P.M.
  - 2 NOV: Retired Military Seminar Event, Naval Base San Diego, Anchors Catering and Conference Center - Bldg 3210, 2375 Yuma Way, San Diego, Ca 92136 Time: 0730 to 1330. Please RSVP as space is limited: 866-923-6478
- **COLA Watch.** The September 2019 CPI is 250.251, 1.6 percent above the FY 2019 COLA baseline. The Consumer Price Index for October is scheduled to be released Nov. 13. The CPI baseline for FY 2019 is 246.352. Learn more about CPI on the BLS web page.
- **Army NGVC.** Looking for more range, more punch, and more options for its Next Generation Combat Vehicle, the Army has turned to Northrop Grumman to provide the 50mm gun that can rip through armor, or reach out and touch targets that current infantry vehicles can't. At <https://youtu.be/dca9WTu1syY> Northrup unveiled their proposed NGVC gun.
- **Animal Cruelty.** The House by voice vote approved H.R.724 - Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act which the law's backers said they hoped would get the Senate to act soon on a companion bill. Animal cruelty would become a federal offense with a penalty of up to seven years in prison under this proposed expansion of an animal welfare law.
- **POW/MIA Flag.** A bipartisan bill introduced in the U.S. Senate requiring the POW/MIA flag to be flown with the American flag at certain memorials and federal buildings, including the White House and the U.S. Capitol has been sent to the president for signature.
- **Refrigerator replacement advice.** A repair guy's answer was basically this: “I don't care if you buy a \$700 Whirlpool or a \$12,000 KitchenAid. All refrigerators these days use circuit boards — sensitive electronics that don't do well in a damp, dusty environment. And most are made in China. So, an appliance that used to routinely last 20-plus years now breaks down in under 10. In short, they're all crap.” Check out [Why Modern Appliances Don't Last](#).
- **Passports.** Passports are available to family members free of charge for the purpose of visiting their loved one's grave or memorialization site at the American military cemeteries on foreign soil.
- **TSA.** The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) offers expedited screening to severely injured members of the U.S. Armed Forces. In addition to offering curb to gate service for our nation's Wounded Warriors, these individuals will also be eligible to move through security checkpoints without having to remove shoes, light outerwear jackets or hats.
- **HISA Program.** Under the Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) program, veterans with service-connected disabilities or veterans with non-service connected disabilities may receive assistance for any home improvement necessary for the continuation of treatment or for disability access to their home and essential lavatory and sanitary facilities. See your VSO for more information.
- **Wheelchairs.** Between January and August 2019 — the latest month for which data is available — U.S. airline carriers reported having mishandled at least 6,915 wheelchairs and scooters. That's an average of 29 times a day. The most popular solution: Let passengers keep their chairs and sit in them during flights.

- **Excess towels and blankets.** Most household contain these and all they do is take up closet space. They're just no longer among the favored ones we reach for. Some animal shelters welcome donations of old towels and blankets. Check with your local organizations to see if your discards can help kitties and puppies stay warm.
- **USS John S. McCain.** The guided-missile destroyer is undergoing sea trials, its first trip to sea since suffering hundreds of millions of dollars in damages during a 2017 fatal collision.
- **Music video.** Check out 'I Don't Look Good Naked Any More' at <https://youtu.be/OOgd9hitEAE> .

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

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## Trump Border Wall

### Update 03: Senate Sustains Veto of Military Base Project Money Use

The Senate voted 17 OCT to sustain President Donald Trump's veto of Democratic-sponsored legislation reversing his raid of military base project money to pay for the U.S.-Mexico border wall. The 53-36 vote was well short of the two-thirds required to overturn the veto. The vote mirrored ones last month and in March in which a number of Republicans broke with Trump in defending lawmakers' power of the purse. The military projects in question included base schools and target ranges. In February, Trump declared the security situation along the border a national emergency. That decision enabled him to take up to \$3.6 billion from such projects to finance wall construction beyond the miles that lawmakers have been willing to fund.

Democrats reacted with outrage and some GOP senators opposed Trump as well. Top Republicans such as Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky had urged Trump not to do it. But once Trump acted, McConnell and others fell into line even as 10 Republicans broke with Trump on Thursday's vote. "The president's emergency declaration is an unconstitutional power grab. Congress has not fully funded his requests for border wall funding," said Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM). "But this president will not accept Congress's judgment. Or our constitutional authority. His emergency declaration is an exercise of power that is just not his under the Constitution."

Trump has obtained just over \$3 billion for border barrier construction by working through regular congressional channels, subject to limitations imposed by lawmakers. He has used various transfer and emergency authorities to shift almost \$7 billion more from the emergency declaration, a forfeiture fund containing money seized by law enforcement, and funding for military counterdrug activities. Last week, a federal judge in Texas ruled that Trump had exceeded his authority in reallocating the money for military construction to the border wall. The Supreme Court in July issued a stay on a ruling by a California court that blocked Trump from carrying out the maneuver.

The Pentagon recently identified \$3.6 billion worth of military construction projects it's willing to kill in order to build 175 miles (282 kilometers) of border wall. The projects included a \$63 million middle school in McConnell's state of Kentucky, though most of the projects are outside the continental U.S. [Source: The Associated Press: | Andrew Taylor | October 18, 2019 ++]

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## Syria

### Update 04: Russian & Syrian Troops Fill Void as U.S. Pulls Out

U.S. forces have played the role of peacekeeper in the Syrian city of Manbij since its Kurdish-led partner force liberated the city from ISIS fighters in 2016. Turkish threats to "liberate" Manbij despite the removal of ISIS fighters from the city years ago forced joint patrols between Russian, U.S. and Turkish forces to keep the peace. That peace

could soon melt away as Col. Myles B. Caggins III, the spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve, announced 15 OCT the U.S. had pulled its forces out of the Syrian city. Russian and Syrian troops have reportedly stepped up to fill the void of the vacating U.S. forces. Meanwhile, most U.S. forces in Syria are pulling out of the country.



**Turkish troops walk alongside an armoured personnel carrier through the town of Tukhar, north of Syria's northern city of Manbij, on Oct. 14, 2019, as Turkey and it's allies continues their assault on Kurdish-held border towns in northeastern Syria.**

A U.S. official told The Associated Press that the approximately 1,000 U.S. troops being withdrawn from northern Syria will reposition in Iraq, Kuwait and possibly Jordan. The official spoke to the AP on 15 OCT on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive planning for a U.S. pullout amid heavy fighting between Turkish and Syrian Kurdish forces. The official said the American troops have pulled out of the Manbij area, where U.S. outposts were set up in 2017. Troops are consolidating their positions to prepare to fly out of the country soon. The official says U.S. troops based in Iraq could conduct cross-border operations against the Islamic State group in Syria as they did before creating the now-abandoned partnership with Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces.

According to The Washington Post, Russia announced its forces were patrolling between Syrian and Turkish troops near Manbij. Syrian state run media SANA reported Monday that Syrian forces had also entered the city of Manbij. Syrian regime forces have been streaming toward the Syria-Turkey border following an agreement with the Syrian Democratic Forces to help thwart Turkish operations targeting Kurdish fighters in northern Syria. In 2017, the U.S. military referred to its patrols in Manbij as “reassurance and deterrence” to help keep the peace between combative allies. With the U.S. out of the picture, the stage is set for a potential bloody conflict between the major players in Syria’s civil war that has raged since 2011.

Secretary of Defense Mark Esper announced 14 OCT that the White House had ordered a “deliberate withdrawal” of U.S. forces from northeast Syria in an attempt to avoid “being engulfed in a broader conflict.” In a statement from the White House President Donald Trump said that U.S. force leaving northeast Syria would “now redeploy and remain in the region to monitor the situation and prevent a repeat of 2014.” Trump also announced a small number of U.S. troops would remain at the al Tanf garrison near the Syria-Iraq border to help disrupt ISIS fighters. Turkey launched military operations 9 OCT against U.S.-backed Kurdish fighters in northern Syria. Turkey believes SDF fighters are an armed wing of the internationally designated terrorist group the Kurdistan Workers’ Party or PKK. Trump said he would be signing an executive order to impose sanctions on current and former Turkish officials who have contributed to the “destabilizing actions in northeast Syria.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Shawn Snow | October 15, 2019 ++]

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## Syria

### Update 05: Turkey Dismisses U.S. Calls for a Ceasefire

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has dismissed US calls for a ceasefire in northern Syria and said that he's not worried about American-imposed sanctions, or the advancement of Russian-backed Syrian forces toward the Turkish border. Speaking to journalists traveling on his presidential plane following a visit to Azerbaijan 15 OCT, Erdogan said a ceasefire was off the table. "Declare a ceasefire, they say. We will never declare a ceasefire," Erdogan said. "We do not sit at the table with terrorist organizations." Erdogan's comments come as Russian-backed Syrian regime troops on Tuesday gained control of the town of Manbij and surrounding areas, until recently an active US military outpost.

Russia has stepped up its role in the Syrian conflict by deploying military police to the country's north -- filling a vacuum left by the withdrawal of US troops from the area. Russian units are patrolling a contact line between Syrian and Turkish forces, according to a statement by Russia's Defense Ministry. On Tuesday, Russia's presidential envoy on Syria, Alexander Lavrentiev, told state news agency TASS that Moscow "won't allow" clashes between Turkish and Syrian forces on the ground. After Turkey launched a long-threatened offensive across the border into Kurdish-controlled northeastern Syria last week, local Syrian Kurdish leaders struck a deal with Syria's government in Damascus to enforce the border.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) who operate in the area are led by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which Turkey considers a terrorist organization affiliated with the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The SDF, however, are US allies that were considered instrumental in the fight against ISIS in northern Syria. Turkey's offensive, called the Peace Spring Operation, is aimed at clearing Kurdish forces away from its border area and resettling 2 million Syrian refugees currently hosted in Turkey into a 18.6 mile "safe zone" along the border.

On 14 OCT, Trump tweeted a statement saying he would soon authorize via executive order new sanctions on current and former Turkish officials. He said he'd also reimpose heavy duties on Turkish steel and cut off trade talks. It marks an attempt by the White House to adopt a firmer stance after facing harsh criticism from Republican lawmakers and senior national security veterans for withdrawing US troops from northern Syria, paving the way for Turkey's military offensive. But Erdogan told reporters onboard the presidential plane Tuesday that his government is "not worried" about any US sanctions. "They are pressuring us to stop the operation (in northern Syria). They are announcing sanctions. Our goal is clear. We are not worried about any sanctions," he said.

According to the Russian Defense Ministry, Syrian government forces have taken control of two areas in northern Syria on Tuesday -- more than 1,000 square kilometers around the town of Manbij and an area in Raqqa around the town of Tabqa. Erdogan said Tuesday that Syrian regime forces entering Manbij was "not very negative for me" so long as Kurdish "terrorists" are cleared from the region. "It's their lands after all. But what is important to me is that the terrorist organization does not remain there," he said. The Turkish president said he told Putin, a key ally of the Syrian government, that "if you are clearing Manbij of terrorist organizations, then go ahead, you or the regime can provide all the logistics. But if you are not going to do this, the people there are telling us to save them."

Erdogan also told reporters that the latest delivery of a Russian-made S-400 missile defense system -- which Washington opposes Ankara buying -- will arrive in November or December. The first delivery of components arrived in July and Erdogan's comments are likely to further rile up US officials, who have threatened to level sanctions against Turkey if the system ever became operational. The State Department had repeatedly warned that "Turkey will face very real and very negative consequences if it completes the delivery of the S-400," as spokesperson Morgan Ortogus said at the end of May. [Source: CNN | Helen Regan & Taylor Barnes | October 16, 2019 ++]

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## Syria

### Update 06: U.S. Continues to Fly Drones | Turks Ceasefire shaky



The United States will continue to fly drones over northeast Syria to monitor the state of play on the ground and keep watch over prisons holding thousands of Islamic State prisoners and their families, a senior defense official said 18 OCT. The flights will keep US eyes on the region even as American troops evacuate their bases in the face of the Turkish invasion this week, which has seen proxy forces murder formerly US-backed Syrian and Kurdish civilians in intense fighting. The speed of the American withdrawal after President Trump issued a surprise announcement on 8 OCT that the US was pulling back its troops was reflected in the fact that American F-15s had to bomb an American base, a former cement factory, to render it unusable for approaching Syrian and Russian troops.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper held an impromptu briefing with reporters at the Pentagon 18 OCT before departing for meetings with allies in the Middle East and Europe, saying he “just got off the phone” with Turkish Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar, demanding Turkey “must adhere to the full terms” of the ceasefire Turkey pledged this week with Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces fighters. Reports of clashes on the border between Turkey and Syria continued 18 OCT, despite Vice President Mike Pence’s announcement he and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reached a five-day ceasefire. The ceasefire is meant to allow Kurdish forces time to withdraw from a 20-mile safe zone along the Turkish border. In a sign of the confusion caused by Trump’s sudden pullout and the subsequent Turkish invasion, a Pentagon statement 18 OCT said the SDF would leave the region. But a defense official later clarified the statement should have read “YPG,” a Kurdish self-defense force Turkey says is part of a separatist Kurdish terrorist group which has also helped the US in its counter-ISIS operations. The US-trained SDF is led by Kurdish commanders, but has thousands of local Arab fighters in its ranks.

The mixup underscored the wider uncertainty over the ceasefire and what the agreement actually promises. “We got what we wanted. This is not a ceasefire. We only halt our operations,” Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said. On 17 OCT, Esper and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark Milley spent much of the day on Capitol Hill briefing angry Senate and House Armed Services Committee members in classified hearings on Turkey’s incursion into Syria. Adding to the strained relationship between the US and Turkey, Pentagon acquisition chief Ellen Lord told reporters at the Pentagon 18 OCT she sees “no change to return Turkey to the F-35 program” after it was kicked out of the program due to the purchase of the Russian S-400 air defense system. Lord added that while Turkish companies still make some 900 parts for the aircraft, that participation should end by March 2020. [Source: Breaking Defense | Paul McLeary | October 18, 2019]

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## Presidency & War Power

### Congress' Need to Restore Separation of Powers Concept

Most Americans are familiar with the concept of the separation of powers, which James Madison crafted as integral to the Constitution. That concept mandates that Congress writes the laws, the president enforces them, the courts decide what they mean and interpret them, and the three branches of government don't step on each other's toes. The separation of powers also recognizes that the Constitution reposes unique authority in each branch and, at times, in each house of Congress. For example, only the Senate can confirm judges and ambassadors and ratify treaties. Only the House can impeach high-ranking executive branch officials and federal judges. Only Congress can declare war, and only the president can decide how to use the military to fight a declared war.

The war powers are clearly articulated in the plain language of the Constitution itself — Congress declares and the president wages. Madison himself argued that if the president could both declare and wage wars, he'd not be a president but a prince. This distinction between declaring and waging was recognized for nearly 200 years, until Congress muddied the waters in 1973 by enacting the War Powers Resolution. That law permits the president to wage any war against any foreign enemy without a congressional declaration of war for 90 days. This is clearly unconstitutional; the Supreme Court has ruled numerous times that the branches of the federal government cannot cede away powers that have been firmly fixed by the Constitution.

When the tragedy of 9/11 took place, President George W. Bush did not use the War Powers Resolution as his legal basis for invading Afghanistan. Rather he sought express authority for the invasion from Congress. Congress, rather than declaring war on Afghanistan (Bush had persuaded Congress that the 9/11 culprits found haven there), enacted a morally ambivalent law known as the Authorization for Use of Military Force of 2001. That statute permitted Bush and his successors to fight against any foreign entity that planned or facilitated the 9/11 attacks and to continue fighting even after the targeted entity had been defeated. Bush sought and received another morally ambivalent AUMF in 2002, which authorized him to wage war in pursuit of any governments that harbored weapons of mass destruction, notably Iraq.

Former New Jersey Superior court Judge Andrew P. Napolitano characterizes both AUMFs as morally ambivalent because they are open-ended. When Congress declared war on the Axis powers in December 1941, those declarations authorized President Franklin Roosevelt to wage war on them only until they surrendered and not thereafter. But the two **AUMFs have no stated endpoint**. They have an implied endpoint, however. The logical and moral endpoint of the AUMF of 2001 came when the folks who took over the government of Afghanistan and used its government power — this is Bush's version — to stage and support 9/11 were defeated and killed. The logical and moral endpoint of AUMF of 2002 came when Saddam Hussein was deposed, no weapons of mass destruction were found, and Washington installed a friendly (lately, not so friendly) regime in Iraq.

Napolitano offers this brief legal and historical background in order to address the current furor raging over the decision of President Donald Trump to withdraw American troops from Syria. From Syria? What are they doing in Syria? The United States has had a financial and quasi-military relationship with the Kurdish people who live in northern Iraq — an area they call Kurdistan — since the end of World War I. The financial support has come via covert sources. Stated differently, from the CIA. The Kurds — who are furious fighters — in turn have supported western interests in the region. In 2017, Trump ordered American troops into Syria to support the Kurds, whose homeland had become threatened by the forces combatting each other in Syria, and who were in the crosshairs of the president of Turkey. Trump used the AUMF of 2001 as his legal authority for sending troops to Syria. That AUMF, of course, was enacted to crush those who perpetrated 9/11, not to assist friendly groups 16 years later anywhere in the world.

Nevertheless, Trump's 2017 decision was consistent with the long-standing, nearly 100-year support that American governments have given to the Kurds. And the Kurds have relied on the continuation of that support. On 6 OCT Trump



changed his mind about military support for the Kurds. He did so after a telephone conversation he had with the president of Turkey, who views the Kurds as terrorists. Trump was told that if American troops stayed in Syria, they risked injury by Turkish troops. However, if they did leave the Kurds would be on their own and subject to whatever action the Turkish president decided to take against them. His decision to withdraw the troops caused a firestorm among many in Congress.

Trump ran for office promising to bring the troops home. He may have made the latest decision to do so without adequate warning to his military commanders, but his decision is utterly consistent with his promises, and it is utterly in compliance with the Constitution. Now is the time for Congress — which is largely angry at the presidential use or nonuse of the military — to **repeal both AUMFs and the War Powers Resolution** and reclaim its constitutional power as the sole entity in the federal government able to declare war. Until it does, these profoundly outdated, morally ambivalent and overtly unconstitutional statutes lie in the presidential desk drawer like a loaded gun. [Source: Jewish world Review | Andrew P. Napolitano | October 10, 2019 ++]

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## Hitler Artwork

### Auction Pieces Bring 270,000 Pounds

It is well-known that Adolf Hitler was a painter and painted many watercolors before and during World War II. Now some of those original pieces of Hitler's artwork have gone on sale at auction and have been brought by art collectors from around the world fetching around 300,000 Pounds. To date, Adolf Hitler's paintings have only fetched small sums of money during auctions in Germany, but now the job-lot of Hitler's watercolors have commanded a lot more money. Historians have widely documented that Hitler would have liked to have been an artist and full-time painter. He painted many scenic watercolors during his time as German leader. The auction took place in Nuremberg with some of the paintings including images of nearby Neuschwanstein Castle. That painting alone fetched over 70,000 Pounds and was sold to a collector from China. Meanwhile, a still life painting of a carnation flower was sold for more than 50,000 Pounds, and others sold off included landscapes in Austria and the Czech Republic. According to German media, the entire auction made more than 270,000 Pounds.



There are many people who are against the sale of Hitler's artwork, however, their sale is not against the law since there is no Nazi symbolism on the paintings. The paintings are all signed A. Hitler and it is thought that they were painted prior to World War II and to Hitler taking the Chancellery in Germany. There are many forgeries of Hitler's work in circulation, so a collection of original, authentic paintings is unusual. Most of those purchasing the paintings were private investors from all over the world including Asia, South America, the Middle East, as well as Germany, the Mirror reports. The auction house says that there aren't really collectors who specialize in owning Hitler's paintings, but that the buyers all generally have an interest in significant artworks. [Source: Together We Served | October 2019 ++]

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## **Overseas Holiday Mail**

### **2019 Deadlines**

Summer is barely over, but it's time to start thinking about the holidays, especially when it comes to getting packages overseas in time for the troops. The U.S. Postal Service helps with your planning. They've just announced recommended mailing deadlines to get those goodies overseas in time for Christmas. To get them there in time for Hanukkah, which starts on Dec. 22 this year, subtract three days from the deadlines. The deadlines for various methods of shipping are the same for most APO/FPO/DPO (Air/Army Post Office/Fleet Post Office/diplomatic post office) ZIP codes. The exception is mail going to ZIP code 093, which covers overseas contingency areas.

- USPS Retail Ground mail (the slowest way to go, formerly known as Standard Post): Nov. 6.
- Space Available Mail (SAM): Nov. 27.
- Parcel Airlift Mail (PAL): Dec. 4.
- First-Class and Priority Mail (letters, cards and packages): Dec. 11, except for ZIP 093, which is Dec. 9.
- Priority Mail Express Military Services: Dec. 18. This service is not available for ZIP 093.

Plan to use the U.S. Postal Service's Priority Mail Flat Rate boxes. The boxes themselves are free; you can stuff whatever you can fit into them, and they cost one flat fee to ship your goodies, regardless of weight. There's a \$1.50 discount per box for those going to APO/FPO/DPO addresses. For example, the largest box military discounted price is \$18.45. The boxes come in various shapes and sizes. The boxes are available at post offices, and at [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com). The Postal Service has also created a "military care kit," which consists of the items most often requested by military families. It's free, and can ordered by calling 800-610-8734. The kit has:

- Two Priority Mail APO/FPO/DPO flat rate boxes
- Four Priority Mail medium flat rate boxes
- Priority Mail tape
- Priority Mail address labels
- Customs forms

At [https://store.usps.com/store/product/shipping-supplies/military-care-kit-P\\_MILITARYKIT](https://store.usps.com/store/product/shipping-supplies/military-care-kit-P_MILITARYKIT) the Postal Service provides guidelines for packing, addressing and shipping items. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | October 10, 2019 ++

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## **Lying**

### **10 Indicators It May Be Happening**

Let's face it: Most of us lie every day. A famous [study](#) by a psychologist at the University of Massachusetts found that "60% of people lied at least once during a 10-minute conversation and told an average of two to three lies." Most of us are not very good at spotting a lie. And science so far hasn't done much better. Polygraph machines (popularly referred to as lie detectors) aren't reliable enough to be used in most courts. And while brain researchers keep trying to unravel the mechanism of lying, they have come up with nothing definitive. Even so, knowing a few things about lies and their tellers might someday help you. Here are some of the more popular techniques researchers and others working in law enforcement recommend when trying to spot a lie:

#### **1. Voice changes**

Changes in a person's normal behavior can betray discomfort of some sort, and might be a tip-off to lies. These departures from normal behavior are most useful when you are observing someone you know well and are familiar

with their normal patterns, and departures from those patterns. If you don't know your subject well, spend time paying attention to how she or he normally talks and acts when relaxed. Is her speech normally slow or quick, loud or soft? What is the quality of his voice usually like? Then, watch for distinct, but not subtle, changes from the normal pattern, retired FBI criminal profiler Gregg McCrary tells [Real Simple](#).

## **2. Fidgeting**

Guilt and the accompanying anxiety are thought to cause some people — although perhaps not accomplished liars — to squirm and fidget. But experts disagree on whether fidgeting really is a telltale sign of lying. Again, it might be more important to know whether fidgeting is typical for a person, or if it is an unusual behavior. Some people do the opposite of fidgeting — they cope with stress by standing still or freezing.

## **3. Protesting too much**

“The lady doth protest too much, methinks,” says Queen Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, while watching a play in which a character swears she'll never remarry if her husband dies. The queen is pointing out that liars sometimes give themselves away by making too big a point of proclaiming their innocence. A twist on this is when someone loudly denies guilt or takes offense at the idea they might be thought guilty even though no one has actually accused them of anything. This hostile defensiveness can include finger-pointing.

## **4. Vowing honesty**

Liars often work too hard to demonstrate their honesty, and that can be a dead giveaway. They'll make too much use of vows and expressions like “to tell the truth,” “to be perfectly honest,” “I swear on a stack of Bibles” and “as God is my witness.”

## **5. Subtle eye movements**

Lying is thought to be stressful for most liars. They have to think about what's true and concoct a story that departs from the truth, causing a level of strain that, even when it's subtle, may be observable. This stress can show up in a number of unconscious gestures. Liars are said to look away, or perhaps glance at an exit, betraying a desire to escape, says Psychology Today. Liars sometimes point their feet or even move their bodies in the direction of the exit.

## **6. Throat clearing**

When you are talking with someone who clears his or her throat repeatedly or continues swallowing hard, see if you can figure out the reason for it. The person might just have something stuck in their throat, but be aware that stress can make your mouth dry, forcing a liar to try to relieve the condition.

## **7. TMI**

Liars, at least unskilled ones — and we can all hope that the liars in our lives at least aren't very good at it — may try to create a distraction by offering much too much information. If you find yourself wondering why you're getting all this unnecessary detail, sit back, watch and listen. Then, ask yourself what's going on.

## **8. Touching the mouth**

People who hold their hands around their mouth, covering it or touching it, are unconsciously betraying the fact that they're lying, behavioral analyst Lillian Glass tells Business Insider: “When adults put their hands over their lips, it means they aren't revealing everything, and they just don't want to tell the truth,” she says. “They are literally closing off communication.”

## **9. Signs of nervousness**

Nervousness betrays many liars. Signs of nervousness aren't hard to spot. For example, someone who is nervous may experience changes in their breathing tempo. Under stress, a person's shoulders rise and fall, and his or her voice rises.

## **10. Fixed staring**

Blinking, looking away and the inability to look you in the eye are supposed to be signs of evasion with some people. Others, though, may look you right in the eye and lie — but they can give themselves away by staring too intently or

failing to blink, Glass says. This brazen behavior might be the sign of a more-accomplished liar. Financial scammer Bernard Madoff, “like most con men, overcompensated and stared at people longer than usual, often without blinking at regular intervals,” Glass tells Business Insider.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | [https://youtu.be/tgJBL\\_A40Es](https://youtu.be/tgJBL_A40Es) | October 1, 2019 ++]

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## Interesting Photos

### 02: Copenhagen Power Plant



The Amager Bakke power plant in Copenhagen is topped with an artificial ski run. Its synthetic bristles aim to simulate a freshly groomed slope.

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## Oath of Office

### What It Means for Public Servants

Federal employees, Representatives, Senators, judges, political appointees, the President and Vice President of the United States take an oath of office. So what does taking an oath mean? Why even do it? The reason is simple – public servants are just that – servants of the people. After much debate about an Oath, the framers of the U. S. Constitution included the requirement to take an Oath of Office in the Constitution itself. Article VI of the Constitution says, “The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.” The Constitution does not prescribe the actual text of the Article VI oaths. For federal civil service employees, the oath is set forth by law in 5 U.S. Code § 3331, which reads as follows:

“An individual, except the President, elected or appointed to an office of honor or profit in the civil service or uniformed services, shall take the following oath: “I, \_\_\_, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.” The President is also required by the Constitution to take an Oath of Office. Article 2, Section 1, of the U.S. Constitution prescribes the Oath. It says, “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.”

The Oaths are relatively straightforward, but what do they mean? The oath has 3 important aspects. First, the employee swears to support and defend the Constitution against enemies. Second, they swear allegiance to the Constitution. Finally, the employee promises to do their job well.

One thing that federal workers often hear is a career supervisor or political appointee talking about loyalty to the agency or the boss. One purpose of the Oath of Office is to remind federal workers that they do not swear allegiance to a supervisor, an agency, a political appointee, or even to the President. The oath is to support and defend the U.S. Constitution and faithfully execute your duties. The intent is to protect the public from a government that might fall victim to political whims and to provide a North Star – the Constitution – as a source of direction. Other laws have been enacted that support that view. For example, in 1939, Congress passed and President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Hatch Act. We call it that today, but the actual name of the law is “An Act to Prevent Pernicious Political Activities.” The Oath does not remove ambiguity and it is not always easy for an employee to know what to do. Here are a few examples:

- **Lawful orders.** Let’s say someone in authority gives a federal worker a lawful order that s/he does not agree with. That disagreement might be for ethical reasons, differences in policy direction, or other reasons. Federal employees are required to follow lawful orders, even if they disagree with them.
- **Unlawful orders.** 5 USC 2302(b) (9)(D) gives employees the right to refuse with respect to unlawful orders. Refusing an unlawful order is not easy. The employee may face significant pressure to carry out an order that s/he knows is unlawful. Most employees never have the experience of being given an unlawful order. In the few cases it has happened to me, an explanation to my boss that what I was asked to do was illegal was sufficient and the matter was dropped. If it had not been enough, my only acceptable course would be to refuse to carry out the order. Doing something illegal because you are “just following orders” is not a viable defense.
- **Regulatory violations.** What happens when an order violates a regulation or rule, but is not technically illegal? A 2015 Merit Systems Protection Board decision directly answered that question. MSPB outlined the issues in the case, writing “Specifically, the appellant asserted that the agency violated 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b) (9)(D), which protects employees from retaliation “for refusing to obey an order that would require the individual to violate a law.” 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b) (9)(D). He alleged that the agency improperly stripped him of particular job duties and gave him a subpar performance rating for disobeying an order that would have required that he violate (1) a Federal Acquisition Regulation that limits the authority of a contracting officer’s representative (COR), and (2) “PA296: How to be a COR,” the agency’s training course for COR certification, which further clarifies the limitations to this authority.” MSPB’s final decision said “...we hold that the right-to-disobey provision at section 2302(b) (9)(D) extends only to orders that would require the individual to take an action barred by statute. Because the appellant in this case contends that he disobeyed an order that would have required him to violate an agency rule or regulation, his claim falls outside of the scope of section 2302(b) (9)(D).” That means a manager could discipline or even remove an employee for failing to carry out an order that violates a regulation but not a law.
- **Other situations.** The oath of office and most case law do not grant any protection for deciding that an order is a bad idea, bad policy, or morally wrong. In fact, the oath does not grant any protection from anything. It is an oath of allegiance and a promise to do good work. Employees who believe they are being ordered to act in a manner inconsistent with their oath of office may pursue other options, such as

whistleblower complaints, contacting their Senators or Representatives or their organization’s Inspector General, or any other avenue provided by law or regulation. Disobeying direct orders is generally not one of the available options. That means an employee who wants to argue that s/he is adhering to the oath of office by disobeying orders has a very tough hill to climb. There is also the option of going to the press, but that can bring its own set of risks. It is up to individual employees to decide how much risk they are willing to assume.

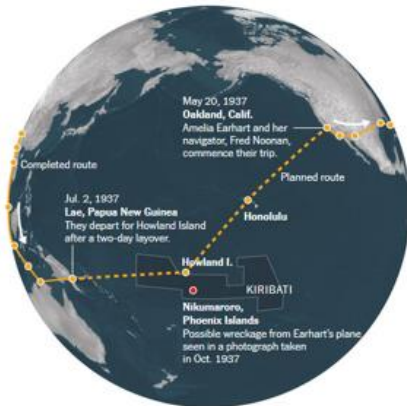
Federal workers are accountable to the people, not to politicians. Whether an employee was a Trump supporter or Clinton supporter, a supporter of another candidate, or someone who chooses not to vote at all is not relevant to the oath of allegiance to the Constitution. Nor is it relevant to the promise to do a good job. Most federal employees are highly professional. They understand their oath of office and take it seriously. Even though many political appointees in every Administration do not recognize the professionalism of federal workers on the day they take their own oath of office, as their experience with federal workers increases, they typically begin to recognize the vital role federal employees play.

We have been hearing more and more from people who say that federal workers should support the President more, or that federal workers should actively work against the President. We heard that to a lesser degree in the Obama Administration too. Neither is true. Federal workers should *do their jobs, obey the law, and carry out their oath* to support and defend the Constitution. That is what most of the American people expect and deserve from their public servants. [Source: Federal News Network | Jeff Neal | October 24, 2019 ++]

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## **Amelia Earhart Mystery** **Stays Down in the Deep**

For two weeks in August, a multimillion-dollar search from air, land and sea sought to solve the 80-year mystery of Amelia Earhart’s disappearance. Robert Ballard, the ocean explorer famous for locating the wreck of the Titanic, led a team aboard the research vessel Nautilus that discovered two hats in the depths. It found debris from an old shipwreck. It even spotted a soda can. What it did not find was a single piece of the Lockheed Electra airplane flown in 1937 by Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan, which vanished during their doomed voyage around the world. Dr. Ballard and his crew don’t consider it a failure. For one thing, he says, they know where the plane isn’t. And in the process, they may have dispensed with one clue that has driven years of speculation, while a team of collaborating archaeologists potentially turned up more hints at the aviator’s fate. “This plane exists,” Dr. Ballard said. “It’s not the Loch Ness monster, and it’s going to be found.”



**Amelia Earhart’s Last Flight**

Dr. Ballard had avoided the Earhart mystery for decades, dismissing the search area as too large, until he was presented with a clue he found irresistible. Kurt Campbell, then a senior official in President Barack Obama's State Department, shared with him what is known as the Bevington image — a photo taken by a British officer in 1940 at what is now known as Nikumaroro, an atoll in the Phoenix Islands in the Republic of Kiribati. American intelligence analysts had enhanced the image at Mr. Campbell's request, and concluded a blurry object in it was consistent with landing gear from Earhart's plane. Motivated by this clue, and by 30 years of research on Nikumaroro by the International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery, Dr. Ballard and his crew set a course for the island in August. They were joined by archaeologists from the National Geographic Society, which sponsored and documented the journey for "Expedition Amelia," which aired on the National Geographic Channel on 20 OCT.

Dr. Ballard and Allison Fundis, the Nautilus's chief operating officer, coordinated an elaborate plan of attack. First, they sent the ship five times around the island to map it with multibeam sonar, and deployed a floating autonomous surface vehicle to map shallower areas off the island's shore. They also used four aerial drones for additional inspections of the surrounding reef. Nikumaroro and its reef are just the tip of a 16,000-foot underwater mountain, a series of 13 sheer escarpments that drop off onto ramps, eventually fanning out at the base for six nautical miles. If Earhart crashed there, they believe, rising tides would have dragged her plane over the reef, and down the escarpments. Fragments should have collected on the ramps, especially heavier components like the engine and the radio.

In deeper water the team deployed the Hercules and the Argus, remotely operated vehicles equipped with spotlights and high-definition cameras. These robots descended 650 feet around the entire island, and found nothing. At that point, the crew focused on the northwest corner of the island near the S.S. Norwich City, a British freighter that ran aground on the island in 1929, eight years before Earhart's disappearance. That is the area where the Bevington photo was taken. While they searched there, crew members found so many beach rocks consistent in size and shape with the supposed landing gear in the Bevington image that it became a joke on the ship. "Oh look," Dr. Ballard would chuckle, "another landing gear rock." Ms. Fundis said, "We felt like if her plane was there, we would have found it pretty early in the expedition." But she said they kept up their morale because Dr. Ballard reminded them that it took four missions to find the Titanic, and that one of those expeditions missed the ship by just under 500 feet.

The crew mapped the mountain's underwater drainage patterns and searched the gullies that might have carried plane fragments down slope, to a depth of 8,500 feet. Crew members even searched roughly four nautical miles out to sea, in case the plane lifted off the reef intact and glided underwater as it sank. Each time a new search tactic yielded nothing, Dr. Ballard said, he felt he was adding "nail after nail after nail" to the coffin of the Nikumaroro hypothesis. Still, Dr. Ballard and Ms. Fundis confess that other clues pointing to Nikumaroro have left them with lingering curiosity about whether Earhart crashed there. For instance, Panamerican Airway radio direction finders on Wake Island, Midway Atoll and Honolulu each picked up distress signals from Earhart and took bearings, which triangulated in the cluster of islands that includes Nikumaroro.

For years, many Earhart historians have been skeptical of the Nikumaroro theory. And Dr. Ballard, Ms. Fundis and their team's return to the island will now depend on whether the archaeologists from the National Geographic Society came up with evidence that Earhart's body was there. Fredrik Hiebert, the society's archaeologist in residence, has some leads. His team awaits DNA analysis on soil samples taken at a bivouac shelter found on the island. The camp, known as the Seven Site for its shape, was first noticed by a British officer in 1940. Thirteen bones were gathered then and sent to a colonial doctor in Fiji, who determined they belonged to a European man. The bones were subsequently lost. Decades later, the International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery, or Tighar, tracked down the doctor's analysis. Richard Jantz, director emeritus of the Forensic Anthropology Center at the University of Tennessee, determined that the bones most likely belonged to a woman, and that Earhart's build was "more similar to the Nikumaroro bones than 99 percent of individuals in a large reference sample."

Since the 1980s, Tighar has conducted 12 expeditions to Nikumaroro in an effort to find more skeletal remains. It turned up other items from a castaway's existence at the camp, but never any bones or DNA. Dr. Hiebert's team is

hoping to use new techniques to identify evidence of mitochondrial DNA with similarities to Earhart's living relatives in the 22 soil samples they collected. Before the expedition, Dr. Hiebert and Erin Kimmerle, a forensic anthropologist, visited the National Museum in Tarawa, Kiribati's capital. On an unmarked shelf, Dr. Kimmerle spotted remnants of a female skull. The team now awaits DNA analysis of the specimen.

In 2021, the Nautilus will be in the South Pacific fulfilling a contract to map underwater American territories. That will bring the ship to the area around Howland Island, Earhart's intended destination for refueling before her plane disappeared. Dr. Ballard and Ms. Fundis plan to make time to explore the alternate theory favored by some skeptics of the Nikumaroro hypothesis: that Earhart crashed at sea closer to Howland. Ms. Fundis considers Earhart a role model, which gives her the "fuel to keep going," she said. And Dr. Ballard explained his own motivation to continue the search. "In many ways, I'm doing this for my mother," he said, describing her as a "brilliant woman" who grew up in Kansas, like Earhart, but dropped out of college to raise three children. His mother, Harriett Ballard, admired Earhart, and hoped she might pave the way for her children, or perhaps grandchildren, to pursue adventurous careers. Dr. Ballard's daughter, Emily Ballard, was among the crew of the Nautilus, hunting for Earhart's plane. "I'm not giving up," he said. [Source: The New York Times | Julie Cohn | October. 14, 2019 ++]

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## Paint

### Update 01: Storage and Disposal Guidelines

Do you want to ensure your paint is properly stored so that it's good later? Have paint cans that you need to get rid of, but you don't know how? Here's how to safely store and dispose of your paint.

#### Storage

1. *Seal it Up* -- Seal the paint can properly before you put it away to keep the paint from drying up. If any paint has gotten in the grooves of the paint can, wipe it with a clean rag. Use a rubber mallet to tap the lid down securely. Don't use a hammer - it can distort the lid, making it more difficult to securely seal the can. If you don't have a mallet, you can cover the can with a piece of wood and then hammer the lid closed.
2. *Location* -- Store paint in a cool, dark location like a basement. If you do store it in the basement, make sure that it's on a shelf. Moisture from basement floors can rust your paint cans. If you don't have a basement, place them in a cabinet or closet in your house. Extreme hot or cold temperatures can ruin paint. Cold weather can cause latex paint to separate, making it unusable. Heat can dry it out. Very hot temperatures can even trigger a fire with oil-based paints.
3. *Space Savers* -- If you have cans that are halfway or almost empty, transfer the remaining paint into quart cans or large jars. Then use some labels and a marker to list the brand, paint name, date of purchase, mixture number and the room that you painted. Place a small dollop of paint on the top or side of the can to easily identify the color. If you have more than one color for a room (such as wall color and trim), keep them together. If you're feeling especially organized, you can use a label maker and mark each room on the shelf front.
4. *Reopening a Can* -- Opening a paint can after it's been sealed for a long time can be difficult. But avoid using a screwdriver to open it. The lid can become warped and it will be difficult to seal it in the future. Use a key that's especially designed for opening paint cans. Lowe's will give you one with your paint purchase.
5. *Shelf Life* -- Latex or water-based paint typically has a shelf life of ten years. Solvent or oil-based paint can last up to fifteen years. You can test to see if your paint is still good by doing the following:
  - Latex - First, smell it. Does it smell rancid? If it does, it's gone bad. Secondly, check to see if the paint is separated. There will usually be a thin skin on top with a layer of liquid underneath. Remove the skin and using a paint stick, stir the paint. Check to make sure that the paint isn't hard on the bottom or the sides. If the paint blends together smoothly and appears to be the original color, then it's OK to use. If you're still



unsure, brush some of the paint onto a piece of newspaper. If the paint comes out rough and lumpy, you need to dispose of it.

- Oil-Based - If it hasn't been exposed to extreme temperatures and was sealed properly, then oil-based paint typically isn't as susceptible to going bad as latex. Just remove the layer of film across the top and stir it well before painting.

### **Disposal**

Paint can be toxic and dangerous to the environment if not disposed of properly. Follow these steps for safely getting rid of that extra paint that you no longer need.

*Latex Paints* -- Here's how to dispose of latex paint without taking it to a recycling center.

Step 1: Add equal parts cat litter to latex paint in the can. If you have more than a half a can, you can also pour the paint into a lined box or trash can. Then pour in cat litter.

Step 2: Stir the cat litter into the paint until it thickens and will not spill. Allow the mixture to sit for one hour.

Step 3: Throw the dried paint in the can in the garbage. Make sure to remove the lid.

Good to Know. If you don't have much paint left in the can, you can just remove the lid and let the paint dry out on its own. Make sure that it's in a location where small children or pets can't get to it. There are also commercial paint hardeners that you can purchase if you prefer not to use cat litter. Just follow the manufacturer's instructions.

### *Oil-Based Paints*

Step 1: Oil-based paints are considered hazardous waste and must be taken to a recycling center. Look for a recycling center in your area to safely dispose of your latex and oil-based paints.

Good to Know. Consider donating your paint to a community center, charity, place of worship, local theater or Habitat for Humanity ReStore. They're often working on projects with a limited budget and could use the extra supplies.

[Source: <https://www.lowes.com> | October 29, 2019 ++]

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## **Have You Heard?**

### **Military Humor 7 | Target Letter | Bubba**

#### **Military Humor 7**

My high school assignment <sup>[SEP]</sup>was to ask a veteran about World War II. Since my father had served <sup>[SEP]</sup>in the Philippines during the war, I chose him. After a few basic questions, I very gingerly asked, "Did you ever kill anyone?"

Dad got quiet. Then, in a soft voice, he said, "Probably. I was the cook."

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When I lost my rifle, the Army charged me \$85. That's why in the Navy, the captain goes down with the ship.

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During basic training at Fort Leavenworth, our sergeant asked if anyone had "artistic" abilities. Having been an architectural draftsman in civilian life, I raised my hand. Then the sergeant announced that everyone would get a three-day pass ... except me. I would stay behind and neatly print each soldier's name onto his Army-issued underwear.

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The steaming jungles of Vietnam were not my husband's first choice <sup>[SEP]</sup>of places to spend his 21st birthday. However, the mood was brightened when he received a birthday cake from his sister. It was carefully encased in a Tupperware container and came with this note: "Dick, when you're finished, can you mail back my container?"

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We were inspecting several lots of grenades. While everyone was concentrating on the task at hand, I held up a spare pin and asked, "Has anyone seen my grenade?"

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The military has a long, proud tradition of pranking recruits. Here are some favorites from rallypoint.com:

- Instructed a private in the mess hall to look for left-handed spatulas
- Sent a recruit to medical-supplies office in search of fallopian tubes
- Had a new guy conduct a “boom test” on a howitzer by yelling “Boom!” down the tube in order to “calibrate” it
- Ordered a private to bring back a five-gallon can of dehydrated water (in fact, the sergeant just wanted an empty water can)

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My 90-year-old dad was giving a talk at our local library about his World War II experiences. During the question-and-answer period, he was asked, “How did you know the war was over?”

He replied, “When they stopped shooting at me.”

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### **Target Letter**

A retiree’s wife insisted that he accompany her on her trips to Target. Unfortunately, like most men; he found shopping boring and preferred to get in and get out as quickly as possible. Equally unfortunate, his wife like most women loved to browse. After about 5 months of accompanying her his wife received the following letter from the local Target:

*Dear Mrs. Murphy:*

*Over the past few months, your husband has caused quite a commotion in our store. We cannot tolerate this behavior and have been forced to, ban both of you from the store. Our complaints against your husband, Mr. Murphy, are listed below and are documented by our video surveillance cameras:*

1. June 15: He took 24 boxes of condoms and randomly put them in other people's carts when they weren't looking.
2. July 2: Set all the alarm clocks in Housewares to go off at 5-minute intervals.
3. July 7: He made a trail of tomato juice on the floor leading to the women's restroom.
4. July 19: Walked up to an employee and told her in an official voice, 'Code 3 in Housewares. Get on it right away'. This caused the employee to leave her assigned station and receive a reprimand from her Supervisor that in turn resulted with a union grievance, causing management to lose time and costing the company money. We don't have a Code 3.
5. August 4: Went to the Service Desk and tried to put a bag of M&Ms on layaway.
6. August 14: Moved a, 'CAUTION - WET FLOOR' sign to a carpeted area.
7. August 15: Set up a tent in the camping department and told the children shoppers he'd invite them in if they would bring pillows and blankets from the bedding department to which twenty children obliged.
8. August 23: When a clerk asked if they could help him he began crying and screamed, 'Why can't you people just leave me alone?' EMTs were called.
9. September 4: Looked right into the security camera and used it as a mirror while he picked his nose.
10. September 10: While handling guns in the hunting department, he asked the clerk where the antidepressants were.
11. October 3: Darted around the store suspiciously while, loudly humming the, 'Mission Impossible' theme.
12. October 6: In the auto department, he practiced his, 'Madonna Look' using different sizes of funnels.
13. October 18: Hid in a clothing rack and when people browsed through, yelled 'PICK ME! PICK ME!'

14. October 22: When an announcement came over the loudspeaker, he assumed a fetal position and screamed; 'OH NO! IT'S THOSE VOICES AGAIN!'

15. Took a box of condoms to the checkout clerk and asked where is the fitting room? And last, but not least:

16. October 23: Went into a fitting room, shut the door, waited awhile; then yelled very loudly, 'Hey! There's no toilet paper in here.' One of the clerks passed out.

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### **Bubba**

His name was Bubba, he was from Mississippi ... And he needed a loan, So... He walked into a bank in New York City and asked for the loan Officer. He told the loan officer that he was going to Paris for an International redneck festival for two weeks and needed to borrow \$5,000; and that he was not a depositor of the bank.

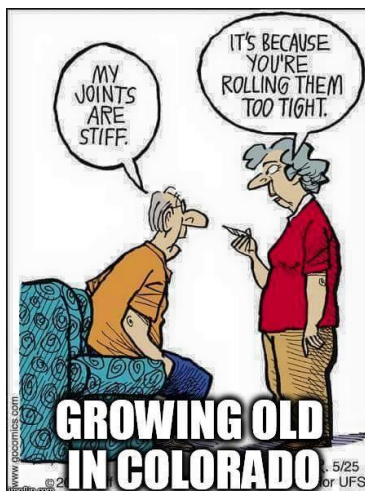
The bank officer told him that the bank would need some form of security for the loan, so the Redneck handed over the keys to a new Ferrari. The car was parked on the street in front of the bank. The Redneck produced the title and everything checked out. The loan officer agreed to hold the car as collateral for the loan and apologized for having to charge 12% interest. Later, the bank's president and its officers all enjoyed a good laugh at the Redneck from the South for using a \$250,000 Ferrari as collateral for a \$5,000 loan. An employee of the bank then drove the Ferrari into the bank's private underground garage and parked it.

Two weeks later, the Redneck returned, repaid the \$5,000 and the interest of \$23.07. The loan officer said, "Sir, we are very happy to have had your business, and this transaction has worked out very nicely, but we are a little puzzled. While you were away, we checked you out on Dunn & Bradstreet and found that you are a Distinguished Alumni from Ole Miss University, a highly sophisticated investor and Multi-Millionaire with real estate and financial interests all over the world. Your investments include a large number of wind turbines around Sweetwater, Texas. What puzzles us is, why would you bother to borrow \$5,000?"

The good 'ole boy replied, "Where else in New York City can I park my car for two weeks for only \$23.07 and expect it to be there when I return?"

His name was BUBBA.... Keep an eye on those southern boys!

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Restroom toe opener for those who want to avoid doorknob germs



As the Years Roll By

## Thought of the Week

“If you feel like giving up, just look back on how far you are already. Stay the course.” — *Unknown*

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### Notes:

1. The Bulletin is provided as a website accessed document vice direct access. This was necessitated by SPAMHAUS who alleged the Bulletin’s size and large subscriber base were choking the airways interfering with other internet user’s capability to send email. SPAMHAUS told us to stop sending the Bulletin in its entirety to individual subscribers and to validate the subscriber base with the threat of removing all our outgoing email capability if we did not. To avoid this we notified all subscribers of the action required to continue their subscription. This Bulletin notice was sent to the 19,473 subscribers who responded to that notice and/or have since subscribed. All others were deleted from the active mailing list.

2. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines, whether or not they live there, can request to be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of notices on Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, and TRICARE in the RP.

3. New subscribers and those who submit a change of address should receive a message that verifies their addition or address change being entered in the mailing list. If you do not receive a message within 3 days it indicates that either I never received your request, I made an error in processing your request, or your server will not allow me to send to the email addree you provided. Anyone who cannot reach me by email can call (858) 842-1111 to ask questions or confirm info needed to add them to the directory.

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6. The Bulletin is normally published on the 1st and 15th of each month. To aid in continued receipt of Bulletin availability notices, recommend enter the email addree [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) into your address book. If you do not receive a Bulletin check either [www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html](http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html) (PDF Edition), [www.veteransresources.org](http://www.veteransresources.org) (PDF & HTML Editions), <http://veteraninformationlinksasa.com/emos-rao.html> (PDF & HTML Editions), or <http://frabr245.org> (PDF & HTML Editions) before sending me an email asking if one was published. If you can access the Bulletin at any of the aforementioned sites it indicates that something is preventing you from receiving my email. Either your server considers it to be spam or I have somehow incorrectly entered or removed your addree from the mailing list. Send me an email so I can verify your entry on the validated mailing list. If you are unable to access the Bulletin at any of these sites let me know.

7. Articles within the Bulletin are editorialized information obtained from over 100 sources. At the end of each article is provided the primary source from which it was obtained. The ++ indicates that that the information was reformatted from the original source and/or editorialized from more than one source. Because of the number of articles contained in each Bulletin there is no way that I can attest to their validity other than they have all been taken from previously reliable sources. My staff consist of only one person (myself) which makes it a 10-12 hour daily endeavor to prepare and publish it. Gives me something to do in my retirement years which are going on 31 now. I was a workaholic in the Navy and old habits are hard to break. Readers who question the validity of content are encouraged to go to the source provided to have their questions answered. I am always open to comments but, as a policy, shy away from anything political. Too controversial and time consuming.

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

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