

# RAO BULLETIN

## 15 April 2021

### 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. To read the articles open the website and slew to the page number of the article you are interested in.
3. Numbers contained within brackets [ ] indicate the number of articles written on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) 'or' [raoemo77@gmail.com](mailto:raoemo77@gmail.com)
4. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin are articles to other vets or veteran organizations

**\* ATTACHMENTS \***



## Afghan Withdrawal

**Update 05: Deadline Moved to 11 SEP**

With less than two months before a deadline to withdraw all U.S. troops from Afghanistan, local security forces there are unprepared to stand up on their own despite years of training and investment from foreign allies, a government watchdog warned lawmakers on 13 APR. “Achieving our counterterrorism reconstruction objectives depends on a strong, stable, democratic and self-reliant Afghanistan. Unfortunately, Afghanistan is far from that reality,” said John Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. “Afghan security forces are nowhere near achieving self-sufficiency, as they cannot maintain their equipment, manage their supply chains or train new soldiers, pilots and policemen.”

The disturbing assessment comes after more than 19 years of U.S. military presence in Afghanistan to root out terrorism and stabilize local governments there. It also comes as the White House struggles with upcoming decisions on whether to fully end the military mission there or prolong the lengthy conflict. More than 2,500 U.S. troops have died, and nearly 21,000 wounded in support of operations in Afghanistan, according to Pentagon figures. About 2,500 American troops are still stationed in the country, down significantly in the last 18 months as former President Donald Trump pushed to completely end U.S. involvement in the war-torn country. (However, the New York Times recently reported that there are actually about 3,500 U.S. troops there, according to U.S., European and Afghan officials.)

That plan was supposed to include a peace deal between Afghan government officials and Taliban leaders, but Sopko said there is little evidence in recent months that the Taliban fighters are prepared to lay down their arms and take up diplomatic posts with the new government instead. Under the deal negotiated by the Trump administration, all U.S. troops are scheduled to leave by 1 MAY. That leaves President Joe Biden with a difficult, looming decision on what to do about the remaining forces there, as well as how to handle the \$143 billion in taxpayer funds already invested in Afghanistan reconstruction projects and 18,000 contractors still working there thanks to American money.

Sopko emphasized that his office has not taken a stance on withdrawal of U.S. forces, but warned lawmakers against seeing the choice as an easy one. “If there is no peace agreement on 1 MAY, the Afghan government will probably lose the capability of flying any of its aircraft within months,” he told members of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform during testimony on 13 APR. “To be blunt, the government would probably face collapse. “If we also withdraw the funding, 80 percent of that (Afghan)

government money comes from the United States and our donors, including salaries for the troops, money to buy fuel, money to buy bullets. So it's a disaster for Afghanistan."

Still, several lawmakers expressed frustration with the ongoing American military presence there and said they will push for a clean end to the war. "We've done enough," said Rep. Clay Higgins (R-LA). "If we haven't taught the Afghan people how to care for themselves in 20 years, what makes us think we can do it in two more?" Sopko said his office will release a "lessons learned" report later this spring on waste and fraud in Afghanistan reconstruction efforts, to help inform and improve future similar efforts. Late last month, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Biden was still committed to ending the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and ensuring that the country will never again be a safe haven for terrorists like the ones who launched the Sept. 11 attack. However, she added that there is a "ongoing discussion" on the next steps ahead for the American military in Afghanistan, and no final decisions have yet been reached. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 13, 2021 ++]

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## **Transgender Troops**

### **Update 29: Pentagon Releases New Transgender Policies**

The Pentagon on 31 MAR swept away Trump-era policies that largely banned transgender people from serving in the military, issuing new rules that offer them wider access to medical care and assistance with gender transition. The new department regulations allow transgender people who meet military standards to enlist and serve openly in their self-identified gender, and they will be able to get medically necessary transition-related care authorized by law, chief Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters during a briefing. The changes come after a two-month Pentagon review aimed at developing guidelines for the new policy, which was announced by President Joe Biden just days after he took office in January.

Biden's executive order overturned the Trump policy and immediately prohibited any service member from being forced out of the military on the basis of gender identity. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin then gave the Pentagon two months to finalize the more detailed regulations that the military services will follow. The new rules also prohibit discrimination based on gender identity. Their release 31 MAR coincides with International Transgender Day of Visibility, and they will take effect in 30 days. Kirby said that will give the military services the time they need to update their policies and provide guidance to commanders. Secretary Austin has also called for a reexamination of the records of service members who were discharged or denied reenlistment because of gender identity issues under the previous policy. Stephanie Miller, the director of military accession policy, told reporters there is no data yet on how many people that may be.

Until a few years ago, service members could be discharged from the military for being transgender, but that changed during the Obama administration. In 2016, the Pentagon announced that transgender people already serving in the military would be allowed to serve openly, and that by July 2017 they would be allowed to enlist. After Donald Trump took office, however, his administration delayed the enlistment date and called for additional study. A few weeks later, Trump caught military leaders by surprise, tweeting that the government wouldn't accept or allow transgender people to serve "in any capacity" in the military.

After a lengthy and complicated legal battle and additional reviews, the Defense Department in April 2019 approved a policy that fell short of an all-out ban but barred transgender troops and recruits from

transitioning to another sex and required most individuals to serve in what the administration called their “birth gender.” Under that policy, currently serving transgender troops and anyone who had signed an enlistment contract before the effective date could continue with plans for hormone treatments and gender transition if they had been diagnosed with gender dysphoria. But after that date, no one with gender dysphoria who was taking hormones or had transitioned to another gender was allowed to enlist. Troops that were already serving and were diagnosed with gender dysphoria were required to serve in the gender assigned at birth and were barred from taking hormones or getting transition surgery.

The new policies released Wednesday are similar to those developed in 2016. The announcement was praised by advocacy groups and members of Congress. “The Pentagon absolutely did the right thing today by reestablishing a policy of inclusion for transgender service members, who once again will be able to serve openly and proudly in their self-identified gender,” said Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) who heads the House Armed Services Military Personnel Subcommittee. Nicholas Talbott, whose plans to enlist in the Air Force National Guard were sidelined by the Trump administration, expressed relief Wednesday. “I’m more confident than ever that when I apply to enlist, I will be judged on my skills and my accomplishments, instead of my transgender status, which has nothing to do with my ability to serve,” said Talbott, who plans to enlist.

Miller said the number of service members who self-identify as transgender could range from 1,000 to 8,000, including those who may not seek treatment. Other studies have said the total could be as high as 14,700. There are more than 1.3 million active-duty troops and close to 800,000 in the National Guard and Reserves. Speaking during a Pentagon briefing, Miller provided updated numbers on troops who have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria, saying there are 2,200 who are currently serving. That total is more than double the 1,071 who were serving in February 2019, according to data released then. Miller also said that medical costs associated with treatment and gender transition is very small, “a handful of million dollars per year.” She added that “we’re not anticipating with these changes in policies that there’s going to be a significant impact in terms of medical costs.”

According to the Pentagon, the department spent about \$8 million on transgender care from 2016 to 2019. Four of the military service chiefs told Congress in 2018 that they had seen no discipline, morale or unit readiness problems with transgender troops serving openly in the military. But they also acknowledged that some commanders were spending a lot of time with transgender people who were working through medical requirements and other transition issues. [Source: Associated Press | Lolita C. Baldor | March 31, 2021 ++]

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## **Army Pacific Missile Plan**

### **Air Force General Says it’s Expensive, Duplicative and “Stupid.”**

The U.S. Air Force general in charge of managing the service’s bomber inventory slammed the Army’s new plan to base long-range missiles in the Pacific, calling the idea expensive, duplicative and “stupid.” “Why in the world would we entertain a brutally expensive idea when we don’t, as the [Defense] Department, have the money to go do that?” Gen. Timothy Ray, who leads Air Force Global Strike Command, said during the Mitchell Institute’s Aerospace Advantage podcast recorded 31 MAR. “I’ve had a few congressmen ask me. And you know what? Honestly I think it’s stupid,” he said. “I just think it’s a

stupid idea to go and invest that kind of money that recreates something that the service has mastered and that we're doing already right now. Why in the world would you try that? I try to make sure that my language isn't a little more colorful than it is, but give me a break."

The long-range precision fires effort currently ranks as the Army's top modernization priority, and the service has plans to field a ground-launched hypersonic missile system by 2023. In March, the Army unveiled a new strategy paper laying out its plan to function as an "inside force" that would forward-deploy troops and ground-based missiles in the Pacific capable of destroying Chinese defenses. Developing strategic counterfire and hypersonic weapons is "hugely important" for the Army to be able to neutralize ships, air defenses, and anti-access/area denial capabilities that could suppress the service's maneuverability, Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville said during a March 25 event at the Brookings Institute.

"When you take a look at what some of our competitors have done with anti-access/area denial, they put up very elaborate air and missile defense systems, they've put up very elaborate anti-ship capabilities, and they're basically trying to expand themselves," he said. "The argument that we have is that you want to have multiple options to do that." That position has rankled some air power advocates who believe the Air Force's bomber fleet presents a more effective option for penetrating enemy airspace and destroying missile defenses, but Air Force leaders have largely stayed silent on their concerns about how the Army's plans could eat away at the defense budget.

In the podcast, Ray argued that the Army hasn't proved it can get allies and partners in the Western Pacific to sign on to host the weapon systems the service hopes to develop. "There are a lot of countries that have to agree to this. I could see some of them probably agreeing in the European theater, maybe in the Central Asian theater, but I don't see it coming together with any credibility in the Pacific any time real soon," he said.

Meanwhile, the Air Force is regularly flying bomber task force missions across the globe, thus positioning long-range strike assets in theater that are ready to quickly respond to a crisis, Ray said. By 2022, the service will have fielded its first air-launched hypersonic missile. "You've got a bird in the hand, a proven capability, a team that knows what it's like, understands how we could do things around the globe so quickly, knows how to integrate the kill chains," he said. "Why are you trying to recreate that, unless there's a parochial interest?" It remains to be seen whether Ray's comments are the first strike in what will become a larger conflict between the Army and Air Force, or simply the frustrations of a single general officer.

Air Force Gen. John Hyten, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said that the Joint Warfighting Concept calls for all the services to be able to conduct the long-range strike mission. "Everything [now] is about lines," Hyten said in August, according to Aviation Week. "But in the future, those lines are eliminated, which means an Army capability can have on its own platform, the ability to defend itself or strike deep into an adversary area of operations. A naval force can defend itself or strike deep. The Air Force can defend itself and strike deep. The Marines can defend themselves or strike deep." During a joint appearance earlier this week with McConville, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. CQ Brown noted that the services must work together despite having "a different perspective of how we look at the battlefield or a strategic environment."



After the publication of this story, an Air Force official told Defense News that Brown and McConville had spoken to each other on 2 APR about Ray's remarks. "They know the Air Force and the Army need to continue to work together in defense of the nation and look forward to making further progress toward that end," the source said. Brown also released his own statement.

*"Each of the services is charged with organizing, training and equipping forces to capitalize on unique capabilities, meet national security requirements, and to support our joint team. I would highlight that in addition to our four other core missions - air superiority, rapid global mobility, ISR and C2 - the U.S. Air Force provides our nation with an unparalleled 24/7 long-range global strike capability," he said. "The Air Force will continue to work closely with all of our joint teammates to provide the capabilities the nation requires."*

[Source: DefenseNews | Valerie Insinn | April 2, 2021 ++]

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## **Korean War Veterans Memorial**

### **Update 4: New Remembrance Wall Name Errors Possible**



Next month, the Korean War Veterans Memorial on the National Mall will have a new focal point — a remembrance wall featuring the names of approximately 36,574 Americans who died supporting the war and more than 7,200 Koreans who died while augmenting the Army. Their names will be organized by rank and respective branch of service, demonstrating how the war's burden fell unevenly across the military.

According to the National Park Service, work began in early March on the addition and additional renovations, which will cost approximately \$22 million. The groundbreaking marks the completion of a years-long fundraising process that began when Congress passed the Korean War Veterans Memorial Wall of Remembrance Act in 2016. The non-profit [Korean War Veterans Memorial Foundation](#) successfully raised the money through private donations from American and South Korean citizens and corporations. "The Korean War Veterans Memorial is one of the most visited monuments on the National Mall, with over four million visitors annually," said KWVMF executive director James Fischer in an email to Military Times. "Completing the Wall of Remembrance will help educate these visitors about the costs of war and honor those who paid the ultimate price for freedom."

Getting the money was step one. Now getting the names right is the task at hand. And advocates are questioning the accuracy of the Defense Casualty Analysis System database that the Defense Department



used to provide the initial list of names to KWVMF. The wall, which will include the names of those killed or reported missing between June 1950 and March 1954, will provide a sobering reminder of the war's ferocity. More than five times as many Americans died in support of the Korean War than the [approximately 7,056](#) who have died in support of the Global War on Terror. DoD won't release the current DCAS list it provided to KWVMF, so the best glimpse into the data comes from an archived, publicly available version of the list available through the National Archives and Records Administration [website](#). Korean War veterans advocates are alarmed at the inaccuracies they are finding there.

From their home near Dallas, Hal and Ted Barker run the [Korean War Project](#), a free-to-use online archive and database documenting those lost in Korea. The site represents more than four decades of research and effort to tell the stories of Korean War veterans such as their father. The Barkers and KWP volunteer researchers estimate there are some 2,000 name discrepancies in the DCAS list publicly available through NARA, they told Military Times. Some shouldn't be there. Some should be there but aren't. Others are grievously misspelled or misformatted. Of particular issue, they explained, are Native American, Asian-American, Hawaiian, and Latino names. And soon these errors could be cut into stone.

One glaring example is that of a Navy officer who died in...2013. Included in error "Killed in action...remains recovered." That's what the [NARA public version](#) of the DCAS database has to say about Navy Lt. j.g. Edwin Nixon Jr., a carrier-based fighter pilot shot down during the Korean War. Nixon's F9F Panther fighter went down in flames in March 1953, crash-landing in North Korea. Contrary to what his fellow pilots reported, what the newspapers reported, and what the NARA DCAS archive says, Nixon survived the crash and became a prisoner of war. He survived his ordeal and returned to his family in Seattle, eventually having three children and self-publishing a memoir, *Killed In Action: Dead...Wrong!*, about his experience. Nixon is not the only person included on the list in error, either.

Another erroneous entry is that of Wilson Fielder Jr., Time magazine's Hong Kong bureau chief who was killed while reporting near Taejon in July 1950. NARA [DCAS lists Fielder](#) as "killed in action." The Time correspondent had served as a Marine Corps officer during World War II, and was an inactive member of the Marine Corps Reserve at the time of his death, but was not serving at the time. As a result, DoD recorded his death as a battle casualty. Other servicemembers in the NARA DCAS list "died from [various] accidents" outside the theater of operations, said Hal Barker, including some who were not supporting operations in Korea. One such example is Navy Lt. j. g. Lawrence Frederick Emigholz Jr., who died in a 1952 accident while trying to land his fighter on the USS Wasp in the Mediterranean Sea, according to contemporaneous newspaper accounts. His remains were never recovered. The NARA DCAS database states that Navy pilot "Lawrence Freder Emigholz Jr." died in an accident aboard the USS James C. Owens, a Sumner-class destroyer that had no planes. His misspelled name appears in a mockup of the Wall of Remembrance presented to the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts by the National Park Service on September 17, 2020.

But for each name erroneously included in the database, there are others not included. Those left out Air Force and Navy personnel who died in accidents are included — or not — haphazardly, explained Barker. Some troops lost in air crashes outside of Korea are included in the NARA DCAS list, such as Air Force 1st Lt. [Frank M. Lopes](#). He was a fighter pilot assigned to the 16th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron [who boarded](#) a C-47 transport flight on October 15, 1950 in an effort to get back to his unit in Japan after surviving an emergency landing of his damaged jet in Korea during a combat mission. The transport became lost over the ocean amid adverse weather after takeoff. Four hours later, the pilots radioed that

fuel was running out, and the crew and its lone passenger, Lopes, would bail out. The aircraft wasn't heard from again, and search teams failed to locate its wreckage, much less its crew and passengers. Lopes remains listed as missing in action, and his name will appear on the Wall of Remembrance.

Many other troops who died in the numerous flights that crashed on their way to or from Korea won't appear on the wall. That includes the [129 servicemembers](#) who died in a C-124A crash near Tachikawa Air Base, Japan in June 1953. Most of the troops onboard the Korea-bound plane were returning to their combat duties following a brief rest period in Japan. The plane went down in a watermelon field, where the only survivor died shortly after an airman passing by stopped and pulled him from the wreckage. At the time, the crash was the deadliest air disaster on record, and it was the first plane crash to ever see more than a hundred lives lost. Hal Barker says the inconsistencies are partially the fault of the services. "Each service had widely varying interpretations of [Theater] of Operations or never reduced their definition of theater to writing...and that is a problem," he said.

The volunteer researchers of the Korean War Project have identified "at least 500" victims of accidents that took place over Japan, Okinawa, and on the seas between that are "missing from the official database," said Barker. But even some those who are indisputably qualified for inclusion on the Wall, such as the "Borinqueneers" of Puerto Rico's 65th Infantry Regiment, suffer from misspellings and misformattings in the NARA archive of the DCAS database. "In accordance with their Latin culture, many [Puerto Rican] soldiers...use[d] both their paternal and maternal last names, usually hyphenated," said Noemi Figueroa-Soulet, a documentary producer and advocate for Puerto Rican veterans, in a letter to KWVMF officials she shared with Military Times. "In some cases where two long surnames are used, either a surname or a first name is [shortened]."

She pointed to the NARA [DCAS listing](#) for Army Pvt. Nelson Galarza-Lebron, who died of wounds sustained in combat in October 1952. In his case, the database lists him as "Nelson G. Lebron," which means "a family member looking for their loved one's name would not be able to find it," according to Figueroa-Soulet. The Barkers said they have identified and worked to correct "approximately 280 Puerto Rican/Latino name issues" through years of coordination with Puerto Rican advocacy groups and people like Figueroa-Soulet. "Three Medal of Honor recipients' names are spelled incorrectly in the official database," said Hal Barker. "A number of servicemen used assumed names, and many servicemen had their names changed by clerical error by the military."

The KWVMF is now working rapidly to identify and address errors in the initial DCAS list they received. "The KWVMF notified DoD last week that they had made changes to that list and the department is reviewing those documents," said Army Maj. César Santiago, a DoD spokesperson. "Beginning in February 2020, we have worked diligently on the information we initially received from DMDC which, by law, is the authoritative source for the list of names for inclusion on the Wall of Remembrance," said Fischer, executive director of the KWVMF, in an email to Military Times. Fischer explained that KWVMF is working "on a potential list of names," but "final confirmation for inclusion on the Wall of Remembrance must come from DoD."

"We continue to extensively review our information to verify the proper spelling of Latino surnames, remove any truncating of name anomalies because of how the individual reporting database parameters may affect how a name is reported in a listing, and address any additional formatting issues," he added. Fischer's statement to Military Times is a change from what another KWVMF official told Figueroa-Soulet in January, according to emails the documentary producer shared with Military Times. In response

to a January letter from Figueroa-Soulet, KWVMF board secretary Michel Au Buchon said, “Although there may be inaccuracies [in Latino and other names], we are unable to change or deviate from this [DCAS] official record.” “We are bound to...H.R. 1475, the Korean War Veterans Memorial Wall of Remembrance Act,” said Au Buchon in January, citing the legal requirement for DoD to provide the list of names.

Figueroa-Soulet is now encouraged by KWVMF’s recent commitment to correcting the names. “That is the right thing to do for those soldiers who served our country but never came back. But it leaves me wondering what sources they are using to correct these names and if the supposed corrections will be accurate.” “The department has established procedures for the military service departments to update or correct errors in casualty records or in the Official Military Personnel File,” said Santiago, the DoD spokesperson. “The official list for the Korean War Veterans Memorial will be available to the public once the [final] eligibility criteria is published,” said Santiago. “It is not available for public release at this time.”

Fischer and KWVMF did not immediately respond to questions seeking clarification on how they were working to correct the names, and what research and documentation requirements were required to do so. “Nevertheless, I look forward to seeing the Wall of Remembrance with the correct names listed,” said Figueroa-Soulet, the documentary producer. “It’s the least we can do for their families.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Davis Winkie | April 6, 2021 ++]

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## **Other than Honorable Discharge**

### **Update 17: New Review Board Offers One Last Chance at Appeal**

Recently separated service members who believe they were unjustly or erroneously discharged or dismissed from the military, or want to upgrade how their discharge was characterized, now have one new last chance at appeal. The Pentagon on 7 APR announced it has created a new route for service members who separated on or after Dec. 20, 2019, to appeal their separation. The new Discharge Appeal Review Board will allow those service members a final review of their requests to upgrade their discharge or dismissal characterization after they have exhausted all other available administrative options, the Defense Department’s release said. Congress ordered the board created in the fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization Act.

Once a service member has exhausted all appeals with the appropriate service Discharge Review Board and Board of Correction of Military or Naval Records, they now can apply to the new appeal board for a final review. These boards of appeal also make corrections to a veteran's discharge, such as fixing dates or misspellings on the DD-214 or adding missing decorations or campaign medals to a veteran’s record. But the new board will take a very tightly defined look at each case. It will review only records from the service Board of Correction of Military/Naval Records’ case file, the release said, and will not see people personally. Anyone who wants to present new evidence first has to ask their Board of Correction to reconsider that evidence before it can be considered by the new appeal board.

It's not yet clear who will sit on the board, how many members it will have or how many cases it's likely to review. If the appeals board recommends that service member’s discharge or dismissal characterization be upgraded, it then will be sent to the secretary of the relevant military department for a

final decision, the release said. It is the final level of review anyone can seek. If the former service member has died or is incapacitated, that person's surviving spouse, next of kin or legal representative can apply on their behalf, the release said.

Veterans who receive a discharge from the military that is characterized as anything other than "honorable" may be ineligible for state and federal benefits, including health care, education, property tax exclusions, employment preferences and even burial benefits. As society has changed throughout the years, many actions that were once a guarantee of a dishonorable discharge now are often not applicable reasons for involuntary termination from military service. Therefore, veterans who appeal a less-than-honorable discharge often are successful in having it upgraded. The formation of a new board of appeals for discharges was designed to ensure all previous decisions on appeals were made according to the law and DoD policy.

The Air Force has been put in charge of the appeal review board process, the Pentagon said. Anyone who believes there's a problem with their discharge or dismissal, as of Dec. 20, 2019, is encouraged to apply for review, the Pentagon said. They can find more information at the Air Force Review Board Agency Portal [HERE](#). [Source: Military.com | Stephen Losey & Jim Absher | April 7, 2021 ++]

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## **DoD Budget 2022**

### **Update 01: Biden Has Proposed \$715 Billion Baseline**

President Joe Biden on Friday proposed \$715 billion for the Pentagon in its 2022 baseline budget, which is a slight increase from this year's spending plan. However, Biden's proposal is a decrease from what former President Donald Trump's administration had expected to request for the Pentagon in 2022. Lawmakers allocated \$704 billion for fiscal year 2021, and Biden's request 9 APR would be a 1.5% increase in defense spending. Yet, the budget boost is less than the Trump administration projected for the fiscal year 2022 budget. That budget would have requested the Pentagon get \$722 billion for the fiscal year that begins 1 OCT.

The overall defense budget topline, which includes money for the Department of Energy and its nuclear weapons program, is \$753 billion. The budget does not detail where the money that is not earmarked for the Pentagon is going, but it is typically spent on the National Nuclear Security Administration that oversees the U.S. nuclear arsenal. The proposal rolled out 9 APR also includes a significant reform and ends the use of an overseas contingency operations, or OCO, account. For the first time in two decades, the budget does not include a separate fund to finance overseas military operations. Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have slammed the OCO account as a "slush fund" that should be spent as part of the baseline Pentagon budget.

Pentagon spokesman Christopher Sherwood said the Defense Department budget proposal will likely be released in late May, but he added the White House's Office of Management and Budget has not set a date yet. The White House also wrote in the proposal sent to lawmakers that the request prioritizes programs that support military families. "Military families are key to the readiness and well-being of the all-volunteer force, and therefore are critical to national security," according to the budget outline. "The discretionary

request supports military families by prioritizing programs that directly support military spouses, caregivers, survivors and dependents.”

Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA) immediately criticized Biden’s request, calling it “disappointing.” The lawmaker said he was happy to see the proposal slashed the use of the OCO “slush fund,” but added he is concerned the budget “will likely include other wasteful spending” on things such as new missiles. “We need a fundamental shift in how we address national security issues and invest in climate action and pandemic response. Those are the issues impacting the security of the American people and will keep Americans safer than spending billions on more deadly weapons,” wrote Khanna, who is a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

Several veterans service organizations also criticized the budget, as well as some watchdog groups, and called for funds to address more urgent needs such as the coronavirus pandemic and a decrease in the budget to stop fueling endless wars. “The pandemic made clear that we can no longer afford to keep funding wasteful and unnecessary Pentagon spending at the expense of great public health and safety needs. We continue to worry that these levels of spending aren’t just unsustainable, but counterproductive for advancing the reforms we need to see at the Department of Defense,” said Mandy Smithberger, director of the Center for Defense Information at the Project On Government Oversight, a nonpartisan watchdog organization.

Rep. Anthony Brown, a Democratic member of the House Armed Services Committee, took a different tone. In support of the request, he said it makes necessary investments to respond to powers such as China and Russia. “President Biden’s defense budget reflects the realities of global security, the need to take care of those who answer the call of service and the benefits of investing in our defense to every sector of our economy,” the Maryland lawmaker said. Rep. Mike Turner was the first Republican on the House Armed Services Committee to repeat calls for a 3-5% increase in defense spending, a boost that top Republicans, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) have been urging Biden to consider in recent weeks to confront China. “While I’m encouraged that the Biden administration intends to support nuclear modernization, amid growing threats from China, North Korea, Iran and Russia, any defense cuts will be cause for concern,” the Ohio lawmaker wrote.

At the same time, some Democrats have called for significant cuts to defense spending to pay for other priorities such as diplomacy, humanitarian aid and public health. The Trump administration had increased defense spending to help the Pentagon challenge rival world powers China and Russia. Trump’s military budget for fiscal year 2021, which ends Sept. 30, was \$740.5 billion. Democrats in Congress have repeatedly called for spending on the military to shift to other issues such as health care, education and jobs, with the Congressional Progressive Caucus pushing last year for a 10% reduction in defense spending. In light of the coronavirus pandemic, “spending \$740 billion a year on this one piece of the federal budget is unconscionable,” Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) said during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing in February.

In March, a group of 50 House Democrats, led by former progressive caucus chairpersons Reps. Barbara Lee of California and Mark Pocan of Wisconsin, urged Biden to make a “significantly reduced Pentagon topline,” without naming a specific number. “While we are heartened that your administration is not contemplating expanding the Pentagon’s already inflated budget, our new Democratic majorities in Congress along with your administration should go further,” the lawmakers wrote in the letter to Biden.

“Rather than requesting a flat Pentagon budget, we urge you to seek a significantly reduced Pentagon topline.”

The lawmakers called for a reevaluation in priorities that had been set under the Trump administration. They said investments in diplomacy and global public health, among other things, would have a greater return on investment than hundreds of billions of dollars directed to the military. “We must end the forever wars, heal our veterans, and re-orient towards a holistic conception of national security that centers public health, climate change and human rights,” they wrote. The letter came after top Republicans on the House Armed Services Committee in early March argued in a letter to Biden that the budget should increase by 3-5% to modernize the force and fill ongoing readiness gaps to keep pace with China’s rising military investments.

“The next four years are going to be a crucial turning point for our military and our nation. If we do not make the investments our military needs today, we will not be able to defend our nation or our allies in the future,” wrote eight lawmakers, led by Mike Rogers of Alabama, the ranking Republican of the House Armed Services Committee. The group urged Biden to focus investments on cyber warfare, nuclear triad modernization, growing the Navy and “to quickly incorporate the latest innovations and enhancements into warfighting capabilities, including air and sealift, space, missile defense, munitions, and electronic warfare.” Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Jim Inhofe (R-OK) has also called for a 3-5% increase, which is in line with the recommendations of the bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission, which reviews U.S. defense strategy issues.

However, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, including House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-WA) and Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Jack Reed (D-RI) have talked about bolstering cyber defenses and the importance of developing new technologies. McConnell said in March that Biden must boost defense spending to prove to Republicans that his administration is serious about getting tough on China. “If the administration is serious about competing with China, deterring Russia and preserving American leadership, the most important test will be in the president’s budget submission,” he said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Sarah Cammarata | April 9, 2021 ++]

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## **DoD Vaccination Program**

### **Update 01: 38.9% of Marines Chose Not To Receive Covid Vaccines**

Nearly 40% of US Marines are declining Covid-19 vaccinations, according to data provided to CNN on 9 APR by the service, the first branch to disclose service-wide numbers on acceptance and declination. As of 8 APR, approximately 75,500 Marines have received vaccines, including fully vaccinated and partially vaccinated service men and women. About 48,000 Marines have chosen not to receive vaccines, for a declination rate of 38.9%. CNN has reached out to the other services for acceptance and declination rates. The corresponding acceptance rate for vaccinations among Marines -- 61.1% -- is not far off the military estimate of two-thirds, or about 66%.

Another 102,000 Marines have not yet been offered the vaccines. The total number of Marines includes active-duty, reserves and Individual Mobilization Augmentee Marines. The declination rate at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, one of the prominent Marine Corps bases, was far higher, at 57%, according to



another set of data provided to CNN. Of 26,400 Marines who have been offered vaccinations, 15,100 have chosen not to receive them, a number that includes both II Marine Expeditionary Force and Marine Corps Installation East -- Camp Lejeune. Another 11,500 active-duty Marines are scheduled to be offered the vaccines.

Frushour said there are a number of potential reasons a Marine may choose not to receive a vaccine, including allowing others to receive it first, waiting until it becomes mandatory, getting it through other channels or being allergic to the vaccine. "Service members who decline one day can change their mind and become vaccinated when next the opportunity presents itself," she said. CNN reported last month that the rejection rate for vaccination among service members may be close to 50%, a number notably higher than the 33% figure defense officials have used publicly. The military cannot make the vaccines mandatory now because they have only emergency use authorizations from the Food and Drug Administration, meaning service members who are required to receive a series of other vaccinations have the option of declining shots to protect against Covid-19. Officials say most of the vaccine hesitancy stems from concerns about the speed at which the vaccines were developed and fears over long-term effects.

The Defense Department has approximately 2.2 million service members operating around the globe. For every 10 percentage point drop in the acceptance rate, that's 220,000 individuals opting not to receive vaccines, a number potentially large enough to affect force readiness. Last year, the military experienced a handful of high-profile Covid outbreaks, including one aboard an aircraft carrier deployed in the Pacific. Last month, a group of Democratic lawmakers called on President Joe Biden to issue a "waiver of informed consent" to make getting vaccinated against Covid-19 mandatory for all US military service members, writing in a letter that "disinformation and vaccine skepticism" are influencing service members to opt out of being vaccinated. [Source: CNN | Oren Lieberman, Ellie Kaufman & Devan Cole | April 10, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Enlistment Standards**

### **Update 14: Surprising Conditions That Could Bar You from Service**

It's no surprise that service members must be in good physical shape to serve in the military. However, there are some medical conditions that you might not know can bar you from service. The military lays out certain physical requirements that those wishing to serve must meet, and recruits must undergo a medical exam. When joining, they must also disclose significant medical conditions. Sometimes waivers from medical professionals are an option for certain medical conditions, particularly ones that relate to eyesight and weight. However, others — like depression and Crohn's disease — are likely to disqualify you from service, especially if they have affected your education or employment in the past. It is important to note that many conditions are not always permanently disqualifying and should not dissuade potential applicants. Recruiters and military doctors will determine if they will affect your duties. Here are eight surprising medical conditions that might prevent you from serving in the U.S. Armed Forces:

#### **1. Food Allergies**

If you have a history of food allergies, you might be disqualified from joining the military. This is because service members can serve in locations that do not have a wide variety of food options or that do not have easily accessible medical care in the case of reactions. Recruits who are merely sensitive to certain foods will not be disqualified. The Army defines allergies as a "reliable history of a moderate to severe reaction

to common foods, spices, or food additives.” The Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps are a little more specific however, defining allergies as reactions with anaphylaxis. Prospective recruits may be able to get a waiver in certain circumstances.

## **2. Celiac Disease**

Similar to the disqualification for allergies, potential recruits with celiac disease may not be able to enlist. The reasoning behind this is based on food availability and the potential for gluten cross-contamination. The U.S. military has a history of being less-than accommodating to food intolerances, which causes some to hide their conditions for fear of being discharged. The good news is the celiac disqualification could be nearing its end as meals ready-to-eat (MRE) makers are providing more gluten-free options.

## **3. Contact dermatitis**

If you’ve ever gotten an uncomfortable rash after contact with certain types of soaps, plants or other substances, you might have contact dermatitis. Because service members come into contact with a variety of substances, you might be disqualified from military service if you have uncontrolled reactions. If the reaction can cause the recruit to be unable to perform regular duties, he or she may not qualify for military service. Recruits with minor, controllable symptoms can request a waiver.

## **4. Asthma**

Asthma, only if requiring treatment after a recruit’s 13th birthday, may disqualify an individual from serving. This is a change from the military’s previous disqualification of all candidates with any history of asthma. If the individual carries an inhaler, he or she is likely to be disqualified. Applicants who have experienced asthma after age 13 require medical documentation and may receive a waiver depending on their medical history. To get a waiver, recruits are required to perform a pulmonary function test (PFT). If the recruit passes, branches are likely to let the recruit serve.

## **5. Braces or dental ailments**

While you’re on your teeth straightening journey, your ability to join the military is likely to be limited until all orthodontic fixtures for traditional treatment or Invisalign are removed. Retainers are allowed as long as all dental treatment is completed. Individuals that are allowed to enlist can participate in the Delayed Entry Program if an orthodontist proves that all active treatment will be completed before the recruit is sworn into active duty. Other dental issues like tooth removal or tooth replacement may cause disqualification if there are potential complications or troubles eating food later on during service. Cavities will not disqualify recruits as long as they are properly treated and filled.

## **6. Motion sickness**

Service members are put in a variety of situations involving moving vehicles. Since motion sickness can be incapacitating, multiple branches list it as a disqualifying medical condition if it continues to occur after childhood. Persistent motion sickness is addressed on a case-by-case basis, and waivers are sometimes possible. Additionally, Army and the Navy aviators can undergo counseling and desensitization that may qualify them for a waiver. Typically, recruits who must take medicine to cope with the sickness are not eligible.

Even though the military disqualifies candidates with motion sickness, there are still service members who get sick. However, there is a new invention looking to combat this in military personnel and civilians. Ototech, a device that is strapped to a headband, tricks the brain into ignoring sensations of motion sickness. The device is still in testing phases.

## 7. Acne

Though acne may just be a minor annoyance for teenagers and adults alike, it could be the reason a recruit is disqualified from service. Like other medical conditions on this list, acne only becomes a problem when it is severe and disrupts the individual from completing their everyday duties. If the acne is severe and interferes with the individual properly wearing military equipment, he or she would be disqualified. Individuals undergoing treatment with system retinoids like Accutane must be at least four weeks off of treatment.

## 8. Too tall

While height is clearly not an illness, being over 80 inches tall deserves an honorable mention for being an unexpected reason a recruit may be disqualified. This is typically because of the need to order custom-made equipment and uniforms. Recruits also may struggle with certain jobs if they are too tall. Male applicants must be between 60 and 80 inches tall and female applicants must be between 58 and 80 inches tall. The Marine Corps is more restrictive and does not accept males of 78 inches tall and females of 72 inches tall.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Caitlin O'Brien | April 10, 2021 ++]

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## POW/MIA

### Update 127: Search for Korean War Missing Picks Up again in the DMZ



**A South Korean soldier works a metal detector at Arrowhead Hill in the Demilitarized Zone in a hunt for leftover mines of the Korean War on Oct. 8, 2018.**

Recovery teams from the United Nations Command and South Korea will start the search again 5 APR along the Demilitarized Zone for lost soldiers of the Korean War. This marks the third consecutive year that teams will search for missing soldiers and leftover ordnance in an area that saw hard fighting during the three-year conflict 70 years ago. The recovery project is a collaboration between the U.N. Command and the Ministry of National Defense, according to a U.N. news release Thursday. The Cheorwon region, 57 miles northeast of Seoul, is the site of battlefields at White Horse Hill, or Baekma, and Arrowhead Hill, where tens of thousands died. Soldiers of South Korea, multinational U.N. forces, the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army all fought in the area, the statement said.

Following the armistice in 1953, Cheorwon, crossed by the DMZ, was divided between the two Koreas. Since 2018, demining and recovery efforts in the area have yielded more than 9,125 mines and unexploded ordnance and more than 2,335 bone fragments and skeletal remains, according to the U.N. The Defense Ministry notified North Korea of continued recovery efforts, according to a Defense Ministry statement

Thursday. The work will resume on Arrowhead Hill and expand east to White Horse Hill with preparations for demining and road construction, the ministry said.

U.S. forces are not involved in the project, U.S. Forces Korea spokeswoman Hochong Song said. She said the U.S. supports the mission with assistance in mission planning, site surveys and identifying and repatriating remains. South Korea's 5th Infantry Division will take the lead with support from the Special Maneuver Support Brigade and the Agency for KIA Recovery & Identification, the ministry said. If necessary, the U.N. Command negotiates the repatriation of North Korean soldiers' remains with their Korean People's Army counterparts, Song said. For the second year in a row, an Australian team will facilitate access for the recovery teams into the area and ensure the search complies with the 1953 armistice.

The Korean War left approximately 7,565 U.S. service members unaccounted for, including 5,300 estimated lost in North Korea, according to U.S. Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency statistics published in February. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Matthew Keeler | April 2, 2021++]

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

**Reported 01 thru 15 APR 2021 | Six**

“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> for a listing and details of the 141 accounted for in 2005. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

== Mail: Public Affairs Office, 2300 Defense Pentagon, Washington, D. C. 20301-2300, Attn: External Affairs Call: Phone: (703) 699-1420

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



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

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

### **LOOK FOR**

-- **Army Pfc. Raymond A. Smith, 18**, was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, after his unit was attacked by enemy forces as they attempted to withdraw near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Smith.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Neal K. Todd, 22**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Todd. Interment services are pending. [Read about Todd.](#)

-- **Navy Mess Attendant 1st Class Octavius Mabine, 21**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Mabine. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Mabine.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Howard S. Magers, 18**, of Merry Oaks, Kentucky, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Magers. He will be buried on May 29, 2021, in Smith's Grove, Kentucky. [Read about Magers.](#)

-- **Navy Signalman 1st Class Eugene M. Skaggs, 33**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941.

The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Skaggs. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Skaggs.](#)

-- **Navy Water Tender 1st Class Milo E. Phillips**, 26, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Phillips. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Phillips.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | April 2021 ++]

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## **VA Lawsuit | Eric March**

### **Manchester Couple \$9.47 Million in Malpractice Suit**

A judge has ordered the federal government to pay a Manchester couple \$9.47 million compensation for life-threatening injuries and long-term disabilities caused to the husband by what the judge found to be medical malpractice during abdominal surgery at the Veterans Administration Hospital in West Haven in 2015. U.S. District Judge Victor A. Bolden ordered the government to pay Eric March \$3.27 million for "economic damages," such as past and future medical expenses and lost earning capacity, and \$5 million in "non-economic damages" for "significant physical, psychological and emotional harm" he has suffered. The judge ordered the government to pay March's wife, Dina, \$1.2 million for "loss of consortium," the practical and "sentimental" changes to their marital relationship.

The judge, who presided over a four-day non-jury trial in the case in October in U.S. District Court in Bridgeport, quoted Dina March as testifying that, before her husband's injuries, she was "treated like a princess, in a sense" but is now "like a nursemaid." The judge's 75-page decision, issued 5 MAR, includes the following information on Eric March's medical history: He had suffered from intestinal problems since 2006, when he began experiencing abdominal pain and learned that he had a condition that eventually developed into diverticulitis, an infection caused by small air pockets around the large intestine.

In 2011, the pain became severe, and Dr. Maher Suede removed about 90% of the diseased area of his large intestine at Manchester Memorial Hospital. The 2015 surgery at the VA Hospital was for a hernia, or weakened area of the abdominal wall, that had been causing March pain. Dr. Marko Lujic, a fourth-year resident, or surgeon in training, performed the operation under the supervision of Dr. Robert Schlessel, who was "scrubbed" and watched most of the operation. The surgery involved removal of "adhesions," scar tissue that sticks the intestine to the abdominal wall. There are several ways to do this, including



"electrocautery," burning away the adhesions, which the judge described as the most dangerous "method of last resort."

Both Lujic and Schlessel testified that, during electrocautery, heat can be transferred from one area of the body to another and cause a burn injury that can progress over several days to complete perforation of the intestinal wall. The two doctors testified that they didn't remember details of the operation on March, basing their testimony on a post-operative note and their general practices. A contested issue during the case was how often — and exactly when — the surgeons inspected March's small intestine for possible injuries during the surgery, which was performed by laparoscopic methods, using small incisions and a camera that projected the laparoscope's pictures onto two large monitors.

The surgery took place on June 15, 2015, and March was discharged from the VA Hospital five days later. Three days after his discharge, he went to Manchester Hospital with problems that included "swelling, and yellow drainage from his abdominal wall." Suede performed what he described as an "emergency operation" on March at Manchester Hospital, which he described as "life-saving." In a second surgery, performed on June 26, 2015, Suede removed parts of the intestine. He testified that March had "severe infection" and "abscesses and hernias of the abdominal wall."

"It is more likely than not that the failure of Drs. Schlessel and Lujic to conduct a final inspection of the bowel and identify thermal injuries caused the injuries" that subsequently caused March to go to Manchester Hospital and "the surgeries and permanent injuries that followed," the judge wrote. [Source: Journal Inquirer, Manchester CT | Alex Wood | March 29, 2021 ++]

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## **GI Bill Comparison Tool**

### **School Selection Aide**

Eligible vets who want to learn about education programs and compare benefits by school can do so by going to <https://www.va.gov/gi-bill-comparison-tool>. At this site after entering your military status you can select which GI Bill benefit you want to use (<https://www.va.gov/education/eligibility>) and search for schools/institutions in your geographic area that can provide the education experience you are seeking.

When you click on the site's "Search" tab all accredited schools in your area will appear and when you select one you will be provided with the housing allowance and book stipend you can expect to receive along with how much the GI Bill will be paying the school for your tuition. Also provided is the number of student complaints received in the last 24 months and an institution summary which contains useful information on the following:

- Accreditation
- Veterans' tuition policy
- Protection against late VA payments
- Credit for military training
- Independent study acceptance
- Rogers STEM Scholarship eligibility
- Does the school have a dedicated point of contact for support services for Veterans, military service members, and their families?

- Institution codes
- Contact details

[Source: Veterans Benefits Newsletter | April 2021 ++]

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## **VA Copay**

### **Update 17: American Recovery Plan Impact**

VA co-payments received between April 6, 2020, and September 30, 2021, will be waived, refunded, or forgiven under the American Recovery Plan. The VA is canceling and refunding copayments for the following benefits:

- All medical care received through VA between April 6, 2020, and September 30, 2021
- All prescription medications received through VA between April 6, 2020, and September 30, 2021

It is hoped that this will help Veterans and their families during this challenging time. If you're a Veteran who receives care through VA, here's what this means for you:

- If you received a statement with copayments for services or medications received on April 6, 2020, or later, we'll remove these copayments from your account. You won't have to pay these copayments.
- If you already paid any copayments for services or medications received on April 6, 2020, or later, we'll send you a refund.
- If you have unpaid copayments for services or medications received before April 6, 2020, we won't require or expect you to make payments on your account until October 1, 2021. We won't add any interest or fees to your accounts. And we won't take any collection actions on these specific copayments. If you'd like to voluntarily make payments during this time, you can. But we won't require or expect payments until October 1, 2021. Find out how to pay your VA copay bill

VA doesn't need anything from you at this time to process your refund. They ask for your patience as they adjust statements and process refunds. Updates will be provided on when to expect refunds to start.

[Source: VHA Co-Pay Recovery Act | <https://www.va.gov/health-care/copay-rates> | April 1, 2021 ++]

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## **Gold Star Spouses**

### **Update 02: Available VA Benefits**

During World War I, Americans hung blue stars in their windows for every family member serving in the military. If a loved one died in service, a gold star replaced the blue one. Since then, the Gold Star has symbolized the spouses and family members of those who made the ultimate sacrifice. Every year on April 5, America salutes these spouses on Gold Star Spouses Day. If you are a survivor of a fallen Veteran or service member, you are not forgotten. VA provides a variety of benefits that can help you navigate life after your loss. Available benefits include:

- **Education and training.** Survivor's and Dependents' Education Assistance Program may be able to help you pay for school or job training through a GI Bill program.
- **VA home loan guaranty.** You can apply for a Certificate of Eligibility to help you buy, build, repair or refinance a home. You may also qualify for a VA-backed home loan if you are having trouble paying your mortgage.
- **Life insurance.** You may be able to convert a spousal Family Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance policy to an individual policy within 120 days from the date of your loved one's passing.
- **Pre-need eligibility determination for burial in a VA national cemetery.** VA can help you plan ahead to make the burial process easier for your family at that time.
- **Burial benefits and memorial items.** You can apply for help paying burial costs, request memorial items or learn about grief counseling and transition support.
- **Survivors Pension.** Survivors Pension offers monthly payments to qualified surviving spouses and unmarried dependent children of wartime Veterans who meet certain income and net worth limits set by Congress.
- **Compensation for surviving spouses and dependents.** You may qualify for a tax-free monetary benefit called VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (VA DIC). Visit <https://www.va.gov/disability/dependency-indemnity-compensation/> to learn more about the documents you will need to apply for VA DIC.

There are some specific eligibility requirements for each of these benefits, so be sure to check out the full list of family member benefits at <https://www.va.gov/family-member-benefits/#benefits-for-spouses,-dependents,-and-survivors> to find out which benefits you may qualify for and how to access them. VA recognizes the sacrifices Gold Star spouses have made for their country. To honor the legacy of your loved one, VA continues to ensure that you and your family receive the benefits and services you have earned. [Source: Vantage Point | April 5, 2021 ++]

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## **Geriatrics & Extended Care**

### **Update 03: Advance Care Planning | Making Health Care Decisions**

There is no one way to get started with Advance Care Planning, which is a process of making decisions about:

- *What* treatments you would or would not want if you were ill or injured and were not able to make those decisions for yourself
- *Who* you want to make those decisions for you

In any case, the information you need to get started can be found at [www.va.gov/Geriatrics](http://www.va.gov/Geriatrics):

- What are [Advance Directives](#)?
- How do I go about [Choosing a Person to Make Decisions](#)?
- How do I begin [Talking with Loved Ones](#)?
- Where can I get [Help Setting Health Care Goals](#)?
- Can I do this with other Veterans and caregivers through [Group Visits](#)?
- Are there [Other Types of Advance Care Planning](#) I should think about?
- Where can I find [More Resources](#)?

Veterans and their caregivers must think about many factors when making care and treatment decisions – choices that meet needs and honor Veteran preferences. These resources can help you identify your priorities. They can also help you prepare to talk with your providers or loved ones about your preferences and make decisions about health care or planning for long term care.

- [Conversation Guide for Patients and Caregivers for Identifying their Health Priorities](#)
- [Tips for Patients to Communicate with Clinicians](#)
- [Veteran Decision Aid for Care at Home or in the Community](#)– Helps Veterans think about what matters most when considering long term care choices
- [Caregiver Self-Assessment](#)– Helps caregivers review their roles and responsibilities and evaluate their stress

Visit [www.va.gov/Geriatrics](http://www.va.gov/Geriatrics) to learn more about services and resources for Veterans and their caregivers. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 23, 2021 ++]

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## **VA Budget FY 2022**

### **Biden Proposes \$8.5 Billion Increase**

President Joe Biden is proposing an \$8.5 billion boost for the Department of Veterans Affairs under his 2022 budget plan released 9 APR. Biden’s plan would increase domestic spending by 16% overall, including an 8.2% increase for the VA, bringing its total discretionary spending for 2022 to \$113.1 billion. According to the budget summary, Biden prioritized veteran homelessness, suicide prevention and caregiver support. “The discretionary request ensures that all of America’s veterans, including women veterans, veterans of color, and LGBTQ+ veterans, receive the care they have earned,” the budget states. Congress will have the final say on the federal budget. VA Secretary Denis McDonough is scheduled to testify before the House appropriators committee 15 APR to defend the president’s budget request for his department. Included in the plan are:

- The allocation of \$97.5 billion to VA health care, an increase of \$7.6 billion from 2021. The money includes boosts to women’s health and mental health, the summary states.
- A significant increase – about 75% – to the VA’s suicide prevention efforts. The budget for these efforts would total \$542 million, about \$230 million more than in 2021. This includes funding to increase the capacity of the Veterans Crisis Line, which is a suicide prevention hotline for veterans and their families.
- It boosts programs for homeless veterans by 4.4% from 2021 to “further the administration’s goal of achieving a systematic end to veteran homelessness,” the plan states.
- Allocation of \$40.3 million to hire 334 new claims processors to work on disability compensation claims. Hundreds of thousands of veterans are waiting for their earned benefits because of a backlog of compensation and pension exam requests that grew during the coronavirus pandemic. The new processors would work specifically on claims for Vietnam War veterans affected by bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson’s-like symptoms. Those conditions were added this year to a list of illnesses presumed to be caused by Agent Orange.
- An increase for medical and prosthetic research and for the VA’s Office of Health Equity, which aims to eliminate health disparities based on race, gender, and other demographics.

- A new initiative funded in Biden’s proposal would establish a partnership between the VA and Department of Labor to create a program to help veterans shift to careers in clean energy.

Biden’s proposal for the VA continues a pattern of increases for the department that lasted throughout the administrations of former Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump. The agency’s budget has increased consistently since the beginning of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. In 2009, the VA operated on a total budget of \$90 billion. Under Trump, the agency’s yearly budget surpassed \$200 billion, including mandatory and discretionary spending. Biden’s plan for the VA consists of \$113.1 billion in discretionary spending. The administration has not yet released estimates about mandatory spending, but in previous years it has totaled over \$130 billion. More details about Biden’s budget plan are expected to be released in the following weeks. Fiscal 2022 starts 1 OCT. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | April 9, 2021++]

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## **VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse**

### **Reported 01 thru 15 APR 2021**

**Pennsylvania** — The United States Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of Pennsylvania announced that a Lower Paxton Postal employee, **Candy Ehler**, age 51, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, pled guilty on 29 MAR before U.S. District Court Judge Sylvia H. Rambo to three counts of theft of mail by an employee.

According to Acting United States Attorney Bruce D. Brandler, on August 2, 2019, the United States Postal Service was notified that a medication package had not been received by its intended recipient. A pattern of missing/stolen medication packages containing opioid based controlled substances that required signature confirmation of receipt was confirmed. These packages were attempted to be delivered by the assigned mail carrier, but were returned to the Lower Paxton Post Office due to the intended recipients not being at their residence. Once returned to the Post Office, video surveillance revealed Postal Carrier Ehler, removing three controlled substance medication packages that were not on her primary route. Ehler did not have a request for second delivery attempt, and the intended recipients never received their medication.

The charges stem from an investigation by the United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General and Department of Veteran’s Affairs Office of Inspector General. Assistant United States Attorney Daryl F. Bloom is prosecuting the case. A sentence following a finding of guilt is imposed by the court after consideration of the applicable federal sentencing statutes and the Federal Sentencing Guidelines.

Ehler is facing a maximum of 15 years of incarceration and a \$750,000 fine. Under the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, the court is also required to consider and weigh a number of factors, including the nature, circumstances and seriousness of the offense; the history and characteristics of the defendant; and the need to punish the defendant, protect the public and provide for the defendant's educational, vocational and medical needs. For these reasons, the statutory maximum penalty for the offense is not an accurate indicator of the potential sentence for a specific defendant. [Source: DoJ Middle Dist. of PA | U.S. Attorney’s Office | March 29, 2021 ++]

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**New York — Muhammad Z. Aabdin**, 30, of New York City, has been charged by complaint with offering a bribe to a public official, Acting United States Attorney Antoinette T. Bacon and Special Agent in Charge Christopher F. Algieri, Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, Northeast Field Office. The complaint filed against Aabdin alleges that in September 2020, he offered a bribe to a contracting officer with the Veterans Administration (“VA”) in Syracuse. Specifically, Aabdin allegedly offered to share profits with the VA contracting officer in exchange for her awarding VA contracts to him for personal protective equipment (“PPE”).

Aabdin was arraigned 9 APR in a hearing held by videoconference before United States Magistrate Judge Miroslav Lovric and was released pending further proceedings. The charge filed against Aabdin carries a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison, a fine of up to \$250,000, and a term of supervised release of up to 3 years. A defendant’s sentence is imposed by a judge based on the particular statute the defendant is charged with violating, the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other factors. The charge in the complaint is merely an accusation. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. [Source: DoJ Northern District of New York | U.S. Attorney’s Office | April 9, 2021 ++]

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**New York — Shawn Pierre Hobbs**, a soldier for the Connecticut Army National Guard and a Rikers Island correction officer employed by the New York City Department of Correction (“NYC DOC”), was arrested 13 APR in El Paso, Texas, on wire fraud and aggravated identity theft charges. HOBBS is alleged to have defrauded the Department of Veterans Affairs and NYC DOC in order to receive financial and other benefits to which he was not entitled.

Hobbs, a National Guard soldier and correction officer at Rikers Island, allegedly submitted false certifications to receive veterans benefits for hundreds of hours of work he did not perform. Moreover, Hobbs allegedly forged the signatures of his colleagues to make the fraudulent paperwork appear to be authentic. Hobbs’s alleged conduct certainly does not befit that of a sworn officer of two government agencies, and thanks to the assistance of Veterans Affairs, he is now charged criminally for fraud and identity theft.”

The Manhattan federal court complaint alleges that from at least in or about April 2015, up to and including at least on or about April 8, 2021, Shawn Pierre Hobbs served as a soldier in the Army National Guard. Army National Guard soldiers hold civilian jobs or attend school while maintaining their military training part-time. The VA provides certain benefits to United States veterans, including Army National Guard soldiers, who work in approved on-the-job training programs. From at least in or about January 2019, up to and including at least on or about April 8, 2021, Hobbs was employed by NYC DOC as a correction officer at Rikers Island, a VA-approved on-the-job training program. NYC DOC employees who are members of the military are entitled to paid leave, with certain limitations, while they are engaged in the performance of ordered military duty.

From at least in or about January 2019, up to and including at least in or about March 2021, Hobbs defrauded the VA and NYC DOC in order to obtain VA Benefits and paid military leave from NYC DOC, among other things. Specifically, Hobbs submitted eight fraudulent military memoranda purportedly from the Army National Guard to NYC DOC in order to obtain paid leave. The fraudulent military memoranda each bore the seal of the United States Department of Defense and the letterhead of the Army National Guard, and falsely represented that HOBBS had served military duty on hundreds of days on which he, in fact, had not served. At the same time, Hobbs transmitted by fax 16 fraudulent employment certifications



to the VA that were purportedly from NYC DOC and falsely represented that he had worked for NYC DOC for hundreds of hours, which he had not worked. To effectuate this scheme, Hobbs used the names, identities, and signatures of an Army National Guard Platoon Leader, an Army National Guard Readiness Noncommissioned Officer, and a NYC DOC employee without their knowledge or authorization on the fraudulent military memoranda and employment certifications.

Shawn Pierre Hobbs, 34, is charged with one count of wire fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, and one count of aggravated identity theft, which carries a mandatory consecutive term of two years in prison. The statutory maximum and mandatory penalties are prescribed by Congress and are provided here for informational purposes only, as any sentencing of the defendant would be determined by a judge. [Source: DoJ Northern District of New York | U.S. Attorney's Office | April 13, 2021 ++]

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## **VA Lung Cancer Care**

### **Update 03: Early Screening Saves Lives | New SBRT Treatment**

Vietnam Veteran Bobby Richardson can attest to the effectiveness of early screening for lung cancer. Last year, he found out that he had stage 1 lung cancer when he took part in a nationwide VA program to boost the number of Veterans screened for lung cancer. He then got treatment through a VA clinical trial. The 69-year-old resident of Bloomfield, Indiana, says his VA doctor recommended screening for lung cancer based on his family history. Several aunts had died from cancer and Richardson had just lost his brother to advanced lung cancer. Following his own diagnosis, his sister was diagnosed with a different form of cancer. "My brother didn't have any symptoms up until the last year before he found out he had lung cancer," Richardson said. "He kept complaining that something was wrong. His doctor said, 'You are just getting emphysema.'" It wasn't until Richardson's brother switched his care to VA that he was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer.

Richardson, who drives a lumber truck for a living, says he was happy to participate in the screening program, the VA Partnership to increase Access to Lung Screening, or VA-PALS. "I was glad to do it because cancer runs in my family," he said. "That way I didn't have to worry about it." Fortunately, his doctors caught his cancer early when it was still treatable. The study through which Richardson subsequently got treated is the VA Lung Cancer Surgery Or Stereotactic Radiotherapy (VALOR) clinical trial. The VA-sponsored study compares two treatments for lung cancer – surgery vs. targeted radiation. Investigators hope to find out which treatment results in a better five-year survival rate for stage 1 non-small cell lung cancer. "I would definitely recommend other Veterans get screened." Study locations include these VA medical centers: Long Beach, California; Bay Pines, Florida; Atlanta, Georgia; Hines, Illinois; Indianapolis, Indiana; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Durham, North Carolina; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Houston, Texas; and Richmond, Virginia. Investigators aim to enroll 670 participants.

Historically, surgery to remove cancerous tissue has been the standard for treatment of stage 1 non-small cell lung cancer. However, surgery can be physically taxing for some patients, especially those who are elderly. Given that the average age of diagnosis for lung cancer is about 70, advanced age can be a significant factor in patient survival. A newer FDA-approved treatment called stereotactic body radiation therapy (SBRT) delivers high-dose X-rays to cancer cells. In frail or elderly patients, the therapy is easier to tolerate than surgery. Both surgery and SBRT can cure stage 1 non-small cell lung cancer. But no large

studies have compared the effectiveness of these two therapies in patients who are healthy enough to get surgery. VA researchers aim to collect data that will help physicians choose the most effective treatment for each patient.

Dr. Drew Moghanaki, radiation oncologist and co-chair for the VALOR study, believes that providing more options for patients with lung cancer is critical. "If we had data that showed that surgery or radiation therapy was better for a given patient, then we would be able to use safety and other criteria to decide which treatment to give," he said. "We would have more options to better match each patient to the optimal treatment." One year after treatment, Richardson is cancer-free. He will undergo follow-up care in VA for five years. He says he's one of the lucky ones. "My experience was pretty positive because my doctors cured me," Richardson said. "The thing of it was, I never felt sick, never felt bad. I didn't even know I had cancer until they told me. I would definitely recommend that other Veterans get screened. [Source: Vantage Point | Mark Turney / April 13, 2021 ++]

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## **VA Lawsuit | Vance Perry**

### **Update 01: \$1,000,000 Settlement Agreed Upon**

The federal government has agreed to pay \$1 million to the children of an Army veteran who froze to death after he was discharged from a Veterans Affairs hospital in Wisconsin. The family of Vance Perry filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the federal government in December. Perry's five children said the hospital in Madison was aware of their father's mental condition, which put him at risk of wandering away, and that staff knew he could not return to his residence on his own. The family's attorney, Terrence Polich, said someone at Memorial Veterans Hospital failed to make sure Perry got in a cab that had been called for him.

The 57-year-old father was found dead on New Year's Eve 2018 in a downtown parking garage a day after he left the hospital. The temperature had dipped to 6 below zero Fahrenheit the night before, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported. The settlement agreement does not include an admission of guilt or liability by the federal government, Polich said. "I'm pleased with how seriously the government took this case," Polich said. "Both the U.S. Attorney's Office and the VA." Perry had served in the U.S. Army from 1978 to 1984, when he was honorably discharged, according to the lawsuit. [Source: Associated Press | April 7, 2021 ++]

**\* Vets \***



## Vet Charity Watch

### Update 68: Sham 'Healing Heroes Network' Charity

The charity, founded by a Palm Harbor, Fla., doctor, was called Healing Heroes Network. Its stated goal: To use generous contributions from donors for medical care, therapy and rehabilitation for veterans wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11. "Often, these men and women are unable to receive the medical treatments that would help them return to a productive civilian life," read a fundraising letter. But this year, after a multistate investigation, the Florida Attorney General's Office called Healing Heroes "a sham veterans charity." A recent court settlement would prevent Dr. Allan Spiegel, 68, wife Stacey Spiegel, 59, and son Neal Spiegel, 31, from running a nonprofit for five years. They will also pay \$95,000 that will go to a veterans' charity that provides the kind of services Healing Heroes promised.

Healing Heroes Network, Inc. was formed in Palm Harbor in 2008, according to court records, and sought donations through telemarketing and direct mail. But "very little of the charitable contributions" went toward care for wounded veterans, the Attorney General's Office said. Instead, money went to professional telemarketing fundraisers, ads, salaries for Stacey and Neal Spiegel, and T-shirts from a family member's clothing business, according to state officials. In 2016 and 2017, Healing Heroes "falsely claimed" on social media that 100% of its proceeds went to wounded veterans, the Attorney General's Office said. In those two years, Healing Heroes provided or paid for medical services for only 10 veterans across the country, according to the civil action filed in Pinellas County court earlier this year.

In 2016, Healing Heroes' revenue was \$2.7 million. A small fraction of that — \$13,387 — was spent on grants and other direct services to veterans, court records said. "This is outrageous," Attorney General Ashley Moody said in a January news release. "The fact that anyone would exploit the service and sacrifice of our wounded military heroes to solicit money under false pretenses is deserving of the highest level of contempt." Dr. Spiegel did not return messages left at his medical office. Stacey Spiegel could not be reached for comment. Lawyers listed in court documents did not respond to phone and email requests for comment. Contacted by the Tampa Bay Times, Neal Spiegel declined to speak with a reporter.

Healing Heroes was dissolved in late 2017, and **Hero Giveaways** formed soon after. Court documents say Hero Giveaways did not use proceeds to provide benefits to veterans and their families "as advertised." Hero Giveaways was voluntarily dissolved in 2019. In the settlement court documents say was agreed to by the parties, Healing Heroes and Hero Giveaways cannot solicit for charitable donations again. The Spiegels agreed to pay the \$95,000 and can't oversee, manage or solicit donations for any nonprofit for five years, the Attorney General's Office said. The Florida proceedings were part of a joint action with California, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Virginia and Washington state. The multistate settlement is final in Florida, but awaiting court approval in one other state before the \$95,000 is recovered and distributed.

In 2013, as part of a yearlong investigation into charities across America, the Times and the Center for Investigative Reporting reviewed Healing Heroes. The report [cited a few red flags](#). Dr. Spiegel, a specialist in hyperbaric oxygen therapy, advocated it to treat some combat injuries, the Times reported. During a two-year period when the charity said it spent about \$160,000 on services for veterans, he got paid more than half of that. Stacey Spiegel ran the nonprofit a few doors down from her husband's medical practice and in 2012 earned \$110,000 as its treasurer, the Times reported.

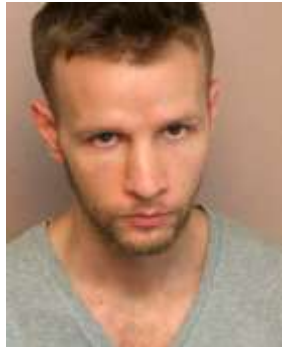
To avoid potential charity scams, the Attorney General's Office advises searching the name of the enterprise online along with the word "scam" or "complaint." Would-be donors should also avoid being swayed by a charity's name alone. [Source: Tampa Bay Times| Sue Carlton | March 25, 2021++]

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## **Vet Indictments**

### **Reported 01 thru 15 APR 2021**

**Leaking Classified Documents** -- A former Air Force intelligence analyst pleaded guilty 31 MAR to leaking classified documents to a reporter about military drone strikes against al-Qaida and other terrorist targets. The guilty plea from **Daniel Hale**, 33, of Nashville, Tennessee, comes just days before he was slated to go on trial in federal court in Alexandria, Virginia, for violating the World War I-era Espionage Act.



Hale admitted leaking roughly a dozen secret and top-secret documents to a reporter in 2014 and 2015, when he was working for a contractor as an analyst at the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA). While court papers never specified the recipient of the leak, details about the case make it clear that the documents were given to Jeremy Scahill, a reporter at The Intercept, who used the documents as part of a series of critical reports on how the military conducted drone strikes on foreign targets. He faces up to 10 years in prison at sentencing scheduled for 13 JUL.

The original indictment against Hale states that he reached out to the reporter in April 2013 while still enlisted in the Air Force and assigned to the National Security Agency. The leaks continued after Hale became a private contractor and was assigned to NGA. Hale's lawyers sought unsuccessfully last year to have the case tossed on First Amendment grounds. They also argued that the case was a selective and vindictive prosecution. Defense lawyers said that while Hale was being punished for leaking information about negative aspects of the drone program, the government seemed unconcerned about anonymous leaks by government officials about successful strikes.

More broadly, they said use of the Espionage Act against whistleblowers has a chilling effect on free speech and a free press. The law has been used by multiple presidential administrations in recent years against multiple whistleblowers. It also allows for prosecution of journalists who receive and publish the information. The Eastern District of Virginia, where Hale pleaded guilty, has been a frequent location over the years for cases involving leaks and whistleblowers. Prosecutors there have filed criminal charges

against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange and against former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden. Both remain overseas despite U.S. efforts to obtain their extradition.

In 2015, a judge imposed a 3 ½-year sentence on former CIA officer Jeffrey Sterling, who was convicted of exposing government secrets to a New York Times reporter. In 2013, another former CIA man, John Kiriakou, was sentenced to 2 ½ years in prison after pleading guilty to leaking a covert officer's identity to a reporter. Kiriakou's indictment in 2012 prompted then-CIA Director David Petraeus to issue a statement reminding his agency's employees of the need for secrecy in their work. In 2015, Petraeus pleaded guilty in federal court in North Carolina to a charge of unauthorized removal and retention of classified information. He was sentenced to probation.

Hale pleaded guilty to a single count of illegally retaining and transmitting national defense information, part of the Espionage Act. The other four counts against him were not dropped as part of the plea deal, as would be typical, but were placed in abeyance, giving the government at least the theoretical opportunity to bring the other counts to trial. Press and whistleblower advocates have urged President Joe Biden's administration to reverse course in prosecuting leak cases, particularly under the Espionage Act. Jameel Jaffer, director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, said the Espionage Act makes no distinction between someone who discloses secrets to benefit a foreign adversary or to get paid, as opposed to someone who feels a moral obligation to disclose problems inside of government.

Jaffer is a former American Civil Liberties Union lawyer who spent years filing lawsuits under the Freedom of Information Act seeking information about the drone program. He said those lawsuits ultimately yielded little information and credited whistleblowers like Hale for many of the disclosures that showed the drone program was not as precise in its strikes as the government portrayed. He said there's bipartisan awareness that the law poses problems and he's optimistic it will eventually be revised. "There's a recognition that the government's interest in protecting national security secrets is important, but it's not the only important thing," Jaffer said.

But Raj Parekh, acting U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, said in a statement that those entrusted with government secrets don't get to decide for themselves whether to keep them. "Those who are entrusted with classified information have a duty to safeguard that information in order to protect our Nation's security," he said. "As an analyst for the Intelligence Community, Daniel Hale knowingly took highly classified documents and disclosed them without authorization, thereby violating his solemn obligations to our country." [Source: Associated Press | Matthew Barakat | April 1, 2021 ++]

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**Fort Stewart Stabbing Death --** Two former soldiers have been indicted on charges including murder in the death of another soldier who was found stabbed to death in his room on a Georgia military base, according to court documents unsealed 12 APR. **Byron Booker**, 28, of Ludowici, and **Jordan Brown**, 21, of St. Marys, are charged in the June 2020 death of 24-year-old Austin J. Hawk at the U.S. Army's Fort Stewart. Amy Lee Copeland, a lawyer for Brown, said in an email that she doesn't comment on pending cases. A lawyer listed in online court documents for Booker did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment on the charges.



Byron Booker in a SEP 10, 2020 photo

The indictment says the two men conspired to retaliate against Hawk for reporting Booker to Army leadership for “poor leadership, poor military performance, and maltreatment of subordinates” and for reporting Brown for using drugs. In mid-June the Booker and Brown discussed “silencing” Hawk and discussed different ways to do that, including beating him, poisoning him and smothering him with a pillow and discussed Brown providing Booker with a key to Hawk's room so he “could enter without authority and ‘silence’ Specialist Hawk,” the indictment says.

Booker left his home in Ludowici on 17 JUN, purposely leaving his cellphone at home to create an alibi and avoid detection by law enforcement, and drove to a parking lot near Fort Stewart, the indictment says. He entered the Army post and walked about a mile to Hawk's barracks. He then “stabbed, cut and slashed” Hawk and then, after leaving Fort Stewart on foot, he got rid of the clothes and shoes he'd been wearing, the indictment says. Booker has been in custody since 18 JUN, and Brown was taken into custody after a grand jury returned the indictment against him last week, prosecutors said in a news release.

“It is a high priority for our office to pursue justice for members of the military who are victims of violent crime,” Acting U.S. Attorney David Estes said in a news release 12 APR. Booker is charged with premeditated murder and murder of a member of the U.S. uniformed services. Both Booker and Brown are charged with felony murder, assault upon a member of the U.S. uniformed services, burglary and retaliation against a witness, as well as conspiracy charges. The murder charges carry possible sentences of mandatory life in prison or death. [Source: Stars & Stripes | April 12, 2021 ++]

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## **Vet Homelessness**

### **Update 106: Secretaries of VA, HUD Joint Statement on Ending It**

The Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress found that on a single night in January 2020, there were 37,252 Veterans experiencing homelessness in America, an increase of 0.4% over 2019. This number does not account for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has added to the nation's housing challenges, including among Veterans. AHAR showed investments from Congress along with strong collaboration between the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) brought about a 47% reduction in Veteran homelessness between 2010 and 2016. However, a GAO report found that, since 2016, progress towards ending Veteran homelessness has stalled. We find this pattern deeply concerning. No Veteran who has served this country — let alone more than 37,000 on a given night — should experience homelessness.



We, the secretaries of VA and HUD, are aligning efforts and joining forces to work towards ending Veteran homelessness. We are mobilizing the strength of our two departments to do everything in our power to ensure every Veteran has access to safe and stable housing. We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to tackle this crisis. The American Rescue Plan included more than \$10 billion in funding for individuals who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. The American Jobs Plan would invest \$213 billion to produce, preserve, and retrofit more than two million affordable homes.

Our collaboration is the first step of a multi-phased whole-of-government effort that will ultimately help us end Veteran homelessness. We will evaluate existing strategies, implement new approaches when necessary, and execute a plan to ensure we achieve tangible results that incorporate best practices, feedback, and lessons learned from Veterans, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders. To fulfill this mission, we will:

- **Make ending Veteran homelessness a top priority** – VA and HUD will prioritize this effort at the highest levels. Staff in both agencies will collaboratively develop a strategy to significantly reduce the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness, as well as a strategy to ensure that no Veteran experiences homelessness in the future. The secretaries will participate in listening sessions with stakeholder groups, including Veterans with lived expertise. Information and materials gathered will be analyzed for use during quarterly meetings with homeless program staff from both departments to inform decisions about changes to policies and programs. We will develop targets, assess progress, and hold our agencies accountable.
- **Lead with an evidence-based Housing First approach** – Evidence and past progress on reducing Veteran homelessness demonstrate a Housing First approach works. Together, our agencies will ensure targeted interventions (such as HUD-VA Supportive Housing, Supportive Services for Veteran Families, and Grant and Per Diem) help Veterans obtain stable housing as quickly as possible without barriers or preconditions.
- **Reach underserved Veterans** – Reducing Veteran homelessness will require new approaches to serving Veterans for whom prior efforts may have fallen short. These include Veterans with less than honorable discharge status, as well as Veterans who are women, members of racial and ethnic minority groups, transgender and gender non-conforming, aging, and/or living in rural areas. We will ensure our interagency effort identifies and removes barriers to VA care and services, so benefits are equitably available among underserved Veteran communities.
- **Ensure the delivery of quality supportive services** – Supportive services are critical to helping Veterans find and retain housing, and to use it as a platform for achieving health, recovery, and economic success. Working diligently with federal and community stakeholders, we commit to identifying ways to ensure Veterans have access to quality supportive health, mental health, and medical legal services alongside employment and housing assistance, whether provided by VA or community partners.
- **Increase the supply of and access to affordable housing** – A significant obstacle to ending Veteran homelessness is the lack of affordable housing, especially in many urban centers. We will work jointly, including examining opportunities through the American Rescue Plan and the American Jobs Plan, to increase the supply of affordable housing and ensure Veterans have access. Our agencies will do this by engaging landlords, and affordable housing developers, supporting the use of federal programs to create and subsidize affordable housing, identifying

ways to improve Veteran access to these housing units, and supporting state and local collaboration to finance and create affordable housing.

Working to end Veteran homelessness requires a multi-agency effort, coordinated through the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. Together, we can enhance how we deliver services and provide opportunities to Veterans to ensure we bring the full force of the federal government to end Veteran homelessness. [Source: VA OPIA News Release | April 12, 2021 ++]

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## **Vet Fugitives**

### **01 thru 15 April 2021**



**Raymond McLeod** -- More than four years after his girlfriend was found dead in a San Diego apartment, a Marine veteran is now one of the most-sought fugitives from justice in the U.S. Police say Raymond McLeod Jr., 37, strangled Krystal Mitchell, 30, on June 10, 2016 while they were visiting a friend of McLeod's in San Diego. He is now one of the U.S. Marshals Service's "15 Most Wanted" fugitives, the agency announced on a 5 APR episode of "America's Most Wanted" and in a press release. The USMS also announced an unprecedented reward for information leading to McLeod's arrest. "Raymond McLeod will be the first fugitive in history on our 15 Most Wanted list with an initial reward of up to \$50,000," said U.S. Marshal Service Director Donald Washington. "We want McLeod's new status as a 15 Most Wanted fugitive and the \$50,000 reward amount to be broadcasted far and wide. McLeod poses a significant threat to the public and must be brought to justice."

McLeod's friend found Mitchell dead in his apartment's guest bedroom, according to America's Most Wanted, but McLeod was nowhere to be found. San Diego prosecutors quickly charged McLeod with murder, but authorities could not find him, and he has evaded capture since. "We're not going to let this defendant run from justice and get away with murder," said San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan in a press release. U.S. Marshals believe McLeod fled to Central America and likely remains there in expatriate communities today. Soon after allegedly murdering Mitchell, McLeod rented a car at San Diego International Airport. The rental was found abandoned in Mazatlan, Mexico on June 13, 2016, according to authorities.

Deputy Inspector Frankie Sanchez told "America's Most Wanted" that McLeod was spotted at a Guatemala hostel in 2017. The former Marine also surfaced in Belize in 2018, according to the USMS press release. Krystal Mitchell's mother, former police detective Josephine Wentzel, told America's Most

Wanted that she had successfully solicited the 2017 and 2018 tips on McLeod's whereabouts by placing social media advertisements with photographs of the Marine veteran. McLeod has a distinctive muscular physique and unique tattoos covering his lower arms. "Catching McLeod will not bring my daughter back, but would prevent this monster from killing someone else's mother, daughter or sister," Wentzel said in the San Diego DA's press release. "It would also mean that Krystal's children can sleep at night, knowing he's been stopped. McLeod has a history of extreme violence against women and even a small child. His tendency is to stalk his victims and strike when they least expect it. He is a ticking time bomb that could go off at any moment and I hope the public will take action and help us bring him to justice."

"Anyone with information is urged to contact the nearest U.S. Marshals office, the U.S. Marshals Service Communications Center at 1-877-WANTED-2, or online via the web or an app at [www.usmarshals.gov/tips](http://www.usmarshals.gov/tips)," said the release. Marine Corps service records show McLeod joined the Marines in July of 2003 and was a combat veteran, having earned the Combat Action Ribbon as his only personal decoration during a four-year enlistment as a light armored vehicle crewman. He deployed to Haiti in 2004 and to Iraq in 2005 before leaving the Corps in 2007 as a Lance Corporal. [Source: MarineCorp[sTimes | Davis Winkie | April 7, 2021 ++]

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## **Air Force Review Board**

### **New Boards Agency Website Launched**

The Department of the Air Force debuted a new website for past and present Airmen and Guardians to correct their military records, 5 APR. Members, and those submitting on their behalf, can submit applications and supporting documents to four boards:

- The Air Force Board for Correction of Military Records,
- Air Force Discharge Review Board,
- Department of Defense Discharge Appeal Review Board, and
- Department of Defense Physical Disability Board of Review.

"Across the Air Force, our workload kept increasing with more and more applications for records corrections, but without a corresponding increase in manpower," said Clifford Tompkins, [Air Force Review Boards Agency](#) mission support director. "We had to become more efficient and one area identified was the amount of physical time that it took to handle hard-copy mail, so the idea of having an electronic way that people can apply, made sense." The Air Force Review Boards Agency has worked on the new website since last year to improve efficiency for record corrections. To make the portal accessible to both current and former service members, the website does not require a Common Access Card. Instead, a unique e-application number will be provided to track each case.

Despite the launch of the website, members can still submit applications via mail; however, processing times may be slower. Members can use their unique e-application number to check the status of their application, whether it was submitted online or via mail. "In the application portal, we designed a decision tree that guides members through the process of figuring out which board they should apply to and determine their eligibility to apply based on their service and the issue they're trying to get corrected for the records," Tompkins explained. Additionally, the website will serve as a single source of information on seven other boards:

- Air Force Civilian Appellate Review Office
- Air Force Personnel Board
- Civilian and Military Service Review Board
- Foreign Government Employment
- Secretary of the Air Force Personnel Council
- Secretary of the Air Force Remission Board
- Security Protection Directorate

"Despite conflicting information on the web, our intent is to provide updated and unified information through this single site, describing all of our boards, their requirements, eligibility and the methods for applying to those boards," Tompkins said. Visit the records correction website at <https://Afrba-portal.cce.af.mil>. [Source: Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs | Tech. Sgt. Areca T. Wilson | April 05, 2021 ++]

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## Vietnam Vets [48]

### Raul Perez Benavidez | 2 Tour Twice Wounded MOH MSG



Raul Perez Benavidez, nicknamed Roy, was born in August 1935 in Cuero, Texas, and grew up in El Campo, Texas. Before enlisting in the Texas Army National Guard in 1952, he worked as a migrant farmworker. In June 1955, Benavidez received his infantry training at Fort Ord, California. By 1965, Benavidez was in Vietnam as a military adviser to the South Vietnamese Army. While gathering intelligence of possible Vietcong infiltration, Benavidez stepped on a land mine that left him with severe damage to his spine. Immediately taken to Brooke Army Hospital in San Antonio, Texas, doctors told him he would never walk again. Benavidez spent months of grueling rehabilitation and training at the U.S. Army Special Forces center. In January 1968, Benavidez eventually returned to Vietnam as staff sergeant with the Detachment B56, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces.

On May 2, 1968, a 12-man Special Forces team near Loc Ninh, Vietnam, came in contact with an entire infantry battalion of the North Vietnam People's Army. After several attempts to rescue the patrol, Benavidez boarded a helicopter and ordered the pilot to a clearing where he could jump from the flying helicopter. Armed only with a knife, he jumped from the helicopter carrying a medical bag and rushed under heavy small arms fire to join the trapped team. He ran to the crippled team. He carried and dragged half of the wounded men to the helicopters for extraction. Before his escape, the enemy shot down the

helicopter. To save the remaining survivors over the course of the six hour fight between the 13 men and an enemy battalion, Benavidez ordered another extraction attempt. As another helicopter landed, an enemy soldier attacked Benavidez, who grabbed the weapon and killed the enemy. Benavidez suffered a broken jaw and 37 bullet and bayonet puncture wounds. When they helped get him into the helicopter, his intestines were in his hands.

After arriving back at the FOB in Lộc Ninh, they learned that, in addition to loading all the trapped team's wounded, Benavidez had also loaded 3 dead Vietcong soldiers. (When they later asked him why, his reply was, "I didn't want to leave anybody behind! My mission was to recover all classified documents and if they had any papers on them, they got carried to the helicopter." Benavidez said that because he had a slight "oriental" look, they had laid him next to the enemy soldiers in the helicopter. Benavidez heard the zippers as the medics began zipping the enemy soldiers into body bags. Then he felt his legs being lifted and heard the zipper as they started zipping him into a body bag. In his mind, Roy said he was thinking "Oh God, no!"

As the zipper was reaching his shoulders, unable to talk or move his eyes because the dried blood on his face and eyes was so thick that they were sealed shut, Roy could hear his friend jumping up and down and telling the doctor "No, No, that's Roy Benavidez!" The doctor replied that he was sorry but there wasn't anything he could do for him. At that point the friend made the doctor at least put his hand on Roy's heart to check for a heartbeat. When Roy felt the hand on his chest, he said he made the 'best shot' he had ever made in his life: He spit in the doctor's face! The doctor then said, "I think he'll make it."

He spent the following year recovering from his injuries. In 1973, after more detailed accounts became available, Special Forces Lieutenant Colonel Ralph R. Drake insisted that Benavidez receive the Medal of Honor. By then, however, the time limit on the medal had expired. An appeal to Congress resulted in an exemption for Benavidez, but the Army Decorations Board still denied him the Medal of Honor. The board required an eyewitness account from someone present during the action, but Benavidez thought that no others were alive who had been at the "Six Hours in Hell."

In 1980, however, Brian O'Connor, a radioman in the attacked Special Forces team, provided a ten-page report of the engagement. O'Connor had been severely wounded (Benavidez had believed him dead), and was evacuated to the U.S. before his superiors could fully debrief him. O'Connor learned that Benavidez was alive by chance. He had been living in the Fiji Islands and was on holiday in Australia when he read a newspaper account of Benavidez from an El Campo newspaper. It had been picked up by the international press and reprinted in Australia. O'Connor soon contacted his old friend and submitted his report, confirming the accounts already provided by others and providing the missing eyewitness.

On 24 February 1981, President Ronald Reagan presented Roy Benavidez the Medal of Honor. Reagan reportedly turned to the press and said: "If the story of his heroism were a movie script, you would not believe it." He then read the official award citation. Benavidez reached the rank of master sergeant and completed a GED and a college degree. Benavidez married his childhood sweetheart, Hilaria Coy and the couple went on to have three children together: Noel, Yvette and Denise. During his retirement, he settled down with his family in El Campo, Texas. Benavidez often talked about the importance of education and the military at several military bases, schools and runaway shelters. Later in life, Benavidez became active in Veterans issues, lobbying for disability benefits and testifying at House committees.

Benavidez passed away on Nov. 29, 1998 and is buried at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio, Texas. [Source: Vantage Point | Adrienne Brookstein | March 25, 2021 ++]

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## WWII Vets 254

### Thiele Fred Harvey | Survivor of Iwo Jima



Fred Harvey was born in Memphis, Texas, in 1923. After living in Memphis for three days, his family moved to San Antonio, Texas. Harvey had a difficult time in school, so he left and decided to join the Marine Corps in 1942. He attended boot camp in San Diego, where he applied and joined the Paramarines. After finishing his training with the Paramarines, Harvey deployed overseas to Vella Lavella and Bougainville in the Solomon Islands with the 1st Parachute Battalion. While there, he fought in combat for the first time. Harvey later landed on Iwo Jima with the 26th Marines.

During the Battle of Iwo Jima, Harvey was part of a three-man patrol assigned to contact an adjoining company. While attempting to establish contact, the Japanese ambushed his patrol with heavy machine gun fire. The gun fire seriously wounded one member of his patrol. Harvey dragged the injured Marine to a nearby hole to provide them shelter from the gunfire, and from there, he held off the hostile forces with hand grenades and his rifle until a rescue squad arrived. To effectively evacuate the fallen Marine, Harvey exposed himself to enemy fire while directing heavy fire on the Japanese position. In an interview with the American Veterans Center, he recalled what helped him to survive his time on Iwo Jima: “Anytime I went into action, I was really scared, and that fear is what saved me.”

Harvey earned a Silver Star for his selflessness and devotion in saving the life of his fellow Marine. He left the Marines after the Battle of Iwo Jima and returned to Texas. In the years since his military career, Harvey has worked with the Nimitz Rotary Club and the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas, where he is speaks to high school students and service clubs about his experiences in the military. He also completed the Marine Corps marathon virtually in a custom wheelchair with the help of fellow Marines in 2020. Thank you for your service!

**Note:** To listen to Harvey recount his experiences while island hopping in the South Pacific go to the 29 minute video at [https://youtu.be/mLufRu\\_1uZ0](https://youtu.be/mLufRu_1uZ0). [Source: Vantage Point Blog | February 23, 2021 ++]

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## WWII Vets 255

### Philip E. Bonner Sr. | Battle of the Bulge Vet



Philip Edward Bonner Sr. was raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Before joining the Army, he was a coxswain for his high school's crew team and played trumpet for the marching band. After the Army drafted him in 1943, he served with the 159th Combat Engineer Battalion. Once deployed, his outfit landed at Utah Beach in Normandy, a month after D-Day. Bonner then took part in liberating Nazi concentration camps, including Buchenwald in Germany. He also fought in the Battle of the Bulge. Bonner first entered Luxemburg on Oct. 7, 1944. Bonner and his unit were building bridges and roads when the Germans suddenly counter-attacked. Ill prepared, they had limited weaponry. Many of them suffered frostbite on their feet.

In December 1944, Bonner's battalion helped defend Hill 313 during the Battle of the Bulge. American troops prevented the German capture of the main road from Echternach to Luxemburg. By Christmas Day, Bonner and his battalion were back in billets in Luxemburg. They were sitting around, relaxing when suddenly, the 4th Infantry Division commander surprised the group with two cases of champagne. He told them that since they fought so courageously, they deserved to have some fun. During his service, Bonner received a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart.

After Bonner left the Army, he became a Philadelphia police officer and later worked for the Pennsylvania Auditor General's Office. He was a proud Irishman and member of the Southwest St. Patrick's Club in Philadelphia. In 2001, Bonner served as Grand Marshal of the Philadelphia St. Patrick's Day Parade. Bonner died on Feb. 15, 2013, at age 87. We honor his service. [Source: Vantage Point | Rachel Heimann | March 17, 2021 ++]

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## Obit: Ray Lambert

9 April 2021 | Big Red One Medic

Ray Lambert, the Army medic who survived multiple wounds on D-Day and was saluted by a president on the World War II battle's 75th anniversary, died on 9 APR. He was 100. Lambert died at his home in Seven Lakes, North Carolina, with his wife and daughter by his side, said neighbor and friend Dr. Darrell Simpkins. The physician, who accompanied Lambert to France in June 2019, said the veteran succumbed to an aggressive form of facial cancer and congestive heart failure. "Ray was talking coherently, conversing on the phone, and enjoying visitors until yesterday," Simpkins wrote in an email to The Associated Press. "He was an amazing man."

The Alabama native was a medic with 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, part of the Army's 1st Division — the "Big Red One." He took part in the Allied invasions of North Africa and Sicily before his war came to an end June 6, 1944, on the sands of Omaha Beach. Sgt. Lambert was in the first wave of the assault. He was helping a wounded soldier in the heavy surf when a landing craft ramp dropped on him, pushing him to the bottom. "Ray was only 23, but he had already earned three Purple Hearts and two Silver Stars for fighting in North Africa and Sicily," then-President Donald Trump told a hushed crowd in 2019 at the American Cemetery overlooking the beach.



In this June 6, 2019, file photo, President Donald Trump salutes D-Day survivor Ray Lambert during a standing ovation for him at a ceremony at the American Military Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, France.

"They came to the sector, right here below us," Trump continued as Lambert sat behind him, his favorite purple "D-Day Survivor" cap on his head. "Again and again, Ray ran back into the water. He dragged out one man after another. He was shot through the arm. His leg was ripped open by shrapnel. His back was broken. He nearly drowned." At the end of his speech, Trump turned to face Lambert. "Ray," he said. "The free world salutes you."

For many years, the diminutive businessman refused to talk about the horrors he had witnessed and experienced overseas. But as he aged and his fellow veterans began passing away, he felt a sacred duty to share his story, and theirs. "I did what I was called to do," he wrote in his book, "Every Man a Hero," published shortly before the 75th anniversary. "As a combat medic, my job was to save people, and to lead others who did the same. I was proud of that job and remain so. But I was always an ordinary man, not one who liked being at the head of a parade... "My job now is to remember, not for my sake, but for the sake of others."

Lambert had made many trips to Normandy in France, visiting classrooms and posing for innumerable photos. During the 2019 trip, a French elementary school student asked Lambert if he still had nightmares about Normandy. "When I go to look at the beaches at Omaha, I remember all my friends that were killed there," he said. "And when I look at the Channel and the water is rough, I, it seems at times that I can hear voices." That morning in 1944, as bullets whizzed and mortar rounds splashed around him, Lambert scanned the beach for something, anything behind which he could safely treat the wounded. He spotted a lump of leftover German concrete, about 8 feet wide and 4 feet high (2.4 meters wide and 1.2 meters high). "It was my salvation," he said.

A plaque installed in 2018 now recognizes it as "Ray's Rock." Simpkins said Lambert requested that his ashes be buried at Arlington National Cemetery, and that some be scattered on Omaha Beach. Lambert is survived by his wife, Barbara, and daughter, Linda McInerney. He was preceded in death by his son,

Arnold Lambert. Breed, who is based in Raleigh, North Carolina, chronicled Lambert's last trip to Normandy. [Source: The Associated Press | Allen G. Breed | April 11, 2021 ++]

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

**As of 15 APR 2021**

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

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

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

Note that events listed on the Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule may be cancelled or rescheduled. Before traveling long distances to attend an event, you should contact the applicable RAO, RSO, event sponsor, etc., to ensure the event will, in fact, be held on the date\time indicated. Also, attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214. Please report broken links, comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and\or other military retiree\veterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, [Milton.Bell126@gmail.com](mailto:Milton.Bell126@gmail.com) [Source: Retiree\Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | April 15, 2021 ++]

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## **Vet Hiring Fairs**

**Scheduled As of 15 APR 2021**

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 | April 15, 2021 ++]

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## **Vet Unemployment 2021**

### **Update 03: MAR Down to 5.0%**

Veterans unemployment in March reached its lowest level since the start of the coronavirus pandemic more than a year ago, but still remains significantly higher than before the nationwide shutdowns and business restrictions began. On 2 APR, officials from the Bureau of Labor Statistics announced that unemployment among all veterans last month was at 5 percent, down from 5.5 percent in February and less than half of what it was in April 2020, right at the start of the pandemic.

Last spring, that number rose to 11.7 percent as civic and industry leaders shut down nearly all public gatherings and severely restricted non-emergency travel in an effort to stop the spread of coronavirus across America. Since then, nearly 550,000 Americans have died from complications related to the illness. Despite recent rollbacks of those restrictions and improvements in recent months in the unemployment estimates, more veterans remain looking for work now than they did before the pandemic. From April 2018 to February 2020, the veterans unemployment rate never rose above 4 percent, and fell as low as 2.3 percent. The 5 percent rate translates into about 450,000 veterans nationwide looking for steady work. BLS officials said about 8.5 million veterans are in the workforce today, with nearly 10 million already past retirement age or unable to work due to injuries and illness.

Iraq and Afghanistan War era veterans remain the hardest hit generational group of veterans looking for work, making up more than half of the unemployed group. Their unemployment rate rose to 6.1 percent in March, up slightly from the 5.9 percent rate in February. That group's figure rose as high as 13 percent in the early days of the pandemic. Nationally, the U.S. unemployment rate dropped to 6 percent in March, the 11th time the number has decreased month-to-month since peaking at 14.7 percent in April 2020. In February 2020, the last full month before pandemic shutdowns, the national rate was 3.5 percent.

On 31 MAR, during a speech unveiling his new infrastructure plan, President Joe Biden lamented that American "was in extreme distress on the day I was elected with a virus on a deadly rampage," resulting in "an economy that left millions out of work and created so much anxiety." He has proposed a nearly \$2 trillion infrastructure investment plan which would create new jobs to fill in some of the pandemic losses, but the ambitious and expensive package faces a difficult path in Congress. Meanwhile, Veterans Affairs

officials in coming weeks are expected to unveil a new job retraining program for veterans who lost their jobs due to the pandemic, part of the latest coronavirus relief plan approved by Congress last month. Eligibility for that program is restricted to individuals who have already used up other GI Bill education benefits but need new training and certifications to switch to in-demand industries. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | April 2, 2021 ++]

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## **Vet Employment Opportunities**

### **APR 15 Listings from Companies Looking For Vets**

Military Times has listings from companies looking for vets to hire which is updated daily. Anyone interested can check them out by clicking on <https://jobboard.militarytimes.com> which will open a daily listing by job title such as posted below. Clicking on the job title will reveal the company and location offering the position, the job summary and description, its core responsibilities, what employees are expected to do, plus prerequisite education and relevant work experience requirements. Also a tab to click on to apply for the job.

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### **APR 13**

- [\*\*92A Automated Logistical Specialist - Supply Chain\*\*](#)
- Army National Guard
- Plum Branch, SC, United States

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Job Board | April 15, 2021 ++]

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## **State Veteran's Benefits**

### **Illinois 2021**

The state of Illinois provides a number of services and benefits to its veterans. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**State Veteran's Benefits – IL**” for an overview of those in the below areas. They are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below plus the state's current position on veteran issues refer to MOAA's [www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard](http://www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard) & DVA's [www2.illinois.gov/veterans/Pages/default.aspx](http://www2.illinois.gov/veterans/Pages/default.aspx):

- Housing
- Financial Assistance
- Employment
- Education
- Recreation
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing
- Burial
- Taxation
- Other State Veteran Programs

**\* Vet Legislation \***



## **Military Retirement Pay**

### **Update 10: H.R.2214 | Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act**

New federal bipartisan legislation aims to prohibit the U.S. Department of Defense from clawing back or recouping some final retirement payments from veterans after they die. U.S. Reps. Mike Turner (R- Dayton) and John Garamendi (D-CA), reintroduced the former bill 116<sup>th</sup> Congress H.R.463, called **"Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act,"** late last week. Under Department of Defense policy, the final month's retirement benefit of a deceased veteran may be refunded if the family fails to immediately notify the DOD of a veteran's death, Turner noted in a joint release.

"Military families in grieving should not be punished under heartless and unnecessary penalties," Turner said. "Congressman Garamendi and I introduced the Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act to fix this misguided policy. Military families deserve our respect, and our bipartisan bill will help these families avoid undue hardship during what is already a difficult time." Military families are often unaware that the DOD's Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) can electronically pull back overpayments without their consent, the congressmen said in their release. The bill would end the practice for any benefit paid in the month in which a veteran was alive for at least 24 hours. "This results in joint bank accounts being drained of funds and subject to overdraft fees, all while the family is still grieving from their loved one's death," they said.

Kimberly Frisco, executive director of the Montgomery County Veterans Service Commission, said this is very much an issue. Families of veterans can find themselves dealing with grief and a loss of income simultaneously. Frisco said she has seen individuals come in for emergency financial help in these and similar situations. "The last month they're alive, they (the DOD and the DFAS) can take back that retiree's pay," she said. "It can leave the family in a lurch." Military families should compile a list of numbers they need to call when a loved veteran dies, such as DFAS and Veterans Affairs, she suggested. "The stress and grief of just making plans and final arrangements for your loved one is just overwhelming," Frisco said. "Sometimes they may not know where to go to do that."

"This is a terrible practice," Turner said in an interview with the Dayton Daily News on 29 MAR. "While people are mourning the loss of their loved one ... they end up in a financial crisis made by the DOD and actually reaching in to their checking account. People need security more than anything when they're mourning the loss of a loved one." He said he doesn't know how often such claw-backs occur. "Every time it happens, it's a tragedy." A similar piece of legislation was introduced in early 2019 in a previous session of Congress, but that bill did not receive a vote, according to GovTrack.



Garamendi is chairman of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness. Turner, also an Armed Services Committee member, cosponsored this legislation in 2019 as H.R.463. A spokeswoman for the Department of Veterans Affairs said the VA does not comment on pending legislation. If necessary family members can go to <https://www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/survivors/Retiree-Death> to report a relative's death to DFAS. [Source: The Dayton Daily News | Thomas Gnau | March 29, 2021 ++]

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## **Burn Pit Toxic Exposure**

### **Update 83: H.R.2368 | Conceding Our Vets' Exposure Now ... Act**

Rep. Elaine Luria (D-VA) unveiled an ambitious and potentially costly legislative effort 1 APR to open up compensation and health care to a large swath of veterans sick from exposure to burn pits, but some are concerned the bill doesn't go far enough. The **Conceding Our Veterans' Exposure Now and Necessitating Training Act** aims to streamline the claims process at the Department of Veterans Affairs by doing away with most of the burden of proof on veterans to show they got sick from breathing in burning garbage for up to a year at a time while deployed.

Most efforts to entitle burn pit victims to health care have been stuck in Congress in a struggle often referred to as the post-9/11 generation's Agent Orange, due to stalled legislation and the difficulty some veterans face navigating the VA bureaucracy seeking disability compensation. "This legislation is going to secure benefits for thousands of veterans who have sacrificed for their country only to be denied what they deserve," Luria, the chair of the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs subpanel of the House VA committee, said in a statement. "We cannot allow our veterans to face the same hardship as the veterans of past battles, who were exposed to toxins but waited decades for the research to catch up."

Luria's bill would cover veterans who served after Aug. 1, 1990, in Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia or the United Arab Emirates. It also covers veterans who served after the 9/11 attacks in Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan, the Philippines or "any other country determined relevant" by the VA secretary. Veterans would need only to prove they served in the affected areas during the covered time period and be diagnosed with one of the illnesses covered in the bill. Illnesses covered in Luria's bill include:

- Asthma that was diagnosed after a period of service
- Head cancer of any type
- Neck cancer of any type
- Respiratory cancer of any type
- Gastrointestinal cancer of any type
- Reproductive cancer of any type
- Lymphoma cancer of any type
- Lymphatic cancer of any type
- Kidney cancer
- Brain cancer
- Melanoma
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

- Constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative bronchiolitis
- Emphysema
- Granulomatous disease
- Interstitial lung disease
- Pleuritis
- Pulmonary fibrosis
- Sarcoidosis
- Rhinitis
- Sinusitis

Luria's legislation directly competes with another bill S.952 reintroduced in the Senate by Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Marco Rubio (R-FL). A House version of that bill is set to be reintroduced by Reps. Raul Ruiz (D-CA) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) in conjunction with a 13 APR press conference to be held by the four lawmakers and veteran advocates including former "Daily Show" host Jon Stewart. That bill also has the backing of key veteran groups, including the American Legion and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

While Luria's proposal covers more illnesses -- including rhinitis and sinusitis -- it could end up being a less costly bill in the long run, thus potentially easier to pass into law by cutting a key provision that could draw the ire of advocates. While Luria's bill has a larger roster of covered illnesses, it locks that list down and doesn't allow new conditions to be covered later, which could be an issue due to the dynamic nature of which new illnesses could be relevant from toxic exposure. The Ruiz-Fitzpatrick-Gillibrand-Rubio bill uses the law providing health care to the victims of the 9/11 attacks as a blueprint, due to the similarities of first responders getting sick and dying from inhaling toxic debris. Both the 9/11 bill passed into law and the burn pit bill allow additional health ailments to be added later.

Rosie Torres, who founded the advocacy group Burn Pits 360, said Luria's proposal "isn't as comprehensive" and limits the care the VA could deliver. "We appreciate they're using Gillibrand and Ruiz's as a template, but there are important provisions not in it," Torres said in an interview with Military.com. "We just don't know; there hasn't been enough time to see the full picture. With 9/11, they're still adding [sicknesses.]" Another key difference between the bills is how a veteran would prove they were exposed. While Luria's bill outlines countries a veteran would have several ways to prove they served in, the other proposal would require a veteran to submit documentation that they received a campaign medal associated with the Global War on Terror or the Gulf War.

It is unclear whether there's a greater burden of proof by showing documentation for medals or proving service in a specific country. However, medals veterans are entitled to aren't always awarded or reflected in official records such as a DD-214. But there could also be barriers to veterans trying to prove they served in a specific country, such as no longer having access to their orders.

For decades, the military used open-air burn pits to dispose of garbage, paint, plastics, jet fuel and human waste. Now, some veterans are getting sick and dying from what they believe are cancers and other illnesses caused by breathing in the toxic fumes. The issue has even touched the White House. President Joe Biden suspects his son Beau's death of brain cancer in 2015 was due to exposure to burn pits in Iraq; he served as a major in the Delaware Army National Guard. Some advocates and lawmakers believed the president's personal connection to the issue would ignite momentum on legislative action, but he has not mentioned burn pits since taking office.

It is unclear how many veterans are sick or have died from toxic exposure. From June 2007 to February this year, more than 13,900 veterans filed for disability claims for issues they believed were related to burn pit exposure. Less than 4,000 claims were granted, according to Luria's office. The VA has not responded to a request for additional data by Military.com But the data probably doesn't show the scope of what could be a massive health crisis. The VA hasn't been clear on why some veterans get care and compensation and others are turned away. Right now, it can be difficult for a veteran to prove they served near a burn pit and connect that service to a disease.

More than 230,000 veterans have registered for the VA's burn pit data collection registry. The department estimates about 3.5 million veterans have been exposed to burn pits, according to a 2015 report. Efforts to provide medical care to military victims of burn pits have long been plagued by delays in Congress and the VA. The VA maintains the science is not clear on diseases potentially caused by burn pit exposure. Advocates, however, have argued the department is stalling and repeating mistakes made with Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange and World War II veterans exposed to radiation. [Source: Military.com | Steve Beynon | April 1, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Family Hunger**

### **H.R. 2339 | Basic Needs Allowance (BNA)**

Junior enlisted military families with two or three dependents face food insecurity, rely on food banks, and fear the stigma of seeking help. Imagine being an E-4 with a struggling family who is banking on the next promotion board to E-5. These hard-working enlisted families often do not seek help because they don't want to jeopardize their promotion out of poverty. And many who do seek help can't qualify for it. Because the Department of Agriculture counts the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) as income, many military families aren't eligible for assistance under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps). This enduring problem for young military families has been intensified by reduced child care availability that drove up spouse unemployment rates.

Families of young enlisted members – especially E-3s and E-4s with two or three dependents – truly struggle. The days of the adage: “if the (insert your service) really wanted you to have a family, they would have issued you one” are over, and demographics have changed for our junior enlisted. This enduring compensation problem has been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has increased spouse unemployment rates and complicated life for all military families. It's an embarrassing problem, one that has garnered media attention in recent months:

- CBS News reported on military families relying on food banks in San Diego and Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. (video and transcript [at Yahoo! News](#))
- Texas Public Radio addressed the [high rate of food insecurity](#) among military families in that state.

The 13th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (Volume 1 PDF) found most junior servicemembers promote out of this problem and recommended no change to compensation related to this issue. Unfortunately, this assessment does not consider the physical and mental developmental impacts of food insecurity on military children. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates 10,200 families of

servicemembers would benefit from a Basic Needs Allowance (BNA) to combat food insecurity – H.R. 2339 would provide such an allowance.

Under this legislation, a BNA automatically tied to a calculation of income and the poverty line would provide an estimated \$400 a month of much-needed help for military families with food insecurity. This systemic solution will remove the stigma of asking for help for junior enlisted families, with a relatively low cost (\$44 million a year). Readers are requested to ask their lawmakers to support the Military Hunger Prevention Act. This they can easily do through the MOAA Take Action site. All they need to do is to click on <https://takeaction.moaa.org/moaa/app/write-a-letter?0&engagementId=511409> to preview a preformatted editable message to their lawmakers. Whether they use it as written or edit it to their desire they can forward it to their legislators by simply entering their contact data and clicking **SUBMIT**. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Mark Belinsky | April 7, 2021 ++]

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## **Vet Toxic Exposure Legislation**

### **Update 13: S.952 | Warfighters Act**

Modern warfare has brought instances such as defoliants sprayed so liberally in Vietnam, the intense plume from the explosion in 1990 of the Khamsiyah during the Persian Gulf War; the ingestion of depleted uranium and the fumes from oil field fires in Kuwait and Iraq; the effects on those who worked in and lived near the burn pits that were a feature of the landscape at U.S. and Allied bases during Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operations Iraqi Freedom and New Dawns in Iraq; and a litany of exposures to toxic materials at bases throughout CONUS.

The bipartisan ***S.952 Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and other Toxins Act*** introduced by Senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Marco Rubio will establish a list of new diseases as service-connected for which veterans having deployed since August 2, 1990, can receive VA benefits as a result of their military toxic exposures. Many call burn pits and other toxic exposures the post-9/11 generation's Agent Orange. Burn pits were a common way to get rid of waste in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we have seen a widespread trend in health symptoms associated with this and other military toxic exposures

Your help is needed in getting this critical legislation passed into law. The Warfighters Act is endorsed by: The American Legion, Burn Pits 360, Cease Fire Campaign, Dixon Center, Feal Good Foundation, Go2 Foundation for Lung Cancer, Green Beret Foundation, Grunt Style, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Military Veterans Advocacy, National Association County Veterans Service Officers, National Veterans Legal Services Program, Reserve Officers Association, Stronghold Freedom Foundation, Sgt. Sullivan Circle, Veterans for Common Sense, Veteran Warriors Inc., Vietnam Veterans of America, Vote Vets, Wounded Warrior Project.

Stand with VVA and many other veterans organizations nationwide and ask your Senator to cosponsor S.952 The Warfighters Act NOW! One way to do this is to log in at <https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/evN-uT5xM2R9cyNyFSSFag>. If you agree with the message they have prepared on their Legislative Action Center site click send to forward it to your senator under your name. [Source: VVA Legislative Alert | April 10, 2021 ++]

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## **Burn Pit Toxic Exposure**

### **Update 84: H.R.0000/S.437 | Veterans Burn Pits Exposure Recognition Act**

Reps. Elissa Slotkin (D-MI), and Peter Meijer (R-MI) introduced a bill 8 APR that removes a key barrier for veterans exposed to toxic fumes while serving overseas to access benefits. It is the seventh piece of legislation introduced in Congress in recent weeks designed to help veterans who were exposed to toxic fumes while serving on military installations. On both sides of the political aisle, lawmakers in Washington are ramping up efforts to expand care for veterans who became sick after breathing the toxic fumes. And the litany of bills illustrate the growing appetite in Congress to address the issue, especially with President Joe Biden believing his son died from toxic exposure.

“We have a unique opportunity before us. There has never been this much momentum before. There has never been this much legislation before,” said Shane Liermann, the deputy national legislative director for benefits for the advocacy group Disabled American Veterans. Lawmakers, veterans and advocates contend the high level of attention is significant and makes a proposal on the issue more likely to pass a vote. The measures are described as complementary to each other that all tackle different parts of the problem. The U.S. military used open-air pits during the 1990s and the post-9/11 wars to dispose of waste such as jet fuel, paint and plastics in Iraq and Afghanistan, among other countries. The smoke and emissions from the burn pits contained chemicals that can cause a number of health problems.

The bill introduced by Slotkin and Meijer would formally recognize veterans who served near burn pits on overseas deployments were exposed to airborne hazards and other toxins, easing the veterans’ burden of proof. Dubbed a “concession of exposure” bill, it would concede veterans’ exposure during deployed services. “As someone who lived close to a burn pit in each of my three tours in Iraq, I know this is an important first step in cutting through red tape and getting veterans care for the conditions caused by toxic exposure,” said Slotkin, who served as a CIA analyst. The **Veterans Burn Pits Exposure Recognition Act** is a companion bill to that measure, which was formerly S.2950 and reintroduced as S.437 in February by Sens. Dan Sullivan (R-AK) and Joe Manchin (D-WV),

These bills aren’t the first efforts to help veterans exposed to toxic environments. Some lawmakers have pushed other legislation that gives care and compensation to veterans, though those efforts have stalled up to now. But some advocates said they believe having high-profile figures, such as Biden, pushing the issue has kept the conversation on toxic exposure alive. Comedian Jon Stewart has also brought attention to the issue by standing alongside advocacy groups and lawmakers to launch a campaign last year that helped raise awareness. For years, Stewart led outreach efforts to attain benefits for first responders in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Biden has said he believes toxic smoke is the cause of the brain cancer that killed his son Beau in 2015. Beau Biden was a major in the Delaware Army National Guard and was exposed to burn pits during a deployment to Iraq. Thousands of veterans have sought care from the Department of Veterans Affairs for illnesses that they believe were caused by serving overseas near burn pits, such as cancers, respiratory issues and lung diseases. However, the VA has said there is insufficient evidence to back up the claims. Veterans affected by burn pits have faced hurdles to receiving care. Sick service members must provide

evidence that their illness is linked to toxic exposure, as well as proof that they have been exposed at a certain location.

Advocates have said this is a challenge and sometimes impossible to prove because it's difficult to pinpoint the exact location of overseas service and the fact that there was a burn pit at that location. The VA also does not have clear guidance on who qualifies for compensation tied to toxic exposure. The VA estimates about 3.5 million veterans have been exposed to toxic piles of trash in Iraq, Afghanistan and other military sites, according to a 2015 report. However, a department official said last year that it denied 78 percent of claims to gain access to benefits. The new proposal from Slotkin and Meijer streamlines the VA's disability claims process by conceding exposure to burn pits for certain locations. It's in line with the concession of exposure that veterans have been granted for Agent Orange, a chemical herbicide used by the U.S. military in Vietnam that is linked to causing cancer, among other illnesses.

The bill would also require the VA conduct a medical examination if the department doesn't have enough evidence to grant service connection, which is necessary to get a claim approved. Though the bill does not automatically grant benefits or health care to veterans who served near a burn pit, it does provide "something you can do now," Liermann said. "While everybody's waiting on science or trying to agree with what diseases should be added as presumptives, here is something you can implement right now, to help veterans get benefits right now," he said. Two other bills introduced in the last couple of weeks do focus on presumptives, or illnesses listed by the VA as presumed conditions of toxic exposure for which a veteran could receive disability compensation. Both bills include a lengthy list of health conditions associated with exposure that lawmakers want the VA to add to its list.

One measure H.R.2368 from Rep. Elaine Luria (D-VA) called the "Conceding Our Veterans' Exposures Now and Necessitating Training Act" would ease the burden of proof for veterans. Under the proposal, veterans would have to prove they suffer from a qualifying health condition on an expansive list of illnesses diagnosed after service, such as asthma and several types of cancer. Veterans would also have to prove they deployed to a country from a list of nations. Luria's bill includes two health conditions that are not listed in similar legislation S.952 Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and other Toxins Act (i.e. Warfighters Act) reintroduced the prior week from Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Marco Rubio (R-FL). Under the Senate proposal, veterans would have to prove they received a campaign medal associated with the Global War on Terror or the Gulf War.

While Luria's bill has a slightly larger number of covered illnesses, it does not allow for new conditions to be covered later. The Gillibrand-Rubio bill does allow additional health ailments to be added later due to the growing body of research that shows new illness could be tied to toxic exposure, potentially making it more costly. A House version of the Gillibrand-Rubio bill was introduced this week by Reps. Raul Ruiz, (D-CA) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA). In an interview last week, Luria, who is the chairwoman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee subpanel that will eventually consider all of the proposals, said she wants to bring the proposals together after reviewing them. "Our plan is to consider all of these pieces of legislation and the various parts of them related to toxic exposure ... I think that it's a good sign that so many people are introducing legislation to approach this problem," she said. The 20-year Navy veteran said there's a "sense of urgency" in Congress to get something passed soon.

Another bill in the mix is the Toxic Exposure in the American Military Act, or TEAM Act (formerly S.4393 & H.R.8506), which has been reintroduced in the House and Senate already. It would provide health care eligibility for any veteran who was exposed to toxic substances, regardless of whether they're



able to establish service connection or not. On the basis that they were exposed, they can enroll in VA health care and remain enrolled. The qualification to be enrolled in VA health care is normally that you must have a service-connected disability.

Aleks Morosky, a government affairs specialist for the advocacy group Wounded Warrior Project, said he sees the large number of bills that attempt to address toxic exposure as “pieces of the puzzle” that could pass as a package because they all target different aspects of the issue. If the “best” parts of each bill come together, it will take less time to get them through Congress. “When it’s a big issue, there’s going to be a lot of members of Congress who are interested in the issue and wanting to introduce bills... [which] shows that it’s a high priority,” he said. Liermann agreed competing bills do not undermine the overall effort. But he said the “concession of exposure” bill is a top priority because it will take time to agree on a list of presumptive illnesses. Then, veterans must be ensured of health care, aided by the TEAM Act, and the bills that add presumptive diseases could come last. However, “eventually, we’re going to need all of them together,” Liermann said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Sarah Cammarata | April 9, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Pregnancy Discharge**

### **H.R.2385 | Justice for Women Veterans Act**

A California lawmaker has introduced a bill that would require the Government Accountability Office to investigate the involuntary discharge of thousands of women from military service from the 1950s to the 1970s due to pregnancy or motherhood -- something that could end up restoring benefits to those who lost them through unwarranted dismissals. Democratic Rep. Julia Brownley on 8 APR introduced the "**Justice for Women Veterans Act**," which would commission a study to identify "irregularities in discharges that may have left these women without the veterans' benefits that they earned," according to a release.

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"The unfair practice of discharging women from the military because they became pregnant or became a mother was not only wrong but it perpetuated a harmful cycle of gender prejudice," Brownley said in the release. "My goal is to identify disparities in access to care and benefits for women veterans and, where necessary, introduce, advocate for, and pass legislation that fixes those gaps." The study would look at involuntary discharges between 1951 and 1976, when Executive Order 10240 was in effect. Signed by President Harry Truman on April 27, 1951, it stipulated that women could be removed "regardless of rank, grade, or length of service." During that time, the Pentagon granted discretionary authority to the service branches to discharge women due to pregnancy, childbirth or becoming parents or stepparents through adoption.

Brownley's office said the policy was prejudiced against "thousands of women who became pregnant, regardless of whether the pregnancy was planned, unplanned, or the result of sexual violence." Women were not given the courtesy of separation benefits, counseling or any type of assistance despite their removal from the armed forces, the release states. The GAO will look at the executive order's impact, including how women of a particular race or ethnicity may have faced other discrimination. The congressional watchdog will make recommendations on the best ways to potentially restore those benefits, the release adds. "This bill is the first step in assessing the impact of this discriminatory practice against servicewomen and will provide recommendations on how to restore fairness for these women veterans," Brownley said.

The review would be similar to an investigation released in May 2017 into other-than-honorable discharges of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury. The GAO found that, of roughly 92,000 service members discharged for misconduct between 2011 and 2015, two-thirds "were diagnosed with PTSD, TBI or other conditions such as adjustment, anxiety, bipolar or substance abuse disorders within two years before leaving the service." That GAO study also said the military services were inconsistent in considering whether service-connected medical issues contributed to the misconduct. [Source: Military.com | Oriana Pawlyk | April 9, 2021 ++]

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**Note:** To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-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 Uniform Changes

### Update 08: Grooming/Appearance Policy Language Revisions

The Navy is eradicating “subjective” terms like “outrageous” and “good taste” from its grooming and appearance policies. While the service has found its standards are not racially biased or discriminatory, the language currently used could be open to misinterpretation and “inconsistent application,” according to a new NAVADMIN. As a result, the Navy said it will remove the following terms from uniform regulations as part of an effort to establish clear guidelines and eliminate conflicting interpretations:

- Faddish
- Good taste
- Eccentric/eccentricities
- Complement the individual
- Complement the skin tone
- Smartness
- Conspicuous/inconspicuous
- Outrageous

The term “professional appearance” will also be revised, while terms like “complementary appearance” and “uniform distraction” will be added and defined. The updated guidance will also implement the term “professional military appearance.” “Updated uniform policy changes are forthcoming and will focus on

simplifying grooming and appearance policies to alleviate misinterpretation and facilitate equal and ready compliance and enforcement,” the NAVADMIN said. The language changes stem from a review of uniform regulations by the Navy Uniform Matters Office, which examined racial bias and responses from sailors during focus groups in 2020 and 2021.

Vice Adm. John Nowell Jr., the Navy’s chief of personnel, signaled that language updates would emerge following the release of Task Force One Navy’s initial report in February. The task force, which was stood up in June 2020 after the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis, aimed to address systemic racism within the service, evaluate racial disparities in the military justice system, and examine the fairness of the promotion and advancement process to eliminate “destructive biases.”

The report ultimately offered more than 50 recommendations after completing nearly 300 listening sessions with active-duty and Reserve sailors, along with almost 1,000 online surveys. “Overall, with grooming standards, we found that there were none that were discriminatory,” Nowell told reporters in February. “But the way that some were written, it was too subjective, as a commanding officer looked at the interpretation and carrying out what those regulations were.” Specifically, Nowell pointed to regulations about hair color complementing skin tone. Such language led some commanding officers to believe that meant Black women could not have blond hair, he said. “That’s what some of the COs were interpreting,” Nowell said. “So, we tightened that language up.”

Task Force One Navy has been merged into the Navy’s Culture of Excellence campaign that aims to facilitate transparency, inclusion and accountability. The most recent verbiage update for uniform policies applies to sailors of all ranks, and marks the first of several forthcoming uniform policy changes, the Navy said. [Source: NavyTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | April 2, 2021 ++]

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## **Court Martial**

### **Writ Of Mandamus Use If Convicted**



After a conviction in a court-martial there are a few processes that may help reduce or eliminate the sting of the conviction. One is through submitting matters for clemency to the convening authority (see generally Rule for Court-Martial 1106 and Articles 60a-60c, UCMJ). However, after the Military Justice Act of 2016, the convening authority has lost a lot of power to act. After the convening authority takes action, many, but not all, convictions will qualify for appellate review (see generally Articles 65-66, UCMJ). Once all the appeals are exhausted, and no relief has been granted, a court-martial conviction can be collaterally attacked.

A collateral attack is an attempt to overturn a judgment rendered in one judicial proceeding, made in a new proceeding other than the original action or an appeal from that original action. The most commonly thought of collateral attack is a writ of habeas corpus; this option is only available though to convicted service members still in confinement. But what happens if the service member is no longer in confinement? Can he or she still use a writ to collaterally attack a conviction? The answer is yes, through a writ of mandamus.

What is a writ of mandamus? In the simplest terms, it is a court order issued by a judge at a petitioner's request compelling the government to execute a duty that they are legally obligated to complete, such as correcting an injustice (see generally 28 U.S.C. § 1361). A writ of mandamus may be an appropriate remedy if:

- The Convicted Service Member Has A Clear Right To The Relief Sought;
- There Is A Plainly Defined And Peremptory Duty On The Part Of Government To Do The Act In Question; And
- There Is No Other Adequate Remedy Available (See *Benshalom V. Secretary Of The Army*, 489 F. Supp. 964, 970 (E.D. Wis. 1980).

In the context of a court-martial conviction, a writ of mandamus may be used when the underlying conviction is unconstitutional (see *Davis v. Marsh*, 876 F.2d 1446, 1448 (9th Cir. 1989) (finding that court-martial convictions may be “collaterally reviewable for constitutional or jurisdictional error.”). In *Ben Shalom*, the petitioner, a former Army reservist who had been discharged from the military for being a homosexual, was successful in getting a court order directing the Army to reinstate her for various constitutional violations. As exhibited in this case, the key thing to find is a constitutional error. For example, that could be:

- Ineffective Assistance Of Counsel In Violation Of The Sixth Amendment
- A Violation Of Double Jeopardy Under The Fifth Amendment
- Racial Discrimination In The Selection Of A Military Panel Under The Sixth Amendment, or
- Legal And Factual Insufficiency Under The Fifth Amendment's Due Process Clause.

This option cannot be pursued in every action, though; the individual service member must have “preserved” the error by previously raising it at trial or on appeal. In *Davis*, an enlisted member charged with various offenses, to include striking her superior non-commissioned officer. *Davis* contended that the incident giving rise to the allegations was the result of sexual harassment from her superior. She was convicted of all charges. Several years later she petitioned for a writ of mandamus on the basis of two constitutional errors: ineffective assistance of counsel and a lack of due process since no African American women served as jury members. Although both were compelling constitutional issues, the court was unable to issue a decision because neither issue had been raised on appeal.

A writ of mandamus is an extraordinary form of relief that can assist service members in righting the wrongs of a particular court-martial conviction. However, this extraordinary process is not for every case. There are quite a number of steps that need to be taken. There are pitfalls and judicially deemed waivers if the issues are not raised on appeal. But, if after all the appeals have ran, and the service member is out of confinement, this may be one of the last options to collaterally attack a court-martial conviction. [Source: NavyTimes | Jason Moy | April 1, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Divorced Spouses**

### **Benefits They Qualify For**



You've recently divorced your spouse or are going through a divorce, and now you're searching for information. Divorce can be complicated, and one of your top questions is: "Do divorced military spouses qualify for any benefits?" Military divorces can be an emotionally taxing time, and a bit more complex than civilian divorces. It's understandable to be concerned about the benefits you may be losing, and the servicemember may be concerned about how a divorce will impact his or her pay. Military spouses who get divorced could be entitled to different benefits under Tricare, retirement pay, and more if they meet certain criteria. There are two general rules for receiving benefits after divorce — they fall under the 20/20/20 rule and the 10/10 rule.

#### **20/20/20 Rule for Divorced Military Spouses**

This rule for military spouses touches on benefits that a military spouse may be entitled to even if they are no longer a dependent of a military member. These benefits include:

- Tricare health benefits
- DoD military ID card
- The ability to shop at the commissary and exchange
- Certain military discounts

The 20/20/20 Requirements state that the ex-spouse can receive Tricare for Life benefits if the following criteria has been met:

- 20 years married
- 20 years of service that is eligible for retirement pay, and
- An overlap of marriage and military service of 20 years
- The spouse has not remarried. 20/20/20 benefits cease if the ex-spouse remarries.

To keep coverage under Tricare, the former (unmarried) military spouse must register with Tricare under their name and social security number, not your former married name or ex-spouse's name. It requires the following documentation:

- Original marriage certificate
- Proof of military service/military retirement
- Divorce decree

There are also some exceptions to the 20/20/20 requirements, the 20/20/15 requirement. To be eligible for the 20/20/15 rule, similar to the 20/20/20 rule, the military member must have served 20 years, the marriage lasted 20 years, but only 15 of those years need to overlap the time of service. Under the 20/20/15 requirements, non-remarried spouses may receive Tricare benefits for up to one year after the official date

of the end of the marriage. The 20/20/15 rule does not apply to military ID cards, commissary, or exchange privileges.

### **10/10 Rule for Divorced Military Spouses**

Now is a great place to note that if you are going through, or considering a divorce, it's crucial that you understand the Uniformed Services Former Spouses' Protection Act (USFSPA). This federal law enacted in September 1982, recognizes the rights of a court to administer retirement pay to a former partner. The USFSPA allows for a method of enforcing:

- Payments through the Department of Defense — if a court awards a portion of the military member's retirement pay to an ex-spouse.
- Court-ordered child support; or
- Court-ordered alimony

What's this have to do with the 10/10 rule? The 10/10 rule comes into play by stating that the former spouse can receive a court-ordered portion of military pay from the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) if:

- They've been married for 10+ years, and
- The service member performed at least 10 years of service creditable towards retirement during their marriage

The 10/10 rule can be confusing to understand. It does not delegate whether a former military spouse is eligible to receive a retirement check, only who sends it. For more information on the 10/10 rule or how/when courts decide dividing a military member's pension is necessary, click [HERE](#).

### **Other Military Spouse Benefits After Divorce**

- Post 9/11 GI Bill - This provides military members, or their family members, with up to \$160,000 of college benefits. Suppose a former military spouse is an eligible beneficiary at the time of the divorce, AND the military member agrees to share the benefits. In that case, the ex-spouse may have access to these benefits. However, under federal law, court systems are not permitted to order the division of these benefits.
- Continued Health Care Benefit Program (CHCBP) - Although Tricare for Life is not available for all former spouses, they do provide those who have not remarried with this transitional health insurance in order to bridge the gap between military medical coverage and civilian medical coverage. This program is called the Continued Health Care Benefit Program (CHCBP). They must elect CHCBP within 60 days of losing Tricare coverage. Unless specific criteria are met, former, unmarried military spouses are permitted up to 36 months of coverage. To be eligible for unlimited CHCBP coverage, the former partner must meet the following criteria:
  - Enrollment as a family member in an approved health care benefits program like Tricare/DEERS within 18 months before the divorce.
  - Did not remarry before the age of 55 years old, and
  - Is receiving a portion of the military member's retirement or has a court order (or written agreement) for SBP coverage.

[Source: The Military Wallet | Jessica Gettle | March 31, 2021 ++]

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## TRICARE Autism Care

### Update 19: Program Expanding For Military Family Members

Military families with a member who has autism will see changes over the next nine months in the Tricare program that covers their medical services. Among the biggest changes: a care coordinator who will help families navigate the system and connect to needed resources. The **Tricare Comprehensive Autism Care Demonstration program** will expand to provide more support to meet the families' needs, according to an announcement 30 MAR by the Defense Health Agency, three days before World Autism Awareness Day on April 2. There are nearly 16,000 military children diagnosed with autism involved in that program.

The demonstration project will continue to cover applied behavior analysis therapy, or ABA, services — which are available for all Tricare-eligible beneficiaries with autism spectrum disorder diagnosed by an approved provider. And Tricare will continue to cover telehealth services for ABA parental guidance and training beyond the pandemic, when the telehealth coverage began, according to the announcement. ABA therapy is a time-consuming, intensive treatment that encourages positive behaviors and discourages negative behaviors to improve a variety of skills.

The autism care demonstration program started July 25, 2014 and has mostly focused on ABA services. The DoD changes will expand and combine all available services into one comprehensive care plan, officials said. The demonstration program is scheduled to end Dec. 31, 2023. “We remain committed to addressing the needs of those beneficiaries diagnosed with [autism spectrum disorder] and their families,” said Dr. Krystyna Bienia, clinical psychologist and senior policy analyst at the Defense Health Agency, in the announcement. “There isn’t a ‘one size fits all’ approach when it comes to ASD care. We want our beneficiaries to have options, and these improvements should help connect families with the right services at the right time.”

Starting 1 MAY, Tricare will no longer require a periodic re-diagnosis to get continued care. Other changes are expected to roll out over the next nine months, and be in place by Jan. 1, 2022, officials said. Some advocates were concerned that DoD would cut back on the ABA therapy coverage with their revisions, following DoD’s reports to Congress about the outcomes of the program. In their 2020 annual report to Congress DoD stated their findings “demonstrate that the current format of the [autism demonstration project], and the delivery of ABA services, is not working for most Tricare beneficiaries” in the project. “It is imperative that [Defense Health Agency] take a deeper look into why Tricare beneficiaries are not seeing more improvement over time,” the DoD report stated.

A recent report was critical of DoD’s interpretation of the data surrounding the measurement of children’s progress under ABA. It’s not clear whether there’s been a change in DoD’s position, but they have made clear they are continuing the ABA therapy coverage, and expanding services beyond ABA. Meanwhile, one of the new requirements is more frequent measurements of children’s progress under ABA. Among the changes:

- For those who enter the autism care demonstration program on or after 1 OCT, Tricare will assign an autism services navigator to work with the family to develop a comprehensive care plan and to coordinate care. The navigator can also connect the family to additional autism resources.

- Telehealth benefits will continue. Parents will be able to get parental guidance and trainings through telehealth even beyond the national emergency due to the pandemic, when Tricare began covering these services through telehealth.
- The provider will be allowed to bill Tricare for group services, if they are clinically appropriate.
- Parents of children with autism will have greater involvement in the development of the child's care plan.
- Tricare will no longer require a periodic re-diagnosis to get continued care. That means, in most cases, families aren't required to follow up with a specialist after the initial Tricare-approved diagnosing provider determines a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Tricare recommends additional appointments with the specialist, however, to help ensure families consider all the clinical and non-clinical options.
- More frequent outcome measures will be required — every year instead of every two years— but families won't have to go back to a specialist for these evaluations. The new one-year evaluation cycle takes effect 1 JUL.

Families will still need a referral and pre-authorization from a Tricare-authorized provider — a diagnosing provider and ABA provider —to receive the services. The ABA provider must conduct an ABA assessment and develop an individual ABA treatment plan. Previously accessible case management services will remain available.

Military special needs families “are still wading through the details of the changes,” said Michelle Norman, executive director and founder at Partners in Promise. While some changes are positive, such as the autism services navigator employed by Tricare to help families, there are some concerns about data collection, and some restrictions on ABA in school and in the community. “There are definitely more requirements that add more to the plates of these families and it is not clear the requirements are ‘helping’ them,” she said. The changes are a result of a review conducted by DoD officials, who in their most recent report to Congress, stated they intended to “evolve the program to a more beneficiary- and family-centric model.” Officials stated they aim to improve the quality of, value, and access to care and services for beneficiaries diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and their families.

According to that DoD report, costs for the ABA treatment in the demonstration project were \$370 million in fiscal 2019. The average cost for the time-consuming, intensive treatment was \$23,253 in 2019. Costs vary depending on the frequency of treatment and a variety of other factors. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | March 31, 2021 ++]

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## **Army Goggles**

### **Update 01: Microsoft ‘Mixed Reality’ \$21.8 Billion IVAS Contract**

The Army announced it has reached an agreement with Microsoft on a \$21.88 billion, 10-year contract to produce its futuristic [do-it-all goggle](#). . The program, the [Integrated Visual Augmentation System](#), or IVAS, has been the centerpiece for future plans to integrate an array of technologies previously only available to fighter pilots or troops in vehicles to individual, dismounted soldiers. The announcement made 31 MAR by

Program Executive Office-Soldier and Microsoft states that the program, which entered its early phases in 2018, will now move from prototyping to production.

The goggle presents a mixed reality view that allows a soldier to use the same goggle to train, rehearse and fight on the same platform. It uses sensors that provide users with night vision, thermal or standard daytime optics. The base device is a ruggedized version of the Microsoft HoloLens 2, using the company's Azure cloud services. "The program delivers enhanced situational awareness, enabling information sharing and decision-making in a variety of scenarios," according to a company statement. "Microsoft has worked closely with the U.S. Army over the past two years, and together we pioneered Soldier Centered Design to enable rapid prototyping for a product to provide Soldiers with the tools and capabilities necessary to achieve their mission," according to the statement.

The goggle can also feed a wealth of information to the user, to include navigation aids, the location of friendly troops, weapons sights' views, facial recognition software and augmented reality avatars for training scenarios. The prototype version being used last year weighed 2.5 pounds, the same as the new Enhanced Night Vision Goggle-Binocular. The IVAS, however, has a design that reduces neck torque by holding the eyepiece closer to the face, officials told Army Times. The system also records training scenarios that can then be used for instant after-action reviews, much like a replay in televised sports. Soldiers in the field for recent experiments have been able to see in the goggle view the video feed from a micro-drone they deployed themselves.

The goggle uses a tactical assault kit, which in recent testing was a Samsung Android smartphone, a conformable battery and radio. Running with all applications, the IVAS system battery lasts for eight hours of continuous operations, officials said. It can also plug into larger networks and cloud computing to draw in more information but is capable of working without a connection. The goggle then can sync with a company-level cloud, called the "bloodhound," that processes the data and updates it with new information. The bloodhound then connects with the larger network or cloud when accessible.

In early work with the company Shield AI, developers are testing out 3D mapping scans of building interiors, which could be piped into the goggle, allowing a team to see the layout of a building before kicking down doors. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers adjusted the sensing tech on the goggles, using them to detect from a distance whether soldiers were feverish. Early plans have called for an initial purchase of 40,000 pairs of goggles for the Army. The Marine Corps and special operations forces have also been involved in experimentation and testing with the device and are expected to field it as well.

Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Grinston gave the goggles a test run at Fort Belvoir, Va., last year and spoke with Army Times about the device. "Half the battle is just knowing what the other squad members are going to do," Grinston said. "Imagine integrating them in the matter of a week. You used to have to wait until a squad live fire." Also last year the Army ran a two-week training familiarization and test of the goggles that included a 72-hour training event in which an Army infantry company, a Marine platoon, support platoon and opposing force platoon ran live fires and multiple tactical squad tactics lanes at Fort Pickett, Va. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Todd South | March 31, 2021 ++]

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## **USS Bonhomme Richard**

**Update 04: Will Be Decommissioned, Then Towed To Texas for Scrapping**

After extensive cleanup and reclamation in the wake of a July inferno, the amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard will be decommissioned in San Diego in mid-APR before being towed to Texas where it will be scrapped, the Navy said in a statement. Navy officials said in November that while Bonhomme Richard was salvageable, the time and price of repair — five to seven years at an estimated \$2.5 billion to \$3.2 billion — were too steep to warrant saving the 22-year-old ship. The Navy plans to hold a small decommissioning ceremony Wednesday with limited attendance. Then the ship will be towed to Galveston, Texas, said Cmdr. Nicole Schwegman, a Naval Surface Force Pacific spokeswoman. Schwegman said most of the roughly 1,000 sailors assigned to Bonhomme Richard have either been reassigned or are in the process of transferring.

Fire broke out on the vessel around 8:30 a.m. on July 12. Noxious black smoke darkened otherwise clear San Diego skies as the fire raged out of control. Temperatures on board topped 1,200 degrees F at times, making it all but impossible for firefighting crews to access burning spaces to extinguish the fire. More than 400 sailors from 16 San Diego-based ships joined federal firefighters to battle the blaze day and night. Helicopters from Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 3 dumped more than 1,500 buckets of water onto the ship in nearly round-the-clock operations. The fire burned for four days before the Navy officially declared it extinguished. Navy officials said at the time they believed the fire began in the 844-foot ship's lower vehicle-storage area, a part of the ship with an ample supply of fuel and oxygen for a fire.

According to a KGTV news report, Navy Criminal Investigative Service agents searched the home of a Bonhomme Richard sailor in August. No charges have been filed in the case, according to Cmdr. Myers Vasquez, a U.S. Pacific Fleet spokesman. Vasquez said the Navy's investigation into the cause of the blaze is ongoing and he declined to say when it might be completed. Amphibious assault ships are the largest amphibious ships in the Navy and are used to deploy Marines and their equipment during amphibious landings. Their flight decks are capable of handling operations with helicopters and the F-35B Lightning fighter jet. At the time of the fire, Bonhomme Richard was nearing the end of a two-year, \$250 million upgrade to accommodate F-35B operations. It is the largest U.S. naval warship lost since World War II. [Source: The San Diego Union-Tribune | Andrew Dyer | April 10, 2021 ++]

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## **Guantanamo Bay Navy Base**

### **Update 05: Once-Secret Prison Unit Closed**

A once-secret unit within the Guantanamo Bay detention center that had fallen into disrepair has been closed and the prisoners moved to another facility on the American base in Cuba, the U.S. military said Sunday. [The prisoners](#) at Camp 7 were transferred to a facility adjacent to where the other detainees on the base are held as part of what U.S. Southern Command said in a statement was an effort to “increase operational efficiency and effectiveness.” Miami-based Southern Command, which oversees the detention center at the southeastern edge of Cuba, did not say how many prisoners were moved. Officials have previously said about 14 men were held in Camp 7. There are 40 prisoners at Guantanamo.

Southern Command said the Camp 7 prisoners were moved to Camp 5 “safely and without incident,” but did not say when the transfer occurred. Camp 5, which was largely empty, is next to Camp 6, where the other detainees are held. Camp 7 opened in December 2006 for prisoners previously held in a network

of clandestine CIA detention facilities, often referred to as “black sites,” where they were subjected to brutal interrogation techniques. The military ran it under an agreement with CIA, and Southern Command said intelligence agencies were involved with the transfer. White House press secretary Jen Psaki said it was the “intention” of the Biden administration to close the detention facility.

The military long refused to even acknowledge the location of Camp 7 on the base and has never allowed journalists to see the inside of the facility. Officials had said that unit, which was never designed to be permanent, had structural issues and needed to be replaced, but the Pentagon dropped plans to seek money for the construction. Among those held at Camp 7 were the five prisoners charged with war crimes for their alleged roles planning and providing logistical support for the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. President Joe Biden has said [he intends to close Guantanamo](#), but that would require approval from Congress to move some prisoners to the U.S. for trial or imprisonment. [Source: Associated Press | April 4, 2021| ++]

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## Armed Forces DNA Testing

### Modern Crime-Solving Methods vs. the Mystery of WWII Deaths



Increasingly sophisticated lab techniques make it possible to obtain a unique genetic profile even from bones that have deteriorated for decades (center). Timothy McMahon, who oversees DNA identification of remains for the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System, walking past some of the 8.2 million DNA reference cards stored at Dover Air Force Base. The military adds about 250,000 samples a year to the repository (right).

South of Rome, an American military cemetery has a grave that is thought to contain the remains of a young Army private named Melton Futch. But the white marble marker reads only, “*Here rests in honored glory a comrade in arms known but to God.*” It is one of some 6,000 graves of American troops killed in World War II whom the military was not able to identify with the technology of the time. Today, of course, there is DNA analysis. Increasingly sophisticated techniques make it possible to obtain, even from bones that may have deteriorated for decades, a unique genomic profile that can reliably confirm their identity.

But in order to work, DNA identification requires a sample from a blood relative for comparison. And in the cases of many of the World War II dead the military can find no siblings, no parents, no children, not even distant cousins. In these cases, despite remarkable advances, the Army runs into the same dead ends today that it encountered in the 1940s. So the Defense Department is considering trying a strikingly different approach: Instead of finding relatives and then matching their DNA, military researchers want to use the DNA to find the relatives. It is a tactic that has helped solve scores of cold murder cases in recent years, including that of the Golden State Killer. Investigators take DNA found at crime scenes and upload it to public genetic databases in hopes of finding matches in family trees that can point back to one

individual. “The technology is there — we just have to develop the policy to use it,” said Timothy McMahon, who oversees DNA identification of remains for the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System.

The Defense Department has mounted a global effort for decades to recover and identify all service members lost since the onset of World War II. Initially it focused on finding unrecovered remains in remote crash sites, sunken ships, overrun jungle foxholes and similar places. But with the development of DNA testing, it has turned increasingly to the thousands of bodies that were recovered long ago and buried without being identified. The cold-case DNA approach has the potential to solve cases that have stumped researchers for years, like that of Private Futch, the poor son of a sawmill worker who had lied about his age to enlist at 16.

One cold winter night in December 1944, 20-year-old Private Futch wrapped himself in a green wool overcoat and crept toward a hill in Northern Italy, as part of a raiding party hoping to surprise the enemy. The Germans were waiting. The tear of machine guns filled the icy darkness. The Americans fell back, and when they regrouped below, Private Futch was nowhere to be found. After the war, local people stumbled on the bones of a soldier on the hillside, still wrapped in a weathered wool coat. The pockets held Private Futch’s address book and a letter from his wife. But what seemed like a straightforward identification soon unraveled. For decades the Army has begun with traditional identification methods like measuring bones, studying old dental charts, and leafing through mimeographed battle reports. Even after DNA testing became available, it has typically been used only at the end of the process, to confirm a tentative identification.

In this case, Army grave-registration examiners could not match the teeth of the dead man to the private’s dental records, and while the bones suggested a soldier of the right age and African ancestry, the Army estimated that they belonged to a man who was several inches taller. Unable to be certain whose bones they were, the Army buried them in the cemetery near Rome. The case was reopened a few years ago by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, which tried to find a relative of Private Futch to compare DNA. But the soldier had no siblings or children. Genealogists could not even find a second cousin. The agency’s rules do not allow a body to be exhumed unless there is at least a 50 percent chance that the remains can be identified by doing so. In Private Futch’s case, the lack of a family DNA sample for comparison prevents the agency from digging up the bones and testing them.

Critics of the current approach — a plodding and costly process that has yielded fewer than 200 identifications a year with a budget exceeding \$150 million — say the government should set aside the 50 percent rule, obtain DNA samples from every unknown’s remains, and start running them through every possible DNA database. “Right now they are doing it backward, so you have policy getting in the way of science,” said Ed Huffine, who headed testing of remains from past wars for the Armed Forces DNA Identification Lab in the 1990s, then spent years doing mass-casualty identification work in the civilian sphere. Mr. Huffine said that the old dental records and other 1940s paperwork that the Army starts with now can create problems because they are often riddled with errors. But starting with DNA quickly produces reliable results, and has been used in places like Bosnia and Argentina to identify large numbers of unknown dead. “Switching to DNA-first will be faster, cheaper and produce better results,” he said. “It just makes sense.”

But developing a new DNA-first policy is “thorny,” said Dr. McMahon, the Army DNA identification expert, because the military must not only set rules for which graves should be opened and when, but also figure out how to uncover the identities of the dead without invading the privacy of the living. It is a tricky



endeavor because genetic searches can reveal infidelity and other long-hidden family secrets. “Our goal is to do no more harm than has already been done,” Dr. McMahon said. Even so, he said, the Army is forging ahead and hopes to begin using the technique soon. The traditional methods can be especially problematic when researching Black American troops like Private Futch who are lost in war, because the legacies of slavery and racial discrimination have made many Black families hard to trace through official records.

The Army was racially segregated in World War II, and Private Futch belonged to its only Black combat unit, the 92nd Infantry Division, nicknamed the Buffalo Soldiers. The division landed in Naples and pushed north alongside white units until they hit fortified German mountain defenses known as the Gothic Line. Fierce fighting there left more than 500 of the division’s soldiers dead and hundreds more missing. After the war, all but 53 of their bodies were identified; the remaining 53 were buried in “unknown” graves in Italy. In 2014, the Defense Department started a project to find the names of the 53, but it has identified only a handful, and attempts to track down families have often found nothing.

“It’s much more challenging,” said Megan Smolenyak, a genealogist who has traced thousands of family trees for the agency. Black soldiers’ relatives are often scattered widely after a century of migration, she said, and may appear only sparingly in the paper trail of voting rolls, property records and local news clippings. “African-Americans, even if they have been in a community for hundreds of years, are just absent from the record,” she said. “They just aren’t there.” Melton Futch was an only child, born to a couple who had moved from rural Georgia to the Florida Panhandle to find work at a saw mill and turpentine still. They owned no property and could not read or write, according to census records. Mr. Futch’s grandparents were enslaved people.

When researchers have to go back generations to try to find cousins, Ms. Smolenyak said, “it doesn’t take long before you hit the wall of slavery, where people become property. That can be a lot more complicated.” The public’s diminishing trust in government may also make distant cousins hesitant to give a DNA sample to help identify someone they may never have heard of. Despite years of outreach, the Army has not been able to obtain family DNA reference for one-third of the 53 unknown Buffalo Soldiers. Family DNA may seem unnecessary in a case like that of Private Futch, where a single body was found on the hillside where he was last seen, bearing some of his possessions in a coat pocket. But decades of experience identifying troops lost in war have taught researchers that even in cases where the identity seems glaringly obvious, a hasty conclusion can put one man’s name on another man’s bones.

“A lot of tricky things can happen in war that you wouldn’t expect,” said Sarah Barksdale, an Accounting Agency historian who has narrowed down the possible identities for several unknown Buffalo Soldiers. She cited one example of a body found wearing a bracelet with a name on it, but the name belonged to a comrade who was still alive. Another died with signed photographs of a wife in his pocket — the wife of another soldier. In the case of the bones found with Private Futch’s address book, researchers started with a list of 44 possible names of men killed in that area of Italy. Based on stature and where each man was last seen, they excluded 36. Dental records ruled out seven more, leaving only one possibility: Melton Futch. But the case is stuck until the Pentagon can find a relative, or change its rules to allow DNA testing first.

Dr. McMahon of the DNA testing lab says the policy change is coming. The idea of solving the unknowns the same way the police solved the Golden State Killer case is so compelling, he said, that “I think we could see it in the near future.” [Source: The New York Times | Dave Philipps | April 6, 2021 ++]

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## **Servicemembers Charged**

**01 thru 15 APR 2021**

**MSgt Michael Reimers** -- An Air Force master sergeant at Nellis Air Force Base pleaded guilty in federal court 6 APR to selling methamphetamine and illegally trafficking in firearms. Reimers, 41, of Las Vegas, offered to sell several firearms in July through September 2019 — including an AK-47, a .25 caliber handgun and a 12-gauge shotgun — the Justice Department said in a statement citing court records and Reimers' admissions in court. In July of that year, he sold \$800 worth of meth, the government said. He was arrested in September 2019 at Nellis, where he was assigned to the 99th Communications Squadron, after a grand jury indicted him on charges, including selling a Century Arms AK-47 and a .25 caliber Titan handgun without a license, and selling a Mossberg shotgun to a prohibited person, who prosecutors said he had reason to believe was in the U.S. illegally.



Reimers was also charged with two counts of distributing a controlled substance, one for the sale of 50 grams or more of meth and one for distributing a mixture laced with cocaine. He pleaded guilty to the count of selling firearms without a license and one count of distributing a controlled substance for the meth sale. A military judge found Reimers guilty in a general court-martial on 11 MAR, a Nellis spokesperson said 8 APR. His sentence: 84 months of confinement, a six-grade demotion from master sergeant to airman basic, and a dishonorable discharge.

Both sides had been working on a resolution to both the military and civil charges, according to a February court filing. Reimers had gone on active duty in April 2000 and was promoted to master sergeant in July 2011 before being assigned to Nellis in 2016, the Las Vegas Review-Journal previously reported, based on information the base provided. The Justice Department referred to him Tuesday only as a “senior U.S. Air Force servicemember.”

The case was investigated by the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department and Henderson Police Department. The airman faces a maximum sentence of a life in prison with the possibility of parole and a fine of over \$10 million. A sentencing hearing is scheduled for 13 JUL. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Chad Garland | April 7, 2021 ++]

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**Pvt. 2nd Class James Murdoch Peele** -- A former 82nd Airborne Division soldier who staged a kidnapping while he was still in the Army has been sentenced to more than 12 years in prison for transportation of a minor with intent to engage in criminal sexual activity as part of a plea deal with U.S. attorneys. Pvt. 2nd Class James Murdoch Peele, who was 19 years old at the time, staged the kidnapping

of a 12-year-old girl in New Bern, North Carolina, Oct. 21, 2018, and left a hand-written ransom note demanding \$20,000 for her return, according to court records. The ransom note was found by the girl's grandmother.



Police noticed garden mulch on the missing girl's bed and dirt smudges on an open window, but no sign of forced entry. Police saw that the girl's Facebook profile identified Peele as her "boyfriend." FBI agents determined that Peele was an enlisted soldier at Fort Bragg and traced him to barracks on post the same day as the staged kidnapping. There, investigators found Peele and the child. A forensic examination confirmed that Peele had recently had sex with the minor. Investigators said Peele staged the kidnapping that morning and initially drove to his parents' home in South Carolina along with the girl. Peele introduced the child as his girlfriend and claimed she worked in a sewing shop.

The two stayed at the parents' home for less than 30 minutes before Peele's sergeant called him and told him to return to Fort Bragg. Peele arrived back at post shortly before noon and left the girl in his room while he went to meet with his sergeant, Peele's roommate told investigators. Peele returned and asked his roommate to turn up his music. The roommate understood this to mean that the two would have sex behind a sheet that had been hung across the room for privacy, according to court records. The roommate left and the FBI arrived soon after.

Peele knew the child's true age but told her that age is just a number, the girl later told investigators. She also admitted that she had not been kidnapped. Peele later made a videotaped confession admitting to having sex with the girl and writing the ransom note. Peele, however, initially told investigators he believed the victim was 18 years old. But he later admitted that he saw her at a sleepover with friends who looked very young, including one girl whose age he had seen to be 12 years old, according to the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of North Carolina. Upon completion of his 151-month prison term, Peele must serve 10 years on supervised release. The 82nd Airborne Division commander at the time, Maj. Gen. James J. Mingus, directed Peele's separation from the Army in April 2019. Peele received an other than honorable discharge, according to the division. [Source: ArmyTimes | Kyle Rempfer | April 7, 2021 ++]

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**SSgt Randall S. Hughes** -- Staff Sgt. Randall S. Hughes got off with a slap on the wrist after he raped the wife of a young soldier under his charge during a Super Bowl party in 2017. It wasn't the first time Hughes raped someone, according to charge sheets, and it wouldn't be the last. The victim, Leah Ramirez, reported the rape to Army CID the next day. It happened after a party held at Ramirez's home near Fort Bliss, Texas. Ramirez's husband was passed out drunk after Hughes had egged him on to continue taking shots of whiskey throughout the evening.



Ramirez put her husband to bed, the party ended and everyone else left. Ramirez was outside alone with Hughes when he propositioned her for sex. She said no, so Hughes grabbed her, forced himself upon her against a grill and later dragged her by the hair into her home where he raped her, she said. After it ended, Ramirez hid in a bathroom until Hughes eventually left the house. “I waited until the morning and then I went to the hospital to get checked,” she recalled. “It took CID 48 hours to get into my house for evidence, so I lived in the crime scene for 48 hours. And then, it took three years to do anything.” ‘This is how it is’

After a year-long investigation, Army CID agents determined the allegations were credible, said Ramirez. But a victim advocate later explained to her that Hughes was receiving a General Officer Memorandum of Reprimand for his personnel file. He would not be prosecuted. Ramirez never understood the reason for that decision. Her husband changed posts while the investigation unfolded, and it didn’t seem like there was much left she could do. “I was told CID had enough evidence to believe it happened, and Fort Bliss still didn’t do anything,” she said. “They just told me the command said this is what it was — this is how it is.” The Army would later learn that Hughes was a serial rapist. A few months after Ramirez reported her rape, Hughes did the same thing to another woman at Fort Bliss, according to court documents.

Hughes transferred to Fort Dix, New Jersey, in the intervening years. It wasn’t long before he was once again accused of rape — this time by his teenage daughter. But now, Fort Dix CID agents saw the GOMOR in Hughes’ file, and in 2020 they began looking into his past. That CID inquiry ultimately resulted in criminal charges spanning more than a decade and involving five victims. A plea agreement whittled the charges down to a few of the most recent incidents, but still included both 2017 rapes. On 30 MAR Hughes pleaded guilty in a Fort Drum, New York, courtroom to a slate of criminal charges and was sentenced to 13 years in prison and a dishonorable discharge. Hughes pleaded guilty to two counts of rape, two counts of sexual assault consummated by battery, one count of sexual abuse of a child, one count of assault consummated by a battery on a child, one count of indecent language and one count of adultery, according to court records.

The allegations of rape against Hughes dated back to 2006, though that case was not reported at the time. Army investigators said Hughes raped his then-wife at Fort Carson in Colorado, but the charge was dropped as a part of Hughes’ plea agreement. Years later, while Army CID was investigating the rape of Ramirez after the Super Bowl party, Hughes violently raped his then-girlfriend at Fort Bliss in the summer of 2017. Hughes later pleaded guilty to that rape. But his plea agreement avoided charges that he told his then-girlfriend to not speak to agents who were investigating Ramirez’s case. Charges that he intentionally cut the woman using a broken glass bottle were also dropped as part of the agreement.

In late 2017, Hughes' estranged 14-year-old daughter moved in with him. Hughes had not been involved in the girl's life previously, according to her mother, Chayla Madsen. But her daughter had gone through a difficult few years and wanted to make a change. Hughes quickly agreed, to Madsen's surprise, but the mother was not aware of the rape allegations. "I never had any idea something like this [investigation] was open, and obviously he did this to look like an upstanding single dad," said Madsen, who has publicly praised her daughter for coming forward with allegations of sexual abuse. "I didn't know he was being investigated ... and Fort Bliss just allowed him to move a child — she was 14 — in with him and move on base."

Hughes behaved inappropriately toward his daughter at Fort Bliss, but his misconduct increased when they moved to Fort Dix. On March 25, 2020, Hughes gave his daughter sleeping medication and raped her. Hughes' plea agreement did not admit to that charge, but he did admit to sexual abuse and assault of a child. "He was taking a plea deal, so he wanted to plead to get the minimum amount of years," said Lesley Madsen, the now 17-year-old daughter who asked, with her mother's approval, to be named in this article. "If I said no, then it would have been years of court. ... It was the easiest way to give everyone that closure and just put him away before he did anything to anybody else." [Source: ArmyTimes | Kyle Rempfer | April 11, 2021 ++]

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

### **'Sleeping Dictionary' thru 'Snival'**

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**

**Sleeping Dictionary** – A member of the local population who teaches a sailor the local language (among other things), usually in exchange for room and board.

**Sliders** - (1) Hamburgers. So greasy, they "slide". (2) (RN) Those who leave work early, either by departments or individually.

**Sliders with lids** - Cheeseburgers.

**Slops** - (RN) Uniforms and other official clothing for sale. The 'slop chit' is the authorization to obtain clothing from stores. Derived from the old terms sloppe or slype, which meant ill-fitting or loose clothing.

**Sloshy** - (RN) The cook, or the cook's helper.

**Slush Fund** – The money accumulated by the ship's cook through the sale of slush, the salty fat which collected during the boiling of salt meat aboard ship. The sailors used the slush on their biscuits, and the cook got to keep the money.

**Small boy** - Frigate or destroyer.

**Smart Money** – Money paid to a sailor who has a Smart Ticket (Smart Certificate), which was issued to a man who had been injured or wounded in the performance of his duty.

**Smoking Lamp** - From the square-rigger days, a lamp from which personnel could light their pipes or cigars. In contemporary usage, signifies whether smoking is permitted or not. If the smoking lamp is out, no smoking is permitted.

**Snack Hole** – See CAKE HOLE.

**SNAFU** - Situation Normal, All Fucked Up.

**Snake-eater** - SEAL's and other Special Forces personnel.

**Snake Ranch** – A house rented by a group of bachelors.

**Snidget** – A member of engineering department who works on electronics, literally a "Snipe Twidget."

**Snipe** - Crew members in the engineering rates; someone who works in the engineering spaces and seldom is seen topside when underway. MM's (Machinist's Mates) and BT's (Boiler Technicians) are ultimate snipes. In today's modern gas turbine fleet, also includes GSM (Gas Turbine Specialist, Mechanic), GSE (Gas Turbine Specialist, Electrician), and EN (Engineman). It is believed that true snipes cannot stand direct sunlight or fresh air, must have machine oil in their coffee in order to survive, and get nosebleeds at altitudes above the waterline. It is also firmly believed that fresh-air sailors who venture into SNIPE COUNTRY are never seen again. Aka BLACK-HAND GANG (RN), BLACK GANG. See STOKER (RN).

**Snipe Country** - The engineering spaces, bilges, and voids where the snipes dwell. Considered to be extremely dangerous territory for non-snipes. "The snipes will get you" is commonly used to deter sailors from going too far below decks.

**Snivel** - (1) A request that one not be assigned a watch or other duty (flight, etc.) due to other obligations. (2) A log for recording same, the 'Snivel Log'. (3) Whining.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | April 15, 2021 ++]

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## **Guard & Reserve Leave**

### **Update 01: Short-Term Paid Leave Entitlement Lawsuits**

A legal battle is unfolding over paid military leave in courtrooms across the country, as a new wave of class-action lawsuits and court rulings raises a question: are National Guard and Reserve troops entitled to paid short-term military leave under federal law? Reserve component troops are suing their employers across the country, arguing that the courts should interpret the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 to include paid leave as one of the “rights and benefits” protected under the law commonly known as USERRA. Their argument: short-term paid military leave is comparable to



other forms of short-term paid leave like jury duty leave or sick leave, therefore employers who offer other paid leaves are violating USERRA if they don't offer paid short-term military leave of comparable length and compensation to the other types of leave.

So far, the argument is seeing some success in federal court. That is partially due to how strong USERRA's protections are, said Allen Shoikhetbrod, a partner at Tully Rinckey who specializes in federal employment law. "USERRA...is very servicemember friendly," said Shoikhetbrod in an interview with Military Times. "When you compare it to Title XII of the Civil Rights Act [or] the Americans With Disabilities Act, it is really in favor of the servicemember. And [USERRA's] definition of benefits of employment and seniority rights continues to be expanded on."

Some employers have opted to settle these cases and change their military leave policies rather than have a costly litigation fight. Walmart settled a class action suit in January, offering up to \$14 million to approximately 7,000 Guard and Reserve troops who were employed by the corporation. The retailer also updated its HR policies to include short-term paid military leaves of less than four days as part of the settlement agreement, in which Walmart did not admit fault.

### **Where do the courts stand?**

Two suits on the topic of paid leave have made it to the federal circuit court level in recent months. Circuit courts are one level below the U.S. Supreme Court. One case, **White v. United Airlines**, is a class action led by Eric White, a United pilot who claimed that the airline should have given him full pay and retirement credit for periods of short-term military leave with the Air Force Reserve since his hiring in 2005. Judge Charles Norgle of the Northern District of Illinois initially ruled against White in 2019 and dismissed the suit, saying in his opinion, "It is contrary to the express language of [USERRA] to hold that a business is required to pay a reservist wages for time not worked." But in February, the Seventh Circuit reversed the decision on appeal. The Seventh Circuit handles federal appeals for Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin. "We find that paid leave falls within the set of 'rights and benefits' defined by [USERRA], and so we reverse" the lower court's decision, said Judge Diane Wood, who wrote the opinion representing the panel.

Wood sent the case back to the Norgle of the Northern District of Illinois to determine whether paid short-term military leave is truly comparable to other forms of leave offered by United, though the airline could still appeal to the Supreme Court. The Reserve Organization of America, which filed a briefing in support of White, celebrated the Seventh Circuit's ruling and subsequent denial of United's request to rehear the case in its April membership newsletter. The reserve component advocacy group described it as "great news as it is the case that ROA filed an amicus brief on behalf of White, an ROA member!"

In another case currently on appeal to the Third Circuit, **Travers v. Federal Express**, Gerard Travers alleged that FedEx should have paid him for periods of short-term military leave taken between 2006 and 2010 due to his service in the Navy Reserve. The Third Circuit oversees appeals for Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and the Virgin Islands. The Eastern District of Pennsylvania dismissed Travers' suit last year, with Judge Mark Kearny ruling. "We deeply appreciate Mr. Travers' service," said Kearny in his opinion. "But Congress's words [in USERRA] do not include paying Mr. Travers his regular wages while he is on short term military leave."

Travers and his attorneys appealed the district court's ruling to the Third Circuit, and oral arguments took place on 16 MAR, after the Seventh Circuit had made its ruling in *White v. United Airlines*. In response to pointed questions from the Third Circuit panel, one of Travers' attorneys, Jonathan Taylor,

leaned heavily on the Seventh Circuit’s rationale in the White case. But the Third Circuit is not bound to follow the Seventh Circuit’s logic, and there is a significant chance they could disagree with the Seventh Circuit and uphold the dismissal, according to Shoikhetbrod, the employment law expert. “They’re not mandated to follow another Circuit’s decision,” he said. “So that’s where there’s potential for circuit splits.”

### **Will the Supreme Court or Congress step in?**

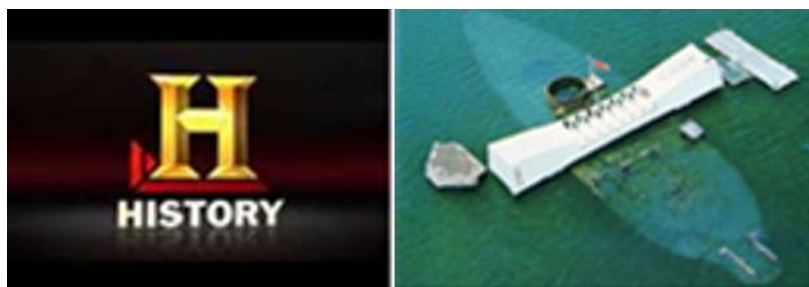
If federal circuit courts were to split on the issue, the Supreme Court is likely to take up the issue, explained Shoikhetbrod. And such a split is becoming likely as more cases reach the circuit level — Shoikhetbrod pointed to *Huntsman v. Southwest Airlines* as a similar class action suit likely to reach the Ninth Circuit in the coming months. “It’s very likely there’s going to be a petition for a writ of certiorari in the United States Supreme Court,” said Shoikhetbrod. “And the Supreme Court tends to accept petitions where there are circuit splits. So there is a strong likelihood that eventually one of these cases will end up at the Supreme Court, probably within the next couple of years, if not sooner.”

It’s unclear how soon a circuit court split may emerge, though. The Third Circuit will likely take several more months to decide *Travers*, and it could be more than a year until *Huntsman* or another similar case makes it to another circuit. Employers, attorneys, and business associations are noticing the pattern, though, and some are not waiting for an adverse ruling to begin updating their policies and limit their liability. Many employers facing similar cases are opting to settle them, said Shoikhetbrod, including Walmart’s settlement earlier this year. “Employers — particularly those in Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin — should revisit their military leave policies in light of the Seventh Circuit’s holding,” warned attorney Scott Allen in a JDSupra post. “All employers should pay attention to this ruling because class actions and other suits addressing the issue are pending in courts nationwide,” said Epstein Becker & Green lawyers in another post.

Congress may also preempt the courts by pushing a legislative fix that clarifies USERRA in relation to paid leave, added Shoikhetbrod. “I think eventually Congress is going to take up this issue, and probably make necessary amendments to clarify their position.” But there isn’t anything in the legislative process yet. Regardless of where, when, or how the debate is resolved, though, Guard troops called to most forms of State Active Duty will be left out — USERRA applies only to federal military duty and 14-day or longer periods of SAD linked to a presidentially-declared national emergency or a major disaster declaration under the Stafford Act.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Davis Winkie | April 13, 2021 ++]

**\* Military History \***



## **U.S. Army Camel Corps**

### **Failed 1836 Modernization Attempt**



In 1836, an Army lieutenant had a... unique idea. The U.S. was in the midst of its expansion west, which was proving to be a difficult and oftentimes dangerous trek for pioneers who were attempting to make their way across harsh terrain. Enter Army Lt. George H. Crossman, who proposed a simple solution: Camels. The idea of buying and importing camels to the American Southwest for “military purposes” would later be considered “the most unique experiment in U.S. Army history,” according to the National Museum of the U.S. Army. Unofficially called the “U.S. Army Camel Corps,” the experiment saw a series of successes before it was effectively ended with the beginning of the Civil War.

Some might say it was the first of many of the Army’s failed modernization attempts. Crossman’s bizarre idea didn’t actually come to fruition until almost two decades after he first proposed it. After Crossman came up with the idea in 1836, he put together a study on the advantages of using camels and sent a report to the War Department in Washington, D.C., proposing that they invest in camels because they were “unrivaled among animals” in their ability to endure labor, navigate difficult terrain, and go without water or much food “for six or eight days, or it is said even longer.” The War Department rejected the idea and it wasn’t thought of again for almost a decade, until Crossman — now a major — met another major, Henry C. Wayne, who was also a “camel enthusiast,” the museum explained. Wayne sent another report to the War Department and to Congress suggesting that the government invest in camels.

This time, the effort caught the attention of then-Sen. Jefferson Davis, who was the chairman of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs at the time. Davis tried to get the idea funded “for several years,” but couldn’t quite get it over the finish line. That was, until Davis became the Secretary of War in 1853. In his annual report in 1854, Davis urged Congress and President Franklin Pierce to take up the idea of buying camels. “I again invite attention to the advantages to be anticipated from the use of camels and dromedaries for military and other purposes,” Davis wrote. “And for reasons set forth in my last annual report, recommend that an appropriation be made to introduce a small number of the several varieties of this animal, to test their adaptation to our country.”

Finally, in 1855, Congress gave Davis \$30,000 to buy and import his camels. Davis appointed Maj. Wayne to oversee the camel expedition, and after two years and two “successful” trips to the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the Army had imported 75 camels, according to the Smithsonian Magazine. They were kept at Camp Verde, an Army post in Texas established in 1855. Wayne worked with soldiers and civilians tasked with caring for the camels for months, teaching them how to feed them, work with them, and “how to deal with the camel’s mannerisms and temperament.” Despite Wayne’s

commitment to the camel experiment, he was later sent back to Washington after James Buchanan became president in March 1857 and Davis was replaced as Secretary of War by John B. Floyd.

With Wayne gone from Camp Verde, the camels were “unused” until months later when Congress approved a surveying expedition to build a permanent roadway between New Mexico and the Colorado River on the border of California and Arizona. Floyd demanded that the man carrying out the survey, Edward Fitzgerald Beale, take 25 camels with him. Beale was pissed. Who wants to be stuck with 25 camels? But Floyd “was adamant,” the Army Museum says, because after all the effort it took to get the camels to the U.S., they hadn’t really had a chance to use them. Beale eventually agreed (though he still hated the idea) and in June he set out from Camp Verde with 25 camels, 12 wagons, dozens of horses, mules, and dogs, and 44 soldiers.

It didn’t take long for Beale to see the benefit of using the camels. According to the Army Museum, the camels began settling into the journey around the second week and “began outdistancing both horses and mules, packing a 700-pound load at a steady speed and traversing ground that caused the other animals to balk.” Over the next several years, the camels were used on other expeditions, sent from one Army post to another, and ultimately proved useful in every situation but one: During a test to see if the camels could be “used as an express service,” several died from exhaustion. Despite the apparent success of the Army’s “Camel Corps,” which Floyd presented to Congress three years straight in his annual reports, lawmakers refused to put any further funding into the program.

Then came the Civil War, which marked the beginning of the end of the camel experiment. Rebel troops who occupied Camp Verde captured several of the camels still living there and used them to transport supplies around San Antonio, according to the Army Museum. “The camels suffered greatly at the hands of their captors, who had an intense dislike for the animals,” the Army Museum says. “They were badly mistreated, abused and a few of them were deliberately killed.” Soon after, the camels started being sold at public auction or turned loose and left to wander.

The Smithsonian Magazine says that some were caught and used over the years by Union and Confederate troops; some ended up in circuses or private ranches; and others “found their way into Mexico.” An unfortunate few were sold to butchers. They became “a familiar sight in California, the Southwest, Northwest, and even as far away as British Columbia.” Every once in a while there would be a rare reported sighting of a “feral” camel in the wild. Doug Baum, a former zookeeper and owner of Texas Camel Corps, told Smithsonian Magazine that there were an estimated six to ten camel sightings in the years after the Civil War. It’s even believed that a wild camel was the subject of an Arizona legend in the 1880s.

The so-called “Red Ghost” was “rumored to stand 30 feet tall,” according to Smithsonian Magazine. Some witnesses said the Red Ghost almost killed them, another said it “disappeared right before his eyes.” It was “a devilish looking creature strapped on the back of some strange-looking beast,” Arizona’s state historian told the magazine. Baum said it was “very likely” that the legendary Red Ghost was actually one of the Army’s camels. The Red Ghost’s “reign of terror” eventually ended in the mid-1880s when a rancher spotted the camel grazing in his garden. The rancher shot and killed the animal, later finding “deep scars dug across its back and body.”

The last of the Army's original camels, named Topsy, is believed to have died in April 1934 at 80 years old. "Ignored and abandoned," the Army Museum says, "it was an ignominious and unfortunate end for these noble 'ships of the desert.'" [Source: Task & Purpose | Haley Britzky | April 05, 2021 ++]

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## Medal of Honor Awardees

**Robert J. Miller | Afghanistan**



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

**MEDAL OF HONOR**

*To*

**SSgt. Robert J. Miller**

**Organization:** Special Forces Operation Detachment Alpha3312, Task Force 33, Company A, 3d Battalion, 3d Special Forces Group (Airborne)

**Place and date:** January 25, 2008 Konar Province, Afghanistan

**Entered service:** August 2003

**Born:** October 14, 1983, Harrisburg, Dauphin County, PA



Army Staff Sgt. Robert J. Miller, a Green Beret, was only 24 when he saved the lives of nearly two-dozen coalition force members pinned down during an intense 2008 firefight in Afghanistan. He sacrificed his own life for theirs, and that bravery and valor earned him the Medal of Honor. Miller was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on Oct. 14, 1983. He was one of eight kids — four boys, four girls — and came from a line of military men; both his grandfathers had fought in World War II, and his father has been a translator for the Army in Berlin during the Cold War.

When Miller was 5, his family moved to the Chicago suburb of Wheaton, Illinois, where he thrived. Miller was a Boy Scout and grew up playing several sports. Although he was an avid gymnast by the time he was in high school, he also played the trumpet and tuba. As a teen, Miller wanted to go to the U.S. Naval

Academy, but those dreams were dashed due to his colorblindness. Instead, he spent a year at the University of Iowa before joining the Army in August 2003 from Oviedo, Florida, where his family had just moved. Miller enlisted as a Special Forces trainee and earned his Special Forces Tab on Sept. 30, 2005. He was immediately assigned to Company A, 3rd Battalion of the 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

During his first deployment to Afghanistan in 2006-2007, Miller's actions earned him two Army Commendation Medals for Valor. He returned to the country in October 2007 as part of Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan. He was a weapons sergeant with Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha 3312, Task Force 33. According to his colleagues, he spoke French, German, some Russian and Pashto, which made him a good point man during missions; he could talk with the locals with whom they worked. On Jan. 25, 2008, Miller's detachment was sent to the Gowardesh Valley, a remote area in northwest Afghanistan near the Pakistani border. Their mission: to clear out insurgents who had been attacking Afghan forces and terrorizing villagers. Surveillance intel had shown a group of armed men holed up at a compound in the valley. Miller's detachment and about 15 Afghan National Army soldiers were tasked with determining if they were insurgents and, if confirmed, calling in close-air support to bomb the compound.

In the frigid pre-dawn morning, Miller volunteered to serve as point man on the patrol, which had to go through "ambush alley," an area with 300-foot near-vertical cliffs surrounding it. The route wasn't easy to traverse – snow packed the way, and they had to blow up two insurgent-placed boulders in their path. So, they were prepared for resistance. Once they got to the compound, they secured a perimeter and sent in a drone to confirm that there were, indeed, 15-20 insurgents inside who had already taken up fighting positions. Miller kicked off the battle using his vehicle's turret-mounted Mk-19 grenade launcher. He then called in the enemy's positions, and the Air Force dropped bombs on them.

When the air cleared, about two-dozen coalition members moved in on foot to assess the damage. Miller was again their point man. As they crossed a bridge and neared the steep, narrow valley through which the enemy had come, about 150 insurgents pounced, launching rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons fire from elevated positions and hiding spots on the ground. Miller's patrol had nowhere to hide. Since Miller was out front, he yelled to his comrades to pull back while he charged the enemy — some of whom were within 20 feet — to draw their fire, giving the others a chance to find cover. Once they were out of immediate danger, Miller tried to find cover himself but was shot in the upper torso under his body armor.

At about the same time, the detachment's commander, Capt. Robert Cusick, was also wounded. He ordered the rest of the team to fall back. Miller, however, knew he had the most firepower out of all of his comrades, so he stayed in that forward position, crawling through the snow to draw the fire in his direction. "Rob seemed to disappear into clouds of dust and debris, but his team could hear him on the radio, still calling out the enemy's position," President Barack Obama recounted at Miller's Medal of Honor ceremony. "They could hear his weapon still firing as he provided cover for his men." Miller continued to move from position to position until he was shot and killed. His team heard his gun fall silent over the radio, Obama's remarks stated. So, two of his teammates rushed forward to find him and be by his side for his last moments. They were soon forced back by more enemy fire, but after several more hours, the detachment was finally able to bring the 24-year-old's body out of the valley.



Five coalition force members were injured that day, but thanks to Miller's extraordinary efforts, 15 Afghan soldiers and seven members of his own team made it out alive. According to post-battle intelligence reports, of the more than 40 insurgents killed and roughly 60 who were wounded that day, Miller was credited with killing 16 and injuring more than 30. Miller's body was returned to the U.S. and buried with full military honors in All Faiths Memorial Park in Casselberry, Florida. At his funeral, one of his friends referred to him as "a loyal friend, a caring brother and son and a great patriot."

On Oct. 6, 2010, Obama presented the Medal of Honor to Miller's parents, Philip and Maureen, during a White House ceremony. More than 100 of the soldier's friends, family and fellow soldiers attended. "He loved what he was doing, and he was very good at it," Miller's father said at the time. "He was extremely enthusiastic about it, and it was very clear he really embraced the work, the mission and the people he worked with, American and Afghan." "When we learned about the details of what Robby had done to receive the Medal of Honor nomination, we weren't surprised, and we also weren't surprised at his reaction (in the field), because that was the sort of person he was — that's what his training taught him to do and be," Maureen Miller said. "I think the fact that he died doing something that he loved and thought was worthwhile was an important factor in helping us deal."

The Afghans who Miller saved wanted to honor him, too. ANA soldiers presented his parents with an Afghan rug. The couple has it hanging in their home as a symbol of their son's sacrifice and the important partnership between the two countries. In 2011, the commons area of Miller's high school was named Robert J. Miller Commons. In 2014, the 3rd Special Forces Group's headquarters building on Fort Bragg was also dedicated in his honor. Miller is one of 18 men to have earned the nation's top award for valor during actions in Afghanistan. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmohs.org> | Katie Lange | February 25, 2021 ++]

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## Cold War Espionage

Israel | Jonathan Pollard



In 1987, Jonathan Pollard became the first American convicted of espionage against the United States for a U.S. ally. He was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole after 30 years. His sentence was lighter than most other convicted spies because of a plea agreement he took to get leniency for him and his wife. Convicted in 1987, he was released in 2015 and was sent to Israel, where he now lives. Once in Israel, he received a hero's welcome for his spying. On Mar. 22, 2021, an Israeli newspaper, the Israel Hayom, published an interview with Pollard where he says the United States was intentionally keeping Israel in the dark in many areas.

“I know I crossed a line, but I had no choice,” he told the newspaper, adding that the threats to Israel were “serious.” He also describes himself as a “soldier” for Israel. Pollard was working as an intelligence analyst for the U.S. Navy. He was arrested in 1985 after trying to get asylum in the Israeli embassy in Washington. The Israelis told him he had to go through the embassy’s front door – where the FBI was waiting for him. He initially told authorities he was passing secrets to the U.S. ally in the Middle East because he was adamant Israel was not getting a total intelligence picture, and that the United States was “stabbing Israel in the back” with an intelligence embargo.

But the facts say something entirely different. Pollard wasn’t just passing along gathered intelligence to the Israelis, he was passing on intelligence about the U.S. military. The Defense Department has never released the full extent of what he sold to Israel, because even the list of his sold secrets is so damaging that it’s also classified Top Secret. Pollard, now 66 years old, blames his Israeli handlers for his capture, claiming they never trained him to be a spy and brushed off his concerns about getting caught. When Pollard was finally captured and tried, the prosecution used security camera footage of Pollard stealing classified documents to win his conviction.

Opposing any form of clemency were many active and retired U.S. officials, including Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, former CIA director George Tenet; several former U.S. Secretaries of Defense; a bi-partisan group of U.S. congressional leaders; and members of the U.S. intelligence community. They maintained that the damage to U.S. national security due to Pollard’s espionage was far more severe, wide-ranging, and enduring than publicly acknowledged. Though Pollard argued that he only supplied Israel with information critical to its security, opponents stated that he had no way of knowing what the Israelis had received through legitimate exchanges, and that much of the data he compromised had nothing to do with Israeli security. Pollard revealed aspects of the U.S. intelligence gathering process, its “sources and methods”. He sold numerous closely guarded state secrets, including the National Security Agency’s ten-volume manual on how the U.S. gathers its signal intelligence, and disclosed the names of thousands of people who had cooperated with U.S. intelligence agencies.

Ron Olive, the FBI agent who apprehended Pollard, said the Israeli spy was on a “spree” of classified document theft from “every intelligence agency in D.C.” Olive believed Pollard should never have been allowed to leave the U.S. and his fear that Pollard would be hailed as a hero came true. “The problem with the Israelis,” Olive told the U.S. Naval Institute, “They denied knowing anything about Pollard. They literally lied to two or three presidents that they knew nothing about Pollard.” Then-Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger said Pollard gave Israel information that could cause grave damage to U.S. national security. The most damaging information he sold was the Navy’s 10-volume Radio and Signal Intelligence [RASIN] manual, which was “in effect, a complete roadmap to American signal intelligence.”

At his defense trial and even to this day, Pollard claimed it was altruistic support for the Jewish state and an American ally that caused him to pass on U.S. intelligence secrets. But for all his altruistic claims, he was still paid \$25,000, along with a near \$6,000 monthly stipend, along with other gifts of jewelry, hotel stays, and other luxuries. The government claimed he also attempted to sell U.S. Navy secrets to South Africa, Argentina, Taiwan, Pakistan, and Iran. They estimate Pollard stole more than a million classified documents to Israel, calling him the “most damaging spy in U.S. history.” Pollard was paroled in 2015 and spent five years on probation before being allowed to leave the United States for Israel. [Source: We Are the Mighty | March 25, 2021 ++]

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## USS Johnson

### DD-557 Sunk at the Battle of Leyte Gulf



After nearly 77 years undisturbed on the floor of the Pacific, the USS Johnston — sunk during the Battle of Leyte Gulf — has been confirmed found. Resting more than 20,000 feet below surface, the shipwreck is the deepest ever discovered, the Naval History and Heritage Command first reported. In October 2019 the wreck of a Fletcher-class destroyer was located on the edge of an undersea cliff by the Vulcan Inc. research vessel Petrel, but the identity of the ship remained unconfirmed until recently. Now, imagery from the undersea technology company Caladan Oceanic, led by retired naval officer Victor Vescovo, has identified the ship by its hull number, 557.

The warship was lost during the Battle off Samar, part of the larger, sprawling Battle of Leyte Gulf on October 25, 1944. With the outcome of the war already decided, the Japanese were seeking little more than a “fitting place to die,” according to their planning documents. Despite technological superiority, American hubris, largely that of Admiral Bill Halsey, led unsuspecting U.S. sailors into the hands of a much larger Japanese force comprised of four battleships — including super-battleship Yamato — six heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and 11 destroyers.

Commander of the Pacific Fleet Adm. Chester Nimitz, attempting to make sense of the confused situation from Hawaii, dispatched a rare, sarcastic rebuke to Halsey that would become one of the most famous messages in naval history: “*Where repeat where is Task Force 34? The world wonders.*” The crew of the USS Johnston had no time to wonder, however. Led by Commander Ernest Evans, the heavily outmatched destroyer “charged into a massive line of Japanese warships in order to protect the American landing force attempting to liberate the Philippine Islands,” the NHHC wrote. The move reflected Evans’ assertion on the day of the Johnston’s commissioning, when he declared, “This is going to be a fighting ship. I intend to go in harm’s way, and anyone who doesn’t want to go along had better get off right now.”

Enemy shells assailed the onrushing Johnston, striking the destroyer and inflicting widespread damage and casualties. Despite being seriously wounded in the attack, Evans ordered a second assault. With no remaining torpedoes and limited firepower left, Johnston’s brave but doomed attack continued unabated, firing 30 more rounds into a 30,000-ton Japanese battleship. As enemy ships began strafing the escort carrier Gambier Bay, Evans gave the order to “commence firing on that cruiser, draw her fire on us and away from Gambier Bay.” The Japanese responded in turn.

“After two-and-a-half hours, Johnston — dead in the water — was surrounded by enemy ships,” the Naval History Center release said. “At 9:45 a.m., Evans gave the order to abandon ship. Twenty-five minutes later, the destroyer rolled over and began to sink.” Of the 327-man crew, only 141 survived. Evans was not among them. The commander was later awarded the Medal of Honor, becoming the first Native American in the U.S. Navy and one of two destroyer captains in WWII to receive the honor. “In no engagement in its entire history has the United States Navy shown more gallantry, guts and gumption than in the two morning hours between 0730 and 0930 off Samar,” Rear Adm. Samuel Eliot Morison wrote.

Because of Evans’ bravery and Johnston’s sacrifice in diverting Japanese attention, General Douglas MacArthur was able to retake the Philippines. However, due to Halsey’s miscalculations, “the Battle off Samar was for a time the victory whose name the navy dared not speak,” historian Jim Hornfischer noted. Now, the final resting place of the Johnston and the gravesite of its sailors can be properly honored. The Caladan Oceanic team, at the conclusion of its expedition, somberly laid a wreath in the vicinity of the battle site to salute the 186 lives lost that day. [Source: NavyTimes | Claire Barrett | April 2, 2021 ++]

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## **Military History Anniversaries**

**16 thru 30 APR**

Significant events in U. S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Military History Anniversaries 16 thru 30 APR**”.

[Source: This Day in History [www.history.com/this-day-in-history](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history) | April 2021 ++]

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## **Legends of WWII**

**Lockered “BuD” Gahs | Fighting Germans during Operation Northwind**



In this WWII veteran interview with 95 year old Lockered 'Bud' Gahs who served with the 42nd Infantry Division (also known as the Rainbow Division), he speaks about the fighting against the Germans and the effect shooting the enemy had on him during the German’s last major offensive of the western front called Operation Northwind. In the 37 min video interview at <https://youtu.be/PTck52FZj9Q> he is talking about close combat when 200 of the enemy attacked the village his unit was in. He and about 4 other men had

holed up in a house and fought off the Germans until they were liberated by the American 79th Infantry Division.

Bud was awarded The Bronze Star Medal for heroic achievement in action on January 25, 1945. Private Gahs and his squad were inside a home in Schweighausen, France when they discovered their house was surrounded by the enemy. They faced intense fire but Private Gahs remained at his post for more than two hours, firing his M-3 machine gun with deadly accuracy and blasting all enemy attempts to enter the house. His courageous act was largely responsible for the repulse of the enemy and for the death of ten Germans, the wounding of eight, and the capture of eight prisoners of war. [Source: Legends of WWII | March 26, 2021 ++]

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## Every Picture Tells A Story

### WWI Bavarian 23 German Snipers



**Snipers of the Bavarian 23. Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment which saw service in Siebenburgen, deep in the Carpathian borderlands, 1917. German snipers were some of the most fearsome fighters of World War I, creating panic and fear in the trenches whenever they appeared. Before the Germans started sniping American and English soldiers, members of the Allied Forces didn't understand the importance of striking in secret. General Lord Horne of the British Army explained that Bavarian snipers like these didn't just strike fear in the hearts of their soldiers, they fought the Allied forces the importance of sniping. He wrote: "In the early days of 1915, in command of the 2nd Division, I well remember the ever-increasing activity of the German sniper and the annoyance of our officers and men in the trenches... It was the experience of 1915 that impressed upon us the necessity of fighting for superiority in all branches of trench warfare, amongst .which sniping held an important position."**

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## WWII Bomber Nose Art

[73] Double Exposure



## USMC Uniform

Update 03: Evolution 1812 thru 1953

The U.S. Marine Corps is the nation's expeditionary force in readiness, participating in every U.S. war since the Corps' founding on Nov. 10, 1775. Marine Corps enlisted uniforms and equipment have evolved to fit the needs and mission of each Marine and every deployment, perpetually increasing warfighters' survivability, mobility and lethality.



### War of 1812 (1812-1815)

*Headgear* - The tall black service dress hat, or shako, made the wearer appear taller and more threatening. Made of felt material, the hat included a brass, octagonal plate bearing the words "National Arms," a scroll



with the Latin word "Fortitudine," meaning with strength or might, and the word "Marines." It had a yellow braided cord with tassel and a red plume to give even greater height.

*Clothing* - The dark blue jacket (coatee) was a wool tailcoat with red collar and cuffs. The chest, collar and cuffs were heavily adorned with yellow worsted wool taping. A linen long-sleeved shirt with ruffling down the front was worn underneath the coat, and considered an undergarment. (not pictured) The neck stock, an approximately 2.5-inch-wide black leather band, fit around the neck and fastened with a copper clasping system. It helped maintain a military posture by keeping the wearer's head erect and straight. The trousers were made of white wool for winter and linen for summer as well as fatigue dress. Black wool gaiters (leggings) were designed to be worn over the trousers' legs. Fastened with 15 naval buttons, they came to just below the knee and kept dirt out of the shoes and protected the wearer's legs in rough terrain.

*Footwear* - The ankle boot was made of smooth, dyed black leather. Small wooden pegs held together the leather soles, which also had small nails called hobnails tacked into them to create traction (similar to cleats today). The rest of the boot was sewn together with linen thread.

### **Civil War (1861-1865)**

*Headgear* The dark blue fatigue cap, or kepi, was a copy of the French chasseur pattern cap. A brass hunting horn with a German silver "M" insignia on the front indicated the wearer's branch. Though it had a brim and chin strap made of black lacquered leather, the fatigue cap did not offer much protection from the weather.

*Equipment* - A white leather waist belt with brass rectangular buckle was added to the uniform. An attached black leather percussion cap pouch, or cap box, contained primers for the rifled musket.

*Clothing* - The indigo blue Kersey wool undress coat, or frock, was single-breasted and had seven large buttons on the front and one button on each hip. A blue wool flannel shirt was worn underneath the coat. During warmer weather it was replaced by a white linen shirt. (not pictured). The trousers were sky-blue wool or unbleached white linen worn during warmer weather.

*Footwear* - The service boots, also known as brogan or Jefferson bootees, were ankle-high, laced, smooth black leather boots. Small wooden pegs held together the leather soles, which had small nails called hobnails tacked into them to create traction (similar to cleats today). The rest of the boot was sewn together with linen thread. This was the first time shoes were made for left and right feet in the military.

### **World War I (1917-1918)**

*Headgear* - The field or campaign hat was the primary headgear Marines wore. With its distinct "Montana peak," introduced in 1912, its influence can still be seen in the campaign hats Marine Corps drill instructors wear today. Remarkably, U.S. forces were deployed to France without a combat helmet. They would address this by initially acquiring the British steel helmet Mark I, also known as the "Brodie helmet." The United States began producing and fielding the M1917 steel helmet in large numbers in 1918. Copied from the British "Brodie" design, the steel helmet had a rounded crown, flared brim, leather lining and a chin strap fastened inside it. Painted a brownish olive green and textured with sand to make them less reflective, the helmets were meant to deflect overhead shell fragments, but they were not bulletproof.

*Equipment* - The webbed cotton canvas M1910 cartridge belt had a brass buckle, and each side had five pockets for five-round clips of .30-caliber ammunition. The total ammunition load was 100 rounds. A newly introduced first-aid pouch, also known as the Carlisle bandage pouch, was attached to the cartridge

belt. This was the first time first-aid items were issued to individual Marines. The British small box respirator used as a gas mask was the principal protection against newly introduced chemical warfare – chlorine, phosgene and mustard gas. A hose connected the tightly fitting rubberized facepiece to an activated charcoal filter, a concept derived from American coal miners. It was contained in a canvas haversack worn on the chest. An American-made copy was issued by the end of the war.

*Clothing* - Wool fiber was the best material at the time despite warm environments. Though cotton khaki summer service uniforms were issued, the Marines predominantly wore the well-known forest green wool service uniforms in France. As veteran Marines' uniforms wore out, they were forced to draw uniforms from the Army supply system that were olive drab. The forest green wool winter field coat had a high closed collar with flat, dark bronze Marine Corps buttons. Two lower pockets were added to the front by 1917. An issued wool, flannel mustard-colored shirt was often worn underneath. (Not pictured). The forest-green wool winter field trousers were a straight-leg design, unlike the U.S. Army breeches of the period. Wool strips, known as leg wraps (puttees), were adopted from European design and wrapped around the lower part of trousers to provide better insulation from cold and damp trenches, protecting the legs from underbrush, dirt, mud and more.

*Footwear* - Boots started as ankle-high, smooth-polished leather. But out of necessity, the Marines adopted another boot, like one French forces had, nicknamed the Pershing boot. It was much heavier and made of roughout leather, with a heavy leather sole and hobnailed. It was better suited for use in the trenches.

### **World War II (1941-1945)**

*Headgear* - This manganese steel M1 helmet upgrade from the WWI helmet provided greater ballistic protection against shell fragments and projectiles. It was a stable fit and didn't interfere with the Marine's vision or weapon-firing capabilities. The inner fiber shell and an attached two-piece webbed chinstrap could be adjusted to the service member's head. The inner liner was the only part of the helmet system that could be removed and worn by itself, providing protection similar to a hard hat. The M1 helmet style remained in use until 1985. Cotton camouflage covers were prevalent among Marines. They were reversible, with frog-skin camouflage in green colors on one side and brown colors on the other. Throughout WWII and Korea, the distinctive camouflage covers made Marines unique on the battlefield.

*Equipment* - The webbed cotton canvas M1923 cartridge belt was similar to the M1910 cartridge belt used in World War I. It had a brass buckle and five pockets on each side. The pockets each held an eight-round en-bloc clip for the M1 rifle, for a total ammunition load of 80 rounds. The bandoleer, slung over the shoulder, carried an additional 60 rounds. The first-aid pouch was the same version used in World War I.

*Clothing* - Herringbone twill material was used for jackets and trousers because it was cooler and lightweight. A one-piece coverall, originally adopted as a work coverall by both the Army and the Marine Corps for fatigue use, wasn't very useful in the field. Troops preferred the two-piece uniform. The M1941 jacket had one upper left chest pocket and two lower pockets on its skirt. The chest pocket bore the stenciled letters "USMC" and the eagle, globe and anchor emblem. Troops sometimes wore cotton undershirts under the coats. M1941 trousers had a straight-leg design similar in cut to blue jeans. The first use of camouflage pattern material was in World War II. The uniforms were reversible, with a green color scheme for jungle and a brown color scheme for beach (see helmet). Herringbone twill material, adopted just before World War II, is a form of weave material like denim copied from civilian work clothes, having a very distinct alternating V-shaped weave. It was used in military clothing until the 1960s. Marines returned to canvas leggings after World War I. The khaki or olive drab leggings laced up the side with a

cord and secured with hooks and eyelets. Marines wore them with the service shoe with an adjustable strap that went under the instep.

*Footwear* - The field service boots, known as boondockers, were ankle-high, roughout leather with black rubber composite soles. Better soles using rubber composite with fiber material were developed by the late 1930s to increase durability.

### **Korean War (1950-1953)**

*Headgear* - The M1 helmet and its camouflage cover were the same version used in World War II.

*Body Armor* - Marines began using the **M1952 flak vest** toward the latter part of the war. The collarless vest was made of multiple layers of nylon and was designed to only stop low-velocity shrapnel and fragments. It lacked the ballistic capability to stop rifle rounds.

*Equipment* - The field equipment was the same as used in World War II. The grenade pouch held two or more grenades and was attached to the cartridge belt.

*Clothing* - Standard combat clothing included a utility uniform worn underneath the winter garment, which was an improved carryover of World War II herringbone twill clothing material. Boots, leggings, field equipment and weapon technology remained the same. To brave winter, Marines donned several layers to enter the subzero climates to the north. The parka was lined with alpaca fleece while the outer shell was made of a cotton canvas. Marines did not have standard cold-weather clothing, so their iconic parka actually came from the Navy, the M1947 Navy deck parka. Alpaca fleece is the natural fiber harvested from an alpaca, is soft and durable, and can be light or heavy in weight.

The 1943 field jacket and trousers were heavy cotton outer garments designed to be worn over the M1941 service uniform. They could also be worn with an inner liner for weather protection. To combat the frigid temperatures, several undergarments were worn including: cotton-wool blend undershirts, wool boot socks worn over regular socks and cotton-blend long underwear called drawers. (Not pictured) Accessories such as mittens, gloves and scarf were made of wool.

The M1943 camouflage pattern poncho was a reversible green or brown, similar to the World War II camouflage poncho. It was made of two cotton cloth pieces bonded with a thin film of rubber in between to make it waterproof. Unlike the Army's, the Marine Corps' poncho did not have a hood.

*Footwear* - The field service boots or boondockers were ankle-high, roughout leather with black rubber composite soles. After the Korean War, Marines transitioned to a high-top leather boot and eliminated the canvas leggings. The M1943 cold weather boots or shoepac were high-ankle leather and rubber boots lined with a thick felt insert. These were usually bought oversized and worn over boondockers and leggings.

[Source: Today in DoD | March 26, 2021 ++]

### **\* Health Care \***



## Prostate Cancer

### Update 19: For Many Men Surgery Risks Outweigh Potential Benefits

Investigators at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System and the University of Minnesota found that “watchful waiting” or prostate specific antigen (PSA) monitoring may be the best approach for many men with prostate cancer. While practicing watchful waiting may slightly increase risk of death for some men clinically diagnosed with cancer, it reduces harm, compared to surgery. The findings will potentially help improve health care quality and inform clinical practice guidelines.

The results suggest that surgery for prostate cancer may be necessary only for younger patients and those with more aggressive cancers, according to lead study author Dr. Timothy Wilt, of the Minneapolis VA Center for Care Delivery and Outcomes Research, and the Minnesota Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality Evidence-based Practice Center. “I hope that clinical guidelines incorporate this information and find a broader role for watchful waiting and PSA-based testing for most men,” noted Wilt. The results [appeared](#) in the Dec. 22, 2020, issue of the Journal of Urology.

After skin cancer, prostate cancer is the most-diagnosed form of cancer for men in the United States. It is the second leading cause of cancer death in U.S. men. However, most cases grow slowly and do not cause symptoms, even if untreated. About 90% of cases are localized, meaning that the cancer is confined to the prostate gland and may not spread to other parts of the body. This is especially true in men diagnosed currently by blood testing for PSA. The vast majority of men with prostate cancer (90%) do not die from it. Despite the fact that prostate cancer is often slow-growing, many patients and doctors opt for an aggressive approach to care, such as surgery or radiation, which can result in urinary, sexual and bowel problems. Radical prostatectomy – surgery to remove the prostate gland – is the most common treatment for prostate cancer. An alternative is watchful waiting, in which direct treatment is deferred while patients are monitored for symptom changes and possible cancer spread.

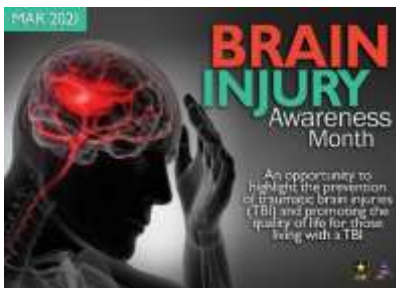
The researchers conducted a systematic review of 67 studies to compare the effectiveness of watchful waiting versus radical prostatectomy, along with several other treatments. The review is one of the first studies to look at very long-term results. The results showed that watchful waiting may increase the risk of both the spread of cancer and death from cancer, compared with surgery, in men with clinically detected cancer. Importantly, the studies comparing the two treatments were long-term studies, looking at results over 20 years, begun before PSA testing became common. Clinical detection of prostate cancer relies on physical examination and biopsy. PSA testing, on the other hand, can detect cancer earlier and find smaller, slower-growing tumors. PSA testing is able to diagnose prostate cancer up to five years or so before it would be clinically detectable.

Different studies reviewed found varying levels of risk: overall, after 20 to 25 years, watchful waiting was linked to an increase in death from any cause of 5% to 15%, and an increase in cancer-related death of 4% to 10%. However, patients undergoing watchful waiting had lower rates of urinary and erectile dysfunction than those who underwent radical prostatectomy. [Source: Vantage Point | Tristan Horrom | April 2, 2021 ++]

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## Traumatic Brain Injury

### Update 79: Vets Urged To Pledge Posthumous Brain Donations



With athletics and military service in his past and present, Alex Balbir knew that traumatic brain injury could be lurking in his future. So a few years ago Balbir pledged to donate his brain to posthumous research into traumatic brain injury in veterans. As independence services director for the Jacksonville-based Wounded Warrior Project, he is now asking other veterans to do the same.

The nonprofit, which serves wounded veterans and active-duty military personnel, has launched a partnership with the Boston-based Concussion Legacy Foundation to boost research into traumatic brain injury in veterans and help determine the best ways to diagnose and treat the disorder. "This is an opportunity to advance research ... It may not help an individual right now but it may help future generations," said Balbir, who is currently an active-duty reservist. "I may be fine. But we need to investigate what could happen to people like me."

Traumatic brain injury can stem from a "violent blow or jolt to the head or body" or from an object, such as a bullet or shrapnel, impacting brain tissue, according to the Mayo Clinic. The damage may be minimal and temporary but can also produce long-term complications such as physical, sensory, cognitive or behavioral symptoms, according to Mayo. Symptoms can be immediate or appear years later and can be risk factors for suicide. "Spreading the word is vital," Balbir said. "Working with the Concussion Legacy Foundation can help us learn better ways to care for and treat these invisible wounds." The foundation's [Project Enlist](#) was developed to increase the number of veteran brains donated for research on traumatic brain injury, chronic traumatic encephalopathy — brain degeneration likely caused by repeated head trauma — and post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

Studying veterans' brains can help determine if repeated traumatic brain injuries in combat and in training lead to long-term health issues. Research is also necessary to help health care providers correctly diagnose traumatic brain injury and PTSD, which require different treatments, Balbir said. Posthumous research is underway at the Veterans Affairs-Boston University-CLF Brain Bank and other leading brain banks. "We don't have all the answers for veterans right now," said Chris Nowinski, the foundation's co-founder and CEO. "Brain-bank research is an essential step in developing effective treatments ... so we can protect and support the heroes who courageously fight for our nation."

The Department of Defense reported roughly 400,000 cases of traumatic brain injuries in service members in the last 20 years, according to the Wounded Warrior Project. In the nonprofit's 2020 Annual Warrior Survey, at least one in three reported experiencing a traumatic brain injury during their military service. After U.S. military involvement in conflicts in Iraq and Syria, among other locations, "we are starting to realize the long-term consequences," Balbir said.

For the NFL, that realization came to the forefront in 2013 with the league's nearly \$1 billion concussion settlement with former players who claimed that years of hits on the field caused traumatic brain injuries that led to chronic traumatic encephalopathy. The same year a PBS television series Frontline aired a two-hour investigation: [League of Denial: The NFL's Concussion Crisis](#) that also pumped awareness. The NFL has since instituted a series of rule changes in an attempt to reduce violent collisions and a five-step protocol for concussed players before they can return to the field. Player concussions dropped by 5 percent in the 2020-21 season, the third consecutive year when the NFL has had a reduction in concussions.

"Making veterans aware of the research opportunity is more difficult than it is with athletes because sports media has done an incredible job covering CTE [chronic traumatic encephalopathy] issues in sports," Nowinski said. The Wounded Warrior partnership, he said, is "going to make an enormous difference" in recruiting veterans. And one veteran and family joining the cause often lead to their friends and colleagues joining as well, particularly "people who have lost someone they care about ... who suffered a long time," he said. Project Enlist is also seeking pledges for posthumous brain donations from people who are not veterans. Their brains would be used as a control group to make comparisons and for genetic studies, Nowinski said. "You can't do genetic studies without thousands of brains," he said. Currently about 80 percent of the brain donations are the result of pledges made before death. In other cases, Nowinski approached families after veterans died.

#### CONCUSSION LEGACY FOUNDATION/PROJECT ENLIST

Veterans who want to pledge posthumous brain donation or want more information should go to [concussionfoundation.org/programs/project-enlist](https://concussionfoundation.org/programs/project-enlist). Other people who want to make a pledge should go to [concussionfoundation.org/get-involved/research-registry](https://concussionfoundation.org/get-involved/research-registry).

#### WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT

To donate, volunteer or get more information, contact the nonprofit at 4899 Belfort Road, Suite 300, Jacksonville FL, 32256; (877) 832-6997; or go to [woundedwarriorproject.org](https://woundedwarriorproject.org).

[Source: The Florida Times-Union | Beth Reese Cravey | March 26, 2021 ++]

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## **Coronavirus Vaccines**

### **Update 34: Army Begins Clinical Trials on SpFN**

A unique vaccine produced by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research started clinical testing 6 APR, and Army researchers hope it will combat variants of SARS-COV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19. The vaccine, called *spike ferritin nanoparticle*, or SpFN, could also help fight other coronaviruses, a group of related RNA viruses that often cause respiratory-related diseases in mammals. Army researchers have been tracking the threat posed by new coronaviruses even before the pandemic, according to Kayvon Modjarrad, director of emerging infectious diseases at Walter Reed. That threat has been accelerating in recent years. "That's why we need a vaccine like this: one that has potential to protect broadly and proactively against multiple coronavirus species and strains," Modjarrad said in a statement announcing the SpFN testing.



The Defense Department has had a combined total of more than 271,000 COVID-19 cases. Of those, 3,814 people have been hospitalized and 332 people have died. Twenty-four of the dead have been service members and 11 have been dependents. Vaccines produced by Pfizer and Moderna were approved under an emergency use authorization by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and are available to troops. The Pentagon has made vaccinating the force a readiness issue so that military operations can return to pre-pandemic norms. Though there was some trouble in lobbying troops to take the voluntary vaccine early on, vaccination rates appear to be rising in recent weeks.

“The more people who get vaccinated as quickly as possible, the level of virus transmission decreases, which gives it less opportunity to continue to mutate,” Dr. Steven Cersovsky, deputy director of the Army Public Health Center, said in late February. New variants of COVID-19 have emerged in South Africa and the United Kingdom. But Army medical personnel are hopeful that the current vaccines can combat those new strains. But if there’s trouble, Walter Reed’s vaccine may prove timely. “We have designed and positioned this platform as the next generation vaccine, one that paves the way for a universal vaccine to protect against not only the current virus, but also counter future variants, stopping them in their tracks before they can cause another pandemic,” Modjarrad said.

Pre-clinical studies indicated that SpFN induces very strong antibody responses in patients, curbing the virus that causes COVID-19 infection, as well as three major SARS-CoV-2 variants and the SARS-CoV-1 virus. The phase 1 study is being conducted at Walter Reed’s Clinical Trials Center and will enroll 72 healthy adult volunteers between the ages of 18-55. Participants will be randomly placed in placebo or experimental groups. The clinical trial of SpFN is sponsored by the U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command. The vaccine was developed by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research with support from the Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine, Inc. [Source: ArmyTimes | Kyle Rempfer | April 7, 2021 ++]

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## **Allergy Season**

### **It’s Here: So, is it Covid, Allergies, Flu, or a Cold?**

One of the concerns last fall and winter was knowing whether someone might have the seasonal flu, a cold, or the coronavirus. As it turned out, seasonal flu was almost non-existent, and colds were also way down. While the reasons for that are still being explored, it is likely the wearing of masks, frequent hand washing and staying away from crowds contributed to those results. Now, allergy season has arrived and in the United States as many as 30 percent of adults and 40 percent of kids have seasonal allergies. Once again, the question among some is whether it is allergies or Covid or something else.

The Mayo Clinic has put out the following information as a way of helping you decide what it is that you may be suffering from. You are advised that if your symptoms are the same as in the past you are likely suffering from allergies again. But if there is any variation you should get tested for Covid. And if you have any doubt, getting tested for Covid is probably the right thing to do, especially if you have not been fully vaccinated.

| <b>Symptom or sign</b>                         | <b>COVID-19</b>                                                 | <b>Allergy</b> | <b>Cold</b>                                     | <b>Flu</b>                                |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Cough                                          | Usually (dry)                                                   | Sometimes      | Usually                                         |                                           |
| Fever                                          | Usually                                                         | Never          | Sometimes                                       | Usually –<br>Not always                   |
| Muscle aches                                   | Usually                                                         | Never          | Sometimes                                       |                                           |
| Tiredness                                      | Usually                                                         | Sometimes      | Sometimes                                       | Usually                                   |
| Itchy nose, eyes, mouth<br>or inner ear        | Never                                                           | Usually        | N/A                                             |                                           |
| Sneezing                                       | Rarely                                                          | Usually        | Sometimes                                       | Usually                                   |
| Sore throat                                    | Usually                                                         | Rarely         | Usually                                         | Usually                                   |
| Runny or stuffy nose                           | Usually                                                         | Usually        | Usually                                         | Usually                                   |
| Pink eye (conjunctivitis)                      | Sometimes                                                       | Sometimes      | N/A                                             |                                           |
| Nausea or vomiting                             | Sometimes                                                       | Never          | Never                                           | Sometimes –<br>More common<br>In children |
| Diarrhea                                       | Sometimes                                                       | Never          | Never                                           | Sometimes –<br>More common<br>In children |
| New loss of taste<br>or smell                  | Usually (early -<br>often without<br>a runny or stuffy<br>nose) | Sometimes      | Sometimes<br>(especially with<br>a stuffy nose) |                                           |
| Shortness of breath<br>or difficulty breathing | N/A                                                             | N/A            | N/A                                             | Usually                                   |

### **How can you prevent allergies?**

The best way to prevent seasonal allergies is to avoid your known triggers. If you're allergic to pollen, stay inside with windows and doors closed when pollen is high. Wearing a cloth face mask to slow the spread of COVID-19 also might provide some protection against seasonal allergies. Masks can prevent you from inhaling some larger pollen particles. However, smaller pollen particles will still be able to get through a mask. It's also important to wash your mask after each use since a mask might carry pollen particles. If you think you might have signs or symptoms of COVID-19, talk to your doctor. Remember, taking preventive measures can help you stay healthy and reduce your risk of becoming ill with COVID-19, the flu or the common cold.

[Source: The Senior Citizens League | Weekly Update | April 5, 2021 ++]

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## **Legionnaires' Disease**

### **Update 01: CDC Reports About 10% Who Gets Sick from It Will Die**

Legionellosis is a common name for one of the several illnesses caused by Legionnaires' disease bacteria (LDB). Legionella can cause Legionnaires' disease, Pontiac fever, and, more rarely, extrapulmonary infections, collectively known as legionellosis. The disease is an infection of the lungs that is a form of

pneumonia. A person can develop the disease by inhaling water mist contaminated with LDB. LDB are widely present at low levels in the environment: in lakes, streams, and ponds. It is a bacterial disease of the lungs caused by *Legionella pneumophila*. The incubation period, the time between exposure and onset of illness, is two to ten days, but most often five to six days. The disease can range from a mild respiratory illness to severe pneumonia and death. It is very similar to other types of pneumonia (lung infection), with symptoms that include:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Fever
- Muscle aches
- Headaches
- Diarrhea, nausea, and confusion.

The most common form of legionellosis is known as "Legionnaires' disease," named after an outbreak in 1976 when many people who attended an American Legion conference in Philadelphia became ill. It is estimated that between 8,000 and 18,000 people are hospitalized with it in the United States each year. An additional unknown number are infected with the *Legionella* bacterium but have mild symptoms or no illness at all. The disease can occur at any time of the year, but is more common in the summer and early autumn. *Legionella* bacteria are widely distributed, and normally grow best in warm water environments. They have been found in creeks and ponds, water taps (primarily hot water taps), hot water tanks, cooling towers and evaporative condensers, whirlpool spas, and decorative fountains.

Most people contract the disease by inhaling mist or vapor from a water source contaminated with the bacteria. In some cases, the disease may be transmitted by other ways, such as aspirating contaminated water. The disease is not contracted by drinking contaminated water, and person-to-person spread of legionellosis does not occur. Outbreaks occur following the exposure of many individuals to a common source of the bacteria in the environment. When a single case occurs, it is extremely difficult to pinpoint a source. Environmental testing is recommended only when multiple cases have the same potential exposure.

People of any age may get Legionnaires' disease, but the disease most often affects persons older than 50. The disease is rare in people younger than 20 years of age. People at high-risk of acquiring the disease include current and former smokers, persons with chronic lung disease like emphysema or COPD, or those with compromised immunity (like patients who receive corticosteroids or have had an organ transplant). People with underlying illnesses, such as cancer, kidney disease, diabetes, or AIDS are also at higher risk. A chest exam and/or x-ray is usually performed to confirm a diagnosis of pneumonia. The most common laboratory test is the urinary antigen test, which detects the presence of *Legionella* antigen in the urine. A diagnosis of legionellosis can be confirmed by successful culture (isolation and growth) of the bacteria from specimens taken from an ill patient.

Hospitalization may be required for patients with legionellosis. Most cases can be successfully treated with antibiotics. There is no vaccine to prevent legionellosis. About one in 10 people who gets sick from Legionnaires' disease will die. Because man-made water systems are the most likely source of *Legionella*, appropriate maintenance is very important. Water temperatures can be raised to reduce transmission, and chemical treatments or biocides can be administered to water systems to inhibit growth of bacteria. Legionellosis is a reportable disease in many states and cases should be reported to the local health department within seven days. Timely reporting allows identification of additional cases and control of

possible contaminated sources. [Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/fastfacts.html> & IL DVA | April 4, 2021 ++]

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## **FLU Prevention**

### **Update 08: Why 2021 Flu Season May Be Severe**

Low levels of flu activity amid the COVID-19 pandemic have made it more challenging for experts developing next year's flu shot to predict which strains will predominate next winter, reports Politico. Without a strong enough vaccine, the U.S. could experience a severe flu season. COVID-19 safety measures helped nearly eradicate this year's season, with a flu hospitalization rate for 2020-21 of just 0.7 per 100,000 people, the lowest rate since the CDC began collecting such data in 2005. Without COVID-19 precautions, there could be new flu strains circulating that scientists didn't anticipate, said Cody Meissner, MD, infectious disease specialist and pediatrician at Boston-based Tufts Children's Hospital and panelist for the FDA's independent vaccine advisory committee.

"We may have a combination of low public health measures at the population level with a low effectiveness vaccine," said Lawrence Gostin, a global health law professor at Washington, D.C.-based Georgetown University. "And then so you might have a raging flu season next year." The low levels of the virus this season were still enough for the FDA committee to pick strains for the upcoming vaccine, said Paul Offit, MD, a vaccine expert at Philadelphia-based University of Pennsylvania and member of the FDA advisory panel. Dr. Offit said he is not worried about the vaccine for next fall.

Mr. Gostin said pandemic fatigue could have people ditching masking and social distancing just in time for the flu, referring back to the 1918 flu pandemic. "What happened was the roaring '20s," Mr. Gostin told Politico. "People started congregating, mingling, hugging, kissing. All the things they missed. ... That's what's likely to happen this fall and that makes the influenza virus very happy." [Source: Becker's Hospital Review | Gabrielle Masson | March 30, 2021 ++]

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## **Sleep Positions**

### **Best for Health Problems**



The optimum sleep position for anyone depends on their individual health and wellbeing. When a medical professional was asked to detail how persons should sleep in order to relieve or try to prevent anything ranging from shoulder and back pain to heartburn, snoring, and more, they provided the following information:

### **Back Pain**

Major damage could occur to the spine if an individual is sleeping in the wrong position. The trick to preventing or at least decreasing the severity of back pain is trying to maintain the spine with its natural arch or curve. The best bets are lying on your side or back with a strategically positioned pillow to reduce the strain that will be placed on the lower back. Many times, the individuals are more comfortable lying on their backs when there is a pillow behind the knees, or between the legs once the individual is on the side. Using a large memory foam pillow could assist the individual in maintaining a sleeping position on the side.

### **Shoulder Pain**

Lying on your side to sleep with the pain-free shoulder could assist, however, there is always the risk of turning on the other side during the night and placing extra pressure on the side that hurts. There are a few mattresses that give a bit therefore the pressure on the joints of the hips and shoulders is not as much, however, if the mattress is stiff or firm, it would resemble sleeping on the floor and very uncomfortable, resulting in positions being shifted. Begin by lying on the back or even the stomach in order to reduce the chance of ending up in a painful position.

### **Hip Pain**

Lying on the back could assist in the relief of painful hips. Lying on the back will result in the curve of the spine being straightened out which would reduce the pressure on the hips, according to sleep medicine specialists at the Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital. No one wants to increase the pressure on the region of the body that hurts due to the fact that it will result in additional pain during the night, which will lead to even lighter phases of sleep.

### **Neck Pain**

There are several innocent things that individuals do innocently that hurt their necks, however, sleeping with the correct set of pillows will maintain the head in an even position with the shoulders, thereby lessening the pain in the neck during the night. Individuals must find a height to stack the pillows which will prevent the individual from placing additional strain on the neck in either direction. The individual must be cautious not to use too many pillows. In an effort to try and alleviate neck pain by finding the most comfortable position to sleep in, many people end up with a massive mound of pillows, on one huge, fluffy pillow. This might be comfortable; however, persons should consider the position of their neck in relation to their head.

### **Knee Pain**

As individuals sleep, it might not be possible to recognize what is resulting in the pains to their knees. The majority of knee pains are a result of the legs being too close to each other and touching. Sleep experts recommend placing something soft such as a pillow or anything you could find that is suitable, between the legs in order to minimize the likelihood of them touching.

### **Snoring**

If individuals find that their sleeping buddy is complaining about the close-to-bear-like sounds coming out of their mouths during the night, then try shifting to a sleep position on the side. While on the back, there is gravity that is pulling everything back towards the airways and results in the air passage becoming constricted with instabilities in the airways. Try elevating the head with a few pillows in order to assist in the draining, which would flow downwards much easier.

### **TMJ**

If an individual suffers from TMJ or also referred to as temporomandibular joint dysfunction or any other kind of pain in the jaw, try to keep the side of the face or cheeks from the pillow by lying with your face up. Try not to place your face on the side as this could result in additional pressure on the joints of the mouth or on the cheekbones themselves and cause more pain.

### **Obstructive Sleep Apnea**

Consult your primary health provider if you suffer from snoring or teeth grinding as you sleep in order to determine if these are symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea. This disorder occurs when the upper air passage is entirely or partially blocked as the individual sleeps, making the person heave into being awake when they finally are able to breathe by gulping a good set of air. This condition is common as a result of lying on the back during the night allowing the tongue to fall backward naturally resulting in it becoming an obstruction. Try not to lay down on your back in order to stop the tongue from potentially blocking the air passage.

### **Heartburn**

As the stomach muscles and valves relax during sleep, to the point that it allows the acids to penetrate their way up the esophagus, the individual may start having a sensation similar to the burning of acid reflux. Research has confirmed that lying on the left side of the body has to relieve properties for heartburn, probably due to the fact that it does not allow the valves of the stomach to open that easily. Also, allow gravity to be your friend, sleep in a position where your upper body is elevated with a pillow, this should allow the acid to flow downwards and not towards the esophagus. For optimal results use a pillow that tapers from roughly ten inches to eight inches, just piling up normal pillows will cause the abdominals to engage and place pressure on the stomach.

[Source: The Outdoor Wear Team| April 5, 2021 ++]

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## **New Developments**

### **Smart Speakers to Detect Abnormal Heart Rhythms**

Researchers at the University of Washington say they have developed a contactless way to screen for irregular heartbeats using ordinary smart speakers. The analysts came up with an AI-powered system that relies on sonar technology to pick up vibrations caused by nearby chest wall movements. If ever deployed, the heart-tracking technology could enhance how doctors conduct telemedicine appointments by providing data that would otherwise require wearables, health hardware or an in-person checkup.

The goal was to find a way to use devices that people already have to edge cardiology and health monitoring into the future, according to Arun Sridhar, assistant professor of cardiology at the UW School of Medicine. The team published their findings Tuesday. “We have Google and Alexa in our homes all



around us. We predominantly use them to wake us up in the morning or play music,” said Shyam Gollakota, a UW computer science professor and co-author of the report. “The question we’ve been asking is, can we use the smart speaker for something more useful.” Smart speaker makers could integrate the technology into existing products via software updates, researchers say.

The system works by emitting audio signals into the room at a volume humans can’t hear. As the pulses bounce back to the speaker, an algorithm works to identify beating patterns generated from a human’s chest wall. A second algorithm is then applied to determine the amount of time between two heartbeats. That information, known as interbeat intervals, could help doctors gauge how well your heart is functioning. Researchers trained the speakers to pick up regular and irregular heart rhythms. The concept of remotely tracking patients’ health isn’t new. Wearable devices such as smartwatches have increasingly added wellness tools for years. But contactless health monitoring is somewhat of a frontier that could prove valuable when you aren’t wearing a device or if you aren’t experiencing any triggering symptoms of a medical emergency.

The smart speaker research project started in 2019 but was held up because of the pandemic. The analysts picked things back up late last year, testing out the software with 26 healthy participants and 24 hospitalized patients with varying cardiac conditions, including atrial fibrillation and heart failure. Healthy patients were tested in office rooms, while cardiac patients were tested in their hospital rooms at the UW Medical Center in Seattle. The specialists then compared the smart speaker findings to results from medical-grade ECG monitors. The smart speakers’ readings turned out to be relatively accurate, only deviating from the ECG readings by an amount that “wasn’t medically relevant,” the researchers say.

The system is set up for spot checks. If you wanted a reading, you’d have to sit within two feet of the speaker for it to work. The researchers used a developer version of Alexa with a low-quality speaker to run their tests. And they say speakers in mainstream devices could be more powerful, enabling readings from farther away. The scientists behind the technology imagine a future in which people could opt in to heart rhythm tracking on their smart speakers. And if you sleep near your device or have it near you during telemedicine appointments, there might be benefits. For instance, you could share your heart rate with your physician during a remote checkup. Or the device could alert medical professionals if you experience a cardiac emergency.

The next step is to figure out whether the AI can be used to detect sleep apnea signs. One-fourth of U.S. households already have smart speakers. But getting the software approved for the devices could take a few years, Gollakota said. The researchers previously created an AI system for smart speakers to detect cardiac arrest. They’ve also developed smart speaker technology to monitor babies’ breathing. Those algorithms are undergoing FDA approval. [Source: Washington Post | Dalvin Brown | March 10, 2021 ++]

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## **Mucus and Phlegm**

### **The Slime That Keeps You Healthy**

Mucus has several names. Snot, the sticky goo that pours from your nose during a cold. Or phlegm, the gunk that can clog your lungs and make you cough. You probably aren’t a fan of the stuff. But mucus is

so much more than a runny nose. Your body is making mucus all the time. And it plays an important role in keeping you healthy. “Mucus and phlegm get sort of a bad reputation,” says Dr. Richard Boucher, a lung expert at the University of North Carolina. “People think about it as something you’re supposed to cough up and get out. That it’s a bad thing. But in truth, mucus really is the interface between you and the outside world.”

Mucus lines the moist surfaces of your body like the lungs, sinuses, mouth, stomach, and intestines. Even your eyes are coated with a thin layer of mucus. It serves as a lubricant to keep tissues from drying out. It’s also a line of defense. “Mucus is very important for filtering out materials that you breathe in through your nose, such as dust and allergens and microorganisms,” says Dr. Andrew Lane, an ear, nose, and throat expert at Johns Hopkins University. “Anything that you breathe in gets stuck in the mucus, like flypaper.”

### **Mucus at Work**

In the next hour, you’re going to inhale thousands of bacteria. But you’ll never know it. Bacteria land on the mucus-lined surface of the lungs and get trapped. Then little hairs called cilia go to work. They push the mucus up and out of the lungs with all the trapped bacteria, viruses, and dust. “It comes up at sort of a nice slow rate to the back of the throat,” Boucher says. “And if you’re normal and healthy, you never feel it and you just swallow it.” The mucus, together with the bacteria and other trapped substances, then goes to the stomach and eventually pass out of the body.

Your body makes a lot of mucus, although no one’s quite sure how much. Mucus is mostly water. But it also contains special proteins, sugars, and molecules that help the body control harmful germs. Usually you’re not aware of all the mucus that slowly flows through your body. That is, until you get sick.

### **Too Much Mucus**

You usually only notice mucus when you’re making too much of it. Or if it changes consistency. An infection can make mucus thicker and stickier. Infections also lead to inflammation in the mucous membranes that line the nose and the rest of your airway. This can cause certain airway glands to make more mucus. That mucus can get thick with bacteria and cells that arrive to fight the infection. That can stimulate even more mucus production. “When mucus is particularly excessive, it can be bothersome in terms of runny nose, clogged nose, and post-nasal drip,” says Dr. Bruce Bochner, an allergy expert at Northwestern University. Post-nasal drip is when excess mucus from the back of the nose gathers and drips down the back of the throat. It’s a common cause of a cough.

Allergies can also cause your body to make extra mucus. When you have an allergy, your immune system overreacts to a harmless substance, like pollen, dust, or animal dander. Cells in your airway then release substances, like histamine. Histamine can make you sneeze. It also causes the mucous membranes in the nose to swell and the glands to make more mucus. Bochner’s team studies how certain proteins on immune cells control allergies and inflammation. They’re also looking at how certain components of mucus might help fight inflammation.

“There are two general types of secretions that are made in the nose,” Bochner explains. Things like allergies, eating spicy food, and being outside in the cold can result in a more watery nasal leakage. Your body usually makes thicker mucus when you have a cold (caused by viruses) or sinus infection (caused by bacteria). Most mucus problems are temporary. But producing too much mucus contributes to some serious conditions. This includes cystic fibrosis, a genetic disorder that causes mucus in the lungs to

become thick and glue-like. Boucher and his colleagues are working to find new treatments for cystic fibrosis and related lung diseases. When there's too much mucus:

- Use a humidifier or vaporizer. Keeping your nose and throat moist may reduce mucus and phlegm production.
- Apply a warm, moist washcloth to your face.
- Try a nasal saline spray or rinse. Clearing out mucus can help you breathe easier. Commercial products are available. If making your own, only use distilled, sterile, or previously boiled water.
- Consider taking over-the-counter medications. Expectorants can thin mucus to help clear it from your chest. Decongestants shrink blood vessels, so you produce less mucus. (Be careful about overusing them, as they can make the problem worse.) Antihistamines can help if your mucus is caused by allergies.
- Talk with your health care provider if your runny nose or congestion lasts more than three weeks or occurs with a fever.

### **Colors of Mucus**

Mucus can come in a range of colors. This won't surprise you if you've ever looked closely at your tissues after blowing your nose. Mucus is normally clear. During a cold, you may find that your snot is cloudy or yellowish. Proteins released by the cells that cause inflammation can get stuck in the mucus and give it this color, Lane explains. He's currently studying how cells in the nose and sinus are involved in long-term inflammation, called chronic sinusitis. Brown or black mucus is more common in heavy smokers and some types of lung disease. Greenish, brownish, or bloody colors may signal a bacterial infection. But that's not always the case. It can be difficult to figure out what's wrong simply by your mucus color. Since many things can cause your body to make too much mucus, doctors rely on other clues to diagnose and treat the problem.

### **Wonders of Mucus**

While excess snot and phlegm aren't pleasant, you wouldn't want to go without mucus. "Mucus creates a layer of protection between the outside world and you. So it's very, very important," Lane says. It's not just important for people. It's also the slime that allows a snail to move across the ground. It's the slippery coating that protects fish against bacteria in the water. "It's a really wonderful material," Boucher says. But maybe your mucus isn't feeling so marvelous.

[Source: NIH News in Health | August 2021 ++]

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## **Testicular Cancer**

### **Update 02: Men Should Be Proactive In Looking For Early Signs**

Testicular Cancer Week is an important time to remind service members and veterans to be proactive in their health. According to Navy Lt. Cmdr. (Dr.) Dorota Hawksworth, a urologist at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, testicular cancer is very rare, but is most common amongst males between 15 and 34 years of age, the age bracket of many military members. It is a disease in which malignant cells form in the tissues of one or both testicles. While the diagnosis of cancer can be frightening, testicular cancer can usually be cured.

"Many men have no known risk factors," said Hawksworth, "the known risk factors [for testicular cancer] can't be changed." These risk factors include a personal history of undescended testicle or prior testicular cancer, family history of testicular cancer, HIV infection, diagnosis of Klinefelter's disease, age, race, and ethnicity, Hawksworth noted. White males develop testicular cancer at a rate four times higher than that of Black males. Testicular cancer can be detected early through screenings both at home and by a doctor. "Screening means looking for cancer before person has any symptoms. This process is performed differently, depending on the type of cancer," said Hawksworth.

Testicular cancer however has no standard routine or screening. According to Hawksworth, most testicular cancers are found by a man or his partner, either by chance or by a self-screening. Self-exams should be performed monthly and in a warm environment such as a bath or shower to allow the scrotum to be more "relaxed," Hawksworth noted. Then each testis should be felt separately, using both hands to ensure that the contour is even and smooth with an egg-like shape with both testes about the same size. If during a self-exam a patient finds a nodule or hard mass on or around the testicle, a size change, or difference in one or both testes, pain, or if the patient "thinks" he feels something and is unsure, he should seek medical attention urgently.

According to Hawksworth, most tumors present with a painless mass or swelling in one or sometimes both testes. Testicular pain only occurs in about 10% of men with testicular cancer. Men may have systemic, as opposed to localized, pain, "they may complain about breast swelling, back pain, or an abnormal pain or mass," said Hawksworth. If caught early enough, many testicular cancers can be removed through surgery. If not treated, testicular cancer has a 95% five-year survival rate. Estimated New Cases in 2020 were 9620 with 440 deaths which were 0.5% and 0.1% of all new cancer cases and deaths. [Source: Health,mil | April 9, 2021 ++]

## \* Finances \*



## Divorce

### Impact on Military Pay

Divorce is an emotionally and financially trying time for anyone, civilians and military members alike. However, if you are a military couple going through a divorce, there are laws and factors unique to a military divorce that can affect how you split your assets, including your pay and eventually, your retirement pay.

If you are a military member and you're seeking a divorce, it's important to understand how divorce will affect your pay. The following article will hopefully shed light on some of your questions as you move forward with divorce proceedings. Please keep in mind, divorce proceedings are held at the state level and laws vary by state. As such, divorce laws, especially as they pertain to the military, can be very

complicated. This should be considered general information, and not taken as legal advice. Please seek legal council for specific questions about your situation.

### **Understanding the USFSPA**

Before you begin the divorce process, it's important for you to understand The Uniformed Services Former Spouses' Protection Act (USFSPA), 10 U.S.C. 1408. The USFSPA is a federal law which was enacted on September 8, 1982. It recognizes the right of state courts to distribute military retired pay to a former spouse. Note that the USFSPA does not automatically award a portion of a military's member's retired pay or pension. It simply provides a method of enforcing payment through the Department of Defense when court orders award a portion of a military member's retired pay to a former spouse. The USFSPA also helps enforce the payment of court-ordered child support or alimony. In other words, the USFSPA makes it possible to provide former spouses with court ordered payments made directly from the servicemember's paycheck or retirement pay from Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS).

### **Dividing Retirement Pay**

Once a military member has served for 20 retirement pay eligible years of service, they can receive a retirement pension. Since the USFSPA law was passed, courts now treat that pay as property (not income), meaning that it can be divided as marital property during a divorce.

There is a false notion that the USFSPA enforces that a certain percentage of a military member's retirement pay goes to their spouse during a divorce after so many years of service. This isn't the case. Dividing retirement pay is completely negotiable, and the payment can be settled as either a fixed dollar amount or a percentage of your disposable retired pay. A division of a military pension is decided by the courts during divorce hearings. A spouse could theoretically be awarded up to 100% of service member's retirement pay. However, the USFSPA will only pay up to fifty percent of their pension to a divorced spouse. Any amount exceeding fifty percent must be paid by the military members themselves.

### **The 10/10 Rule**

Many people mistakenly believe that under the USFSPA's 10/10 rule, former spouses are ineligible to receive any of the service member's pay unless they were married for 10 years. This isn't true. The 10/10 rule simply states that a former spouse can receive their court-ordered portion of the divided military retirement pay directly from the Defense Finance and Accounting Service if they were married for 10 years or more during which the member performed at least 10 years of military service creditable towards retirement eligibility (the 10/10 rule = 10 years of marriage that overlaps 10 years of service creditable toward military retirement). The 10/10 rule only affects who sends a former military spouse a retirement check, not whether or not they're eligible to receive one.

Again, years of marriage and service have no bearing on the amount a spouse can receive from retirement pay. That number is settled in the courts. For example, a civilian spouse can ask for half of the military's spouse's pension even if they were married for less than ten years. They can also ask for less even if they were married for more than 10 years. Retirement pay is completely negotiable between the two parties in a divorce. Even if a spouse was married to a military member for 20 years, they might decide to ask for ownership of real estate instead of pursuing a portion of their military spouse's retirement pay.

### **Child Support Payments and Alimony**

Each branch of the military has their own policies regarding child support and alimony in the absence of a mutual agreement or court-ordered payments. Bear in mind that a military commander has a limited legal

authority to enforce child or spousal support payments, even without the presence of a court order. If a former military spouse has been granted court-ordered child support or alimony payments, the USFSPA guarantees that they can receive direct payment from DFAS if they send DFAS an order from a court or child support enforcement agency that directs the government to pay support or alimony payments. A military member's pay can be garnished by DFAS to make these payments.

### **The Importance of Finding a Specialized Divorce Lawyer**

If you're a military service member or spouse and currently going through a divorce, it's in your best interest to find a lawyer who specializes in military matters, especially divorces. The laws and statutes regarding divorce law vary from those undergoing a civilian divorce. If your lawyer has never dealt with a military divorce, they may not be able to help you effectively. Find a lawyer with a long history and in-depth experience with divorce in military families. Interview them about their experience with military divorce and their understanding of how a military divorce could affect your pay. You don't want to find out after you have secured their services that they don't understand the laws as they pertain to military service members.

### **Try to Settle Outside of Court**

There's no question that divorce can get ugly, but it doesn't have to be. If you and your spouse are able to split amicably, you'll have more wiggle room in your negotiations. As soon as a court order for payments or a split in property is involved, you have no choice but to comply or have your wages garnished. Keeping things friendly will help everyone involved, and if you're a service member, you will have more control over your pay.

[Source: The Military Wallet | March 17, 2017 ++]

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## **SBP & Divorce**

### **Update 02: Impact on Former Spouse and Children**

Nobody gets married with the intention of getting divorced at a later point, but still, divorce happens. The process of splitting assets and determining alimony and child support payments is not easy, but it's important that you work with a lawyer or representative to ensure that you and your soon-to-be-ex-spouse reach an agreement that is fair to all. When it comes to a divorce between a servicemember and their spouse, there are additional considerations, including the impact on the servicemember's pay, the former spouse's benefits, and what happens with the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP).

### **The Survivor Benefit Plan Explained**

The Survivor Benefit Plan is a government-subsidized, monthly income annuity provided to eligible beneficiaries when a servicemember or veteran passes away. Since military retirees receive a monthly pension for life – which stops upon their death – the Survivor Benefit Plan offers a way to preserve part of that monthly income for a beneficiary. Participation is free and automatic while servicemembers are on active duty, but to continue the coverage into their retirement, servicemembers must elect to continue participating in the Survivor Benefit Plan by their last day on active duty and begin paying premiums. After the servicemember's death, monthly benefit payments to their beneficiary begin.

### **What Happens to the Survivor Benefit Plan After a Divorce?**



If a retiree elects SBP at the time of retirement and lists their current spouse as the beneficiary, what would happen if they were later to divorce? There are a couple common occurrences:

- The retiree is mandated to maintain their former spouse (and children) as their SBP beneficiary by a court order or divorce decree.
- The retiree and their former spouse agree voluntarily that the retiree will maintain the former spouse (and children) as their SBP beneficiary.
- The retiree is not mandated to maintain their former spouse as their SBP beneficiary by a court order or divorce decree and the retiree can suspend their coverage by providing their divorce decree to DFAS. In the future, the retiree can update their SBP beneficiary to cover a new spouse or a new spouse and children.

If the court mandates that SBP coverage be provided to a former spouse, they can decide who is liable for the premiums. They may order the retiree to pay the premiums in full, in which case they would continue to come out of their military retirement pay each month, or they may order the retiree and the former spouse to split the cost. Because premiums are automatically paid out of the retiree's retirement pay, the former spouse may then owe money to the retiree each month. Additionally, if the former spouse is entitled to receive a portion of the retiree's military retirement pay each month, the SBP premium will first be deducted from the gross monthly retirement amount and then the remainder will be divided based on the court-ordered percentage. It is up to the retiree and the former spouse to work out an arrangement on how costs will be reimbursed, if necessary.

### **How to Ensure a Former Spouse Remains Covered Under the SBP**

If the court requires the retiree's SBP beneficiary to remain the now-former spouse or the now-former spouse and children OR if the retiree and former spouse agree to maintain coverage voluntarily:

- A retiree should not assume that if they elected current spouse coverage at the time of retirement that the coverage will continue when that spouse becomes a former spouse. The retiree must complete DD Form 2656-1 (Survivor Benefit Plan Election Statement for Former Spouse Coverage) and submit the completed form as well as a copy of their divorce decree and settlement agreement to Defense Finance and Accounting Services (DFAS) within one year of the court order.
- DD Form 2656-1 does not require a signature from the former spouse, and a retiree may neglect to submit it on time or at all. To protect themselves and ensure that the SBP changes go through, the former spouse should complete DD Form 2656-10 (Survivor Benefit Plan Former Spouse Request for Deemed Election) and send it to DFAS within one year of the court order mandating the SBP beneficiary change. Along with the form, the former spouse must also submit a copy of the divorce decree and settlement agreement. If the deemed election form and divorce decree are not received within one year of the divorce, DFAS is not required to honor it.

If child coverage is required along with former spouse coverage, it is important to note that only children from the marriage of the retiree and the former spouse are covered. Children from another marriage (of either the retiree or former spouse) are ineligible for coverage under this SBP beneficiary election.

Former spouse and child(ren) as a beneficiary designation does not indicate that both the spouse and child(ren) will receive annuity payments at the same time. Provided that the former spouse remains alive and eligible for SBP, they will receive the entirety of the payment each month. If the former spouse passes

away or become ineligible through remarriage before age 55, each child will receive monthly annuity payments instead, provided that:

- The child remains unmarried, and
- The child is under age 18 or under age 22 if they are enrolled in school, or
- The child is disabled and cannot support themselves and the disability occurred while the child was under the age of 18 or 22 (if a student).

If the former spouse remarries after age 55, their coverage is unaffected. *Note:* Retirees can only have one main beneficiary designated at a time. If a former spouse is designated as the retiree's SBP beneficiary, a current spouse (and any affiliated children) cannot also be listed.

### **What Happens When the Former Spouse Remarries?**

If a former spouse was designated as a retiree's SBP beneficiary and remarries before age 55 the SBP coverage for the former spouse is suspended for the duration of their remarriage. Either the former spouse or the retiree needs to submit written notification of the marriage and a copy of the marriage certificate to DFAS in order for premiums to be suspended. If the remarriage also ends in divorce, the former spouse's SBP coverage will resume. In this case, DFAS must be given written notification and a copy of the divorce decree. If the remarriage ends with the death of the former spouse's new spouse, coverage will resume after DFAS receives notification and a copy of the death certificate. If the former spouse remarries after age 55, their coverage is unaffected.

### **What Happens When a Former Spouse Passes Away?**

If a former spouse was designated as a retiree's SBP beneficiary and passes away SBP coverage can be transferred to the retiree's current spouse provided they notify DFAS of the former spouse's death within one year of its occurrence. If the retiree was not married at the time of their former spouse's death, but later marries, the new spouse can still be listed as the SBP beneficiary. DFAS must be notified within one year of the marriage.

### **Other Times When the Retiree May Be Able to Change Their SBP Beneficiary**

There are four other situations in which a retiree may be able to change their SBP beneficiary away from their former spouse:

- If the retiree obtains a court order stating that the former spouse needs no longer to be designated as their SBP beneficiary.
- If the original SBP election was based on a written agreement between the retiree and the former spouse, and not a court order, the former spouse can agree in writing to the beneficiary change.
- If the retiree provided former spouse coverage voluntarily, and not as part of a court order or written agreement, the retiree can change the beneficiary designation without consent from the former spouse.
- If the retiree wants to cancel their SBP coverage in the one-year window between the second and third anniversaries of their initial receipt of retired pay, the retiree must provide a copy of a modified court order allowing SBP termination or, if SBP was originally provided voluntarily and based on a written agreement, the former spouse must consent to SBP termination. A retiree who chooses this option cannot change or add a beneficiary; this is a complete withdrawal from SBP.

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In summary the [Survivor Benefit Plan](#) offers a way for military retirees to ensure their eligible beneficiaries receive a monthly annuity after they pass away. Because this is such a valuable benefit, it's important to be sure you understand how the SBP works, especially if there is divorce. For more information about the Survivor Benefit Plan – or other veterans benefits – contact the Navy Mutual education team at [education@navymutual.org](mailto:education@navymutual.org) or by calling 888-298-4442. [Source: Military.com | Steve Beynon | March 29, 2021 ++]

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## **American Jobs Plan**

### **Raises Taxes on U.S. Production**

Ahead of President Joe Biden's speech in Pittsburgh on 1 APR, the White House released a fact sheet on the proposed American Jobs Plan to fund additional spending on infrastructure and R&D. The proposal's tax increases on corporations are among the most harmful options to pay for the increased spending. While the President's plan emphasizes making goods in America, the tax increases will raise the cost of production in the U.S, erode American competitiveness, and slow our economic recovery. The American Jobs Plan (Biden infrastructure plan) would raise taxes on corporations in several ways:

- Increase the federal corporate tax rate from 21 percent to 28 percent and tighten inversion regulations.
- Raise the tax on Global Intangible Low Tax Income (GILTI) to 21 percent, calculate it on a country-by-country basis, and eliminate the exemption of a 10 percent return on tangible investment abroad (QBAI).
- Impose a 15 percent minimum tax on corporate book income, which would be levied on a firm's financial profits instead of taxable income for firms with revenue over \$100 million.
- Repeal the Foreign-Derived Intangible Income (FDII) deduction, which incentivizes firms to move intellectual property (IP) into the U.S.
- Provide a tax credit for certain onshoring activity and deny expense deductions on jobs that were offshored.
- Increase corporate tax enforcement.
- Eliminate certain deductions and credits for the fossil fuel industry.

The tax proposals in the American Jobs Plan (Biden infrastructure plan) rely on mistaken assumptions about how corporate taxes work, how corporations respond, and how workers are affected. Here are the facts:

- An increase in the federal corporate tax rate to 28 percent would raise the U.S. federal-state combined tax rate to 32.34 percent, higher than every country in the OECD, the G7, and all our major trade partners and competitors including China. This would harm U.S. economic [competitiveness](#) and diminish our role in the world.
- When the U.S. last had the highest corporate tax rate in the OECD, prior to tax reform in 2017 with the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), the U.S. experienced several years of economic malaise,

including chronically low levels of investment, productivity, and wage growth, as well as major distortions and avoidance schemes in the corporate sector. This included corporate inversions to lower-tax countries, migration out of the corporate sector and into the noncorporate sector, and a decline in business dynamism. This is why the U.S. lowered the corporate tax rate, to compete with other countries around the world that lowered theirs [long ago](#).

- Contrary to the proposal's claims about a "race to the bottom" on corporate tax rates, reductions in corporate rates have plateaued for more than a decade. When the U.S. cut the federal statutory corporate rate from 35 percent to 21 percent in 2017, it was not leading a race to the bottom but moving to the average. The U.S. combined (state and federal) tax rate on corporate income is now 25.77 percent. The average corporate rate among countries in the OECD (excluding the U.S.) is 23.4 percent.
- Raising the federal corporate tax rate 7 percentage points would reduce the after-tax rate of return on corporate investment in America, resulting in less investment, less productivity, fewer jobs, and lower wages. We estimate that raising the federal corporate tax rate to 28 percent would reduce long-run economic output by 0.8 percent, eliminate 159,000 jobs, and reduce wages by 0.7 percent.
- Workers across the income scale would bear much of the tax increase. For example, the bottom 20 percent of earners would on average see a 1.5 percent drop in after-tax income in the long run.
- The design of the tax on U.S. companies' foreign earnings known as GILTI does not incentivize offshoring.
- Critics of the design ignore the context of the policy, which includes the lower corporate tax rate and full expensing for short-lived assets. The tax burden on GILTI can be much higher than 10.5 percent since it is a second layer of tax in addition to foreign taxes. A company that chooses to invest abroad simply because of GILTI's design would be ignoring the balance that the TCJA intended to create with real policies that incentivize investment in the U.S.
- The lower tax rate on companies that export to foreign markets was designed to make the U.S. an attractive place for businesses to hold their IP. Rather than develop their IP assets in the U.S. and then move them offshore, the design of FDII makes the U.S. an attractive place for holding IP. Just last week, Rob Portman (R-OH) referred to the fact that U.S. companies have brought back IP from offshore due to FDII.
- A minimum tax on corporate book income would make the tax code more complicated, as it would require corporations to use two tax bases to determine their tax liability. It would outsource key aspects of the corporate income tax to the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) or require policymakers to meddle in standards for financial accounting, reducing the value of financial income statements for corporate stakeholders.
- A minimum tax would also distort investment incentives when firms become liable for the minimum tax and reduce incentives to invest by clawing back provisions like the R&D tax credit and accelerated depreciation deductions. The tax would potentially undermine current-law investment incentives as well as those proposed by President Biden, such as the "Made in America" tax credit.
- The fact sheet argues that corporations face low effective tax rates in the U.S. One reason for that is because firms are investing in the United States (and can legally take a deduction for that

investment). It would be a mistake to think such firms investing in the U.S. should pay corporate income taxes on that investment.

- There are real, legitimate reasons why a corporation should not be required to pay corporate income taxes in a particular year, such as deductions for accelerated depreciation, R&D tax credits, and net operating loss (NOL) carryforwards.
- The American Jobs Plan would provide additional funding for the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to increase auditing and enforcement. Instead of simplifying the tax code to help with compliance, however, the American Jobs Plan would significantly increase the complexity of the tax code by enacting policies like a minimum tax on book income that will further complicate enforcement.
- There are already guardrails in the existing tax system to check for compliance. For example, the Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT) must approve any tax refund for a C corporation that exceeds \$5 million. The IRS routinely audits large corporations; for instance, in fiscal year 2019, it examined nearly 50 percent of large corporate returns with more than \$20 billion in assets.

[Source: Tax Foundation | Daniel Bunn, William McBride, Garrett Watson, & Erica York | March 31, 2021  
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## **Uncommon State Tax Laws**

### **Strange but True Tax Laws | HI - MD**

The United States tax code is anything but simple. The instructions for the standard 1040 tax form alone are more than 100 pages long, and good luck getting through them in one sitting. Tax rules and regulations at the state level provide no relief, riddled as they are with strange fees and exemptions, some of them decades out of date. Every state has odd and sometimes unbelievable state tax laws — including a number of regulations that could save consumers money.

#### **Hawaii: Saving a Tree**

Trees with historic or cultural value, and those that are otherwise deemed worthy of preservation due to their age, rarity, location, size, or aesthetic quality, come with a tax deduction of up to \$3,000 a tree in Hawaii. The deduction can be used to cover the cost of maintaining the tree.

#### **Idaho: Merrily Streaming**

In 2014, Idaho changed its statute governing sales tax on cloud computing. The state no longer taxes purchases of cloud-based or downloaded computer software. Digital entertainment, such as ebooks and movies, is subject to sales tax if the purchase includes a permanent right to the work, meaning streaming or rental services may be exempt.

#### **Illinois: Flour Power**

Pity the poor candy-store owner. In Illinois, Twix bars aren't taxed because they are made with flour, so they don't meet the state's definition of candy. Other Mars candy bars such as Snickers, though, are taxed, because they contain no flour. Similar laws are on the books in Washington, Colorado, and Connecticut.

#### **Indiana: Cake Treat**

The Hoosier State has several oddball food taxes. For example, marshmallow creme is tax exempt, but marshmallows are not. Icing in tubes and containers of frosting are also exempt, but cake decorations are not.

#### **Iowa: Use It or Lose It**

A use tax is assessed for the use, storage, or consumption of something in a state, regardless where the purchase was made. If a computer is bought while visiting a state that doesn't charge sales tax, the buyer may still need to pay a use tax when returning home. Iowa has use-tax exemptions for prescription drugs and medical devices, including catheter trays, oxygen equipment, when they're sold to the user (rather than a business).

#### **Kansas: Balloon Payment**

Want to ride in a hot air balloon in Kansas? If it is tethered to the ground, passengers are taxed for the entertainment. But if the rope is untied, it's treated as air transportation and the ride is tax-free. Wisconsin and Missouri have had similar laws on the books.

#### **Kentucky: Breeding Contempt**

Home to the world-famous Kentucky Derby, this state has a 6% sales tax on thoroughbred stud fees. The revenue has topped \$15 million in some years, split among three horse breeder incentive funds.

#### **Louisiana: Worth a Shot**

Every September, Louisiana has a Second Amendment sales tax holiday. Hunting supplies, ammunition, and firearms are all exempt from state and local sales taxes, as well as use taxes. At one point it was accidentally repealed, but it was subsequently reinstated last year.

#### **Maine: Blue Laws**

Officially called the Maine Wild Blueberry Tax, this charge amounts to 1.5 cents per pound of wild blueberries sold. Businesses generally pass the tax on to consumers.

#### **Maryland: Waste of Money**

Homeowners with septic systems in Maryland have had to pay \$5 a month, or \$60 a year, with the money going to upgrade wastewater treatment plants and failing septic systems and reduce pollution in the Chesapeake Bay.

[Source: Cheapism Info | March 15, 2021 ++]

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## **Plumbers**

### **Update 01: Lies That Plumbers Tell to Drain Your Wallet**

It pays to be vigilant about whom we hire and how much we pay — and plumbing is a profession fraught with potential for deceit and ripoffs, since most consumers [don't know much about the subject](#). It's crucial to find and develop relationships with a plumber you can trust, and information and reviews available online make it easier to research, compare quotes, and generally find safe and fully insured businesses with good service and reasonable, transparent pricing. Especially in the case of emergencies when you don't have a plumber on call, though, you need to watch out for a few red flags and lies to avoid getting ripped off — or worse.



### **I Have a Free Inspection to Offer**

Be especially wary of any plumber or tradesmen showing up at the front door uninvited to offer their services, starting with a free inspection. This could be a cover story for a credit fraudster or burglar casing the home — a problem best solved by requesting identification and conducting the appropriate research before letting anyone in.

### **It's Okay That I'm Unlicensed**

Most cities, counties, and states demand that homeowners use licensed professionals for complex work. There may be some unlicensed plumbers and handymen out there offering lower prices — but watch out. "Sometimes they are not insured, the coverage might not be sufficient or included in the final quote price," says Stephany Smith of Fantastic Services, which operates in the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and mainland Europe. If there's a problem, "there is nowhere to go if the plumbing job is done by an unlicensed tradesman." Don't hire unlicensed. Ask to see license identification and proof of insurance if a plumber doesn't volunteer them.

### **I'm the Best**

When looking for a plumber, it's useful to get recommendations from family members, colleagues, and websites. Recommendations from the plumbers themselves are pretty much useless. Some companies use bold claims and non-descriptive language to compensate for a lack of actual information about their services, Smith says. "Such companies describe themselves as the best, amazing, awesome, stunning, or other superlatives without a meaningful connection with real services and benefits they deliver," she explains. "Don't count merely on their superior words. Instead, look for collected feedbacks, reviews, opinions of friends and neighbors, web search and many others."

### **I Can Give You an Estimate Without Seeing the Job**

Beware any plumber or company quoting you a price before seeing the problem. Even clogged sinks and drains usually need to be inspected in person to get an accurate idea of the cost for repair, so premature estimates are a sign the plumber isn't concerned with communicating honestly about price, and may upcharge you once the job is finished.

### **This Offer Expires in Five Minutes**

A disreputable or greedy plumber doesn't want you taking the time to weigh options and consider alternatives, so they'll often pressure you into deciding right then and there. "Such behavior may aim to prevent asking questions," Smith says. "Organizations that do it right provide hassle-free support paving a way to an intelligent, smart, and conscious decision." Daniel Dicus of Ross Plumbing in Leesburg, Florida, describes one egregious tactic used to corner customers after taking apart their faucet to perform a diagnostic check: "They'll take the faucet apart, come up with a price to make the repair, and at the point the homeowner has a choice: Accept the given rate or reject it. If they reject it, the plumber will just hand you the faucet back with all the separate parts and say, 'Have a good day.' "

### **I Can Do the Job for Much Cheaper**

Always compare prices between multiple contractors. And remember that the price that seems too good to be true probably is. Your instinct may be to jump at any ludicrously low price a plumber quotes you compared with their competitors, but "the cheapest offers are the riskiest," Smith says. "A common plumbing trick is to give you a less expensive offer that doesn't include all services necessary to complete the project. [Afterwards], you have to pay additional unexpected labor or product costs."

### **Hey, That's Just What the Job Costs**

In contrast, plumbers may also try to take advantage of a homeowner's perceived ignorance by inflating their estimate — in other words, giving a high price with lots of extra services and hoping the customer won't know to question it. Avoid falling for this by comparing statements between several providers, and remember that an ever-changing or inconsistent estimate usually points to foul play.

### **Hey, It's Your Call**

Much as we value having choices in most situations, a plumber shouldn't foist too many options onto an inexperienced homeowner to the point that they feel lost or overwhelmed. Some might even try to abuse this sense of choice paralysis to get homeowners to accept recommendations without question and squeeze out payment for added services. "An experienced plumber will give you a reasonable solution to any specific problem trying to make things easy for both sides," Smith says.

### **You Need to Pay Everything in Advance**

Most plumbers are "just getting paid when finishing the work," Smith says. Some companies may ask for a down payment of up to half the estimated total, but it's unfair and a definite red flag for any plumber or company to request a homeowner pay the full charge before work is complete.

### **This Is a Three-Plumber Job**

Similar to upselling, a plumber seeking to pad his pockets could bring in extra help to prolong and overcharge for a relatively simple task they could accomplish themselves. Of course, some jobs require multiple laborers, but the homeowner should have a clear idea of why and know about the additional help ahead of time. To avoid this, always make sure and ask if the plumber providing the quote will also be the one doing repairs.

### **It Turned Out to Be a Much Harder Job Than I Thought**

The underlying element to many of these shifty pricing tactics is a general lack of transparency and communication between homeowner and service provider. A reputable plumber should volunteer information on how their pricing works, starting with whether there's an initial diagnostic fee just to show up at your door, and the likely duration of repairs, then keep the homeowner updated as they progress and new charges arise. "Most work we do, we tell the homeowners right upfront, it's a time and material cost," Dicus says. "They don't know the material cost per se, but we try to give a close estimate to the approximate hours it'll take to do the job, so they don't get blindsided thinking we were gonna be there one hour and stay three."

### **These Substitutions Are Just As Good**

Homeowners who don't get a detailed receipt or understand the repairs upfront are more vulnerable to bait-and-switch tactics, when a plumber advertises one product and substitutes another, likely shoddier, version without saying so. To prevent this, ask for the make and model of all new or replacement parts in writing ahead of time to compare with the finished repairs.

### **It Turns Out You Also Need All This Other Stuff**

Another way homeowners get fleeced is through upselling — unnecessary add-ons beyond the specified work. Smith says to watch out for include supposedly money-saving "bundle offers," or such things as toilet replacements for minor issues such as a wobbly seat, leaky wax seal, or damaged flapper. Shady plumbers also recommend such things as putting water softeners on a home to extend the pipes' longevity, Dicus

warns. Not all add-ons are scams, though. Replacing a rotted P-trap when unclogging a sink is "a form of upcharge at the time, but it saves that homeowner money in the long run," Dicus says.

### **I Just Round Up**

A standard pricing model for most plumbing companies is to charge by the hour plus material costs. Dicus says a reputable provider should volunteer to check on other parts of a home's plumbing if they finish before their hour's up. Watch out for plumbers trying to round up and charge you for hours they weren't working through — you can call their bluff by requesting they perform maintenance checks and other tasks to fill out the time you're being billed.

### **The Cash Discount Is Good for Everyone**

This isn't so much a lie as it is a subtle sign of foul play. If a plumber offers you a better price to pay in cash without any receipt or record of the transaction, it's likely they're trying to skimp on their taxes by not reporting certain gigs. It may be tempting to save yourself a few bucks, but keep in mind this kind of dishonesty hurts other taxpayers and could be a sign a plumber isn't trustworthy on other matters as well.

### **That's a Complete Receipt**

Always push for a detailed receipt showing the parts and services your money's going toward. It's nice to take someone at their word, but don't — having a written record of a transaction will help protect you from being overcharged, or from a plumber undertaking repairs different from what's been discussed.

### **You Violated the Warranty**

It's important to ask about warranties on fixtures or parts plumbers install, which is limited to one year for Ross Plumbing and many other companies. Some, however, may try and renege on repairs by alleging the homeowner somehow violated the warranty agreement in the interim. Dicus provides one example: "If a toilet's leaking around the base, they'll come in and ask the homeowner, did you use a plunger on this? Most homeowners will say yeah, and they'll use that as an excuse to not warranty the work, saying the homeowner blew out the wax ring on the bottom of the toilet — so they get paid again to do the job."

[Source: Cheapism | March 31, 2021 ++]

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## **Covid-19 Funeral Cost**

### **FEMA to Help Pay**

In early April, FEMA will begin providing financial assistance for funeral expenses incurred after Jan. 20, 2020 for deaths related to coronavirus (COVID-19) to help ease some of the financial stress and burden caused by the pandemic. The policy was finalized today, and FEMA is now moving rapidly to implement this funeral assistance program nationwide. "At FEMA, our mission is to help people before, during and after disasters," said Acting FEMA Administrator Bob Fenton. "The COVID-19 pandemic has caused immense grief for so many people. Although we cannot change what has happened, we affirm our commitment to help with funeral and burial expenses that many families did not anticipate." To be eligible for COVID-19 funeral assistance, the policy states:

- The applicant must be a U.S. citizen, non-citizen national, or qualified alien who incurred funeral expenses after Jan. 20, 2020 for a death attributed to COVID-19.

- If multiple individuals contributed toward funeral expenses, they should apply under a single application as applicant and co-applicant. FEMA will also consider documentation from other individuals not listed as the applicant and co-applicant who may have incurred funeral expenses as part of the registration for the deceased individual.
- An applicant may apply for multiple deceased individuals.
- The COVID-19-related death must have occurred in the United States, including the U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.
- This assistance is limited to a maximum financial amount of \$9,000 per funeral and a maximum of \$35,500 per application.
- Funeral assistance is intended to assist with expenses for funeral services and interment or cremation.

FEMA will start accepting application 12 APR. You will be able to call the dedicated toll-free phone number 844-684-6333 to get an application completed with help from FEMA's representatives. No online applications will be accepted. Multilingual services will be available. Once an applicant has applied for COVID-19 Funeral Assistance and is provided an application number, they may provide supporting documentation to FEMA a few ways:

- Upload to their DisasterAssistance.gov account
- Fax documents
- Mail documents

In the meantime, potential applicants are encouraged to start gathering the following documentation:

- An official death certificate that attributes the death to COVID-19 and shows that the death occurred in the United States. The death certificate must indicate the death “may have been caused by” or “was likely the result of” COVID-19 or COVID-19-like symptoms. Similar phrases that indicate a high likelihood of COVID-19 are considered sufficient attribution. It is possible to change or amend a death certificate. This process starts with contacting the person who certified the death. This may be a treating doctor, a coroner or a medical examiner, and their name and address is on the death certificate. Applicants may present evidence to them to support the claim the death was attributable to COVID-19.
- Funeral expense documents (receipts, funeral home contract, etc.) that include the applicant’s name, the deceased individual’s name, the amount of funeral expenses and dates the funeral expenses were incurred.
- Proof of funds received from other sources specifically for use toward funeral costs. Funeral assistance may not duplicate benefits received from burial or funeral insurance, financial assistance received from voluntary agencies, federal/state/local/tribal/territorial government programs or agencies, or other sources.

Expenses for funeral services and interment or cremation typically include, but are not limited to:

- Transportation for up to two individuals to identify the deceased individual
- Transfer of remains
- Casket or urn
- Burial plot or cremation niche
- Marker or headstone

- Clergy or officiant services
- Arrangement of the funeral ceremony
- Use of funeral home equipment or staff
- Cremation or interment costs
- Costs associated with producing and certifying multiple death certificates
- Additional expenses mandated by any applicable local or state government laws or ordinances

Beware of scams. FEMA's Funeral Assistance Program has controls in place to mitigate fraudulent activity. FEMA will not contact anyone until they have called FEMA or have applied for assistance. Do not disclose information such as the name, birth date or social security number of any deceased family member to any unsolicited telephone calls or e-mails from anyone claiming to be a federal employee or from FEMA. For more information about this assistance, visit COVID-19 Funeral Assistance | FEMA.gov at <https://www.fema.gov/disasters/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance>. [Source: FEMA | March 24, 2021 ++]

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## **Vaccine Passports**

### **Update 01: Darknet Booming With Activity Related to Fake Ones**



As states continue to open up eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine and more services start to require proof of vaccination, experts are warning of a rise in fraudulent activity surrounding vaccine passports. Vaccine passports and certificates are being touted around the world as a way for various industries to start returning to normal while minimizing the risk of spreading the coronavirus. Consumers are already being required to use the passes at venues ranging from sports arenas and movie theaters to services like international travel. But with the rollout of vaccine passports, experts tell ABC News they are seeing an increase in websites and online forums advertising fraudulent certificates and passports.

"The darknet is booming with activity related to the vaccines," said Ekram Ahmed, spokesperson for Check Point, a cybersecurity firm. "Cyber criminals are looking to capitalize on the public's interest to both get the vaccine and/or avoid the vaccine." Since the beginning of the pandemic, scams surrounding coronavirus testing, fake protective equipment and fake COVID-19 vaccines have circulated on the internet. Now experts are concerned about a rise in fake vaccine certificates. "Vaccination certificate for Covid (for those who do not want to be vaccinated)," said one ad found on the dark web, according to Check Point.

Speaking during a White House briefing, CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky grew emotional as she reflected "on the recurring feeling I have of impending doom." "Not every body will like to take the covid19 vaccine and we provide proof of having been vaccinated," said another. Check Point reports that overall, the number of false advertisements related to vaccines has more than tripled since January. "It's only a matter of time before hackers find a way to organize fraudulent activity for digital passports," said Ahmed. "With a digital passport in each person's hand, it could make for some serious fraud."

As of now, New York is the only state that has officially announced a digital vaccine passport to fast-track the reopening of businesses and entertainment venues statewide. "New Yorkers have proven they can follow public health guidance to beat back COVID, and the innovative Excelsior Pass is another tool in our new toolbox to fight the virus while allowing more sectors of the economy to reopen safely and keeping personal information secure," Gov. Andrew Cuomo said in a press release last week. IBM, which helped the state develop the digital passport system, told ABC News that the pass is built on blockchain technology that allows individuals to share their health status through an encrypted digital wallet on their smartphone, without the need to share underlying medical and personal information.

President Joe Biden announced on 29 MAR that 90% of adults will be eligible to get a coronavirus vaccine within the next three weeks as well as have a vaccination site within five miles of where they live. Alex Holden, chief information security officer for Hold Security, a cybersecurity firm, told ABC News that the market for counterfeits means that vaccine passports "will likely be a target for abuse similar to fake COVID-19 test kits and protective equipment." "The notion of potential profit and abuse is in the air," Holden said.

Dr. Krutika Kuppalli, assistant professor of medicine in the Division of Infectious Diseases at the Medical University of South Carolina, told ABC News that people who are hesitant to get vaccinated may instead seek fake vaccine passports or certificates. "When you institute the use of a vaccine passport you are essentially forcing individuals to get vaccinated, and for those who may not feel comfortable or want to, there may be a greater propensity to falsify information," Kuppalli said. "This will only make the market for these types of things stronger."

Nevertheless, new tools like the vaccine pass will allow vaccinated people to "reap the benefits" of normal daily activities, said John Brownstein, chief innovation officer at Boston Children's Hospital and an ABC News contributor. "I think there's real opportunity to think through how these cards could actually become a form of immunity identity," Brownstein said. "We just have to make sure to understand the potential unintended consequences." [Source: ABC News | Laura Romero & Dr. Leah Croll | March 30, 2021 ++]

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## **IRS Backlog**

### **Too 'Outgunned' To Keep Up with Current Tasking**

IRS Commissioner Chuck Rettig in testimony before the members of the Senate Finance Committee on 13 APR made the cost of decade-long workforce and budget cuts clear in terms of its taxpayer service – fewer employees to answer phone calls and IT staff working around the clock to reprogram systems. The agency, with 33,000 fewer employees than what it had in 2010, is spread thin in all directions and pushed



to its limits to roll out new benefits Congress dropped in the middle of the filing season. Those cuts now translate into a greater share of tax revenue being left on the table. The Commissioner said cuts to the agency's enforcement operations mean the tax gap between what taxpayers owe and what the agency collects is likely to reach \$1 trillion annually — more than double the previous estimate. "It would not be outlandish to believe that the actual tax gap could approach, and possibly exceed, \$1 trillion per year.

The top 1% of taxpayers, according [to research from IRS personnel](#), account for \$175 billion of the tax gap. While the IRS won't officially release its updated tax gap estimate until next year, the figure has more than doubled the \$441 billion annual estimate the agency calculated for tax years 2011-2013. Rettig said the IRS, based on historical trends, could realistically collect up to 20% of these taxes with the right resources, and could probably do better than that, if Congress gives the agency the resources needed to pull off the full scope of its six-year modernization effort. "The IRS absolutely needs more resources across all lanes of the Internal Revenue Service. And, you know, we do get outgunned," Rettig said. "I mean, there's no other way to say it. I'm confident and I can assure you we're using our resources to the absolute best of our ability. It is not a dedication or a people issue, it's a numbers issue," Rettig said.

While IRS workforce cuts have been felt all across the agency, Rettig says the agency has 17,000 fewer enforcement personnel than it did a decade ago. But even if the agency received a significantly higher budget in 2022, Rettig said it would take years for the IRS to fully train new enforcement employees. "It will take time for the IRS to overcome the challenges of the past decade and the agency will continue to struggle to replace workers lost through attrition and to expand our workforce and support implementation of our multi-year integrated business modernization plan as designed," Rettig said. The IRS currently has about 6,500 frontline revenue agents who handle the most complex, sophisticated individual and corporate tax issues. [President Joe Biden's fiscal 2022 budget](#) request would increase IRS's budget by more than 10%. Most of the additional IRS funding would go toward customer service improvements, as well as a multi-year initiative to improve tax compliance and oversight.

If the IRS had an extra \$1 billion to spend on enforcement, Rettig said the agency could bring on as many as 4,875 new frontline enforcement personnel, as well as staff up the Taxpayer Advocate Service and other related services. [Demand for taxpayer assistance, accelerated by COVID-19 programs like stimulus payments and an expanded child tax credit \(CTC\), far outweighs employee availability.](#) Rettig said the IRS set its taxpayer service targets two years ago in the annual appropriations process — long before the pandemic. Call volumes have more than doubled, compared to previous years. Rettig said the agency has received a peak of 1,500 calls a second. The IRS website, meanwhile, has logged 1.1 billion visits. The IRS has received more than 93 million tax returns, and issued more than 62 million refunds worth \$180 billion.

Rettig said the agency still has a backlog of 1.7 million tax returns from last year's filing season, but said the agency is "current" on its inventory of mail it needs to open. Rettig said the agency is "all hands on deck" with processing, and has implemented mandatory overtime and weekend work to clear the backlog. With these extraordinary measures in place, he said the backlog of tax returns will take until this summer to process. "I asked a tremendous amount of every employee of the Internal Revenue Service. We've got the best of the best, they stepped in, they were creative, they were innovative, they came up with plans in a hurry to allow us to do as well as we did. The success and strength of the Internal Revenue Service is the employees of the Internal Revenue Service," Rettig said.

The ability of employees to work above and beyond, however, doesn't undercut the agency's need to replace some of the oldest legacy IT systems in government. Rettig said the agency needs "consistent,

adequate multi-year funding” to meet the goals of its IT modernization plan. In addition to juggling the filing season and sending out a third wave of Economic Impact Payments, Rettig said the agency is doing everything it can to create an online portal as part of expanded child tax credits in the American Rescue Plan. The provision, as stated by lawmakers, will translate into \$300 monthly payments per child for eligible households.

Rettig said the program will cost the IRS \$391 million to implement and requires significant effort for a tax enforcement agency to become more of a public-facing benefits provider. “We were asked to create an entirely new structure for the Internal Revenue Service. We are not historically a benefits delivery federal agency, but we’re setting that up,” Rettig said. While the pandemic spending bill requires the IRS to get the payments out the door by 1 JUL, and set up an online portal, Rettig said the agency won’t launch the system until it’s ready and able to mitigate improper payments. “If we are not prepared, we will not launch. We’re not going to risk our systems. We’re not going to open our systems up, as you would hope, to possible fraudsters and the rest, and a series of errors. We will test, retest and get it right before we launch,” Rettig said.

Rettig said the IRS worked closely with lawmakers to meet the 1 JUL deadline it helped set in the legislation, which gives the agency breathing room to handle its other obligations. Still, meeting the deadline remains a challenge. “It would have been extremely difficult for the IRS to launch a CTC program at any time before July 1. It’s a challenge to do it July 1,” Rettig said. [Source: Federal News Network | Jory Heckman | April 13, 2021 ++]

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## **Student Scams**

### **Update 06: Scammers Extort Cheating Students**

College and high school students who hire “tutors” to complete their class assignments are finding themselves the victims of extortion cons. BBB Scam Tracker has gotten reports about scam tutors who make money by threatening to report cheating students.

#### **How the Scam Works**

- You are struggling in class and search online for a tutoring company that can help – not by teaching you the material but by doing the work for you. Victims report paying a couple hundred dollars for “help” with assignments for math and technology classes.
- As soon as you pay up, things don’t go as you expect. Instead of helping you complete your homework, the company instead demands more money. They may claim it’s for “additional research” or make another excuse
- When you refuse to pay, the “tutor” turns on you. They send threatening emails or text messages claiming they will contact your school and expose you as a cheater. One victim reported to Scam Tracker: “Once you ask for your money back, they will try to email your school or teacher to tell them that you use them and they did your homework.”

#### **Tips to avoid a homework helper con:**

Hiring someone to complete your school assignments is cheating. But if you want to hire a legitimate tutor, follow these tips:

- Ask for referrals. Asking friends, family, and teachers if they have any recommendations. Some schools even offer Honor Society students as free or reduced-cost tutors, so asking at school is a great place to start.
- Check references. You should ask the individual tutor or tutoring service for references, and then contact them. It's best to speak to at least three references. Ask about their experience with the tutor and what sort of results they saw.
- Decide availability and rates up front. While tutors may charge extra for additional sessions before a big test, this should all be discussed and negotiated upfront. Last minute surprises and demands are signs of a less-than-scrupulous business.

### **For More Information**

See BBB's tips for [hiring a tutor](#). Find a qualified tutor near you in the [BBB directory](#). Read more about a similar scam, sextortion emails.

If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to [BBB Scam Tracker](#). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Find more information about scams and how to avoid them at [BBB.org/AvoidScams](#). [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | April 2, 2021 ++]

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## **State Tax Tips**

### **Nebraska thru Oklahoma**

Paying taxes may be a fact of life, but depending where you live, you may be able to keep a little extra money in your pocket thanks to some state-specific tax breaks. From socking away money in a college savings fund to [donating](#) to a charitable cause, there are plenty of ways to save money with available tax credits and deductions — if you qualify. While heading into tax season, shoebox of receipts in hand, keep in mind these money-saving tax tips from each state. Note: Be sure to consult a tax adviser to confirm benefits that might be available based on your state or individual status.

**Minnesota --** Taxpayers saving for college can take advantage of a state tax deduction or credit. Individual taxpayers may deduct up to \$1,500 for contributions to qualified plans, while married couples filing jointly can deduct up to \$3,000.

**Mississippi --** Taxpayers whose homes are damaged by hurricanes or flooding may be able to open a [catastrophe](#) savings account that can be used tax-free to pay for eligible expenses. Homeowners can put in up to \$2,000 if their home insurance deductible is \$1,000 or less. If the deductible is over \$1,000, they can contribute up to \$15,000 or twice the deductible, depending on which is less.

**Missouri --** Residents may be able to save a bundle come tax time from an extensive [list](#) of available tax credits that help reduce tax bills dollar for dollar (as opposed to deductions that just reduce the amount of taxable income). Many credits involve making donations to charitable causes, such as eligible agencies that help at-risk children, domestic violence victims, pregnant mothers, and even local sports organizations.

**Montana** -- Taxpayers can save with [tax credits](#) for a range of expenses, such as those related to adoption, alternative energy, dependent care, and college contributions. The state also offers an [Elderly Homeowner/Renter Tax Credit](#) that helps renters and homeowners 62 and older with less than \$45,000 in gross household income.

**Nebraska** --To encourage careers in farming, Nebraska offers a [Beginning Farmer/Rancher](#) program tax incentive. Qualifying farmers — who don't have to be young to be eligible — may be exempted from personal property tax up to \$100,000 for agricultural land, and up to \$500 credit for qualified financial management classes. Taxpayers that help beginning farmers with such things as land, livestock, and equipment may also be eligible for tax credits.

**Nevada** -- Nevada is another state with no income tax, which means residents aren't taxed on winnings at the state's casinos (though they are responsible for federal taxes on those).

**New Hampshire** -- Wages and salaries aren't taxed by New Hampshire (there's also no sales tax) but those getting income from interest and dividends have to pay a 5% flat tax on earnings above \$2,400 individually or \$4,800 married filing jointly. There are [additional](#) exemptions of \$1,200 for residents 65 or older; blind; or disabled and unable to work but under 65.

**New Jersey** -- While a number of federal deductions are not allowed on the New Jersey state tax return, such as moving expenses, mortgage interest, IRA contributions and employee business expenses, Garden Staters still have available deductions in medical expenses that exceed 2% of income, including doctor's visits and dental care, and self-employed health insurance. In some cases homeowners and renters may qualify for a [property tax deduction or credit](#) for up to 100% of property taxes or \$15,000, whichever is less (and for tenants, 18% of rent paid during the year).

**New Mexico** -- If you're lucky enough to live to 100 or older in the Land of Enchantment and no one is claiming you as a dependent, you're exempt from state income tax. And if you're married at that age, you can exempt half of all community income and all of your income. Younger folks still may be able to make the most of [numerous](#) tax credits.

**New York** -- The Empire State offers taxpayers a lengthy list of [tax credits](#) that could come in handy. Popular ones include a college tuition credit up to \$400 and a child and dependent care credit. Volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers can also claim \$200 (or \$400 for married couples when both volunteer), and individuals and families living in New York City may also be eligible for additional credits.

**North Carolina** -- In recent years, North Carolina did away with several tax credits, but as long as a taxpayer continues to meet the eligibility requirements for those repealed credits they can still benefit from them. Additionally, the state allows tax credits for each dependent child. If you happened to rehabilitate a historic structure or mill facility, you may also be eligible for tax credits.

**North Dakota** -- Taxpayers may be eligible for a [number](#) of tax credits, including a popular marriage credit. If an individual takes care of a [family member](#) who is disabled or age 65 or older, they may be eligible for a credit up to \$2,000 per family member (with a total limit of \$4,000) for qualified care expenses

**Ohio** -- A tax reform package passed a few years back lets small-business owners deduct 100% of business income up to [\\$250,000](#). Taxpayers saving for college can deduct up to \$4,000 per person by contributing to the state's College Savings Plan.

**Oklahoma** -- Oklahoma's another state encouraging historic preservation with tax credits — in this case, for 20% of [qualified](#) rehab and preservation expenses. And uniquely, it's offering a \$5,000 to [aerospace engineers](#) with the right degree, in an effort to keep the industry thriving in the state.

[Source: Cheapism | Danny Jensen | March 09, 2021 ++]

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## **Tax Burden for Mississippi Vets**

### **As of APR 2021**

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 **Mississippi**:

#### **Sales Taxes**

The Mississippi state sales tax rate is 7%, and the average MS sales tax after local surtaxes is 7.07% which is lower than 61.5% of all states

- Counties and cities can charge an additional local sales tax of up to 0.25%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 7.25%
- Mississippi has 5 special sales tax jurisdictions with local sales taxes in addition to the state sales tax
- Counties and cities in Mississippi are allowed to charge an additional local sales tax on tourism-related businesses and services such as hotels and restaurants.
- Mississippi 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. Unlike many states, Mississippi treats both candy and soda as groceries for sales tax purposes. Other items including gasoline, alcohol, and cigarettes are subject to various Mississippi excise taxes in addition to the sales tax.
- Mississippi has two sales tax holidays, during which certain items can be purchased sales-tax free. For more details, see the Mississippi sales tax holiday calendar at <http://www.tax-rates.org/mississippi/sales-tax-holidays>.

#### **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 state government are the fuel tax on gasoline and the so-called "sin tax" collected on cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. Mississippi's excise tax is not the same thing as their Sales Tax which is collected as a percentage of the final purchase price of all qualifying sales, and is collected directly from the end consumer of the product. The excise taxes, on the other hand, are flat per-unit taxes that must be paid directly to the state 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. An average of \$411 in yearly excise taxes per capita is collected, lower than 62% of the other 50 states.

- **Alcohol:** Beer: \$0.43 per gal | Wine: \$0.35 per gal with sparkling wine and champagne having an addition \$1 per gal | Liquor \$7.46 per gal. This is in addition to the federal excise tax and state 7% sales tax. The excise tax on beer is higher than 76% of the other 50 states. Mississippi's beer excise tax is ranked #12 out of the 50 states. The excise tax on Spirits is higher than 68% of the other 50 states. Mississippi's excise tax on Spirits is ranked #16 out of the 50 states
- **Cannabis:** none
- **Cellphone:** The average tax collected on cell phone plans in Missouri is **\$9.08 per phone** service plan, one of the highest cellphone taxes in the country. The average cellphone tax is ranked #27 out of the 50 states. The Missouri 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 excise tax on cigarettes is \$0.68 per 20 cigarettes, lower than 72% of the other 50 states. Missouri's excise tax on cigarettes is ranked #36 out of the 50 states. The cigarette tax of \$0.68 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 state excise tax on gasoline is **18.00¢ per gallon**, one of the lowest in the country and is ranked #45 out of the 50 states. The gas tax is included in the pump price at all gas stations in the state and is in addition to the federal excise tax of 18.4¢ per gallon on gasoline and 24.4¢ per gallon, on diesel. The federal tax was last raised in OCT 1993 and is not indexed to inflation, which has increased a total of 77% from 1993 to 2020. For all state and federal taxes by type of fuel refer to <https://www.salestaxhandbook.com/maine/gasoline-fuel>.
- **Vehicle:** The state 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 Mississippi Department of Transportation and receive documentation (registration and title papers) proving the fees were paid.

### **Personal Income Taxes**

The average family pays \$1,360 in income taxes which is ranked as 28th highest of all states. Unlike the Federal Income Tax, Mississippi's state income tax does not provide couples filing jointly with expanded income tax brackets. Mississippi recently added a special income tax exemption for any contributions to a qualifying Individual Retirement Account (IRA), similar to the IRA exemption allowed on your federal return. Mississippi is one of only four states to offer this exemption.

**Tax Rates:** 0% on the first \$3,000 of taxable income, 3% on the next \$2,000, 4% on the next \$5,000 of

**Personal Exemptions:** Single – \$6,000; Married – \$12,000; Head of Household \$8,000

**Additional Exemption:** Each dependent other than yourself or spouse \$1,500, Age 65 or over, taxpayer or spouse only \$1,500, and Blind, taxpayer or spouse only \$1,500

**Standard Deduction:** \$2,300 single, \$4,600 married, Head of Household \$3,400

**Medical/Dental Deduction:** The instructions included with your federal return should be used in determining your medical deduction. You should base your 7.5% limitation, line 2b, on your federal adjusted gross income from your federal income tax return.

**Federal Income Tax Deduction:** None



**Retirement Income Taxes:** Qualified retirement income is exempt from state income tax. Social Security is not taxed, regardless of total income. Retirement income from IRAs, 401s/403s, Keoghs and qualified public and private pension plans is not taxable. Interest income from federal securities and obligations of Mississippi and its political subdivisions are all exempt.

**Retired Military Pay:** Retired pay is exempt. The exemption is also available to the spouse or other beneficiary upon the death of the primary retiree. Widows' pensions received from the VA are not taxable.

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

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

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

**Tax Credits:** An income tax credit is available up to \$5,000 for qualified adoption expenses paid or incurred during the tax year for each child legally adopted by a taxpayer. The credit may be claimed for the tax year in which the adoption becomes final and any unused credit may be carried forward for three (3) years. Visit web site at [www.dor.ms.gov](http://www.dor.ms.gov) for information on other credits and their limitations.

**Delinquent Fee:** An installment agreement is available to taxpayers that have a tax liability of at least \$75. Interest and penalty are charged on taxes paid late even if an extension of time to file is granted. The interest is at the rate of 1/2% per month from the due date until paid. The penalty imposed for failure to pay the tax when due is 1/2% per month not to exceed 25% in the aggregate. Late payment interest and penalty apply to any unpaid tax after April 15.

**Website:** Mississippi Department of Revenue <https://www.dor.ms.gov/Individual/Pages/default.aspx> .

#### **Tax Forms:**

- <https://www.dor.ms.gov/Forms/80100201.pdf> Tax Instructions
- <https://www.dor.ms.gov/Forms/80105208.pdf> Resident Return
- <https://www.dor.ms.gov/Pages/Individual-Income-Forms.aspx> All Tax forms

#### **Property Taxes**

The median property tax is **\$508 per year** for a home worth the median value of \$98,000. Counties collect an average of **0.52%** of a property's assessed fair market value as property tax per year. Mississippi has one of the lowest median property tax rates in the United States, with only 3 states collecting a lower one. The state's median income is \$45,925 per year, so the median yearly property tax paid by residents amounts to approximately 1.11% of their yearly income. Mississippi is ranked 47 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. Madison County collects the highest property tax in the state levying an average of \$1,204 (0.66% of median home value) yearly in property taxes, while Amite County has the lowest property tax in the state, collecting an average tax of \$281 (0.39% of median home value) per year.

Property taxes are collected on a county level, and each county has its own method of assessing and collecting taxes. As a result, it's not possible to provide a single property tax rate that applies uniformly to

all properties in the state. For more localized property tax rates refer to the county list at <http://www.tax-rates.org/mississippi/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.

Property and automobiles are both subject to ad valorem taxes – meaning that the tax is assessed in relationship to the value of the property. Single family residential property is taxed at 10% of its assessed value. All other personal property is assessed at 15% of its value. Motor vehicles are taxed at 30% of their value. The state offers a homestead exemption to all eligible taxpayers. Eligible homeowners should make application with the Tax Assessor in the county where the home is located. This application must be filed between January 1 and April 1. The maximum exemption for regular homeowners is \$300. For homeowners 65 years of age or totally disabled, there is an exemption on the first \$7,500 true value. You do not have to apply for homestead exemption each year. You should reapply if there were changes in your homestead status (marital, property, ownership, etc.). For additional information, call 601-923-7631 or <http://www.dor.ms.gov/Pages/default.aspx>.

### **Inheritance and Estate Taxes**

There is no inheritance tax. An estate tax is imposed on the value of a decedent's estate when the total gross estate exceeds the federal exemption of \$1,000,000. The exemption amount will follow the federal exclusion under 26 USC 2010.

### **Other State Tax Rates**

To compare the above sales, excise, 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> & <https://www.salestaxhandbook.com>
- Excise Taxes (i.e. gasoline, cigarettes, cellphones, automobiles, beer, wine, and liquor: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/excise-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>.
- Income Tax: <https://taxfoundation.org/state-individual-income-tax-rates-brackets-2019>
- State Tax Comparisons <https://www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard>

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For further information visit the Mississippi Department of Revenue site <http://www.dor.ms.gov> or call 601-923-7000 [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#MISSISSIPPI> | FEB 2019 ++]

**\* General Interest \***



## Notes of Interest

April 01 thru 15, 2021

- **Free Doughnut.** Starting Monday, 3/22, anyone who shows their COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card will receive a free Original Glazed® doughnut from Krispy Kreme.
- **VA Infrastructure.** President Joe Biden's \$2 trillion infrastructure plan includes more than \$18 billion for upgrades to Veterans Affairs medical centers, work that veterans advocates have said is long overdue. The White House is expected to release its fiscal 2022 plan for funding VA operations sometime next month.
- **Spouse Jobs.** Blue Star Families' report on its annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey found that during the pandemic about 42% of working spouses reported they lost their jobs, with the most common reason being a furlough or layoff.
- **VA Claim Exams.** Although the pandemic has caused Compensation & Pension examinations to accumulate, VBA has now safely resumed in-person exams everywhere in the country and will schedule them as soon as possible. VA has implemented policy changes that enable broader use of the virtual Tele-C&P and Acceptable Clinical Evidence examination procedures by both the VHA and VBA contract examiners.
- **Air Quality.** The American Lung Association has documented that 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.
- **Covid-19 2020 Deaths.** The coronavirus caused approximately 375,000 deaths and was the third leading cause of death in 2020, after heart disease and cancer. Covid-19 deaths in the U.S. now top 550,000 since the start of the pandemic.
- **Virtual Vietnam Wall.** At <https://www.virtualwall.org/iStates.htm> you can see the personal memorial pages of casualties listed by home of record by selecting your state and then your town.
- **POW/MIA White House Flag.** On June 14, 2020, Flag Day, Trump ordered the POW/MIA flag removed. President Joe Biden has restored it to its rightful place, where it is visible for the world to see. This flag symbolizes our Nation's commitment to resolving the fates of those still listed as prisoner, missing, and unaccounted for from all conflicts.
- **U.S.\*India Relations.** India on 9 APR objected to a U.S. Navy ship conducting a "freedom of navigation" patrol in its exclusive economic zone without its prior consent. The U.S. 7th Fleet said in a statement that India's requirement that countries receive prior consent for military operations in its 'exclusive economic zone' was "inconsistent with international law" and that the United States "will fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows." India believes the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea does not authorize countries to carry out military exercises or maneuvers, particularly involving the use of weapons or explosives, in other states' exclusive economic zones and continental shelves without the consent of the coastal state.
- **U.S.\*Philippine Relations.** The Philippines restarted military drills with the U.S. on 12 APR as the Southeast Asian nation seeks to speed up Covid vaccine deliveries from its longtime defense ally.
- **Russia\*Ukraine Relations.** Turkey Confirms U.S. Destroyers Are Headed For The Black Sea Amid Russian-Ukraine Crisis.

- **U.S.\*Israel relations.** U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on 11 APR declared an “enduring and ironclad” American commitment to Israel, reinforcing support at a tense time in Israeli politics and amid questions about the Biden administration’s efforts to revive nuclear negotiations with Israel’s archenemy, Iran.
- **Sinking the Tirpitz.** At <https://youtu.be/7Exst44CyG0> is a 47 minute film on the sinking of Germany’s allegedly unsinkable battleship.
- **Commissary Sidewalk Sales.** After being canceled last year because of the pandemic they are returning between 29 APR and 31 MAY at most stateside military commissaries,

[Source: Various | April 15, 2021 ++]

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## Unwanted Comms

### Telemarketing, Mail & Email



Tired of having your mailbox crammed with unsolicited mail, including preapproved credit card applications? Fed up with getting telemarketing calls just as you’re sitting down to dinner? Fuming that your email inbox is chock-full of unsolicited advertising? The good news is that you can cut down on the number of unsolicited mailings, calls, and emails you receive by learning where to go to “just say no.”

### Consumer Reporting Companies

If you decide that you don’t want to receive prescreened offers of credit and insurance, you have two choices. You can opt out of receiving them for five years or opt out of receiving them permanently.

- To opt out for five years: Call toll-free (888) 5-OPT-OUT (888-567-8688) or visit [www.optoutprescreen.com](http://www.optoutprescreen.com) . The phone number and website are operated by the major consumer reporting companies.
- To opt out permanently: You may begin the permanent Opt-Out process online at [www.optoutprescreen.com](http://www.optoutprescreen.com).

To complete your request, you must return the signed Permanent Opt-Out Election form, which will be provided after you initiate your online request. Now be advised: When you call or visit the website, you’ll be asked to provide certain personal information, including your home telephone number, name, Social Security number, and date of birth. The information you provide is confidential and will be used only to process your request to opt out.

If you don’t have access to the Internet, you may send a written request to permanently opt out to each of the major consumer reporting companies. Make sure your request includes your home telephone number, name, Social Security number, and date of birth.

### Direct Marketers Telemarketing

The government's National Do Not Call Registry is a free, easy way to reduce the telemarketing calls you get at home. To register your phone number or to get information about the registry, visit [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov), or call (888) 382-1222 from the phone number you want to register. You will get fewer telemarketing calls within 31 days of registering your number. Telephone numbers on the registry will only be removed when they are disconnected and reassigned, or when you choose to remove a number from the registry.

### **Mail and Email**

Consumers can register at the Direct Marketing Association's (DMA) consumer website: [www.DMAchoice.org](http://www.DMAchoice.org) for a processing fee of \$2 for a period of ten years. Registering online is the fastest way to see results. DMAchoice offers consumers a simple, step-by-step process that enables them to decide what mail they do and do not want. In addition, DMAchoice online offers registration for DMA's eMail Preference Service (reduce your unsolicited commercial email)

Mail-in registration: If you do not wish to complete your registration online, you can register by using the mail-in form that is online: it out with all required information, print it and mail to DMAchoice, DMAPO Box 900, Cos Cob, CT 06807. Or, if you do not have access to the Internet, you can register by sending your name and address (with signature), along with a \$3 processing fee (check or money order payable to DMA) to the same address.

### **Department of Motor Vehicles**

The Drivers Privacy Protection Act allows states to distribute personal information only to law enforcement officials, courts, government agencies, private investigators, insurance under-writers, and similar businesses — but not for direct marketing and other uses

[Source: Shift Colors | Spring-Summer 2021 ++]

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## **Psychedelic Drugs**

### **Army Vet Urges California Lawmakers to Decriminalize**



Jose Martinez believes psychedelic drugs saved his life. The 32-year-old U.S. Army veteran said he felt worthless and depressed when he returned from a deployment in Afghanistan, where he lost both legs and an arm after stepping on an improvised explosive device. "I just wanted to disintegrate," Martinez told The Sacramento Bee in an interview. Then, six years ago, he said he discovered psilocybin mushrooms. He credits them with bringing him back from the brink. "I went back to surfing," said Martinez, who lives near San Bernardino. "It made me go from feeling worthless to feeling worthy of living this life."

On 7 AUG, Martinez urged California lawmakers to help others like him by advancing a bill that would decriminalize psychedelic drugs like mushrooms and LSD. He told the Senate Public Safety Committee the therapies could be used to prevent suicides. The committee voted to approve the bill, which now goes before the Senate Health Committee. Under both state and federal law, possession of psychedelic drugs is illegal under most circumstances. Senate Bill 519, authored by State Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco) would decriminalize possession and sharing of several drugs, including ketamine, psilocybin, LSD and mescaline, for people 21 and older. The bill notably excludes peyote and GHB from decriminalization. The bill also would create a state Department of Public Health working group that would be tasked with researching the regulation of psychedelic drugs and making recommendations to the Legislature.

Speaking in support of the bill, Wiener pointed out that California would be following in the footsteps of states like Oregon, and nations like Portugal, which have decriminalized possession of drugs. The medical community in recent years has opened up to exploring the treatment possibilities of psychedelic drugs. The Department of Veterans Affairs is funding research into the effectiveness of psychedelics in treating post-traumatic stress disorder in combat veterans.

The bill is opposed by several groups, including the California Narcotic Officers' Association and the Congress of Racial Equality. John Lovell, a lobbyist who represents the California Narcotic Officers' Association, warned lawmakers that passage of the bill would carry lethal consequences. "You're going to see dead bodies around this bill," he said in an interview with The Bee. Lovell's primary concern with the bill centered on the term "social sharing," defined in the bill's language as "the giving away or consensual administering of mescaline by a person 21 years of age or older, to another person 21 years of age or older, not for financial gain, including in the context of group counseling, spiritual guidance, community-based healing, or related services."

Lovell said that decriminalizing social sharing of psychedelic drugs will open the door to accidental poisonings. He gave an example of someone taking what they think is ketamine, which actually is a powerful synthetic opioid such as fentanyl. "The reality is that the sharing of pills, of medications, the social sharing, is fraught with enormous risk," Lovell said. Tak Allen, president of the Congress of Racial Equality, pointed out to lawmakers that one of the drugs that would be decriminalized, ketamine, has a history of being used as a date rape drug. "I would particularly be nervous for college students at this point," Allen said in an interview with The Bee.

The bill is supported by a variety of groups, including veterans groups Heroic Hearts Project and Veterans Exploring Treatment Solutions, which are both co-sponsors of the legislation, as well as groups such as the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, also known as MAPS. Ismail Ali, policy and advocacy counsel for MAPS, told The Bee that decriminalizing psychedelics "is a step toward ending the failed war on drugs and beginning the process of what a post-prohibition world looks like." He said that decriminalizing social sharing is critical because the safest way to use psychedelics is in groups with a trained facilitator. "Social sharing is really a way to acknowledge for some of these substances the use rarely occurs in personal context," he said.

Ali disputed the statement that decriminalizing ketamine would lead to a spike in drug-assisted sexual assaults. "Alcohol is the most commonly used date rape drug and it's perfectly legal," he said. Ali said that he would like to see more honest education about what psychedelic drugs actually do, but that this legislation would be a good first step. "It's not the whole picture. It's not the silver bullet that's going to fix



all our mental health problems. But it's a significant step." [Source: | The Sacramento Bee | Andrew Sheeler | April 7, 2021 ++]

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## Jefferson Davis Chair

### Confederate Monument Stolen and Held for Ransom



Ransom note (left) sent to the UDC for chair (right)

Military personnel have considerable experience when it comes to fashioning previously unrelated items into bodily waste receptacles. Cut-up milk crates adorned with duct tape for added comfort, wooden ammo crates positioned over dug-out holes, piss pipes, straddle trenches, cat holes, etc. — the creativity in the quest for intestinal relief remains unmatched. So, it might impress such lav-savvy service members to learn that one particular group, after stealing a Confederate monument in March from a cemetery in Alabama, is threatening to convert it into a Porta John unless the United Daughters of the Confederacy meet the group's demands.

Valued at \$500,000, the Jefferson Davis Memorial Chair was the subject of a heist by the activist organization White Lies Matter, which claimed in an email to local news outlets that they will return the monument only if the UDC agrees to hang a banner outside its Richmond, Virginia, headquarters with a quote by former Black Liberation Army member Assata Shakur: "The rulers of this country have always considered their property more important than our lives." hakur — who has lived in Cuba under political asylum since the early 1980s — is still wanted by the FBI for the 1973 slaying of a New Jersey state trooper.

The banner, the chair's captors wrote, must go up on April 9 — the anniversary of the Confederacy's surrender — and remain hanging for 24 hours or the stone chair, which weighs several hundred pounds, will be converted into the Grand Central Station of Defecation. A ransom note styled to look like a 19th-century flyer included mocked up images of what the chair would look like converted into a fecal throne. In its email, the group also included photographs of the chair in their possession, some of which featured a mocked-up hole ready to welcome any and all glutes in its vicinity.

The organization, described as an anti-racist group with no definitive leader, according to the Washington Post, indicated that they first learned of the chair's existence through a book purchased at a memorabilia store. Presented in memory of Confederate President Jefferson Davis in 1893, the ornate stone chair was installed in a part of the cemetery known as Confederate Circle due to the site's numerous



graves and monuments dedicated to Civil War figures, according to The Art Newspaper. The surrounding area was purchased in 2011 by the UDC. Despite some UDC members initial labeling of the demand as “fake news,” the Selma police and District Attorney Michael Jackson confirmed to Alabama.com that they were aware of the theft’s authenticity and ransom demand.

“We took their toy, and we don’t feel guilty about it,” White Lies Matter wrote. “They never play with it anyway. They just want it there to remind us what they’ve done, what they are still willing to do. But the south won’t rise again. Not as the Confederacy. Because that coalition left out a large portion of its population. “All that’s left of that nightmare is an obscenely heavy chair that’s a throne for a ghost whose greatest accomplishment was treason.” The only thing left to do now is to add some padding to the chair’s alleged opening and airlift it to its proper resting place — the field. [Source: MilitaryTimes Observation Post | Claire Barrett & J.D. Simkins | April 9, 2021 ++]

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## **Taiwan-China Dispute**

### **Update 09: U.S. Military Cites Rising Risk of Chinese Move**



The American military is warning that China is probably accelerating its timetable for capturing control of Taiwan, the island democracy that has been the chief source of tension between Washington and Beijing for decades and is widely seen as the most likely trigger for a potentially catastrophic U.S.-China war. The worry about Taiwan comes as China wields new strength from years of military buildup. It has become more aggressive with Taiwan and more assertive in sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea. Beijing also has become more confrontational with Washington; senior Chinese officials traded sharp and unusually public barbs with Secretary of State Antony Blinken in talks in Alaska last month.

A military move against Taiwan, however, would be a test of U.S. support for the island that Beijing views as a breakaway province. For the Biden administration, it could present the choice of abandoning a friendly, democratic entity or risking what could become an all-out war over a cause that is not on the radar of most Americans. The United States has long pledged to help Taiwan defend itself, but it has deliberately left unclear how far it would go in response to a Chinese attack. This accumulation of concerns meshes with the administration’s view that China is a frontline challenge for the United States and that more must be done soon — militarily, diplomatically and by other means — to deter Beijing as it seeks to supplant the United States as the predominant power in Asia. Some American military leaders see Taiwan as potentially the most immediate flashpoint.

“We have indications that the risks are actually going up,” Adm. Philip Davidson, the most senior U.S. military commander in the Asia-Pacific region, told a Senate panel last month, referring to a Chinese military move on Taiwan. “The threat is manifest during this decade — in fact, in the next six years,” Davidson said. Days later, Davidson’s expected successor, Adm. John Aquilino, declined to back up the six-year timeframe but told senators at his confirmation hearing: “My opinion is, this problem is much closer to us than most think.” Biden administration officials have spoken less pointedly but stress the intention to deepen ties with Taiwan, eliciting warnings from Beijing against outsider interference in what it considers a domestic matter.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin calls China the “pacing threat” for the United States, and the military services are adjusting accordingly. The Marine Corps, for example, is reshaping itself with China and Russia in mind after two decades of ground-focused combat against extremists in the Middle East. Hardly an aspect of China’s military modernization has failed to rile the U.S. military. Adm. Charles Richard, who as head of U.S. Strategic Command is responsible for U.S. nuclear forces, wrote in a recent essay that China is on track to be a “strategic peer” of the United States. He said China’s nuclear weapons stockpile is expected to double “if not triple or quadruple” in the next 10 years, although that goes beyond the Pentagon’s official view that the stockpile will “at least double” in that period.

Taiwan, however, is seen as the most pressing problem. U.S. officials have noted People’s Liberation Army actions that seem designed to rattle Taiwan. For example, Chinese aerial incursions, including flying around the island, are a near-daily occurrence, serving to advertise the threat, wear down Taiwanese pilots and aircraft and learn more about Taiwan’s capabilities. Chinese officials have scoffed at Davidson’s Taiwan comments. A Ministry of Defense spokesman, Col. Ren Guoqiang, urged Washington to “abandon zero-peace thinking” and do more to build mutual trust and stability. He said that “attempts by outside forces to use Taiwan to seek to restrain China, or the use by Taiwan independence forces to use military means to achieve independence, are all dead ends.”

The implications of a Chinese military move against Taiwan and its 23 million people are so profound and potentially grave that Beijing and Washington have long managed a fragile middle ground — Taiwanese political autonomy that precludes control by Beijing but stops short of formal independence. Predictions of when China might decide to try to compel Taiwan to reunite with the mainland have long varied, and there is no uniform view in the United States. Larry Diamond, a senior fellow at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution, said last week he doubts Chinese leaders are ready to force the issue. “I don’t think it’s coming soon,” he said.

The Trump administration made a series of moves to demonstrate a stronger commitment to Taiwan, including sending a Cabinet member to Taipei last year, making him the highest-level U.S. official to visit the island since formal diplomatic relations were severed in 1979 in deference to China. The Biden administration says it wants to cooperate with China where possible but has voiced its objections to a wide range of Chinese actions. Last week, the U.S. ambassador to the Pacific island nation of Palau, John Hennessey-Niland, became the first serving U.S. ambassador to visit Taiwan since Washington cut ties with Taipei in favor of Beijing.

China is a frequent target of criticism in Congress. Concerns about countering its growing military might are reflected in passage of the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, funded at \$2.2 billion for 2021. Davidson wants it to support, among other initiatives, establishing a better air defense system to protect the U.S. territory of Guam from Chinese missiles and preserving U.S. military dominance in the region. Rep. Adam

Smith, a Washington Democrat and chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, is skeptical of the military's fixation on dominance. "Given the way the world works now, having one country be dominant is just hopelessly unrealistic," he said in a recent online forum sponsored by Meridian, a nonpartisan diplomacy center. He said the U.S. military can maintain sufficient strength, in partnership with allies, to send the message: "China, don't invade Taiwan because the price you're going to pay for that isn't worth it." [Source: The Associated Press | Robert Burns | April 7, 2021 ++]

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## **Taiwan-China Dispute**

### **Update 10: China Flanks Taiwan with Military Exercises in Air & Sea**



China's armed forces conducted simultaneous military exercises to the west and east of Taiwan on 5 APR in a move analysts said was a warning to the self-ruled island and its supporter, the United States. The Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning and its escorts were conducting maneuvers around Taiwan, China's military said in a statement. "It was a routine training exercise organized according to the annual work plan to test the troops' training effectiveness and beef up their capability to safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests," the statement said.

Meanwhile, at least 10 People's Liberation Army (PLA) warplanes, including four J-16 and four J-10 fighter jets, a Y-8 anti-submarine warfare aircraft and a KJ-500 early warning aircraft, entered Taiwan's self-declared air defense identification zone (ADIZ), according to Taiwan's Defense Ministry. The US Federal Aviation Administration defines an ADIZ as "a designated area of airspace over land or water within which a country requires the immediate and positive identification, location, and air traffic control of aircraft in the interest of the country's national security." Taiwan's Defense Ministry said it had a "full grasp" of the situation and was "appropriately handling" the matter, Reuters reported.

The PLA kept up its pressure on Taiwan on 7 APR, sending 15 warplanes into the island's ADIZ, the Defense Ministry said. For its part, the US Navy showed its flag around the island on 7 APR as the guided-missile destroyer USS John S McCain steamed through the Taiwan Strait, the waterway that separates the island from mainland China. "The ship's transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the US commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," US Navy 7th Fleet spokesperson Lt. Mark Langford said in a statement. Beijing claims full sovereignty over Taiwan, a democracy of almost 24 million people located off the southeastern coast of mainland China, even though the two sides have been governed separately for more than seven decades. Chinese President Xi Jinping has vowed that Beijing will never allow the island to become formally independent and has refused to rule out the use of force, if necessary, to take the island back.

Tensions over Taiwan have been heating up in recent months as Taipei has garnered support from the US in the form of new military hardware, an agreement between the US and Taiwanese coast guards, and strong statements of support from the administration of US President Joe Biden. "Our commitment to Taiwan is rock-solid," US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said 7 APR. "We have, of course, taken note with great concern the pattern of ongoing PRC efforts and attempts to intimidate in the region, including in the context of Taiwan," he said. "The United States maintains the capacity to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security or the social or economic system of the people on Taiwan," Price told reporters at the State Department.

Last month, after talks with Japanese leaders and diplomats, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned that Washington and Tokyo were prepared to push back against Chinese threats to stability and order in Asia. "China uses coercion and aggression to systemically erode autonomy in Hong Kong, undercut democracy in Taiwan, abuse human rights in Xinjiang and Tibet, and assert maritime claims in the South China Sea that violate international law," Blinken said. "We will push back if necessary when China uses coercion or aggression to get its way."

China's maneuvers 5 APR demonstrated its military superiority over Taiwan, Shi Hong, executive chief editor of Chinese magazine Shipborne Weapons, said in a Global Times report. "The exercise showed that the PLA (People's Liberation Army) is capable of surrounding the island of Taiwan, isolating its troops and leaving them nowhere to run and no chance to win if circumstances arise," Shi said. The exercises also sent a message to both the US and Japan, Shi added. Since any US and Japanese military interventions would likely come from the east, China, by exercising its carrier group there, demonstrated it could cut off that help, Shi said.

Western analysts said China did not demonstrate any new capabilities in Monday's exercises. In fact, a Chinese carrier in the open Pacific could play to one of the strengths of the US Navy -- its nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSN), said Thomas Shugart, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security and former US Navy captain. "A Chinese carrier operating east of Taiwan is not particularly valuable being used like that, as it could be quite vulnerable operating that far out -- in SSN-infested deep water and beyond China's integrated air defense/SAM umbrella," Shugart said.

But the Chinese military did make a political statement, analysts said. "It's intended as a warning to the Taiwanese and others who Beijing deemed as undermining its interests, not least the Americans," said Collin Koh, research fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore. Koh points out that a PLA Navy carrier group has operated east of Taiwan at least twice before. And the [large numbers of PLA aircraft in Taiwan's ADIZ](#) is becoming more common. In late March, 20 PLA warplanes entered Taiwan's ADIZ in one day, according to Taiwan's Defense Ministry. It's the highest number since last year, when Taiwan began disclosing almost daily flights by Chinese aircraft into its airspace. Such Chinese activity is expected to continue. The PLA said in its statement that carrier operations such as the one staged Monday would occur on a regular basis.

While the Chinese carrier was conducting exercises off Taiwan, a US Navy aircraft carrier strike group was carrying out its own operations in the South China Sea. The US 7th Fleet said the USS Theodore Roosevelt and its escorts entered the South China Sea on Sunday for routine operations, the second such visit of the Roosevelt to the area this year. "It is great to be back in the South China Sea to reassure our allies and partners that we remain committed to freedom of the seas," Rear Adm. Doug Verissimo, commander, Carrier Strike Group Nine, said in a statement. "While in the South China Sea, the strike

group will conduct fixed and rotary-wing flight operations, maritime strike exercises, anti-submarine operations, coordinated tactical training, and more," the 7th Fleet statement said.

Beijing claims almost all of the 1.3 million square mile South China Sea as its sovereign territory and in recent years has built up military fortifications on several islands. It says the presence of foreign military forces like the US aircraft carrier strike group are fomenting tensions in the region.

On 12 APR Chinese officials warned the U.S. to stop "playing with fire" when it comes to U.S. relations with Taiwan, following new State Department guidelines that seek to deepen ties with Taipei. "There is zero room for compromise and not an inch to give," Chinese spokesperson Zhao Lijian told reporters. "We urge the U.S. side to grasp the situation, earnestly abide by the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiqués, refrain from playing with fire, immediately stop official contact with Taiwan in any form. The spokesman warned against sending the "wrong signals to Taiwan 'independence forces' so as not to subversively influence and damage Sino-U.S. relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait." While the U.S. officially recognizes Beijing and a "one China" policy, Washington is legally bound to supply Taiwan with arms to defend itself under the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act. [Source: CNN & Fox News | Brad Lendon & Caitlin McFall | April 8 & 14, 2021 ++]

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## RP~China Dispute

### Update 27: RP Renews Demands for Chinese Vessels to Leave



Chinese vessels, believed to be crewed by Chinese maritime militia personnel, are seen at Whitsun Reef within the Philippines's exclusive economic zone on March 27

An annoyed Philippine defense chief renewed a demand on 3 APR for dozens of Chinese vessels to leave a Manila-claimed reef in the South China Sea and said he would not be fooled by Chinese assertions that the vessels were taking shelter from bad weather. The Chinese Embassy shot back at what it called a "perplexing statement" by Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and insisted that the vessels had the right to take shelter in what it said was Chinese territory. "Nobody has the right to make wanton remarks on such activities," it said.

The unusually hostile public exchange stemmed from the sighting early last month by the Philippine coast guard of more than 200 Chinese vessels, which Lorenzana called "militias," at the Whitsun Reef. The Philippines filed a diplomatic protest, saying the reef, which it calls Julian Felipe, lies within an internationally recognized offshore zone, where it has the exclusive right to exploit fisheries, oil, gas and other resources. China ignored Manila's demand for the Chinese vessels to leave the area, which it calls

Niu'e Jiao and claims as Chinese territory. The Chinese Embassy in Manila said the vessels were taking shelter at the reef from rough sea conditions.

"The Chinese ambassador has a lot of explaining to do," Lorenzana said in a statement 3 APR, adding that the latest Philippine military surveillance showed 44 Chinese vessels were still moored at the reef. "I am no fool. The weather has been good so far, so they have no other reason to stay there. These vessels should be on their way out. You should get out of there," Lorenzana said Saturday. The Chinese Embassy responded anew by repeating that the vessels were taking cover in what it called Chinese waters. "It is completely normal for Chinese fishing vessels to fish in the waters and take shelter near the reef during rough sea conditions," the embassy said. "We hope that authorities concerned would make constructive efforts and avoid any unprofessional remarks which may further fan irrational emotions," the embassy said. It added that "China is committed to safeguarding peace and stability in the waters."

Whitsun Reef lies in the Spratlys, the most hotly contested region in the South China Sea. The Philippines regards the resource-rich chain of islands, islets and atolls as part of its western province of Palawan. But the offshore region is also claimed entirely or partly by China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei. China has turned seven disputed reefs into missile-protected island bases in recent years, ratcheting up tensions. The United States has expressed support for the Philippines, its long-time treaty ally, and accused China of using "maritime militia to intimidate, provoke and threaten other nations, which undermines peace and security in the region." Beijing denied the vessels were part of a maritime militia.

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has nurtured friendly ties with Beijing since taking office in 2016 and has been criticized for not immediately demanding Chinese compliance with an international arbitration ruling that invalidated Beijing's historic claims to virtually the entire South China Sea. China has refused to recognize the 2016 ruling, which it called "a sham," and continues to defy it. The President has now expressed concern to the Chinese ambassador over the ships, according to his spokesman. Until 5 APR he had left the tough-talking in public to his defense and foreign ministers. But in the strongest remarks yet from his office, Duterte's top legal counsel Salvador Panelo warned China's "present territorial incursions is producing an unwelcome stain in their bond and may trigger unwanted hostilities that both countries would rather not pursue." "The matter of territorial dispute has to be resolved in the diplomatic negotiating table or by the dictates of international law," Panelo said in a statement on Monday [Source: Associated Press / Aljazeera | Jim Gomez | April 3 & 6, 2021 ++]

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## **Panama Canal**

### **U.S. Naval Ship Transits**

The Panama Canal is a man-made 52-mile-long waterway through Panama that connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. When it opened in 1914, about 1,000 vessels transited the canal. By 2012, more than 815,000 vessels had passed through. In 2016, the waterway was expanded to allow larger vessels with more cargo. Here are five impressive pictures of massive U.S. naval vessels passing through the Panama Canal.





1. USS Lexington (CV-2) in one of the Panama Canal's locks in March 1928
2. USS Missouri (BB-63) had just 8 inches of clearance on either side
3. USS Valley Forge (CV-45) was one of the last aircraft carriers to transit the Panama Canal
4. *USS Boxer (CVS-21) passes through the canal in 1958 before she was redesignated as an experimental amphibious assault ship (LPH-4) in 1959.*
5. USNS Comfort (T-AH-20) passes through the Miraflores Lock



[Source: We Are the Mighty | Miguel Ortiz| April 2021 ++]

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## House Pests

### Cheap, Natural Ways to Rid Your Home of Them

Fleas, spiders, termites, flies, centipedes, ants, bedbugs, cockroaches ... these tenacious intruders won't give up, so we humans have to fight for our living spaces — especially since we're spending more time in them these days due to the coronavirus pandemic. In the quest to keep their homes clean and bug-free, many people don't want to expose their households to toxins or shell out lots of cash to debug. Fortunately, many homes don't require a professional exterminator to keep pests at bay. There are plenty of cheap, natural ways to control these invaders. Following are some of them.

#### **Break Out Borax for Roaches**

For cheap, natural roach bait, use borax (or boric acid) or a mixture of equal parts baking powder and sugar. The bugs carry the bait back to the colony, poisoning the lair. Sprinkle it along floorboards in rooms where roaches appear. (Note: Keep borax out of reach of kids and animals, and consider the baking powder/sugar mix in households with kids or pets.)

#### **Summon the Nematodes**



Fight critters with critters. Nematodes are microscopic worms that are parasitic toward larvae or consume larvae, thereby keeping pest populations from growing. They can take down fleas, termites, cutworms, Japanese beetles, sod webworms, and a couple hundred other unwelcome pests. Nematodes are completely safe around people and animals other than insects. Use *Steinernema feltiae* (a nematode species) for warmer areas and *Steinernema carpocapsae* in cooler areas. Consumers can pay \$78 for 10 million active worms on [Peaceful Valley Farm & Garden Supply](#), or find similar prices at a garden supply store. Online reviews suggest these nematodes are worth their weight in gold. Water them down and apply with a watering can or gardening spray to the lawn and alleyways around the house. The recommended rate is 10 million per 600 square feet.

### **Make a Fruit Fly Trap**

Fruit flies are gross, for sure, but harmless and easily removed. Generally, solutions to fruit fly infestations involve insecticides, or a crafty cone and special oil. But the easiest and cheapest method is pour about an inch of vinegar plus a squirt of dish soap into a plastic cup, glass, or bottle and cover with cling wrap. (An alternative to vinegar is a piece of the rotting fruit.) Secure the film with a rubber band and poke a few slim holes, and place the trap in the problem area. When curious fruit flies enter the vessel, the cover and sticky dish soap will prevent them from getting back out. We tested this method with basic white vinegar, generic Costco dish soap, dollar store cling wrap, and patience. Within a few hours, all the fruit flies got stuck in the container.

### **Use Spice to Make Lizards Shoo**

Small insects and bugs naturally attract reptile predators, so with one pest problem comes another. Fortunately, many household ingredients drive out lizards. Try a spray of water plus hot sauce, onions, garlic juice, or pepper and chili powder. Spray around dark areas (behind cabinets and furniture), windows, and doors. If the solution doesn't work, rolled balls made of ground coffee and tobacco powder, fly paper, or cheap mouse traps can take care of lizards too. It's preferable not to kill them, though, as they're harmless and control the insect population outdoors.

### **Use Feathers and Egg Shells to Ward off Lizards**

It seems a bit voodoo, but it's true that hanging or displaying bird feathers or spreading egg shells around the house, especially near doors and windows, can ward off lizards. They are birds' natural prey and hate the eggy smell (replace the shells every three to four weeks).

### **Protect Dogs with Essential Oils**

Dog owners can protect their pets and homes from fleas without pricey flea-and-tick collars. Mixes of certain [essential oils](#) and natural ingredients function as do-it-yourself flea and tick repellants. Recipes generally incorporate rose geranium oil, lemon oil, eucalyptus oil, citrus oil, peppermint oil, or almond oil (about [\\$3 to \\$13](#) a bottle). The bottles are small, but just a few drops at a time do the trick. Be sure to avoid any oils potentially harmful to dogs ([listed here](#)). Some DIY sprays also involve distilled white or apple cider vinegar. Apply the mixture to a doggie bandana, or spray lightly on the dog's harness and/or coat before venturing outdoors. One other natural way to repel fleas: cedar chips on the lawn.

### **Ward Off Spiders with Plants**

While spiders help with household insects, such as mosquitos, flies, earwigs, roaches, and moths, arachnophobia [may be encoded in our DNA](#). Many plants and natural oils repel spiders with great success. Eucalyptus, garlic, cilantro, conkers, and Osage hedge balls can be grown or placed in or outdoors to ward off spiders cheaply. Also consider putting chestnuts near windows and doors; spiders find them rank.

### **Get Rid of a Spider ASAP**

While spiders are really your friends in the fight against pests if you must kill one immediately, try a spray bottle with a few garlic cloves and water, or peppermint oil and water, or an essential oil of choice with dish soap and water. The pest control information site [PestKill](#) also recommends citronella candles, a refrigerated blend of tomato leaves and water in a spray bottle, or lemon dish soap mixed with water and five drops of citronella for spider prevention. Spray these natural concoctions near doors and windows.

### **Send Bedbugs Packing**

Professional extermination services can be depressingly expensive, so try natural remedies first. Experts recommend preventive cleaning measures, such as vacuuming mattresses, washing bedding, scrubbing floors with a solution of rubbing alcohol and water, and cleaning doormats regularly. If bedbugs seem to have spread, use a hot iron on all clothes and bedding. Alternatively, clothes can be soaked in freezing cold water to kill these nasty little guys; they can't survive extreme cold or heat. Next, call on tea tree oil, Indian lilac ("neem") leaves, lavender oil, or black walnut leaves to eliminate the infestation. [Natural-HomeRemedies](#) has specific instructions.

### **Got Ants? Stop the Line**

Step one in addressing that eerie line of ants is to clean up the source of attraction — food left out, unnoticed spill residue, crumbs, or stickiness. If the sink and counter areas are free of food detritus and standing water, try natural ant repellants such as cucumber, mint, cinnamon, cloves, cayenne pepper, coffee grounds, and lemon juice. If the marching ants' origin point becomes apparent, dab one of those items (on a watery cotton ball) at the spot and along the ant line. Spray the area with a mix of water and a natural repellant from the list. Afterward, leave a nightlight on in the room for three nights to confuse their foraging habits.

### **Invite Ants into a Cup**

One option to stop ants in their tracks is to place cotton balls soaked in a mixture of 1 liter of water, 1 teaspoon of borax, and 1 cup of sugar inside an empty yogurt cup. Cover with plastic wrap and punch holes. The ants will enjoy the bait inside and return through the holes to their colonies, which will die out. Don't use this trick outdoors or in reach of kids or other animals, though.

[Source: Cheapism | Gina Martinez | April 07, 2021 ++]

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## **Philippine Retirement Authority** **Source of Permanent Residence in PI**

The Philippine Retirement Authority (PRA) is a government owned and controlled corporation created by virtue of Executive Order No. 1037, signed by former President Ferdinand E. Marcos on 04 July 1985. On 31 August 2001, through Executive Order No. 26, the control and supervision of PRA was transferred to the Board of Investments (BOI) – Department of Trade and Industry from the Office of the President. On 12 May 2009, Republic Act No. 9593, otherwise known as Tourism Act of 2009, PRA became an attached agency of the Department of Tourism and placed under the supervision of the Secretary. PRA is mandated to develop and promote the Philippines as retirement haven as a means of accelerating the social and economic development of the country, strengthening its foreign exchange position at the same time providing further best quality of life to the targeted retirees in a most attractive package.

The Special Resident Retiree's Visa (SRRV) is a special non-immigrant visa for foreign nationals who would like to make the Philippines their second home or investment destination. Some benefits of the visa include:

- Indefinite stay with multiple-entry/exit privileges;
- Exemption from:
  - Philippine Bureau of Immigration ACR-I Card (Annual Report)
  - Customs duties & taxes for one time importation of household goods & personal effects worth up to US\$7,000.00
  - Tax from pensions & annuities
  - Travel Tax, if retiree has not stayed in the Philippines for more than 1 year from last date of entry
  - Student Visa/Study Permit
- Entitlement to PHILHEALTH benefits & privileges.

Veterans interested in moving to or retiring in the Philippines should refer to [www.pra.gov.ph](http://www.pra.gov.ph) for complete details on different aspects and costs of the program and <https://www.facebook.com/PhilippineRetirementVisa> for current situations they should be aware of. For those with VA service connected disabilities there is currently a VAMC in Manila which will only service whatever their rated disability is. Its initial establishment was to service Filipino veterans who served in the U.S Armed forces during WWII thus it is questionable that with time how long its presence will remain. There are a few RAOs scattered around the country that can provide limited service to veterans as well as the U.S. Embassy in Manila.

**Note:** PRA Advisory No. 01-03-2021 on Temporary Suspension of Foreigners Travel into the Philippines limits inbound passengers to 1500 per day in light of efforts to prevent the entry of SARS-COV-2 variants from other countries. For details on exemptions refer to the PRA website.

[Source: Various | April 14, 2021 ++]

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## **Philippine Retirement Authority**

### **Update 01: PRA Message to Members | 8 APR 2021**

Please be informed that PRA Offices are currently operating on a mixed Skeletal Work force and Work from Home (WFH) arrangements from April 5 until further notice. All requests may take longer than the usual. We expect your due understanding and cooperation. We would like also to provide you some reminders:

1. For those still outside the country and with plans of returning to the Philippines, make sure to request from the authority a DFA Entry Exemption Document (EED) to be presented upon arrival. Send request with requirements to [reentryrequest@pra.gov.ph](mailto:reentryrequest@pra.gov.ph), copy furnished (cc) [pra.centalluzon@gmail.com](mailto:pra.centalluzon@gmail.com) for follow – up.
2. For those who have plans of leaving the country, please secure a travel pass from our website [www.pra.gov.ph](http://www.pra.gov.ph). If planning to travel abroad (outbound), it is best to apply DFA Entry Exemption Document (EED) ahead of time and secure travel pass prior to travelling.
3. For those who need to renew/update PRA ID cards and with other Servicing related requests, send to [pracso.mara@gmail.com](mailto:pracso.mara@gmail.com) the required details for clearance and instructions, as follows:

SRRV No.:

Name:

Telephone No.:

Email Address:

Request/s:

Name of representative (if any):

4. For those who would like to book an appointment and visit our office, they may schedule via PRA CENTRAL LUZON FB Page or call/text Shylle 09186731414

5. SRRV Application of Principal and Inclusion of dependent-spouse and children, still suspended until further notice.

For more concerns, please feel free to coordinate with:

- Sky Lachica, General Concerns 0917-8553811 or [pra.centalluzon@gmail.com](mailto:pra.centalluzon@gmail.com).
- Mara Dela Cruz, Servicing Concerns: PRA ID card renewal, Re-stamping, Cancellation etc. 0927-5641031 or [pracssso.mara@gmail.com](mailto:pracssso.mara@gmail.com).
- Shylle Echipare, SRRV Application related concerns: Pending and Pre-processing etc. 0918-6731414 or [prashylle@gmail.com](mailto:prashylle@gmail.com).
- Nino Anthony Sicat, Government Liaison Officer: LTO, BIR, Philhealth, DOLE etc. 0956-5328441 or [ninosicat1987@gmail.com](mailto:ninosicat1987@gmail.com).

Thank you for your usual support and patience. Please keep safe all the time.

Kind regards,

PRA CSSO Team

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## Map Comparisons

### World's Smallest Country vs. Largest Building



**World's smallest country Vatican City (0.44 sq km) in red outline is smaller than the Aalsmeer Flower Auction building Netherlands (0.52.sq km) by footprint, the world's largest building**

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## News of the Weird

APR 01 thru 15, 2021

**Animal Antics** – EuroWeekly reported that on Feb. 24, a routine Sudanese Tarco airline flight from Khartoum to Doha, Qatar, was forced to turn around about a half-hour after takeoff when a stowaway cat caused a midair emergency. The cat gained entry to the cockpit and became aggressive, attacking the crew, who were unable to restrain it, prompting the pilot to return to the airport. Officials believe the cat got onto the airplane while it was parked overnight in a hangar in Khartoum. [EuroWeekly News, March 2021]

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**Quick Thinking** – An unnamed maskless woman waiting in line at a Pick 'n' Pay supermarket in South Africa was caught on cellphone video being confronted by a store guard who demanded she put on a mask or be thrown out of the store. On the video, she is next seen reaching up under her dress, pulling out her underwear -- a black thong -- and placing it on her face, the New York Post reported. Witnesses were mixed in their reaction. "Good lord," one shopper was heard saying. "Brilliant," said another. [New York Post, 2/26/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Crime Report** – Detectives investigating recent thefts of catalytic converters from vehicles in Pasco, Washington, went to the mobile home of Dustin Allen Bushnell, 30, in nearby Burbank with a search warrant on Feb. 26, and not only found converters, but also discovered a 400-pound playground slide that had been removed from a city park in December, KEPR reported. The slide had been repainted and mounted to a bunk bed in the home. Bushnell was arrested for possession of stolen property for the slide; no charges were filed for the converters. [KEPR, 3/10/2021]

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**The Passing Parade** – Authorities in Sri Lanka arrested Caroline Jurie, the reigning Mrs. World, after she snatched the crown from the head of Pushpika De Silva as she was crowned Mrs. Sri Lanka on national television on April 4, allegedly injuring her. Jurie, the 2019 Mrs. Sri Lanka, claimed De Silva was a divorced woman, which made her ineligible to win the pageant, but organizers confirmed De Silva is only separated, and she has been re-crowned. The new queen reported on Facebook that she went to the hospital to be treated for head injuries after the incident, and police spokesman Ajith Rohana told the BBC Jurie was charged with "simple hurt and criminal cause." Pageant director Chandimal Jayasinghe said, "It was a disgrace how Caroline Jurie behaved on the stage." [BBC, 4/8/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

**All in the Family** – At a wedding in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province in China on 31 MAR, the groom's mother noticed a birthmark on the bride's hand that was similar to one belonging to her long-lost daughter. When asked, the bride's parents admitted they had found her as a baby by the side of the road and taken her to live with them as their own -- a secret they had never told. The Daily Star reported that upon hearing of the connection, the bride burst into tears, saying the moment was "happier than the wedding day itself." Bonus: The groom was also adopted, so their marriage could proceed as planned. [Daily Star, 4/5/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Causing a Stink** – Police in Phoenix are searching for whoever dumped hundreds of carp and gizzard shad along a road on the north side of the city on April 4, KPHO-TV reported. Arizona Game and Fish said the estimated 1,000 pounds of fish were dumped along with trash left over from a spearfishing tournament at nearby Lake Pleasant. "It's pretty gross," said motorist Karen Rowe. "I mean fish in the middle of the desert, so it's quite shocking." Authorities said those responsible could be charged with criminal littering. [AZFamily.com, 4/6/2021]

-o-o-O-o-o-

**Disturbing the Peace** – Neighbors around a new luxury condo tower in Brooklyn, New York, are up in arms, and up at night, because of the persistent, shrill whistle they say is coming from the building, reported NBC New York. The city has been inundated with complaints. "It almost sounds like the subway screeching, but it's constant, and it usually happens late at night," Chris Valentini said of the noise. A representative of the developer told neighbors the sound originates from wind whipping around the new metal balconies. "This is not uncommon in new buildings," he said, "and we will resolve it." [NBC New York, 4/3/2021]

[Source: <https://www.uexpress.com/news-of-the-weird> | April 15, 2021 ++]

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## Vocabulary

### Some Words to Enhance Yours | 210415

- **Ambidextrous** [ am-bi-dek-struhs ] -- able to use both hands equally well.
- **Bandersnatch** [ ban-der-snach ] -- an imaginary wild animal of fierce disposition.
- **Chutzpah** [ hutz-pah ] -- informal shameless audacity; impudence.
- **Conundrum** [ kuh-nuhn-druhm ] -- 1. a riddle, the answer to which involves a pun or play on words, as: "What is black and white and read all over? A newspaper." 2. a confusing and difficult problem or question.
- **Funambulist** [ fyoo-nam-byuh-list ] -- a tightrope walker.
- **Infamy** [ in-fuh-mee ] -- extremely bad reputation, public reproach, or strong condemnation as the result of a shameful, criminal, or outrageous act.
- **Micawber** [ mi-caw-ber ] -- one who is poor but lives in optimistic expectation of better fortune.
- **Nemesis** [ nem-uh-sis ] -- something that a person cannot conquer, achieve, etc.
- **Obfuscate** [ ob-fuh-skeyt, ob-fuhs-keyt ] -- to confuse, bewilder, or stupefy; to make obscure or unclear.
- **Peregrinate** [ per-i-gruh-neyt ] -- to travel or journey, especially to walk on foot.
- **Prolixity** [ proh-lik-si-tee ] -- a tendency to speak or write at great or tedious length.
- **Ramshackle** [ ram-shak-uhl ] -- loosely made or held together; rickety; shaky.



- **Ubiquitous** [ yoo-bik-wi-tuhs ] -- existing or being everywhere, especially at the same time; omnipresent.

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## **Have You Heard or Seen?**

### **Little Johnny 2 | Military Humor 19 | Think Toons**

#### **Little Johnny 2**

Fred and Mary got married, but can't afford a honeymoon, so they go back to Fred's parent's home for their first night together. In the morning, Johnny, Fred's little brother, gets up and has his breakfast. As he is going out of the door to go to school, he asks his Mom if Fred and Mary are up yet. She replies, "No". Johnny asks, "Do you know what I think?" His mom replies, "I don't want to hear what you think! Just go to school." ‘

Johnny comes home for lunch and asks his mom, "Are Fred and Mary up yet?" She replies, "No." Johnny says, "Do you know what I think?" His mom replies, "Never mind what you think! Eat your lunch and go back to school."

After school, Johnny comes home and asks again, "Are Fred and Mary up yet?" His mom says "No." He asks, "Do you know what I think?" His Mom replies, "Ok, do tell me what you think?" He says: "Last night Fred came to my room for the Vaseline and I think I gave him my airplane glue."

o-o-O-o-o-

A teacher said to her class, "All Right, I'm going to hold something under the desk and I want you to guess it. This one is round and red." Little Johnny's hand shot up, but he was ignored.

"It's a plum miss," said a girl. "No it's an apple, but I like your thinking. The next one is oval shaped and green." The teacher ignored Little Johnny again and a boy said, "It's a kiwi miss." No, it's a guana, but I like your thinking."

Little Johnny said, "I got one miss, its stiff, about an inch long and with a red nib." "Johnny, that's disgusting!" shouted the teacher. "No it's a match, but I like your thinking." Said Little Johnny.

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One day, Little Johnny saw his grandpa smoking his cigarettes. Little Johnny asked, "Grandpa, can I smoke some of your cigarettes?" His grandpa replied, "Can your penis reach your anus?" "No", said Little Johnny. His grandpa replied, "Then you're not old enough."

The next day, Little Johnny saw his grandpa drinking beer. He asked, "Grandpa, can I drink some of your beer?" His grandpa replied, "Can your penis reach your anus?" "No" said Little Johnny. "Then you're not old enough." his grandpa replied.

The next day, Little Johnny was eating cookies. His grandpa asked, "Can I have some of your cookies?" Little Johnny replied, "Can your penis reach your anus?" His grandpa replied, "It most certainly can!" Little Johnny replied, "Then go screw yourself."

o-o-O-o-o-



A new teacher was trying to make use of her psychology courses. She started her class by saying, "Everyone who thinks they're stupid, stand up!" After a few seconds, Little Johnny stood up. The teacher said, "Do you think you're stupid, Little Johnny?" "No, ma'am, but I hate to see you standing there all by yourself!"

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Little Johnny comes home from Sunday school with a black eye. His father sees it and says, "Johnny, how many times do I have to tell you not to fight with the other boys?" "But Dad, it wasn't my fault. We were all in church saying our prayers. We all stood up and my teacher in front of me had her dress in the crack of her butt. I reached over and pulled it out. That's when she hit me!" "Johnny," the father said. "You don't do those kind of things to women."

Sure enough, the very next Sunday Johnny came home with the other eye black and blue. Johnny's father said, "Johnny, I thought we had a talk!" "But Dad," Johnny said, "It wasn't my fault. There we were in church saying our prayers. We all stood up and my teacher in front of us had her dress in the crack of her butt. Then Louie who was sitting next to me saw it and he reached over and pulled it out. Now I know she doesn't like this, so I pushed it back in!"

o-o-O-o-o-

Little April was not the best student in Sunday school. Usually she slept through the class. One day the teacher called on her while she was napping, "Tell me, April, who created the universe?" When April didn't stir, little Johnny, a boy seated in the chair behind her, took a pin and jabbed her in the rear. "GOD ALMIGHTY!" shouted April and the teacher said, "Very good" and April fell back asleep.

A while later the teacher asked April, "Who is our Lord and Savior," But, April didn't even stir from her slumber. Once again, Johnny came to the rescue and stuck her again. "JESUS CHRIST!" shouted April and the teacher said, "very good," and April fell back to sleep.

Then the teacher asked April a third question. "What did Eve say to Adam after she had her twenty-third child?" And again, Johnny jabbed her with the pin. This time April jumped up and shouted, "IF YOU STICK THAT F\*\*\*\*\*G THING IN ME ONE MORE TIME, I'LL BREAK IT IN HALF AND STICK IT UP YOUR ARSE!" The Teacher fainted.

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Little Johnny is always being teased by the other neighborhood boys for being stupid. Their favorite joke is to offer Johnny his choice between a nickel and a dime Little Johnny always takes the nickel.

One day, after Johnny takes the nickel, a neighbor takes him aside and says, "Johnny, those boys are making fun of you. Don't you know that a dime is worth more than a nickel, even though the nickel's bigger?"

Johnny grins and says, "Well, if I took the dime, they'd stop doing it, and so far I've made \$20!"

### **Military Humor 19**

#### **1. How do you knock out a marine while he's drinking water?**

Slam the toilet lid down on his head.

#### **2. A Marine orders a pizza and the waitress asks if he'd like it sliced into four pieces or six.**

"Make it four. I'm not hungry enough for six."

**3. What do Marines have in common with other members of the Armed Forces?**

They all originally set out to become Marines.

**4. Why did God give the Marine one more brain cell than the horse?**

So he wouldn't poop along the parade route.

**5. Ever wonder what Marine stands for?**

*M*uscles. *A*re. *R*equired. *I*ntelligence. *N*ot. *E*ssential.

**6. Helicopter nicknames**

USAF: Birds

USA: Choppers

USN: Helos

USMC: OHH! OHH OHOH! (pointing at the sky)

**7. What's the worst thing you can say to a Marine?**

"I thought you had to be in relatively good physical condition to join the marines."

**8. A vegan, a cross-fitter, and a Marine walk into a bar...**

I know it because they announced it as soon as they walked in.

**9. How do you keep a Marine happy in his old age?**

Tell him a joke when he's young.

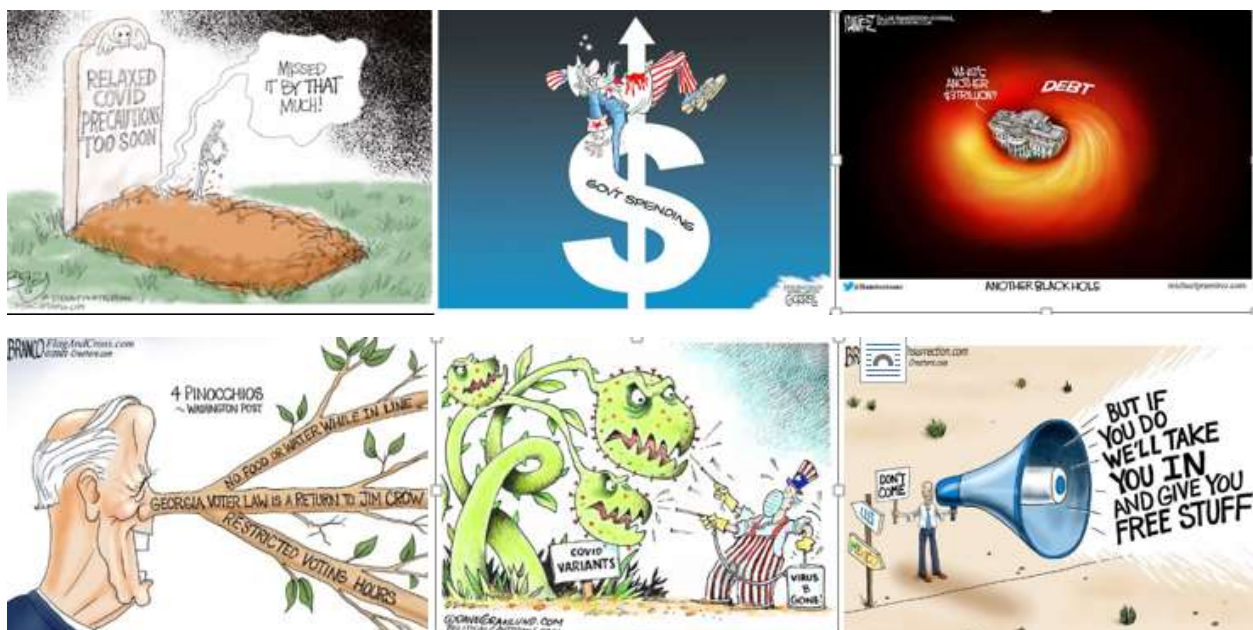
**10. Bartender: "Guys, I just heard a great joke about the military!"**

Patron: "Before you say anything, you should know that my buddy and I are marines. Think you still want to share it?"

Bartender: "Nah. I don't want to have to explain it."

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**Think Toons**





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## Thought of the Week

“There are three kinds of men. The ones that learn by reading. The few who learn by observation. And the remainder who have to pee on the electric fence for themselves.”

--- Will Rogers

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