

RAO BULLETIN

15 September 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.

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- Attachment – Oregon Veteran State Benefits
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*** DoD ***



NDAA 2021

Update 08: Vote/Compromise on Bill Isn't Likely Before Nov. 3 Elections

A bipartisan compromise and vote on the 2021 defense policy bill isn't likely before the Nov. 3 elections, but it should come "quickly" thereafter, the House Armed Services Committee's top Republican said 9 SEP. The vote would delay a decision from Congress about whether the Defense Department to rename military bases honoring Confederate

leaders. It's defining issue for the \$740.5 billion defense authorization bill, which includes must-pass provisions like military pay hikes, defense equipment purchase plans and strategic posturing of forces in coming years. "There are more negotiations that have to occur, and part of that negotiation is talking with the White House about the shape of that provision," Rep. Mac Thornberry, of Texas, said at the Defense News Conference. "Is there a way to get everybody to 'good?' Of course there is. Is it likely to happen before the election? No, it's not."

Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate voted overwhelmingly to back language requiring the changes, though the House requires the names changed within one year and the Senate bill requires them within three years. President Donald Trump has threatened to veto the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act over the Confederate name changes among other issues. Trump has said Senate Armed Services Chairman Jim Inhofe, (R-OK) personally assured him that Congress will not force the Pentagon to change the names. That's fueled speculation that bipartisan negotiations to reconcile the bills could drag on. The summer's sustained protests over racial injustice have buoyed the provision, while Trump has argued that changing the names would dishonor troops who have served at the sites and that Confederate symbols aren't racist. "We can't cancel our whole history," he told Fox News last month. Sign up for our Early Bird Brief

Thornberry, who had offered a softer alternative as a House amendment, said 9 SEP that both sides have political incentives not to compromise on the base renaming provision, among other issues. "I don't know how that will come out in conference, but I do think we are in a time when neither party is rewarded for compromise, and coming together and getting things done," he said. "On the other hand, I think we should be able to get a conference report pretty quickly after the election." [Source: DefenseNews | Joe Gould | September 9, 2020 ++]

Artificial Intelligence

Update 01: SecDef Says AI Will Change the Battlefield



One aspect of the return of great power competition is the race to develop artificial intelligence, Defense Secretary Dr. Mark T. Esper said at the virtual Joint Artificial Intelligence Center symposium. Artificial intelligence has the potential to change the battlefield, and the country that's first to field it will have enormous advantages over competitors, he told participants today. "History informs us that those who are first to harness once-in-a-generation technologies often have a decisive advantage on the battlefield for years to come," the secretary said. "I experienced this firsthand during Operation Desert Storm, when the United States' military's smart bombs, stealth aircraft and satellite-enabled GPS helped decimate Iraqi forces and their Soviet equipment."

Artificial intelligence has the potential to be even more far-reaching than those technologies. "Unlike advanced munitions or next-generation platforms, artificial intelligence is in a league of its own, with the potential to transform nearly every aspect of the battlefield, from the back office to the front lines," he said. "That is why we cannot afford to cede the high ground to revisionist powers intent on bending, breaking or reshaping international rules and norms

in their favor — to the collective detriment of others." Esper noted that Russian President Vladimir Putin said the nation that leads in AI will be the "ruler of the world," and Russia has increased investments in the technology. "His intent is to employ any possible advantage to expand Russia's influence and chip away at the sovereignty of others," Esper said.

The Russians used a sophisticated and well-coordinated combination of unmanned aerial vehicles, cyberattacks, and artillery barrages to inflict severe damage on Ukrainian forces when they invaded that country. "Since then, Moscow has announced the development of AI-enabled autonomous systems across ground vehicles, aircraft, nuclear submarines and command and control," he said. "We expect them to deploy these capabilities in future combat zones."

The Chinese Communist Party has a goal of being the AI world leader in 10 years. The People's Liberation Army sees AI as a leap-frog technology that will allow the largest military on Earth to field low-cost, long-range autonomous vehicles and systems to counter America's conventional power projection. "At this moment, Chinese weapons manufacturers are selling autonomous drones they claim can conduct lethal, targeted strikes," the secretary said. "Meanwhile, the Chinese government is advancing the development of next-generation stealth UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicle], which they are preparing to export internationally."

"Beijing is constructing a 21st-century surveillance state designed to wield unprecedented control over its own people," Esper said. "With hundreds of millions of cameras strategically located across the country and billions of data points generated by the Chinese Internet of Things, the CCP will soon be able to identify almost anyone entering a public space, and censor dissent in real time." The Chinese system can be used to invade private lives, leaving no text message, internet search, purchase or personal activity free from Beijing's ever tightening grip, the secretary said. "As we speak, the PRC is deploying — and honing — its AI surveillance apparatus to support the targeted repression of its Muslim Uighur population," he said. "Likewise, pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong are being identified, seized, and imprisoned or worse by the CCP's digital police state — unencumbered by privacy laws or ethical governing principles. As China scales this technology, we fully expect it to sell these capabilities abroad, enabling other autocratic governments to move toward a new era of digital authoritarianism."

The U.S. is pioneering a vision for the emerging technology that protects the U.S. Constitution and the rights of all Americans. U.S. officials would like to see allies and partners adopt the standards of individual liberty, democracy, human rights and respect for the rule of law. "We approach AI as we have other high-tech breakthroughs throughout our department's history — with rigorous standards for testing and fielding capabilities and the highest ethical expectations," Esper said. "Technology may constantly change, but our commitment to our core values does not."

Earlier this year, DOD adopted ethical principles for the use of AI-based on core values, such as transparency, reliability and governability. "These principles make clear to the American people — and the world — that the United States will once again lead the way in the responsible development and application of emerging technologies, reinforcing our role as the global security partner of choice," he said. Esper touted the work of the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center saying its more than 200 civil service and military professionals work diligently to accelerate AI solutions and deliver these capabilities to the warfighter.

The JAIC helps the joint force organize, fight and win at machine speed. For example, AI helps in enhancing wildfire and flood responses through computer vision technology. "The JAIC is utilizing every aspect of artificial intelligence as a transformative instrument at home and abroad," he said. "The JAIC is also lowering technical barriers to AI adoption by building a cloud-based platform to allow DOD components to test, validate and field capabilities with greater speed, at greater scale. The goal is to make AI tools and data accessible across the force, which will help synchronize projects and reduce redundancy, among many other benefits." [Source: DOD News | Jim Garamone | Sept. 9, 2020 ++]

USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62)

Update 25: NTSB Report Faults US Navy for Collision

Disorganization and a lack of situational awareness by the on-watch crew of the U.S. Navy destroyer Fitzgerald was the primary cause of the collision off Japan in June 2017 that claimed the lives of seven sailors, according to a new report by the National Transportation Safety Board. The report, which largely mirrors the Navy's own report on the incident, found that the Fitzgerald was the vessel that was required to maneuver to avoid the collision, but failed to do so, the American investigative agency found.

"The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the collision between the US Navy Destroyer Fitzgerald and container ship ACX Crystal was the Fitzgerald's bridge team's failure to take early and substantial action to avoid collision as the giveaway vessel," the report read. The report also found that the bridge team lacked sufficient training and neither asked for nor received adequate support from the radar operators in the ship's combat information center. Crew fatigue also played a role in the accident, NTSB found, as did the commanding officer's failure to put more experienced watchstanders on the bridge while navigating busy shipping lanes.

The release of the NTSB report reopens wounds for the Navy from three years ago. The service — in the wake of the Fitzgerald collision and another fatal collision of the destroyer John S. McCain in remarkably similar circumstances just weeks later — has conducted a sweeping overhaul of how it trains its junior officers to drive ships, and how it screens its perspective commanding officers for taking command. Those changes have made the Navy safer than it was three years ago, the service's top surface warfare officer told Defense News in an exclusive interview. "When we look back on those costly lessons learned and think about where do we need to go and what do we have to do," said Vice Adm. Roy Kitchener, head of Naval Surface Forces, "we need to continue to build the professional training base of the surface force. And we've come an awful long way, but I'm dedicated to that. There's some work we need to complete, and I see it as a journey."

In the wake of the accidents, the Navy performed spot checks on surface warfare officers in the fleet to determine how well they handled ships, but the results were distressing. Almost 85 percent of the junior officers evaluated struggled to extricate the ship from danger in an extreme situation, and struggled to practically apply the rules of navigation on the open ocean, even though they knew the rules. The accidents spurred the Navy to invest in more training for its junior officers before they check in on their first ship, and to invest in shore-based watch team trainers so ships can put their watch teams through challenging navigation situations. The Navy has also required officers at multiple levels of their career to take go/no-go assessments in a bridge navigation simulator to determine if they have the skills to proceed back to sea.

Prospective commanding officers now, for example, must pass a simulator evaluation on ship handling before being allowed to take command of a ship. "We came up with an aggressive agenda post-collisions," Kitchener said. "There's a deep education piece, and then there's the piece that's up to me and that's: Are we executing? What's the knowledge base on the ships? What's the status of those programs?" Kitchener said he's getting positive feedback from the fleet on the increased rigor put into training surface warfare officers to handle ships. Beyond that, he said the two enlisted ratings most concerned with safe navigation — operations specialists, who monitor radars from the ship's combat information center, and quartermasters, who generally ensure safe navigation from the bridge — have both increased the rigor of their navigation training, and that it is paying dividends in the fleet.

In the wake of the Fitzgerald and McCain accidents, it emerged that Naval Surface Forces had been signing off on waivers for ship certifications in the Japan-based 7th Fleet as a means of allowing the ships to perform operational tasking, even if they required further training or regular evaluations to ensure they were sharp on critical skills such as damage control or navigation. But it also emerged that Naval Surface Forces and 7th Fleet felt somewhat powerless to say no to operational tasking from US Pacific Command, even if that tasking meant taking irresponsible risks with training and readiness. That has changed since the accidents, Kitchener said. Today, he is empowered to raise the red flag if a ship has a training or maintenance need that would limit a ship's availability for operational tasking.

“It is clear to me as the surface type commander that I own the training and maintenance entitlement for surface ships,” Kitchener said. “That’s on me. And I need to be the one who holds the line on that. “And when I get a question of, ‘Hey can we accelerate this or can we do that,’ my answer is, ‘Here’s the entitlement, here’s what I have to do,’ ” he added. “Sometimes there is some negotiation, but what’s not negotiable is that entitlement has to be fulfilled. And my experience, so far, is that has pretty much worked. Does that create a little bit of tension between me and the numbered fleet commanders, the operational commanders? Yes. But I think it’s supposed to. I think that’s healthy. I think it forces us to come up with an informed decision. And I think that’s one of the best things we did.”

As for crew fatigue, Kitchener said he’s seeing progress in the fleet in getting sailors on more natural sleep and watch cycles, and that most ships are adopting a form of what’s known as circadian rhythm-based watches. Another key component to addressing the issues that led to the collisions is teaching commanders how to gauge risks the ship is taking as it moves, Kitchener said. “I want our COs to be bold, but I want them to understand the risk, be able to evaluate it and drive that discussion so that they can be advocates for their sailors, but at the same time communicate to me what the risk is to our mission and what the risk is to our force,” he said. [Source: DefenseNews | David B. Larter | September 4, 2020 ++]

DoD Religion Policy

Update 01: On Base Catholic Mass Cutbacks Directive Rescinded

The U.S. Navy reversed a controversial cost-cutting decision to suspend most contracts for Catholic priests, a move that would have canceled Catholic Masses at Naval bases in Southern California. The religious services will continue for at least the next year, Rear Adm. Bette Bolivar, commander Navy Region Southwest, said in a statement to Fox News on 8 SEP. “Contrary to previous discussions, this year we will continue contracted religious ministry programs and services similar to what we’ve had in place previously,” Bolivar said. “We will also continue to assess how best to meet the needs of our sailors and their families throughout the region.”

The plan, as first reported by the San Diego Union-Tribune on 5 SEP, would have caused a shortage of priests in the active-duty Chaplain Corps and left base chapels at most installations in San Diego without the means to provide Catholic Masses. Meanwhile, other on-base religious services, such as Protestant services led by non-Catholic chaplains, would continue. The move was widely criticized, with Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) tweeting that if the Navy’s plan were true, “we need to look at canceling admirals, not priests.”

Archbishop Timothy Broglio, head of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, released a statement on 8 SEP that questioned why the Navy would cancel priest contracts at bases in Southern California when they only amount to \$250,000, or what he called “approximately .000156%” of the Navy’s budget. “It is difficult to fathom how the First Amendment rights of the largest faith group in the Navy can be compromised for such an insignificant sum,” Broglio said.

News of the Navy’s reversal was positively received. “I’m grateful that they realize the importance of the ministry we provide to the sailors, Marines and Coast Guard members – people of all diverse backgrounds – we’re here for them,” Rev. Jose Pimentel, a priest who has led services at bases in Southern California for eight years, told the Union-Tribune. President Trump tweeted: “The United States Navy, or the Department of Defense, will NOT be cancelling its contract with Catholic Priests who serve our men and women in the Armed Forces so well, and with such great compassion & skill. This will no longer be even a point of discussion!” [Source: Fox News | Stephen Sorace & Lucas Tomlinson | September 9, 2020 ++]

Arlington National Cemetery

Update 88: Reopening for Gravesite Visitation Only

Members of the public will be allowed inside Arlington National Cemetery for the first time since March. Starting 9 SEP, visitors will be allowed to enter the cemetery to visit gravesites. The cemetery closed in March in response to the coronavirus pandemic. For six months, only funeral attendees and family pass holders were allowed entry. Now, the cemetery will be open to the public every day from 8 a.m. to noon. Points of interest inside the cemetery will remain closed, including the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, the John F. Kennedy gravesite, the amphitheater, the Tomb of The Unknown Soldier and exhibits inside the welcome center. “As conditions in the National Capital Region have continued to improve, our goal is to provide increased access for the public to visit a loved one’s gravesite,” said Karen Durham-Aguilera, executive director of the cemetery. “We hope this limited reopening will better accommodate our visitors.”

According to guidance issued 8 SEP, members of the public will be screened outside the welcome center before entering the cemetery. Masks will be required at all times. The cemetery’s parking garage is open for passenger cars only. The Arlington Cemetery Metro Station has been open since 23 AUG. Visitor screening lanes will be set up outside the Welcome Center for direct access to cemetery grounds. A screening lane can be found inside the Welcome Center for restroom access upon arrival only. For more information, visit <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/#/> or call 877-907-8585.

The superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery, Charles “Ray” Alexander Jr., said cemetery staff was preparing for a full opening in the “near future.” “We are conducting internal assessments of the care and protection of our visitors,” Alexander said in a statement. “We will evaluate our standard operating procedures and efficiencies to ensure the outstanding visitor experience and high standards people expect when coming to the cemetery.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | September 8, 2020 ++]

DOD Troop Deployments

US to Cut Thousands from Iraq, Afghanistan in Coming Months

The United States will withdraw almost half of its troops from Iraq this month and make a similar cut to its force in Afghanistan by November, the top U.S. general overseeing operations in the Middle East announced 9 SEP. The decisions were announced by Marine Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, commander for U.S. Central Command, during a visit to Baghdad almost exactly six years after the United States first launched military operations against the Islamic State along the Iraq-Syria border. They also come as President Donald Trump has continued to denounce U.S. involvement in long-running wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan, from which he vowed to disentangle U.S. troops since his 2016 election campaign.

“In recognition of the great progress the Iraqi forces have made and in consultation and coordination with the government of Iraq and our coalition partners, the United States has decided to reduce our troop presence in Iraq from about 5,200 to 3,000 troops during the month of September. “This reduced footprint allows us to continue advising and assisting our Iraqi partners in rooting out the final remnants of ISIS in Iraq and ensuring its enduring defeat.” McKenzie said during a U.S. military ceremony in Baghdad. The general was less specific on Afghanistan drawdown plans, which he shared after the Iraq announcement with a small group of reporters on a phone call, a defense official confirmed. McKenzie’s new plan accelerates the ongoing drawdown in Afghanistan, aiming to reduce the 8,600 troops there to some 4,500 “by the late October-November time frame,” the official said. McKenzie has been clear that he believes the United States must retain some troops in Iraq to aid the ongoing ISIS fight and in Afghanistan to fight terrorist groups there, including the Afghan branch of ISIS.

While U.S.-backed troops in Iraq — primarily, the Iraqi military — and militia forces in Syria known as the Syrian Democratic Forces have ousted ISIS from the vast territory that the terrorist group once controlled across eastern Syria and northern Iraq, the group remains a threat in both countries. Officials believe the group retains tens of thousands of fighters, largely in underground sleeper cells. McKenzie said last month that he believes ISIS leaders aim to retake the territory that the group lost.

Three weeks ago, Trump hosted new Iraq Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi at the White House, where the two leaders were said to be negotiating a withdrawal of at least some American forces. In public remarks, Trump said he hoped to remove American troops from Iraq soon. Al-Kadhimi, however, requested the United States retain some troops in his country. “At some point, we obviously will be gone,” Trump said during the 20 AUG meeting. “And, we look forward to the day when we don’t have to be there, and hopefully Iraq can live their own lives and they can defend themselves, which they’ve been doing long before we got involved.”

The United States has maintained about 5,200 troops in Iraq for most of the past six years since it first began a bombing campaign against ISIS in September 2014 that expanded to a ground operation by the end of that year. Former President Barack Obama ordered troops to return to Iraq for the first time since the last American forces left the country at the end of 2011, also during his administration. The troops were sent primarily to train and advise Iraqi and Syrian forces to conduct the brunt of the fighting against the terrorists, whose brutality captured the attention of leaders across the world. Nonetheless, American troops fought on the front lines at times, and at least 21 U.S. service members have been killed and another 231 wounded in action fighting ISIS in Iraq and Syria since 2015.

Pentagon officials in recent years have acknowledged there were at times far more than 5,200 American troops in Iraq, though that number stood as the highest official count throughout anti-ISIS operations. Another 2,000 or so troops were operating simultaneously in neighboring Syria, where several hundred U.S. troops now remain, according to Pentagon officials. At the height of American operations in Iraq under former President George W. Bush, the U.S. boasted some 150,000 troops there. In recent months, Pentagon officials have said the count of roughly 5,200 troops in Iraq was accurate. The U.S. military in recent months has closed down operations on several smaller outposts throughout Iraq, handing those over to Iraqi forces and consolidating mostly on larger bases. That has come, at least in part, because of the near-constant threat of rocket and mortar attacks by pro-Iranian militia in Iraq, who aim to push U.S. service members out of the country and the region. McKenzie said last month that the attacks and other Iranian-supported operations in Iraq have served as a distraction from the ISIS fight, and they forced the United States to reposition resources to protect its troops from attacks from Iran or its proxies.

In his 2 SEP remarks, McKenzie hinted the United States would not fully withdraw from Iraq in the near future, where there remained ‘much work to be done’. “The U.S. decision is a clear demonstration of our continued commitment to the ultimate goal, which is an Iraqi Security Force that is capable of preventing an ISIS resurgence and of securing Iraq’s sovereignty without external assistance,” he said. “The journey has been difficult, the sacrifice has been great, but the progress has been significant.” White House officials told some reporters 8 SEP of the 9 SEP plan to announce the Iraq drawdown. They also telegraphed McKenzie’s announcement on the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, multiple news outlets reported.

Earlier this year, the United States began withdrawing troops from Afghanistan after striking an unprecedented peace accord with the Taliban in February. The U.S. has already downsized from some 14,000 troops there to less than 8,600 during the summer. Pentagon officials said last month that they were working to further downsize its force in Afghanistan to less than 5,000 troops by the end of November, but Trump has repeatedly said he wanted to see such reductions by 3 NOV, which is Election Day.

U.S. troops have been fighting in Afghanistan since just weeks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York City and the Pentagon. Obama spent his presidency attempting to end combat operations in Afghanistan, eventually reducing forces to about 8,400 before he left office and declaring an end to combat operations there. Trump, at the urging of his then-advisers, ordered thousands of new troops to Afghanistan in August 2017, and loosened Obama-

era restrictions that largely had kept them off the front lines. But Trump has continued to rail against continuing operations in Afghanistan.

After reaching a deal with the Taliban in February, the U.S. quickly began to move some troops out of the country. Pentagon officials said last month that they intended to draw down to about 5,000 troops by the end of November. McKenzie's announcement 9 SEP appears to slightly accelerate that timeline. U.S. military officials have said the drawdowns will be based on needed capabilities and not on numbers of troops. But McKenzie said ultimately such decisions must be made by the president. "We're getting out of these endless wars," Trump said 20 AUG. "Out of these ridiculous, endless wars." [Source: Stars & Stripes | Corey Dickstein | September 8, 2020 ++]

Stars & Stripes

DOD Rescinding Newspaper's Shut Down Order



The Defense Department is rescinding its order to shut down the military's independent newspaper, Stars and Stripes, in the wake of a tweet late last week by President Donald Trump vowing to continue funding the paper. In an email to Stripes' publisher Max Lederer, Army Col. Paul Haverstick said the paper does not have to submit a plan to close. Haverstick, acting director of the Pentagon's Defense Media Activity, said a formal memo is being drafted that will rescind the order to halt publication by Sept. 30, and dissolve the organization by the end of January. The email was obtained by The Associated Press. "The memo will be provided once it is completed and properly vetted and approved within the Department," said Haverstick's email. "We are trying to get this completed by the weekend, but this timeline may shift based on vetting."

The Defense Department had ordered the paper to shut down following the Pentagon's move earlier this year to cut the \$15.5 million in funding for Stars and Stripes from the budget. On 4 SEP, as news of the shutdown order trickled out, Trump abruptly tweeted his opposition to the plan. "The United States of America will NOT be cutting funding to @starsandstripes magazine under my watch," Trump tweeted. "It will continue to be a wonderful source of information to our Great Military!" Trump's tweet came after the Pentagon notified Stars and Stripes that its final newspaper publication will be released this month.

Trump's tweet came as he fought off accusations that he called service members killed in World War I "losers" and "suckers" during an event in France in 2018. The comments, first reported by The Atlantic and confirmed by The Associated Press, shined a fresh light on Trump's previous public disparaging of American troops and military families and they delivered a new campaign issue to his Democratic rival Joe Biden, less than two months from Election Day. Trump was alleged to have made the comments about the war dead as he was set to visit the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery during a trip to France in November 2018.

The Trump White House hadn't spoken out against the Pentagon plan to close the paper before last Friday, even though it's been in the works and publicly written about for months and was in the president's budget request. Friday afternoon, however, Trump worked to shore up his reputation as a staunch supporter of the nation's armed services. Members of Congress have objected to the defunding move for months. And senators sent a letter to Defense Secretary

Mark Esper last week urging him to reinstate the money. The letter, signed by 15 senators — including Republicans and Democrats — also warned Esper that the department is legally prohibited from canceling a budget program while a temporary continuing resolution to fund the federal government is in effect.

The House-passed version of the Pentagon's 2021 budget contains funding for the paper's publication, but the Senate has not yet finalized a defense funding bill. "Stars and Stripes is an essential part of our nation's freedom of the press that serves the very population charged with defending that freedom," the senators said in the letter. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), in a separate letter to Esper in late August, also voiced opposition to the move, calling Stripes "a valued 'hometown newspaper' for the members of the Armed Forces, their families, and civilian employees across the globe." He added that "as a veteran who has served overseas, I know the value that the Stars and Stripes brings to its readers." Haverstick, in his new email, also said the department is looking into how it will fund Stripes for the next year, since it was not budgeted. And he said the paper will be required to submit a budget plan for the next year.

The first newspaper called Stars and Stripes was very briefly produced in 1861 during the Civil War, but the paper began consistent publication during World War I. When the war was over, publication ended, only to restart in 1942 during World War II, providing wartime news written by troops specifically for troops in battle. Although the paper gets funding from the Defense Department, it is editorially independent and is delivered in print and digitally to troops all over the world. [Source: The Associated Press | Lolita C. Baldor | September 10, 2020 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials

Reported 01 thru 15 SEP 2020 | Three

"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

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Frank L. Athon, Jr.**, 29, of Cincinnati, Ohio, was a member of Company A, 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. Athon died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Athon will be buried Nov. 21, 2020, in his hometown. [Read about Athon.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Thomas F. Johnson**, 18, of San Jose, California, as a member of Company B, 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. Johnson died on the fourth day of battle, Nov. 23, 1943. Johnson will be buried in Igo, California. The date has yet to be determined. Read about Johnson at <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2181367/marine-accounted-for-from-world-war-ii-johnson-t>

-- **Navy Shipfitter 3rd Class Patrick L. Chess**, 24, of Yakima, Washington, 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 Chess. Chess will be buried Oct. 22, 2020, in his hometown. [Read about Chess.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | August 31, 2020 ++]

* VA *



VA Data Breach

Update 60: 46,000 Vet's Personal Information Compromised

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Management today announced on 14 SEP a data breach involving the personal information of approximately 46,000 Veterans and actions taken by the department to prevent

and mitigate any potential harm to those individuals. The Financial Services Center (FSC) determined one of its online applications was accessed by unauthorized users to divert payments to community health care providers for the medical treatment of Veterans. The FSC took the application offline and reported the breach to VA's Privacy Office. A preliminary review indicates these unauthorized users gained access to the application to change financial information and divert payments from VA by using social engineering techniques and exploiting authentication protocols. To prevent any future improper access to and modification of information, system access will not be re-enabled until a comprehensive security review is completed by the VA Office of Information Technology.

To protect these Veterans, the FSC is alerting the affected individuals, including the next-of-kin of those who are deceased, of the potential risk to their personal information. The department is also offering access to credit monitoring services, at no cost, to those whose social security numbers may have been compromised. Veterans whose information was involved are advised to follow the instructions in the letter to protect their data. There is no action needed from Veterans if they did not receive an alert by mail, as their personal information was not involved in the incident. Veterans or Veteran next-of-kin that receive notification their information is potentially at risk from this incident can direct specific questions to the FSC Customer Help Desk to VAFSCVeteransSupport@va.gov or writing to VA FSC Help Desk, Attn: Customer Engagement Center, .P.O. Box 149971, Austin, TX 78714-9971. [Source: VA Press Release | September 14, 2020 ++]

VA Copayments

Pandemic Volunteer Payment Procedure

As stated in an April 3rd press release [<https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5412>], the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is not sending monthly patient account statements for health-care-associated costs to Veterans and Veterans will not receive a monthly bill for copayments or pharmacy charges during this time. Additionally, no late charges or interest will be added and collection action on copayment debt will be halted until at least December 31, 2020. VA will soon be reaching out to Veterans directly providing them additional information in regards to when patient statements will resume and future payment options including how to request financial hardship accommodations.

In the interim, if Veterans choose to voluntarily make payments, they can do so at any time. Payments may be made voluntarily during the time that statements are suspended using the following methods. Veterans will need their account number to access their balance and other related information.

- An account balance can be obtained by doing the following:
 - Call 866-400-1238 OR
 - Call the facility revenue office at your local VA Medical Center (VAMC), OR
 - Consult the letter that will be mailed to Veterans in October 2020 which will include a current account balance.
- Going to www.pay.gov.
- By telephone at 888-827-4817
- By mail: Department of Veterans Affairs , PO Box 3978 , Portland, OR 97208-3978
- In person at a VAMC agent cashier's office

2020 Copayment Rates

Outpatient Services

- Basic Care Services provided by a primary care clinician -- \$15 per visit

- Specialty Care Services provided by a clinical specialist such as surgeon, radiologist, audiologist, optometrist, cardiologist, and specialty tests such as magnetic resonance imagery (MRI), computerized axial tomography (CAT) scan, and nuclear medicine studies -- \$50 per visit
- Note that copayment amount is limited to a single charge per visit regardless of the number of health care providers seen in a single day. The copayment amount is based on the highest level of service received. There is no copayment requirement for preventive care services such as screenings and immunizations.

Urgent Care (Community Care)

Veterans must be enrolled in the VA health care system; and received VA care within 24 months of receiving urgent care. An eligible Veteran, as a condition for receiving urgent care provided by VA, must agree to pay the applicable VA copayment. Note: Urgent Care services provided in VA facilities/CBOC's is not subject to urgent care copayment

Priority Group(s)	Copayment Amount
1-5	First three visits (per calendar year): \$0 Fourth and greater visits (per calendar year): \$30
6	If related to a condition covered by a special authority: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First three visits (per calendar year): \$0 • Fourth and greater visits (per calendar year): \$30 If not related to a condition covered by a special authority: \$30 per visit
7-8	\$30 per visit
1-8	\$0 copay for visit consisting of only a flu shots

Medications

- Veterans in Priority Group 1 do not pay for medications.
- Veterans in Priority Groups 2-8, for each 30-day or less supply of medication for treatment of nonservice-connected condition
 - Tier 1 drugs (preferred generics) \$5
 - Tier 2 drugs (non-preferred generics) \$8
 - Tier 3 drugs (brand name drugs) \$11
 - Veterans in Priority Groups 2 through 8 are limited to \$700 annual cap

Inpatient Services

- Priority Group 7
 - Inpatient Copay for first 90 days of care during a 365-day period \$281.60
 - Inpatient Copay for each additional 90 days of care during a 365-day period \$140.80
 - Per Diem Charge \$2/day
- Priority Group 8
 - Inpatient Copay for first 90 days of care during a 365-day period \$1,408
 - Copay for each additional 90 days of care during a 365-day period \$704
 - Per Diem Charge \$10/day

Long-Term Care

Copayments for Long-Term Care services start on the 22nd day of care during any 12-month period— there is no copayment requirement for the first 21 days. Actual copayment charges will vary from Veteran to Veteran depending upon financial information submitted on VA Form 10-10EC [<https://va-form-10-10ec.pdf.filler.com>].

- Nursing Home Care/Inpatient Respite Care/Geriatric Evaluation maximum of \$97/day
- Adult Day Health Care/Outpatient Geriatric Evaluation Outpatient Respite Care maximum of \$15/day
- Domiciliary Care maximum of \$5/day
- Spousal Resource Protection Amount \$128,640

[Source: VHA via Veterans Council of St. Johns County | William Dudley | September 12, 2020 ++]

VA Medical Marijuana

Update 69: House Poised to Vote on Bill to Let VA Recommend It to Vets

The Department of Veterans Affairs has long used marijuana's position on the federal controlled substances list as a reason not to incorporate it into veterans' care. Now, the House is poised to vote on legislation that would remove marijuana from the Controlled Substances Act, effectively ending marijuana prohibition at the federal level -- though states would still get to rule on it for themselves. House Majority Whip James Clyburn (D-SC) announced over the weekend of 28 AUG that the House plans to bring the bill to the floor after nine months of silence, and "will be voting soon" on H.R. 3884, the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act. The exact date for the vote is still to be determined.

The legislation, though unlikely to pass the current Senate, is one of the most significant steps from Congress so far in changing federal marijuana policy. The vote in the House will be historic, even if the bill is all but dead on arrival in the Senate. VA senior leaders have told Capitol Hill lawmakers again and again that the reason they will not allow VA physicians to recommend marijuana use for veteran patients -- even in states where it is legal -- is because of the federal prohibition. It would put doctors and VA at legal risk, they argued, as lawmaker after lawmaker and advocate after advocate questioned, pushed and promoted the drug's potential use for a variety of veterans' health concerns. VA leaders said it would take an act of Congress for things to change at the department.

"The MORE Act decriminalized marijuana at the federal level by removing it from the Controlled Substances Act," Clyburn said in an emailed announcement. "This would allow state law to determine the status of marijuana legality for each state." VA senior leaders, including Secretary Robert Wilkie, told Veterans Affairs lawmakers that it would take an act of Congress for them to be willing to sign off on doctors recommending the drug to vets in states where it was already legal. The bill itself contains a provision specifically for veterans -- allowing VA doctors, or contracted doctors, to make recommendations to qualifying veterans who live in states where use of the drug is legal for medical purposes.

Multiple polls show a vast majority of veterans agree that medical marijuana should be legal. Most Americans overall believe marijuana in all its uses should be legal. So far, 33 states and the District of Columbia have legalized medical marijuana. Past attempts by Congress -- even those with some bipartisan support -- have been met with opposition from VA leaders. In the Senate, some of those measures have been met with opposition from Republican leadership. In November last year, the House Judiciary Committee took the first vote in Congress to remove marijuana from the Controlled Substances Act. The committee voted 24-10 to advance the bill, and it has not made it to the House floor until now.

Some veterans fear their use or potential use of marijuana could jeopardize their VA benefits and lawmakers have even introduced bills to prevent exactly that. But VA says on its website that "veterans will not be denied VA benefits because of marijuana use." A few bills have been filed to codify that and ensure that VA could not take benefits from veterans for their marijuana use. None have passed so far. Dr. Ben Kligler of the Veterans Health Administration recently told Connecting Vets that veterans can talk to their VA doctors about cannabis use and ensure use will not interact negatively with existing medications, but VA doctors cannot prescribe or recommend its use to veterans, or replace existing medication with medical marijuana.

Marijuana use for veterans has gained some traction among lawmakers in Congress, but none of the legislation has made significant progress, and some of it has been shut out entirely, especially in the Senate. While some veterans have, anecdotally, shared that marijuana has benefitted them, including in some cases helping to prevent suicide, many lawmakers remain unconvinced, calling for more evidence-based conclusions before a decision can be made. But lawmakers also have supported other alternative treatments and therapies for vets that, in some cases, have questionable

efficacy for veterans' health concerns. One thing both Republicans and Democrats seem able to agree on is the need for VA to study marijuana's potential uses for veterans, though some have expressed frustration with the timeline for that research. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | August 31, 2020 ++]

VA Coronary Care

Study Reveals Better Chance of Living for Post PCI Patients

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced 2 SEP study results, published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology, found Veterans undergoing an elective percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI) for stable angina at community hospitals had an increased chance of dying following the intervention than Veterans who underwent the procedure at VA hospitals who had better outcomes. At community hospitals Veterans had a 143% increased chance of mortality within the first month following PCI and a 33% increased chance of death within the first year. PCI is a non-surgical procedure that uses a flexible tube to place a metal scaffold (stent) into a narrowed coronary artery to allow blood to pass through more easily. “Our dedicated health care professionals often lead the nation in innovative procedures and quality of patient care — the results of this study reflect the dedication and level of attention provided by VA medical centers,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Veteran trust in VA is at an all-time high with VA seeing more patients than before and studies showing VA compares favorably to the private sector on wait times and quality of care — many times VA exceeding them.”

The analysis included a review of 9,000 enrolled Veterans who were actively receiving care in the VA health care system who subsequently underwent elective PCI at either a VA medical center or a community hospital. The data available on patients treated in community facilities is largely limited to administrative billing records. Therefore, it is possible more complex procedures were performed in that setting. The researchers concluded further study is needed to determine the most effective means to improve Veterans’ access to medical care while also maintaining quality. The analysis was conducted by the VA Clinical Assessment, Reporting and Tracking (CART) Program in the VHA Office of Quality and Patient Safety. [Source: VA News Release | September 2, 2020 ++]

VA Appointments

Update 21: Millions of Vets Waiting to Hear About Their Canceled Ones



The Department of Veterans Affairs was forced to cancel more than 11 million appointments from March to June during the coronavirus pandemic, but didn't follow up on more than 3 million of those, potentially putting veterans at risk, according to a recent watchdog report [<https://images.radio.com/connectingvets/VAOIG-20-02794-218.pdf>]. The VA Office of the Inspector General released the report 1 SEP focusing mainly on the 7.3 million canceled appointments

from March 15 until May 1 and the about 2.3 million, or 32%, that "had no evidence of follow-up or tracking" which "poses a significant risk to patient care."

About 5 million of those canceled appointments from March to May, or 68%, did have some level of follow-up, which the report said "generally means the patient was able to complete the appointment virtually by telephone or video, or the appointment has been rescheduled." Some of those 5 million, though, include appointments that are still canceled but are being actively tracked in VA's scheduling system and "likely still need to be rescheduled for an in-person visit or converted" to a telehealth appointment. VA "never closed its doors" during the pandemic, "but like most other health care providers, VA canceled most non-urgent health care appointments in response to the pandemic and in accordance with CDC guidelines," VA Press Secretary Christina Noel told Connecting Vets, adding that the report shows VA "appropriately flagged the vast majority of these appointments for follow up."

At least 1.1 million of the canceled appointments were converted to telehealth appointments by phone or video, according to the report. VA held about 2.8 million total virtual appointments in March and April, including some that had been canceled and some newly scheduled. The appointments include "primary care, mental health care and specialty care," according to the report, and VA facilities don't have a tracking system specifically associated with the pandemic cancellations to make sure they are rescheduled.

Veterans Health Administration (VHA) leaders issued guidance to staff in March about how to track pandemic cancellations, including labeling those appointments with the keyword "COVID19." About 55% of canceled appointments from March 15 to May 1 included that label, leaving 45% without a label. This made it difficult for staff to know whether an appointment was canceled because of the pandemic or other reasons, though because of the timing of so many cancellations, it is reasonable to infer that the vast majority were canceled due to COVID-19. Appointment wait times recorded by VA could be questionable during and after the pandemic, the report said, after an issue related to how the department labeled the canceled appointments. VA may have erroneously labeled some canceled appointments as "canceled by the veteran," according to the report. When VA labels an appointment as canceled by the patient, the wait time resets, the report said, which could mean that "individual and cumulative wait time data will be of questionable reliability during and following the pandemic."

VA staff said they will use cancellation dates, instead of the labels, when rescheduling to avoid missing anyone, the report said. While VHA guidance issued 22 MAR directed staff not to cancel or discontinue consults, the report says that's exactly what happened to more than 500,000 consults during the period from March 22 to May 1. Consults are usually requests for specialty care that are submitted by the patient's primary care provider. "Canceled or discontinued consults can lead to a veteran experiencing additional, undocumented delays, or in some cases not receiving care if the referring provider does not resubmit or create another consult," the report said.

VHA staff also canceled multiple appointments at the same time -- affecting about 350,000 appointments. In one case, a scheduler at the Orlando, Florida VA medical center canceled 77 primary care appointments. The VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Washington canceled about 3,300 consults, and the Orlando and Tampa VAs each canceled more than 10,000 consults, the report showed. By not properly tracking canceled appointments, VHA also risks that its hospitals and clinics could "lose track of patients who require follow-up for community care referrals" through the Mission Act, according to the report.

On 20 MAR, VHA sent a memo to its medical system directors "stating that VHA requested a temporary (90-day) pause from the Mission Act standards," though it still planned to complete referrals for "urgent needs as necessary." Three days later, another VHA document said the department wasn't "pausing" Mission Act access standards, but was taking "into account whether referrals for community care are clinically appropriate" during the pandemic. That lack of clarity could cause challenges for the department, the report said, and VHA "faces a potentially large influx of community care referrals when the pandemic subsides, as large numbers of patients return to VA for care and as facilities work to reschedule canceled appointments." That spike in demand could create future issues for VA and community care staff, the report notes.

Noel said the report "creates the false impression" that some veterans may not have gotten a follow up from VA after their appointment was canceled. "VA follows up on all canceled appointments regardless of whether the follow up is annotated in the scheduling system," she said. "Nevertheless, out of an abundance of caution, VA has already started on a review of all appointments canceled during the pandemic." The Inspector General recommended that VHA create a "well-defined rescheduling strategy" with all its hospitals and clinics and provide oversight to those facilities that have a "significant rate of appointments with no evidence of follow-up or tracking.

"The OIG recognizes the efforts of VHA personnel to manage the needs of patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. Avoiding nonurgent face-to-face appointments was warranted, but unfortunately increased the risk of patients not receiving rescheduled appointments," Assistant Inspector General for Audits and Evaluations Larry Reinkemeyer wrote in the report. "VA medical facilities provided some care virtually and have worked to track and reschedule canceled appointments. Despite these efforts, millions of canceled appointments must be managed during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. VHA officials said they had nearly completed a plan for managing appointments and consults, including plans to "review all appointment (and consult) cancellations and provide follow-up." [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | September 1, 2020 ++]

VA Pharmacy Mail-Order

Update 03: Ignore the Conspiracy Theories



A new wave of media stories is sadly using veterans to score political points against the Trump administration — this time by alleging delays in the delivery of prescription drugs by the U.S. Postal Service. These stories falsely imply that the Department of Veterans Affairs is no longer a reliable supplier of prescription drugs through the mail. But this utterly untrue premise doesn't square with the fact that the vast majority of veterans are happy with VA's prescription program, which has been rated the highest in overall customer service satisfaction from the consumer group J.D. Power in nine of the last 11 years. So, what's really going on? Here are the facts:

- VA fills more than 150 million prescriptions each year, and about 86% of them are delivered through the U.S. Postal Service. Most veterans are satisfied with our service, which is most recently getting prescriptions to veterans in an average of 2.89 days — faster than our target of three to five days.
- We tell veterans to expect their prescriptions to be delivered in three to five days not because we pulled these numbers out of a hat, but because that's how long it typically takes. And as the numbers show above, we're doing even better than what we tell veterans to expect.
- It's only natural that some isolated problems will occur, given the volume of prescriptions we send in the mail. But when we see delays, we don't sit back and accept them — we find solutions. VA staff continuously monitor our delivery times, and we shift to commercial carriers if USPS is experiencing problems in certain regions of the country. For example, when Detroit and parts of New Jersey and New York were seeing slower delivery times, we switched to UPS second day air for those areas. And when we saw problems in Arizona with UPS, we shifted over to FedEx for about five weeks until service levels improved.

- We're also working closely with USPS to ensure prescription drugs are given priority status in the mail. On Aug. 1, VA worked with USPS to implement a system to mark first-class and priority mail prescription packages with a pharma-code to identify them and move them through the system as a priority.
- And as always, we coach veterans to plan ahead and order routine prescriptions at least 10 days in advance so that a late-arriving prescription doesn't become a health risk.

Now, some are speculating that policy changes at USPS are hurting veterans. There are no data backing up this assertion, but unfortunately, too many people have been willing to jump on the bandwagon and push this story without knowing if it's supported by the facts. It's disappointing to see how comfortable some are with presenting misinformation to advance a political agenda, even when that information has the potential to cause harm to those who served this country. Veterans should never be given reason to doubt a system that continues to work for them at a high level, year after year.

To every veteran reading this, Trump and his administration have done more to improve the lives of veterans and reform the department than any administration in recent history. VA has undergone significant reform in the last few years and is delivering greater healthcare choices, modernizing to fit the needs of today's veterans, and finding creative new ways to care for you, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. And we will continue to safeguard your health by working to provide the prompt delivery of your prescriptions. [Source: Washington Examiner | Sec. Robert Wilkie | September 01, 2020 ++]

HUD-VASH

Update 11: West LA VA's Tent City Homeless Alternative



On one of the lawns at the West LA VA, there are rows of camping tents for veterans experiencing homelessness. It's an alternative to sleeping on the sidewalk. The VA provides tents, bathrooms, meals, medical care, and social services. KCRW reporter Anna Scott recently visited this site and found that for some, it's a refuge. And now, some city officials are looking at starting their own government-run homeless encampments. Here are a few key questions about the possibility:

- **What is the West LA VA, and why is it operating a sanctioned encampment?** The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System campus in Brentwood is a 388-acre complex of medical offices, old buildings and open space, serving military veterans. Portions of the land are also leased to private and outside entities. Many veterans experiencing homelessness receive services there, and some camp on the sidewalks surrounding the property. In April, amid the pandemic, the VA turned one of its parking lots into a makeshift campground with 25 tents to allow homeless veterans to shelter in place. The program, which is called the Care, Treatment and Rehabilitative Services Initiative (CTRS), is specifically for health care-eligible veterans and provides hot meals, bathrooms, security, health care and social services. The idea is to provide a low barrier place to begin exiting homelessness.

- **Is it working?** According to a spokesperson for the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, 220 veterans have participated in CTRS so far, and the vast majority have remained engaged in services. A little less than half (46%) have moved into transitional or temporary housing with case management. About 10% have been discharged to receive higher level medical care, while smaller numbers have left to live with family, entered a residential program on the campus or walked out with no notice. The VA is in the process of expanding CTRS. Over the past few months, it has grown from 25 to 50 tents, and now officials have made space for 100.
- **Could this be done in other parts of LA?** At least two LA City Councilmembers are actively exploring potential sites for service-connected, sanctioned campgrounds. Spokespeople for Mike Bonin, who represents much of the Westside and Venice, and Joe Buscaino, who represents San Pedro, told KCRW they are looking into it. Buscaino is specifically considering a parking lot on the campus of Los Angeles Harbor College, according to spokesman Branimir Kvartuc, but only if he can resume sanitation cleanups of nearby street encampments.

A spokesman for LA Mayor Eric Garcetti, Alex Comisar, told KCRW in an email: "Sanctioned encampments are not the solution to homelessness, and they are far from ideal. But bringing people into areas with security and services is better than leaving them out on our sidewalks. We're taking nothing off the table." [Source: www.kcrw.com | Steve Chiotakis | September 2, 2020 ++]

VA Secretary

Update 90: Does Not Believe Trump Disparaged Veterans

Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie defended President Donald Trump's reported comments about American soldiers, claiming that Trump's remarks about prisoners of war were "politics" and made in the "heat of the campaign." Wilkie was responding to a bombshell article by The Atlantic, which claimed that Trump canceled a 2018 visit to a French cemetery housing fallen American soldiers from World War I to mark the end of the war because he did not believe it was important to go. The White House blamed bad weather conditions at the time. Trump claimed that the cemetery was "filled with losers" and separately said on the same trip that the US Marines who lost their lives in the war were "suckers," The Atlantic reported.

According to the report, Trump also called Sen. John McCain — a Republican and a Navy veteran who spent more than five years as a prisoner in Vietnam — a "loser" after his 2018 death, saying: "We're not going to support that loser's funeral." Trump has forcefully denied making the comments, despite other outlets corroborating some details of The Atlantic's report. Wilkie also defended Trump to CNN, saying he had "absolutely not" heard Trump make disparaging comments about US service members, and that he did not believe Trump made the reported comments about Marines. "I would be offended too if I thought it was true," he told CNN's Dana Bash. He said that he supported Trump based on what he has done for veterans: "What I'm looking at is the Donald Trump I know. The Donald Trump who has turned around Veteran Affairs."

He also dismissed Trump's comments about McCain as just "politics." Wilkie said he "was a friend with John McCain" but understood that Trump's comments are part of "name-calling" coming "from both sides." Bash then said that Trump's comments insulted all prisoners of war, and asked: "Is that acceptable?" Wilkie responded: "Well, it's politics. It's the heat of a campaign," without specifying what campaign he was talking about. "I judge a man by his actions," Wilkie said, adding that McCain was "definitely" a war hero. Trump nominated Wilkie to the role of Veterans Affairs secretary in 2018, after he served as acting secretary.

President Trump never bashed America's war dead as "losers," according to the US ambassador to France and Monaco — who was there the day he's accused of making the disparaging remarks. Ambassador Jamie McCourt is the latest public official to push back against the report published by The Atlantic late last week. "In my presence, POTUS

has NEVER denigrated any member of the US military or anyone in service to our country. And he certainly did not that day, either,” McCourt told Breitbart News in an exclusive interview. “Let me add, he was devastated to not be able to go to the cemetery at Belleau Wood. In fact, the next day, he attended and spoke at the ceremony in Suresnes in the pouring rain.”



US President Donald Trump at the American Cemetery of Suresnes outside Paris in November 2018 as part of commemorations marking the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I. He cancelled the other cemetery journey on his trip.

Former national security adviser John Bolton disputed the main thesis of The Atlantic's recent report alleging that President Trump disparaged fallen American soldiers in France, calling the claim "simply false" in an appearance on "The Story" 7 SEP. "According to what that article said, the president made disparaging remarks about soldiers and people buried in the cemetery in connection with the decision for him not to go to the ceremony that was planned that afternoon, and that was simply false," Bolton said. "I don't know who told the author that, but that was false." The president canceled the planned 2018 trip to the cemetery for American war dead in France because of the weather and not because of disdain for the slain soldiers, Bolton said, contradicting the report.

Despite denials, other outlets have confirmed details from the Atlantic report. Fox News' national security correspondent Jennifer Griffin said on 4 SEP that parts of the report were verified to her by two people who previously worked for the Trump administration. In response, Trump tweeted a Breitbart News story that said Griffin had been able to confirm much of the story, but not that Trump called the dead soldiers "losers" and "suckers." The president has also called for Griffin to be fired over her claims. A former senior administration official confirmed to CNN that Trump referred to fallen US soldiers while using "crude and derogatory terms" during the trip.

Many have also pointed to Trump's public comments as evidence that the reporting is likely accurate. In his denial of The Atlantic's reporting, Trump said that he "was never a big fan" of McCain, but that he had "never called John a loser." But Trump described McCain as a loser in 2015 when talking about McCain's capture at an Iowa summit. "I like people who weren't captured," he said then. "I don't like losers." At the time, he also tweeted a link to a political blog that quoted him calling McCain a loser at the event.

Jeffrey Goldberg, the editor-in-chief of The Atlantic and the author of the report, told CNN on 5 SEP: "I would fully expect more reporting to come out about this and more confirmation and new pieces of information in the coming days and weeks." He said: "We have a responsibility and we're going to do it regardless of what he says." He also defended his use of anonymous sources in the reporting, saying: "We all have to use anonymous sources, especially in a climate where the president of the United States tries to actively intimidate. These are not people who are anonymous to me." [Source: Business Insider | Sinéad Baker | September 7, 2020 ++]

VA Police

Update 01: GAO Applauds Training but Not Use of Force Record Keeping



The VA has specific policies on the use of force by its police officers and those officers are trained on it regularly, but the department’s records of such incidents are incomplete and not fully accurate, GAO has said. The GAO report was ordered by Congress after an inspector general report in 2018 criticized the department for shortcomings in controls of the police forces at its hospitals and other facilities tasked with protecting agency employees, patients and visitors. The officers are authorized to carry firearms, investigate criminal activities, and arrest individuals for offenses committed on medical center property, among other activities.

They “operate in a unique environment that requires balancing the treatment and care of veterans while also maintaining order and enforcing the law. For example, VA police officers might respond to incidents involving disruptive patients in emergency rooms or mental health areas that experience high levels of security incidents,” GAO said. GAO found that the VA has specific policies governing the use of differing levels of use of force, ranging from the mere presence of an officer to potentially deadly force. Officers complete a 10 week basic training course on being hired—including issues such as how to respond to veterans with mental illness or a traumatic brain injury—and also undergo biannual refresher training, it said.

Further, officers are required to complete electronic records of their daily activities, including use of force incidents, in two main ways—daily operations journals and incident reports—which are reviewed by local chiefs of police on a daily basis. Any incidents typically are investigated locally but higher levels also may become involved. However, in examining about 1,200 incidents over a twelve-month period reported in a central database, GAO found that “the data are not sufficiently complete or accurate for reporting numbers or trends about incidents across all medical centers. For example, of the 74 reports in which officers reported drawing or discharging a firearm, in 18 cases the officers reported some other type of use of force, such as handcuffs, as the highest level used.

GAO also said that the VA “does not systematically collect or analyze use of force investigation findings from local medical centers. As a result, VA is hindered in its ability to oversee officers’ use of force across medical centers.” It said that management concurred with its recommendations to improve the completeness and accuracy of its use of force data; implement a tool to analyze use of force incidents at medical centers nationwide; ensure that medical centers submit all use of force investigations to VA headquarters; and analyze the use of force investigation data. [Source: FedWeek | Federal Manager’s Daily Report | September 10, 2020 ++]

VA Suicide Prevention

Update 64: GAO Uncovers Multiple Mistakes in On-Campus Suicide Reporting

Despite public promises to make suicide prevention their top priority, Veterans Affairs officials made errors in nearly one in every four reports concerning self-inflicted deaths on department campuses over a two-year span, according to

new findings from the Government Accountability Office. The news comes as lawmakers on Capitol Hill are considering new legislation to improve record keeping on veterans suicide as part of a broader legislative package on prevention efforts. About 20 veterans and still-serving troops die from suicide each day, according to the latest department statistics.

That number has remained steady in recent years even as administration officials and Congress have invested millions in new resources on the problem. However, Veterans Affairs leaders have reported significant decreases in campus suicides in recent years, which they attribute to new response and prevention efforts. The GAO study was conducted in response to questions from the House Veterans' Affairs Committee following a series of deaths in publicly visible sections of VA medical campuses, including parking lots and hospital waiting rooms. VA officials did not begin collecting comprehensive records on campus suicides until 2017, following a federal Freedom of Information Act request by the Tampa Bay Times. Researchers noted that today, the department "has a process to identify on-campus suicides; however, its numbers are inaccurate."

Veterans Health Administration records show 55 suicides on department medical campuses in fiscal 2018 and 2019. However, GAO researchers found four cases that administrators missed in their counts, and 10 cases included in the total that should not have been. "For example, VHA's list did not include a suicide that occurred in a VA parking lot of a community-based outpatient clinic despite the death being reported in a VHA Issue Brief and VA Police data," the report states. "In contrast, VHA's list also included one case as a suicide in which the veteran was alive." In that case, the veteran had survived a suicide attempt but was listed as deceased because of reporting errors. Three others were double-counted in department files. Two missed cases involved deaths at facilities that provide transition support for homeless veterans.

GAO officials said only 25 percent of all suicides over the two-year period met criteria for being fully investigated by VA officials, and other relevant demographic and clinical data was missing from most files, even though all the deaths occurred in places where collection of that information was possible. "VA's inaccurate information is at odds with its own goals," the report states. "Specifically, in its National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicides, VHA identified the need for quality veteran suicide-related data to better understand the scope of the problem." In response to recommendations from GAO, acting VA Chief of Staff Brooks Tucker promised improvements to the suicide records monitoring in coming months. The department has established a new standing committee to review the issue and provide suggestions for improvement by July 2021. However, Tucker disagreed with suggestions calling for a "root cause analysis" of every suicide, saying that type of investigation may not be warranted in all cases.

Of the estimated 17 veteran deaths each day from suicide, only six involve individuals considered recent users of VA health services. Department officials have pointed to that number as evidence of the need for more public outreach and awareness of available mental health services in solving the problem. Veterans experiencing a mental health emergency can contact the Veteran Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and select option 1 for a VA staffer. Veterans, troops or their family members can also text 838255 or visit VeteransCrisisLine.net for assistance. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | September 9, 2020 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse

Reported 01 thru 15 SEP 2020

Ocala, Fla. – **Miller Wilson**, Jr. (50, Sparr), his daughter, **Myoshi Wilson** (26, Citra), and **Erica Wilson** (43, Ocala) have each pleaded guilty for their roles a scheme to defraud the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health care benefits. Miller Wilson, Jr. pleaded guilty 26 AUG to conspiracy to commit health care fraud and wire fraud and solicitation and receipt of a health care kickback. He faces a maximum sentence of 5 years' imprisonment for the conspiracy charge, and up to 10 years in federal prison for the kickback offense. On March 5, 2020, Erica Wilson

pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit health care fraud and wire fraud. She faces a maximum sentence of 5 years' imprisonment. Myoshi Wilson had pleaded guilty on February 18, 2020, to making false statements to law enforcement. She faces a maximum sentence of 5 years' imprisonment. All three defendants will be sentenced on October 6, 2020.

According to court documents, Miller Wilson, Jr. was an employee at the Department of Veterans Affairs Clinic located in The Villages, Florida. As part of his employment, he provided transportation arrangements for veterans needing medical treatment. From 2014 through 2016, Miller Wilson, Jr. obtained cash kickbacks from the transportation vendors in exchange for awarding them health care contracts from the VA. Thereafter, from 2016-2017, Miller Wilson, Jr. conspired with Erica and Myoshi Wilson to open and manage two different transportation companies to conduct similar schemes. Miller Wilson, Jr. used his official position at the VA to funnel health care contracts to the companies that he had formed with Erica and Myoshi Wilson. During a 17-month period, the two companies billed the federal government \$305,673. Myoshi Wilson admitted to making false statements to a federal agent in 2019, to conceal the conspiracy. [Source: DoJ Middle Dist. of Florida | U.S. Attorney's Office | August 28, 2020 ++]

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Tampa, Florida -- Chief U.S. District Judge Steven D. Merryday on 4 SEP sentenced **Samuel Friedman** (45, Land O' Lakes) to four years in federal prison for health care fraud. The court also ordered Friedman to forfeit his interests in real property as well as a bank account containing nearly \$475,000, which were traceable to proceeds of the offense. Restitution was ordered in the amount of \$3.42 million. Friedman had pleaded guilty on June 16, 2020.

According to court documents, Friedman owned and operated a telemarketing operation known as SKF Enterprises, LLC (SKF). SKF targeted the Medicare-aged population to generate orders for durable medical equipment (DME) and cancer genetic (CGx) testing. SKF's call center employees were trained to follow a script of triage questions designed to upsell DME and CGx testing to Medicare beneficiaries. SKF then packaged this information into the format of a prescription for doctors' approval under the guise of "telemedicine," but no proper telemedicine occurred. Rather, doctors' signatures were secured in exchange for bribes and kickbacks.

During the scheme, Friedman bribed numerous doctors, through fraudulent "telemedicine" companies, to sign and to approve thousands of DME and CGx-testing orders, regardless of medical necessity. Once signed by doctors, Friedman sold the prescriptions to client-conspirators for submission to Medicare and the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The conspirators attempted to conceal their illegal kickback relationships using sham boilerplate marketing agreements. For these illegal sales, conspirators paid SKF more than \$3.4 million. [Source: DoJ Middle Dist. of Florida | U.S. Attorney's Office | September 4, 2020 ++]

* Vets *



Vet Housing

Update 17: Foreclosure Moratorium Extended to 31 DEC

On August 27, 2020, the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) [announced](#) the extension of the Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac moratorium on single-family foreclosures from August 31, 2020, to December 31, 2020. The moratorium on evictions from single-family homes owned by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac also is extended until December 31, 2020. The announcement does not address evictions from multi-family properties subject to a Fannie Mae or Freddie

Mac loan. Fannie Mae addresses the extension of the single-family foreclosure moratorium in an update to [Lender Letter 2020-02](#) and advises that the moratorium does not apply to vacant or abandoned homes.

Also on August 27, 2020, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in [Mortgagee Letter 2020-27](#) extended the foreclosure and eviction moratorium for FHA insured single-family loans from August 31, 2020, to December 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. In [Circular 26-20-29](#) and [Circular 26-20-30](#), each dated August 24, 2020, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) extended the eviction and foreclosure moratoriums, respectively, for properties secured by VA guaranteed loans from August 31, 2020, to December 31, 2020. [Source: JDSUPRA | Ballard Spahr | August 2020 ++]

Pin Ups For Vets

Update 01: Annual Calendar Now Available



Pin-Ups For Vets has released its annual calendar in an effort to raise money to support hospitalized veterans and personnel currently deployed overseas, the non-profit announced. This year's edition, which features 12 women decked out in 1940s vogue — veterans representing all five branches of the military — marks the 15th year the company has endeavored to raise morale while shattering stereotypes about women in the armed services. “In addition to helping these female Veterans embrace their femininity again, many of the ladies have said that being involved with our organization has given them a renewed sense of purpose after transitioning out of the military,” said company founder Gina Elise. “It has given them a community again, and a mission to give back.”

Past issues have included veterans from all walks of life, including Kirstie Ennis, a wounded Marine veteran who received the 2019 Pat Tillman Award for Service at the 2019 ESPYS. One participant in the 2021 edition is Monica Patrow, a Marine Corps veteran and avionics technician who noted the importance of being able to show a different side of herself than her peers in uniform were accustomed to. “My Marine Corps uniform will forever be the most prideful thing I will ever wear,” Patrow said. “But with the uniform, comes uniformity. And being a female, you can lose your feminine touches. ... Being a pin-up shows that even though we spent years tying our combat boots and twirling our hair into buns to look more masculine, we are still ... gorgeous, classy women with a background that surprises mostly anybody we meet.”

Sarah Weber, a Coast Guard veteran currently working toward a doctorate in psychology, also lauded the opportunity, saying, “The best part of being involved with Pin-Ups For vets is the camaraderie. I work a lot with Veterans in transition these days, on campus and clinically, and it is clear to me how much benefit there is in maintaining connection to a community of former or current service members.” However, in most traditional organizations meant for those purposes, it is difficult to find many women Veterans. This is not the case with Pin-Ups For Vets. I meet so many amazing, talented, big-hearted women through being involved with this organization.

During a normal year, Pin-Ups For Vets would be in the middle of a 50-state VA hospital tour, but the pandemic, like it has with so many other customary practices, has thrown a wrench in those plans. Instead, the organization is distributing care packages to hospitalized veterans all over the country. To date, members of Pin-Ups For Vets have visited nearly 15,000 hospitalized veterans and donated over \$70,000 toward new therapy equipment and financial assistance for veterans' healthcare programs. This effort, Weber says, makes the experience especially rewarding. "This, on top of the fun of dressing up, volunteering and helping raise money for the cause of other Veterans, makes this the perfect way of staying involved in a community which I care so deeply about." The 2021 calendar is available for [purchase here](#). [Source: MilitaryTimes | J.D. Simkins| August 31, 2020 ++]

Burn Pit Toxic Exposure

Update 78: New Approach Needed to Prove Direct Illness Link

Limitations in existing studies and lack of quality data mean there's "insufficient evidence" to prove veterans' respiratory illnesses are caused by burn pit and other airborne hazard exposure in Afghanistan and Persian Gulf countries and a new approach is needed, experts said in a report released this week. A committee of National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine researchers said better, more thorough studies are necessary to definitively link respiratory illnesses in troops and veterans to their exposure to burn pits and airborne hazards while deployed in the Southwest Asia Theater.

That doesn't mean there's no evidence suggesting exposures cause illnesses, though. There was "limited or suggestive evidence" of a link between service in the Gulf War from 1990 to 1991 and for those who served in operations after Sept. 11, 2001, who experience "chronic persistent cough, shortness of breath and wheezing," according to existing data. But it's not enough to definitively prove a connection without better studies, experts said. "New approaches are needed to better answer whether respiratory health issues are associated with deployment. The current uncertainty should not be interpreted as meaning that there is no association – rather, the issue is that the available data are of insufficient quality to draw definitive conclusions," said Mark Utell, a doctor and professor of medicine and environmental medicine at the University of Rochester Medical Center, and chair of the committee that wrote the report. "However, the committee believes it is possible – today – to conduct well-designed studies that will provide more clarity to veterans who are seeking to understand the respiratory problems they are experiencing."

National Academies' experts were tasked with sifting through existing research to determine if any had gathered sufficient evidence to prove that exposures caused respiratory illnesses and to identify gaps in knowledge about those exposures and how they affect troops and veterans deployed to those areas. So far, VA only recognizes temporary health effects related to burn pits, including respiratory, skin, eye and gastrointestinal tract irritation. Sverre Vedal, professor emeritus for the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences at the University of Washington School of Public Health, said the committee "experienced a general sense of frustration" during their work, as they heard testimonials from veterans and service members who said they experienced ill effects after their exposures. "But the data did not support it," Vedal said, explaining again the limits of previous studies. "That was a frustrating aspect of our work on this committee. The data were not strong enough for us to conclude that there were associations."

Data on veterans and troops who experienced toxic exposures is frequently limited, since many veterans go undiagnosed, misdiagnosed or don't report their exposure, said Chelsey Poisson, National Guard medic, ER nurse and toxic exposure researcher at the Hunter Seven Foundation. "If approximately 50% of Afghanistan veterans go to civilian providers and never use VA Medical Center services, how can the VA clinically account for a representative sample of the post-9/11 VA population?" In limiting the scope of the review to respiratory illnesses, VA may miss other illnesses

linked to exposures, Poisson said. "We have to look beyond the respiratory diseases," she said. "If they looked at glioblastoma rates or prostate (issues), they'd probably see the seriousness of toxins on other organ systems."

The report, sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs, reviewed 27 respiratory health illnesses, including cancers, asthma, chronic bronchitis and sinusitis. Of those, "none met the criteria for sufficient evidence of an association with service" in those areas of operation. Since 1990, researchers and VA estimate that more than 3.7 million American troops have served in the Southwest Asian Theater during operations including the Gulf War, stabilization period following the war and in post-9/11 conflicts. Troops were met with exposure to airborne hazards including emissions from open burn pits, oil-well fire smoke, fine airborne particles, military vehicle exhaust -- including from diesel and jet fuel -- and industrial emissions causing local air pollution. Those exposures coupled with "extremes, stress and noise" those troops may have experienced could have "increased their vulnerability to these exposures," the report said.

But limited or flawed studies so far have in some ways crippled researchers reaching conclusive proof. Many of the completed studies assume that deployed veterans had the same types and levels of exposure, even though the types of hazards varied over time. For example, what was torched in burn pits varied by conflict and location,. As troops levels varied, Poisson said exposures increased and decreased, too. Research by the Hunter Seven Foundation showed that a majority of the veterans in Operation Iraqi Freedom suffered a more "severe" set of symptoms and complaints if they served in 2007, 2004 and 2005 (in that order), which "correlates with the increasing amount of combat in the country at the time. More combat equals more waste production, more combat-related exposures."

Several of the studies also failed to account for troops' smoking cigarettes, a known alternative cause to respiratory illnesses. Mortality reports have also not done a thorough job of separating deaths caused by respiratory illnesses specifically, making it difficult for experts to determine "the extent of the harm" airborne exposures may have caused, including the number who have died because of it. Existing studies also did not account for how factors such as race, gender and the location or timing of specific deployments could affect how service member and veteran exposures and illnesses. While some data on the timing and locations of deployed troops is available, advocates, researchers and vets have warned for years that the records are incomplete at best.

Toxic exposures have plagued troops likely as long as the American military has existed, and because the effects of those exposures may take time to fully manifest, experts have an even more difficult time tracking and linking them to illnesses vets may not develop until later in life. National Academies researchers said in their report that "longitudinal studies" are needed to record a baseline lung function -- since troops are often at the peak of their lung function and in their early 20s when they deploy -- and then analyze how their lung function changes over time.

The Hunter Seven Foundation has collected that data in its research. Troops who deployed to Iraq from 2003 to 2011 with a 100% physical training (PT) pass rate had a 58% pass rate after deploying. While 5% of those reported shortness of breath while exercising before they deployed, 87% reported shortness of breath after they returned. About 20% reported having one chronic symptom before deployment (such as migraines, skin rashes, acid reflux or memory loss) compared to 95% after deployment. Troops Hunter Seven collected data on who served in Afghanistan after 9/11 had a 99.7% PT pass rate before deploying. After, it was 89%. Before deploying, about 4.5% reported shortness of breath when exercising. After, nearly 47% reported shortness of breath. About 20% of the troops who served in Afghanistan reported having one or more chronic symptoms before deploying, which increased to 75% during the deployment and 89% after.

Researchers recommended that VA conduct updated and expanded studies of the deaths of veterans who served in Afghanistan and Persian Gulf countries, and compare veterans with higher and lower levels of exposure, instead of comparing exposed vets to the general civilian population. The last study was done in 2011. "Through partnerships with other agencies, and the use of emerging exposure assessment technologies, VA could conduct or support well-designed studies that would yield more definitive answers," researchers said, urging VA to work with NASA, the

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health to take advantage of their data and technology.

As VA prepares to launch its new, long-delayed electronic health record system that is intended to create a universal health record for troops during service and after, the report said researchers should have access to exposure information in that system. In addition to its work with the Pentagon on programs such as the electronic health record system and the Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER) to track troops' exposures over time, National Academies' researchers recommended VA consider other partnerships to improve its data and studies.

Newly developed and emerging technology and techniques could also help researchers prove a connection between airborne exposures and illnesses, researchers said in the report. Newly discovered biomarkers, or "characteristics of the body that can be measured," could provide more information on those exposures, their effects on veterans' bodies and even how susceptible some people may be compared to others. New developments in satellite data could also help researchers with more accurate estimates of past levels of airborne hazards, including burn pit emissions, the report said. Silicone wristbands have been created that could help troops detect their exposures in real-time. Portable "readers" are being developed that could help "map changes to the human genome" caused by exposures. To read the National Academies' full report refer to <https://connectingvets.radio.com/media/docs/embargo-national-academies-respiratory-health-effects-of-airborne-hazards-1.pdf>. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | September 11, 2020 ++]

Korean War Vets

Ernest R. Kouma | Actions Surpassed Audie Murphy's



Army Master Sgt. Ernest R. Kouma was credited with killing an astonishing 250 enemy soldiers to protect retreating U.S. infantrymen during an hours-long battle at the beginning of the Korean War. It's no surprise that his efforts earned him the Medal of Honor. Kouma was born Nov. 23, 1919, in Dwight, Nebraska, and grew up on a family farm. In 1940, as war was building in Europe, he decided to enlist in the Army. When the United States entered World War II, Kouma was trained as a tank crew member. He was assigned to the 9th Armored Division.

The division landed in Normandy late in September 1944 and moved to the front lines on 23 OCT. Its first mission was patrol duty in a quiet sector along the Luxembourg-German frontier. When the Germans launched their winter offensive, the 9th Armored Division was quickly involved in the Battle of the Bulge with next to no experience. The division saw very heavy action at St. Vith, Echternach and Bastogne, its units, unprepared to counter the offensive, fighting in widely separated areas. The 9th Armored Division made a stand at Bastogne and held off the Germans long enough to enable the 101st Airborne Division to dig in for a defense of the city, resulting in the Battle of Bastogne.

After a rest period in January 1945, the 9th Armored Division made preparations for a drive across the Roer River. The offensive was launched on 28 FEB, and the unit smashed across the Roer to Rheinbach, sending patrols into Remagen. The Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen was found intact, and was seized by elements of the 9th Armored minutes before demolition charges were set to explode on March 7, 1945. The division exploited the bridgehead, moving south and east across the Lahn River toward Limburg, where thousands of Allied prisoners were liberated. The division drove

on to Frankfurt and then turned to assist in the closing of the Ruhr Pocket. In April, it continued east, encircled Leipzig and secured a line along the Mulde River. The division was shifting south to Czechoslovakia when the war in Europe ended on V-E Day in May 1945.

Following the end of the war, Kouma decided to stay in the Army. He was moved to South Korea for occupation duties before being moved to Japan for the post-war occupation of that country. Eventually, Kouma was assigned as a tank commander in A Company, 72nd Tank Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, which was stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington. By this time, he had a home in Penobscot County, Maine, when he was not at Fort Lewis. But shortly after the Korean War began in the summer of 1950, Kouma who was then a sergeant first class was again sent to the front lines as an M26 Pershing tank commander of Company A, 72nd Tank Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. Kouma's unit was part of the defensive perimeter around the port city of Pusan along the Naktong River.

The North Korean People's Army, meanwhile, was preparing for a September offensive by capturing the Miryang and Samnangjin areas to cut off the 2nd Division's route of supply and withdrawal between Daegu and Busan. However, the North Koreans were unaware that the 2nd Infantry Division had recently replaced the 24th Infantry Division in positions along the Naktong River. Consequently, they expected lighter resistance; the troops of the 24th were exhausted from months of fighting, but the men of the 2nd Division were fresh and newly arrived in Korea. They had only established their lines shortly before the North Koreans began their attack. The North Koreans began crossing the Naktong River under cover of darkness at certain points. On the southernmost flank of the US 9th Infantry Regiment river line, just above the junction of the Nam River with the Naktong, A Company of the 1st Battalion was dug in on a long finger ridge paralleling the Naktong that terminates in Hill 94 at the Kihang ferry site. The river road from Namjiri running west along the Naktong passes the southern tip of this ridge and crosses to the west side of the river at the ferry. A small village called Agok lay at the base of Hill 94 and 300 yards from the river.

A patrol of tanks and armored vehicles, together with two infantry squads of A Company, 9th Infantry, held a roadblock near the ferry and close to Agok. On the evening of 31 AUG, A Company moved from its ridge positions overlooking Agok and the river to new positions along the river below the ridge line. Kouma led the patrol of two M26 Pershing tanks and two M19 Gun Motor Carriages in Agok, along the Naktong River. Kouma placed his patrol on the west side of Agok near the Kihang ferry. At 20:00, a heavy fog covered the river, and at 22:00 mortar shells began falling on the American-held side of the river. By 22:15, this strike intensified and North Korean mortar preparation struck A Company's positions. American mortars and artillery began responding with counter-battery fire. Some of A Company's men reported hearing noises on the opposite side of the river and splashes in the water.

At 22:30, the fog lifted and Kouma saw that a North Korean pontoon bridge was being laid across the river directly in front of his position. Kouma's four vehicles attacked this structure, with Kouma manning the M2 Browning .50-caliber machine gun atop the tank. As the gunner fired the tank's main cannon, Kouma sank many of the boats attempting to cross the river with his machine gun. At 23:00, a small arms fight flared around the left side of A Company north of the tanks. This gunfire had lasted only two or three minutes when the A Company roadblock squads near the tanks heard over the field telephone that the company was withdrawing and that they should do likewise. Kouma instead opted to act as a rearguard to cover the infantry. He was wounded shortly thereafter in the foot reloading the tank's ammunition. He quickly fought off another North Korean attack across the river with his machine gun.

Kouma's force was then ambushed by a group of North Koreans dressed in US military uniforms. Kouma was wounded a second time, in the shoulder, as he beat back repeated North Korean crossings with his machine gun. Several strong attacks came within meters of the tank, but Kouma was able to drive them back despite his wounds. Eventually, the other three vehicles withdrew or were neutralized, and Kouma held the Agok crossing site until 07:30 the next morning with just his tank. At one point, the tank was surrounded and Kouma had to engage the North Koreans from outside the tank with machine gun fire at point blank range. After the tank gun's ammunition was expended, Kouma used his pistol and grenades to hold off the North Koreans. The tank then withdrew 8 miles to the newly established American lines, destroying three North Korean machine gun positions along the way.

During his action, Kouma had killed an estimated 250 North Korean troops. His actions in this fight alone surpassed the highly decorated US Army soldier Audie Murphy, who was credited with 240 kills during World War II, and who had been the second most decorated US soldier in the war. His single-handed heroic battle may have served as a seed for the fictional WWII movie, *Fury* (2014 film).

His leadership, heroism and intense devotion to the mission first led to the Distinguished Service Cross being awarded to him. That was quickly upgraded, however, to the Medal of Honor. He was one of the first men to receive it for actions taken in Korea and received it during a ceremony held by President Harry S. Truman on May 10, 1951. After the war, the distinguished soldier remained in the Army and served as a recruiter, a tank gunnery instructor and a tank commander, but he never again saw combat. He retired in 1971 after 31 years of service and went on to work as a game warden at Fort Knox.

Kouma lived a quiet life in McDaniels, Kentucky, until his death on Dec. 19, 1993. He is the only Medal of Honor recipient buried in Fort Knox Cemetery. Kouma received many honors after leaving the service. The 194th Brigade Dining Facility at Fort Benning, Georgia, is named in his honor. In 2016, just outside of Fort Knox, officials in Radcliff, Kentucky, renamed a road Ernest R. Kouma Boulevard in his memory. [Source: DOD News | Katie Lange| August 31, 2020 ++]

Korean War Vets

Ronald Rosser | MOH Awardee Dies at Age 90



Retired Army Master Sgt. Ronald Rosser, who earned the Medal of Honor in Korea by charging three times alone into enemy trenches to fight off the Chinese and save the wounded, died 26 AUG at age 90 in Bumpus Mills, Tenn. Rosser served in the post-World War II Army from 1946-1949 in Japan and Germany, and re-enlisted in June 1951 with one purpose in mind: revenge. His younger brother, Richard, had been killed in Korea while serving with the 1st Cavalry Division in February 1951.

He initially was sent to Japan, but volunteered for combat and fought with officers to get to the front lines, eventually serving with Company L, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. "The Army couldn't believe that's what I wanted, but I made up my mind that you can't kill my brother and get away with it. It was kind of a revenge-type of thing," Rosser said in oral histories for Arlington National Cemetery and the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. His unit participated in actions at places that came to be known as "Heartbreak Ridge" and "Bloody Ridge." Then on Jan. 12, 1952, Company L was ordered to take a hill occupied by the Red Army near the town of Ponggilli.

Rosser estimated that about three battalions of Chinese troops were on the hill in heavily fortified positions. The attack began with 170 men from his company, in temperatures reaching 20 degrees below zero. The attack stalled about halfway up the hill. "They were dug in. We were coming after them. They just cut us to pieces," Rosser said. He handed the radio he was carrying to another soldier and charged alone to a trench line, stopping at an outcropping. According to the oral histories, Rosser said he thought to himself: "Well, I went through a lot of trouble to get here -- no use wasting the whole day. I let out a war whoop and jumped in the trench. I just charged straight into them."

His Medal of Honor citation said that Rosser "charged the enemy positions armed with only a carbine and a grenade. Gaining the top of the hill, he killed two enemy soldiers, and then went down the trench, killing five more as he advanced." It was hand-to-hand at times, Rosser said. "The Chinese piled onto me. I beat them off me," he said. He kept firing, sometimes using his weapon as a club. When he ran out of ammunition, he returned to his own positions twice to reload, and attacked twice more. Of the 170 men who began the attack, 90 were killed, 68 were wounded and 12 went missing, Rosser said.

"All I was trying to do was protect the men I was responsible for," Rosser said. He feared that if he didn't attack, the Chinese troops would come down the hill to kill the wounded. "I was trying to keep them off our wounded," he said. "The purpose of me doing all that crazy stuff was trying to stop them from doing that." As Company L withdrew from the hill, not a shot was fired at them, Rosser said. "Personally, I think they were glad to see us leave." His medal citation said he had killed at least 13 of the enemy, but Rosser estimated it was more than 40. President Harry S. Truman awarded Rosser the Medal of Honor in a June 1952 ceremony in the Rose Garden of the White House. Rosser recalled Truman fumbling with his glasses a bit to read the citation before telling him, "Personally, I'd rather have [the medal] than be president." He said he was unfamiliar at the time with the traditions of the medal. Somebody at the White House told him that officers would now have to salute him: "I said, 'You're kidding me.'"

Rosser remained in the Army until 1968, and tried once again to volunteer for combat -- for the same reason as he did the first time. Another brother, Marine Pfc. Gary Edward Rosser, had been killed in action in Vietnam in 1966. The Army turned down Ron Rosser's request. Rosser left the Army as a Sergeant 1st Class, and later was promoted to Master Sergeant. Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy said in a Twitter post Friday that the Army "grieves the loss of a true hero, Medal of Honor recipient, SFC Ronald E. Rosser."

Rosser was born in Ohio, the son of a coal miner and the eldest of 17 children. He would later joke that he joined the Army when his mother gave birth to the 16th and 17th children -- twins. He said he decided: "There goes my place at the table. I'm joining the Army." After leaving the Army, Rosser settled in West Palm Beach, Florida, and earned a degree at Florida Atlantic University. Over time, he would work as a security guard, small-town police chief, letter carrier, construction foreman and history teacher. "As you get older, you realize you're carrying an honor that represents a lot of people," Rosser said of the medal. He said of those he served with that "I didn't do anything they didn't do. I was just lucky enough to survive it." [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | August 29, 2020 ++]

WWII Vets 120

Update 01: Hershel Williams | Recounts Iwo Jima Battle Experience



Hershel "Woody" Williams, 96, is the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient to have fought in the Battle of Iwo Jima, which started Feb. 19, 1945. Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. David. H. Berger hosted a sunset parade at the Marine Corps War Memorial, Arlington, Va., 2 SEP Williams was the guest of honor As Williams made his way up to the memorial on Sept. 2, scores of Marines snapped to attention, rendering the 96-year-old veteran a heartfelt salute.

Williams joined the Marines in May 1943 and took part in the battle to retake Guam in the summer of 1944 before being sent to Iwo Jima, a tiny island in the Volcano Islands chain. The two were vastly different, he said. "Guam was

more jungle-type fighting — a lot of creeping and crawling — but when we got to Iwo Jima, everything had been wiped off that island," Williams explained in an interview for the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project. "About the only protection you could find would be a shell crater or try to dig your own hole." Capturing Iwo Jima was crucial to the Allies. The U.S. needed the island's airfields. Other U.S.-occupied islands placed fighter jets out of bomber-escort range of Japan's mainland.

Williams' reserve unit was sent ashore two days after the battle started, and the scene was chaotic. He said they found out quickly that the land was incredibly difficult to maneuver. The tanks had trouble opening up a lane for the infantry through the black volcanic sand that sloped steeply up the beach from the waterline. But the biggest problem was posed by the many steel-reinforced "pillbox" bunkers protecting the Japanese airfields. "Bazookas and that sort of thing had no effect on them, because they were so thick and well built," Williams said in a 2017 interview. "The only way to actually eliminate the enemy inside those pillboxes was by flamethrower."

The battle saw heavier than usual casualties. Williams had initially been one of several demolition sergeants, but by Feb. 23, 1945, he was the only one left. So, he bravely volunteered to go forward as the last flamethrower to try to quell the devastating machine-gun fire from the pillboxes. In four hours, with only four riflemen to protect him, Williams managed to wipe out seven pillboxes. He repeatedly prepared explosives in a safe area, struggled back to where the enemy was, and then set off the charges. One time, he jumped onto one of the pillboxes from the side and shoved the nozzle of his 70-pound flamethrower into an air vent pipe and fired, killing everyone inside.

Another time, he charged bayonet-wielding enemies and killed them with one burst of flame. "That made a hole big enough that [the company] could go through and get behind any other pillboxes that were in that area," Williams said. "Once you got behind the pillboxes, then we had the advantage." Williams' efforts helped to neutralize one of the most fanatically defended Japanese strongholds his regiment had encountered. For his actions, he received the Medal of Honor from President Harry S. Truman during a group ceremony at the White House on Oct. 5, 1945. Ten other Marines and two sailors also received the honor that day.

Before Sunset Parade on 2 SEP, Williams made additional remarks about his service and what it means to serve. When he and his fellow Marines saw the second American flag raised atop Mount Suribachi, Williams said their spirits were lifted. "I still remember that day," he added. Williams said he's been asked where bravery comes from, particularly about his valorous actions leading to the Medal of Honor. He said he's never been able to answer that question satisfactorily. "Everybody has some instinct of bravery. And, as long as they can control the fear, you can be brave. But if fear overtakes you and becomes the dominant instinct, you cannot operate. You cannot operate under fear. Your brain won't let you. "I feel that our upbringing had some influence on our bravery because we were taught in the depression years, if you didn't have it, you had to make it," Williams said. "And the only way you could make it was to work at it. Our upbringing gave us the confidence that developed into bravery." America was and is worth fighting for, he said. "If we lose our freedom we lose America."

Williams was discharged in 1945, but he stayed in the Marine Corps Reserve until his retirement. Nowadays, he continues to serve through his foundation, the Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation, which honors families who have lost a loved one in service to their country. Williams said it's those men — the ones who died protecting him — who really deserve the honor. "This medal doesn't belong to me. It belongs to them because they gave their lives for me," he said, trying to hold back tears. "I was just doing a job that I was trained to do."

Asked what advice he'd give to young people, he said: "If you love America, truly, you are going to have the instinct and desire to serve your country. If you don't, then you're going to find some way to go in the other direction. "Service is within all of us," he continued. "Every time we do something to help another person, we get a residual of that that makes us feel good, makes us feel proud that we could do something for someone else. And, there's no feeling like it." In the last few years, Williams observed that Americans have become more separated than at any time since the Civil War. "We must come back together as a nation and as a people to where we can truly say, 'We are the United States of America.'" [Source: DOD News | David Vergun & Katie Lange | September 4, 2020 ++]

MWR

Update 02: Army Approves Military Retirees/Eligible Vets Use in Germany



The German government has approved an Army request for military retirees and eligible veterans to use Morale, Welfare and Recreation services and facilities such as libraries, gyms, lodges and golf courses on Army bases in Germany, officials said 2 SEP. A provision in the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act expanded veteran eligibility for shopping at military exchanges and commissaries starting 1 JAN of this year. “This came out of this same initiative,” said Mark Heeter, a spokesman for Installation Management Command-Europe. “The Army needed to get some additional permissions from the German government to allow these same populations to use MWR facilities and services.”

The authorized list of facilities includes paid services such as golf courses, bowling centers, auto skills shops, arts and crafts shops, outdoor recreation and lodging; and free services such as fitness centers, libraries and Army Community Service. Retirees approached IMCOM-Europe “with a request for help” that was championed by U.S. Army Europe commander Lt. Gen. Christopher Cavoli, IMCOM-Europe said in a statement. To obtain post access at garrisons within Germany, veterans must have a Veterans Health Identification Card issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs in the U.S.

The card, which is not yet issued overseas, must be the newest version that displays the veteran’s eligibility status, to include Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, and veterans with documented service-connected disabilities or their VA-documented caregivers, IMCOM-Europe said. Veterans residing in Germany must also obtain an installation access pass, which requires a background check. The pass will also allow veterans to sign on spouses. Veterans who are only visiting Germany may obtain a temporary installation pass, officials said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | September 1, 2020 ++]

Retiree Court-Marshaling

Violation of Equal Protection Issue

The military's ability to court-martial some retirees and not others is a "textbook violation of equal protection," an opening brief filed this week with a top court of appeals says. Lawyers representing Stephen Begani, a retired Navy chief petty officer who was court-martialed shortly after leaving the Navy in 2017, filed their opening brief with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces on Monday. Begani filed a petition earlier this year for the top military appellate court to hear his case after a lower court determined he'd been rightly court-martialed. Begani was subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice as a member of the Fleet Reserve. Sailors and Marines who leave active duty after serving more than 20 years, but less than 30, move into that status if they want to collect retiree pay.

Retired reservists don't face those same rules, however. Unlike members of the Fleet Reserve, they are not subject to the UCMJ. That, Begani's lawyers say, is unconstitutional. "This Court's responsibility in such a case is clear: to bar the court-martial of Fleet Reservists for offenses committed after their retirement and off active duty until and unless Congress eliminates this disparity," they wrote in their opening brief. Begani was working as a contractor at a Marine Corps air station in Japan when he was arrested by members of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and charged with attempted sexual abuse of a child. The retired chief petty officer arrived at what he thought was the home of a 15-year-old girl with whom he'd been communicating. That person was actually an undercover NCIS agent. Begani received a bad-conduct discharge and was sentenced to 18 months' confinement.

"Servicemembers who 'retire' from regular components remain subject to military law in perpetuity; those who retire from the reserves don't," Steve Vladeck, who's representing Begani, tweeted this week. "... [That] distinction is unconstitutional." Navy Lt. Daniel Rosinski, who also represents Begani, argued that point in a lower court last year. There's no difference between someone leaving active duty or the Reserve, he said, adding that any of them can be recalled to active duty, though Reserve retirees would be tried as civilians -- unlike Begani. Rosinski declined to comment further on Monday's opening briefing.

The Navy-Marine Corps Court of Criminal Appeals last summer issued a legal opinion saying court-martialing military retirees was unconstitutional. In a rare move though, that opinion was later withdrawn. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces, known as CAAF, is the last stop before military appeals battles head to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has previously upheld the Defense Department's authority to try retirees. In 2019, the court opted against hearing the case of a retired Marine who was court-martialed for a sexual assault he committed after leaving the military. [Source: Military.com | Gina Harkins | September 2, 2020 ++]

Vet Unemployment

Update 24: August Down for 4th Month in a Row

Veterans unemployment fell for the fourth consecutive month in August but is still nearly double what it was one year ago, according to the latest statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The jobless rate for all veterans last month was 6.4 percent, down from 7.9 percent in July. The figure translates into about 560,000 veterans actively looking for work last month. The news came as the national unemployment rate also fell for the fourth month in a row, to 8.4 percent. But both numbers sit well above where they did before the start of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The veterans unemployment rate was 3.5 percent in August 2019 and at 2.8 percent last December.

Following widespread temporary and permanent business closings amid state quarantine rules last spring, the national unemployment rate jumped to nearly 15 percent before its current decline. On 4 SEP, President Donald Trump hailed the improvements as a sign that the economy is recovering faster than expected from the effects of the pandemic. Veterans from the most recent wars saw their unemployment rate drop from 8.2 percent in July to 7.0 percent in August, outpacing the national rate. But that number still sits well above the 4.0 percent reported by BLS at the end of summer 2019, or the 3.1 percent reported last December. Veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars era represent about 40 percent of all veterans in the American workforce today. Veterans of the first Gulf War era — who make up about a quarter of all working veterans — had a jobless rate of just 4.7 percent.

Lawmakers have floated several new job training and unemployment relief programs for veterans in recent months, but those plans have not moved ahead as congressional plans for a new coronavirus economic relief package have stalled amid partisan infighting. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | September 4, 2020 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule

As of 15 SEP 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\veterans related websites and resources.

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

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

Note that events listed on the Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule may be cancelled or rescheduled. Before traveling long distances to attend an event, you should contact the applicable RAO, RSO, event sponsor, etc., to ensure the event will, in fact, be held on the date\time indicated. Also, attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214. Please report broken links, comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and\or other military retiree\veterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, Milton.Bell126@gmail.com [Source: Retiree\Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | September 15, 2020 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs

Scheduled As of 15 SEP 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. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown on the Hiring Our Heroes website <https://www.hiringourheroes.org> for the next month. For details of each you should click on the city next to the date. 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 some 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 | September 15, 2020 ++]

Veteran State Benefits

Oregon 2020

The state of Oregon provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these, refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Vet State Benefits – OR**” for an overview of the below benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the following refer to <http://militaryandveteransdiscounts.com/location/oregon.html> & <http://www.oregon.gov/odva/Pages/index.aspx>

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

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

* Vet Legislation *



Note: To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 116th Congress. Bills are listed in reverse numerical order for House and then Senate. Bills are normally initially assigned to a congressional committee to consider and amend before sending them on to the House or Senate as a whole. 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>.

VA Burial Benefits

Update 49: HR.5639 | Chuck Osier Burial Benefits Act

Three House members have introduced a bill that could help a U.S. military veteran who uses a body disposition option other than a cemetery burial. H.R. 5639, the “**Chuck Osier Burial Benefits Act**” bill, would provide a free urn or plaque for an eligible veteran who used cremation, a burial at sea, or another alternative to inhumation in a cemetery.

Under current law, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides a kind of preneed memorial benefit. Veterans Affairs gives free headstones or grave markers to veterans who are interred in a cemetery, and who have received any kind of discharge other than a dishonorable discharge, according to a department guide to veterans burial and memorial benefits.



H.R. 5639 would make an urn or plaque available for any veteran, upon the request of the family, who would be eligible for a headstone for a traditional cemetery burial but was using another body disposition option, according to the text of the bill. The new benefit would make the free plaques and urns available to veterans who will be using, or have used, nontraditional body disposition options and who served on or after April 6, 1917, according to a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) analysis of H.R. 5639. CBO analysts estimate that about 45,000 veterans would use the new benefit in 2021, and that about 56,000 veterans would use the benefit in 2030. The analysts predict that about half of the veterans would use urns and half would use plaques, with urns costing an average of \$171 each and plaques costing an average of \$57 each. Rep. Anthony Brindisi (D-NY) sponsored the bill. The two cosponsors are Rep. Michael Waltz (R-FL) and Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA). [Source: Press Release | Allison Bell | August 31, 2020 ++]

Vet Suicide

Update 50: 10 House Bills Introduced to Help Prevention

On 2 SEP, House Committee of Veterans' Affairs Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA0 announced 10 new bills introduced over the past week that will help complete the House's companion legislation to S.785, the **Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act**. These bills, many of which enjoy bipartisan support, would expand lethal means safety training, improve diagnosis and treatment for serious mental illness, ensure emergency room personnel institute safety plans and follow ups for at-risk veterans, streamline VA's collaboration with outside researchers, assess the availability of mental health care providers, survey veterans and providers on appointment scheduling and help remove barriers to access for veterans, and address racial and gender gaps in suicide prevention programs and ensure their staffing plans take into account shifting demographics.

"This Suicide Prevention Month, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs is ready to make real, meaningful change to prevent veteran suicide, and I'm so pleased to add 10 more bills to our growing list of comprehensive suicide prevention legislation," said Chairman Mark Takano. "After listening to recommendations from mental health experts, veteran stakeholders, and the PREVENTS Task Force, we know what steps we must take to really make a dent in this crisis—we know that we need expanded lethal means training, a serious look at our mental health provider staffing, and better tools and research to support VA providers. At our upcoming legislative hearing, we'll discuss these bills and more as the Committee takes action to pass a truly comprehensive veteran suicide prevention bill package, and I'm grateful that Members from across the caucus and across the aisle have come together to join us in this fight."

All 10 of these bills align with the Committee's comprehensive seven pillar approach to address every angle, factor, and intersection that may lead to veteran suicide and will be featured at the Committee's September 10th legislative

hearing-- along with the 10 bills already introduced so far this summer. This work builds off the 16 bipartisan suicide prevention bills that have already passed the House during the 116th Congress.

Earlier this year, the Committee adopted a comprehensive 7 pillar framework to address every factor that may leads to veteran suicide. Building on this strategy, Chairman Takano introduced the Veterans ACCESS Act—meaningful legislation that would ensure all veterans-- regardless of discharge status or whether they receive care at VA hospitals -- have access to the emergent mental health care they need. So far this summer, ten suicide prevention bills have been introduced to require outreach and mental health care to American Indians and Alaska Native veterans, ensure every VA has a Suicide Prevention Coordinator on staff, increase access to virtual mental healthcare, provide peer support to veterans' families, expand VA telehealth care, evaluate the effectiveness of VA's REACH VET program, reform VA Police, examine VA's Solid Start program, implement the Zero Suicide Initiative, and mandate suicide prevention training for community health providers.

The 10 new suicide prevention bills were introduced this week include:

- The **Lethal Means Safety Training Act** introduced by Rep. Lauren Underwood (D-IL) will expand VA's lethal means safety trainings for every employee or contractor that encounters veterans—a key priority for the White House's PREVENTS Task Force.
- The **VA Serious Mental Illness Act** introduced by Rep. Tom Malinowski (D-NJ) and Rep. Neal Dunn (R-Fl.) will help VA practitioners better diagnose and care for veterans with serious illness.
- The **VA Emergency Department Safety Planning Act** introduced by Rep. Andy Levin (D-MI) and Rep. Steve Stivers (R-Ohio) will help ensure emergency room personnel are effectively implementing safety plans & follow-ups for at-risk veterans as well as address racial & gender disparities in suicide prevention programs.
- The **VA Peer Specialists Act** introduced by Rep. Kathleen Rice (D-NY) and Rep. Anthony Gonzalez (R-Ohio) requires VA to analyze their staffing plan and adjust to the growing demand for women peer specialists.
- The **VA Mental Health Staffing Act** introduced Rep. Jahana Hayes (D-CT) and Rep. Greg Steube (R-FL) will require VA to review its mental health staffing plan and report any gaps to Congress with a plan to fix them-- research shows that VA mental health care is often superior to care veterans can find in the community.
- The **VA Mental Health Counseling Act** introduced by Rep. Jahana Hayes (D-CT) will direct VA to develop separate staffing plans for two key new categories of mental health providers: licensed professional mental health counselors (LPMHCs) and marriage and family therapists (MFTs).
- The **VA ECHO Act** introduced by Rep. Joe Cunningham (D-SC) and Rep. Jim Banks (R-IN) will direct VA to survey veterans and VA providers about offering appointments outside of standard work week hours—removing the barrier to access for many veterans.
- The **Testing, Researching, and Expanding Alternative Treatments (TREAT) Act** introduced by Rep. Conor Lamb (D-PA) and Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) requires VA to establish a two-year program to provide complementary and integrative health services for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety.
- The **VA Precision Medicine Act** introduced by Rep. Conor Lamb (D-PA) and Rep. Mike Bost (IL) calls on VA to develop and implement the “Precision Medicine Initiative for Veterans” to identify and validate brain and mental health biomarkers among veterans.
- The **VA Data Analytics and Technology Assistance (DATA) Act** introduced by Rep. Conor Lamb (D-PA) and Rep. Jim Banks (R-Ind.) will expand VA's ability to further contract and work with outside academic and research entities.

If you or a veteran you know are struggling, contact the Veteran Crisis Line 24/7 at 1-800-273-8255 and select option 1, or text 838255. For more information about the Committee's efforts to address the COVID-19 crisis and resources available for veterans, visit: <https://veterans.house.gov/covid-19>. [Source: HVAC Press Release | Chairman Mark Takano | September 2, 2020]



Military Support

National Conventions Reveal Common Ground

The third night of the Republican National Convention highlighted stark contrasts with Democrats on national defense. But even in an election year, the parties did find common ground on military pay, support for veterans and military families, and the withdrawal of troops from "endless wars."

- Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY), one of the speakers on 26 AUG, said that President Donald Trump "signed the largest pay increase for our troops in a decade:" 3.1% for 2020; Democrats in their platform last week voiced support for military pay increases tied to growth in the economy.
- Vice President Mike Pence hailed the Mission Act as greatly expanding and overhauling the existing "Choice" program on private care options for veterans; Democrats supported the program to improve overall VA health care but "not privatize it."
- In an address to the convention, retired Army Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, an adviser to Pence and a Silver Star recipient in Vietnam, said the question often arose whether Trump would "keep us out of endless conflicts. You and I know the answer is 'Yes.'"
- "Democrats will deliver on this overdue commitment to end the forever wars, and we will do it responsibly" in the Mideast and Afghanistan, the Democrats' platform states.

Party platforms are mostly symbolic and do not bind presidential nominees. But they can serve as general outlines of a policy agenda. Democrats released their 90-page platform last week; in an unusual step, Republicans chose not to have a platform this year. Instead, the Republican National Committee last week approved a resolution stating that the party "will continue to enthusiastically support the President's America-first agenda," leaving it to Trump himself and the speakers at the convention to define the way forward.

Possibly the most significant difference between the parties on national security surrounded the push for continued increases in the defense budget, which now stands at a record of about \$740 billion. In his remarks, Kellogg said that Trump "reversed the decline of our military and restructured our national security strategy with historic investment and vision." Defense Secretary Mark Esper and others have warned that increases of 3-5% in coming years were necessary to maintain dominance and readiness, while also recognizing downward pressure from the immense costs of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and rebuilding the economy. "We can maintain a strong defense and protect our safety and security for less," Democrats said in their platform.

The theme of the Republican convention was "Land of Heroes," and speaker after speaker charged that former Vice President Joe Biden and the Democrats had disdain for the sacrifices of the military and law enforcement. "Leftists are trying to turn them into villains," said Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn. "I'm here to tell you these heroes can't be canceled." Rep. Dan Crenshaw, R-Texas, a decorated former SEAL officer who lost his right eye in Afghanistan to an improvised explosive, said enemies fear the U.S. heroes in the ranks "because Americans fight for good." He called for "heroism in rebuilding our communities, not by destroying them. We must become the heroes we so admire."

Pence, the father of a Marine captain, spoke at historic Fort McHenry near Baltimore before an audience that included four Medal of Honor recipients. As commander-in-chief, Trump inherited from the Obama administration a

military "hollowed out by budget cuts," but "he stepped in and from day one and kept his word to rebuild our military," Pence said. He charged that the agenda of Biden and the Democrats was "based on government control; ours is based on freedom." Taking up a consistent theme of other speakers, Pence charged that the Democrats have either ignored or condoned the violence that has marred many of the protests for racial justice nationwide. "The hard truth is, you won't be safe in Joe Biden's America," Pence said. [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | August 27, 2020 ++]

USS Tang (SS-306)

Last Survivor | William Liebold



Only nine crew members survived when the submarine Tang (left) sank in 1944 in the Formosa Strait. Former Navy chief boatswain's mate Bill Liebold, 97 (right), is now the last remaining survivor

Sept. 2 marked the 75th anniversary of the formal Japanese surrender ceremony that officially brought World War II to an end. Navy veteran William "Bill" Liebold remembers that time well. He had just been released from a secret Japanese military compound, known as the "torture farm," after 10 months in captivity. His weight, he recalls, had dropped from 172 to less than 100 pounds. "I try not to think of those days," says the Escondido resident, 97. "We weren't fed regularly." Liebold was one of nine survivors of a crew of 87 on the Navy submarine, USS Tang. The sailors were plucked out of the ocean by a Japanese patrol boat after the sub had aggressively attacked its convoy in the Formosa Strait en route to the Philippines.

After sinking to its watery grave on Oct. 25, 1944, the Tang was later credited with taking out 33 enemy ships, carrying out daring attacks and rescuing numerous downed airmen. It earned the WW II reputation as the most lethal Allied sub in the Pacific. In a tragic quirk of fate, as the Tang fired its 24th and final torpedo before heading home that October night, the torpedo malfunctioned. Liebold was stationed on the bridge. "When we fired, the torpedo surfaced instead of running as it should have. It flew out of the water and then went back down," he recalls. The erratic torpedo continued to splash up and down like a porpoise in a semi-circle on the port side, as the sub built up speed to move out of harm's way. "All of us on the bridge were concerned, but I don't think any of us fully realized it was heading back to hit us in the stern," says Liebold, who served as chief boatswain's mate. "No one to this day knows what caused it to run erratic. Something just went wrong with the torpedo itself. Possibly it was damaged during loading into the tube. Any number of things could have happened. No one will ever know."

The rest is naval history. And the details are clearly imbedded in Liebold's memory: "When it hit our stern, we went down fast. The aft torpedo room flooded. Half the compartments flooded rapidly.... I went down with the ship. I don't know how far. I was able to swim back to the surface. I could see the bow of the Tang still out of the water, but I couldn't swim against the current to get to it. None of the men on the bridge were able to swim back to the bow." The disaster unfolded in the 2:30 a.m. darkness. Liebold guesses that maybe he was submerged about 50 feet before he felt a thud and started swimming upward. Trying to stay afloat, Liebold kicked off his shoes and took off his trousers. He tied the pant legs together, tried to inflate them and slip them over his head to use as a lifesaver-like flotation device as the crew had been instructed, but they didn't hold air.

Eventually he heard a nearby voice call out. It was Floyd Caverly, a radio technician who, by luck, had been dispatched to the bridge to resolve a communication problem moments before the sinking. “He told me he couldn’t swim,” says Leibold. “I told him he could float.” Leibold continued to coax him on when to inhale and exhale in the choppy water to keep from drowning. Leibold later received the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for heroic conduct for supporting a shipmate in the water for eight hours.

It was discovered later that half of the 87 members were killed upon impact. Others were trapped in what had become a metal tomb on the ocean floor 180 feet deep. The incident made naval history because this was the only sub to have survivors ascend during an emergency without surface assistance by using the Momsen lung, a crude breathing device stored on the sub for use in such emergencies. Some who reached the surface could not swim and drowned, Leibold says. In the end, only nine of the original 87 crew, including Leibold and three others from the bridge, survived the night and were picked up by the Japanese. They were placed in solitary confinement in a navy compound in Ofuna, Japan but not classified as prisoners of war, Leibold says. “They referred to us as captured enemy.”

Nearly every day they were taken out to “swab the halls,” he recalls, explaining it was really a ruse to give the guards “an opportunity to exercise what we called their baseball bats. We were beaten almost every time we were taken out of the cells.” When asked what kept him going, Leibold said: “I don’t know. It was just the determination to survive. Staying alive was the one thing we had to do.” Just before their liberation on Aug. 22, 1945, they were moved to a separate section of a POW camp run by the Japanese army. Leibold has recorded an oral history of his ordeal and was extensively interviewed by Alex Kershaw, an author who specializes in military history.

Kershaw wrote the dramatic story of the Tang legend and tragedy in his 2008 book, “Escape from the Deep: The Epic Story of a Legendary Submarine and Her Courageous Crew.” “Bill is (the) last survivor of (the) greatest U.S. submarine in history,” Kershaw tells me. “He helped found Navy Seals. He’s a living legend in U.S. Navy. Brave, honorable, selfless, the best example of the greatest generation.” Kershaw credits Leibold with helping win the war through his role in the “silent service” — the submarine force that strangled the Japanese Empire through its sinkings and blockade. “He’s also a star of my book,” Kershaw notes.

After being liberated, Leibold returned to the United States to find that his wife, his high school sweetheart, Grace, was still waiting for him. A less lucky fate greeted four of the seven married ex-prisoners. Having received a telegram notifying them of the ship’s loss, their brides, understandably, had moved on with their lives and remarried. Despite his ordeal, Leibold completed a 40-year career in the Navy, returning several times to Japanese waters as commander of a submarine service/rescue ship. Having previously been homeported in San Diego, he and Grace stayed and raised their three children in Chula Vista. The couple later built a home on Palomar Mountain, aptly nicknamed the “Ship House” for its shape and windows. Several years later, they bought a house in Escondido. After Grace passed away, he moved into an independent living facility.

Leibold stayed in touch with his former Tang crewmates and even held a reunion in the Ship House. Floyd Caverly died in 2011, just shy of his 94th birthday and is buried here at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery. Leibold is the last survivor. [Source: The San Diego Tribune | Diane Bell | August 31, 2020 ++]

Air Force Hospital/Clinic

DHA Launches New USAF Military Hospital & Clinic Websites

On 1 SEP the Defense Health Agency launched 74 new military hospital and clinic Air Force websites – an important milestone in the effort to modernize the web presence of all military medical treatment facilities (MTFs). Each website transitioned to the TRICARE domain to provide a standardized patient experience across the Military Health System.

The transition to the [TRICARE.mil](https://www.tricare.mil) domain incorporates new layouts and adds helpful features to enhance the user experience and provide easier access to information about the local military hospital or clinic and the TRICARE benefit in one place.

“Standardizing military hospital and clinic websites will help our patients across the Military Health System to access all of the information they need to manage their health care and their TRICARE benefit,” said Lt. Gen. Ronald Place, Director of the Defense Health Agency. “This change will make it easier for our service members, retirees, and families to find the information they need to navigate and access health care information. As our service members and families move across the country and around the world, having a standard website will be one less thing they will have to learn at their new location.” Upgrading the military’s online resources by improving the military hospital and clinic websites and relying on user input for future enhancements allows service members, retirees, and their families worldwide to help drive future updates to ensure they get the web experience they want from the Military Health System.

“No matter where our military forces are deployed or what service they belong to, all members will enjoy a universal experience and consistent information about the TRICARE benefit and local military health services,” said Diana Logreira, DHA Chief of Digital Communications. The website enhancement is part of the [transition of administrative oversight of MTFs to the DHA](#) under the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act. Navigating through the local military hospital or clinic websites will be easier through key features like:

- Standardized look and feel
- Simplicity and ease of navigation
- Up-to-date health care information
- Easy to find data on quality, patient safety and access
- Centralized TRICARE information
- Localized health services

While the new website design supports consistent information sharing for TRICARE beneficiaries throughout the entire Military Health System, local hospitals and clinics will manage their site to keep their own beneficiary population informed on issues specific to that facility. Experience the new changes for yourself. Visit the following newly launched local hospital and clinic websites:

- [Air Force Academy](#)
- [Altus Air Force Base](#)
- [Andersen Air Force Base](#)
- [Aviano Air Base](#)
- [Barksdale Air Force Base](#)
- [Beale Air Force Base](#)
- [Edwards Air Force Base](#)
- [Eglin Air Force Base](#)
- [Eielson Air Force Base](#)
- [FE Warren Air Force Base](#)
- [Goodfellow Air Force Base](#)
- [Grand Forks Air Force Base](#)
- [Hanscom Air Force Base](#)
- [Hill Air Force Base](#)
- [Joint Base Andrews \(Malcom Grow Medical Clinics and Surgery Center\)](#)
- [Kadena Air Base](#)
- [Keesler Air Force Base](#)
- [Kirtland Air Force Base](#)
- [Kunsan Air Base](#)
- [Laughlin Air Force Base](#)
- [Little Rock Air Force Base](#)
- [Los Angeles Air Force Base](#)
- [Luke Air Force Base](#)
- [MacDill Air Force Base](#)
- [Malmstrom Air Force base](#)
- [Maxwell Air Force Base](#)

- [McConnell Air Force Base](#)
- [Minot Air Base](#)
- [Misawa Air Base](#)
- [Moody Air Force Base](#)
- [Mountain Home Air Force Base](#)
- [Nellis Air Force Base](#)
- [Offutt Air Force Base](#)
- [Osan Air Base](#)
- [Patrick Air Force Base](#)
- [Pope Field](#)
- [RAF Alconbury](#)
- [RAF Croughton](#)
- [RAF Lakenheath](#)
- [Ramstein Air Base](#)
- [Robins Air Force Base](#)
- [Scott Air Force Base](#)
- [Seymour Johnson Air Force Base](#)
- [Shaw Air Force Base](#)
- [Sheppard Air Force Base](#)
- [Spangdahlem Air Base](#)
- [Tinker Air Force Base](#)
- [Travis Air Force Base](#)
- [Tyndall Air Force Base](#)
- [Vance Air Force Base](#)
- [Vandenberg Air Force Base](#)
- [Whiteman Air Force Base](#)
- [JBSA - Wilford Hall Ambulatory Surgical Center](#)
- [Wright-Patterson Air Force Base](#)
- [Yokota Air Base](#)

[Source: Health.mil | September 1, 2020 ++]

Coronavirus Vaccine

Update 13: Military Not Selected to Be Among First Groups to Receive

Service members might not be at the front of the line to receive the coronavirus vaccine when it is ready, unless they are health care workers or at high risk of contracting the disease, according to a document outlining the possible order of distribution. A four-phased approach for distributing a coronavirus vaccine in the United States has been recommended by the Committee on Equitable Allocation of Vaccine for the Novel Coronavirus. It was laid out in "Discussion Draft of the Preliminary Framework for Equitable Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccine," published 1 SEP by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.

According to the preliminary framework, which was open for public comment until 4 SEP, the military was not set aside as an individual population group to be prioritized in any of the four phases of distribution for a vaccine. Instead, "in the absence of a separate allotment of [coronavirus] vaccine to the U.S. military," the committee recommended personnel would receive the vaccine using the same priority criteria as civilians, the document states. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine provides independent policy advice, including ad hoc committees such as the one that wrote this vaccine distribution draft at the request of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health. The Pentagon did not respond 2 SEP to a request for comment about the document.

The four phases are organized into population groups, with those who are at the highest risk of contracting the virus or becoming severely sick receiving the vaccine first. Then, workers in daily support industries, such as mail carriers, bus drivers and teachers, would be next, as well as those in homeless shelters and prisons. The third group would be children, young adults and workers in industries such as restaurants and hotels. And finally, everyone else who does

not fall into the criteria for the other three phases would then get the vaccine. For each population group, the vaccine would also be prioritized geographically through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Vulnerability Index, according to the report.

- Phase One populations are high-risk workers in health care facilities and those whose underlying health puts them at "significantly" higher risk from the virus, according to the document. Service members who work in health care facilities or who have underlying conditions that would put them at significant risk would potentially be in this first phase.
- Phase Three also would cover a large portion of the military as it includes all "young adults" or people who are between 18 to 30 years old. Even though people in this age range are less likely to die or be hospitalized by the virus, more evidence is showing that they might disproportionately be spreading the virus more, according to the report. It also cites studies that adults younger than 30 have larger social networks than other adult-age groups, making them more at risk of exposure and spreading the virus. They are also more likely to live in communal settings, and this would also apply to the barracks and dorms for service members on military installations.

Pentagon officials have repeatedly said service members are less likely to be severely affected by the virus. The military now has about 1.2 million active-duty service members and 781,000 reservists, according to the report. "We have a young, healthy, fit, robust demographic in the United States military," Defense Secretary Mark Esper said in March. As of 2 SEP, the military has had 38,424 cases of the coronavirus and seven service members have died. About 575 people have been hospitalized and 23,011 have recovered, according to Pentagon data. Throughout the United States, there have been more than 6.1 million cases of the coronavirus and more than 185,000 deaths as of 2 SEP, according to Johns Hopkins University, the highest numbers of any country affected by the pandemic.

Operation Warp Speed is the public-private effort led by the government to rapidly develop and distribute a vaccine for the coronavirus. The Defense Department is a participant in the effort, and one of its key responsibilities would be supporting a quicker distribution of the vaccine across the country. The goal of Operation Warp Speed is to have 300 million doses of a vaccine developed and delivered by January 2021, according to the Defense Department. But the details for how the vaccine will be distributed and given to people have not been fully determined, according to the draft document. Despite the goal to have doses available for everyone in the United States by early next year, the committee was established in July to look at how the vaccine would be distributed with a small initial supply, according to the report. The committee researched and designed a way for distributing the vaccine fairly by examining other frameworks for medical care during the coronavirus pandemic and past priorities for vaccines, including the 2009 H1N1 influenza A pandemic and the Ebola epidemic in West Africa between 2013 to 2016.

The military has had outbreaks among its personnel, including on ships where sailors are put in confined work and living conditions. The outbreak of the virus aboard the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt in March infected more than 1,150 sailors. One died. The public comments submitted this week will be considered in the final framework and report that is expected to be released in the early fall, according to the National Academies website. [Source: Stars & Stripes | =Caitlin M. Kenney | September 20, 2020 ++]

Absentee Voting

Update 05: Overseas Military Free Expedited Mail Service

With the election just two months away and all the discussions swirling about the mail service and ballots getting to election officials in time, troops and their families overseas now have an advantage. As of this week, they have access to the free expedited mail service from overseas, and tracking of their absentee ballot. This means that each voted ballot dropped off at a military post office overseas will receive the Label 11-DoD, automatically giving that ballot

expedited delivery. Make sure you keep that part of the label with the tracking number that allows you to track your ballot.



The service has been in place in each of the election years since 2010, for the two months before the general election. Only overseas military and their family members are allowed to use the service, and the ballots must be mailed from military post offices overseas. The Military Postal Service Agency distributes the labels overseas to the post offices and pays for the postage. But first things first. There's still time to register to vote, if you haven't done so. You can do that, and request your absentee ballot at the same time by using the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), which is available from your unit's voting assistance officer, your installation voting assistance office, or you can download it at the Federal Voting Assistance Program website, [FVAP.gov](https://www.fvap.gov). Click on your state on the map, to find information, deadlines and links to the forms you can download, including the FPCA.

It's best to use the FPCA, because that ensures your state will mail your absentee ballot at least 45 days before the election, as required by law. Even if you registered to vote years ago, you must still request your absentee ballot. If you've moved, notify your local election official. You can use the FPCA to do that. There are a variety of resources on FVAP.gov site, including information about how to locate your local election official, state voting guidelines and election dates and guidelines; and installation voting assistance office locations. FVAP was created to help make service members, their families and overseas voters aware of their right to vote, even when away from their polling place, and to make sure they have the tools and resources to do so from anywhere in the world. [Source: Military Times | Karen Jowers | September 3, 2020 ++]

Marine Corps Boot Camp

Update 01: Plan to End Gender Segregation



Marine leaders want every male recruit arriving at boot camp to train alongside women in the same company, putting an end to the longstanding tradition of separating trainees by gender, according to newly released plans to make both of the service's recruit depots coed. All-male recruit companies trained solely by men will be made "obsolete," according to a memo the Marine Corps submitted to the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. That includes boot camp at the Marine Corps' West Coast training depot in San Diego, which currently doesn't accept female trainees. "Gender integration at Marine Corps Recruit Training remains a top priority," the memo states. "The

outcome the Marine Corps desires for gender integration is for every male recruit to train alongside a female recruit within the same company.”

The Marine Corps was tasked with explaining its short- and long-term plans for integrating recruit training, which was mandated by the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act. Signed into law in December, the NDAA requires the Marine Corps to stop separating trainees by gender at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island in South Carolina within five years and in San Diego within eight. The memo says officials from Training and Education Command are now working with Marine Corps Installations Command “to identify the requirements, shortfalls, and cost estimates to meet the NDAA requirements.” The biggest limitation, officials added, is the need for new facilities to house coed training companies. Several coed companies have completed training at Parris Island since early 2019, but the East Coast recruit depot doesn’t have the space to accommodate that setup during certain months. The number of recruits shipping to boot camp spikes between June and September, when many new high-school graduates head off to training.

Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, which currently only trains men, needs new facilities not only for female recruits, but also for women drill instructors. “Once the infrastructure conditions have been set at MCRD San Diego (MCRD SD) for integrated training,” the memo states, “then MCRD SD Drill Instructor School will begin training female Drill Instructors.” Parris Island has a staffing goal of 116 female drill instructors. Officials said in the memo that the number of female drill instructors at both recruit depots would depend on the number of women that train at each in the years to come. “The ratio of female to male DIs is proportionate to the number of female and male recruits,” the memo states. “The Marine Corps focuses on the importance of having four DIs assigned to each platoon. ... Platoons and the assigned DIs are gender specific.”

The Marine Corps has been slow to adopt gender-integrated entry-level training for new enlistees. The service has faced increasing pressure from lawmakers in recent years to make boot camp training coed after combat arms jobs opened to women and a high-profile scandal highlighted the troubling way some male Marines treated their female colleagues. Last year, the first-ever coed company graduated from Parris Island. The 50-person company included one female platoon and five male platoons. The male and female platoons lived in separate squad bays, but otherwise completed much of their training together after the first phase of boot camp, which runs about four weeks.

Marine Commandant Gen. David Berger has said that model would continue at Parris Island after the first company performed “very well.” Eight more coed companies have followed, but the effort has been slowed during the coronavirus pandemic due to more restrictive social distancing requirements, officials wrote in the memo to the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. “These iterations demonstrated the strength of the Marine Corps’ platoon training model, as it transformed young women and men into U.S. Marines,” it states. “The Marine Corps is continuously assessing and refining recruit training and is identifying opportunities in FY21 to utilize the fully integrated company structure with future recruit training companies to best combine the strength of our platoon model with the logistical benefits of integrated companies.”

The Marine Corps plans to continue studying how best to train men and women together at boot camp. By 1 OCT, the service plans to award an academic institution access to its recruit depots to conduct a third-party review on the way Marine recruits are trained. The findings of that study will be published in a peer-reviewed journal after it’s completed in fiscal 2022, which runs from Oct. 1, 2021, through September of the following year. The Marine Corps originally wanted the study back by Feb. 1, 2021, but no one applied to the original solicitation to complete the review. Maj. Gen. Bill Mullen, the former head of Training and Education Command who recently retired, said he directed the study to see if the service had their entry-level training model right.

“We think we have it right ... but how much of that is our own biases?” Mullen told Military.com in a 2019 interview. “How much of that is a ‘we invented it here’ kind of thing? ... If an independent study, not affiliated with the Marine Corps, comes in and takes a hard, honest look at things in an unbiased way, how do you argue with that?” The academic study will examine four areas: alternative boot camp training models; costs for those alternatives; costs

for the traditional model of separating male and female recruits; and how perceptions about coed training influences a person's decision to join the service. [Source: Military.com | Military.com | Gina Harkins| September 1, 2020 ++]

Air Force Assignments

Child Custody Arrangement Policy



Master Sgt. William Rotroff, and his son, Chevvy

An airman from Luke Air Force Base late last month became the first to receive an assignment that took into consideration his child custody arrangement. Master Sgt. William Rotroff will move this fall to his next assignment at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, where his ex-wife and son, Chevvy, live, the Air Force Personnel Center said in an 27 AUG release. The Air Force on 17 AUG began allowing airmen who have court-ordered child custody arrangements to ask to be stationed near their children for their next assignments, or to have their next assignments deferred if it would take them away from their kids. Previously, child custody arrangements were not considered as part of the assignment process.

Rotroff, an F-35 integrated section chief with the 756th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Luke, submitted his request to be stationed near Chevvy right away. Less than 24 hours later, his commander, Maj. Joseph Langan, gave him the good news in person. “One of the greatest parts about being a squadron commander is that I have the ability and authority to fix many problems for my airmen relatively quickly,” Langan said in the release. “Sometimes the problems are messy and have complex solutions, but this was one of the easiest and most satisfying wins I’ve had during my time in command.” Langan said Rotroff was “overjoyed.” “I was in shock,” Rotroff said. “I know the assignment process is busy, with a lot of moving parts. I’m just so grateful to the assignments team and everyone that was involved with making this happen.”

Rotroff was originally supposed to go overseas, so he helped his ex-wife and son move to Florida, where she would have more support while he was gone. But then, his overseas orders were unexpectedly cancelled, complicating his situation. The cancellation came shortly after 5 AUG, when the Air Force announced the decision to consider child custody arrangements for assignments. He got more information on what was required from his Military Personnel Flight and carefully prepared his package to make sure he qualified. Cristi Bowes, AFPC’s head of military assignment policy and procedures, said Rotroff got his quick response because he made sure his package already had all the necessary documentation. AFPC’s assignment teams were also trained to quickly accept and review requests right after the application period opened up.

However, the Air Force cautioned last month that it still has to meet its needs, and might not be able to accommodate all airmen requesting assignment near their children. These assignment matches will be made when possible, the Air Force said, and it will try to accommodate airmen’s family situations, unless there is no other option. Rotroff said he will likely arrive in Florida just in time to join in the celebration of his son’s fifth birthday, which he said would be a “huge gift” for them both. “Everyone’s situation is different, everyone’s urgency is different, but it’s

a blessing this program exists,” Rotroff said. “I’m thankful my son will be able [to] have his mom and dad. His happiness means the world to me.” [Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | September 2, 2020 ++]

Air Force Uniforms

Your Ideas Sought for Future Uniform Updates



Airmen can now tell the Air Force their ideas on where they'd like to see improvements for uniforms, appearance standards, badges and patches and even jewelry, the service announced 3 SEP. Starting now, airmen and civilians can submit their recommendations through the Air Force's website "Airman Powered by Innovation" (<https://usaf.ideascalegov.com>) via a Common Access Card. "If we want an environment in which Airmen feel valued, we need to create transformative opportunities to foster a culture of innovation and then listen to their ideas," Lisa Truesdale, Air Force military force policy deputy director, said in a release. "Additionally, wearing the uniform and having pride in your personal appearance enhances esprit de corps." Personnel can make recommendations in the following categories, according to the release:

- Grooming and appearance: such as hairstyles, beards, shaving, etc.
- Dress uniforms: service dress, mess dress and accessories (e.g. hat, shoes, shirt, belt, tie, ribbons, medals, insignia, etc.)
- Utility uniform: Operational Camouflage Pattern Uniform & associated accessories (e.g. hat, boots, belt, t-shirt, insignia, etc.)
- Accessories: jewelry, earrings, rings, purses, backpacks, gym bags, phone, headphones, etc.
- Outer garments: pullover sweater, cardigan sweater, lightweight blue jacket, fleece, etc.
- Physical Training gear: shorts, pants, jacket, shoes, socks, shirt, etc.
- Flight Duty uniforms: Two-piece Flight Duty Uniform, Flight Duty Uniform, Desert Flight Duty Uniform and associated accessories (e.g. hat, boots, t-shirt, patches, insignia, etc.)
- Badges and specialty insignia: organization badges, unit patches, duty identification patches, tabs, etc.
- Maternity uniforms: service dress, utility, accessories, etc.

A uniform board will review submissions before presenting them to Chief of Staff Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown, who will then move to revise the Air Force Instruction 36-2903, Dress and Personal Appearance Policy. The service will notify those airmen whose ideas were rejected.

The Air Force did not provide a timeline to roll out uniform changes, but said the move is in line with an effort to create a more inclusive culture among the ranks. [Criticisms](#) have been recently raised within multiple military services that some uniform and grooming standards, such as hair length and style regulations, unfairly tax or inconvenience non-white troops. "We want our dress and appearance guidance to be inclusive," Truesdale said. "We are committed

to considering the views of all members. Individuals contribute their highest levels of creativity when they are cared for and feel a sense of belonging."

During a Q&A segment during the Air Force Sergeants' virtual symposium last week, Brown teased the possibility of allowing women to wear ponytails in uniform. "I just got a package [proposal] yesterday about ponytails for women," Brown said Aug. 26. "So we're looking at a number of different things that we've got to work through, [where there are] second-order impacts associated," he said. That review is part of an ongoing effort to "improve dress and appearance policies," where applicable, Capt. Leah Brading, a service spokeswoman, told Military.com. "We are looking at hairstyle and grooming policies, including the possibility of various new options for women," Brading said in an email. It was not immediately clear if the IdeaScale crowdsourcing project will overshadow the ongoing hairstyle review. The Air Force could not provide additional details by press time. [Source: Military.com | Oriana Pawlyk | September 3, 2020 ++]

USMC Retention

Update 01: Will Pay Pilots Up to \$210,000 to Stay in Uniform

The Marine Corps will pay some of its pilots retention bonuses of nearly a quarter-million dollars in order to address "shortfalls" in the service's aviation community. In a message released on 9 SEP by Lt. Gen. David Ottignon, deputy commandant for manpower and reserve affairs, the Corps said its aviation bonus program provides "a proactive, short-term incentive for aviation officers in certain grades and communities with current or forecasted inventory shortfalls." The bonuses will be paid out to skilled aviators trained on at least one of the Corps' main aviation platforms, including the F-35 Lightning, AV-8 Harrier, and F/A-18 fighter jets; MV-22 Osprey, AH-1 Cobra, CH-53 Sea Stallion, and UH-1 "Huey" helicopters; and KC-130 aircraft, which is mainly used for aerial refueling.

Fixed-wing pilots seem to be in the highest demand: Flyers in those categories with less than 12 years of service can get \$210,000 if they sign up for an additional six years of service, or receive \$100,000 for an additional four. Pilots of the Osprey, a tiltrotor aircraft capable of vertical takeoff and landing, can get up to \$125,000, while pilots of traditional helicopters, such as the Huey, Cobra, or Sea Stallion, can receive up to \$75,000. The bonuses will be paid out in equal annuities over the length of a Marine's contract, according to the message. "For example, an AV-8B pilot with less than 12 YCS, with a 72-month contract will receive six equal payments of 35,000 dollars," the message said. You can view the full requirements at <https://www.marines.mil/News/Messages/Messages-Display/Article/1890307/fy20-aviation-bonus-avb>. [Source: Task & Purpose | Paul Szoldra | September 9, 2020 ++]

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang

‘NFO’ thru ‘Oh Dark Thirty’

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

NFO - Naval Flight Officer. Derisively, Non-Flying Officer.

Nixie – A countermeasure against acoustic homing torpedoes. It consists of a noise-generating body ("fish") towed behind the ship on a long cable.

NJP - Non-Judicial Punishment. See CAPTAIN'S MAST.

No-Load – 1) A servicemember who does not pull his or her own weight. 2) A test of a catapult system where the cat is fired without launching anything (a dry firing).

No Joy – No radio contact, or no visual contact. Sometimes used to say "it didn't work."

Nonskid - An epoxy compound applied to deck surfaces to improve traction for feet and wheels. At the end of a cruise, when a flight deck's nonskid is mostly gone, not to mention oily and/or greasy, taxiing or landing can be even more of an adventure than usual. Usually applied to all weather decks of any ship.

No room to swing a cat – Originally, this term meant insufficient room to carry out a flogging, which punishment was performed with a CAT. The modern meaning is simply that an area is crowded.

Noseconer – See CONER.

NQP - Non-Qual-Puke. (submarines only) One who has not yet received his DOLPHINS. Also used as a derogatory term for a Dolphin wearer who screws up on something he should have known.

Nub – Newbie, or someone who does not stand watches and is therefore deadweight to the department. Literally, "Non-Usable Body."

Nugget - First-tour pilot or NFO. A diamond in the rough, or at least with a few rough edges.

Nuke, nuc – (1) Nuclear-trained and qualified personnel, whether surface or sub. (2) A nuclear-powered vessel. (3) Nuclear weapon, although the term "special weapon" is preferred.

Number 8's - (RN) Action working dress. The equivalent of US dungarees.

Nuts and Bolts - (RN) Stores rating concerned with equipment.

O1 (or O2, O3, etc.) – A paygrade designation for an American commissioned officer. Pronounced oh-1, oh-2, etc. A naval O1 is an Ensign, O2 is a Lieutenant (j.g.), etc.

Oakum – Jute or hemp fiber. Used with pine tar in caulking the seams of a wooden ship.

OBA - Oxygen Breathing Apparatus. An oxygen generating and rebreathing system used for firefighting.

OBE - Overcome By Events. Eaten by the snakes in the cockpit; the victim of task saturation. What happens to the pilot who forgets that his priority of actions goes in the following order: Aviate, Navigate, Communicate.

Occulting – A navigation light (buoy or lighthouse) in which the light is on longer than it is off. See also FLASHING.

OCS - A program which takes in college graduates and turns out commissioned officers. See "90-Day Wonder."

OD - (RN) (1) An ordinary seaman. (2) Derogatory term for anyone acting 'green' (Olive Drab). Frequently modified with the adjective "fucking".

Officers' Country – The area of the ship where the officers live. Generally off-limits to enlisted crew unless they are on duty or on a specific errand.

O-ganger - Officer.

Oh Dark Thirty - Very late at night, or very early in the morning. Aka Zero Dark Thirty.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | September 15, 2020 ++]

* Military History *



WWII Finland

Impact on War's Outcome

Throughout World War II, countless countries fought against one another. While the majority of the battles pitted the Allied Forces against the Axis Powers, other nations entered conflicts with these two predominant forces too. It was truly a conflict that consumed the entire world – yet today, more than half a century after the fighting ceased and peace treaties were signed, we often forget that unaligned countries were yanked into the war.

While you might think that the Scandinavian countries such as quiet Sweden, and unassuming Finland remained well out of the way of any wartime battles, this wasn't the case. Finland, in particular, joined WWII as a force to be reckoned with, and the northern nation proved it wouldn't stand for invasions on its territory. Eventually, Finland joined the fight against Nazi Germany with a declaration of war against its former ally. That's right: even unassuming Finland fought a war against Germany, even though it never aligned with the Allied Forces.

Before the outbreak and total international involvement that occurred during WWII, a significant struggle was happening in Finland. In the late 1930s, the world watched as Adolf Hitler and his Army stormed into Poland. Rumblings and fears regarding this sudden takeover began spreading, and they were perhaps the loudest in the USSR as Josef Stalin began to worry about the German intentions for Leningrad. Concerned that Hitler would target Leningrad in the coming weeks and months, Stalin wanted to protect his city – so he decided to fight back by building up his territories and armed forces. The Soviet leader began demanding that Finland, the USSR's western neighbor, allow his military to control certain portions of its land.

Finland didn't want to get involved in a potential war – and the nation certainly didn't want to experience a military occupation similar to Poland's. So, the country refused Stalin's demands and pushed back, announcing its intent to keep its land for Finland alone. Stalin and the USSR didn't like that response. On November 30, 1939, the Red Army enacted its ability to invade any nation in its "sphere of influence" as detailed in the non-aggression agreement signed by Germany, Russia, and other nations (including Finland). The USSR military stormed into Finland, taking control of those highly desired lands.

Yet the Red Army found itself stunned when Finland responded with a strong defensive attack, sending the Soviets back with trained resistance. Unfortunately, the Finnish resistance lost power quickly, and the country found itself involved in an unexpected war. Fortunately for Finland, Germany was growing increasingly angry with the USSR. The Nazi-controlled nation formed an alliance with Finland, offering aid in the form of money and military power. German troops entered Finland and fought alongside its soldiers, helping to push the Red Army back. As Finland succeeded, so too did its alliance with Germany strengthen.



Grenade launching (left) and light infantry on patrol (right) during Winter War with USSR

Everything changed in June 1944. As Finland and its German assistance fought against the Soviet invasion, Finnish President Risto Ryti resigned. Suddenly, the pro-Nazi and pro-German government leading Finland was no more – and an anti-German successor, Gustaf Mannerheim, stepped in to lead the country. He immediately moved to end the Finland-USSR war. So, less than a year after the Soviet invasion, Finland and the USSR signed the Treaty of Moscow, which allowed the Russians to control their desired Finnish territories and stopped all aggression. However, there was one particular stipulation in the treaty: Finland had to break off its alliance with Germany and remove every last German soldier from its land.

In addition to kicking German aid to the curb, the Treaty of Moscow required that Finland break all diplomatic ties with the Nazi-run nation and publicly announce the end of all German military support. Finland received a hard deadline from the USSR: all German troops had to leave Finnish soil by September 15, 1944. Immediately, the Finnish government and military began making plans to evacuate all German presence – yet the Germans had plans of their own. Once the news of the armistice between Finland and the USSR broke, the German military decided that they would leave only on their own terms. Unsurprisingly, the tension between Finland and Germany grew after this announcement. Finland was desperate to avoid any further fighting after years of battling the Red Army, exhausted and depleted. However, the German military wasn't about to leave quietly. Within hours of discovering Finland's alliance switch, German intelligence planned to carry out a secret objective: they would give the Finnish government a timeline for their withdrawal, but would then implement a scorched earth policy, destroying as many roads, railroads, and bridges as possible on their way out.

It took just a little more than a week for a skirmish to break out between the Finnish and German armies. On September 28, 1944, a unit of the Finnish military issued a surrender demand to a small German contingent. When no response came back, the Fins opened fire on the Germans, stunning them with a surprise attack. Just 24 hours later, another battle broke out when a German outfit detonated explosives and destroyed a bridge while the Finnish military was crossing it. A day later on September 30th Finland's army surrounded the German army and cut them off while attempting to cross a road headed north. The battles continued to intensify as both Finland and Germany attempted to thwart the other's objectives. As 1944 rolled into a new year and 1945 began, the two nations were facing off on a regular basis as Finland worked to keep its word with the USSR and Germany tried to maintain its position, territory-wise.

Though it took Finland a bit of time, the Scandinavian nation finally decided to go all in and declare war against its former ally. On March 3, 1945, Finland announced that it was at war with Germany – and both the USSR and the US were thrilled. The move proved smart, as Germany was already struggling against the massive Russian Army now at the gates of Berlin and Western Allies who were now deep inside Germany. Finland fought Germany for less time than many other nations, and was never officially aligned with the Allied Forces, yet the nation became an important factor contributing to the end of WWII. Thanks to the added pressure of sending troops and supplies to yet another country, Germany was unable to continue fighting on every front – and the Allies were able to secure a victory over a frightened and exhausted Germany. [Source: War History Online | Heather Fishel | May 30, 2017 ++]

Vietnam Unsung Heroes

The ‘Trash Haulers’ of 374th Tactical Airlift Wing



In April 1972, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) launched its Easter Offensive — the largest military invasion since China crossed the Yalu River during the Korean War. American military presence in Vietnam had largely been reduced to air power, and the 5th Division of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) was soon surrounded by three enemy divisions at An Loc, the capital of Binh Phuoc province. The only shot the defenders had at victory would be through the devastating firepower of U.S. Air Force B-52s and AC-130 gunships, but in order to survive, they would need the unsung heroes referred to as “trash haulers” — C-130 crews flying in ammunition and badly needed supplies.

The roads to An Loc were cut so the defenders had to rely on aerial resupply. The drop zone was in such a small area (a soccer field), in close proximity to what one crew member described as the “deadliest concentration of anti-aircraft fire ever seen in South Vietnam.” Vietnamese Air Force C-123 pilots, used to daylight drops in far less challenging situations, couldn’t put the supplies on target, so the job went to the better trained American crews. Two Vietnamese C-123s were shot down and several American C-130s were badly damaged during the campaign. NVA gunfire was so deadly that air crews began building custom armor to improve their chances of surviving the flight.

On 15 April, the enemy guns tore through the belly of a C-130 flown by Capt. William Caldwell, killing the engineer, Tech. Sgt. Jon Sanders and wounding two crew members. Also hit was the 27,000-pound load of ammunition, which caught fire. Loadmaster Staff Sgt. Charles Shaub quickly jettisoned the pallets, which exploded almost instantly after leaving the plane, then fought a raging fire which burned him badly. Although two of the Hercules’ four engines were no longer operable, Caldwell limped the broken bird back to Tan Son Nhut Air Base. The landing gear had to be extended manually and the C-130 lost one of its two functioning engines just before landing. Caldwell and Shaub were both awarded the Air Force Cross for their superb airmanship.

One C-130 flown by Capt. Don B. Jensen was shot down on 18 April, but they crash-landed in a rice paddy, surrounded by enemy soldiers. Fortunately for the downed airmen, a flight of Army helicopters saw Jensen’s flaming C-130 fly past and followed the cargo plane until it crashed. Cobra gunships held off the enemy while Hueys quickly picked up the crew — all of which survived. Jensen and the Army chopper pilots were all awarded Silver Stars.

Just after 0400 on 26 April, Maj. Harry A. Amesbury Jr. checked in with the forward air controller, who gave him the go-ahead to drop his cargo over An Loc. Seconds later, Amesbury’s C-130E was on fire and crashed into the ground. No time for parachutes, no emergency beacons were heard. Due to heavy enemy presence, there was no way a ground element could inspect the site. Lost were Amesbury (40, Morrison, Ill.), copilot Capt. Kurt F. Weisman (25, Jasper, Ind.), navigator 1st Lt. Richard L. Russell (25, Snyder, Texas), loadmasters Staff Sgt. Calvin C. Cooke (26,

Washington, D.C.) and Tech Sergeant Richard E. Dunn (38, Terryville, Conn.), and flight engineer Tech Sgt. Donald R. Hoskins (43, Madison, Ind.).

Another C-130E was shot down during a An Loc nighttime supply drop on 3 May. Lost were pilot Capt. Don L. Unger (26, Lake Worth, Fla.), copilot 1st Lt. Thomas C. Winderquist (25, Morton Grove, Ill.), navigator Capt. Alexander McIver (34, Santa Monica, Calif.), loadmasters Staff Sgt. Lester Bracey (20, Yonkers, N.Y.), and Staff Sgt. Joseph C. Hopper (24, Memphis, Tenn.), and flight engineer Staff Sgt. Freddie L. Slater (34, Baltimore). Unger's crash site was located in 1974 and the remains of the entire crew were repatriated. It wasn't until 1975 that Special Forces advisors and an ARVN team could search the Amesbury crash site recovering remains. of Capt. Weisman. Amesbury's remains were identified in 2001.

Hauling supplies on a cargo plane isn't what we typically think of when the word hero comes to mind, but the airmen that strapped into C-130s to fly treetop level into terrifying enemy anti-aircraft artillery strongholds — at night — unquestionably had a ton of guts. "Every plane that flew over An Loc came back with bullet holes in it," said Jensen. These USAF C-130 crews kept the ARVN troops supplied and played a crucial role in handing the North Vietnamese Army an unexpected defeat at An Loc. [Source: Unto the Breach | Chris Carter | August 11, 2019| ++]

Pacific War Ends

Four Troops Who Remember the Day



Donald Fosburg, Elmer Halley (right), Robert McGranaghan, and 99 year old and James Richardson

Donald Fosburg was off duty and lying in his bunk in the belly of the battleship USS Missouri on a steamy August night in 1945. He and his fellow radiomen were always first to receive news of the Pacific war against Imperial Japan, but that night's scoop was a bombshell. "A radioman friend of mine came running up," recalled Fosburg, 93, during a recent phone interview from his home in Whittier, Calif. "He said, 'Wake up, Don! The Japanese have accepted our terms of surrender — the war is over!'" The radioman swore Fosburg to secrecy because it was rightly up to the Missouri's command to announce it to the crew. "But you know, you're in a bunk room. You're right next to everybody so in a very short time everybody aboard ship became aware of it."

The news of Japan's surrender Aug. 15 — which became official during a formal ceremony of surrender aboard the Missouri in Tokyo Bay on Sept. 2, 1945 — eventually made its way to the tens of thousands of soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines deployed throughout the Pacific. Some had been away from home for years, while others had already returned to the States after long stints at war. Many suspected the end was near after the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima on Aug. 6 and Nagasaki on Aug. 9. Their hope was fulfilled when Japanese Emperor Hirohito announced the surrender in a radio broadcast six days after the second bombing. The news was, of course, welcomed by troops scattered across a theater that had been at war for almost four years. But whether filled with joy or relief, most men's minds turned quickly to a single question. "Your first reaction is: When are we going to go back home?" Fosburg said.

Elmer Halley, 95, was drafted into the Navy while still in high school in 1943 and became a pharmacist's mate. He was stationed at a hospital on Saipan until he and 10 other pharmacist's mates were plucked from there and put aboard the USS Monitor, a vehicle landing ship, which headed for Japan in August 1945. "We were all just young guys, 18 years old, greenhorns really," Halley said during a phone interview from his home in Huntsville, Mo. "We were there to win the war. This was our main thought. I didn't know how long I was going to be over there. All we wanted to do was whip the Japanese. "Never again will you see our country united like we were then. It was like one big family trying to get the job done. Our people were really united to get this job done." As fate would have it, the Monitor was moored close to the USS Missouri on the day of the surrender ceremony, and Halley was among the thousands of servicemembers who watched as Gen. Douglas MacArthur presided over the signing. "It was one of the greatest events," Halley said. "We knew we were making a lot of history there. I can still close my eyes and see MacArthur and those people signing that peace treaty."

Not everyone sensed the momentous nature of what would unfold on Tokyo Bay that day. Robert McGranaghan, 95, was a seaman first class on duty aboard the destroyer USS Nicholas, also moored near the Missouri. "Over the PA, they announced that anyone who wants to watch the signing of the treaty on the Missouri can go over," said McGranaghan during a phone interview from his home in Omaha, Neb. He had joined the Navy at age 17 in 1943 and was aboard the Nicholas for 12 major battles as it hopped island to island north toward Japan. On the heels of all that, McGranaghan says that, at the time, the signing did not strike him as a lasting historical moment. "In fact, some of my friends who could have gone over didn't go over," he said. But McGranaghan did attend, and a few moments remain vivid in his mind. "I watched MacArthur slam his hand down and say, 'This meeting is over,'" he said with a laugh. "That was after five guys talked. He didn't want any more talk. He was the boss of that day."

Some men in uniform were out of the combat zone by the time of the surrender and reflecting on the sacrifices made for the victory. James E. Richardson, 99, served in Burma as a member of the famed Merrill's Marauders, only eight of whom are still alive to see the surrender's 75th anniversary. He was one of seven brothers, six of whom served during the war. In a written response to Stars and Stripes, Richardson recollected returning to the U.S. from India in December 1944 and being reassigned to Camp Rucker in Alabama, where he learned that the atomic bombs had been dropped. "I was glad to know the war was finally over and won by the United States and Allied Forces," said Richardson, who lives in Jacksboro, Tenn. "But I felt sad about the loss of one of my younger brothers, J. C. Richardson, as I learned he had been killed fighting in France. I didn't know he had been killed until I returned to the United States. He is buried in France." [Source: Stars & Stripes | Wyatt Olson | August 31, 2020 ++]

WWII Bomber Nose Art

[59] Bourbon Boxcar



Military History Anniversaries

16 thru 30 SEP

Significant events in U. S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 30 SEP**”. [Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | September 2020 ++]

WWII Photos

Australian Troopers in Papua New Guinea



The three Chapman brothers from Moonta, South Australia, who all joined the 2/27th Infantry Battalion. The siblings are pictured, pausing during a break in the fighting against the Japanese just after the fall of Gona in Papua New Guinea on 16 December 1942. The lads, the sons of Maurice and Mabel Chapman, all survived the war but an elder brother, Lance Chapman, age 25, was killed in Egypt six weeks before this photo was taken.

Medal of Honor Citations

Stanley T. Adams | Korea



The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the

MEDAL OF HONOR

To

M/Sgt Stanley T. Adams

Rank at Time of Action: Sergeant First Class

Organization: U.S. Army, 1st Platoon, Co. A, 1st Bn, 19th Inf. Rgt, 24th Infantry Division

Place and date: Sesim-ni, Korea, February 4, 1951

Entered service: Olathe, Kansas in 1942 at age 20

Born: May 9, 1922, DeSoto, Johnson County, KS,

Citation

M/Sgt. Adams, Company A, distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action against an enemy. At approximately 0100 hours M/Sgt. Adams' platoon, holding an outpost some 200 yards ahead of his company, came under a determined attack by an estimated 250 enemy troops. Intense small-arms, machine-gun, and mortar fire from three sides pressed the platoon back against the main line of resistance. Observing approximately 150 hostile troops silhouetted against the skyline advancing against his platoon, M/Sgt. Adams leaped to his feet, urged his men to fix bayonets, and he, with 13 members of his platoon, charged this hostile force with indomitable courage. Within 50 yards of the enemy M/Sgt. Adams was knocked to the ground when pierced in the leg by an enemy bullet. He jumped to his feet and, ignoring his wound, continued on to close with the enemy when he was knocked down four times from the concussion of grenades which had bounced off his body. Shouting orders he charged the enemy positions and engaged them in hand-to-hand combat where man after man fell before his terrific onslaught with bayonet and rifle butt. After nearly an hour of vicious action M/Sgt. Adams and his comrades routed the fanatical foe, killing over 50 and forcing the remainder to withdraw. Upon receiving orders that his battalion was moving back he provided cover fire while his men withdrew. M/Sgt. Adams' superb leadership, incredible courage, and consummate devotion to duty so inspired his comrades that the enemy attack was completely thwarted, saving his battalion from possible disaster. His sustained personal bravery and indomitable fighting spirit against overwhelming odds reflect the utmost glory upon himself and uphold the finest traditions of the infantry and the military service.



A native of Kansas, Adams fought in World War II as an enlisted soldier. During World War II, he was wounded in action while fighting in North Africa and Italy. After World War II, he served in Japan as part of the Allied occupation force. In July 1950 he was sent to Korea as a sergeant soon after the outbreak of war there, and was awarded for leading a bayonet charge against a numerically superior force in early 1951. Adams was subsequently promoted to master sergeant and received the Medal of Honor for his actions during the battle. The medal was formally presented to him by President Harry S. Truman in a July 5, 1951, ceremony at the White House. Shortly after receiving the Medal of

Honor, Adams was commissioned as a second lieutenant. Adams continued to serve into the Vietnam War, eventually retiring as a lieutenant colonel in 1970.

He married Wava J. Ware Adams and they had a son, Gary. The marriage ended in divorce. He later married Penny DeGraff and they had a daughter, Joy. In 1981, he married Jean Elizabeth VanderStoep Adams, and was with her until his death. As a civilian, Adams lived in Alaska and worked as an administrator for the Internal Revenue Service there. He later moved to Bend, Oregon, and, after being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, lived at the Oregon Veterans Home in The Dalles. He died in the veterans home on April 19, 1999, aged 76, and was buried at Willamette National Cemetery in Clackamas County. Adams' widow, Jean, donated his Medal of Honor to the Oregon Veterans Home, where it is displayed in the entryway. Upon her death in 2008, she left a substantial contribution of funds and memorabilia to the home. A multipurpose building, to be named the Stan & Jean Adams Veterans' Community Center, is currently under construction at the facility.

[Source: <https://www.cmoHS.org/recipients/stanley-t-adams> & https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley_T._Adams | September 2020 ++]

* Health Care *



TRICARE Health Care Providers

Proposal Would Give Some Users a Wider Choice

The next iteration of Tricare will give some military families and retirees the option to choose a health network other than the two selected to manage the Tricare East and West regions, according to a report delivered by the Pentagon to Congress in August. The new contracts, known as T-5, will require the winning contractors to partner with local health plans or networks in their regions to provide health services to Tricare beneficiaries -- a test of the "multiple provider network" concept to determine how effectively the expanded opportunities might work.

The Defense Health Agency will also implement a separate pilot program to test the concept in certain areas, issuing contracts directly to provider networks so they can accept Tricare beneficiaries, according to the report sent 14 AUG to leaders of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "We believe this approach, which will allow local and regional contracted health plans and providers to focus solely on delivering health care services rather than these back office activities unique to Tricare, will lead to more plans and providers competing for Tricare business," defense officials wrote.

The fiscal 2017 National Defense Authorization Act required the DoD to make significant changes to the military health system and to Tricare, the department's program for managing private health services for military beneficiaries and retirees. The law also required the DoD to report on the structure of its managed care contracts and explain how it plans to comply with previous legislation requiring the department to give patients more health care choices, part of an effort to improve access and quality and lower costs. In the report, the DoD said it plans to offer broader selection in phases, first as demonstration or pilot projects before rolling them out program-wide. "This demonstration will require education of beneficiaries on new options, assessment of the cost structure and other requirements of the innovations to ensure they improve care, quality and access, and analysis and evaluation to understand what could work," the report states.

To understand how the new system may work, Tricare beneficiaries can look to Atlanta, where Tricare East Region contractor Humana Military has partnered with Kaiser Permanente, the not-for-profit health care company, to offer Tricare Prime to area residents. Under the agreement, which runs through 2023, Kaiser Permanente is to provide "value-based care" to retirees and military family members, defined as a health program that rewards providers based on performance, quality and value, as defined by the DoD. The pilot, according to Humana Military, is a test as to whether Kaiser Permanente's version of managed care "can improve health care quality and reduce health care costs for Tricare beneficiaries."

The Pentagon released a draft request for proposal last week for the two T-5 contracts, which could be worth up to \$58 billion. Currently, Humana Military Healthcare Services holds the contract for Tricare East, while Health Net Federal Services manages the Tricare West contract. Responses to the draft RFP from interested bidders are due Sept. 18. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime | September 3, 2020++]

Health Information Exchange

Update 01: What it will Do When Fully Deployed



Before the SARS-CoV-2 virus began to spread across the globe, the Federal Electronic Health Record Modernization program was in the process of coordinating with the Department of Defense and the Department Veterans Affairs to expand provider access to patient health records through the new joint health information exchange (HIE). "The joint HIE gives providers a more complete view of a patient's medical history," said Bill Tinston, director, FEHRM, which spearheaded the establishment of the joint HIE with the DoD and VA. "This reduces the burden of patients to repeat their medical histories and helps providers make more informed treatment decisions, enhancing the care experience."

The DoD and VA jointly created the FEHRM in 2019 to coordinate future electronic health record decisions and improve collaboration in sharing secure health data between the two health systems. The joint HIE is one of the fruits of that collaboration. The joint HIE securely connects DoD, VA, U.S. Coast Guard and hundreds of other select federal and private sector partners with patient health and benefit information data. Using joint HIE, all health providers within the system—whether at a military medical treatment facility or in the TRICARE civilian network—can securely access beneficiary records and health information. When fully deployed, the joint HIE will give providers access to medical data from 225 federal and private sector partners representing more than 2,000 hospitals; 33,000 clinics; 1,100 laboratories; 8,800 pharmacies; and 300 nursing homes around the country.

"The story of the joint HIE is really a story of interagency collaboration," said Army Col. Francisco Dominicci, chief, DHA Solution Delivery Division. "The DoD has pushed to make health data securely accessible regardless of where our beneficiaries receive care, and now we are expanding to exchange even more data with the VA and a broader set of private providers." The joint HIE's data access mission is especially important during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. "In the fight against COVID-19, timely, thorough access to a patient's health records helps inform treatment decisions leading to lives saved," said U.S. Public Health Service Capt. Mark Clayton, chief, Defense Health Agency Electronic Health Record Modernization Branch. "That's an exciting part of what joint HIE can do."

The joint HIE also ensures the health data network is accessible at the many military field clinics and hospital ships, enabling providers in those deployed locations access to the same health records. Regardless of where beneficiaries go to receive care, the joint HIE will allow providers access to essential information, such as lists of prescription medications, medication allergies, illnesses or existing problems, laboratory and radiology results, immunizations, past medical procedures, and clinical notes. [Source: Health.mil | SDD Stakeholder Engagement Branch | September 9, 2020 ++]

Flu Shots

Update 14: Fighting Flu Together: Get an Immunization!



Getting a flu vaccine this fall is more important than ever to protect yourself, your family, friends, and coworkers. We are facing a tough 2020 flu season as we prepare to battle the coronavirus at the same time. Flu shots protect you against flu. By getting a flu shot, you will be less likely to spread flu to others. By keeping you healthy, our VA facilities won't be overwhelmed with flu patients during the pandemic. Flu and COVID-19 can lead to serious health complications resulting in hospitalization or death. The good news is both may be prevented by wearing a face covering, practicing physical distancing, washing your hands frequently and coughing into your elbow.

With flu season approaching, talk to your health provider about where to safely get a flu shot this fall. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone six months or older should get a yearly flu shot. Flu can be serious among young children, older adults and those with chronic health conditions, such as asthma, heart disease or diabetes. Every year, hundreds of thousands of Americans are hospitalized with the flu. During the 2019-2020 flu season, more than 4,600 Veterans were hospitalized at VA medical centers. More than 600 of them required intensive care stays. VA providers also saw over 27,000 Veterans for flu and spoke to more than 13,000 during phone triage calls.

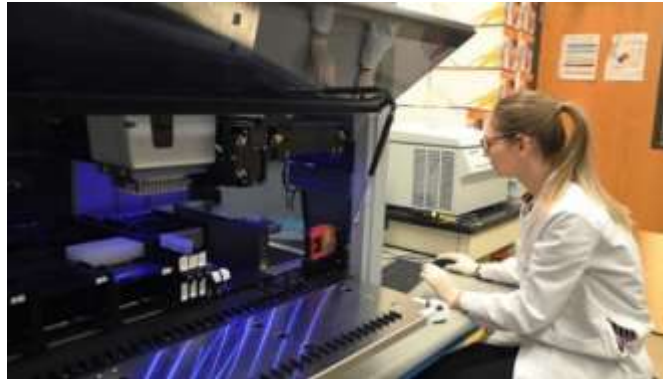
If you are enrolled in VA health care, you can receive the seasonal flu vaccination at more than 60,000 locations through the Community Care Network in-network retail pharmacies and urgent care partners. VA will pay for standard-dose and high-dose flu shots. Even if you haven't had a flu shot lately, make this the year that you do! Enrolled Veterans can visit <https://www.va.gov/communitycare/flushot.asp> to find locations to get a no-cost flu shot. Help us help you: we are fighting flu and COVID-19 together. Important Resources

- [Influenza](#)
- [COVID-19](#)
- [Coronavirus Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [CDC Similarities and Differences Between Flu and COVID-19](#)

[Source: Vantage Point | Dr. Jane Kim, MPH | September 8, 2020 ++]

Lung Cancer

Update 03: Military Medicine Forging Pathways to Treat and Prevent



The treatment landscape for lung cancer has changed dramatically in the six years since Navy Lt. Cmdr. (Dr.) Karen Zeman began her lung cancer training. Just a decade ago, little was known about the leading cause of cancer deaths among both men and women. A newly diagnosed patient coming into her clinic would have a tumor checked for, at most, four genetic mutations. In comparison, now every lung cancer tumor is sent for next generation genetic sequencing to check for over 100 different markers to help identify the most effective treatment to combat the patient's unique cancer. "In my clinic, I have more survivors today than I had years ago," said Zeman, an oncologist at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center or WRNMMC in Bethesda, Maryland. "The lung cancer patients are doing significantly better in 2020 than they were doing in 2014."

Within the last two years, the Food and Drug Administration approved nearly two dozen new drugs to treat lung cancer. Among those was a new drug for a fast-growing and deadly lung cancer common among smokers, the first in over a decade, according to Zeman. New treatment advances are made by understanding the disease itself, through analyzing the mutations and proteins that drive lung cancer, said Matthew Wilkerson, Ph.D., director of the Data Science Core of the Center for Precision Medicine for Military Medical Education and Research at the Uniformed Services University in Bethesda, Maryland.

Three ongoing lung cancer research projects within the Department of Defense aim to do just that by investigating the building blocks of lung cancers to find effective treatments and perhaps even prevent lung cancer one day. The Applied Proteogenomics Organizational Learning and Outcomes network, or APOLLO, is a tri-federal initiative between the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and DoD that resulted from the Cancer Moonshot. Spearheaded by retired Army Col. (Dr.) Craig Shriver, director of the Murtha Cancer Center Research Program, Department of Surgery, School of Medicine, USU, and director of the Murtha Cancer Center at WRNMMC, APOLLO leverages the technology and expertise in the tri-federal initiative to accelerate a cure for cancer, including lung cancer, said retired Navy Capt. (Dr.) Robert Browning, medical director of interventional pulmonary at WRNMMC.

"It's really important because the APOLLO project is mainly focused on active duty military service members in the DoD and veterans," said Browning, noting that 10 different military medical treatment facilities are collecting and testing lung cancer specimens as part of the project. "We're going to find some answers about lung cancer in the military and the DoD, among other cancers, that just were not possible before this project."

In addition to APOLLO, the Detection of Early Lung Cancer Among Military Personnel, or DECAMP, and the Genomics of Early Lung Cancer Among Military, or GELCAMP, both hold ramifications for why certain people get lung cancer and some don't among military service members. Cigarette smoking contributes to 80% to 90% of lung cancer deaths, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Smoking cessation remains a priority for preventing lung cancer, but not all lung cancers are a result of smoking, said Browning. "Some smokers don't get lung

cancer and there are people who have never smoked who do,” he said. “All of these DoD studies have some component where we are looking for biomarkers to detect early- or high-risk patients, and even looking for precancerous markers.”

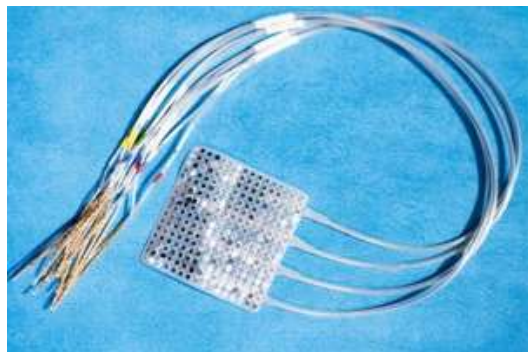
Wilkerson agreed, adding that quitting smoking is one way to prevent lung cancer, but with the advances in molecular imaging and genetic sequencing of tumors, lung cancer prevention can also mean preventing the cancer on a whole new level. “The DECAMP project is another way to look at lung cancer prevention as we learn more about these lesions that occur in individuals who smoked, differentiating growths that are cancerous versus noncancerous,” he said. By understanding who is more likely to develop lung cancer and why, scientists could develop a test to screen for lung cancer based on genetic markers, not just smoking history. Today lung cancer screening is limited to a low-dose CT scan in people ages 55 to 80 who have a history of heavy smoking. But in the future, Browning imagines lung cancer screening could be more prescriptive.

“In cardiology, you give a statin to prevent cholesterol buildup so a patient doesn’t have a heart attack,” he said. “We’re not there yet, but that is where we are headed in lung cancer prevention.” Advances in treatment, including therapies that train the immune system to detect and kill cancer cells, are already changing the lives of Zeman’s lung cancer patients. “We have patients who can have better quality of life with therapies that are less toxic. And for patients fit enough, even more effective therapies are available,” she said. “Lung cancer. When you hear that term, there’s a lot of fear,” she added. “We’ve come a long way and we’re going much farther.”

Browning agreed: “Lung cancer is a terrible diagnosis, but if there’s any message to get to lung cancer patients diagnosed now, it’s to hang on because there are treatments coming at a pace we have never seen in our lives or in history,” he said. “We all were trained in treating lung cancer that had the same death rate for the past 50 years. And then in the past five years, things have exploded and we’ve made tremendous progress.” [Source: Health.mil | September 9, 2020 ++]

Prosthetics

Update 02: First ‘Plug and Play’ Brain Prosthesis Demonstrated



ECoG electrode array and wires

In a significant advance, researchers working toward a brain-controlled prosthetic limb at the UCSF Weill Institute for Neurosciences have shown that machine learning techniques helped a paralyzed individual learn to control a computer cursor using their brain activity without requiring extensive daily retraining, which has been a requirement of all past brain-computer interface (BCI) efforts.

“The BCI field has made great progress in recent years, but because existing systems have had to be reset and recalibrated each day, they haven’t been able to tap into the brain’s natural learning processes. It’s like asking someone to learn to ride a bike over and over again from scratch,” said study senior author Karunesh Ganguly, MD, PhD, an associate professor of in the UC San Francisco Department of Neurology. “Adapting an artificial learning system to

work smoothly with the brain's sophisticated long-term learning schemas is something that's never been shown before in a paralyzed person."

The achievement of "plug and play" performance demonstrates the value of so-called ECoG electrode arrays for BCI applications. An ECoG array comprises a pad of electrodes about the size of a Post-it note that is surgically placed on the surface of the brain. They allow long-term, stable recordings of neural activity and have been approved for seizure monitoring in epilepsy patients. In contrast, past BCI efforts have used "pin-cushion" style arrays of sharp electrodes that penetrate the brain tissue for more sensitive recordings but tend to shift or lose signal over time. In this case, the authors obtained investigational device approval for long-term chronic implantation of ECoG arrays in paralyzed subjects to test their safety and efficacy as long-term, stable BCI implants.

In their new paper, published 7 SEP in *Nature Biotechnology*, Ganguly's team documents the use of an ECoG electrode array in an individual with paralysis of all four limbs (tetraplegia). The participant is also enrolled in a clinical trial designed to test the use of ECoG arrays to allow paralyzed patients to control a prosthetic arm and hand, but in the new paper, the participant used the implant to control a computer cursor on a screen. The researchers developed a BCI algorithm that uses machine learning to match brain activity recorded by the ECoG electrodes to the user's desired cursor movements.

Initially, the researchers followed the standard practice of resetting the algorithm each day. The participant would begin by imagining specific neck and wrist movements while watching the cursor move across the screen. Gradually the computer algorithm would update itself to match the cursor's movements to the brain activity this generated, effectively passing control of the cursor over to the user. However, starting this process over every day put a severe limit on the level of control that could be achieved. It could take hours to master control of the device, and some days the participant had to give up altogether. The researchers then switched to allow the algorithm to continue updating to match the participant's brain activity without resetting it each day. They found that the continued interplay between brain signals and the machine learning-enhanced algorithm resulted in continuous improvements in performance over many days. Initially there was a little lost ground to make up each day, but soon the participant was able to immediately achieve top level performance.

"We found that we could further improve learning by making sure that the algorithm wasn't updating faster than the brain could follow — a rate of about once every 10 seconds," said Ganguly, a practicing neurologist with UCSF Health and the San Francisco Veterans Administration Medical Center's Neurology & Rehabilitation Service. "We see this as trying to build a partnership between two learning systems – brain and computer – that ultimately lets the artificial interface become an extension of the user, like their own hand or arm."

Over time, the participant's brain was able to amplify patterns of neural activity it could use to most effectively drive the artificial interface via the ECoG array, while eliminating less effective signals – a pruning process much like how the brain is thought to learn any complex task, the researcher say. They observed that the participant's brain activity seemed to develop an ingrained and consistent mental "model" for controlling the BCI interface, something that had never occurred with daily resetting and recalibration. When the interface was reset after several weeks of continuous learning, the participant rapidly re-established the same patterns of neural activity for controlling the device – effectively retraining the algorithm to its former state.

"Once the user has established an enduring memory of the solution for controlling the interface, there's no need for resetting," Ganguly said. "The brain just rapidly convergences back to the same solution." Eventually, once expertise was established, the researchers showed they could turn off the algorithm's need to update itself altogether, and the participant could simply begin using the interface each day without any need for retraining or recalibration. Performance did not decline over 44 days in the absence of retraining, and the participant could even go days without practicing and see little decline in performance. The establishment of stable expertise in one form of BCI control (moving the cursor) also allowed researchers to begin "stacking" additional learned skills — such as "clicking" a virtual button — without loss of performance.

Such immediate “plug and play” BCI performance has long been a goal in the field, but has been out of reach because the “pincushion-style” electrodes used by most researchers tend to move over time, changing the signals seen by each electrode. Also, because these electrodes penetrate brain tissue, the immune system tends to reject them, gradually impairing their signal. ECoG arrays are less sensitive than these traditional implants, but their long-term stability appears to compensate for this shortcoming. The stability of ECoG recordings may be even more important for long-term control of more complex robotic systems such as artificial limbs, a key goal of the next phase of Ganguly’s research.

“We’ve always been mindful of the need to design technology that doesn’t end up in a drawer, so to speak, but which will actually improve the day-to-day lives of paralyzed patients,” Ganguly said. “These data show that ECoG-based BCIs could be the foundation for such a technology.” [Source: University of California San Francisco | Nicholas Weiler| September 7, 2020 ++]

Prosthetics

Update 03: Artificial Hand that Feels

Keith Vonderhuevel lost his right hand in a work accident and has struggled with a prosthetic. Vonderhuevel shared, "My granddaughters, they grab a hold of my hand. If I'm not watching close enough, I squeeze a little tight, and they're like, 'Ow, let go!' Because without sensation, you can't tell." But now, Vonderhuevel is on the cutting edge of technology. A team from CU Boulder, Case Western Reserve, and the Cleveland VA Medical Center is working to give amputees prosthetics that can feel. "

The perception of touch actually occurs in the brain, not in the hand itself, so losing the limb is really just losing the switch that turns that sensation on or off," described Dustin Tyler, a biomedical engineer at Case Western Reserve. "After amputation, the wires are still there," elaborated Jacob Segil, a research healthcare scientist at Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center and an instructor of the engineering plus program at the University of Colorado Boulder. Pressure sensors on the prosthetic hand send signals to a portable stimulator, which then sends electrical impulses into electrodes implanted into nerves in the upper arm. Those nerve bundles send signals to the brain, tricking it into thinking that it can feel fingers, even if there are no fingers to feel.



"Grabbing eggs and not smashing them may seem little to some people, but it's a big thing to others," Vonderhuevel said. An unexpected effect, it relieved Igor Spetic's phantom pain, giving him and Vonderhuevel the chance to feel good about their futures once again. "With sensation on, I grabbed her with both hands and picked her up and could actually feel that I was holding her and not squeezing too tight," Vonderhuevel shared, "and she gave me a big hug, and that one just gets to me." Segil recently won a \$1 million career development award from the VA to continue his work. He's started a company called Point Designs, which focuses on prosthetic fingers. He hopes to create artificial limbs and fingers that function and feel like real body parts. [Source: 69 WFMZ-TV News | Melanie Falcon | September 9, 2020 ++]

Respiratory Illness

Update 01: Wildfire Impact



Smoke from wildfires blocks out the sun Aug. 19, 2020, at Fort Hunter Liggett

Across much of the Western United States, residents continue to endure the current wildfire season, which has firefighters battling nearly 100 large active wildfires that have already burned nearly 5 million acres. And where there's fire, there's smoke that blanketed several western cities this week. This smoke has resulted in reduced air quality and contributed to a host of associated health risks that mirror COVID-19 symptoms. For Pacific Northwest residents, the smoke from these fires and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic have led to an increased number of respiratory and cardiovascular ailments.

At Naval Hospital Bremerton, staff continue efforts to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Staff and beneficiaries there remain aware that prevailing winds have pushed wildfire smoke over more densely populated areas, which can cause coughing, wheezing, and difficulty breathing, and aggravate existing conditions. "Staff and patients should do their best to avoid prolonged exposure to the smoke due to the fact that it can irritate the eyes, nose, throat and lungs," said Navy Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Omar Garcia-Argueta, Internal Medicine & Specialty Clinics. State and country health advisory alerts on diminished air quality have been posted and shared to alert local populations, with NHB also taking a lead to assess those in need. "The smoke can exacerbate any existing underlying condition," said Navy Cmdr. Robert Uniszkiewicz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton COVID-19 lead and public health emergency officer, acknowledging that both COVID-19 and wildfire smoke can damage a person's respiratory and immune systems.

The Washington State Emergency Management Division indicate those sensitive to wildfire smoke exposure include people with heart and lung disease, existing respiratory infections, diabetes, stroke survivors, infants, children, pregnant women, and people over 65 years of age. "Patients and staff who will be impacted the most are those who have been diagnosed with cardio-respiratory diseases such as asthma, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), pulmonary fibrosis, or heart disease," explained Garcia-Argueta. "Asthma and COPD patients in particular should ensure that they are taking their maintenance medications as prescribed by their providers. Smoke may also impact pregnant women, the elderly population, and children. These patients and staff members should consult with their health care providers regarding specific precautions." "We realize that not everything is COVID-19 related, such as someone dealing with allergies, hay fever, and the flu. But there are definitely those who are more vulnerable than others," Uniszkiewicz added.

The COVID-19 screening process determines if a person in the previous 24 hours has had such symptoms as fever, cough (not allergy related), sore throat, shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, and/or loss of smell or taste. Wildfire smoke is capable of producing harmful health effects from eye, nose, and throat irritation or headaches to more severe conditions like shortness of breath, dry cough, throat soreness, chest tightness, asthma attacks, and worsening existing chronic conditions. Experts at NHB encourage anyone experiencing these symptoms to seek medical attention. They should also continue to follow CDC guidelines for stopping the spread of COVID-19, such as staying at least 6 feet from others; washing hands often, and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces at home; avoiding touch the eyes, nose, or mouth; and covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the crook of an elbow.

Garcia-Argueta attests that the best recourse for avoiding wildfire smoke is to stay indoors. “In order to prevent prolonged exposure to the wildfire smoke, one should plan to stay indoors and have both their windows and doors closed. Patients and staff members should also avoid engaging in strenuous physical activity outside and refrain from smoking,” Garcia-Argueta said. “Our recommendation is to still wear cloth face coverings. There are going to be those who think the smoke is causing them to have trouble breathing with the air quality like it is, but they’re more susceptible to particles in the air due to being exposed to wildfire smoke,” explained Uniszkiewicz.

Garcia-Argueta also advocates basic steps for everyone to follow to protect their lungs, such as: stay indoors as much as possible; reduce strenuous activity; reduce other sources of indoor air pollution like vacuuming and frying meat; use HVAC systems to filter the air; when traveling in a vehicle, keep the windows closed, run the air conditioner and set air to ‘recirculate’ to reduce smoke. Hot, dry conditions remain in the forecast for the region, which keeps the fire danger high. To breathe a sigh of relief, everyone should continue to heed sound medical advice from their providers and strive to keep the air around them clear. [Source: Health.mil | Douglas H. Stutz | September 11, 2020 ++]

Drug Cost Increases

Update 19: Drug Price Spikes Still Unchecked

The current debate over expensive prescription drugs caught fire after a notorious 2015 episode, when the price of a cheap, lifesaving drug was jacked up by more than 5,000 percent and the pharmaceutical executive behind it seemed to revel in the outrage over his decision. The drug was Daraprim, used to treat a parasitic infection, toxoplasmosis, that can be fatal, particularly in immunocompromised patients like those with HIV/AIDS or pregnant women. The manufacturer’s young leader — Martin Shkreli, who earned the moniker "Pharma Bro" because of his brash social media presence — had more experience in investing than in drug development. Congress and, later, President Donald Trump used the public shock sparked by that incident to push to lower drug prices more broadly. Little was implemented, though, and the drug still appears to cost as much now as when the controversy occurred.

Professor Michael Carrier of Rutgers Law School, who has testified before Congress on the issue of anti-competitive behavior in the pharmaceutical industry, notes that huge price hikes could still happen today. "It’s possible for a company to acquire the rights to an off-patent drug and significantly increase price," he said. "If it’s a small market, generics might not find it profitable to enter." After years of executive and legislative pushes for the Food and Drug Administration to prioritize generic drugs, a copycat version of Daraprim was finally approved earlier this year. The controversy brought congressional scrutiny to other companies that employed similar practices and highlighted ways that drugmakers could act in an anti-competitive manner, which left rare-disease patients particularly vulnerable.

In 2015, Daraprim only cost \$13.50 per pill when the company, Turing Pharmaceuticals, acquired the rights to it. In September 2015, Turing hiked the price to \$750 per pill. A standard course of treatment could be around \$60,000. The company, now Vyera Pharmaceuticals, didn’t reply to an inquiry about Daraprim’s list price, but the price still appears to be \$750 per pill. The generic Daraprim, pyrimethamine, was approved by the FDA in March. The list price is around the same as the brand-name version, according to the website GoodRx. With coupons, the generic can be acquired more cheaply — around \$183 per pill, or more than \$16,000 for a course — but is still more than 13 times higher than the original brand-name price five years ago. Vyera has vowed to provide it free to the uninsured and said many insured patients should be able to acquire it for a \$10 copay. But the list price still matters, as some patients, including seniors on Medicare, often have to pay a percentage of a drug’s total price. And insurers’ costs are closer to the full price, which later can raise consumers’ premiums.

Daraprim wasn’t the only old drug that underwent shocking price hikes around the same time. The company formerly known as Valeant Pharmaceuticals, now Bausch Health, faced similar scrutiny for increasing the prices of blood pressure and heart disease medications by 3,100 percent and 6,700 percent, respectively, from 2012 to 2015. More well-known products — like insulin for diabetes, Naloxone for opioid overdoses and the EpiPen for serious

allergic reactions — also saw well-publicized price increases. When an original brand-name drug loses its patent protections, generic versions may enter the market and compete for sales based on lower prices. But when there are relatively few patients — such as for toxoplasmosis, which affected around 2,000 patients in 2015 — the market often doesn't work that way.

Immediately after the Daraprim controversy and through the start of the Trump administration, policymakers focused on how to encourage generic competition that could potentially deter price increases. In 2017, the Food and Drug Administration said it would prioritize reviews for new generics until there were three approved for a given branded product. It also began putting out a list of off-patent products with no competition. Later that year, Congress codified those policies and created a new designation for those drugs known as “competitive generic therapies” as part of a broader FDA law. That type of product would get a speedier review and a 180-day period of exclusive sales if it was the first new competitor to emerge from review and go on the market. Since the law was enacted, 44 drugs have received that designation. As it happens, the company behind the Daraprim generic, Cerovene Inc., didn't receive the competitive generic therapy designation.

In late 2019, a new law made it possible for generic firms to sue companies for preventing sample sales, a tactic Turing used to thwart potential competitors. Earlier this year, the Federal Trade Commission and seven state attorneys general filed a lawsuit against Vyera and Shkreli. He no longer has an official role with the company, but the FTC alleges he still exerts influence from behind bars while serving a prison sentence for securities fraud stemming from another drug company he once ran. Even though the company has been able to keep Daraprim's price high for five years, Carrier of Rutgers said the lawsuit could result in Vyera paying damages, and ultimately “could deter other companies contemplating this behavior.” [Source: Roll Call | Andrew Siddons | September 9, 2020 ++]

Covid-19 Fake Cures

Update 02: Cannabidiol (CBD) Products

Cannabidiol (CBD) is a chemical compound found in marijuana and hemp that does not produce a high. In 2018, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a cannabidiol preparation (brand name Epidiolex) to treat two rare, severe forms of epilepsy. In 2020, the FDA approved Epidiolex (cannabidiol) [CBD] oral solution for the treatment of seizures associated with tuberous sclerosis complex (TSC) in patients one year of age and older. Although there is great interest in potential medical uses for CBD, the evidence for its safety and effectiveness falls far short of the marketing hype for many available products. Since 2015, the FDA has ordered many companies to stop making unapproved claims. The market for unapproved CBD products is nevertheless burgeoning as marketers have claimed the products have value in treating a variety of diseases. The FDA and others have found that some CBD products have not contained dosages claimed by marketers. Dangerous chemicals have been found in popular CBD vaping liquids.

The FDA and/or the Federal Trade Commission have sent warning letters to these businesses who have marketed their CBD products with unsubstantiated COVID-19-related claims

- [AgroTerra, Ltd. dba Patriot Hemp Company](#) (Lyons, Colorado)
- [Apollo Holding LLC](#) (United States)
- [CBD Center](#) (Fresno, California)
- [CBD Gaze](#) (Guaynabo 00966-2732 Puerto Rico)
- [CBD Online Store](#) (Laguna Hills, California)
- [Indigo Naturals](#) (United States)
- [Living Senior, LLC](#) (Las Vegas, Nevada)
- [Myers Detox](#) (Los Angeles, California)
- [Native Roots Hemp](#) (Algoma, Wisconsin)
- [Noetic Nutraceuticals](#) (Columbia, Maryland)

- [Nova Botanix LTD DBA CanaBD](#) (London EC1A 2BN, United Kingdom)
- [Project 1600, Inc.](#) (Amagansett, New York)

[Source: DoJ So. Dist of GA | U.S. Attorney's Office | August 10, 2020 ++]

Covid-19 Headgear

Update 09: Valved Masks Do More Harm than Good



The U.S. Army has banned masks with valves for soldiers and other personnel in South Korea, joining a growing consensus that the high-tech face coverings may do more harm than good in preventing the coronavirus' spread. The decision followed new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which said last month that such masks "allow air to be exhaled through a hole in the material, which can result in expelled respiratory droplets that can reach others." South Korea's Ministry of Food and Drug Safety also recommended against wearing masks with valves.

U.S. Forces Korea made it mandatory for people to wear masks when in public off-base in accordance with rules set by local communities after another coronavirus outbreak began last month. On base, people must wear them inside stores and other crowded facilities, or anytime it's not possible to maintain a safe distance from other people, USFK said. However, the Eighth Army announced last 1 SEP that masks with valves were no longer authorized. "Neck gaiters and other cloth items, such as bandannas and scarves, are authorized as face masks along with masks without valves," it said in a post distributed on social media. "Face coverings or masks must cover both the mouth and nose and extend to the chin or below as well as to the sides of the face. Stop the spread!" it added.

Many commenters expressed frustration about the decision, noting that the high-tech masks had previously been recommended as most effective against pollution. Some also asked if refunds would be provided since the Vogmasks sold at the post exchanges cost about \$30. Victoria Stanton, an Army spouse based at Camp Humphreys, said her primary care manager recommended a valved mask as the best option to avoid exacerbating her eczema. "I have one that has a filter between my face and the valve, which essentially makes it the same as a non-valved mask because what I'm breathing out is filtered before going out from the valve," Stanton said. The adviser "said the a valved mask with a disposable filter would help out with pollution and if I was sick," she added. "It was also more cost effective and better for the environment."

The Eighth Army said the ban applies to all personnel including troops, civilians, contractors and their family members. "The U.S. CDC and Army Public Health Command state the exhalation valves allow unfiltered exhaled air and droplets to escape the mask that may contain viruses," the public affairs office said in response to questions from Stars and Stripes. Eighth Army said all unit and base facilities that require face coverings may restrict entry to those wearing masks with valves. The post exchange, which still had valve masks on display at Camp Humphreys this week, said its standard return policy applies. "Shoppers who have purchased a VOG mask with valves may return their unused

mask in its original packaging for a full refund,” said Army Staff Sgt. Mark Kauffman of the regional Army and Air Force Exchange’s public affairs office.

The Air Force has begun encouraging people not to wear them based on the CDC recommendations but hasn’t issued a ban, according to the 51st Fighter Wing. Face masks have long been a controversial topic for the U.S. military in South Korea, where people commonly wore them even before the pandemic as protection against high levels of pollution. USFK previously banned soldiers from wearing masks while in uniform but reversed that last year to allow face coverings under certain conditions following complaints that more protection was needed against poor air quality in South Korea. As the coronavirus took hold earlier this year, the policy evolved to encourage face masks as one of the simplest and most effective ways to save lives.

Masks with valves, a common site among construction workers, may be more comfortable and make it easier to breathe. However, recent studies have found that they are less effective at preventing the spread of the coronavirus because they put people near the wearer at risk. Research published last week in the scientific journal *Physics of Fluids* (<https://aip.scitation.org/doi/10.1063/5.0015044>) included dramatic visualizations showing that vented masks and face shields allow large plumes of particles to escape. “Masks with exhalation ports include a one-way valve, which restricts airflow when breathing in, but allows free outflow of air,” the article said. “The inhaled air gets filtered through the mask material; however, the exhaled breath passes through the valve unfiltered.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Kim Gamel | September 4, 2020 ++]

* Finances *



SSA Payroll Tax Break

How It Works

Payroll taxes might be the last thing you want to think about during the pandemic, but now is the time to understand how the new payroll tax break works. This payroll tax deferral opportunity, recently established by President Donald Trump, is available only from September through December. So, there is limited time for employers to take advantage of it — not that they necessarily should. For workers, the deferral is akin to postponing a debt. For retirees, the deferral will not reduce tax revenue for the already-worrisome level of Social Security reserves, but it could affect those reserves in another way. Confusion has surrounded Trump’s executive memorandum about the payroll tax deferral since he issued it on 8 Aug. But new guidance from the IRS and clarification from Republicans on the House Ways and Means Committee provide further details of how it works.

Basically, the executive memorandum allows — but does not require — employers to postpone the employee portion of the Social Security taxes that they normally must withhold from employees’ paychecks. These taxes are 6.2% of an employee’s pay. So, if an employer opts to defer them, eligible employees will have bigger paychecks from September through December because 6.2% of their pay would not be withheld from their checks during those months. The catch is that employers must withhold the deferred taxes from eligible employees’ checks within the first four months of 2021. This means that the employees who see bigger paychecks than usual from September through December will see

smaller paychecks than usual from January through April. In effect, employers who opt to participate in the deferral are merely postponing a governmental debt on behalf of their eligible employees. Defense and military officials confirmed over the weekend of 5 SEP that active-duty military personnel and federal civilian employees cannot opt out of the payroll tax deferral.

Employees who make less than \$4,000 biweekly — or less than \$104,000 annually — are eligible for the deferral. Being eligible does not guarantee you a deferral, however: It's up to your employer. As the House Ways and Means Committee writes in a blog post, the executive memorandum “does not provide a right for employees to demand that an employer participate in the deferral.” Self-employed people are not eligible for the deferral at this time. “Additional guidance would be required in order to apply the deferral to self-employment taxes,” the committee explains.

Technically, the payroll tax deferral will have no net effect on Social Security funding because it merely postpones Social Security payroll taxes. It does not eliminate any Social Security payroll taxes, so it will not shortchange the Social Security coffers of any such taxes. In fact, the IRS guidance states penalties and interest will apply to deferred Social Security payroll taxes that are not paid by May 1, 2021. There is one way in which Social Security trust funds might be negatively affected by the payroll tax deferral, however. Social Security reserves generate interest, which is its own source of revenue for the Social Security coffers. So, any Social Security payroll taxes that are not paid as usual in September through December will not have the opportunity to generate interest during that time. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Karla Bowsheer | September 7, 2020 ++]

Coronavirus Financial Planning

Update 21: CARES Act Stimulus Money Deadline 30 SEP

After the [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#) authorized economic stimulus payments for American families, the IRS sent out more than 160 million payments via direct deposit or check. Months after those payments were received, lawmakers have been struggling to come to a consensus on how to provide more COVID-19 money and have so far failed to do so. While the chances of every American getting more stimulus funds continue to decline as time passes with no compromise legislation, there are some people who should definitely receive more cash. That's because they're due part of their payment from the first check under the CARES Act. The IRS has now made it easier for those people to gain access to the money they're owed, but only if they act by 30 SEP.

Are you entitled to more COVID-19 money?

The [CARES Act payments](#) were worth up to \$1,200 per qualifying adult and \$500 per eligible dependent under the age of 17. But not everyone got the money they were entitled to for their dependents. That's because the IRS had to obtain information about who to send payments to from either 2018 or 2019 tax returns, or from various federal agencies, including those that send out Social Security checks or VA benefits. For those receiving federal benefits who don't file their taxes, the IRS was able to find out enough information to send checks even to people who didn't submit tax returns in either 2018 or 2019. However, the SSA and VA couldn't provide info to the IRS about which beneficiaries have qualifying dependents.

While the IRS urged those who receive benefits and don't file taxes to [use an online form to report their dependents](#), some people didn't — and thus missed out on the \$500 they should have received for each one. Now, the IRS is providing a second chance for people who didn't receive their dependent money to take action. It reopened its [online non-filers](#) tool and is requesting that people complete the form ASAP to get the extra funds. However, the IRS will keep the form open only until Sept. 30. For those who provide details about their dependents, the extra \$500 (for each eligible dependent) will be sent out by mid-October. If you have a dependent (or several) and didn't get your money for them, you'll want to act before this deadline to get your money ASAP.

What if you miss the Sept. 30 deadline?

If you miss the September deadline, take heart – you aren't out of luck. You'll be able to get your money for your dependents eventually. However, to do so, you'll have to file a [2020 tax return](#). Since the COVID-19 payment was an advance on a tax credit, filing your return for this tax year will make it possible to claim the money. Unfortunately, the IRS won't start accepting returns for 2020 until at least January 2021 so you'll have to wait a lot longer than October to get your money if you don't act by Sept. 30. And chances are good that if you didn't file a 2018 or 2019 return, you probably weren't planning to file one for 2020, either. Since you'll need to file a return to get your money, you'll have to do a lot more paperwork. Completing the IRS form for non-filers is easier and gets you the money sooner, so aim to do it if you can, as it will make your life a lot simpler.

[Source: The Motley Fool | Christy Bieber | August 29, 2020 ++]

Vet Predatory Loans

Update 03: Offenders | Service 1st Mortgage, Inc. & Hypotec Inc.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau issued a consent order against two companies on 1 SEP following recent investigations of mortgage companies that use deceptive mailers to advertise loans guaranteed by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. A consent order allows people to settle a case without having to wait for a court judgement. Investigations have resulted in actions against six companies this summer. The most recent cases were those against Service 1st Mortgage, Inc., and Hypotec Inc., which found the companies had sent consumers numerous mailers for VA-guaranteed mortgages that contained false, misleading, and inaccurate statements or that lacked required disclosures. In the case of Service 1st Mortgage, the misleading mailers were sent out for a period beginning in 2015, and for Hypotec, beginning in 2016.

According to the CFPB, Service 1st Mortgage and Hypotec advertised specific credit terms, such as interest rates, APRs, and hypothetical payment amounts that they were not prepared to offer, or that they could only offer for an introductory period but advertised as if they were permanent loan terms. “Service 1st also sent advertisements between December 2015 and April 2017 representing that a consumer could “skip two payments” or “miss” two payments by refinancing with the company, but it did not disclose the limitations on this option, or that the skipped or missed payments would be added to the principal balance of the consumer’s loan,” the release said.

On 26 AUG, the CFPB settled with PHLoans, Inc., for advertisements that stated credit terms that the company was not actually prepared to offer to the consumers, among other deceptive practices. On 24 JUL, the CFPB announced consent orders against Sovereign Lending Group, Inc., and Prime Choice Funding, Inc., and on 21 AUG against Go Direct Lenders, Inc., for similar violations. Each settlement included requirements for various civil money penalties and conditions imposed to prevent future violations and bolster compliance functions.

According to a 2019 report from the Federal Trade Commission, since 2015 the FTC has received 163,000 fraud reports from military retirees and veterans, as well as 13,000 from active duty servicemembers and 3 million from civilians. Retirees and veterans experienced the highest average loss due to fraud at \$950 – 23% higher than current servicemembers – and 44% higher than that for other civilians. VA loans may need protection now more than ever as a recent report on Department of Veterans Affairs data revealed VA loans rose 114% through the first three quarters of fiscal year 2020 compared to the same period last year. According to the report, a surge in VA refinance loans is driving the increase, with Q3 refinances spiking 296% year-over-year, compared to purchase loans gaining 7% from the previous year. Millennials led the pack for VA refinances with a 463% jump year over year. [Source: HouseingWire Newsletter | Alex Roh | September 1, 2020 ++]

Retiree Finances

Update 03: Average Annual Expenditures 2019

How much does it cost to get by in retirement? Pretty close to what it costs to live before retirement, according to federal data. U.S. households led by someone who is 65 or older spend a whopping \$50,220 a year, according to the latest federal data on consumer spending, which covers the 12 months from July 2018 through June 2019. By comparison, the average across all households is \$63,036. So, where is all that money going every golden year? The biggest expenses for older households are many of the same as those for younger Americans. They include:

1. Housing

A whopping one-third of older-household spending is related to housing. That translates to an average of \$17,472 per year, which compares with \$20,679 for the average U.S. household. That spending includes rent and mortgage costs as well as [hidden homeowner costs](#) such as property taxes, insurance, maintenance and repairs. It does not include utilities — which are detailed in section No. 5.

2. Transportation

Commuting expenses might vanish during retirement, but that doesn't mean all transportation costs will. Older households spend an average of \$7,492 on transportation costs such as vehicles, gas and insurance each year. That compares with an average of \$10,742 for all households.

3. Health care

Now, here's an example of an expense that increases in retirement. Older households spend an average of \$6,833 on health care annually — compared with \$5,193 for all households.

The bulk of consumers' health care spending — for both older households and the average household across all ages — is on insurance. The rest is on medical services, medical supplies and drugs.

4. Food

Members of older households spend an average of \$6,599 per year on food, including both the food they eat at home (\$4,063) and eating out (\$2,536). That's lower than the total of \$8,169 spent by the average household.

5. Utilities and public services

Older households spend an average of \$3,810 per year on utilities like natural gas and electricity, and services such as phone and water. By comparison, the average spent across all households is \$4,055.

[Source: MoneyTalksNes | Karla Bowsher | September 12, 2019 ++]

Google Password Scam

A Phishing Con

The Phishing Scam is After Your Google Password. Don't let your curiosity get the better of you. A new scam appears to be an email from Google, informing you that someone has shared a photo album. But it's really a phishing scheme that's after your password.

How the Scam Works

- You get an email or text message that appears to come from Google Photo. Someone is sharing an album of photos with you. To view the photos, you just need to click the link. The message looks so real! It may use a convincing URL, which has been created by Google's goo.gl URL shortener to appear to be an official Google domain name. The message also seems to come from the email noreply-photos@google.com.

- The catch? There is no photo album. It's a phishing con. When you click the "View Photo" link, it will open in your web browser and prompt you to log into your Google account. If you enter your information, you are giving scammers your username and password. Con artists can now access your email account as well as any other accounts that use the same login information.

How to avoid a phishing scam:

Follow these tips to protect yourself from this and other online phishing scams.

- Never click on links in unsolicited messages. Phishing scams direct you to websites that look official, but these sites may be infected with malware. If you don't know and trust the person who sent you the message, don't click on any links.
- Be careful with shortened links. Con artists often use link shorteners, such as Bit.ly or Goo.gl, to disguise scam links. Be extra cautious when following one of these links because you can't tell where it leads.
- If it seems strange, it may be a scam. Be wary of any message that comes from a friend but seems out of character. (For example, an old work acquaintance who contacts you out of the blue.) It may have originated from their account, but they could be victims, too.
- Don't fall for "urgent" scams. Scammers like to cause alarm to create urgency. You might get a message that indicates you're in a compromising video, your password is being reset, your account is in danger of deactivation, or some other dire situation that needs immediate attention. If it seems unlikely, watch out.

For More Information

Read more about common phishing scams and how to avoid them at BBB.org/PhishingScam. If you've been a victim of this or another phishing scam, be sure to report it at BBB.org/ScamTracker. Your report can help others to spot a scam before it's too late.

[Source: BBB Scam Alerts | September 4, 2020 ++]

Car Insurance

Update 25: Getting the Best Possible Deal

Here's an extreme way to cut your car insurance rates: Move. Auto insurance can cost you more than three times as much in one state compared with another. According to Insure.com, the top five most outrageous locations for car insurance premiums are: Michigan, Louisiana, Florida, Oklahoma, and Washington, D.C. You can slash your premium by more than half by relocating from Michigan to Maine, for example. Those states have the highest and lowest average premiums — \$2,611 and \$845 per year, respectively — according to Insure.com's latest analysis of car insurance rates, which looked at the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. By comparison, the average premium nationally is \$1,457 per year. These figures are based on data from six large insurers. They assume the insured is a 40-year-old single male who commutes 12 miles to work, has a clean driving record and has good credit. This hypothetical man's car insurance policy includes:

- Limits of \$100,000 for injury liability for one person, \$300,000 for all injuries and \$50,000 for property damage in an accident.
- A \$500 deductible on collision and comprehensive coverage.
- Uninsured motorist coverage.

Several aspects of your location can impact your car insurance rates. Insure.com reports that these factors include: State laws, Weather, Uninsured drivers, Crime, crash and claim rates In Michigan — which Insure.com has ranked as the most expensive state for car insurance for six consecutive years now — high rates are primarily due to state laws

governing personal injury protection (PIP). PIP covers medical expenses of the insured and the insured's passengers if they are injured in an auto accident. Michigan requires all drivers to carry PIP coverage. As Insure.com notes:

"Michigan has a very unique no-fault car insurance scheme, which requires all drivers to carry Personal Injury Protection (PIP) coverage.... The majority of other states that use a PIP system put a reasonable limit on PIP coverage amounts. However, Michigan guarantees unlimited, lifetime medical benefits to auto accident victims, which dramatically increases an insurer's risk, and your premium."

The high cost of insurance has made it unaffordable to many in Michigan, and is one reason so many drivers there — 20.3% — are uninsured, Insure.com explains. Having a high percentage of uninsured motorists pushes up car insurance rates because it means there are fewer insured drivers to offset the risk for insurers. Conversely, having a low percentage of uninsured motorists helps lower rates.

If moving to Maine sounds a bit too chilly for you, fear not: There are more practical ways to slash your car insurance rates. Chief among them is shopping around. You can do this yourself or sit back and let someone else do it for you. If you prefer shopping around the old-fashioned way, check out "[The Complete Guide to Getting the Best Possible Deal on Car Insurance](#)." It will help you determine what to look for in a policy so you can find the best one for you at the best price. It addresses the issues of Getting Organized, Liability, Comprehensive and Collision needs, Deductibles, Personal injury protection, Uninsured motorists, and Shopping for a policy. [Source: MoneyTalksNews & www.insure.com | Karla Bowsher | November 16, 2019 ++]

Gas Pump Scam

Skimming Victimized More Drivers



A surging number of American drivers believe they've been victimized by skimming when they swipe their credit card at the gas pump. A CompareCards survey found that 31% of drivers who recently bought gas believe they have been a victim of such skimming at some point during the past year. That marks a major jump from 23% in 2019 and 15% in 2018. Skimming takes place when a scammer attaches a tiny device to a payment terminal, such as those found at gas pumps. If you swipe your card in these terminals, the crook can steal your account information from the magnetic stripe on the back of the card.

Of course, chip cards were supposed to prevent this sort of fraud. But according to CompareCards, gas stations were exempted from a 2015 deadline to make the switch to chip terminals. The extra time was granted to gas stations because of the difficulty of making the changeover, which often involves replacement of the entire pump. According to CompareCards: "The original deadline for gas stations to make these improvements was October 2017, before getting pushed back to October 2020. However, in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, it was pushed back again earlier this year and is now April 2021. It's possible that the deadline could move again depending on the state of the pandemic next spring."

CompareCards reports that fears of card skimming are forcing drivers to modify their behavior when paying for gas, with 44% of survey respondents saying they have made such changes. For example, 23% of respondents now use their

credit card more often at the pump because credit cards offer stronger fraud liability protections than debit cards. Three groups — members of Generation X, men and wealthier Americans — most often report making such changes. If you are worried about falling victim to a skimming scam, CompareCards offers the following tips for staying safe:

- Use credit cards instead of debit cards, since credit cards offer superior financial protection. For more on this, check out “9 Things You Should Never Pay For With a Debit Card.”
- Fill up at well-lit pumps close to the store, as these are less likely to be targets of fraudsters.
- Keep an eye on your online card statements and look for any potentially fraudulent charges.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | September 8, 2020 ++]

Tax Burden for Iowa Retired Vets

As of Sep 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 Iowa:

Sales Taxes

The Iowa state sales tax rate is 6%, and the average IA sales tax after local surtaxes is 6.78%. Counties and cities can charge an additional local sales tax of up to 1.0%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 7%. Iowa has a higher state sales tax than 51.9% of states.

- Groceries and prescription drugs are exempt from the Iowa sales tax.
- Iowa does not treat candy or soda as groceries, which means they are not subject to reduced grocery sales tax rates. Other items including gasoline, alcohol, and cigarettes are subject to various Iowa excise taxes in addition to the sales tax.
- Iowa has 893 special sales tax jurisdictions with local sales taxes in addition to the state sales tax
- 1% of the Iowa sales tax is allocated directly for local school districts, and most counties add a local surtax of 1%. Some services are also subject to the Iowa sales tax.
- Iowa has one sales tax holidays, during which certain items can be purchased sales-tax free. For more details, see the Iowa sales tax holiday [calendar](#).
- The IA sales tax applicable to the sale of cars, boats, and real estate sales may also vary by jurisdiction.
- If you buy goods and are not charged the Iowa Sales Tax by the retailer, such as with online and out-of-state purchases, you are supposed to pay the 6% sales tax (less any foreign sales tax paid) for these items yourself as the Iowa Use Tax. You are expected to voluntarily list your liable purchases on a Iowa Use Tax Return, which should be attached with payment to your Iowa Income Tax Return. Historically, compliance rates with the Iowa Use Tax have been low.

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 Iowa state government are the fuel tax on gasoline and the so-called "sin tax" collected on cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. An excise tax is not the same thing as the Iowa Sales Tax which is collected as a percentage of the final purchase price of all qualifying sales, and is collected directly from the end consumer of the product.

Iowa's excise taxes, on the other hand, are flat per-unit taxes that must be paid directly to the Iowa government by the merchant before the goods can be sold. Merchants may be required to attach tax stamps to taxable merchandise to show that the excise tax was paid. Even though excise taxes are collected from businesses, virtually all Iowa merchants pass on the excise tax to the customer through higher prices for the taxed goods. Iowa collects an average of \$416 in yearly excise taxes per capita, lower than 60% of the other 50 states.

Alcohol: Liquor \$12.49 per gal | Wine: \$1.75 per gal | Beer: \$0.19 per gal. All are already added to their purchase prices. The liquor tax is one of the highest in the country. Iowa's excise tax on Spirits is ranked #6 out of the 50 states. The Iowa state government owns all distilled liquor and spirits distributors in the state. Because all liquor stores are state-owned, the excise tax is determined by the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS). The wine tax is also one of the highest in the country. Iowa's excise tax on wine is ranked #4 out of the 50 states. The beer tax is lower than 62% of the other 50 states. Iowa's beer excise tax is ranked #31 out of the 50 states.

Cannabis Tax: N/A

Cellphone: The average tax collected on cell phone plans in Iowa is \$7.91 per phone service plan, lower than 70% of the other 50 states. The average cellphone tax is ranked #35 out of the 50 states. It 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: \$1.36 per pack of cigarettes, higher than 50% of the other 50 states. It is ranked #25 out of the 50 states. The tax is applied to every 20 cigarettes sold (the size of an average pack of cigarettes). If a pack contains more than 20 cigarettes, a higher excise tax will be collected.

Fuel: 21¢ per gallon for gasoline, lower than 70% of the other 50 states. Iowa's excise tax on gasoline is ranked #35 out of the 50 states. The tax is included in the pump price at all gas stations in Iowa. This is in addition to the federal excise tax of 18.4¢ per gallon on gasoline and 24.4¢ per gallon, on diesel.

Vehicle: Hawaii 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 Iowa Department of Transportation and receive documentation (registration and title papers) proving the fees were paid. Other general taxes, similar to excise taxes, may be collected on other items including vehicle sales, transportation tickets, firearms, tanning salons, gas guzzlers, and more.

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 0.33%; High – 8.53%

Tax Bracket (Single)	Tax Bracket (Couple)	Marginal Tax Rate
\$0+	\$0+	0.33%
\$1,638+	\$1,638+	0.67%
\$3,276+	\$3,276+	2.25%
\$6,552+	\$6,552+	4.14%
\$14,742+	\$14,742+	5.63%
\$24,570+	\$24,570+	5.96%
\$32,760+	\$32,760+	6.25%
\$49,140+	\$49,140+	7.44%
\$73,710+	\$73,710+	8.53%

Income Brackets: Above Nine. Note: Taxpayers 65 years of age or older are exempt if: (1) You are single and your income is \$24,000 or less, or (2) Your filing status is other than single and your combined income is \$32,000 or less.

Personal Tax Credits: Personal exemption structured as a tax credit. Single - \$40; Married filing joint return - \$80; Each Dependent times \$40; Each person over 65 times \$20; Each blind person times \$20

Standard Deduction: Filing Status – (1, 3, or 4) \$2,080; (2, 5, or 6) – \$5,120

Certain itemized deductions (including property tax, qualified charitable contributions, etc.) may be allowed depending on the income level and filing type of the taxpayer. Keep in mind that not all deductions allowed on your federal income tax return are necessarily going to be allowed on your Iowa income tax return. Iowa allows itemized deductions, and you can claim the same itemized deductions on your Iowa tax return as you do on your Federal tax return. You must choose between itemizing your deductions and choosing the Iowa standard deduction, so it's generally only worth itemizing your deductions if your itemized total is more than the Iowa and Federal standard deductions.

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: Full

Retired Military Pay: Not taxed

Social Security: Not taxed

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.

Tax Forms: <https://tax.iowa.gov/forms>

Property Taxes

Iowa has more than 2,000 taxing authorities. All property is assessed at 100% of market value. Most property is taxed by more than one taxing authority. The tax rate differs in each locality and is a composite of county, city, school district and special levies. A property tax credit is available to residents whose total household income is less than \$19,503 and are age 65 or older, totally disabled or are a surviving spouse (not remarried) and born before 1934. A homestead tax credit is given to residents who live in the state for at least six months of each year and actually live on the property on July 1. Military veterans who (1) served on active duty and were honorably discharged or (2) members of reserve forces or Iowa National Guard who served at least 20 years qualify for this exemption. Once a person qualifies, the credit continues. The current credit is the first \$4,850 of the actual value. Property taxes may be suspended or reduced if the property owner receives Supplemental Security Income or lives in a nursing home and the Department of Human Services is paying part or all of the costs. The suspended taxes will have to be paid when a property is sold or transferred. Refer to <http://www.iowa.gov/tax/educate/78573.html> for more details. You can also refer to the Iowa Appraisal Manual at <https://tax.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-01/Introduction.pdf> for clarification on how the value of your property was determined.

- The median property tax in Iowa is \$1,569.00 per year for a home worth the median value of \$122,000.00. Counties in Iowa collect an average of 1.29% of a property's assessed fair market value as property tax per year.
- Iowa is ranked number twenty eight out of the fifty states, in order of the average amount of property taxes collected.
- Iowa's median income is \$58,613 per year, so the median yearly property tax paid by Iowa residents amounts to approximately 2.67% of their yearly income. Iowa is ranked 26th of the 50 states for property taxes as a percentage of median income.
- The exact property tax levied depends on the county in Iowa the property is located in. Johnson County collects the highest property tax in Iowa, levying an average of \$2,526.00 (1.43% of median home value) yearly in property taxes, while Pocahontas County has the lowest property tax in the state, collecting an average tax of \$561.00 (1% of median home value) per year.

- The exact property tax levied depends on the county in Iowa the property is located in. Refer to <http://www.tax-rates.org/iowa/property-tax#Counties> for median property taxes by County. Your county's property tax assessor will send you a bill detailing the exact amount of property tax you owe every year.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

The Iowa inheritance tax ranges from 1% to 15% depending on the amount of the inheritance and the relationship of the recipient to the decedent. If all the property of the estate has a value of less than \$25,000, no tax is due. The surviving spouse's share, regardless of the amount, is not subject to tax. Currently annual gifts in the amount of \$13,000 or less are not taxable.

The gross estate includes real estate and tangible personal property located in Iowa, in which the decedent had an interest at the time of death. It also includes all intangible personal property if the decedent was domiciled in Iowa. Examples of intangible property are real estate contracts, cash, bank accounts, promissory notes, accounts receivable, mortgages, crop rent, cash rent, stock, bonds. Generally, the property law of the state where the property is located determines whether the property is classified as real, personal, tangible, or intangible, and also whether the decedent had an interest in the property.

There are certain types of property which due to the nature of the ownership agreement may be only partially included in the decedent's estate or not included at all. This includes insurance payable to a person other than the decedent or the estate of the decedent, property owned in joint tenancy, certain gifts, life estates, powers of appointment, qualified terminable interest property, and annuities. Employee pensions, profit sharing plans and IRAs may also be included in the gross estate.

Some property may not be included in the estate for probate administration purposes. However, the value of the property is included in the estate for tax purposes. For example, joint tenancy property, gifts made within three years of death, annuities and certain retirement plans, retained life interest, and trusts are not subject to probate administration but are subject to inheritance tax. Go to www.iowa.gov/tax/educate/78517.html & <https://tax.iowa.gov/inheritance> for details or call 515-281-3114 or 800-367-3388. Iowa estate tax is not applicable for deaths on or after 1/1/05 due to changes in the IRS Code which replaced the state death tax credit with a state death tax deduction.

Other State Tax Rates

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

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

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For further information visit the Iowa Department of Revenue website <http://www.iowa.gov/tax/index.html> or call 515-281-3114 or 800-367-3388. [Source: <http://www.tax-rates.org> | September 2020 ++]

*** General Interest ***



Notes of Interest

August 16 thru 31, 2020

- **WWII Tanker Interviews.** At <https://www.wearethemighty.com/military-culture/wargaming-stone-cold-tanker-interviews-walter?rebelltitem=2#rebelltitem2> listen to tankers talk about their combat experiences and survival in the Normandy campaign.
- **National Guard.** Soldiers from the Indiana Army National Guard began working at the northern Indiana Miami Correctional Facility that's faced with staffing shortages after several prison workers were stricken with COVID-19 during the second week of August. The unique duties performed by correctional staff must continue with proper staffing levels.
- **WWII.** Japan restored ties with South Korea in 1965, and with China in 1972, though disputes over wartime history continue to affect Japan's ties with its neighbors. Japan has yet to sign a peace treaty with Russia because of territorial disputes and has not established diplomatic ties with North Korea.
- **Military Pay Charts.** Go to <https://themilitarywallet.com/2021-military-pay-charts> to see the projected 2021 pay by paygrade and service time with the anticipated 3% pay increase.
- **Nursing Homes.** The U.S. nursing homes (~400) with a history of providing subpar care are listed at <https://www.aging.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Casey%20Toomey%20SFF%20Report%20June%202019.pdf>
- **Flu.** Last flu season, more than 27,000 Veterans came to VA hospitals with the flu. In addition, over 4,600 Veterans were hospitalized and 600 were in intensive care due to the flu.
- **Covid-19 Vaccine.** The Surgeon General says HHS will be issuing guidance letting pharmacists administer COVID-19 vaccines to individuals 3 years and older.
- **Palau Bases.** The Republic of Palau has asked the Pentagon to build ports, bases and airfields on the island nation, officials said, offering a boost to U.S. military expansion plans in Asia, as Washington aims to counter China.
- **Earplug Lawsuit.** A class-action lawsuit Tinnitus & Hearing Loss was filed against the company that manufactured the Combat Arms Earplugs™ (CAEv2) for the military. Military members who used these earplugs between 2003 and 2015 can find more information at [Lawsuit-winning.com](https://lawsuit-winning.com).
- **Covid-19.** As of 9 SEP more than 900,000 people have died from COVID-19 worldwide with the U.S. accounting for about 21 percent of recorded deaths. In the U.S. the stats are Cases: 6,363,729, Deaths 190,887, Recovered: 2,387,479.
- **Israel.** Bahrain on 11 SEP agreed to normalize relations with Israel, becoming the latest Arab nation to do so as part of a broader diplomatic push by President Donald Trump and his administration to further ease the Jewish state's relative isolation in the Middle East and find common ground with nations that share U.S. wariness of Iran.
- **Afghanistan.** Afghanistan's warring sides started negotiations 12 SEP for the first time, bringing together the Taliban and delegates appointed by the Afghan government for historic meetings aimed at ending decades of war.

[Source: Various | September 15, 2020 ++]

Eisenhower Memorial

Update 06: Will be Dedicated and Unveiled in Washington, D.C. on 17 SEP

The long-awaited presidential memorial honoring Dwight D. Eisenhower will be dedicated and unveiled in Washington, D.C., on 17 SEP – more than 20 years after Congress commissioned it. The memorial – dedicated to the life, military service and presidency of Eisenhower – sits on four acres along Independence Avenue, just off the National Mall. It was designed by architect Frank Gehry, now 91, and went through various stages of redesign because of criticism from Eisenhower's family. On 8 SEP, the site was blocked from view by green privacy fence. Inside were three statues of America's 34th president: one as a young boy in his home state of Kansas, one as a general addressing troops on D-Day, and one of Eisenhower as president, surrounded by advisers.



Carl Reddel, the executive director of the Eisenhower Memorial Commission and a retired brigadier general, sat on one of the memorial's many stone benches, wearing an "I like Ike" face mask. Reddel joined the commission in 2001. He led a study of Eisenhower's legacy and saw the memorial through its lengthy site-selection, design and construction processes. "Eisenhower is one of the best pieces of evidence that this American experiment can work," Reddel said. "He's the real thing."

Reddel pointed at the statue of Eisenhower as a boy. The statue, in the northwest corner of the memorial, faces the statues of Eisenhower as a general and president. "The Eisenhower story starts over there with a young man," Reddel said. "He has no idea that what he's looking at from over there, at the general and the president down here, were part of his future. Can you imagine? No famous family name, no advantages of money and no particular assets in that regard." Eisenhower was born in Denison, Texas, but grew up with six brothers in Abilene, Kansas, as part of a poor family. The longest quotation at the memorial is from Eisenhower's speech on June 22, 1945, at a homecoming celebration in Kansas following World War II. In part, it reads, "...I come here, first, to thank you, to say the proudest thing I can claim is that I am from Abilene."

Eisenhower won an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Later in his military career, he served as a military aide to Gen. John J. Pershing, commander of the U.S. forces during World War I, and to Gen. Douglas MacArthur, U.S. Army chief of staff. During World War II, Eisenhower led an Allied invasion of North Africa. He was appointed supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force in 1943 and tasked with leading the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe. At the memorial, a quotation from Eisenhower's address to troops on D-Day is inscribed on stone. It reads, "The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to victory!"

Along one side of the memorial is a towering, 60-foot tall, 450-foot wide metal tapestry. During the day, the tapestry is nearly transparent. At night, however, it lights up to reveal a sketch of Pointe du Hoc, a D-Day landing site in Normandy, at peacetime. The D-Day invasion led to the liberation of Paris and turned the tide of the war in Europe. Following the war, Eisenhower became the Army chief of staff and later took command of the NATO forces in Europe. He ran for president and won in 1952. The final quotation inscribed at the Eisenhower Memorial is from his second inaugural address in 1957: "We look upon this shaken earth, and we declare our firm and fixed purpose – the building of a peace with justice in a world where moral law prevails." The quotations at the memorial, along with its location and other details, were chosen carefully.

The memorial is located south of the National Air and Space Museum and surrounded on other sides by the Federal Aviation Administration and the Department of Education. The location is symbolic, Reddel said. Eisenhower called for the creation of NASA in 1958, signed the legislation that formed the FAA and created the Department of Health, Education and Welfare as a Cabinet-level agency in 1953. Eisenhower is also celebrated for strengthening Social Security, forming the massive Interstate Highway System and working behind-the-scenes to discredit Sen. Joseph McCarthy. Reddel, who has spent 19 years working to establish the memorial, said the former president 'was worth all the time and effort.' "In his own way, he transformed the country during his presidency and his time alive," Reddel said.

A dedication ceremony will be held at the memorial on the evening of 17 SEP. Fox News host Bret Baier will emcee the event, and Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., will deliver an address. There will also be recorded remarks by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and performances by the 101st Airborne Honor Guard, the U.S. Marine Band and Voices of Service, a quartet of veterans and service members. President Donald Trump and the Eisenhower family, as well as former and current members of Congress, Cabinet members and military leaders, were invited to the ceremony.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the event will be a scaled-down unveiling compared to original plans to dedicate the site on 8 MAY, the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day. The Eisenhower commission created an online memorial that includes an audio tour, an interactive timeline of Eisenhower's life and 18 lesson plans for educators.

Over the past 19 years, Reddel learned a lot about Eisenhower, whom he described as complex, intelligent, fascinating and one of the most accessible and popular U.S. presidents. "I think Eisenhower is a great lesson in life itself and dealing with challenges and change in a manner that doesn't hurt people and gives them hope for themselves and their future," Reddel said. "He was a lesson in being personally committed to that positive story about himself and his fellow Americans." The memorial will open to the public 18 SEP. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | September 10, 2020 ++]

POW/MIA Flag

Update 01: Removal from White House Roof to South Lawn Sparks Anger



A decision by the Trump administration earlier this year to move the flag honoring missing war veterans from a prominent position atop the White House to a less visible spot on the South Lawn has angered some veterans and lawmakers, who see it as disrespectful and potentially illegal. The flag is dedicated to prisoners of war and service members who are missing in action. According to a White House video posted in June, it was relocated in a private ceremony with full military honors, months after President Donald Trump signed into law a bill requiring the flag to be flown at certain federal properties including the White House every day.

The revelations come amid growing questions over Trump's respect for the military, after a report last week by the Atlantic magazine alleging that Trump had called fallen American soldiers "losers" and "suckers" sparked outrage and controversy. Trump denied the assertions, but has publicly disparaged the service of the late Senator John McCain, a war veteran, and was accused of criticizing his own generals in excerpts of a forthcoming book titled "Rage," by Bob Woodward. "It's bad enough that President Trump publicly ridicules American heroes like Senator McCain and others who were captured on the battlefield. He inexplicably promotes the Confederate flag but fails to fly the POW/MIA flag," said Democratic Senator Jack Reed, a co-sponsor of the bill. "It's part of a pattern of disrespect by President Trump toward those who honorably served our nation."

Reed, and fellow Democratic Senators Elizabeth Warren and Margaret Hassan, who also co-sponsored the bill, sent a letter to the White House on 10 SEP requesting that it reconsider the flag's relocation. "This decision to abruptly move the POW/MIA Flag from atop the White House to an area that is apparently not visible to the public may violate federal law and does not appropriately honor the service and sacrifices of American prisoners of war, missing servicemembers, and their families," the letter reads. Hassan said that law was intended to pay tribute to the prisoners of war and those missing in action and called on the White House to reverse its decision.

The White House defended the change of venue but did not offer a reason for it. "President Trump dedicated a POW/MIA memorial site earlier this year on the White House grounds to forever remember our heroic service members who were prisoners of war or missing in action," White House spokesman Judd Deere said. "The President selected a site on the Southwest corner of the South Lawn for this prominent and sacred memorial, which is visible to all those who visit the White House, that features the POW/MIA flag," he added. The black and white flag, which reads "you

are not forgotten,” depicts a man beneath a guard tower gazing down at a barbed wire fence. Roughly 82,000 American servicemembers are still missing since World War Two.

U.S. law requires the flag to be displayed in a “manner designed to ensure visibility to the public.” In its current position, it can be viewed from limited vantage points outside the White House complex. The American Ex-Prisoners of War group, which represents 10,000 former POWs and their families, said it was outraged last month when it learned of the move, calling it a “slap in the face.” “While he touts his support for the U.S. Armed Forces and their families, actions speak louder than words. And this action speaks of disdain for Prisoners of War and the Missing in Action,” the group said. The bill, co-sponsored by Republicans including Senators Marco Rubio, Tom Cotton and John Thune, was signed by Trump in November and sought to give the flag a lasting place of prominence.

Over Memorial Day weekend this May, Trump touted his signing of the law to representatives of Rolling Thunder, a veterans advocacy group. “In the months since, that righteous flag has proudly flown over the White House; you probably noticed it today,” Trump told them. But its relocation prompted inquiries from veterans advocates, including Artie Muller, founder and executive director of Rolling Thunder, who said he “wasn’t too happy” when he learned of the change. “It was supposed to be over the White House,” he said, adding that he did not see it as illegal or disrespectful, but hoped it would be restored to its prior location to increase visibility.

Ann Mills-Griffiths, chairman and chief executive officer of the National League of POW/MIA Families, said that “working-level White House staff members” had been made aware of the concern over the flag not being flown over the White House. For its part, the American legion said it was pleased that the flag “flies 24/7 at its own POW/MIA Memorial on White House grounds.” On March 9, 1989, a league flag that had flown over the White House on the 1988 National POW/MIA Recognition Day was installed in the U.S. Capitol rotunda as a result of legislation passed by the 100th Congress. The leadership of both houses of Congress hosted the installation ceremony in a demonstration of bipartisan congressional support. [Source: Reuters | Alexandra Alper & Idrees Ali | September 11, 2020 ++

China’s Nuclear Arsenal

Projected to Double in Ten Years



Chinese sailors stand in formation at the People's Liberation Army headquarters in Beijing

Over the next 10 years, it's expected China will double the number of nuclear warheads it possesses, while embarking on an effort to expand the ways it can deploy its nuclear capability, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for China Chad L. Sbragia said at the American Enterprise Institute. He discussed findings of a just-released Defense Department report, "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China — 2020." "The report does contend that there are currently an estimated low-200s in terms of warhead stockpiles, and it's projected to at least double in size over the next decade as China expands and modernizes its nuclear forces," Sbragia said. Even with such increases, China’s nuclear force would be far smaller than that of the United States, which has an estimated 3,800 warheads in active status and others in reserve.

But equally as important is how China would be able to deliver those warheads. It intends to develop a "nuclear triad" similar to the one the U.S. has and is currently working to modernize. "The report [also] notes that China is expanding, modernizing and diversifying its nuclear forces across the board," Sbragia said. "Just looking at the number of warheads by itself is not the entire picture, or doesn't paint a holistic understanding of where the Chinese are or where they want to go. A nuclear triad, as it exists in the U.S., allows for land-based missile delivery, sea-based delivery from submarines and air-based delivery with bombers.

Within the next decade, Sbragia said, China plans to expand its ballistic submarine fleet and field more capable, longer-range, sea-launched ballistic missiles. It also plans to complete the development of its nuclear-capable, air-launched ballistic missiles along with bombers to deliver them. On the ground, he said, China plans to field additional mobile ICBMs and also possibly expand its silo-based ICBM capability. "As has been noted by others, and then as the report contends ... they're obviously in pursuit of the full suite of capacities ... to include the building out of infrastructure for a more modernized, capable and larger capacity in this area," Sbragia said.

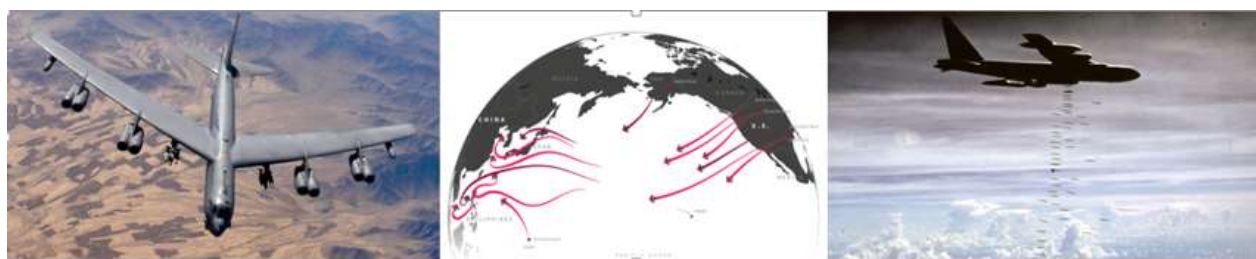
Sbragia said that the report also concludes that, besides its investments in nuclear capability, China aims to transform the People's Liberation Army into a "world-class military" by around 2050. "While China has not defined exactly what 'world-class military' means, it is likely that China will seek to build a military that is equal to or in some cases superior to the U.S. military or the military of any other great power that China perceives as a potential threat," Sbragia said. One aspect of that advancement towards a world-class military, he said, is power projection. The Chinese want their military to be able to operate anywhere on the globe. One step towards that is the establishment of a more robust overseas logistics network. According to the report, China is "very likely already considering and planning for" the establishment of military logistics facilities outside China that can support naval, air and ground forces.

Some locations that they may now be considering include Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates, Kenya, the Seychelles, Tanzania, Angola and Tajikistan. China already has a military installation in Djibouti. "The Chinese do have ... an aspiration for great power status by virtually every measure of comprehensive or composite national power that you can measure," Sbragia said. "To achieve that, it means that they have to have ... global convergence at the broadest scale possible. For the PLA, that means that they do have the intent to go out. I think that's certainly one of the aspects of what 'world-class military' means ... the capacity to have influence at distance, at a time and place of their choosing. They certainly aspire to do that."

China's foreign ministry on 2 SEP rejected the U.S. report that Beijing was expected to double the number of its nuclear warheads. Hua Chunying, spokeswoman of the Chinese foreign ministry, told a news briefing that the report is filled with bias. [Source: DOD News | C. Todd Lopez | September 1, 2020 ++]

U.S. China Military Tensions

Update 02: Pentagon's Cold War Bomber Threat



On 21 JUL, two U.S Air Force B-1B bombers took off from Guam and headed west over the Pacific Ocean to the hotly contested South China Sea. The sleek jets made a low-level pass over the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and its

escorting fleet, which was exercising nearby in the Philippines Sea, according to images released by the U.S. military. The operation was part of the Trump administration's intensifying challenge to China's ruling Communist Party and its sweeping territorial claims over one of the world's most important strategic waterways. While senior Trump officials launch diplomatic and rhetorical broadsides at Beijing, the U.S. Defense Department is turning to the firepower of its heavily armed, long-range bombers as it seeks to counter Beijing's bid to control the seas off the Chinese coast.

Since late January, American B-1B and B-52 bombers, usually operating in pairs, have flown about 20 missions over key waterways, including the South China Sea, the East China Sea and the Sea of Japan, according to accounts of these flights from U.S. Air Force statements and official social media posts. These missions, military analysts say, are designed to send a crystal-clear signal: The United States can threaten China's fleet and Chinese land targets at any time, from distant bases, without having to move America's aircraft carriers and other expensive surface warships within range of Beijing's massive arsenal of missiles.

In this response to the growing power of China's military, the Pentagon has combined some of its oldest weapons with some of its newest: Cold War-era bombers and cutting-edge, stealthy missiles. The supersonic B1-B first entered service in 1986; the newest plane in the B-52 fleet was built during the Kennedy administration. But these workhorses can carry a huge payload of precision weapons. A B-1B can carry 24 of the U.S. military's stealthy new Long Range Anti-Ship Missiles, which entered service in 2018 and can strike targets at ranges of up to 600 kilometers, according to U.S. and other Western officials.

- "A single B-1 can deliver the same ordnance payload as an entire carrier battle group in a day," said David Deptula, dean of the Washington-based Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies and a retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General. And, in a crisis, he added, bombers can be rapidly deployed.
- "Depending on where they are, ships can take weeks to get in place," said Deptula. "But by using bombers, they can respond in a matter of hours," he adds, noting that the U.S. object is to deter war. "Nobody wants to engage in conflict with China."

Chinese and western military strategists warn that a conflict between the two nuclear-armed powers could be difficult to contain. In a clash with China, this fast response from the bomber force could be vital while the U.S. and its allies rush naval reinforcements to the Pacific to bolster the vastly outnumbered U.S. naval fleet stationed in the region, according to current and former U.S. and other Western military officers. A spokeswoman for Pacific Air Forces, Captain Veronica Perez, said the U.S. Air Force had increased its publicity about its bomber missions to assure allies and partners of Washington's commitment to global security, regional stability and a free and open Indo-Pacific. "Though the frequency and scope of our operations vary based on the current operating environment, the U.S. has a persistent military presence and routinely operates throughout the Indo-Pacific," she said. China's defense ministry did not respond to questions from Reuters.

While the bomber missions continue, relations between Washington and Beijing have reached their lowest point since the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. In a show of force, Chinese fighter jets crossed the mid-line of the Taiwan Strait while U.S. Secretary for Health, Alex Azar, was visiting Taipei on 10 AUG to congratulate the government of President Tsai Ing-wen on its successful containment of the COVID-19 virus. Azar was the most senior American official to visit Taiwan in four decades. Taiwan's missile radars tracked the Chinese fighters in only the third such incursion across the median line since 2016, the Taiwanese government said. Beijing condemned the visit. It regards the island as a province of China and hasn't ruled out the use of force to bring it under Communist Party control.

In a series of speeches ahead of Azar's visit, top Trump officials had hammered China on multiple fronts, including its military build-up, territorial ambitions, domestic political repression, intellectual property theft, espionage, trade practices and its failure to alert the world to the danger of COVID-19. In one of the most harshly worded attacks on China from an American official in decades, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on 23 JUL that China's military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), was not a normal fighting force. "Its purpose is to uphold the absolute rule of the Chinese Communist Party elites and expand a Chinese empire, not protect the Chinese people," he said. "And so our Department of Defense has ramped up its efforts, freedom of navigation operations out and throughout the East and

South China Seas and in the Taiwan Strait as well.” In July, Pompeo declared most of Beijing’s claims of sovereignty over the South China Sea illegal.

With the combination of bombers and long-range missiles, the United States is trying to turn the tables on the PLA. Over more than two decades, China has assembled a force of ground, sea and air-launched missiles that would make it deadly for warships of the U.S. Navy and its allies to approach the Chinese coast in a conflict. This Chinese strategy is specifically tailored to threaten U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups and the network of bases that form the backbone of American power in Asia. In a demonstration of this capability, the PLA launched one of its so-called carrier-killer missiles, the DF-26, in an exercise in the South China Sea following the deployment in July of two U.S. aircraft carriers to the area, China’s official military media reported in early August. And a U.S. defense official told Reuters that on 26 AUG, China launched four medium-range ballistic missiles that hit the South China Sea between Hainan Island and the Paracel Islands.

But the PLA Navy’s huge and rapidly expanding fleet is also vulnerable to long-range missiles. China has built the world’s biggest navy, including new aircraft carriers, amphibious assault ships and powerful cruisers and destroyers. And the PLA’s extensive network of bases and ports would also be targets for missiles. In a conflict, U.S. bombers over the Western Pacific could target PLA Navy warships at their bases on the Chinese coast or underway inside the so-called first island chain, the string of islands that run from the Japanese archipelago through Taiwan, the Philippines and on to Borneo, enclosing China’s coastal seas. Chinese warships would be even more vulnerable if they broke out through the island chain into the Western Pacific, outside the coverage of the PLA’s land-based air defenses and strike aircraft.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, Washington assumed it had uncontested control of the oceans and neglected to arm its surface fleet with modern, long-range anti-ship missiles. To be sure, the U.S. and its allies, particularly Japan, still have a powerful fleet of attack submarines that would pose a deadly menace to PLA warships. But the bombers help fill the firepower gap in the U.S. surface fleet while the Pentagon is re-purposing existing missiles and introducing new versions to its destroyers and cruisers, according to maritime strategists. The bomber deployments are one element of a much wider reshaping of forces and tactics that the U.S. and its allies in East Asia have launched to deter China from attacking Taiwan, expanding its hold over the South China Sea or seizing other disputed territories. These include the uninhabited group of isles in the East China Sea known as the Senkaku Islands in Japan and the Diaoyu Islands in China, which are claimed by both Tokyo and Beijing.

Tensions are on the rise around these islands, now under Japanese control. The commander of U.S. forces in Japan, Lieutenant General Kevin Schneider, pledged in July that America would help Japan monitor “unprecedented” Chinese incursions into waters around the Senkakus that were challenging Tokyo’s administration. Within an hour of Schneider’s comments, China’s foreign ministry fired back that the islands were “Chinese territory.” Long-range U.S. bombers operating from distant airfields would remain a threat if Chinese missile attacks disabled key U.S. bases in Japan, South Korea and Guam. These bases, mostly a carry-over from World War Two and the Korean War, were built at a time when China had very limited means to attack them. Now it does. In a clear acknowledgement that Guam is now at risk, the U.S. Air Force announced on 17 APR it would end its continuous rotation of bombers to the island base and withdraw them to the U.S. mainland. [Source: Reuters | David Lague in Hong Kong | September 1, 2020 ++]

War With China

What It Could Look Like

Pentagon war planners can envision a conflict with China starting in any number of ways. For example, they fear a scenario that might involve a mass of Chinese military forces posturing along China’s coast near Taiwan and the aggressive reorientation of Chinese missile systems that would start setting off alarms in Washington, D.C. Top

military leaders in Indo-Pacific Command would brace for reports of cyber-attacks, satellites shutting down, vessels crowding and swarming various ships and ports across the South China Sea. More than a dozen experts contacted by Military Times described how this hypothetical nightmare could erupt fully, perhaps as Chinese missiles start hitting targets in Taiwan. A conflict could spin out of control quickly as sensors across the region light up with simultaneous events, stretching the United States and its allies in every imaginable domain all at once.

It's a global contingency that Pentagon planners are now studying more than ever before, as both the U.S. and Chinese military are setting up more tripwires across the Pacific Rim that could draw the world's two largest powers into open conflict. To learn more on projections of what such a conflict could be like refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**What War With China Could Look Like.**" [Source: Military Times | Todd South | September 2, 2020++]

Navajo Code Talkers

Update 01: Commemorative Ale Gets Rave Reviews But also Backlash



In honor of National Navajo Code Talkers Day celebrated annually on the date of the Japanese surrender marking the end of the war, the Associated Press Washington, D.C., craft brewery recently rereleased its Code Talker American Pale Ale — this time in a can — drawing some rave reviews but also backlash. The beer was formulated and brewed by LT Goodluck in honor of his late grandfather and Navajo Code Talker John V. Goodluck. The Hellbender Brewing Company announced the ale's third annual release in August, debuting a bright red can featuring John V. Goodluck's image.

Some social media commenters commended the company for bringing awareness to the Navajo Code Talkers, saying Goodluck has the right to honor his grandfather any way he sees fit. "This can release and design was done out of a good place in my heart, without any malice," LT Goodluck said. "I just wanted to make sure that people who may have never heard of the code talkers or my grandfather know about the importance of Navajo Code Talkers Day through this brew and a tasteful label." John V. Goodluck was from the town of Lukachukai, Arizona, on the Navajo Nation, and reached the rank of private first class. He served in the third division of the Marine Corps as a Navajo Code Talker. Code talkers were military men from various Native nations who used their languages to secretly communicate information during World War II.

Some have commented that the product's name makes it representative of all code talkers, not just the Navajo, and is tone-deaf because it creates another Native mascot. "Living in Washington, D.C., my wife and I are obviously cognizant of Native mascots. It was not my intention to prompt Navajo Code Talkers awareness with that negativity," Goodluck said. Others took issue with the use of a code talker to promote an alcoholic beverage. For instance, one Facebook commenter who said his grandfather was a code talker noted alcohol has destroyed many Native veterans' lives, and called the use of a Code Talker's image "completely sickening." Goodluck said he disagrees with those who say the product is tacky because alcohol has ravaged Native communities. "It's unfortunately a stereotype created by

settlers and colonial ideas; however, I don't feel our people should be defined by the stereotype. It was not my intent to hurt anyone, and I apologize to any ancestors of Navajo Code Talkers that felt that way," he said.

Maryanne and Joanne Goodluck, daughters of John V. Goodluck, and his granddaughter Lynette said the controversy has reached their family, with distant relatives upset about the beer. "Our family is going to purchase one can and not open it, to keep it and honor my dad," Maryanne Goodluck said. "(Navajo Code Talkers Day) is a holy day for us descendants." Observed on Aug. 14, National Navajo Code Talkers Day recognizes Navajos and other Native Americans who served as code talkers. It's also a Navajo Nation holiday. Despite harassment on social media, the Goodlucks said they support the brew and are very proud in the way it honors their family. "People are bashing us and saying we're teaching our family and my grandkids to drink alcohol. I'm teaching my grandkids the Navajo language, culture and prayers. Not to drink," Joanne Goodluck said.

Though this is the third iteration of the Code Talker American Pale Ale, it is the first time the brewery has sold it in a can. In previous years, it was sold at the brewery and distributed to Washington, D.C., restaurants. The brew was praised in national websites and magazines and was always met with positive feedback from the Native American community, LT Goodluck said. He believes this year's negative comments are directly related to the release of a can. "It was brought into a negative light by other Native Americans," Goodluck said. "I wanted to have a conversation about Natives in this industry and bring to light there's not a lot of people of color. I'm not a rug weaver or do other traditional Navajo crafts. I make recipes, brew beer, and hopefully people who try my craft believe I do it well."

The can's label features an illustration of John V. Goodluck in his uniform, wearing a traditional Navajo turquoise necklace, leather pouch and a bow guard. On the back is a summary about the Code Talkers and a dedication to John V. Goodluck. Neither the Navajo Code Talkers Association nor a descendants Facebook group immediately responded to requests for comment. Some on social media commented that the product was ironic considering alcohol is not allowed in the Navajo Nation. Others called for the beer to be banned. It would not be the first time an alcoholic beverage was barred due to complaints about the label's sensitivity to Native Americans.

In 1992, the Hornell Brewing Co. was ordered by the Senate to negotiate with the Oglala Sioux over its Crazy Horse malt liquor. The surgeon general and activist groups argued the label promoted negative habits and affected the physical and mental health of Native Americans. The Senate later revoked the company's license to sell Crazy Horse beer, which caused hype around the product. According to The Associated Press, the beer was selling for five times the price on the black market. The company argued the beer was not sold in states with large Native American populations. The ban was overturned, citing First Amendment rights, but the state of Washington continued to prohibit sales.

In response to the criticism, Hellbender released a statement on social media reiterating that the beer was created by a Navajo brewer with the intention of honoring his grandfather. The brewery shared a link to a story by DC Beer, which goes into detail about the Goodluck family, John V. Goodluck's military service, the creation of the label and LT Goodluck's vision in brewing the beer. The brewery has received comments suggesting a portion of the proceeds go to the Navajo Code Talkers Association or Navajo COVID relief. Goodluck said he and the company have been working on identifying an organization that supports the Native American community where the donation can make the most impact. According to Goodluck, they expect to announce the organization chosen within the next few days.

Hellbender has not yet commented on social media requests to donate part of the earnings, but the company has a history of philanthropy. Last week it announced profits from selling its canned Amplify Black Voices brew would be donated to Capital Partners for Education, a mentoring and college success program for low-income students in the Washington, D.C., metro area. The ale is LT Goodluck's first solo recipe, according to Hellbender's post. Goodluck traveled to the hops harvest in Oregon last year to pick the two hops to showcase in the brew. "My grandfather used to enjoy Coors," Goodluck said. "This is a departure in flavor from Coors. My whole vision for this beer was to use old school hops with modern brewing techniques."

Code Talker Pale Ale will be sold for only a limited time at the Hellbender Brewery taproom in Washington, D.C. The beer is on tap for \$7 a pint or sold in six-packs for \$12. Hellbender says the brew is popular, especially with locals

who know LT Goodluck, and they expected it to sell out quickly. [Source: Reuters | Parisa Hafezi | August 20, 2020
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Afghan Withdrawal

Update 02: Some Vets Who Fought there Torn Over U.S. Pullout

Nineteen years after the attacks of 9/11, some American veterans of the war in Afghanistan wrestle with the idea that the pull-out of U.S. troops from the country was born out of a deal struck with the very enemy more than 2,400 of their brothers and sisters died fighting. The troop withdrawal, which is supposed to be completed by next summer, will not be the result of military victory but of a deal struck with the Taliban in February, and that sticks like a bone in the throats of some of the veterans. But others say the time is long past for the U.S. to be out of its longest war. “We need to finally get the hell out of that country and send everybody home,” said Tim Patterson, a former Navy officer who mentored Afghan police. “Our ongoing presence in Afghanistan, with no clear purpose, is a waste of lives and money.”

Just over 2,440 American service members have been killed in action in Afghanistan in nearly two decades of war, which started when the U.S. invaded the country in October 2001, to destroy al-Qaida after the 9/11 attacks and oust the Taliban, who had harbored the terrorist group. Army Staff Sgt. Séamus Fennessy, who fought in Ghazni province in 2010, said he feels a range of emotions — none of them positive — about the peace deal with the Taliban. While he is proud of what he and his fellow soldiers did in the country, those feelings are blurred by his anger toward leaders who have allowed the sacrifices of thousands of U.S. soldiers to go to waste, and by mistrust, worry and rage over the peace deal. “That the soldier in question, alive or dead, did their job — they won the battle on the ground, as they were trained to do — there is comfort in that,” Fennessy said. “But simultaneously, there is a sense of bitterness against the politicians and bureaucrats for big-picture incompetence.”

For Kristen Rouse, a logistics officer who deployed to Afghanistan in 2006, 2010 and 2012, it’s difficult to square the images of Taliban leaders posing for photos at a luxurious Doha hotel as they hammered out the peace deal with the Americans with “the evil they committed against innocent civilians.” And after almost two decades of war, it was hard to figure out what had been accomplished, Rouse said. “I honestly can’t speak to the overall tactical wins or losses, or whether that is what this conflict has even been about in the end,” she said. “I think for many of us, we have stories of scenes and incidents that happened — a lot of tragedy and what can feel like wasted efforts.”

U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan have dropped from around 13,000 to below 9,000 service members since the February deal with the Taliban. President Donald Trump wants that number to be below 5,000 by Election Day. If the Taliban hold up their end of the peace deal and prevent al-Qaida and other terrorist groups from using Afghan soil to train or recruit fighters to launch attacks on the U.S. or its allies, the February deal would be worth some of the American sacrifices made, said Army 1st Lt. Eric Jungels, who deployed to Kunar and Nuristan provinces in 2006. “After nearly two decades of war, perhaps we’ve finally achieved what we had set out to achieve, which was to decimate a breeding ground for terrorism,” said Jungels, now with the Minnesota National Guard. “For all those who lost their lives and suffered as a result of this conflict, I hope that is the case.”

But the deal has so far not produced many of the results it was supposed to, at least on the Afghan side. While the U.S. is ahead of schedule on the troop drawdown, talks between the Taliban and Afghan government, which were supposed to begin within days of the deal’s signing, have still not gotten off the ground, and the Defense Department has said the Taliban still has close ties to al-Qaida, despite assuring the U.S. they would disavow the terrorist group in exchange for the troop withdrawal. Add to that the fact that the Taliban has stepped up attacks on Afghan troops since the deal was signed, and it’s little surprise that lawmakers in Washington have questioned how the U.S. plans to ensure the group will comply with the peace terms after U.S. and other foreign troops leave.

Many veterans share that skepticism, saying the Taliban can't be trusted to fulfill the promises they made to the U.S. Fennessy said he thinks the militants signed the Doha deal primarily to get U.S. forces out of the country before they stage an armed takeover. If that is the case, and if Afghanistan is allowed to fall apart after the U.S. leaves, the deaths on 9/11 and during America's longest war will have been in vain, he said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | J.P. Lawrence | September 9, 2020 ++]



U.S. Embassy Manila

Overseas Voting Guidelines

Overseas absentee voting is fast, easy, and available anywhere in the world. Overseas voters who are eligible to vote can participate in all general, primary, and special elections for federal offices. Some states allow overseas voters to vote in state and local elections.

- **Fast:** Most U.S. citizens can complete the voter registration and ballot request application online in a matter of minutes. Register to vote in just a few quick clicks or taps, wherever you are in the world.
- **Easy:** It has never been easier to obtain information on the voting process for each state. U.S. citizens can go to <https://www.fvap.gov/citizen-voter> to select their state from a U.S. map. Most states have options for voters to register and request ballots online. Some states also have options for eligible voters to submit registration forms and return voted ballots by email or fax.
- **Anywhere:** U.S. citizens can vote from anywhere they roam, whether it's the European countryside or a Pacific island. Voters can mail their completed and signed ballots using the local country's international postal service or drop off the completed ballot package at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, and we'll get it to the U.S. Postal Service for delivery to your election office. Be sure to sign your absentee ballot before sealing it in the mailing envelope. Local election officials will reject unsigned ballots.

In the Philippines you may drop off your completed voting forms and ballots, addressed to your local election officials, at:

- U.S. Embassy Manila's public entrance from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except for U.S. and local holidays.
- Veterans Affairs Manila Regional Office from 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Monday - Friday, except for U.S. and local holidays.
- Voters may also mail in completed forms and ballots to the address below, and the embassy will forward the items to the United States. Please make sure that your voter document is in a pre-paid envelope or that it has sufficient postage. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, please expect delays with domestic and international mail. Send your completed forms and ballots to: American Citizen Services Unit (Consular), ATTN: Voter Information, U.S. Embassy Manila, 1201 Roxas Boulevard, Ermita, Manila, Philippines 1000

Remember, in some states, voter registration and ballot request deadlines are as early as October 5, 2020, for the November 2020 presidential election. If you have never voted while overseas before, it is not too late. The process is easy -- just follow these steps:

1. Complete a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA)

Whether you are a first-time voter or have voted absentee in past elections, we recommend that you complete an [FPCA](#) to receive your ballot this fall. It allows you to register to vote and request absentee ballots for all elections for federal offices (presidential and state primaries, run-off, special, and the November general elections) during the course of the year in which you submit the FPCA. Local election officials in all U.S. states and territories accept the [FPCA](#).

The online voting assistant (<https://www.fvap.gov/guide>) available at [FVAP.gov](https://www.fvap.gov) is an easy way to complete the **FPCA**. It will ask you questions specific to your state and tell you if electronic ballot delivery is possible. No matter which state you vote in, **we encourage you to ask your local election officials to deliver your blank ballots to you electronically** (by email, internet download, or fax, depending on your state). Be sure to include your email address to take advantage of electronic delivery. The [online voting assistant](#) will generate a printable **FPCA**, which you can then print and sign.

2. Submit the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA)

The FVAP online tool will walk you through the form and provide you with a PDF packet to print, sign, and send directly to your local election official (LEO). Some states offer online voter registration. If your state requires you to return paper voting forms to local election officials by mail, you can do so through international mail, or courier service. Place your voting forms in postage paid return envelopes or in envelopes bearing sufficient domestic U.S. postage, and address them to the relevant local election officials. Another option is to drop off election materials at the Embassy's public entrance from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except for U.S. and local holidays or the Veterans Affairs Regional Manila Office from 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except for U.S. and local holidays.

3. Receive Your Ballot

After submitting your FPCA, most states allow you to confirm online your registration and ballot delivery selection. States are now required to send out ballots 45 days before an election (September 19) for federal office (President, U.S. Senate, or U.S. House of Representatives) to any overseas U.S. citizen who has completed an FPCA.

4. Return Your Ballot

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We recommend that if you plan to return your paper ballot to your election officials via the U.S. embassy, please drop your ballot off with us by October 2 to account for transit times. If you wish to drop off your ballot, or have a friend or colleague drop it off for you, place it in either a postage-paid envelope or envelope bearing domestic U.S. postage addressed to your local election officials. You can download the postage paid envelope (https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Forms/fpca_envelope.pdf) from the [FVAP.gov](https://www.fvap.gov) website

If there isn't enough time to receive and send back your ballot before the election, use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (<https://www.fvap.gov/fwab-privacy-notice>). It is a backup ballot you can use if you don't receive your ballot in a timely manner. If your official absentee ballot arrives after sending in the FWAB, fill it out and send in the official ballot too. Only one will be counted. After you send in your ballot, you can check at <https://www.fvap.gov/citizen-voter/registration-ballots> if it was received by your election office.

Your vote counts! Many U.S. elections within the past ten years have been decided by a margin of victory of less than 0.1%. All states are required to count every absentee ballot as long as it is valid and reaches local election officials by the absentee ballot receipt deadline (differs by state). Be an educated voter. Check out the FVAP links page (<https://www.fvap.gov/links>) for helpful resources that will aid your research of candidates and issues. You can also read national and hometown newspapers online and search the Internet to locate articles and information. To receive information by email about election dates and deadlines, subscribe to FVAP's Voting Alerts (vote@fvap.gov). FVAP also shares Voting Alerts via [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). If you have any questions about registering to vote overseas, please contact U.S. Embassy Manila's Voting Assistance Officer at VoteMANILA@state.gov

[Source: Message for U.S. Citizens | U.S. Embassy Manila | September 9, 2020 ++]

Cars That Never Made It

Buick LeSabre, GM Firebird III, and Lincoln Futura

They were pure fantasy on wheels, machines designed to make the heart race and the mind ask, "What if?" These 1950s concept cars were automotive art built to attract public attention, test wild engineering ideas and give motorists a fleeting glimpse down the highway of tomorrow.



1951 BUICK LeSABRE



1955 LINCOLN FUTURA



1959 GM FIREBIRD III

Have You Heard?

Military Q&As | Military Jokes/Jabs

Military Q&As

- How Do You Play Air Force Bingo? *B-52...F-16...A-10.*
- What Do You Call a Soldier Who Survived Mustard Gas & Pepper Spray? *A seasoned veteran.*
- What Do You Call a Marine with an IQ of 160? *A platoon!*
- What's the Difference Between the Army and the Boy Scouts? *The Boy Scouts have adult supervision.*
- Which Month Do Soldiers Hate? *March!*
- What's the Main Mission of the Marines? *To make sure the Army never get their feet wet.*
- What's the Difference Between a Fighter Pilot and a Fighter Jet? *The jet stops whining when the engines are shut off.*
- What's Long, Hard, and Full of Seamen? *A submarine!*
- Did You Hear about the Accident at the Army Base? *A tank ran over a box of popcorn and killed two kernals!*
- How Do They Separate the Men From the Boys in the Navy? *With a crowbar!*
- How Do You Knock Out a Marine Drinking Water? *Slam the toilet lid on his head.*
- How Many American Officers Does It Take to Screw in a Light Bulb? *Only one, but they do it from 30 miles away using laser targeting at a cost of \$8.3 million.*
- What Do You Call a Marine with an Open Head Wound? *Ajar head.*
- What Branch of the Military Do Babies Join? *The infantry!*
- What Did One Sailor Say to the Other When They Had the Same Problem? *"We're in the same boat."*
- Have You Heard about the Karate Champion Who Joined the Military? *He nearly killed himself the first time he saluted!*
- Why Was the Sergeant Upset That His Son Got an A in Math? *Because he spent more time dividing than conquering!*
- What Don't You Say to a Marine? *I thought you had to be in relatively good physical condition to join the Marine Corps.*
- What's the Difference Between Aeroflot & The Scud Missile? *Aeroflot has killed more people.*

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Military Jokes/Jabs

Joke #1

- Ask the Army to secure a building and they will set up a perimeter around it and make sure nobody gets out.
- Ask the Marines to secure a building and they will charge in, kill everybody inside, and then set up defenses to make sure nobody gets in.
- Ask the Navy to secure a building and they will turn off all the lights and lock all the doors at 1700.
- Ask the Air Force to secure a building and they will sign a 10 year lease with an option to buy.

Joke #2

- Officer: "Soldier, do you have change for a dollar?"
- Soldier: "Sure, buddy."
- Officer: "That's no way to address an officer! Now, let's try it again!"
- Officer: "Soldier. Do you have change for a dollar?"
- Soldier: "No, SIR!"

Joke #3

A visitor, returning to Kuwait for the first time since the Gulf War, was impressed by a sociological change. On previous visits, she noted that women customarily walked about 5 paces behind their husbands. She observed that the men now walked over 20 paces BEHIND their wives! She approached one of the women for an explanation: "What enabled women here to achieve this marvelous reversal of roles?" "Land mines," replied the Kuwaiti woman.

Joke #4

An Airman, Soldier, and Marine are sitting around talking about hardships they faced on their last deployment.

Airman: "The worst was when the air conditioner in our tent broke and it was 110 outside!"

Soldier: "WTF, you had air conditioners?"

Marine: "Wait, stop. You had tents?"

Joke #5

- USAF: Birds
- USA: Choppers
- USN: Helos
- USMC: OHH! OHH OHOH! (pointing at the sky)

Joke #6

An Army Drill Sergeant took some recruits to the mess hall. After everyone had made it through the chow line, he sat them down and told them "There are three rules in this mess hall - Shut up! Eat up! Get up!" Checking to see that he had everyone's attention, he asked, "What is the first rule?" Much to the amusement of the other instructors, 60 privates yelled in unison, "Shut up, Drill Sergeant!"

Joke #7

- Army Says: "HOOOOOAH!"
- Marines Say "OOOOORAH!"
- Navy and CG Say "HOOOOOYAH!"

- Air Force Says “OKEY DOKEY?”

Joke #8

As we stood in formation at the Pensacola Naval Air Station, our Flight Instructor said, “All right! All you dummies fall out.” As the rest of the squad wandered away, I remained at attention. The instructor walked over until he was eye-to-eye with me, and then just raised a single eyebrow. I smiled and said, “Sure was a lot of ‘em, huh sir?”

Joke #9

A Soldier and a Marine were sitting next to each other on a plane. The Marine took off his boots and began to stretch out. The soldier swore under his breath at the Marine and told him he wanted to get up and get a drink.

The Marine insisted that since he was in the aisle seat he would get it for him. The Soldier agreed, and when the Marine went to get his drink he started spitting in the Marine’s boots.

When the Marine came back the Soldier nodded and thanked him for the drink, very pleased he pulled one over on the Marine. This happened several times throughout the flight.

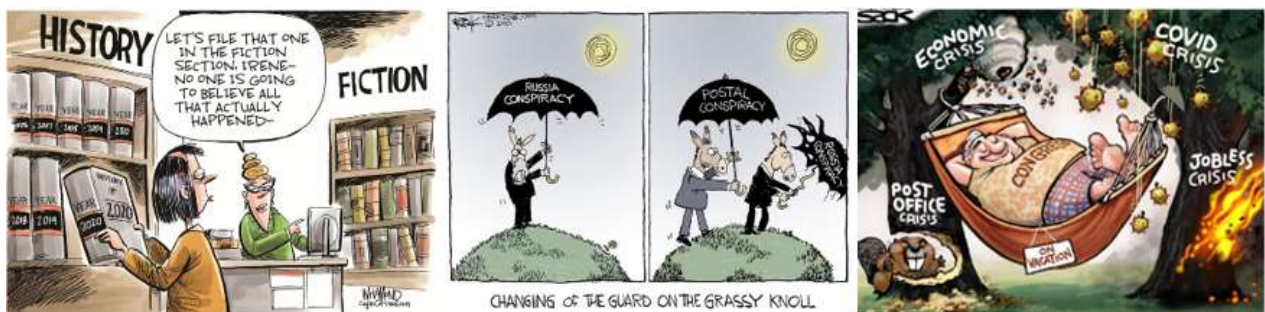
When the plane was descending for the landing, the Marine put his boots back on and quickly realized the Soldier had been spitting in his boots.

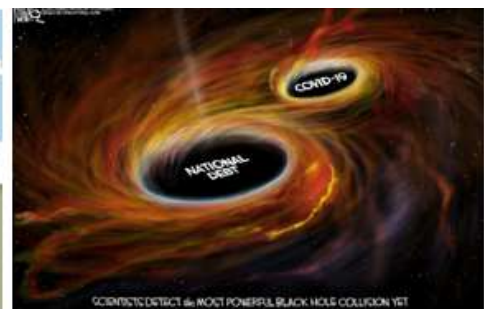
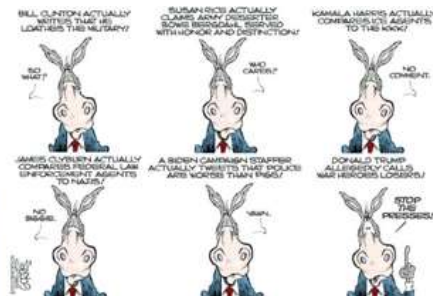
To the Soldiers surprise, the Marine was laughing about it. He looked over at the Soldier and said “when are we going to stop playing these games, spitting in each other’s boots and pissing in each other’s drinks, it’s so juvenile!”

Joke #10

A soldier and a marine were walking through the woods one day when they came upon a bear. The soldier immediately sat down and began digging through his rucksack. He pulled out a pair of running shoes and started putting them on. The Marine said “Are you crazy? You know you can’t outrun a bear, right?”

The soldier said, “The way I see it, I just have to outrun you.”





Thought of the Week

“We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

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

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