

RAO BULLETIN

1 July 2020

PDF Edition



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

*** ATTACHMENTS ***

* DoD *



NDA 2021

Update 01: House Draft Proposals

Troops would see a 3.0 percent pay raise, more child care options at bases with 24-hour duty shifts, and a new basic needs allowance for low-income military families under a House draft of the annual defense budget policy bill. The measure also calls for a new military domestic violence task force to review and address the scope of that problem within the ranks and would require Pentagon leaders to collect information on the extent of the problem of anti-Semitism and white supremacist activity among the active-duty force. The proposals — all included in the personnel section of the House Armed Services Committee’s defense authorization bill for fiscal 2021 — were scheduled to be publicly unveiled and voted on by panel members 23 JUN.

Military Times obtained an advanced copy of the draft language, which included several items likely to draw the ire of the White House. The pay raise proposal, however, is not one of them. The House committee plan for a 3.0 percent pay raise next January equals the administration’s suggested raise, the raise included in a Senate Armed Services Committee bill earlier this month, and the mark dictated by federal statute to match projected increases in civilian sector wages. Altogether, the matching proposals make the 3.0 percent raise for 2021 nearly certain. It represents the first time in a decade that troops will see consecutive years with salary boosts of at least 3 percent. This past January, military pay increased by 3.1 percent.

For junior enlisted troops, the proposed raise would amount to roughly \$860 more a year in pay. For senior enlisted and junior officers, the hike equals about \$1,500 more. An O-4 with 12 years’ service would see more than \$2,800 extra next year under the increase. The basic needs allowance proposal would also boost take-home salaries for thousands of service members, but faces tougher legislative odds. White House officials successfully opposed the same idea in last year’s authorization bill, citing the potential costs. Under the plan, military families whose total pay is less than 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines (set at \$24,600 for a family of four, for example) would receive monthly stipends of several hundred dollars to help cover food, clothing and other essential costs. Military family advocates have argued for the assistance in the past, calling it a dire need and noting that one-third of military children attending Department of Defense schools qualified for free or reduced-price lunch in recent years.

Lawmakers included several new child care provisions designed to help military families. Language in the proposal calls for military leaders to provide child care to any troops or department civilian employees “working on a rotating shift at a military installation.” Military spouses who agree to provide home day care services for other military families would be granted preferential on-base housing under another bill proposal. Lawmakers have also called for several studies related to military family life, including a look into Defense Department school options and “military family readiness” issues. Pentagon leaders would also be required to establish a new domestic violence task force to collect data on the problem and propose solutions. The topic has been a major focus of the committee’s personnel panel in recent months, with victims lamenting military leadership’s inadequate reaction thus far.

Committee members revived language from last year’s defense bill draft (later dropped in inter-chamber negotiations) to poll troops on signs of “racist, anti-Semitic, or supremacist” extremist ideology among active-duty

forces amid numerous individual reports of such activity in recent years. With the ongoing coronavirus pandemic still threatening much of the country, committee members included language in the measure mandating that defense officials “have the diagnostic equipment, testing capabilities, and personal protective equipment necessary to protect members of the Armed Forces from the threat of infectious diseases.” That work includes refining plans to research and develop vaccines for infectious diseases (something the White House has already tapped military officials to help with) and increasing service leaders’ ability to recall retirees with specialized medical skills to help with the response.

Another mandate would require defense leaders to work with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine on a study to determine the incidence of cancers among military pilots, after news reports suggested those service members could face additional medical risks. House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-WA) already indicated he will include in the authorization bill a billion-dollar pandemic response and preparedness fund to help boost production of key medical equipment sought by states in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. And the panel will suggest several new policies related to preventing sexual assault and harassment, including prohibiting the prosecution of minor offenses against victims who report sexual assault and requiring the victims and accused perpetrators at military service academies to be kept separate but still both allowed to continue their studies.

A Provision from the Subcommittee on Intelligence and Emerging Threats and Capabilities calls for the National Guard and Reserve components to assist in defending the nation in cyberspace. It requires a review of statutes and rules that pertain to the use of the National Guard for response and recovery from significant cyberattacks. The bill defines a cyber incident as significant if the event results in demonstrable harm to the national security interests or economy of the United States and the public confidence, civil liberties, or public health and safety of the American people. A separate provision in the bill requires an evaluation of nontraditional cyber support to the Department of Defense. The assessment will include an evaluation of Reserve and Guard support to cyber operations forces; an evaluation of various Reserve, Guard, auxiliary and nontraditional support models to include those that can be utilized domestically and internationally; and an evaluation of dedicated reserve components specific to U.S. Cyber Command.

A Paid Parental Leave benefit provision would extend the benefit awarded to most federal employees in 2020 to all staffers at VA, the Federal Aviation Administration, and a few other agencies “inadvertently omitted” from the original policy change. Supporters of the plan blamed their exclusion on technical issues with how certain employees are classified in government statutes. More than 90,000 employees in the VA system alone would be affected by the change. If the new proposal becomes law, those workers could see up to 12 weeks of paid leave for care of a newborn, adopting a child or fostering a minor. The defense authorization bill typically includes provisions focused solely on the military and connected agencies. But last year, in an effort to win over progressive lawmakers skeptical of significant defense spending increases, House leaders included parental leave for federal workers as part of the nearly 1,000-page bill.

The bill requires a feasibility study of allowing military spouses to contribute to their service member's Thrift Savings Plan. Committee aides say that Members are interested in determining whether this might help to improve retention of families. Also, a five-year pilot program would be created to issue maternity uniforms to pregnant service members for free. After the pregnancy, the uniform would be returned to be reissued to other service members.

Another piece of the bill listed under items of special interest — which means HASC is directing a briefing to just the House — requires a report on the National Guard’s cyber mission assurance teams. Those teams are part of a pilot program to harness the cyber talent resident within the Guard to protect critical infrastructure connected to military installations, the bill read. “Efforts such as the nascent CMAT program are important as the military services seek to better understand the operational risks, to include cybersecurity, of domestic installations,” the bill language stated. “The committee seeks greater fidelity on how the CMAT program will align to the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s regional construct, as well as work with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency’s Critical Infrastructure Vulnerability Assessments program and the Protective Security Advisors program.”

As both public and private entities struggle to find top cyber talent, the Guard and Reserve forces can provide a bevy of resources to help protect the nation from cyber incidents, so the argument goes. The Senate's version of the bill requires the DoD conduct a review of National Guard responses to cyberattacks and an evaluation of cyber reserve force options to provide a surge capability. It also authorizes a pilot program to prepare the Guard to provide cyber assistance remotely in the event of a cyberattack.

Committee aides from both sides of the aisle stress the bipartisan nature of this bill. As HASC ranking member Rep. Thornberry (R-TX) noted in his statement, this "is not the bill I would have written, but on the whole, it is one I agree with and can support." In fact, it includes many of the reform proposals Thornberry proposed earlier this year. The bill itself is shorter than in years past, largely because of the limitations created by working remotely in a pandemic environment. Thornberry, in his statement, indicated he has a few areas of concern. He highlighted the increased number of reports and briefings from the Pentagon, "imposing a substantial burden without an obvious oversight benefit." He added that some items in the bill, such as perfecting changes to last year's expansion of paid parental leave to all federal employees, fall outside HASC's jurisdiction.

The full package was subject to amendment during the 24 JUN markup. The full committee will be in a large hearing room, with enough space to allow for physical distancing between all 57 committee members and a few staff. All of the provisions will have to survive debate among the full House Armed Services Committee later this month and negotiations with Senate lawmakers later this summer before becoming law. [Source: NavyTimes + | Leo Shane III & Joe Gould + | June 20 thru 27, 2020 ++]

NDAA 2021

Update 02: Senate Votes to Start Debate

Senators voted 90 to 7 to start debating the NDAA, and almost 120 amendments were filed in the first 12 hours after the bill was formally filed 23 JUN. Senate Armed Services Committee Sen. Inhofe (R-OK) wants to have a manager's package of amendments ready to offer on the floor by 26 JUN, and to finish work on the bill before they leave for the July 4th break. This will only happen if Senators cooperate and rapidly reach agreement as issues arise. Among the amendments filed as of the morning of 25 JUN were:

- Restriction to the procurement of items containing PFOA and PFAS, including non-stick cookware, food packaging materials, furniture, carpeting, personal care items, dental floss, and sunscreen, by Sen. Blumenthal (D-CT)
- Requirement that the President report to Congress within 48 hours of invoking the Insurrection Act of 1807, by Sen. Blumenthal (D-CT)
- Allowance for time taken for maternity leave to be counted towards retirement by members of the reserve components, by Sen. Moran (R-KS)
- Authorization for the US to participate in the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovation (CEPI), with a \$200 million authorization for global health security, by Sen. Menendez (D-NJ)
- Creation of a Basic Needs Allowance for service members whose gross household income does not exceed 130% of federal poverty guidelines for their location and family size, by Sen. Duckworth (D-IL)
- An additional \$5 million for the CDC study on the health effects of PFOS and PFOA, to \$15 million, by Sen. Shaheen (D-NH)
- Creation of a registry of those exposed to PFOS/PFOA on military bases to track their health, by Sen. Shaheen (D-NH)
- Requirement for annual reports on military personnel and extremist ideologies, by Sen. Bennet (D-CO)
- Report required on the effects of COVID-19 mobilization on the behavioral and physical health of the National Guard, by Sen. Bennet (D-CO)

- Briefing on the effects of climate change on the health of service members, by Sen. Bennet (D-CO)
- Development of human-based training methods to train people in the treatment of combat trauma, to replace the use of training that uses live animals, by Sen. Wyden (D-OR)
- Repeal of the Selective Service Act, by Sen. Wyden (D-OR)
- Expansion of the Burn Pits Registry to include sites in Syria and Egypt, by Sen. Gillibrand (D-NY)
- Creation of a process to allow veterans service organization representatives to participate in the Transition Assistance Program sessions, by Sen. Schatz (D-HI)
- Prohibition against constructing a wall, fence, or associated roads on the southern border using military construction funding, by Sen. Blumenthal (D-CT)
- Sen. Durbin (D-IL) submitted something similar
- Report on hazardous waste incinerators used to dispose of PFOS and PFOA, by Sen. Duckworth (D-IL)
- Study and report on DoD's surge capacity to establish negative air pressure rooms in military treatment facilities, by Sen. Collins (R-ME)
- Expansion of eligibility for VA coverage of medical and nursing home services for World War Two veterans, by Sen. Menendez (D-NJ)
- GAO report required on VA's handling of disability benefits claims by veterans with type 1 diabetes who were exposed to a herbicide agent, by Sen. Menendez (D-NJ)
- Report on the Navy's pandemic preparedness and plan, by Sen. Collins (R-ME)
- Support for service members undergoing deployment and their families beyond the Yellow Ribbon Integration Program, by Sen. Sanders (I-VT)
- Limitation on the use of funds for military operations under the auspices of existing AUMFs, by Sen. Durbin (D-IL)
- Pilot program to increase the number of people training to provide prosthetic and orthotic care to the military and to veterans, by Sen. Durbin (D-IL)

Majority Leader McConnell (R-KY) brought up the FY21 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) reported the bill to the floor with only two votes against it, after considering 391 amendments. In remarks on the Senate floor on 26 JUN, McConnell said, "I hope and expect this body will be able to put partisanship aside and honor the bipartisan tradition that has defined this crucial bill for decades." If enacted, this will be the 60th consecutive year Congress has gotten the NDAA over the finish line.

One issue sure to see floor action will be the treatment of military memorials to those who served the Confederate States of America, including the naming of bases. The Senate NDAA would create a commission to figure the situation out over the course of three years. Earlier in the week, however, dozens of Democrats signed onto legislation introduced by Sen. Warren (D-MA) that would change those names within a year. [Source: VVA GA Newsletter | June 26, 2020 ++)

Military Racial Disparities

Legal Officers Concede Still Exist in Justice System

The military's top legal officers conceded on 16 JUN that racial disparities still exist within the military justice system, and said that improvements need to be made. But lawmakers and advocates say that overdue acknowledgement isn't enough. "We've got to quit talking about some of these things that may or may not be the problem, and we have to figure out what the root causes are," said Rep. Trent Kelly (R-MS), a former district attorney and current Army Guardsman. "I think right now, we're failing horribly." Members of the House Armed Services Committee on 16 JUN voiced concerns that despite numerous indications in recent years that minority black service members are more likely treated unfairly in the military justice system, service leaders have done little to research or address the discrepancy.

A Government Accountability Office report released in May 2019 found evidence that black and Hispanic troops were more likely than their white peers to be investigated by military commanders and tried in courts-martial, but not any more likely to be found guilty. They also found inconsistencies in how racial data related to court cases is collected, and chastised military leaders for being slow to react to the report recommendations a year after they were released. The GAO findings echoed similar work by the outside advocacy group Protect Our Defenders, which has fought with service officials for years over the release of the legal data. Retired Col. Don Christensen, president of the group, said military officials have had some of the information for decades but largely kept close hold of it. "There is a long track record of doing nothing," he told lawmakers.

Tuesday's hearing came amid a national conversation on racial inequities prompted by the death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man who died while being arrested on 25 MAY. Four former Minneapolis police officers — fired after the killing — have been charged with crimes as a result. One, Derek Chauvin, has been charged with murdering Floyd. Military officials at the event said that diversity and equality are core values of the military, but acknowledged that isn't enough to prevent problems in how minorities are treated by the military bureaucracy. "As good as our justice system is, we can never take for granted its health or its fairness," said Lt. Gen. Charles Pede, Judge Advocate General for the Army. "It requires constant care by well-trained law enforcement educated commanders and qualified attorneys, working together with Congress."

Lt. Gen. Pede and leaders from the other services said military leaders are looking into the problems raised in the GAO report and potential solutions to address them. An Air Force Inspector General report is due later this summer. "We have to get after this," said Maj. Gen. Daniel Lecce, Staff Judge Advocate to the Commandant of the Marine Corps. "We're at the beginning, but there is a lot of work to be done. Commanders need to drive this." But committee members said those types of promises so far have amounted to "little more than some unconscious bias training" and not enough aggressive action. "The way things have always been done is unacceptable, the results are repugnant," said Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) and chairwoman of the committee's military personnel panel. "I hope that all our military leaders in the room can accept that as a starting point for the change we must lead. We must seek new solutions."

Last year, as part of the annual defense authorization bill, lawmakers mandated an assessment of "racial, ethnic and gender disparities within the military justice system" amid concerns about the problems. Military officials said they are still working on that analysis, but Speier noted that the work could have started years earlier without congressional intervention. "It would have been a whole lot better if (the idea) came from you." The Defense Department witnesses said several reports are due later this summer, and promised increased focus on the topic. Committee officials in turn promised increased scrutiny on the topic until they are confident Pentagon leaders have made it a priority. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 16, 2020 ++]

Military Racial Disparities

Update 01: SecDef Efforts to Eliminate

Defense Secretary Mark Esper said 18 JUN that the military was committed to rooting out racism in the ranks and serving as an example to the nation of an institution that values diversity and equality. "More often than not, we have led on these issues. However, we are not immune to the forces of bias and prejudice -- whether visible or invisible, conscious or unconscious," Esper said in a [video message](#) to the force. "We know this bias burdens many of our service members, and has direct and indirect impact on the experiences of our minority members, the cultural and ethnic diversity of the force, and representation in our officer ranks. "These things have no place in our military, they have no place in our country," he said.

To bring about change, Esper said he met with senior officers and enlisted leaders over the past week on ways to promote inclusion and create equality of opportunity. The military led the nation on ending segregation after World

War II, Esper noted. "We all agreed it is time to lead once again on this issue as America's most respected institution and as a globally recognized leader when it comes to building diverse winning teams and creating opportunity for all," he said. To that end, Esper said he was standing up within the department a new "Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion" which will be tasked to come up with a plan in the next six months to increase racial diversity in the ranks. In addition, the plan calls for a separate and independent body outside DoD to be called the "Defense Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion in the Armed Services." That new advisory committee would provide long-term guidance on racial issues, and would be modeled on the "well-regarded and successful Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services," Esper said.

Esper said he also had directed the Pentagon's uniformed and civilian leadership to present him with ideas for promoting diversity that could immediately be put in place. He suggested that a way to eliminate race as a possible factor in deciding on promotions might be by "removing photos from promotion, school, and command selection boards -- this is something I pushed as secretary of the Army as we worked to overhaul our personnel system." In his message to the force, Esper described his own roots to convey that he had an understanding of the issues. "I myself am keenly aware of how diversity is inherent in the foundations of this country," he said, although historians have consistently pointed out the profound differences between immigrants to America and those brought here in chains. "I'm a second-generation American whose paternal grandparents emigrated from Lebanon around the turn of the last Century and whose Irish ancestors from my mother's side came to this country decades before them," he added. "Each saw America as a land of hope and equal opportunity."

Esper issued the 17 JUN message amid growing tensions between DoD and the White House on the use of military forces to quell civil unrest and the renaming of military bases now honoring Confederate leaders. Esper has also expressed his regrets for participating in a 1 JUN photo op with President Donald Trump in front of St. John's Episcopal Church near the White House, after local streets were forcibly cleared of peaceful protesters. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | June 18, 2020 ++]

Military Racial Disparities

Update 02: Selection Board Photo Elimination

The Army will no longer include official photos for officer selection boards, beginning in August, to help eliminate unconscious biases in the promotion process, the service secretary and chief of staff announced 25 JUN at the Pentagon. Promotion board processes for warrant officers and noncommissioned officers are being reviewed as well, the Army's senior enlisted soldier said. An officer and enlisted soldier's race and gender are still currently visible as part of a promotion and selection board file. However, the Army is also looking at making race not visible starting with the August board, officials clarified in a statement after the press conference. "But [from] the studies we were shown it's a visual, not as much a written, discriminator," said Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston. "The unconscious bias deals with the picture, not necessarily the words."

The decision to eliminate photos stemmed from a study that began in October 2018, according to service officials. The Army ran two identical selection boards as part of an experiment. One board used photos, while the other didn't. Researchers found that when the Department of the Army photo was removed, there was less variance between voters' scoring, meaning voters ranked candidates more similarly across the board. After removing the photo, voters also took less time to make decisions on each individual file, and the outcomes for minorities and women improved. "The photo is introducing more noise than signal about the officer's talent," said Col. Carl Wojtaszek, who works with the Army Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis.

Ditching promotion photos is one part of a larger initiative that Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy called "Project Inclusion." It will involve sending Army senior leaders to installations around the force in the coming months to visit with soldiers and have "uncomfortable conversations" with troops about race, diversity, equity and inclusion. The

project also involves the review of racial disparity in the Army justice system following the release of a Government Accountability Office report last year that found black and Hispanic service members are more likely to face a trial than their white counterparts. This month, the Army's judge advocate general started an examination of racial disparity within the Army justice system, focusing on AWOL cases, urinalysis results, sexual assault and sexual harassment.

The Army is in the "very early stages of figuring out what could cause this," Lt. Gen. Charles Pede, the service's ranking attorney, told congressional lawmakers last week. Pede said he has already directed a "comprehensive assessment" in conjunction with the Army's provost marshal general "to examine why the justice system is more likely to investigate certain soldiers and what our investigations and command decisions tell us about this issue." The Army has also taken steps to increase awareness of unconscious bias and mitigate its impacts in other ways, such as updating diversity and inclusion training across its ranks, said Army Chief of Staff Gen. James C. McConville. "What makes us the world's greatest Army is unit cohesion," said McConville. "Anything that makes people feel like they're not a valued member of the team is something we have to go after." [Source: ArmyTimes | Kyle Rempfer | June 26, 2020 ++]

PFAS Toxic Exposure

Update 18: DOD Must Do More to Address Pollution



Firefighters spray foam on a house fire July 7, 2018, in Goleta, Calif.

Military service members and their families are especially at risk from forever chemicals because of the DOD's 50-year use of fire-fighting foam made with PFAS. Vietnam Veterans of America's Rebecca Patterson and Environmental Working Group's Scott Faber say Congress needs to help accelerate the cleanup of legacy PFAS contamination in installations and reduce ongoing exposures. The toxic fluorinated chemicals known as PFAS contaminate the blood of virtually every American. These chemicals have been linked to serious health problems, including cancer, harm to the reproductive system, and harm to the immune system. Americans are exposed to dozens of PFAS every day. Because PFAS never break down and build up in our blood and organs, they are often known as "forever chemicals." Military service members and their families are especially at risk. The DOD's 50-year use of fire-fighting foam made with PFAS, also known as aqueous film-forming foam (AFFF), has disproportionately exposed them to PFAS pollution.

The DOD has so far confirmed PFAS in the tap water or groundwater at 328 military installations, and the DOD suspects that hundreds of additional installations are likely to be contaminated. Until recently, PFAS contaminated the drinking water of dozens of military bases, and many communities near these installations continue to drink contaminated water. Many of the highest PFAS detections in the nation have been found on or near the DOD installations. In particular, reported PFAS levels surpassed 1 million parts per trillion (ppt) at 14 installations, far above the 70 ppt level recommended by the EPA. Tests taken at one base in Louisiana exceeded 20 million ppt. While PFOA and PFOS, the most well-known PFAS, are commonly found at the DOD installations, other PFAS associated with AFFF also contaminate groundwater on and near military installations, including PFHxS and PFBS. Like PFOA and PFOS, these chemicals have also been linked to serious health problems.

The DOD worked with 3M to develop PFAS-based AFFF in the 1960s, and some DOD officials were alerted to the risks of AFFF in the early 1970s, when Navy and Air Force studies first showed AFFF was toxic to fish. In the

early 1980s, the Air Force conducted additional animal studies on AFFF that found toxic effects. By 2000, when the maker of PFOS, the main ingredient in AFFF at that time, exited the market, the risks of AFFF were well understood. In 2001, a DOD memo concluded that PFOS in AFFF was “persistent, bioaccumulating and toxic.” But the DOD waited another decade to warn servicemembers about the risks posed by AFFF. And, despite the risks, the DOD has been slow to switch to PFAS-free AFFF alternatives and has been slow to clean up legacy PFAS pollution. One official recently testified it could take 30 years to clean up legacy PFAS pollution. What’s more, some DOD officials have argued for cleanup and screening levels that are less protective of our servicemembers and their families than those proposed by EPA.

The National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2020 included important bipartisan reforms, including provisions to phase out most military uses of fluorinated foams by 2024, ban the use of PFAS in some military food packaging, allow clean-up funds to be used at National Guard bases, and to consider state clean-up standards. The bill also expanded PFAS reporting and monitoring requirements. But, the last NDAA fell short of what’s needed to address the serious public health risks posed by PFAS to our servicemembers. In particular, Congress should do more to accelerate the cleanup of legacy PFAS contamination at installations and reduce ongoing PFAS exposures. To do so, Congress should increase funding for clean-up programs and designate PFAS as hazardous substances, which will ensure that PFAS manufacturers pay their fair share of cleanup costs. Congress should set a deadline by which the DOD determines which bases are contaminated.

Because service members are disproportionately exposed to PFAS, Congress should build upon the progress made in last year’s defense authorization bill by prohibiting other non-essential uses of PFAS. The DOD should also prohibit the incineration of legacy AFFF until incineration can be done safely. And, Congress should direct the DOD to expand blood testing to other active and retired service members, veterans, and their families, and should direct the DOD to share what they know about exposure to PFAS and the health risks service members may face.

Service members and their families risk everything to keep us safe. We must do everything we can to protect them from toxic chemicals like PFAS. It’s been nearly 50 years since the DOD officials first suspected that PFAS was toxic and nearly 20 years since the DOD confirmed that PFAS was not only toxic but building up in our blood. It should not take another 30 years for DOD to clean up legacy PFAS pollution. [Source: Bloomberg Law | Rebecca Patterson & Scott Faber (Opinion) | June 19, 2020 ++]

Arlington National Cemetery

Update 85: Expansion through Civil Condemnation Sought

The Justice Department has initiated legal proceedings to condemn nine acres of land in northern Virginia to facilitate a major expansion of Arlington National Cemetery. Government lawyers filed the civil condemnation suit 15 JUN in federal court in Alexandria. According to court papers, Arlington County will be repaid for the land with a realignment of Columbia Pike, a major highway running through the county. The condemnation will allow the cemetery to add roughly 50,000 spaces as part of a \$274 million southern expansion project that is expected to extend the life of the cemetery beyond the year 2050. The cemetery is also considering revamping eligibility rules that would slow the number of burials and extend the cemetery's life even further.

The cemetery and the county had been negotiating a land exchange for years to facilitate the expansion, but the cemetery ended those talks and proceeded unilaterally in 2017 after congressional legislation authorized the U.S. Army, which runs the cemetery, to move ahead on the expansion without exchanging any land. Court papers say county leaders have endorsed the condemnation plan and been involved in negotiating its details. More than 400,000 are buried or interred at Arlington, which conducts nearly 30 funeral ceremonies a day. Burials first began there in 1864, during the Civil War. The site had been the home of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee and was chosen in part as a way to spite the Lee family for his decision to join the Confederacy. [Source: Associated Press | June 15, 2020 ++]

DOD Defense Space Strategy

Shift to Approaching Space as a War-Fighting Domain



The Pentagon has put forward a new Defense Space Strategy designed to maintain U.S. military superiority in space amid growing counter-space efforts in Russia and China. “China and Russia have weaponized space and turned it into a war-fighting domain,” Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Stephen Kitay said during a 17 JUN press call. “Their actions pose the greatest strategic threat with ongoing development, testing and deployment of counter-space systems and the associated military doctrine designed to hold allied and U.S. space systems at risk.” The strategy reflects the Defense Department’s shift to approaching space as a war-fighting domain, which includes the establishment of both U.S. Space Command and U.S. Space Force in 2019 as well as the ongoing efforts to bolster those two organizations.

Space Command in particular has been vocal in calling out the counter-space capabilities being built and fielded by Russia, such as [direct ascent weapons](#) and potential on-orbit kinetic weapons. But the threat extends beyond [kinetic threats](#) to include electronic warfare, ground-based lasers that can blind space-based sensors, and cyberattacks. “The U.S. space enterprise was not built for the current strategic environment,” Kitay said, adding that the U.S. has historically approached space as a supporting domain, where satellites are launched into orbit and relied upon to deliver capability without interruption. Now, however, the U.S. military is preparing for conflicts that could extend into the space domain, threatening on-orbit assets that war fighters rely on for communications, navigation and intelligence. The self-stated purpose of the strategy is to ensure the space domain is secure, stable and accessible for U.S. and allied activities over the next 10 years through American military strength. Further, it will leverage its space capabilities to employ power across all domains throughout the spectrum of conflict.

“The Defense Space Strategy is the next step to ensure space superiority and to secure the nation’s vital interests in space now and in the future,” Defense Secretary Mark Esper said in a statement. “We desire a secure, stable, and accessible space domain that underpins our nation’s security, prosperity, and scientific achievement. However, our adversaries have made space a war fighting domain and we have to implement enterprise-wide changes to policies, strategies, operations, investments, capabilities, and expertise for this new strategic environment. This strategy identifies a phased approach on how we are going to achieve the desired conditions in space over the next 10 years.” To achieve these objectives over the next decade, the strategy lays out four lines of effort:

- **Build a comprehensive military advantage in space.** According to the strategy, the Department of Defense must transform its space enterprise to meet the evolving counter-space threats. To do that, the DoD must become more agile, taking advantage of technological and commercial innovation. Specifically, this line of effort calls for further support for the Space Force; development of military space power doctrines; and the further development of space war-fighting expertise and culture. This effort also includes the

fielding of assured space capabilities, including capabilities that can counter the hostile use of space. The strategy also calls for improving U.S. space-based intelligence and command-and-control capabilities.

- **Integrate space into national, joint and combined operations.** As the DoD expands its capabilities, doctrine and culture as outlined above, it plans to integrate them into national, joint and combined operations. Space Command must be enabled to plan, exercise and execute joint and combined space operations across the spectrum of conflict, and space war-fighting efforts must be integrated with military plans and staffs, including those of allies and partners. The strategy calls for the realignment of operational authorities and an updated rules of engagement that reflect this new reality. In addition, the document states that the DoD's space program security classifications should be updated.
- **Shape the strategic environment.** Under the strategy, the DoD will try to deter hostile and aggressive activities in space. Partnering with the State Department, the Pentagon will work with allies and partners to develop international norms of behavior for space that will reduce misunderstandings and conflict. In addition, the Pentagon will work to inform the public about the growing threats to U.S. space capabilities.
- **Cooperate with allies, partners, industry and other U.S. government departments and agencies.** This line of effort calls for the DoD to work with allies and partners to increase information sharing; align space policy; promote favorable standards and norms of behavior for space; and expand cooperative research, development and acquisition. In addition, the DoD will modernize its approach to the commercial licensing approval process.

[Source: C4ISRNET | Nathan Strout | June 18, 2020 ++]

Afghan War Crimes

ICC Sanctioned Over Allegations



Hague International Criminal Court

The Trump administration on 11 JUN announced a series of sanctions against the International Criminal Court (ICC), the latest salvo in a battle with the Hague-based tribunal over investigating and prosecuting American service members for alleged war crimes in Afghanistan. In an executive order President Trump declared a national emergency in response to the ICC's efforts, which the organization first announced in March. After an appeal, a judge ruled in favor of investigating troops, U.S. intelligence officers, Afghan government personnel and the Taliban. In an announcement during which he did not take questions from reporters, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo laid out a "nightmare" scenario, in which a U.S. service member is arrested while on a family vacation abroad. "The European country's national police take that soldiers into custody, detaining him or her on politically-motivated charges," he said. "A prison sentence abroad is a distinct possibility."

Trump's executive order includes authorizing economic sanctions against ICC officials and restricting visas for officials directly involved in investigations, as well as their family members. Despite the U.S. not being subject to the ICC, whose 123 member countries first joined in 1998, the tribunal's chief prosecutor first authorized investigations in 2017. U.S. troops may have "committed acts of torture, cruel treatment, outrages upon personal dignity, rape and sexual

violence against conflict-related detainees in Afghanistan and other locations, principally in the 2003-2004 period," Fatou Bensouda said at the time. "Instead, we expect information about alleged misconduct by our people to be turned over to U.S. authorities, so that we can take appropriate action, as we have consistently done so in the past," Defense Secretary Mark Esper said, rather than participating in these unsanctioned investigations.

"Rest assured that the men and women of the United States armed forces, will never appear before the ICC," Esper added. "Nor will they be subject to the judgments of unaccountable international bodies." Beyond the U.S.'s lack of involvement with the ICC, officials pointed toward corruption and mismanagement as reasons not to comply with ICC investigations. "This specific investigation of American service men and women in Afghanistan — we have every reason to believe our adversaries are manipulating the ICC by encouraging these allegations," White House National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said. Since its beginning, the court has opened 12 investigations and secured four convictions, at the cost of over \$1 billion, Pompeo said.

The International Criminal Court has condemned the Trump administration's decision to authorize sanctions against court staff, saying it amounted to "an unacceptable attempt to interfere with the rule of law and the Court's judicial proceedings." The court in a statement released 12 JUN that it "stands firmly by its staff and officials and remains unwavering in its commitment to discharging, independently and impartially, the mandate" laid down in its founding treaty, the Rome Statute. It said an attack on the Hague-based court also constitutes "an attack against the interests of victims of atrocity crimes, for many of whom the Court represents the last hope for justice." O-Gon Kwon, president of the court's management and oversight mechanism, the Assembly of States Parties, also criticized the U.S. measures. "They undermine our common endeavor to fight impunity and to ensure accountability for mass atrocities," he said in a statement. "I deeply regret measures targeting Court officials, staff and their families."

The tribunal has been the subject of multiple calls for reform in recent years. "There is now a perception in many quarters that the ICC has not fulfilled the expectations of its founders," Elizabeth Wilmshurst, a fellow for the United Kingdom think tank Chatham House, wrote last year. The court's proceedings are cumbersome and lengthy. Many of the accused are still at large, including Omar al-Bashir, the former president of Sudan." A spokesman for the ICC did not respond to a Military Times request for comment. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Meghann Myers /Mike Corder | June 11 & 12, 2020 ++]

COVID-19 Myths vs. Facts

Appointments, Immunity, Scams, & Pharmacy

Are you wondering how to access health care during COVID-19? Do you have questions about developing immunity, or how to respond to TRICARE scams? Get help using TRICARE resources, FAQs, and read these "myths vs. facts."

MYTH: All routine appointments at military hospitals and clinics are cancelled.

FACT: Your appointments may not take place in person, but you still have options. You may postpone your appointment. Also, you may be able to make a virtual appointment. You can still get high quality care through telemedicine.

MYTH: Beneficiaries can't book military hospital or clinic appointments for routine care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FACT: Providers are ready to meet your health care needs. You can get the care you need using telehealth by scheduling virtual telephone, video, or in-person visits. Contact your provider by calling your local military hospital or clinic appointment line. You can also schedule an appointment directly through secure messaging with your health care team using the TRICARE Online Patient Portal.

MYTH: A positive antibody test means that an individual is now immune to the virus.

FACT: As of now, this information is unknown. Researchers are working to understand COVID-19 immunity. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, antibody test results are especially important for detecting previous infections when a patient experienced few or no symptoms.

MYTH: I can't do anything about the increased online fraud related to COVID-19.

FACT: According to the Department of Homeland Security, you can help defeat online criminals in a number of ways:

- Always select strong passwords
- Update them often
- Don't reuse passwords for multiple sites

Don't open emails or attachments from people you don't know—and never respond to them. Emails that request your personal information are almost always fake. Government agencies and major U.S. companies don't send personal information over email. For your military health needs, use the TRICARE health contractors sites and those with “.mil” or “.gov” domains. No one from TRICARE will ever contact you to sell a product or medication. If you're contacted by phone or email and suspect fraudulent activity, you can help others from being targeted by reporting it. If you're concerned about fraud related to your military health benefits, visit www.tricare.mil/fraud.

MYTH: Military family members can show up at a military hospital or clinic for COVID-19 testing.

FACT: Military family members should call their provider or the Military Health System Nurse Advice Line for screening first. The nurse will tell you what to do if you need additional evaluation or testing. Testing is authorized based on the clinical judgment of a provider, exposure, travel history, and symptoms.

MYTH: You pay a copayment for COVID-19 testing.

FACT: TRICARE waived copayments for COVID-19 testing and related appointments.

MYTH: Now I need to get prescriptions filled at a network pharmacy or through home delivery.

FACT: Beneficiaries can continue to get prescriptions at military pharmacies [as long as the military pharmacy is open](#). Many have expanded to offer curb-side pick-up. Home delivery and network pharmacies remain options for beneficiaries if the military pharmacy closes due to the national health emergency due to the pandemic.

MYTH: I can't get prescription refills early.

FACT: You can get early refills three ways:

- [TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery](#) can send a 90-day supply of most drugs
- [Retail network pharmacies](#) can provide three, 30-day refills at once
- [Military pharmacies](#) offer a 90-day supply for most drugs (Note: There may be temporary limitations that result in a decrease in service or closure at your pharmacy due to COVID-19).

MYTH: Due to low supplies, I can't get my prescriptions at a military hospital or clinic pharmacy.

FACT: Currently, military pharmacies don't have supply issues. You should be able to fill or refill your prescriptions as usual (Note: There may be temporary limitations that result in a decrease in service or closure at your military pharmacy due to COVID-19).

MYTH: Some medication combinations can prevent or treat COVID-19.

FACT: There's no FDA-approved medication combination to prevent or treat COVID-19. Don't take any medications without your doctor's advice.

MYTH: I can hold Zoom meetings on my Department of Defense (DoD) computer.

FACT: Zoom isn't approved for DoD computers or networks. For personal use on your own device, prevent hackers by always using a [strong password](#).

[Source: TRICARE West Region e-Updates | June 2020 ++]

COVID-19 Convalescent Plasma

Update 01: DoD's Goal to Collect 8,000+ CCP Units by 30 SEP



The Department of Defense has set a goal to collect more than 8,000 donated units of plasma from patients who have recovered from COVID-19 by Sept. 30, 2020. This blood will be used to treat critically ill patients and support the development of an effective treatment against the disease.

Like a missile locking on its target, antibodies attack invaders inside the body with a singularity of purpose: search and destroy. Typically, infection-fighting white blood cells produce antibodies as an appropriate response to an invading germ. In some people whose immune systems can't mount a sufficient attack against a virus, donated antibodies from another person's plasma may help. Researchers believe the power of antibodies lies in their ability to bind to a virus and neutralize it, or block it from entering cells, said Dr. Kayvon Modjarrad, director of the Emerging Infectious Diseases Branch at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Silver Spring, Maryland. Modjarrad leads the Army's COVID-19 vaccine development research.

But not all antibodies are created the same. "Antibodies come in different flavors, some of them are neutralizing and some of them are non-neutralizing and we don't know exactly which individuals are developing what type of antibody," said Shelly Krebs, chief of B Cell Biology Core at WRAIR Military HIV Research program. COVID-19 convalescent plasma, or CCP, from a recovered patient could be a mixture of both neutralizing and non-neutralizing antibodies. In fact, people infected with COVID-19 can have varying antibody responses. Some may not have enough antibodies in their plasma to benefit another patient, which is why CCP first needs to be tested for neutralizing antibody levels before transfusing, explained Modjarrad. His lab works to understand the mechanism of COVID-19 antibodies to predict the levels required to offer a person protection from the virus.

Transfusing antibodies provides short-term immunity as the donor antibodies last several weeks to months inside the body, said Navy Capt. (Dr.) Todd Gleeson of the Navy Bloodborne Infection Management Center, located at Naval Support Activity Bethesda, Maryland. "It is likely that a person with COVID-19 who receives CCP will also still develop their own immune cells and produce antibodies to fight the virus if that person is re-exposed in the future," said Gleeson, who leads a convalescent plasma study of patients at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center also at NSAB in Bethesda. But scientists just can't confirm that yet. They hope to uncover the answer and many more as they study CCP and COVID-19 antibodies to better treat patients and develop future vaccines.

Military medical treatment facilities will soon take part in an observational study across the Department of Defense to help researchers track trends among patients with COVID-19. The data will help trace recovered patients to ask for CCP donations as the DoD seeks to build a storehouse of CCP for patients admitted to Military Health System facilities and those deployed outside the U.S., explained Army Col. (Dr.) Andrew Cap, director of research at the Army Institute of Surgical Research in San Antonio, Texas. "The goal is to build a convalescent plasma capability within the DoD, both on the collection and on the treatment side," said Cap, who helped draft a CCP protocol for the DoD. Future

research may lead to the development of highly concentrated neutralizing antibodies extracted from large quantities of convalescent plasma as a potential therapy for prevention and treatment, added Cap.

Scientists believe monoclonal antibodies—derived from a single immune cell—may also hold potential as both a treatment and preventive measure against COVID-19. Krebs and her team have engineered monoclonal antibodies in the lab by isolating the best neutralizing antibodies from CCP samples to create an army of exact replicas that target the COVID-19 virus down to the atomic level, explained Modjarrad. “We know where and how well it’s going to target, and we know the kinetics of how long it will last in the body and how long it will provide protection,” he explained, noting convalescent plasma does not provide that level of effectiveness. “CCP is not generally used for prevention but for treatment.” Monoclonal antibodies could be used for both treatment and prevention of COVID-19 because the transfused neutralizing antibodies would provide immediate immunity, he added.

Monoclonal antibodies have been in use for decades and revolutionized cancer treatment. Krebs’ lab plans to expand the research into monoclonal antibodies against COVID-19 into animal studies this summer. “Our primary goal is to come up with a treatment for people who have COVID-19,” she said. Anyone able to donate convalescent plasma should contact the Armed Services Blood Program or go [online](#) to find a complete list of available collection centers. [Source: Health.mil | MHS Communications Office | June 19, 2020 ++]

Transgender Troops

Update 26: Does Supreme Court Ruling Affect Military?

The Supreme Court recently ruled that employers cannot discriminate against transgender employees -- so how does that ruling affect the military? According to the 15 JUN 6-3 ruling, discrimination against transgender people in the workplace falls under the broader umbrella of discrimination based on sex -- something prohibited by the Supreme Court through Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in 1964."An employer who fires an individual for being homosexual or transgender fires that person for traits or actions it would not have questioned in members of a different sex. Sex plays a necessary and undisguisable role in the decision, exactly what Title VII forbids," Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote. So, as of Monday's ruling, firing or discriminating against transgender employees is likewise prohibited by Title VII.

But the question remains about how it will affect the military. It's certainly helpful for those advocacy groups and individuals currently battling the military's transgender ban which went into effect in April of 2019. One of the military's default arguments against allowing transgenders to serve is that of the right of an employer to fire workers for being gay, bisexual, or transgender -- which was legal in more than half the states before Monday's ruling. The military is subject to any Supreme Court ruling through the Uniform Code of Military Justice -- so the military is not necessarily exempt from this newest development in transgender rights. There are ways the military could adjust its ban on transgender personnel to adhere to Monday's ruling. But the four lawsuits currently in process against the military's ban now have one less hurdle to jump, advocacy groups say.

The Pentagon referred media inquiries to the Department of Justice, which said it had no comment regarding the ruling's impact on the military transgender ban at this time. Just last month -- more than a year after the transgender ban went into effect -- the Navy approved its first waiver allowing a transgender individual to serve under their preferred gender. The fight over transgender military service began in 2017 with a tweet from President Donald Trump. Legal battles mounted in the following years as the Pentagon clarified its policy for the 9,000 service members it affects. The ban on transgender military personnel went into effect on April 12, 2019. Under the ban, individuals who have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria are not able to join the military. Anyone who hopes to join the service must do so under the sex they were assigned at birth. Current service members are unable to transition genders.

"Over the past year, we've continued to hear from qualified transgender patriots who want to serve their country but can't because of the Trump-Pence transgender military ban," Perkowski added. "As our nation faces unprecedented

challenges, the last thing our military should be doing is rejecting qualified individuals who want to serve simply because of their gender identity." According to a study released by the University of California, Los Angeles in March, the majority of those currently serving in the U.S. military believe that transgender individuals should be allowed to serve. UCLA, funded by the Department of Defense, surveyed 486 active duty, non-transgender service members from every branch of the military -- 66 percent of them oppose the Trump-Pence transgender military ban. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Elizabeth Howe (Opinion) | June 17, 2020 ++]

PCS Moves

Update 13: What Families Need to Know as Moves Restart



For military families moving this summer — or fall or winter — you’ve heard it before in this age of coronavirus: It’s a new world. Don’t expect the same experience with your household goods move. Some travel restrictions have been eased, and more service members are moving. But things could change quickly, so service members and families need to be even more flexible than usual in their permanent change of station moves. “Even though you’re doing the right thing in scheduling your move 60 days in advance, things could change,” said John Becker, interim president of the American Moving and Storage Association.

Moving companies “are going to do the best we can. There are locations that are going to pop up as having a hot spot, with a new wave, or second wave of the coronavirus.” Individual or multiple areas could go on lockdown again, affecting the PCS move, or different countries could have issues. “It’s going to be a very different year,” Becker said. “Until they come up with a vaccine, this is going to affect people moving for the next year.” Military orders are backlogged, moves are backlogged, and moving companies in some areas are experiencing labor shortages. New requirements for moving crews are necessary to avoid the spread of coronavirus, but they’re also slowing down the process.

U.S. Transportation Command and the services are addressing issues, and service personnel officials are “continually refining their projections for the conditions-based relocation of personnel. We do anticipate higher-than-average shipment levels in the fall and winter,” said Dave Dunn, spokesman for the U.S. Transportation Command, which manages about 600,000 personal property shipments in connection with permanent change of station moves each year. Far fewer military members have made PCS moves this year, as a result of the coronavirus-related stop movement order issued by Secretary of Defense Mark Esper in March. According to Becker, between the official start of peak season on May 15 and June 12, military movers had picked up 15,302 household goods shipments, compared to 86,843 household goods shipments in the same period in 2019. That’s an 82 percent decrease from last year.

The moving season is going to stretch out this year for military members. According to Becker, TRANSCOM has told moving industry members officials are extending the time that moving companies will get “peak season” rates to Nov. 15. Peak season for military moves is normally mid-May to the end of August. Peak season rates mean more money for companies, helping make DoD moves more competitive in vying for the packers, loaders and truckers.

And because of the readiness needs of the services, some families may move later than their service members’ report date. For example, the Navy is allowing sailors with dependents the flexibility to delay dependent PCS travel for up to 180 days from their transfer date. Those with children in school will be authorized to delay dependent PCS

travel until the end of the next school year, or June 30, 2021, whichever comes first, according to a news release from Navy Personnel Command. Navy officials said the PCS pause affected 42,000 sets of officer and enlisted orders, and eliminating the backlog of orders could extend well beyond the end of 2020. As travel restrictions have been eased, 39 states and seven countries have met the conditions to lift the restrictions – but that’s also subject to the assessment of conditions at individual military installations within those areas.

The Navy, for example, has announced it’s restarting its PCS moves using this conditions-based, phased approach, ensuring that high-priority sea duty units are adequately manned. Sailors transferring to these high-priority commands will move first, and may have their shore duty shortened by up to six months. Sailors transferring from high priority commands will move last, and could be extended at their current duty station by up to six months. These actions will take place on a case-by-case basis to make sure there is face-to-face relief in the turnover process.

Some Things To Know

Scheduling. It’s even more important to schedule your move as soon as you receive your orders, even if you don’t report to your new duty station for two or three months down the road. But don’t expect to be able to move the following week. Some service members have had that expectation recently, Becker said. While it’s understandable because troops been on hold for so long, that quick move is just not possible in many locations, he said. It takes time for companies to pull together crews and trucks.

Counseling. Get move counseling from your office responsible for household goods moves. That means everybody, this year. “We recommend all service members receive counseling, whether this is their first move or their 15th,” said TRANSCOM’s Dunn. “This is to ensure they are not only aware of COVID-related protocols, but also so that are aware of the changes that went into effect for this peak season,” he said.

New regulations. These will give service members more time to submit a claim for loss and/or damage to household goods, and provide a streamlined process for inconvenience claims for offsetting expenses incurred when household goods deliveries are delayed. Service members now have more time to submit a claim for loss and/or damage: 180 days from shipment delivery to submit the notice of loss and/or damage, and nine months to submit a claim on those items.

Temporary Storage. About 700 military household goods shipments are still in temporary storage after being put there this spring when most moves came to a screeching halt. Service members on the move who are ready to receive their household goods at their destination should contact their moving company and/or personal property office to request delivery, said TRANSCOM’s Dunn.

- The shipments put into temporary storage at origin because of the stop movement order have the same priority and requirements as other DoD shipments, Dunn said. Shipments must be delivered out of temporary storage within five days of the customer’s request for those household goods, he said. Companies are paid while the shipment is in storage, up to five days after the service member requests delivery. Defense officials have also allocated money (from the COVID funds appropriated by Congress) to provide a 10-percent increase in compensation for companies moving these shipments.
- Whether companies will be able to deliver these storage shipments to the service member within five days is another question. It takes at least several days to arrange for a truck, perhaps longer during peak season when military moves are competing with commercial moves for packers, loaders and trucks. Add another seven to 10 days transit time when a shipment has to travel, for example, from the Washington, D.C. area to Texas, and you’re looking at closer to two weeks or more, AMSA’s Becker said.

Labor. Shortages can complicate many parts of the process. Becker some problem areas are already coming up -- Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma are areas where companies are already finding difficulty in hiring enough workers, Becker said.

Embrace the virtual. A number of moving companies have long had procedures in place that allow some functions to be done virtually. For example, in 2019 about 95 percent of the pre-move surveys were done by videoconferencing, Becker said. The moving company employee connects at a time convenient for the service member or family member, watching through an online connection as the service member or spouse walks through the house with the smart phone slowly filming everything that will be moved.

Be ready for COVID measures. There's no escaping the physical aspect of movers touching your belongings. The coronavirus has necessitated new procedures designed to protect the health and safety of everyone involved, but these changes are going to slow down the process for movers, Becker said. The moving companies are required to bring only the minimum number of employees required to handle the shipment. The workers must clean frequently touched surfaces in the home. Every worker entering a service member's home must wear a face covering. Those can be uncomfortable, especially in hot weather. "We're hearing that crews are struggling to work as fast as in the past," Becker said, partly because they have to take more breaks.

Don't argue with requirements. These guidelines are for everyone's protection. Becker said some companies are reporting that some service members won't wear a face covering in their homes while movers are there, and service members are telling crew members not to wear the coverings. "The crews must wear them, even if the service member says you don't have to," Becker said.

- The moving crew could be subject to corrective action ranging from simply reminding them to wear a face covering, to removing an employee, to stopping the move altogether. It's not up to the service member or families; these TRANSCOM requirements follow guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Defense and service officials expect military members and their families to wear face coverings, too, and they've asked families to limit the number of people in the home during the pack-out or delivery process. "We do expect those family members in the home to wear face coverings while in close quarters to moving crews," Dunn said.
- The moving company is required to provide written verification that anyone coming into your home has been screened for illness and is properly equipped to work in your home.
- Families must also notify their transportation office if anyone in the family is ill, to reschedule the move.

You have power. It's important for families to understand their decision-making authority, Dunn said. You can decide who enters your residence; you can question moving company personnel about how they're following health protection protocols; and you can say "stop" at any point in the process. If families are uncomfortable at any point, they should contact their local personal property/transportation office and chain of command for help. There's a personal property office locator on move.mil.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | June 18, 2020 ++]

Navy Surface Fleet

Update 01: Next-Gen Large Combatant in Jeopardy

The U.S. Navy's interminable quest to design and field a next-generation large surface combatant is going back to the drawing board once again, a victim of the Pentagon's disorganization around this year's long-range shipbuilding plan, according to documents and a source familiar with the situation. The Senate Armed Services Committee stripped \$60.4 million dollars from the Navy's proposed fiscal 2021 budget intended to be used for preliminary design work for the future large surface combatant, according to documents released by the committee. Instead, the money is being funneled into a land-based testing facility in Philadelphia that will work on the future combatant's power system, which is the *raison d'être* for the envisioned class, a source familiar with the deliberations told Defense News.

The money for the large surface combatant design is one of the victims of the Pentagon's inability to produce an annual 30-year shipbuilding plan, an annual requirement that is intended to give Congress an idea of where the Navy wants to steer its fleet, the source said, adding that the large surface combatant was not in the five-year future years defense program which is submitted with the President's budget. The 30-year shipbuilding plan has been held up this year by the Office of the Secretary of Defense as the Pentagon struggles to come up with a fleet that more closely integrates the Navy and Marine Corps for the Pacific theater and incorporates a significant fleet of unmanned surface and subsurface systems.

It's the latest setback in the effort to field next-generation surface combatants, which has seen more than 20 years of false starts and setbacks. The Navy initially intended to field a fleet of 21st Century cruisers and destroyers to replace the current Arleigh Burke-class DDGs and Ticonderoga-class cruisers. But the DDG-1000 program was truncated to just three hulls, and the so-called CG(X) cruiser was cancelled in 2010 at the beginning of the Obama Administration. Given the long lead times for new ship development, as much as a decade or more, the situation is becoming increasingly urgent for the U.S. Navy. Many of the cruisers have reached their effective service lives and the oldest Arleigh Burke-class ships are closing on 30 years of age, but the Navy is not currently planning a class-wide service-life extension program.

For its next-generation large surface combatant, the Navy is looking to field a ship that uses the latest AEGIS combat system destined for its Flight III DDG, but with a hull and power system that has ample margin for integrating future systems such as lasers and rail guns, and with missile magazines able to haul larger hypersonic strike missiles. But according to the SASC, the Navy is way too early in the process to justify funding for design, especially when Congress doesn't know what the Navy's plans are for fielding it and when. "The committee lacks sufficient clarity on the Large Surface Combatant (LSC) capability requirements... to support the start of preliminary design for the LSC program or completion of the Capabilities Development Document," according to a document released by the committee.

The document also shows the SASC directing \$75 million toward the Integrated Power and Energy Systems test facility in Philadelphia, known as the ITF, which a source said is where the heavy work of fielding a power system with plenty of margin for future weapons would be performed. That facility should be up and running by 2023, according to the documents. The FY21 NDAA is currently working its way through Congress and is not yet in its final form, meaning funding for large surface combatant design work could still be reinstated at some point in the process. Congress has been increasingly agitated by the Navy's design-on-the-fly approach to fielding new capabilities, such as the littoral combat ship's mission modules or several of the key technologies that have been holding up the lead Ford-class carrier.

In the view of lawmakers, the delays could be mitigated by taking a more cautious approach to developing new classes of systems, by maturing technologies ahead of launching into construction. For example, if the Advanced Weapons Elevators on Ford had been developed before the start of construction, there would not be a months-long delay in getting the carrier ready for deployment because the system would work before it was installed. To that end, Congress has been inserting itself heavily into the development of unmanned surface vessels, restricting funding for procurement until the Navy can produce a reliable system. In its markup of the 2021 NDAA, the House Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee called for restricting funding for procurement of any large unmanned surface vessels, or LUSV, until the Navy can certify it has worked out an appropriate hull and mechanical and electrical system, and that it can operate autonomously for 30 consecutive days. Furthermore, the Navy must demonstrate a reliable operating system and that any systems integrated into the platform — sonars, radars, etc. — are likewise functioning and reliable.

In short, the language would mean the Navy could not spend procurement dollars on a large unmanned surface vessel until it has a working model, and it may not try to develop those technologies on the fly. The Defense Department has been championing a major shift away from large surface combatants, based on decisions by Defense Secretary Mark Esper that are in line with his in-house think tank, the Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation office. The Pentagon wants to focus on fielding more unmanned platforms with missile cells that can be more

expendable in a fight and act as an external missile magazine for larger manned combatants with more exquisite sensors. But Congress has repeatedly balked at the idea because the Navy has yet to produce a concept of operations or a coherent public strategy to back up the investment plan. [Source: Defense News | David B. Larter | June 25, 2020 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials

Reported 16 thru 30 JUN 2020 | Seven

“Keeping the Promise“, “Fulfill their Trust” and “No one left behind” are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century as of FEB 2019 are: World War II 73,025 of which over 41,000 are presumed to be lost at sea, Korean War 7665, Vietnam War 1589 (i. e. VN-1,246, Laos-288, Cambodia-48, & Peoples Republic of China territorial waters-7), Cold War 111, Iraq and other conflicts 5. Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home.

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

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

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

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



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

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

LOOK FOR

-- **Army Cpl. Billie Joe Hash**, 18, of Corbin, Kentucky, was a member of Headquarters Battery, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Hash

will be buried Aug. 29, 2020, in his hometown. Read about Hash at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2201759/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-hash-bj>.

-- **Army Cpl. Francis J. Rochon**, 21, was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Sept. 1, 1950, near Changnyeong, South Korea. The Army officially declared Rochon deceased on Dec. 31, 1953, and declared his remains non-recoverable Jan. 16, 1956. Interment services are pending. [Read about Rochon](#).

-- **Army Master Sgt. James L. Quong**, 30, was an Army Reserve captain in World War II but gave up his commission to join the Regular Army as a master sergeant in the Korean War, he was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Quong](#).

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. John M. Fahy**, 19, was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Fahy died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Fahy](#).

-- **Navy Fire Controlman 3rd Class Robert T. Stout**, 21, was assigned to the battleship 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 sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Stout. Interment services are pending. [Read about Stout](#).

-- **Navy Radioman 3rd Class Irvin F. Rice**, 22, was assigned to the battleship 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 sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Rice. Interment services are pending. Read about Rice at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2218011/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-rice-i>.

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Wesley E. Graham**, 21, was assigned to the battleship 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 sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Graham. Interment services are pending. Read about Graham at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2217973/uss-oklahoma-sailor-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-graham-w>.

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | June 30, 2020 ++]

* VA *



VGLI

Update 06: Eligibility Window Extended

VGLI is a life insurance program that allows veterans to convert their Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) coverage to renewable term insurance. Service members with full-time SGLI coverage are eligible for VGLI

when they leave the military. VGLI, like SGLI, is overseen by the VA, but is administered by the Office of Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance. VGLI coverage is issued in multiples of \$10,000, up to a maximum of \$400,000. However, your VGLI coverage amount can't be more than the SGLI coverage you had on active duty.

Normally, you have one year and 120 days from your discharge date to apply for VGLI. After that, you are no longer eligible for the popular life insurance program. But due to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 emergency, the VA will extend the time period that eligible veterans can enroll in VGLI by 90 days. This extended enrollment and eligibility period will end June 11, 2021. The new period of eligibility for enrollment is:

- 330 days after discharge to submit an application and pay the first month's premium with no health exam required.
- One year and 210 days (about 18 months) after discharge to enroll if you submit proof of good health with your application and pay the premium.

"As a result of the economic situation, former members, who otherwise may be eligible for VGLI coverage, currently may not be able to afford VGLI coverage or to provide evidence of insurability," the VA said. So, it has extended the period of VGLI eligibility to allow veterans who may be facing financial issues to regain financial stability while they remain eligible to enroll in the government-sponsored life insurance program.

If you have a home, two children and a wife SGLI/VGLI coverage simply might not be enough. That's where private insurance can fill in the difference. Your insurance provider will help you come up with the best supplemental package to meet your military family's needs. Financial advisors suggest having seven to ten times your annual income. For example, if you're an E-7 or civilian with a salary of around \$58,000 you'll want to make sure you have between \$406,000 and \$580,000 of coverage. In addition, there are several other things to consider when choosing the right life insurance. Here are some factors that can directly affect how much life insurance you will need to prevent financial woes for your family:

- *Home ownership* – How much do you still owe on your mortgage? If you don't own a home, will your SGLI/VGLI be enough to cover all your financial obligations as well as at least 12 months of rent for your family?
- *Number of dependents* – Whether you have one child or several, your needs will change based on how many members of your family count on you for financial support.
- *Spouse* – Do you have a spouse? Is he or she employed full-time, or do they work hard at home raising your family? Their financial situation will also be a factor when deciding what kind of policy you need.
- *Current finances* – Car payments, credit card debt, existing installment loans, etc. should also be considered when deciding on the right life insurance policy.
- *Location* – Living in Minneapolis, for example, is 62% less expensive than living in San Francisco. Factor in where your family lives and the cost of living in that area.

Military.com | Jim Absher | June 10, 2020++]

VA Health Handbook

Update 02: Your Personalized Copy

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to informing enrolled Veterans about VA health benefits and services they have earned and deserve. All new enrollees in the VA health care system receive a personalized Veterans Health Benefits Handbook, generally two weeks after enrollment has been confirmed. The handbooks are tailored specifically for each Veteran and provide detailed, updated information about the VA health care benefits the Veteran

may be eligible to receive, such as medications, prosthetics and dental care. The handbook also provides answers to common questions, contact information for the Veteran's preferred facility, instructions on how to schedule appointments, information regarding the Affordable Care Act, the Veteran's copay responsibilities, if any, and much more. When you receive a new, replacement Handbook, you are encouraged to destroy their old handbook by cutting it up or shredding it, since the handbook contains personal information. For information about the Handbook or to **request a replacement**, contact call 1-877-222-8387. To view a sample copy of the Veterans Health Benefits Handbook go to https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhbh/publications/vhbh_sample_handbook_2014.pdf. [Source: VA News Release | June 1, 2020 ++]

VA Motto

Update 02: Lawmakers Call for a Change



Lawmakers are calling for Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie to replace what they call an "outdated" and "exclusionary" VA motto and halt plans to memorialize it in bronze at all national veteran cemeteries across the country. Democrats on the House Veterans Affairs Committee, led by Chairman Rep. Mark Takano D-CA) and Women Veterans Task Force Chair Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA) sent a letter to Wilkie 18 JUN criticizing his recent decision to place plaques in all VA cemeteries with the motto advocates, women veterans and some lawmakers have for years argued should be changed. Go to https://images.radio.com/connectingvets/0965_001.pdf to read the full letter.

That motto quotes President Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address in 1865: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan." While the lawmakers said they agreed the "original spirit" of Lincoln's words were inclusive, they argued that it was time to alter the motto slightly to reflect a more diverse veteran population. "Your announcement sends a troubling message to millions of veterans and their families that even in death they are unwelcome at VA," lawmakers wrote. "In a divisive time in America, we encourage you to create a VA culture that is welcoming. You can begin by changing VA's motto to reflect dedicated service to every veteran, regardless of gender or sexual orientation ... Today, these words exclude millions of veterans and families that VA is obligated to serve, such as women veterans, LGBTQ+ veterans and caregivers."

Now, more than 10 percent of America's veterans and more than 17 percent of its armed forces are women. Wilkie told lawmakers in recent weeks that about 42 percent of women veterans eligible for VA care are now enrolled. Lawmakers and advocates suggest an alternative, more inclusive motto that echoes Lincoln's words: "To care for those who shall have borne the battle, and for their families, caregivers and survivors." But VA has resisted changing the motto, repeatedly arguing that it would be costly to alter and citing historical significance, though officials often have used an updated version. Wilkie himself altered it in Congressional testimony earlier this month in the Senate. "Today we are rededicated to Lincoln's vision -- taking care of all who have borne the battle and their families," he said.

VA Press Secretary Christina Noel previously told Connecting Vets VA is not concerned that the motto for the new plaques is not gender-neutral. "This was a direct quote from President Lincoln's second inaugural address and is verbatim," Noel said. "The speech formed the basis of VA's subsequent creation and is part of our recognized mission.

Of course today, our mission is focused more broadly on the men and women veterans we treat in our medical facilities, provide earned benefits and inter in our national cemeteries and their families." Noel also noted that the quote is etched in stone on the Lincoln Memorial.

It's not only Democrats who have called for the motto to be changed. House Veterans Affairs Committee ranking member Rep. Phil Roe earlier this month said he believed it was "very appropriate" to consider an update to make the motto more inclusive. "We certainly don't want to change what Lincoln said, but it's time in the 21st century to change it to 'those who have borne the battle,' which would include all our veterans," he said. Perhaps one of the most vocal proponents of changing the motto has been Rep. Kathleen Rice (D-NY) who also serves on the committee. For the past two Congresses, she has introduced legislation to alter the motto, but they have never made it out of committee to the floor.

Lawmakers further criticized the decision to purchase and install the plaques themselves. "Given the economic and healthcare crisis facing this country, it is disappointing that you would use taxpayer funds on this unnecessary expense," they wrote. VA so far has refused to provide an estimate for how much the project will cost. As time goes on, lawmakers said, the population VA serves will only become more diverse. "You now have the opportunity to make a decision that comports with your leadership of an organization that must serve all veterans," they said.

Takano told Connecting Vets that when he became chairman of the House VA committee, he vowed "to help prepare VA for more women, LGBTQ, and minority veterans accessing VA care and benefits than ever before -- that starts by recognizing the service of all of our veterans. By changing its exclusionary motto, VA has a clear opportunity to show millions of women veterans, LGBTQ veterans, and their caregivers that they matter. We don't need bronze plaques at every VA cemetery, we need VA to serve and honor all veterans regardless of gender or sexual orientation -- its motto should reflect that." The members of Congress called for VA to specifically:

- Replace the motto;
- Share cost estimates for the plan to install motto plaques at all VA cemeteries;
- Conduct a study of veterans, families and caregivers, oversampling for women veterans and veterans of color, for their opinions on the motto;
- Provide Congress a list of all locations where the motto currently appears on signs.

[Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | June 18, 2020 ++]

VA Telehealth Program

Update 19: Vets Struggle to Access Internet Service/Technology



The Department of Veterans Affairs is increasingly depending on telehealth, including online and phone appointments, during the coronavirus pandemic, with plans to expand. But many veterans, especially vets of color and those who are homeless, lower-income or live in rural or remote areas, struggle with access to Internet service and technology to get that virtual care. VA officials touted the department as a leader in electronic healthcare options, including the 9 million more telehealth appointments VA has completed so far this year compared to last year, to lawmakers on Capitol Hill

Tuesday. But representatives of minority veterans, including Native Americans and Native Alaskans, said that telehealth option is not always available to all vets.

Veterans can now access care "anywhere in the country" through telehealth, Veterans Health Administration consultant to the deputy undersecretary for health Jennifer MacDonald said. But veteran advocates said it's not that simple. VA's telehealth options operations have caused "a barrage of issues ... that deeply and disproportionately impact the minority veteran community's ability to take advantage of benefits intended to ease and increase medical access, despite a pandemic," said Lindsay Church, executive director of Minority Veterans of America. "It assumes a veteran has stable broadband connection, a working computer or phone, a private space in which to sit for the appointment and an environment lacking disruption."

VA's telehealth system made healthcare more accessible "only for those who already had access to technology, or the ability to purchase it," Church said. Congress earmarked about \$2.2 billion of the nearly \$20 billion in pandemic emergency funds for VA specifically for telehealth. While some veterans have struggled with access to internet and technology long before the pandemic, it has complicated matters further. Advocates have told lawmakers previously that public internet access spots, such as libraries or cafes, have been shut down for months because of the pandemic. VA has partnered with some Veteran Service Organizations, as well as private companies such as Walmart, to create hubs for telehealth, with computer stations set up for veterans to go for their online appointments. But even many of those were shut down during the pandemic, officials acknowledged. VA officials also said they were working to get thousands of tablets, phones and computers to veterans, but advocates said few veterans in need had seen those resources yet.

Those public technology hubs were often the sole opportunity for many veterans, particularly homeless veterans, to access telehealth services, advocates have said. Homeless veterans are among those perhaps most likely to struggle to access telehealth because of limited availability of technology and internet. The FCC estimated that by the end of 2017, at least 21.3 million Americans didn't have access to adequate broadband, though other research has shown that number could be closer to 113 million, Church said. For Native American and Native Alaskan veterans, access to adequate internet can be particularly challenging, said Vietnam veteran Chief Bill Smith of the Valdez Native Tribe, vice chairman of the Alaska Native Health Board and vice chairman and Alaska-area representative for the National Indian Health Board.

Smith said VA care for Native veterans was "substandard" before the pandemic, and has only worsened. Native veterans service in the U.S. military at a higher rate than any other group, but remain among the poorest, least insured vets with the least access to VA care. "This is a disgrace," he said. A 2019 FCC report showed that fewer than 47 percent of homes on Tribal lands had sufficient broadband access, Smith said, adding that the "sobering statistics" about access "once again" show a disparity between healthcare accessibility for native veterans compared to other vets. In areas with many fluent Native language speakers, telehealth also has led to a lack of "culturally and linguistically appropriate virtual care," Smith said. It's also unclear how veterans of color are being affected by COVID-19, since VA officials have so far refused to provide racial or ethnic breakdowns of the department's coronavirus cases.

Telehealth is challenging for veterans living in areas without adequate broadband access, including more remote or rural areas, but also for veterans struggling to afford that service or technology, particularly during the pandemic. "For households that do not have the economic means to purchase computers, adequate cellular devices, or maintain internet/broadband connectivity, the ability to attend appointments is a barrier to care," Church told lawmakers. Before the pandemic, median personal income of Black, Hispanic and Native American, Native Alaskans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islander veterans was 13-21 percent lower than white veterans. Black and Hispanic veterans were also 8 percent more likely than white veterans to hold sales or service industry jobs -- among the jobs most affected by pandemic cuts, layoffs and furloughs, Church said. Veteran unemployment is about 12 percent, and slightly higher for post-9/11 veterans.

Telehealth also is not always an option for domestic abuse survivors, particularly without safety and security measures. VA has safe messaging options for veterans who may be considering suicide, but does not have those tools

open for domestic violence survivors, Church said. "Leaving a digital footprint can be deadly for survivors and historically, barriers that abuse victims experience are used to further control and victimize them," she said. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | June 23, 2020 ++]

VA Hearing Care

Update 06: Remote Audiology Program

VHA's Innovation Ecosystem (VHA IE) is bringing better hearing options to Veterans virtually. The VA Audiology and Speech Pathology Program Office, led by Dr. Rachel McArdle, has worked with VHA IE to extend care beyond the walls of VA audiology clinics. Those options include remote hearing aid orientations and adjustment sessions using a variety of hearing aid tools. ERTHI is Enterprise Remote Tuning of Hearing Instruments. The program uses a specialized applications that allows a Veteran to connect their hearing aids to their phone via Bluetooth. This enables virtual interaction with an audiologist to ensure the appropriate settings on their hearing aids. The audiologist can see how the hearing aid is functioning and help the Veteran adjust it despite not being there in person. "The Veteran called the whole session magic," Dr. Lori Howe, an audiologist at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center (FHCC), said of an 84-year-old Veteran participant. This is just one of many testimonials about the new remote hearing care efforts underway at VA.

Hearing loss is a common issue for the Veteran community, with more than 1.2 million Veterans receiving hearing loss compensation. Loss of hearing can have major impacts on an individual's emotional, cognitive, and even physical well-being. This also means that hearing aids need to be adjusted and corrected regularly. Because of this need and recent events, VA has now pushed 10 years of research, studies, and work over the finish line, rapidly spreading ERTHI across the health care system in only five weeks.

Audiology teams at Cheyenne VA Medical Center (VAMC), Capt. James A. Lovell FHCC, Miami VA Healthcare System, VA Northeast Ohio Healthcare System, and Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital, under the guidance of Dr. Chad Gladden, began testing and implementing the use of remote audiology care apps that multiple hearing aid vendors created. These apps had to function within VA's IT infrastructure, be secure to ensure Veterans' health care privacy, and be easy to use so that any Veteran could engage with them. After extensive testing, Veterans across the enterprise began use of mobile audiology care apps in May, receiving remote hearing aid orientation and adjustments.

"Being able to hear has an incredible impact on how individuals interact with the world around them," said Dr. McArdle. "This program enables us to help our patients get the most of their hearing aids in the safety of their own home." [Source: Vantage Point | Matthew Razak | June 24, 2020 ++]

VA Claims Backlog

Update 165: House Wants Detailed Reduction Plan ASAP

House lawmakers are turning up the heat on the Department of Veterans Affairs after it failed to provide them with a plan for safely cutting down on its increasing backlog of disability compensation & pension exams. In a letter sent to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie on 16 JUN, five Democratic lawmakers expressed their frustration with the department's lack of transparency on the issue so far. The letter comes nearly three weeks after the department did not participate in a virtual forum about the issue hosted by Rep. Elaine Luria (D-VA), chair of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, on 27 MAY. "Over the past years VA has made great progress reducing the existing claims and appeal backlogs," lawmakers wrote. "To ensure [Veterans Benefits Administration]'s hard work is not undone, VA needs a detailed plan that relies on input from VA staff, examination contractors, and veterans themselves. If you have

a plan prepared, please work with the Office of Management and Budget to make your plan available to Congress as soon as possible.”

Veterans need C&P exams in order to receive a disability rating, but the department paused over 230,000 C&P exams on April 2nd to prevent further spread of COVID-19. While lawmakers said in the 27 MAY forum that they agreed with the decision to stop the exams, they also argued that the VA needed a back-up plan, such as conducting virtual C&P exams, so that veterans could still take the exams in order to receive disability ratings. Experts from Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) who were in the forum said VA was hamstrung in its efforts to conduct virtual exams by the fact that all but one of its virtual exams required in-home tele-practitioners, which doesn’t make sense in a pandemic when vulnerable patient populations ought to be social distancing. “This is obviously the largest barrier we have identified in transitioning from in-person exams to a virtual model,” said Derek Fronabarger, government affairs director for the Wounded Warrior Project, at the forum.

What the VA did next did not ease many of the lawmakers’ concerns. The day after the forum, the department announced it would resume in-person exams at 20 facilities across the country. However, VA did not say how it would improve its virtual offerings, or explain how it would resume in-person exams in a relatively safe manner amidst COVID-19. House lawmakers restated their concerns in their letter on 16 JUN. “In-person C&P exams have resumed in twenty cities across the country, yet we have not heard how you intend to ensure sanitation measures, supply protective equipment to veterans and providers, and manage the growing backlog,” wrote the lawmakers, who were Luria, Gilbert Cisneros Jr. (D-CA), Rep. Gregorio Sablan (D-Northern Mariana Islands), Colin Allred (D-TX) and Lauren Underwood (D-OH).

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, so too does the VA backlog of claims. According to the VA, claims pending for 125-plus days are considered “backlog.” In January, the VA had a backlog of 70,000 claims, but that number rose to over 125,000 as of last week, lawmakers wrote. The representatives called for VA to provide a plan for reducing its backlog and figuring out its C&P exam process. Specifically, their questions include the following:

- What sanitation and social distancing measures are required during C&P examinations?
- How is this plan being communicated to providers, VSOs and veterans?
- What requirements can VA waive so that it can conduct virtual C&P exams without an in-home practitioner?
- How can VA use third-party contractors and VSOs to help with virtual exams?
- What is the status of benefit disability exams that VA provides to separating service members?
- How many vacancies for C&P examiners exist within VA and what is VA’s plan to fill them?
- What data has VBA collected on backlogged claims and how does it intend to address them?
- What risks are associated with the claims backlog and how does it intend to manage them?

[Source: Task & Purpose | David Roza | June 16, 2020++]

VA Claims Backlog

Update 166: Overtime Use Impact on Reduction

For years, the Department of Veterans Affairs signed off on millions of dollars' in staff overtime to tackle a backlog of community care claims. But a watchdog investigation found staff weren't working on those claims half the time. Congress and the presidency have continued to expand veterans' ability to seek care in their communities, paid for by VA, for years. And over those years, the backlog of claims has piled up. Backlogged community care claims increased from more than a quarter million in 2016 to 988,000 in 2018. In 2019, the backlog reached more than 1.3 million. While staff increased the number of claims they processed each year, the total claims filed continued to grow, while veterans, lawmakers and advocates put increasing pressure on the department to bring the backlog down and prevent veterans from being charged for their care or, in some cases, denied care.

Even though the backlog continued to grow, VA added only about 10 claims processors in 2017 and 2018, or VA called on contracted support staff to help. Leaders in the VA Office of Community Care encouraged employees for years to use overtime to make up for a lack of staff and mounting claims, according to a new report from the VA Office of the Inspector General. But leaders didn't establish a policy for use of overtime or required staff to exclusively use overtime for claims processing. In 2017 and 2018, supervisors approved more than 677,000 overtime hours totaling \$23.8 million. But in an audit of the claims system, investigators found that \$11.6 million of that overtime was not spent on processing the backlog of community care claims. "Leaders did not effectively ensure their staff used overtime primarily to process claims," the report read. "There was no evidence of claims processing production or activity in the ... claims system (for) almost half of the total overtime paid."

Investigators took a sample of 45 employees and found that 16 of them received more than \$10,000 in overtime for hours when they did not process a single claim or complete any other claims-related work. Leaders did nothing to mitigate "the risk of overtime abuse," the report said, and the audit showed claims processors averaged "only an estimated 3.7 claims decisions per hour," about a quarter of the 13-claims-per-hour standard. And, of all the claims processed during those overtime hours, investigators found that only 60 percent were backlogged claims. Supervisors weren't sure what staff was working on during those overtime hours, according to the report. "Even though leaders encouraged employees to process backlogged claims during overtime, supervisors said they occasionally approved overtime to process backlogged mail," investigators wrote in the report. "Supervisors were not always able to identify what work the staff did accomplish on overtime, such as answering phone calls, assisting claimants in person, scanning incoming mail, and processing outgoing claim decision letters."

Investigators said the use of overtime "presented a high risk for fraud and abuse" and the office had no strategy for reducing the claims backlog "without depending on overtime." The Office of Community Care planned to put in place a more automated system in 2020 expected to reduce manual claims processing, investigators said, but recommended leaders put in place clear policies and controls to prevent abuse of overtime. Investigators also recommended leaders review employees' overtime to determine whether they should be disciplined.

VA leaders including Veterans Health Administration executive in charge Dr. Richard Stone, agreed with investigators' recommendations and provided a plan to address them, saying they recognized "the impact that misuse of overtime could have on veterans and providers" and said they were reviewing a list of employees for disciplinary action and establishing a system to monitor overtime. VA did not immediately respond to requests for comment. To read the full OIG report refer to <https://images.radio.com/connectingvets/VAOIG-18-06292-117.pdf>. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | June 23, 2020 ++]

Agent Orange Thailand

Update 03: Vet's Win Leaves Glimmer of Hope for Others



Dan Tolly today and long ago in Thailand

Veterans like 73-year-old Dan Tolly, exposed to herbicides while serving with the Air Force in Thailand during the Vietnam War, face a knockdown drag out when they apply for VA benefits. After a years-long struggle, Dan got quite

the surprise last weekend in his mailbox. The Department of Veterans Affairs finally approved his claim that his heart disease and cancer were caused by exposure to the herbicide Agent Orange while he served at Ubon Air Force Base. Not only was he awarded disability benefits for life, he got a check from the VA retroactive to 2016. “I’ve never seen a check like that,” Dan said. “I looked at the amount and it was more numbers than I expected.” Like Dan, tens of thousands of Americans served in Thailand during the war. WFLA News 8 ‘On Your Side’ profiled Dan’s case in a series of reports in September 2019. They forwarded Dan’s records to the VA and asked that it review his case further.

For years, the military denied it sprayed Agent Orange in Thailand. Of late, the VA has awarded disability benefits for herbicide exposure to personnel who could prove they worked on base perimeters, where the military now concedes it used tactical herbicides. Dan assembled missiles for F-4 Phantoms. The shop was about 100 feet from the perimeter. “I walked through the perimeter gate everyday – back and forth, going to work,” Dan said. “That stuff was mixed with petroleum, so anybody walking across that perimeter would pick it up on their shoes, carry it into the mess halls, the barracks,” explained John Wells, the director of litigation for Military Veterans Advocacy. “You’d hop in the barracks with your boots on and walk around the barracks in your bare feet,” Dan remembered. “So you have no idea what you’re walking in.”

Years later, Dan developed soft-tissue sarcoma in his foot. He eventually lost his leg to the disease. Agent Orange is linked to several illnesses, including heart disease, leukemia, cancers and Parkinsons Disease. Dan filed for disability and health care benefits in 2016, claiming his illnesses were tied to Agent Orange exposure. After repeated rejections, Dan hired an out-of-state law firm to handle his case. Lawyers, he says, resubmitted his documents. After months of hearing nothing, he was surprised to find what he did in the mailbox. According to Dan, two other friends who worked in the same missile shop at the same time that he did were also recently awarded benefits. “When we were over there, we never heard of any of this Agent Orange or herbicides or anything like that,” Dan explained. “Then coming back later, we found out the rest of the story.”

Meanwhile, according to its website, the VA is currently reviewing its policy on Agent Orange exposure in Thailand, leaving Dan hopeful the door is now open for other veterans. [Source: WFLA-8 News | Steve Andrews | June 25, 2020 ++]

VA Veteran Homes

Update 03: Holyoke Soldiers’ Home Report Released

The leadership of a home for aging veterans in Massachusetts where nearly 80 residents sickened with the coronavirus have died packed dementia patients into a crowded unit as the virus spread, one of several “utterly baffling” decisions that helped the disease run rampant, investigators said in a report released 24 JAN.

- The superintendent of the Holyoke Soldiers’ Home was not qualified to run a long-term care facility and “substantial errors and failures” he and his team made likely contributed to the high death toll there, investigators found. Among them was a decision prompted by staffing shortages to combine two locked dementia units, both of which already housed some residents with the virus.
- “Rather than isolating those with the disease from those who were asymptomatic — a basic tenet of infection control — the consolidation of these two units resulted in more than 40 veterans crowded into a space designed to hold 25. This overcrowding was the opposite of infection control; instead, it put those who were asymptomatic at even greater risk of contracting COVID-19,” the report said.
- When a social worker raised concerns about the move, the chief nursing officer said “it didn’t matter because (the veterans) were all exposed anyway and there was not enough staff to cover both units,” the report said. One staffer who helped move the dementia patients told investigators she felt like she was “walking (the veterans) to their death.” A nurse said the packed dementia unit looked “like a battlefield tent where the cots are all next to each other.”

- As the virus took hold, leadership shifted from trying to prevent its spread, “to preparing for the deaths of scores of residents,” the report said. On the day the veterans were moved, more than a dozen additional body bags were sent to the combined dementia unit, investigators said. The next day, a refrigerated truck to hold bodies that wouldn't fit in the home's morgue arrived, the report said.

Since 1 MAR, 76 veterans who contracted COVID-19 at the home have died, officials said. Another 84 veterans and more than 80 staff have also tested positive. The first veteran tested positive 17 MAR. Even though he had been showing symptoms for weeks, staff “did nothing to isolate” him until his test came back positive, allowing him to remain with three roommates, wander the unit and spend time in a common room, investigators said. An attorney for the superintendent, Bennett Walsh, said they dispute many of the investigation's findings and are “disappointed that the report contains many baseless accusations that are immaterial to the issues under consideration.” The lawyer said in an emailed statement that “Walsh reached out for help when the crisis erupted” and sought National Guard assistance. “The failure of the Commonwealth to affirmatively respond to that request contributed to many of the problems outlined in the report,” the attorney, William Bennett, said.

Walsh was placed on administrative leave 30 MAR and the CEO of Western Massachusetts Hospital, Val Liptak, took over operations. Susan Kenney, whose 78-year-old father died in April after contracting the virus at the home, said she was horrified as she read details about veterans being denied basic care. “Action needs to be taken,” said Kenney, the daughter of Air Force veteran Charlie Lowell. “We want this to never happen again.” The report said officials with the Department of Veterans Services were aware of Walsh’s “shortcomings,” but failed to do enough about it. The chief of staff for Secretary of Veterans’ Services Francisco Urena told investigators they thought Walsh was “in over his head” and did not spend enough time at the home. But Urena allowed Walsh to remain in his job. Urena told reporters 23 JUN he was asked to resign ahead of the release of the report. “I’m very sorry,” Urena told WCVB-TV. “I tried my best.”

Republican Gov. Charlie Baker, who hired former federal prosecutor Mark Pearlstein to conduct the investigation, called the details in the report “nothing short of gut-wrenching.” Baker acknowledged that his administration did not properly oversee Holyoke or the home's superintendent. “The loss of life is difficult to even think or speak about. The events that took place at the Holyoke Soldiers’ Home in March are truly horrific and tragic,” Baker told reporters at a news conference. Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey is also investigating to determine if legal action is warranted, she said. And the U.S. attorney’s office in Massachusetts and Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division are looking into whether the home violated residents’ rights by failing to provide them proper medical care. [Source: The Associated Press | Alanna Durkin Richer | 25 Jun 2020 ++]

COVID-19 Analytics

VA Challenge Launched to Predict Outcomes

The Veterans Health Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, is calling for members of the public to develop machine learning and artificial intelligence models to predict health outcomes related to the novel coronavirus. The challenge opened at the beginning of June, and VHA representatives say 84 participants have registered so far. COVID-19 has a particularly deadly effect on those over the age of 65 and people with underlying conditions, such as heart disease or diabetes. Because many veterans fall into those categories, the VA has moved to implement several facets of a response plan – including providing outpatient care through telehealth, offering testing for the virus and implementing outreach.

Now, the VHA is asking scientists and analysts to use synthetic veteran health records to create and test computational models predicting COVID-19 related health outcomes in veterans. The outcomes include COVID-19 status, length of hospitalization and time in the ICU, and mortality. "We encourage participants to use demographic

data and the presence of comorbidities when developing their model to help precision FDA and the VHA Innovation Ecosystem better understand how race, ethnicity, age, and comorbidities can affect the progression of COVID-19," said the VHA in a description of the challenge on the department's site. "AI will be used to mine the data to look for predictive factors, including analyzing predictive value of each factor to then develop operation tools to guide clinical decisions within the VHA," said VHA Senior Innovation Fellow Amanda Purnell.

Challengers have until 3 JUL to enter. The success for the models will be determined, according to the VHA, by combining the ranks of model performance across all predicted outcomes. Top performers may be invited to contribute to a manuscript, present at a conference or continue developing tools through the VHA Innovation Ecosystem. Researchers have begun developing multiple AI models to aid in early detection and treatment. Last week, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued an emergency use authorization for a COVID-19 predictive screening tool from CLEW for use in the ICU. "Healthcare providers need more than simple analytics. Systems need to integrate into the provider's workflow, offering ease of use and actionable data," said CLEW CEO Gal Salomon in a statement.

And in a Nature Medicine study last month, scientists at Mount Sinai Health System used AI alongside imaging and clinical data to diagnose patients with COVID-19 at a rate comparable to – and in some cases better than – experienced radiologists. "The challenge originated from an interest on the VHA to better understand underlying risk factors, including impacts of current care and contextual variables to provide better care," said Purnell. [Source: Health IT News | Kat Jercich | June 22, 2020 ++]

VA COVID-19 Deaths

Update 03: Grim Milestone Reached

The Department of Veterans Affairs this week reached a series of new, grim milestones related to the coronavirus pandemic, including topping 20,000 cases of the fast-spreading illness since the nationwide crisis began. On 26 JUN, department officials reported that they have recorded at least 20,509 cases of coronavirus among patients since early March, when the outbreak began to spread across the United States. The total represents about 7 percent of all individuals tested in the Veterans Health System. A day earlier, the number of VA employee cases surpassed 2,000. At least 38 employees have died from complications related to the illness, although officials have emphasized that most of them have not had direct contact with patients.

Earlier this week, the death total among VA patients who have contracted the virus rose above 1,500. As of Friday, that number was about 5 percent to 1,573. The percent of fatal complications among VA patients who test positive has decreased slightly in recent weeks, dropping below 8 percent for the first time since early May. However, it still sits well above the 6 percent death rate for cases among all Americans, according to the latest data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. VA officials have said the mortality data for their patients “cannot be used to compare VA infection or mortality rates with the community because of differences in population risk, test availability, and follow-up.”

The most troubling milestone, however, may be the department announcing on Friday it has gone above 3,000 active cases of coronavirus among patients for the first time since April, during the initial wave of the pandemic. As of the morning of 26 JUN, 3,094 patients were being actively treated for the illness, an increase of nearly two-thirds in the last week and up 123 percent since the start of June. The rise is fueled mainly by spikes at VA medical centers in Texas, California, Florida, Arizona and South Carolina — areas that public health experts have warned have seen significant increases in recent weeks. VA officials in recent days have downplayed concerns about the rising number of active coronavirus cases, saying those figures do not necessarily mean increased pressure on department facilities. They will not release specific breakdowns of patients receiving care inside department hospitals versus those isolated at home, but say the hospitalization rate of patients currently sits around 24 percent, significantly lower than the 38 percent peak in March.

About 2.4 million Americans have tested positive for coronavirus since the start of March. On Thursday, officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the number of infected people in the country could be as much as 10 times higher than those known cases. Deaths as of 29 JUN have surpassed 125,800 Americans and 500,000 worldwide from complications related to the illness. Confirmed cases have exceeded five million in the U.S. and 10 million worldwide. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 26, 2020 ++]

VA Infection Preventionists

Patient Protectors from Contamination & Disease

Veterans need to know their VA hospital is free from contamination and disease. Here's what a special team at a Vermont medical center is doing to keep you safe. At every VA hospital and medical center in the nation are those with the title of infection preventionist. These professionals, hidden from the spotlight, often work around the clock. Behind every infectious process is an infection preventionist team. These people consult clinicians at their facility and infection preventionists at other facilities. Also, they consult with expert organizations to ensure the appropriate steps are taken to prevent and control transmission of disease. These expert organizations include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization.

Infection preventionists are active members on hospital committees ranging from high sterility compounding in pharmacies to air handling and water qualities. Also, they advise on bloodborne pathogen exposures and guide staff regarding personal protective equipment. "We work collaboratively across the healthcare system, not just on policies", John Flanigin of the White River Junction VA Healthcare System explained. An example of this was facilitating a course on Infection Control Risk Assessment to the facilities management service to ensure they have a better understanding of how they, too, can be an asset in reducing contamination across campus. This has been a tremendous help when working with contractors and construction projects on campus. The infection prevention team sets standards prior to initiating a job. It also inspects to ensure the standards are followed, and adjust them, if suitable.

As early as February, at the White River Junction VHS, infection preventionists approached their VA leadership team. They felt it was important to stand up the hospital command center, knowing the spread of COVID-19 would eventually make its way to Vermont. They received full support and the collaboration across all services began immediately. Every decision pivoted on the input and knowledge base of the infection preventionists. The White River Junction VA Healthcare System community is grateful for these hidden heroes of the COVID-19 response efforts. The training, consultations and flexibility they offer have been instrumental in the day-to-day operations of the medical center, even prior to the pandemic. Infection preventionists save lives every day, even if you do not see them at the bedside. [Source: Vantage Point | Katherine Tang | June 25, 2020 ++]

VR&E Program

Update 03: Program Name Change

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) service announced 22 JUN it's changing its name to **Veteran Readiness and Employment Service** to better reflect the needs of Veterans. The new name, which includes readiness, is more in line with what service members and Veterans already understand from their military service. "The new name puts an emphasis on the Veteran and the department's mission to help them reach their employment goals," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "The service will also maintain the VR&E abbreviation allowing it to remain identifiable."

The process of renaming the program began with a comprehensive Human-Centered Design (HCD) research effort to better understand the program's strengths, pain points and opportunities to increase program awareness and enhance the delivery of VR&E services. Data collection activities and information sessions were held with Veterans, service members, VR&E employees and Veterans service officers at the various stages of the HCD research process. VR&E learned that confusion and stigma around the former program name deterred some potential program participants from seeking services. VR&E provides benefits and services that enable transitioning service members and Veterans with service-connected disabilities and an employment barrier, to prepare for, obtain and maintain suitable employment, and to the maximum extent possible, achieve independence in daily living. Visit [careers-employment and vocational-readiness](#) for more information. [Source: OPIA News Release | June 22, 2020 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse

Reported 16 thru 30 JUN 2020

Buffalo, New York -- It was announced on 12 JUN that **Darnell Curry**, 27, of Buffalo, NY, pleaded guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge H. Kenneth Schroeder to assaulting, resisting, or impeding a federal officer. The charge carries a maximum penalty of one year in prison and a \$100,000 fine. Assistant U.S. Attorney John D. Fabian, who is handling the case, stated that on February 19, 2020, while at the Starbucks inside the Veterans Affairs Medical Center on Bailey Avenue in Buffalo, the defendant engaged in a verbal argument with a female friend employed at Starbucks. Three Department of Veterans Affairs Police officers approached Curry in response to a complaint about the verbal argument. When the defendant did not hear or acknowledge verbal commands, an officer touched Curry's shoulder. The defendant turned and a scuffle with the officers ensued. During the scuffle, Curry pulled an officer by the vest and into his body. In the process, the defendant struck the officer in the head, leaving a mark on his cheek below his left eye. Physical resistance by the defendant resulted in the officers taking Curry to the ground, handcuffing, and detaining him. The plea is the result of an investigation by the VA Office of Inspector General, Criminal Investigations Division, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Christopher Algeri, and the VA Medical Center Police, under the direction of Chief Michael Steinmetz. Sentencing is scheduled for September 16, 2020, before Judge Schroeder. [Source: DoJ W. Dist. of NY | U.S. Attorney's Office | June 12, 2020 ++]

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Bedford, Mass. – The body of a 62-year-old man, who has been missing for five weeks, was found dead 12 JUN in the stairwell of a building on the campus of a VA hospital in Bedford, Mass., according to WBZ-TV. The man was last seen at Bedford VA Medical Center on 8 MAY, and he was reported missing less than a week later. The man, whose name has not been released, lived in a housing complex on the hospital's campus, according to the report. Residents say certain exits have been blocked off for months to prevent coronavirus spread and they wonder if that's why nobody found the missing man in a stairwell for weeks.

Middlesex District Attorney Marian Ryan said the incident is "very concerning," and an investigation is ongoing. "We're looking at obviously the circumstances around which he was last seen and looking at the efforts that were made from that day 8 MAY until today," Ms. Ryan told WBZ on 13 JUN. "We are going to be looking at all those circumstances and making an assessment whether appropriate action was taken." The federal government runs the VA hospital, and nonprofit Caritas runs the housing complex on the hospital's campus. Caritas said it filed a missing persons report for the resident on 13 MAY. "The stairwell where the deceased man was found was outside the lease premises of Caritas Communities, is alarmed and solely controlled by the VA," the company said in a statement to WBZ. "Caritas Communities and the Bedford VA are cooperating fully with the investigation."



Caritas Communities works to prevent homelessness by providing very low-income individuals with permanent housing, support, a sense of community, and expanded opportunities. For more than 35 years, Caritas has helped fill the need for safe, secure housing in Greater Boston. Caritas has 33 buildings in 17 Greater Boston communities, housing more than 1,000 individuals annually. Caritas provides on-site support services, emergency rental assistance, veterans-specific housing and services, and on-site property management. Caritas enables working people on minimum wage, veterans experiencing post-service challenges, and low-income elderly and disabled citizens to live in a clean, safe home that they can afford. [Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Ayla Ellison | June 15, 2020 ++]

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Seattle, Wash. – A 41- year-old Bonney Lake, Washington VA employee **Gene Wamsley** made his initial appearance in Seattle on a criminal complaint 17 JUN. He is charged in U.S. District Court with theft of government property for his scheme to profit by stealing and selling respiratory support equipment from the Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC). He is employed as a Respiratory Therapist at VAMC until he was placed on leave from VAMC on 9 JUN. “Right now respiratory support equipment is critical in medical care for those suffering with COVID-19 infections. To steal and sell equipment needed to care for our veterans is a shocking betrayal,” said U.S. Attorney Brian T. Moran.

According to the criminal complaint, the investigation began in January 2020 when VAMC reported two bronchoscopes missing from the hospital. A third bronchoscope was reported missing in April 2020. Staff at the VAMC had noticed bronchoscopes listed for sale on eBay from a seller in Bonney Lake, Washington. The investigation linked the sale of three bronchoscopes to Wamsley. A further review of eBay records revealed Wamsley had sold five ventilators in March and April 2020. Three ventilators were found to be missing from VAMC during the same time period. EBay records reveal a variety of other respiratory support equipment sold by the account linked to Wamsley. Administrators at VAMC confirmed the items were used in the respiratory therapy department.

Law enforcement executed a court authorized search warrant at Wamsley’s home on June 9, 2020. Medical supplies and eBay sales records were seized in the search. The charges contained in the criminal complaint are only allegations. A person is presumed innocent unless and until he or she is proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law. Theft of government property is punishable by up to ten years in prison. The case is being investigated by the Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General (VA-OIG). The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Cecelia Gregson. [Source: DoJ W. Dist of Wash | U.S. Attorney’s Office | June 17, 2020 ++]

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Winston Salem, N. Car. – The United States Attorney for the Middle District of North Carolina, announced 18 JUN that **Willie Doshier Cain** pleaded guilty to a felony count of theft of government funds related to healthcare fraud. Cain, age 73, of Fayetteville, N.C., pleaded guilty before Chief United States District Judge Thomas D. Schroeder in federal court in Winston-Salem, to one count of theft of government funds, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 641. Cain also agreed to the forfeiture of \$155,041.30, a condominium located in Carolina Beach, a Toyota Sienna van, and a mobility scooter.

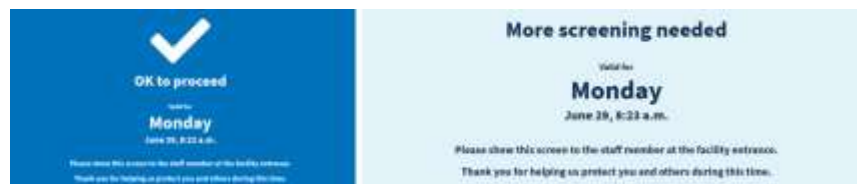
According to documents filed with the court, Cain, a US Army and Fayetteville Police Department veteran, represented to the VA that as a result of shrapnel wounds sustained in Vietnam in 1965, he had suffered the loss of use of both legs, as well as loss of bowel and bladder control, that he was unable to perform daily activities such as dressing and bathing without assistance, and that he was dependent on a wheelchair or motorized scooter for mobility. Filed documents further state, however, that CAIN in fact maintained an active lifestyle throughout this time, including

working as a firearms and concealed carry instructor, enjoying beach activities, playing basketball, dancing, and attending social events. He also bought a condominium at Carolina Beach on the third floor of a building which had no elevator. The investigation revealed that as a result of his false claims, Cain received hundreds of thousands of dollars of VA benefits to which he was not entitled, in the form of direct payments for aid and attendance, modifications to his home, and the purchase and adaptation of vehicles. He faces a maximum penalty of ten years imprisonment, a fine of up to \$250,000, or both, and a term of supervised release of not more than three years. Sentencing will occur in Winston-Salem on September 29, 2020 at 09:30am. [Source: DoJ Middle District of North Carolina | U.S. Attorney's Office | June 18, 2020 ++]

Covid-19 Screening Tool

Nationwide Use Encouraged by VA

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced 29 JUN the launching of a digital COVID-19 screening tool to streamline Veteran access to medical care during the coronavirus pandemic. The tool, designed with Veteran and staff input, enables the screening of more than 10,000 people each day. Veterans, their caregivers and VA health care employees can use this tool on their mobile phones before entering facilities. It takes less than a minute to complete and helps reduce wait times, lowers exposure risk and eases patient stress. It also helps Veterans gain confidence with increased digital interactions as part of their VA health care experience.



“This screening tool emphasizes the ongoing importance of VA’s investment in digital modernization, as it went from initial concept to national availability in less than two weeks,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “In addition to providing a broad range of innovations and improvements that significantly benefit the Veterans we serve; our culture of innovation allows us to respond quickly to urgent and evolving needs.” To protect patients and staff, VA screens everyone for coronavirus symptoms and exposure each time they enter a health facility. VA staff uses the information received to direct people to either enter the building or go to a designated area for additional screening.

Veterans, caregivers and staff can use the tool by texting the word “SCREEN” to 53079 or scan a dedicated QR code with their mobile phone to get a link to the tool. They then answer a series of simple questions and share their results at the VA facility entrance. Go to <https://www.va.gov/covid19screen> to see the questions you will be asked. [Source: VA News Release | June 29, 2020 ++]

VA Travel Allowance

Update 17: New Reimbursement System

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is rolling out a new system in July for Veterans and eligible beneficiaries to submit and track transportation reimbursement claims using VA’s secure web-based portal, [Access VA](#). The Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS), which is accessible 24/7, 365 days a year, will simplify how [eligible](#) Veterans and beneficiaries claim mileage reimbursement for travel to and from both VA health care or VA authorized non-VA health care service locations. “VA is working diligently to find new ways to innovate and simplify how we serve Veterans and their beneficiaries,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Streamlining the

Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System will help our Veterans get their travel reimbursements more securely and efficiently.”

BTSSS enables Veterans and caregivers to submit claims for reimbursement of costs from a personally owned vehicle, common carrier, meals and/or lodging, and other travel related expenses such as tolls, parking and luggage. The national implementation across Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN) will run in phases through November. The first phase will start in July and includes VA Salt Lake City Health Care System, Kansas City VA Medical Center, Bay Pines VA Health Care System, Bay Pines, FL and Minneapolis VA Health Care System. The implementation will continue in phases beginning on the following dates:

- September 8: VISN’s 1, 9, 12, 17, 21, 22
- October 5: VISN’s 2, 6, 10, 15, 20
- November 2: VISN’s 4, 5, 7, 8, 16, 19, 23

As BTSSS goes live, the use of kiosks will be discontinued however, in person claims and hard-copy submissions are still available. For more information on BTSSS and eligibility, visit the VA Travel Pay Reimbursement webpage <https://www.va.gov/health-care/get-reimbursed-for-travel-pay>. [Source: VA News Release | June 29, 2020 ++]

*** Vets ***



Vet Housing

Update 17: Foreclosure and Eviction Moratorium Extended

On June 17, 2020, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in Mortgagee Letter 2020-19 extended the foreclosure and eviction moratorium for FHA insured single-family loans from June 30, 2020 to August 31, 2020. Also on June 17, 2020, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in Circular 26-20-22 extended the foreclosure moratorium for VA guaranteed loans from June 30, 2020 to August 31, 2020. The FHA moratorium applies to all FHA Title II single-family forward and Home Equity Conversion (reverse) mortgage loans, except for FHA loans secured by vacant or abandoned properties. Deadlines for the first legal action and reasonable diligence timelines are extended by 90 days from the date of expiration of the moratorium. As previously reported, recently the Federal Housing Finance Agency announced the extension of the Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac moratorium on foreclosures and evictions from June 30, 2020 to August 31, 2020. [Source: JD Supra | Ballard Spahr | June 19, 2020 ++]

Burn Pit Toxic Exposure

Update 77: Make War Profiteers Pay

Comedian Jon Stewart has a not-so-funny pitch on how to help veterans who are victims of war’s toxic exposures such as burn pits and a host of other lifelong damages. He wants an upfront fee paid by ‘war profiteers’ much like the contingency fees oil companies pay in case there is a spill. “We’ve gotten really, really good in this country at saying we support the military and we put on the flag pin and we thank them for their service and we give them that 10

percent coupon for appetizers at Chili's but the truth is, structurally, we have not done enough to address the wounds of war that they come home with whether they be brain injury, PTS, or these toxic exposures," the former host of The Daily Show said.



Jon Stewart

Stewart spoke 16 JUN during a live event hosted by the Washington Post also featuring Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-CA), Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC), Derek Fronabarger with the Wounded Warrior Project and McClatchy reporter Tara Copp. "I believe that in the way that oil and gas companies have to kick a 10 percent contingency on spills, I believe that war profiteers should kick in a 10 percent contingency plan so that Dereck and the VSOs and the frontline workers and veterans don't have to always come hat in hand begging for money because their brothers and sisters are still dying from the things that they saw and faced in downrange war zones," Stewart said. While only Stewart pushed forward the notion of a fee paid for by defense companies, all participants featured on the nearly hour-long event roundly agreed that especially those facing an array of health complications from burn pit exposures need to be given 'presumptive' connection rather than suffer through lengthy delays that sometimes are not resolved when the veteran dies of complications.

VA officials have previously fought against efforts to presumptively link burn pit exposure to health problems, saying there's a need for more research. Tillis said he supported an outside agency to study burn pit health concerns but also pushed for presumptive connection, which he said could actually help in the long run by allowing officials to "get ahead" of acute conditions and treat veterans before problems worsen over time. The senator said that the government should "assume we're responsible for the care and safety of veterans."

Rep. Ruiz, a former emergency room doctor, has sponsored or co-sponsored numerous bills to expand the VA's coverage and care of conditions believed to be related to burn pit exposure. He highlighted two bills introduced last year, "The Right To Breath Act" which would legislate that nine pulmonary conditions would be qualifying for veterans under a presumption of service connection and receive care. The other bill mentioned, "Jennifer Kepner Healthcare for Open Air Burn Pit Exposure," would make veterans exposed to burn pits able to receive low-cost care from the VA. Both bills remain in subcommittees after being introduced in mid-2019.

Stewart, who spent years advocating for health care coverage for 9/11 first responders and ground zero workers, has set veterans health in relation to burn pits and other burdens as his target. The comedian noted the parallels that both the 9/11 worker population and veterans have faced — repeated denials of a connection to their health conditions and battling their own government for recognition and help. "The system is set up to deny them the benefit," Stewart said of the current setup that requires veterans to prove a service connection before receiving vital healthcare from the Veterans Health Administration. Most recently he has been working with groups like BurnPits360, the Wounded Warrior Project and other Veterans Service Organizations to write a package of legislation to get stopgap measures introduced to cover health for those suffering and dying from toxic exposure-related conditions with the ultimate goal of a presumptive connection as the standard.

Copp, a former Military Times reporter, spoke with The Post about recent reporting from McClatchy that has focused on K2 exposure victims, those veterans who served at the Karshi-Khanabad Air Base, Uzbekistan from 2001 to 2005. The base was used by primarily U.S. forces for aerial missions into nearby Afghanistan to hunt Osama bin Laden, Al-Qaida and Taliban members. But it was the site of massive, decades-long toxic and radioactive materials by the former Soviet Union. Black goo and glowing retention ponds dotted the small base. And, Copp said, the

Pentagon knew about it early yet did not inform troops stationed there. Some of those troops sought help but had little to no support proving their connection to the contaminated site. Even currently, K2 is not classified in the correct category to be placed on the VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, she said.

Copp also referenced work McClatchy has done on the evidence of higher cancer rates among pilots, which some believe is connected to radiation exposure. Those findings have prompted a U.S. Air Force study to look back at data among pilots going back to 1970, she said. Another bill in Congress seeks to broaden the research to pilots from all services. Most efforts do have bipartisan support in these early stages, based on bill co-sponsorship. As Stewart shared though, it may take a change in how the system is operated to see an effect on care for those in need. "If we're going to make them fight our wars then come home and fight for their lives, that's just a model that has to change," Stewart said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Todd South | June 16, 2020 ++]

LGBT Veterans

Discharge Review

For veterans in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, there is an immense sense of pride that comes from serving their country. Unfortunately for some, they were involuntarily separated from the military due to their sexual orientation, making them ineligible for many Veterans Administration benefits earned by veterans by their military service. Between the end of World War II and the repeal of the 2011, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, it is estimated that more than 100,000 veterans were involuntarily discharged from service due to their sexual orientation. While many of those veterans affected by this policy would likely qualify for a discharge upgrade, few have completed the process.

The DD-214 form (Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty), is a United States Department of Defense document. It is issued upon a military service member's retirement, separation or discharge from active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States. It is the most important discharge document a veteran receives because it proves they served in the U.S. military. It is also required to prove entitlement to various veterans' benefits (health, housing, home loans and education benefits), and critical for employment purposes. Eligibility for various veterans' benefits is linked to the type of discharge from service listed on the DD-214. This is sometimes also referred to as the "character of discharge."

Due to the character of discharge listed on the DD-214s for veterans separated due to sexual orientation, many were unable to claim full veterans' benefits, had difficulty receiving their G.I. Bill benefits, and had problems finding employment. Even under the, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, some LGBT service members who received honorable discharges were noted as, "Ineligible to reenlist" on their DD-214, which negatively affected their job prospects when asked to explain their circumstances. One may ask, "What is the significance of a military discharge and why does it matter now?" A discharge terminates the contract to serve in the military. Only enlisted personnel are discharged, and officers resign their commission. Discharges are considered either administrative or punitive. Characterizations of discharge include: Honorable, General Under Honorable Conditions (General), Other Than Honorable (OTH) Bad Conduct (BCD) or Dishonorable (the latter two are recognized as punitive only).

LGBT service members discharged for homosexual conduct under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" have been able to apply for a discharge review to the review board that pertains to their branch of service. Genuine error, failure to counsel, regulatory violations, any circumstance that creates an injustice, changing standards/law, and clemency constitutes a basis for correction. LGBT Veterans separated due to sexual orientation can get help with the discharge upgrade process from their state veterans services offices and assistance in filling out and submitting a DD Form 149 (Application for Correction of Military Records). At the time of your appointment with them, you will be required to explain what happened and why you consider being discharged was deemed an injustice. The form will then be submitted to the proper military board for review.

In Maine any veterans service officer at the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services can help. For questions about LGBT care services for veterans at VA Maine, contact David Strong, LICSW, VA Maine LGBT veteran care coordinator, at 207-616-8990, or email David.Strong@va.gov. For questions about general VA LGBT policies and information, contact Andrea Mooney, LCSW, intimate partner violence assistance program coordinator and chair of the LGBT EEO committee, VA Maine Healthcare System, at 207-623-8411, ext. 7221, or email Andrea.Mooney@va.gov. [Source: Sun Journal | Sarah Sherman | June 21, 2020 ++]

Afghan Vets 12

Jason Freiwald



Navy Veteran, Chief Petty Officer Jason Richar Freiwald was born and raised in Michigan. Upon graduating in 1996 from Armanda High School, Freiwald enlisted in the Navy on April 25, 1996. He completed basic training at the Naval Training Center in Great Lakes, Illinois and then attended the Navy and Marine Corps Intelligence Training Center in Dam Neck, Virginia, before subsequently reporting to Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training in Coronado, California. After graduating with BUD/S class 215, Freiwald completed Basic Airborne School at Fort Benning, Georgia. Freiwald received his first assignment with SEAL Team 5 in Coronado, where he served for two years. He then transferred to SEAL Team 3. During this time, Freiwald served on multiple combat deployments to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In March 2005, Freiwald began the rigorous selection and training process for the Navy's Naval Special Warfare Development Group.

On Sept. 12, 2008, Freiwald at age 30 was on a direct combat operation mission against the Taliban in Afghanistan. While returning fire to protect teammates, he received a gunshot wound. He continued fighting, helping to secure the target before he succumbed to his wound. Freiwald received a Silver Star, Bronze Star with combat "V," Purple Heart and Joint Service Commendation Medal with combat "V." He is survived by his wife, Stacey, and their daughter, Jasmine. Burial was September 29, 2008 in Arlington National Cemetery. We honor his service. [Source: Vantage Point | Kaylee Hogsed | June 21, 2020 ++]

Afghan Vets 13

Robert Hendriks



Robert Hendriks grew up in Locust Valley, New York, and attended Locust Valley High School, where he played lacrosse. Before joining the Marines, Hendriks was a construction worker in Queens. Following graduation, Hendriks joined the Marine Corps in October 2012 where served with the 25th Marine Regiment, Fourth Marine Division Marine Forces Reserve. Hendriks received deployment orders in May 2018 as part of the Georgia Deployment Program-Resolute Support Mission in which Marines trained and advised Georgian infantry troops. In March 2019 while deployed in Bagram Airfield, Hendriks celebrated his twenty-fifth birthday. Hendriks served aboard armored mine-resistant ambush protected vehicles as a turret gunner.

On April 8, 2019 Hendriks at age 25, Staff Sgt. Christopher Slutman, of the Bronx, and Sgt. Benjamin S. Hines, of York, Pennsylvania died when an explosive device went off near Bagram Airfield, a joint U.S. base located near Kabul, Afghanistan. He received a posthumous promotion from corporal to sergeant. In honor of Hendriks and his service, Locust Valley School District created the United States Marine Sergeant Robert A. Hendriks Memorial Scholarship thanks to a donation from the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation. The recipient is a senior who plans to enter the military and exemplifies the characteristics Hendriks displayed as a student and Marine. Hendriks is survived by his parents and brother. We honor his service. [Source: Vantage Point | Kristen Reece | June 22, 2020 ++]

Korean War Vets

Anthony Kaho'ohanohano | Chose to Stay Behind

Long before Hawaii became a state, men from the island territory joined the United States military, including during World War II and the Korean War. One of Hawaii's native sons, Army Pfc. Anthony Kaho'ohanohano, fought in the latter conflict. His brave solo stand against an overwhelming enemy force led to his death, but it also earned him the Medal of Honor.



Kaho'ohanohano was born on Maui, Hawaii, on July 22, 1930. He grew to be a tall kid and was known by several of his siblings to be a quiet guardian to them. He loved swimming, going to the ocean and playing basketball. Service was important to the family. Kaho'ohanohano's father had served in the military and was a dedicated police officer. His five brothers joined the military when they were old enough, and Kaho'ohanohano did the same. He enlisted in the Hawaii National Guard after high school. On Feb. 5, 1951, several months after the Korean War began, he joined the regular Army. Kaho'ohanohano was assigned to Company H of the 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division based in Korea.

In August 1951, his unit was deployed to the front lines of the war. By the end of that month, an operation known as the Battle of Chup'a-ri was launched. Over the next several days, Kaho'ohanohano's unit fought for strategic hills in action that would shape the course of the war. On Sept. 1, 1951, Kaho'ohanohano was in charge of a machine gun squad that was supporting his company's defensive position when a large enemy force attacked. The Americans were overwhelmed, so they started to retreat. Kaho'ohanohano ordered his squad to fall back, too, and find more defensible positions so they could provide cover for the retreating men. Kaho'ohanohano had been hit in the shoulder during the attack, but he chose to stay behind as his men moved to safety. He gathered up as much ammunition and as many

grenades as he could find, then went back to his original position to face the enemy alone. The North Koreans were determined to overrun his position, but he wasn't about to give it up easily.

Kaho'ohanohano blasted the onrushing enemy with machine gun fire and grenades. When he ran out of both, he grabbed the only weapon he had left — a shovel — and fought his aggressors one on one until there were too many for him to handle. The position was overrun, and Kaho'ohanohano was killed. When his unit heard about his heroic stand, they were inspired. The company launched a counterattack that was eventually able to repel the enemy soldiers. When Kaho'ohanohano's fellow soldiers found his body, they were amazed by what they found with it: 11 enemy soldiers lay dead in front of his position, while two others that the 21-year-old had fought in hand-to-hand combat lay dead beside him. Kaho'ohanohano's machine gun had fired so many times that its barrel was bent.

For his selfless actions, Kaho'ohanohano was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second-highest military honor. But his family and many in his community thought he deserved more. So, after decades of petitioning for a higher honor from World War II veterans and fellow Hawaiians, U.S. Sens. Danny Akaka and Dan Inouye, it was decided the award would be upgraded to the Medal of Honor. On May 2, 2011, President Barack Obama presented the Medal of Honor to Kaho'ohanohano's sister, Elaine, and brother, Eugene, at a White House ceremony. Nearly 30 more members of Kaho'ohanohano's family attended, as did several Korean War veterans.

"Kaho'ohanohano will always be remembered for the lone assault that saved his comrades, and then inspired their counterattack," Deputy Defense Secretary William J. Lynn III said at a ceremony at the Pentagon the day after the White House presentation. "His last words — reportedly, 'I've got your back,' — are a creed our soldiers carry with them today whenever they go into harm's way." Kaho'ohanohano's spirit lives on in his native Hawaii. A National Guard armory was named for him in the village of Puunene on his home island of Maui. [Source: DOD News | Katie Lange | June 15, 2020 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule

As of 30 JUN 2020

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\veternans related websites and resources.

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

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

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\veternans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, Milton.Bell126@gmail.com [Source: Retiree\Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | JUN 30, 2020 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs

Scheduled As of 30 JUN 2020

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. Note that many of the scheduled events for the next 2 to 6 weeks have been postponed and are awaiting reschedule dates due to the current COVID-19 outbreak. 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>

First Civilian Job

Forty-one percent of veterans surveyed indicated they left their first post-military job within one year. Another 31% indicated said they left their first civilian job to make ends meet and never intended to stay. Another 30% left as the result of finding a better job, while 19% left because the job did not align with their expectations. Only 12% left because the position was terminated or they were laid off. The reasons for staying at a job depend greatly on financial and long-term opportunities in the company. Sixty-five percent of veterans say they will stay at a company for better pay, while 55% stay for a clear path of career growth. Other activities, like veteran resource groups and volunteer activities, seem to have less impact on whether veterans remain or leave their jobs.

[Source: Recruit Military, USCC, and American Legion | June 30, 2020 ++]

Veteran State Benefits ► Connecticut 2020

The state of Connecticut 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 & Discounts – CT**" 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 below benefits refer to <https://portal.ct.gov/dva>.

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/connecticut-state-veterans-benefits.html> | Oct 2020 ++]

* Vet Legislation *



Note: To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bills/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. To read the text of bills that are to be considered on the House floor in the upcoming week refer to <https://docs.house.gov/floor>.

Drug Cost Increases

Update 18: Senate Urged to Pass Prescription Drug Price Reduction Act

AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), on 10 JUN renews its call on the United States Senate to swiftly pass S.2543, the **Prescription Drug Price Reduction Act**, sponsored by U.S. Senators Charles Grassley (R-IA) and Ron Wyden (D-OR). “Lifesaving medicines and vaccines don’t work if patients can’t get access to them. As we face the worst public health crisis in recent history, the stark reality is the market is simply not working to keep drug prices affordable,” said AHF President Michael Weinstein. “Now more than ever, the U.S. Congress should take action against obscene drug prices and enact the Prescription Drug Price Reduction Act.” S.2543, which passed the U.S. Senate Finance Committee with bipartisan support, would provide needed relief for Medicare beneficiaries and increased penalties for drug companies that practice price gouging.

The bill would save the U.S. Medicare program over \$100 billion over ten years, according to the U.S. Congressional Budget Office (CBO) without cutting access. It lowers out of pocket costs for seniors by capping them at \$3,100 annually. It also requires more transparency and accountability from pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs), which secretly negotiate drug formularies between drug manufacturers and insurance companies while collecting kickbacks from drug companies in the form of rebates. The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association (PhRMA) opposes the bill.

“The status quo enriches drug companies, PBMs and the insurance industry and does nothing to improve access to life-saving medicines needed for controlling epidemics like HIV and COVID 19,” added Weinstein. “We hope that taxpayer-funded research will yield needed medicines and vaccines to treat and control COVID 19. But right now, with the current structure, only the rich will get access to these medications. The dogged determination of Senator Grassley, the most senior U.S. Senator and chairman of the powerful Senate Finance Committee, has been inspiring. AHF pledges its continuing support for getting this bill enacted into law.” AHF is the largest global AIDS organization who currently provides medical care and/or services to over 1.4 million individuals in 45 countries worldwide. [Source: <https://www.wfmz.com> | Business Wire | Jun 10, 2020 ++]

Prescription Drug Costs

Update 58: S.3979/H.R.7116 | Tricare Prescriptions Relief Act

Two U.S. senators have introduced legislation that would let Tricare waive prescription drug copayments for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic or other national emergency. Sens. Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) and Roger Wicker (R-MS) proposed the **Tricare Prescriptions Relief Act** bill 10 JUN to provide financial help for active-duty and retiree families experiencing unexpected increases in prescription drug costs during the pandemic. Military families

and retirees who use on-base pharmacies have no copayments for prescriptions at those facilities. But they do share the cost of their prescriptions at civilian retail stores and through Tricare's mail-order system.

The bill would let DoD waive those fees, which range from \$10 to \$60 for a 90-day drug supply by mail, and from \$11 to \$60 for a 30-day prescription at a retail pharmacy. That waiver would stay in effect during the pandemic or other national emergency as declared by the federal government. "In the wake of a widespread disaster like a hurricane or global pandemic, our military service members, veterans, and their families should not have to worry about how they will continue to afford life saving treatments," Wicker said in a release. "Ensuring Arizona Tricare recipients can receive their prescriptions outside of military clinics at no added cost helps keep Arizona military families and retirees safe during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic," said Sinema. A similar bill was introduced in the House on 16 JUN by Reps. Elaine Luria (D-VA) and Lisa Blunt (D-DE).

At the height of social distancing measures during the coronavirus pandemic, Defense Health Agency officials encouraged Tricare beneficiaries to switch to mail order, which carries lower copayments than retail stores and offers the convenience of home delivery. Base restrictions and reduced staffing also made it more difficult for some beneficiaries to pick up prescriptions at military pharmacies. Although some established temporary drive-up or curbside service or changed hours to accommodate patients, some limited operations only to active-duty personnel or closed temporarily. Beneficiaries who also take medications needed for COVID-19 patients and use mail order also saw some of their copayments triple when Tricare limited prescriptions of certain drugs to a 30-day supply. Previously, beneficiaries could receive a 90-day supply of these medications for the same copay.

Defense officials announced in May that it would limit prescriptions of albuterol and levalbuterol, also known by the brand names ProAir, Proventil, Ventolin and Xopenex, as well as hydroxychloroquine, also known as Plaquenil, to prevent shortages. Tricare beneficiaries also told Military.com that other medications were on the limited supply list, such as fluticasone, also known as Flovent or Flonase. The corticosteroid reduces inflammation of the nasal passages. Retired Marine Corps Maj. Mike Snyder said he received a 60-day supply, rather than his usual 90-day supply, without warning. "I only get a two-month supply and then I have to renew in 30 days for another two-month supply as long as this restriction is in place. What that means is that I will pay two copays and only get half the product I'm supposed to," Snyder said.

The bills circulating in the House and Senate would give DoD the "flexibility they need to waive cost sharing requirements," since the department is not allowed by law to change Tricare copayments. But they would not require the DoD to waive the fees, and, if made into law and the Pentagon decided to institute the copayment waiver, would not be retroactive. Still, with no end in sight for the national emergency and when planning for future disasters, DoD should have the ability to change the copays if needed, the lawmakers said. "Forcing our service men and women to make the decision between saving money and their health is wrong," Blunt Rochester said. "This is the least we can do for those who have served our nation." [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | June 18, 2020 ++]

Vet Suicide

Update 49: H.R.3495/S.1906 | Improve Well-Being for Veterans' Act

H.R.3495 was introduced in the House by Rep. Jack Bergman (R-MI-1) on 19 JUN 2019 and currently has 256 cosponsors. Its companion bill S.1906 was just introduced in the Senate by Sen. John Boozman (R-AR) on 19 JUN 2019 and currently has 31 Cosponsors. The **Improve Well-Being for Veterans' Act** requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to award grants for a period of three years to eligible entities for the provision of suicide prevention services to veterans and their families. Under the bill, eligible entities include tribally designated housing entities, community-based organizations, and other private entities that meet certain requirements.

Current data indicates that approximately 20 of our nation's veterans, active-duty servicemembers, and members of the National Guard and Reserve die by suicide every day. This has remained true since the late 1990's despite significant increases to funding, staffing, programs, and attention for suicide prevention and mental health care at and through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Only six of those 20 suicide deaths per day were among those who had sought VA care in the two years preceding their death. Suicide is often the result of a complex interaction of risk and protective factors at the individual, community, and societal levels and prevention requires a similarly broad-based effort.

The IMPROVE Well-being for Veterans Act would expand the reach of services aimed at preventing veterans' suicide by providing grants to entities that offer and coordinate suicide prevention services for veterans and their families. Because there is no single cause of suicide, the services authorized to be provided through the grant are designed to help address known risk factors and, ultimately, to get veterans on a path to a life of purpose. Those services include outreach, health assessments, treatment, therapy, medication management, peer support, and assistance obtaining VA benefits. This bill would also require VA to coordinate with national, regional, and local public and private entities –like veterans service organizations, community partners working in mental health and suicide prevention, and local law enforcement -to plan the design and implementation of the grant program.

The Message:

- The suicide crisis is a multi-faceted national crisis –not a veteran-specific one -and it is going to take a government and society wide effort to solve it.
- Because only six of the 20 servicemembers and veterans per day who are taking their lives are receiving healthcare services at VA, we must empower VA to work through community partners to reach those most in need.
- The IMPROVE Act would prevent veteran suicide by expanding the reach of VA's suicide prevention programs and increasing coordination among currently disparate community resources that serve a wide variety

To read the full PREVENTS Task Force report, click [here](#). To learn more about the Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act, as introduced, click [here](#). If you or a veteran you know is struggling, please contact the Veteran Crisis Line which is available 24/7, 365 days a year at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, or text 838-255. [Source: HVAC Release | June 17, 2020 ++]

. National Park Fees

Update 02: S.327/H.R.4930 | Wounded Veterans Recreation Act

The Senate approved a bill 22 JUN to grant all veterans with service-connected disabilities free lifetime entry to America's 419 national park sites. The **Wounded Veterans Recreation Act** (S.327), introduced 24 JUN 2019 by Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, Jeanne [D-NH] was passed to the House on 24 JUN for consideration. It amends the current eligibility standards for national park passes which would result in granting them to millions more U.S. veterans. Now, veterans must have a 100% permanent disability to receive free lifetime entry. If approved by the House, the bill would grant a National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass to any veteran with a disability rating through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

According to a recent report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 4.7 million veterans, or 25% of the total vets in the U.S., had a service-connected disability in 2019. About 2.09 million had a disability rating of 60% or higher, the report shows. It did not specify how many veterans were 100% disabled. For years, veterans and experts have praised experiences in nature as therapy for those suffering from symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. "Recreation in our national parks and public lands can be a valuable healing tool for veterans living with physical and emotional

wounds as a result of their service," said Sen. Jon Tester, D-Montana. "I'll continue fighting to make sure our legislation crosses the finish line in Congress."

Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-CA) introduced the H.R.4930 in the House 30 OCT 2019 which was referred to the Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry on 15 NOV with no further action. "National parks can connect our veterans with nature and increase their spiritual, mental and physical well-being," Ruiz said at the time. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | June 24, 2020++]

VA Vietnam Vet Benefits

S.4086/H.R.6082 | Forgotten Vietnam Veterans Act

Two Senators introduced bipartisan legislation in Congress this week aimed at expanding Department of Veterans Affairs benefits to "forgotten" Vietnam vets. The "**Forgotten Vietnam Veterans Act**" would expand wartime benefits to veterans who served in the Vietnam War but have so far been ineligible for assistance because of a disagreement between the Pentagon and VA on when exactly the war happened. The Defense Department currently recognizes the Vietnam War era as Nov. 1, 1955 to May 15, 1975. But VA says the Vietnam War era is Feb. 28, 1961 to May 7, 1975, making any veterans who served in the conflict prior to 1961 ineligible for wartime benefits at VA such as pensions and health care."

Those "forgotten" Vietnam veterans include members of the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG). MAAG is a designation for U.S. military advisors sent to other nations to help in training conventional armed forces and providing military aid. More than 3,200 MAAGs served in the Vietnam War, Sens. Jon Tester (D-MT) and John Boozman (R-AR) said in a news release announcing the bill 25 JUN. The legislation intends to correct the date disagreement and extend benefits to the MAAG vets, though it was not immediately clear how many are still living.

"As a nation, we have an obligation to ensure that the men and women who served in Vietnam are properly recognized — and honored — for their sacrifices," said Tester, ranking member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. *"Our bipartisan bill will alter the federal government's timeline to reflect our country's official involvement in the Vietnam War, rightfully extending wartime benefits to veterans previously excluded from receiving the benefits they deserve."*

"Expanding the VA's statutory definition of the Vietnam War era will ensure MAAG veterans are eligible for benefits they earned," Boozman said. *"Our legislation will correct the error that has prevented them from receiving benefits they are rightly due."*

The bill already has support from the VFW, American Legion and Vietnam Veterans of America. "More than 3,000 veterans served in Vietnam from November 1, 1955 to February 27, 1961, ten of whom were killed in action," said Matthew Doyle, deputy director for national legislative service at VFW. "However, veterans who served in Vietnam prior to February 28, 1961 are not considered wartime veterans and likewise are ineligible for certain VA benefits. The VFW is proud to support this legislation, which would change the statutory definition of Vietnam veteran to include those who served in the Republic of Vietnam beginning on November 1, 1955."

"This legislation, when enacted into law, will make right an historic wrong," said John Rowan, national president and CEO of VVA. A companion bill H.R.6082 was introduced in the House by Rep. T.J. Cox (D-CA) on 4 MAR. A year ago in JUN Congress passed and the president signed into law the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act (H.R.299), expanding benefits to sailors who served during the war off the coast of Vietnam who may have been exposed to Agent Orange. About a week later, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie delayed all claims processing for those veterans until Jan. 1, 2020. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | June 25, 2020++]



Military Base Names

Renaming Controversy

Top Senate Republican Mitch McConnell said 16 JUN he's "OK" with renaming military bases such as Fort Bragg that are named after Confederate Army officers, declining to side with President Donald Trump and other Republicans opposed to the move. The Kentucky senator said he'll live with whatever lawmakers decide as they debate an annual defense policy bill for the military in the coming weeks. Trump has blasted the calls to rename the military bases. "Hopefully our great Republican Senators won't fall for this!" he said in a tweet last week. Trump opposes changing bases named for Confederate generals. The president said the controversial names are an important part of American military history and heritage.



A GOP-controlled Senate panel voted last week to require bases such as Fort Bragg and Fort Hood to be renamed within three years. McConnell, himself the descendant of a Confederate veteran, didn't endorse the idea but said he wouldn't oppose it. Similarly, top House Republican Kevin McCarthy of California said last week — after repeated prodding — that he doesn't oppose the idea. "I can only speak for myself on this issue. If it's appropriate to take another look at these names I'm OK with that," McConnell said. "Whatever is ultimately decided I don't have a problem with."

The debate over the Confederate flag and other symbols of slavery and black oppression has burst open in the wake of widespread protests over police abuse of African Americans and specifically the choking death of George Floyd. Public opinion has shifted dramatically since Floyd's killing. The Democratic-controlled House is sure to include legislation to rename bases and it's plain that Republicans in the Senate who are opposed to the idea, such as Josh Hawley of Missouri, don't have the votes to remove it during floor debate.

The Senate's requirement for the bases to be renamed within three years was approved by a voice vote as a piece of the annual Pentagon policy bill. A commission would be set up to oversee the process. But McConnell came out forcefully against a proposal by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to remove statues of Confederates such as Jefferson Davis from display in the Capitol, calling it "nonsense" and saying it would "airbrush the Capitol." McConnell is sticking with the Washington tradition — and current law — of having states choose their own statues for display in the Capitol complex, saying it's preferable for states like Mississippi, home to Confederate President Davis, to remove them on their own. [Source: The Associated Press | Dan Sewell | June 14, 2020 ++]

USS Theodore Roosevelt

Update 05: Commander Will Not Be Reinstated

Following the release of a report into the events surrounding an outbreak of COVID-19 on the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, Navy Capt. Brett E. Crozier, the ship's former commander, will not be reinstated, Navy Adm. Michael M. Gilday, chief of naval operations said at a Pentagon news conference. Based on facts found in the report, which Gilday and Navy Secretary Kenneth J. Braithwaite characterized as both thorough and fair, Gilday said his initial recommendation that Crozier reinstated was proven wrong. In addition, Navy Rear Adm. Stuart Baker's pending promotion to two-star rank has been put on hold, pending further review, Gilday said. Baker, the commander of Strike Group 9, was Crozier's immediate superior.

"I previously believed that Captain Crozier should be reinstated following his relief in April, after conducting an initial investigation," Gilday said at the news conference. "The much broader, deeper investigation that we conducted in the weeks following that had a much deeper scope. It is my belief that both Admiral Baker and Captain Crozier fell well short of what we expect of those in command. Had I known then what I know today, I would have not made that recommendation to reinstate Captain Crozier. Moreover, if Captain Crozier were still in command today, I would be relieving him." Crozier will not be reassigned as the commanding officer of the USS Theodore Roosevelt, nor will he be eligible for future command opportunities. Instead, he will be reassigned to other work.

"Captain Crozier's primary responsibility was the safety and the well-being of the crew, so that the ship could remain as operationally ready as possible," he said. "In reviewing both Admiral Baker and Captain Crozier's actions, they did not do enough, soon enough, to fulfill their primary obligation." Both Crozier and Baker failed to move sailors off the aircraft carrier as quickly as they could have, and failed to move them to a safer environment more quickly, Gilday said. Additionally, he said, Crozier "exercised questionable judgment when he released sailors from quarantine on the ship, which put his crew at higher risk and may have increased the spread of the virus aboard the Theodore Roosevelt."

Crozier was relieved of duty 2 APR following the leak of a letter he wrote to those higher up in his chain of command. In the letter, he asked for more assistance in dealing with the outbreak of COVID-19 on the ship. Gilday said it is the findings of the more detailed investigation, rather than the existence of the leaked letter, that have prevented Crozier from being reinstated as commander of the Roosevelt. "As Captain Crozier stated in his email, he should have been more decisive when the ship pulled into Guam," Gilday said. "He also said that he was ultimately responsible for his ship and his crew. And I agree. In the end, the email and the letters sent by Captain Crozier were unnecessary. Actions were already underway to acquire [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]-compliant off-base hotel rooms for the crew before he sent that email."

Gilday said it's rare for ship commanders to directly communicate as high up in their chain of command as Crozier did. "If they do, they must ensure that all of the means of communication within the chain of command have been thoroughly exhausted and that they have a full understanding of all the facts, and that they include all members of their chain of command in that communication," he said. At the time the letter was sent, Gilday said, the Navy already had made arrangements for off-ship lodging for Roosevelt sailors. Braithwaite said he's satisfied with the depth and fairness of the report, and its conclusions. "I am satisfied that it was conducted in an extremely thorough and fair manner," he said. "Moreover, I fully support its findings and recommendations, and I'd like to take this time to commend the investigation team led by [Adm. Robert P. Burke] under the direction of our chief of naval operations [on the work that they did, under very demanding conditions]."

The secretary also commended Guam Gov. Lew Guerrero; Navy Rear Adm. John Menoni, the commander of Joint Region Marianas; and Navy Capt. Jeffrey Grimes, commander of Naval Base Guam, for work related to finding facilities on Guam to house sailors from the Roosevelt. "Their outstanding efforts greatly contributed to the health, safety and recovery of the crew of USS Theodore Roosevelt," Braithwaite said. Braithwaite also expressed

condolences for Navy Chief Petty Officer Charles Robert Thacker Jr., a USS Theodore Roosevelt aviation ordnanceman, who died 13 APR of COVID-19. He was the only sailor aboard the Roosevelt to die from COVID-19. [Source: |DOD News | Todd Lopez | June 19, 2020 ++]

USS John S. McCain (DDG-56)

Update 12: Big Bad John is back



John S. McCain is headed back into operation

Nearly three years after a collision tore a hole in its side and killed 10 of its crew members, the guided-missile destroyer John S. McCain is heading back into naval operations. It's been a long road back since the warship's collision with a tanker in the West Pacific in August 2017, which came less than two months after another fatal ship collision involving the destroyer Fitzgerald that killed seven sailors. This week's announcement of the McCain's return comes after the Fitz left a Mississippi shipyard earlier this month and headed for its new home port in San Diego.

McCain underwent nearly two years' worth of repairs at the headquarters of U.S. 7th Fleet in Yokosuka, Japan, a rehab that included updates to the ship's computer network, antenna systems and berthing. It hit the water and got back underway in October. The destroyer and its crew then began months of basic phase training and certification across 23 areas, including seamanship, navigation and damage control, according to a Navy release. Finally, on 2 JUN, the once-stricken ship was declared good to go and able to take on missions for 7th Fleet, a vast command that includes the often-restive waters of the South China Sea. "We couldn't have gotten here without the support from the community and all the training organizations that helped us accomplish this," McCain's commanding officer, Cmdr. Ryan Easterday, said in a statement. "Big Bad John is back and we're ready to take the watch." [Source: NavyTimes | Geoff Ziezulewicz | June 19, 2020 ++]

Russia Submarine Force

Update 01: Newest Submarine Could Redefine Underwater Warfare



In a move that harks back to the Cold War, the Russian Navy is quietly developing a whole new category of submarines, and their unique capabilities could influence the nature of undersea warfare. The first of the new type, Khabarovsk, is expected to be launched this month. This is likely to be the defining submarine of the 2020s because it represents a novel and difficult adversary. Other navies are unlikely to emulate it, but they will want to counter it. The underwater game of cat and mouse where U.S. Navy hunter-killer submarines stalk the Russians could be reinvigorated. But these new targets are not ballistic missile subs. Khabarovsk is instead designed to be armed with the gigantic Poseidon nuclear drone-torpedoes.

Russia has managed to keep many details about the submarine out of the public domain. Relatively little is known about this large nuclear-armed boat, certainly in comparison to Western types. So its launch is eagerly anticipated by defense watchers. Despite rumors of its impending launch, analysis of the shipyard does not yet show any leading indicators. We know that that she is being built in Construction Hall 1 at the Sevmash yard in Severodvinsk in Russia's Arctic North. These details may sound mundane, but it means that we can watch for any tell-tale signs of launch preparations.

In order to roll her out of the shed, the launch rails outside will have to be cleared. Then flotation devices will be prepared on either side of the launch rail. Their arrangement will be different for each type of submarine so this will be useful information in itself. Then the boat is winched out tail first. The whole basin will then be flooded to float the submarine off. This presents its own problems because the Kirov-Class battle cruiser Admiral Nakhimov is undergoing an extensive upgrade there. She is likely watertight, but all the items associated with the work will have to be moved out of the way. These things do not yet appear to be happening. And there is a large red barge blocking the most obvious route. Based on analysis of the satellite images, the barge has been in the same position since last July. But while a launch date of this month seems optimistic, it cannot yet be ruled out. Time will tell.

The existence of the "Project 08951" submarine has never been a secret, but it is barely talked about in Russian sources. Gradually, from the few sources and old-fashioned analysis, a picture has emerged. Khabarovsk will likely share a lot of elements of the Borei Class Ballistic Missile Submarine (SSBN). This should reduce cost and also make it stealthier than many other submarines in service with the Russian Navy. The forward half will be taken up by six ginormous Poseidon torpedoes. This is what makes her a unique category of submarine. Poseidon, also known as 'Status-6' and the NATO reporting name 'Kanyon,' is designed to be both nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed, giving it virtually unlimited range. It therefore would pose a threat to coastal cities such as New York and Los Angeles. The Russian Ministry of Defense describes it as a multi-purpose weapon and suggests that it could also target the U.S. Navy's Carrier Battle Groups.

Actually Khabarovsk is not the first Russian submarine to be fitted for Poseidon. The equally enigmatic 'special mission submarine' (i.e. 'spy sub') Belgorod was launched on 23 APR last year. She will also be armed with 6 Poseidon weapons. But her role will be split, with her also acting as a mother submarine to the Losharik deep-diving midget sub. The combination of being a spy submarine and a strategic weapons platform at the same time seems contradictory. Belgorod may be further delayed however because of repairs needed to Losharik. The nuclear-powered midget sub suffered a fatal accident on July 1 2019. So Khabarovsk may yet overtake Belgorod to become the first Poseidon carrier to enter operational service in around 2027. Khabarovsk will not be the last of these Poseidon-armed submarines either. Two follow-on Project 09853 are planned, bringing the fleet to four submarines each with six Poseidons. Even less is known about these other submarines.

Unless there is a change in Russian plans, Khabarovsk will likely be a new focus of Western anti-submarine warfare for the next decade, in particular the U.S. Navy and Royal Navy, whose nuclear submarine fleets have a long tradition of stalking Russian boats. The Poseidon-armed boats will present new challenges to these hunters. In particular, building new weapons to intercept the Poseidon will take time. Its speed and depth might make it virtually untouchable to the current generation of advanced torpedoes. Possibly the U.S. Navy's Mk.48 ADCAP (Advanced Capability) and the Royal Navy's Spearfish torpedoes could just reach it. But the angles and ranges involved seem to make it a limited proposition. So new faster, longer ranged and deeper diving torpedoes may be on the cards.

And possibly that is part of the rationale behind Poseidon. Countering it will cost the West vast amounts of money. And it will mean compromises along the way. Other priorities may be sidelined to make way for countering Poseidon, which could weaken capabilities elsewhere. Today, hardly anyone in the West has even heard of this submarine. But it is the one to watch for. [Source: Forbes | H.I. Sutton (Opinion) | June 9, 2020 ++]

China's Submarine Force

Navy Steps Closer to New Generation of Nuclear Submarines

New evidence at the Bohai shipyard in China points to the construction of the next generation of nuclear submarines for the Chinese Navy (known as the PLAN). While many have argued that the new Type 095 and 096 subs will be built there, it is only now that the infrastructure is largely ready. The new submarines will be important if the PLAN wishes to patrol the open Pacific, or routinely venture into the Indian Ocean. Analysis of commercial imagery shows a new launch barge has recently been completed at the site. From an intelligence standpoint, this is an important indicator.

In an unclassified analysis, the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) expects China's submarine fleet to grow from around 66 boats today to 76 by 2030. This will include 6 more nuclear-powered attack submarines, which is what the Bohai yard at Huludao builds. So the work at the new Huludao facility will play a key part in the expansion. The ONI points to this fact, stating, "Current expansion at submarine production yards could allow higher future production numbers." So it is not a great leap to say that the new construction halls and dry dock at Huludao will be used to build new nuclear-powered attack submarines. These are expected to be the all-new Type-095 Tang Class which may be China's answer to the Virginia Class. I estimate that at least 9 will need to be built to reach the 2030 projection.

This is because three of the existing boats are reaching the end of their operational lives. The Type-091 Han class were China's first generation nuclear submarines and entered service in the 1970s. Three of the class, laid down in the 1980s, are still in service. The rest are the newer Type-093 Shang class which first entered service in 2006. Work on the Huludao expansion started in 2014 with large new construction halls built on reclaimed land. The hall has three construction bays, each large enough to house two submarines. The buildings themselves were complete by 2017, but it is only recently that they have been connected to the dry dock where the submarines will be launched. A new launch barge has been put in place to transfer the submarines from dry land into the water. So China now has the facilities lined up to start launching Type-095 submarines.

According to Captain Chris Carlson, a former Senior Intelligence Officer and Technical Intelligence expert, the driver for the new construction facility may not be the Type-095. Instead he sees the next generation ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), the Type-096, as benefiting more. This is because he expects it to be larger and heavier than the current Type-094 Jin class SSBN. "The original construction hall is probably too small to house both new submarines, but this assumes the submarines' beam (width) is the constraining issue – the Type 096's expected greater length is a definite problem. The original launch barge also likely has inadequate lifting capacity to get a much larger Type 096 submarine into the water."

Carlson believes that the new submarines will be wider than the current generation. "Despite all the blog blustering, the current Type 093 attack submarine is a noisy boat. And the 093A, while better, isn't the equivalent of a 688 (Los Angeles Class)". This is largely because of size. Carlson continues, "The pressure hull diameter of a Type-093 is just too small for a full entablature raft along with compound isolation to house the entire propulsion plant and the necessary auxiliaries. This is the same constraint the Russian's experienced with the Victor III Class that has a less effective ring raft." In layperson's terms, the pressure hull needs to be bigger to provide space to insulate the submarine's steel hull from the vibrations of the machinery.

If high levels of stealth are desired, then the new submarines will likely have a similar hull diameter to the Russian Improved Akula class. According to ONI documents the Improved Akula-I is reputed to be quieter than a U.S. Navy Improved Los Angeles (688I) Class submarines. The new Chinese boats will also have a special outer hull treatment, known as an anechoic coating, which improves stealth. Of course the new submarines are expected to have the latest in Chinese sonar and weapons. But the biggest capability leap might be a larger crew. This will enable much longer patrols because, despite ever-improving automation, crew fatigue remains a major constraint for at-sea endurance. So these bigger boats are seen as a step in the journey for a PLAN with global ambitions. [Source: Forbes | H.I. Sutton | June 19, 2020 ++]

Military Prisons

Biggest Differences from Civilian Ones



From the moment you don the uniform of the U.S. military, the biggest threat looming over your nascent career is being forced to "turn big rocks into little rocks" at Leavenworth. There are actually a number of military prisons, which house inmates for crimes of varying degrees of severity, including capital murder. As a matter of fact, the U.S. military hasn't executed one of its own since 1961, when the Army hanged Pvt. John Bennett for sexual assault and murder. Most criminal troops, like most criminal civilians, do not commit crimes on that level and are expected to spend a shorter time in the slammer. Civilian prisons have a less-than-stellar reputation that precedes them. Film and television portray American civilian prisons as a violent jungle of gangs, drugs, rape, and boredom where death stalks inmates at every turn. To make matters worse, the food is so terrible, ramen noodles replaced cigarettes as the unofficial currency. But military life has always been different from civilian life and the two systems of justice are just as different.

1. Guards

- *Military* -- Guards are usually from a local military police/security forces unit. These are uniformed personnel who took on the same obligation as the inmates under their control. Their military specialty is their job and they want their lives and the lives of the prisoners to go as smoothly as possible – and in military prisons, life usually happens that way.
- *Federal* -- Guards come in two types, according to a former inmate who saw both systems while doing time for drug trafficking. The first is the kind that come in and do their jobs, preferring to hang out in offices and guard shacks, drinking coffee and taking home a check. The other kind is aggressive, trying to provoke the prisoners so he can assert authority (and sometimes a beating of sorts) on prisoners. This is not to imply that correctional officers are entirely terrible – every job has its best and worst. Prisoners will "put on a show" while the worst guards are around.

2. Facilities

- *Military* -- Just like in basic training, every one in a military prison is responsible for cleaning their areas of the facility, as well as its maintenance and upkeep. If a prisoner's area gets even slightly unkept or unsanitary, that prisoner will hear about it immediately and the strict code of military discipline will come down in a hurry. More than that, however, military prisons are incredibly clean and well-kept anyway, so keeping it

looking that way is almost effortless. There might be something to the broken windows theory because it's very different in a federal penitentiary.

- *Federal* -- Prisons are run down, broken, unsanitary messes. Prisoners here are also responsible for cleaning the facilities but many leave much to be desired in this respect. Civilian prisoners tend not to care as much about cleanliness, doing the bare minimum amount of work or giving up after seeing how far gone certain areas are.

3. Rehab

In general, military prisoners are focused on the long-term of life after prison while civilian prisoners are only focused on what's going to happen later that same day:

- *Military* -- The military offers a plethora of different ways a prisoner can rehabilitate him or herself before leaving the military prison system. Since most of the prisoners who leave the military with a sentence will be left with a dishonorable discharge, the ability to work in fields that are critically undermanned or a skilled trade will be important in their new lives. As such, the military prison system offers training in carpentry, certified auto repair, culinary arts and hospitality services, and more.
- *Federal* -- Preventing recidivism isn't as apparent in the civilian prison system. The Federal Bureau of Prisons offers offenders with sufficient time on their sentences the opportunity to get out nine months early in the Residential Drug Abuse Program. Federal prisons offer education for those without a high school education or for prisoners who don't speak English and some job training exists, but depends mostly on the labor needs of the prison system. College coursework is available, but prisoners must fund these themselves.

4. Salutes

- *Military* -- Civilian prisoners would never think to do this but for a military audience, this is important. Prisoners in military correctional facilities, while technically still in the military, are not allowed to salute military officers and the offense is punishable under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The reason is respect, but not the way you're likely thinking. A military officer returns salutes thrown at them as a matter of respect to the person saluting them. If a prisoner saluted a military officer, the officer would be obliged to return the salute – and who wants to salute a convict? Military convicts are still expected to refer to their guards by rank and name, however.
- *Federal* -- While inmates are still a part of the military and answer to the military hierarchy, one corrections officer from California noted that inmates in a general population at a federal prison will create their own chain of command (outside of the prison personnel), leading right up to the top inmates.

5. Fights

- *Military* -- Fights are uncommon in the military prison system and when they do happen, they are broken up quickly. Inmates in military prisons were – at some point – military personnel trained and held to a high standard. Breaking a few laws will not usually change this very much. Besides, everyone is trying to get out of the military system on good behavior, and many will re-enter the military after their sentence. Most importantly, they don't want to lose access to their nice rehab programs and lose the work they've put in because of a stupid fight – and prison gangs don't exist. Military personnel don't lose the sense of camaraderie they garner during service, and that same "in it together" mindset binds military prisoners.
- *Federal* -- In the civilian system, the world is not how it's portrayed on television. There are more fistfights that happen than in military facilities, but there are also higher population densities in federal prisons. For the most part, problem inmates are separated. When fights in civilian prisons get really bad, the entire facility can be placed on lockdown. For gangs, some facilities have more gangs and gang members than others, with a "you stay with yours and I stay with mine" mentality

6. Solitary

Whether in Federal prison or a military prison, refusing to obey the guards will land you in segregation, aka solitary confinement, aka "The Hole." The only activity left to a prisoner in solitary confinement is sleeping or perhaps carrying on a conversation with him or herself. In a military prison, noncompliance can land you in solitary for up to six months

at a time, where your home is an eight by seven-foot room with a single bunk, a single light, along with a toilet and sink. The only interaction with the outside world is a small slot in the door for food. No matter if a prisoner is in solitary or general population, the life of a prisoner is boring and monotonous. Work details and recreation help pass the time, a chief concern of the extended-stay prisoner.

7. Daily Life

Both military and civilian prisoners lead regimented lives, but naturally the military prisoner's is much more so. In the military, prisoners will have the option of working in one of the prison's workshops or details, like a wood shop, kitchen detail, dorm cleaning, chapel cleaning, grounds maintenance and masonry. Every day, prisoners have a very rigid structured schedule, which including shaving in the morning, work details, multiple head counts, recreation, and showers. The weekends have no work details and more recreation.

On the plus side, the food is much better in a military prison – like that of a chow hall – but inmates are searched to ensure they don't take food back with them to their dorm/barracks room. Some civilian prisons have very little oversight over the prisoners' food and reports of undercooked meat are common. In general, prison food is bland, one more reason ramen is the currency of choice. Military prisoners also receive much better medical care as a result of being in a military correctional facility.

8. Crimes Matter

Whether in civilian prisons or military prisons, the reason for your detention is important – to the other prisoners. Besides the security level of your sentence being based on the crime you committed, convicts convicted of child molestation and underage pornography are shunned and harassed by other prisoners. Snitches usually get ostracized as well and are usually said to be forced to group with convicts who committed crimes against children.

[Source: We Are the Mighty | Blake Stilwell | June 11, 2020 ++]

Navy SEALs

Update 01: Former Seal Gallagher Launches Pipe Hitter Foundation



Former Navy SEAL Eddie Gallagher and his wife have launched a nonprofit to assist military service members, first responders and their families with legal support, following his war crimes trial that was marred by missteps and prosecutorial misconduct. The Pipe Hitter Foundation will provide financial support, including legal defense funds, advocacy for its clients through the public and policymakers, and public affairs campaigns, the group said 10 JUN in an announcement. “During our own personal ordeal, we pledged to those supporting us that if we overcame the injustices that were inflicted on Eddie and our family, we'd fight to help others,” said Gallagher's wife, Andrea.

The initiative comes nearly a year after Eddie Gallagher, a 15-year SEAL, was found not guilty of almost all charges against him -- including murder and attempted murder -- in the fatal stabbing of a teen Islamic State fighter in 2017.

Eddie Gallagher was accused of killing the captive militant and posing for photos with a corpse. He was convicted of the latter charge and had his rank reduced as a result. But President Trump took an interest in the highly-charged case and restored Gallagher's rank in November 2019. He also prevented the Navy from seeking further disciplinary action against the SEAL and fired Navy Secretary Richard Spencer for his handling of the case.

At his trial, fellow SEALs testified that Eddie Gallagher stabbed the prisoner, but one witness, Special Warfare Operator 1st Class Corey Scott, stunned trial observers when he took responsibility for the death. Scott said he saw Gallagher stab the teen but that he killed the Islamic militant when he blocked the breathing tube inserted into his mouth. The trial was further marred when the lead prosecutor was removed from the case for allegedly trying to spy on attorneys and a journalist. Navy Cmdr. Christopher Czaplak was ousted after he was accused of attaching tracking software to emails sent to attorneys and a Navy Times reporter in an effort to find the source of leaks to the media.

Eddie Gallagher recently filed a lawsuit against Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite and a New York Times journalist, claiming Navy officials leaked personal documents to the newspaper in an attempt to smear him and compel him to take a plea deal. "I was fortunate to have Andrea, my brother Sean [Gallagher] and countless individuals dedicated to finding the best resources to help me during my personal case, but not everyone has that type of support," Eddie Gallagher said in the foundation's release 11 JUN. The retired SEAL was found not guilty of murder only after a grassroots campaign led by his family and intense legal battle, the foundation's website says, adding that he came "dangerously close to being crushed by a military justice system corrupted by political correctness, careerism and incompetence." Pipe Hitter, Eddie Gallagher said, stems from a term of the same name to describe "someone you want with you during tough situations, someone who has your back and is willing to sacrifice and work hard to get the job done." [Source: Fox News | Louis Casiano | June 12, 2020 ++]

USMC Camp Fuji

Covid-19 Restrictions Loosened for Troops



The Marine Corps just gave service members at its training center in the shadow of Mount Fuji a little more freedom than most U.S. military personnel in Japan as coronavirus restrictions continue to ease. Marines and sailors who live on a spartan facility at Combined Arms Training Center Camp Fuji are now free on their own time to roam nearly anywhere in Shizuoka and Yamanashi prefectures, according to a base Facebook post on Wednesday. They're also allowed to visit U.S. bases in Tokyo and Kanagawa prefectures. U.S. military authorities are slowly relaxing restrictions imposed on service members in the spring to combat the virus' spread. Most troops, however, are still limited in their movements and activities.

On 17 JUN, Camp Fuji in Shizuoka prefecture, west of Tokyo, lowered its health protection condition from "substantial" to "moderate," according to its Facebook post. The move tracks those of a number of other U.S. bases following U.S. Forces Japan commander Lt. Gen. Kevin Schneider's decision 12 JUN to lower the health protection condition for all U.S. forces in Japan. Like troops at other bases in and around the Japanese capital, those at Camp Fuji are barred from going to central Tokyo and visiting off-base bars, nightclubs, lounges, massage parlors, karaoke

boxes, fitness centers and pachinko spots. But they are allowed to visit tattoo parlors and natural hot springs, which are ubiquitous in Japan but off-limits to most other American personnel due to the risk of spreading the virus.

Camp Fuji troops can also ride public transport such as buses and trains that are forbidden for those at many other bases, other than to get to and from work. And they may visit a number of U.S. installations in nearby prefectures, including Naval Air Facility Atsugi, Yokosuka Naval Base, Camp Zama, Yokota Air Base and Tama Hills Recreation Area. For other personnel, travel between bases is generally prohibited other than for official duty and essential services such as medical appointments. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Seth Robson | June 17, 2020 ++]

USMC Ship Needs

Update 01: Commandant Considers Amphibious Ships ‘Obsolete’

The Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. David Berger, dismisses current Marine and Navy plans for amphibious ships as “obsolete,” and worries that in any conflict, China could replace damaged ships faster than the US in a draft operating concept obtained by Breaking Defense. The warnings are the latest in a campaign waged by the reform-minded Berger to overhaul how the Marine Corps trains and equips to meet the challenges of China and other advanced nations, while working more closely with the other armed services and allies around the globe. In the sharply-worded 22-page document, Berger rejects war plans anticipating a Cold War-style confrontation in which huge ships can creep close to shore free from the threat of precision-guided munitions being launched from batteries deep inland. He calls the current configuration of amphibious ships “the most obvious manifestation of this obsolete paradigm” in a draft document obtained by Breaking Defense.

In an unsigned draft of the unreleased report, “Naval Campaigning: The 2020 Marine Corps Capstone Operating Concept,” Berger underlines the need for new thinking about how the Marine Corps and Navy will fight an advanced Chinese military that can control islands, coastlines, and vast swaths of the sea with aircraft carriers, a swelling blue ocean fleet and long-distance precision munitions. The old way of thinking “is also exemplified by our current amphibious warships and maritime prepositioning ships, which are large and built for deployment efficiency rather than warfighting effectiveness,” he writes. “These superb, multipurpose ships are extremely expensive—meaning we’ve never had the desired number.”

Berger also raises significant concerns about the United States’ ability to replace any combat losses, even in a short, sharp conflict. “Replacing ships lost in combat will be problematic, inasmuch as our industrial base has shrunk, while peer adversaries have expanded their shipbuilding capacity. In an extended conflict, the United States will be on the losing end of a production race—reversing the advantage we had in World War II when we last fought a peer competitor.” The stark admission comes as the Navy’s shipyards struggle under the disruptions caused by COVID-19, leading the service to order an emergency call up over 1,600 Reservists to fill labor shortages to do repair work on aircraft carriers and submarines in a desperate effort to get them back out to sea as soon as possible.

Berger takes care not to blame the Navy for building expensive, relatively slow amphibious ships to carry Marines across the globe. “These issues should not be construed as a criticism of our Navy partners who built the fleet—to include the types of amphibious warfare and maritime prepositioning ships the Marine Corps asked for—that was appropriate to the security era within the constraints of finite resources.” But that era is now over the Corps wants to build a more dynamic “inside force” of smaller ships that can operate within range of Chinese and Russian weapons and pack a potent offensive punch while offering more and smaller targets than the current amphibious fleet. But these small ships won’t replace their bigger cousins — they’ll come in addition to them, creating new issues for both Navy budgets and the limited number of shipbuilders who can produce hulls for the sea service. The ships will also need ports to call home. “One can think of basing forces and lots of smaller vessels in theater, but this raises the issue of where to put everything and doesn’t seem to be a ready solution that replaces divestiture of large ships,” said Dakota Wood, senior research fellow for defense programs at The Heritage Foundation.

In recent weeks, the Navy met with shipbuilders to talk about plans for a new class of logistics ship that can operate under fire and resupply Marines deep within the range of enemy precision weapons. The Next Generation Medium Logistics Ship would resupply both ships at sea, as well as small, ad hoc bases ashore. The ship fits within plans Berger has made to stand up several Marine Littoral Regiments designed to move fast and have their own integrated anti-air and possibly anti-ship weapons. The Corps and Navy are also looking to buy as many as 30 Light Amphibious Warships in coming years, which would be much smaller than the current amphibious ships. The draft document doesn't include any those specifics. But Berger has already done that work in previous statements and documents, where he outlined plans: to rethink the role that large amphibious ships play in future; divest of M1 Abrams tanks; cut artillery units; slash helicopter squadrons; and reassess the role F-35s might play in future operations.

Berger has admitted he realizes he needs to undertake this transition within existing budgets, leading him to call for cutting tanks, helicopters, and even some end strength. But for the Navy, Wood said, "I think much of this will be added cost because it must maintain current capabilities (types of ships) while developing new capabilities. It does not have the luxury of getting rid of current before new replacements are ready." A significant omission in all of these plans is the absence of a larger, coherent naval strategy. The 30-year shipbuilding plan, due to Congress in February, continues to be missing in action. A major Navy force structure review was rejected by Defense Secretary Mark Esper earlier this year. The force structure review, currently being taken apart by Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist, is expected this fall.

The Navy's plans are in such a fluid state that Vice Adm. Stuart Munsch, head of the service's Warfighting Development office, cited Chinese attention as a reason to decline to give a progress report in a call with reporters earlier this month. "I'm not going to divulge our intentions," he said. "I'm very conscious that, if I say anything public, I'm an authoritative source and the Chinese will key on what I say, and likewise any kind of public-facing document that we put out as well." Pressed to explain what the Navy's strategy for operating in a world with competing great powers looks like, Munsch said, "I'm not sure how you would see that keeping our intentions for warfighting classified is something you would want as an American citizen." While Berger continues to push out papers and strategies for pushing the Marines into the future, the Navy, which will provide much of the lift he needs, is still at the drawing board. [Source: Breaking Defense | Paul McLeary | June 17, 2020 ++]

USMC Hypersonic Weapon Use

Not Interested in Adding to Arsenal

The Pentagon's research and development community reached out to the Marine Corps over how a land-based hypersonic weapon could be incorporated into the smallest service's quick-maneuver concept. Mike White, assistant director for hypersonics in the Office of the Under Secretary for Defense for Research and Engineering, said 19 JUN that "I haven't given up on the Marines yet" for incorporating hypersonic weapons into their future operational concepts. "The Army and the Navy and the Air Force are moving out aggressively with hypersonic systems, but we are also talking to the Marines about possible applications of ground-launched hypersonic capabilities," he said during the Defense One Tech Summit held online this week.

Hypersonic weapons travel at speeds of at least Mach 5 – five times the speed of sound – and challenge enemy defense systems not only in tracking their path but in being able to hit and defeat them. Asked why the Marines would be a good candidate for using hypersonics, which can be shot from greater distances and still hit their targets quickly, White said, "the Marines bring agility to the land campaign. They are an agile force; they can be in certain places with a relatively small footprint relatively quickly. And so that agility and flexibility allows for a number of different advantages. So there's some conversations happening between DARPA and the Marines in particular to talk about the potential transition of a land-based hypersonic capability to the Marines. And it's just being discussed as part of the opportunity space for future application of hypersonic weapons."

However, the Marine Corps does not appear interested in this collaboration. Marine Corps spokesman Maj. Josh Benson told USNI News after the original publication of this story that two weeks ago the Marine Corps decided it would not pursue land-based hypersonics. “We are not working with DARPA on it and will not be pursuing this like other services,” he said. Lt. Gen. Eric Smith, deputy commandant for combat development and integration, told USNI News in a statement that, “The Marine Corps is committed to long-range precision fires, however we are a light and austere force who must consider our speed and mobility. We do not openly discuss our work on future weapons, but it is fair to say that we are focused on systems which adhere to our concepts of speed and mobility.” The Marine Corps spent much of the last two decades with personnel and equipment flowing in and out of Iraq and Afghanistan for lengthy deployments to the ground wars there. Though routine deployments of marine expeditionary units on amphibious ships never stopped, they were certainly not the focus of Marine Corps operations.

Today, though, the service is seeing a renaissance in its amphibious force, with new thought focused on how to better employ forces and significant attention focused on how to develop small ships, unmanned vessels, new connectors, simplified logistics, new weapons and much more to support these new operational concepts that tend to focus on small groups of Marines moving from the sea to a piece of land, conducting a mission quickly and then moving away to a different piece of land. This island-hopping strategy is primarily being crafted with a Pacific operating area in mind, but it could also be used in places like the Baltic Sea.

The Navy was dubbed the lead service for developing a hypersonic weapon to serve as a conventional prompt global strike weapon – not meant to replace nuclear weapons but rather to provide another option for launching a retaliatory strike anywhere around the world in less than an hour. The Navy’s approach has been to develop a glide body that all the services could use that could withstand the harshest possible conditions: in this case, being launched from a submarine undersea. The Navy has since talked about putting this hypersonic weapon onboard Block V and later Virginia-class submarines with the Virginia Payload Module, as well as potentially the Zumwalt-class destroyer, but the topic of arming Marines with ground-based hypersonic weapons had not been publicly discussed before. [Source: USNI News | Megan Eckstein | June 19, 2020 ++]

Military Marijuana Use

Most All CBD Products Now Prohibited



U.S. troops can now be punished for using products that contain hemp or cannabidiol, according to a Defense Department memo recently made public. In February, Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Matthew Donovan directed the services to issue general orders or regulations by 1 MAR prohibiting the use of products made from hemp under Article 92 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Donovan's memo, dated 26 FEB, was highlighted 22 JUN in a tweet by the DoD's Operation Supplement Safety, an initiative within the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences that provides information to service members on dietary supplements.

Troops have known since last year that most products containing cannabidiol, or CBD, were off-limits, with two of the four DoD services issuing guidance restricting use of any form of CBD, including in supplements, creams, ointments and tinctures. But the new orders make use of hemp and CBD punitive across all DoD active-duty and reserve

component personnel, including the Navy and Marine Corps, whose members were allowed under the Department of the Navy to use topical products like shampoo, lotions and creams. Donovan said the move was needed to "protect the integrity of the drug testing program." "I specifically find a military necessity to require a prohibition of this scope to ensure the military drug testing program continues to be able to identify the use of marijuana, which is prohibited, and to spare the U.S. military the risks and adverse effects marijuana use has on the mission readiness of individual service members and military units," he wrote.

The federal government removed hemp from its list of controlled substances under the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018. By law, hemp that contains less than .3% THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana) is legal. Since hemp's legalization, the market for CBD, derived from the hemp plant, has exploded into a \$1 billion industry in the U.S., with products touted to help nearly every ache and ailment, from pain and stress to mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. Although products containing CBD and less than .3% THC are legal in the U.S., the Food and Drug Administration does not certify the ingredients of dietary supplements, and in an unregulated market, such products may contain levels of THC that may cause service members to pop positive on a drug test.

Since troops can't determine exactly what they are getting in any CBD product and the DoD can't practically maintain a list of approved hemp products, all products must be off-limits, Donovan said. If a service member is found to have used a CBD product, it would be punishable under Article 92 of the UCMJ. **Exceptions** include use by authorized personnel in the performance of medical duties, those who ingest or use hemp and weren't aware that what they were consuming contained hemp or CBD, and those taking it "pursuant to legitimate law enforcement duties," according to the memo. The order also does not apply to those taking FDA-approved medications that contain CBD or synthetic cannabis, including Epidiolex, Marinol and Syndros.

The Air Force and Army have had policies since last year that made use of any CBD product punishable under Article 92. The Navy's policy restricted ingestible CBD or other hemp products but allowed Marines and sailors to use topical goods. But according to a Navy official, additional guidance is in the works to align the service's policy with the memo to apply to all sailors and Marines.

The Coast Guard's policy restricts ingestion of hemp oil or products made from hemp seed oil but does not include food items that contain hemp ingredients. A Coast Guard spokeswoman said 23 JUN that the service's policy to allow food items containing hemp remains in effect. The service falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security and not the DoD. Lt. Brittany Panetta added that marijuana and other THC products remain prohibited under federal law, and Coast Guard men and women are not allowed to participate in any event that celebrates cannabis or enter any establishment that sells or promotes such products. "The Coast Guard does not foresee any change to our clear and firm prohibition on the use of any cannabis-based products by Coast Guard members/employees. In order to protect themselves from potential violations of law and policy, members must make deliberate choices of their behaviors and, if in doubt, err on the side of caution," Panetta said. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | June 24, 2020 ++]

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang

‘Ladder’ thru ‘Line Crossing Ceremony’

Every profession has its own jargon and the Navy is no exception. Since days of yore the military in general, and sailors in particular, have often had a rather pithy (dare say ‘tasteless’?) manner of speech. That may be changing somewhat in these politically correct times, but to Bowdlerize the sailor’s language represented here would be to deny its rich history. The traditions and origins remain. While it attempted to present things with a bit of humor, if you are easily offended this may not be for you. You have been warned.

Note: 'RN' denotes Royal Navy usage. Similarly, RCN = Royal Canadian Navy, RAN = Royal Australian Navy, RM = Royal Marines, RNZN = Royal New Zealand Navy, UK = general usage in militaries of the former British Empire

Ladder – Stairs aboard ship. Found in a "ladderwell" (stairwell).

Lagging – Fiberglass insulation material commonly attached to bulkheads, ducts, and piping.

Lagging Paste – Oatmeal.

Laundry Queen - (submarines) A junior sailor, usually an NQP (especially if he's DINK) assigned to handle a division's laundry chores.

Lawn Mower - (RN) 'Flashing up a lawn mower' is a term used when a sailor is about to steal away or woo another sailor's companion away. Cutting one's fellow sailor's grass.

Lead (the) – See HEAVE THE LEAD.

Leadsman – One who heaves the lead (q.v.).

Leatherneck – US Marine. Derives from the historical use of a leather collar or stock to protect the neck from saber cuts. Also BOOTNECK (RN), GRUNT, JARHEAD, MUDPUPPY. All terms frequently modified by Naval personnel with the fond adjective "fucking".

Lens (the) - See FRESNEL LENS

Let the Cat Out of the Bag – Originally, this term simply meant to remove the cat (cat o' nine tails) from its baize bag, generally preliminary to administering punishment. The term's meaning today is to reveal a secret.

Liberty Card – A CHIT granting permission for a junior enlisted sailor to go on liberty. Usually implies that all his assigned work is done and he is not in trouble at the moment.

Liberty Boat – Various small craft used to shuttle personnel ashore and back aboard when the ship is anchored out rather than moored alongside. May be operated by a civilian contractor or by ship's personnel.

Liberty Hound – Party animal.

Liberty Risk – Someone with a reputation for getting into trouble while on liberty.

Lifer (or Lifer Dog) – A career member of the service, or one who has been in a long time.

Light Off – Start.

Light Water – See AFFF.

Line – (1) What mere mortals call 'rope', the sailor calls 'line.' Small line is called by the number of threads it's made up of (e.g. 9-thread line); larger line is sized by its circumference (rather than diameter). Traditionally, the PORKCHOP buys rope, but as soon as you cut a piece off of the spool, it is called 'line.' (2) The equator.

Line-Crossing Ceremony - The ceremony which turns POLLYWOGs into SHELLBACKs. Enjoyed much more by the Shellbacks than by the 'Wogs. Held when a vessel crosses the Equator. During the ceremony, POLLYWOGS are made to go through a number of ordeals, each more disgusting than the last. These trials are conducted in full view of KING NEPTUNE and his court. Once the ceremony is completed, the POLLYWOG is now a SHELLBACK. Similar ceremonies are conducted for Orders of the BLUENOSE and REDNOSE.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | June 30, 2020 ++]



Korean Expedition

The Other Korean War | 1871

In 1871, an American fleet led by a diplomatic and merchant ship entered Korean waters and were fired upon by antiquated shore batteries, leading to a battle where 650 Marines and sailors landed on one of the island and fought against Korean personnel to capture five forts. The mission of the fleet was to open up trade and diplomatic relations with the Korean people, a mission that was fraught with dangers stemming from a bloody history. The expedition is sometimes known as the Punitive Expedition and may or may not have come as a result of a previous expedition in 1866 where the USS General Sherman sailed upriver to Pyongyang, clashed with local authorities, and fought with large crowds of Koreans before Korean people managed to burn the vessel and kill the survivors.



U.S. Navy officers (left) pose during a council of war aboard the USS Colorado in June 1871 while preparing to make landfall on a Korean island, Korean troops (center) killed during the Expedition, and Marine Corps Cpl. Charles Brown and Pvt. Hugh Purvis (right) stand in front of a captured Korean Military Flag following the capture of Korean forts on June 11. Brown and Purvis received Medals of Honor for their actions during the short conflict.

Meanwhile, the General Sherman incident followed years of Korean atrocities against their Christian populations, largely a response to perceived encroachment by missionaries and other western influences. So, when the fleet arrived in Korea, they shouldn't have expected a warm welcome. But they were still surprised when the lead vessel, an unarmed merchant ship, came under a sustained 15-minute barrage from shore batteries. But the American fleet was only moderately damaged from the fusillade and the Americans simply withdrew. They returned 10 days later, made landfall, and spoke to Korean authorities. The Koreans refused to apologize, and the Americans launched a concerted assault on Ganghwa Island, the source of the earlier fire. The island boasted five forts, but they were mostly armed with outdated weapons and the troops lacked training in the tactics of the day.

Approximately 650 Marines and sailors, nearly all the men of the expedition, attacked one fort after another, pushing the Korean forces back and inflicting heavy casualties while suffering relatively little in return. The fighting was over before nightfall, but the Americans achieved a dramatic success. They captured five forts, killed 243 Korean troops, and suffered three deaths and little damage to equipment. The Koreans refused to enter negotiations with the Americans, and simply closed themselves back off for another two years. While the force failed to meet its political and strategic goals, it had been a smashing tactical success. This was partially thanks to the superior American weaponry, but also thanks to the bravery of individual fighters.

Fifteen Medals of Honor for actions in the one-day battle were approved. They range from citations for fighting hand-to-hand with the enemy to save a fellow American like Marine Corps Pvt. John Coleman to "carrying out his

duties with coolness" like Quartermaster Patrick Grace did. This engagement took place before the Battle of Little Bighorn triggered a review of the Medal of Honor standards, resulting in a slow increase in what was necessary to earn one of the medals. As for Korean relations, they wouldn't take off until the 1882 Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce, and Navigation. Relations under the treaty continued until 1910 when Japan established colonial rule, which didn't end until 1945 and Japanese capitulation in World War II. [Source: We Are the Mighty | Logan Nye | August 01, 2018 ++]

Battle of Iwo Jima

Japanese Outnumbered by a More than 3 to 1 margin



The Battle of Iwo Jima was an epic military campaign between U.S. Marines and the Imperial Army of Japan in early 1945. Located 750 miles off the coast of Japan, the island of Iwo Jima had three airfields that could serve as a staging facility for a potential invasion of mainland Japan. American forces invaded the island on February 19, 1945, and the ensuing Battle of Iwo Jima lasted for five weeks. In some of the bloodiest fighting of World War II, it's believed that all but 200 or so of the 21,000 Japanese forces on the island were killed, as were almost 7,000 Marines. But once the fighting was over, the strategic value of Iwo Jima was called into question.

According to postwar analyses, the Imperial Japanese Navy had been so crippled by earlier World War II clashes in the Pacific that it was already unable to defend the empire's island holdings, including the Marshall archipelago. In addition, Japan's air force had lost many of its warplanes, and those it had were unable to protect an inner line of defenses set up by the empire's military leaders. This line of defenses included islands like Iwo Jima. Given this information, American military leaders planned an attack on the island that they believed would last no more than a few days. However, the Japanese had secretly embarked on a new defensive tactic, taking advantage of Iwo Jima's mountainous landscape and jungles to set up camouflaged artillery positions.

Although Allied forces, led by the Americans, bombarded Iwo Jima with bombs dropped from the sky and heavy gunfire from ships positioned off the coast of the island. The strategy developed by Japanese General Tadamichi Kuribayashi meant that the forces controlling it suffered little damage and were thus ready to repel the initial attack by the U.S. Marines, under the command of Holland M. "Howlin' Mad" Smith. On February 19, 1945, U.S. Marines made an amphibious landing on Iwo Jima and were met immediately with unforeseen challenges. First and foremost, the beaches of the island were made up of steep dunes of soft, gray volcanic ash, which made getting sturdy footing and passage for vehicles difficult.

As the Marines struggled forward, the Japanese lay in wait. The Americans assumed the pre-attack bombardment had been effective and had crippled the enemy's defenses on the island. However, the lack of immediate response was simply part of Kuribayashi's plan. With the Americans struggling to get a foothold on the beaches of Iwo Jima - literally and figuratively - Kuribayashi's artillery positions in the mountains above opened fire, stalling the advancing Marines and inflicting significant casualties. Despite a banzai charge by dozens of Japanese soldiers as dusk fell, however, the Marines were eventually able to move in past the beach and seize part of one Iwo Jima's airfields - the stated mission of the invasion.

Within days, some 70,000 U.S. Marines landed on Iwo Jima. Although they significantly outnumbered their Japanese enemies on the island (by a more than three-to-one margin), many Americans were wounded or killed over the five weeks of fighting, with some estimates suggesting more than 25,000 casualties, including nearly 7,000 deaths. The Japanese, meanwhile, were also suffering major losses and were running low on supplies - namely, weapons and food. Under Kuribayashi's leadership, they mounted most of their defenses via attacks under the cover of darkness. While effective, the success of the Japanese forces seemed to forestall the inevitable merely.

Just four days into the fighting, U.S. Marines captured Mount Suribachi, on Iwo Jima's south side, famously raising an American flag at the summit. That image was captured by Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal, who won a Pulitzer Prize for the iconic photograph. More recently, actor/director Clint Eastwood in 2006 made two movies about the events on Iwo Jima called, respectively, *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*. The first depicts the battle from the American perspective, while the latter shows it from the Japanese perspective. [Source: Together We Served Newsletter | June 2020 ++]

WWII Guadalcanal

Second Naval Battle

In the Pacific Theater of World War II, many of the battles were either curb-stomp affairs by one side or the other — either because Japan was "running wild" in the early parts of the war, or because America brought its industrial might to bear. Many historians view Midway as an exception to that one-sided rule since America's victory is often viewed as a pure luck. But one engagement where the two sides stood toe-to-toe occurred during the Second Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. On the night of Nov. 14, 1942 — less than 48 hours after Rear Adm. Daniel Callaghan had defied the odds to turn back an attempt to bombard Henderson Field — the Japanese made another run for the airfield that was the big prize of the Guadalcanal campaign. They went with the battleship *Kirishima*, two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and nine destroyers to do the job.



Henderson Field (left) in August, 1942, Japanese ships (center) sailing towards Guadalcanal on 14 NOV, and USS Washington (BB-56) fires at the Kirishima on 14 NOV

Against this force, Vice Adm. William F. Halsey was scraping the bottom of the barrel. He stripped the aircraft carrier *USS Enterprise* (CV-6) of most of her escorts, sending in four destroyers and the fast battleships *USS Washington* (BB-56) and *USS South Dakota* (BB-57), under the command of Rear Adm. Willis A. Lee. Admiral Lee was an expert on naval gunnery, and according to *The Struggle for Guadalcanal*, written by naval historian Samuel Eliot Morison, "knew more about radar than the radar operators." That knowledge would soon be put to the ultimate test.

The Japanese force cut through the American destroyers, sinking two outright, fatally damaging a third, and crippling the fourth. The battleship *USS South Dakota* then turned and was silhouetted by the burning destroyers. The *South Dakota* took 26 hits from the Japanese guns, but the Japanese lost track of the *Washington*, which closed to within 8,500 yards of the Japanese battleship *Kirishima*. *USS Washington* was about to slug it out with a Japanese

battleship in a one-on-one fight. Using radar control, the Washington opened fire on Kirishima, and scored as many as 20 hits with her 16-inch guns. The Kirishima was rendered a sinking wreck.

The Japanese tried to even the score with Long Lance torpedoes, but missed. The Japanese made a very hasty retreat, leaving Kirishima and a destroyer to sink. Their last chance at shutting down Henderson Field for the Allies was gone. [Source: We Are the Mighty | Harold C. Hutchison | June 12, 2020++]

Battle of Okinawa

Update 02: 75th Anniversary with Scaled-Back Ceremony



Japan marked the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Okinawa on 23 JUN with a scaled-down, pandemic version of the annual Irei no Hi ceremony that drew less than a tenth of the attendees of years past. About 200 people wearing face masks and maintaining social distance to ward off the coronavirus gathered at Okinawa Peace Memorial Park in Itoman. No U.S. military members or government representatives attended, and Japanese VIPs like Prime Minister Shinzo Abe delivered their remarks via recorded video message. The general public was told to stay home, though handfuls of locals who lost family in the battle during the final stages of World War II did turn out to pay their respects. “It has been 75 years since the war has ended; however, the sorrow from losing beloved friends and family has never healed, it has only got stronger,” Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki said in his opening remarks. “It is our duty to keep sending the message of the terror of war and the importance of peace to the world.”

The Battle of Okinawa began on April 1, 1945, and lasted 82 days. More than 14,000 Americans, about 110,000 Japanese troops and at least 140,000 Okinawan civilians were killed during or after the fighting, though the total number of civilian deaths may never be known. The battle rendered large swaths of Okinawa a scorched hellscape, more closely resembling the surface of the moon than the tropical landscape it is today. Reverberations are still evident in the island’s passionate anti-war movement. For the Allies, the battle was pivotal. From airfields on Okinawa, U.S. troops began their final assault on the Japanese homeland. The war ended, however, with atomic bombings several months after the Battle of Okinawa.

The program for this year’s ceremony remained mostly the same as in prior years. Local officials, dressed in black funeral attire, sat in the Okinawa heat, underneath expansive white sunshades, flanked by food offerings for the deceased. A select group, including Tamaki, gave speeches. Then they each offered a single white flower at center stage. Tamaki, elected in 2018 on an anti-base platform, used his remarks to highlight the number of U.S. military forces on the island. Okinawa, an area roughly the same size as metropolitan Tokyo, hosts approximately half of the 50,000 troops stationed in Japan. “There are accidents and crime cases caused by the U.S. force personnel and civilian personnel, noise from the military airplanes, water contamination from the PFOS affecting the everyday life of people of Okinawa,” he said.

Abe vowed in his remarks to reduce Okinawa’s “huge burden” and to support the rebuilding of Shuri Castle, which burned down in October. The landmark was a keystone in the Japanese line of defense and fell on June 1, 1945, according to Encyclopedia Britannica. “Over 200,000 innocent people were killed during the war and beautiful ocean and forest was also destroyed,” he said via video message. “My heart is heavy thinking of those lost lives — young people with dreams and future and the parents that died worrying about their children ... we must pay the deepest

respect for those lost lives.” Tamaki asked everyone who could not be at Tuesday’s ceremony due to the coronavirus to pause at noon for a minute of silence. Marine officials said that they would be observing the request at bases across the island Tuesday.

“This battle was the largest amphibious assault undertaken by the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps in the Pacific theater and signaled the end of the massive island-hopping campaign by U.S. military forces,” III Marine Expeditionary Force commander Lt. Gen. H. Stacy Clardy III said in a statement to the force Monday on Facebook. “The harrowing battle that ensued was among the fiercest of the war. We owe those who struggled on this soil, military and civilian, especially the Okinawan people who endured so much during the battle, a great debt of gratitude.” Four U.S. Army divisions and two Marine Corps divisions, a total of about 180,000 troops, fought on Okinawa.

Army Col. Theodore White, commander of the 10th Support Group headquartered on Torii Station, said the alliance between Japan and the U.S. is the strongest in the region and can be traced back to an end of hostilities on Okinawa on June 22, 1945. “So much has changed in the 75 years since the last shots fired in anger occurred on this island,” White said in a statement emailed to Stars and Stripes 23 JUN. “The strength of the relationship between the United States and Japan is a testament to the unifying principles driven by our common goal – peace and prosperity,” he said. “We were bitter enemies that waged a brutal battle leaving scars on this island still visible today and while time will heal the wounds from war, the scars will remain as a reminder what was ... Let us find strength and comfort in our combined commitment to each other for a peaceful and prosperous future.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Matthew M. Burke & Aya Ichihashi | June 23, 2020 ++]

WWII Bomber Nose Art

[54] Texas Raiders



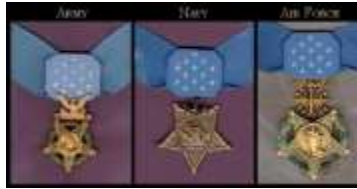
Military History Anniversaries

01 thru 15 JUL

Significant events in U. S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 JUL**”. [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | June 2020 ++]

Medal of Honor Citations

Harold E. Goettler | WWI



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

Harold Ernest Goettler

Rank and organization: First Lieutenant U.S. Army 50th Aero Squadron

Place and date: Near Binarville, France, 6 October 1918

Entered service: Chicago Ill.

Born: 21 July 1890 Chicago Ill.

Citation

1st. Lt. Goettler, with his observer, 2d Lt. Erwin R. Bleckley, 130th Field Artillery, left the airdrome late in the afternoon on their second trip to drop supplies to a battalion of the 77th Division which had been cut off by the enemy in the Argonne Forest. Having been subjected on the first trip to violent fire from the enemy, they attempted on the second trip to come still lower in order to get the packages even more precisely on the designated spot. In the course of this mission the plane was brought down by enemy rifle and machinegun fire from the ground, resulting in the instant death of 1st. Lt. Goettler. In attempting and performing this mission 1st. Lt. Goettler showed the highest possible contempt of personal danger, devotion to duty, courage and valor.



Harold Ernest Goettler was a U.S. Army Air Service aviator killed in action while locating the Lost Battalion of the 77th Division during World War I. He died of wounds resulting from German fire from the ground during the flight. For his actions, he posthumously received the Medal of Honor on 31 DEC December 1921.

He attended the University of Chicago, and the Harold E. Goettler Political Institutions Prize awarded to University of Chicago undergraduates is named in his honor. Goettler's remains had been reinterred from France to Graceland Cemetery the previous year. Bleckley remained in France.

[Source: <http://www.cmohs.org/recipient-detail/2529/goettler-harold-ernest.php> | June 2020 ++]



Telehealth

Next Big Hurdles: Integration & Payment

In the past few months, many health systems have jumped forward years in developing their telehealth programs. Within a matter of days, Seattle-based nonprofit system Providence St. Joseph Health saw virtual urgent care visits jump from 50 per day to 1,500 per day. The Department of Veterans Affairs retooled its telehealth system to be able to handle more than 15,000 patients in the system at any one time. Before, it could only handle 3,000 at once. But after soaring to peak heights, telehealth visits at both facilities have started to plateau, as patients begin venturing back into the office for appointments.

How can health systems keep the momentum going for further adoption of virtual care tools? Integration into existing workflows and competitive payment structures will be needed, four experts said in a panel the American Telemedicine Association's annual conference. "I think we're going to see increased simplicity and more integration," said Kevin Galpin, executive director of telehealth for the Department of Veterans Affairs. "The key is putting this in the provider workflow so it doesn't feel like something else."

According to a recent survey of more than 1,000 health executives by health IT company Innovaccer, 57% of hospitals used technology to screen and triage patients, and 89% offered telehealth appointments. But the majority of them were using standalone telemedicine solutions that are not connected to their health record systems. With better integration, Galpin expects to see an uptick in the use of remote monitoring tools in the future. The VA already has some remote monitoring programs in place that it was able to expand during the pandemic. A few years ago, the VA launched a program to send out connected iPads to patients that have limited internet connectivity at home. More recently, it added the ability to send patients stethoscopes, scales and pulse oximeters. The VA also launched a remote monitoring program for patients with Covid-19, based on existing programs for patients with diabetes and COPD.

Providence St. Joseph Health, which combatted the first U.S. outbreaks of Covid-19, also developed a framework to monitor patients remotely. The health system purchased thermometers and pulse oximeters to send to patients — though not "smart" devices with Bluetooth connectivity. "We didn't have to deal with any of the Bluetooth connectivity issues or frankly the expense of distributing devices that are hundreds of dollars to each of our thousands of patients," said Sara Vaezy, Providence's chief digital strategy and business development officer. Instead, patients would be prompted three times per day to input their temperature and oxygen saturation readings through a secure web form created by a startup called Twistle. A group of tele-ICU nurses would be able to simply view that data in the patient's health record, thanks to an integration through another startup, Xealth. "Prior to putting this in place, our nurses were calling folks several times per day," Vaezy said.

In this lull where health systems are beginning to offer more in-person care, but patients are still hesitant to come into the office, Vaezy sees an opportunity for continued adoption of telehealth. But future expansion will depend on the "...degree to which we integrate it and make the experience for our providers and our patients frictionless," she said. "We're all very excited we've overcome some of the (onboarding) folks onto these new technologies. But we have some work to do on the experience side of things to drive maintaining and sustaining the progress that we made."

How much to pay?

The other big question looming over virtual care — whether in the form of video visits or asynchronous chats — is how to reimburse for it. Prior to the pandemic, reimbursement for telehealth was less than optimal, the panelists agreed. But emergency regulations changed that, with most physicians getting paid the same for telehealth visits as in-person visits. Should that continue? “I’ll say something which might be kind of controversial. I don’t think over the long run, reimbursement should be the same,” Vaezy said. “When you convert something to digital, it should help the cost of that thing and the price of that thing go down. That’s not to say it should be reimbursed at historical rates, either.”

Fatima Paruk, chief medical information officer for Microsoft Health and Life Sciences, said she expected to see more companies ensure financial incentives are in place for virtual care to be a success. At the same time, the opportunity for reduced overhead costs could be a big selling point for telehealth. “You don’t have to turn around patient rooms and outpatient clinics. If you can deliver this stuff virtually and a heck of a lot more efficiently so you can get to the next patient on time, I think all of a sudden there’s a whole additional value proposition here that has not been quantified,” she said.

Others advocated for throwing out traditional payment models altogether, especially as virtual care begins to encompass a wider variety of services than just video visits. Dr. Tom Lee, founder of One Medical and his newest primary care venture, Galileo, said the conversation needs to shift from measuring telehealth services as a proportion of in-office visits. “We have this arbitrary unit called the office encounter. How does that get micronized into a text message, a voice mail, an asynchronous video?” he said. “It’s a challenging thing. Do we really want to go in the direction of measuring every CPT (code) associated with every single activity?” [Source: MedCity News | Elise Reuter (Opinion) | June 23, 2020 ++]

Drug Price Fixing

Coalition Lawsuit against Generic Manufacturers

Attorney General Keith Ellison has joined a coalition of 51 states and territories, led by the State of Connecticut, in another lawsuit against manufacturers of generic drugs for an alleged conspiracy to illegally fix prices and allocate markets, in this instance for 80 generic topical dermatological drugs that account for billions of dollars of sales in the United States alone. The complaint that Attorney General Ellison joined names 26 corporations and 10 individuals as defendants, and seeks damages, civil penalties, and actions by the court to restore competition to the generic drug market.

This is the third lawsuit filed against alleged illegal behavior by generics manufacturers in what has been called most likely the largest cartel in the history of the United States. “This kind of conspiracy has been illegal for more than a century. There’s one simple reason that drug companies still engage in it: greed,” Attorney General Ellison said. “While they lined their pockets, Minnesotans and Americans who suffered from the conditions these drugs are designed to treat emptied theirs. I’m taking these corporations to court for making it harder for Minnesotans to afford their lives and live with basic dignity and respect,” he added. In February 2020, Attorney General Ellison released the report of his Task Force on Lowering Pharmaceutical Drug Prices. The Task Force found that one of the major causes of the high cost of prescription drugs is anticompetitive conduct in the industry. Several of the report’s 14 recommendations center around requiring more transparency and accountability in the broken and dysfunctional pharmaceutical-drug market.

The current complaint stems from an ongoing investigation built on evidence from several cooperating witnesses at the core of the conspiracy, a massive document database of more than 20 million documents, and a phone-records database containing millions of call detail records and contact information for over 600 sales and pricing individuals in the generics industry. Among the records the states obtained is a two-volume notebook with the contemporaneous notes of one of the states’ cooperators that memorialized his discussions during phone calls with competitors and internal company meetings over a period of several years. Between 2007 and 2014, three generic drug manufacturers,

Taro, Perrigo, and Fougera (now Sandoz) sold nearly two-thirds of all generic topical products dispensed in the United States. The multistate investigation has uncovered comprehensive, direct evidence of unlawful agreements to minimize competition and raise prices on dozens of topical products. The complaint alleges longstanding agreements among manufacturers to ensure a “fair share” of the market for each competitor, and to prevent “price erosion” due to competition.

The complaint is the third filed in an ongoing, expanding investigation. The first complaint was filed in 2016 and now includes 18 corporate defendants, two individual defendants, and 15 generic drugs. Two former executives from Heritage Pharmaceuticals, Jeffery Glazer and Jason Malek, have entered into settlement agreements and are cooperating with the attorneys general in that case. In May 2019, Attorney General Ellison joined 42 other states and Puerto Rico in filing a second complaint against Teva Pharmaceuticals and 19 other of the nation’s largest generic drug manufacturers for market allocation and price fixing on 112 generic drugs that treat cancer, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and other conditions. [Source: Red Lake Nation News | June 17, 2020 ++]

Mosquitos

Update 07: Potential Health Hazard



Yellow fever mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*)

Warmer temperatures bring mosquitoes – and these pesky flying insects present a potential health hazard. Through biting, mosquitoes may transmit serious or even deadly illnesses. According to experts including the World Health Organization, there's no evidence mosquitoes can transmit the COVID-19 virus. But mosquitoes are to blame for the spread of many other germs. [West Nile](#) is the most common virus spread by mosquitoes in the continental United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Mosquitoes also spread malaria. About 2,000 cases of this flu-like illness are diagnosed in the United States every year, according to the CDC. It can be severe and even lethal in young children, said Anne Radavich, chief of product development and education in the Entomological Sciences Division of the U.S. Army Public Health Center, or APHC.

Other ailments spread by mosquitoes include the dengue, yellow fever, Zika, and chikungunyaviruses. "Vaccines are not available for many of the illnesses and diseases that mosquitoes spread," Radavich said. "So the best prevention is to control mosquitoes and eliminate their breeding habitat." June 21-27 marked National Mosquito Control Awareness Week. The Department of Defense has enacted measures to protect the health of service members in parts of the world where mosquito-borne illnesses are common. Those steps include pretreating uniforms with permethrin, an insecticide that kills or repels mosquitoes. Permethrin also can be applied in the field to clothes and other items, but it should not be applied to skin.

Tests are being conducted on a possible replacement for permethrin, said James English, assistant professor in the Global Public Health Division, Department of Preventive Medicine and Biostatistics, at Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland. "Permethrin in field uniforms works well to protect from mosquito bites; it's safe; and the formulation used in military uniforms has been providing safe, effective protection against disease vectors for nearly 30 years," English said. "But that doesn't mean we can't find something that works better or lasts longer." English added that permethrin has been used all over the world against agricultural pests, and that has caused resistance to occur in mosquitoes in some locations.

"If and when we change to a new active ingredient or a new method of protection, it will be because we found something that is more effective, lasts longer in the uniform and doesn't wash out or wear off as quickly; that the method has a better risk profile for the wearer, the environment or the people who apply it; or that the new protection method is the next step in the dance to avoid resistance in the target disease vectors," he said. Other steps in the DoD [repellent system](#) include protecting exposed skin using insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, or IR3535 as the active ingredient. All three can be used on skin or clothing, Radavich said. These products are available in a variety of forms including liquids, lotions, and sprays.

At home, look for ways to eliminate spots where mosquitoes lay their eggs, experts say. Some mosquitoes breed in outdoor containers with standing water, including flowerpot saucers, birdbaths, and trash can lids. "They can breed in something as small as a bottle cap with a few drops of water in it," Radavich said. Army entomologists invented the [Trap-N-Kill](#). Users place a plastic pesticide strip inside the approximately 8-inch-tall, cylinder-shaped device and then fill with water. Mosquitoes looking for a place to lay their eggs enter through a small hole in the front. The pesticide strip fatally poisons them and any larvae that hatch from the eggs. Trap-N-Kill became available to DoD personnel through the military supply system starting in 2014. It's also available through a commercial licensing agreement at civilian retail locations. APHC and the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research jointly hold the patent on the device, Radavich said. A [fact sheet](#) available from APHC offers more information about controlling mosquitoes around the home. [Source: Health.mil | Communications Office | June 23, 2020 ++]

Metabolic Syndrome

Unhealthy Predictors of Heart Disease

A new study finds that 1 in 5 people under age 40 now have metabolic syndrome, a group of risk factors that together increase the odds for many serious conditions, including diabetes, heart disease and stroke. The rate of metabolic syndrome is rising in all age groups -- as many as half of adults over 60 have it. But among 20- to 39-year-olds, the rate rose 5 percentage points over five years, the study reported. Metabolic syndrome is a group of heart disease risk factors that occur together. They include:

- A large waistline,
- High blood pressure,
- Higher-than-normal blood sugar levels,
- High triglyceride levels (triglycerides are a type of blood fat),
- Low levels of good (HDL) cholesterol.

"The trends for metabolic syndrome are very alarming. A huge proportion of the adult population is affected -- overall, 37% of adults in the United States. In young adults, the prevalence was remarkably higher than in our previous study through 2012," said study co-author Dr. Robert Wong, from the Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System in California. Wong said the specific effects of metabolic syndrome in younger people haven't been well studied yet, but it's concerning to see because the impact is cumulative. "Young adults have so many years for damage and impact from metabolic syndrome," he said. While many effects of metabolic syndrome take years to develop, a more immediate concern is COVID-19. People with metabolic syndrome, including younger people, have greater odds for developing severe complications if infected with the new coronavirus, according to Wong.

The study included data from a nationally representative group of more than 17,000 volunteers. More than 1 in 3 (35%) had metabolic syndrome. Rates were similar in both men and women. The researchers compared data on cases in 2011-2012 to levels in 2015-2016. Among 20- to 39-year-olds, metabolic syndrome rose during from 16% to 21%. For 40- to 59-year-olds, the rate went from 38% to 42%, and in those over 60, it rose from 47% to 50%. Only the change in the youngest group was considered statistically significant, Wong said.

Researchers also examined rates by race and ethnic group. They noticed that levels stayed roughly the same over the period among Blacks, but rose about 5 percentage points for whites. The biggest increases were seen in Asians, Hispanics and people who identified with other groups, according to Wong. Among people 60 and older who did not identify as Hispanic, White, Black or Asian, the rate of metabolic syndrome was 64%. In Hispanics 60 and older, it was 57%. While genetics may play a role, Wong said lifestyle appears to be the biggest contributor to the rise. He said targeted interventions to help people eat healthier and get more activity are needed. "The challenge with metabolic syndrome is that for the most part, it has no symptoms. You may feel fine now, but these risk factors can culminate into serious outcomes like heart attack, stroke and cancers," Wong said.

Dr. John Osborne, director of cardiology at State of the Heart Cardiology in Southlake, Texas, reviewed the findings and said the rising rates in younger people were concerning. "It's not just having a condition, it's the duration," he said. "The longer you have metabolic syndrome, the more likely it is that it will ultimately turn into diabetes, heart disease, stroke, acid reflux, sleep apnea and other problems." Osborne said the biggest factors in the rise boil down to two big factors: "As a population, we're getting grayer [older] and we're getting fluffier [more overweight]."

While acknowledging that it can be hard, he said it's crucial for your health to try to eat better and move more. Osborne recommended a more Mediterranean diet -- lots of plant-based foods and less processed foods. "Try to eat real food and avoid simple sugars," he advised. The findings were published June 23 as a letter in Journal of the American Medical Association. Learn more about metabolic syndrome from the [U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute](#). [Source: U.S. News & World Report | Serena Gordon | June 23, 2020 ++]

Diabetes

Update 24: Patient Data Can Predict Older Adults Life Expectancy

A new study finds that clinicians can use patient data, such as a history of co-occurring health conditions and medication, to predict the 5- and 10-year life expectancy of older people with diabetes. The ability to make such predictions, the researchers say, may help clinicians and patients develop personalized treatment goals that balance risks and benefits. The results appeared 19 JUN in the journal Diabetes Care. Drs. Kevin Griffith and Paul Conlin of the VA Boston Healthcare System led the study. The researchers embarked on the study knowing that federal and professional society clinical practice guidelines recommend that treatment goals be individualized for older adults with diabetes.

Key factors that impact diabetes treatment goals include co-occurring health conditions (such as severe mental illness or cancer); diabetes complications, such as chronic kidney disease and heart failure; co-existing conditions, and life expectancy. The benefits of lower blood sugar can take several years to occur. For some older adults with limited life expectancy, the treatment burden may not be worth the benefits. "But the guidelines don't give doctors guidance for how to decide whether or not people fall into these different bins for life expectancy," Griffith noted. "Furthermore, clinicians are notoriously inaccurate in predicting life expectancy, with studies frequently showing both over- and underestimating. We developed models with high predictive validity of future mortality in a large sample of older Veterans with diabetes." Conlin added: "Our goal was to use the best available information to inform decision-making in setting glucose control targets. Doctors and patients, of course, can then use their own judgment to make a decision."

The researchers reviewed the electronic health record data of more than 275,000 Veterans with diabetes who were at least 65 years old. Using predictive modeling techniques, they identified 37 predictive factors that have previously been linked to, or are suspected to impact, mortality in older adults with diabetes: demographic variables (age, sex, marital status); prescriptions for insulin or sulfonylureas, a class of diabetes drugs; and biomarkers such as hemoglobin A1c, blood pressure, body mass index, and levels of cholesterol and triglycerides, a type of fat found in the blood. The 37 predictive factors also included inpatient and outpatient history and more than 20 medical procedures and co-occurring health disorders.

The results placed patients in three time frames for expected death: within five years, 5 to 10 years, and more than 10 years. The final predictive models for 5- and 10-year mortality had high predictive validity and demonstrate the importance of several individual and condition-specific characteristics that may inform clinicians and patients about life expectancy. “We aren’t saying, for example, that any of these risk factors result in decreased life expectancy,” Griffith commented. “However, the more risk factors that individuals have, the greater the risk of higher mortality over time.” The researchers suggested that these results could assist clinicians in using shared decision-making to establish A1c target ranges that balance treatment benefits and risks.

The study has some important limitations. Since the analysis was based on a Veteran cohort and on older adults, it is possible that results may not generalize to other settings. However, the predictive models can be evaluated by other health care systems that have similar electronic health care records. It is also possible that recent changes in the approach to older adults with diabetes, such as less emphasis on tight blood sugar control, as well as treatment advances especially for congestive heart failure and chronic kidney disease, could affect model results. Conlin said he hopes that in the future, predictive models will come into use at the point of care to help clinicians and patients mutually set diabetes treatment goals. However, he noted that the study findings are immediately relevant to clinicians. “Our results identify multiple common conditions that can easily be identified in clinical practice and assist clinicians in shared decision-making with patients, which is a key recommendation of the VA/DoD Diabetes Guidelines,” said Conlin. [Source: VA ORD | Mike Richman | June 19, 2020 ++]

Asthma

Update 04: Management & Spirometry Testing

According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 26 million Americans have asthma, which is 8.3 percent of adults and 8.3 percent of children. More than 50 million Americans have various types of allergies each year, including indoor/outdoor, food and drug, latex, and insect allergies. Inhaling specific substances called allergens can cause asthma and allergy symptoms. It is important to know what triggers your symptoms so you can learn how to limit your exposure to them. Those impacted by Asthma are encouraged to check out [The Basics of Asthma Management](#) to learn how to effectively manage your asthma symptoms and tools to help you live a quality life.

Those who suspect they may have Asthma could avail themselves of a Spirometry test. This is a simple breathing test that measures how much air flows in and out of your lungs. If you have symptoms that could be a sign of asthma—like shortness of breath—you should have a spirometry test. Here’s why:

- **Asthma and other diseases can have the same symptoms --** When you have asthma, the lining of the airways in the lungs swells and the muscles around the airways get tight. Then the airways get narrow. When you breathe, you have trouble moving air out of your lungs. As a result, you may cough, wheeze, feel short of breath, or have tightness in your chest. Exercise or cold air may make the symptoms worse. However, those same symptoms can also be a sign of other lung problems, such as a common cold, bronchitis, or pneumonia. They can even be symptoms of heart disease and other diseases. It is important to know the cause of your symptoms to make sure you get the right treatment. The treatment for asthma is very different from the treatment for pneumonia or heart disease.
- **Spirometry helps diagnose and manage asthma --** A spirometry test can confirm whether you have asthma or another disease. And it helps your healthcare provider decide on your treatment. A spirometry test can also show how well your treatment is working. If follow-up spirometry tests show that your asthma is well controlled, your treatment is working. If it shows that your asthma is not under control, your doctor may need to change your medicine or give you more medicine.

- **Skipping the test has risks --** Many people who need a spirometry test never have one. Some healthcare providers only rely on symptoms to decide whether a patient has asthma or another disease. If your doctor assumes you have asthma without giving you a spirometry test, you could be taking asthma drugs when you don't need them. And the real cause of your symptoms would not be treated. On the other hand, you and your doctor might assume the cause of your symptoms is a mild problem, when in fact it is asthma. If your asthma is not treated, you could have severe asthma attacks. About nine people die from asthma attacks every day in the U.S. Untreated or poorly managed asthma can also cause scarring in the lungs, which can lead to COPD. Once the lungs are scarred, asthma medicines won't work as well.
- **The test can save money --** A spirometry test generally costs less than \$100. Not having the test can cost a lot more money. If the test shows that you do not have asthma, this can save you hundreds of dollars a month for asthma medicines. If you do not have the test and you have asthma, an emergency room visit for an asthma attack can cost thousands of dollars.

Children older than age five, and adults of any age, who have asthma-like symptoms should have a spirometry test. The healthcare provider should also do a physical exam and a full medical history. If the test shows that you have asthma, your doctor should prescribe asthma medicine. Then you should be retested four to six weeks later. If your test results improve, your treatment is working. You may even be able to take less medicine. If your symptoms get worse, you should have another spirometry test. If your symptoms are controlled, you should have a test at least once every year or two. **Note:** This report is for you to use when talking with your healthcare provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this report is at your own risk. [Source: TRICARE West Region e-Update | June 2020 ++]

Seborrheic Dermatitis

Non-Contagious Skin Condition

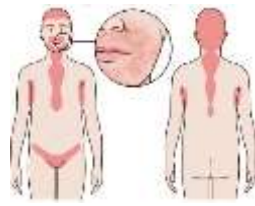
This condition leads to scaly patches of skin with oily, dandruff-like flakes, especially on your face and scalp. It is only rarely itchy. Experts believe that seborrheic dermatitis is made more likely by certain things. These include an increased production of sebum (an oily substance) in the skin, too much of a yeast (fungus) that lives on the skin, and a weakened immune system. If someone first has seborrheic dermatitis as a teenager or adult, it almost always tends to come back again and again. Then it helps to apply antifungal medicines or steroid creams to the inflamed areas of skin. The situation is very different in babies, though: If seborrheic dermatitis occurs during the first few months of a child's life, it usually goes away on its own within one year and also doesn't come back. This is commonly known as cradle cap.

Symptoms

The typical symptoms of seborrheic dermatitis are patches of skin covered with yellowish, shiny, oily scales. These patches look reddish on light-colored skin, and lighter on darker skin. They don't usually itch. The patches occur most commonly on areas of skin that have a lot of sebaceous (oil-producing) glands. These typically include areas

- Along the hairline and on the part of the scalp covered with hair,
- Along and between the eyebrows,
- On the cheeks and particularly in the folds of skin that run from the nostrils down to the corners of the mouth.

Seborrheic dermatitis may also spread to other parts of the body, most commonly above the breastbone and on the back near the thoracic spine. Fold of skin may be affected too – for example, under the breasts, or in the armpits or groin area. In men, the patches may also occur in the genital region. Seborrheic dermatitis looks a little different in babies and mostly affects their scalp.



Parts of the body typically affected

Causes, Prevalence & Outlook

The scaly patches of skin are probably caused by various factors, such as an increased production of sebum (skin oil) and the usually harmless growth of the yeast *Malassezia furfur* on the skin. Other factors that can play a role here include bacteria, stress, genes, hormones, nervous system disorders like Parkinson's disease, and a weakened immune system. People with a weakened immune system also have a higher risk of developing a more severe type of seborrheic dermatitis that spreads to the rest of the skin and is harder to treat. Seborrheic dermatitis is common: About 3 to 10 out of 100 people are affected. It's more common in men than in women. People usually get it for the first time when they are young adults or over the age of 50. It's a chronic condition in adults and teenagers, with symptoms that vary in their severity over time. These skin symptoms might also go away for a while – often in the summer. But they may return in the winter or during periods of stress.

Diagnosis & Treatment

It is easy to diagnose seborrheic dermatitis if scaly, non-itchy patches of skin appear on the parts of the body typical for the condition. Usually it's enough to have a detailed talk with the doctor and then a physical examination. The doctor will first try to rule out other skin conditions that are similar to seborrheic dermatitis, such as psoriasis or eczema (also called atopic dermatitis). Like seborrheic dermatitis, these conditions cause changes in the skin, but usually on other parts of the body. In eczema, the skin inflammations itch and are made up of patches of skin without clearly defined edges. Sometimes there are small blisters too. Further examinations are only rarely needed. For instance, a swab test can be done and sent to a laboratory to find out whether it's a bacterial skin infection such as impetigo. It's usually not necessary to take a sample of the tissue (biopsy).

In teenagers and adults, the symptoms can be relieved by applying certain medications to the inflamed patches of skin. The possible medications include the following:

- Shampoos containing tar
- Creams that have salicylic acid in them
- Creams or shampoos with antifungal agents (antimycotics)
- Anti-inflammatory creams or gels containing steroids

It usually isn't necessary to take any pills or tablets. Because sunlight can make seborrheic dermatitis improve, some people also try phototherapy with UVB light. There is no treatment that can clear up seborrheic dermatitis for good. Babies don't usually need treatment for seborrheic dermatitis because it goes away on its own.

Everyday life

Although seborrheic dermatitis is harmless, it can still be distressing for teenagers and adults: The scaly patches of skin often occur on the face, making them visible to others. And they may never go away again. If you feel very bad about your skin, you can talk with a doctor about finding a way to better cope with the condition, for instance with the help of behavioral therapy. You should avoid always covering up the inflamed patches of skin with a heavy foundation or concealer because that clogs the pores in the skin. But it's okay to use a light foundation every now and then. Mild, non-oily skin care products are well suited for skin care. You don't need to use special sun protection for seborrheic dermatitis. Exposing the skin to sunlight and fresh air, for example by going to the beach, may even reduce the symptoms. It's enough to use an appropriate sunscreen strength for your skin type. Less oily sun lotions are more suitable than very oily lotions.

[Source: www.informedhealth.org | June 18, 2020 ++]

Presbyopia

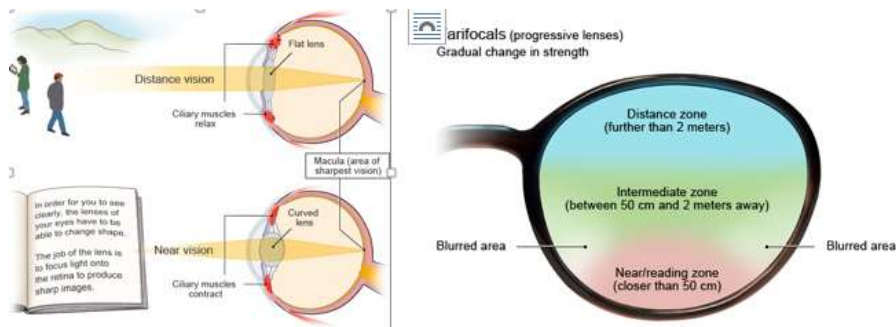
Seeing Objects Less Clearly

It happens to all of us eventually: You have to start holding newspapers or books further away in order to be able to read them and clearly recognize letters without straining your eyes. Seeing nearby objects less clearly is a normal part of aging. Known as presbyopia, this typically becomes noticeable in your mid-forties. Although there are no effective treatments for the causes of presbyopia, the effects can be corrected. The best and easiest way to do so is using reading glasses.

Symptoms & Causes

Early signs of presbyopia usually become apparent when reading. It also gets harder to do things like checking your watch or mobile phone, reading the prices in supermarkets or recognizing people on photos. At first, this problem is especially noticeable when you're tired or in dim light. It's often still easy to read a short newspaper article. But it gradually gets harder to read for longer periods of time because the letters start blurring. You have to strain your eyes to see clearly and they might start burning. You may also get a headache after a while.

Your eyes can focus on nearby and faraway objects by changing the shape of their lens. This changes the refractive power (focusing power) of the lens: When looking at faraway objects the lens becomes flatter and thinner. To see nearby objects clearly, the lens becomes curved and thicker with the help of a muscle in the eye. The medical term for these adjustments is accommodation. The lenses of your eyes become harder and less flexible with age, and your eye muscles probably become weaker too. As a result, the lenses can no longer change shape as easily. This means that it's harder to see things close-up. But your ability to see faraway objects isn't affected. So presbyopia could be described as age-related farsightedness.



Adjusting to nearby and distant objects (left) and Varifocals (progressive lenses) with gradual change in strength (right)

Risk factors. Prevalence & Outlook

While some people already start having trouble reading or seeing things close-up in their early forties, this may only happen much later in others. It's not clear why that is. What is known, though, is that people who have medical conditions like diabetes, cardiovascular disease or multiple sclerosis may develop presbyopia at a younger age. Women often start wearing reading glasses at a younger age than men do. This is mainly because they tend to do something about the problem sooner, though. There is no difference between men and women in terms of when presbyopia starts.

Experts believe that more than one billion people around the world have presbyopia, and this number is expected to grow. Toddlers can see objects clearly even if they are right in front of their eyes. This ability is lost as people grow older. A reading distance of about 35 cm is considered to be normal in adults. This distance gradually increases in your early forties, and most of us will need reading glasses by the age of 45. People tend to become increasingly farsighted until around the age of 65 or 70, when presbyopia generally stops getting worse. In shortsighted people, who have problems seeing distant objects clearly, the effects of presbyopia are usually milder and occur later. They can

counterbalance these effects by not wearing their glasses. The hardening of the eye lenses is more of a problem for people who are already farsighted because it then becomes even more difficult for their eyes to adjust to see nearby objects.

Diagnosis & Treatment

Presbyopia can be diagnosed by an ophthalmologist (an eye doctor) or at an optician's. This involves using a small instrument (a phoropter) to measure the refractive power of your eyes, followed by an eye test to determine the prescription strength needed for corrective lenses. In the eye test you are asked to look at eye charts, a projector screen or other screen. These have letters, numbers or broken rings of decreasing size on them. Because your eyesight is usually different in each eye, your eyes are tested separately by first covering one eye and then covering the other. The test determines what kind of corrective lenses are needed to improve your sight. Like the refractive power of your natural eye lenses, the refractive power of glasses or contact lenses are measured in diopters (D).

Although there are no effective treatments to fight the cause of presbyopia, the effects of presbyopia are easily corrected. The easiest way to solve the problem of not being able to see nearby objects is wearing glasses. Some people use ready-made reading glasses that are available in shops. But the two lenses of these readily available reading glasses have the same lens power, although most people have different vision in each eye. Individually adjusted prescription reading glasses are only available from an optician's, where glasses with the exact required lens power are made especially based on the results of an eye test. It sometimes makes sense to wear multifocal glasses, such as varifocals. These can, for instance, help to correct nearsightedness at the same time too, in people who are both nearsighted and farsighted. As an alternative to glasses, contact lenses can be used to correct the effects of presbyopia too. Laser treatment or surgery to correct presbyopia are possible too. But the only advantage of these approaches, if any, is that you no longer have to wear glasses. They can lead to side effects and complications too, though.

Special eye exercises are sometimes recommended for the prevention of presbyopia. These exercises usually focus on training the eye muscles. Even if there are a lot of descriptions of how to do these eye exercises on the internet or in books, doing them won't prevent presbyopia. Training the muscles in your eyes won't stop your eye lenses from becoming harder and less flexible as you grow older.

[Source: www.informedhealth.org | June 16, 2020 ++]

Coronavirus Vaccine

Update 03: Medical Glass Shortage Could Delay Availability



As drugmakers race to develop a COVID-19 vaccine, a shortage of medical glass needed to make vials to contain the vaccine may delay when the public gets it, The Wall Street Journal reported. Medical glass was in shortage several months before the pandemic. Medical glass is different from the glass household containers or cups are made of because it has chemicals that make it resistant to drastic temperature changes and keeps vaccines stable, according to the Journal. Schott AG, one of the world's biggest makers of medical glass, told the Journal it has received requests for about a billion vials this year, nearly double its capacity to make.

- Johnson & Johnson has bought 250 million vials for its experimental COVID-19 vaccine.

- Corning, another medical glass-maker, told the Journal it has reached a \$204 million deal with the U.S. to expand its manufacturing capacity and produce vials for COVID-19 vaccines. Corning plans to produce tens of millions of vials in the coming weeks.
- Pfizer has signed a long-term supply agreement with Corning for medical glass, the Journal reported.
- The government also has given a \$143 million contract to a privately held company called SiO2 to make 120 million vials by November.

Drugmakers are exploring using alternative packaging that could reduce the demand for medical glass, according to the Journal. For more on the subject refer to <https://www.wsj.com/articles/coronavirus-vaccine-makers-are-hunting-for-vital-equipment-glass-vials-11592317525>. [Source: Washington Post | Maia Anderson (Opinion) | June 16, 2020 ++]

COVID-19 Vulnerability

Update 01: Who's Affected Most



New Medicare data reveals which chronic conditions make seniors especially vulnerable to ending up in the hospital with COVID-19. Seniors with five chronic conditions are especially vulnerable to ending up in the hospital due to exposure to the coronavirus, according to new data from the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. CMS says more than 325,000 Original Medicare beneficiaries were diagnosed with COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, between the start of the year and May 16. Of those beneficiaries, 111,000 were hospitalized during that period. The CMS data reveals that five chronic conditions were most commonly found among the Original Medicare beneficiaries who had been hospitalized:

- Hypertension: 79%
- Hyperlipidemia: 60%
- Chronic kidney disease: 50%
- Anemia: 50%
- Diabetes: 50%

Of the beneficiaries who were hospitalized, 28% died in the hospital and 27% were discharged to their homes. The others moved from the hospital to skilled nursing facilities (21%) or other health care settings, CMS says. Half of the hospital stays lasted for fewer than eight days, while 9% percent of the stays were at least 21 days.

The coronavirus appears to be affecting people of color, older adults and the poor in greater numbers, and that disparity also shows up in the Medicare data. CMS says COVID-19 hospitalization rates are especially high for:

- Black beneficiaries (465 hospitalizations per 100,000 beneficiaries)
- Hispanic beneficiaries (258 hospitalizations per 100,000 beneficiaries)
- Beneficiaries who are age 85 or older (379 hospitalizations per 100,000 beneficiaries)
- Beneficiaries enrolled in both Medicare and Medicaid, the government insurance program for people with low incomes (473 hospitalizations per 100,000 beneficiaries)

By comparison with that last group, the rate for beneficiaries enrolled only in Medicare is 112 hospitalizations per 100,000 people. Regardless of your race, ethnicity, age or financial standing, there are steps you can take to reduce your risk of contracting the coronavirus. Some measures are obvious or have gotten a lot of media attention. You can find helpful tips in “[Beware These 7 Hand-Washing Mistakes](#)” and “[5 Disinfectants That Can Destroy the Coronavirus](#)”. Other ways to keep the coronavirus at bay might be less obvious. For one example, check out “[Doing This in the Car Can Reduce Your Coronavirus Risk](#).” [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | June 27, 2020 ++]

COVID-19 Gatherings & Cookouts

How to Safely Host During Pandemic



Trying to navigate social interaction during a summer of COVID-19 comes with a lot of questions about safety. On 12 JUN, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) aimed to answer some of these questions, issuing very specific guidance on what to do to lower your risk of contracting the virus while doing a range of social activities, including hosting gatherings and cookouts. If you plan to have guests over, the CDC recommends reminding people to stay home if they’ve been exposed to COVID-19 in the past 14 days or if they’re showing symptoms of the virus. But there are many more recommendations for how to be as safe as possible while entertaining people from outside of your household.

- *Consider Keeping a List of Invited Guests* -- If someone at your gathering contracts COVID-19, having a list of people who were at the gathering can be helpful for contact tracing, the CDC says.
- *Encourage Social Distancing* -- The CDC recommends holding your party outside, if possible. If you need to host indoors, make sure the room or space is well-ventilated by opening a window. Tables and chairs should be spaced out, although people from the same household can be grouped together. Try to focus on activities that allow for social distancing for adults and kids, like playing frisbee or doing sidewalk chalk art.
- *Minimize Contact* -- It’s best to try to avoid close contact at all, the CDC says. Specifically, don’t shake hands, do elbow bumps, or give hugs. Instead, wave at your guests and verbally greet them.
- *Wear Face Coverings* -- Cloth face coverings should be worn when you’re less than 6 feet apart from other people, or if you’re indoors.
- *Promote Good Hand Hygiene* -- The CDC recommends that guests wash their hands for at least 20 seconds when they arrive at the party and before they leave. Consider making hand sanitizer readily available at the gathering, and make sure there is plenty of soap in the bathroom.
- *Use Disposable Paper Towels* -- Have single-use hand towels or disposable paper towels available for your guests to dry their hands so they don’t share a towel.
- *Limit Who Serves or Handles Food* -- Limit how many people are in the kitchen or near the grill and choose one person to serve all of the food, if possible, the CDC says.¹ Single-use items, like small packages of condiments, are ideal so that multiple people aren’t handling the same item. If that’s not possible, designate one person to handle sharable items, like salad dressings, containers, and condiments. You should even encourage your guests to bring their own food and drinks.

- *Limit Contact With Shared Items* -- If you can, use touchless garbage cans or pails. Use gloves, if available, when you take out the trash, and wash your hands after you take off your gloves. You'll also want to clean and disinfect commonly-touched surfaces like tables and chairs after the event.

While the guidelines are a helpful starting point, effectively putting them into practice depends on your personal situation and location. Follow the recommendations as best as you can, and gauge how comfortable your guests are with interacting with other people. But of course, every situation is different, Andres Romero, MD, an infectious disease specialist at Providence Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica, CA, told Verywell. "The precautions that you need to take will always depend on what's going on in your area," Romero said. "In more crowded cities, there is a higher likelihood of being infected whenever you leave your door, because you are constantly surrounded by people who might be infected." For example, people gathering on a deck in a hard-hit area like New York City may need to be more mindful about hosting than those in a spacious backyard in Montana, which has not seen many cases. "Every space, city, and county is so different," Romero said.

- *Who to Invite* -- The CDC didn't mention a suggested maximum number of people for these gatherings, and there's likely a reason for that, David Cennimo, MD, director of East Orange VA Medical Center and assistant professor of medicine-infectious disease at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, told Verywell. "No one is giving numbers, because no one really knows," he said. "All it takes is one infected person." Cennimo recommends thinking in terms of households versus total number of people, as well as what those people do when they're not at your gathering. If you bring together a group of essential workers who have regularly been interacting with the public, the odds may be higher that one of those guests will be infected, compared to bringing together multiple households where you know the members have mostly stayed home, he said.
- *Keep It Short* -- The amount of time you spend with others can influence the risk of COVID-19 transmission. "COVID-19 spread [happens through] viral shedding, and the longer you are in contact, the more virus is shed," Suzanne Willard, PhD, a clinical professor and associate dean for global health at the Rutgers School of Nursing, told Verywell. Viral shedding happens when a virus replicates inside a host and is then released, posing a risk of disease transmission.

Overall, experts stress the importance of keeping in mind that any interaction with people outside of your household comes with some risk. "Unfortunately, people don't light up when they're infected and there is no specific look to someone with COVID-19," Willard said. Ultimately, Cennimo explained, it comes down to your risk tolerance. "You can do as much as you can to mitigate risk but you have to figure out what level of comfort you have when interacting with others," he said. [Source: VeryWell Health | Korin Miller | June 22, 2020 ++]

* Finances *



Social Security Taxes

Update 04: Why Half of Retirees Now Pay Them

Having Social Security taxes taken from your paycheck is bad enough. But for millions of Americans, the obligations don't end there. Half of retirees say they paid income taxes on their Social Security benefit income during the 2019 tax year, according to a survey by the Senior Citizens League. Mary Johnson, a Social Security and Medicare policy analyst for the Senior Citizens League, notes: "There was no change from previous years in the 50 percent of retiree households

who report that they pay tax on a portion of their benefits, despite the 2017 tax reform law.” As the league points out, the problem is likely to grow worse with time.

While income tax brackets are adjusted for inflation over the years, there has been no adjustment since 1984 to the income thresholds that subject Social Security benefits to taxes. That was the first year benefits became taxable. How bad has the problem become since then? Initially, less than 10% of Social Security recipients were expected to owe taxes on their benefits. Now, Uncle Sam is reaching into the pockets of about half of recipients. Even retirees with modest incomes can become ensnared in these taxes. As the league states: “Up to 85 percent of Social Security benefits can be subject to taxation if an individual has a combined income of \$25,000 and married couples filing jointly have a combined income of \$32,000. Had income thresholds been adjusted for inflation, they would be about \$62,902 for individuals and \$80,515 for joint filers in 2020.” Your combined income determines whether your Social Security benefits are taxable by the federal government and, if so, to what extent.

As previously reported the Social Security 2100 Act (H.R.860/S.269) would greatly help alleviate this situation for millions of older taxpayers by making substantial changes to the income thresholds. The bill would raise the current income thresholds for taxation of Social Security benefits to \$50,000 for single filers and \$100,000 for joint filers, effective for tax year 2020. It would make up for the loss of revenue, by other payroll tax changes. H.R.860 with 280 cosponsors was introduced in the House on 30 JAN 2019 and referred to the Subcommittee on Social Security by the Committee on Ways and Means. S.260 was also introduced on 30 JAN to the Senate and currently only has one cosponsor. It was referred to the Committee on Finance. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | June 15, 2020 ++]

Tricare Catastrophic Cap

Update 07: Enrollment Fee Application Error

Since Jan. 1, 2018, enrollment fees for TRICARE Prime, TRICARE Select, and the US Family Health Plan (USFHP) haven’t been applied to the annual TRICARE family catastrophic cap for certain households. The Defense Health Agency is working to fix this issue. This issue only affects those TRICARE-eligible households who exceeded or came close to exceeding their catastrophic cap in 2018, 2019, and 2020. The catastrophic cap is the maximum you and your family pay for covered TRICARE health care services each calendar year. This protects you because it limits the amount of out-of-pocket expenses you pay for TRICARE covered medical services. Out-of-pocket costs that apply to the catastrophic cap include:

- Enrollment fees
- Deductibles
- Copayments
- Cost-shares

This may affect your household if you exceeded or came close to exceeding your family’s annual catastrophic cap in 2018, 2019, or 2020, and you paid enrollment fees in any of those years as either a:

- TRICARE Prime [Group A enrollee](#) or TRICARE Prime [Group B enrollee](#).
- TRICARE Select Group B
- If you or your sponsor’s initial enlistment or appointment occurs on or after January 1, 2018, are in Group B. DS enrollee.

If your household was affected, you’ll get a letter from your TRICARE regional contractor, USFHP provider, or TRICARE Overseas Program (TOP) contractor. The Department of Defense estimates this may affect about 35,000 retiree households. If you get a letter indicating a catastrophic cap overpayment occurred, you have two options:

- Automatically get a credit toward future enrollment fee payments. If you choose this option, you don't need to do anything. You'll be credited up to two years' worth of enrollment fees. You'll get a refund for any amount over two years' worth.
- Request a refund of the amount overage. You may also request a refund for the overage amount. Make this refund request by calling your [regional contractor](#), [USFHP provider](#), or [TOP contractor](#).

Going forward, future enrollment fees will be credited towards your family's yearly catastrophic cap. To learn more about your catastrophic cap or TRICARE costs, visit [Cost Terms](#) and [Costs](#) on the TRICARE website. [Source: TRICARE West Region eUpdate | June 2020 ++]

TRICARE Select

Update 04: Retiree Monthly Enrollment Fees to Begin in 2021

"Working age" military retirees -- those under age 65 -- who use Tricare Select for their health care will start paying enrollment fees beginning next year, Defense Department officials announced Tuesday. For the first time since the creation of Tricare Standard, now known as Tricare Select, retired beneficiaries who joined the military before 2018 will pay a monthly fee for their health care: \$12.50 for an individual or \$25 for a family. The enrollment fees do not apply to active-duty family members on Tricare Select or Medicare-eligible retirees on Tricare For Life. Defense health officials said these retirees can expect to hear from their regional contractors -- either Health Net Federal Services for Tricare West or Humana Military for Tricare East -- in the coming months instructing them on how to set up payments, either by allotment from their retired pay, electronic funds transfer, debit or credit card.

Dr. Danita Hunter, director of Tricare at the Defense Health Agency, said the DHA decided to issue a news release now to give beneficiaries time to prepare and factor the fees into their decisions on health care. "We're communicating this well before the change is implemented so beneficiaries can be informed about the change, as well as their Tricare plan and cost options," Hunter said in the release. In the fiscal 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress approved a request from the DoD to implement enrollment fees for what was then known as Tricare Standard. At the time, the DoD argued that the change would entice more retirees to use Tricare Prime at military hospitals and clinics, where they would pay an annual enrollment fee but not make any copayments.

The switch would curb the government's cost of providing health care to these beneficiaries, since private care was determined to be more expensive to provide than military health care. But in the past three years, the DoD has done an about-face on providing health services to the 3.2 million retirees and their family members under the age of 65 who are eligible for Tricare, forcing many from military hospitals as soon as they retire and embarking on a restructuring geared to reserving military treatment facilities to treat active-duty personnel only. By law, the DoD was required to wait to implement the Tricare Select enrollment fees until at least 90 days after the Government Accountability Office provided a report to Congress reviewing Tricare patients' access to medical care, the percent of network providers that accept new patients, the satisfaction of beneficiaries in Tricare Select and any changes to the Tricare system since 2017.

In response, the GAO issued several reports this year indicating that, overall, patients saw very little change to their health care or access to care when Tricare Standard became Tricare Select. Patient satisfaction also remained relatively unchanged during the first year of care, although some did report issues finding providers, according to the GAO. In another report released in late May, GAO analysts warned that DoD's assessment of whether there are enough network providers to accept an influx of new patients once seen at military treatment facilities is built on "incomplete and inaccurate information." Without a robust network able to accept patients from military facilities that are being realigned to serve active-duty troops, some may experience problems finding care, the GAO said.

With the announcement of the new enrollment fees, all military retirees under age 65 will be paying a baseline for participating in Tricare. Retirees using Tricare Prime, a health-maintenance style program offered at military treatment

facilities and through specialty programs and networks near military bases, pay \$300 a year for an individual and \$600 a year for a family. Copayments per visit to a network provider run from \$20 for primary care and \$31 for specialty care or urgent care. These retirees make no copays if they are seen at a military treatment facility. Retirees using Tricare Select currently pay no enrollment fees. But with the new change, they will pay \$150 per year for an individual and \$300 per year for a family. They also are obligated to meet deductibles of \$150 for an individual and \$300 for a family. And they must pay a \$30 copay for a primary care visit or urgent care at a network physician, or 25% of the cost for non-network care, as well as \$45 or 25% at a network or non-network specialty care provider, respectively.

If retirees on Tricare Select do not pay the enrollment fees, they could lose their health care for nearly a year, since they would have to wait for Tricare open season to re-enroll. That potential loss has some military advocacy organizations worried. “The stakes are high,” Karen Ruedisueli, director for Health Affairs at the Military Officers Association of America, said. “We are very concerned about the new Tricare Select enrollment fee for Group A retirees [retirees who joined the military before Jan. 1, 2018]. For the past couple of years, the open enrollment message has been ‘if you are happy with your plan, you don’t have to take action.’ I think that has created an uphill battle for effectively communicating about this enrollment fee,” Ruedisueli said.

Eileen Huck, deputy director of health care at the National Military Family Association, called it “unfortunate” that the enrollment fee is being imposed on retirees. However, she added, “We’re glad the Defense Health Agency is being proactive and putting out the information. That will make it easier for families to plan and budget for this change.” Tricare Open Season, the period during which Tricare beneficiaries can switch health plans, is scheduled for 9 NOV through 14 DEC this year. The DoD has established a Tricare Select Enrollment Fee information page, and beneficiaries can sign up for email alerts through the website. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | June 24, 2020 ++]

Medicare Cost | Military Retirees

Update 03: How Much Medicare Really Costs

As folks already on Medicare likely know too well, it does not cover all medical expenses. The federal health insurance program for seniors and some younger folks with disabilities is like any other type of health insurance in that the beneficiaries are responsible for certain costs. And a recent analysis shows just how much Americans with traditional Medicare spend on these out-of-pocket expenses. Also known as Original Medicare, traditional Medicare is the more common of the two main types of Medicare.

The analysis, by the AARP Public Policy Institute, is based on 2017 Medicare beneficiary data, the latest available. So, keep in mind that all of the following figures would be a bit higher in 2020 dollars. On average, Medicare beneficiaries spend a total of \$5,801 per year — 16% of their income — on out-of-pocket health care costs, AARP found. Among beneficiaries age 65 and older, this spending is even higher — \$6,089, or 15% of their income. This spending, which includes any supplemental insurance costs, breaks down as follows:

<u>Expense</u>	<u>All beneficiaries</u>	<u>Beneficiaries age 65 and older</u>
• Premiums	\$2,728	\$2,891
• Medicare-covered services	\$1,522	\$1,536
• Non-covered services	\$1,551	\$1,662

Services that traditional Medicare does not cover include dental care and long-term care, as are detailed in “5 Common Medical Expenses That Medicare Won’t Pay For” at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/slideshows/costs-that-medicare-does-not-cover>. It’s no secret that health care is expensive, particularly for retirees. A 65-year-old man who retired in 2019 would need a total of \$135,000 for medical expenses throughout his retirement, and a woman in the same situation would need \$150,000, according to Fidelity Investments’ latest annual Retiree Health Care Cost

Estimate. So, if anything, the AARP analysis findings serve to underscore the importance of planning for retirement health care costs and doing your homework before choosing or changing your Medicare plan.

Perhaps the biggest decision Medicare recipients ever make is whether to go with Original Medicare or a Medicare Advantage plan when they first become eligible for Medicare, which is generally at age 65. Medicare Advantage is the other main type of Medicare. Beneficiaries have the opportunity to switch between Original Medicare and Medicare Advantage during open enrollment periods, but that can carry risks, as is explained in “4 Dangers for First-Time Medicare Enrollees” at <https://www.moneytalksnews.com/slideshows/dangers-for-first-time-medicare-enrollees>. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsher | June 19, 2020 ++]

Bayer Lawsuit

\$10 B+ Settlement in Roundup Cancer Lawsuits



Bayer will pay more than \$10 billion to resolve thousands of lawsuits regarding claims that its herbicide Roundup causes cancer, the company announced 24 JUN. Monsanto, which Bayer bought in 2018, lost a lawsuit that same year brought by a school groundskeeper who claimed its weedkiller had caused his non-Hodgkin lymphoma. Since then, thousands of U.S. lawsuits have been filed against the company. Bayer CEO Werner Baumann called the decision to settle the lawsuits the right one in order to end a long period of uncertainty. “The decision to resolve the Roundup litigation enables us to focus fully on the critical supply of health care and food,” he said in statement. “It will also return the conversation about the safety and utility of glyphosate-based herbicides to the scientific and regulatory arena and to the full body of science.”

The settlement, however, does not contain any admission of wrongdoing or liability. Bayer will pay \$8.8 billion to settle existing lawsuits and then another \$1.25 billion that will cover any potential litigation in the future, the company said in its press release. Kenneth Feinberg, a court-appointed mediator for the settlement, called the deal a “constructive and reasonable” resolution. “The significant progress made to date — which exceeds the initial participation rates of other claims resolution proceedings — provides a robust framework that will enable the parties to bring closure to the current Roundup litigation in due course,” he said in the statement from Bayer. Lawsuits allege that Monsanto ignored warnings that its herbicide contained potentially cancer-causing chemicals, then concealed the threat to consumers.

A jury awarded the California groundskeeper, Dewayne Johnson, nearly \$290 million in damages in August 2018 after it found Monsanto failed to warn Johnson and other consumers about the risks posed by its weed-killing products. A judge upheld the decision upon appeal, but lowered the damages to \$78 million due to what she considered an overreach in punitive damages decided by the jury. And last year, a California jury awarded a husband and wife more than \$2 billion in damages in a suit that claimed Roundup caused their illness. Those damages were also reduced by a judge to \$87 million instead. German pharmaceuticals and chemical giant Bayer bought Monsanto in 2018 just months before Johnson won his suit against the company. Bayer eliminated the Monsanto name, but maintained the brands and folded them into its portfolio. [Source: NBC News | Doha Madani | June 24, 2020 ++]

Freelancer Scam

Scammers Create Fake Accounts

Small businesses looking to hire a freelancer online, beware. Scammers are creating fake accounts on platforms like Upwork. They use photos and resumes of real professionals and entice businesses with low rates.

How the Scam Works

- You are looking to hire a freelancer, such as software developer or graphic designer, to help with a project for your business. You decide to post the gig on a website, such as Upwork or Freelancer.com, where you can connect directly with independent contractors.
- On that site, you find a freelancer who looks perfect for the job. According to their resume, they have the knowledge you need and years of experience. And best of all, this freelancer's rate is far below what other similarly qualified people charge. You decide to hire them and pay a deposit upfront. Your new contractor seems to get to work. But weeks pass, and the project still isn't finished. In fact, your freelancer stops responding to messages!
- Unfortunately, this qualified freelancer is likely an imposter. Scammers are stealing the photos and resumes of real independent contractors and posting them on Upwork and other sites. They may even contact freelancers directly and ask to use their profile in exchange for payment or promise of future work.

Tips to spot this scam:

- Watch out for too good to be true rates. Before hiring a freelancer, do some research and know the standard hourly rate for the position you want to hire. If an experienced candidate is advertising a price well below that – for example, a professional web developer who charges \$25 an hour – it's very likely a scam.
- Do a video interview before hiring. Always speak with top applicants over video chat first. Make sure they match their photo and have the knowledge and experience they claim in their profile. Put that requirement in your job post to help weed out scammers.
- Find your freelancer on other platforms. Look for your freelancer's LinkedIn profile, portfolio website, or social media presence. This will help you confirm their identity and experience.
- Report phony accounts. To report a suspicious account on Upwork, click the "Flag as inappropriate" button. Learn more about reporting scams on Upwork.
- Freelancers, make sure you aren't being impersonated. Scammers can steal your photo, portfolio, and resume from sites like LinkedIn. Be sure that someone isn't impersonating you online and hurting your reputation.

For More Information

Learn more about [staying safe](#) on Upwork. Read more about [imposter scams on BBB.org](#). For more about scams, go to BBB Scam Tips (BBB.org/ScamTips). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker (BBB.org/ScamTracker). [Source: BBB Scam Alert | June 5, 2020 ++]

Money Mule Scam

When Love Turns into Money Laundering

The CARES Act funding is helping Americans with the COVID-19 pandemic by providing increased unemployment benefits and other support. But unfortunately, some of this money is ending up in the hands of scammers. These con artists are then using people to funnel money out of the country. This con may look like a classic romance scam, but victims are tricked into illegal activity and can be prosecuted.

How the Scam Works:

- You join a dating app and start messaging with someone who looks amazing. They are the complete package: good-looking, successful, kind... and, most importantly, really into you, too! After chatting for a little while, your new love interest suggests that you chat on text or email, rather than through the app. If you do that, you may notice that they also delete their dating profile.
- Everything seems great, but soon your new beau has some unusual – but seemingly harmless – requests. They want you to receive money for them and wire it overseas. They may claim to be helping a loved one battling COVID-19, doing a business deal, or representing a charitable organization. If you refuse, your amorous new beau may suddenly get hostile, threaten you or grow distant.
- It turns out that the money they want you to receive is actually stolen CARES Act funds. After stealing it, scammers send the money through someone in the United States to make it harder for authorities to trace. Money laundering and wire fraud are illegal! Although the “money mule” is a victim, too, they may still face prosecution.

Tips to spot this scam:

- Do your research. Many scammers steal photos from to use in their dating profiles. You can do a reverse image lookup using a website, like Google Images, to see if the photos on a profile are stolen from somewhere else. You can also search online for a profile name, email, or phone number to see what adds up and what doesn't. Scammers most often pose as men and target women in their 50s and 60s.
- Ask specific questions about details given in a profile. A scammer may stumble over remembering details or making a story fit.
- Never send money or sensitive personal information to someone you've never met in person. Cut off contact if someone starts asking you for financial or personally identifiable information (PII), like your credit card number or government ID numbers.
- Be very suspicious of requests to wire money or use a pre-paid debit card. These are scammers' favorite ways to send payments because, like cash, once the money is gone, it can't be recovered.

For More Information

Find more information in this romance scams [study from BBB](#) and these romance scam [tips](#). Learn more about money mule scams on the Federal Bureau of Investigations [website](#). For more about scams, go to BBB Scam Tips (BBB.org/ScamTips). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker (BBB.org/ScamTracker). [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | June 26, 2020 ++]

Tax Burden for Delaware Retired Vets

As of JUN 2020

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 Delaware:

Sales Tax

Delaware has no sales tax, and does not allow cities or counties to assess any type of sales tax. Businesses are, taxed on their gross receipts as an alternative to sales tax, but this tax cannot be passed on to consumers. A 3.75% "document

fee" is collected on all automobile sales, and occupational license taxes of up to 1.92% are also collected on certain business activity.

Excise Taxes

An excise tax is a tax directly levied on certain goods by a state or federal government. The most prominent excise taxes collected by the Delaware state government are the fuel tax on gasoline and the so-called "sin tax" collected on cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. Connecticut collects an average of \$602 in yearly excise taxes per capita, one of the highest average per capita excise taxes in the country.

Alcohol: Liquor \$3.75 per gal | Wine: 97¢ per gal | Beer: 16¢ per gal. Note that the IRS also collects a federal excise taxes on alcoholic beverages, which are included separately from Delaware's alcohol taxes in the final purchase price.

Cannabis Tax: N/A

Cellphone: The average tax collected on cell phone plans in Delaware is \$6.25 per phone service plan, one of the lowest cellphone taxes in the country. Delaware's average cellphone tax is ranked #45 out of the 50 states. The cellphone tax is already included in the service plan price you pay to your service provider, and may be listed as "Misc. taxes and Fees" or "Other" on your monthly bill.

Cigarettes: \$1.60/pack of 20. Delaware's excise tax on cigarettes is ranked #21 out of the 50 states.

Diesel Fuel: 23 cents/gallon (Plus federal excise tax on diesel @ 24.4 cents per gallon) ranked 32 out of 50 states.

Gasoline: 23 cents/gallon (Plus federal excise tax on gasoline @ 18.4 cents per gallon) ranked 32 out of 50 states.

Vehicle: Delaware collects a registration fee and a title fee on the sale or transfer of cars and motorcycles, which are essentially renamed excise taxes. Unlike standard excise taxes, however, the end consumer must pay the tax directly to the Connecticut Department of Transportation and receive documentation (registration and title papers) proving the fees were paid.

Personal Income Taxes

All taxpayers: Unlike the Federal Income Tax, Delaware's income tax does not provide couples filing jointly with expanded income tax brackets. Delaware's maximum marginal income tax rate is the highest in the United States. You can learn more about how it compares to other states' income taxes by visiting the map of income taxes by state at <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/income-tax-by-state>. Resident taxpayers can review the Instruction Pub for completing state tax Form 200-01 (<https://www.tax-brackets.org/delawaretaxforms/form-200-01>) at <https://www.tax-brackets.org/delawaretaxforms/income-tax-instructions>. If you have a question about your Delaware tax return, you can contact the Delaware Department of Finance via email at personaltax@state.de.us or call the general income tax helpline at 302-577-8200. For refund assistance call 302-577-8784, and for assistance with monthly installments call 302-577-8586.

Tax Rate Range: Low – 2.2%; High – 6.6%. In addition to the personal income tax rates, Delaware imposes a tax on lump-sum distributions.

Income Brackets: Six. Lowest – \$2,000; Highest – \$60,000 +

Tax Credits: Single – \$110; Married – \$220; Dependents – \$110; Over 60 – take an additional \$110. Tax Credit instead of a deduction

Standard Deduction: \$3,250 if single and not itemizing; \$6,500 if married filing jointly and not itemizing.

Medical/Dental Deduction: None

Federal Income Tax Deduction: Some or all of federal income tax paid can be deducted from state taxable income

Retirement Income Taxes: Social Security and Railroad Retirement benefits are exempt. Taxpayers 60 and older can exclude \$12,500 of investment and qualified pension income. They may qualify for an additional tax credit of \$110. Out-of-state government pensions qualify for the pension and retirement exemption. Under age 60, \$2,000 is exempt. If you are 65 or older on December 31, you are eligible for an additional standard deduction of \$2,500 (if you do not itemize). Go to http://revenue.delaware.gov/information/faqs_pit.shtml#RI for more information on tax rates and exemptions

Retired Military Pay: Up to \$2,000 of military retirement pay excluded for individuals under age 60; \$12,500 if 60 or older.

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

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

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

Property Taxes

The median property tax is \$1,078.00 per year (38th of 50) for a home worth the median value of \$249,400.00. Counties in Delaware collect an average of 0.43% (7th of 50) of a property's assessed fair market value as property tax per year. Delaware has one of the lowest median property tax rates in the United States, with only twelve states collecting a lower median property tax than Delaware. The state's median income is \$67,249 per year, so the median yearly property tax paid by residents amounts to approximately 1.6% of their yearly income. Delaware is ranked 43rd of the 50 states for property taxes as a percentage of median income. Exact property tax levied depends on the county the property is located in. Refer to <http://www.tax-rates.org/delaware/property-tax#Counties>. The state offers various property tax relief programs for residents age 65 and older and for residents with disabilities.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

Estates with a total value of more than \$5.149 million may be subject to the Delaware estate tax of 0/8% to 16%.

Other State Tax Rates

- 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>.
- Excise Taxes (i.e. gasoline, cigarettes, cellphones, automobiles, beer, wine, and liquor: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/excise-tax-by-state>.

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Go to <https://revenue.delaware.gov/forms> for resident individual tax forms. For further information visit the Delaware Division of Revenue site <http://revenue.delaware.gov> or call 302-577-8200. [Source: <http://www.tax-rates.org/delaware/sales-tax> | June 2020 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest

June 16 thru 30, 2020

- **Stock Investors.** Those who dabble in the stock market might want to check out '25 Stocks That Billionaires Are Selling' at http://www.jewishworldreview.com/0620/stocks_billionaires_are_selling.php3.
- **VA Caregiver Support Line.** Whether you're in need of immediate assistance or have questions about what services you may be eligible for, the caring licensed social workers at 1-855-260-3274 who answer the support line can provide you with information about assistance available from VA, help you access services, connect you with the Caregiver Support Coordinator at a VA Medical Center near you, or just listen, if that's what you need right now.

- **Covid-19 Deaths.** More Americans have now died of the coronavirus than died serving in World War I. In the two years the U.S. fought in WWI, more than 116,500 service members died. The COVID-19 pandemic has now claimed nearly 118,000. As of 18 JUN, at least 117,832 Americans had died because of the virus, according to counts kept by Johns Hopkins University. About 26 percent of the world's COVID-19 deaths have happened in the United States, according to the World Health Organization. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recorded more than 2.1 million cases of the virus in the United States this week.
- **DoD Travel Restrictions.** SecDef signed a memo identifying criteria and locations that meet the conditions to lift them. To view it go to <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2225922/travel-restrictions-green-locations-june-19-2020/source/GovDelivery>.
- **Washington DC Monuments.** About 400 Washington, D.C., National Guard troops have been activated to help the U.S. Park Police protect local monuments and critical infrastructure amid ongoing protests against police brutality that have led to some monuments being vandalized.
- **Videos Worth Watching.** Recommend The Policeman <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUUZ2fKVqcs>, I am the Flag <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Akfd9xYMSs4&feature=youtu.be>, and Boy on a beach <https://pinearts.smugmug.com/The-Boy-on-the-Beach-Omaha-Beach-2014/i-vPVMh5F/A>.
- **Last Voyage of the U-853.** At <https://youtu.be/haUO2chYB-o> can be viewed a 30 min video on Germany's U-853 submarine which was ultimately sunk off the coast of Rhode Island.
- **Sea Time.** On 26 JUN the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Ticonderoga-class cruiser San Jacinto under COVID-19 orders to keep moving and avoid all port visits, as ship stops in foreign countries are too risky, notched their 161st consecutive day at sea, breaking the previous Record of 160 days. And they're on pace to crush it, since they won't hit land again until they get home to Virginia later this year.
- **Great Wall.** Around 30% of China's Ming-era Great Wall has disappeared over time as adverse natural conditions and reckless human activities – including stealing bricks to build houses. It is not a single unbroken structure but stretches for thousands of miles in sections, from Shanhaiguan on the east coast to Jiayuguan in the windswept sands on the edge of the Gobi desert to the west. It is so dilapidated in places that estimates of its total length vary from 5,600 to 13,000 miles depending on whether missing sections are included.

[Source: Various | June 30, 2020 ++]

National Anthem

Update 10: Why it is Played before Sporting Events



During the bombardment of Fort McHenry in 1814, Francis Scott Key, a lawyer and poet pulled into port on a mission to negotiate the release several POWs from British forces. Before a deal could be reached, the British started bombing the city of Baltimore, restricting Key's access to the fort. Key witnessed the devastation of the battle and documented the events in a poem — which we know today as "The Star-Spangled Banner." The song grew in popularity, often playing at public events and various celebrations throughout the nation. Fast forward to 1889, the Secretary of the Navy ordered Key's song to play during the each raising of the flag at the beginning of the day. In 1916, President

Woodrow Wilson ordered that the "The Star-Spangled Banner" be played at all military ceremonies and other various occasions.

Soon after America entered WWI, Major League Baseball started to feature a variety patriotic rituals like pregame military drills. During game one of the 1918 World Series, the players took their traditional seventh-inning stretch, and a band started to play the anthem. The song caused the Cubs and Red Sox to stand at attention and face the centerfield flag pole. The crowd stood on their feet and sang along to the anthem — applauding afterward. Since the song had gotten such positive feedback, the band continued to play the tune during the next few games. Once the series moved to Boston, the anthem was played at the beginning of the game under the Red Sox owner's request. In March 1931, the patriotic song passed through congress, confirming it as America's official national anthem. President Herbert Hoover signed the document, and the tradition spread throughout the major sporting events. [Source: We Are the Mighty | Tim Kirkpatrick | June 12, 2020 ++]

Veterans' Memorial Preservation Act

Applicable to Monument/Memorial Vandals



President Donald Trump warned that anyone who "vandalizes or destroys" any monument, in the United States will be arrested and imprisoned for up to 10 years under the Veterans' Memorial Preservation Act or other federal laws. As more and more monuments to Confederate leaders, slaveholders or those with ties to racist policies, are toppled across the country -- and some in other nations -- the president took to Twitter on 23 JUN threatening prison time under federal laws set up to protect veteran memorials. "I have authorized the federal government to arrest anyone who vandalizes or destroys any monument, statue or other such federal property in the U.S. with up to 10 years in prison, per the Veterans' Memorial Preservation Act, or such other laws that may be pertinent," Trump wrote the day after an attempt to remove the statue of President Andrew Jackson near the White House. "This action is taken effective immediately, but may also be used retroactively for destruction or vandalism already caused. There will be no exceptions!"

The Veterans' Memorial Preservation and Recognition Act of 2003 establishes criminal penalties for anyone who "willfully injures or destroys, or attempts to injure or destroy ...veterans' memorials" including "any structure, plaque, statue or other monument on public property commemorating the service of any person or persons in the armed forces of the United States." Under that statute, anyone convicted of those acts could be fined and/or imprisoned for no more than 10 years, or both. But since that federal law is already established, and has been for nearly two decades, no authorization from the president is needed to enforce it or prosecute someone under the law.

Congress passed the law in 2003 in response to a string of vandalisms at national veterans' cemeteries. At the time, there were few laws protecting those cemeteries specifically, tied mostly to grave desecration, trespassing on federal property or destruction of government property. The bill passed into law generally without incident, signed by then-President George W. Bush. Discussion of the proposal among lawmakers at the time did not include monuments to Confederate veterans, instead focusing on the recent vandalism of cemeteries and memorials. The president said he plans to sign an executive order on the monuments. "I will have an executive order very shortly," Trump said on the

South Lawn Tuesday before a trip to Arizona, according to the White House. "And all it's really going to do is reinforce what's already there, but in a more uniform way." [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | June 23, 2020 ++]

China's Nuclear Arsenal

Congress Urges Trump Admin to Constrain It

A delegation of 40 Republican lawmakers is urging the Trump administration to constrain China's nuclear weapons program and significantly overhaul America's own arsenal of aging nuclear arms, according to a letter sent 15 JUN to President Donald Trump. China is on pace to triple its stockpile of nuclear arms, including missiles capable of reaching America, GOP House lawmakers warned in the letter. Beijing's proliferation efforts warrant increased U.S. readiness and lethality in the Indo-Pacific region, they said. "The Chinese regime has put its aggressive nuclear ambitions on full display," necessitating an immediate intervention by the Trump administration, the lawmakers wrote in the letter spearheaded by Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY).

GOP hawks in Congress want to bolster recent efforts by the Trump administration to include China in the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (known as New START), an arms control pact that restricts the number of nuclear missiles the United States and Russia can deploy. As China looks to expand its program past these caps—with a particular emphasis on countering U.S. capabilities—the Trump administration can no longer ignore the imminent threat this poses, according to the lawmakers.

In a move likely to rattle the arms control community, the GOP delegation is calling on the Trump administration to significantly expand the United States' nuclear arms program to counter China. This would include the construction of advanced missile and missile-defense capabilities, as well as a complete overhaul of the U.S. nuclear triad—land-based nuclear missiles, nuclear-armed submarines, and nuclear-capable aircraft bombers. "Powered by the state-mandated fusion of its defense and civilian sectors, China, after many years of proclaiming its minimum nuclear deterrent, has developed its own nuclear triad to directly rival America," the lawmakers wrote. In addition to modernizing its arsenal, China is "developing capabilities to evade U.S. missile defenses," a threat that necessitates Beijing's inclusion in the New START treaty.

China is already seeking to expand its nuclear arsenal to more than 1,000 warheads, triple its current stockpile. The Communist regime will at least double its weapons cache in the next decade, in what Defense Intelligence Agency director Lt. Gen. Robert Ashley recently described as "the most rapid expansion and diversification of its nuclear arsenal" in history. The White House must also renew efforts to bring China to the negotiating table, including discussions that reach beyond the New START treaty, the lawmakers said.

It is unclear, however, how much leverage the United States has over China. As negotiations with Russia over the New START treaty languish, the Trump administration has threatened to let the agreement lapse next year if China is not included in the talks. Opponents of this approach argue that the United States has little power to bring China to the negotiating table and risks allowing the most significant arms control treaty in history to collapse. Republican lawmakers are backing the Trump administration's stance and hope to show the White House that these efforts will be supported by allies in Congress.

Trump's "directive to bring China to the table has only grown in urgency since the spread of the coronavirus pandemic," the lawmakers wrote. "We must compel the CCP to be transparent about both this devastating virus and its nuclear capabilities and ambitions." In addition to Cheney, the letter is backed by prominent Republican China hawks, including Reps. Jim Banks (IN), Mike Gallagher (WI), Doug Lamborn (CO), and Lee Zeldin (NY), among many others. [Source: Washington Free Beacon | Adam Kredo (Opinion) | June 15, 2020 ++]

China's Nuclear Arsenal

Update 01: China Quietly Building It Up



Has Beijing had a change of heart and revived its fondness for weapons of mass destruction while other world powers are in talks to reduce them? It seems so. China quietly added at least 30 nuclear warheads, some already deployable, to its stockpile in 2019, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute said, citing sources within the country and the Rocket Force of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). "China is in the middle of a significant modernization and expansion of its arsenal," the think tank said. At its annual session last month, China's parliament approved a 1.27 trillion yuan (US\$179 billion) budget for the PLA, up 6.6% year-on-year. The move came as Washington was aiming to include Beijing in talks with Moscow to cut each other's inventory of nuclear and other strategic arms and dismantle retired stocks.

Details about the PLA's nuclear tactics, especially related to production, capacity-building and deployment, are always concealed from overseas observers. But it is generally believed that the Chinese military houses its warheads across a number of bases in inland provinces, in particular the far-west Xinjiang, where China detonated its first atomic bomb in 1964 and its first hydrogen bomb three years later. In July 1996, having conducted its 45th and final nuclear test at Lop Nur, a remote, largely dried up salt lake in an arid basin on the edge of a massive desert in southern Xinjiang, then-Chinese President Jiang Zemin declared a formal moratorium on nuclear testing, although further subcritical tests have likely been held over the following years. The nuclear test base near Lop Nur has since been converted into a tourist attraction, as the PLA shifted its nuclear research and development elsewhere across Xinjiang and the western province of Sichuan.

Some military observers, including Jun Takada, a Japanese scientist and activist known for prominently opposing nuclear tests, note that large areas in backwater provinces like Xinjiang, Sichuan, Qinghai and Inner Mongolia are off-limits to locals and visitors. Some saw those closed areas as evidence of the PLA's active nuclear stockpiling. To be sure, the size of China's nuclear arsenal lags way behind those of the United States and Russia. The US-based Federation of American Scientists estimated China had about 320 warheads, all stockpiled, as of 2019, compared with America's 5,800 and Russia's 6,370. Both countries also have more than 1,500 already deployed, either placed on missiles or on bases with operational forces.

Earlier this year, Hu Xijin, the chief editor of China's state-owned tabloid Global Times, stirred a commotion with his posts on Weibo that claimed there was not an atom of truth in the international media's renewed smear campaign of China's military modernization. He suggested the PLA should more than triple its nuclear inventory to at least 1,000 warheads to match the US and reflect China's overall strength. It is believed Hu was channeling calls from the military and the party's hardcore faction for more funding and resources for the PLA. When asked if Beijing had shifted its approach to nuclear development and nonproliferation, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying stressed that countries with much bigger arsenals should have a bigger responsibility and that Beijing would stand by its "no first use" pledge.

Whether the increase in Beijing's nuclear inventory is a breach of its commitment to nuclear nonproliferation is a moot point. The fact is that China is not the only power investing in its nuclear arsenal. India, Britain, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea are all increasing their capabilities, yet each country added fewer than 20 warheads last year. But by taking the lead in an emerging new nuclear arms race, Beijing may have given the Pentagon more justification to

restart its own nuclear testing, ending a decades-long hiatus since 1992. [Source: AsiaTimes | K.G. Chan (Opinion) | June 17, 2020 ++]

Afghan Russian Involvement

Taliban-linked Militants Allegedly Offered Bounties

A Russian military spy unit offered bounties to Taliban-linked militants to attack coalition forces in Afghanistan, including U.S. and British troops, in a striking escalation of the Kremlin's hostility toward the United States, American intelligence has found. The Russian operation, first reported by the New York Times, has generated an intense debate within the Trump administration about how best to respond to a troubling new tactic by a nation that most U.S. officials regard as a potential foe but that "President" Trump has frequently embraced as a friend, said the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive intelligence matter. The officials said administration leaders learned of reported bounties in recent months from U.S. intelligence agencies, prompting a series of internal discussions including a large interagency meeting that was held in late March. According to one person familiar with the matter, the responses discussed at that meeting included sending a diplomatic communication to relay disapproval and authorizing new sanctions.

Russian involvement in operations targeting Americans, if confirmed, is likely to lead to outrage on Capitol Hill and questions about why the administration has not responded to it. Spokesmen for the National Security Council, the Pentagon, and the CIA declined to comment. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that the story, "illustrates the low intellectual abilities of propagandists from the American intelligence, who instead of inventing something more reliable have to come up with such nonsense... However, what else can be expected from intelligence, which miserably failed the twenty-year war in Afghanistan" The Taliban denied any involvement. "We categorically reject the notion of ever planning or carrying out targeted attacks against U.S. or foreign forces at the behest of foreign intelligence or for the sake of collecting bounty," said Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid in a statement, "and we also reject receiving material support from foreign intelligence because such undertakings are harmful for the sovereign decision-making of any country and movement."

It was not immediately clear whether the militants approached by Russia as part of the initiative had succeeded in killing Americans or allied forces. News of the murky initiative comes as American diplomats attempt to kindle political talks that could put end to America's longest war, now in its 19th year. Earlier this year, the administration struck an initial peace deal with the Taliban. The agreement, which outlined the full withdrawal of the U.S. military within 14 months, was supposed to lead to a prompt start to talks between militant representatives and the Afghan government. But the Afghan parties have failed to reach agreement on interim steps, and with the coronavirus crisis taking hold in Afghanistan, those talks have yet to materialize. Hanging over the process is Trump's oft-stated desire to remove U.S. forces from the country, where local forces have been unable to secure an edge over the Taliban despite two decades of foreign funding and advising.

The attempt to stoke violence against Americans, if confirmed, would also represent a significant departure from Moscow's earlier position toward Islamist militants in Afghanistan. Previously, U.S. officials had cited what they characterized as sporadic, low-level Russian support for the Taliban, including the supply of small arms via Afghanistan's northern neighbors. After the Soviet Union's own punishing insurgent war in Afghanistan in the 1980s, Moscow remained largely in the background in the years after U.S. and NATO forces entered the country in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. But as America's anxiousness to depart has fueled greater uncertainty, Russia has appeared to attempt to wield greater influence in recent years. While Moscow's motives for alleged bounties were not immediately clear, officials said they might include retaliation for the U.S. military's 2018 killing of Russian mercenary troops working for Yevgeniy Prigozhin, an oligarch with links to Russian President Vladimir Putin, in Syria, or simply, as one official put it, an attempt to "muddy the negotiations on Afghanistan by throwing a stick in that."

During the Soviet war in Afghanistan, which ended in 1989, the U.S. government provided weaponry and funds to Afghan mujahideen rebels fighting against Soviet forces. The unit that officials identified as responsible for allegedly offering the bounties has also been linked to the poisoning and attempted murder of former Russian military spy Sergei Skripal in Britain in 2018. While that attack — along with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and its role in the war in Syria — has generated strong criticism in Europe and from many of Trump’s most senior advisers, the president himself has frequently appeared to have a chummy relationship with Putin, downplaying Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election and other Russian transgressions.

Russia is one of a number of issues on which Trump’s instincts have appeared to differ from those of his senior advisers. The United States has imposed sanctions on Russia over a number of issues, including its invasion of Ukraine, cyberattacks, and election meddling, while the Pentagon has identified Russia as second only to China in terms of its “great power” rivals. Military officials this month spoke out in unusually harsh terms over what they said was Russia’s decision to provide fourth-generation jet fighters to a rogue general in Libya, adding to a spiraling proxy conflict there. News of the cloaked operation comes as the Pentagon confirms that it has completed an initial drawdown of American forces to about 8,600 servicemembers from Afghanistan, a first step toward a full withdrawal. Officials have said the full withdrawal remains “conditions-based,” suggesting they will seek to keep a sizable force there if the Taliban does not make a political deal with the Afghanistan government.

While Taliban forces have halted attacks against the United States as part of that deal, the militants have continued to assault Afghan troops, making for what one senior Afghan official described this week as the most deadly conditions in 19 years. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Ellen Nakashima, Missy Ryan & John Hudson | June 27, 2020 ++]

Robocalls

Update 02: Steps that Could Put an End to Them

If your phone is ringing off the hook with infuriating robocalls, you are not alone. Americans received 3 billion robocalls in May, according to the [YouMail Robocall Index](#). That is down from a peak of 5.7 billion robocalls in October 2019, a trend that YouMail has attributed to the coronavirus pandemic. Still, it’s little consolation to the recipients of those 3 billion unwanted calls last month. While stopping robocalls might seem hopeless, there are more ways than ever to fight back, thanks to stronger federal laws and improved technology. Following are some tips for reducing those pesky calls.

- 1. Check with your phone carrier** -- A federal law enacted in December — [the Pallone-Thune TRACED Act](#) — requires phone companies to adopt authentication technology that enables them to determine whether incoming calls are legitimate before calls reach their customers’ phones. But even before that, some major phone carriers had introduced new free anti-robocall [features](#) or were working on [authentication technology](#), as was reported in 2019. So, contact your phone company or check its website to see what features, apps or other technology it offers to customers seeking to cut down on unwanted calls.
- 2. Check your smartphone** -- In addition to your phone company, your smartphone operating system might offer an anti-spam feature. For example, certain Android devices offer [caller ID and spam protection](#), and some Apple iOS devices offer a relatively new feature called “[Silence Unknown Callers](#),” which enables you to send spam calls directly to voicemail.
- 3. Use a third-party app** -- If you’re unhappy with the anti-spam call options that your phone carrier or smartphone operating system offers, look into third-party apps like those detailed in “[5 Apps That Block Robocalls](#).” Some of those apps have been recognized by the Federal Trade Commission. One even lets you get revenge on telemarketers by tying up their phone lines with mindless chatter from “Answer Bots.” Check out <https://www.robokiller.com>.
- 4. Don’t answer calls from unfamiliar numbers** -- Ignore calls that come from unfamiliar numbers. According to the Better Business Bureau: *Use Caller ID to screen your calls and just don’t answer if you don’t recognize the number. If someone really needs to reach you, they will leave a message.* If you accidentally or unthinkingly answer, hang up

immediately if the call sounds like telemarketing. If the caller hangs up after one ring and you don't recognize the number, don't call back: It could be what's known as a one-ring scam. To learn more, check out "[Why Answering the Phone at Night Could Cost You Cash.](#)"

5. Keep your number to yourself -- You know how businesses and websites ask for your phone number for just about any reason? If you don't have to give it, don't. The more you give out your number, the greater the chances that it will be sold to a third party. If you must provide a number — such as if an online retailer requires you to give one in order to place an order — consider giving a fake number. Money Talks News managing editor Karla Bowsher has been using a go-to fake phone number in such situations for years without issue, she says.

6. Watch out for spoofing -- Spoofing is a practice that some unscrupulous callers use to disguise the phone number from which they are actually calling. The goal is to trick you into thinking someone else is calling so that you answer the phone. As the Federal Communications Commission warns: "*You may not be able to tell right away if an incoming call is spoofed. Be aware: Caller ID showing a 'local' number does not necessarily mean it is a local caller.*" Be extra careful in weeding out these calls — which often come from scammers. Common variations on spoofing scams include someone impersonating the IRS, A debt collector, or a computer tech support representative. So, remember tip No. 4: If you don't recognize the number, let the call go to voicemail.

7. Get on the Do Not Call Registry -- Put your cellphone and landline numbers on the [National Do Not Call Registry](#). It's free, and it will at least stop law-abiding solicitors. Just be aware that some organizations — including charities, political groups and debt collectors — are exempt and thus still can call you even if you are on the Do Not Call Registry.

8. File a complaint -- If you've been on the Do Not Call Registry for a month or longer and are still getting calls, [file a complaint](#) with the Federal Trade Commission. This may seem like a waste of time, but it doesn't take long, and enough complaints could get policy changed.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Brandon Ballenger & Chris Kissell | June 17, 2020 ++]

Juneteenth

S.RES. 219/S.4019 | Proposal to Make it a Federal Holiday

Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) announced on 18 JUN he would introduce a bill to make Juneteenth a federal holiday. On 19 JUN he introduced S.RES. 219 to do so which currently has 57 cosponsors. This is in addition to S.4019 (a bill to amend title 5, United States Code, to designate Juneteenth National Independence Day as a legal public holiday) introduced by Sen. Edward Markey (D-MA) on 22 JUN which currently has 50 cosponsors. Cornyn said in a floor speech, "One of the most defining days in our nation's history was when President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, finally freeing all slaves in Confederate territory. But slaves in Texas wouldn't learn this life-altering news for two and a half years." The Texas Republican added, "It took two and a half years for the slaves in the South to learn that they were free. And that day came on a day we now celebrate as Juneteenth,"

It was on June 19, 1865 that the Union soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, landed at Galveston, Texas with news that the war had ended and that the enslaved were now free. The Emancipation Proclamation had little impact on the Texans due to the minimal number of Union troops to enforce the new Executive Order. However, with the surrender of General Lee in April of 1865, and the arrival of General Granger's regiment, the forces were finally strong enough to influence and overcome the resistance.

Texas was the first state to make 19 JUN a state holiday in 1980. Earlier this week, both New York and Virginia honored the day as a state holiday, meaning state employees will receive a paid day off or overtime pay. Forty-three other states and the District of Columbia recognize the day, but not as a state holiday. A number of corporations, including Google, Twitter and the NFL announced plans to begin observing Juneteenth as a holiday. This year marks the 155th anniversary of the holiday when Texas -- the last confederate holdout -- officially abolished slavery in 1865. On June 19, 1865, the Union army rode into Galveston, Texas, with news the Civil War had ended and the state's more than 250,000 enslaved people were now free.

Cornyn released his bill to make Juneteenth a federal holiday after the death of George Floyd sparked renewed focus on the civil rights movement after nationwide protests called out racial injustices. “Over the last several weeks, Americans of all races and backgrounds, of all ages, have raised their voice in the fight against inequality and injustice that continues to exist in our society,” said Cornyn. “As the list of black men and women killed by police officers in custody grows, the calls for action are getting louder and louder, as they must, and as they should.” Cornyn stood along Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC) as he unveiled the Senate’s plan to tackle police reform, the Justice Act, this week.

The Texas senator, who is up for reelection in the fall, took heat this week from Democrats for questioning the notion of systemic racism, and that all Americans had implicit racial bias. "Do you believe that, basically, all Americans are racist?" Cornyn asked Vanita Gupta, a former Department of Justice official during the Obama administration, during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on police reform. "We all have implicit bias and racial bias, yes I do," Gupta said, to which Cornyn responded with "Wow." "And I think that we are an amazing country that strives to be better every single day," she added. "It's why I went into government to make a more perfect union." Cornyn said, "You lost me when you ... took the acts of a few misguided, perhaps malicious individuals, and ascribed that to all Americans, not just our 800,000 police officers, our 18,000 police departments". [Source: Fox News | Morgan Phillips | June 19, 2020 ++]

COVID-19 Changes

Update 01: More That May Outlast the Pandemic

Right now, it may feel like most people are in a perpetual state of waiting. Waiting for state restrictions to ease, waiting for news about jobs or school, waiting for news about a coronavirus vaccine... But even after things return to a more normal state — whenever that may be — it’s clear that some of the changes we’ve made will be permanent. Some of those may be positive. Others may forever remain annoying reminders of this unusual time. No one can predict the future, but here’s a look at some more things that we expect to be part of our lives long after we return to a more normal state.

PPE upgrades at the dentist and doctor

Face masks on grocery cashiers and other retail workers have become a common sight. But for health care procedures that require getting up close and personal, such as those performed by dental hygienists, you may be seeing the use of more intense personal protective equipment, such as face shields.

Fading sick-day stigma

The coronavirus pandemic has reminded us all that there’s no perfect attendance award at work when an illness could be contagious or even life-threatening. Sensible bosses will likely be more encouraging of sick-day use in the future, especially for workers with fevers or coughs. Of course, it’s much easier to stay home if you have paid sick days or can work from home — luxuries not everyone has.

Telehealth appointments

During the coronavirus outbreak, many medical professionals have shifted to meeting with non-emergency patients with video conference software, a practice known as “telehealth” or “telemedicine.” This form of doctor’s appointment may not be as personal, but it is likely to live on as a convenience, especially for patients who have difficulty traveling to see a doctor in person.

Electronic menus

We’ve all used giant paper restaurant menus that have been spilled on (and maybe sneezed on). We may not have given them a second thought last year, but those grungy menus are off-putting today. We may be seeing more recyclable, single-use menus or possibly [table tents](#) — placards with barcodes that customers can scan to see the menu or make an e-payment.

Hotel key on your phone

Hotels, like airplanes, must adjust to keep up with a traveling public that's suddenly anxious about sanitation. At Marriott, for instance, "Guests will ... be able to check into and unlock their rooms with their phones, eliminating the need [for] touching or exchanging keys, according to Travel & Leisure. Front desks are adding partitions, and lobbies and other public areas will have hand-sanitation stations and more space between seating.

Sporting events with empty stands

Will sporting events ever feel as exciting without cheers and boos from a big home crowd? Some televised matches this spring have performed to empty arenas. South Korean baseball stadiums now fill the seating sections with banners sporting images of fans instead of the real thing. Root, root, root for the home team ... but maybe from your couch.



Food deliveries

Signing for a package or a pizza, where you come into close contact with the delivery person and share a pen and clipboard, is a practice that has already disappeared from many delivery services. Camera alerts and other technological advances that let customers see when a product is delivered seem likely to be more common in the future.

More bagged produce

The CDC says there's no evidence to support food-related transmission of the coronavirus. That's good news. But it doesn't mean grocery shoppers won't be comforted by choosing pre-packaged foods more often before, rather than digging through an open pile of produce as we previously have done.

Buffet restaurants rethought

Buffet restaurants offer a lot of food for a good price, but that food sits in open steam trays, potentially exposed to unwashed hands and airborne droplets from sneezes and coughs. The CDC says there currently is no evidence the coronavirus is spread through food. But will eaters in the future be willing to return to buffets?

Big group birthday parties

If you have a kid, you've likely attended more than one birthday party at a giant trampoline park, bounce-house palace, indoor gym or game arcade. These days, though, it seems likely that most parents won't encourage their kids to jump into a ball pit where 20 other toddlers have been chewing and coughing on the toys.

Attending religious services in person

It's a sad irony that places of worship, where people seek comfort in troubling times, are all but off-limits during the outbreak. The National Catholic Reporter suggests that churches may need to use tickets to limit the number attending a service. It also considers the possibility of putting individual communion hosts at each seat to prevent eucharistic ministers from touching congregants' tongues or hands. And outbreaks such as one in March that infected dozens at a Washington state church mean that the potential spread of coronavirus by choir singing could be a difficult problem for some time to come.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Gael F. Cooper | June 5, 2020 ++]

COVID-19 Headgear

Update 05: Eyewear Fogging Prevention Tips when Wearing Masks



Wearing a mask in public is annoying enough — but an irritating side effect makes the practice even worse for those who wear eyeglasses or sunglasses. As anyone who dons spectacles quickly realizes, wearing a mask can cause your lenses to fog. Every time you breathe, the warm air you exhale travels into the mask, then up and over your lenses. Because the lenses are cooler, fog forms. Fortunately, the following fixes can prevent this annoyance.

1. Soap and water

A 2011 study published in the journal *Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons of England* found that a little soap and water goes a long way toward eliminating unwanted fogging. According to the study authors: *“Immediately before wearing a face mask, wash the spectacles with soapy water and shake off the excess. Then, let the spectacles air dry or gently dry off the lenses with a soft tissue before putting them back on. Now the spectacle lenses should not mist up when the face mask is worn.”* One caveat: Although dish soap typically is recommended for this technique, it’s important to choose a brand that does not use lotion, which can harm the lenses. Lukewarm water also is recommended, as hot water can damage lenses too.

2. Anti-fog spray

Sprays also are available to keep your lenses mist-free. You can find [anti-fog sprays](#) at Amazon. Just note that these can cause irritation of the eyes in some people, so they may not work for everyone.

3. Tuck a small tissue into the mask

Newsweek [says](#) attaching a small tissue to the inside of the mask will absorb moisture that otherwise would find its way to the lenses. The publication recommends placing a folded tissue at the top of your mask and taping it there. The tissue should absorb some of the air making it less likely for your glasses to get foggy.

4. Slide your glasses further down your nose

By sliding your spectacles a little lower down your nose, you can keep them out of the way of the moist air escaping from the top of the mask. This is probably not an ideal long-term solution, but it works in a pinch.

5. Fold down your face mask

For masks without flexible metal noses, one method to try is folding down the top quarter of the face mask to allow more room for the air to escape before it meets your glasses. However, be aware that folding down the mask reduces the area of your face that is covered.

6. Modify the mask to better fit your face

Finally, Glamour [says](#) a mask that fits your face more snugly is less likely to produce fogging. So, if the mask has a wire inside the top edge, pinch it to your nose. If your mask doesn’t have a wire, Glamour recommends a [tutorial](#) that can help you create a mask with a “flexible nose.”

Note: Remember, do not touch the mask while wearing it. If you do touch the mask clean your hands.

[Source: New York Times |Jason Gutierrez |June 3, 2020 ++]

Travel Tax Credit

\$4,000 ‘Explore America’ Proposal

The U.S. economy has started to show some signs of life again. Employment is on the rise and businesses across the country are starting to reopen, but sadly, the fight against COVID-19 still has a ways to go. Nonetheless, the coronavirus pandemic has sparked one of the sharpest economic downturns since the Great Depression. Regardless of what positives we may be seeing during this initial recovery period, experts say there’s still a long road ahead. In an effort to keep things on the right track, lawmakers are considering additional forms of aid to help stimulate the economy. One of the proposals being discussed is dubbed the “Explore America” tax credit. It was brought up in President Donald Trump’s remarks at a roundtable of restaurant industry executives in May — earning the approval of the Independent Restaurant Coalition and the U.S. Travel Association.

The proposal would allow Americans to get a tax credit of up to \$4,000 on domestic travel, which in turn could help speed up the recovery of the U.S. travel industry. The tax break would let individuals claim a credit for up to 50% of their expenses at U.S. airlines, rental car companies, theme parks, hotels and restaurants in 2020 and 2021. However, there are still many details that have yet to be answered, so it’s a bit foggy on what this stimulus option could mean for consumers. The goal of the “Explore America” bill would be to incentivize consumers to support restaurants, airlines and hotels — all businesses that have taken an especially hard hit because of COVID-19. In fact, it’s estimated that the U.S. travel industry will see a 40% drop in spending, according to the U.S. Travel Association. Given that staggering number, it’s not surprising that tourism boards have cheered the proposal.

“Travel supported jobs for 1 in every 10 Americans before the pandemic, and measures to incentivize travel will not only give people a renewed appreciation for this great country in which we live, but they are an efficient and effective way to ignite a recovery and restore jobs in every corner of the nation,” according to the U.S. Travel Association in a May 19 press release. While it would likely provide much-needed relief to tourism workers, the question remains: Would the tax credit be enough to motivate people to travel given the current health and safety risks?

- “It’s too far disconnected,” says Francine Lipman, a professor of law at University of Nevada Las Vegas and former CPA. “It would end up being a windfall for people who were going to spend that money anyway, so that doesn’t achieve the goal (of stimulating the economy).”
- “If someone isn’t traveling out of fear for the virus, I can’t imagine a tax credit would eliminate that fear,” says Kirk Kinder, CFP and president of Picket Fence Financial in Palm Harbor, Florida. “I also think it would fail in motivating someone who isn’t traveling due to a financial impact (job loss, reduced hours, etc.) because they have to front that money for the travel only to be reimbursed when they file the tax return in early 2021.”
- On the contrary, Morris Armstrong, a licensed Enrolled Agent (EA), notes how a travel-focused subsidy would ensure that money is put directly into the economy. “People who have not been impacted at all, financially, received stimulus checks, and many people have received unemployment benefits in excess of their normal wage. Those payments may wind up in banks or markets and not in the economy,” Armstrong says. “The idea of a travel-related subsidy would ensure that money has to be spent in order to receive any benefit. It is a transfer — money from the consumer to the vendor, be it airline, car rental, hotel or restaurant. In my opinion, that is viable and not much different than an energy credit. You are rewarding the consumer for doing something that is in the interests of the economy.”

Would it be enough, however, to help struggling Americans, or would it mostly benefit those who would have traveled anyway? “If you’re not working, or worried about your job along with another possible increase in COVID-

19 during late fall and winter, you're just not going to travel," says David Evangelista, a CPA who specializes in tax and accounting services at MBAF in New York. "The credit will only be realized upon the filing of a taxpayer's 2020 tax return in 2021 or their 2021 tax return filed in 2022. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Bankrate.com | June 25, 2020 ++]

National Suicide Hotline

Update 01: VA Supports 988 Expansion Initiative

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced 26 JUN their support for the Suicide Prevention 988 expansion initiative, a new national three-digit emergency telephone number to access crisis call centers across the country for suicide prevention and mental health services, including the Veterans Crisis Line, by July 2022. VA is working alongside the Federal Communications Commission, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to implement and activate the 988 expansion. "The 988 three-digit number will help Veterans and non-Veteran callers quickly access help in times of crisis and open the door to engage new individuals in life-saving care," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "The Veterans Crisis Line will continue to remain available 24/7, 365 days a year, by calling 1-800-273-8255 and pressing 1."

Once activated, the 988 expansion will also grant VA the opportunity to collaborate with the suicide prevention community across the United States. This initiative is aligned with the President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) program, a nationwide plan to raise awareness about mental health, connect Veterans and others at risk of suicide to federal and local resources. If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255, or chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat. [Source: VA News Release | June 26, 2020 ++]

Have You Heard?

Remember the Real America | Definitions |Then (1945) & Now (2020)

Remember the Real America

When riots were unthinkable
When you left front doors open
When socialism was a dirty word
When ghettos were neighborhoods
When the Flag was a sacred symbol
When criminals actually went to jail
When you weren't afraid to go out at night
When taxes were only a necessary nuisance
When a boy was a boy and dressed like one
When a girl was a girl and dressed like one
When the poor were to proud to take charity
When the clergy and repairmen tried to please you
When college kids swallowed goldfish, not acid
When songs had a tune, and the words made sense
When young fellows tried to join the Army or Navy

When people knew what the Fourth of July stood for.
When you never dreamed our country could ever lose
When a Sunday drive was a pleasant trip, not an ordeal.
When you bragged about your hometown and home state.
When everybody didn't feel entitled to a college education.
When people expected less and value what had more.
When politicians proclaimed their patriotism and meant it.
When everybody knew the difference between right and wrong.
When things weren't perfect - but you never expected them to be.
When you weren't made to feel guilty for enjoying dialect comedy.
When our Government stood up for Americans, anywhere in the world.
When you knew that the law would be enforced and your safety protected.
When you considered yourself lucky to have a good job, and proud to have it.
When the law meant justice, and you felt a shiver of awe at the sight of a policeman.
When you weren't embarrassed to say that this is the best country in the world.
When America was a land filled with brave, proud, confident, hardworking people!

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Definitions

ADULT - A person who has stopped growing at both ends and is now growing in the middle.

BEAUTY PARLOR - A place where women curl up and dye.

CHICKENS - The only animal you eat before they are born and after they are dead.

COMMITTEE - A body that keeps minutes and wastes hours.

DUST - Mud with the juice squeezed out.

EGOTIST - Someone who is usually me-deep in conversation.

HANDKERCHIEF - Cold Storage.

INFLATION - Cutting money in half without damaging the paper.

MOSQUITO - An insect that makes you like flies better.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS - A doctrine fostered by a delusional, illogical minority.

RAISIN - A grape with a sunburn.

SECRET - A story you tell to one person at a time.

SKELETON - A bunch of bones with the person scraped off.

TOOTHACHE - The pain that drives you to extraction.

TOMORROW - One of the greatest labor saving devices of today.

YAWN - An honest opinion openly expressed.

WRINKLES - Something other people have....similar to my character lines.

OLD - I very quietly confided to my friend that I was having an Affair. She turned to me and asked, "Are you having it catered?" . . . and that, my friend, is the definition of 'OLD'!!!

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Then (1945) & Now (2020)

1945 - NCO's had a typewriter on their desks for doing daily reports.

2020 - Everyone has an internet access computer, and they wonder why no work is getting done.

1945 - We painted pictures of girls on airplanes to remind us of home.

2020 - They put the real thing in the cockpit.

1945 - Your girlfriend was at home praying you would return alive.

2020 - She is in the same trench praying your condom worked.

1945 - If you got drunk off duty your buddies would take you back to the barracks to sleep it off.

2020 - If you get drunk they slap you in rehab and ruin your career.

1945 - You were taught to aim at your enemy and shoot him.

2020 - You spray 500 bullets into the brush, don't hit anything, and retreat because you're out of ammo.

1945 - Canteens were made of steel, and you could heat coffee or hot chocolate in them.

2020 - Canteens are made of plastic, you can't heat anything in them, and they always taste like plastic.

1945 - Officers were professional soldiers first and they commanded respect.

2020 - Officers are politicians first and beg not to be given a wedgie.

1945 - They collected enemy intelligence and analyzed it.

2020 - They collect your pee and analyze it.

1945 - If you didn't act right, the Sergeant Major put you in the brig until you straightened up.

2020 - If you don't act right, they start a paper trail that follows you forever.

1945 - Medals were awarded to heroes who saved lives at the risk of their own.

2020 - Medals are awarded to people who work at headquarters.

1945 - You slept in barracks like a soldier.

2020 - You sleep in a dormitory like a college kid.

1945 - You ate in a mess hall, which was free, and you could have all the food you wanted.

2020 - You eat in a dining facility, every slice of bread or pad of butter costs, and you better not take too much.

1945 - We defeated powerful countries like Germany and Japan.

2020 - We come up short against Iraq and Afghanistan.

1945 - If you wanted to relax, you went to the rec center, played pool, smoked and drank beer.

2020 - You go to the community center, and you can play pool.

1945 - If you wanted beer and conversation you went to the NCO or Officers' Club.

2020 - The beer will cost you \$2.75, membership is forced, and someone is watching how much you drink.

1945 - The Exchange had bargains for soldiers who didn't make much money and accepted returned merchandise.

2020 - You can get better and cheaper merchandise at Walmart. But don't try to return anything until after the pandemic is over.

1945 - We could recognize the enemy by their Nazi helmets.

2020 - We are wearing the Nazi helmets.

1945 - We called the enemy names like "Krauts" and "Japs" because we didn't like them.

2020 - We call the enemy the "opposing force" or "aggressor" because we don't want to offend them.

1945 - Victory was declared when the enemy was defeated and all his things were broken.

2020 - We haven't a clue as to what victory is or what it takes to achieve it.

1945 - A commander would put his butt on the line to protect his people.

2020 - A commander will put his people on the line to protect his butt.

1945 - Wars were planned and run by generals who knew how to fight and win.

2020 - Wars are planned by politicians who haven't a clue about fighting or winning.

1945 - We were fighting for freedom, and the country was committed to winning.

2020 - We don't know what we're fighting for, and the government is committed to social programs and political correctness. Now our real enemy is global warming and politics.

1945 - All you could think about was getting out and becoming a civilian again.

2020 - All you can think about is getting out and becoming a civilian again.



Thought of the Week

Those who stand for nothing fall for anything.

--- Alexander Hamilton

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RAO Bulletin Editor/Publisher:

Lt. James (EMO) Tichacek, USN (Ret) Tel: (858) 842-1111 Email: raoemo@sbcglobal.net
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RAO Baguio Director:

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

RAO Baguio Office: Mountain Lodge, 27 Leonard Wood Road, Baguio City, 2600 Philippines
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