

RAO BULLETIN

1 December 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 'or' raoemo77@gmail.com
3. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin to other vets or veteran organizations.

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DOD Lawsuit

Navy Unlawful Disability Retirement Benefits Denials

On 10 NOV, [Dechert LLP](#), in coordination with the [National Veterans Legal Services Program](#) (NVLSP), filed a class action complaint in the United States Court for the District of the District of Columbia, on behalf of former members of the Navy and Marine Corps who were subject to an unlawful Navy practice that resulted in the denial of military disability retirement benefits to more than 16,000 Navy and Marine Corps veterans for more than 15 years.

Military disability retirement benefits are critical to veterans who are injured during their military service, and who depend on them for access to healthcare and other benefits for the service member and his or her family. The complaint, brought under the Administrative Procedure Act, seeks declaratory and injunctive relief to correct these veterans' military records to accurately reflect their full disability rating as required by law.

“In this filing we seek to address the Navy’s failure to fully recognize and afford benefits to Navy and Marine Corps veterans for service-connected disabilities that contributed to their medical discharge,” said Phillip Garber, Dechert associate and former hospital corpsman second class in the U.S. Navy. “This filing reflects the continued commitment of NVLSP and Dechert, through the activities of its veteran affinity group, Dechert Heroes, to assisting the veteran community by making sure that veterans receive the benefits they have earned through military service and are entitled to under the law.”

“When they enter the military, every service member takes a solemn oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. The government also pledges to provide them with certain rights and benefits if they are injured or become sick due to their military service. Unfortunately, the Navy has disregarded the men and women in the military by systematically and illegally denying the benefits to which thousands of servicemembers and their families are rightfully entitled,” said National Veterans Legal Services Program Executive Director Bart Stichman. “The Navy’s denial of benefits is not simply a bureaucratic matter. A denial can have negative repercussions in the lives of servicemembers and their families for many years.” [Source: NVLSP News Release | Ashley Baldev | November 10, 2020 ++

DoD Lawsuit | Bad Paper Discharges

Update 04: Army to Reconsider Rulings on Vets with PTSD

As part of a lawsuit settlement reached 17 NOV, the U.S. Army would be required to review and potentially upgrade thousands of other-than-honorable discharges dating back to April 2011. The agreement is pending approval by the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut. It orders the Army Discharge Review Board to reconsider thousands of cases in which the board denied upgrades, despite evidence that veterans were struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury or military sexual trauma when they separated from the military.

Andrew DeGuglielmo, an attorney in the case, said the agreement would provide “durable, long-standing relief” to veterans who were denied upgrades and those who will apply for upgrades in the future. “This lawsuit has challenged decades-long, systemic deficiencies in the Army Discharge Review Board,” DeGuglielmo said 18 NOV. “I’m confident this settlement will make the discharge upgrade process more accessible, just and fair for Army veterans who endure the invisible wounds of service.”

The Defense Department instituted a policy in 2017 to give “liberal consideration” to veterans looking to upgrade their other-than-honorable discharges, or “bad paper,” in situations where a service-related medical disorder could have led to their misconduct. Plaintiffs in the lawsuit argued that the Army Discharge Review Board ignored the policy and denied upgrades when they were warranted. The wrongful discharges go back even further, according to the Government Accountability Office. The GAO has reported that the Pentagon didn’t consistently apply previous policies going back to 2011 that required discharge review boards to take mental health issues into consideration. “Bad paper” discharges disqualify veterans from receiving certain health and education benefits, as well as preferential hiring and tax breaks.

The lawsuit was filed in 2017 by Steve Kennedy and Alicia Carson, Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who were denied discharge upgrades despite diagnoses of mental health conditions. They were represented by the Yale Law School Veterans Legal Services Clinic. The court granted class-action status to the case in 2018 and denied a motion from Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy to dismiss it. The parties reached an agreement 17 NOV and will next go

before the court for its approval. The Veterans Legal Services Clinic is arguing a similar class-action case against the Navy for decisions made by the Navy Discharge Review Board. DeGuglielmo said he hoped the settlement with the Army would “provide some momentum” for the Navy lawsuit.

In addition to reviewing cases going back to 2011, the settlement requires the Army to send individual notices to veterans who were denied discharge upgrades from Oct. 7, 2001, to April 16, 2011. These veterans will be given information about what to include in their applications for upgrades and how the process works. Garry Monk, executive director of the National Veterans Council for Legal Redress, said veterans are often unsure about how to apply for upgrades. The notices will help fill what Monk described as a “gap in information.” As part of the agreement, veterans will also be allowed to participate in their review board hearings over the phone. Currently, veterans are required to appear in person in Washington if they want to argue their case. Kennedy had his discharge upgraded to honorable in 2018 and traveled to Washington to appear before the review board. Appearing in person helped his case, but it’s not something everyone can do, he said. “It’s an equity issue,” Kennedy said. “You are much more likely to be successful if you appear. A lot of people don’t have the money, job flexibility and child care, and they’re put at an extreme disadvantage because of it. So, this is a key part of the settlement.”

The Army also agreed to institute more training for members and staff of the Army Discharge Review Board. The parties also agreed that, moving forward, veterans should be given more detailed information about how to apply for upgrades. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) plans to introduce legislation in the next congressional session that would codify the changes into law, he said. “I think there really is a need after this settlement to put into statute the kinds of reforms that are achieved here,” Blumenthal said. “It’s been a step-by-step litigation process, and there should be no need for veterans to go to court. I am planning to suggest to the new Congress a measure that will codify these reforms.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | November 18, 2020 ++]

SECDEF

Update 21: All Wars Must End

President Donald Trump's new defense secretary signaled to the military in a 10 NOV message that he may be there to carry out one of the president's early campaign promises, an overseas drawdown of forces in Iraq and Afghanistan "This is the critical phase in which we transition our efforts from a leadership to supporting role," acting Defense Secretary Chris Miller said in a memo obtained by McClatchy. "We are not a people of perpetual war — it is the antithesis of everything for which we stand and for which our ancestors fought. All wars must end."

In the memo to the Defense Department workforce, Miller described at length the respect he has for the institution and the sacrifices made by thousands of men and women who have deployed to the Middle East since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. He said, "ending wars requires compromise and partnership. We met the challenge; we gave it our all. Now, it's time to come home."

It was the first indication of what direction the Pentagon may take in Trump's final weeks in office, the uncertainty of which has raised concerns among career defense officials and the incoming Biden administration about what the changes mean — whether he is rewarding loyalists or trying to force through policies the department has resisted over the last four years. Top Biden transition officials said that postelection upheaval at the Defense Department, Trump's firing of Esper and the resignations of top defense policy and intelligence chiefs that followed, amount to a final push to politicize the military. The firings and resignations come amid Trump's to then refusal to acknowledge his electoral defeat and authorize the federal government to begin preparing for a transition of power to President-elect Joe Biden. The defense officials and Biden's team said that gap could increase security risks for the country.

"In the 9-11 Commission report, one of the things they talked about was the impact of the delay of the transition period on our national security," Jen Psaki, a spokeswoman for the Biden transition team, told reporters on a call 10

NOV.” “Of course it’s of concern to see the upheaval. It should be of concern to anybody because there shouldn’t be a politicization of the military,” said Psaki, who previously served in the Obama administration. The firing and quick replacement of Esper had worried longtime defense civilian staffers, who wondered if there are major policy changes — such as a rapid withdrawal from Afghanistan or new counterterrorism action in the Middle East or the Sahel, or even a potential use of military forces on U.S. soil to contest the election results — on the horizon before the president departs.

“I don’t know what the end game is,” said one current defense official who worked with policy staff members at the Office of the Secretary of Defense during Trump’s time in office. “For me that’s probably the most difficult thing to try and figure out. The instability and uncertainty complicates things.” Another current defense official said, “They aren’t letting us talk about transition.” One former defense official who has stayed close to the Pentagon’s current uniformed senior leadership said, “It’s helpful to decapitate the senior civilian leadership at the Pentagon in preparation of some aggressive use of the military to bolster the president’s claims that he has won this election. That is probably the most worrisome, most extreme reason they could be making these decisions. Then the other extreme — which is also possible, in fact some people think it’s the most likely, which is that this is just about score settling. Once you got rid of Esper the decks were cleared to get rid of these other people that didn’t pass the loyalty test, and replace them with people that could use the experience over the next 70 days to pad their resume.”

In the last four years, the Pentagon has pushed back on decisions that senior military leaders hoped they could counsel the president to amend, such as the creation of the Space Force, withdrawal from Afghanistan and Syria and the use of military force to quell protests. Each pushback has come at a cost.

- Now-retired Air Force Gen. David Goldfein’s public resistance to creating a Space Force, over cost and bureaucracy concerns, is widely believed to be one of the reasons Trump did not select him to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.
- Former Defense Secretary James Mattis irked Trump by convincing him not to withdraw troops from Afghanistan in 2017, and ultimately resigned over Trump’s announcement that U.S. forces in Syria would depart in late 2018.
- Esper fell out of favor with Trump when he pushed back on the use of active duty forces to counter nationwide protests following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis police custody.

“I don’t see what the legal order would be for the military to get involved in something that had to do with the elections,” said retired Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Arnold Punaro, who has assisted new administrations with Senate confirmations since the late 1990s. Withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Afghanistan or Germany, where the U.S. military has thousands of troops based, is much more likely to be the reason for the recent changes, Punaro said. “There are certain things the president can do without the Congress. One is to deploy troops, two he can bring troops home,” Punaro said. “Troop levels in various locations is the most logical thing he could change with most recent changes in personnel.”

Punaro, like the former defense official, also said it was more likely some of these last-minute replacements were about rewarding staff that have remained in Trump’s favor. “It really depends on the billet or the person,” Punaro said. “Allowing people a chance to have a significant position, for example they are bringing in some people in the chief management officer’s office, a new deputy chief management officer. There’s some other people coming in. These aren’t related to bring(ing) the troops home from Afghanistan or (to) settle scores. These are really positions that have been vacant where they are giving people opportunities to serve perhaps only 70 days.” After Esper was replaced by Miller, the following changes were also made at the Defense Department:

- James Anderson, acting under secretary of defense for policy, was replaced by Anthony Tata, who Trump previously sought for the position. Tata, at that time, was unable to get Senate confirmation due to inflammatory remarks he has made about Muslims and former President Barack Obama. Tata will serve as “performing the duties of” the under secretary role, which will result in some limits to his authorities.

- Retired Navy Vice Adm. Joseph Kernan, under secretary of defense for intelligence and security, was replaced by Ezra Cohen-Watnick, an early administration hire by former national security adviser retired Air Force Gen. Michael Flynn, before Flynn was replaced by retired Army Gen. H.R. McMaster.
- Esper's chief of staff, Jen Stewart, was replaced with Kash Patel, who previously worked for Rep. Devin Nunes, R- Calif., on the Senate Intelligence Committee and assisted the Republican efforts on the committee to question the credibility of FBI agents investigating Russian election interference.

[Source: McClatchy Washington Bureau | Tara Copp & Michael Wilner | November 13, 2020 ++]

SECDEF

Update 22: New Senior Advisor Formerly Proposed USMC Elimination



Retired Army Col. Douglas Macgregor (left) appointed senior advisor to New SECDEF Miller (Right)

Retired Army Col. Douglas Macgregor, newly-appointed as a senior adviser at the Pentagon, has a track record of making controversial statements. But his most provocative of all might be a proposal to do away with the U.S. Marine Corps. In a 2012 opinion piece for Time Magazine, Macgregor, a decorated veteran of the Gulf War, argued that the Corps was living on its past glories and was unsuited for combat on today's battlefield, with the possible exception for pushover enemies. He went further, too, suggesting the acronym "USMC" should really stand for "Under-utilized Superfluous Military Capability."

"Most of today's Marine force consists of airmobile light infantry," Macgregor wrote. "This Marine force is designed for use in the developing world against incapable opponents from Haiti to Fiji, but not much else." He took exception to previous remarks from then-Marine Corps Commandant Gen. James Amos on the future of the Corps as "America's shock force" of agile and adaptable units vital to the nation's defense against evolving threats. Macgregor summed up Amos' assessment this way: "Rah, rah, the Marine Corps is awesome, and all we have to do is make sure they have the equipment & training & facilities they need so they can always be awesome Marines, rah, rah!" "Wrong," said Macgregor. "The Marines as currently organized and equipped are about as relevant as the Army's horse cavalry in the 1930s."

Macgregor, who has a reputation as an iconoclastic thinker on military strategy and tactics, was brought on as a senior adviser at the Pentagon by new Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller, who was named to the post by President Donald Trump after he fired Defense Secretary Mark Esper via a Twitter post. The Pentagon announced Wednesday that Macgregor "will be serving as a Senior Advisor to the Acting Secretary of Defense. Mr. MacGregor's decades of military experience will be used to assist in the continued implementation of the president's national security priorities." Macgregor, a frequent guest on Fox News, has argued for the imposition of martial law at the

U.S.-Mexico border with orders for troops to "shoot people" if necessary to stop illegal immigration. He has also criticized European countries for being too welcoming to "Muslim invaders."

There is a historical precedent for arguing to disband the Marine Corps. Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower both attempted to do away with the amphibious service. But these arguments have always been brushed aside by furious pushback from the Marines and their allies in Congress. The enduring future of the Marine Corps was seen from a Navy ship offshore of Iwo Jima by then-Navy Secretary James Forrestal in February 1945. When he saw the flag go up atop Mount Suribachi, Forrestal said that "means a Marine Corps for the next 500 years."

Retired Marine Lt. Col. Dakota Wood, senior fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation think tank, said Macgregor's new Pentagon assignment is likely a non-issue for the Marine Corps. "I do not think it will cause any notable problems," Wood said. In the short time before the inauguration of the next president, "there isn't any opportunity to make significant changes to the [National Defense Authorization Act] or any key documents that would materially affect the Corps," Wood said. "Plus," he said, "the Corps is well-supported in Congress and any big changes in role, funding or programs would be driven from there." [Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk & Gina Harkins | November 12, 2020 ++]

National Security

Update 03: Climate Change Threat

The impact of climate change may be most visible in the Arctic, but the former commanding general of Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island argued 11 NOV that it and other coastal bases face drastic threats from the warming planet. "I used to command a base that was dramatically impacted, Parris Island, and is now getting flooded routinely just in normal rainfall and sea level rise," retired Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Stephen Cheney said during a discussion on what the U.S. should do to prevent climate change from becoming a national security threat. The event was sponsored by Elected Officials to Protect America, a nonprofit focused on environment and sustainability, among other policy areas.

"They are going to have to put a sea wall around parts of Parris Island, otherwise it's going to go under water," Cheney said. Parris Island sits on South Carolina's coast, just north of Hilton Head, leaving it susceptible to hurricanes. The Marine Corps is currently studying whether to close the recruit depot and build a new training facility, but that's to meet a congressional mandate to make its training bases gender-integrated, not an effort to address the effects of climate change. Cheney, who served 30 years in the Marine Corps, is now president of the American Security Project, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute that studies the effects of climate change.

Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, is a poster child for those effects, he said. "The piers at Norfolk are going under water; the problem with that is the electricity is run underneath those piers," Cheney said. "As the water level rises, they don't get electricity. You cannot put ships next to those piers." The Norfolk facility also faces "flooding, literally a dozen-plus times a year, flooding to the extent that nobody can get on the base so the sailors can't get to the ships," he added. "I mean you talk about a national security concern -- it is dramatic." Cheney was one of a handful of military veterans who attended the discussion to argue for a more decisive national climate plan as President-elect Joe Biden prepares to take office.

In 2017, President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Agreement on climate, a move that Biden has pledged to reverse when he takes office in January, according to the Biden-Harris transition team website. Both Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris mentioned climate in their victory speeches 8 NOV, highlighting their intent to focus on climate change as a key policy area. Oregon State Rep. Paul Evans -- an Air Force veteran and co-chairman of EOPA -- said that the national security issues posed by climate change are "so significant and so big and so impactful" that it's difficult for states to begin to address the problem on their own. "We are looking forward to the next four years,

hopefully, for a more integrated approach to ensure that we, for example, become a part of the Paris accord again," he said.

This year, the U.S. has seen devastating wildfires from California to Oregon, fueled by higher temperatures and drier seasons, Cheney said. "The more these fires burn, the more carbon dioxide is released, which contributes to the warming of the planet," he explained. "And the more climate changes, the more fires we have, the more sea ice that melts ... the more our national security is going to be threatened." Last year, the Union of Concerned Scientists, a Massachusetts-based science advocacy nonprofit, released a study warning that rising carbon emissions would likely lead to months where temperatures will reach 100 degrees or higher at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma in Arizona, as well as at Florida's MacDill Air Force Base and Homestead Air Reserve Base.

The Arctic is warming twice as fast as the rest of the planet, Cheney said. He believes the U.S. should build a stronger presence in that region to increase the Pentagon's options for projecting forces in a conflict. "There is certainly renewed great power competition in the Arctic," he said. "Russia and China continue to dramatically increase their Arctic operations." Cheney called for the U.S. to ratify the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea, which would give America greater credibility in disputes over freedom of navigation in the Arctic, he said.

"We've got to invest in the development of a deep-water port in Alaska," he said. "We need it to support greater sea-base power projection." But overall, the U.S. has to "reduce its carbon footprint and other greenhouse gas emissions and find alternative energy sources," Cheney said. "The more carbon we emit, the hotter the planet gets, which makes melting more rapid. We cannot afford to ignore the risks of a changing climate, and it's right here at our front door. [Source: Military.com | Matthew Cox| November 12, 2020 ++]

DoD Budget 2022 **Will It Be a Climate-Focused?**



Water covered one-third of Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, after the Missouri River flooded in March 2019.

President-elect Joe Biden has said that he has no plans for major defense budget cuts. At the same time, House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-WA) has [indicated](#) that he expects progressive members would be prepared to fight for reductions. As a way to thread this needle, some [observers](#) have speculated that rather than cuts, there may be a greater emphasis on COVID or climate change impacts within the defense budget.

What would a greater emphasis on climate change in the budget look like? It's complicated. There's no "climate change" line item in the budget, and there's a lot one can do to take the security threats from climate change seriously without moving money around. A climate-focused DoD budget is at least as much about how you spend the money you were already planning to spend as it is about spending new money. One possible blueprint emerged last year. The [Climate Security Plan for America](#) provides dozens of recommendations on how to address climate security challenges in the years ahead. It is the work of the Climate and Security Advisory Group, whose dozens of security experts include a former Chief of Staff of the Army, a former Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and six other retired four-stars.

One item that stands out is the recommendation to create a Climate Security Infrastructure Initiative to bolster the climate resilience of critical civilian and military infrastructure. The need should come as no surprise to those who watched hurricanes devastate [Tyndall Air Force Base](#) and [Camp Lejeune](#), or who saw floods submerge a third of [Offutt Air Force Base](#), which hosts U.S. Strategic Command. These disasters imposed recovery costs in the billions of dollars. The Defense Department has long recognized sea-level rise trends in Norfolk and other coastal installations. It wrestles with the threat of wildfires to bases in California; in August, it [evacuated Travis Air Force Base](#) as flames drew near. [Bases in Alaska](#) are threatened by permafrost thaw.

Initial investments might be focused at the installations the [Army](#), [Navy](#) and [Air Force](#) identified last year as the ones most vulnerable to climate impacts. Of note, more than half of the Air Force's most vulnerable installations were in Florida. These funds might require higher military construction budgets, which were [slashed by 59 percent](#) in this year's budget request, but it's easy to argue that these investments would improve the military's readiness, especially when the National Defense Strategy argues that the homeland is no longer a sanctuary.

The Climate Security Plan for America also identified the importance of energy resilience programs and natural resilience to protect DoD training and testing ranges, so it would be reasonable to foresee increases in programs such as the Energy Resilience and Conservation Investment Program and the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program. It highlighted the need to develop resilience plans at every DoD base – a requirement recently enacted by Congress – but planning dollars are in the noise of the DoD budget. A budget that focused more on climate change might increase funding for research on the effects on DoD, such as the [discovery](#) that rising seas will in coming decades force humans to leave Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands, host to a sophisticated and very expensive military radar installation.

Many people think of a climate-focused budget as one that will be full of "green" initiatives designed to reduce emissions. However, many such efforts – such as energy efficiency investments or renewable energy installations – can pay for themselves or yield resilience benefits more significant than their prospective emissions reductions. In other words, there are other reasons to fix a hole in the roof than reducing emissions or increasing energy efficiency. In addition, there have been proposals to use the buying power of the Federal government to increase purchase electric vehicles, but this is again more of a choice on what types of vehicles to purchase within existing budgets.

That leads us back to the point that incorporating climate will be less about what you spend and more about how you spend the money you already have. It'll be about incorporating climate stress into intelligence assessments or planning for more frequent flooding or other climate impacts at our bases. It will be about shifting requirements for aircraft to be able to achieve the same lift in the extreme heat and humidity that we'll see in the Middle East in coming decades, or shifting requirements for ships to be able to operate in icy Arctic seas. Ultimately, it's about recognizing that climate change is influencing traditional security priorities and we're going to have to take it into account more and more. (Note: John Conger, the author of this article, is the Director of the Center for Climate and Security and the former Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller).

[Source: Defense One | John Conger (Opinion) | November 11, 2020 ++]

NPRC Military Records

Update 06: Covid-19 Reduced Operations



The National Personnel Records Center's Military Personnel Records facility is operating at less than 10% of normal capacity because of worsening COVID-19 conditions in the St. Louis area –a status that limits records requests to emergency needs only. The facility's on-site staff will continue its work to accommodate veterans or family members who need records in relation to:

- Burial honors
- Life-threatening medical emergencies
- Homeless veterans seeking entry to shelters
- Any “comparable emergencies,” per the center's website <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records-0>.

The center entered this emergencies-only status 23 MAR, but began a gradual reopening on 24 JUN as COVID-19 cases slowed. This reopening process allowed a 20% operational capacity for most of October, but “on-site exposures to staff” led to a regression to emergency-only levels on 7 NOV.

Individuals with emergencies can submit a [Standard Form 180](#) via fax to (314) 801-0764. Even emergency requests face delays under this process. Families seeking records to confirm burial eligibility in a VA national cemetery can visit <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility> for detailed information. Casketed interments will be prioritized over cremated interments. The majority of burial requests can be approved without access to National Personnel Records Center materials. MOAA Premium and Life members can download [Your Guide to Military Burials](#).

Visit <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2020-news-articles/dd-214-and-beyond-how-to-track-down-your-military-records> for more background on the records center, including contact information. [Source: MOAA News Article | Kevin Lilley | November 23, 2020 ++]

POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials

Reported 16 thru 30 NOV 2020 | None

“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

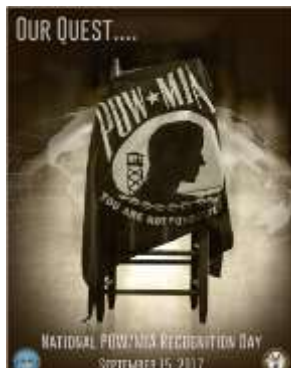
of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home.

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

-- The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced no new identifications or burial updates for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for.

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | November 2020 ++]

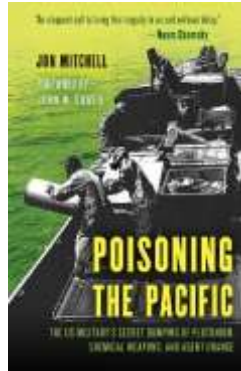
* VA *



Toxic Exposure Documentation

Update 01: Trove of US Documents on Okinawa Released

A Welsh journalist in Japan has released a trove of U.S. government documents regarding pollutants at U.S. bases in the Pacific in hopes they will aid veterans seeking compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs for a variety of service-related ailments. Jon Mitchell, 46, an investigative journalist and contracted correspondent for the Japan Times and Okinawa Times who lives in Yokohama, released over a dozen documents that he uncovered while writing “Poisoning the Pacific: The U.S. Military’s Secret Dumping of Plutonium, Chemical Weapons and Agent Orange,” which was published by Rowman & Littlefield in October.



The document release on Rowman & Littlefield’s website for “Poisoning the Pacific” caps off more than a decade of reporting by Mitchell. The documents cover the storage and leakage of chemical weapons, lead in the drinking water at schools on Kadena Air Base and “forever chemicals” like PFOS contamination at Kadena and Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. Mitchell’s previous work has been used by American veterans seeking VA compensation, something he said he hopes will continue with the current crop of records. “I really think active service members, their families and former service members, they need to be able to access this information so they can provide this documentary proof to their health care providers and also to [Veterans Affairs] when they’re filing for health claims for exposures that occurred in Japan and mainly on Okinawa,” Mitchell said by phone 16 OCT. “Because the bases are concentrated on Okinawa, the contamination is concentrated on Okinawa as well.”

During college, Mitchell studied U.S. history and the use of Agent Orange in the Vietnam War. He first visited Okinawa in October 2010 on assignment for the Japan Times. He said locals in the northern jungle region expressed concerns while recalling U.S. service members spraying defoliants in and around their bases in the community. “They told me the military had sprayed Agent Orange,” Mitchell said. “They said they were worried about the ongoing contamination of their land and the local base workers had been dying quite young.” After those interviews, Mitchell spent years requesting documents through the Freedom of Information Act and tracking down American veterans who back island residents’ claims. “The Americans were worried about the health of their children,” he said. “The Americans were sick with illnesses they believed had been caused by their own spraying of Agent Orange.”

The U.S. government maintains there is “no credible evidence of Agent Orange use, storage, testing, or transportation in Okinawa, and thus no evidence to support claims of exposure to Agent Orange during military service in Okinawa,” the Department of Veterans Affairs told Stars and Stripes in 2017. The VA has continuously denied wholesale exposure claims by veterans lacking documentary proof. “VA currently has no evidence that Agent Orange or any other tactical herbicide was used on Okinawa that would warrant revision of current policies,” VA press secretary Christina Noel said in a statement emailed 31 OCT to Stars and Stripes. “If credible evidence is obtained showing otherwise, VA will reconsider its current policy.”

Despite the government's position, 108 barrels were found starting in 2013 buried on land adjacent to Kadena Air Base, Stars and Stripes previously reported. The barrels contained traces of cancer-causing dioxin and toxic ingredients of Agent Orange and other common pesticides and herbicides, Japan's Defense Ministry said at the time. The discovery coincided with Mitchell's reporting that earned him the 2015 Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan's lifetime achievement award for press freedom.

In one U.S. Forces Japan talking paper from 1993 that Mitchell shared with Stars and Stripes three years ago, the U.S. government described how large amounts of hazardous chemicals and waste coming back from Vietnam were stacked in barrels at U.S. bases on the island. They included insect, rodent and plant killers; acids; alkalis; degreasers; and solvents. The barrels, which appear to number in the thousands, according to photographs from the time, were exposed to the elements for long periods and leaked into the soil, which then seeped into the sea, killing fish offshore, according to the report Mitchell obtained. Toxic substances like arsenic, asbestos, lead and hexavalent chromium have also been discovered on land near Camp Lester that has since reverted to Japanese ownership. In 2015 and 2016, habu snakes captured adjacent to Camp Kinser tested positive for toxic substances.

High levels of the hazardous organic compound perfluorooctane sulfonate, or PFOS, were detected in streams running through Kadena Air Base and in adjacent groundwater wells. Military officials later admitted the use of a firefighting foam, banned in Japan, that contains the compound. There have been several high-profile spills of the firefighting foam in recent years, including about 60,000 gallons at MCAS Futenma on April 10. In October 2015, the first U.S. veteran was awarded disability benefits related to Agent Orange exposure on Okinawa. A year later, a second veteran received benefits. Since then, at least 13 others have been successful, Mitchell said.

A Government Accountability Office report from 2018 found that the Defense Department's official list of herbicide testing and storage locations outside of Vietnam "is inaccurate and incomplete" and that ships carrying Agent Orange to and from Vietnam did stop in Okinawa, among other locations in the region. It was unclear how much was loaded or unloaded.

The documents

The first documents of note released by Mitchell are an organizational history of the Army's 267th Chemical Company from March 1966 and a 1969 Army chief of staff report titled, "Overseas Storage of Chemical Agents/Munitions." The organizational history confirms three movements of chemical weapons to Okinawa between 1963 and 1965. The weapons were removed in 1971 as part of Operation Red Hat, according to the 1987 report "Chemical Weapons Movement History Compilation," which can be found on the Environmental Protection Agency's website. The 1969 chief of staff report details a chemical weapons leak at the Chibana Army Ammunition Depot and discusses moving the weapons to Guam. The weapons listed include nerve agents VX and sarin and the blister agent sulfur mustard. Both documents confirm Okinawa was a Project 112 chemical and biological warfare testing site. The DOD does not classify Okinawa as one, according to its Project 112 site on Health.mil. Representatives from the VA did not respond to questions related to Project 112 posed by Stars and Stripes in October.

A 2015 document Mitchell unearthed, "Department of Defense Dependent Schools Lead Assessment Project, Kadena Air Base," reported 165 fixtures in 106 rooms at DOD schools had lead levels above the 20 parts per billion action limit established by the EPA, the report said. There were eight high-risk rooms/faucets, 88 medium-risk rooms and 10 low-risk rooms. A high-risk room or faucet means a probable drinking source like a kitchen sink, water fountain or breakroom sink, the report said. A medium-risk source is neither a probable drinking source, nor it can be ruled out as a probable drinking source, like a classroom or a bathroom sink. "All high-risk faucets were placed out-of-order and permanently removed or replaced using zero-lead content fixtures," a spokesman for Kadena's 18th Wing wrote in a statement emailed Nov. 3 to Stars and Stripes, citing Kadena's 18th Aerospace Medicine Squadron, Bioenvironmental Engineering Flight. Signs telling students "Do not drink" were put up around medium-risk sources, an education campaign and a flushing program was launched. Kadena resampled in 2015, 2017 and 2018, the statement said. Dozens of fixtures have been remediated.

Mitchell also uncovered Okinawa prefectural records from 2016 that detailed extremely high levels of PFOS and PFOA, perfluorooctanoic acid, at a fire training area aboard MCAS Futenma. Testing found 1.8 micrograms per liter of PFOA and 27 micrograms per liter of PFOS, according to those records. In early 2020, Japan established a combined safety threshold of 0.05 micrograms per liter for PFOS and PFOA. A subsequent document from testing firm Maxxam Analytics, a Canadian company now known as Bureau Veritas, to Kadena's 18th Wing indicated elevated levels of PFOS and PFOA at a fire training area retention basin. Officials from Kadena's 18th Wing did not respond to questions posed by Stars and Stripes about PFOS and PFOA.

The DOD has admitted to 651 contaminated sites in the U.S. but none in Japan, Mitchell said, something he believes will eventually change. U.S. military officials in Japan told Stars and Stripes last year the source of the PFOS and PFOA pollution on Okinawa is not necessarily U.S. military facilities. "The U.S. works diligently to comply with the Japan Environmental Governing Standards," U.S. Forces Japan wrote in a statement emailed to Stars and Stripes on Nov. 17. It touted an environmental agreement signed between the two nations in 2015 that enhanced cooperation on environmental matters, including establishing protocol to give Japanese authorities access to U.S. bases on Okinawa in the event of a spill or land return.

"Environmental sampling conducted over decades by relevant U.S. and Japan government authorities indicates that actions taken aboard our installations are effective in reducing impacts both on and off base," the statement said. "We will continue to take a proactive and bilateral approach to environmental stewardship as the health and safety of our nations' publics is equally as important as their defense."

Mitchell, who has written three Japanese language books on military pollution, said more important than selling copies of his first English-language book is letting veterans know these documents exist and are available free. "All of these documents provide support for veterans who are sick and veterans who believe their sickness is linked to their service on Okinawa," Mitchell said. "The proof is there, and I think the military will do the right thing and admit to it." [Source: Stars & Stripes | Matthew M. Burke | November 23, 2020 ++]

VA Blue Water Claims

Update 85: Court Orders VA to Redecide Thousands of Claims

On 5 NOV, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California ruled in favor of thousands of so-called Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans and their survivors in response to the motion filed by attorneys from the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) to enforce the 29-Year Old Class Action Consent Decree in *Nehmer v. U.S. Department of Veterans Administration (VA)*. The Court **ordered the VA to automatically readjudicate** thousands of benefits claims that the Court found had been wrongly denied under the Consent Decree. The Court also ordered the VA to pay retroactive compensation if it finds the veteran served in the territorial seas of Vietnam. The motion was filed with the pro bono assistance of Paul Hastings LLP.

"We applaud the Court's recognition that Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans and their survivors have been wrongly denied retroactive disability and death benefits ever since 2002, when VA reversed its prior position and denied the presumption of Agent Orange exposure to veterans who served in the territorial seas of Vietnam," said National Veterans Legal Services Program Executive Director Bart Stichman. "These veterans and their surviving family members have already been waiting years for benefits to which they are entitled under the Consent Decree simply because they did not set foot in the land mass of Vietnam."

The 1991 Consent Decree applies to a class consisting of hundreds of thousands of Vietnam veterans and their survivors who applied to the VA for service-connected disability and death benefits due to exposure to Agent Orange, the toxic herbicide used by the U.S. government during the Vietnam War. That Decree required the VA, whenever it recognized an additional disease is associated with exposure to Agent Orange, to identify and readjudicate all prior VA

denials of benefit claims filed for that disease and pay benefits retroactive to the date of the claim that led to the prior denial.

On July 10, 2020, NVLSP, which has served as counsel for the class since 1987, filed its fourth motion for enforcement to obtain compliance with the 1991 Consent Decree. The District Court had granted all three prior enforcement motions. As a result of the prior three successful enforcement actions, VA conceded that it paid billions of dollars in retroactive benefits to Vietnam veterans and their survivors.

The VA's 2002 change in policy challenged in the fourth enforcement motion was that these "Blue Water" Vietnam veterans were not covered by the language of the Agent Orange Act of 1991, which provided that veterans who "served in the Republic of Vietnam" during the Vietnam era "shall be presumed to have been exposed during such service" to Agent Orange. But in 2019, in *Procopio v. Wilkie*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit rejected VA's interpretation of that language and ruled that Congress intended that all Vietnam veterans who served on ships in the territorial sea of Vietnam—within 12 nautical miles of the coast—be entitled to the presumption of exposure. NVLSP filed its enforcement motion after VA refused to redecide the post-2002 claims of "Blue Water" Vietnam veterans and their survivors that were denied under the VA policy rejected in the *Procopio* decision.

"The Nehmer consent decree has been instrumental for nearly 30 years to ensure full comprehensive relief for veterans who have suffered greatly from Agent Orange-related diseases. We are gratified that the intended relief is now available to the Blue Water Navy Veterans," said Stephen Kinnaird, Partner, Litigation Department, Paul Hastings LLP. Based on the Court's decision, the VA must:

- (1). Identify within 120 days of the date of this order, all of the Nehmer readjudication decisions made based on the consent decree in which the VA denied compensation on the ground that the veteran was not entitled to the presumption of herbicide exposure because the veteran did not set foot on the landmass of Vietnam or serve in the inland waterways of Vietnam.
- (2). Within 240 days of the date of this order, issue a replacement decision that determines:
 - (a) whether the veteran served in the territorial waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the war and, if so,
 - (b) the amount of retroactive compensation, if any, the veteran or the veteran's survivor (or, if the veteran or survivor is deceased, the estate of the deceased veteran or survivor) is entitled under the terms of consent decree; and
- (3). Provide class counsel, pursuant to the Privacy Protection Order, with a copy of (a) all of the Nehmer readjudication decisions identified, (b) all of the replacement decisions issued, and (c) each notice letter sent to the class members and coding sheet associated with such replacement decisions.

According to estimates, this ruling could impact 2,000 to 15,000 veterans and their survivors and potentially result in each receiving an average of \$28,000 tax-free in benefits. Ultimately, this decision could result in tens or hundreds of millions of dollars in relief to Blue Water Navy veterans and their survivors. The Department of Veterans Affairs has no plans to challenge the court ruling.

The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 (BWN Act) codified the presumption of herbicide exposure for Blue Water Vietnam veterans. However, the BWN Act does not automatically require the VA to assess if any Blue Water Vietnam veteran or survivor is eligible for retroactive compensation. The BWN Act requirement to pay retroactive compensation is triggered only if a Blue Water Vietnam veteran affirmatively files a claim after January 1, 2020 and the veteran specifically identifies the Agent-Orange related disease that was the subject of the earlier claim.

The BWN Act does not completely correspond to the Nehmer Consent Decree. Some Blue Water Vietnam veterans and their survivors may be eligible for retroactive compensation under the Consent Decree but not eligible under the BWN Act and vice versa. As a result, the House Report on the BWN Act states that "Nothing in [the BWN Act] intends to limit the rights of Nehmer class members who seek relief for benefits under the Nehmer Consent Decree."

The Department of Veterans Affairs has no plans to challenge the court ruling ordering it to make retroactive payments to a small class of "Blue Water Navy" Vietnam veterans and their survivors who were wrongly denied benefits for exposure to Agent Orange, the head of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) said 16 NOV. The Justice Department has not indicated whether the 5 NOV ruling by federal District Judge William Alsup in San Francisco will be appealed, but Paul Lawrence, VA under secretary and VBA chief, said the VA will comply with the decision in the complicated case.

Background on Nehmer Case

Nehmer v. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is a class action lawsuit brought by NVLSP attorneys in 1986 to challenge a VA regulation that stated, among other things, that chloracne is the only disease that scientific evidence shows is associated with exposure to herbicides like Agent Orange used by the United States in Vietnam. In 1987, the district court certified the case as a class action on behalf of all Vietnam veterans and their survivors who had been denied VA benefits for a condition allegedly associated with herbicide exposure or who would be eligible to file a claim for such benefits in the future. The court also certified NVLSP's lawyers as the lawyers for the class. In an order issued on May 3, 1989, the court invalidated the portion of the regulation providing that no condition other than chloracne is associated with herbicide exposure and voided all VA decisions denying benefit claims under that portion of the regulation.

In 1991, NVLSP's attorneys negotiated a favorable consent decree with the VA in Nehmer. The Nehmer consent decree requires the VA, whenever it recognizes that the emerging scientific evidence shows that a positive relationship exists between Agent Orange exposure and a new disease, to (a) identify all claims based on the newly recognized disease that were previously denied and then (b) pay disability and death benefits to these claimants, retroactive to the initial date of claim. Since 1991, the VA has recognized that scientific studies show that there is a positive association between Agent Orange exposure and diabetes, ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's disease, and more than a dozen different types of cancer. As a result of the Nehmer consent decree, over the last two decades, the VA has paid an aggregate of more than \$4.6 billion in retroactive disability and death benefits to hundreds of thousands of Vietnam veterans and their surviving family members.

About NVLSP

The National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) is an independent, nonprofit veterans service organization that has served active duty military personnel and veterans since 1981. NVLSP strives to ensure that our nation honors its commitment to its 22 million veterans and active duty personnel by ensuring they have the benefits they have earned through their service to our country. NVLSP has represented veterans in lawsuits that compelled enforcement of the law where the VA or other military services denied benefits to veterans in violation of the law. NVLSP's success in these lawsuits has resulted in more than \$5.2 billion dollars being awarded in disability, death and medical benefits to hundreds of thousands of veterans and their survivors. NVLSP offers training for attorneys and other advocates; connects veterans and active duty personnel with pro bono legal help when seeking disability benefits; publishes the nation's definitive guide on veteran benefits; and represents and litigates for veterans and their families before the VA, military discharge review agencies and federal courts. For more information, go to www.nvlsp.org. Media contacts: For NVLSP: Patty Briotta, office 202-621-5698, patty@nvlsp.org. [Source: VVA News Flash | November 17, 2020 ++]

VA Accountability

Update 56: FLRA Calls for Rehiring of Fired Workers

The Trump administration was dealt a blow by a labor panel on 16 NOV, which ruled the Veterans Affairs Department violated a contract with one of its employee unions as it sought to quickly dismiss poorly performing workers. The Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA) decision in part unwinds VA's implementation of the 2017 VA

Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act, a law that made it easier to fire employees. President Trump has repeatedly highlighted the act as one of the key legislative accomplishments of his term. FLRA upheld a 2018 arbitrator's ruling, which found VA violated its collective bargaining agreement with the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) when it eliminated "performance improvement plans" from the pre-disciplinary process. Monday's decision requires VA to reinstate all employees fired without first being provided such a plan.

Trump, VA and lawmakers in both parties have heralded the law as a significant step in cracking down on misbehaving and poorly performing employees, but its enforcement has been mired in controversy since its passage. A federal court ruled earlier this year that VA could not apply the law retroactively and appellate judges could review whether VA's selected punishment fit an employee's alleged misbehavior. AFGE brought the case for mediation after VA issued a series of memoranda that said VA was no longer required to give employees 90 days to improve and performance improvement plans—or PIPs—would not be used. The union said that violated specific clauses in its collective bargaining agreement requiring those steps for employees identified for poor performance.

VA argued before FLRA, as it did before a mediator two years prior, that the contents of the 2017 accountability law superseded the provisions of its contract requiring the improvement plans. The authority agreed with the arbitrator, however, in ruling the law dealt only with the timeline for carrying out a firing or other punishment after VA provided the disciplinary notice. Because the PIPs are intended to improve performance well before the actual issuance of a punishment, FLRA said, the law has no bearing on them. "The Accountability Act does not specify what actions an agency can or cannot do prior to providing notice of a removal, demotion or suspension," FLRA wrote in its majority opinion.

The authority also said the arbitrator's decision did not interfere with management's ability to communicate with and assign work to employees because it is merely ensuring compliance with a provision of a collective bargaining agreement to which management itself had agreed. VA argued the arbitrator was too broad in his framing of the issue and improperly included all bargaining unit employees, but FLRA said those interpretations were appropriate. The labor panel also rejected VA's assertion that the case was outside of its jurisdiction, noting the issue was about contractual and statutory violations rather than appeals of specific firings. The FLRA decision requires VA:

- To resume compliance with its collective bargaining agreement,
- Rescind any adverse action against afge-represented employees who did not first receive a performance improvement plan, and reinstate any fired worker at the department, including back pay, restored leave and other benefits.
- Pay AFGE's attorney fees, though it can still appeal the ruling to federal court.

A department spokesperson said VA is reviewing the decision. VA challenged the remedy ordered by the arbitrator and upheld by FLRA, but the panel said it was "reasonably and proportionally related to the found violation." Thomas Dargon, acting supervisory attorney for the AFGE VA council, said the union has flagged the PIP issue since before the law was even passed. "We're very pleased," Dargon said of the FLRA decision. "It's a complete and total victory."

AFGE originally brought the case to mediation on behalf of its employees at the Veterans Benefits Administration, but the union has since said it expects the ruling to apply across the department. It is unclear exactly how many VA employees could be impacted by the ruling, but public data show the department has fired at least 7,800 employees since the accountability law and subsequent memoranda revoking performance improvement plans went into effect. AFGE represents more than two-thirds of the department's nearly 400,000 workers, and the union expects the number of impacted employees is at least in the hundreds.

While the bill won broad bipartisan support, lawmakers have since consistently accused the Trump administration of flouting congressional intent in implementing it. Trump, for his part, frequently cites the success of the accountability law among his most significant accomplishments, saying it has enabled the department to get rid of poorly behaving employees. "In just a few short years, my administration completely overhauled the Department of Veterans Affairs removing employees who were not giving our veterans the care and attention they deserve and making the agency more

accountable to the heroes it serves,” Trump said earlier this month. He previously said the law was “very important” to him as it allowed VA to remove “sadists” and “thieves.”

Colleen Duffy Kiko, the FLRA chairman, dissented in part with the decision, saying the true intent of the accountability law did in fact run counter to the AFGE contract. Performance improvement plans are part of the adverse action process, she said, and therefore should be part of the 15-day removal timeline the law created. The decision changes that to a 105-day timeline, she argued, and the legislative history of the bill made clear lawmakers had intended to streamline the “cumbersome process for taking adverse actions against employees unfit to serve our nation’s veterans due to poor performance or misconduct.” [Source: Government Executive | Eric Katz | November 17, 2020 ++]

VA Vision Care

Update 09: Orcam MyEye | Digital Technology Helps Blind Veteran



Seeing” the world through a digital voice, Army Veteran Tom Arcand above glimpses the world through a unique device – even though he’s legally blind. Arcand has a device that details the world around him, feeding him input, like identifying people around him and reading to him what he’s “looking at.” The life-changing device came after a simple question to his doctor.

It all started when a friend recommended a device to him. Tom, and his wife Lucy – also a Veteran – watched a few short video clips and were ready to purchase the device. The Arcands reached out to the West Texas VA Health Care System, asking their ophthalmologist, Dr. Geert Craenen, if the device was worth getting. Army Veteran Arcand uses an artificial vision device that reads a magazine to him. Prepared to buy it themselves, the Arcands were surprised by Craenen’s response. “It’s one of the advantages of the VA health care system. We have great flexibility in procuring devices such as this for our Veterans.”

Around the size of a large thumb drive, the Orcam MyEye attaches to a pair of reading glasses and scans anything Tom Arcand signals or points to. A small speaker near his ear will then tell him what it scans. “It will read anything to you, books or signs, it’ll read it all,” said Arcand. “I mostly use it to read at home or go through bills, but there are a number of things you can use it for.” The artificial vision device has given Arcand a connection to the world that he didn’t have after losing his vision completely in one eye and most of his vision in his other eye. Mobility was a significant barrier.

Arcand has extremely limited vision in one eye and in good lighting conditions can make out basic shapes. When walking down a hallway in the medical center, Arcand can find a room by simply pointing at the sign shapes on the wall. The device will read to Arcand what is on the sign, giving him greater independence, both in his life at home and when he goes out into the world. As the Arcands first started using the device, it was challenging, like with any new technology. Over time, they have become more comfortable using it, learning new functions every day.

“This device has so many features,” said Lucy. Tom holds up his arm like he’s looking at a wristwatch that isn’t there. He smiles and says, “It even tells you the time.” “This thing has been a lot of help. For years, I’ve been getting all my medical care from the VA, like walkers and an insulin pump. This is just another example of how they’ve helped me.” The Orcam Myeye also features a facial recognition function that tells the person wearing it who comes into their presence. By programing people, the device will tell the wearer when a person comes into the room. [Source: Vantage Point | William Hatton | November 19, 2020 ++]

VA Vaccination Program

Update 01: Planning Underway to Deliver a COVID-19 Vaccine



Planning is underway at VA to deliver a COVID-19 vaccine when one becomes available. VA is working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to develop a phased plan based on five core ethical pillars: safety, maximizing the benefit of the vaccine, equity, fairness and transparency. Veteran and employee safety remain our #1 priority. The plan takes into consideration a number of risk factors, including risks of acquiring infection, severe illness and death if infected, and transmitting the disease, as well as the risk to essential workers, including health care personnel. When COVID-19 vaccine comes, VA will be ready.

Offering the vaccine first to health care personnel and Veterans

Initially, we expect supplies to be limited. Based on these risk factors, VA will offer the vaccine first to high-risk health care personnel (HCP), as they are essential in continuing to care for patients throughout the pandemic. As more vaccines become available, VA will offer the vaccine to high-risk Veterans. VA’s ultimate goal is to offer it to all Veterans and employees who want to be vaccinated.

Preparing VA facilities

VA medical centers across the country performed planning exercises in late October to prepare for initial receipt of the vaccine. These exercises help sites determine how they will distribute immunizations. They based the decisions on the number of doses available and coordinated communications with Veterans to schedule their immunization. They also addressed ordering, storage, handling, and administration of the vaccine.

Listening to Veterans

Additionally, VA has been conducting listening sessions and interviews with Veterans across the country to gauge their interest and determine the best methods for reaching out to our diverse Veteran population. Your local medical facility will update you as vaccines become available.

Important resources

- CDC COVID-19 Vaccine website <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html>
- VA News Release on vaccine distribution <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5570>

[Source: Vantage Point | Jane Kim, MD | November 17, 2020 ++]

VA COVID-19 Cases

Update 09: Doubled in 20 Days

As of 13 NOV more than 13,300 Department of Veterans Affairs patients are sick with the coronavirus — a number that more than doubled in the previous 20 days and represents the most active cases the VA has ever had at one time. Cases have increased 108% since 2 NOV. On that day, VA cases hit an all-time high, surpassing the number of active cases seen during a surge of the virus in July. Every day since 2 NOV, the department has set a new record. Deaths are also on the rise. As of 23 NOV, 4,584 veterans had died of the virus — up 12% since the beginning of the month. In addition, 69 VA employees have died, five of them in the previous 20 days.

The Minneapolis VA hospital has the most cases across the VA system, with 433 patients who are currently sick with the virus — an increase of 113% in a little over two weeks. The Cleveland VA hospital in Cleveland, Ohio, has the second-most cases with 417, and Aurora, Colorado, has the third, with 310. VA hospitals across the national are experiencing more cases than previously seen. Fifty-one hospitals reported having more than 100 active cases Monday. Only two VA locations reported having no active cases: the hospital in Spokane, Washington, and the VA outpatient clinic in the Philippines. The numbers reflect a nationwide trend that shows a third wave of the virus affecting most of the United States, particularly the Midwest. Public health experts are worried the situation will become exasperated after Americans gathered for Thanksgiving. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the nation’s top health agency, had pled with Americans not to travel for the holiday or spend time with people outside of their household.

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie had not as of 23 NOV issued public guidance discouraging veterans from traveling or gathering outside of their households this Thanksgiving. However, the local director of the VA health system in New Orleans — which was hit hard by the pandemic early on — did call on veterans there to limit travel and postpone their gatherings. Fernando Riviera, director of the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System, published a public letter to patients 23 NOV. He said the New Orleans hospital would likely raise its threat level because of an increased rate of positive coronavirus tests and may soon limit services to non-coronavirus patients.

In March, the New Orleans facility accounted for one-third of the VA’s coronavirus cases, and the hospital canceled elective surgeries. On 23 NOV, the hospital reported 36 active cases — one of the lowest counts across all VA facilities. However, Riviera was anticipating a surge of hospitalizations. “Our facility is in the ‘yellow,’ or ‘surge watch,’ right now, but will likely move into ‘red,’ or ‘surge warning,’ in the near future,” Riviera wrote. “If this surge continues to increase, we may once again limit services. Similar to earlier this year, we will need to remain flexible and resilient to ensure veterans who need care receive it.”

The New Orleans hospital was chosen as one of five VA sites that will distribute coronavirus vaccines once they become available, Riviera said. He predicted it would be a “long and difficult path” to reach that point. AstraZeneca announced promising results 23 NOV of its vaccine trials, becoming the third drug maker to do so. Health officials have said that once available, the first doses are likely to go to high-risk groups. The general public could have access to a vaccine in the spring. “Many of us will have to change our holiday plans by limiting travel or postponing gatherings,” Riviera wrote. “These sacrifices will give us the time we need as a health care system to deliver vaccinations without being overwhelmed by Covid cases.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | November 23, 2020 ++]

VA Health Care

Update 03: Ask Not Get Not | What Do You Need?

Many veteran's that have VA benefits may not know that the VA provides complementary treatment items such as CPAP machines, hearing aids, custom fit orthotic shoe inserts, Marsona sound conditioning machines (for masking tinnitus), prescription eyeglasses, and many other items to help provide injury relief. Sometimes veterans have to ask for such equipment.

- A veteran that is struggling to fall asleep due to ringing or buzzing ears can ask a VA audiologist for a Masona sound conditioning machine that may help mask the tinnitus enough to fall asleep.
- A veteran with sleep apnea will have to participate in a sleep clinic and be tested. If sleep apnea is determined then, the VA will hand the veteran a high-quality modern CPAP machine that is much smaller than the older versions and easier to keep clean.
- Also, some VA clinics offer Chronic Pain Management and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which may be helpful for some veterans that are struggling to maintain relationships and experiencing declining work performance.
- The VA will supply a veteran who has been diagnosed with vitamin D deficiency-free vitamin D supplements if asked. Many veterans are vitamin D deficient. Vitamin D is extremely important for good health.
- Some veterans struggle with joint pain, and the VA will provide Voltaren topical gel for relief if asked.
- Some clinics provide ultrasound physical therapy for plantar fasciitis relief if asked.

Veterans with VA benefits sometimes have to ask. There's no harm in asking for relief products. The harm comes when veterans don't ask for relief items. You are not taking away from another veteran if you ask for relief items. These items are stockpiled and do no good for anyone if they are not distributed and providing relief. Ask not. Get not.

[Source: Together We Served | Steven Lucas | November 2020 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse

Reported 16 thru 30 NOV 2020

Cleveland, OH – U.S. Attorney Justin Herdman announced 20 NOV that a grand jury sitting in Cleveland has returned a 28-count indictment charging **William H. Precht**, age 53, of Kent, Ohio, with theft of government property, conspiracy to commit wire fraud and honest services fraud, wire fraud, and false statements relating to health care matters. According to the indictment, from October 5, 2010, through January 4, 2019, the defendant is accused of using his position with the Cleveland Veteran Affairs (VA) Medical Center to engage in a scheme to enrich himself and co-conspirators.

The indictment alleges that from on or about October 5, 2010, through on or about February 16, 2018, the defendant fraudulently used his VA-issued purchase card and facilitated the use of other VA employees' purchase cards to make purchases from a company controlled by the defendant for approximately \$1,066,348. In addition, from on or about May 27, 2015, through on or about January 4, 2019, the defendant is accused of conspiring with a medical supplies

company located in South Euclid, Ohio, to devise a scheme in which the defendant would receive kickbacks and other items of value, in exchange for steering VA business and other monetary awards to the medical supplies vendor.

Allegedly, it was part of the conspiracy that the defendant would solicit and accept items of value from the medical supplies vendor such as money, sporting event tickets and future business interest. The defendant would then provide favorable actions for the benefit of his co-conspirators and the medical supplies vendor when the opportunities arose. He is accused of concealing this activity from the Cleveland VA by providing false and misleading information to VA employees about reasons for ordering medical supplies. The defendant also allegedly falsified some patient records to make it appear patients had implants in their electronic health record that did not correlate to any actual surgical or medical procedure, to justify the purchase of implants.

An indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is entitled to a fair trial in which it will be the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. If convicted, the defendant's sentence will be determined by the Court after review of factors unique to this case, including the defendant's prior criminal record, if any, the defendant's role in the offense and the characteristics of the violation. In all cases, the sentence will not exceed the statutory maximum and in most cases it will be less than the maximum. [Source: DoJ Northern District of Ohio | U.S. Attorney's Office | November 20, 2020 ++]

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New Britain, Connecticut – A former Connecticut lawyer was charged by state authorities 25 NOV with embezzling nearly \$1 million from a charity for military veterans and their families, just two weeks after he was sentenced to more than three years in prison on a federal charge for the same crimes. The chief state's attorney's office said **Kevin Creed**, 69, of Litchfield was charged with felony larceny and was released on a \$250,000 bond following a court appearance Wednesday. Creed could not be reached for comment Wednesday. Phone listings for him were disconnected. His lawyer in the federal case said he was not representing Creed in the state case.

On 9 NOV, Creed was sentenced on a federal fraud charge to the prison time and ordered to pay \$1.4 million restitution to Fisher House Foundation in Connecticut, a chapter of a national charity that builds homes near veterans medical centers where families can stay for free while their loved ones undergo treatment. State prosecutors said Creed stole \$985,000 from the charity and used the money for his own purposes. He has not yet reported to federal prison. Creed, An Army Veteran And Former State Trooper, Gave Up His Right To Practice Law In Connecticut Last Year.

[Source: Associated Press | November 25, 2020 ++]

VA Secretary

Update 91: Accused of Issuing Directive to Discredit Veteran

Former Department of Veterans Affairs Deputy Secretary James Byrne said his refusal to follow a directive to discredit a veteran and senior Congressional advisor who said she was sexually assaulted at a VA hospital contributed to his removal, according to a 19 NOV report from Newsweek. Connecting Vets confirmed Newsweek's reporting on Thursday through interviews with Byrne, VA and White House officials. Those officials spoke on condition of anonymity either because they were not authorized to speak publicly or because they said they feared retaliation. A Navy Reserve officer and senior advisor for the House Women Veterans Task Force said late last year she was sexually assaulted at the D.C. VA Medical Center. Connecting Vets is withholding her name from this story at her request.

In February, an anonymous written complaint was submitted to the House Veterans Affairs Committee alleging that VA Secretary Robert Wilkie personally sought and shared with staff "damaging information" about the veteran in an attempt to discredit her. Wilkie is being examined by an independent watchdog agency over those allegations. Byrne told Connecting Vets on 19 NOV he was not the author of that complaint, but decided to come forward to share his

story which corroborates some of those allegations. Wilkie and VA have strongly denied the allegations against him and in an emailed statement on 20 NOV, VA Press Secretary Christina Noel called Byrne's allegations "false," said he was fired for cause, sought to discredit him and defended Wilkie.

Wilkie "did not and never would do anything of this sort," Noel told Connecting Vets previously. "I never would do that to a fellow officer -- it is a breach of honor," Wilkie said of the woman veteran in a statement earlier this year. The complaint followed shortly after Wilkie fired Byrne, his No. 2 at the massive federal agency, about five months after his confirmation in the Senate. Prior to his confirmation, Byrne, a Marine veteran, served as acting deputy secretary. Wilkie said he dismissed Byrne because of "loss of confidence." Two days later, Wilkie called it a "simple business decision," adding that it was "nothing personal" and Byrne failed to "jell" with other members of VA leadership. Noel said Byrne's "dismissal has nothing to do with" the veteran's case.

A few weeks later, lawmakers asked the VA Inspector General to investigate. House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA) said he was concerned "Wilkie and other VA officials may have unlawfully accessed or attempted to access (the veteran's) military service records, medical records, or took other actions to obtain sensitive or personal information about (her) with intent to discredit her character and retaliate against her." Byrne said he was not certain where Wilkie allegedly first sourced information he told staff about the veteran. VA Inspector General Mike Missal agreed to review the allegations against Wilkie. As of 19 NOV, that report had not yet been released publicly, but Byrne said he was interviewed as part of the review. Missal said in a statement to Connecting Vets Friday that the matter remains a "high priority" for his office and IG plans to publish a report on its findings when the review is complete.

Wilkie believed Takano and other Democrat leaders in Congress may have contrived the allegations of sexual assault to damage Wilkie personally as a senior member of President Donald Trump's cabinet, Newsweek first reported and Byrne also told Connecting Vets Thursday. Wilkie's belief that the allegations were invented were what led him to allegedly seek the damaging information about the veteran, Byrne said. Byrne and Wilkie had worked together for about a year when he says the VA secretary charged him with "shopping dirt to the media" on the veteran in an attempt to discredit her and her allegations, which Byrne said Wilkie characterized as attacks against him and VA. Wilkie allegedly gathered the information and asked Byrne and other staff to share it.

Byrne didn't outright refuse, he said, but instead told Wilkie repeatedly, "I hear ya," to avoid giving a definitive answer. He says he never followed the directive -- but Wilkie also approached other VA staff Byrne said may have been more willing. "Maybe he thought I was going to be a good little Marine and run out and do it," Byrne told Connecting Vets. "I truly didn't think they (other VA staff) had taken it out of the house. "I just thought, 'They're not going to do this. This is indecent, immoral, unprofessional.'" Wilkie approached Byrne about spreading the alleged damaging information multiple times. When it became clear Byrne wasn't going to "play ball," he claims Wilkie pressured him. "He basically said this is what good deputies do for their secretaries," Byrne said. "That was the souring of our relationship. It was never that good to begin with."

Byrne said his refusal to spread information about the veteran was likely not the only reason Wilkie fired him. Byrne also says he refused to issue several formal memos ordered by the secretary, attempts to remove other VA officials and "lighten up" on oversight of the department's \$16 billion electronic health record modernization project. Perhaps the biggest reason Byrne was removed from his Senate-appointed position was because Wilkie believed the president might fire him and thought to avoid it by firing his apparent replacement instead, Byrne alleged. Byrne was fired just a few days before the date he claims Wilkie was expected to be fired, when he says he was told by White House staff to avoid traveling from D.C. and "be prepared to assume the big chair."

A letter Byrne said he was provided upon his dismissal said it "served as confirmation that the president concurred with Secretary Wilkie's request to remove" him from his appointed position, but appeared on a page without any signature or letterhead. The letter said it originated from the White House Office of Presidential Personnel. White House officials told Connecting Vets on Friday they had "no comment" regarding Byrne's allegations about the VA

secretary. Wilkie told Byrne on 3 FEB that he'd "lost confidence" in him and demanded his resignation, Byrne said. He initially refused, arguing only the president could dismiss him, and was escorted out of VA headquarters by security guards.

Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R-TX) was specifically named in the complaint. Wilkie mentioned the Congressman as someone who helped him confirm information about the veteran, Byrne alleged. Crenshaw, a former Navy SEAL, at one time served with her. Earlier this year Crenshaw's staff said he had never been contacted by anyone at VA about the veteran, and told Connecting Vets Friday they had nothing more to add.

At first, Byrne said he feared sharing his story because it could hurt VA, and therefore veterans, and was dealing with his own bitterness over being dismissed. "VA's had a lot of turmoil. Turmoil in the leadership translates into veterans losing confidence in the VA and not coming in and getting care, benefits and treatment, and it results in dead veterans," he said. "I can't shake that. I couldn't shake that and go stand up for myself and take this guy down." During the election, Byrne said he was pressured by some to come forward, but says he wanted to avoid becoming a "political football" and stayed out of it. "There's going to be turmoil now anyway at the VA with turnover," he said. "I don't think I'm going to add too much more turmoil ... It's sort of like a shot in my arm going 'You've got a story to tell, so you need to stand up and take the arrows or whatever comes that way.'"

Takano said in a statement 20 NOV that the House Veterans Affairs Committee would "not turn a blind eye to inappropriate behavior or statements that seek to discredit survivors of sexual assault or harassment. "Sadly, this type of denial, and an unwillingness to seek out truth is exactly the problem that has plagued VA and our nation's military - casting doubt on survivors and sullyng their good names will not fix the decades of injustice these servicemembers have endured," Takano continued. "If VA hopes to fully embrace the contributions these survivors have made to our country, it must step up and build a change in culture - a change that starts at the top."

During Congressional testimony on VA's budget in February, Wilkie committed to testifying at a future hearing on sexual assault at VA facilities. He did not attend, but sent Acting Deputy Secretary Pamela Powers in his place. Following his February testimony, Wilkie told reporters he hoped the hearing would provide an opportunity to clear the air about the veteran's case and allegations against him.

In September, the veteran said that a man sexually assaulted and harassed her at the Washington, D.C. VA Medical Center. She said multiple people witnessed the alleged assault, and that she tried to report it to several VA staffers who were slow to react or unresponsive until police were involved. At the time, Wilkie promised a full investigation from the Office of the Inspector General. But that investigation concluded earlier this year with no criminal charges filed. Multiple sources with knowledge of the case told Connecting Vets this was due, at least in part, to a lack of functioning security cameras at the hospital in the area the assault took place.

Records obtained by Connecting Vets through Freedom of Information Act requests confirmed that the one camera in the area was malfunctioning at the time of the incident. VA Press Secretary Christina Mandreucci told Connecting Vets "all cameras in the DC VA are fully functional and have been since September 2019" following the incident. Wilkie announced that the case was closed without charges in a letter to Congress last month, where he also called the veteran's report "unsubstantiated claims," setting off a firestorm of criticism from lawmakers and advocates. Wilkie told reporters earlier this year he regretted his use of the phrase and didn't intend to suggest that she was lying about her assault. "I have to know, she has to know, if our facilities are safe," Wilkie said. "We're going to make a renewed push to get answers ... to help us help ourselves and help women veterans to make sure that they feel safe and welcomed."

[Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | November 20, 2020 ++]

For confidential help with sexual assault 24/7, call the National Sexual Assault hotline at 800-656-4673 or go to online.rainn.org.



Vet Tax Breaks

Approved in 3 State's 2020 Elections

While many races from the Nov. 3 elections remained too close to call hours after the polls closed, voters in three states moved decisively to approve measures aimed at offering support and appreciation -- in the form of tax breaks -- to veterans.

Florida -- Amendment 6, which would extend a property tax discount for combat-disabled veterans to their surviving spouses in the event of their death, received resounding support from voters. With 100% of the vote counted, The Associated Press reported that 89.7% of voters supported the measure, making it the most popular of the six referendum issues Florida considered this election cycle. The homestead property tax discount applies only to veterans over age 65 with permanent combat-related disabilities. The measure would continue that discount for the veteran's surviving spouse in perpetuity, unless the widowed spouse remarries or sells or otherwise disposes of the property.

On 16 OCT, the Herald-Tribune newspaper published a compilation of seven Florida newspapers' editorial boards weighing in on the ballot question. All seven concluded that the measure should pass. "Veterans aren't the only ones sacrificing their lives for the country," the board of Florida Today wrote in an editorial. "That sacrifice is shared by their spouses and family, and they too deserve a property tax break." With well over the 60% of the vote required for passage, the measure will take effect Jan. 1, 2021.

New Jersey -- Public Question 2 would make veterans who served in peacetime eligible for a \$250 property tax deduction currently available only to combat veterans. This measure also passed easily with 76.3% of the counted vote as of 4 NOV, making it the most-supported of the three referendum issues New Jersey voters took up. The property tax deduction is also available to the surviving spouses of deceased wartime veterans, and the measure would make spouses of peacetime veterans eligible for it as well. In addition to the deduction, New Jersey offers a 100% property tax exemption for disabled wartime veterans or their surviving spouses. Voters moved to extend that as well to disabled peacetime veterans. For both policies, an honorable military discharge is a prerequisite for eligibility.

Opposition to the measure focused on the cost to the state in the form of lost revenue. According to information compiled by Ballotpedia, it's estimated to benefit an additional 4,000 New Jersey veterans. That will cost an estimated \$38 million in lost revenue. Supporters of the measure called it a matter of simple fairness to veterans, who volunteer to serve regardless of whether they see wartime or combat. With the approval of the referendum, the measure will take effect 1 JAN 2021.

Virginia -- Ballot Question 2 would create a vehicle tax exemption for disabled veterans -- a measure designed to ease the cost burden for vets whose disabilities require them to purchase specially modified vehicles. The tax break would apply to one vehicle or pickup truck for any veteran who has a 100% service-connected, permanent disability documented by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans would not have to prove, however, that their disability necessitates vehicle modifications.

This measure also passed with overwhelming support: 85.9% of voters approved it, with 99% reporting. It was the most popular of two referendum issues Virginia voters considered this cycle. As with the New Jersey ballot question, any opposition to the Virginia tax exemption focused on cost. Virginia Association of Counties noted that the measure followed a previous series of tax exemptions for disabled veterans and spouses of the fallen. All those breaks, the organization said, cost localities roughly \$53 million in 2018 -- lost revenue that was not offset by the state. With massive support from voters, however, the measure is now set to become policy 1 JAN 2021.

[Source: Military.com | Hope Hodge Seck | November 4, 2020++]

Proposal to Incoming Administration **A Simple Political Appointee Tasking**



There was a time, not so long ago, when Veterans Day was a personal affair for most Americans. The mass mobilization of World War II, coupled with the draft era of Korea and Vietnam, meant that almost every dinner table was connected to the military, and almost every citizen had a close relationship with someone who had served in uniform. That time has passed, and it has passed with consequences. Forty-seven years into the all-volunteer force, military veterans make up only seven percent of the population. Many Americans do not know and have not spent any meaningful time with a service member. It's a fact for the man on the street, and it's a fact for many of the women and men who walk the halls of American power.

We are about to see a change in who walks those halls. The challenges facing the incoming administration are enormous, made even more complicated by a raging pandemic and a toxic and divided political culture. In the face of these daunting issues, I propose a small idea, one that won't resolve any of major policy disputes, but that might affect the environment in which they are considered. What if every new Biden-Harris appointee was asked to go to Arlington National Cemetery and to walk the grounds with a member of the military, a veteran, or a military family member? Not just the appointees serving in national security or Veterans Affairs posts, but every appointee, from every department, from cabinet secretaries to policy experts to confidential assistants across the interagency.

It is a simple act, but an important one. The originator of this proposal, Bren Colburn, never served in the military, but he was lucky to spend time in the company of those who did. Growing up an Army brat, and later working as political appointee in the Pentagon, shaped his sense of service, his understanding of sacrifice, and his relationship to the concept of public-policy consequences. It made him better at what he did. One afternoon can't replicate those connections, but it can start to change perceptions. During his time in government, he often found himself visiting Arlington, and was surprised by how few of his colleagues had never been. It was only a couple Metro stops away from their offices, but it was a world away from many of their life experiences.

These would be quiet visits, opportunities to listen. They shouldn't be viewed as partisan—it just happens that the President-elect is a Democrat—and the offer to participate could be extended to incoming members of Congress and their staffs. This could be a starting point for a national commitment to directly connect, in small ways, the American people to the military that defends them. For all the talk in policy circles about the growing civ-mil divide, sometimes the simplest steps are overlooked. Imagine an America where a visit like this was facilitated for every graduating high school senior? A chance to personally be exposed to the military, to look beyond Hollywood takes and sporting event flyovers, to have a conversation with someone who has been there. Think of these opportunities as reverse Honor Flights, meant not to celebrate but to educate.

It is important to stop and say thank you, to pause and remember. But we can truly honor our veterans by bringing their experiences into our lives, and into the policy-making circles of our nation. The effort needs to be intentional, and it needs to be sustained. An afternoon to walk and talk isn't much, but for many, it's a start. [Source: Defense One | Brent Colburn (Opinion) | November 11, 2020 ++]

Vet Jobs

Update 269: Code Platoon Offers Vets Software Development Training

Veterans and their spouses can train to become professional, certified software developers with Code Platoon's Coding Bootcamp, an immersive, hands-on training program with opportunities for paid internships (in Chicago only) and job placements as a web developer upon graduation. The Code Platoon Coding Bootcamp covers everything needed to work as a "full-stack developer," which means Veterans and spouses can get hands-on experience in building front-facing websites and behind-the-scenes databases. Over the 14-week full-time training course, students will learn about today's web development tools, programming languages, industry best practices, and even some soft skills to help them become well-rounded professionals prepared for finding a job.

There are also evening and weekend courses available, which run for 28 weeks and cover the same curriculum as the 14-week course. And there is a self-paced coding program that is free to Veterans, active duty service members, and military spouses. For students new to coding, Code Platoon offers Intro to Coding and Bootcamp prep classes. Currently, Coding Bootcamp classes are all online for safety reasons.

Anyone who has served at least one day in the military (or is married to someone who has) is eligible to apply to Code Platoon, including National Guard and Reserve. The Code Platoon team works individually with each incoming student, providing a personal connection right from the start. Code Platoon accepts the GI Bill for in-person students, [VET TEC](#), VR&E, and Skillbridge. For students who do not want to use VA benefits or have exhausted their benefits, Code Platoon offers scholarships, including full scholarships for women, Transgender, and Black and Hispanic students. Contact Code Platoon for more information on program costs.

According to Rod Levy, Code Platoon Executive Director and Founder, "Code Platoon has a long-standing partnership with the Department of Veteran Affairs. Their team works tirelessly to ensure Veterans and spouses can utilize their educational benefits to participate in our programs. We are grateful VA recognizes the importance and impact of coding boot camps in helping fill the increasing need for technical talent in our country. To Apply check out [Code Platoon's program site](#) to learn more about the program, eligibility, training curriculum, costs, and other important information. When you're ready to apply, [click here to start your application](#). For more information on the program, eligibility, and application process, Contact Code Platoon at info@codeplatoon.org. [Source: <https://www.vvmf.org> | Kevin Secor | November 13, 2020 ++]

WWII Vets 238

David Baker | Silver Star PI Vet



David Lieuwen Baker was drafted into the Army in February 1942 and kept a frequent correspondence with his wife and parents. Baker wrote often to his family in Iowa about army life and events while stationed in Honolulu, Hawaii, as part of the 25th Infantry Division, 8th Field Artillery Battalion. While in Hawaii, the 25th infantry division participated in jungle warfare and amphibious training in preparation for deployment to the Pacific. In a letter of Aug. 19, 1942, Baker wrote that “it seems like there is always something to do and I try as hard as I can to keep busy.” He later commented in a letter from 1943 how “it is so funny how many things there are to write about over here and yet none of them are permissible [due to censorship].”

After serving as an operations and training staff officer in Guadalcanal, Baker became the business post exchange officer for the 25th ID. Post exchanges serve as shopping areas for soldiers on military bases or installations. During the summer of 1944, Baker also attended the Command and Staff College at his base in California while continuing to serve in the Post Exchange. In mid-January 1945, the 25th Infantry Division deployed to the Pacific as part of the Philippine liberation campaign. After landing at San Fabian in northern Luzon, the division fought its way southward through the Caraballo Mountains and the surrounding provinces.

On Feb. 9, 1945, Baker was serving as a liaison officer when he learned that an assault company’s leaders were trapped by mortar fire near a heavily fortified hill close to the village of Rosaldo. According to his April 1945 citation for the Silver Star, Baker led two consecutive artillery assaults against the hill to rescue the trapped company. When enemy fire damaged his communications radio, Baker put himself in harm’s way to repair the radio and restore communications before recommencing the next assault.

After the capture of Balet Pass in April, Baker’s unit remained in the Cagayan Valley until the beginning of July 1945. When the Japanese surrendered in August, Baker stayed in Tarlac to assist with postwar duties until mid-September, when he was sent by ship to Gifu, Japan. In one of his last letters before leaving the Philippines, Baker described the dismantling of military equipment and the downsizing of bases. “We have been awfully busy getting everything loaded and moved to the beach. We are loading from the identical same spot on the same beach nine long months ago. It looks quite a bit different than it did then.” Baker eventually returned to the U.S. in spring 1946. He was honorably discharged in April as a lieutenant colonel.

For his service during the course of the war, Baker received numerous medals, including the Silver Star, the Air Medal and the Philippine Liberation Ribbon. “I have changed my ideas about a lot of things,” Baker wrote in a letter dating May 1945, “mainly to be happy with what I have and enjoy life as it is rather than to always be feeling sorry for myself for what I haven’t.” We honor his service. [Source: Vantage Point | Sarah Concepcion | October 8, 2020 ++]

WWII Vets 239

George Percy | Bataan POW Killed in Transfer to Japan



George Washington Percy served in the Washington University Reserve Officer Training Corps while attending law school in St. Louis, Missouri. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army in 1940. Percy served at Camp Robinson, Arkansas, and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in the 527th Coast Artillery. In January 1941, Percy traveled to Manila in the Philippines. He arrived in Manila Feb. 10 and served with the 60th Coast Artillery in Corregidor. He later served with the 2nd Observation Squadron of the Army Air Forces stationed at Clark Air Base in central Luzon. In July, Percy transferred to the Army Air Forces at Nichols Field.

On the same day as the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor Dec. 7, 1941, the Japanese immediately attacked the Philippines 8 DEC and destroyed several American air bases. In early January 1942, the 2nd Observation Squadron relocated to Bataan Airfield. As part of the 60th Coast Artillery, Percy participated as an infantry officer in the battles of Bataan in April and Corregidor in May.

After the American surrender on May 6, 1942, Percy was among the 4,000 Filipino and American soldiers taken to Bilibid Prison in Manila. The Japanese imprisoned him at Davao Penal Colony on Mindanao Island in the southern Philippines and Cabanatuan Prison Camp near Bataan. While captured, Percy kept a diary that documented unsuccessfully attempted prisoner escapes, the resulting executions, the lack of food, and camp population estimates.

On Oct. 11, 1944, Percy was among the 1,774 prisoners of war who sailed on a Japanese troopship from Manila to work as slave labor in Japan. En route north, a U.S. naval submarine torpedoed and sunk the unmarked ship in the South China Sea 24 OCT. Percy was among the 1,760 casualties. He posthumously received a Purple Heart in January 1945. A friend later sent Percy's prison diaries to his family. [Vantage Point | Melissa Burgh | George Washington Percy served in the Washington University Reserve Officer Training Corps while attending law school in St. Louis, Missouri. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army in 1940. Percy served at Camp Robinson, Arkansas, and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in the 527th Coast Artillery. In January 1941, Percy traveled to Manila in the Philippines. He arrived in Manila Feb. 10 and served with the 60th Coast Artillery in Corregidor. He later served with the 2nd Observation Squadron of the Army Air Forces stationed at Clark Air Base in central Luzon. In July, Percy transferred to the Army Air Forces at Nichols Field.

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WWII Vets 240

Horace Carswell Jr. | China B24J Pilot



Fort Worth, Texas native Horace Carswell Jr., joined the Army Air Corps in Dallas as a flying cadet March 26, 1940. Prior to his enlistment, Carswell earned his bachelor's degree in physical education from Texas Christian University. He played both football and baseball for the Horned Frogs until his graduation in 1939. After completing primary flight training in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Carswell returned to Texas. He attended primary flight school and the Army Air Corps' advanced school outside of San Antonio. Upon graduation, Carswell commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army Air Corps Reserve. When assigned to active duty in 1941, he first served as a flight instructor at Randolph Field in San Antonio. Carswell then transferred between Tucson, Arizona, and Biggs Army Air Field in El Paso, Texas. He promoted to captain in 1942 after working as a flight commander.

His rotation of assignments continued the next year with moves to bases in both Clovis, New Mexico, and Langley, Virginia. Carswell's resume developed exponentially in these two locations, serving as squadron and deputy group commander of the 302nd Group in the 356th Bombardment Squadron. His time stateside concluded with a promotion to major, before transferring to the 308th Bombardment Group stationed in China.

In Liuchow, China, Carswell was responsible for a detachment of B-24Js, bombers which were outfitted with radars and intended for low-altitude flights. On the evening of Oct. 26, 1944, Carswell piloted a B-24J over the South China Sea, ordering two bombing runs of Japanese convoys. During the second attack, Carswell's bomber was hit by Japanese fire. Carswell directed the aircraft to the coastline but could not maintain altitude and ordered his fellow crewmembers to abandon the bomber. His copilot and one other squadron member refused to do so. Eventually, the aircraft crashed into a mountainside, fatally wounding all three men aboard. For his skill and valor, Carswell posthumously received a Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal, and the Purple Heart. We honor his service. [Source: Vantage Point | Hannah Randolph| October 26, 2020 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure | Karshi-Khanabad

Update 03: Lawmakers Upset w/VA over Failure to Provide Care

A Department of Veterans Affairs official on 18 NOV drew the ire of some House lawmakers during a hearing over the agency's continued resistance to providing health care to more service members and veterans for toxic exposure, stating more data is needed to conclude exposure leads to illnesses such as cancer. "More scientific investigation is needed to enable VA and [the Defense Department] to perform a reliable assessment of the possible or known long-term adverse health effects," said Dr. Patricia Hastings, chief consultant for post-deployment health services at the VA.

But recently declassified Defense Department documents show the Pentagon knew troops were exposed to multiple toxins and hazards that have led to hundreds of cancer cases and dozens of dead veterans after deploying to the Karshi-Khanabad Air Base, known as K2, in Uzbekistan in the early days of the War on Terror. Some lawmakers responded harshly to the VA's stance during the hearing of the House Oversight and Reform Committee's subpanel on national security. "The VA's continued denial has left hundreds, if not thousands, of K2 veterans ineligible for certain preventative health programs and unable to receive VA disability benefits in connection with their service at K2," said Rep. Stephen Lynch, D-Mass., chairman of the committee's subpanel. "This is an injustice that must be rectified, and [VA] Secretary [Robert] Wilkie has the authority to fix it by granting presumptive status to K2 veterans today."

K2 is a former Soviet air base in southeastern Uzbekistan that shares a border with northern Afghanistan. After the 9/11 attacks, U.S. forces established Camp Stronghold Freedom at K2, which was used to support combat missions from 2001 to 2005. Veterans have described a toxic environment at the post, where pond water glowed green, black sludge oozed from the ground and the government posted massive white and yellow signs warning troops to keep out of certain areas due to chemical agents.

Lawmakers argued during the hearing that the VA isn't providing presumptive care, which it has the authority to do without approval from Congress or the White House. Lawmakers agreed conclusive research is needed, but the evidence is increasing that young veterans got sick after deploying to K2. And it isn't just K2, thousands of veterans have been exposed to burn pits all over the world, most notably Iraq and Afghanistan, and VA has denied nearly 78% of those claims as well. Former service members who spent time at K2 testified on Capitol Hill in February that they were aware of at least 400 individuals diagnosed with cancers who served at the base. They said at least 30 have died.

During a health assessment test in 2001 by the Defense Department, military analysts found the base had "elevated levels of volatile organic compounds and total petroleum hydrocarbons were detected at numerous locations throughout Stronghold Freedom, including tent city, eastern expansion area and adjacent to the aircraft maintenance facility." It also found ambient air is the "main concern for environmental contaminants." The assessment found that "inhalation of vapors from exposed, subsurface fuel contaminated soils could potentially cause adverse health effects to personnel at Stronghold Freedom if sufficient exposure circumstances occurred." As a result, the assessment recommended "prohibit digging into soil contaminated with jet fuel," but those areas were populated with aircraft hangars and tents in which soldiers slept.

An area near the tents was found to contain pieces of depleted uranium in 2001, and external radiation measurements in 2002 detected elevated radiation levels. K2 also had open-air burn pits used to get rid of waste, which the VA has posted on its website "may affect the skin, eyes, respiratory and cardiovascular systems, gastrointestinal tract and internal organs." Yet, VA officials remain unconvinced and said the issue needs more science to back up veterans' claims for health care and disability compensation. Hastings said the agency is still studying the K2 mission and how it might have impacted the health of troops serving there. She said the study will take about 12-18 months to complete. She added the study is being conducted with a "very small staff." "Good science takes time ... it will take some time," she said.

Hastings also noted the Defense Department made efforts to reduce health risks at K2. "Remediation efforts were completed to reduce potential exposure and risk to service members deployed there. In accordance with environmental

science best practices, DoD covered contaminated areas with clean dirt and declaring them ‘off limits’ to prevent mitigate the threat of radiation hazard and fuel,” Hastings said.

But lawmakers said they are losing patience with the VA, which took decades to provide care for victims of Agent Orange exposure during the Vietnam War. Lawmakers said they fear toxic exposure is the post-9/11 generation’s Agent Orange and questioned who would criticize opening up presumptive care. “The downside is maybe one of these veterans got cancer from somewhere else and they’d be covered, I’d absorb that risk,” Lynch said. “If that’s the downside for the government here, embrace it...Don’t deny them all for the misplaced concern a couple of veterans with cancer might get the treatment that might not be connected to service at K2.”

Lynch and Rep. Glenn Grothman of Wisconsin, the ranking Republican on the subpanel, penned a letter to Wilkie to request a senior VA official testify at the K2 hearing, which the department declined to do. The lawmakers said while they appreciate Hastings’ medical expertise, she has no role in crafting VA policy and determining eligibility for benefits. “Hundreds of veterans have been diagnosed with various forms of cancer and other health ailments since deploying to K2 between 2001 and 2005. We believe these veterans deserve to hear directly from VA leadership about why the department continues to deny that their illnesses are service-connected despite the growing evidence to the contrary,” the letter reads.

Some veterans advocates said they believe toxic exposure is likely to be a top issue in President-elect Joe Biden’s administration since he believes his son Beau Biden’s brain cancer was caused by burn pit exposure in Iraq when he deployed there as a part of the Delaware National Guard. The issue has gained more public attention after comedian Jon Stewart has started to lead the lobbying effort to get care to veterans suffering from illnesses linked to toxic exposure. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Steve Beynon | November 18, 2020 ++]

Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule

As of 1 DEC 2020

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

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

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

Note that events listed on the Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule may be cancelled or rescheduled. Before traveling long distances to attend an event, you should contact the applicable RAO, RSO, event sponsor, etc., to ensure the event will, in fact, be held on the date\time indicated. Also, attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214. Please report broken links, comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and\or other military retiree\veternans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, Milton.Bell126@gmail.com [Source: Retiree\Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | November 30, 2020 ++]

Vet Hiring Fairs

Scheduled As of 1 DEC 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 | November 30, 2020 ++]

Veteran State Benefits

Virginia 2020

The commonwealth of Virginia provides several benefits to veterans and their families. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Vet State Benefits– VA**” for an overview of the ones listed below. Benefits are available to active duty and veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below refer to refer to <https://www.dvs.virginia.gov>:

- Housing
- Financial Assistance
- Employment
- Education
- Recreation

- Burials
- Other commonwealth Veteran Benefits

[Source: <https://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/utah-state-veterans-benefits.html> | November 2020
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*** Vet Legislation ***



VA Medical Malpractice

Update 02: S.4883/ H.R.3813 | VA Medical Care and Liability Improvement Act

A key House bill has now also been introduced in the Senate, signaling further bipartisan support for game-changing legislation aiming to protect veterans who experience medical malpractice at the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Brian Tally VA Employment Transparency Act would allow any veteran or family member who has filed a claim against VA for damage, injury or death to be entitled to receive, within 30 days, a notice from VA about legal council, the employment status of anyone involved in the claim (including whether they work for VA or are a contractor) and the statute of limitations for the claim. Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Thom Tillis (R-NC), both members of the Veterans Affairs and Armed Services committees, introduced the bill this week.

The House version H.R.4526, sponsored by Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA), already received a hearing at the Veterans Affairs Committee and now is awaiting approval to advance. If the bill passes both the House and Senate -- with bipartisan support on both sides, it's likely -- then it moves on to the president's desk. President Donald Trump recently signed a slate of bills to help veterans, particularly with suicide prevention mental health concerns and frequently touts his support for veterans and his work to improve VA. White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, a Republican Congressman from North Carolina before being appointed to Trump's cabinet, also has publicly supported the measure. But there are limited legislative days left on the calendar for Congress this year, so lawmakers will have to act quickly. If the bill doesn't pass this session, it will have to be reintroduced next year.

The information the bill requires VA to provide is critical for veterans if they become victims of malpractice since the statute of limitations and rules for potential lawsuits can vary depending on the status of the employee allegedly responsible. If veterans aren't informed, they could be left with no legal recourse and no justice for the harm done -- precisely what happened to the bill's namesake. The bill is one of two named for Marine veteran Brian Tally, who has been working for years since he was irreparably injured by near-fatal VA medical malpractice to ensure what happened to him doesn't happen to any of his fellow veterans. Now, he's anxiously awaiting the chance to make history for the veteran community.

"I've been working for over two and a half years on this and have dedicated my life to making this change. I've been absolutely nonpartisan and have worked successfully with both Democrats and Republicans," Tally told Connecting Vets on 13 NOV. "This legislation is far too important to politicize. "This is about the veteran community as a whole and I'm using my story as one example to give the voiceless a voice and make the VA transparent to the veterans they serve," he said.

In what little feedback VA provided Congress, it seemed as though the department did not initially support the bill, despite the veterans and lawmakers who already stand behind it. During the House hearing during the summer, VA was unable to answer lawmakers' questions about bill because only one VA official was capable of answering the question, but she could not be heard because of technical difficulties and was not physically present at the hearing. VA's written testimony on the bill, however, said it could be difficult for the department to keep track of claims and statutes of limitations for veteran malpractice claims. "VA, a federal agency with a budget of over \$200 billion," Levin said during the hearing. "What makes you think it's easier for a veteran to keep track of this information, especially without legal counsel?"

With or without VA's approval, lawmakers seem prepared to move forward with the legislation that stands to create new policies the department will be lawfully required to follow. "This bipartisan, bicameral bill will rectify the VA's gross administrative neglect and restore legal options to our country's veterans when they are wronged by the VA or a VA contractor," Blumenthal said in a statement this week. "It is simply unacceptable that the VA is failing to properly notify our country's veterans about their options when they file legal claims, essentially robbing them of their rights. Veterans must have the ability to seek legal recourse in cases of medical malpractice or other negligence – period."

"Medical malpractice remains an issue at hospitals across the country, and veterans should have due process rights if they experience malpractice," said Tillis. "This bill ensures that veterans have the information they need to receive justice, whether they were treated by a VA employee or a contractor." "If I waited, I would have died." Tally woke up one morning in 2016 with debilitating back pain that left him unable to stand or walk. Like many other veterans before him, he headed to the VA -- a decision that changed his life forever. A doctor Tally said he thought worked directly for VA, but was actually an independent contractor, botched his diagnoses, delaying or denying critical care for months. His family was forced to pay out-of-pocket for private care that eventually prompted a battery of tests and surgeries to discover, and then fight, a bone-eating staph infection that was destroying his spine and threatening his life.



"If I waited, I would have died," Tally (above) says now, practiced in retelling his own brush with death and his family's hardships.

VA officials admitted that Tally received second-rate care at the VA emergency room in Loma Linda, Calif., about 56 miles outside of Los Angeles, according to documents obtained by Connecting Vets. But a 73-year-old legal loophole allows VA to deflect responsibility for the malpractice, leaving Tally with no legal recourse, no way to seek recompense for losing his family car, his small business and putting him out of work for years. VA deferred Tally's federal tort claim, saying the VA employee responsible for the malpractice was a contractor and he had to file a state claim. Information they failed to pass along to Tally until it was too late and the statute of limitations in his state had expired, he said.

"We nearly lost everything," Tally told Connecting Vets during one of his last trips to Capitol Hill while walking steadily from one Congressional office to the next to promote his bills. "My life changed in ways I never imagined or saw coming. I live and feel it every day." But Tally has never given up. He knows what happened to him could happen to anyone -- with VA contractors nearly indistinguishable from normal VA employees, working "behind the VA veil," he says. Now, seemingly poised to see real action taken, he can almost see the finish line. "I've never been angry," the former small business owner, football and baseball coach said. "This hurt my family and I really bad and people can see my tenacious effort and my motivation through my actions and positive engagement. I've killed them with

kindness," he said of his advocacy for the bills in Congress. "I'm running this as if it's my business. I've logged over 11,000 hours in two and a half years and have had four bill introductions to date."

Tally sees his mission as protecting other veterans now that it's too late for him to get justice. "I want to be heard. I want to be taken seriously," he continued. "I've been called to serve and I have no problem serving my country again in this capacity. I'm certainly looking very forward to accomplishing this mission to ensure the rights and protections of all veterans. Once this happens, I will finally be able to close this chapter of my life, begin to heal and start to live again." The second bill in Congress named for Tally is the Brian Tally VA Medical Care and Liability Improvement Act which would ensure that VA health care contractors are subject to federal tort claims, to improve the accountability of VA physicians. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | November 11, 2020 ++]

Vet Suicide

Update 52: S.4900 | Improving Servicemember Transition to Reduce Vet Suicide

U.S. Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and Joni Ernst (R-IA) introduced legislation to support the mental health needs of servicemembers and veterans as they return to their local communities. The **Daniel J. Harvey Jr. and Adam Lambert Improving Servicemember Transition to Reduce Veteran Suicide Act** – which was named to honor the memory of two Marines who died by suicide – would create a pilot program to add a new component to the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Specifically the bill is designed to counsel servicemembers about mental health, the challenges that they might face during transition and how that might affect their mental health, and the services available to them at their local Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facility.

“We know the first year post-separation is a critical period for servicemembers and their families, and we must do a better job at highlighting potential mental health stressors. By providing a direct link for veterans at their local VA facilities, it helps to ensure they can connect with providers and the resources that can best address their needs,” said Brown. “Our bill gets us one step closer to meeting this gap in care by requiring VA to take proactive measures to address mental health issues faced by servicemembers, thereby helping to alleviate the pressure to seek care they may not realize that they need.”

“This bill extends a helping hand to our country’s servicemembers as they transition out of the military,” said Blumenthal. “We’ve lost far too many of our nation’s bravest to suicide, PTSD, TBI, and other conditions, because they suffered in isolation and didn’t know where to turn for help. I am fighting for this bill in memory of Connecticut’s Staff Sergeant Tyler Michael Reeb, who served as a Marine Corps sniper and tragically took his own life last year. Expanding the transition assistance program to act as a ‘reverse boot camp’ can help prevent the deaths and needless suffering of brave veterans like Staff Sergeant Reeb and their families.”

“Iowan and Marine Corps veteran Cpl. Adam Lambert was not just a hero to our nation, but he was a hero to his friends and family. Our nation has a duty to veterans across the country and to their loved ones, a duty to ensure that our heroes have the care and support they are promised. That’s why I’m proud to partner with Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown on this important measure to provide resources for our veterans who are adjusting to civilian life and may be facing serious challenges,” said Ernst.

“This piece of legislation is the first step toward properly transitioning our nation’s veterans after their service. Our current transition program does not prepare our veterans for the grief and emotional and mental stressors they will face once they leave the military. We have witnessed our failure to address the transition process in the staggering rates of veteran suicide, substance misuse, and homelessness. By providing them with this valuable knowledge and a healthy support system to navigate their transition they will be more likely to succeed in their post-military lives,” said Tom Wike, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran and social work student at Ohio State University.

The pilot program would be established at ten different Transition Assistance Center locations, which serve at least 300 members annually. TAP counseling would include discussion related to possible loss of community or identity crises while transitioning to civilian life, as well as the five stages of grief. Servicemembers would be provided with information regarding the mental health programs and benefits at their local VA facility. The bill would require servicemembers to submit their medical record to VA regardless of whether they chose to utilize benefits. The bill would also require a social worker or mental health professional from their local VA to call the servicemember within 90 days of transitioning to set up an appointment. After an assessment, the Secretaries of Defense and VA would assess whether to expand the pilot program after five years.

This builds on Senator Brown’s earlier work to improve the transition process for servicemembers. In 2018, Brown introduced bipartisan legislation with U.S. Sen Mike Rounds (R-SD), the Better Access to Technical Training, Learning, and Entrepreneurship for Servicemembers Act (BATTLE) for Servicemembers Act, which will better connect servicemembers with resources to secure quality education and good-paying jobs as they transition from military service to civilian life. According to a 2017 GAO report, only 14 percent of servicemembers completed at least one additional two-day training program after completing the three day required portion of TAP. Currently, TAP training covers a curriculum that includes sessions on veterans’ benefits, financial planning, and post-service employment. The BATTLE for Servicemembers Act will now supplement the current training and better tailor the sessions to fit the needs of servicemembers. [Source: Sen. Brown Press Release | November 16, 2020 ++]

VA Website

Update 06: H.R. 1199/S.3587 | VA Website Accessibility Act

Help could soon be on the way for thousands of disabled veterans. Both the House of Representatives and Senate have passed a version of the "VA Website Accessibility Act." The bipartisan bill directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study of all VA websites and kiosks at medical facilities. The secretary will then submit a report to Congress and provide a plan to bring those sites into compliance. "I am proud the House will send to the President’s desk this legislation to eliminate barriers that prevent veterans from receiving the care and benefits they earned," said Rep. Elaine Lura (VA-02). "This bill will ensure that veterans can use the resources available on all VA websites. Our veterans should not have to wait one day longer." The bill now heads to President Donald Trump to be signed into law. [Source: ABC 13 News | November 1, 2020 ++]

Military Domestic Violence

Update 01: S.4922 | Military Domestic Violence Prevention Act

Two senators have introduced a bipartisan bill to improve staffing levels for a Defense Department program designed to address domestic abuse while also raising awareness of the program’s existence among military spouses. Sens. John Cornyn (R-TX) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) introduced the **Military Domestic Violence Prevention Act**, which takes aim at improving the Defense Department’s Family Advocacy Program through better resourcing, sharing more information about its services with families and enhancing coordination between the military service branches, according to a joint news release from the senators. “Domestic violence survivors in the military deserve our full support as they rebuild and recover, and we owe it to them to ensure perpetrators are held accountable,” Sinema said in a statement issued Thursday. “Our bipartisan bill empowers survivors by improving counseling and encouraging reporting on military bases, ensuring the health and safety of everyone in our military communities.”

The bill requires the Family Advocacy Program to report to Congress on staffing “to ensure the program is properly resourced,” according to the news release. As of now, this specific staffing information is not reported to Congress, according to an aide in Cornyn’s office speaking on the condition of anonymity. Delivered through the service branches, the Family Advocacy Program addresses domestic abuse, child abuse and neglect and problematic sexual behavior in children and youth, according to its website. It also coordinates with military and civilian agencies to prevent and identify abuse and provide appropriate treatment for affected service members and their families.

Incidents reported to the program make up the information available in an annual Pentagon report on the prevalence of domestic abuse among service members and their families. The fiscal year 2019 report, released in April, stated the Pentagon funds more than 1,950 positions in the military departments for clinical providers, domestic abuse victim advocates, new parent support personnel and prevention staff. The report did not describe how those staffers are divided among military bases or whether all funded positions were filled. The report also stated 7,921 of the 13,571 incidents of domestic abuse reported to the program met the program’s definition of abuse, which is “domestic violence, or a pattern of behavior resulting in emotional or psychological abuse, economic control, and/or interference with personal liberty that is directed to a person who is a current or former spouse, a person with whom the abuser shares a child in common or a current or former intimate partner with whom the abuser shares or has shared a common domicile.”

There were 12 confirmed domestic abuse fatalities in 2019 involving military personnel as perpetrators or victims, according to the Pentagon report. Fewer than one in five domestic violence survivors now self-report to their base’s advocacy program, according to the senators. To raise awareness, the bill creates a pilot program to educate spouses about it when they receive a military identification card and enroll in Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System, known as DEERS. The senators cited two deaths this year of service members from their home states who told their friends and families that they felt their safety was threatened by a peer, but did not make official reports on base.

- Army Spc. Vanessa Guillen, a Texas native, was killed in April at Fort Hood, Texas, by a fellow soldier who her family said had previously sexually harassed her.
- Air Force Airman 1st Class Natasha Aposhian of Arizona was shot and killed in June at Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D., by another airman. She had dated the man, but recently told him that she did not want to continue seeing him, according to her parents.

Some victims choose not to report domestic violence because of community stigma and fear of retribution from the perpetrator, according to a report from the RAND Corporation. “Service members who put their lives on the line shouldn’t have to fear reporting domestic violence or face dealing with the resulting trauma alone,” Cornyn said in the statement issued Thursday. “In addition to funding education and prevention programs, this legislation would encourage members of the military and their families to seek help while ensuring they have access to the resources they need to heal.”

The bipartisan bill also requires the Defense Department to produce a report on solutions to encourage reporting and identify lessons learned that can be shared between service branches and bases. The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, an organization that conducts research and provides comprehensive information and resources on domestic violence, applauded the efforts of the bill. “We know that domestic violence is preventable,” according to a statement from the center. “We also know that survivors of violence in the military face unique circumstances that compound their vulnerability and increase barriers to safety and healing.”

The senators said they’ve received endorsements on the bill from two military-specific advocacy organizations, Protect Our Defenders and the Modern Military Association of America. “Far too often, service members and their family members do not seek help when dealing with domestic violence, resulting in serious consequences that could have been prevented,” said Jennifer Dane, Air Force veteran and interim executive director of the Modern Military Association of America. “Our military families deserve better, and it’s critical that we take action to stop the escalation of violence through earlier education, prevention, and treatment.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Rose L. Thayer | November 23, 2020 ++]

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>.

*** Military ***



Navy Carrier Fleet

Update 04: No margin Left | Overworked after Decades of Overuse

Navy aircraft carrier operations are up 40 percent this year over last year, even as the service has fewer available for tasking due to maintenance and acquisition challenges. From January through 31 OCT, U.S. carriers had spent a combined total of 855 days at sea – 258 days more than all of 2019, according to a USNI News analysis of carrier deployments over the last five years. That heavy carrier usage makes 2020 the busiest year for the carrier fleet since the Arab Spring, forcing some carriers to stay on station for record-length deployments and conduct double-pumps even as others are sidelined and can't contribute to the workload. The National Defense Strategy in January 2018 called on the military to prioritize building up readiness and lethality for a future fight over routine low-end operations today, giving the Navy something it hadn't had in almost two decades: a reprieve from keeping an aircraft carrier in the Middle East. To read how the Navy is attempting to cope with its maintenance and acquisition challenges refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Overworked Navy Carrier Fleet**". [Source: USNI News | Megan Eckstein | November 12, 2020 ++]

Military Force Reduction

Update 03: Afghanistan & Iraq

The United States will draw down forces in Afghanistan and Iraq by Jan. 15, 2021, Acting Defense Secretary Christopher C. Miller said 17 NOV at the Pentagon. Miller announced the drawdown of troops to 2,500 in Afghanistan and 2,500 in Iraq during his first appearance in the Pentagon briefing room. There are currently around 4,500 U.S. service members in Afghanistan and 3,000 in Iraq. Miller, who took over as acting secretary on 9 NOV, said the move was made with the full concurrence of military officials in the U.S. Central Command area and at the Pentagon. The decision is in keeping with President Donald J. Trump's promise to get U.S. forces home from the "forever wars."

A senior defense official speaking on background before the announcement said the president has been consistent about withdrawing forces from the countries. One precondition was that U.S. safety and security not be threatened by the actions. The senior defense official said that certain conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan had to be met, but the

official declined to enumerate them. The official said the U.S. forces left in both countries should be able to continue the mission with no degradation in capabilities.

Hundreds of thousands of U.S. service members and troops from partner nations have served in Afghanistan and Iraq. Many Americans served multiple tours. More than 6,900 Americans have been killed in these wars and more than 52,000 have been wounded. This does not count the almost 3,000 Americans killed in the terror strikes of Sept. 11, 2001, that began this. The al-Qaida terror group used Afghanistan as a planning, training and staging area for the strikes in New York, at the Pentagon, and in Pennsylvania. "In light of these tremendous sacrifices, and with great humility and gratitude to those who came before us, I am formally announcing that we will implement President Trump's orders to continue our repositioning of forces from those two countries," Miller said. "This is consistent with our established plans and strategic objectives, supported by the American people, and does not equate to a change in policy or objectives."

Miller said Trump's decision is based on continuous engagement with his national security cabinet over the past several months. "We will execute this repositioning in a way that protects our fighting men and women, our partners in the intelligence community and diplomatic corps, and our superb allies that are critical to rebuilding Afghan and Iraqi security capabilities and civil society for lasting peace in troubled lands," Miller said. Miller said he has spoken to Afghan and Iraqi officials and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. The decision is not irreversible, Miller said. "If the forces of terror, instability, division and hate begin a deliberate campaign to disrupt our efforts, we stand ready to ally the capabilities required to thwart them," Miller said. You can listen to his announcement at https://cdn.dvidshub.net/media/video/2011/DOD_108067050/DOD_108067050-1280x720-2765k.mp4. [Source: DOD News| Jim Garamone | November 17, 2020 ++]

Military Cellphone Use

Are Phoneless Deployments the Future for Marines?



U.S. Marine secures a personal cellphone during Combined Marine Component Command, Command Post Exercise at the III Marine Expeditionary Force Entry Control Point (ECP) on Camp Mujuk, Republic of Korea (ROK), March 19, 2015.

Cellphones have become everywhere in the modern U.S. military. It is how word is passed and how Marines pass time after hurrying up to wait. But against a sophisticated enemy, the signals given off by cellphones could give away a unit's position and cause them to be targeted by long-range weapons. When 3,500 paratroopers with the 82nd Airborne Division deployed to the Middle East in early 2020 as tensions rose between Iran and the U.S., the soldiers were barred from bringing their cellphones.

The Marine Corps likely would copy in future deployments, Lt. Gen. Brain Beaudreault, commander of II Marine Expeditionary Force, told reporters 13 NOV. "I will put out a MEF order on an actual deployment that provides

absolute control,” the commander said while discussing the MEF level exercise his unit just completed. The exercise simulated an attack from a “near-peer” adversary against an ally in Northern Europe, Beaudreault said. A large part of the exercise was avoiding detection by the enemy by using distributed operations and hiding the electronic signals a large modern force is bound to be emitting. During the exercise cellphones were banned within the operating space as the MEF attempted to avoid detection by the near-peer, Beaudreault said.

“We can absolutely crack down,” the commander said. “It’s harder to do than say, but it requires discipline and it requires education and understanding that this is no joke when we’re facing a peer adversary who’s looking for those exact signals,” Beaudreault added. In 2018 the military banned Fitbits and other fitness tracking apps from deployed service members who were deploying after a fitness app revealed the details of life on base for deployed service members. Ever since the military has considered restricting the use of cellphones in places like the Pentagon and on deployment. Eventually then Defense Secretary Jim Mattis opted to allow cellphones in the Pentagon. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Philip Athey | November 16, 2020 ++]

Navy Retention

Update 02: Voluntary Separations to be Offered to Some

The Navy will allow some enlisted sailors serving in overstaffed jobs to apply to leave the service before the end of their enlistment contract, the service has announced. The Navy hopes granting some enlisted sailors an early release from their enlistment commitment will ensure promotion opportunities for sailors who intend to remain in the Navy without forcing people from the service involuntarily, according to a service news release. Early separations will be considered on a case-by-case basis, the service said. “As the Navy has grown over recent years, some enlisted ratings at specific pay grades have become overmanned due to high retention in these ratings,” Vice Adm. John B. Nowell, the Navy’s chief of personnel, wrote in a Nov. 19 memorandum. “Fleet readiness is our No. 1 priority while also allowing for a flexible marketplace of talent management.”

The Navy will publish further information about sailors who might be considered for early separation in the coming weeks. Such information including identification of overstaffed jobs and year groups will be posted on the Navy Personnel Command website, the Navy release said. Officials said the Navy will offer several paths to early separations, but they expect most to be granted via the recently reestablished Early Enlisted Transition Program, which grants early separations on a first-come, first-served basis based on quotas determined by a sailors’ job, rank, year group and skills.

Other pathways would allow enlisted sailors to request early separation to go to college, to pursue a commission or a change to another service. Sailors who intend to commission or transfer military services would have to apply for a “conditional release,” which can only be approved by Navy Personnel Command, the service said. Sailors interested in those possibilities should submit requests to that command through their commanding officer, according to the memo. Sailors facing forced rating changes with less than a year left in the service would also be able to apply for early separation, according to the service. Those sailors would have to request to be separated immediately and would forfeit any bonuses that required them to complete the full terms of their enlistment.

The Navy is also encouraging sailors who might apply for early separation to consider instead a transfer to the Reserve or a change in specialty. “All sailors considering early out options are also highly encouraged to seek conversion to other ratings for which they are eligible and qualified,” Nowell wrote in the memo. “Command career counselors and enlisted community managers are available resources for determining the ratings for which a sailor is best suited.” [Source: Stars & Stripes | Corey Dickstein | November 25, 2020 ++]

Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang

'Pork Sword' thru 'Puzzle Palace

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

Pork Sword – (RNZN) Penis

Post-Stall Gyration – The behavior of an aircraft immediately following a DEPARTURE; a period of uncommanded (and uncontrollable) roll, pitch, and yaw excursions while the aircraft is deciding whether it wants to fly or not.

Port and Starboard – (1) Watch schedule where one stands 6 (or four or eight) hours on, the same amount of time off watch, then back on watch. Aka "Port and Stupid." (2) Before ships had rudders, they were steered by an oar which was positioned on the quarter. This side was known as the "steer board side" which, over time, was corrupted to "starboard side." For a long time, the other side of a ship was known as the "larboard" side, even into the 1700s. This led to confusion and difficulty in giving orders during storms, etc., where it might be easily confused between starboard and larboard. Since the larboard side was also the side of the vessel which was placed against a pier or dock, it became known as the "port" side, i.e. when you went into port, that side of the ship was against the pier.

PQS - Personnel Qualification System. A method of formalizing and tracking the qualification progress of personnel toward watchstation certification. Often abbreviated as 'Qual System'. Used by all warfare specialties, but has reached its ultimate in the submarine service.

Prairie - A noise-masking system which pumps air out of holes in a screw blade to reduce cavitation noises.

Pressure Hull – The watertight, pressure-bearing structure that makes up the living and working area of a submarine.

Probe and Drogue – An air-to-air refueling system which involves an inflatable 'basket' (the drogue) which is extended at the end of a long hose trailed by the tanker aircraft. The receiving aircraft maneuvers so that its refueling probe enters the basket.

Pro Word – Radio procedure word. Used to standardize and expedite voice radio communications. Examples: 'over' ("I am finished speaking now, and expect you to reply"), 'roger' ("I understand you," or "yes"), 'out' (perhaps the most misused term in Hollywood, it means "I am finished speaking and do not require an answer or acknowledgement back").

Pucker Factor - A measure of the stressfulness of a situation, determined by the amount of muscle tension registered in one's rectum. High pucker factor events are usually accompanied by 'that old sinking feeling'.

Puke – People, or person. "What are those pukers up to?" "He's a drifty puke, isn't he?", etc.

Pull G's – (Aviation) To maneuver in such a way that centrifugal acceleration adds to the force of gravity.

Pumpkin Suit – Orange exposure suit worn by topside watchstanders aboard U.S. submarines.

Punch Elvis - Eject.

Purchase Cable - The part of the arresting gear that connects the CROSS-DECK PENDANT to the arresting engines belowdecks.

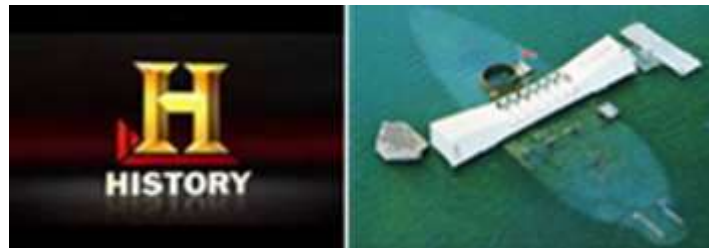
Pusser, pussers - (RN) (1) Supply officer. (2) Anyone who goes 'by the book'. (3) Of or belonging to the Royal Navy. The term is a corruption of "Purser".

Pusser Neats - (RCN) Royal Navy issue rum, rarely seen but a few bottles still exist. Aka 'Blue Label Rum', 'Instant Stupid.'

Puzzle Palace - (1) The Pentagon or, more generally, headquarters of any sort. (2) (RM) The maze of offices on any UK camp.

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

*** Military History ***



Taps

How It Originated



The origins of "Taps," the distinctive bugle melody played at U.S. military funerals and memorials and as a lights-out signal at 2100 hrs (9:00 PM) to soldiers at night, date back to the American Civil War. In July 1862, U.S. General Daniel Butterfield and his brigade were camped at Harrison's Landing, Virginia, recuperating after the Seven Days Battles near Richmond. Dissatisfied with the standard bugle call employed by the Army to indicate to troops it was time to go to sleep, and thinking the call should sound more melodious, Butterfield reworked an existing bugle call used to signal the end of the day. After he had his brigade bugler, Private Oliver Wilcox Norton, play it for the men, buglers from other units became interested in the 24-note tune and it quickly spread throughout the Army, and even caught on with the Confederates.

Not long after Butterfield created "Taps," it was played for the first time at a military funeral, for a Union cannoner killed in action. The man's commanding officer, Captain John Tidball, decided the bugle call would be safer than the traditional firing of three rifle volleys over the soldier's grave, a move which couldn't be confused by the nearby enemy as an attack. As for the name "Taps," the most likely explanation is that it comes from the fact that prior to Butterfield's bugle call, the lights-out call was followed by three drum beats, dubbed the "Drum Taps," as well as "The Taps" and then simply "Taps." When Butterfield's call replaced the drum beats, soldiers referred to it as "Taps," although this was an unofficial moniker, according to "Taps" historian and bugle expert Jari Villanueva. He notes that Butterfield's bugle call was officially known as "Extinguish Lights" in American military manuals until 1891. Since that time, "Taps" also has been a formally recognized part of U.S. military funerals.

The tune is also sometimes known as "Butterfield's Lullaby", or by the first line of the lyric, "Day Is Done". Taps" is a bugle call – a signal, not a song. As such, there is no associated lyric. Many bugle calls had words associated with

them as a mnemonic device but these are not lyrics. A Horace Lorenzo Trim wrote a set of words intended to accompany the music:

Day is done, gone the sun,
From the lake, from the hills, from the sky;
All is well, safely rest, God is nigh.

Fading light, dims the sight,
And a star gems the sky, gleaming bright.
From afar, drawing nigh, falls the night.

Thanks and praise, for our days,
'Neath the sun, 'neath the stars, 'neath the sky;
As we go, this we know, God is nigh.

Sun has set, shadows come,
Time has fled, Scouts must go to their beds
Always true to the promise that they made.

While the light fades from sight,
And the stars gleaming rays softly send,
To thy hands we our souls, Lord, commend.

Today at Berkeley Plantation, the historic estate located at Harrison's Landing, there's a monument commemorating the origins of "Taps" at the site. Berkeley Plantation also happens to be the birthplace of Benjamin Harrison V, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and William Henry Harrison, the nation's ninth president.

[Source: <https://www.history.com/news> | Elizabeth Nix | August 22, 2018 ++]

USS Lehigh Grounding Civil War Action



An old photo (left & right) shows sailors standing in front of USS Lehigh's turret and USS Lehigh in Trent's Reach, James River, Va (center)

On Nov. 16, 1863, the ironclad USS Lehigh, a Union monitor ship came to the aid of soldiers on Morris Island, South Carolina. The soldiers were being fired on from long range by Confederate troops at Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island near Charleston, South Carolina. The Lehigh and other ironclad ships in the area were ordered to cover approaches to the Union position from the water in case the Confederates intended to launch a boat attack. The Lehigh's commander ordered its crew to anchor the ship by sundown, but flood tides that night moved the ship and grounded it on a sandbar. The movement also put the ship within range of Confederate guns. The enemy realized this change in circumstance at daybreak, so several of their batteries started blasting the ship from 2,300 yards away.

The Lehigh was a sitting duck. Hundreds of rounds hit the ironclad, including six that broke through the deck's armor. One strike to the hull started a leak that let in nine inches of water per hour. Two other ironclads, the Nahant and the Montauk, came to the Lehigh's rescue to try to tow it off the sandbar. Crewmembers Leland, a Savannah, Georgia, native; and Irving, a young man who had immigrated to New York from England, were tasked with taking a small boat to the Nahant to pass a line over to begin the towing process. Navy assistant surgeon William Longshaw went with them.

Leland and Irving rowed as cannon and mortar shells whizzed past them; meanwhile, Longshaw carried and handed to the Nahant's crew members the lines of the thick ropes, known as hawsers, that would be used to tow the ship. They twice succeeded in passing the hawsers under heavy fire, but both times, enemy guns cut the lines. Eventually, casualties were reported on the Lehigh, so Longshaw had to go to the aid of the wounded. That's when three more sailors stepped up to make a third attempt: Young, an 18-year-old from Calais, Maine; Williams, an Irishman living in Pennsylvania; and Gile, a 16-year-old from North Andover, Massachusetts. This attempt succeeded. Within about an hour, the line the men took to the Nahant pulled the Lehigh off the sandbar, getting it out of its precarious position.

Seven men on the Lehigh were wounded during the assault. That number likely would have been much higher if it weren't for the brave efforts of the five men who secured the ship's move to freedom. Leland, Irving, Young, Williams and Gile were all praised for their courage and each received the Medal of Honor, as well as a promotion to the next rate. Unfortunately, Longshaw wasn't eligible for the high honor because of his status as a medical officer. Enlisted sailors were the only men who could receive the award until 1915 when officers became eligible, too. It didn't take long for the Lehigh to recover. It was repaired and returned to action by January 1864.

As for its five saviors? Leland moved to Maine after the war and lived until March 1880. Young returned to the St. Croix Valley in Maine and lived until 1913. Williams returned to life in Philadelphia; he died in May 1893. It's unclear what Irving did after the war or when he died. Gile, the youngest of the men, remained in the Navy and served on three other ships. He joined the Army after the war ended, according to his hometown newspaper, the Eagle Tribune, and died in his hometown in March 1898. [Source: DOD News | Katie Lange | November 16, 2020 ++]

Nuremburg Trials

Update 01: German Admiral Karl Doenitz

Why did German Admiral Karl Doenitz only receive a ten-year prison sentence at the Nuremberg trials while his military co-defendants Generals Alfred Jodl and Wilhelm Keitel were executed? He had a better lawyer. Doenitz had the best lawyer, and it showed. Before the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, Dönitz was indicted as a major war criminal on three counts:

- Count 1 -- Conspiracy To Commit Crimes Against Peace,
- Count 2 -- Planning, Initiating, And Waging Wars Of Aggression, and
- Count 3 -- Crimes Against The Laws Of War.

Dönitz was not indicted on a fourth count of crimes against humanity. Otto Kranzbühler had the unprecedented task of defending Nazi Germany's last Reichspräsident (President) and Grand Admiral. Kranzbühler made his presence known immediately. In his first court appearance, he appeared before the International Tribunal in his full Kriegsmarine uniform, indicating that if the Navy head were on trial, it would be the Navy that would defend him. This entrance caught not only the attention of the members of the court but also a group of Russian guards who immediately confronted Kranzbühler with their arms.



Admiral Karl Dönitz and his attorney Otto Kranzbühler

The indictments made against Dönitz bothered Kranzbühler a great deal. As a result, he wanted to make it immediately clear to the Tribunal that, though on the losing side of the war, Dönitz's actions were not deserving of the indictments brought against him. Kranzbühler argued that if the Grand Admiral of the German Navy was to be tried, he should be addressed by the court with the respect he deserved as a military leader. While the prosecutors (including Chief Prosecutor Robert Jackson) and judges at Nuremberg continued to address the defendant without any recognition, Kranzbühler always referred to Dönitz as Grand Admiral, or "Herr Grossadmiral."

As for Count 1 of the indictment (conspiracy to commit a crime under international law), Kranzbühler demonstrated rather easily that Dönitz was not privy to the conspiracy to commit crimes against the peace. Kranzbühler showed that Dönitz was not present at the important war planning conferences - rather, he was performing strictly tactical duties regarding Germany's naval war efforts. The Tribunal agreed and did not find Dönitz guilty on this count.

As for Count 2 of the indictment (Planning, initiating, and waging wars of aggression), Kranzbühler once again relied on the fact that Dönitz was not present to plan or initiate a particular type of war because he was merely performing tactical duties and not present at the war planning conferences. The Tribunal, as it did in Count 1, agreed with this conclusion. However, arguing that Dönitz did not wage war of aggression would be a difficult assignment for Kranzbühler. In later writings, Kranzbühler noted this difficulty because in his opinion the term "war of aggression" was never adequately defined. The U-Boat arm was the principal part of the German fleet - with its submarines sinking millions of tons of allied and neutral shipping. Dönitz's fleet had been successful, and this success was unavoidable. Kranzbühler argued that Dönitz's actions were consistent with the actions of a successful Admiral during war. Nevertheless, the Tribunal found that Dönitz was active in waging an aggressive war.

As for Count 3 of the indictment, (crimes against the laws of war, or [war crimes](#)), Dönitz was specifically charged with waging unrestricted submarine warfare contrary to the Naval Protocol of 1936 to which Germany acceded - particularly that (1) Dönitz ordered the German U-Boat arm to attack both enemy and neutral merchant ships without warning and that (2) Dönitz issued orders not to rescue survivors from ships attacked by submarine.

In reference to the charge of waging unrestricted submarine warfare on all merchant ships, Dönitz argued that he ordered the attack of merchant ships because his reports indicated that British merchant ships were armed, attacking submarines on sight, and being used to transmit information. To defend Dönitz against the charge that orders to sink merchant vessels were illegal, Kranzbühler brilliantly presented to Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commander of the United States Pacific Fleet, an interrogatory in which he extracted various items of information about American naval practice. Nimitz answered questions describing the practice of the United States Navy concerning submarines and merchant ships, especially when a submarine crew had no way of knowing whether or not the ship was armed. The answers made it clear that the German practice of attacking merchant ships was indistinguishable from American practice. Kranzbühler used the interrogatory "not to argue that the Americans had committed war crimes, but rather to argue that what his client had done—which was paralleled by the actions of the American Admiral—was in accordance with the practice of war at sea at the time, and therefore was not criminal." As a result of Kranzbühler's crafty legal

dexterity, the Tribunal did not hold Dönitz guilty for his conduct of submarine warfare against British armed merchant ships (nevertheless, the Tribunal did find that the sinking of neutral ships was a violation of the Protocol).

Dönitz was also accused of waging unrestricted submarine warfare for issuing orders not to rescue survivors from ships attacked by submarine - specifically War Order No. 154 in 1939 and another similar order after the Laconia incident in 1942. Kranzbühler crafted a defense that the security of the submarine is paramount to rescue and that to risk the submarine to rescue survivors from ships would be contrary to typical naval behavior. Yet, unlike in the merchant ship argument, Kranzbühler was unable to attain an affidavit from Allied Forces that Americans had done the same - even though they arguably did. As a result, by issuing these two orders Dönitz was found guilty of causing Germany to be in breach of the Second London Naval Treaty of 1936.

Kranzbühler did not defend Dönitz on count 4 (crimes against humanity) because Dönitz was not indicted regarding this count. Nevertheless, in light of the interrogatories induced by the brilliant lawyering of Kranzbühler, the Tribunal did not assess a sentence for Dönitz's Count #3 breaches of crimes against the laws of submarine warfare. As a result of Kranzbühler's crafty legal dexterity, the Tribunal did not hold Dönitz guilty for his conduct of submarine warfare against British armed merchant ships (nevertheless, the Tribunal did find that the sinking of neutral ships was a violation of the Protocol). Dönitz was sentenced to 10 years in prison – solely for his conviction related to waging a war of aggression. Once again, Dönitz's order to conduct unrestricted submarine warfare was not officially included in his sentence; however, this was still the main reason why most judges wanted him convicted. Admiral Nimitz supported his defense with an affidavit that the Allies had engaged in unrestricted submarine warfare in the Pacific.

Dönitz served ten years in Spandau Prison plus the additional 18 months he had spent at Mondorf and Nuremberg while awaiting trial and being tried. If it were not for the efforts of Kranzbühler, particularly in respect to his defense-related to Count #3, Dönitz would have likely served a much longer sentence or perhaps even have been sentenced to death. Even though Dönitz received only ten years, Kranzbühler was bothered by the ultimate verdict. Remarking on the conviction, he noted that “This conviction was born out of the dilemma to take the Grand Admiral into prison for political reasons.” According to Kranzbühler years later, “As I learned, later on, an American law advisor proposed the Allied control office to nullify the verdict.”

Despite all of Nuremberg's negative aspects, Kranzbühler did note the importance and significance of the Nuremberg Trials. According to Kranzbühler, the British would have summarily shot the principal leaders of the Third Reich. The Russians would have adhered to the same principle, only multiplying the victims. But the United States insisted that expiation be sought and found by judicial proceedings. In this regard, Kranzbühler concluded that the International Military Tribunal proceedings discharged the tensions between the victors and the vanquished. [Source: USSVI Tuscon Base | November 17, 2020 ++]

WWII Italian Sub Performance

Why 100 Submarine Fleet Do So Little

At the joining of hostilities in June 1940, Italy had 115 submarines, of which 84 were operational; however, ten were lost in the first twenty days of action, partly due to flaws in quality, inadequate training, and partly due to reckless bravado. After that, the Italians never had more than 25 to 30 boats at sea at any one time. The commander of the Italian submarine fleet on June 10, 1940, was Admiral Mario Falangola, who was replaced by Admiral Antonio Legnani in December 1941.

Soon after June 1940, a submarine force was dispatched to the Atlantic, honoring Germany's commitment to helping in the Atlantic campaign. Code-named BETASOM, this force was stationed at Bordeaux in occupied France. Thirty-two boats in total served in the Atlantic, equaling the German numbers at the time. Half of them later returned

to the Mediterranean or were converted to transports for operations to the Far East. The Italian submarines operating in the Atlantic overall sank 109 allied merchant ships totaling 593,864 tons.

In the Mediterranean, the submarine force suffered heavily in intense anti-submarine warfare and attacks on heavily guarded convoys and naval formations. Results were modest, with only 21 merchantmen and 13 enemy warships sunk (for a total around 100,000 tons); one reason for such a disappointing score was the lack of targets (with most of them being harder-to-hit warships, and the merchant ships being under sober escort). Another was the outdated doctrine employed at the beginning of the war (with static patrols and attacks being executed, firing only one or two torpedoes). However, this aspect was being corrected by 1942 (as proven during Operation Pedestal, when more aggressive and dynamic conduct met with considerable success).

In 1943 at Italy's surrender, the Regia Marina had 34 boats operational, having lost 92 vessels in action (over two-thirds of their number). During the conflict, 88 submarines, some two-thirds of its total strength, were lost. Three thousand twenty-one men of the Italian submarine service were lost at sea during the war. [Source: USSVI Tucson Base | G. Arnould | November 18, 2020 ++]

Battle of Saipan

Rather than Surrender Japanese Ordered to Commit Suicide



War inevitably equals mass casualties, whether numbering in the dozens or the hundreds, or the hundreds of thousands - this truth that has accompanied war for thousands of years. A generally accepted fact is that these casualties, whether civilian or military, are usually the direct result of enemy soldiers attacking, disease, and famine in the wake of an invasion. Sometimes, however, other means account for mass deaths in war. Such was the case of Saipan's Battle in the Second World War when it became apparent that Americans would take the island. Around one thousand Japanese civilians - men, women, and children, old and young - tragically chose to take their own lives rather than surrender.

The Battle of Saipan began on June 15, 1944, when around 8,000 US Marines landed on Saipan's island on the first day of the invasion. Naval bombardment of the island had started two days earlier on the 13th and had some effect in weakening Japanese defenses. Still, no amount of shelling could shake the Japanese soldiers' resolve. As soon as the Marines started their amphibious landing, they were met with ferocious resistance from soldiers who had been conditioned to do only two things: win or die. The fighting was intense, with every inch of territory on the 185 square kilometer island that was wrested from Japanese control being won at the expense of many American lives. The Americans had learned many lessons from their earlier invasions of the Japanese-controlled islands of Tarawa, Kwajalein, and Eniwetok, and they put this knowledge to use on Saipan. As hard as the Japanese fought to repel the invaders, the US Marines fought with equal fervor and grit, determined to take the island.

The ferocious fighting saw acts of brutality on both sides. Owing to the island's topography, with its many mountains and caves, retreating Japanese troops could take cover in ravines, cliffs, and caves and use them to ambush

the Marines, often with devastating results. In retaliation, Marines took to clearing out caves with flamethrowers, sometimes not checking first to see if they were occupied by Japanese troops or Japanese civilians, of which there was a sizable population on the island. The Japanese soldiers exacerbated the problem of getting noncombatants killed by deliberately using civilians as decoys in their ambushes. Emotions were running high on both sides as the battle progressed. After a few weeks of fighting, it was obvious that the Japanese had lost the battle. By the end of June, the remaining Japanese forces and civilians had been corralled into the island's northern tip. Meanwhile, out at sea, US naval forces decimated the Imperial Japanese Navy, sinking three aircraft carriers along with the hundreds of aircraft on board. Any hopes that the Japanese troops may have had for relief were dashed.

Most other nations, in such a position, would have surrendered at this point. Not the Japanese, though. Emperor Hirohito, who the Japanese revered as a demi-god, issued what was to be a tragically fateful imperial order when word reached him that Saipan was sure to be lost. The order stated that all Japanese citizens - soldiers and civilians alike - on Saipan were to commit suicide rather than surrender to the Americans. To the average Westerner, raised in a secular nation, such an order would seem utterly insane. However, WWII-era Japanese were raised in a culture in which ritual suicide was a perfectly acceptable, rational means to avoid dishonor, reverse disgrace, and restore disrupted social order. The concept manifested itself in wartime Japan through kamikaze and banzai attacks against their enemies, as well as seppuku suicides by officers who lost battles, which was called kakuro no jisatsu ("suicide of resolve").

Accordingly, Lieutenant-General Yoshisugu Saito ordered all the remaining Japanese troops on the island to amass and die in honor of the Emperor, in a mass banzai charge at the American forces. In what was to be the largest banzai charge of the entire war, 4,000 Japanese troops - with the most able-bodied at the front, down to the sick and wounded at the rear, hobbling or limping along without weapons, along with a number of civilians carrying improvised bamboo spears - engaged the American Marines and Army forces in a suicidal frontal charge. The ensuing battle lasted fifteen hours, and almost all of the Japanese troops were killed - but not before they killed or wounded 650 American soldiers. The banzai charge took place on 7 JUL, and on the 9th, Admiral Turner made the announcement that Saipan was officially in American hands.

Saito and the other senior Japanese officers who remained committed seppuku in a cave with their swords. After a month of fierce fighting, the American troops, weary of battle, though it was finally over. However, there was no relief from killing and brutality for the Americans, though - indeed, some of the worst horrors they would witness lay ahead. Not only had the revered Emperor Hirohito ordered the civilians to commit shodan jiketsu ("mass suicide"), but the Imperial Japanese Army had also spread terrifying propaganda about what would befall Japanese civilians should they fall into American hands. According to the propaganda, they could expect to be raped, tortured to death, or even cannibalized by the savage enemy.

As the Americans pressed onward after their military takeover, the remaining Japanese civilians started to put the emperor's fateful order into action. Many suicides took place at Marpi Point, at the northern tip of the island. Here, hundreds of people jumped to their deaths from two high cliffs - later named Suicide Cliff and Banzai Cliff. Entire families leaped to their death. Sometimes the parents would slit their children's throats before throwing them over the edge and then following them to their doom. Other individuals and families simply walked into the ocean until the waves swallowed them. Other groups huddled together around grenades they obtained from Japanese soldiers, with one person pulling the pin.

In a desperate attempt to stop the senseless deaths, American troops got captured Japanese civilians to shout out to their compatriots over loudspeakers, assuring them that the Americans would treat them kindly if they surrendered and give them food and shelter. Some chose to surrender after hearing this, but others remained stubbornly steadfast in their fanatical commitment to their emperor and took their own lives - and the lives of their loved ones - regardless. There is no official count of how many civilians took their own lives at the end of Saipan's Battle, but estimates usually range from 800 - 1000 civilian deaths by suicide. It was one of the many great tragedies of a war that was marked by mass deaths of combatants and non-combatants alike.

Today, the mass suicides have become a place that many Japanese visits on a pilgrimage to console the souls of the dead. Local islanders say that no white birds lived on the cliffs prior to the war, but now they are full of flocks of them - and each white bird, they believe, represents the soul of a person who tragically lost their lives there. [Source: Together We served | Battlefield Chronicles | November 2020 ++]

WWI Battle of Cambrai

First Successful Use of the Tank



The Battle of Cambrai (20 NOV – 7 DEC 1917) was a British attack followed by the biggest German counter-attack against the British Expeditionary Force since 1914, in the First World War. The town of Cambrai in northern France was an important supply point for the German Hindenburg Line and capture of the town and the nearby Broulton Ridge would threaten the rear of the German line to the north. Major General Henry Tudor, Commander, Royal Artillery of the 9th (Scottish) Division, advocated the use of new artillery-infantry techniques on his sector of the front. During preparations, J. F. C. Fuller, a staff officer with the Tank Corps, looked for places to use tanks for raids. The commander of the British Third Army, decided to combine both plans. The French and British armies had used tanks in mass earlier in 1917, although to considerably less effect.

Appreciating the futility of using tanks in the Flanders swamps, the officers of the British Tank Corps looked for an area where they could achieve some measure of success. Their chief General Staff officer, Col. J.F.C. Fuller, drew up a project for a large-scale raid to scour a canal-enclosed “pocket” on the front southwest of Cambrai where the rolling downland lent itself to tank movement. The basic idea was to release a swarm of tanks without any preparatory bombardment to avoid warning the enemy of the impending attack. With the bloody horror of the previous Battle of Passchendaele demonstrating the need for fresh tactics on the Western Front, the British Command adopted the scheme. While retaining Fuller’s basic idea, they transformed the raid into a full-fledged offensive with far-reaching aims (including the capture of Cambrai itself and a thrust toward the strategically-located city of Valenciennes), for which they did not have the resources because of the drain of Passchendaele.

The operation would be carried out by the Third Army under Gen. Sir Julian Byng in order to relieve pressure on the French front. The offensive consisted of an assault against the Germans’ Hindenburg Line along a 10-mile front some 8 miles west of Cambrai. Nineteen British divisions were assembled for the offensive, supported by tanks (476 in all, of which about 378 were fighting tanks; the rest were supply and service vehicles) and five horsed cavalry divisions. The British armoured force was moved into position at night, so as to avoid detection by German aerial reconnaissance craft. Moreover, cloudy weather limited air operations during the day. For the initial attack, eight British divisions were launched against three German divisions.

Attacking by complete surprise on 20 NOV, the British tanks ripped through German defenses in depth and took some 7,500 prisoners at low cost in casualties. Bad weather intervened, however, so that the cavalry could not exploit the breakthrough, and adequate infantry reinforcements were not made available in time to exploit the initial success. By 29 NOV the offensive had been halted after an advance of about 6 miles. On 30 NOV the German Second Army,

launched a counterstroke with 20 divisions against the flanks of the salient created by the British advance. In the north the attack was deflected, but in the south it broke through, and a disaster for the British was averted only by the superb counterattack, first by the Guards Division and later by a tank brigade. By 5 DEC the British had been driven back almost to their original positions.

Casualties for the British totaled 75,681 of which 10,042 were killed plus the loss of 179 tanks. Casualties for the Germans totaled 54,720 of which 8,817 were killed. Despite the British failure to exploit the initial success of their tanks, the battle demonstrated that armour was the key to a decision on the Western Front. The initial British success showed that even the strongest trench defenses could be overcome by a surprise attack, using a combination of new methods and equipment, reflecting a general increase in the British capacity to combine infantry, artillery, tanks and aircraft in attacks. The German revival after the shock of the British attack improved German morale but the potential for similar attacks meant that the Germans had to divert resources to anti-tank defences and weapons, an extra demand that the Germans could ill afford to meet. The German counter-attack showed the effectiveness of artillery, trench mortars and evolving stormtrooper tactics.

[Source: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Cambrai-1917> | November 20, 2020 ++]

WWII Rationing

Americans Were Asked to Conserve on Everything.

The Second World War seems like a very, *very* long time ago to many young people today. It was a war against tyranny, against Nazism and Fascism. The United States and its allies organized themselves to oppose Hitler, Mussolini and their partners. The stories of bravery and sacrifice on the battlefields, on the sea, and in the air fill volumes of books in libraries. However, the people on the homefront made their own contributions. In addition to working in the many industries supporting the war effort, all Americans made sacrifices through rationing of many precious commodities.

During the First World War, both Germany and the United Kingdom instituted some form of food rationing. The United States did not have food rationing in World War I. Through slogans such as "Food Will Win the War," "Meatless Mondays," and "Wheatless Wednesdays," the United States Food Administration – under future U.S. President Herbert Hoover – reduced national consumption by 15 percent. By the summer of 1941 the Office of Price Administration believed, however, that with factories converting to military production and consuming many critical supplies, rationing would become necessary if the country entered World War II. It established a rationing system after the Pearl Harbor attack. The entire country was concerned with a shortage of rubber for tires since the Japanese quickly conquered the rubber-producing regions of Southeast Asia.



War Ration Book No. 3, tank stamp, circa 1943 (left), waiting in line at the Rationing Board office, New Orleans, LA in March of 1943 (center), and Ration coins, circa 1944 (right), used as change for ration stamps

Although synthetic rubber had been invented in the years preceding the war, it had been unable to compete with natural rubber commercially, so the US did not have enough manufacturing capacity at the start of the war to make synthetic rubber. Throughout the war, rationing of gasoline was motivated by a desire to conserve rubber as much as by a desire to conserve gasoline. Tires were the first item to be rationed by the OPA, which ordered the temporary end of sales on December 11, 1941 while it created 7,500 unpaid, volunteer three-person tire ration boards around the country. By January 5, 1942 the boards were ready. Each received a monthly allotment of tires based on the number of local vehicle registrations, and allocated them to applicants based on OPA rules.

The War Production Board (WPB) ordered the temporary end of all civilian automobile sales on January 1, 1942, leaving dealers with one half million unsold cars. Ration boards grew in size as they began evaluating automobile sales in February (only certain professions, such as doctors and clergymen, qualified to purchase the remaining inventory of new automobiles). Automobile factories stopped manufacturing civilian models by early February 1942 and converted to producing tanks, aircraft, weapons, and other military products, with the United States government as the only customer. By June 1942 companies also stopped manufacturing for civilians' metal office furniture, radios, phonographs, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, and sewing machines.

Civilians first received ration books – War Ration Book Number One, or the "Sugar Book" – on May 4, 1942, through more than 100,000 schoolteachers, PTA groups, and other volunteers. A national speed limit of 35 miles per hour was imposed to save fuel and rubber for tires. Later that month volunteers again helped distribute gasoline cards in 17 Atlantic and Pacific Northwest states. To get a classification and rationing stamps, one had to appear before a local War Price and Rationing Board which reported to the OPA. Each person in a household received a ration book, including babies and small children who qualified for canned milk not available to others. To receive a gasoline ration card, a person had to certify a need for gasoline and ownership of no more than five tires. All tires in excess of five per driver were confiscated by the government, because of rubber shortages.



A gasoline sticker on a care (left) and Basic Mileage Ration Class A card, for a 1934 Plymouth

An 'A' sticker on a car was the lowest priority of gasoline rationing and entitled the car owner to 3 to 4 gallons of gasoline per week. B stickers were issued to workers in the military industry, entitling their holder up to 8 gallons of gasoline per week. C stickers were granted to persons deemed very essential to the war effort, such as ministers, doctors, mail carriers, and railroad workers. T rations were made available for truckers. Lastly, X stickers on cars entitled the holder to unlimited supplies and were the highest priority in the system. Police, firemen, and civil defense workers were in this category.

As of April 1, 1942, anyone wishing to purchase a new tube of toothpaste had to turn in an empty one. Sugar was the first consumer commodity rationed, with all sales ended on April 27, 1942 and resumed eight days later with a ration of one half pound per person per week, half of normal consumption. Bakeries, ice cream makers, and other commercial users received rations of about 70% of normal usage. Scarce medicines such as penicillin were rationed by triage officers in the US military during World War II. Civilian hospitals received only small amounts of penicillin

during the war, because it was not mass-produced for civilian use until after the war. A triage panel at each hospital decided which patients would receive the penicillin.

The next commodity to be nationally rationed was coffee, beginning November 29, 1942 to one pound every five weeks, about half of normal consumption. This rationing was traceable to German U-boat attacks on shipping from Brazil. Some of the items subject to rationing were typewriters, bicycles, footwear, silk, nylon, fuel oil, stoves, meat, lard, shortenings and oils, cheese, butter, margarine, processed foods (canned, bottled, and frozen), dried fruits, canned milk, firewood and coal, jams, jellies, and fruit butter were rationed by November 1943. Many retailers welcomed rationing because they were already running short of many items due to rumors and panics, such as flashlights and batteries after Pearl Harbor.

Many levels of rationing went into effect. Some items, such as sugar, were distributed evenly based on the number of people in a household. Other items, like gasoline or fuel oil, were rationed only to those who could justify a need. Restaurant owners and other merchants were accorded more availability, but had to collect ration stamps to restock their supplies. In exchange for used ration stamps, ration boards delivered certificates to restaurants and merchants to authorize procurement of more products. As of 1 March 1942, dog food could no longer be sold in tin cans, and manufacturers switched to dehydrated versions. Even clothing was impacted as noted in this Life Magazine, April 20, 1942 article:

"Uncle Sam last week assumed the role of fashion designer. Sweeping restrictions aim to save 15 percent of the yardage now used on women's and girls' apparel through such measures as restricting hems and belts to two inches, [and] eliminating cuffs on sleeves. Exempt categories include bridal gowns, maternity dresses, [and] vestments for religious orders."

The work of issuing ration books and exchanging used stamps for certificates was handled by some 5,500 local ration boards of mostly volunteer workers selected by local officials. Each ration stamp had a generic drawing of an airplane, gun, tank, aircraft carrier, ear of wheat, fruit, etc. and a serial number. Some stamps also had alphabetic lettering. The kind and amount of rationed commodities were not specified on most of the stamps and were not defined until later when local newspapers published, for example, that beginning on a specified date, one airplane stamp was required (in addition to cash) to buy one pair of shoes and one stamp number 30 from ration book four was required to buy five pounds of sugar. The commodity amounts changed from time to time depending on availability. Red stamps were used to ration meat and butter, and blue stamps were used to ration processed foods.

To enable making change for ration stamps, the government issued "red point" tokens to be given in change for red stamps, and "blue point" tokens in change for blue stamps. The red and blue tokens were about the size of dimes (16 mm) and were made of thin compressed wood fiber material, because metals were in short supply. As a result of the rationing, all forms of automobile racing, including the Indianapolis 500, were banned. Sightseeing driving was also banned. In some regions breaking the gas rationing was so prevalent that night courts were set up to supplement the number of violators caught; the first gasoline-ration night court was created at Pittsburgh's Fulton Building on May 26, 1943.

With the pending capitulation of Japan, the printing of ration books for 1946 was halted by the OPA on August 13, 1945. It was thought that "even if Japan does not fold now, the war will certainly be over before the books can be used." On August 15, 1945, World War II gas rationing was ended on the West Coast of the United States. After three years of rationing, World War II came to a welcome end. Rationing, however, did not completely end until 1946. Life resumed as normal and the consumption of meat, butter, and sugar inevitably rose. While Americans still live with some of the results of World War II, rationing has not returned. The Office of Price Administration was terminated in 1947, with its various functions reassigned to other federal agencies.

[Source: American Legion | Burn Pit | November 21, 2012 ++]

WWII Bomber Nose Art

[64] Bottoms Up



Every Picture Tells A Story

Elephant Power



Elephant power replaces horse power. At Royal Naval Air Station *Puttalam* in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) during the Second World War, Fifi the “Duty Elephant” was a legend who brought smiles to the faces of Fleet Air Arm aviators long after the war. With fuel at a premium, roadways and taxi strips almost impassable after monsoon rains and tow vehicles prone to breakdown in the humidity and tropical temperatures, Fifi and other Indian elephants saw plenty of work towing fuel bowzers and aircraft like this Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm Corsair fighter.

Military History Anniversaries

01 thru 15 DEC

Significant events in U. S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 DEC**”.

[Source: This Day in History www.history.com/this-day-in-history | November 2020 ++]

Medal of Honor Awardees

Christian Schilt | Nicaraguan



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

To

First Lieutenant Christian Schilt

Organization: U.S. Marine Corps, Observation Squadron 7-M, Second Nicaraguan Campaign

Place and date: Quilali, Nicaragua January 6 - 8, 1928

Entered service: June 23, 1917

Born: March 19, 1895, Olney, Illinois



The majority of aviators who have received the Medal of Honor have earned it for their service in World War II or later conflicts. Marine Corps Gen. Christian Schilt, however, was one of the early aviators in that service. He earned his medal many years before World War II for his bravery in the skies over Nicaragua. Schilt was born in Olney, Illinois, and grew up on a farm. After high school, he studied engineering at Rose Polytechnic Institute (now the Rose–Hulman Institute of Technology) in Terre Haute, Indiana. But after about two years, he felt compelled to do something else. So, on June 23, 1917, he enlisted in the Marine Corps.

Schilt first served in the Azores, a group of islands off the coast of Portugal, with a seaplane squadron assigned to anti-submarine patrol duty during World War I. When he returned to the U.S., he had decided he wanted to be a pilot, so he entered flight training. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant on June 10, 1919, and spent the next several years on expeditionary duty in the Caribbean. In November 1927, Schilt joined Observation Squadron 7-M in Managua, Nicaragua. U.S. forces had been serving in the Central American country since 1912 — with a brief pullout in 1925 — at the request of the Nicaraguan government, which continuously feared revolution. By 1927, a new, dangerous revolt against the country's government was indeed taking place.

In December 1927, guerillas known as Sandinistas had established a base in the country's north in a mountainous jungle region on the border with Honduras. There, they ambushed a detachment of 175 Marines, killing eight men and wounding 30 more. The Marines were forced to fall back to a village called Quilali, which the guerillas promptly surrounded. There was little hope for the Marines to fight their way out, so they instead concocted plans for an air rescue. Over the next few weeks, the trapped Marines built a makeshift airstrip by burning and leveling part of the town's main street to make it long enough to land and take off. Schilt's squadron then modified an observation airplane with landing gear from a DeHavilland DH-4, an old combat plane used in World War I, to accommodate expected hard landings.

Schilt volunteered to be the pilot. Between Jan. 6-8, 1928, Schilt, then a first lieutenant, used the plane to evacuate the wounded from their precarious position and bring aid to the other men, who were in desperate need of it. Schilt flew his plane 10 times into the besieged village, hauling in 1,400 pounds of medical supplies and evacuating more than a dozen wounded Marines. He was also able to transport a relief commanding officer to take charge of the beleaguered men on the ground. According to records, Schilt's modified plane had no brakes, so the Marines on the ground had to help him stop by grabbing its wings when it touched down. He faced hostile fire from the enemy with every landing and takeoff. Clouds, mountains and air currents added to the difficulty of the mission. Once the ground troops were resupplied and the wounded had been taken to safety, the Marines at Quilali were able to fight their way free of the village and rejoin the main governmental force — a feat that was made possible by Schilt's bravery.

For his courage, Schilt was presented with the Medal of Honor during a White House ceremony hosted by President Calvin Coolidge that April. Schilt remained deployed for the rest of the year, finally returning to the U.S. in 1929. He continued to serve in the Marines for decades, including throughout World War II and in Korea where he commanded the 1st U.S. Marine Corps Aircraft Wing for a time. His years of service earned him several more awards, including the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, Legion of Merit, Air Force Distinguished Service Medal and five Air Medals. Schilt retired on April 1, 1957, when he was promoted to full general. At some point in life, Schilt married Elizabeth Schilt. They had four daughters and two sons and spent the remainder of their lives in Norfolk, Virginia. Schilt died on Jan. 8, 1987, at age 91 after a bout with Alzheimer's disease. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Schilt's Medal of Honor is now at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico, Virginia.

Schilt's name and career are well-remembered across the U.S. Among the more recent honors, in October 2011, a new headquarters building at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point in North Carolina was named in his honor. In 2014, his home state of Illinois dedicated a stretch of highway to him. [Source: <https://www.cmohs.org> & DOD News | Katie Lange | November 23, 2020 ++]



Trump Drug Price Plan

Update 02: Pharmacy Industry Warnings Not to Proceed

The CEO of a biotech and pharmaceutical trade group warned 17 NOV that the industry could sue to try to stop a proposal from the Trump administration to lower drug prices. The Trump administration could move forward as soon as this week on a proposal to lower certain Medicare drug prices by tying them to lower prices paid in other wealthy countries, an idea fiercely opposed by drug companies, which are now mobilizing both to try to stop the rule and plan for a fight if it does go forward. “I would say all tools would be at our disposal because it would just have such a devastating impact on our ability to bring new cures for patients,” Michelle McMurry-Heath, CEO of the Biotechnology Innovation Organization, told The Hill on Tuesday.

McMurry-Heath also accused President Trump of moving forward with the proposal out of retribution because the drug companies did not announce efficacy results for coronavirus vaccines before the election. “We’re hearing that he’s doing it out of apparent retribution because our researchers didn’t comply with his arbitrary timeline,” McMurry-Heath said. Trump did tweet his displeasure at Pfizer last week for not announcing results before the election. Pfizer, however, said it was simply following the science and announced the data once it was available from an independent board overseeing the clinical trial. But Trump also initially proposed this drug pricing plan, known as “most-favored nation,” well before the election and Pfizer’s announcement. An earlier version was unveiled in 2018, and Trump signed an executive order to push it forward in September.

McMurry-Heath, whose organization represents small biotech companies as well as large pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer, argued that if the proposal goes forward this week, it would harm the industry’s ability to continue developing coronavirus vaccines and treatments. She said the administration should “consider the impact this will have on an industry that’s trying to get a nation and world back on its feet.” Under fire over their prices, drug companies have been increasingly pointing to their work fighting the coronavirus pandemic to try to improve their image. More broadly, McMurry-Heath said the reduced prices from the proposal would mean “investment would dry up” in innovative small biotech companies.

Advocates for lower drug prices say the industry simply uses protecting innovation as an excuse to fight proposals that would lower their profits, and that the Trump proposal would help remedy a situation where the U.S. pays two to three times what other countries pay for drugs. “They don’t raise prices to fuel innovation; they raise prices to hit profit targets and to trigger executive bonuses,” said David Mitchell, founder of the advocacy group Patients for Affordable Drugs Now, pointing to an investigation from the House Oversight Committee in September. He also pointed to the billions of dollars in investments from the government’s Operation Warp Speed to fight coronavirus. “It’s the taxpayers who are investing in vaccines and treatments,” he said.

McMurry-Heath said her understanding is that the administration’s proposal will only affect drugs in Medicare Part B, meaning drugs administered in doctors offices, and not those in Part D, which is drugs people pick up at the pharmacy counter. She said BIO has not yet been in touch with the incoming Biden administration, which would be left to finish the implementation of the program. “They’re just going to lay this debacle on the doorstep of the Biden administration and let them clean up the mess,” she said. [Source: The Hill | Peter Sullivan – November 17, 2020 ++]

Coronavirus Vaccine

Update 18: Federal Allocation Program

To maximize access to COVID-19 vaccines for all Americans, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on 12 NOV announced the U.S. government’s partnerships with large chain pharmacies and networks that represent independent pharmacies and regional chains. Through the partnership with pharmacy chains, this program covers approximately 60 percent of pharmacies throughout the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Through the partnerships with network administrators, independent pharmacies and regional chains will also be part of the federal pharmacy program, further increasing access to vaccine across the country—particularly in traditionally underserved areas.

“Ensuring access and affordability of the COVID-19 vaccine for all Americans is a top priority for the Trump Administration,” said HHS Secretary Alex Azar. “We are leveraging the existing private sector infrastructure to get safe and effective vaccines supported by Operation Warp Speed into communities and into arms as quickly as possible with no out-of-pocket costs. The vast majority of Americans live within five miles of a pharmacy, and our new agreement with pharmacy partners across America is a critical step toward making sure all Americans have access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines when they are available.”

In addition to traditional brick-and-mortar pharmacies, pharmacists, pharmacy interns, and pharmacy technicians also provide vaccinations in retail and grocery stores. Therefore, pharmacy vaccinators are crucial public health partners for increasing access and convenience of COVID-19 vaccines. Many pharmacists and the interns and technicians working under their supervision are trained to provide immunizations and are already important immunizers in their communities. Pharmacists are also a trusted health resource in their communities, and have played a vital role in the public health response to COVID-19 by counseling patients, expanding access to childhood vaccinations during the pandemic, and ordering and administering COVID-19 tests. By working with these partners, the federal government will rapidly expand access to COVID-19 vaccines. Vaccine will be administered at partners’ pharmacy locations at no cost to patients.

“Since 2012, CDC has worked extensively with pharmacies to improve pandemic preparedness, conduct vaccine throughput exercises, and assess store and organizational response capabilities,” said CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield. “Through these partnerships, we will leverage established relationships to support our critical public health mission of vaccinating the American public to prevent the spread of COVID-19.” Pharmacies that do not participate in the federal allocation program are encouraged to be part of the solution and should coordinate with their jurisdiction’s health department to become COVID-19 vaccine providers. Below is the list of chain and community-pharmacies networks that have signed on as of 6 NOV:

- Albertsons Companies, Inc. (incl., Osco, Jewel-Osco, Albertsons, Albertsons Market, Safeway, Tom Thumb, Star Market, Shaws, Haggen, Acme, Randalls, Carrs, Market Street, United, Vons, Pavilions, Amigos, Lucky’s, Pak n Save, Sav-On)
- Costco Wholesale Corp.
- CPESN USA, LLC
- CVS Pharmacy, Inc. (incl. Long’s)
- Good Neighbor Pharmacy and AmerisourceBergen Drug Corporation’s PSAO, Elevate Provider
- Health Mart Systems, Inc.
- H-E-B, LP
- Hy-Vee, Inc.

- LeaderNET and Medicine Shoppe, Cardinal Health’s PSAOs
- Managed Health Care Associates (MHA)
- Meijer Inc.
- Publix Super Markets, Inc.
- Retail Business Services, LLC (incl., Food Lion, Giant Food, The Giant Company, Hannaford Bros Co, Stop & Shop)
- Rite Aid Corp.
- The Kroger Co. (incl., Kroger, Harris Teeter, Fred Meyer, Frys, Ralphs, King Soopers, Smiths, City Market, Dillons, Marianos, Pick-n-Save, Copps, Metro Market)
- Topco Associates, LLC (incl. Big-Y Pharmacy and Wellness Center, Brookshire’s Pharmacy, Super One Pharmacy, FRESH by Brookshire’s Pharmacy, Coborn’s Pharmacy, Cash Wise Pharmacy, MarketPlace Pharmacy, Hartig Drug Company, King Kullen, Food City Pharmacy, Ingles Pharmacy, Raley’s, Bel Air, Nob Hill Pharmacies, Save Mart Pharmacies, Lucky Pharmacies, SpartanNash, Price Chopper, Market 32, Tops Friendly Markets, ShopRite, Wegmans, Weis Markets, Acme Fresh Markets)
- Walgreens (incl. Duane Reade)
- Walmart, Inc. (incl. Sam’s Club)
- Winn-Dixie Stores Inc. (incl. Winn-Dixie, Harveys, Fresco Y Mas)

Currently, there are no COVID-19 vaccines that have been authorized or approved by the Food and Drug Administration and recommended by CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices to the CDC. However, this pharmacy partnership is being established in anticipation that one or more COVID-19 vaccines will be authorized or approved and recommended for use in the United States before the end of 2020. [Source: HHS Press Office | November 12, 2020 ++]

Coronavirus Vaccine

Update 19: Most States Aren’t Ready to Distribute Pfizer Vaccine

As the first coronavirus vaccine takes a major stride toward approval, state governments’ distribution plans show many are not ready to deliver the shots. The challenge is especially steep in rural areas, many of which are contending with a surge of infections, meaning that access to the first batch of Covid-19 vaccines may be limited by geography. Pfizer announced 16 NOV that its vaccine demonstrated more than 90% effectiveness and no serious bad reactions in early trial results—an impressive outcome that will pave the way for the company to seek an emergency authorization once it collects more safety data for another week or two. But establishing that the vaccine is safe and effective is just the first step.

The Pfizer vaccine is unusually difficult to ship and store: It is administered in two doses given 28 days apart, has to be stored at temperatures of about minus 100 degrees Fahrenheit and will be delivered in dry ice-packed boxes holding 1,000 to 5,000 doses. These cartons can stay cold enough to keep the doses viable for up to 10 days, according to details provided by the company. The ice can be replenished up to three times. Once opened, the packages can keep the vaccine for five days but can’t be opened more than twice a day. The vaccine can also survive in a refrigerator for five days but can’t be refrozen if unused.

Health officials haven’t figured out how to get the ultracold doses to critical populations living far from cities, according to a ProPublica review of distribution plans obtained through open records laws in every state. Needing to use 1,000 doses within a few days may be fine for large hospital systems or mass vaccination centers. But it could rule out sending the vaccine to providers who don’t treat that many people, even doctors’ offices in cities. It’s especially

challenging in smaller towns, rural areas and Native communities on reservations that are likely to struggle to administer that many doses quickly or to maintain them at ultracold temperatures.

The government's vaccine program, Operation Warp Speed, has projected optimism about its readiness to distribute the vaccine. On Monday, Gen. Gustave Perna told NPR, "I think we're in a good place," saying that "with the right planning, we can execute it with zero loss of vaccine." But the federal program is only going to be responsible for delivering vaccines to the states, which must then figure out on their own how to get the shots to the people who need them most. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention asked each state to turn in distribution plans on 2 NOV, imagining a scenario in which a vaccine with Pfizer's specifications came first.

ProPublica obtained full preliminary plans for 47 states (Hawaii, Pennsylvania and Minnesota say they're still working on theirs). Many struggled with how to handle a Pfizer-like vaccine. Washington state's Health Department does not have its own warehouse that can store the Pfizer vaccine at a cold enough temperature. Arizona expects the Pfizer vaccine cannot be handled by the state's rural communities and tribal lands. North Dakota and Oregon aren't sure how to take care of migrant workers. Kansas' plan appears to mistakenly assume shipments will be far smaller than 1,000 doses. Georgia's Public Health Department is relying on local districts and counties to work out their own details. "Early, when we don't have lots of doses, I frankly do not anticipate that vaccine will be widely available in every rural community," Dr. Amanda Cohn, chief medical officer for the CDC's Vaccine Task Force, said during a call on vaccine implementation planning with rural stakeholders on Nov. 3. "The first couple months will be not ideal, but we really want to listen to our rural partners and understand what we can do to make it better," she added.

The concern is most pronounced in places like Mt. Vernon Countryside Manor, a nursing home in southern Illinois more than 100 miles from the nearest major city, where the staff is working to contain the facility's first COVID-19 outbreak. Glenda Lee Young, a nurse at the home, said four residents and an employee tested positive for COVID-19 in recent weeks. The sick have been isolated from the other 70 elderly residents, and are recovering. The surrounding county has a fatality rate of 4.5%, more than double that of Illinois as a whole, according to data from the Johns Hopkins University COVID-19 dashboard. The staff at Mt. Vernon is eager for a vaccine to help them and their residents. Illinois' distribution plan includes health care workers and people 65 years and older among the first groups to be immunized.

"Our people would not travel," Young said. "If a vaccine becomes available, it would have to come to us." However, Illinois' plan does not specify how shots will be provided to rural parts of the state that may not have enough people or ultracold storage. The state's Department of Public Health didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. Young said she was not surprised by the state's silence on rural vaccine access. "We get the shaft on a lot of stuff."

Officials Are Trying to Hit 'a Moving Target'

Health officials stressed that the plans are still evolving as they receive changing information. Even though Pfizer's vaccine has long been seen as the likely front-runner, details from the trial, including the vaccine's efficacy in specific populations like the elderly, have yet to be published. Shipping and storage logistics are also expected to continue to be fine-tuned with each passing week. "It's a moving target," Dr. Philip Huang, director of the Dallas County Health and Human Services Department, said. "There's new info every day." The changing details make it harder to plan, and some officials acknowledged they haven't gotten very far. "There are too many variables still to be worked out at the federal level," a spokeswoman for the Georgia Department of Public Health said by way of declining an interview request for this article. "Much of what happens going forward will depend on the vaccine itself, when we receive it and what the protocols will be for prioritizing distribution among various populations."

The problem with waiting for details on the vaccine to be revealed is that mass immunization is a multilayered process, involving public communication campaigns, ordering of equipment, hiring of staff, training of vaccine providers and the added complexity, in this pandemic, of making sure all vaccine sites are safe and won't contribute to the spread. Operation Warp Speed has said its goal is to begin shipping the day that a vaccine is given the green light

by the FDA, so states need to be ready at any moment. For the initial months after the Food and Drug Administration signs off on a vaccine, the CDC advised state and local health authorities to prioritize health care workers, then move on to other essential workers and at-risk populations such as nursing home residents. Access would expand to the general public as manufacturing ramps up to make more doses available.

But there are a lot of details left to determine within those broad categories. Some health care workers have more exposure than others; North Dakota wants hospitals to document how they decided whom to vaccinate first. Maryland is prioritizing people in jails and prisons (where sharing close quarters has led to severe outbreaks), but states like Idaho and Mississippi have scheduled them for later. Arkansas, which has a large chicken industry, considers meatpacking workers to be essential. Oklahoma is prioritizing its long-term care population. Some states stressed communities of color, which have been disproportionately sickened and killed by the virus. “We are currently in the midst of a social justice movement across the county,” Kentucky’s plan notes.

Rural Communities Are 'the Greatest Challenge'

Across the country, authorities are grappling with how to accommodate the Pfizer vaccine’s finicky specifications. So far, state plans show few have come up with clear solutions. Oregon, for instance, said it still needs to “develop [a] plan* For how to handle 1,000-dose orders in “remote Oregon locations, while maintaining the ultracold chain and avoiding wastage.” Perna, the general leading logistics for Operation Warp Speed, told NPR that it’s up to states to buy more freezers. That contradicts the CDC’s instruction to not invest in more equipment. But many states said they’re doing so anyway, or at least looking into it. They’re also taking stock of what facilities already exist in their states at hospitals and universities, or where they can get dry ice.

North Dakota, where the virus has killed roughly 1 out of every 1,200 people, is considering whether to break down the 1,000-dose packages and, on its own, distribute smaller quantities to individual hospitals and clinics. “The greatest challenge will be to moving small amounts of vaccine to widely scattered locations during Phase 1 since only a small percentage of the small population will be eligible for the vaccine,” the state’s plan said. It describes one health district that has three hospitals, two of which are more than an hour’s drive away from the nearest city via a two-lane road, and eight long-term care facilities that are even more remote. “Reaching small populations without redistribution may not [be] possible.”

Even in the case where prioritized health care workers were physically capable of driving themselves to the city to get a vaccine, relying on doctors and nurses to get themselves to a vaccine “doesn’t compute,” said Tim Size, executive director of the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative, which represents 43 rural acute hospitals. Wisconsin is battling its worst outbreak of the pandemic, and every hospital is stretched thin on staff, he said. Requiring everyone to take time off, twice, to get the Pfizer vaccine “means two days of lost staff time at a time we’re desperately short of staff.” Size urged Pfizer to figure out a way to package its vaccine in smaller shipments so it could be delivered directly to rural hospitals. A spokeswoman for Pfizer declined to comment on whether the company is working on that.

Later vaccines will likely have less onerous storage requirements, and at least one, made by Johnson & Johnson, only requires one dose instead of two, so many states are hoping to have multiple options to work with that may make it easier to reach remote populations. Some states appeared to be avoiding the issue of Pfizer’s packaging for now. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment’s plan assumes any approved vaccine will be “available in minimal quantities such as 100 doses per order.” Kansas’ department did not respond to requests for comment. “If Pfizer comes out and says they’re going to provide doses of 25 instead of 1,000, that’s a game changer,” said Imelda Garcia, associate commissioner for the Texas Department of State Health Services’ Division for Laboratory and Infectious Disease Services. “The manufacturers were imagining mass vaccination efforts and not really thinking about rural areas. We’ve been pushing pretty hard at the federal level for them to provide smaller packages. We don’t know if that will occur or not.”













As Texas and other states consider the need to break down the 1,000-dose packages into smaller shipments, that’s an additional cost that they’d have to shoulder, since the federal government will only pay to move the vaccines once.

Several states identified funding as a major problem. Virginia’s plan included a “preparedness gap analysis” that estimates that it will need \$71 million to establish and operate mass vaccination clinics, which would include hiring temporary staff and covering facility rental costs, translation services, signage and other operating costs. The plan also calls for a further \$2.5 million in equipment such as refrigerators and thermometers and \$3 million for public education, including TV, radio and social media ads, as well as “targeted outreach to clinicians, vulnerable populations and other key groups.”

CDC Director Robert Redfield has said Congress will need to provide up to \$6 billion for vaccine distribution, but funding negotiations stalled ahead of the election. To date, the federal government has allocated 3% of that amount, \$200 million, to the states to immunize the nation. Much of the implementation will spill into the next administration. President-elect Joe Biden on Monday named a team of public health experts to advise him on the COVID-19 response. But so far the Trump administration is refusing to cooperate with the transition. [Source: Route*Fifty | Isaac Arnsdorf, Ryan Gabrielson & Caroline Chen | November 12, 2020 ++]

Covid-19 Testing

Update 08: Symptoms to Look For

CORONAVIRUS vs. COLD vs. FLU vs. ALLERGIES				
SYMPTOMS	COVID-19*	COLD	FLU	ALLERGIES
 Fever	Common (measured at 100 F or higher)	Rare	High (100-102 F), can last 3-4 days	No
 Headache	Sometimes	Rare	Intense	Sometimes
 General aches, pains	Sometimes	Slight	Common, often severe	No
 Fatigue, weakness	Sometimes	Slight	Common, often severe	Sometimes
 Extreme exhaustion	Sometimes (progresses slowly)	Never	Common (starts early)	No
 Stuffy nose	Rare	Common	Sometimes	Common
 Sneezing	Rare	Common	Sometimes	Common
 Sore throat	Rare	Common	Common	No
 Cough	Common	Mild to moderate	Common, can become severe	Sometimes
 Shortness of breath	In more serious infections	Rare	Rare	Common
 Runny nose	Rare	Common	Sometimes	Common
 Diarrhea	Sometimes	No	Sometimes**	No

[Source: USSVI Tucson Base | November 16, 2020 ++]

Covid-19 Victims

Update 01: Those Most Often Hospitalized

Seniors with seven chronic conditions are especially vulnerable to ending up in the hospital due to exposure to the coronavirus, according to newly updated data from the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). CMS says that nearly 1.2 million Medicare beneficiaries were diagnosed with COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, between the start of the year and Sept. 12. Of those beneficiaries, more than 332,000 were hospitalized with a COVID-19 diagnosis during that period. Those numbers, released 19 NOV, reflect cases and hospitalizations that CMS knew about as of Oct. 9. The federal agency notes that all data in its latest report “will continue to change as CMS processes additional claims and encounters for the reporting period.”

The data reveals that seven chronic conditions were most common among the Medicare beneficiaries who had been hospitalized:

- Hypertension: 80%
- Hyperlipidemia (abnormally high levels of triglycerides and cholesterol in the blood): 62%
- Chronic kidney disease: 51%
- Diabetes: 50%
- Anemia: 48%
- Ischemic heart disease (heart muscle receives insufficient blood flow): 46%
- Rheumatoid arthritis/osteoarthritis: 46%

Of the beneficiaries who were hospitalized, 21% died and 32% were discharged to their homes. The others moved from the hospital to skilled nursing facilities (22%), home health care (14%), hospice (5%) or other health care settings, CMS says. About half of the hospital stays lasted for fewer than eight days, while 12% percent of the stays were at least 21 days.

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

- Black beneficiaries (1,263 hospitalizations per 100,000 beneficiaries)
- Hispanic beneficiaries (967 hospitalizations per 100,000 beneficiaries)
- Beneficiaries who are age 85 or older (1,003 hospitalizations per 100,000 beneficiaries)
- Beneficiaries who are age 75 to 84 (604 hospitalizations per 100,000 beneficiaries)
- Beneficiaries enrolled in both Medicare and Medicaid, the government insurance program for people with low incomes (1,374 hospitalizations per 100,000 beneficiaries)

By comparison, the overall rate for all Medicare beneficiaries was 517 hospitalizations per 100,000 people. Regardless of your race, ethnicity, age or financial standing, there are steps you can take to reduce your risk of contracting the coronavirus. Some measures are obvious or have gotten a lot of media attention. You can find helpful tips in the following stories:

- [“Are You Making These 7 Hand-Washing Mistakes?”](#)
- [“These 5 Cleaning Products Kill the Coronavirus”](#)

Other ways to keep the coronavirus at bay might be less obvious. You can learn more about them in:

- [“Do This in the Car If You Want to Avoid COVID-19”](#)
- [“Here’s an Easy Way to Avoid Crowds at Stores”](#)
- [“How to Protect Your Eyes From the Coronavirus”](#)

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | November 19, 2020++]

Covid-19 Precautions

Update 03: Symptoms Unique to Seniors



Largely asymptomatic seniors may experience a symptom not commonly associated with the coronavirus. More than one-quarter of seniors admitted to emergency departments and eventually diagnosed with COVID-19 initially displayed symptoms of delirium, new research finds. The study published 19 NOV in the medical journal JAMA Network Open also found that a delirium diagnosis was the main presenting symptom for 16% of such patients. And of those patients who initially displayed symptoms of delirium, 37% had no typical COVID-19 symptoms, such as fever or shortness of breath.

The surprising findings suggest that delirium — a symptom not commonly associated with COVID-19 — may indicate the possible presence of the coronavirus in patients who otherwise do not appear to have symptoms suggestive of coronavirus infection. Properly diagnosing COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, is crucial in older patients. Adults aged 65 years and older have accounted for more than 80% of COVID-19 deaths in the U.S., despite that the age group accounts for just 16% of the U.S. population, according to Hebrew SeniorLife, a geriatric care organization affiliated with Harvard Medical School. Delirium is a state of confusion characterized by several symptoms. Those most common among the patients in the study include:

- Impaired consciousness
- Disorientation
- Inattention
- Disorganized thinking

In reaching their conclusions, researchers examined 817 patients 65 or older who were admitted to one of seven emergency departments across the U.S. and diagnosed with COVID-19. Their average age was about 78. The findings should change how health care professionals evaluate older patients for possible coronavirus infection, says Dr. Sharon K. Inouye, senior author of the study, director of the Aging Brain Center at Hebrew SeniorLife, and professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School: “This study demonstrates that delirium is not only a common symptom of COVID-19, but also may be the leading and possibly sole symptom in older persons. Thus, delirium should be considered an important presenting symptom of COVID-19.”

The study authors also note that although delirium is a common symptom in older adults with severe disease who visit the emergency department, it goes undetected in two-thirds of all cases. Delirium is not the only unusual symptom that seniors might display when they are infected with the coronavirus. There are other more subtle indications that something is not right, such as:

- Sleeping more than usual
- Not eating
- Unusual apathy and confusion
- A loss of orientation to their surroundings

- Dizziness and potential falls
- Failure to speak

In some cases, a senior infected with the coronavirus may suddenly collapse. And seniors may not display fever, cough or shortness of breath despite being infected. Why are older people more likely to experience unusual symptoms, rather than the typical signs of a coronavirus infection? It largely comes down to the aging process. As we grow older, our immune system weakens and our ability to regulate body temperature changes, says Dr. Joseph Ouslander, a geriatrician and professor at Florida Atlantic University's Schmidt College of Medicine. He tells Kaiser Health: "Underlying chronic illnesses can mask or interfere with signs of infection. Some older people, whether from age-related changes or previous neurologic issues such as a stroke, may have altered cough reflexes. Others with cognitive impairment may not be able to communicate their symptoms."

If you are older and experience any of the symptoms listed above — or if an older loved one displays them — you should let a doctor know immediately. Kaiser Health notes that it is especially important for seniors to receive treatment quickly if they have developed COVID-19. "Someone may be just having a bad day. But if they're not themselves for a couple of days, absolutely reach out to a primary care doctor or a local health system hotline to see if they meet the threshold for [coronavirus] testing." Vaughan adds that you may need to be persistent: "If you get a 'no' the first time and things aren't improving, call back and ask again," she says. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | May 9 & November 20, 2020 ++]

* Finances *



Tricare Select

Update 09: Have You Signed Up for Payments?

Just 14 percent of the military retiree households who must start paying enrollment fees for Tricare Select have set up their payment process, Tricare officials said. Those who don't set up their payments by 31 DEC risk losing their Tricare coverage as of Jan. 1. The new fees are \$12.50 per month, or \$150 a year for an individual; and \$25 a month, or \$300 a year, for family coverage. Those affected are working-age retirees under age 65 who entered the military before Jan. 1, 2018, their family members and survivors. Previously, these beneficiaries haven't had to pay enrollment fees for Tricare Select, but a 2017 law required the Defense Department to start charging these enrollment fees by Jan. 1, 2021.

The preferred payment method is through allotment, but recurring credit or debit card transactions can be used, or electronic funds transfers. Click here for more information from Tricare about setting up the payments. Those who set up their payment process by 20 NOV did not have to pay upfront enrollment fees, said Mark Ellis, chief of policy and programs for the Tricare Health Plan. You'll just be arranging to start the recurring payment. As of 9 NOV, just 14 percent of the households that must set up payments had done so, Ellis said.

Currently there are about 850,000 beneficiaries who fall into this category, also known as Group A retiree beneficiaries and are covered by Tricare Select. Information was not immediately available about how many households

those 850,000 beneficiaries represent, since in many cases, multiple beneficiaries are covered under a retiree’s Tricare Select plan. Ellis’ message to these beneficiaries: “Please don’t let coverage lapse. Please contact your regional contractor if you want to continue in Tricare Select.” The new fees don’t affect military retirees in Tricare for Life. Defense officials have sent out several mailing over the last few months, Ellis said. They’ve also taken some steps to mitigate the impact to those who don’t set up their payments.

Tricare officials have extended the grace period for people to reinstate their coverage, from 90 days to 180 days, Ellis said. That means those who are terminated can pay their missed monthly premiums, and the coverage will be retroactive. Tricare will then pay the claims that were denied because of the coverage termination. There are concerns that this particular patient population “needs to be educated to make an informed decision about whether they want to continue their coverage or use other health insurance available outside the military health system,” Ellis said. Many of these retirees were previously in the Tricare Standard or Extra program before it was replaced by Tricare Select in January, 2018. These beneficiaries were automatically transitioned into Tricare Select at that time, and fees were not required.

Tricare officials have directed the Tricare regional contractors to make at least three phone calls to households whose coverage was terminated because they didn’t set up their payments. They’ll call the home phone, cell phone, work phone, speaking to an adult in the household, letting them know their coverage has been terminated and what they can do to reinstate the coverage, said Ellis. [MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | November 17, 2020 ++]

Traffic Tickets

Update 02: Impact on Insurance Premiums



Accidentally run a red light or drive a little too fast, and you may get a ticket. But that is just the start of your worries. Many types of traffic violations can drive your car insurance premium dramatically higher, according to a study from insurance comparison tool The Zebra. For example, blow through a red light, and your rate can be expected to jump by an average of 23.3%. That could cost you an extra \$361 in your annual premium, The Zebra says in its 2020 State of Auto Insurance Report. Tickets for more serious offenses can prove especially costly — increasing your premium by as much as 78%, on average. Below are 13 violations that increase premiums by an average of more than 25% over the course of a year, according to The Zebra.

- Following too closely: 25.5% (\$395)
- Speeding in a 65 mph zone: 27.6% (\$428)
- Passing a school bus: 28.5% (\$441)
- Speeding 21-25 mph over the limit: 29.7% (\$460)
- Operating a vehicle without permission: 31.1% (\$481)
- Driving with an open container: 34.7% (\$537)
- At-fault accident: 41.1% (\$636)

- Reckless driving: 67.0% (\$1,038)
- Driving with a suspended license: 67.4% (\$1,043)
- Refusing a breathalyzer/chemical test: 69.8% (\$1,080)
- DUI: 71.0% (\$1,099)
- Racing: 73.1% (\$1,131)
- Hit and run: 78.3% (\$1,212)

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | February 22, 2020

Seniors Financial Abuse & Exploitation

Update 02: Congress Approves Bill Protecting Seniors

New legislation intended to protect seniors from fraud passed both the House and the Senate this week. The [Seniors Fraud Prevention Act](#) of 2019 (S.512) directs the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to create an office to educate seniors about fraud schemes. The goal is to prevent scams that target the assets of seniors, including scams that target seniors via telemarketing and robocalls. In addition, the measure contains provisions to improve the FTC’s monitoring of and response to fraud complaints.

For example, the bill requires the FTC to work with other agencies in looking for fraud schemes targeting seniors. The FTC also would be charged with distributing information — to seniors, their families and their caregivers — that explains how to recognize fraud schemes, and how to contact law enforcement when fraud occurs. The Seniors Fraud Prevention Act requires the FTC to start carrying out these requirements within one year of when the president signs the bill, which is the next and final major step before the bill becomes law.

Fraud impacts people of all ages, and people age 60 and older actually are less likely to report that they are victims of most types of fraud than people age 20 to 59, according to the FTC. In addition, these older adults are less likely than younger people to report losing money to fraud. In fact, in each of the past three years, the “overwhelming majority” of older adults who filed fraud reports did not lose any money to scams. Contrary to popular belief, older adults also are more likely to spot and report fraud before they lose money than people between the ages of 20 and 59, the FTC says. However, when scammers do successfully target seniors for fraud, they generally lose greater amounts of money to fraud than younger people.

According to the FTC: “Consumers 80 and over reported the largest median losses of \$1,600. The median individual dollar loss for this 80 and over age group was about two to four times the median loss amounts reported by other age groups.” In addition, seniors are more likely to be targets of certain types of fraud, including:

- Tech support scams
- Prize, sweepstakes and lottery scams
- Family and friend impersonation

[Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | November 19, 2020 ++]

Retirement

How a Biden Presidency Might Impact Yours’

Joe Biden is now the president-elect, even though President Donald Trump has vowed to fight the election results in court. There are several ways a Biden presidency might affect your retirement, including lower tax benefits on 401(k)

accounts and more generous Social Security benefits. Biden's [Plan for Older Americans](#) gives specific details on what Biden would like to do as president to overhaul the nation's retirement system, shore up Social Security and Medicare, and fight ageism that forces people out of the workforce prematurely. Although, if the Senate remains under Republican control, any really big changes are actually unlikely. Following are some changes Biden would like to make that could impact your retirement.

Biden would like to reduce 401(k) tax breaks for high-earners

Currently, the tax breaks for high earners who contribute to 401(k) and traditional IRA plans are higher than the breaks for middle- and lower-income workers. Biden's plan cites a study by the Tax Policy Center that shows two-thirds of the tax benefit of these plans goes to the wealthiest 20% of families. Because the tax benefit of these plans is based on your tax bracket, earners in higher brackets get more government tax relief than earners in lower brackets. A person whose income puts her in the top 37% tax bracket gets a deduction worth \$370 for each \$1,000 contribution she makes, while a person in the 22% bracket only gets \$220 in tax breaks for the same \$1,000 contribution. And if you're a low-income earner with a full-time job, you could get nothing in tax breaks for putting money in an IRA while still paying payroll taxes.

Biden's plan would replace the current tax-deferral mechanism for 401(k)s and traditional IRAs with a tax credit. This credit would operate similarly to a flat tax so that the person in the 37% tax bracket and the person in the 22% tax bracket would get the same \$220 credit for their \$1,000 contribution.

Biden would like to increase access to 401(k) plans

Biden's plan provides tax credits for small businesses to incentivize them to create 401(k) plans for lower-income workers. A similar proposal is already in the [Strong Retirement Act of 2020](#) sponsored by Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard E. Neal (D-MA) and Ranking Member Kevin Brady (R-TX). Other provisions of the Strong Retirement Act that could make it into a Biden plan are:

- Expanding automatic enrollment in workplace retirement accounts. Some states have led the way with automatic enrollment into retirement accounts. Oregon's [OregonSaves](#) program automatically enrolls all full-time employees in the state at no cost to employers. According to Pew, the reaction to the plan so far has been positive. Biden's plan calls for the creation of a national version of Oregon's plan.
- Increasing [catch-up](#) contributions
- Allowing employers to help younger workers by adding money to retirement accounts equivalent to their student loan payments

Biden proposes making Medicare available to early retirees

Biden would like to lower the age for Medicare eligibility from 65 to 60. Biden said his plan will help Americans who retire early and those who are unemployed or can't find jobs with health benefits. "It reflects the reality that, even after the current crisis ends, older Americans are likely to find it difficult to secure jobs," Biden wrote in April.

Biden suggests lower prescription drug prices and more affordable long-term care

Biden's site says "Too many Americans — and too many older Americans — cannot afford their prescriptions or their long-term care." To fix this situation, Biden proposes several policy solutions.

- Include dental, vision, and hearing costs in traditional Medicare.
- Allow Medicare to negotiate prices for prescription drugs, which the Congressional Budget Office estimates would save \$456 billion between 2023 and 2029.
- Put an inflation cap on drug prices.
- Allow U.S. citizens to buy name-brand drugs or generic equivalents from other countries.

In real terms, these measures would mean higher-earning retirees would spend less on Medigap and Medicare Advantage insurance plans. It could also mean that Medicare premiums for higher-earners would be capped or go down.

Biden would like to shore up Social Security and broaden its tax base

Biden has pledged to shore up Social Security, which may run into a budget shortfall by 2028, forcing a reduction in benefits if there is no plan to save it. According to his website, Biden “will strengthen benefits for the most vulnerable older Americans — including widows and widowers, lifelong workers with low monthly benefits, and old-age beneficiaries who may have exhausted their other savings.” To do that he is calling for changes in how Social Security calculates its benefits. The plan would:

- Create a “true minimum benefit for lifelong workers” of at least 125% of the poverty level.
- Extend benefits for widows and widowers if their spouse who is receiving Social Security benefits dies.
- Add a supplementary benefit for older recipients who have been collecting Social Security for 20 years or more.
- Change the way the Social Security COLA is calculated to increase benefits.
- Extend benefits for teachers and those receiving public sector pensions.

To fund these changes, Biden’s plan proposes raising payroll taxes only on those now earning more than \$400,000 annually. Although the specifics aren’t spelled out on the Biden plan’s webpage, at the moment it seems like Biden’s plan would not tax income above the current \$137,700 income threshold, creating a tax “doughnut hole” between \$137,700 and \$400,000. The nonprofit Tax Policy Center thinks lawmakers would try to close the doughnut hole gradually over several years and expand the tax base for Social Security to include taxing other kinds of income like capital gains on investments and passive income. But to make any substantive changes will require an act of Congress.

Biden pledges more support for workers over 65

Biden’s plan pledges “that all workers deserve an opportunity to earn a living and will fight to change the laws to allow all people — regardless of their age — to get the pay they deserve.” The key policy to achieve this goal is to extend the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to workers over 65. Currently, those workers are excluded from this tax benefit. The EITC is a matching tax credit for low-income workers. For every dollar a low-income worker makes, the government matches their income with a credit dollar up to a certain amount. For very-low-income workers who may owe no tax, this means they get a refund check that is similar to a grant. For workers over the age of 65 who receive Social Security benefits and work part time, the extension of the EITC would mean a big boost in income.

Biden’s plan also promises to “back bipartisan legislation protecting older workers from being discriminated against in the workforce.” How that would work in practice, however, remains to be seen.

Divided Government Means We Will Likely See No Major Changes

Biden’s plan depends on Congress, and if Republicans maintain control of the Senate — which seems likely — the new president will have a hard time getting his plan passed. Although shoring up Social Security may have bipartisan backing, a divided Congress will not do any of the following:

- *Raise taxes.* That means no new taxes on income and probably no changes to the tax breaks for 401(k)s and IRAs.
- *Make significant changes to Medicare and Medicaid.* Without new legislation, there isn’t a clear way to increase coverage for seniors.
- *Expand benefits for Social Security.* The U.S. deficit soared in 2020 due to the COVID-19 stimulus, and fiscal austerity could become popular again for members of Congress during a Biden presidency. No new spending would make serious Social Security reform difficult.

On the other hand, Biden’s proposal to expand the EITC to workers over 65 could be accomplished as a compromise with Senate Republicans because it is a tax cut, not a tax raise. Other policy changes that could happen through executive order instead of legislation include asking Social Security to change the formula it uses to calculate its cost-of-living update. And a Biden administration could promote more efficient cost-sharing between Medicare programs that could cap out-of-pocket expenses. But divided government means big changes to the way things are done are

unlikely. Some modest reform efforts, like the bipartisan Strong Retirement Act, could get passed in the upcoming legislative session. But the status quo in terms of retirement is probably here to stay. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Will Kenton | November 20, 2020 ++]

Holiday Scams

Update 05: Phony Copycat Events

The holiday shopping season is upon us. With the pandemic, many local in-person events, such as popup holiday markets or craft fairs, have moved online. Scammers are creating phony copycat events that charge for admission and steal your credit card information.

How the Scam Works

- You hear that your city’s annual holiday market or another shopping event will be held virtually this year. You search for it online and find a social media post or event page. Besides moving online, one other big thing is different this year. The event, which has been free in the past, is now requiring a paid ticket. You enter your credit card number and personal information, such as full name and address.
- Unfortunately, the “ticket” is a scam! The event information you found was posted by scammers and not affiliated with the real holiday market. Con artists are creating fake event pages, social posts, and emails to confuse attendees into sharing their credit card information.
- In another twist on this scam, some virtual holiday markets have a website or social media page where vendors can post photos of their products and links to their websites. Be careful here too! Some consumers reported to BBB that they clicked the links provided, thinking they lead to an online shop. Instead, the sites downloaded malware.

How to Avoid a Online Event Scam:

- Is there an admission fee? Visit the event’s website to see if you need to purchase an admission ticket for the virtual event. If not, watch for scammers trying to claim otherwise. If this happens, message the event coordinator to help prevent other virtual attendees from being scammed.
- Research vendors and the host. If the event is unfamiliar to you, research the host and list of vendors ahead of time. While virtually browsing from booth to booth, make sure you are only clicking on the links provided. If you are unsure if a shop is legitimate do an online search for that vendor’s store rather than follow the link provided.
- Use a credit card. When making any purchases, use your credit card. This way if anything gets charged that wasn’t supposed to be, you can file a claim with your credit card company.
- Keep your receipts. Make note of all of your purchases and save your receipts. If you have a question about a product or need to make a return, you will have the vendor’s information readily available.
- Know the return policy. Before making a purchase, ask the vendor what their return policy is so you will not run into issues after the holidays.

For More Information

Read more about [holiday pop-up shops](#) and event scams on BBB.org. Find out more about [online event scams on Event Industry News](#). Click here for BBB's tips for [buying tickets to an event](#). If you’ve been targeted by this scam, help others avoid the same problem by reporting your experience on the [BBB.org/ScamTracker](#). [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | November 13, 2020 ++]

Online Shopping Scam

Update 04: Among Top 3 Since 2017

Are you purchasing more online now? It's convenient. It's fast. But is it safe? The Better Business Bureau (BBB) found that online purchase scams have been in the top three types of scams since 2017. With this year's social distancing to limit exposure, and many businesses previously closed and now slowly reopening with limited hours, many consumers are turning to online purchases for home delivery. But predators have been taking advantage of this increase in online purchases. BBB reports that in 2020 so far, 64% of reported scams are from online purchases, with a staggering 80.5% of consumers reporting they lost money from these scams.

What is an Online Purchase Scam?

Online purchase scams typically involve the purchase of products and/or services via a website. Scammers offer attractive deals, but no product/service is delivered once payment is made. Or scammers pretend to purchase an item, but then send a fake check and ask for a refund of the "accidental" overpayment.

Outsmart Scammers with Prevention Tips

BBB offers helpful information and tips to stay safe from online purchase scams and many other types of scams, such as scams for rental, employment, credit card and debt relief, tax collection, health care, and identity theft. Ten tips to protect against most scams:

- Never send money via gift card or wire transfer to someone you have never met face-to-face.
- Avoid clicking on links or opening attachments in unsolicited emails.
- Don't believe everything you see.
- Double check your online purchase is secure before checking out.
- Use extreme caution when dealing with anyone you've met online.
- Never share personally identifiable information with someone who has contacted you unsolicited, whether it's over the phone, by email, on social media, even at your front door.
- Resist the pressure to act immediately.
- Use secure and traceable transactions.
- Whenever possible, work with local businesses.
- Be cautious about what you share on social media.

Find More Tips at the Better Business Bureau

BBB offers a handy [scam tracker](#) to find local scams in your area, a way to [file a complaint](#), and a weekly [scam alert email](#) to stay updated on scammers' latest tricks and tips to stay ahead of them. Safeguard your health. Safeguard your family. And safeguard against scammers. [Source: Vantage Point | Better Business Bureau | November 10, 2020 ++]

Fake Gaming Console Scam

Fake Deals Trick Holiday Shoppers

With many people shopping for gifts on a budget this holiday season, scammers are taking advantage of the demand for pricey gaming consoles by promoting fake deals on Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4 PRO, and the new PlayStation 5. Be sure to use caution when buying a console online.

How the Scam Works

- You find a popular gaming console for sale online at a reduced price. Hoping to save some money, you research the seller’s website and find a few positive reviews. Convinced, you make your purchase via PayPal or another online payment method. You receive an email confirmation with shipping information and a tracking number.
- If you receive a package at all from the company, it isn’t a gaming console – instead, it is a valueless phone cover or similar small object. Since you technically received a shipment, you will be unable to contest the purchase with the third-party who processed the payment.
- Attempts to contact the company are useless. No one answers your phone calls or emails. One consumer who never received any package reported to BBB.org/ScamTracker: “I attempted to reach out to the email address on their website, however I received an email informing me that it was not a valid email address. I then attempted to call the phone number listed on the website, [which gave me] an automatic message informing me that the number was not valid.”

Avoid Online Shopping Scams:

- Research the company you plan to purchase from thoroughly. It’s best to purchase items from sellers you already know and trust, but if you decide to purchase from an unfamiliar online store, do your homework first. Read as many customer reviews as you can find, look up the business on org, and do an online search with the company’s name followed by the word “scam” to see if you find any complaints. Make sure the company has legitimate customer service contact information (not just a form you have to fill out and hope for a response) and clear return and refund policies as well.
- Avoid impulse buying. Scammers like to draw people in with “flash sales” and “limited time offers” in hopes you will hand over your money on impulse. Resist the urge.
- Don’t believe prices that are too good to be true. Before you start shopping, find out the price of the gaming console at a major retailer. You can check prices online to get a general idea of what the console is selling for. Keep that price in mind as you shop and be wary of sellers who offer the product at a steeply discounted price. You could end up spending money on a defective or counterfeit product, or no product at all!

For More Information

For more holiday tips, check out www.BBB.org/holiday-tips, as well as information from BBB on how to shop safe this holiday season. If you’ve been a victim of this scam, help out your fellow consumers by filing a scam report at www.BBB.org/ScamTracker. [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | November 6, 2020 ++]

State Tax Burden for Kansas Retired Vets

As of NOV 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 the state of Kansas.

Sales Taxes

The Kansas state sales tax rate is 6.5%, and the average KS sales tax after local surtaxes is 8.2%.

- Kansas does not exempt any types of purchase from the state sales tax. In most states, necessities such as groceries, clothes, and drugs are exempted from the sales tax or charged at a lower sales tax rate.
- Counties and cities can charge an additional local sales tax of up to 3.5%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 10%
- Kansas has 677 special sales tax jurisdictions with local sales taxes in addition to the state sales tax
- Kansas treats both candy and soda as groceries for sales tax purposes. Other items including gasoline, alcohol, and cigarettes are subject to various Kansas excise taxes in addition to the sales tax.
- Kansas has a lower state sales tax than 82.7% of states

Companies or individuals who wish to make a qualifying purchase tax-free must have a Kansas state sales tax exemption certificate, which can be obtained from the Kansas Department of Revenue. On making an exempt purchase, Exemption Certificate holders may submit a completed Kansas Sales Tax Exemption Form to the vendor instead of paying sales tax.

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 Kansas 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 a Sales Tax. The Kansas Sales Tax 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. Kansas' excise taxes, on the other hand, are flat per-unit taxes that must be paid directly to the Vermont 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 merchants pass on the excise tax to the customer through higher prices for the taxed goods.

- **Alcohol:** Liquor \$2.50 per gal | Light Wine: \$0.30 per gal | Fortified Wine: \$0.75 per gal | Beer: \$0.18 per gal. All are already added to their purchase prices by the retailer. The Kansas excise tax on liquor is ranked #43 out of the 50 states, one of the lowest liquor taxes in the country. The excise tax on wine is one of the lowest in the country and is ranked #40 out of the 50 states. The excise tax on beer is lower than 64% of the other states and is ranked #32 out of the 50 states. Kansas also charges a 10% Liquor Drink Tax on gross receipts (Liquor-by-the-Drink - on-premises consumption; i.e., Drinking Establishments).
- **Cannabis Tax:** Processed: \$3.50 per gram or portion of gram | Wet Plant: \$0.40 per gram or portion of gram | Dry Plant: \$0.90 per gram or portion of gram.
- **Cellphone:** The average tax collected on cell phone plans in Kansas is \$13.34 per phone service plan, one of the highest cellphone taxes in the country. Kansas' average cellphone tax is ranked 9th highest out of the 50 states. The Kansas cellphone tax is already included in the service plan price you pay to your service provider, and may be listed as "Misc. taxes and Fees" or "Other" on your
- **Cigarettes:** The Kansas excise tax on cigarettes is \$0.79 per 20 cigarettes, lower than 70% of the other 50 states. Kansas' excise tax on cigarettes is ranked 35th highest out of the 50 states. The Kansas cigarette tax of \$0.79 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:** The excise tax on gasoline & diesel is \$0.24 & \$0.26 per gallon, which is the 29th highest in the country and lower than 58% of the states. This is in addition to the federal excise tax of 18.4¢ per gallon on gasoline and 24.4¢ per gallon, on diesel. Refer to <https://www.salestaxhandbook.com/vermont/gasoline-fuel> for all state and federal taxes by type of fuel.
- **Vehicle:** Kansas 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 Kansas Department of Transportation and receive documentation (registration and title papers) proving the fees were paid. Kansas also charges a 3.5% excise tax for rentals not exceeding 28 consecutive days

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Single Low – 3.1%; High – 5.7% + \$1252.50 (Tax. Go to <https://www.tax-brackets.org/vermonttaxtable> for details).

Income Brackets: Single Lowest – \$0 to \$15,000; Highest – \$30,000+

Number of Brackets: 3

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$2,250; Married – \$4,500; Each Dependent – \$2,250; Head of Household +\$2,250

Standard Deduction: Single - \$3,000; Couple - \$7,500; Head of Household - \$5,500; Age over 65 or blind +\$850 each

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Military, civil service, state/local government pensions are exempt. Out-of-state government pensions are fully taxed. Railroad retirement is fully exempt. Social Security is exempt for residents with a federal adjusted gross income of \$75,000 will be exempt from any state tax on their Social Security benefits.

Retired Military pay: 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: Not taxed

Website: Kansas Department of Revenue <https://ksrevenue.org/>

Tax Forms:

- K-40 2019 Income Tax Form Instructions <https://www.ksrevenue.org/pdf/ip19.pdf>
- K-40 2019 Income Tax Form <https://ksrevenue.org/pdf/k-4019.pdf>
- Sched S 2019 Kansas Supplemental Schedule <https://ksrevenue.org/pdf/schs19.pdf>
- All Kansas Tax forms <https://ksrevenue.org/formslibrary.html>

Property Taxes

A property tax is a levy on property that the owner is required to pay, with rates set as a percentage of the home value. Property assessments include two components—the improvement or building value, and the land or site value. Your property taxes help to fund local programs such as schools, fire stations, and municipal governments like select boards. Additional information to help you with understanding property taxes, including how to appeal your property taxes can be found on the Secretary of State's website <https://sos.vermont.gov/municipal-division/laws-resources>.

- The median property tax in Kansas is \$1,625 per year for a home worth the median value of \$125,500. Counties in the state collect an average of 1.29% of a property's assessed fair market value as property tax per year. Kansas is ranked number twenty six out of the fifty states, in order of the average amount of property taxes collected.
- Kansas' median income is \$60,427 per year, so the median yearly property tax paid by their residents amounts to approximately 2.68% of their yearly income. The state is ranked 25th of the 50 states for property taxes as a percentage of median income.
- The exact property tax levied depends on the county the property is located in. Johnson County collects the highest property tax in Kansas, levying an average of \$2,664.00 (1.27% of median home value) yearly in

property taxes, while Osborne County has the lowest property tax in the state, collecting an average tax of \$594.00 (1.5% of median home value) per year. For more localized property tax rates, find your county in the county list at <http://www.tax-rates.org/kansas/property-tax#Counties>. Your county's property tax assessor will send you a bill detailing the exact amount of property tax you owe every year.

- An individual that is a Kansas resident that lives in Kansas for all of 2019, who owned and occupied a home in Kansas during 2019, who was aged 65 years or older for all of 2019 (born before January 1, 1954) and who had a "household income" of \$20,300 or less in 2019 shall qualify for a SAFESR refund. The refund is 75% of the 2018 general property tax paid or to be paid - as shown on the 2019 real estate tax statement for the residence in which the claimant lived in 2019. The 2019 property tax consists of the 1st half which is due Dec. 20, 2019 and the 2nd half which is due May 10, 2020. The 2019 property tax is the total of both the 1st and 2nd half taxes. While there is no limit as to the amount of the SAFESR refund, the appraised value of the residence cannot exceed \$350,000. SAFESR claimants with a 2019 general property tax of \$936 or more will receive a SAFESR refund in excess of \$700 ($\$936 \times .75 = \702). Income for SAFESR purposes is the same as "household income" for Homestead refund purposes. It is generally all income - taxable and nontaxable - received by all household members during 2019 - TO INCLUDE 100% of Social Security Benefits received. A claimant may receive either a Homestead or a SAFESR refund but not both. "Household Income" DOES NOT INCLUDE:
 - Social Security Disability payments,
 - SSI Disability payments,
 - Railroad Disability payments or,
 - Veterans Disability payments.
- The Homestead Refund is a rebate program for the property taxes paid by homeowners. The refund is based on a portion of the property tax paid on a Kansas resident's home. The maximum refund is \$700. Refer to <https://www.ksrevenue.org/faqs-taxhomestead.html>. To qualify you must be a Kansas resident, living in Kansas the entire year. Your total household income must be \$35,700 or less. You must also meet one of the following requirements:
 - You were born before Jan. 1, 1964; OR
 - You must have been totally and permanently disabled or blind during the entire year, regardless of your age; OR
 - You must have had a dependent child living with you all of last year who was born before Jan. 1, 2019, and was under the age of 18 the entire year

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

The Kansas inheritance (succession) tax has been repealed. Due to the retroactive nature of the repeal, any succession tax that has been paid will be refunded. For further information, [click here](#).

Interest & Penalty

- Interest is computed on the amount of tax due if payment is received after the due date. Interest is not computed on penalty or on interest itself. Go to <https://www.ksrevenue.org/pandi.html> for the interest rate accessed annually for the tax years 1950 thru 2021
- Penalty for tax years ending after 12/31/01: Penalty will be computed at the rate of 1 percent per month on the balance due with a maximum penalty not to exceed 24 percent (maximum 10 percent penalty on field audits).
- Penalty for tax years 2001 and prior: Penalty is computed at the rate of 10 percent on the amount of tax due if payment is received after the due date but within six months of the original due date. Penalty is computed at 25 percent on the tax balance due if the payment is received after six months of the original due date. Penalty is not computed on interest or penalty itself.

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 Kansas Department of Revenue site <http://www.ksrevenue.org> . [Source: <https://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#KANSAS> | November 2020 ++]

* General Interest *



Notes of Interest

November 16 thru 30, 2020

- **Wreaths Across America.** Arlington National Cemetery announced 16 NOV that it would not take part in this year's event scheduled for 19 DEC due to the pandemic. However, Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy on 17 NOV ordered Arlington National Cemetery to reverse course after "Wreaths Across America" tribute to the nation's fallen set for next month.
- **Covid-19 Vaccines.** To find out the latest news on Covid-19 Vaccines refer to the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html>.
- **Care Packages.** The USO at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, had the opportunity to deliver the three-millionth USO care package on 11 NOV. Each year the USO sends care packages to members of the U.S. military all over the world.
- **Recycling.** The Environmental Protection Agency wants 50% of the waste generated in the United States to be recycled by 2030. At present the rate is actually headed in the wrong direction, dropping from 35% to 32% from 2017 to 2018, when 94 million of the 292 million tons of municipal solid waste generated that year were recycled and composted.
- **A Call to Spy.** A film that tackles WWII espionage. It recounts the story of Virginia Hall, one of the most successful espionage operatives of that war, earning not only the contempt of the Gestapo, but also the Distinguished Service Cross — the only civilian woman to be so honored. The movie's trailer can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/TbZgLKjrdnA>.
- **WWI Legacy.** The French government estimates that millions of unexploded shells from World War I remain buried or undiscovered in the French countryside. Every year, bomb-clearing units remove more than 40 tons of unexploded munitions from the Verdun area alone.
- **Submarines.** After decades of naming attack submarines after cities and states, the Navy has announced it will name three boats after denizens of the deep.
- **Covid-19 Masks.** In South Korea, you can now be fined \$90 for not wearing a mask in public.

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

Military Congressional Committees

Shake-Ups Coming for Some after the Election



The membership of the House in the 117th Congress is largely set, with Democrats maintaining the majority and most key leaders of committees that oversee the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs returning. The makeup of the Senate and who chairs its committees is another matter, dependent on the outcome of two runoff elections in Georgia on 5 JAN. According to The Associated Press, the current count in the 100-member Senate is 50 Republicans, 46 Democrats and two Independents who caucus with the Democrats -- Sens. Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Angus King of Maine.

Should the Democrats win the two races in Georgia, it would give them a total of 50, with Vice President-elect Kamala Harris empowered to break ties as president of the Senate. Control of the Senate would pass to the Democrats and trigger a seismic role reversal for current Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY). Who keeps their chairmanships or ranking member positions depends largely on committee assignments by party leaders in the House and on seniority in the Senate -- or, in the case of Republicans in both chambers, term limits. Here's a look at the committees that set policy and fund the armed services and VA, and the outcome of their leaderships' elections.

- ***House Armed Services Committee:*** Chairman Adam Smith of Washington easily defeated Republican challenger Doug Basler, winning nearly three-quarters of his district's vote. Ranking member Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, is retiring at the end of the year; lawmakers vying for his position, including Rep. Mike Rogers of Alabama and Rep. Mike Turner of Ohio, both won their elections.
- ***House Veterans Affairs Committee:*** Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA) defeated his challenger, Air Force veteran Aja Smith, earning 64% of the vote vs. Smith's 35.9%. Ranking member Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN) announced his retirement earlier this year; a possible successor for his role is Florida Rep. Gus Bilirakis, who served as vice chairman of the committee before the House flipped in 2018.
- ***House Appropriations Committee:*** There will be a leadership shake-up in this committee, which controls all federal funding, including for the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security. Chairwoman Rep. Nita Lowey of New York is retiring; House Democrats likely will select her replacement from among those who chair one of the committee's 12 subcommittees, although reelected Defense Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Peter Visclosky (D-IN) and Homeland Security Subcommittee Chairwoman Lucille Roybal-Allard of California have taken themselves out of the running. Rep. Kay Granger serves as the committee's ranking member; she won reelection with 63.7% of the vote in Texas' 12th District.

- *Senate Armed Services Committee*: Chairman Jim Inhofe (R-OK) and ranking member Jack Reed (D-RI) both won their elections. Whether they keep their positions will depend on who wins the majority after the Georgia runoffs.
- *Senate Veterans Affairs Committee*: Neither Chairman Jerry Moran of Kansas nor ranking member Jon Tester of Montana were up for reelection this year; both are likely to keep their positions if the Senate doesn't flip.
- *Senate Appropriations Committee*: The terms of Chairman Richard Shelby of Alabama and ranking member Patrick Leahy of Vermont end in 2022; it's nearly certain both will keep their positions but could swap roles if the Senate changes hands.

Other races of interest:

- Retired NASA astronaut and Navy Capt. Mark Kelly defeated Sen. Martha McSally, the Air Force's first female combat fighter pilot, in a close race that continues to be counted in Arizona. As of Wednesday, Kelly had 51.2% of the vote to McSally's 48.8%. McSally has not conceded.
- Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA), a retired Army National Guard lieutenant colonel, fought off a tough challenge from Democrat Theresa Greenfield, securing her job with 51.8% of the vote statewide. Ernst is chairwoman of the Senate Armed Services Committee's Emerging Threats and Capabilities subcommittee.
- Sen. David Perdue (R-GA) chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee's Seapower subcommittee and faces a runoff 5 JAN against John Ossoff, a filmmaker and journalist who served as a congressional staffer for Rep. Hank Johnson (D-GA) for five years.

[Source: Military.com | Richard Sisk | November 12, 2020 ++]

U.S. Russian Tensions

Update 05: Military Activity Picking Up in the Quiet Waters between the Two

Tensions between the US and Russia and increasing activity in the Arctic have drawn more attention to the countries' otherwise quiet boundary in the high north. The Bering Strait, between Alaska and Russia's Far East, has long been an area of low tension and cooperation on matters like waterway management and fisheries enforcement. But expectations of increased commercial and military activity in the Arctic have raised the strait's strategic profile. "The Northwest Passage and the Northern Passage all link through one strategic waterway in the West, and that's through the Bering Strait," retired US Air Force Gen. Douglas Fraser said at a Wilson Center event in October, referring to sea routes along the northern coasts of Canada and Russia, respectively.

Russia is modernizing its military, and the rejuvenation of its submarine fleet in particular has drawn US military attention back to the Greenland-Iceland-UK Gap, through which Russian navy ships would need to pass to strike targets at sea in the Atlantic or in the US and Europe. "The issues that we're facing and talking about in the GIUK Gap, you need to be very cognizant that they could also appear in the Bering Sea," added Fraser, who led Alaska Command in the mid-2000s. Fraser is not alone in that assessment. At a Senate hearing in March, the Navy's top officer, Adm. Michael Gilday, said he expected the Bering Strait to be "strategically as important as the Strait of Malacca or the Strait of Hormuz."

The US military has been active in those straits for years, but its activity in and around Alaska is increasing. With the Seward Peninsula of Alaska to the east, and Chukotskiy Poluostrov of Siberia to the west, the Bering Strait separates the United States and the Russian Federation by only 90 kilometers.



In May 2019, a Navy aircraft carrier joined the Northern Edge exercise in the Gulf of Alaska for the first time in a decade; months later, the Navy returned to Adak Island, in Alaska's Aleutian Island Chain, for another exercise. Adak was home to a sprawling Navy base that closed in the 1990s, but Navy officials have discussed again using it for aerial patrols. The Navy's longstanding Arctic submarine exercises have also taken on new relevance. "I think we ought to pay a lot of attention to the Aleutians," Fraser said at the October event. "They provide, really, a string across the approaches into the Bering, and as more and more strategic activity happens ... through the northern approaches, the Aleutians are going to be a strategic and key terrain."

The Air Force and Space Force will be "key contributors" to addressing issues that arise in the region, Fraser said. The Air Force has the US military's largest presence in the Arctic, where it works with Canadian forces on airborne early-warning operations, including intercepting Russian bombers that approach US airspace. That presence will grow as the Air Force adds more F-35s to its bases in Alaska. Other service branches want to increase their training in Alaska, and lawmakers have pushed for more investment there. The US Army Corps of Engineers recently approved plans to expand the port of Nome, on Alaska's Bering coast. That "will not only help from a national-security perspective but ... help [local communities] to reduce the cost of living," Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski said at another event in October. 'Not so much about signaling'

Russia's Far East and Arctic regions are sparsely populated, and after the Cold War the military infrastructure there deteriorated, but Moscow is refurbishing those facilities. "The physical proximity to both Canada and Alaska ... makes the Far Eastern flank of the Arctic as ... important to the Russians as the European flank, or NATO flank, of the Arctic," Alexey Muraviev, head of the Department of Social Sciences and Security Studies at Australia's Curtin University, told Insider this summer. The work includes expanding and upgrading airfields to handle strategic bombers and support all-weather operations, though Russia is "mindful of China" and concerns it may have about such activity near their shared border, Muraviev said.

Russia has renovated Arctic bases to support maritime operations along the Northern Sea Route and added new radars and other installations to detect an airborne attack. The easternmost Arctic radar facility is on Wrangel Island, just 300 miles from Alaska. Russia's Pacific Fleet has received a variety of new ships and has increased its exercises. A major naval drill in August led to close encounters between Russian ships and US fishermen near Alaska. That was Russia's first significant exercise in the region in some time, but it wasn't clear if it was a response to US actions, according to Michael Kofman, director of the Russia Studies Program at CNA, a nonprofit research group. "A lot of big Russian military exercises, it's not so much about signaling," Kofman told Insider. "It's much more about them actually being able to do it ... to mass forces, to exercise farther away from the actual naval bases."

Kofman was skeptical that the Bering Strait would take on the same strategic significance as the GIUK Gap but said the sea lines of communication that run through it mean it would be important if the US pursues a sea-control strategy in a conflict, particularly one with China, which brands itself a "near-Arctic power" and is increasingly active there.

"China's quite interested in the Arctic," Kofman said, "and the United States is always interested not just in Russia but anywhere China gets interested." [Source: Business Insider | Christopher Woody | November 15, 2020 ++]

U.S. Russian Tensions

Update 06: Trump Cancels Open Skies Treaty

The Trump administration has officially withdrawn from the Open Skies treaty, six months after starting the process to leave. "On May 22, 2020, the United States exercised its right pursuant to paragraph 2 of Article XV of the Treaty on Open Skies by providing notice to the Treaty Depositaries and to all States Parties of its decision to withdraw from the Treaty, effective six months from the notification date," State Department deputy spokesman Cale Brown said in a statement. "Six months having elapsed, the U.S. withdrawal took effect on November 22, 2020, and the United States is no longer a State Party to the Treaty on Open Skies," Brown added. The post-Cold War agreement was struck to allow nations to conduct flyovers of other allies in an attempt to collect military data and other intelligence on neighboring foreign enemies.

In a statement issued on 22 NOV, Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ) called the administration's withdrawal "reckless" and encouraged President-elect Joe Biden's administration to rejoin the pact once he is inaugurated. "I strongly believe that President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Treaty is a violation of domestic law," the ranking member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee said. "In the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress reaffirmed its support for the Open Skies Treaty and specifically mandated the administration justify a withdrawal four months before any formal notification of withdrawal took place. President Trump brazenly ignored the law and is unilaterally imposing a politically-charged withdrawal, even after losing a presidential election."

Trump first announced in May he would withdraw from the treaty, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo formally submitting a notice of intent to withdraw from the pact a day later. "While the United States, along with our Allies and partners that are States Parties to the treaty, have lived up to our commitments and obligations under the treaty, Russia has flagrantly and continuously violated the treaty in various ways for years," Pompeo said at the time. "This is not a story exclusive to just the treaty on Open Skies, unfortunately, for Russia has been a serial violator of many of its arms control obligations and commitments."

In June, Democrats on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee questioned the legality of the Trump administration's desire to withdraw from the pact. "The timing of your decision — less than five months before an election — is also suspect. Beginning the U.S. withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty, without complying with U.S. domestic law or constitutional practice, is an obvious political maneuver in an attempt to bind a future administration," senators wrote in a letter to Pompeo and former Secretary of Defense Mark Esper. "As such, we demand that you immediately discontinue your efforts to initiate the withdrawal process until Congress is provided with the requisite notification under the [National Defense Authorization Act], and the Senate has had an opportunity to weigh in on the withdrawal."

During his first term in office, Trump and his allies have boasted that they have been tougher on Russia in recent years than any previous administration, despite claims of an inappropriately friendly relationship between the president and his Russian counterpart. In August, the Trump administration pulled out of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia, an agreement banning nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers that was signed in 1987. At the time, the administration accused Russia of violating the terms of the treaty after saying U.S. officials had "tried everything possible since May 2013" to stop Russia from building up its nuclear capability. [Source: The Hill | Dominick Mastrangelo | November 22, 2020 ++]

Climate Change

Update 04: The Climate Hustle



Not everyone is on board in supporting government's efforts to stop it. Following is an opinion article written by news correspondent and consumer advocate John Stossel, former co-anchor of ABC News 20-20. Any comments you may have can be forwarded to him via <http://www.jewishworldreview.com/1120/stosse111820.php3>.

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I hear that climate change will destroy much of the world. "There will be irreversible damage to the planet!" warns a CNN anchor. Joe Biden says he'll spend \$500 billion a year to fight what his website calls an "existential threat to life. Really? I'm a consumer reporter. Over the years, alarmed scientists have passionately warned me about many things that they thought were about to kill Americans. "Asbestos in hair dryers, coffee, computer terminals, electric power lines, microwave ovens, cell phones (brain tumors!), electric blankets, computer terminals, herbicides, plastic residue, etc. are causing America's cancer epidemic!" If those things don't get us, "West Nile Virus will!" Or SARS, Bird Flu, Ebola, flesh-eating bacteria or "killer bees." Experts told me millions would die on Jan. 1, 2000, because computers couldn't handle the switch from 1999. Machines would fail; planes would crash.

The scientists were well-informed specialists in their fields. They were sincerely alarmed. The more knowledge you have about a threat, the more alarmed you get. Yet, mass death didn't happen. COVID-19 has been the only time in my 50 years of reporting that a scare proved true. Maybe you accepted the phrase I used above: "America's cancer epidemic." But there is no cancer epidemic. Cancer rates are down. We simply live long enough to get diseases like cancer. But people think there's a cancer epidemic. The opposite is true. As we've been exposed to more plastics, pesticides, mysterious chemicals, food additives and new technologies, we live longer than ever! That's why I'm skeptical when I'm told: Climate change is a crisis!

Climate change is real. It's a problem, but I doubt that it's "an existential threat." Saying that makes alarmists mad. When Marc Morano says it, activists try to prevent him from speaking. "They do not want dissent," says Morano, founder of www.ClimateDepot.com, a website that rebuts much of what climate activists teach in schools. "It's an indoctrination that's so complete that by the time (kids) get to high school, they're not even aware that there's any scientific dissent." Morano's new movie, "Climate Hustle 2," presents that dissent. My new [video](#) this week features his movie. Morano argues that politicians use fear of global warming in order to gain power. "Climate Hustle 2" features Senator Chuck Schumer shouting: "If we would do more on climate change, we'd have fewer of these hurricanes and other types of storms! Everyone knows that!"

But everyone doesn't know that. Many scientists refute it. Congress' own hearings include testimony about how our warmer climate has not caused increases in the number of hurricanes or tornadoes. "Climate Hustle 2" includes many examples like that. "Why should we believe you?" I ask Morano. "You're getting money from the fossil fuel industry." After all, Daily Kos calls him "Evil Personified" and says ExxonMobil funds him. "Not at all," he replies. "I'm paid by about 90% individual contributions from around the country. Why would ExxonMobil give me money (when) they want to appear green?"

Morano's movie frustrates climate activists by pointing out how hypocritical some are. Actor Leonardo DiCaprio says he lives a "green lifestyle... (using) energy-efficient appliances. I drive a hybrid car." Then he flies to Europe to attend a party. I like watching Morano point out celebrities' hypocrisy, but think one claim in his movie goes too far. "Stopping climate change is not about saving the planet," says narrator Kevin Sorbo. "It's about climate elites trying to convince us to accept a future where they call all the shots." I push back at Morano: "I think they are genuinely concerned, and they want to save us." "Their vision of saving us is putting them in charge," he replies. And if they're in charge, he says, they will destroy capitalism. [Source: Jewish World Review | John Stossel (Opinion) | November 18, 2020 ++]

Air Quality **Ten Worst U.S. States**

It has been proven in many studies that the air quality in certain sections of the United States has steadily gotten worse over the last decade. The American Lung Association has documented that over four out of every ten Americans or approximately forty-three percent of the entire population, live in regions that have observed unhealthy ozone which is sometimes called smog, and or particle pollution sometimes referred to as soot, of which both have substantial implications for health and can even increase the decline in air quality. There are states in the US that have reported improved air quality than just a few years ago, weather conditions like high temperatures have increased the chances of wildfires resulting in creating higher particle pollution. Here are the seven US states with the worst air quality.

California

Unfortunately for Californians, this state constantly ranks as the most polluted state in the entire United States. The majority of cities that are considered the most polluted based on particle pollution are located in California, with Fresno-Madera being the most polluted of them all. Cities such as Bakersfield, another California city, has also ranked as the worst for short term particle pollution, as well as Los Angeles being the worst in the nation for ozone pollution. The Golden State is the state with the highest level of population density and also has the fifth largest economy on the planet. The major sources of air pollution are derived from automobile traffic, in association with industrial pollution. Pollution that occurs in valley walls tends to come from local topography, specifically due to farming regions and the warm weather. Poor air quality is also enhanced by wildfire smoke.





Pennsylvania

This state has a very long-standing coal industry and has constantly struggled with particle and ozone pollution, stated by the ALA. There are five cities located in Pennsylvania that rank in the top twenty-five most particle polluted cities, namely Pittsburgh. Due to Pennsylvania being a major metropolitan sub-region of New York, it is consistently impacted by regional pollution of the ozone. On a better note, as natural gas increased in popularity in 2003, the use of coal has decreased resulting in the state experiencing a steady reduction in particle matter.

Oregon

Medford, Grants Pass, and Portland are the main culprits for Oregon being on this list, placing it in fourth place for the most particle pollution. Oregon’s high particulate matter comes from air toxins, that normally come from industry sources and motor vehicles, including diesel soot, metals such as manganese, and by-products from auto exhaust, according to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.



Alaska

Two of the top twenty-five most polluted cities can be found in Alaska, in spite of the state’s immense open spaces and extents of nature. Fairbanks, Alaska has drawn the number three position in the top twenty-five short term particle polluted cities. This is due to residents burning wood for heat during the winter season. The Alaska Division of Air Quality determined that the reason for the pollution is a result of land clearing, dust, open burning, and volcanic ash.

Utah

The cities of Logan and Salt Lake are the reasons for Utah being near to the top of the short term particle pollution list. Due to temperature inversions in the winter season, the ozone has become a concern, this is the process of cold air on the surface becoming trapped below the warmer air. Valleys covered by snow actually begin to reflect the heat rather than absorbing it, preventing vertical mixing of cold and warm air.



New York

New York the city is ranked number ten of the twenty-five most polluted cities in the country. Most of the pollution is derived from fossil fuel combustion for the cooling and heating of residential homes and vehicle emissions.

Montana

To note is Montana and the air quality challenges this state has been having, the reason for this state being listed is the reduction of air quality associated with wildfires.



Connecticut

Along with its neighbors Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Connecticut has been affected by ozone pollution. Receiving a grade F from the ALA due to the high ozone periods.

[Source: The Outdoor Wear Team | November 20, 2020 ++]

Sub Drug Smuggling

Narco Sub Discovery Indicates Trend to Larger Vessel Use



Central and South American drug runners are continuing to create new specialized smuggling vessels to move narcotics into the US, as evidenced by a sophisticated electric submersible seized earlier this month. On 5 NOV, the Colombian Navy, assisting by the US Drug Enforcement Agency and local law enforcement agencies, raided an artisan boatyard near the Cucurupí River in the Chocó area of Colombia. Under a makeshift roof, they discovered a high-capacity narco submarine, the Colombian Navy announced on Twitter. The submarine is estimated to have cost \$1.5 million to construct, according to officials. Based on the plans seized by Colombian authorities, had it sailed, it would have carried some six metric tons of cocaine towards the American market, valued at around \$120 million.

Put into perspective, most narco submarines interdicted by the US Navy and Coast Guard carry around 1.6 metric tons of cocaine, worth approximately \$30 to 35 million. The trend had been towards smaller payloads per trip, but the

new submarine discovery points toward a trend reversal. Another significant difference compared to other narco-submarines is that this seized vessel is fully submersible for short periods. Virtually all narco submarines interdicted at sea have been more correctly termed low-profile vessels (LPVs). Also known as semi-submersibles, these are craft designed to run exceptionally low in the water to avoid detection. But they cannot fully submerge. This submarine's cylindrical hull, sealed roof hatch, and hydroplanes all point to a submerged running degree.

Underwater it uses batteries to power two electric motors. Ten tons of batteries give it an estimated endurance of 12 hours, which would equate to about 32 nautical miles if the submerged speed is around three knots. Even if the cruising speed is higher, an electric submersible like this cannot make the entire trip unaided. A towing ring on the nose points to the answer: the craft is designed to be towed by a larger vessel until close to its destination. It would then make the final leg on its own. Once unloaded, it would be scuttled and join the hundreds of discarded narco subs that litter the seafloor.

The design is reminiscent of another rare electric narco submarine found in the same area in July 2017. That also had a twin electric drive, four large hydroplanes, and a tow ring. This suggests that the same master boat builder was behind it, or at least some common human thread. Although this vessel's design appears to have been active for at least three years, none have been interdicted at sea. This latest discovery by the Colombian Navy is a reminder that these sophisticated drug transports are still being built, inferring that spending more than \$1 million is worth the effort for the traffickers. The engineer behind this latest vessel was arrested during the raids, but it's unclear if his design will live on with a new engineer filling in his role. ▲

China's Submarine Program

Update 02: Increasing Nuclear Submarine Shipyard Capacity



As China pushes to become a blue-water power, nuclear-powered submarines are critically important to Beijing's plan. Historically the Chinese Navy's (PLAN) nuclear-powered submarine fleet has been constrained by its limited construction capacity. There is only one shipyard in the country up to the task. But that yard has been undergoing a massive enlargement. And now, recent satellite imagery suggests an additional capacity expansion. China's nuclear-powered submarine fleet was already expected to get much larger in the coming years. This latest development suggests that China could pump out submarines at an even greater rate.

Just how many nuclear submarines China will build over the next ten years is a hot topic. The Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) recently forecast China's submarine fleet to grow by six nuclear-powered attack submarines by 2030. Other observers, such as retired Capt. James Fanell, Director of Intelligence and Information Operations for the

US Navy’s Pacific Fleet, places their estimates even higher. What seems clear is that the number of nuclear submarines will increase.

Analysis of commercial satellite imagery reveals work on a new construction hall at the Bohai Shipyard at Huludao. The building appears to be virtually identical to the one built there in 2015. That is widely believed to be for the construction of a new generation of nuclear submarines. The new hall is estimated to be large enough to allow the construction of two submarines simultaneously. When added to the other hall recently constructed, four boats would be in the sheds at once. And there is another much older construction hall at the other end of the site, which could add another if still active. So four or five boats at once. The nuclear submarines include both ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) and attack submarines (SSN). All nuclear submarines are built at the Bohai shipyard, so its capacity will be a significant factor in the total fleet strength.

China’s naval growth has not gone unnoticed in Washington. In response, the US Navy will have to adjust. Outlining the proposed Battle Force 2045, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said that the US must begin building three Virginia Class submarines per year as soon as possible. This would build a “larger and more capable submarine force.” The proposed force will include 70-80 attack submarines, described as “the most survival strike platform in a future great powers conflict.” There are three new classes of the submarine which might be built at Bohai.

- The most straightforward is the Type-09IIIB (also written Type-093B). This is an iterative improvement on the current Type-09IIIA Shang-II Class submarine. The main improvement expected is the inclusion of cruise missiles in vertical launch tubes. These will allow it to carry an increased load of cruise missiles, improving its strategic strike capability. The YJ-18 cruise missiles are generally analogous to the Russian Kalibr family of missiles. China already operates Kalibr from some of its submarines.
- More advanced than the Type-09III family is the next-generation Type-09V Tang Class (aka Type -095). This is expected to be everything the Type-09IIIB is, and also stealthier.
- The third projected type is a next-generation ballistic missile submarine (SSBN). The Type-09VI (Type-096) will follow the current generation Type-09IV Jin Class (Type-094). They are expected to augment the six Type-09IV instead of replacing them, leading to a net increase in China’s SSBN fleet. The 2020 China Military Power Report to Congress projected an increase to eight SSBNs by 2030.

At this stage, we are still learning new details of the Bohai shipyard expansion. We have yet to see any submarines roll out of the new halls. And the newest shed may be intended for some other purpose. But the takeaway is that China is transforming its submarine construction capabilities. The work at Huludao will remove the physical constraint which previously limited their nuclear Navy. [Source: USSVI Tucson Base | H I Sutton | October 12, 2020 ++]

Tomb of the Unknowns

Update 12: Near Fatality during Veterans Day Ceremony



President Donald Trump participates in a Veterans Day wreath laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va., Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2020 with Gen. Mark Milley & Hollyanne Milley in attendance

The wife of the nation’s highest-ranking military officer saved the life of man during a Veterans Day event at the Arlington National Cemetery on Veterans Day. Hollyanne Milley — a practicing nurse married to Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — was attending the ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier when she heard groaning behind her. It was just after the ceremonial wreath had been placed and before President Donald Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie appeared.

She can be seen on the ceremony’s video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DyjZ3p8c-k&feature=youtu.be>) closing her umbrella and walking toward the sound about a minute and a half after a man in a dark suit is seen uneasily walking up the stairs, bracing himself on the marble as he went. Once at the top of the stairs, he kneeled behind a column at the eastern entrance of the Memorial Amphitheater, near where the ceremony was taking place. In a statement emailed to Military Times on Saturday, she said she heard “a little commotion” behind her and she went to see if she could help. “When I first got there, he was breathing in a very erratic way that he wasn’t really taking air into his lungs as he should have been,” she said. “And then he stopped breathing.”

Mrs. Milley checked his pulse and it was flat, so she told an onlooker to call 911 before beginning CPR. She didn’t give mouth-to-mouth, she said. After about two cycles of chest compression, “he took a big spontaneous breath and a big groan on his own, and he started moving air,” she said. “After a few breaths, he started coming around.” At that point, she stopped resuscitating the man and moved him into the rescue position on his side. “It took about a minute or two for him to begin responding to my questions, asking about allergies and medical history and that kind of thing,” she said. “I was just reorienting him to where he was, things that a medical person would ask when assessing a patient.” Several minutes later, a gurney can be seen wheeled in by Fort Meyer Emergency Medical Services, who then transported him to a local hospital.

“Whenever there is a rescue like this in a group, there are a lot of people who pitch in,” she said. “The (senior enlisted advisor to the chairman) came to help, and there was a physician who worked with the VA who was there as well, so it was a team effort by everybody.” She said if any key message should be conveyed, it’s that people should learn CPR. “Bystander intervention can save lives, and it did (Wednesday),” she said. “It absolutely did.” Mrs. Milley checked on the man the next day, when she discovered he was a veteran, there at the cemetery to honor those who served. The man, who wished to remain anonymous, told her he was grateful he’d be alive for the next Veterans Day memorial, she recounted.

Mrs. Milley has been a nurse for 33 years, 18 of which were spent in critical care. She’s worked as a cardiac nurse for the past 15 years and is currently practicing in northern Virginia. She said she’s worked hard to continue her career by transferring her nursing license multiple times while moving from state to state as a military spouse. “While it certainly took a lot of grit and tenacity to maintain my career, these broad experiences have actually made me a better nurse,” she said. Gen. Milley, in a statement emailed to Military Times, said this is what America is about. “This is **people helping people without question or hesitation**,” Gen. Milley said. “Hollyanne’s actions were representative of the hero medical professionals who are always there when we need them.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Jared Morgan | November 17, 2020 ++]

Turkey

Ben Franklin’s Bird of Courage

Every year, the United States goes through some 46 million turkeys, many of them going toward Thanksgiving dinners around the country. Meanwhile, no one sits down to eat American Bald Eagles. There are many reasons for this; the most important is that it’s illegal because it’s the United States’ official bird. But it didn’t have to be that way. Founding

Father and First American Benjamin Franklin thought the Bald Eagle had a “low moral character.” Instead, he believed it should have been the wild turkey, which he called a “bird of courage.” Here are some things you may not have known about these birds



1. The turkey is a stone cold killer

Wild turkeys have a very rigid social structure. The term “pecking order” likely originated with turkeys – and turkeys don’t care what species you are. If you’re lower on the pecking order, they will let you know. And that’s no joke. A turkey has 270 degree vision and can see better in the daytime than most other animals. To top it off, we’re talking about a 20 lb+ bird that can fly up to 60 miles per hour. So, get some turkey before they get you.

2. They’re delicious and plentiful

As far as a food bird goes, you can’t get better than a turkey. The same 20-pound frame that makes a turkey a formidable adversary also makes it a rich prize. Simply put, a turkey yields a lot of food. And like the Bald Eagle, its conservation status is of “least concern” to environmentalists. It wasn’t always this way. By the early 20th century, the American wild turkey was almost extinct. It bounced back in a big way, though. Unlike the Bald Eagle, they are still legal to eat. By the 1950s, turkey was one of America’s favorite foods.

3. They were probably velociraptors

Despite what some incredibly popular movies would have you believe, the Velociraptor was likely not any bigger than a wild turkey. 65 million years ago, the raptor was a bizarre, bird-looking creature, even back then. With feathers and its signature longclaw, it would have been a fearsome creature. Given the temperament of today’s wild turkeys, they can’t be too far removed from their dinosaur ancestors, can they?

4. Turkeys are meat-eaters

The wild turkey isn’t going around pecking at corn and feed like a chicken. When it comes to eating, turkeys don’t really hold back. Sure, they will indulge in what’s provided like any other bird, but turkeys won’t stop there. They will even eat small reptiles.

5. Mayans worshipped turkeys as gods

Even if the rest of America didn’t share Benjamin Franklin’s vision of the turkey, Franklin wasn’t alone. Centuries before Franklin started going around inventing stoves and bifocals, the Mayans of Central America were domesticating turkeys for religious reasons. Mayans believed the bird had special powers, and could only be owned by the rich and powerful among them. Beat that, eagle.

6. The tryptophan thing is a myth

Every Thanksgiving, without fail, someone perpetuates the myth that turkey contains an abundance of the amino acid L-tryptophan, which is the reason we fall asleep so fast after eating it. This is fake news. In fact, it sounds like something someone over at Big Chicken made up to muscle in on turkey’s Thanksgiving monopoly. While turkey has a lot of the amino acid, it’s not what’s putting us to sleep. We fall asleep because we just stuffed our faces with butter, sugar and carbohydrates.

7. The eggs are even more delicious

Why don’t humans eat more turkey eggs? Because turkeys require more food and space to lay eggs, and when they do, they don’t lay quite as many as chickens. So acquiring eggs from turkeys can be much more expensive than the chicken.

A turkey egg can cost twice as much as a dozen chicken eggs. But when you taste the difference between chicken and turkey eggs, you'll understand why it's worth \$3.00 per egg.

8. Without turkeys, Thanksgiving gets weird

While no one ever thought to go around eating bald eagles for Thanksgiving (yet), the Thanksgiving dinner table in America was a very different place before we accepted turkey as our bird and savior. For example, the pilgrims likely ate seals for the first Thanksgiving, which shows why England was right to persecute them. Just drawing on presidential Thanksgiving menus, things didn't exactly get better from there. President William Howard Taft had a possum for Thanksgiving one year and Calvin Coolidge ate a raccoon. We can thank the turkey for not having to have Thanksgiving dinners we likely hunted with our cars.

[Source: We Are the Mighty | November 11, 2020 ++]

Cars That Never Made It

1956 Oldsmobile Golden Rocket & 1956 Pontiac Club De Mer



1956 OLDSMOBILE GOLDEN ROCKET



1956 PONTIAC CLUB DE MER

News of The Weird

November 16-30, 2020

Uniform Complaint -- The BBC reported that Police Constable Simon Read of the Cambridgeshire Police will be the subject of a misconduct hearing on Nov. 25 after being accused of switching prices on a box of doughnuts in February. Read, shopping at a Tesco Extra store while on duty and uniformed, allegedly selected a \$13 box of Krispy Kreme doughnuts and replaced its barcode with one from the produce section that lowered the price to 9 cents, then went through the self-checkout line. In papers filed before the hearing, Read was said to bring "discredit upon the police service ... because a reasonable member of the public ... would be justifiably appalled that a police officer had acted dishonestly and without integrity." [BBC, 11/17/2020]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Unlicensed Surgery -- An unnamed 28-year-old man in search of a voluntary castration found himself drawn to a website offering such services, which led him to travel from Virginia to a cabin in the woods of Poteau, Oklahoma. There, on Oct. 12, Bob Lee Allen, 53, and Thomas Evans Gates, 42, allegedly relieved the victim of his testicles during a two-hour surgery, The Oklahoman reported. Allen told the victim that he has "a freezer of body parts" and that "he was going to consume the parts and laughed and said that he was a cannibal," an affidavit said. The day following the operation, Allen took the victim to the hospital because he was bleeding badly, but cautioned him to say "he done it to

himself." The hospital contacted police, and investigators searched the property, finding suspected body parts in a deep freeze. Allen and Gates were charged with multiple felonies and misdemeanors, including conspiracy to commit unlicensed surgery and failure to bury the body parts. [The Oklahoman, 10/22/2020]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Illegal Possession -- Tynette Housley, 73, of Black Forest, Colorado, was cited by Colorado Parks and Wildlife officials after her "pet" deer attacked and gored a neighbor who was out walking her dog on Oct. 16. The buck, now sporting two-pronged antlers, was taken in by Housley when it was just a few days old and raised as a pet. The victim tried to run first to another neighbor's home, then to her own, but the buck repeatedly knocked her down and gored her. A CPW officer euthanized the deer and took it for testing for rabies and other diseases. "We can't say it enough: Wild animals are not pets," said Frank McGee, CPW's area wildlife manager. Housley was charged with illegal possession and illegal feeding of wildlife. [Colorado Parks and Wildlife, 10/19/2020]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Line Crossed -- Typo, a gift and stationery retailer in Australia known for its tongue-in-cheek merchandise, is drawing fire from moms and dads Down Under after marketing a Christmas ornament that features a small elf holding a sign that says, "Santa isn't real," 7News reported. One dad posted that the item led to an awkward discussion with his son and encouraged other parents to "complain and get these things taken off the shelves." The store said the ornament, which is part of its "naughty" line, has been removed from Typo's in-person and online stores. "Sometimes we do make mistakes," a spokesperson admitted. "We certainly don't want to take the fun out of Christmas for anyone, especially after the year we've all had." [7News, 11/11/2020]

-o-o-O-o-o-

Finders Keepers -- Douglas Allen Hatley, 71, of Lakeland, Florida, was arrested on Nov. 16 after the Florida Highway Patrol said he found a metal light pole by the side of the road in Tampa and tried to sell it to Eagle Metals Recycling. The Tampa Bay Times reported the recycling center turned him away because he didn't have documentation for the pole, and officers responding to reports of a 1997 Camry with a pole twice its length strapped to the top pulled him over soon afterward. Hatley told troopers a highway maintenance worker "gave it to me." He was charged with third-degree grand theft. [Tampa Bay Times, 11/17/2020]

-o-o-O-o-o-

OOPS! -- The mayor of Oudenburg, Belgium, said it was not the city's intention that new Christmas decorations it installed resemble an iconic part of the male anatomy. City officials had set out to create lighted columns that looked like candles, the Daily Mail reported, but decided to do something different and placed blue spheres on top instead of flames. "I only realized (they looked phallic) when they were illuminted," Mayor Anthony Dumarey said. "I see the funny side of it myself (and) I see no reason to remove or replace them ... we will have the country's most talked-about Christmas lights this year." [Daily Mail, 11/19/2020]

[Source: <https://www.uexpress.com/news-of-the-weird> | November 20, 2020 ++]

Have You Heard or Seen?

Military Humor (12) | Nostalgia | Latest Satirical Cartoons

Military Humor (12)

1. **What do you call a soldier who survived mustard gas and pepper spray?** A seasoned veteran.

2. As a group of soldiers stood in formation at an Army Base, the Drill Sergeant said,
“All right! All you idiots fall out.”

As the rest of the squad wandered away, one soldier remained at attention.

The Drill Instructor walked over until he was eye-to-eye with him.

The soldier smiled and said, “Sure were a lot of ’em, huh, sir?”

3. How many guns do you need for a firefight?

Two. One for us to shoot and one for the US to sell to the enemy so he can shoot us back.

4. What do you call someone who just got run over by a tank? Crunchy.

5. How different military branches use stars:

The Army sleeps under the stars

The Navy navigates by the stars

And the Air Force choose hotels by the stars

6. What month do all troops hate? March

7. A soldier finds a scorpion in his tent...

In the Marines, he kills the scorpion.

In the Army, he calls his CO and reports the presence of the scorpion.

In the Air Force, he calls the front desk and asks why there’s a tent in his room.

8. Why do military men often marry lovers from the foreign countries in which they’re deployed?

Because when they finally come home, they get to leave their in-laws thousands of miles away.

9. Did you hear about the karate master who joined the military?

He saluted and nearly chopped off his own head.

10. Why was the sergeant mad when his son brought home an A in math?

He said he spent more time dividing than conquering.

Nostalgia

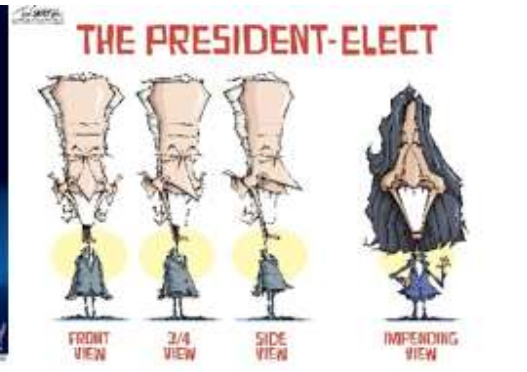
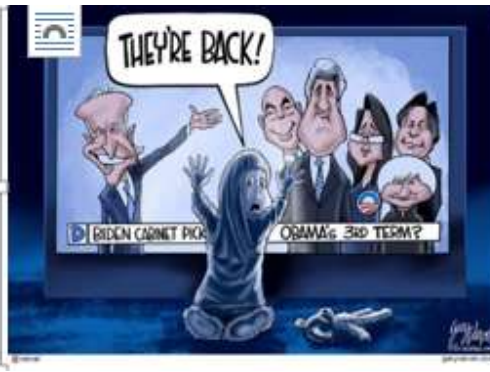
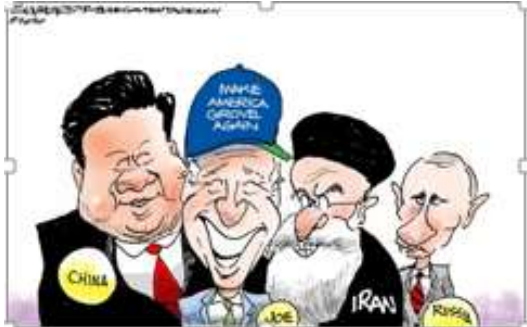
I remember it all. Still even remember when I was riding a 'streetcar' (remember them) in downtown St. Louis with my mother and it stopped because all the cars had stopped and were blocking it. Then my mother started crying, everyone aboard started yelling and jumping up and down, and all the cars were blowing their horns because they announced WWII had ended. Do YOU remember when:

- It took three minutes for the TV to warm up?
- Nobody owned a purebred dog?
- When a quarter was a decent allowance? And made with real Silver!
- You'd reach into a muddy gutter for a penny? Made with real copper! Looking to see if it was a 1943 copper penny!
- Your Mom wore nylons that came in two pieces?
- You got your windshield cleaned, oil checked, and gas pumped, without asking, all for free, every time? And you didn't pay for air? And, you got trading stamps to boot?
- Laundry detergent had free glasses, dishes or towels hidden inside the box? Not to mention Cracker Jacks!
- It was considered a great privilege to be taken out to dinner at a real restaurant with your parents?
- They threatened to keep kids back a grade if they failed...and they did it!

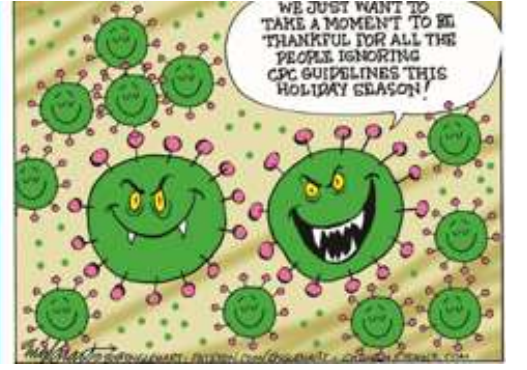
- When a 57 Chevy was everyone's dream car... to cruise, peel out, lay rubber or watch submarine races, and people went steady.
- No one ever asked where the car keys were because they were always in the car, in the ignition, and the doors were never locked?
- Lying on your back in the grass with your friends and saying things like, "That cloud looks like a...?"
- Playing baseball with no adults to help kids with the rules of the game?
- Stuff from the store came without safety caps and hermetic seals because no one had yet tried to poison a perfect stranger?
- When being sent to the principal's office was nothing compared to the fate that awaited the student at home.
- Summers filled with bike rides, Hula hoops, and visits to the pool, and eating Kool-Aid powder with sugar.
- Howdy Doody and The Peanut Gallery, the Lone Ranger, The Shadow knows, Nellie Bell, Roy and Dale, Trigger and Buttermilk.
- Candy cigarettes, Peashooters, Hi-Fi's & 45 RPM records, 78 RPM records, S&H Green Stamps, Mimeograph paper, and the The Fort Apache Play Set.
- Wax Coke-shaped bottles with colored sugar water inside.
- Soda pop machines that dispensed glass bottles.
- Coffee shops with Table Side Jukeboxes.
- Blackjack, Clove and Teaberry chewing gum.
- Home milk delivery in glass bottles with cardboard stoppers.
- Newsreels before the movie.
- Telephone numbers with a word prefix...(Yukon 2-601). Or, some of us remember when there were just 4 numbers with no word prefix at all. And, nearly everyone had a party line.
- Decisions were made by going 'eeny-meeny-miney-moe'?
- Mistakes were corrected by simply exclaiming, 'Do Over!'?
- 'Race issue' meant arguing about who ran the fastest?
- Catching the fireflies could happily occupy an entire evening?
- It wasn't odd to have two or three 'Best Friends'?
- Having a weapon in school meant being caught with a slingshot?
- Saturday morning cartoons weren't 30-minute commercials for action figures?
- Oly-oly-oxen-free' made perfect sense?
- Spinning around, getting dizzy, and falling down was cause for giggles?
- The Worst Embarrassment was being picked last for a team?
- War was a card game?
- Baseball cards in the spokes transformed any bike into a motorcycle?
- Taking drugs meant orange - flavored chewable aspirin?
- Water balloons were the ultimate weapon?
- Basically we were in fear for our lives, but it wasn't because of drive-by shootings, drugs, gangs, etc. Our parents and grandparents were a much bigger threat! But we survived because their love was greater than the threat.

And with all our progress, don't you just wish, just once, you could slip back in time and savor the slower pace, and share it with the children of today. If you can remember most or all of these, Then You Have Lived!!!!!!

Latest Satirical Cartoons



As I watch this generation try to rewrite history, one thing I'm sure of.... it will be misspelled and have no punctuation.





Thought of the Week

"Live now. Procrastinate later."

— Karen Salmansohn (self-help book author)

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